

# **Reciprocal Exchange and Community Vitality: The Case of Gortshom Village in Eastern Bhutan\***

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## **Introduction**

The goals of Gross National Happiness implicitly uphold the preservation and promotion of village life which is the primary source and repository of the Bhutanese way of life. Bhutan is a country of villages and small communities. Hundreds of small communities scattered throughout the hills and valleys form the building blocks of our society. Each community is a consequence of a long process of historical, social, economic and cultural evolution.

A community's vitality depends on various interactions that take place in different realms of the social, economic and cultural life. An interactive environment fomented by the necessities of inter-dependence at all levels fostered the sense of community vitality and strong sense of belonging. The foundations of a stable and cohesive society in traditional Bhutan were small and sustainable rural communities. As subsistence agricultural communities, they are more inter-dependent, more interactive and their lives more integrated.

Community vitality depends on various factors such as voluntary activities in the community, level of trust among members, safety levels and emotional support and care during times of childbirth, illness and death. However, I limit myself to discussion of three attributes: village festivals, marriage and labour exchange in a subsistence agricultural village. I do this in context of an ethnographic case study of a village in eastern Bhutan called Gortshom. Although it is isolated in terms of modern communications like roads, telephones and electricity, it

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\* This paper is based on the ethnography of Gortshom village in Lhuntse, which was submitted in partial fulfilment of the pre-doctoral course to the Graduate School of Asian and African Studies at Kyoto University, Japan in February 2007.

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has continued to exist alongside the Bhutanese state. After the beginning of modernisation in early 1950's, the state's effort to build a modern nation through socio-economic development was felt almost simultaneously in Gortshom. The scope of the paper doesn't allow for discussing how the currents of modernisation and nation-building were simultaneously experienced in the state's margin such as Gortshom but suffice it to mention here that the gradual expansion of the modern state into Gortshom in the name of development has affected the bases of their social and economic life such as land and kinship as well as domains of exchange of subsistence resources.

Villagers have responded to this expansion mostly, but not exclusively, by adapting the means of subsistence livelihood. One primary means of securing subsistence livelihood is the exchange of resources like labour. Such exchanges are underscored by the principle of reciprocity. The pressures and opportunities created by development have required farmers to adapt their exchange relationship in order to secure or enhance their subsistence needs. Adaptation of exchange relationship does not imply disappearance of exchanges. Exchanges persist because without them, community life and subsistence production would be impossible for several reasons.

In the face of modernisation, villagers emphasise more on their exchange relationship. Emphasis is marked by payment of economic compensations which serve as social reminder of the obligations and debt to reciprocate in the near or immediate future. Compensations are usually made in the form of money and sometimes goods. But payment does not complete the exchange relationship as in a market place. In fact, it commits to memory of both the payer and the recipient the obligation to continue reciprocal exchanges.

While reciprocal exchange of labour is indeed a vital component of economic life for securing subsistence livelihood, the ability to engage in such exchanges is dependent on the demographic status and kinship network in the community. A depopulating village with diffusing ties of kinship impinges on labour exchange and hence, community vitality. The Gortshom kinship and marriage system is based on exchange of primarily men but also women among Gortshom and other neighbouring

villages. The scarcity of marriageable women created by a prescription of cross-cousins and non-kindred villagers means that men circulate among these villages, while as women usually, but not always, remain in the village inheriting land and property. While Gortshom men moved out to marry, other men moved in to marry women from Gortshom. There was thus an endogamy not in the village but among villages. However, outflow of men without a corresponding inflow tips the balance of labour supply. In the process, a situation of men-deficit gradually arose, whereby women from Gortshom and those other villages had to look for husbands from other parts of the country. Since there was no traditional practice of men from other parts of the country coming to Gortshom looking for wives, it amounted to girls leaving the villages. As girls also go to school and then move to towns for employment, the possibility for younger men of finding spouses in neighbouring villages are also comparatively limited. Without remaining or coming back, the village's ability to reproduce itself as a community is challenged. While the kinship system made men and women symbolically scarce, education and employment made them physically scarce as well. Marriage has now become more exogamous. A few men from other parts of the country have come and married women in Gortshom and other villages over the last few years. They have come either as civil servants, or on business. Exchange of men thus continues, but with communities far beyond the social, cultural and geographic boundaries of Yungtoed.

Indeed the vitality of the community depends on its ability to reproduce and sustain. Besides economic and social attributes that can help assess its vitality, the preservation and promotion of cultural life is also crucial. An important aspect of cultural life in villages such as Gortshom is the upholding and celebration of calendar rituals and local festivals. These rituals and festivals serve as the cultural framework within which community membership are actualised. They require the participation of households and families taking turns. Non-participation is a severe act of disregarding social and cultural obligations and thus deserving of punitive community action. A community that upholds such celebrations through active members' participation is indeed an indication of vibrant cultural life. They constitute the

heart of village civilisation. In Gortshom, there are many annual ritual celebrations. However, I discuss three inter-connected celebrations that give the community its cultural identity and affirm membership.

### **Gortshom - The Ethnographic Locale**

Gortshom is a small village in eastern Bhutan. It falls under Lhuntse Dzongkhag, one of the 20 districts in the country, and under Metsho Gewog, one of the eight blocks or administrative units in Lhuntse Dzongkhag. Located at an elevation of approximately 1800 metres above sea level, the only access to it is on foot. It takes a day's walk from an eight-shop settlement called Gorgan located on the highway between Lhuntse and Mongar, another district in eastern Bhutan. With a 20-minute steep descent from Gorgan into the valley of Kurichu, one of the two largest rivers in eastern Bhutan, the rest of the mule track alternates between steep and gentle climbs through an expansive forest of pine, goose berry trees, lemon grasses and onto more sub-alpine growths like oak, rhododendron, walnut and others. Only after crossing three villages called Obi, Pangshingmey and Tongthrong does one reach Gortshom. However, Gortshom isn't the last village. It is actually the heart of Metsho Gewog of which much will be said later.

While it is removed from the nearest motor road built only in the mid 1970's, it is actually located a few minutes below the erstwhile footpath-highway called *jalam* that connected Lhuntse Dzongkhag to the royal court at Bumthang, a district in Bhutan's central alpine region.<sup>1</sup> It has witnessed caravans of mules and humans travelling between Bumthang and Lhuntse crossing the high mountain peak of Rodungla that rises over 4000 metres, especially as villagers transported loads of agro and dairy products collected as tax by the state's tax collector to the royal

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<sup>1</sup> Bumthang can said to be the capital of Bhutan during the reigns of the first two kings between 1907 and 1952. Although Punakha was the state capital, the two kings and their courts operated from Bumthang in summer and Trongsa in winter. It was the third King, who moved to Thimphu. When the majestic state headquarter of Tashichho Dzong was being built in 1962, the king temporarily moved the court to Paro.

court. Most of these loads were reached by villagers living closer to Lhuntse to the transit point of Khini Lhakhang, a small but ancient monastery located only 10-minutes away from Gortshom. From there, it was the responsibility of people of Gortshom and nearby villages to deliver it to Bumthang. Transportation of goods for the state, as a corvee labour always had one member of the household travelling up and down away from the house, away from the fields. Such labour service to the state is however, part of history now, but other labour services have to be rendered to build development infrastructure. It is noteworthy that both the geographic and mental proximity to the state for the people of Gortshom was much closer when the royal court was at Bumthang. It was nearer their village as compared to Thimphu, the present capital which is two-days away on bus.

