CHAPTER 1
The tiny kingdom of Bhutan lies between 26° 45' and 28° 30' north latitude and 88° 45' and 92° 10' east longitude along the Himalayan mountain range. Bhutan is approximately 46000 square kilometres with a population of 700 000. On the north is Tibet (now China), while on the south, and west it is bound by the Indian state of West Bengal, and on the east by the states of Arunachal Pradesh and Assam. Bhutan with its high lofty mountains, lush green valleys and fertile foothills is blessed with all types of climatic conditions and flora and fauna. It is home to animals such as the yak, tarkin, blue sheep, snow leopard, wild ass, musk deer, tiger, elephant, and the one horned rhinoceros. Even the mystical and elusive yeti is believed to inhabit these high mountain ranges. Agriculture is the main preoccupation of Bhutan.

Bhutan’s physical features have been divided into four zones viz., the northern, the eastern, the western and the southern zone. The northern zone consists of high mountains and narrow valleys with extreme cold climate. It is the most sparsely populated region. The main occupation of people in this region is yak herding like in Laya and Lhuntshi. Some of the prominent peaks such as the Jhomo Lhari (24000 feet), Masang Gang (23700 feet), and Tshering Gang (21400 feet) are located here. At lower altitudes coniferous forests of pine and fir abound.

The central zone consists of majestic mountains in the north and fertile valleys. It is the most densely populated zone. Thimphu the capital of Bhutan is located in this zone. A wide variety of crops such as high altitude red rice, wheat, buck -wheat, maize; vegetables and fruits such as apples, plums, peaches, walnuts and apricots are grown in this region. This zone also has forests consisting of oaks, pines, and firs.

The eastern zone is composed of high hills and narrow valleys with extreme cold winters and warm summers. The main preoccupation of this zone is agriculture and handicrafts such as weaving, bamboo works, wooden handicrafts etc.
Southern Bhutan is largely low foothills with dense tropical forests. It is therefore, hot and humid. This zone is also densely populated but not as much as the central zone. The main predominant occupation of the people is agriculture and oranges, cardamom and ginger are the main cash crops that are grown here. The people living in this region are mostly of Nepalese origin and are known as the Lhotsampas.

ETHNIC GROUPS AND LANGUAGES OF BHUTAN

G N Mehra has recorded the classification of the Bhutanese people into three distinct groups: the people of Mongolian descent/Ngalops inhabiting the north, people with Arunachali features that live in the east such as the Tsharchops who are believed to be the earliest inhabitants of the land, and the people of Nepalese/Lhotsampas descent living in the south who settled in the country at the end of the nineteenth century.
Blanche C Olschak in *Ancient Bhutan: A Study on Early Buddhism in the Himalayas*, records *Dzongkha/language of the Dzong* as the official language of the country, stating also that six of the native languages of Bhutan belong to the *Dzongkha* group such as:

1. *Dzongkha* spoken primarily in Western Bhutan;  
2. *Tapadamtang* spoken in the South-West near Buxa;  
3. *Laya-Ling Zhi* spoken by the shepherds of the North-West particularly in Laya and Lhin Zhi;  
4. *Tshalingpa* spoken in the Tshahi area of the Shongar district of Eastern Bhutan;  
5. *Dagpakha* which is the Tibetan dialect of the North-Eastern border and  
6. *Mira Sagtenpa* spoken in the area of Tashigang. Apart from this there are seven dialects of the *Khen* language group, such as:

(2) *Mangdikha* spoken in the Mangdi district of Tongsa;  
(2) *Khenkha* spoken in the Khen district (South of Tongsa);  
(3) *Gungdekha* which is an archaic language of Southern Bhutan;  
(4) *Bumthangkha* which is spoken in Bumthang and other parts of Central Bhutan;  
(5) *Tsamangkha* which is spoken in the East and the North-Eastern border of Kurtoe;  
(6) *Kurtopakha* which is spoken in Kurtoe and  
(7) *Salabekha/Yangtsepakha* which is spoken in the Yangtse district as well as in adjoining areas of Tawang and Bomdila in Arunachal Pradesh in India. There are two more dialects belonging to the *Mon* group of Languages such as:  

1. *Monpakha* spoken in the South and the South East and  
2. *Sharchagpakha* spoken in the East and the South-East, in places such as Tashigang and Dungsam.²

However, very little is known about Bhutan’s early history. From the extant literature that has been preserved in some old monasteries, it is obvious that *Bonpo/a shamanistic form of religion* existed before the advent of Buddhism. The old *Bonpo* traditions and rituals are however, still practiced in some parts of Bhutan when local festivals are celebrated.

**MEDIEVAL BHUTANESE SOCIETY**

Medieval Bhutanese society had three classes – the monastic community, or the nobility of the land, the lay civil servants who were brought up in the forts/dzongs and palaces,
and the farmers who comprised the majority. The civil servants ensured that provisions supplied by the farmers by way of tax were sufficient. There were also serfs who were prisoners-of-war taken from the Buxar-Duar plains of India, and their descendants. They could marry and own houses but they were not allowed to own land. From the twelfth century till about the end of the sixteenth century medieval Bhutan may be characterised by the lack of political unity and frequent wars between various powerful local families that controlled the valleys. But, even this medieval society had a democratic set up. Starting from the village headman onwards up to the Desi Raja they were all elected. Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal (1594-1651) established this democratic set up.

_Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal_ was a great statesman and leader. Incidentally _Zhabdrung_ means 'He at whose feet one submits'. He was originally from Tibet but had been forced to run away to Bhutan due to various religious intrigues that were taking place in Tibet then. In medieval Bhutan he was welcomed by the Bhutanese followers of the Drukpa Kagyukpa School of thought and the Zhabdrung by dint of his administrative skill and religious insight, was to bring about many changes in Bhutan. It was his political acumen that actually led to the unification of Bhutan from the hitherto warring principalities that comprised medieval Bhutan. He was to fight against foreign aggression (Tibetan and Mongolian aggression), and establish a strong administrative system by codifying the laws of the land. He introduced changes in the monastic order of Bhutan after unifying the land and established a well thought out hierarchy within the monastic system. The Chief Abbott/Je Khenpo was at the top of the hierarchical chain. While the religious side was taken care of by the Chief Abbott/Je Khenpo, the administration of the newly unified country was looked after by the Temporal King/the Desi Raja. That is why Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal is often referred to as the ‘Architect of Modern Bhutan’. Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal divided the country into various forts/dzongs, and started a system of government by appointing a Penlop/Governor/Dzongpon (Lieutenant Governor) for each fort/Dzong. When the Zhabdrung died in 1651, he had managed to restore order more or less all over Bhutan, only the central valleys remained to be unified, and this too was achieved by 1665.
19th CENTURY BHUTAN

Till the second half of the nineteenth century the government of Bhutan, had established political relations with the Indian Kingdom of Cooch Bihar, and other regions that was under the patronage and influence of Tibet, such as Tibet itself, Ladakh and the erstwhile Kingdom of Sikkim. The British meanwhile sought to incorporate both Tibet and Bhutan within their sphere of influence by beginning trade relations with them. Their intentions of annexing Bhutan to the British Empire were not to be. This was primarily due to the conflict of interest between the British and Bhutan over the possession of the Buxar Duars, an extremely fertile narrow plain on the southern border of Bhutan. Border skirmishes continued to break out between the two countries and eventually ended up in the Duar War of 1864. However, the political acumen of Trongsa Penlop Ugyen Wangchuk (the most powerful Penlop, who was to become the first King of Bhutan), successfully mediated between British India and Tibet restored peace. This peacekeeping resulted in the signing of the Treaty of Sinchula in 1865 and though Bhutan was to lose the Buxar Duars it was to gain annuity from the British. Trongsa Penlop Ugyen Wangchuk was unanimously elected the first hereditary monarch of Bhutan. He was given the title of Druk Gyalpo/Precious King of the Thunder Dragon. The system that Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyel put in place was to last till hereditary monarchy was established by Sir Ugyen Wangchuk of the Wangchuk dynasty in 1907.

