

# **On the Mule Track to Dagana**

**Dorji Penjore**

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*On The Mule Track to Dagana*

By Dorji Penjore

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### Author's Note

*On the Mule Track to Dagana* is the part of Sacred Route Series initiated by the Centre for Bhutan Studies to document some of the ancient footpaths in the country. Most footpaths are abandoned by a larger population today as network of motor roads reaches even the remotest corner. Still some paths continue to serve as important communication line between different societies and valleys.

This travelogue was written after I went on a week long trek along the Genyekha-Dagana *zhunglam* from 23 to 30 October 2002, 17-24th day of the Ninth Bhutanese month. Mr. Wangchuk of Chamgang in Thimphu and a few people of Genyekha, Dagala and Dagana provided the information. Some were my direct observations. No further research, whatsoever, has been done to confirm their oral information.

I thank Mr. Deiter Zurcher, former Co-ordinator, Helvetas, Bhutan and his wife, for their assistance, my guide Mr. Wangchuk, Ap Gado and Ap Chador of Genyekha, and Mr Karma Ura, Director of the Centre for his valuable insight and comments.

## Introduction

The ancient footpath from Thimphu to Dagana was once an important highway in medieval Bhutan. Before the construction of motor roads in the early 1960s, it served as an important traditional highway between the southern and western Bhutan.

This traditional *zhunglam* was earlier trodden by deities and monks, *penlop* and government officials, lamas and laities, cattle and herders, porters and horses, village traders and farmers, *rilang* and many wild animals. The people of Dagana in particular used this road for purpose of government, business and pastoral movements. They also travelled this road to farm their summer land in Genyekha, and to pay revenues to the government. Even today, cattle herders, farmers, village businessmen and tourists continue to tread the road.

Daga Penlop, one of the six powerful regional governors<sup>1</sup> who held great political sway from the mid-seventeenth to early twentieth century, traveled to Thimphu along this road. Without a good road, it would have been difficult for the

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<sup>1</sup> Other five regional governors were Trongsa Penlop, Paro Penlop, Thimphu Dzongpon, Wangdue Dzongpon and Punakha Dzongpon.

government in Thimphu to have an effective control over Daga Penlop and the region, or for Penlop himself to keep abreast of political events in Punakha and Thimphu.

But all is not clear on this historic road as returning wilderness slowly narrows it. Life embedded in ruins and some old paved roads struggling against the wilderness only remind any traveller of a rich ancient history.

Dorji Penjore  
May 2003

### **One: Thimphu to Genyekha**

The Genyekha-Dagana road begins from Charkilo, about four kilometers from Chuzom. An unpaved road winds up from there to the village of Genyekha. The place was earlier known as Chhoeten Kharisumchi, named after a small *chhoeten* above the road junction. It got its present name after the construction of the Phuntsholing-Thimphu motor road in 1960s since it is about four kilometers from Chuzom (kilo is kilometer and *char* in Hindi is four).

Bama is the next village, and it is followed by Zangkher village, which forms a part of Zanglingkha. Zangkher was once the village of potters. Today there are only a few houses against the backdrop of village ruins. The land around Zangkher belongs to the people of Wang, and the people of Zangkher made their livelihood by making potteries. In winter they moved to Mendeygang in Punakha.<sup>2</sup> They made different types of potteries like *khaza*, *maza*, *baza* and *jaza* and sold it to neighbouring villages.<sup>3</sup> After the import of cheap

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<sup>2</sup> There is a saying, *in the end weavers will not get food (livelihood), but the people of Zangkher will*, to testify that potteries then must have been a successful trade.

<sup>3</sup> During those days, there were different villages that made potteries for different regions. For instance Shaba Kesa, opposite Shaba, made potteries for Paro. Besides Thimphu, Zangkher potteries reached Punakha and Wangdi Phodrang. (Meme Tandin, age 73, Babesa, Thimphu, personal interview, November 2002).

aluminum and steel pots from India, they lost their market. The whole village moved to Langjo, and the remains of what was once a village bustling with pottery trade are now only in ruins. However, one family still continues the trade.<sup>4</sup>

After crossing the settlement of Zangkher, Chizhing Samten Chholing Lhakhang is right above the road. The local people call it Chizhi Goenpa. It is an old Sakya monastery built during the fifteenth century (eighth *rabjung* or sexagenary cycle) by Sakya Thinley Rabyang, according to the records maintained by the National Commission for Cultural Affairs. According to *lho'i chos byung* (1759) by Tenzin Chogyal, Sakyapa were the last to arrive in the country. Lhading (*lha lding*) monastery north of Paro probably had an early Sakya connection. The consort of Pau Tagshamchen (*dpa' bo stag sham can*, 1267-1326) who founded the monastery came from a ruling Sakya family.

Je Geden Rinchen's *lho'i phyogs nags mo'i ljongs kyi chos 'byung* (1972) mentions that Thinley Rabyang (*'phrin las rab yang*) founded a number of Sakya monasteries in the eighth *rabjung* (1447-1506) in Bhutan: Chizhi Goenpa (*spyi zhing*) in

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<sup>4</sup> National Technical Training Authority (NTTA) has initiated a pottery training programme for a few students under that surviving family. At present 21-year-old Kunzang from Bumthang and 22-year-old Choki from Tsirang make potteries in Kawajangsa, Thimphu.

Genyekha, Shelmar (*shel dmar dgonpa* in *skyabs khra*) in Chapcha, and Neyba Goenpa (*sne ba dgonpa* in *shel sna*) in Shengana. He was later followed by another Sakya lama Drupthob Nyarong Dondup (*grup thob nya rong don grup*), who founded Ritshog Goenpa (*ri tshogs dgon pa*) and Dolmachen (*dol ma can*) in northern Bhutan. The main Sakya branch was introduced in the same period by Changdur Panchen Dragpa (*rkyang 'dur pan chen sgra pa*), and he founded Paga Goenpa (*spa gar dgon pa* in *wang yul*), Sharwang Goenpa (*shar wang dgon pa* in *nags rnying*) in Nagnying and Phangye Goenpa (*phang ye dgon pa*) in Shar. Each monastery had its own lineage of lamas, the one attached to Chizhi being more famous.<sup>5</sup>

Recently the *zhung dratshang* took over the lhakhang from the community. Recent renovation works carried out by the *zhung dratshang* has given its old facade a new look. This double-storied lhakhang serves the community's spiritual and social needs through its annual *dromchho* and *tshechu*. Earlier the Chizhi (Goenpa) lama held great spiritual sway over the area,

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<sup>5</sup> David Jackson, in "The 'Bhutan Abbot' of Ngor: Stubborn Idealist with a Grudge against Shugs-Idan", LUNGTA, Spring 2001, aspects of Tibetan history, mentions that the Sak-skyapa establishment existed in Bhutan in the 1930s. There are five Sakya monasteries in Bhutan. Every three years a lama was sent with several attendants from Ngor (Tibet) to Bhutan for a three-year term to serve as head of the monasteries.

including the people of Dagala and Dagana. The lama was traditionally appointed from Tibet. One of the important *nannten* of the lhakhang is a *dung* (Buddhist ritual horn) pulled out from a rock (*nye*) called Dungchen Menchu (literally meaning medicinal spring of a big horn) near Daga Dzong.<sup>6</sup> Medicinal water flowing from the hole from where the *dung* was taken out is piped to a bathtub where people take spiritual and curative hot baths.

The education and health centres of Genye Gewog are located in Khoma village. There is a new grade II BHU, and a lower secondary school has been completed. There is no settlement in Dhamje Sima (2865 meters) where the present Genyekha primary school is located. Most of its 139 students are boarders. There is a *tse*n called Mechutsen dwelling in the mountain above the school. The place is about a kilometer from Khoma.

A few meters from Genyekha primary school, a small unpaved motor roads winds up to Chagkola (the iron mountain) named after the iron-ore was found there. The road passes across Genyezingkha, a cluster of houses, above Genyekha village. The Geological Survey of India reportedly once mined iron-ore. In ancient times, the people of

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<sup>6</sup> One of the lama brought the *dung* to Chizhi Goenpa.

