

### 3.2.1.9. Custom of Pilgrimage

A pilgrimage is a journey made to some place of spiritual significance to a person's personal beliefs or faith. The notion of pilgrimage is strongly embedded in Buddhism, and Bhutanese of the older generation aspire to start a journey on pilgrimage to as many places as possible in their lifetime. Bhutanese visit holy places and sites to accumulate merit and purify negative karma. This comes from their belief in the principle of 'cause and effect' and rebirth. Thus, it is a virtue to engage in virtuous actions for the benefit of others. To support the above principles, there is a popular maxim that says:

*Look at the present life and you will know what you have done in your past life.*

*Look at your present actions and you will come to know what would be your next life.*

This maxim has an impact on the lives of Bhutanese people. So people try to visit as many sacred places as possible during their pilgrimage to accumulate merit. Although most people are tied to their farms to sustain livelihood, they do not miss any opportunity to go on pilgrimage both inside and outside the country whenever their time permits. Bhutanese people seldom travel outside as tourists to visit amazing places and meet people for fun and enjoyment, but rather, they travel to holy places to pay their respects and pray to make their next life happier, and also to pray for all sentient beings.

### 3.2.2. Agrarian Traditions and Customs

#### 3.2.2.1. Agricultural Practices

As Bhutan remained under self-imposed isolation for several centuries, modern economic development made its way to this country very much later than in many other countries. Agriculture is still the main source of livelihood for a large majority of the population. More than sixty percent of the people still live in rural villages tilling their land and raising livestock. Farmers generally use traditional methods of farming and homemade tools, but increasing

numbers are beginning to use modern technology appropriate to their individual farming needs.

Bhutanese farmers grow nine basic varieties of cereal grains – wheat, barley, paddy, maize, bitter buckwheat, sweet buckwheat, pulse, foxtail millet, and finger millet. These are grown at different places and times, depending upon the altitude and season. The most dominant crop is rice followed by maize and wheat. Due to the introduction of new farming technologies and growth in market opportunities, farmers are venturing into commercial crops such as oranges, apples, cardamoms and potatoes. Commercial gardening of chilli, cabbage, cauliflower, tomato, and asparagus is also undertaken nowadays.

Traditionally, when farming works are due, a suitable day is sought from the village astrologer for ploughing and sowing of seeds. Days coinciding with animal signs such as Ox, Tiger, and Sheep are avoided when oxen are used in the fields. Similarly, days bearing the signs of Rat, Rooster, and Pig are avoided for sowing seeds. Nevertheless, farmers generally stick to the *throejor-throechen* and *throechung*, which are combinations of two of the five elements according to astrology.

Every farmer aspires for a good harvest in any season. Therefore, the very first step is to gather stubble and twigs, which are then burnt in the field. Thereafter, manure is collected from cowsheds and scattered in the fields. The farmlands are ploughed with the help of a pair of male animals – oxen or yaks yoked together. In the eastern region, two men are required to guide the oxen with one at the yoke and the other holding the





plough. In order to encourage the animals, some farmers sing inspirational songs called *Lang ke* or *Lang kor*.

*Please come, my Dongkar,  
Listen, with your golden ear,  
Concentrate your mind.  
Please come, my Yangcha,  
Even if my voice is not soft as wool,  
Prove that you are as strong as iron.*

*Come on, my Dongkar,  
The breakfast that we have eaten this morning,  
It is vanishing as the sun passes the midpoint.  
Come on, my Yangcha,  
Without having worked ahead,  
It is hard to leave the results behind.*

*Come; turn on, my Dongkar,  
The time has come for the sun to set behind the mountains,  
You have to complete one more round of work.  
Come; turn on, my Yangcha,*



*After successful completion of one more round,  
The repressing yoke will be removed from your neck.*

Maize is the first crop to be sowed, right after the New Year celebrations. It is followed by paddy and other crops depending upon the elevation of the land. The maize seeds are thrown directly into the hollows of the soil as the ploughing is in progress. Unlike other crops, rice involves several cycles of attention and is the most tedious of all crops for cultivation, requiring constant irrigation and frequent weeding. Seeds are sown in separate nurseries in early spring and seedlings are transplanted during the monsoon season.

Both maize and rice are harvested between September and October. While harvesting the paddy, a beautiful song seeking high production is sung as follows:

*Please shower, shower with prosperity!  
The white-headed mother of prosperity,  
Please bring productivity and [your] first offering.*

*Please shower, shower with prosperity!  
The yellow-headed mother of prosperity,  
Please bring productivity and [your] first offering.*

*Please shower, shower with prosperity!  
The red-headed mother of prosperity,  
Please bring productivity and [your] first offering.*

*Please shower, shower with prosperity!  
The green-headed mother of prosperity,  
Please bring productivity and [your] first offering.*







### 3.2.2.2. Preparation of Organic Manures

Farming in Bhutan emphasises organic methods as a government policy, which is widely supported by the farmers. Preparation of organic manure is not a new concept as farmers have been practising this in the past. Raising cattle has been a part of a farmer's life in Bhutan for a number of reasons. They are the source of dairy products and also meat, they provide power for tilling the land and they provide organic fertiliser in the form of manure.

People collect dry oak and pine leaves from the forest and withered meadow ferns from open areas using a *kotra* (rake with metal prongs and a wooden or bamboo handle) and sickles. The leaves are collected in the winter season when deciduous trees have shed their foliage. The leaves are carried in baskets while the long, withered fern fronds are bundled together with ropes. Generally, the women take turns to help each other, which makes it possible for them to go in groups to do the job. The dry leaves are spread out in the cowshed layer after layer over many days. As the cattle are kept in the sheds at night, the plant products and cattle droppings get mixed together over the course of time. The decomposed leaves are then taken out and piled in heaps of up to 3 metres high. This compost is then scattered over the field to help the soil regain its nutrients for the next round of crops.



