

3.4.2. Secular Festive Events

3.4.2.1. National Events

Apart from religious celebrations, we also celebrate a number of National Events or *gyalyong duechen* that are not directly associated with religion. In order to promote the notion of ‘national solidarity’, Bhutanese celebrate the National Day on the 17th of December every year. It was on this day in 1907 that our ancestors handed over the charge of the country and its people to *Gongsa* (Supreme Leader) Ugyen Wangchuck, at the same time establishing a hereditary monarchy through male heirs of his line. With a centralised government, the people of Bhutan saw a new measure of peace, harmony and progress in their lives after enduring more than 200 years of social unrest, frequent warfare and struggles for power between ambitious local rulers. National Day is an occasion to remind all citizens of the establishment of monarchy and the subsequent benign and much more peaceful reigns of the successive kings.

In addition to National Day, Bhutanese celebrate the birth anniversaries of our Fourth King, His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck (11th November) and the Fifth King and reigning monarch, His Majesty Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck (21st February). Furthermore, Coronation Day of His Majesty the

King, Constitution Day and other important national events are also celebrated. People celebrate these days with a sense of pride and patriotism and say prayers for the long life of our great monarchs and the continued peace and happiness of the *tsha-wa-sum* — the king, the country and the people.

3.4.2.2. New Year Celebrations

Although the *losar* is celebrated as a New Year in Bhutan, there are other occasions that have become New Year too. These are briefly described in the following sections.

3.4.2.2.1. Dangbi Losar

Dangbi losar is celebrated on the first two days of the first month according to the Bhutanese calendar. Government offices, education institutes and other agencies remain closed for the occasion. It is a very important annual event for families and the community, giving everyone the chance to come together to enjoy one another’s company, play traditional games and sports such as archery and *khuru* (outdoor darts), and to enjoy delicious foods and drinks.

3.4.2.2.2. Traditional Day of Offering

Celebration of the traditional day of offering was



instituted in the Zhabdrung's time, after Bhutan had been consolidated as a nation-state. On this day, the local administrators came from all parts of the country with their entourages, to make offering on behalf of the people to the Zhabdrung in Punakha. The offerings comprised first sacred offerings from the harvest, and dairy products. The Zhabdrung, considering it as an auspicious occasion, made the first offerings to the Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, and deities in the monasteries. Official appointments to various monasteries were also conferred on this day. This auspicious occasion was celebrated as the Day of the *Bulwa* (day of the offering) which continues to be observed even today. Similarly, the same day is observed as a New Year (Chunipa Losar) by the people of the eight eastern districts (or *sharcho khorlo tsipgay*). It falls on the 1st day of the 12th month.

3.4.2.2.3. Lomba

From the 29th day of the 10th month to the 1st day of the next month every year, the districts of Ha and Paro observe Lomba, which means the good year that has ended is now carried over to another year of prosperity with the gift of a bountiful harvest. They propitiate their local deities for their protection and support for timely rain and prevention of diseases, and the underground beings for their grant of prosperity. They prepare human effigies with all kinds of human belongings like games items, household items and clothing and then cast them away along with the diseases and sufferings. This is an occasion when all members of the family, wherever they live and work, gather for a grand feast and pray together for the peace and prosperity of the country, the king and royal family and their own family for yet another good year ahead. They make special dumplings from buckwheat flour and the green leaves of turnips and distribute these, to all near and dear ones and other well-wishers.

3.4.2.2.4. Jawog Karmai Nyarub

Nya means full moon, *rub* means meeting and *karma* means star. Karmoi Nyarub means coming together of the Pleiades and the full moon, which happens once a year on the 15th day of the 10th month in the lunar calendar. In Paro, this is celebrated annually as a New Year in one block where there is a village called Jawog. Elsewhere in Bhutan, this is observed by burning away the evil elements of the past year in heaps of hay, while boys play with one end of long pegs struck into the ground, going round and round holding the other end imagining the crushing of evil into the ground.

3.4.2.3. Winter Solstice

Guengi nyinlo is the Winter Solstice, which is considered auspicious because from this date many things change astrologically. The previous year's animal sign ends and the New Year animal sign takes effect. This New Year is observed with great enthusiasm in Thimphu, Punakha, Dagana and Wangdi Phodrang districts and some parts of Chukha as well. The day is rolled out based on Bhutanese astrology by young children reciting *Lole* on the eve of the winter solstice. Young children go from door to door chanting the verse. In return, they are given rice, butter, and meat by the generous households. On the following day (i.e. the day of the solstice) they go for a picnic.

