

Glimpse of the history of Khaling village

Sumjay Tshering

Department of History, Sherubtse College, Kanglung, Bhutan, E-mail: sumjayt@gmail.com

Abstract: Rural-urban migration is a serious problem in Bhutan and is faced by every pockets of the country. As a result, adequate community participation in religious activities, traditional labour exchange and reciprocity are waning and finding its last breadth, which means those good and lively inherent socio-religious and cultural values are imperiled strongly. Therefore, this is a qualitative study and it attempts to present a glimpse of history of Khaling villages in eastern Bhutan. It aimed to report the historical and religious importance, with the assumption that many people lack historical and religious knowledge as a result they lack appreciation that perhaps promotes rural-urban flights. The study is also aimed to inform the richness of the history of Khaling with the hope that, it would either fascinate or motivate them to reverse their settlement back in the villages to curb ongoing aggravating rural-urban migration in the Gewog, the county.

Key words: Rural-urban fights, local deity, socio-cultural values.

Introduction

Bhutan's internal migration rate is the highest in South Asia (UNDP's Human Development Report, 2009). So rural-urban migration is a serious problem and is faced by every pockets of the country. Khaling Gewog located under Trashigang Dzongkhag is no exception. As a result, adequate community participation in religious activities, traditional labour exchange and reciprocity are waning and finding its last breadth, which means those good and lively inherent socio-religious and cultural values are imperiled strongly.

Khaling Gewog lies on the lateral highway route of Trashigang-Sumbdrup Jongkhar high way. It is 54 km drive from the Trashigang District and it lies at an altitude of 2,300 m. The Gewog has the total area of 154.50 km². It is bounded by Kanglung and Uzorong in the west, Merak in the north and Thrimshing and Kangpara in the east and Lumang in the south. The Gewog enjoys temperate climate with warm summer and cold winter. The Gewog comprise of 6 Chiwogs and 18 villages. The Gewog has 574 households with a population of 5,486 of which 2,800 are males and 2,686 females (GAO, Khaling, 2012).

Of all, the study concerns three villages such as Bremang, Dawzor and Khaling Gonpa Dzor. These villages are known for its historical as well religious significance to elaborate separately here below. The study assumes that one of the contributing factors for leaving villages is that the people hardly know and appreciate the richness of the local history. In such a situation, it further deepens and encourages the ongoing aggravating rural-urban flights. Therefore, the study attempts to record the oral history of the villages to fascinate the peoples and motivate those who already abandoned and those who plan to leave villages to reverse their settlement back home to solve the pressing aggravating issues of rural-urban fights.

Materials and Methods

Both primary and secondary data were collected to accomplish this study. Primary data tools comprise of Focus Group interviews and Key Informants. The data were gathered using unstructured topic guides. A total of 3 focus groups which comprise of 5 participants were used while in-depth interviews were held with three village elderly.

Results and Discussion

Nomenclature of Khaling Village: There are diverse meanings and interpretations of the name Khaling. Different informants have to say differently.

1. Khaling "is the corrupt word of "*Khan doling*". Historically, Khaling is known to produce an abundance "ling" of the celestial nymphs like girls "*Khandom*" who captivated men folk. However, today, it is called as Khaling.

2. Abundance "*Ling*" of talkative people "*Kha*" dwelled in the village and thus the association of the name Khaling.

3. Khaling is the corrupt name of "*Khalu*". "*Khalu*" denotes a cereal in sharchop dialect, believed to have cultivated abundantly (Ling) in the Khaling village. Thus, it is from the practice of an abundant cultivation of "*Khalu*", came the association with the name "Khaling"

4. The name Khaling was derived from the present Barshong Lhaxhang (temple), constructed right at the imposing peak. The story has it that, once birds irrespective of any species, small or big, had passed their droppings, and at one point of time, an accumulation of droppings gave rise to a mountain like structure, and upon which the extant Barshong temple, is said to have been constructed. The word "*Kha*" insinuates birds in eastern dialect, whereas "*Ling*" denotes an abundant accumulation of droppings.

5. The name Khaling was derived based upon the presence of pleasing spacious topography like the "sky" or "namkha" in abundance. Thus, came the association with the name Khaling.

Khaling Gonpa Dzor: Its religious significance: Khaling Gonpa, the temple located at Gonpa Dzor is one of the important temples in Khaling gewog (Photo 1). It has historical as well religious significance. According to Mr. Thubten Sherab, 89, the temple was built by Je Kuenga Gyeltshen also known as Gyalse Ganapati, the first re-incarnation of Jampel Dorji, the son of Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyel (Namthar Pagsam Yodhingema 2012). Currently, the temple houses one of the sacred religious scrolls. It is believed that the scroll which portrays the figures of Guru Rinpoche (Guru Padma Sambhava, the 8th century spiritual Guru) and Chenrigzig, the Avaloketesvera, which is the *Chak zo*, the original hand art of an outstanding Dharma Raja or Gyalpo (the King), his venerable Thrisong Duetshen (the propagator of Buddhism) in the 7th century AD in Tibet. It is believed that the scroll has flown itself from Tibet and as the destiny would have it, the scroll perched at the current site of the temple. Today, it is unfurled on every annual Tshechu (festival) and it is for this important treasure, the people from different pockets of the country drive to