Tshochekha, Genyekha and surrounding villages dug iron-ore for local use. They also bartered it with other essential goods that were not available locally. It was once an important economic activity, especially for the people of Tshochekha. All villages like Zanglep, Genyep and Tshochep had their respective mining fields in Chagkola. A pit of 50 feet had to be dug below the earth, and most often iron-ore could not be found, no matter how deep the pits were. The people would shift to different spots until iron-ore was found.

The iron-ore was burnt and smelted by fanning with bellows<sup>7</sup> (*spud pa*) stitched from hides of two oxen. Four people were engaged to fan the fire burnt with *kharshing*. The smelted iron was taken home, and cut into different shapes and sizes. Some pieces were used for local needs, while the rest were bartered for rice and other necessary food items with the people of Paro, Punakha, Dagana, other neighbouring dzongkhags, and India.

The last generation of people who mined Chagkola were grandparents of 42-year-old Ap Gado. Ap Gado heard his grandparents talk about iron-ore mining in Chagkola. Some

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<sup>7</sup> It consists of a leather bag between two wooden boards, which on pulling apart and then pushing together sends a gush of air to fan burning charcoal.

big holes where iron were once dug or smelted can be found to this day.

Genyekha is a small cluster houses under Genye Gewog<sup>8</sup> with 22 households. Until recently, it was a poor village. Except for wheat and some vegetables, nothing could be grown because of the high altitude, and the whole village would be abandoned during winter. In earlier days, people suffered greatly since they possessed neither *tsamdo* in mountains like the *Bjop*, nor wetlands in lower valleys. Dagala *Bjop* were comparatively better off.



*Genyekha Village*

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<sup>8</sup> Main villages in the gewog are Bama, Chizhikha, Zanglingkha, Genyekha, Zamto and Tshochekha.

After the coming of motor road, socio-economic conditions improved. Farmers shifted their farming pattern from a simple subsistence to limited commercial farming. They started to grow potato and pea, and exported to Phuntsholing. Matsutake and chantarelle mushroom found in abundance in the region brought in much needed cash. Farmers now own power tillers for potato and wheat cultivation. A group of villagers (both children and adult) have enrolled in the non-formal education programme.



*The Remains of Genye Dzong*

There was once a big fortress called Genye Dzong, a few meters from Genyekha. A small, dilapidated *utse* (central tower) is the living remnants of what was once a big dzong. It was the seat of the Genye Drungpa- the local ruler of Genyekha and surrounding villages- appointed by Thimphu Dzongpon; and from here the *drungpa*<sup>9</sup> governed and dispensed justice to the people. The village-elders explained that the lhakhang (*utse*) could not be renovated since the people themselves had just come out of difficult times. The lhakhang houses a priceless statute of Zhabdrung that was known to have spoken. Walls of the collapsed dzong still serve as fencing for the lhakhang.<sup>10</sup>

During those times the Genye Drungpa owned all the land in Genyekha and surrounding area. It was divided into four *zhing* (land), viz. Zangleypaizhing,<sup>11</sup> Genyepaizhing, Tsochepaizhing and Dagapaizhing. The people of Zanglingkha, Genyekha, Tshochekha and Dagana contributed farm labour as tax. They farmed their respective *zhing*, from ploughing, sowing, harvesting to grinding wheat- the main

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<sup>9</sup> One village-elder called it *thrum*, and another *throm*. There was a *drungpa* in 1937 when 50-year-old Ap Chador was only 15.

<sup>10</sup> The dzong was intact around 1949 when 41-year-old Ap Wangchuk was 12.

<sup>11</sup> Zangley is a village before the Genyekha primary school in Dhamje Sima.

traditional staple cereal crop then. The *drungpa* shared some<sup>12</sup> of the harvests with the people. Under this land tenure and taxation system, Dagap moved to Genyekha during summer to farm their land, and in the process they travelled the Genyekha-Dagana *zhunglam* frequently. They also had to pay other taxes not available in Genyekha in kind. After the post of *drungpa* was abolished, Dagap passed on their *zhing* to the locals,<sup>13</sup> and their seasonal movement hence came to an end.



*Ruins of Dagap Houses*

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<sup>12</sup> The amount shared is *khagang*, which literally means a 'mouthful'. Some local people interpret it as 'adequate for living', while other say it means meager or very little.

<sup>13</sup> People of Genyekha are originally Dagap, according to Ap Chador of Genyekha.

The ruins of their houses below Genye Dzong stand as testimonial witness to their residence in Genyekha. It was in this Dzong that Daga Penlop would stop for the night or tea on his way to Thimphu from Dagana.

### **Two: Genyekha to Kepchen**

The road winds downhill between Genye Dzong and the ruins of houses abandoned by Dagap. After crossing a small stream, there is an irrigation channel that feeds water to rice fields in Khoma during summer. There is a camping site after passing a small *chhoeten* alongside Genye Rongchhu (2765 meters).

The suspension bridge over Genye Rongchhu was constructed during the sixth plan.<sup>14</sup> There is no trace of the old bridge built further below the present suspension bridge. A few meters after crossing the Genye Rongchhu, there is a small river called Genyechhu where some thick wooden planks bridge the river. There is a ruin of old *churu*<sup>15</sup> below Genyechhu bridge. The people of Genyekha ground their wheat before the arrival of rice-hullers and flourmills. The *churu* was abandoned recently and some portion of its roof and stonewalls are still intact. After climbing for a few meters from the *churu*, there is another camping site called Tshochagsa

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<sup>14</sup> Late Lyonpo Tashi Tobgyel was Thimphu Dzongda then.

<sup>15</sup> A stone-mill turned by water.

where rainwater accumulates into a *tsho* (lake) in summer. Tourists mostly camp here.

An hour of steep climb takes one to a rock platform called Dophu Jasey Dokha. Here Daga Penlop and travelers normally stopped for lunch and tea. One gets a picturesque view of Genyekha in front, and the whole valley below. Nobla is a mountain pass that serves as a border between Genye and Dagala gewog.

Gur is a *tsamdo* (3350 meters) where travellers who cannot reach Genyekha halt for the night. There is a ruin of a guesthouse (*mgyon khyim*) where a caretaker (*neydag*) was appointed to look after travelers' welfare in the past. *Neydag's* duty was to provide shelter, firewood and water for tired travelers. Some trekkers camp here. Kepchen (3645 meters) is the next camping place, and the *tsamdo* around it are known by the same name. From Kepchen, the alpine flora becomes dominant.

### **Three: Kepchen to Labatama**

There are two main ways to cross the mountain. The first one is to walk south along the traditional route, almost parallel to mountain ridges towards Paga Laptsa. The second is to make a steep climb right above Kepchen in the direction of Dolung

towards Menchhu Laptsa, and later dismount to Labatama floor.

A few minutes climb from Kepchen takes one along Jongzhi Zhongzhi where four *jong* (small ridge) and four *zhong* (small valley) alternate. From Jongzhi Zhongzhi the walk is almost parallel to the mountain ridges until Paga Laptsa.

Four roads lead to four different places from Paga Laptsa (4170 meters). Paga Laptsa was named after one of the roads that lead to Paga Goenpa above Chuzom. It was the main Sakya monastery founded by Changdur Panchen Dragpa (*rkyang 'dur pan chen sgra pa*), and later brought under Drukpa Kagye by Khaydrup Kunga Gyamtsho (*mkhas grub kun dga' rgya mtsho*) in the early eighteenth century. The second road leads to Labatama, the third to Tshangda Goenpa in front of Dobje Dzong, and the last one to Dokhachi Goenpa (Dargaychu) in Chapcha.<sup>16</sup>

The Labatama road takes one to other side of the mountain. Wangthachem is the *tsamdo* on the way to Labatama. Before reaching Labatama there is another *tsamdo* called Dokarpo. It was named after a white round rock on the mountain. The mountain is also called Dokarpo.

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<sup>16</sup> *Aekarzati* is its *neydag* (Nidup Dorji, age 49, of Tsimakha, Chukha, personal interview, November 2002).

The second route is shorter but more difficult. It takes over an hour of steep climb along many yak trails to reach Dolung- a huge rock in the shape of a cup handle. The *tsamdo* around Dolung are owned by the *zhung dratshang*. Opposite Dolung is another mountain, and a small hermitage called Japhu Singye Goensey can be seen clearly.

