out. The spermatic cords are severed and the testicles are thrown away. Post-castration procedures are the same as above.

3.2.3.5. Shearing

The next major activity in the highlands is shearing. Before it is shorn, the sheep’s legs are tied together and it is laid on the ground. The shearer cuts the wool off, tuft by tuft, with a knife, taking about half an hour to shear each sheep. Yaks are not laid down prior to shearing, but their forelimbs and hind limbs are tied and they are tethered by their horns. When shearing yaks, the soft hair is pulled out by hand while the coarse hair is clipped with scissors or cut off with a knife, from the dewlap to the abdomen and the tail.

Although the time of shearing slightly differs from place to place, yaks are shorn once a year in the late spring, while sheep are shorn three to four times a year starting in spring.

3.2.3.6. Custom of Sparing Animal Life

Saving the lives of animals, or tshe-thar, is considered a virtuous deed. The life forms of all sentient beings are believed to be interconnected through the continuum of time. Thus, all living beings of today could have formed part of our own personal ancestries in the past. In philosophical terms, this concept is often expressed as them being the rebirth of our mother during infinite times in the past. Whether they have been our mothers or not, we must respect every living being irrespective of size and species, as all would find it hard to bear the pain of being killed. Therefore, saving an animal at the time when it was about to be butchered is considered a virtuous act. Although an animal cannot express this outwardly to us, the escape from the near death situation must bring an immensely gratifying relief. The saved animals, especially bovines, are left to roam and graze freely in the forest, where they are guarded by someone paid to protect them. Spared from slaughter, they are left to roam until they die natural deaths.

Another form of saving an animal’s life is called tentug or tshedar. The animal is offered to a particular deity as a riding pony. The animal is kept in the herd but forbidden from being put to use for any purpose such as a pack or riding animal or from being shorn with metal instruments. Tentug is offered to deities to appease them and in return, animal herds and owners are protected from unforeseen harms and epidemics.

3.2.4. Social Customs

3.2.4.1. Regulation of Social Manners

3.2.4.1.1. Etiquette

Driglam denotes ‘order, conformity and uniformity’ while namzha refers to ‘the principle’. Hence, driglam namzha means abiding by the principle of living in harmony and in pure forms concerning physical, verbal and mental behaviours.

Every society has its own code of discipline in order to regulate human conduct, enabling people to live together as civilised human beings. The Bhutanese code of driglam namzha covers a wide range of social norms. These include speaking, eating, drinking, walking, sitting, dressing, relationship, patriotism and gratitude. It is a way of showing gratitude for the benefits one has received from parents, leaders, elders and spiritual teachers. These distinctive social customs have been carefully maintained and preserved over generations by our forefathers. Today, they are deeply rooted in our society and remains as an insignia of our cultural identity.

Precisely, driglam namzha involves action, speech and thoughts. Accordingly, it can be described as follows:

1. Physical Etiquette (lueki driglam): It means conducting oneself through the body. This covers the conduct of eating, drinking, walking, sitting, seeing, dressing, showing respect, and physical gestures.
2. Speech Etiquette (ngagi driglam): It means conducting oneself through speech. This covers speaking the truth, speaking gently and politely, speaking in a respectful way, and saying words that are beneficial to others.
3. Mind Etiquette (yiki driglam): It means conducting oneself through the mind. This covers faith in the Three Jewels (Tri Ratna, that is, Buddha, Dharma and Sangha), dedication to work, loyalty to the country, good intentions, showing kindness and gratitude, and trust in the cycle of karma.

Among the three aspects of driglam namzha, mind etiquette is the most important of all because the mind influences and controls our actions and speech. It is through intelligence that human values can be analysed, understood, appreciated and followed. Therefore, to rectify our thinking and have the right attitude is most important. Thus, mind etiquette plays a vital role in the person’s maintenance of quality and decency.
3.2.4.1.2. National Costume

Gho and Kira

The national dress for men is gho and kira for women. Gho is a one-piece outfit pulled up to knee-length and fastened with a belt called kera at the waist, leading to formation of an enormous pouch across the belly. Men's belt is a striped hand woven textile using plain cotton or wool on a card loom. It has fringes at both the ends.

Kira is a rectangular ankle-length robe wrapped around the body, tied at the waist with a wide woven belt, and fastened at the shoulders by a pair of shoulder brooches called koma. A necklace-like chain called the jabtha holds together the pair of koma. Jabtha also makes an attractive ornament. Women's kera is made of cotton woven on card looms with intricate silk designs of varying colours. Elderly women wear the broad kera in three folds. The female kera has also fringes at both the ends. The weft thread used is commonly thicker than the base fabric used.

Women also wear a toego (short, loose jacket) over the kira. Toego can be made from any kind of material and be in any colour. Women also wear a garment called wonju under the kira. Commonly made from silk or polyester, the wonju is a loose, wrap-over long-sleeved blouse.

The semi-nomadic herders of the high valleys of Merak, Sakten and Laya and some other ethnic communities do not traditionally wear the gho and kira. They have a unique dress, lifestyle and language, and their own weaving specialty.

In an effort to preserve and promote cultural heritage, all Bhutanese are required to wear the national dress in government offices, schools and on formal occasions.

Necklace

Traditionally, a necklace is also a part of the costume of a Bhutanese woman, and a woman who is not wearing a necklace is considered to be incompletely attired. Therefore, women make it a point to wear necklaces, especially during celebrative occasions. When a woman is dressing, she puts on her necklace at the very end, to complete the outfit.

Necklaces of precious stones are passed down from mother to daughter. A traditional Bhutanese necklace consists of a string of beads of various stones such as coral, turquoise, onyx, pearl, agate, and many more. The necklace may reach almost to the waist. If the woman is very rich and possesses many precious stones, she will choose to wear more than one necklace at a time. Since public gatherings and celebrative occasions provide formal platforms for display of wealth and/or position in society, women make it a point to wear as much as they possess.

Sword

For hundreds of years Bhutan suffered from territorial invasion as well as internal strife and civil war, challenges which were countered by our pazaps (militia), and senior officials. In earlier times, those who performed well in battle were awarded a sword in recognition of their show of courage, valour and success.

Once the monarchy was established those officials who served the king and the country with utmost dedication and patriotic zeal were awarded pata (sword) and red scarf (bura marp) in recognition of their selfless service. Awarding kabney along with pata is, therefore, the sole prerogative of the monarch. The awardee is then addressed as a ‘Drasho’, which literally means ‘the best’
as they are exemplary people. Therefore, this award symbolises secular responsibility — the preparedness to fight any enemy harming the interest of the Tsa-wa-sum (the king, the country, and the people) and to safeguard the country and its cultural traditions.