THE MODERNISATION OF BHUTAN

Druk Gyalpo Ugyen Wangchuk established central authority and brought peace and stability to the land. He laid the foundation for modern Bhutan. His son King Jigme Wangchuk succeeded him in 1926. During the reign of his successor King Jigme Dorji Wangchuk (1952-1972) the country opened its doors to the outside world and Bhutan became a member of the United Nations. With His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuk the fourth king of Bhutan, the country achieved a new status. Bhutan now has a constitutional monarchy with a council of ministers that run the country with efficiency and dedication. His Majesty has also given due importance to the “constructive role
that can be played by the clergy in the promotion of the high values of the country's rich and social and cultural heritage. More recently the fourth King has abdicated in favour of his son and successor King Jigme Khesar Wangchuk and has declared that Bhutan will be a constitutional democracy from 2008 onwards with the King serving as a titular head of state. Since then Bhutan has also been quite successful in creating an image of itself as a balanced and unbiased country and has been an active member of various international bodies. It was King Jigme Dorji Wangchuk (the Third King of Bhutan) who was instrumental in establishing the country's political administration into four main bodies: The National Assembly, The Royal Advisory Council, The Judiciary, The Council of Ministers and the Central Cabinet.

The National Assembly (Established 1953)

This Assembly was established in order to facilitate the development of political consciousness among the ordinary people of Bhutan and that, they have a say in the running of the government. The National Assembly or the Tshongdu meets twice a year and has 150 members. Of the 150 members -105 members are elected representatives of the people, 10 members are elected to represent the clergy and the government nominates 33 members. They serve a term of three years. The Speaker and the Deputy Speaker are elected from amongst its members. Care was taken even as far back as 1953 that 70% of the seats were reserved for the people, 8% for the clergy and only 22% for the government. This was done to ensure people's participation in decision-making.

The Royal Advisory Council (established 1965)

The Royal Advisory Council consists of nine members out of which, 6 represent the people, 2 the clergy and one, is, His Majesty's nominee. All 9 members hold office for a term of five years. This body's main function is to advice the King and his Council of Ministers in all matters of national importance. They are responsible for promoting both the welfare of the people and the national interests of the kingdom. In 1984, His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuk added a clause to the Royal Advisory Council. This
clause permitted the Council to report against the King to the Cabinet and the National Assembly should the need arise, (if they felt that His Majesty’s decisions or actions were detrimental to the interest of the kingdom).

The Judiciary

All the laws of the land have been codified and while minor matters are handled directly by the Gup or Village headman, matters that cannot be resolved at that level of jurisdiction are referred to the District Courts. The next court of appeal is the Thimphu High Court. But, the highest court of appeal is His Majesty the King, who delegates the Royal Advisory Council to investigate into the matter and to ensure that the courts have dispensed justice in accordance with the laws of the kingdom.

The Council of Ministers and the Central Cabinet

The Council of Ministers and the Central Secretariat came into existence in 1968. Earlier on, the King presided over the Council of Ministers, Deputy Ministers and the Royal Advisory Council. However, with the King’s decision to delegate power to his Council of Ministers, His Majesty does not preside over their meetings any more. Except in matters that affect national security, His Majesty does not interfere with the day-to-day functioning of the government. His Majesty has also decentralised the administration of the country by establishing District Development Committees in the 18 districts of the land. Each district/ dzongkhang is under a District Administrator/Dzongdhag. The people of the respective villages elect the village headman/ Gup.

The political and historical background of Bhutan having been dealt with, what needs to be highlighted in this chapter is the religious history of this land that has often been described as the Last Shangri-la/ Bae-yul/ the Hidden Paradise. It is important to trace the religious history here, as this will provide the necessary background for the study and close analysis of the mandala/ khilkhor that will be dealt with in the third chapter.
RELIGIOUS HISTORY OF BHUTAN

Buddhist teachings were brought to Bhutan in the eighth century and were to become an integral part of Bhutanese culture. In 746 AD, Guru Padma Sambhava/Guru Rinpoche, a tantric Buddhist scholar-saint, from the Swat district of Sindh, came to Bhutan and brought the teachings of the Buddha with him. It is critical to note that Guru Padma Sambhava/Guru Rinpoche is also worshipped as the Second Buddha. The official state religion of Bhutan is the Drukpa Kagyukpa sect of Mahayana Buddhism and 70% of the population of Bhutan practice Vajrayana Buddhism/ the Nyingmapa sect including tantric practises. The form of Buddhism practiced in Bhutan has been derived from the following “spirituals ancestors of the Nyingmapa and the Drukpa Kargyupa schools: Guru Padmasambhava, Longchen Rabjampa, Phajo Drukgom Zhigpo, Dorji Lingpa, Choeji Kunga Paljor, Padma Lingpa, Drukpa Kunlay, Yongzin Ngagi Wangchuk, Mipham Tenpi Nyima, Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal and Gyalse Tenzin Rabgye."

The Durkpa Kargyukpa sect of Tibetan Buddhism that is practiced in Bhutan combines three traditions of Buddhism - the Monastic Tradition/ Theravada/Hinayana; Universal Vehicle/ Mahayana/Messianic and the Tantrayana/ Vajrayana/ Apocalyptic. Bhutanese Buddhism and its scholar-saints have also brought out the inter-relationship and interdependence of the three “yanas” in the following observations:

Outward conduct is practiced in accordance with Vinayana (Hinayana); inwardly, mental activity is practiced with Bodhimind (Mahayana) and practice in secrecy in Tantra (Vajrayana).\(^5\)

All Bhutanese Buddhists also believe that they can attain nirvana/liberation with the help of the compassionate Bodhisattvas/enlightened beings who, (could have gained nirvana but), delayed their attaining nirvana, in an effort to help other sentient beings. A great deal of emphasis therefore is laid on the cosmic Buddha, of whom the historical Buddha (563 CA- 483 BC) is a manifestation. The Bodhisattvas have however, over the years evolved into Gods rather than remained as enlightened beings. They occupy a very crucial and central position in the Buddhist cosmology.
There are numerous gods, demons and *dakinis* female energies or the consorts of gods, who are chiefly invoked for their worldly concerns. *Guru Padma Sambhava* / *Guru Rinpoche* (founder of the oldest school of *Mahayana Buddhism* – the *Nyingmapa*) and his eight manifestations / the *Guru Tshengye* too receive special treatment as the second historical Buddha. The *Drukpa Kargyus* also lay stress on mediating on the *Mahamudra* / the Great Seal, which is essentially a concept that binds emptiness / *Sunyata* with freedom from re-incarnation / freedom from the cycle of birth-death-rebirth. This School of thought also lays great stress on the laws of nature / *Karma*, and on particularly, the six tantric meditative practices that teach self-control so a means of attaining *nirvana* / freedom from the cycle of birth, death and re-birth. This sect was the most prominent belief in Bhutan towards the end of the twelfth century.

To bring Buddhism within the reach of the ordinary people of Bhutan, numerous symbols and structures are employed. Various religious monuments, such as *chortens* / stupas, *lhaghangs* / temples, and prayer walls are built, prayer flags erected and mantras carved on rocks and along hillsides. There are various types of *Chortens*. In his 1974 work, *Bhutan – Land of the Peaceful Dragon*, G N Mehra has classified seven types of *Chortens* such as the *Chortens* of the Lotus pile, the *Chorten* of enlightenment, the multi-door *Chorten* to name just a few. Prayer flags are made of block printed cloth, and the block printing is done with the help of wooden blocks on which are carved prayers in *Tshokey* / language of the scriptures fixed onto bamboos to be erected on desolate hillsides. They are also mounted at dangerous and strategic locations like high passes etc. to ward off evil spirits and to benefit the spirits of the dead. Sometimes, itinerant monks travel from village to village carrying small portable shrines with them. These portable shrines have many small doors, which open and are there for a purpose. These doors reveal the statues and images of the Buddha, the *Bodhisattvas*, and learned lamas.