Dolung is a small rock on the ridge of Dagala range, and it is clearly visible from Genyekha. It is called Dolung since it looks like the handle of a cup. The *tsamdo* around Dolung are known by the same name.

Japhu Singye Goensey is an important *nye* of *Bjop* and the people of Genyekha. The double-storied lhakhang was built by Je Ngawang Druk as his retreat.<sup>17</sup> Its upper floor is used as a kitchen, and the ground floor as lhakhang. There are three *chhoeten* as its *nangten*. Namkochasa and Gelongdrak are two other important retreats where some lama and monks still go on retreat.

The *Bjop* conduct *nyungney* (fasting) in Japhu Singye Goensey from the ninth day to *namgang* (fifteenth day) of the eighth Bhutanese month every year. Various *chhosham* (altar) objects

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<sup>17</sup> The lama who founded Tshangda Goenpa.

are borrowed from Zamto Lhakhang,<sup>18</sup> while lama of Paga Goenpa always leads the rituals. Even today, *thrulchhu* (holy water) flows from a rock in the lhakhang.

The Menchu Laptsa (4320 meters) summit can be reached after a half hour climb from Dolung. There are four laptsa *chhoeten* made out of many stones dropped by travelers. After walking across a beautiful, wide mountain meadow there are two small lakes called Pangserpaitsho (yellow meadow lake) and Komteytsho. A long steep descent leads to Labatama.

#### **Four: Labatama**

Labatama divides the valleys of Thimphu and Wangdue. It is the centre of Dagala enclosed between Dokarpo in the west and Larigang mountain in the east. To its north are famous Labatama lakes, and Tendrup Zomtsegang is to its south. It is also known as Labatam or Lawalazhu. Lakes overflow from the north to flow across Labatama valley, and it is joined by a few streams to form Labatamchhu.<sup>19</sup> It flows as Tagchhu below Chapcha.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Zamto Lhakhang is in Zamto village after Genyekha. The statue of *Jow* is the most important *nangten*.

<sup>19</sup> There are fishes even in Labatam river.

<sup>20</sup> A new immigrant check post has been built near Tagchhu bridge. People still consider that river as sacred since its source is yutsho gyutsho in Labatama. People take water for the annual *locho* or

The whole Labatama valley is a camping site, but people mostly camp in a place called Zhugthri Gyalkha where water is easily available from Labatamchhu. The mountains and valleys around Labatama are loveliest in summer between the sixth and seventh months of Bhutanese calendar, filled with green pastures and flowers. All *Bjop* gather in the valley floor on the first day of the sixth Bhutanese month every year. Since Labatama valley is a community *tsamdo*, *Bjop* station a caretaker<sup>21</sup> to ensure that no cattle graze before the first day of the sixth month. As soon as the *Bjop* gather, distant relatives and the people from villages like Genyekha come to meet *Bjop* in Labatama, bringing rice, *chang*, chilli, wheat flour etc. These two months are the period of merrymaking and festivities among the *Bjop*. They mix their cattle in the valley, and even calves are let loose at night. The happy days come to an end by the end of the seventh month as they disperse to their respective household *tsamdo*. Many *Bjop* weep on departure since they cannot meet until next year at the same place and time. The *Bjop* community is divided into three groups called Tshogkhasum. The 18 households south of Zhugthri

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*choku* from the river (Nidup Dorji, age 49, of Tsimakha, Chukha, personal interview, November 2002).

<sup>21</sup> Caretaker is stationed at expense of all *Bjop* who contribute rations.

Gyalkha<sup>22</sup> are known as Dunbjop. Wambjop constitutes 30 households north of Zhugthri Gyalkha, while Jartala consists of six households in various *tsamdo* in the Dagala ranges above Tsimalakha.<sup>23</sup>



*A typical Bjop khyim (cowshed)*

The terrain of Dagala is very difficult and complex. There is a well-known *Bjop* saying, *Dagala Bjop gye shi rung, Dagalai phu meshey* (even if Dagala *Bjop* die of age, he will not know Dagala). The *Bjop* believe that there is no end to Dagala range. The starting point of Dagala range is in Tibet and its tails

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<sup>22</sup> It is a place where the travellers camp for night. The border between Dunbjop and Wambjop is not exactly Zhugthri Gyalkha, but a few meters to its north where there is a small black rock.

<sup>23</sup> Dunbjop and Wambjop are also known as Dundrog and Wamdrog respectively.

elongate to the plains of India. Beginning from Lhasa in Tibet, Dagala branches out and ends in Dhara Zama (below Daga Dzong), Tashasili (above Sonkosh) and Aum Yangtam Dzong. There is a belief that if one lose way in Dagala, one will reach Tibet by going north, and India by going south. If it is cloudy, even a *Bjop*, supposed to be a master of Dagala terrain, will get lost. A *Bjop*, at his best, may know his own *tsamdo* in Dagala, but not the whole terrain of Dagala. Two weeks of rain and one week of sun is considered good weather in Dagala.

Once two men from Genyekha were returning home from a *Bjop's* house when thick clouds enveloped mountains, making the road invisible. They kept walking until they came across a river. Since there is no river on the way to Genyekha, they returned along the same route and spent their night in Dagala. Later they came to know that the river they had crossed was in Tsimalakha.

People believe that no one lived in Dagala range initially. There were no *tsamdo* or yak. A *dud* (malevolent spirit) did not allow either man or animal to live. As prophesied, the god of yaks sent Yak Legpai Lhadar (a yak) from heaven. Yak Legpai Lhadar started to clear yak trails and *tsamdo*. Trails along which Yak Legpai Lhadar traveled became path for yaks, and places where it slept became *tsamdo*, and others as human settlements. So the number of *tsamdo* is equal to number of

nights the god halted. It was Yak Legpai Lhadar who showed *Bjop* the ways of rearing yaks and making cowsheds (*khyim*). The present road from Dagana to Tsimalakha was made by Yak Legpai Lhadar.

Earlier the Dagala *Bjop* did not possess any lands in valleys. Since they kept on moving from one *tsamdo* to another throughout the year, people, especially children, had no access to education, health and basic social amenities.<sup>24</sup> It was gup Changlo Dorji who petitioned His Majesty for a land *kidu*. In the first phase, 31 households were granted one acre of land each in Chamgang, Thimphu. In the second phase, 16 households were given 50 decimal each. The settlers came from *Bjop* Tshogkhasum- Dunbjop, Wambjop and Jartala. Three *Bjop* households without any *tsamdo* and cattle were granted five acres of both wet and dry land in Tsirang. The first ever batch of class VI *Bjop* students from Chamgang primary school have been admitted in Thinleygang lower secondary school in 2002.

The *Bjop* believe that there are a total of 108 lakes in Dagala range. Labatama lakes are more than an hour's walk across Labatama valleys from Zhugthri Gyalkha.

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<sup>24</sup> The *Bjop tsamdo* holding ranges from one to 300 acres.

**Yutsho Gygutsho: The Cornered, Turquoise Lake**

Right below a mountain base is the first lake called Yutsho Gygutsho (cornered, turquoise lake). Since the lake is believed to contain turquoise, its colour is turquoise, especially in summer.<sup>25</sup> Until one goes near the lake, it cannot be seen from far. It was therefore named Gygutsho, the cornered lake.



*Yutsho Gygutsho*

**Sertsho: The Golden Lake**

Sertsho is right above Yutsho Gygutsho. It is believed that a person of noble birth, good merit and positive karma can see a golden *thro* (jar) floating around the lake. Sometimes a *thro* can

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<sup>25</sup> The colour is turquoise even in winter.

be seen on a small, submerged rock visible near the shore. There are two smaller *tsho* to the left of Sertsho.

**Tshatsho: The Salt Lake**

To the right of mountain is Tshatsho. It was named after a rock salt found in it. True to its name, it has the colour of salt. There are some smaller *tsho* to its right.



*Tshatsho*

**Baytsho: The Woolen Lake**

Above Tshatsho there is a smaller lake called Baytsho. It is believed that in olden days wool was found in it.

**Bjagaedtsho: The Vulture Lake**

The biggest lake is Bjagaedtsho located above Sertsho. It has the shape of a flying vulture, and hence its name Bjagaedtsho. There is a small hermitage called *drupkhang* on a small islet near its shore. It was built against a rock and some parts of the stonewalls had collapsed all around. Aum Jomo Dagam was believed to have terrified a monk from Dagana to death while meditating inside.