The total population is 118 people. 40 are students mostly at the community school in Gortshom, in Tangmachu Higher Secondary School, which is almost a day away on foot and in some other schools in the country. Three are serving as army personnel elsewhere, one is a monk, five others are laymonk, and five are civil servants. Ten women live in different parts of the country because they are married to people outside the village, while one lives with her son who is in the army. Nine are babies. Thus only 46 people, or 38.9% of the village's population, constitute the active workforce working in the fields. Including students in the community school and others, only about 50% of the population live in the village.

Gortshom is a subsistence agricultural village. Its main produce is maize. Grounded maize mixed with rice is the staple food consumed with vegetables that are grown aplenty. Most of the maize fields are located immediately below the village whereas paddy fields belonging to five households are located above it. Some paddy fields are located in Dung, which is far below the village by the banks of Yungchu. Rice is considered more valuable. It is eaten mixed in little quantities with grounded maize. A pure rice dish is eaten only on festive occasions and served to guests. However, the value of rice is going down as access to it is increasing through purchase enabled by Fair Price Shops and some cash income.

Cattle and livestock are valuable possessions and measures of wealth especially horses and cows. The size of the cattle heads owned by households have declined heavily over the years. There are many reasons for this decline. First, the establishment of an eight-shop town in Gorgan beginning in the early 1980's provided an alternative source to cooking oil and other edibles. As farmers either buy or barter their produce with shopkeepers with whom they have a strong connection, the dependence on cows is declining. There are also fewer cowherds available as young children who normally looked after them increasingly attend school.

Gortshom consists of 17 households. But a household is not equivalent to a family. In some households, there are more than one family. The families are registered as member of the same household. There are two registered households without a house. Their houses were damaged and demolished over the last ten years, and families moved to other parts of the country. But they still appear in the local census record as separate households. There is also a new house, which is not yet registered as a household.

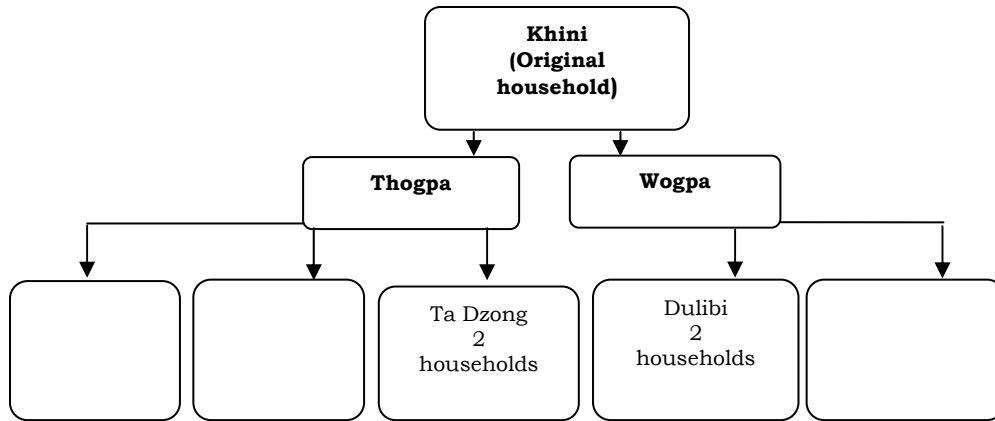
Thus, what defines a household is bit problematic. The state refers to a household as *gung* (basically meaning a roof). A *gung* is a taxable unit. A unit of taxation in both kinds and labour was also called *mephu* (fire-place or hearth). A household is assigned a house number (*gung ang*) as well as a land registration number (*thram ang*). But there are households, who have a house but no *thram* because they don't own land. Some have *thram* because they own land but no house number as they don't own houses. I must mention here the fact that the procedures and formalities of the state to make communities legible are contested in such seemingly small isolated cases.

Most of the households are clustered, separated either by kitchen gardens, toilets or pigsties. However, two households are located further from the main village. Villagers are all related to each other as they descend from one family. Over a hundred years ago, Gortshom comprised of only one household called Khini which was a three-storied house. It was located at the site of the present-day health clinic, which is built on a spur overlooking

Gortshom village. An elder sister inherited the upper storey known as *thog* and the younger sister, the lower storey called *wog*.

Descendents of the two sisters have subsequently built the houses in Gortshom and came to be known as *thogpa* and *wogpa* households respectively after them. Over the years, these two households branched into more households. The first household that separated from the main *wogpa* family is called *khimsar* (new house). Today, there are four households that have branched out from *khimsar* one of which is an absentee household. The next household that branched out from the *wogpa* is called *lagtang* (arm extension). Later, *lagtang* also branched into five more households. Similarly, the *thogpa* household split into smaller households such as Thogpa (original *thogpa* family), Ta Dzung, Frangchen, Dulibi and another household which doesn't have a name. Similar to the *wogpa*, one *thogpa* is also an absentee household. Three *thogpa* households have two families each.

**Diagram 1: Households of Gortshom**



Lagtan  
6  
households

Gortshom falls under Metsho Gewog, one of the 201 administrative blocks or *gewogs* in Bhutan. The villages comprising of more than 400 households lying at different elevations on either side of Yungchu River constitute this block. Yungchu is a tributary of Kurichhu. All these villages are collectively referred to as Yungtoed (source of Yungchu). Till the mid 1970's, Gortshom and all villages in Yungtoed were under

Jarey Gewog. The Yungtoed villages were later constituted into one separate *gewog*. As of today, the administrative boundary of the *gewog* and geographic boundary of Yungtoed villages marked by Yungchu and mountains, which are abodes of local gods, coincide.

This *gewog* consists of five sub-administrative units called *chiwogs*. A *chiwog* consists of one or more villages. Gortshom is a village or *yue* as well as a *chiwog* by itself. Every *gewog* has a *gup* as the chief administrator. He is supported by a *gedung* (clerk), a *mangmi* (community man) or the *gup's* deputy, a few *tshogpas* depending on the number of *chiwogs* or sub-blocks in a *gewog*, and a *chipon* for a village. Gortshom used to have a *chipon gongma* and *chipon wogma*, a senior *chipon* and a deputy. One member of *thogpa* households always served as the senior while the *wogpa* served as the deputy for one-year. The positions were rotated among households. Some years ago, the association of senior *chipon* to the *thogpa* household and the position of the deputy were abolished.

Now every household takes turn to serve as *chipon* for one year. There are no fixed criteria for assuming the post. Depending upon conveniences of households, the position is rotated. A *chipon*, known as *pirpon* in Kurtepkha also called Chocha Ngacha is basically a messenger. He or she reports to the *gup* once every week, and conveys official messages from the *gup* to every household about village meetings, tax payment, labour contribution and their deadlines. Although Gortshom is a *chiwog* and should actually have a *tshogpa* as its representative to the GYT (Gewog Yargye Tshogchung) which is headed by the *gup*, it shares the *tshogpa* of another nearby village.

