

no retrieving what is exhausted; in time, even the earth will crack open,” yet grieving is said to only cause the departed soul to suffer more in the intermediate state. Therefore, you must remain strong and concentrate on performing appropriate rituals so that the deceased will be able to find the right path. So you cannot afford to remain weak.

1.3.3.4. Propitiation to the Spirits

It is believed that there are 18 major evils or devils, 80,000 obstacles and 480 different types of diseases prevalent in this world. When we are possessed by any of these evils causing us to feel sick, the first thing we do is to consult the village astrologer to identify the causes. Then we conduct rituals to rectify the spells of the devil that took possession of the sick person by an eloquent person expert in the tradition. The ritual is called *doen chhoe* (propitiation of evil spirits). Laying out all the items required for the rituals, usually comprising all types of food consumed in the community and *sur* (roasted cereal flour mixed with butter and milk), the orator recites the words of propitiation in accordance with the tradition practised in the village, often in the local dialect, further refining the content according to his own skills and experience. A sample of such a propitiation conducted in one of the villages in western Bhutan is given below to illustrate this tradition.

“*Phyi! Phyi! Phyi! Yah*, the (Here the person who propitiates usually inserts the exact male or female birth year of the patient). Whoever is the possessor, whether you are cardinal King of the east or south or west or the north, whether you are the spirit of a dead male or female, an underground being or a local deity, whichever you are and from wherever you hail. You are intangible beings whereas we are tangible human forms. We cannot establish who you really are. But this person you have possessed has neither meat to eat nor the blood to drink. This person is left with just the skin on the outside and just stools and yellowish urine inside. Instead of clinging on to such a being, here are food items in bright and reddish colours and drinks of all kinds obtained from India and Tibet all assembled as offerings for you. These are offered to you with generosity.

On your part, without saying that the lame had not arrived, the deaf had not heard or the blind had not seen, please satisfy yourself with the feast we have offered; without embracing arrogance and jealousy, enjoy the feast with compassionate mind. Think of your root guru and go away while reciting Om Mani Padme

Hung, the mantra of Avalokiteshvara. Because once this consciousness or spirit leaves the body, there is nothing for it to do but wander aimlessly in the intermediate realms. Have you not received the teachings from a Lama while living in this tangible world? Have you never recited the Vajra Guru Mantra or six syllable Mantra? Oh! Please do not do this. There is neither flesh left to eat nor blood left to drink. Starting this day, please let this (man or woman) regain the appetite to eat, peace to sleep, relieve him/her of this ailment just like the loosening of a belt on the waist, just like removing a rock from the bed, just like removing a hat from the head. *Phyi! Phyi! Phyi!* Leave the life, fortune and wealth behind but take the diseases and evils away with you. *Phyi! Phyi! Phyi!*

This is only an example of how evil spirits are appeased to cure a patient in local tradition. Beside this, there are similar narrations made while making offerings to *zhi da* (local deities) and *ten-zug* (offering of domestic animals to the deities).

1.3.4. Riddle

As in other countries, Bhutan has a number of *Ngag tsed* (oral games) and *Khar tam* (riddles), a popular indigenous oral tradition. The tradition of oral games is found in different regions in the country under different nomenclature. For example in the Tshangla speaking eastern region it is known as *khar-shigpe*, while it is *shed-lo* in the Cho cha Nga cha speaking areas. The people of Trashi Yangtse call it *sho-long* while it is called *drap-drap khyep-khyep* in Paro and Wang (Thimphu) and Thed (Punakha) valleys. The people of Shar valley (Wangduephodrang) call it *shy-shyep* and the people of Haa call it *pey-tam* while the Bumthangpas call it by several names such as *meg-meg chop-chop*, *phiko ding ding*, *migto-goto-nyam nyam*. In Kurtoe (Lhuentse) district they call it *megpa chop chop* and the people of Merak and Sakteng call it *en-tshen chi go do*. In the southern region they call it *gaong khane katha*. Their ways of questioning also differ from each other.

Khar tam is an oral game played between two persons or groups in order to test each other's quickness of wit. In the old days people used to bet on the outcome, with stakes ranging from personal items to the family home and even land ownership, often leading to the loser being ousted from his home village. This system of betting seems to point to the use of the word *Khar* in this game. *Khar* means home and *tam* means speech or statement. The two words have been put together as *Khar-tam*, to mean puzzling statements put forward

for the opponents to solve. There are superstitious beliefs concerning the involvement of evil spirits while the game is being played. The believers are mostly the Tshangla speakers. It is said that after the game has been concluded, one must drive away or see off the evil spirits beyond the country's border. This is called *Don nung-mey* (see off the evil spirits) in Tshangla language. If it is not done properly, it is believed that mishaps will occur in the village at any time and at any place.

Riddle is played like this- Question: "A thing that shows fist from the Sky? What is it? Do you know?" "If not, can you give that Mansion, Temple, Monastery, Dzong, Village or good livestock, whichever it may be?" If the respondent does not know the answer, then he /she should admit "I don't know. Have it! What is the answer?" "Ok. The Mansion is now mine." The answer is "The flower bud of the banana." Thus, he/she wins the bet. Then it is the turn of the Respondent to ask the question, and so forth with the stake remaining the same.