The form of Buddhism practiced in Bhutan, like Tibetan Buddhism, recognises six different realms of existence. The six realms being:

The *Deva Loka* / the Realm of the Gods
The *Asura Lokal* the Realm of the Demi-Gods
The *Manushya Lokal* the Realm of the Human Beings
The *Pashu Lokal* the Realm of the Animals
The *Preta Lokal* the Realm of the Hungry Ghosts
The *Naraka Lokal* the Realm of Infernal Pain

We shall not go into the details of these *Lokas* Realms here, as these will be dealt with in Chapter 3. In Buddhism, human existence is viewed as a cycle or the wheel of birth, death and re-birth, wherein there is suffering.

The monk body is structured in a strict hierarchy. *Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal* established this hierarchy. Heading the monk body is the *Je Khenpo*/Chief Abbot, assisted by the four *Lopons* or masters. The four deputies are known as the *Lopon Zhibs* Four Masters:

1. *Dorji Lopon* Master of the *Vajrayana* Tradition;
2. *Yangbi Lopon* Master of Rhetoric/Liturgy;
3. *Drabi Lopon* Master of Lexicography and

The highest ranking among the *Lopons* is the *Dorji Lopon*, who normally succeeds the *Je Khenpo*.

Below these four *Lopons* are the *Umdzays* Heads of the Liturgical Congregation. The *Kudrungs*/Aides-de-camp who also, form, the *Chothrimzhil* Four Religious Administrators, follow the *Umdzays*. The *Kudrungs*/Aides-de-camp are followed by other junior *Lopons*:

1. *Kilkhor Lopon* Master of the Graphic Arts;
2. *Dungbi Lopon* Master of Trumpets and
Next in order of hierarchy are the various religious administrative staff and junior monastic officers in charge of the fine arts, and Bhutanese religious music.

Rituals form an important and integral part of monastic life. The practice of rituals in Bhutan as elsewhere in the Himalayan Buddhist region are accompanied by the use of wind and percussion musical instruments including the trumpet, the *shawm* and the drum among others. These rituals are performed on a daily, weekly, monthly and annual basis in Bhutanese homes. Special rites and rituals also mark specific days of the Bhutanese calendar dedicated to *Guru Rinpoche*, *Zhabdrung Tara* (the mother of all *Buddhas*), an individual's personal *Bodhisattva*, and the guardian deities of the practitioner's choice. Other rites practised are related to healing the sick or securing the good fortune of a household or a community.

Monks too, play an important role in the life of the Bhutanese. They are there to perform rites during births, marriages, sicknesses, death, before the laying of the foundation stone in the construction of houses, promotions of senior officials, at inaugural functions and many other day-to-day functions. The clergy or the monk body is also guaranteed representation in the National Assembly and the Royal Advisory Council.

The government supports the state religion through various subsidies granted to the monasteries, shrine, monks and nuns. Monasteries also meet expenses from their assets and estates and with the support of the general public as well. The general public hand over their first crop, work at the monasteries and also make cash donations to the monasteries. *His Late Majesty King Jigme Dorji Wangchuk* (the Third King of Bhutan) "commissioned the manufacture of 10,000 gilded bronze images of the Buddha, as well as the publication of the 108-volume *Kanjur* (collection of the words of the Buddha) and the 225-volume *Tenjur* (collection of commentaries), and the construction of numerous *chortens* / stupas throughout the country 7".

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So far, we have talked about Bhutan, the land and the people. We have also briefly traced the religious history of Bhutan. In the next section of this chapter, it would be pertinent to determine the relationship between religion and society from a cultural anthropological point of view.

**RELIGION AND SOCIETY**

If religion is viewed as “the beliefs and practices concerned with supernatural beings, powers and forces” (Wallace 1966, quoted by S Nanda, *Anthropology and Culture*, 1987, p. 113) then it may be observed that all societies have some form of belief system or the other and certain practices associated with that belief system. Moreover, religion dates back to the very beginning of human civilisation and has by now acquired a truly universal culture. Religion therefore, serves several functions in the society where it is practiced. The chief functions religion serves are:

1. It provides a sense of both order and meaning to the chaos and disorder of the many inexplicable aspects of nature and society. It also explains the meaning and way of life while dealing with the nature of life, existence, and death. Religion provides an over-view of the origins of societies, the shared relationship of people with various groups within these societies and the relationship of people with the society at large. In short, it provides a cosmology/world-view of the whole ambit of relationships between human beings, nature, the universe and society. How does this cognitive system or cosmology work? Human societies have a strong tendency to create images of reality. Literary Criticism is fully aware of this tendency among human beings as may be seen from Plato’s writings. These images of reality are always created through the use of symbols. Religious symbols therefore, serve as guidelines for deciphering incidents and experiences, especially the extra ordinary events that occur in our lives. These “realities provide a way of imposing both order and meaning or in other words structure, and it also provides a measure of control over the world for humans.”

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(2) It helps reduce anxiety/mental anguish and enhances the sense of control that human beings desire innately. For instance, many religious practices are adopted to ensure peace of mind and success in human endeavours. Therefore, prayers and offerings are made to supernatural powers with the hope that they (supernatural powers) come to the aid of either individuals or the community. Individuals perform rituals, request the priests to intercede on their part, in order to ensure that the supernatural powers work in their favour. Recently, a particular episode on National Geographic showed a lady medium in Singapore who assumed the roles of various gods and goddesses who entered her body at various points of time. Her temple was thronged by hundreds of devotees who wanted to win at the races, or needed some special favours from the Gods. In Bhutan, a small land-locked Himalayan kingdom, entire villages perform annual poojas/ rituals to seek the blessings and protection of their local deities. The blessings could be in the form of good harvests, general well being, or prosperity. Sometimes, forest fires devastate entire villages, then, too the protective deities are called upon. How do these performers of rituals/ poojaries/ priests/monks manage this intercession (on behalf of the common people), with the powers that be? They use rituals, symbolism and very often magic to do so. Magical practices exist in many societies and situations when one is not certain about the results/outcome of one’s efforts. By using magic/magical symbolism ordinary human beings can assume a sense of power and control over natural forces. This feeling of being in command of the situation, gives human beings a sense of emotional and mental wellbeing. But does magic really work? No one can be sure it does. However, at the psychological level it does help to control anxiety and provides solace and comfort to troubled souls, so magic does work in that sense. However, in societies that are technologically advanced, magic loses its importance and prominence.

(3) Religion helps maintain a sense of social order, and also ensures the survival of a society. But how does this happen? All religions propagate a way of life, and this way of life usually has a strong belief system attached to it, which in
turn, differentiates between good and evil. It is this differentiation that helps maintain social control, and governs the social code of conduct of human beings in that particular community. Moreover, both myths and associated rituals also contribute to the maintenance of social control. Myths may be defined as stories with a didactic lesson, often related to social values, which in turn are given sacred authority through the passage of time. Rituals are also observed in a group. For instance, the annual village poojas (performed in all villages in Bhutan), create a sense of union, a feeling of sharing a sacred space and everyone present participating in that sacred moment and space are emotionally moved by the shared experience.

(4) Stemming from the issue of maintaining social order is the next function that religion serves. Religion supports the existing social fabricstructure/order and defines the place of the human being in society as well as in the larger scheme of thingsuniverse/cosmology. This fact provides human beings with a sense of belonging. Religion also serves as a means that holds people together. Very often in technologically advanced societies, where intrinsic cultural values have been depleted and eroded the only anchor that, members of such societies possess is religion. Many people also look at religion as providing a glimpse of a world view/reality that is better than the harsh realities of day- to-day living. Sometimes people at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder too, try and manipulate religious symbols to create an illusion of power. When this happens, religion provides an outlet for the pent-up frustrations of the deprived, which could otherwise prove to be detrimental to the social well being of the community at large.

Directly or indirectly religion therefore, contributes to maintaining the existing social order, and also serves both “instrumental and expressive functions”. As Nanda summarises, “the instrumental aspect of religion has to do with action, performed in the belief, that, if people do certain things, they can influence the course of natural or social events to their advantage. The expressive aspect of ritual refers to the ways in which
religious symbolism is used to express ideas about the relation of humans to nature, self to society, or group-to-group. In its expressive aspect, religion is an important force for social integration. How are religious ideas expressed? Religious ideas are always usually expressed through symbolism. The objective of this thesis is essentially, analysing religious symbols, studying their meanings and locating the logic that connects these symbols to religious beliefs. As such religious symbols could be verbal - names of Gods/ Goddesses/ Spirits; could be the utterance of certain words/phrases/mantras, or songs/ hymns that have the potential to contain supernatural powers. Religious symbols as stated by Nanda, are also manifested in the form of material objects such as masks, paintings, costumes, body decorations, or objects in the physical environment.