Thus as a *chiwog*, Gortshom is an administrative unit by itself. An interesting aspect is that it is also the home of the *gewog* or block administration office and other service centres. Gortshom is referred to as the *gewog* centre. The *gup's* office, a health clinic, a community school, a veterinary centre, an agriculture extension agent's office and some shops are all located right above it. Very soon, a forest extension office will also be set up. Gortshom's identity as the administrative centre is very recent. Although the school, health clinic, veterinary centre, *gup's* office and even a shop are all located in one area and distinctly separated from



Gortshom village, Gortshom as *gewog* administrative centre is becoming synonymous to its identity.

### **Village festivals**

Gortshom is part of a monastery-supporting community. The most historical monastery in Yungtoed is Khini Lhakhang. Referred to as Mon Tamnyen Lhakhang in scriptures, this *lhakhang*, or monastery, is believed to have been built soon after the construction of the first two Buddhist monasteries in Bhutan, Paro Kyichu Lhakhang and Bumthang Jampa Lhakhang in the 8th century. Both these monasteries are in western Bhutan. Khini, as noted above is the name of the first household from which sprung the households of Gortshom. It is also said to be the patron of the monastery, and therefore, patron of prayers, rituals and ceremonies conducted there. There is no monastic school or a monastic community associated with this monastery.

While the government has extended support in the form of corrugated zinc sheets for roofing and casting of new images, both the maintenance of the monastery and observance of an annual festival called Ramda celebrated on the 15<sup>th</sup> day of every 10<sup>th</sup> month of the lunar calendar are responsibilities of many but not all villages in Yungtoed or Metsho Gewog. Households have to either perform mask dances or make contributions mainly cereals, alcohol, vegetables and butter for meeting the expenses of celebration. Members of *thogpa* and *wogpa* households have to perform the mask dances unlike other villagers, who only make material contributions. The tradition has however declined over the years so much so that people from another village in Yungtoed called Zhongmey came and performed in 2004.<sup>2</sup> The argument was that the dance still preserved in Zhongmey is not different from that of Gortshom as they propitiate the same *yue lha*. The festival is organised by a caretaker who is a laymonk appointed in

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<sup>2</sup> When I attended this festival, Gortshompas were there only as spectators while the whole show was performed by those from Zhongmey, led by a very elderly person. There were talks among Gortshompas about how shameful it was that another village's members have to come and perform for them.

a village meeting from amongst the monastic community of the area.

The caretaker, called *konyer*, is responsible for conducting daily prayers and making offerings, and for ensuring the security of its sacred images and scriptures. For his livelihood, every community member must provide three *dreys* of maize or paddy annually called *phog*. He collects over 400 *drey* of cereals. Yeshela from Tongthrong village is the present caretaker.

Mem Bragtsan is the *tsan* or guardian deity of Khini Lhakhang. He is propitiated in the second month in a rite called Tsanchoed (*tsan* propitiation). This is part of a larger celebration called Ha which is discussed below. Everyone in Yungtoed valley dedicated to him performs propitiatory rites or makes offerings at their convenience. But it is only the people of Gortshom, led by a *thogpa* and *wogpa* household each who organise the annual propitiation rite. These same households also had to perform a dance called *tsan cham* during the Khini Lhakhang Ramda. The people of Tongthrong, a village located just below Gortshom are also required to participate in performing the *tsan cham* although their own *tsan* is different, known as Gonpo Dorshey. Yet they participate in the Ramda owing to the fact that their forefathers were originally from Gortshom. *Tsan cham* is the dance mimicking and honouring Mem Bragtsan and his non-human attendants. The following year, another *thogpa* and *wogpa* household take over the responsibility. If someone from their households does not know the dance, they must learn it from those who know by providing a fee and meals.

Gortshom propitiates a host of village gods or *yue lha* in a distinctive festival called *lha* (hereafter called Ha as pronounced and known in Gortshom) in the sixth month.<sup>3</sup> In the process of propitiation, offerings called Hai Wannyer are made to all the spirits and deities of cliffs, valleys, streams and mountains in the vicinity of Gortshom and neighbouring villages. They are Lhatsen Karpo of Phrang Phrangla, Yonten Dorshe and Gonpo Dorshe of Pelphug, and Thratsen Marpo of Tirphub, Sherab Zangpo of

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<sup>3</sup> I attended the Ha celebration twice; once in 1986 and again in July 2002. My knowledge and information about Ha are based on those two attendances since I couldn't attend it as part of fieldwork for this study.

Kempaphu (the cliff adjacent to Gortshom), Ludi Lubtsen of Samburung (the small valley below Kempaphu in which a rivulet flows), Thekar Gyelpo of Trashigang (a steep cliff located at the end of Gortshom), Latsa Karpo of Lawa, Terda Dra of Charcharmey, Thongdang Kara of Rodpagang, Lawa Dragpa of Tsangpho, Kingkhar Zangmo of Rulibi, Rangthang Gormo of Milabambo, Drongkher Gupa of Dung, Drangpo Janzan of Nor, Dzamling Wangmo of Tashobra, and Jamo Gormo of Shokang.

All these gods are associated with a stream, cliff or a mountain in Yungtoed. As much as people inhabit villages in Yungtoed, these gods and deities have their citadels or abodes in these natural places. There are spaces where those of the humans and deities overlap as well as those that are separate and inviolable. Unlike other festivals in Yungtoed, Ha is not an isolated celebration. Various activities are observed at different times of the year either in anticipation of, or as follow up to the festival. The Ha celebration is a part of Bon tradition. This particular tradition belongs to the Bon Kar. *Bon* practitioners are of two types: The *Bon kar* and *Bon nag*. *Kar* means white, and are those who do not engage in animal sacrifices. *Nag* means black, and refers to those engaged in activities such as black magic sorceries and animal sacrifices. In Bhutan, *Bon nag* was replaced by the introduction of Buddhism.

**Table 1: Ha calendar**

**Annual activities**

Month	2nd	5th	6th
Day	18th	10th	10th
Activity	Tsanchoed	Hagtshe	Ha

**Activities in the sixth month**

Day	Activities
1st	Prepare Machhang
6th	Prepare Gazang Chhang
9th	Preparatory works for Ha. Bring sangshing and darchoed
10th	Ha
11th	Hai Lan or Lanchhen
12th	Dued choed
13th	Dudkilan or Lanchhung
14th	Phag chham

The days for activities listed in Table 2 are not always followed strictly. Since paddy is transplanted during the sixth month, the Ha celebration may be postponed to the 18th day if plantation has not been completed. The calendar of the actual celebration of Ha is no longer followed through the five days listed in the table above. While Duechod is conducted on the third day, the tradition of performing Phagcham (dance of hog) has disappeared altogether.

Just as they did with the position of *pirpon*, one household of *thogpa* and *wogpa* are responsible for organising celebrations of Ha and events related to it every year. They are known as *Hai tsawa*, or hosts of Ha. The very households who are responsible for organising Ha are also responsible for the *tsan cham* at Khini Lhakhang Ramda that year. They are accountable for any crop damages due to hailstorms and strong winds or misfortunes to cattle and livestock which could occur if the local deity is not propitiated or due to untimely propitiation.