*Bjagaedtsho*

**Dagaytsho: The Archery Range Lake**

The longest lake Dagaytsho (arrow lake) is located on the base of another higher mountain, next to Bjagaedtsho. Since the

lake is very long, it is difficult for an arrow to reach from one end to the other. It is thus named Dagaytsho.

**Laatsho: Aum Jomo's Drinking Lake**

Laatsho is the highest and the most sacred lake. It is located on the base of a small mountain next to Aum Jomo's citadel. Supposing that the mountain is Aum Jomo herself, Laatsho is located on her lap. It is considered as Aum Jomo's *soelchhu* since it is the highest, cleanest and nearest to her abode. Aum Jomo was known to have obstructed an initial attempt to introduce fish in the lake by enveloping the road and Laatsho with thick black clouds so that people could not see both the *tsho* and the road.



*Drupkhang in Bjagaedtsho*

Earlier, no one dared to go near Laatsho. But in recent years fish have also been introduced. From the twelfth to first month a thick layer of ice covers the lakes surface and people can easily walk on the surface. Only a small corner will be free of ice sheet where Aum Tshomen is believed to reside.

Some of the biggest Dagala lakes like Dungkartsho, Haytsho and Himtsho are located beyond the citadel of Aum Jomo Dagam. Haytsho and Himtsho (considered male and female) are so big that even birds cannot fly over from one end to the other.

**Aum Jomo Dagam- The Goddess of Cattle**

Aum Jomo Dagam is a mountain goddess.<sup>26</sup> She is considered as the cattle goddess of *Bjop*, and they propitiate her with sacrificial offerings every year. The *Bjop* consider her as a spinster goddess,<sup>27</sup> and as spinster, she is known to like young, unmarried men in particular, and hates women, lama, monks and anyone attired in saffron robes. She controls the weather in Dagala by inviting clouds, rain and snow if travelers happen to be women, monks or anyone polluted

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<sup>26</sup> Jomo Lhari (*molha*) and Jichu Drake (*pholha*) are considered Aum Jomo Dagam's sister and brother respectively (Meme Wangda, personal interview, November 2002).

<sup>27</sup> Chagkotsen dwells in Chagkola. In Genyekha village Chagkotsen and Aum Jomo Dagam are considered as couple. The Genyekha *Chosung* text makes reference to '*Phola Chakutsen, Molha Aum Dagam*'.

with defilements of birth and death. A visit by either king or men would be favoured with good weather. Like *Bjop* (her subject, patrons) she moves to warmer abode in Dagana during winter, and returns in the fourth month to reside in her summer abode in Labatama. If she is disturbed or not well propitiated, she sends predators like tigers to kill yaks, and inflicts man and animal with disease. But she is also known to bless her faithful patrons (*Bjop*) by multiplying their cattle and protecting health.



*Aum Jomo Dagam's Citadel (Phodrang)*

The *Bjop* propitiate their cattle goddess- Aum Jomo Dagam every year during the sixth Bhutanese month when they

gather in Labatama. Propitiation includes animal sacrifice, *tshog* offering and rituals, and it takes place from two directions. A man from each of the 18 households of Dunbjob gather on a small mount in Tagtherkha for a sacrificial ceremony called *lhasol* (*l.lhasol*) that lasts for an hour.

Every household takes turn to arrange a calf as sacrificial animal.<sup>28</sup> The calf must be two years old with a white spot on its forehead. The calf tied with either a white or white-black patterned yak tail rope (*nagthag*) is led to the sacrificial ground. Women should avoid stepping over the rope so that the offering is not polluted. Monks perform *lhabsang* and *thrisel* ceremony to purify the calf by pouring water over it. If the calf does not shake off the water from its body, then the offering is said to be polluted.

A volunteer normally beheads the calf, and in absence of any such volunteer, the responsibility falls on its owner. The sacrificial ceremony is traditionally led by a hereditary Bonpo. Until recently Ap Sona from Jongkhina was the Bonpo. After his death, his two sons have taken his role, and whichever son is available conducts the ceremony. The Bonpo receives no wage or labour exemption for his service. In addition, they also make *tshog* offering of rice and all available fruits. After

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<sup>28</sup> The owner takes the calf meat after the offering.

the offering everybody looks at the citadel of Aum Jomo Dagam. If the clouds open even a small space around the citadel, then the goddess is believed to have accepted the offering. Women's participation in the offering is discouraged.

People stopped the animal sacrifice a few years ago by substituting it with a simple meat offering. Nothing happened until the third year when an unknown predator killed six animals, diseases struck the cattle, animal health worsened and numbers failed to multiply. The people attribute the tragedy to Aum Jomo Dagam's wrath. The calf sacrifice was resumed, and life returned to normal after it. Similarly 30 households of Wambjop sacrifice a sheep from a place called Bjaduna, a traditional offering ground, beyond the north of Aum Jomo's citadel.

A folk song, Yak Legpai Lhadar, is the most popular among the *Bjop*. The folk song was reportedly composed by a *Bjop* when he had to sacrifice his yak for the *lhatsol*.

གཡག་ལེགས་བའི་ལྷ་དར།<sup>29</sup>  
སྤྱོད་གཡག་ལེགས་བའི་ལྷ་དར་གཞོན་ལེགས་ས།  
གཡག་ལེགས་བའི་ལྷ་དར་ལྷ་ཅུང་འདི།

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<sup>29</sup> I am grateful to Mr. Jigme Dukrpa, Music Lecturer in Royal Academy of Performing Arts, Thimphu. The folk song is recorded in his *Endless Songs from Bhutan*.



**English Translation**<sup>30</sup>

How beautiful is Yak Legpai Lhadar's face!  
Yak Legpai Lhadar- the god-sent calf!  
There is no need to describe my place and paths,  
If I were to explain my place and paths,  
It is on the high snow-capped mountains  
And the highland meadow of *sershog* flower  
Where flower buds blossom. There, my home is.  
I graze on mountains grass,  
And drink fresh water of glacial lakes.  
Should I dance my happiness,  
I dance along the base of distant meadows.  
One by one, the whole herd was slaughtered!  
And I, the unfortunate Lhadar  
It is I, Lhadar who feel sad.  
A heavy command of a powerful lord came,  
A man with a sword fastened at his waist  
Came to take me, Lhadar.  
Lhadar has no choice not to go.  
When turn to be slaughtered is set  
The turn fell on me, Lhadar.  
Crossing mountains, a Highlander came.  
And when the Highlander came,  
The snow-covered peaks above, how high?  
And Lhadar's tree of life, how low?

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<sup>30</sup> English translation by Sonam Kinga, Dorji Penjore and Jigme Drukpa.

### The Folk Story of Aum Jomo and a Monk

"I have heard that Aum Jomo Dagam terrifies monks meditating near Labatama lakes. Let me go and test Aum Jomo's power," said a learned monk from Dagana, and went to Bjagaedtsho in Labatama.

He meditated in the *drupkhang* for three nights, but there was no sign of Aum Jomo. On his way back to Dagana he encountered Aum Jomo Dagam, returning to her summer abode in Labatama from her winter residence in Dagakaley Zingkha in Dagana. The goddess had transformed herself into a Bjop woman, and was carrying a *dob*.

"Where are you coming from, *lopen*?" she asked.

"I am coming from Labatama. In Dagana everybody is talking about Aum Jomo's power. I meditated there for three nights, and she was powerless before me," the monk replied.

"Oh! Is it so? Go back and meditate for another three nights. You might encounter her," the woman suggested.

The monk agreed and went back to meditate in the same place. On the first night itself, a gigantic snake appeared before him, among many other terrifying signs. The monk died that night.

In the middle of Labatama valley, there is a huge round rock, and two cowsheds. There was no rock when the *Bjop* came for the first time. Later a star that fell there transformed into a huge, round rock. Even today, the *Bjop* narrate their children that stars and the rock are of the same size.