Here are the verses of the *Lole*:

*Good New Year! Good New Year!
Let livestock fill the ground floor,
Good New Year! Good New Year!*

*Good New Year! Good New Year!
Let horses fill the entrance,
Good New Year! Good New Year!*

*Good New Year! Good New Year!
Let grains fill up the middle floor,
Good New Year! Good New Year!*

*Good New Year! Good New Year!
Let sons and daughters fill the house,
Good New Year! Good New Year!*

*Good New Year! Good New Year!
Let flagpoles fill the roof,
Good New Year! Good New Year!*

*Good New Year! Good New Year!
Let meat fill the meat store,
Good New Year! Good New Year!*

*Good New Year! Good New Year!
Let wines fill the wine store,
Good New Year! Good New Year!*

*Now we hear thumping of footsteps,
Here comes the fortunate host.
Picking up the golden phueta,
Opening the golden box,
Here come the lavish one phueta of rice, a pair of pork
slices, and one sang of butter.*



3.4.2.4. Lochu of Sha District

Wangdi Phodrang district was known as Sha in the olden days and hence the festival is known as *Shagi Lochu*. Lochu is celebrated every three years in the Sha valley for three days coinciding with the Winter Solstice. Lochu consists of rituals propitiating the war deity or *dralha* and is a festival for the brave warriors of the past. Like any other ritual, it is conducted to invoke and appease the pantheon of Drukpa protective deities for the wellbeing of the Sha community and the nation at large. This festival is accompanied by more merrymaking activities such as performance of war dance by pazaps, adorning of a phallus, and the local version of beauty pageant amongst others. Furthermore, invocation of the war deity and exorcising of malignant spirits also form part of the festivities.

3.4.2.5. Dasain

Dasain, or Durga Puja, is an annual Hindu festival in South Asia that celebrates the worship of the Hindu goddess, Durga (known as the embodiment of Mahakali, Maha Saraswati, and Mahalaxmi). The ceremony falls in the Ashvin month in the Hindu calendar. It has its roots in events narrated in the Sanskrit epic poem, the Ramayana, in which Lord Ramachandra defeated the evil demon King Ravana, after he performed the nine-day Puja and received Tikka at the altar of Durga on the 10th day. The Southern Bhutanese community begins performing the prayers to invoke Goddess Durga (or Durga Puja) on the first day of the new moon and concludes with the Tikka ceremony on the 10th day, after which the Dasain festival is celebrated for five days. Likewise, other festivals such as Tihar (Deepawali), the Festival of Lights, Flowers and Affection, Magai Sagrati, Sauni Sagrati, and Nuwagi are also widely celebrated by southern Bhutanese.

3.4.2.6. Meeting of Nine Evils

It is said that the black planet Nyinag revolved round the Mount Meru from the right side while the demoness Drogising went around from the left side. They met on the north side of Mount Meru on the 7th day of the 11th month in the lunar calendar. Thinking there was no one around, the brother and sister engaged in a union, which then made the wind above move down beneath them and the wind below move up above them while the side winds went into a turbulent cyclone. Thus, there arose nine different evil signs causing

calamities, epidemics and other bad signs on earth that came to be observed as *nyenpa gu-dzom*. Hence, this day is observed as 'meeting of the nine evils' and not recommended for doing anything at all as virtuous deeds will bear no results but any bad actions will have multiple consequences. That is why everybody stops working on this day, and engages in games like archery, doegor, khuru and so forth instead.

3.4.2.7. Blessed Rainy Day

This day is an important occasion for the Bhutanese. It is believed that when the star rikhi or water star comes right above the crown of the Buddha in the Buddha Field above, then blessed nectar drops from the Buddha's crown and comes in contact with earthly precipitation, making the water blessed and ambrosial in nature. People take baths at that time, in order to cleanse themselves of all defilements, obstacles and infections (both spiritual and physical) and enjoy the fruits of prosperity. Blessed rainy day is called *thruebab*, and lasts for a week. An astrologer usually announces the precise time when the nectar will be released. Getting up early is a problem for most people nowadays, so it is advised to leave a bowl of water outside at night, so that the dew of the stars mixed with the blessed nectar will fall into the bowl, transforming the contents into blessed water to be mixed with one's bathing water.