In some societies, religious ideas may be acted out (for instance the Ram Lila, amongst Hindus in India), in dance (the Ramayana by the temple dancers of Bali, Indonesia) and through various physical movements. When performing these varied religious rituals, symbolic methods are used in order to express certain religious ideas. For instance, if we take the example of Shaivaisim in India or the cult of Shiva, as prevalent in practice even today, we find that the statue of the God Shiva, symbolises both the pre-agricultural society as well as society thereafter across both time and space. To elucidate, ancient Indian society during its pre-agricultural days, lived in tribes and practiced professions that ranged from the capturing of snakes, to the rearing of elephants. With the passage of time and the depletion of natural resources and with man taking to agriculture and a settled way of life, these cultural practices came to be associated with Shiva and has continued since then in the form of the coiled serpent around Shiva's head, the elephant God/ Shree Ganesh, who is the son of Shiva, Nandi the Bull, and the Rat who belong to the agricultural phase of civilisation and his other son Kartthekeya who is the God of War and representative of the industrial age. Shiva therefore, represents the pre-Harappan civilisation and his symbolism associated with the cult of Shiva continues till date. He is also accessible to each and everyone and is therefore different from the other gods in the Hindu pantheon.
Similarly, among the Christians, the concept of heaven and hell is a rather abstract term to comprehend, so what does one do to explain why one would need to lead a good and virtuous life? The concept of the *Seven Deadly Sins* takes shape. What are these sins? *Gluttony, Pride, Anger, Sloth, Jealousy, Arrogance* and *Greed* constitute the *Seven Deadly Sins*. These are qualities that are not desirable in human beings hence, if one commits any one of these sins one is likely to perish in the burning fires of hell, where hell is imagined to be a giant boiling cauldron, full of hot oil, in which people are fried for their sins. Religious ideas are by nature not only abstract and difficult to understand but also extremely complex. Hence, religion needs the help of symbolism in order to be easily understood by lay people.

Having said that, let us look at how religion can be organised. Religion and religious behaviour is patterned and structured. Anthony Wallace (1966) has identified four patterns of religious organisation: individualistic cults, shamanistic cults, communal cults, and ecclesiastical cults. All complex and advanced societies normally have all these four elements as will be witnessed through the course of the chapters that follow. Individualistic cults are those that are started by individual specialists of religion. The followers of particular *Trulkus* in Bhutan may be classified as examples of individualistic cults, even though these *Trulkus* are part of the larger mainstream Buddhist culture.

Shamanistic cults have immense faith in the *Shaman* who is recognised as one having received special powers from the higher forces. As one who can cure ailments, foresee the future, perform sorcery, and so on. *Shamans* have different names according to the society/culture where they practice. *Shamans or Diviners* are called *Moh* in Bhutan. Among the Nepalese of Bhutan they are called *Dhamis* or *Jhakris*. Then there are communal cults symbolised by groups of people. Ecclesiastical cults are communities "formally elected or appointed and that devotes all or most of its time to a specialised religious role. These people, called priests, are responsible for performing certain rituals on behalf of individuals, groups, or the entire community." Buddhism and Hinduism fit into this category, as does Christianity. But being concerned with the *mandala/*
khilkhor and Bhutan, we need to curtail our explanations to Buddhism alone. These elected and highly specialised practitioners/priests have special access to supernatural power. Such religious organisation is characteristic of highly complex and socially stratified societies.

RELIGIOUS ART AND ITS FUNCTION

There appears to be a symbiotic relationship between religion and art in all societies. Art may be defined as “the process and the products of human skill applied to any activity that meets the standards of preferred form or beauty in a particular society.”\(^{12}\) Art could be looked at as the entire process and human skill that goes into the production and creation of aesthetic forms that meet with standards preferred by a particular society or community, (Nanda, 1987, p. 342). In Bhutan particularly, art is more or less entirely devoted to religious activity. Art may therefore be said to serve the immediate function of communicating symbolically in a society particularly in Bhutan. Bhutanese art forms such as the religious masks dances performed during the Tshechus, communicates direct meaning to its viewers. This happens because those participating in that performance (both dancers as well as viewers), believe, that the dancers have assumed the super natural powers of the deities they represent. This belief could arise from what Nanda discerns as the notion that the wearer of the mask etc. assumes the powers of the mask/ deity/ supernatural force. In other words, by wearing the masks and the colourful attires of the deities they represent, the dancers could assume the form of higher beings and manipulate the higher beings into doing what they desire. As a result of which, they could also be seen as able to control lesser mortals. In this instance various art forms may be said to represent the general langue of religious art whereas the mask dances represent the parole of Bhutanese religion and culture. The function of art in society and the place of art within culture need to be examined next. Art is also symbolic as it reflects emotions or meaning. It should, however, be noted that symbolism is largely culture specific and one would need to know or in other words be well versed in the traditions of the culture under study to be able to read the symbolic meaning attached to particular artistic elements properly. Art also reflects social behaviour and social stature. Art can and may also reflect cultural values or patterns.
Yet, art can be symbolic on a much deeper level as well. For instance, works of art “represent certain universal aspects of human thought, needs, and emotions.” 13 In the case of this research, art symbolises at a much deeper level the consciousness of man and his/her place in the larger scheme of things, and is symbolic of the Buddhist belief and way of life.

The next section will therefore, deal with Buddhist art and symbolism especially in Bhutan before dealing with the theoretical framework of this study. It will, then, deal with the biography of Terton Pema Lingpa and the history of Gangtey Goenpa/ Gangtey Monastery.

BHUTANESE ART

Bhutanese artisans have, since time immemorial, been inspired by nature and their environment hence the Bhutanese craftsmen possess consummate and age-old skills in working with clay and wood, as well as bronze, iron, silver and other fine metals. The Bhutanese are also skilled calligraphists. Tradition has it that Buddhist arts and crafts developed because of Terton Pema Lingpa who was an accomplished xylographer, painter, sculptor and architect of the fifteenth century. The country’s arts and crafts received a further boost when Getshe Tenzin Rabgye, under the instructions from Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, opened the school of Zorichusum or thirteen types of Bhutanese arts and crafts including painting, sculpture, embroidery, xylography (the art of making wood cuts/ wood engravings), and bronze-silver-and gold work in 1680. Bhutanese art has a unique feature. It is both religious and anonymous. The Bhutanese believe that commissioning paintings and statues are pious acts that will eventually help in gaining merit. The name of the donor is sometimes written on the work (so that his/her pious act is remembered) and the artist being a religious man also gains merit by creating the work he has been commissioned to produce. However, the artist’s name is almost never mentioned.

The subjects of Bhutanese art normally include the Wheel of Life/ Serpa Khorlo, the Four Guardians, Bodhisattva Avalokiteswara/ Chenrizi, or his multiple forms; the Sixteen Arhats/ Neten Chudrug, the Eighty-Four Mahasiddhas/ Drubthob Gyechushi;
the Thousand Buddhas; Guru Rinpoche and his Eight Manifestations/ Guru Thsen Gyeh; Buddha Amutayus/ Tsepaney; the highest tantric deities such as Hayagriva/ Trandin and Cakrasamvara/ Demchog; the protective deities such as the different forms of Mahakala/ Gombo/ Palden Lhamo, Gyelpo Pehar; and various diagrams such as mandalas/ khilkhors. Some of the most beautiful and astonishing painting are those to be found in Paro Dzong, Punakha Dzong and Gantey Goenpa. These painting comprise those mandalas, depicting the creation of the universes “according to the Adhidharmakosha, an encyclopaedic treaty on Buddhist cosmology and astrology of Tantric Buddhism.” The paints/dyes used in the execution of these paintings is traditionally made of earth, minerals and vegetables though in recent times synthetically produced chemical colours are also used. The dye in powder form is mixed with water, glue and chalk. The paintbrushes are usually made of twigs, and animal hair (such as that of the rabbit or the squirrel). The colours are applied in a particular order as they bear symbolic connotations. While the junior artist/ lhadrip executes these paintings and sculptures, the masters themselves will execute the fine work.