Kabney

When Gautama Buddha administered vinaya rules at the first sermon, the five chief disciples first wore kabney as a mark of respect to the Buddha. Later, when Guru Rinpoche visited Bumthang in the 8th century and sowed the seeds of faith in the dharma, he instructed people not to take the lives of others, and gave ge-nyen vows (vow of lay devotee). He instructed his devotees to wear rezen or kabney as a sign of their having become followers of Buddhism or taking precepts. While dharma practitioners wore red coloured kabney as a mark of following the dharma teachings, ordinary people wore white coloured kabney as a mark of safeguarding the country — their secular duty.

Today, we wear kabney as a part of our national dress in accordance with the code of driglam namzha. The smaller scarf worn by women is called rachu.

Kabney is a large, fringed scarf (about 90 by 300 cm), which is worn with one half placed over the left shoulder and the other half drawn across the back, below the right arm and across the body, then caught in a loop made by folding the lower part of the left end over it and then throwing the left end over the left shoulder. When the kabney is correctly placed, the right side should loop down at equal level to the hem of the gho, and the two sides should come together at the left breast. There is considerable variation in how the kabney is actually worn, but what is written here describes how it should be worn.

Bhutanese at all social levels wear kabney as a part of formal wear along with the national dress, gho. Wearing kabney marks respect for sacred objects and higher authorities, and symbolises the position or rank of officers serving in the government.

Scarfes worn by women in place of the male kabney are called rachu. These much smaller, colourful, decoratively woven scarves can be worn draped over both shoulders with the two fringed edges falling from the chest, or can be folded in half and placed over the left shoulder with the fringes falling from the chest. Women in general wear rachu by making a fold in the centre and placing the rachu over the left shoulder.

Besides kabney and rachu, there are other variants used by religious practitioners. Those worn by lams and monks are called zen or rezen and the one worn over their rezen is called choe-gho. The rezen is worn all the time over the robe but the choe-gho is worn only during special religious occasions. Similarly, the one worn by ngagpas (tantric practitioners) is called ber or dagam; and the one used by togdenpas (adepts) is called rey or rekar and khamar.

Kabney and rachu are worn to pay respect to sublime masters or leaders, and to sacred objects enshrined in the dzongs, monasteries and temples. They are also worn as a symbol of official position. The colour of the kabney determines the official rank of the bearer.

Traditional Boot

Bhutan's traditional footwear is a kind of boot worn as high as the knee, the upper, cloth part of which is then held and tied by a narrow strap below the knee. Dra-lham, thru-lham karchung and tshoglam are three different types of traditional footwear and form an important part of Bhutanese national costume.

Dra-lham are worn by the senior monks in the monasteries. They are similar to tshoglam but red in colour. Thru-lham karchung derives its name from the white colour of the ben (section just above the ankle) which is highly visible from a distance. The traditional boot worn by the general public is called tshoglam.

The thil or sole of the boot used to be made from hard leather, but these days tshoglam usually have rubber soles. Above the sole, two layers of red and white leather (or rubber) make the drilden. Above the drilden is the ri karchu, on which comes the ben in different colours. The ben, is yellow, orange, red, blue or green according to the official position of the wearer. Yellow ben is reserved only for the king and the head abbot (the Je Khenpo); orange is for ministers, red is for senior officials, blue is for members of parliament (both houses) and green is for the general public. The cloth part above the ben is generally black or blue silk brocade.

It is mandatory to wear thru-lham or tshoglam as a part of formal national dress during any formal occasions.

3.2.4.1.3. Law

Two sets of codified laws — the religious and the secular — were instituted during the Zhabdrung’s time. The 253 monastic rules taught by Buddha in the vinaya
pitaka formed the main part of the religious law. The secular law was mainly based on the prevailing social and behavioural norms in the country, drawing on appropriate excerpts from the Buddhist principles of lhachoe gewa chu (The Ten Divine Virtues) and micheo tsangma chudru (The Sixteen Human Principles). The codes were formulated in such a way as to organise in a Buddhist perspective the relationship between the Drukpa Kagyud tradition’s monastic community, representing the state, and lay patrons and subjects in the judicial and financial fields. Equality before the law was always emphasised. All sections of society, from highest to lowest, were bound by the same laws and none was exempted from penalty for committing any form of criminal act. This code of laws was put into strict observance by the first desi (regent), Tenzin Drugey (1591-1656, regent 1651-56) giving rise to the well-known aphorism that “The spiritual laws resemble a silken knot which appears light but gradually become tighter and tighter, whilst the temporal laws resemble a golden yoke which grows heavier and heavier.” These laws of enduring value, handed down to us from earlier times, form the framework for Bhutan’s present judicial system.

3.2.4.2. Life Cycle

3.2.4.2.1. Pregnancy and Baby Shower

According to our conventional wisdom, once a woman stops menstruating, and starts vomiting in the morning as well as experiencing loss of appetite, she is pregnant. Henceforth, she avoids doing any heavy work, and elders and experienced people advise her on the dos and don’ts of birthing-related subjects. Although pregnancy was socially acceptable for a woman who had a husband, there was a social stigma against unmarried pregnant women. Not only did people gossip behind their backs, but some communities even ostracised them on the pretext that their pregnancy outside marriage would cause accident or disaster to the people, animals and community, especially if they happened to pass through any restricted areas such as ladam or ridam (see above under 3.2.2.4.). Although no nasty actions are taken against unwedded pregnant women these days, they are still the subject of gossip, and social stigmatisation persists, though perhaps to a lesser degree now than is mirrored in the well-known traditional saying:

**If the bastard is faced to the rocky cliff, the cliff breaks down.**

And if the bastard is faced towards the lake, the lake dries up.

Although due date for the birth could not be predicted precisely, impending birth is determined based on the size of the abdomen and frequency and intensity of labour pains. As soon as childbirth seems imminent, the woman readies herself by preparing ara (distilled wine) or changkyoe (fermented rice) as well as stocking up with other nutritious foods such as meat, egg and fish. She also avoids crossing the tethers of horses, as it is believed that this will delay birth, since pregnancy in mares lasts about a year. Besides, roaming or journeying at night is strictly forbidden. When it is time, a few elderly women will be called to assist the pregnant woman, as it is also believed that it will be easy to give birth if there is an experienced woman nearby.

If the woman is in protracted labour, various methods are followed to aid her in delivering the baby, such as: opening a container of fermented rice (phafen, also known as buchang) and serving it to her; a family member going to a cross-section of paths and stamping the ground hard three times, collecting the dust from that spot, and then rubbing it on the abdomen of the expectant woman; or her brother (phungi ajang) dresses up and covers his body with a lhiu (rain coat made from yak hair) and then, carrying a quiver and holding a bow in his right hand, he jumps across the abdomen of his sister who is lying on the bed. These are some of the popular practices claimed to have saved pregnant women from suffering further.