**Five: Labatama to Northogang**

Larigang is the first mountain from Labatama valley. After a few minutes of steep climb is Serpaigang covered with yellow flowers in summer. Further up the mountain, one comes across a *laptsa* from where a tip of Jomolhari can be seen rising above the mountain along the climb, and before long soon some of the world's highest mountains began to rise: Mt. Everest, Kunchenjunga, Jhomolhari, Jichu Drake, Tshering Khang, Khangbum, Masagang, Tsendegang and Gangcheen Ta.

Larigang snakes down, before reaching the Labatam river. People believe that Larigang was a giant snake, which moved down to block the Labatam river and turn the Labatama valley into a big lake. But before it could reach the river, one of the Chizhi lama subdued the snake, and built a *chhoeten* on its head. The *chhoeten* is visible from the road.

There is a small stream called Dabjogichhu after crossing Larigang. A thick layer of ice covers the river from the twelfth to first month, and it is difficult to get water even for brewing tea.

Every three years, the 18 households of Dunbjop host *wangkur*<sup>31</sup> at Zhongkhina in Tagtherkha. Chizhi lama traditionally conducts the *wangkur*. One unique characteristics of this *wangkur* is that the *dung* must be borrowed from Chizhi Goenpa, and only Chizhi Lama, not any other, can conduct the *wangkur*. By early dawn the *dung* is blown from Tagtherkha to spread the message of *wangkur* to households of Wambjop. The sound can be heard as far as Labatama lakes. On hearing the sound of *dung*, the *Bjop* come for *wangkur* carrying a *shog*<sup>32</sup> each. The Chizhi Lama and three or four monks also conduct *thrisor* (purification rite) in the *chhoeten*, while people burn incense or *sang* and circumambulate it.

A Bon ritual called *bongkor* is held before the *wangkur*. A *paw* (shaman) stays in a tent pitched near the cliff for three nights. Every household from Wambjop contributes some rice, butter and cheese for the ceremony. The *paw* divines and recommends *rimdo* for the community and individuals as well.

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<sup>31</sup> This is a part of *wangkur* conducted after every three years in Dawakha, Punakha (Dawa *Wangkur*), Lhakhang Nima in Matolungchu, Dekiling Goenpa in Dagana, and a few other places. (Meme Wangda, personal interview November 2002).

<sup>32</sup> *Shog* constitutes some rice put in certain containers on which incense sticks are inserted. *Shog* is the traditional entitlement (*thobthang*) of the Chizhi Lama.

Dotajemiji is a flat gigantic rock in front of Lawagu Laptsa. There are two footprints of a yak protected by stonewalls around it. Some believe they were footprints of a horse. The road near the Dotajemiji is paved with stone slabs. Some *tsamdo* around Lawagu like Thoipuendey belongs to the people of Wang Sisina in Thimphu. They got the possession of *tsamdo* after *Bjop* could not pay tax and contribute *woola*. Burnt stems and branches of rhododendron and *pam* dot its slopes. The *Bjop* either cut or uproot short rhododendron for the following year's firewood. *Pam* is a short tree considered to be Ashi Jazam's mattress, and hence it cannot be used as *sang* or incense. Since it does not grow tall, its thick leaves prevent the growth of grass. So the *Bjop* burn them with permits from the forestry department.

The altitude of Lawagu Laptsa is 4560 meters. There is a huge mound of stones of different sizes and shapes dropped by travelers crossing Lawagu, and theoretically the number of stones should be equal to the number of travelers who crossed the mountain. A flock of Himalayan Monal pheasants were spotted.



*Langtsho and the road beyond Lawagu*

From Lawagu Laptsa, the road zigzags down a steep and rocky mountain slope, and passes between Tatsho and Langtsho. There is a small stone bowl above the road where people drop coins as *nyendar*. The road is difficult for horses. Tatsho was earlier a big lake, but it has dried up after Aum Tshomen escaped to some other place. The *Bjop* believe that a horse used to appear from the lake. Langtsho is below Tatsho and the road passes above it. People believe that a yak used to appear on the shore and impregnate cows. There is a ruin of a *Bjop Khyim* in Sipsarbu *tsamdo* at the base of Goraigang. *The Bjop* used to live there in ancient days, but it was later abandoned after *dud* residing in the opposite mountain terrified the people. The walls of the two-storied house are intact, and it is now used for sheltering sheep from cold

winter. Gora and Changphetorsaigang *tsamdo* can be seen from the house. There is a road leading to Kadori *tsamdo*. From Sipsarbu, some parts of the roads are beautifully paved with stone slabs. Doma<sup>33</sup> is a big *tsamdo* located at an altitude of 3700 meters. There are ruins of a guesthouse called Doma Gyem Khyim. A rectangle-shaped double-storied stone house was built by Dagap as guesthouse for Daga Penlop. Penlop and travelers shared the upper floor, while horses were sheltered in ground floor.<sup>34</sup>



*Ruins of Doma Guest House*

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<sup>33</sup> Some call it *Dompa*.

<sup>34</sup> A 62-year-old Dungshe from Dagana traveled with Dzungpon Haap Doley as a porter. There were 20 of them and two horses for Dzungpon and his Aum. He slept in Doma and Bjetikha guesthouse many times. Haap Doley served as Daga Dzungpon from 1954 to 1959.

Northogang (3330 meters) is a group of *tsamdo* owned jointly by the *Bjop* and Dagap. The former brings down their cattle here on the first day of the eleventh month and stays for a maximum of two months. They return in the third or fourth months in summer. When *Bjop* leave, the Dagap will be in Bjetikha, from where they move to Wangroo and Pangjukha, and reach Northogang in the fifth month. They leave by the sixth month, allowing a five-month grass regeneration period, until *Bjop* arrive in the eleventh month.

*Sintoshing*,<sup>35</sup> *leechushing*,<sup>36</sup> different species of *etometo* (rhododendron) like *mashom* and *yashom*, *khemkarchu*, *kechu-inla*, *balesule*, *tabaishing*, and *zintoshing* are the dominant trees around Northogang. *Gyem* is the dominant grass<sup>37</sup>, besides *sawra*, *heychu* or *ba*, *dremi*, *lham*, *changsep*,<sup>38</sup> *sershimeto*, *tshecha*,<sup>39</sup> *gyem*,<sup>40</sup> and *dumchukarchu*.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> It is called *bumseng* in Khengkha dialect.

<sup>36</sup> It is called *haleyseng* in Khengkha dialect. The *Bjop* use *leechushing* leaves to roll tobacco.

<sup>37</sup> It known as *shutali* in Khengkha dialect, and it is eaten by cattle when leaves are dry.

<sup>38</sup> Only sheep eat them.

<sup>39</sup> It grows along the path made by cattle.

<sup>40</sup> It grows in *thang* (plain).

<sup>41</sup> Both sheep and cattle eat them.

**Six: Northogang to Kunga**

The Seyzu *tsamdo* forms a part of Northogang. Above Seyzu is Yakshibji *tsamdo* where runaway yaks always graze. If a yak is found missing from the herd, it is always found grazing in Yakshibji *tsamdo*. Tashigang *tsamdo* belonging to Wang Sisina can be seen below Zeykhergang. Next is Pangjukha *tsamdo*- a big rolling, uninterrupted meadow which belongs to late Dasho Babu Wangchuk, Thimphu. The cattle (*yulnor*) have already started grazing. A small patch of Bjetikha can be seen amid some thick forests below Pangjukha.

Road passes through a thick, tall rhododendron forests to the *tsamdo* of Wangroo (1870 meters) which is the proper pastoral border between Dagala and Dagana. All *tsamdo* below Wangroo belong to Dagana, and those above it to Dagala. However, Dagap can graze their cattle as far as Northogang during summer, and *Bjop* can graze till Bjetikha.

Wangroo is covered with luxuriant green grass. In the tenth month, the *Bjop* bring down their cattle when the grass is dry. Since pastures have been grazed by *yulnor* of Dagap, the grass would poison the yaks. People believe that if yaks eat offshoot of grass once already eaten by *yulnor*, then yaks would be poisoned.



*A Dagap Cowshed in Bjetikha*

Some dominant trees after passing Wangroo are *daegishing* (paper tree), *aetoshing*, *bjishing* and *kharshing*. A bamboo species called *heeman* (reeds) is found in abundance. *Karshishing* is dominant after crossing a stream called Gyem Semchelungichhu. *Za* is extracted from *karshishing* for making *phob* (cup). *Thomshing* and *phagishing* also grow abundantly. People use *thomshing* leaves to make traditional medicine, while *dob* and other containers for milking and churning are mostly made from *phagishing*.