Bhutanese monasteries follow two distinct architectural designs: (a) the cluster type and (b) the dzong type. Of the two architectural forms the cluster type is probably the more ancient and it is composed of one or two temples at the centre, surrounded by small habitation centres built especially for the monks. The dzong type monastery on the other hand is built like a dzong/ fortress. It has a main tower/ utse that houses many temples. It also has a surrounding outer wall that consists of small rooms inhabited by the monks. The most impressive of the dzong/ fort type of architecture is to be found at Gangtey Goenpa, near the Pelela Pass, dating back to the late seventeenth century. This is the monastery that will be studied in detail in this thesis.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THIS STUDY

Semiotics is the science of signs, a field of study involving many different theoretical stances and methodological tools that is useful in the analysis of a text. Semiotics develops various levels of classification in the realm of special language frameworks.
These special language frameworks are those that are used in specialised areas of expertise, for example science, law, dance, drama or art.

These levels of classification are translated into signs and symbols that stand for something else. A sign or a symbol is something that stands in place of something else and is used as an object of interpretation within a particular culture or society. For instance, if you drive a car you are at once familiar with the red, yellow and green traffic lights, but if the person concerned does not belong to that culture then those three colours would be meaningless for him/her. Hence, for signs to have meaning they need to be accepted by the users as well. Signs *per se* cannot exist on their own since they do not have any meaning or significance outside that particular framework or culture. Signs serve another important function — they are a means of communication and in fact, the very basis of human communication. In this thesis consistent effort has been made to examine the relatively simple aspects of Buddhist symbology in trying to understand the cosmology of the Buddhist *mandala*/*khilkhor*.

Etymologically, tracing the origins of the word *semiotics* - the Greek word for sign was *to senneion* (plural, *ta semeia*). The modern word *semiotics* is a derivation of a medieval intermediary form of the Greek word *semeiotikos* that essentially means an observer of signs/ even someone who interprets signs/ one who may be in a unique position of ‘divining’ the meaning of the signs. Beginning with Roland Barthes’ declaration that ‘semiology [from the Greek word “semeion”, sign] aims to take in any system of signs, whatever their substance and limits, images, gestures, musical sounds, objects, and the complex associations of all of these, which form the contents of ritual. Conventions or public entertainment constitute, if not languages, at least systems of signification. This study will involve a semiotic study of a Buddhist *mandala*/*khilkhor* as the title suggests. This study will adopt Umberto Eco’s definition of semiotics as ‘being concerned with everything that can be taken as a sign’, and will examine the Buddhist *mandala*/*khilkhor* along with its symbols, the deities with varied gestures, objects as a part of a larger semiotic ‘sign system’ such as an understanding of the Buddhist cosmology. We shall attempt to look at the manner in which meanings are generated; as
well as the manner in which communication takes place between the signifier and the
signified. This study will also attempt an observation and an understanding of how
“reality is not only constructed but also maintained.” The text that this semiotic analysis
will examine is a Buddhist Mandala – the Norbu Gyamtsho Mandala/ Khilkhor, a non-
verbal sign, an ensemble of signs that has been constructed and maintained in
accordance with the conventions of the Peling tradition and Gangtey Goenpa in Bhutan,
within the larger framework of Vajrayana Buddhism. This study is also concerned with
not only the communication of meaning per se but also with our own ascription of
significance to things in the tangible world.

In Teresa de Lauretis’s words: “In the last decade or so, semiotics has undergone a shift
of its theoretical gears:...a shift away from the classification of sign systems – their
basic units, their levels of structural organization – and towards the exploration of the
modes of production of signs and meanings, the ways in which systems and codes are
used, transformed or transgressed in social practice. While formerly the emphasis was
on studying sign systems, (language, literature, cinema, architecture, music etc.),
conceived of as mechanisms that generate messages, what is now being examined is the
work performed through them. It is this work or activity which constitutes and
transforms the individuals using the codes, performing the work, the individuals who
are, therefore, the subjects of semiosis. 15

This study borrows the term ‘semiosis’ from Charles Sanders Peirce, but uses it in the
sense that Eco does to analyse a problematic wherein, a particular culture produces
signs (in the form of the practice of the mandala) and assigns meaning to those signs.
The meaning that is assigned to those signs is not an individuated process but one in
which the whole society participates. This study will therefore, also engage with the
socio-cultural aspects of signification and will adopt a holistic approach while
examining the use of signs and signification for communication. This study will adapt
Peirce’s methodology as well when interpreting symbols in accordance with the
convention or ‘rule’ or a ‘habitual connection’. Essentially this study attempts to look at
the nature and method of constructing reality as well as the manner through which
meaning is not reality and meanings/ signification is not only constructed but also transmitted. The manner in which meaning is created is of course, through the complex interplay of codes and conventions that we are not usually aware of.

This study will also look at the symbols and symbology in the mandala/ khilkhor as Peirce did, meaning ‘a sign which refers to the object that it denotes by virtue of a law, usually an association of the general ideas of which operates to cause the symbol to be interpreted as referring to that object’ (Peirce, 1931- 58, 2.249). In other words, what we do is interpret symbols in accordance with a convention or what Peirce calls a ‘rule’ or ‘a habitual connection’ (ibid, 2.292, 2.297. 1.369 as cited by Daniel Chandler in Semiotics for Beginners, in www.aber.ac.uk).

**TERTON PEMALINGPA’S BIOGRAPHY**

The biography of Terton Pema Lingpa needs to be looked at since the monastery and the mandala/ khilkhor under study belong to the tradition of this fifteenth – century saint and Tertoh/ Treasure – Revealer. Terton Pema Lingpa (1480-1521) was one of most religious and important figures to be born in Bhutan. The term Terton is derived from the root word Terma meaning “Hidden Treasures,” a Terton (for Nyingmapa Buddhists generally, though Tertons, have also appeared among the Kagyupas, the Sakyapas, the Bonpo saints and the Gelugpas), is someone who discovers the Terma and reveals it to people for the benefit of all sentient beings. It is believed that Guru Padmasambhava/ Guru Rinpoche hid these religious treasures (assisted by his disciples and his female consorts/ dakinis/ khandomas, as well as by other divine helpers) in the eighth century, realising that the people of that time were not ready to receive these advanced levels of teachings, and that future discoveries would ensure that the faith was kept alive.

In The Treasure Revealer of Bhutan, it is mentioned that over 400 Tertons have been recognised, including all the five ‘sovereigns.’ Terton Pema Lingpa is recognised as the fourth ‘sovereign’ or major Terton. While the first major Terton appeared in the twelfth century, the last of the five major Tertons lived roughly a hundred years ago. Though not much research has been done on the Terma tradition, work has been done
by the following scholars: Tulku Thondu Rinpoche, Eva Dargyay, Keith Dowman, Janet Gyatso and Michael Aris. Other Scholars who studied and researched this tradition include Anne-Marie Blondeau, Matthew Kapstein, Per Knaerne, Samten G Karmay and Ramon Prats. Let us look at a very brief introduction to the theory and practice of this very complex yet fascinating subject - the Terma and the Terton tradition.

Termas are religious treasures that have been revealed by spiritually inclined people. Termas are of three kinds:

- Objects such as statues, bells and ritual daggers,
- Religious texts, and
- Holy medicinal substances.