After delivery, the child is picked up by the kindest and most gentle person present, as it is again believed that the new-born will take on the character of the person who first picks the baby up. Once the child has been picked up, its umbilical cord is cut with a sharp knife or a scissor. The child is washed with lukewarm water and welcomed by inserting a piece of butter in the mouth, placing another piece on the head, and uttering many good wishes and prayers for his/her long life. While the child is being washed, the mother awaits expulsion of the placenta. The placenta is buried in the ground, placing the umbilical cord towards the surface. However, in some cases the placenta is taken to a river and pressed under a heavy stone with the umbilical cord turned upstream. Either way, if the umbilical cord is not placed correctly, it is believed that the child will vomit. After washing, the baby is allowed to suckle at the mother’s breast either before or after expulsion of placenta, and following that ara and nutritious foods are given to the mother.
However, if placental expulsion does not occur, a *rundi* (kind of flat rope made from bamboo, used when carrying loads on the back in Tshangla Community) is cut in half and burned. The ash is given to the mother to eat. In some cases, the cast off skin of a snake (*buesop*) is fed to the woman. People believe that these practices will help the body expel the retained placenta.

As the birth of a child is considered impure, outsiders will avoid visiting the family for three days after the birth. After three days, where possible, a lama or *tsip* (astrologer, or lama who knows astrology) is invited to the house to perform a purification ritual called *lhabsang* and define the child’s horoscope and bestow a name. Following this, well-wishers and neighbours will visit, bringing a ceremonial scarf and a pitcher of *ara*, a small amount of dried meats, eggs or anything else that is considered valuable to the weak and recuperating mother. The next very important function for a child is the first cutting of hair, which can be done at any suitable time after the hair is long enough. The practice is that the first haircut is done by a brother of the child’s mother, or in some cases (for example if she has no brother), it may be done by a lama.

### 3.2.4.2.2. Matrimonial Customs

Marriage is considered a sacred ritual to bring together two independent individuals into a unit for the rest of their lives. In the old days, marriage by love was problematic, rare and went through much scrutiny. Therefore, choosing a life partner became not just the parents’ prerogative but the choice was confined mostly to one’s own blood relations due to strong influence from the so-called extended family members. Consequently, various marital practices were held in communities of Bhutan. Tshangla speakers in the east preferred inter-cousin marriages (*serga khotkhen mathang*) without much celebration; Doyas chose a maternal uncle’s son (*aazhang gi tshaw bomoi thobthang*) for marriage; and people of Mesak — Merak and Sakteng — were known for child betrothal (*chungnyen*) and arranged marriage, while the Nepali speaking communities in southern Bhutan preferred marriage within their own or an equivalent caste. Other ethnic groups also arranged marriages in similar fashion but love marriage was very rare.

Generally speaking, a system of dowry is absent from the traditional Bhutanese culture, but dowry remains, to some extent, a component of marriage amongst the more traditional Hindu communities in southern Bhutan. Both polyandry and polygamy were permissible in earlier times, but there were very few who followed these practices.

Once the matrimonial knot has been tied, heredity inheritance of land, house, animals and other valuable properties comes into effect. In the east, the male children inherit the land and houses while in the west it is the opposite. However, the formal codification of property inheritance law in the modern era is likely to result in fairer and more uniform practices across the country.

### 3.2.4.2.3. Custom of Kinship

The culture of extended family has led to relatives. Of all sections of the society, tshangla speakers have the richest terminology for kinship. Hence, tshangla terms are used in the following chart of kinship nomenclature:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tshangla</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pepe</td>
<td>Great Grand Father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ubi</td>
<td>Great Grand Mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meme</td>
<td>Grand Father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abi</td>
<td>Grand Mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apa</td>
<td>Father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ama</td>
<td>Mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apchi</td>
<td>Paternal Uncle (father’s elder brother) &amp; husband of Amchi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aku</td>
<td>Paternal Uncle (father’s younger brother) &amp; husband of Azem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amchi</td>
<td>Maternal Aunt (mother’s elder sister) &amp; wife of Apchi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Azem</td>
<td>Maternal Aunt (mother’s younger sister) &amp; wife of Aku</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ajang</td>
<td>Maternal Uncle &amp; husband of Ani &amp; Father-in-law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ani</td>
<td>Maternal Aunt &amp; wife of Ajang &amp; Mother-in-law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wäksa</td>
<td>Children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Za</td>
<td>Son</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zamin</td>
<td>Daughter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ara</td>
<td>Elder Brother &amp; elder male cousin from Apchi &amp; Amchi and Aku &amp; Azem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ana</td>
<td>Elder Sister &amp; elder female cousin from Apchi &amp; Amchi and Aku &amp; Azem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kota/</td>
<td>Younger Brother &amp; younger male cousin from Apchi &amp; Amchi and Aku &amp; Azem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boning</td>
<td>Younger Sister &amp; younger female cousin from Apchi &amp; Amchi and Aku &amp; Azem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tshau</td>
<td>Nephew</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tshamo</td>
<td>Niece</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khotkhen</td>
<td>Male cousin from Ajang &amp; Ani and Brother-in-law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathang</td>
<td>Female cousin from Ajang &amp; Ani and Sister-in-law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Makpa</td>
<td>Husband</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miwaktsa</td>
<td>Wife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jaro</td>
<td>Friend</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Based on the above kinship terminologies, the relations emerging from marriage are also confined to the same terms as stated above: ajang for father-in-law and ani for mother-in-law, khotkhen for brother-in-law and mathang for sister-in-law. The relationship is not limited to paternal and maternal family members, as relations through marriage are equally considered as family members. Brothers of father-in-law are called ajang while sisters of mother-in-law are called ani. The elder sister of father-in-law is called as amchi but his younger sister is azem. Similarly, elder brother of mother-in-law is apchi while her younger brother is addressed as aku. The relationship extends further afield, also.

3.2.4.2.4. Old Age

During old age, Bhutanese people like to devote their time to spiritual activities. The preferred option is to go to an isolated monastery to say prayers from the text if one has learnt earlier, or chant mantras like mani or vajra guru and others. The next option is to live with their children but visit religious centres and/or attend initiations and teaching sessions whenever possible. The last option is to stay at home to help their children in minor chores and often babysitting. In short, aged people find greatest solace in religious activities like circumambulating stupas and temples, participating in religious activities, reciting mantras and going on pilgrimage.

Traditionally, Bhutanese have lived in extended families where the bond is much stronger and where both old and young receive the much needed love and care. The economically active members also benefit from the presence of old parents and young children in their day-to-day activities. Older parents prefer to live with daughters, rather than with sons, as they grow old.

However, modern development, rural-urban migration and the urban lifestyle have started to change the traditional way of life, and nowadays the trend is towards living in smaller family units in urban areas. Further aggravated by the contrasts in outlooks on life, elderly people are now left behind tending to domestic chores in villages while younger, western-educated generations regard farming outdated and physically arduous work.

