

And ending with *zo paisangay* (complete enlightenment);
The art of making beautiful letters;
Wonder how these are written;
Au le sa, au le, au le.

From our forefathers we have inherited countless such oral descriptions touching on different aspects of life

and different situations, composed with intelligence and wit, which were passed on down to the future generations through oral transmission by many people over the years. It is hoped that these few khashey translated above will provide the nucleus for future researchers wishing to make an in depth study of this topic.

1.3. ORAL TRADITIONS WITHOUT MELODIES



1.3.1. Stories

The literal meaning of the word *sung* is to protect or to guard or narrate something. In this context, *sung* means narration of an account from the past, proverbs, and such stories that are accompanied by examples from relevant situations expressed in varying moods. Narrated without specific length, such accounts are considered appropriate mode of informing others aimed at educating children. Some of these narrations have been passed down orally while others are found in written forms. Both constitute the concept of stories. Stories that fall in this genre are folktale, legend, and historical accounts. Persons who tell stories are known as *sung tangmi* (story teller) or *drung tangmi* or *drung khen* (narrator of legends). It is beyond the scope of this study to state how oral traditions have originated and developed.

In the context of Bhutan such stories are generally classified into three groups. These are: *Choe drel gi sung* (religious stories), which are factual accounts of events

that took place concerning spiritual persons and their activities, such as: *tog joed* (account), *kerab* or *namthar* (biography, autobiography) of a historical figure, an enlightened master, a dharma king or queen, or a minister, providing an account of the legends and myths concerning their deeds, preserved in written form by their disciples, attendants or their followers. There are also *jigten ngoe jung gi sung* or true stories of ordinary life. People with literary talent often composed ghost stories, romances and fairy tales, with fictional people, animals, birds and so forth as the central characters with the intention of providing moral lessons for the reader, or listener when the account is narrated orally.

These three types of stories are briefly described below:

a) Choe drel gi sung: This includes *namthar* (biography/ autobiography), *namthar cha drawa* (an account similar to biography), *ke rab tog joed* (biographical accounts of famous persons) and other dharma-related stories like legends and myths.

b) Jigten ngoe jung gi sung: This includes - *gyal sid lojue* (history of monarchy), *mi de lojue* (accounts of daily life), *dzong gi chagrab* (history of fortresses), *mag drung* (accounts of war and conflict), *pawoi sung* (accounts of heroism), *dre due ki sung* (narratives related to demons, ghosts and spirits), *sa ne lojue* (accounts of places), *lung chog lojue* (accounts of regions), *yue goi lojue* (accounts of villages), *khar gi lojue* (history of castles), *nag tshang gi lojue* (accounts about the nobility), and still others; *choe drel ze go* (accounts of religious ceremonies), *gyal sid ze go* (accounts related to a king's deeds), *ne kor lojue* (accounts of pilgrimages), *Tse dran lojue* (accounts of sporting events), *tshong dral lojue* (accounts of trading activities) and *tsoe sher lojue* (accounts of disputes) amongst others. These are all nonfictional accounts of events, people and places.

c) Jig ten choe sung: This group includes *aloi sung* (child lore/fairy tales), *goe droi sung* (jokes/humorous stories), *jig nang gi sung* (horror stories), *thruel nang gi sung* (sorrowful/sad stories), *gu kor gi sung* (witty/deceptive stories), *tse dung gi sung* (romantic/love stories), *sem chen gi sung* (parables and fables) and other fictitious stories.

According to the elderly people in the villages, although there are many types of stories they generally fall into one of three categories: *ngoe sung* (true stories), *dre sung* (ghost stories) and *ro sung* (stories related to death). As this category seems narrow and overlaps with others, it is mentioned here for information of the readers. In olden days, stories were told by parents, teachers, elders and friends to groups, to one another or to children, especially during leisure time and while in bed. Stories are told to ease weariness and to create fun, as well as for the conveying of moral and ethical lessons.