Apart from these three main categories/types, Termas may also include other religious objects such as, amulets, engravings, jewels, daggers, masks, paintings, robes, holy water, as well as larger items such as bridges and hidden valleys as listed in The Treasure Revealer of Bhutan. Termas are, however, not mere collections of objects or documents. Terton Pema Lingpa is believed to have revealed many types of Termas during his lifetime. These treasures may not really be physical treasures but could be treasures of what has been called the "Universal Mind". The Tertons have prior knowledge of the location, meaning and mode of dissemination of the treasure locked in their sub conscious mind. It is also said that Guru Rinpoche/Guru Padma Sambhava transferred this gnosis to them through the process of the Mind - Mandate Transmission, at an earlier point of time. But in his/her life as a Terton these treasures serve as keys to awaken the dormant mind. Terton Pema Lingpa, it is said, discovered the Earth, Rock and Lake Termas, or physically concrete, tangible Termas as well.

The textual Termas that are discovered are not fully written documents, but are clues and often cryptic. These texts have been classified into three types such as "full text", "just indicated" and "just visible." The Terton in his/her newly awakened state of consciousness/being, said to be perfectly in tune with Guru Rinpoche himself, deciphers the contents of the Terma. The Terma texts are therefore, the work of the Tertorns.
themselves; but where spirituality is concerned, the *Termas* are believed to be the work of the mind of *Guru Rinpoche*/*Guru Padma Sambhava* himself.

The *Terma* is hidden amongst extraordinary natural settings and often under mysterious and supernatural circumstances. However, when the time arrives for extracting the *Terma* from its hidden place or 'power place', there are a series of rituals and conventions that are to be adhered to very strictly. For instance, the local deities of these 'power places' have to be propitiated in the right manner, failing which great harm could befall the *Terton* or his/her followers. These *Termas* are very difficult to extract the *Terma* from their hidden 'power place' because these *Termas* are extremely powerful and of exceptional value to the spiritual knowledge of mankind and also because the high spiritual powers/ the intangible, (what may be said to belong to the domain of the *imaginariie*), affects the real, the tangible, the physical aspect of life. On this simple Buddhist belief rests the entire mystery of the *Terma* and the *Terton*. Even the great *Terton Pema Lingpa* is said to have revealed only one third of the more than 100 *Termas* that were meant for him to reveal. The *Terton* must not only be the right man/woman, but s/he could often require the assistance of another, who too, needs to be the right person, s/he should also be a devout Buddhist of outstanding faith in the *Dhamma*.

It is not enough to merely recover the *Terma* from their 'power place.' The *Terton* also has to find the key or the 'insight' as Chris Butters puts it. This discovery of the 'insight' could either come naturally and at once to the *Terton* or s/he could require considerable time, sustained effort and deep meditation in order to unravel the mystery of the 'cryptic/esoteric/secret text that s/he has discovered. Once the *Terton* has figured out the significance and has acquired the full understanding of the *Terma*, it is his sacred duty to expand and explain it to the followers of the Buddha *Dhamma* (after empowering them through the correct observation of rituals). While, some of the *Termas* are of the 'Mind Class' others belong to the 'Phurpa Class' and the 'Twice Concealed Treasures' or the 'Earth *Termas*.' These Earth *Termas* are special, as they need to be re-concealed for posterity.
It is said that the 'Terma of the Earth type' are the most "difficult and dangerous to extract." In the case of Termas of the 'Mind Class', the Terton is said to receive clues about the location of the Terma in a dream, or to find the clues written in the sky, or to have even perceived the Termas as sound. Terton Pema Lingpa’s life is inextricably linked with the Gangtey Gonpa, the monastery that will form the core of Chapter 4. Legend has it that Pema Lingpa’s birthplace too was pre-destined and that Guru Padma Sambhava/Guru Rinpoche named the birthplace of Terton Pema Lingpa as "Chel Baridrang in Tang district of Central Bhutan." Terton Pema Lingpa is believed to have descended from "the shining realm of the godly beings." The clan that Terton Pema Lingpa was born into the myo clan “can still be traced in U-Tsang and Kham (Tibet) as well as in Bhutan.”

When the Terton was conceived, both parents had extraordinary dreams. The sun and the moon shone together in the mother’s dream and a beautiful ‘turquoise-coloured girl bearing a holy vase descended from the sky and entered the crown of her head.” At the same time his father dreamt that a Mandala had filled “the whole sky, which seemed to be filled with holy-scriptures.” Terton Pema Lingpa was born in 1450 A.D., on the “fifteenth of the second month in the Iron Horse year.” The baby was named Penjor. It is believed that a rainbow shone when he was born, much like the star that shone over the manger when Jesus was born in Bethlehem. Legend also has it that for three days after the birth of Terton Pema Lingpa, he was encircled by a halo of light.

Yonten Jangchuk, Pema Lingpa’s grandfather brought him up by even training him to become a blacksmith like himself. When he was three years old his grandfather took him to the Mani Gonpa near Chel. It was here that the Lama Choyingpa, “son of the late Master Dorji Lingpa” prophesised that the child was a “holy child” and that he would “benefit the Teachings and all sentient beings.” The baby named Penjor at birth was later christened Ugyen Pema Lingpa according to the prophecy of Guru Rinpoche.

Pema Lingpa was a skilled blacksmith who, from a very young age, made miniature chortens, thrones and temples for children. He used to imitate sermons, religious rites,
and erect prayer flags, as well as write texts on leaves. He is also believed to have
performed sacred dances for the entertainment of children. Whenever he built a
millstone for someone, he would pray for others to be saved from evil, when he made
iron frying pans for people he would pray for the users of those frying pans. He is said
to have buried many frying pans all over the Chel valley. The reason behind doing so he
said, was for them to be revealed by the deity Dorje Phagmo at a later date. He also said
that these frying pans would bear "the imprint of the pig's nose" on them. There are
many people in Bhutan who have these rare and exceptional artifacts. He also made
knives and swords and some swords are still to be found in Bhutan. It is believed that
those killed by these swords would be free from the cycle of birth-death- re-birth or
would attain nirvana.

He was to become a treasure revealer or Terton when he was about twenty-five years
old. He dreamt that "he was sitting on a pile of corpses in a cemetery; he then rose to
the top of the nearby mountain, from where he saw the four continents extending before
him. The sun and moon then came down towards him from the sky where upon he
captured the one in his lap and put the other in the fold of his robe." Thereafter, he was
directed by 'dreams and trances' in revealing the Terma and deciphering these sacred
texts.

He was told about the first treasure that he was to reveal, by Guru Rinpoche's
manifestation that appeared to him in a dream and handed him a scroll of paper. The
scroll is said to have read thus:

...during the night of the full moon this month, take five companions with you
and go to fetch your destined wealth from the rock called Naring Drak which
lies at the bottom end of the valley."

It was the "tenth of the first month of autumn in the year of the monkey". He followed
the instruction of the scroll and on reaching the Naring Drak, fell into a trance and
stripping off his clothes he left his companions at the edge of the Mebarstho/ the
burning lake and jumped into it. From there he was to emerge with a chest of religious
texts. As destiny would have it, the texts could not be read by anyone. Pema Lingpa was then advised to concentrate and to meditate on it deeply as it was meant only for him to decipher the texts. Finally, after mediating on the text, he was able to read the title with great difficulty. He was instructed by the writing on the scroll to transcribe the text and to give public teachings “three months later, in the pig month.” He was told that his scribe would be found in Ura, and that he would be lame in the left leg and that he would “wear a red robe with blue cuffs.” Terton Pema Lingpa not only found his scribe but also managed to get the texts transcribed by him.

A lama from Dunkhabi village, Rinchen Phel arranged for Terton Pema Lingpa’s initiation ceremonies for the Terma and was to become the first benefactor and patron of Terton Pema Lingpa. Once again, when he was troubled about how he would go about conducting the initiation ceremony, the Dakini consort of Guru Rinpoche, Yeshe Tshogyal appeared to him in a dream and demonstrated the Dances of the Five Dakinis. He not only recalled the dance sequence but also demonstrated it to his followers, who have preserved the dance form to this day in Gangtey Goenpa in Bhutan.

He expounded these teachings even though he had no knowledge of the explanations a priori. It is believed that each night, the Dakinis gave him detailed instructions on what he should do the next day. He was always accompanied by celestial music whenever he performed these dances. Later on, he was to have more dreams in which he was given more information about treasures that he was to reveal later. He was to reveal the Termas of Kurje in the “third month of the Tiger Year” when he was thirty-three years old (1483). This text that he discovered here was known as the “Lama Drakpo teachings.”