receive blessings to ward off misfortunes expiate sins and increase their good luck. In addition, the temple houses, *Zhablham* (a pair of boot), *chakdam* (a walking stick) and a *ZheyBang* (a bowl) are concealed and well preserved till date. However, to eternalize the remains in the hearts of the people, the concerned caretaker in consultation with the district administrators showcased for the first time before the festive gatherings since 2011 (in other times, no one is authorized to showcase). Also the believe has it that the tall gigantic living *Tshenden Shing*, the cypress tree (see Photo 1) on the North of the Lhakhang was what he had planted by his powerful *Chakar* (the walking stick). The tree in any way is so exquisite in itself and as such, tree of this kind is hardly to be found within the premises of the villages in terms of height, size and its uniqueness of fanning out its roots. As far as the physical architecture is concerned, the original structure was no better than a makeshift, but was later renovated and enlarged under the behest of Tashigangpa alias Dzongpon Say Dopola sometimes in the late 18th century (in personal conversation with Lopen Sherab, age 82).



Photo 1. Khaling Monastery in Trashigang (Source: KUENSEL, national newspaper of Bhutan).



Photo 2. Bokha Temple/Dzong in Bremang village (taken by Sumjay Tshering, 2012).

Bokha -Bremang village: its political significance: The other notable temple is Bokha Dzong (fortress, Photo 2). It is nested at the heart of Bremang village. It is 20 minutes walk down from the Khaling town. As mentioned earlier, many believed that, this Dzong which today functions as the sole temple of the village was the replica of the Bjiri

Dzong (the ruins are still visible). The founder and the date of the establishment are not ascertained. Politically, Bokha Dzong is significant. In fact, it is the popular medieval battle ground during the reign of Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyel, the founding father of Bhutan in the 16th century. Politically, before the arrival of the founder of Bhutan in 1616 AD, every nook of the country was dominated and steered by regional chieftains. Eastern regions or the villages such as Bikhar, Samkhar, Tshangkhar, Rangshikhar, Domkhar, Jamkhar, Merak and Sakteng were seats of power. Although rest of the powers were brought under the political yoke of the centre, yet the resistance from places like Merak and Sakteng under the command of Lam Nakseng was not easily extinguished. Therefore, as ordered by Trongsa Penlop Chogyal Minjur Tempa, the veteran lieutenants Lam Namsey and Umze Damchoe Rabgay had defeated and completed the consolidation of local chieftains in Trashigang including Khaling Bremang area. To mark the vehement victory over the regional chieftains, thus commenced the construction of Bjiri Dzong in 1651.

Local deity: Ama Jomo and Meme Dangling are the most propitiated guardian deities of the Gewog (Photo 3, 4, 5). They are honored by all the villages in general but it is mainly worshipped by the villages such as Bremang, Kholdung, Dawzor, Rashung, Gomchu Tshangpo, Barshong, Khospeck and Dewong. There are different birth deities' *Ke tshan*" in almost all the villages. To mention some of them, *Kharung la* is the birth deity of the Tshangpo, Kholdung, Dewong and Dangrey village while *Churchur bu* for the Bremang village. *Shehkhar* for Gomchu village and *Jomo- Dangling* for Dawzor and Rashung villages. They are the sub-ordinates of the main deities. In fact, according to Ap Dorji, age 71, the local *Bonpo* from Gomchu village, *Meme Shehkhar* is the body guard "*gorepa*" of Ama Jomo and Meme Dangling. The locals say that while it is important to offer small spirit libation "*Serkem*" to respective birth deities, it is equally important or more necessary for them to honor the main deities separately on special days for they deemed as the supreme commander of all the deities in the Gewog. To this end, the local *Bonpo* and Community altogether propitiate Ama Jomo -Dangling twice annually, that is once in the summer and once in winter. In summer, it falls on every 14th day of 4th month and in winter it marks on every 14th day of the 10th month of the Bhutanese calendar.



Photo 3. Cooking oven of the local deity in Bremang village (taken by Sumjay Tshering, 2012).



Photo 4. Memem Dangling, the male local deity housed at Bokha temple, Bremang Village (taken by Sumjay Tshering, 2012).