3.2.4.2.5. Funeral Customs

In Bhutan, there are several funeral practices as mentioned below:

1. Cremation of dead body at cremation ground or near one’s own house or on a river bank;
2. Sky burial, where the body is placed on a mountaintop for vultures to consume;
3. Water burial, where the body is immersed in the river and weighed down with heavy stones, or else cut into small pieces which are then scattered in the river;
4. Ground burial, where the body is buried underground;
5. Cave burial, where the body is deposited or hidden in caves on cliff faces; and
6. Surface burial, where the body is buried above the ground but covered with a structure made of stones and plaster.

Cremation is the most common practice throughout the country. People prefer to cremate the body of a family member at a charnel ground, which has been prepared in accordance with the mandala of Buddha Akshobhya, and consecrated and blessed by highly attained lamas. The Hindus in the southern foothills
cremate their dead on riverbanks so that the ashes and remaining debris are easily disposed of in the river. People in Merak and Sakteng communities dispose of dead bodies in the river or else bury them underground, while in places like Lingzhi the dead bodies are left on a flat stone at a higher elevation for the vultures. In the Lhop community, the dead body is buried above the surface of the ground within a stone mound which is plastered to make it air proof.

Where cremation is practised, dead children below the age of eight are not allowed to be cremated. In olden days, they were either taken for sky burial on high mountaintops where vultures could feed on them, or they were buried in the river, weighed down with heavy stones to prevent them from being carried downstream. Sky burial is discouraged these days, however.

In the event of a death, it is of utmost importance to seek divination from an astrologer before disposing of the body. Based on his ruling, various religious and charitable activities are organised in the name of the deceased. The main purpose of such activity is to accumulate enough merit to speed up his or her next rebirth as a human. Failing to accumulate enough merit will lead the deceased to be reborn into one of the four unhappy states of existence below the human plane. The virtuous person will either take rebirth as a human being, or be reborn in the pure realm of a Buddha field, from which they may travel the path towards enlightenment without falling back into the lower realms.

The Buddhist tradition of funeral rite continues for 49 days after death. Aspiration prayers for the deceased are recited and rituals performed almost daily by those who can afford it, depending on the availability of monks or gomchens and nuns. Those who cannot afford daily rituals, must at the very least initiate the droda zhip on the 4th day since the death, duen tshi on the 7th day, chuzhi tshi on the 14th day and nyishu tsachi or gewa on the 21st day and finally zhipchu zhegu on the 49th day for performance of kangsha (prayer rituals) to the various forms of Compassionate Buddhas (mithrugpa and chenrezig), without fail. The family also conducts a ritual at the first anniversary after the passing away of the person, but for those who can afford it, the anniversary ritual can go on up to any number of years from the third year onwards. Relatives and intimate friends will try to attend all the rites including the annual rites, but people from the community will prefer to come mostly during the last two days (i.e. 21st and 49th days since the death).
Following the funeral rite, a drigo (meaning, an effigy or a photograph of the deceased) is kept in the corner of the shrine room and offered meals, butter lamps, tshog (other forms of food), fruits and drinks every day, starting with the first day of passing away, until the 21st day rite, after which the drigo is removed. This is because the soul of the deceased is thought to hover around the body instead of leaving to seek the path of liberation.

After cremation, any remaining fragments of bone are collected from the cremation site, then ground into powder, mixed with clean mud and made into tshatsha (mini stupas). These are laid in caves, on ledges of cliffs and at other sacred sites before the 49th day. One hundred and eight prayer flags printed with the Chenrezig mantra (om mani padme hum) are hoisted for the deceased, in order to benefit all sentient beings. Customarily, the six-syllable mani mantra would be sung melodiously with heartfelt devotion by those present at such rituals, but the practice is slowly diminishing, either because people nowadays do not know the tradition or because it is coming to be seen as obsolete. Even in remoter areas of the country, the tradition is no longer very strong.

3.2.4.2.6. Rebirth and Reincarnation

Buddhism expounds and accepts the concepts of rebirth and reincarnation. And also Buddhism recognises six realms of existence of which human is considered best since humans have the potential to achieve a better future through practising dharma, and all but gods do not have this opportunity. Following on from this, Bhutanese consider all living beings to have potentially been our parents at some time or other during our sojourns in the six realms of existence (or samsara). Although there is nothing we can do to stop death, we humans have the ability to change our futures for the better by engaging in virtuous deeds in our present lives. It is believed that those who have led virtuous lives take rebirth at a higher level and thus will enjoy more richly satisfying lives with greater opportunity to help others on their own samsaric paths, whereas those who pay no attention to moral values will sink to lower levels in rebirth, thus losing the opportunity to work at their own salvations.

Rebirth prospects may be enhanced if sufficient merits are accumulated through religious and charitable activities in the name of the deceased person, but of course much also depends on the kind of life the deceased person had led. However, it is important and a merit-worthy activity in itself, to do what one can to ease the wandering spirit of the deceased and help it on its way to a better or at least not inferior rebirth.

Reincarnation, where the spirit of the deceased takes up residence in the person of a newborn, is accorded only to spiritually great figures. The reincarnation of a spiritually realised practitioner is confirmed from the behaviour of the very young child tentatively identified as the rebirth. The child will speak about his or her past works, and act in the manner of the deceased person. Besides, the child might repeatedly describe and talk about places and people from the past.

Renowned lamas have been known to have the psychic power to forecast their rebirths before passing away, but this is very rare. Based on such a forecast, a reincarnation may be recognised. To verify recognition of a reincarnation, the child trueku (reincarnated one) is shown belongings from his previous life together with similar items, and asked to point out which are his. If the child identifies these correctly, he is confirmed as the reincarnation. The child reincarnate is accorded full liberty to continue his previous works, to own the properties of his previous existence, and to lead the life of reincarnated individual, but of course, though a reincarnate, he is still a child and will have much to learn before he reaches the level of his former powers. Through the reincarnation identification tradition, works of the past are continued into the next life.
3.2.4.3. Household Customs

3.2.4.3.1. Family Structure

Bhutan's family structure must be seen in its historical perspective. Bhutan became a unified state only in the 17th century and remained a totally agrarian society up to the third quarter of the 20th century. Though sparsely populated, our small, mountainous, landlocked country was to a large extent protected from the unwelcome interest of outsiders by the inhospitable terrain, but there were numerous acts of bullying from powerful neighbours in the north and south. The Tibetans launched as many as 13 invasions, a few of which were highly destructive. Later, in the 19th century, there were skirmishes against the British in the southern border regions leading to a major but brief conflict in 1865, after which friendly relations resumed. However, in spite of all this, our forefathers had kept foreign rulers at bay.