In this treasure scroll, he found three types of “certificates, the outer one giving the address of a certain Lama Norbu Gyatsho; the Inner one giving the Terma’s title, and the secret one containing the essence of the Terma itself. The address given to him, led him to his next Terma, in Lhodrak.” He was told about the time to reveal the Lama Norbu Gyatsho Terma in a dream by a girl, who also told him that this was a ‘Mind Treasure’. He was to reveal this treasure on the tenth day of the eighth month in the
Rabbit Year (1484). In order to reveal this Terma, Pema Lingpa travelled to the Lhodrak region of Tibet. There he stayed with Lama Tonpa who assisted Terton Pema Lingpa by providing him and his followers with the “grain offerings for the guardian deity, the ornaments for the ritual cakes, wine and so on.” The Norbu Gyamtsho Terma is the most well known of Terton Pema Lingpa's Termas and is of great importance to our study as it is also the mandala that is under study in this doctoral thesis.

Terton Pema Lingpa was to reveal the Terma of God Do, the Terma of Tang Rimochen and the Terma of the Vajra Rock, and the Khenpalung Terma called Gongpa Lame' in Trashingang in Kurtoe. The sacred monasteries, temples associated with Terton Pema Lingpa are the monasteries of Tharpaling, Jampa Tsilung and Padmasambhava in Bumthang, and with other eight such Lings/monasteries, such as the Gangte Goenpa, Dramitse in East Bhutan and other in southeast and southern Tibet, holy sites such as the Mebartho gorge, the “Lion Rock at Chodrak, the Vajra Rock, the Kurje’ hill and Rimochen.” His legacy is still preserved in three main monasteries in Bhutan – the “Tamzhing Lhundrup Choling in the Chokhor Valley, Gangte, and the mountainside sanctuary at Kungangdrak above Chel.”

Terton Pema Lingpa was seventy-two years old when he travelled to Lhalung for the last time. It was the “Dog month of the Iron Dragon Year, 1520 A.D.” Here, he gave initiations into the Lama Norbu Gyamtsho Terma cycle, after which he returned home to Bumthang. Then strange omens began showing signs of impending disaster around this time. The women of Chokhor had gone to the Konchogrum temple to offer butter lamps. Inside the temple three statues were weeping. The women wiped away the tears of the statues. At about the same time an extremely sacred statue the “Thongwakundal” of the Tamzhing monastery also wept for three days, and butter lamps lit in front of the deity did not burn properly. Then nature too sent signs to the people of impending doom. It began snowing heavily in Bumthang early in the “eleventh month itself and locusts destroyed fields of crops”. On the night of eleventh November Terton Pema Lingpa fell ill. He was to remain ill for two days. Towards the evening a flock of black-
necked Siberian cranes soared over the monastery of Tamzhing and circled over Terton Pema Lingpa’s Zhimchu residence, calling out loudly. His son Lama Dawa Gyaltshen dreamt of a “woman clad in the blue dress of mon, who told him: “Terton Pema Lingpa will pass away in the Snake Year.” Yet another son, Drakpa Gyaltshen dreamed of the sun setting three times. At Dechenling Monastery near Kunzangdrak the sound of ritual bells, drums, cymbals and trumpets was heard much to the amazement of everyone. The monks rushed into the temple, but nothing was amiss. The temple however, was filled with the “smell of incense”, and they heard “three loud thunderclaps.”

Terton Pema Lingpa passed away to a better realm at Tamzhing Lhundrup Choling in the Iron Snake Year. When Terton Pema Lingpa passed away, he was found sitting upright in the posture of meditation, and it is said that at the final moment of death he uttered the syllable ‘A’ several times; and he was holding the hands of his son Lama Dawa Gyaltshen. Music sounded, five rainbows shone, and at all his monasteries there was a shower of flowers and the air was filled with perfume.” His family and followers respected his last wishes and did not disturb him for nine days. This period is called the “wosel bardo when the bodies of great lamas are left covered up but completely untouched.” When his followers removed his clothes they were surprised to find the “Terton’s hands held before his heart, with index fingers crossed in the digdzup mudra.” The body of the Terton had shrunk to “a cubit’s length in size.” After the observance of the funeral, the Terton’s body was “embalmed within a vase and sealed into a Chorten at Tamzhing.” Tamzhing monastery remains the seat of the incarnations or Tulkus of Terton Pema Lingpa.

THE HISTORY OF GANGTEY GOENPA IN BHUTAN

Gangtey Goenpa is the only Nyingmapa monastery on the western side of the Black Mountains and also has the distinction of being the biggest Nyingmapa monastery in Bhutan. It is located in the Phubchika valley at a distance of about 140 kilometres from Thimphu, the capital of Bhutan. Phubchika, a glacial valley is on the periphery of the north-western tip of the Black Mountain National Park, a conservation park, home to
the Black Necked Siberian Crane (*grus nigri collies*). The valley lies to the north of the *Jowo Durshing* mountain range. In order to trace the history of *Gangtey Goenpa* the monastery under study, we would need to look a little further into Bhutan’s religious history particularly, the history of the lineage behind this monastery. This thesis as mentioned earlier is on *Terton Pema Lingpa’s treasure* the *Norbu Gyatsho Terma* hence *Terton Pema Lingpa* is of primary importance to this study. It should be highlighted that the attempt to trace the history of the *Gangtey Goenpa* has been made through interviews with the former *Dorji Lopon* of *Gangtey Goenpa Phugay* and *Lopon Tashi Penjore* a resident of the area surrounding *Gangtey Goenpa* in the Phobchika valley and a man of letters.

The history of *Gangtey Goenpa* needs to be traced from *Kuenkhen Lhochen Rabmjang*, who arrived in Bhutan in 1400 AD from Tibet. *Kuenkhoen Lhochen Rabmjang* brought with him a new branch of the *Nyingmpa* tradition called the *Ningthik* and established this tradition firmly in medieval Bhutan. Etymologically, *Ning* means ‘heart’ and *thik* means ‘circle’. It was the pre-dominant religion prevailing in Bhutan before the arrival of *Shabdrung Nawang Namgyal*. The *Shabdrung* too did not differentiate between the two schools of thought – the *Ningthik* and the *Nyingmapa* sect.

*Terton Pema Lingpa* the reincarnation of *Kuenkhen Lonchen Rambjang* was a native of Bumthang. It also needs to be mentioned that the actual seat of *Terton Pema Lingpa* is in *Tharpaling* in *Bumthang* and that he travelled from there to the Phobchika valley where the *Gangtey Goenpa* (Gela) stands to day. He is credited with the founding of
Nelong Dratshangling at Gela. He is said to have planted his walking stick upside down in the mud from which a cypress tree grew and still stands today. From Gela he went back to Bumthang and then finally back to Tibet where he had originally come from. Apart from this he founded eight other lings such as: Tharpling in Bumthang; Sha Kuenzaling in Wangdi Phodrang; Samteling in Paro; Ngalung Dhatahkling (opposite Gangtey Goenpa at Gela); Kuenzangling in Kurtoe; Shinkhar Dechenling in Bumthang; Khothar Richenling in Wangdi Phodrang and Kuenzangling in Bumthang.

It is said that when Terton Pema Lingpa visited the area, he saw butter lamps burning, heard the sound of drums beating and bells ringing at the site where Gangtey Goenpa stands today. It was then that he predicted that in the future a seat of this sacred lineage/San- nya- zang-po would be constructed there. This prediction was mentioned in his biography, so his grandson Getshey Pema Thinlay came to the Phobchikha valley in the central Black mountain range to build the monastery at Gangtey. Getshey Pema Thinlay was born in the Tang valley of Bumthang. The construction of the main Lhaghang/temple with its 12 sides representing the twelve stages of causality, as evident from the Wheel of Life/Serpa Khorlo is credited to Getshey Pema Thinlay, while the outer Dratshang/residential quarters of the monks in residence is said to have been built by Tenzi Legpey Dhendup.