In the context of games, in general terms a riddle is a question testing ingenuity in finding the answer. A riddle may sometimes be called an enigma, meaning a puzzling thing. Another term for riddle in conundrum, but this is generally used more specifically in reference to a riddle with a pun, or play on words, as its answer.

Bhutanese riddles are of two types, generally fitting the definitions above:

- *Khar tam thung ku* (short riddle) *enigma*: a puzzle with a short answer
- *Khar tam rem* (extended riddle) *conundrum*: a riddle in which a fanciful question is answered with a witticism.

Elderly people with good knowledge of their local culture say "There are stories from the olden days when the loser had to go into exile". Riddles are played mostly for entertainment but they also test how quick-witted one is. People of any age can participate and it is a platform to showcase astuteness and also a sharing and learning process. It is said that Khar tam thung-ku have always been the most popular amongst Bhutanese and that Khar tam rem are rarely practiced in the country. Educationists consider Khar tam rem to have been introduced by Indians and other foreign teachers after the establishment of the new education system in the early 1960s. A new oral tradition, the conundrum enriches cultural heritage, notwithstanding.

Following are some examples of enigmas:

1.3.4.1. Examples of riddles

Western Region

- It drinks from the dark lake; rests in the cliff but stays in the ground. What is it? *Writing pen.*
- A stooped old woman never satisfies her hunger. What is it? *Sickle.*
- Hands always stretching but no one gives. What is it? *Tree branches.*

Tshangla speakers

- It retreats during the day but comes out from the cave at night. What is it? *Door bolt.*
- It becomes rich at night but poor during the day. What is it? *Peg to tether the cattle.*
- A tall girl carrying a flat stone on her back. What is it? *Fingernails.*