They cover a number of themes conveying various ideas and exchange of knowledge amongst families, friends and neighbours. In Bhutan, irrespective of the language in which it is told, a story usually begins with “*dang phu ding phu* (long time ago) and follows with appropriate gestures depending on the mood of the story. While narrating any type of story, though there is no written document of rules to abide by both narrator and listener yet, there are oral accounts and belief deep embedded to all the Bhutanese irrespective of different regions. The rules are very simple: when the narrator starts a story he/she should not leave it unfinished, and the listeners have to be attentive and respond to every single sentence, uttering ‘*Ong! Ong!*’ If the rules are not followed, and the narrator stops before coming to the end of his tale, it is believed that evil spirits or ghosts who are also

listening to the story, will make their own ending for it, or, if listeners are inattentive, these invisible spirits will respond instead, later causing sickness or even death.

There is a tragic story narrated by knowledgeable persons on disregard of rules to be observed while telling a story. The story goes as follows: Once upon a time two brothers lived with their cattle in a dense forest. In the day, while looking after their cattle they used to play various games to pass the time, and in the evening, they brought all their cattle back to the shed. While the older brother tied up the cattle and made them secure and safe from predators, the younger brother would prepare dinner on an earthen hearth for both of them. After satisfying their hunger, they would settle down for sleep near the oven to absorb the heat from it. Before going to sleep, the older brother would tell a story every night. Sometimes the theme of the story would be very enjoyable and at times sentimental. Occasionally, the story would be romantic or else a horror tale. On one night, unlike other days, the older brother narrated a rather boring story and the brother made an attentive response till the second half of the tale. Unaware that the younger brother had dropped off to sleep, the older brother continued the story. Later he heard an unusual voice making the response from the dark near their feet. Doubtfully, he asked his brother “Is that you brother?” When there was no reply, he realised his brother was already in a deep sleep. “Who is that?” shouted the older brother who quickly lit a lamp and then saw a horrifying figure he had never set eyes on before in his life. The evil spirit had caused no harm to him yet, but it had frightened him and he gradually began to fall ill after that. Rituals and divination gave no benefit, and gradually he weakened and finally died. However, the moral of the story is that both the story teller and the listener must be attentive and responsive to any type of story that is being narrated.

A few examples are given below.

1.3.1.1. A Religious Story

Choeden gi Gyalpo (Dharma King)

Long, long ago, in this world, there lived an incomparable Dharma King, who was an embodiment of Bodhisattvas. He was not only respected by his countrymen but also by the kings of other countries. Although the King ruled the country in accordance with the laws of the Dharma, due to the bad karma of the people and other beings, the country was experiencing a terrible draught. The King then gathered together all his knowledgeable and

resourceful ministers, and elderly Brahmins and sought their suggestions on how to make it possible for the rain to come in order to help the growth of the crops. The ministers and the Brahmins suggested offering libations to invoke the guardian deities according to non-Buddhist practices. The King knew that the non-Buddhist practices involved animal sacrifice, but he acknowledged their advice. Secretly, though, the King had a different plan.

With the intention of steering his subjects onto the path of virtue, he shared his plan with the ministers and intellectuals. "I have decided to make one thousand human sacrifices. Therefore, you must make preparations for the ritual" commanded the King, his command seeming heavier than a mountain falling upon them.

The nervous ministers pleaded with the King, saying that the citizens would feel uneasy at such activity, but, the King replied, "You do not need to worry about this. I can assure you that the people will not feel perturbed." Then the King gathered his subjects and made this announcement: "In order to bring peace in the country, I have decided to make an offering of one thousand human sacrifices. Those of you who violate the laws and cause harm to the community will be sacrificed. For this, you are closely watched by my secret agents. Therefore, all of you have to be aware of the consequences of what you do."

Believing in the seriousness of the Royal Command, the ministers spread fear by sending officials to arrest the violators of the laws. But, not a single violator was found. Having succeeded in making his subjects abide by the ten virtues and follow the path of Buddha dharma, the King was very happy. The King then opened his treasury and distributed alms lavishly to everyone's satisfaction. In this way the King ruled the country in accordance with the Buddha's precepts. The kingdom was then blessed with timely rain and a bountiful harvest that reduced the sufferings of the people and brought economic progress. Due to the wise rule of the Bodhisattva King and the collective prosperity of all the officials and subjects, everyone lived in complete happiness and peace.

1.3.1.2. A Humorous Story

Ap Wang Drugye

Long ago, there lived a man named Ap Wang Drugye in the district of Wang (present day Thimphu) who was famous for his wit and craftiness. One day, four thieves

set out to steal cattle. On the way they came upon Ap Wang Drugye and asked him, "Oi! Ap Wang Drugye, where are you going?"