The name Bjetikha sounds like a settlement, but except for a *gyem khyim* (guest house) already in ruins, there is not a single house. Located at an altitude of 2600 meters, the place is

warm, and there is thick tropical undergrowth. Clover is the dominant grass. The sounds of cicada and other singing insects fill the air. The cowshed in Bjetikha is double-storied built with bamboo-thatched roof and walls. People stay in the upper storey,<sup>42</sup> while calves are kept on the ground floor. Traditionally two *Bjop* households bring down their cattle for grazing in Bjetikha during winter on some payment.

The old Bjetikha *gyem khyim* is located on the edge of *tsamdo*. It might have been built after 1942.<sup>43</sup> The shape and size of the house are similar to that of Doma. The Dagap constructed the house on land belonging to Ap Pasang Dorji and Aum Tandin, and the family was appointed as *neydag* of the house. As in Doma, the ground floor was used for keeping horses, while people lived in the upper floor. The responsibility of providing roof for guesthouses in Bjetikha and Doma fell on Dagap. There are two pines trees among the ruins. The surrounding land was used for growing wheat, and vegetables like radish and turnip. A *dungshing* planted by the family for *sang* still stands, while rotten trunk of *shokshing/shup* lay across the road.

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<sup>42</sup> The *Bjop*-style cowshed is not practical because of leech and hot climate.

<sup>43</sup> When Meme Wangda travelled to Dagana as 12-year-old boy, he saw the old Doma guesthouse. There was no house in Bjetikha, but only a *bago* (hut) at that time. The year of his travel corresponds to 1942.



*The Ruins of Bjetikha Guest House*

The main responsibilities of *neydag* were to arrange water and fire (*chu okal me okal*), collect firewood, cut fodder for riding ponies,<sup>44</sup> and welcome guests. They provided these commodities to all travelers who reciprocated with food provision, butter, cheese and other goods. Their duties were greater when a Penlop traveled the road. A messenger would inform *neydag* and villages along the road of the Penlop's journey. When the Penlop approached Bjetikha, the *neydag* would welcome him with *sang*. The *neydag* was not required to provide food for the Penlop and retinue of porters. Early in

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<sup>44</sup> Unlike today, horses were rare and only rich and powerful people could afford it.

the morning, *neydag's* children would go to Doma and keep fodder, firewood and water ready.

The Dagap carried Penlop's loads from Daga Dzong to Doma, and from Doma, the responsibility fell on *Bjop* to carry till Charkila. People of Genyekha then took charge and transported them to Thimphu. One source claimed that Daga Penlop traveled to Thimphu twice a year. "There is no end to Penlop's visit to Thimphu," according to another source. From the second to ninth month, Penlop used this road, and from the tenth month, he travelled via Uma.

From Bjetikha, the weather gets warmer and warmer. Sounds of cicada overpower other sounds of the forests. After crossing a small stream called Geychizagichhu, there is no water on the way until you reach the river. The road is muddy, and infested with leech in summer. Pine and oak trees dominate the vegetation, besides *gamashing*. A plant called *daemoishing*<sup>45</sup> grows everywhere below trees. Its red fruits deck every available space along the road. Its leaves are used as roof for cowshed and as mattress for calves. Geychizagtagmo is the next *tsamdo*. *Jaitshasupani* once eaten in place of *paan* leaves grow along the road. *Dafaishamu* mushroom grows abundantly on some oak and other big

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<sup>45</sup> It is called *doimolampa* in Khengkha dialect, and its leaves are used for wrapping and packing butter.

trees. Geychizagwom is the last *tsamdo* before reaching the Telungichhu. A bamboo species called *rawa* is abundant there. *Tsetuchem*, which is eaten by cattle, also grows all around.

Techuzam is a wooden bridge across Telungichhu. The altitude around the bridge is about 2000 meters. There are different types of wild flowers and fruits hanging all over the leaves, climbers and branches. The vegetation is a sub-tropical with thick undergrowth, and many climbers and creepers envelop most trees, short and tall. After walking across Techhulung there is a small stream called Gewakhagichhu near Gewakha *tsamdo*.

From the river, there are some gentle climbs. A half hour walk from Gewakha leads to oak and young pine vegetation. There were no pine trees twenty years ago, but now it has almost become a dominant species. Both above and below the road, branches of oak had been clamped by bears for its acorn. Footprints of a bear cub were found beside a muddy pond. There are many small streams along the way, and the most notable is a beautiful waterfall. Gangzhizomsa is a resting place where four mountains meet.



*A Wooden Plank Bridge over Churalung*

Churalung is a stream. There was once a *chura*- a traditional water mill built over the river, like the one in Genyechhu, where travellers normally ground their grains. There is no trace of *chura* today.<sup>46</sup>

Kunga is the name of a *tsamdo*. People consider it as the best in whole of Dagana. There is *khempa* (artemesia) growing all

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<sup>46</sup> Dungshe only heard his parents talk about the *chura*, and he did not see even its ruins.

around and some walnut trees. A herder Dungshe<sup>47</sup> will be the last man to migrate his herd from Kunga. He was forced to stay behind since he did not have enough *tsamdo* around Dagana. His friend (a herder) had moved to another *tsamdo* near Dagana only a few days ago. He possesses around forty cattle, including ten extra cattle belonging to others and milks six *jatsham*. Dungshe remembers Thrimpon<sup>48</sup> Haap Doley, Thrimpon Tan Dorji, Ramjam Doto and a few other government officials traveling the roads before motor road reached Dagana.

### **Seven: Kunga to Daga Dzong**

Kungathongsai Zur<sup>49</sup> is a travellers' resting place. One house settlement of Demi can be seen from a small platform. Descendants of Ap Pasang Dorji and Aum Tandin who once looked after Bjetikha and Doma guesthouses settled in Demi. They lost their source of livelihood after motor road reached Dagana, and the Dagana-Thimphu traditional footpath was abandoned. Earlier the Daga Penlop, government officials and travellers provided them ration, in addition to whatever they

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<sup>47</sup> The name should be Dungche or Dungchen. Dungche is a typical Dagap name. Dagap families which have problem raising children (because of death) normally go to Dungchen Menchu *nye* to entrust the custody of their children. The children are named Dungche after the *nye*.

<sup>48</sup> Haap Doley was a Daga Dzongpon.

<sup>49</sup> Literally meaning an edge from where Kunga can be seen.

could harvest from their summer land in Demi. Above the picturesque terraced rice fields, there are orange and walnut trees. Ap Pasang Dorji and Aum Tandin demolished the Bjetikha guesthouse and transported all usable wooden parts to build the present house in Demi. They were forced to live in this secluded settlement since the family did not have any land in Dagana, nor in their ancestral village called Peling, which is one-day walk from Daga Dzong. Presently their grandchildren live in the house.<sup>50</sup>



*A Single House Settlement of Demi*

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<sup>50</sup> Ap Pasang Dorji and Aum Tandin had died, and their eldest daughter live in Demi with her daughter and son-in-law. One of their daughters is a lhakhang caretaker, and another a school cook.

The bridge across Zertazomchhu was made of two thick wooden planks laid across to connect a deep and dangerous ravine. One plank had been removed, making it a difficult crossing even for man. Horses had to dismount a steep cliff, cross the stream and then mount a similar steep cliff.

The road after Zertazomchhu covered with thick sub-tropical bushes, climbers and nettles is very difficult. It has not been cleared for many years, for only a few herders use the road. In ancient days, Dagap cleared the road every summer. The grass above and below the road is inaccessible because of the cliff, and the cattle can graze along the road during seasonal movement only. Wogbjalung is after Zertazomchhu. Chagphubyag almost looked like a hanging road. It was named Chagphubyag after the road made by using iron poles.

Aum Jomo's Cliff is a huge rock that has rolled down the mountain before it stopped on a rocky slope. The road passes below it. There is an interesting story associated with Aum Jomo's cliff. When the Tibetan forces were advancing to Daga Dzong, Dagap fooled them by planting three plantains to look like pillars supporting the huge rock. Some people hid above the rock and move plantain pillars with small nettle ropes. When the Tibetans reached the rock, they saw three small pillars supporting a huge rock move. Frightened, the invading Tibetan forces retreated.