The observation and propitiation of gods in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> months are accompanied by prohibition of entry to higher reaches of the mountains in Yungtoed. An astrologer or a laymonk accompanied by some friends would go up to certain location in the mountains and offer *serkem* (ritual offering of distilled spirit). Then they would erect symbolic fences declaring that the entry is prohibited. This tradition is called *ladam* or *ridam* (meaning mountain closure). Any entry of human or cattle provokes the wraths of the gods. The following event will illustrate what this means.

On 14 July 2006, the former *gup* of Metsho Gup, Gyempo Tshering sent a notice to the *tshogpa* (representative) of Tshangthromey village, which is 10 minutes away on foot from Khini Lhakhang. Through the notice, he conveyed the message that villagers have to bear responsibility if strong winds flatten and damage maize in the next few months. This was because someone reported that some villagers from that village had entered the mountains, one of which is located directly above Gortshom, along with their cattle despite the entry restriction being in force that month.

The notice read, "This is the month of *lha* (Ha) in our *gewog*. Without permission, and taking decision on their own, some people and cattle from your village have entered closed mountain areas like Pimay, Yamalung, Phungpogang, Nyungmabi, Ranila, Phrang Phrangla, Gonpo Dorshey and Khen. You must be mindful that these people will be implicated if strong winds destroy maize plants."

It was learnt that one of the persons who violated the entry restriction was implicated for crops damage a few years earlier. He was going to hoist prayer flags up on the mountain top in memory of his late mother. The prayer flags inscribed with mantras have to be blessed by a lama. One lama happened to be at a house where a child had been just born, and he visited him there. According to Buddhist and local belief, visit to families where there is death, birth or marriage can cause defilements (*keydrib*, *shidrib* and *bagdrib*) or impurities that need to be purified. Because he did not perform any purification rite and went straight to the mountain to hoist the flags, the defilements he contacted at this house provoked the mountain deity. It sent hailstorms and winds, which destroyed a lot of crops in the village. He was pressured by the community to pay thousands of *ngultrums* (Bhutanese currency) as compensation but later pardoned with a stern warning.

This indicates that while Gortshom community alone propitiates the *yue lha* or village deities, the consequence of non-propitiation or provoking them can be harmful to all villages in Yungtoed valley. Similarly, the benefits of propitiation and appeasement can be enjoyed by all in the form of timely rainfall, absence of illness and misfortunes to both humans and livestock, and bumper harvests. The whole Yungtoed valley or villages under Metsho Gewog are under the protection of these *yue lha*, whom Gortshom community propitiates.

The association of Gortshom community to the village god or *yue lha* is very important. While only this community is responsible for co-ordinating Ha celebrations, the other villages in the vicinity are associated with it. For example, symbolic gesture of contributions like butter and alcohol, in meagre quantities are collected from households in nearby villages a day before the Ha celebration. These contributions constitute part of offerings to the

*yue lha* on the following day. These symbolic collections are tokens of confirming their membership to Gortshom community with whom they have kinship affinities, and also of confirming their loyalties to the gods propitiated on those days.

Therefore, seen in these three different contexts, Gortshom is the centre or heart of many other villages in Yungtoed. It is the centre of the *gewog* administration. By virtue of its historical association with Khini Lhaxhang, it also becomes the centre of the monastery-supporting community. By propitiation of the *yue lha* who inhabit natural niches of Yungtoed, it is at the centre of ritual performances. Gortshom can thus be said to be the core village in Yungtoed valley. As a village community, it combines functions and characteristics of administration, monastery-support and propitiation of village-deities or *yue lha*.

### **Marriage: Reciprocal Exchange of Men and Women**

Since the nearest primary school was established at Zangkhar in 1975, boys gradually began to leave their villages for education and then employment. Girls followed later. The establishment of the community school in Gortshom in the mid 90's accelerated the process of boys and girls leaving the village. Their departure isn't just temporary but extended as most of those, but not all, who went to school didn't return. I reiterate the fact that about 50% of Gortshom's population is in other parts of the country for various reasons. This is a situation of not only symbolic but physical scarcity of men and women.

This scarcity is expressed in the form of labour shortages on farms (see below), but in relation to kinship there are two important consequences. First, owing to scarcity of both young men and women, the endogamy of marriages among communities of Yungtoed valley is not always possible. Most young men and women who left Gortshom have married spouses from other parts of the country. Marriage is becoming more exogamous. Received notions of morality are also making cross-cousin marriage less preferable. This leads to the second consequence. Since community and kinship are more or less coterminous in the case of Gortshom, exogamous marriage leads to a diffusion of kinship, affinal kinship far beyond the village community. Because kinship

is diffused, the emphasis and operationalisation of kinship in terms of daily face-to-face interactions are not possible. Since affinal kinsmen live in other parts of the country, it is not possible to engage in interactions like labour exchange or celebrations of community festival. As exchange of men and women dwindles among the communities, the ability of communities like Gortshom to reproduce itself is also questioned. For now, there are men who have come to Gortshom and neighbouring villages in marriage from other parts of the country. This indicates that while exchange of men among villages in Yungtoed is dwindling, some exchange with people from other parts of the country have been taking place.

In table 4, I list three generations of Gortshompas. The ones referred to as the first generation constitute those who are mostly remembered by their grandchildren. If the table were extended further, it can show two or more generations, the last being the young pre-teenage children and babies. All the grandmothers listed in this table are children of the same parents. Therefore all their daughters, granddaughters and grandsons are parallel cousins. We see a similar pattern in the case of Thogpa households as well. All the grandmothers as well as mothers of the children listed (except for one) were from Gortshom. Their grandfathers and fathers were from neighbouring villages. Similarly, all the husbands of the daughters are from neighbouring villages. Only half of the sons listed have their wives from neighbouring villages. It is men from this generation of Gortshompas who first leave the village for employment in non-farming sectors. Two are in the army, two in private companies, one in business and one in civil service. Most of their children are not in Gortshom since they married spouses from other parts of the country. Therefore, the kinship network begins to diffuse from this generation on.

As I stated previously, marriage among Yungtoed communities characterised by exchange of men and women can be described as villages' endogamy. In Table 2, I list 18 households that include only resident Gortshompas and exclude those who are away from the Gortshom. The non-resident Gortshompas are listed below. In this table, there are 11 households with wives from Gortshom. In three households, wives

have come from other villages; three more households have both husbands and wives from Gortshom. Eight women from Gortshom in this table belong to the younger generation, by which I refer to those having children now who are as young as a month-old baby to 14 year-old daughter. Except for four men, most husbands of these 11 women are from neighbouring villages in the same administrative and monastery-support group of which Gortshom is the centre.

On the other hand, many men in neighbouring villages are from Gortshom. They have left Gortshom or were sent out to live with women in villages like Obee, Pangshingmey, Tongthrong, Dowa Leptang, Lhakhang Tsa, Changshing Pogpa, Tshobrang and Sengyebee. These men belong to both the older and younger generation. Two sons of these men have come back to marry girls from Gortshom. Every village in the vicinity has some affinal relatives in Gortshom. Again, among the older generation, very few women or men have married outside the cultural and geographic region of Yungtoed. Whereas almost all women of the older generation of Gortshom married people from neighbouring villages, more than half of younger women are married to people who are not farmers and belong to other districts. All these women have moved out to live with their husbands. Therefore, marriages are becoming more exogamous. For comparative purpose, I have listed in Table 4 both younger and older men from Gortshom who are not farmers but work either in government or private sector. They have married women either from Gortshom, neighbouring villages or outside the Yungtoed valley. But not one of them has brought his wife to Gortshom. Whether employed or not, all these men and their wives, except for one couple, live beyond Yungtoed valley.