Ap Wang Drugye replied, "Can't you see? I am coming from where my back is and I am going towards where I am facing. But the four of you look like you are going to steal cattle. Where are you going?" The foursome thought that since he already knew they were going to steal cattle, they might as well ask him teach them a better idea. They said, "Ap Wang Drugye, please take a little rest, we have something to discuss." Then they said, "Since you already know what we are going to do, please teach us where to go and how should we go about it."

Ap Wang Drugye replied, "I have already thought that four of you could not have done anything better than this. I think what you are going to do is very easy. How can this be done? Look across to the other side. There is a man ploughing with a pair of oxen. Consider those oxen as yours and you may take them away right now." The four thieves said, "How can this be possible? Firstly it is broad daylight and secondly there is a man guiding the oxen to plough the field. This is going to be difficult." Then, Ap Wang Drugye retorted, "In that case you might as well forget it. I said it is easy and you said it is difficult. So I am going." As he was moving away, the foursome asked, "then, how should we go about this?" He replied, "Later when the ploughman goes to take his meal, he will leave the oxen to graze on the edge of the field. Then two of you will lead away the oxen while the other two will sweep the track to conceal the footprints. That is how you will fulfil your intentions."

Then the thieves waited until the ploughman left the field to take his lunch. Right away they rushed towards the oxen. Two of them led away an ox each while the other two followed, sweeping clean the footmarks left behind and covering a long distance.

Later in the evening, they killed the poor oxen. Having completed the task, they went to Ap Wang Drugye and said, "Today, because of your idea, we got what we wanted without much trouble. As a gesture of our gratitude, please take as much as you want of the meat and the remainder will be equally divided among us." Ap Wang Drugye replied "You want to look like good hearted men, after all. But I did not help you because I needed the meat. I have no one to feed and I cannot carry the meat. If you insist then, give me the bladder and a knuckle.

Then the four thieves whispered among themselves

saying, “Other times Ap Wang Drugye is said to be very crafty but today he appears to be a good hearted man.” So they gave him the bladder and a knuckle. Then Ap Wang Drugye told them, “Now the four of you do not need to fear or be in a hurry. It will be better if you take your time and let the meat dry up a bit before you carry it away.” Then he left them.

But, Ap Wang Drugye stayed at a hearing distance from them and inflated the bladder. The four thieves were cooking the meat, which let out a delicious smell right up to his nose. As they were ready to enjoy the feast, Ap Wang Drugye beat the knuckle on the inflated bladder that gave out a *bang* sound. Upon hearing the banging, the foursome looked at each other in shock. Then Ap Wang Drugye once again beat the bladder and then cried out loudly, “Please it is not I. It is the four of them. They are down there drying the meat. Please forgive me.” Then the four thieves said, “Now this Ap Wang Drugye has messed everything up. If people come here there will be big trouble. We should run away while there is time.” So saying, they abandoned the meat and the sumptuous meal and ran away.

Having allowed some time for the thieves to run away, Ap Wang Drugye went to the spot and enjoyed a leisurely meal. Afterwards he took the meat and went home.

1.3.1.3. Fairy Tales

The Clever Fox

Once upon a time, there lived a clever fox. One day, the fox was sitting in front of his den experiencing the warmth of the sun. At that time a hungry tiger suddenly appeared before him. The tiger began to think of a way to kill the fox, but the fox knew that. Between their conversations, the fox said to the tiger “Yaa! I was eating my meal but I came out to bask in the sun without finishing the food. Please wait here until I finish my meal and come out.” The fox went inside his den.



The tiger waited outside but the fox would not come out of his den. Out of frustration, the hungry tiger went near the door of the den and called out “Oi! Fox, come out of your den.” “Please, wait a while, I have not finished my meal.” replied the fox. The tiger impatiently waited again. Then the tiger was annoyed and called out louder, “Why is it taking such a long time to finish your food. What are you eating?” “How can I finish eating so fast, I am eating a tiger’s heart” the fox replied. The tiger was surprised by this, so he asked again “Where did you get the tiger’s heart?” “My hunter friend killed a tiger yesterday and gave the heart to me, saying that he might bring me another heart of a tiger today.” Frightened by the response, the tiger disappeared into the forest.