Photo 5. Ama Jomo, the female local deity housed at Bokha temple, Bremang Village (taken by Sumjay Tshering, 2012)

Festival “Soelkha” in honor of local deities in Bokha-Bremang area: *Jomo-Dangling Soelkha* is the name of the festival. The deities are honored thrice annually that is twice by the villagers in general and in particular by the villages such as Kholdung, Bremang, Dawzor, Gomchu, Rashung, Khospeck, Tshangpo and Dewong and once by the Trashigang Rabdey. The villagers honor once in summer and once in winter season. In summer, the *soelkha* falls on every 14th day of 4th month while in the winter it marks on every 14th day of the 10th month of the Bhutanese calendar. Similarly, a crew of monks from Trashigang Rabdey visits the *Dangling Tsho* on every 20th day of the 4 month of the Bhutanese calendar. The entire spirit libation offerings “*Soelkhas*”, takes place at different places for different reasons. The former takes place at *Jomo Dogsa* signifying the deity’s flight for summer residence to Martshala while the later takes place at *Dangrey* (Bremang Village) to welcome and mark the arrival of the deities from their summer residence. Mostly analogous to it, two monk astrologers visit *Dangling Tsho* every year and honor the deity. The day incepts Lhadam and it is henceforth the people of all walks of life are prohibited to visit the lake side for almost three to four months in order to maintain the sanctity of the deity as the deity cannot resist *drib*. According to Ap Kuenzang, age

77 from Bremang, before the commencement of the Lhadam, even the *Bjobs* in Khaling who have come for winter pasture must return back to Merak. The overall essence of observing *Soelkhas* are to supplicate for continued protection for the glory of the villages. The dates of rites are fixed and for that matter a slight deviation is unacceptable as is the tradition and believe has it that the bad omen would befall including untimely incessant heavy downpour and it would even trigger to fanning of flash floods that would cost livelihood and the lives of dwellers. It is therefore, inimical to perform on the propitious time as it determines deities bountiful blessing “*Nedup*” that would endure peace and prosperity in the subsequent days.

Bokha Dzong:

Its association with Meme-Jomo Dangling: Bokha Dzong is nested in Bremang village under Khaling Gewog. The site was visited by the deity and his entourage. Currently, it houses the artifacts of the local deity. In one of the alcoves in the eastern frontage of the temple, is the sacred chapel of the deity. One would find the *Thro* the Urn, inside which there is a *Drali*, the Shield worn by Bhutanese scourges during the medieval century (Photo 6). In the same room, towards its west, there are few long standing grouped *Mendas*” guns” and a ceremonial gun adorned with *dardar*, a colorful scarf, and a hanging red colored hat for their *Aku* “Uncle”. Local people say that these armors belonged to the deities. According to the care taker of the temple, except local shaman, one must not dare to touch the stuffs as it invites the displeasure of the deity including the instant death.



Photo 6. The Urn of the local deities housed at Bokha temple at Bremang village (taken by Sumjay Tshering, 2012).

Rural-urban migration:

Its sustainability and risk of socio-cultural values in the village: Socio-cultural values include community traditional labor mobilization, goods exchange, vitality of traditional games and music and an adequate selfless participation and reciprocity. In the past, given the

adequate participation, *Dangling Soelkha* (the festivals in honor of Dangling, the local deity), the traditional games such as Archery (national game), *Degor* (game of two stones), *Khuru* (play of dart) and *Kolukpu* (popular game for females) and *Tshechu* (The annual religious festival) used to be one of the liveliest socio-cultural events back in the village. But unlike in the past, these games and festivals have lost the charms and its liveliness in the play due to lack of gaiety youths and inadequate participation. The other reason pointed out for losing the vitality of traditional games is once youths are exposed to urban modern games such as modern bow, western songs etc. as they find the traditional games old fashioned and monotonous. Therefore, they prefer modern games to traditional one. This is largely attributed to the ongoing rural-urban shift of village.

Conclusion: Bremang, Dawzor and Khaling Gonpa Dzor villages in Khaling Gewog are known for its historical as well religious significance. Ama Jomo and Meme Dang are the most venerated and propitiated over all deity of Khaling Gewog. Meme Dorji from Gomchu is the living descendents of the deity and he along with two other local priests performs the libation rites. The rites are observed twice by the villagers and once by the Trashigang Rabdey.

The people of these villages are by nature orthodox and they continue to uphold this pre-Buddhist bonpo tradition. The bonpo deems it indispensable and in the event they fail to mark it, they believe that the deity would express their displeasure in the form of incessant untimely rainfall triggering to fanning of flash floods that would gut the houses and raise the crops to the ground. The rites have positive impacts. It provides the people far and wide to assemble twice every year and helps to cement their traditional bond or traditional socio-cultural values. The rites of this demand adequate people participation. However, given the constant and continuous rural-urban flight, there is hardly anyone to maintain the trend of the past and it is finding its last breadth.

References

- Gewog Administrative Office. 2012. Khaling Gewog Centre, Trashigang Dzongkhag.
- Namthar Pagsam Yodhingema*, the Biography of Gyalse Ganapati (n.d). Retrieved on 7th May 2012 from: <http://www.kuenselonline.com/2011/?p=30833>
- UNDP, Human Development Report 2009. Retrieved on 16/02/2013 from: <http://www.undp.org.bt/Human-Development-Report-2009-Migration-leads-to-development.Htm>.