Following unification, there was a long period of internal strife fuelled by ambitious and power-hungry leaders in different regions. With such a small population, Bhutan could not afford to have manpower tied up in a regular army. Military forces were established in the various districts, and when the call to arms came, the pazaps (warriors) would leave their farms and assemble for duty. A large number of men lost their lives in the ensuing conflicts, while many were away from their families for long stretches of time as the end of one battle gave rise to yet another. Building of the nation also meant that important administrative infrastructure needed to be put in place: dzongs had to be built (through a system of beneficiary labour contribution, or wula) to guard the valleys, goods had to be collected and transported, and messages had to be delivered between officials living in different places. All these difficult assignments required the strength and courage to overcome the rugged terrain, spending long periods under harsh conditions often with minimal shelter. Men, rather than women, had to bear these burdens. With their men so often away, the home-based women often became de facto heads of the family, running the domestic side of things and also organising and participating in the farming work.

With the 1907 establishment of the monarchy came a gradual change in the social roles where women's contributions in nation building were enhanced. This process was accelerated once modernisation got under way in the 1960s. The modern economic development programmes required intellectual capability as much as physical strength, and the western model of education that taught the language of modern technological development gave equal access to girls and boys. However, old habits die hard, and the long rooted social structure of men playing a more external and public role while women were primarily engaged in domestic responsibilities has continued to persist to some extent. The age old belief that women should take care of children, look after aged parents and engage in domestic chores, as nang gi aum (mother of home) still prevails in many social circles.

Despite policy reforms regarding gender equality and ratification of international conventions on equality, women still lag behind in many affairs. However, on the day-to-day level, relations between the sexes are quite evenly balanced. The trend is for women to put themselves forward more in the public arena these days, and seek more active and public participation at both community and national levels. Bhutan's new generation of educated youth does not think any difference should prevail between male and female, in terms of opportunities to work and rights. This new development in mind-set gives reason to believe that achieving equality in Bhutanese society is not very far off, as there is also an inherent belief that women and men are equal as human beings.

3.2.4.3.2. Dining Custom

Zacha drosum means the manners including dining manners, and is part of the physical aspects of driglam namzha described above in this chapter. The meal is served when all the family members are seated along with the eldest members of the household. Hierarchy is observed in seating, with the exception that the youngest one is allowed to break the rule by sitting next to anyone he/she favours.

All the members are seated in a circular fashion with the pots and pans placed in the middle but closer to the mother. Alcoholic beverages (ara, bangchang, or singchang) are served to the adults (but not the children) before the meal begins. Since dining is a solemn affair, it is considered respectful to maintain silence while eating the meal. Mother or the eldest daughter will distribute rice and curry and tea, or any non-alcoholic drinks, serving the oldest person first and the youngest last. No one eats until the food has been offered to the Buddhas and the Bodhisattvas of the ten directions, the family and village deities, and wandering spirits such as hungry ghosts. The offering prayer is normally initiated by the head of the family or a monk (if present), and is made whether the meal is grand or simple.
Everyone should remain seated until the elder members have finished eating, and then the younger ones — both boys and girls — should stand quickly to remove the dishes and cutlery. The family discusses its plan of works and other important matters at the meal gathering, which children are expected to listen but not participate.

3.2.4.3.3. Feast Custom

The custom of organising a feast is common in Bhutan. There are several occasions when large numbers of guests are gathered for dinner or lunch in a family home or a village temple or in a bigger monastery. Although the primary reason is linked with ‘giving away alms’ as a part of the six perfections, it is not the direct and sole reason for gathering the crowds. People gather together for annual tshechu festivals, propitiation of local deities, annual family rituals, and birth of a new baby. The other solemn reasons are for 21st day and 49th day rituals following the demise of a person. People usually take advantage of such gatherings to carry out the virtuous offering of food alms.

Social gatherings may also be sponsored by the monarchy, which may be a continuation of the noble tradition of kings giving food alms to common people in ancient times. Other dignitaries also organise parties to celebrate promotion and so on. Social gatherings may also be held just to give families and individuals to meet and socialise. On happy occasions, dancing and drinking of alcohol follow the meals and can often go on until the next morning. Such parties provide young people with an opportunity to socialise with their peers and to make the acquaintance of older people who they can take as role models for adult life.

Likewise, the feasting custom is sometimes transformed into a picnic. As mentioned above, each picnic will have religious, social or family significance and its own special identity. The picnickers pack their food in traditional bamboo containers, assembling everything in a bag or basket along with a bottle of drink, and carry everything off with them to their picnic spot. Selection of the picnic spot is predetermined in accordance with the purpose of the gathering, except for private or family picnics. Drinking, singing and dancing will follow the picnic event, after all activities formally scheduled for the gathering have been successfully carried out.

3.2.4.3.4. Custom of Dunchang

Drinking alcohol with one’s family and friends is a common phenomenon in villages of Merak and Sakteng, but tea is also served according to one’s preference. Therefore, tea and alcohol are the elements of bonding and socialising, symbols of trust and cohesion, solidarity and interdependence in the community. Putting together a pitcher of ara each, irrespective of whether one prefers to drink alcohol or tea, they congregate in one house and share the drinks. After a few rounds of servings, the mood for singing and dancing is heightened, filling the atmosphere with real party-inspired melody. The party can go on until everybody agrees to call off the programme. By then, most of the participants will be too drunk to find their way home. Such a gathering is called when friends and family members meet each other after a long time.

3.2.4.3.5. Custom of Chamchang

Quarrelling and trifling fights are common in communities, especially among close neighbours, and
often lead to serious frictions and disharmony. In such a situation, neighbours and village elders come together to initiate reconciliation. Here too, the people of Merak use alcohol, calling it *chamchang* for this purpose, to rebuild the disrupted harmony.

The causes of disharmony between two individuals or among the neighbours or families in Bhutan can vary from matrimonial affairs to property disputes and petty matters like use of improper language at each other and accidental harm done to one another. Such non-criminal matters are often settled within the village community called *nangdrig* or *nangkha nangdrig*. Village elders like the *gap* (village leader) or someone else of influence who deem it as their social responsibility to prevent disharmony in the community, take the initiative to bring the aggrieved parties together for a settlement. Sometimes the affected members themselves request such people to negotiate on their behalf. In certain communities, *chang* is shared between the opposing groups or individuals as a sign of reconciliation.

### 3.2.4.3.6. Custom of Tshokchang

*Tshokchang* is a popular custom in the eastern part of Bhutan and is normally presented to a guest as a sign of respect. Village people, usually women, come in a group along with a pitcher of wine, a few eggs and some rice to pay respect to the guest, either along the way, or wherever the guest is staying. Once seated, *tshokchang* will be placed before the guest and then one by one, the owner of the wine will serve the guest. People prefer the guest to taste all their wines if possible. In some communities, women will insist that the guest tastes the drink she has brought as her gift. After the guest has been served with a few cups, others present will also join in the drinking.