**Table 2: Women (householders) of Gortshompas**

Sl #	Wives	Household	Village	Husband	Household	Village	Remarks
1	Dekimo	Khimsar	Gortshom	Tashila		Jarey	Husband from different gewog
2	Ai Muku	Khimsar	Gortshom	Late. Gembola		Zhungkhar	Non-resident
3	Dorjimo	Khimsar	Gortshom	Karchung		Trashigang	T/gang is a different district
4	Pema Dolkar	Lagtang	Gortshom	Gembo		Obee	
5	Pema Tshomo	Lagtang	Gortshom	Sonam		Dowa Leptang	Husband's father is from Gortshom
6	Ai Cheni	Lagtang	Gortshom	Pema Tshewang		Dowa Leptang	
7	Ugyenmo	Lagtang	Gortshom	Gangchula		Tongthrong	
8	Ai Tshomo	Lagtang	Gortshom	Not married			Has two sons
9	Jangchumo	Ta Dzong	Gortshom	Tshering		Tongthrong	
10	Late Bichamo	Ta Dzong	Gortshom	Norbula		Changshing Pogpa	Husband's father was from Gortshom
11	Yeshey Yangchen	Frangchen	Gortshom	Samdrup		Jarey	Divorced
12	Northelmo	Khimsar	Gortshom	J.B. Gurung		Dagana	Southern Bhutan
13	Yesheymo	Dulibi	Gortshom	Yeshey Dorji	Frangchen	Gortshom	
14	Yangdon	Frangchen	Gortshom	Kesangla	Dulibi	Gortshom	
15	Tashi Tshomo	Ta Dzong	Gortshom	Kesang	Thogpa	Gortshom	
16	Dorjimo		Tongthrong	Namgyela	Khimsar	Gortshom	
17	Pema		Pangshingmey	Jambayla	Ta Dzong	Gortshom	
18	Dorjimo		Yurung	Late Lhamola	Thogpa	Gortshom	Her 2nd husband is from Tongthrong

**Table 3: Villages and occupations of husbands of younger Gortshom women**

Women	Household	Husband	Husband's Occupation	Husband's District	Present Residence
Thinley Wangmo	Khimsar	Jamyang	Electric Linesman of Chukha Hydro Power Project	Trashigang	Chukha
Kunzangmo	Khimsar		Security guard of Chukha Hydro Power Project	Pema Gatshel	Chukha
Kunzangmo	Thogpa	Not-married			
Tshering Choeki	Thogpa	Kezangla	Health Assistant	Lhuntse	Zangkar/ Lhuntse
Rinzin	Thogpa		Civil servant	T/ Yangtse	T/Yangtse
Northelmo	Thogpa	J.B. Gurung	Teacher	Dagana	Gortshom/Lhuntse
Kesangmo	Lagtang		Civil servant	Pema Gatshel	Thimphu
Tenzin Wangmo	Ta Dzong		Army	Pema Gatshel	Thimphu
Choden	Ta Dzong		Plumber	Paro	Paro
Dechen	Thogpa		Laymonk	Lhuntse	Yurung/Lhuntse

### From endogamy to exogamy

Most young men and women of marriageable age are now in junior high and high schools. I take note of the fact that the age of 16 years for women and 18 years for men have been considered as marriageable although marriages have taken place at younger age as well. Since Gortshom Community School provides education from Class PP (Pre-primary) till Class VI to children within the age group of 6-12 years, most children go to boarding schools to pursue their junior high and higher secondary schools which are located further from the village. As they continue either in pursuit of vocational training or employment, they remain away from the villages. Only those students, who are 12 years old and below, stay with their parents studying in the day school of the community.

**Table 4: Men of Gortshom working in non-farming sector**

Husband	Occupation	Wife	Occupation	Wife's Native Place	Present Residence
Sonam Ngedup	Dental Surgeon	Tshokimo	Housewife	Singyebee, Lhuntse	Gelephu
Tshering Phuntsho	Civil Servant		Housewife	Sephu, W/Phodrang	Thimphu
Tashi Penjor	Student		Housewife	Tongthrong, Lhuntse	Lhuntse
Sonam Kinga	Private employee	Tashimo	Housewife	Khomo, Lhuntse	Thimphu
Tshewang Sithar	Private employee	Kinzangmo	Housewife	Yidang, Lhuntse	W/Phodrang
Tshering Phuntso	Private employee		Housewife	T/Yangtse	Thimphu
Tshering Dorji	Army		Housewife	T/Yangtse	Thimphu
Lekila	Civil Servant		Housewife		Bumthang
Ugyen Dorji	Retd. employee	Dema	Housewife	Singyebee, Lhuntse	Thimphu
Tenzin	Private employee		Housewife		Thimphu

The only two young men in Gortshom who are in their early 20's and not married yet are Kinzangla and Sonam Wangchu. Although the former is from *thogpa* household and the latter from

*wogpa* household, they are half brothers. There aren't many young women in the neighbouring villages. While difficulty of farm life has been cited as reasons for quite a few women from Gortshom and neighbouring villages to run away to towns, this ethnography reveals that the absence of young marriageable men in both Gortshom and neighbouring communities wean women into towns. While some succeeded in finding a husband, a few have returned for various reasons.

Exchange of men and, sometimes of women depending upon circumstances, has characterised the marriage tradition of Gortshom and villages neighbouring it. Since the kinship system has made marriageable men and women symbolically scarce in the community, men had to leave to other villages in marriage as much as other men came to marry women in Gortshom. As long as both men and women were largely farmers and tied to their landholdings for subsistence livelihood, the exchange of men and women didn't take place beyond communities of Yungtoed valley. However, the introduction of modern education took younger men followed by women to schools and then to towns for employment. So the symbolic scarcity of marriageable men and women became a physical and genuine scarcity in both Gortshom and neighbouring villages. This meant that the level of exchange of men and women among these communities was constrained. It doesn't mean inter-community marriage has disappeared as I have indicated above. But the scarcity of marriageable men and women has made it necessary for women of Gortshom to look for husbands from communities beyond Yungtoed valley. A few men from far off communities have come to Gortshom either as farmers, on business or as civil servants. A majority of them, nevertheless, have to leave Gortshom which has resulted in a situation of women 'running away'. Thus most Gortshom women who are in other parts of the country are those who have never been to school and married salaried husbands. It can be seen then that marriages of Gortshompas are still characterised largely by exchange of men. The difference is that instead of neighbouring villages, wives are from other parts of the country. Similarly, husbands of Gortshom women are also from other parts of the country. The traditional boundary within which marriageable women and men were found has been extended. Like men who

have always left the village to marry, women also leave now either in marriage or for school and employment. They are not in the village.

As people marry outside Yungtoed village communities, and kinship ties diffuse, the ability of the villages to reproduce is challenged because of gradual depopulation. Although those who leave their villages for education and employment still retain their census registration there, many are considering options of settling in towns. For example, three Gortshompas who have left the village have land and houses in Thimphu. Two of them live in Thimphu although they are retired. One has land and a house in Paro and lives there. Except for the parents who are living in Gortshom and working their fields, most of their children are away or would perhaps go away unless new opportunities of employment and livelihood attract them back to the village.