### 3.2.2.3. Shifting Cultivation

*Tseri* or shifting cultivation is sometimes known as 'slash and burn' cultivation. *Tseri* was practised when households did not have enough grains to last the whole year. Farmers would cut down shrubs and bushes or dig out turf in the meadows on pieces of land kept fallow during the winter. The dry winter weather helped dry the felled vegetation, so that it was ready to be burnt in the spring. In the ashes of the burnt vegetation, the farmers sowed millet, buckwheat or maize according to preference as supplementary crops. Most often large areas were registered as *tseri* in a farmer's land record, but it was also normal to use government lands.

In the interest of conserving the natural environment, this practice has now been discontinued as a policy, except where there is a shortage of other permanent cultivated fields in remote areas of the countryside.

### 3.2.2.4. Restrictions to Enter Hillside

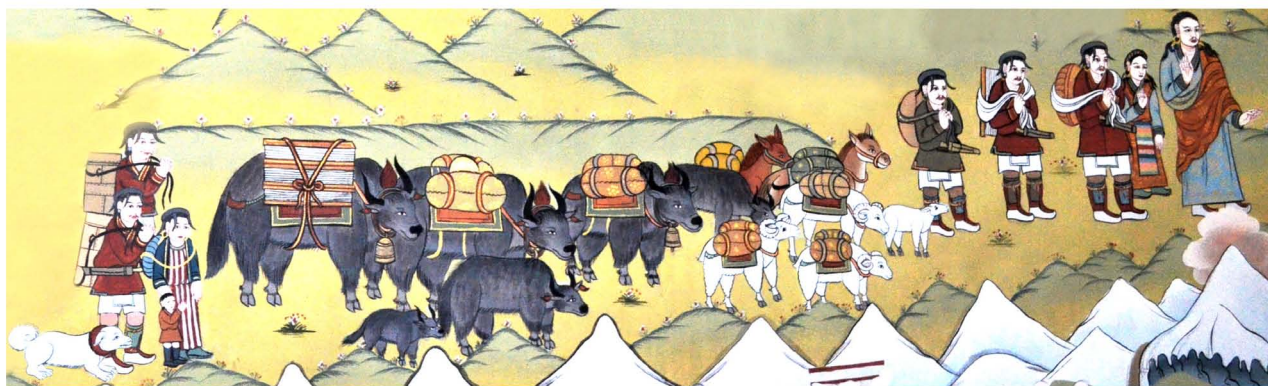
*Ladam* or *ridam* is a customary law enforced by a community to prevent harsh and destructive weather conditions particularly when the harvest season is just round the corner. *La* means pass but it implies the mountain areas surrounding a village, and *ri* means forest hills especially in the upper part of a village, and *dam* means restriction or prohibition. Therefore, *ladam* or *ridam* means restricting villagers from entering the hills and restricting visitors from wandering into the mountains, passes and forests.

The belief is that the mountains and hills are the abode of *tsen* or mountain deities who are very sensitive to any mischief such as desecration of the area or setting fires or cooking something unusual or making loud noises. Such mischievous deeds are said to ignite the anger of the deities, causing them to send heavy rains, hailstones and stormy winds that destroy the crops.

Hence, the community restricts everyone from entering the areas in order to avoid disturbances to the deities. This customary law is enforced by the communities, which in some places may impose the restriction from the time the seeds start sprouting until the harvest is over.

### 3.2.2.5. Custom of Observing Auspicious Day

Observing Auspicious Day is strongly driven by the Buddhist precept of 'not doing harm to life.' Since farming involves tilling and digging the earth, numerous



insects are killed: they are brought up to the surface or buried deep into the earth inadvertently causing harm to their lives. So, days like the 8<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup>, 25<sup>th</sup>, 30<sup>th</sup> and other holy days of every month in the lunar calendar are considered *duezang* (auspicious day) and any non-virtuous deeds carried out on these days will result in manifold karmic consequences. Therefore, farmers try to observe *duezang* on these days. Instead of farming activities, people attempt to visit monasteries, temples, and sacred sites to offer prayers to accumulate merits. Even if people are not able to make a pilgrimage to a sacred site on an auspicious day, they avoid harnessing their oxen and tilling the soil. *Duezang* is known by the term *sa-nyen* in some communities.

### 3.2.3. Animal Husbandry

#### 3.2.3.1. Nomadic Herders

Livestock is an important part of agriculture in the country. The residents of high elevation settlements have limited arable lands, so they rear herds of yaks or dzo-dzomo (cross-breeds) and sheep to supplement

their means of livelihood. The herders of these animals are part of family groups domiciled in permanent homes in highland settlements where they grow high altitude crops. The herders move with their animals from place to place for most part of the year, but remain well connected to their families at home. That is why they are basically not nomads, but rather, semi-nomads. In the winter, when it is too cold to remain in their villages, the families travel with the herds down to low-lying valleys. However, a few members of the family also move to lower altitude villages to trade their dairy products with cereals, which they then transport to their highland homes. Some of the highlanders have enough cereals to last the next ten to twenty years. Pastureland or rangeland is very important for these semi-nomads to sustain their herds of animals. To avoid intrusions onto the pastureland by stray animals before moving in their own herds, the herders must guard the area for months to make sure that there is enough forage for their animals to graze. The health and produce of their animals are directly linked to the availability of forages in the pasturelands. They build sheds with stones, wood and bamboo for the herds and bamboo or wooden