Tshokchang is also presented during an archery match. Village women will flock together at the archery range, each carrying a pitcher of wine or kettle of tea. They will prepare some space to sit near the archery range. As the archers come and take their seats, the women will present the *tshokchang* to the archers and then one of them will serve the beverage. The custom is that the guest or archer has to drink at least two to three sips as a sign of accepting the offer. *Tshokchang* is usually followed by singing and dancing. At the end of the session, the guests or archers leave some cash to reciprocate their kind gesture.

### 3.2.4.3.7. Greeting and Seeing-off Customs

The receiving of guests at a distance before they reach their destination is an age-old tradition in Bhutan. Sumptuous meals are prepared along with tea or alcoholic drinks. Both the guest and the reception party enjoy the meal together and continue on their way. This tradition called *suwa* before arriving at home has now all but disappeared in most parts of the country due to motor road connections, which take the guest right up to the village. Nonetheless, the custom continues at the national level for the receiving of dignitaries, and elaborate preparations are made in the case of His Majesty the King and members of the Royal Family, and His Holiness the Je Khenpo. People from the village normally make a point of offering
tshokchang especially to the Royal Visitors, and the ministers of the entourage. Separately visiting officials are also welcomed in this way but with less elaboration.

Likewise, guests are also accompanied some distance along the way when they depart. In the family or the village, seeing off the guest takes place at the point where the transport service is available. However, the official seeing off is as elaborate as the reception, at about the same distance from the place of residence.

Apart from His Majesty the King and members of the Royal Family and His Holiness the Je Khenpo, alcohol is an important item to serve both at the reception and see-off points. Chawang char is to unfold the kabney and bow down to receive the VIPs as the main host offers khadar (auspicious silk scarf). The reception party should be formally dressed for the occasion. At the time of seeing off, the hosts unfold the kabney and bow down as a sign of respect, but do not present khadar. In traditional Bhutanese custom, the oral greeting of ‘kuzu zangpo la’ is used among people of equal rank and not to dignitaries higher than oneself. Similarly, no words of farewell are used while seeing off, except that the departing dignitary may say a few words of appreciation.

Some soelre (gift, usually in the form of cash) is left in appreciation for the tshokchang or hospitality offered by the people or a household. Formerly, people waved to each other with khadar until the departing guests were no longer in sight. However, this custom has also disappeared because of travel in motor cars. Nonetheless, at the point of departure, a friendly well-wishing song is exchanged between the two parties as follows:

**People who are leaving:**
The high sky is on the other side of the pass,
While the sun is on this side of the pass;
Because of the distance, we could not meet last year,
Yet it made us happy as we could meet this year.
Let the wishes of those leaving be fulfilled,
And let the fortune of those staying behind flourish.

**People who are staying back:**
The sun is all set and going,
While the high sky will remain behind;
If the sun is definitely leaving,
Please take the high sky along with you.
Let the wishes of those leaving be fulfilled,
And let the fortune of those staying behind flourish.

**People who are leaving:**
The high mountain is on the other side of the pass,
While the snow lion is on this side of the pass;
Because of the distance, we could not meet last year,
Yet it made us happy as we could meet this year.
Let the wishes of those leaving be fulfilled,
And let the fortune of those staying behind flourish.
People who are staying back:
The snow lion is all set and going,
While the mountain will stay behind;
If the snow lion is definitely leaving,
Please take the mountain along with you.
Let the wishes of those leaving be fulfilled,
And let the fortune of those staying behind flourish.

People who are leaving:
The majestic fortress stands on the other side of the pass,
While the powerful ruler is on this side of the pass;
Owing to long distance, we could not meet last year,
Yet it made us happy as we could meet this year.
Let the wishes of those leaving be fulfilled,
And let the fortune of those left behind flourish.

People who are staying back:
The stag is all set and going,
While the beautiful meadow is staying back;
If the stag is definitely leaving,
Please take the beautiful meadow along with you.
Let the wishes of those leaving be fulfilled,
And let the fortune of those left behind flourish.

People who are leaving:
The serene lake is on the other side of the pass,
While the golden-eyed fish is on this side of the pass;
Owing to distance, we could not meet last year,
Yet it made us happy as we could meet this year.
Let the wishes of those leaving be fulfilled,
And let the fortune of those left behind flourish.

People who are staying back:
The golden-eyed fish is all set and going,
While the serene lake is staying back;
If the golden-eyed fish is definitely leaving,
Please take the serene lake along with you.
Let the wishes of those leaving be fulfilled,
And let the fortune of those left behind flourish.

People who are leaving:
The peaceful hamlet is on the other side of the pass,
While the benevolent parents are on this side of the pass;
Owing to long distance, we could not meet last year,
Yet it made us happy as we could meet this year.
Let the wishes of those leaving be fulfilled,
And let the fortune of those left behind flourish.

People who are staying back:
The venerable lama is all set and going,
While the solitary monastery is staying behind;
If the venerable lama is definitely leaving,
Please take the solitary monastery along with you.
Let the wishes of those leaving be fulfilled,
And let the fortune of those staying behind flourish.

People who are leaving:
The majestic fortress stands on the other side of the pass,
While the powerful ruler is on this side of the pass;
Owing to long distance, we could not meet last year,
Yet it made us happy as we could meet this year.
Let the wishes of those leaving be fulfilled,
And let the fortune of those left behind flourish.

3.2.4.3.8. Custom of Gathering Grains

Brukor and Tokor mean the same thing, that is, collection of bru (grain) or collection of to (food grains). The highland settlers of the east use brukor while the highland settlers of the west use tokor.

The highlanders fill their stores with various types of grains, mostly rice and maize. Some households even have grain stocks as old as 20 years as one does not need to worry about insects at high altitude.

During the summer, the highlanders are busy tending their animals while farmers in the lower altitude villages are busy with crop farming, but during the autumn season when farmers harvest their crops, the highlanders come for brukor or tokor. They normally take loads of raw incense leaves, butter, dried cheese, fermented cheese,
meat, hides, wool, and all sorts of animal products to exchange for grains. Normally their transactions are barter system, though cash transaction is also common in order to buy necessary items such as salt, sugar, and tealeaves that are imported from India. The highlanders transport these goods on horses, yaks, dzos, and oxen and also carry them on their own backs. The caravan will range from a few to over 20 pack animals walking in line along the tracks, halting at nights where there is enough grass and water for the animals.

Over the years, this custom has led to a special bond between the highland dwellers and lowland farmers known as naep (host/guest). Following the harvest in winter, the highlanders visit the lower altitude for brukor and become the guests of the farmers, while in summer, the farmers visit the highland pastures in search of butter and cheese and become guests of highland hosts. In the central districts, the highlanders also take care of the flocks of sheep belonging to the low altitude farmers from April until the Blessed Rainy Day in the autumn, receiving a measure of grain for each animal by way of exchange. The highlanders store their grains with the host family until all of it has been carried up to their highland homes, which may take some months. They do this with complete trust that the quantity will remain correct, to the last grain.