### **Labour exchange**

Besides land, the most important factor or resource for production of subsistence livelihood is labour. It is the most exploited of resources by both the farmers and state, at present and in the past. Such demands have always made labour a scarce resource, and hence an extremely valuable one. On its own, a household will not be in a position to farm and cultivate its landholdings within the limits of seasons through labour at its disposal. Hence, an intricate system of labour mobilisation has developed.

In Gortshom, the most common form of mobilising labour is to exchange it among households. Labour exchange takes place among households of Gortshom as well as those of neighbouring villages. Not only labour of humans but of animals like bulls and sometimes horses are also exchanged. Exchange involves other obligations such as providing drinks and meals. There is no discrimination between the labour of young children, in their teens and of adults. Where exchange isn't possible owing to shortage of labour or other reasons such as illness or deaths in the household, other means of mobilisation such as asking for free labour or paying wages in kinds or cash are used. Similarly, when the labour of other households cannot be reciprocated for various reasons, there is no compulsion to fulfil all labour

exchange commitments in one season. Exchange obligations can be spilled over to the following season, or the following year.

Exchange of labour takes place among households to overcome limitations of time and labour in completing works on time. It enables a synergy of labour in ensuring timely completion of works. It is not possible for any household to complete ploughing the fields, sowing, weeding, and harvesting his/her entire landholdings without entering into this exchange system. Rather than pay wages, in cash or kind, exchanging labour on reciprocal basis ensures that the available household labour is used to its optimum level. This is also a primary motivation for households to engage in labour exchange.

While the need for labour compels households to enter into reciprocal exchange relationship, it isn't a mechanical reciprocity compliant to rules and behaviour of market exchange. Even during the times of peak demand for labour, in which exchange labour is a scarce resource, the rate of exchange does not vary according to the balance between 'demand' and 'supply' of exchange labour. Consequently, the individual choice about whether or not and how much to exchange labour on the reciprocal basis does not depend on the market mechanisms.

There are different forms of labour mobilization (see below) but reciprocal labour exchange is the dominant one. Reciprocal exchanges can be between dyads or among triads, meaning between two or more households. In a dyadic exchange, labour of household A is reciprocated by household B. It is like but not exactly a 'balanced reciprocity', "which stipulate returns of commensurate worth or utility within a finite and narrow period" (Sahlins 1972: 148). It is not absolutely necessary for household A to reciprocate labour to a household to whom it owes labour. Instead, A can work for household C to whom B owes labour. This flexibility among households ensures that labour dues to one household can be offset with labour dues from another household. It is somewhat like Levi-Strauss's 'generalised exchange', where resources transfer from A to B, B to C, and C to A. Sometimes, it may involve more than three or four households. It is also possible to think of labour exchanges along what Ekeh (1974: 209) calls individual focused generalised exchange. A group of households help another household (ABCD→E; ABCE→D; ABDE→C;

ACDE→B; and BCDE→A). This however, should not imply that labours are exchanged for a particular work taking turns among households. At any given time, there may be two or three households doing the same work, say paddy transplantation or maize weeding, where parallel exchanges of such type could be taking place.

I must mention here that hiring of bulls is important for ploughing fields and is also reciprocated by human labour. Except for those who own bulls, everyone has to hire them. By 'hiring' I do not mean in its market sense. A day of a bull hired is reciprocated by a day of human labour. Obviously, the value or amount of work done by a bull is more than a human being. A man cannot dig as much field as a bull can plough in a day. Similarly, the amount of work done by a young teenager is comparably less than that of an adult. Yet a day of labour done by a teenager is reciprocated by a day of an adult.

### **Typology of labour mobilisation**

While exchange is the popular form of labour mobilization among members of the community particularly during farming season, there are other types of work besides farm work such as felling trees and cutting them for fuel wood, bringing them home after drying for few weeks, and collecting dry leaves. There is also work where labour is contributed 'freely' or wages paid. I will discuss below the typology of labour mobilisation prevalent in Gortshom.

First, labour exchange is called *lakpho*. The basic idea is that a household who has employed the labour services of another person must reciprocate with equal number of days. While farmers would try to fulfil all exchange obligations in one farming season, there is no compulsion to have them fulfilled. Similarly, labour can be exchanged not for the same type of work. If someone has worked for you while ploughing the field, you can exchange it by fetching fuel wood or collecting leaves. The severity or difficulties involved are not considered. There are indeed many factors that determine this. For example, farmer A goes to plough fields for farmer B. But farmer A has already finished ploughing his fields with the help of C and D. So there is no need for B to go and plough fields for A. He can go during the weeding or

harvesting season. If A hasn't finished ploughing, he would insist B to reciprocate if B has no other labour commitments on the day of ploughing.

Second, a household may choose to pay wages in-kind (*pheu* or *chieu*) although the consent of the labourer must be sought before work. This is because farmers normally prefer labour services rather than wage during peak seasons. In instances where a household is unable to reciprocate labour obligations, he/she may request the person to accept wages in-kind or accept labour services at a later time or during the next farming season. Wages in-kind include corn, paddy, cheese, eggs, butter and dry chilli. The choice of wages in-kind reflects the necessity of these materials for daily subsistence. In some cases, rather than the household initiating the work, the workers may ask for wages in-kind if he/she feels the need for it.

Third, some households who may have limited household workforce or face difficulties during working seasons may find themselves unable to fulfil reciprocal labour obligations. In such cases, they will organise a work feast called *danpa*. Here, the whole idea of work is converted to day-long feasting and working at the same time. Although the hosts always provide foods and drink for all kinds of labour exchange practices, they have to be very special and served at regular intervals during *danpa*. Delicacies served during *danpa* are mostly rice, meat or fish, egg, cheese or butter. Even at worksites, additional drinks of tea and alcohol have to be served. Farmers are not always keen on *danpa* especially during peak farming seasons. So, the organiser has to decide on a date and request farmers to attend *danpa* much earlier. It used to be more popular during autumn and winter. For a regular *lakpho*, foods served are the usual staple meal of mixed corn and rice, some vegetables and whey. *Kharang* may also be substituted by kneaded and cooked maize flour. It isn't considered special or a delicacy. At each meal, workers are also served alcohol. Those who don't drink alcohol are compensated by egg, butter or cheese to be eaten with their meals. Sometimes, tea may be served. During a *danpa*, *kharang* can never be served. Besides the alcohol served with meals, it must also be served in the fields just before lunch and before dinner called *nagchang* and *nubchang* respectively.



Works done at a *danpa* are supposedly not reciprocated in exchange. It is seen as a form of support or help for the household in difficulty, for which the host has expressed appreciation and gratitude through good meals and regular drinks. But there is an implicit understanding that in the future, the household who organised the *danpa* may also come for *danpa* organised by those who have come now. Thus, a *danpa* may be reciprocated in future, but on the other hand, it may not be reciprocated either. This can be thought of as a 'delayed reciprocity' or 'generalised reciprocity'. Sahlin says:

[T]he expectation of a direct material return is unseemly. At best it is implicit...the counter is not stipulated by time, quantity, or quality, the expectation of reciprocity is indefinite...The requital thus may be very soon, but then again it may be never (1972: 147).