Dhar Charsa is a resting place where people mostly take lunch. There is a rock overlooking the whole view below. A small hole has been drilled into the rock to plant prayer flags. Earlier there would be a prayer flag raised on the rock, but no flag is seen today. Gungleyphangka and Laphu on the other side of the river are the summer *tsamdo* of Dagap. There is a small *chhoeten* perched atop a high cliff to the right side of Dhar Charsa.

A rivulet called Yakhatoichhu flows between Dhar Charsa and Dharchar Bjaphu. Dharchar Bjaphu is also a resting place. People halt for the night in caves and beneath thick canopies. There is a stream which is a source of drinking water for Dagona town. The road winds parallel to the water pipes. The road thereafter is sandy and rocky, covered with nettles till Shelto Goenpa Laptsa.

Shelto (*shawthong*) Goenpa is located above the Daga Dzong. There is a *laptsa* where the road branches out, one along the main road and the second leading to Shelto Goenpa. When Drupthob Shawaripa was meditating there, he saw two deer drinking water from Kalizingkhatsho, and the Goenpa was named Shawthong (literally, from where the deer was seen). Towards the end of the nineteenth century, a fire burnt down the Goenpa. Following the main road to Daga Dzong, there is

Zamto lhakhang. After crossing Tsangleykha, one comes across two *chhoeten* in Keshuphangka.

Traditionally Dagana (*dar dkar nang*) was divided into three *lung* (regions): Shargilung, Darkarlung and Nobkilung. Settlements of Tagshar, Oomap and Gadbab east of Daga Dzong are in Shargilung, while Nobkilung constitutes of Bjarugang, Namsigang and Gaytog villages. Kali Zingkha, Lhaling, Peling, Darling and Drugjegang and other settlements near the Dzong fall under Darkarlung.<sup>51</sup>

In ancient times, the region was covered with thick forests where dangerous wild animals roamed freely. The settlements were scattered with little or no contact with each other. Bon practice was widespread, and people propitiated various deities residing in rivers, rocks, mountains, trees and lakes. Every village had *yullha* and *nyep*, and sacrifice of goats, sheep and livestock were widespread. Some vestiges of Bon exist even today.

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<sup>51</sup> Some sources mention three *ling* of Dagana: Lhaling, Palling and Darling. According to *lho'i chojung*, there are eight *ling*, Lhaling, Palling, Darling, Siling, Byimailing, Karling Zingkha, Khagorling, Yongsuling.

**Ivory and Rhino Horns of Dagara**<sup>52</sup>

In 1651 Tenpa Thinley was appointed as the first Daga Chila. He was also a member of the *zhung lhentshog*.<sup>53</sup> All Chila and Dzongpon paid taxes of their respective provinces to the central government in Punakha every year. Daga Chila offered rhino horns and elephant tusk (ivory) covered in white clothes.<sup>54</sup> Since rhino horns and ivory were considered precious, Daga Chila was rated highly. Of the three ladders leading to Punakha Dzong from the main entrance, the middle one could only be used by Daga Penlop. Other Penlop and Dzongpon had to use the other two ladders while depositing taxes.

Some of the Daga Penlop, Dzongpon, Dzongtshab, Nyerchen, Thrimsab and Dzongda from 1651 to 2003 are:

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<sup>52</sup> I am grateful to Khenpo Phuntsho Tashi, Director, National Museum, Paro, for information on Daga Dzong. For detail information refer, *dar dkar bkra shi yang rtse'i rdzong gi chags tshul mdor bsdu* by mkhan po phun tshog okra shis in *Proceedings of the Third Colloquium on History and Culture of Bhutan*, National Museum of Bhutan, National Commission for Culture Affairs, 2001, pp. 137-163.

<sup>53</sup> During the time of the first Desi Tenzin Drukgyal (r.1651-1655), the nine members of *zhung lhentshog* were: Yangzin (*zhung dromyer*), Tenpa (*zhung kalon*), Pekar Rabgye (*Punakha Dzongpon*), Choje Namkhair Rinchen (*Wangdue Dzongpon*) Au Tshering (*Thimphu Dzongpon*), Chogyal Minjur Tenpa (*Trongsa Chila*), Tenpa Thinley (*Daga Chila*) and Tenzin Drugda (*Paro Chila*).

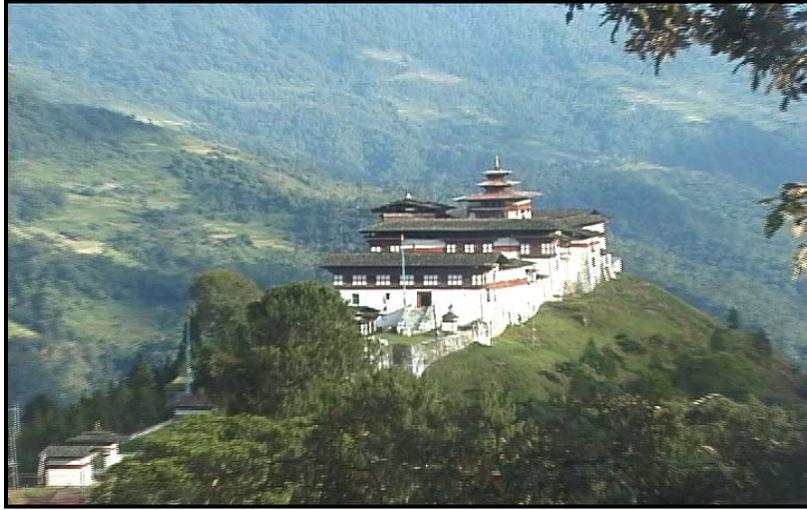
<sup>54</sup> *Trongsa Chila* (*shar chog 'khor lu rtsib bryad*) offered mainly textiles and *Paro Chila* brought tea, butter and salt.

No.	Name	Reign
1.	Penlop Tenpa Thinley <i>bstan pa 'phrin las</i>	1651
2.	Penlop Tshelthrium Jungnay <i>tshul khrims 'byung gnas</i>	?
3.	Penlop Rigzin Lhundup <i>rig 'zing l.lhun grub</i>	?
4.	Penlop Rabten <i>rab brtan</i>	?
5.	Penlop Tenzin Wangpo <i>btan 'zin dang po</i>	?
6.	Penlop Padkar Jungney <i>pad dkar 'byung gnas</i>	?
7.	Penlop Tshering Dendup <i>tshe ring don grub</i>	?
8.	Penlop Dorji Norbu <i>rdo rje nor bu</i>	?
9.	Penlop Tashi Gangpa <i>okra shi sgang pa</i>	?
10.	Penlop Tshewang Phuntsho <i>rtshe dbang phun rtshog</i>	?
11.	Penlop Samten Dorji <i>osam gtan rdo rje</i>	?
12.	Penlop Jamo Serpo <i>bya mo ser po</i>	?
13.	Penlop Doyon Chelwa <i>'dod yon dpyal ba</i>	?
14.	Penlop Tsithub <i>sri thub</i>	?
15.	Penlop Tsewang Dorji <i>tshe dbang rdo rje</i>	?
16.	Nyerchen Phowa Bom <i>pho ba sbom</i>	?
17.	Nyerchen Martogpa <i>mar tog pa</i>	?
18.	Dzongpon Chungkhab Rinzin <i>khyung khab rig 'zin</i>	?