However, this tradition is now almost lost in some parts of the country, since the yak products are easily traded for cash in the urban centres where alternative accommodation is now easily found. Moreover, the modern market has everything that a highlander needs to buy with cash. The liberalisation of cordyceps collection has also increased the purchasing power of the highlanders. In the central districts, sheep culture has disappeared from the landscape.

3.2.4.3.9. Restriction Sign

When a woman gives birth to a child or a person is seriously ill and should not be bothered by frequent visitors, a signpost known as tshamshing is erected at the gate. It is a branch (preferably of a pine tree) fixed at the entrance with a white scarf hung from it. This indicates that one cannot visit the house for the meantime. The restriction remains until the family sees fit to remove it. This custom is also disappearing.

3.2.4.3.10. Custom of Voluntarism

Khelang, which means voluntarism, has been a common phenomenon in the Bhutanese countryside. During the construction of a house or the hectic farming season, especially rice plantation season, village people contribute labour free of charge. The beneficiary provides food and drinks but no wages. In return for the help, the host makes a reciprocal contribution at a later date. Such customs of reciprocity of favour embedded in the traditional way of life serve to ensure that mutual support is provided in times of need. For example, when there is a death in the family, the entire village contributes both labour and food items to help ease the burden on the bereaved family.

Community service facilities such as schools and basic health units have also been built through voluntary labour with the government providing the building materials, and also covering wages for employment of skilled labour for carpentry, painting, masonry and plumbing and electrical fittings. This tradition continues in many of the rural communities.
3.2.4.3.11. Traditional Transportation

For transportation of goods, called *keldren*, people used animals such as oxen, yaks, dzos, mules and horses. However, usually people themselves carried the goods, as porter ponies were not available to most households. Goods were packed to the size of *do-tshe* (standard load weighing up to 30 or 35 kilos) in various types of containers depending upon the kind of goods. Grains would be packed in sacks woven from nettle fibres and later jute sacks, textiles and cloth items were packed in cane baskets or *buendri* (a large square wrapper made from cotton or nettle fibre), some kind of items were packed in wooden boxes and milk products were packed in baskets with broad leaves inside.

Carrying a load on one's back together with necessary rations while walking on rough tracks was a hard life. For the most part, finding suitable resting spots was also problematic. Therefore, the porters brought along a T-shaped walking stick called a *toma*, which they rested their loads on to ease the strain on their backs and shoulders when taking a brief halt. Porters would set out with their loads in the cool hours of early morning, resting for brunch during the peak of the midday heat. They would pause after every twenty or so steps while walking and rest briefly against the toma, then set off again on their way. There was no distinction made between men and women except that usually women would carry lighter loads.

Men travelling light would wrap what was necessary in one end of the kabney, placing the load on the back over the left shoulder. They would then bring the long end under the left arm and around the back to cover and support the baggage, bringing it up over the right shoulder and knotting it at the front to the part that went under the left arm. A woman would put her bag at her back, then wrap her rachu across it, bringing the two ends forward around the shoulders and knotting them in front. Cane baskets called *tseu* and *zem* were also used for carrying luggage. In some communities the weight of the load is borne on the head while in other places, shoulders bear the weight.

The monk or gomchen carry their loads in a backpack called *keza khushi* while on a long journey. It is a specially designed cane frame joined together by cloth. Garments and rations are arranged inside the backpack and books are placed on the top, while other belongings such as cooking utensils are hung from the sides. These days, it is rare to see either a person carrying *keza khushi*, or a porter carrying different kinds of loads, because of motor transport facilities.

3.2.4.3.12. Custom of Pulling Heavy Loads

In the absence of machines, the lifting and dragging of heavy loads was a huge burden on men in the past. Yet, they had still managed to put in place pillars, beams and frames in the main structures of dzongs and lay stone slabs in the courtyards of these imposing fortresses, feats that are unimaginable these days. Often strongmen called *nyagor* or *mason* were called upon to execute the works. In the absence of such people, other techniques were utilised to get the best out of the available workforce. In order to consolidate and coordinate the individual strengths of the group members, wise elderly people used inspiring verses and chorus to encourage and coordinate the effort, so that all pulled or pushed together as one. In course of time the singing of such verses (often humorous) became popular during any work that require collective effort:

*Come One! Come Two! Come Three!*
If the ropes are coarse,
It is the hands that bear the brunt,
Come on! (At which everyone pulls or pushes.)

*Come One! Come Two! Come Three!*
If the high officer’s hand has no peace,
It is a hell for the servants.
Come on!

*Come One! Come Two! Come Three!*
If the master has no knowledge,
It is the students who get the lashing.
Come on!

*Come One! Come Two! Come Three!*
If there is a loose husband,
It is troublesome for the mother and children,
Come on!

In this case, there are no standardised verses, which were composed and written down. These verses are chanted by witty people who compose them on the spot, based on the situation and the type of work. Such extempore chanting serves to both amuse and further motivate the group so that it gives its collective best to the work.

3.2.4.4 General Social Practices

3.2.4.4.1 Carrying a Pocket Knife and a Cup

There is an old maxim:
*Keep knife and cup with you at all times,*
*For it is uncertain when one will encounter wine and trouble.*
This custom of carrying a cup wrapped in tora and a knife tucked in the belt was essential in the early days. One was not expected to ask for a spare cup at the time of taking a meal, or when one was offered wine or some other kind of drink. If a person failed to carry this item, he or she would certainly be left watching when others ate, and would have to forego any offer of drinks. Similarly, a knife was an essential tool, as one often had to pass through wilderness, camp in a strange place, or encounter an unexpected situation.

People in Merak and Sakteng strap their knives to the belt over the left hip while those in other valleys keep it tucked in the belt but concealed inside the pouch between the layers of the gho. Some keep it exposed outside the pouch. These are smaller knives of about 35 cm long, but a larger knife called ringme thungme (neither long nor short) is usually slung at the right hip.

In the villages, women carry a crescent-shaped knife called zou (or zorba) tucked in the back of their belts with its long handle within reach of the right hand. However, instead of the zou, women in Merak and Sakteng carry a penknife called nyukdri suspended from their right hip by a chain of precious coins joined together with small rings.

3.2.4.4.2. Betel Nut and Betel Leaf

Doma paney is a combination of areca nut, betel leaf and a little paste of lime. Although the combination was scarcely available in Bhutan earlier times, it now occupies an important place in our culture. Many Bhutanese — irrespective of age, gender, occupation or social status — enjoy chewing doma paney. It acts as an icebreaker for chitchats, serves as a gift of friendship between individuals, is an indispensable item on auspicious occasions and for some individuals the chewing of doma paney has become a regular daily habit that is very hard to break. Among the Hindu community in the south, doma paney is offered as an invitation to important occasions.