Fourth, households organise *drola* (morning work) based on similar principles of *danpa*. The only difference is that *drola* begins very early in the morning and ends by sunrise. It is for shorter duration, and the purpose is to mobilise labour for works that do not require a whole day. *Drola* is more popular than *danpa* since it enables farmers to work and enjoy, and also continue working during the day without loss of labour.

Fifth, *ruba* (to help) is not as common in farming as it is in house construction and other social activities. However, if the household suffers serious difficulties owing to labour shortage, poverty or illness and death in a family, they ask or rather request (*nangma*) others to come to help them. On the other hand, house construction is completed with 'free' labour of friends, labours and relatives. The host has to provide food and drinks, and they would be qualitatively better than those served for routine farm works. Here too, the basic premise is that if one helps someone in need now, that person will reciprocate in future. To the extent that an expectation of reciprocity in the future is present in this kind of labour mobilisation, it isn't really free.

Labour mobilisation in the case of *danpa*, *drola* and *ruba* for farm works has to be initiated by the host household. He or she would go to different households and say she has come for *lapa nangma* (requesting for workers) or *danpa nangma* (requesting for

*danpa*). But if it was for house construction or some illness and death related ceremony, neighbours, friends and relatives would just walk in to help.

### **Adaptations of forms of labour mobilisation**

While the types of labour mobilisation described above are still practiced, there are adaptations farmers now make in response to different circumstances, particularly to that of labour scarcity. The only instance where the system remains in place is the *drola*. This is because it is done early in the morning and involves only few hours of work without implications on the day's labour.

The size of the workforce of each household is different. For example, there are four households with only one working person. All of these persons are women. Dekimo and Dorjimo's husbands are laymonks. Lay monks don't work in the field. Pema Dolkar's husband is caretaker of the local health clinic, and Ai Tshomo isn't married. In other words, there is no man in these households, which is an important consideration for labour exchange. Many works require men. All these women complained that their neighbours and relatives are now increasingly reluctant to work for them because there is no man in their households. Their children are either working elsewhere or in schools. They complain that exchange has become very selective and limited to those who have men. Ai Tshomo told me, "Because there is no men in my family, people do not readily agree to work for me. My brother and a son are laymonks. Another son is in the army. The youngest son is studying. So I am the only one working in the fields. People are afraid they won't get back their *lakpho*." Penjorla, who was from Gortshom but lives with his wife in the neighbouring village said, "If we have the time and convenience, of course we go to work for them. But first, we must have our own works done. And to do that, we must have labour exchange. They don't have men. But if they really suffer from want of food and drinks, they have their sons and sisters in towns who will send them money. We don't have anyone but ourselves. So we need to do *lakpho* with those who have men." Most households with limited workforce have someone or the other who earns a salary by working in non-agriculture sector in some parts of the country.

Another Dorjimo, who is Dekimo's elder sister doesn't exchange much labour with each other. They have not been on good terms for many years although they interact, even eat and drink in each others house but they don't talk. Most of Dorjimo's children are in school. One daughter is married to a salaried man and lives in another part of the country. Her eldest son studying in Class X is married to a girl from Tongthrong, the next village. The wife's family has enough labour supply in their household. So Dorjimo cooperates more frequently for labour exchange with her daughter in-law's family. Because she and her husband own a bull, it is also easier to exchange labour with other households. In doing this selective cooperation, her ties with her daughter in-law's family becomes more emphasised than with her own sister, who lives next door. Karchung, Dorjimo's husband, also has other source of income. He owns two horses, which transports the goods and luggage of civil servants like teachers working in the community school, government officials on tours, medicines for the clinic, stationeries for the school etc.

Kesang and his wife own three bulls. His wife, Tashi Tshomo is more at home with her children or with the cows they own. So Kesang is the only worker. Because he is a man, and also owns three bulls, he has no difficulty in mobilising labour. He also lends his bull to these women because almost every work also requires women. This is advantageous for him as his wife is hardly free to work.

Dekimo and the other Dorjimo are trying a different alternative. Both of them own cows. Dekimo and Dorjimo have three milking cows; the milk is quite substantial. In order to get labour, they pay *pheu*, wages in-kinds particularly butter and cheese. *Pheu* or wages in-kind used to be a means of earning subsistence livelihood for those who had limited landholdings. When the values of these different goods are translated into monetary terms, there are different values for some of the goods. But the importance attached is less with monetary value than with the consumption necessity in rural areas.

There are many households with one or two non-milking cows. Cheese and butter are essential ingredients for meals taken every day. Thus rearing cows enables households without labour to pay wages. More often than not, the husbands of these two

women rear the cows. Their husbands are laymonks. While they can't work in the fields, they aren't prohibited from rearing cows. On the contrary, Ai Tshomo isn't married, and doesn't own any cow. This makes her situation much more difficult than other households in Gortshom.

**Table 5: Daily wages in-kind and the corresponding monetary value in 1999**

Grains	6 dreys	10	60
Cheese	3 tegpa	3	45
Butter	1 sang	40	40
Eggs	15 eggs	0.33	5
Potato (seeds)	6 dreys	10	60
Chilli (dry)	3 dreys	20	60
Ara (alcohol)	2 and 1/2 bottles	15	37.5

If wages were paid in cash, both men and women were paid Nu.60 for a day's work. The host, however, had to provide the meals. The wage was Nu.100 if meals were not provided. The quantities of goods listed in Table 5 were paid when meals are also provided.

In the eighties, the daily wage paid in terms of grains was 3 *dreys* which increased to 4 *dreys* in early nineties. Today, it has increased to 10 *dreys*. One *drey* of grain costs Nu.10. Thus Nu.100 for 10 *dreys* is equated to the national daily wage rate of Nu.100. But in addition to the wage, three meals a day have to be provided. This new wage rate became applicable five years ago. If it is cheese, now 20 balls have to be paid. Each ball is priced at Nu.5. Since one *sang* of butter is valued less than Nu.100, it was decided two years ago that five balls of cheese (called a *teppa*) should be added to take the value to Nu.100. This means one *sang* of butter costs Nu.75. But last year, it was decided that if someone wants butter, the wage should be paid in butter and not clubbed with cheese. So, the cost of one *sang* of butter was brought down to Nu.50. Two *sangs* of butter are paid today.

Farmers are also adapting to the way and logic by which *danpa* was organised. In the short run, it is materially expensive to organise *danpa*. So when it is done, there are usually lots of labourers in order to ensure that the works are completed. Where *danpa* used to be organised to avoid immediate labour exchange through its festive appeal owing to the household's labour

shortage, it is now organised more as a means of attracting workers with immediate reciprocity. It is becoming more like a *lakpho*.

Ai Cheni organised a *danpa* to plant paddy. The late rainfall two years ago made people compete with each other to get their work done faster when some rain fell. Ai Cheni also has no men in the household. She couldn't have her paddy planted unless she organised a *danpa*. About 13 men and women turned up. That evening when they were chatting after dinner, another farmer said that he is organising a *danpa* in three days. So, he asked all of them to come. It was difficult for many of them to say no. Later, I asked why he said thus because a *danpa* means you can choose to go or not. He said rather than go from one house to another to mobilise labour, it is good to get all of them agree to come when they are gathered at one place. And no one can say they won't come. He has come for Ai Cheni's *danpa*. So he should be able to come for the others *danpa* as well.