19.	Dzongtshab Gasing Dungpa <i>dga' rtsing drung pa</i>	?
20.	Dzongpon Rigzin Dorji <i>rig 'zin rdo rji</i>	?
21.	Dzongpon Haap Doley <i>hap do legs</i>	1954-59
22.	Thrimsab Tandin Dorji <i>rta mgrin rdo rje</i>	1959-64
23.	Dzongda Kawang Rinchen <i>ka wang rin chen</i>	1964-67
24.	Dzongda Parop Jangwang Darpo <i>spa rop gyang wang dar po</i>	1967-74
25.	Dzongda Shar Chalthi <i>shar dpyal the</i>	1974-78
26.	Dzongda Shar Namgyal <i>shar rnam rgyal</i>	1978-80
27.	Dzongda Karma Sherpa <i>rkar rma shar pa</i>	1980-83
28.	Dzongda Parop Thinley Yezer <i>spa rop phrin las 'od zer</i>	1983-86
29.	Dzongda Shar Tshelthrim Gyaltshe <i>shar tshul khrims rgyal mtshan</i>	1986-87
30.	Dzongda Gasing Lhundup <i>'ga seng l.lung grub</i>	1987-88
31.	Dzongda Karma Dorji <i>rkar rma rdo rje</i>	1988-90
32.	Dzongda Hari Sonam Tobgay <i>ha ri osod nams stobs rgyas</i>	1990-91
33.	Dzongda Jala Yeshe Tshering <i>rgy la ye she tshe ring</i>	1991-98
34.	Dzongda Nubi Ugyen Tenzin <i>nub sbi ao rgyan bstan 'zin</i>	1998-98
35.	Dzongda Orongpa Mingpo Dukpa <i>ao rong pa ming po 'brug pa</i>	1998-'03
36.	Dzongda Sangay Dorji <i>sang rgas rdo rje</i>	2003- ?

**Daga Tashi Yangtse Dzong**

After *zhung droenyer* (*mgron gnyer*- chief of protocol) Druk Namgyal brought Dagalungsum under the central rule, he built a *dradzong* (enemy fortress) in 1652 on a ridge that looks like an elephant's head, below Shelto Goenpa. It was meant to subdue enemies of the southern frontier and to address the spiritual needs of the region. The dzong was named Daga Tashi Yangtse Dzong.



*Daga Tashi Yangtse Dzong*

The dzong is unique in many aspects. Its shape and size were dictated by the topography, and the dzong, its *utse* (*dbo rtsi*-centre tower) and the entrance gate face the north. A square-shaped *utse*, which has three floors, is taller than the *utse* of other dzong. In absence of a *tadzong*, it was used as a

watchtower to keep vigilance on enemies. Three difficult ladders leading to *utse* cannot be seen from outside. These were designed to make the *utse* more inaccessible to enemies, besides making it easier for the defence and apprehend enemies. High stonewalls surround the dzong from three directions, making it accessible only from the entrance gate in the north. With the *utse* in the centre, the *shakor* (*shag bskor*) around it houses lhakhang and the monks. The lhakhang and *tensum* are in the right *shakor*, while Lam Neten and the monks reside in the left.

The Goenkhang (*mgon khang*) is in the upper floor of the *utse*, housing statues of Goempo Chamdrel (*mgon po lcam dral gsum*) and other protecting deities; here rituals of Lhamo, Goempoi Drupchod (*mgon po'i sgrub mchod*) and other *kurim* (*sku rim*) are performed.

In the middle floor is Lamai Lhakhang. There is a human size statue of Tsangpa Jarey. To its right is Künra (*kun ra*) lhakhang with a gold Buddha statue and Zhabdrung as its main *nannten*. In front to Kinra lhakhang is Jigjad (*'jigs byed*) lhakhang whose exterior part was renovated by Dzungpon Chungkhab Rinzin. It bears the statute of Guru Rimpoche (which was said to have spoken) and statues of deities in wrathful forms. The next is Gyalkhang (*rgyal khang*) lhakhang.

Neten lhakhang has a statue of Jowo (also said to have spoken) brought by Zhabdrung Jigme Chogyal from Talo, and of Neten Chudru. It was constructed by Zhabdrung Jigme Chogyal, and is also known as lhakhang *sarp*. To its right is Kago (*bka' bsgo*) lhakhang with statues of Jampa (Maitreya), Guru Rimpoche and Zhabdrung. Methrugpa (*mi 'kruga pa*) lhakhang houses many deities of *gyalwa metrugpa*. Lhakhang Gashig (*'g' zhig*) was built at the time of Dzungpon Chungkhab Rinzin after the original lhakhang was destroyed by an earthquake. There are a total of eight lhakhang. Daga dzong was destroyed twice: when Pekar Jungney was Penlop, its roof, walls and *utse* were destroyed by wind, and later by an earthquake.

#### Megalith of Dagana

Do Namgi Kaw<sup>55</sup> *rdo gnam gyi kaw-* pillar of all rocks) is opposite Daga Dzong near Nyindugkha. It is believed to have flown from India (*rgy gar 'phag pa'i gyul*). The pillar measures approximately 20 meters high and its base circumference hidden by dense forest undergrowth is 15 meters. Its crown bears a footprint of *khandom* measuring 16 cm. Tradition has it that when the megalith landed on the present site, nearby trees and rocks bowed in respect. Locals believe that even

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<sup>55</sup> I am grateful to Sonam Kinga for more information on Do Namgi Kaw and other historical and cultural monuments of Dagana. Refer his '*The Megaliths of Dagana*' (unpublished), 2003.

today all trees and rocks bend towards the pillar. It is believed to have spoken while Daga Dzong was being constructed, threatening that the dzong would collapse if its *sertho* (golden copula) were taller than its crown. Today the dzong's *sertho* and the pillar are of same height. Earlier a whole sangha of monks lived around the pillar. Now it is covered with thick forests.

Following these events, the size of Dagana *dratshang* increased considerably and most monks became highly accomplished both in learning and in physique. People attributed this to the blessings of the pillar. When a powerful earthquake destroyed Daga Dzong, its *kuenray* was seen facing the pillar. During the reconstruction, the *kuenray* was built facing Mahey Lungm, a forest opposite the pillar. Later, most monks went to live around the pillar and the *dratshang* declined.

There are two other megaliths. Do Kelpai Genthey (*rdo bkal pa'i gyen*- the rock steps of eon) in Tanabji is as high as Do Namgi Kaw. There is a flight of five zig-zag stone steps; the first step had disappeared beneath the ground. People believe that the present eon (*kalpa*) would end when the remaining four steps have finally submerged beneath the earth.

The third megalith, Tha Namkhai Dzong (*'tha gnam mkha'i rdzong*- the frontier sky fortress) is a *nye* blessed by Guru

Rimpoche; as sacred and famous as Taktshang in Paro, to the locals. From the valley floor, the cliff where a cave is located looks as if it is suspended in air. No human or animal can enter the cave. There were reports of sighting a long structure, ringing in the cave like a bell on a windy afternoon, and the people could hear the sound.

Nyindugkha is the birthplace of Zhabdrung Sungtrul Cholay Namgyal (1708-1736). It is located to the south of Daga Dzong. The ruins of the house where Zhabdrung was born can be seen.<sup>56</sup>

Dekiling Goenpa is above Nyindugkha. It is the winter residence of Chizhi lama of the Sakya tradition; in summer the lama moved to Chizhi Goenpa in Genyekha, Thimphu. Oral tradition has it that when the *goenpa's* caretaker (*dkun gnyer*) was making offering on the *chhosham* (altar) one early morning, he found a *dung* (ritual horn) beside the window. The caretaker was so amazed that he wrapped the *dung* with a cloth and kept it in the shrine. Most oral sources say that the *dung* was extracted as *ter* (hidden treasure) from a *nye* called Dungchen Menchu in Dagana. Each year, the *dung* was

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<sup>56</sup> Incarnations of Cholay Namgyal were Cholay Shacha Tenzin (1736-1780), Cholay Yeshe Gyaltsen (1781-1830), Cholay Jigme Dorji (1831-1850), Cholay Yeshe Ngedup (1850-1917), Cholay Jigme Tenzin (1919-1949).

brought to every household in Nyindugkha, and after performing *marchang* and *serkhem* it was blown. As destined the *dung* was believed to have flown to Dekiling Goenpa, and from Dekiling, Chizhi lama took it to Chizhi Goenpa.<sup>57</sup>

At the left side of Daga Dzong, there is a cliff (*nye*) known as Dungchen Menchu (*dung chen sman chu*). The remains of the *dung* extracted by a *terton* can still be seen. The hole is similar to the shape of a *dung*. *Menchu* (medicinal water) flowing from the hole is used for curative bath and drinking.

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<sup>57</sup> The *dung* is one of the *nanngen*. It was believed that monks of Chizhi Goenpa were known for blowing *dung* due to its blessing.