Bhutanese link this custom with the visit of Guru Padmasambhava in the 8th century when the inhabitants were blessed and ordained with ge-nyen vows to refrain from killing animals and consuming their meat and blood. In the 17th century, Zhabdrung Rinpoche received gifts of betel nuts and leaves from his chief patron, the king of Gatrikha (Cooch Behar) in India, Zhabdrung included these items as the first offering item in the zhugdre ceremony. The custom became very popular after that.

In earlier times, people used ingredients that were locally available, but later these same ingredients were imported from India in large quantities. More recently, people have started cultivating the areca palm and the betel vine in their own gardens, but there is still not sufficient supply to meet the demand.

There is a saying associated with doma paney:
INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE OF BHUTAN
Areca nut, the foodstuff from India, Dissect it as if axing summer woods.

A beloved is the betel leaf, Tear it as if tearing leaves.

The dazzling white lime, Paint it as if to whitewash.

The culture of chewing doma paney is so strong that even old people manage to consume it by crushing it in a drechag (metal grinder, also called chagdre) or in a kodre. Drechag or chagdre is a metal tube and a metal pestle, which is used to crush the betel nut and the other ingredient in the tube. The kodre is a skin bag, which is crushed between stones with the three ingredients inside.

The betel nuts and leaves are kept in a rectangular box with a hinged lid called a chaka, while the lime paste is kept in a circular box with a conical lid, called a trimi. Both chaka and trimi are usually made of silver or brass and embossed with intricate designs. Sometimes they are gold- or silver-plated. The king and the chief abbot would have doma bathra, a round silver betel nut container, which is carved with intricate motifs such as lotus or dragon.

### 3.2.4.4.3. Carrying Flint and Tinder

Bhutanese had to travel on foot not just for trade and in search of food, but also for study and pilgrimage. On a long and strenuous journey, the travellers would try to make the night halt in a village. Usually the travellers would ask for shelter at houses on their way. While the owner of the house would normally welcome the strangers and extend hospitality until departure, one would not always come across such a host. Denying refuge to travellers was considered a non-virtuous act, which could well lead to future rebirth as a tortoise or snail, fated to carry their homes on their backs, as a result of refusing to host travellers in their past life.

However, when travellers have to travel through areas where there are no settlements, they must spend their nights under the sky, at the foot of a tree, in thick woods, in snow, or in caves or any other place that looks relatively comfortable. Therefore, travellers would carry flint and tinder with which to start a fire, as there were no matchboxes in the past. The equipment included a piece of metal, flint stone and tinder. Striking the flint stone on the metal produced sparks that ignited the tinder and with the help of dry wood, there would soon be a good fire going.

### 3.2.4.4.4. Nocturnal Wandering

Nocturnal wandering, as the phrase suggests, is a custom of meeting one’s beloved secretly during the night. It is quite natural for young boys and girls to be attracted to
romantic adventures, when a boy sets his mind on the
girl who appears to be the most beautiful in his eyes.
Nevertheless, getting into an intimate relationship has
to be suspended until he finds an opportunity to meet
her in person. Therefore, he sets out on a lone nocturnal
walk to find the place where she lives.

This custom has deeper meanings if looked at carefully.
The custom was formerly accepted as part of personal
growth, and may still be viewed in this way in some
parts of the country. There are two methods of night
wandering: agreed wandering and blind wandering.
While agreed wandering is relatively easier as there
is already an intimate relationship between the two
partners, blind wandering is difficult and sometimes
dangerous. One may not know whom one might
encounter — the dog, the father or the mother once
at the house, or pits or hobgoblins while on the way.
If one tried to climb into the house through a window,
there was the possibility of falling back onto the ground
or encountering trouble once inside the premises. Yet,
these difficulties were readily accepted as worth the risk
by many. The night wanderer has to carefully plot his
plan for getting into the house through either door or
window or from the roof. Once he gets into the house,
he has to copy the cat’s way of seeing in the dark, walk
along in absolute silence and get to his destination
without disturbing anyone. Then his visit has to be
accepted by the girl, or otherwise the household will
suddenly become awake. If he is permitted to stay for
the night, he makes sure to leave the house before the
first crow of the rooster.

The night visit is not driven just by physical urges; its
planning and implementation also show signs of self-
identity and maturing into manhood and a new sense
of responsibility. Such an adventure often takes the lone
walker through thick forests and narrow tracks along
steep slopes but with minimal mishaps, as it is believed
that there is a god of love who watches over the safety
of the lover. Such risks are taken mostly by the already
accepted lover.

The right to accept or to reject the relationship rests
entirely with the woman. Thus, it becomes a basis for
marriage for simple families, as for men and women who
met through pre-marriage love; the outcome usually
resulted in a good married life. The boy’s father must
watch where his son usually goes while the parents of the
girl must also be aware of who comes to their daughter’s
bed. They intervene in the relationship if they consider
it not entirely feasible on socio-economic grounds or if
the blood relationship seems too close.

Quite often, the custom has been criticised as leading
to births out of wedlock and men not returning as
promised to take responsibility for their actions. Today,
this custom is slowly, and rightly, becoming obsolete.

3.3. RITES AND RITUALS

Buddhism permeates daily life in Bhutan, and various
rites and rituals are carried out in order to invoke deities
and to remove hindrances. Though held countrywide,
these rites and rituals vary from place to place in both
type and grandeur. In ritual ceremonies and rites, there
is strong influence from Bon, indigenous and pre-
Buddhist religious cultures of Bhutan, as discussed
below. The ethnic Nepalese residing mostly in southern
Bhutan also have their own Hindu rituals. The
Buddhist religious rites can be grouped into three broad
categories, based on the purpose for which they are held:
religious rites for the living, religious rites for the dead,
and religious rites for achievement and success. Yet the
following classification is not based on purpose of the
religious rites but on the nature of the performance.

3.3.1. Bon Tradition

3.3.1.1. Shamanistic Tradition

A number of people in Bhutan still follow the Bon
tradition and seek the services of shamans to conduct
rituals for them. Shamans are known by various names,
such as pawo, pam, nelorma, jomo, jah, bonpo, jhakri,
and terda, on account of both ritual and locality, as the
type of shaman varies from community to community.
A shaman acts as a medium between humans and
the spirit world, for the purpose of healing patients,
diagnosing the causes of sickness and mishaps or
accidents, and for making predictions on health and
wellbeing. These diagnoses and predictions play a vital
role in the psychological wellbeing of the believers.

3.3.1.2. Cairn Worshipping

Stones and pebbles are piled up to form cairns at
mountain passes and on either side of the pathways in
honour of local deities of the pass. Any person crossing
the pass or passing by the track picks up a stone and adds
it to the existing pile as a symbolic offering to the deities
seeking their protection. In the course of time, more