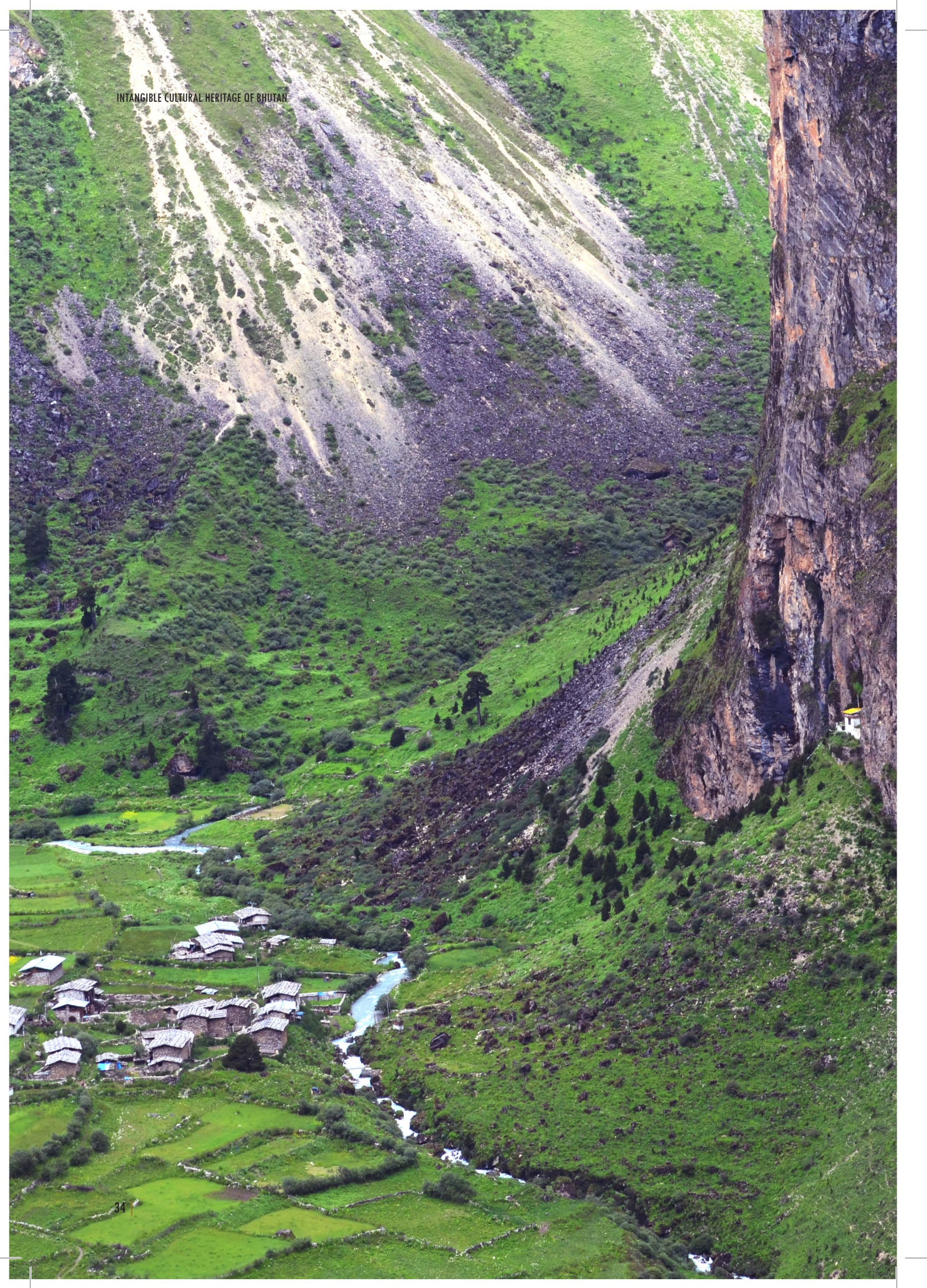
Merak and Sakteng

- An tshen chi go go. Ten tall sisters each carrying a flat stone on her back. What is it? *The ten fingers.*
- An tshen chi go go. There is a huge lake on either side of a gigantic mountain. What is it? *Nose and two eyes.*
- An tshen chi go go. Two sisters, competing for their height. What is it? *Two pestles in motion.* (That is, pestles used for pounding rice or roasted corn)

Kurtoep speakers

- Sholo sholo doh sholo. A red bag with golden coins inside. What is it? *Red chillies.*
- Sholo sholo doh sholo. A very tall person wearing a half gho. What is it? *Prayer flags.*
- Sholo sholo doh sholo. Beneath the earth, a pair of cymbals beating. What is it? *Turnip.*





Bumthang

- *meg meg chop chop/ phe ko ding ding/ mig to gu to nyam nyam*

One who questions: *mig to gu to nyam nyam*

Responder: *nyam nyam* (only once while starting)

- A handful of crystal stones lying in a cave. What is it? *Teeth*.
- Two bulls are about to fight, but hindered by a ridge. What is it? *Two eyes and the nose*.
- A hermit meditating in a cave. What is it? *Tongue*.

Lho tsham speakers

- Channel of the sky, fields of leaves, five assistants but a lone worker. What is it? *Pen*
- Spears on the tip of a small tree. What is it? *Wheat*
- Small and tiny figure but, jumps energetically. What is it? *Grasshopper*

1.3.4.2. Examples of Conundra

Question: There is a rooster perching on the tree. It is facing towards north and its tail pointing to the south. As strong wind blows from south to north, if the rooster laid an egg, on which side will it fall?

Answer: Rooster will never lay an egg.

Question: Once in a village, there lived four friends. All of them are physically impaired. One is blind; one deaf, another dumb and the last one has no legs. They have planned to make a visit to another village. So, how will they go?

Answer: Eventually, limbless will guide and the dumb will carry him and the other two will follow.

1.3.4.3. See-off the Riddle Evil Spirits

Though there is neither written nor oral account for evidence of evil spirits' involvement in the riddle game yet, that belief still prevails in the mind of Tshangla people. As it is part of a cultural tradition which has

been handed down through the centuries and taught to them by their forefathers they didn't see any need to question them as to how the belief came about. This is a sad situation, as there are hardly any villagers who have any knowledge about how the evil spirit is supposed to dwell in the riddle game. And, why drive evil spirits beyond borders? However, the wordings are narrated by an eloquent person and others say the names of different places and gradually lead up to calling out the names of places that are beyond the borders.

Thus, I present here the wordings of how to see off the evil spirits. Lyrics are actually the names of different tools associated with *kam-thag* (cotton weaving); *kre-shing* (machine to segregate cotton and seed), *sonda-ring* (spin wheel), *wai-dum* (reed), *pun pa-lang* (end feed shuttle), *key-thag* (wrist belt), *shugu-dong* (bigger reed to help heddles separate the threads) and *thag-chung* (beater plank).

Lyrics

- *kre kre kre-ta shing| son son son-da-ring| wai-dum dum thur mey-ne| pun pa-lang thur mey-ne| key-thag dom thur mey ne| sho-gu-dong dong thur mey-ne| thag-chung dong thur meyne| O sheg-pa-ya don?* (Where did the evil spirit arrive?) Mention the name of villages and places.

- *kre kre kre-ta shing| son son son-da-ring| wai-dum dum thur mey-ne| pun pa-lang thur mey-ne| key-thag dom thur mey ne| sho-gu-dong dong thur mey-ne| thag-chung dong thur meyne| O sheg-pa-ya don?*

(Where did the evil spirit arrive?) Mention the name of villages and southern places.

- *kre kre kre-ta shing| son son son-da-ring| wai-dum dum thur mey-ne| pun pa-lang thur mey-ne| key-thag dom thur mey ne| sho-gu-dong dong thur mey-ne| thag-chung dong thur meyne| O sheg-pa-ya don?* (Where did the evil spirit arrive?) Mention the name of places across border.

1.3.5. Tongue-twister

Chetsal or tongue-twister is another form of sung or spoken word game, using words or groups of words designed to be difficult to articulate properly, usually because of a succession of similar sounds. Tongue-twisters can be long or short and are popular among Bhutanese of all ages.