Such arguments are increasingly used to mobilise labour. What is happening is that farmers are using the festive appeal of *danpa* to attract labourers but with implied assurance for more immediate reciprocal labour than otherwise. *Danpa* was usually organised when there was a lull in the works or when most of the work of the community was finished. Then farmers are usually available and they can afford to go for *danpa*.

Labour mobilisation with *ruba* has to be thought of at two levels: for farm work and for non-farm work like house construction. *Ruba* (help) in case of farm work is a response to a request (*nangma*). This is given on occasions of illness and death in a household during peak season when farm work is in progress. For non-farm works such as those that concern funeral or prayer ceremonies, help is more voluntary. It is not requested or sought. Such help is still given with the understanding that others would also come to help when one is in need in a similar situation in future. The obligation for mutual help in times of need underwrites such interaction.

However, *ruba* for non-farm works, especially those that do not have to do with misfortunes are not as 'free' as it sounds. This has got to do with the tradition of *ruba* for house construction.

When someone in the community began to build a house, neighbours, friends and relatives both from near and afar used to come and contribute labour whenever they are free. House construction took place especially during lean seasons, i.e., in spring or winter. Both the young and old would come to help. The host would also go around asking people to come and help. Meals and drinks would be provided. I reiterate the fact that although this was said to be a 'free help', there was an understanding that the person helped would also reciprocate in futures during other's time of need.

The apparent shift from 'free help' to paid labour mustn't however, be interpreted as abandoning of the 'free help' tradition. On the one hand, members of community still extend their 'free help' although it may be for a day or two only. On the other hand, this 'free help' wasn't really free in the sense of altruistic voluntarism. Rather this shift to a paid wage labour can be seen as a kind of token of reciprocity for the help provided. Although help in the future is delayed reciprocity, cash does not make reciprocity more immediate and complete the exchange relation. The very fact that they have come to work also obliges one to go to work and help them in future even if the wage has been paid for now. Labour scarcity and the unavailability of immigrant labour will require one to reciprocate help in future even if that help is paid. Cash wage hasn't displaced reciprocal interaction. It recognises that help has been provided, and thus obliges the recipient to reciprocate in future if and when needed. "Money is mainly...an act of remembering, a way of keeping track of the exchanges which we enter into with the rest of humanity" (Hart 1999: 234) The fact that cash is comparatively more accessible now and labour scarce also makes it more reasonable to pay wages than exchange labour. So money paid as wage is then a compensatory token for the debt incurred by having received the help needed. For those who have provided the help, the memory of having received the money also reminds them that not only can reciprocal help be expected in future; it also obliges them to again help if it is needed. So rather than circumvent exchanges, cash wage in a way reinforces it. And this reinforcement is understandable in a situation of labour scarcity.

The challenges posed by limited labour force in the community have required farmers to adapt the way the mobilise labour. There is a tendency for households with more labour, especially more men, to co-operate among themselves. Thus even when someone is more related or kindred, the possibility of co-operation is conditional to availability of household labour force.

This selective co-operation is however, not a dismissal of their kinship or inter-personal relationships. In other spheres of social life especially when misfortune befalls someone, no one is ignored. The preference for households with adequate labour supply ensures continuity of works and harvests that in turn ensure subsistence livelihood. The threat to subsistence of those with limited labour supply is offset by implied assurances from family members who have some income and live in other parts of the country. Farmers know this very well. Almost all households with limited labour supply have someone working in government or private sector as salaried employee or are married to such a person. In situations of any threat to subsistence of family members in the village, their help can always be called upon. The very reason that they have limited labour supply is because their family members have left the village in search of other opportunities of livelihood. Such choice for alternative livelihood beyond farming was not for their sake alone but for those of family members as well. Therefore, farmers with adequate household labour find it more secure in terms of ensuring subsistence livelihood to exchange labour among themselves.

Labour shortage has also compelled farmers to think of *danpa* as a means of attracting labour due to its festive nature. Although reciprocal obligation was not pronounced in *danpa*, it was not absent either. The expectation that it would be reciprocated in the long run was present. However, the expectation now is for more immediate exchange. The reciprocal obligation for *danpa* is emphasised and expressed whereas it was subdued and implied earlier.

Just as *danpa* was possible in a situation of more labour supply, so was *ruba* or 'free help' to those families constructing houses. Even here, the expectation that similar help may be reciprocated in future underpinned this 'free help' labour. Labour shortage now requires that this expectation is more pronounced.

So paying wages in cash as economic compensation emphasises the reciprocal obligation they owe. Just because cash has been paid does not free one from obligation to provide labour as help to those who have helped you now. He too would pay cash wage but again only as token of the fact that he is obliged to help in future. So, the obligation to reciprocate persists even when cash wage is paid.

Friends, neighbours and relatives still extend 'free help' for a day or two. Such labourers are also entitled to better food and drink as compared to others working for wage. Similarly 'free help' extended to families in need during difficult times is still in place. The underlying logic is the same. Everyone in need must help each other.

Those households where a woman is the only household labour have sought alternatives to offset pressures of selective cooperation exercised by those with adequate labour. They do this by way of raising cattle, and offering diary products as wages in-kind. Besides, they have also tried to gain comparative advantage by arguing to increase cost for butter and cheese, two primary commodities paid as wages. They are able to do this by valuing these goods against the monetary value of the national daily wage rate fixed by the government. Whereas, different wages in-kind were paid earlier considering people's need and not the monetary value of each commodity, the need to address labour shortage has made them adopt a new point of reference.

Here again, it must be noted that either money or the concept of it entering the domain of village economy doesn't function as a medium of exchange as in a market place. Since households with only women are disadvantaged in labour exchange, they pay wages in-kind more as a substitute for the labour exchange they should have provided, not as 'wage' for labour service they used. It becomes a symbolic token for the reciprocal obligation they owe but cannot fulfil through labour. Although the national daily wage rate of Nu.100 is taken as a referent, the value of wages paid and those of meals provided together are much higher. There lies a different perception of interaction beyond a market framework.



## **Conclusion**

The vibrancy and vitality of community life is indispensable in realising the goals of Gross National Happiness. The fact that Bhutan is largely a Kingdom consisting of many subsistence farming villages require an objective understanding of the dynamics of community life. A 'hot' community that retains and regenerates its vitality overtime is one that takes cognizance of social, cultural, economic and political life based on active participation of its members characterised by upholding its core values and reciprocal exchanges of resources.

I have discussed a case of Gortshom by studying three attributes of its community life: local festival as the cultural, marriage as the social, and labour exchange as the economic dimension. In assessing whether this community is vibrant and interactive, I discussed how responsive it is to challenges posed by modernisation and development. The responsiveness of the community is expressed in adjustment it makes to address these challenges.

In making these adjustments, farmers have not abandoned the basic premise on which subsistence livelihood was secured and social and cultural life enacted. This premise is the social and economic exchanges underscored by principles of reciprocity as well as participation in village festival. However, while the premise is not abandoned, adjustments require that exchange obligations are kept alive in memory. Memory of exchange relationship has to be pronounced because of scarce labour as well as diffusing marriage ties.

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