The Wise Son

Once upon a time, in a village there lived an old man and his only son. One day the father fell ill and died. Before he died he said to his son, “Listen carefully my son! Never in your life serve an unkind King, make friends with bad people or marry an unfaithful girl. You must always serve a benevolent King, keep close ties with good friends and settle down with a good wife and live a happy life.” With these final words he passed away.

Some years later, the boy attended on an immoral King, associated with a good friend and lived with a disloyal wife to test the advice of his father. One day, the King planned to go for hunting and the boy went together with him as a bodyguard into a dense forest. Suddenly, a tiger appeared from the thick bushes and attacked the King, but the boy killed the tiger and saved the King. The King thanked him for his heroic deed.

One day the boy stole from the palace a peacock, which was the favourite pet of the King, and he left it with his friend. Then he caught a wild peacock and took it home and said to his wife, “This is the King’s peacock, I stole it from the palace. I saved the King’s life from a tiger but there was no appreciation. So, we are going to kill the peacock for dinner.”



They killed the peacock and enjoyed the dinner. A week later, an announcement was given about the lost peacock, stating that the finder would receive an impressive reward. The King's army was spread all over the country in search of the peacock. His friend kept the secret even when he was interrogated, but the greedy wife approached the King and revealed the secret thinking she would be rewarded. Then the King called him and asked "Why did you kill my peacock?" He replied, "I killed it because Your Majesty has not shown any special kindness to me for saving your life from the tiger."

The King became very angry and said "There is no custom of the King showing appreciation to a servant." The King then commanded to his guards, "Take him out of my sight and kill him." At that time, he realised that the King was mean, so he admitted that he had not killed the peacock and he gave it back. So the King released him and he parted from his disloyal wife and left to live in a neighbouring kingdom which was ruled by a benevolent King.

There he served under the benevolent King but stayed with a bad companion. One summer day, the King set out on a long walk and the boy was also accompanying the King along with other attendants. They arrived at a place where there was no water. The water that attendants had been carrying was exhausted. The King was about to die of thirst. Surprisingly, when the boy checked his pocket he found three *Chu-ru-ra* (fruits of emblic myrobalan, commonly called Indian gooseberry) and offered them to the King to help quench his thirst. Later, he kidnapped the Crown Prince and kept him in his house secretly and left the Prince's clothes and ornaments with his friend. An announcement was given out all over the country to find the lost Prince. There was a reward of precious gems to the person who would report the whereabouts of the Prince.

Immediately, the boy's evil friend went to the King and revealed the secret and showed all the belongings of the Prince as proof. The King called the boy and questioned. "Have you murdered my son? The boy replied "Your Majesty, I have indeed murdered the Crown Prince." The King questioned again, "What debt did I owe you that you have to murder my Prince?" The boy replied, "I offered three *Chu-ru-ra* to you and saved Your Majesty earlier, but you did not show me any appreciation. That is why I killed the Crown Prince."

The kind King remembered the unforgettable deed and said, "If you were not there with me, I might have died

and because of your help, now I stand here again to serve my people. Therefore, for the first *Chu ru ra* offered to me, I release you from imprisonment for murdering my son, for the second, I offer you my beautiful daughter as your wife and for the third fruit, I offer half of my kingdom to you for saving my precious life from the deadly thirst.

The boy realised the truth of his father's final words and developed a deep sense of faith and trust in the noble activities of the King. Then, he prostrated many times before the King and submitted, "Your Majesty! Actually, I was testing the truth of the advice my father gave me on his deathbed. I don't want anything in return, but I offer you the Crown Prince, unharmed." The King was very pleased and realised that the boy was an intelligent, wise and devoted son and could make enormous contributions to the country. Thus, he appointed him as his Prime Minister. Due to the wise rule of the benevolent King and his wise minister, the kingdom experienced increased development, peace, tranquillity and happiness.

1.3.2. Religious Oral literature

1.3.2.1. Refuge

To describe the term refuge, one needs to understand this. If anyone is born in one of the three realms of sufferings, namely the hell, the hungry ghost and the animal realms, there is the suffering of extreme heat and cold in the hell realm, there is the suffering of starvation and thirst in the realm of hungry ghosts, and there is the suffering of having to work for others and being consumed as food in the animal realms. Awareness of these sufferings cause constant fear in the mind, which