According to the former Dorji Lopon of Gangtey Goenpa, Phugay and Lopon Tashi Penjore, when Getshey Pema Thinlay reached the Phobchika valley he realised that the place he was looking at was not the right location for the monastery. He sat upon a rock by the wayside and began meditating and was soon immersed deeply in prayers. It was then that he looked straight ahead and saw butter lamps/karmi burning and heard the beating of ritual drums and the ringing of ritual bells. The spot that he was looking at, is, where the present Gangtey Goenpa stands. It was said that the sky over the sacred space on which the monastery is to be built should resemble the Dhamma Chakra/the Wheel of the Buddha Dhamma, with its eight spokes.

The earth/ the ground on which the Gangtey Goenpa/ monastery was to be built was to be like a giant lotus with eight-petals/ pedab ghey. The surrounding mountains would
resemble the sixteen arhats of the Buddhist pantheon. To the East/shar would be the tiger’s symbol (a mound that resembled the shape of a tiger), to the west/nub a red bird/the red garuda, to the south/lhor the blue dragon and to the north/jhang the yellow turtle. But what were these animals doing here and did they really exist? The tiger’s mound was none other than a small hamlet that resembled the shape of a tiger to the east of the location of the Gangtey Goenpa, a place called Trshipang, the blue dragon was in actuality the river that meanders down through the Phobchikha valley. Apart from this nine mountainous passes surround this beautiful valley. Some of the passes in and around the Gangtey Goenpa and the Phobchika valley are listed below.

i. Jichey la
ii. Lawang la
iii. Shashe la
iv. Tsele la
v. Lamsel la
vi. Ada Tashi la
vii. Shobju la
viii. Hele la

It was under all these auspicious signs that the Gangtey Goenpa was built in 1613 in the seventeenth century by Getshey Pema Thinlay (the grandson of Terton Pema Lingpa), who became the First Gangtey Trulku. The twelve sides of the monastery are based on the Zang do Pelri/celestial abode of Guru Rinpoche/ Guru Padma Sambhava while the eighteen columns represent the teri chopgay or the 16 types of emptiness that are practiced in meditation.

Getshey Pema Thinlay was the contemporary of the Shabdrung and his immense popularity in Bhutan stemmed largely from the high esteem that the Shabdrung held him in. Shabdrung Nwang Namgyel had invited Getshey Pema Thinlay to Punakha Dzong during the winter months when the entire monastic body shifted from their summer Retreat at Thimphu to Punakha, but Getshey Pema Thinlay was to die a couple
of months later before the second meeting between these two great men of religion could take place.

The place where the monastery stands today was thus named Gangtey Goenpa. Etymologically, Gang – means mound in Dzongkha and teng – means on top, hence the name Gangtey Goenpa meaning the monastery/ Goenpa on top of the mound/hillock. Gangtey Goenpa is actually named Gangtey Sanga Choeling but is more popularly known as Gangtey Goenpa. Getshey Pema Thinlay built the Dratshang at Gangtey Goenpa and the Sangay Tempa Lhaghang/ the temple of the Buddha Sangay Tempa.

Tenzi Legpey Dhendup, the Second Gangtey Trulku expanded the structure made by Getshey Pema Thinlay. Before the Goenpa was built at Gangtey, there was no human settlement there at all. Once the Goenpa was built and the seat of the Gangtey Trulku was established in 1613, people began to flock there from all parts of Bhutan. It must be mentioned that if a survey is carried out in the Phobchika valley in and around Gangtey Goenpa then it will be discovered that the present inhabitants of Gangtey have migrated from different parts of Bhutan. Tenzi Legpey Dhendup was a contemporary of Getshe Tenzi Rabgay, the Fourth Regent of Bhutan. Tenzi Legpey Dhendup was born at Bhenji in Trongsa. It was during this time that Tibet attacked Bhutan and the Shabdrung invited Tenzi Legpey Dhendup to Punakha in order to perform the Torjab ceremony against Tibet. Legend tells us that when Tenzi Legpey Dhendup threw the tom/ ritual flour cakes towards the north (in the general directions of Tibet from Bhutan), a fire broke out which signified the efficacy of his prayers. The present Trulku of Gangtey Goenpa - Kuenzang Pema Namgay, who is the ninth Trulku, belongs to the same lineage as Tenzi Legpey Dhendup. Tenzi Legpey Dhendup was also responsible for making the original structure (constructed by Getshey Pema Thinlay) larger into the monastery it stands as today. Tenzi Legpey Dhendup was to establish the Shedra/ College and the Dhrupday/ meditation retreats. He was to make Gangtey Goenpa the centre of spiritual activity in the Kingdom of Bhutan. Tenzi Legpey Dhendup was also responsible for the spread of the Nyingmapa sect, particularly the Peling tradition in Bhutan.
According to Lopon Tashi Penjore and Dorji Lopon Phugay, these people dressed differently, spoke different dialects and came there initially, merely to receive the blessings of the Gangtey Trulku but later on, they settled down in the Phobchika valley. They began cultivating the land around the monastery and settled there for good. Many of them even took to religious teachings, and became married, lay monks or Gomchens, but they were however subordinate to the lamas or draphs. Initially only the Sangay Terma Tumpa Lhaghang was built. Later on, Tenzin Legpey Dhendu built the rest of the monastery.

Tenzin Legpey Dhendup had visited China and is believed to have brought a Thangkha made by the Princess Choli Padma. This thangka is hand woven and depicts the Buddha. It covers half the utse/ the central tower of the monastery. The monastery houses many treasures of national heritage. The Kongjo Princess is believed to have woven another square banner that is housed in the Monastery. Legend has it that Tenzin Legpey Dhendup also brought the Chatey that is woven in two pieces. He is said to have hidden the two separately woven pieces in bricks of tea and having prayed to the Buddha of the ten directions to ensure that the two pieces of Chatey reach the most sacred place. He set the two bricks of tea flying. The bricks of tea eventually reached Gangtey Goenpa. It is also said that he sent a messenger ahead for a ritualistic procession/sherdah to welcome his arrival with the two pieces of Chatey to Gangtey Goenpa. Due to the large number of robberies and desecration of monasteries, especially in the remote areas of Bhutan, His Majesty, King Jigme Singye Wangchuk has sealed most of the sacred objects of worship. The statue of Sangay Tempa (from where the Lhakhang gets its name) was originally from a place called Ghoyen in Tibet. The house where this statue was enshrined was gutted by fire, and the statue is believed to have flown from Ghoyen to Gangtey Goenpa, the statue has teardrop marks on his face.

Another ancient and religious relic to be found in the Gangtey Goenpa is the hat of Sahoruja. King Sahargeb is said to have offered all his clothing to the Gangtey Trulku when he became Guru Rinpoche’s discipline. Shabdrung Jigme Norbu desired the hat
and he thought of a way of taking the hat for his own personal use. He set about making an identical hat and planned to switch it with the original hat. However, when the hat was complete, it changed colour and could not be used to replace the original hat. However, Shabdrung Jigme Norbu was not to be outdone. He managed to steal the famed hat away. The Gangtey Trukku had a strong premonition that something was wrong. Upon opening his chest of treasures he realised that the real hat was missing and in its stead sat the fake hat. He followed the Shabdrung all the way to Shasula. The Shabdrung finally agreed to return the real as well as the fake hat into the Trulku's safe custody.

In a talk the present researcher had (1998) with the Gangtey Trulku, he said:

Although there were great lamas born before the establishment of the monastery, it was only after the Gangtey Goenpa was built that the Gangtey Trulku came into existence. Prior to the establishment of Gangtey Goenpa the lineage holders or the former Trulkus were all born in Tibet or in India but not in the Kingdom of Bhutan.

Earlier on, mention was made of the religious artifacts that are preserved at the Gangtey Geonpa. It must be mentioned that Kusho Mipham Wangpo and Ngoensay Tshering Wangchuk were the two people responsible for collecting the artefacts that are to be found in Gangtey Geonpa/monastery even today. They collected and preserved most of the chango/ mask dance costumes. After the Shedra/ College of higher learning was established at Gangtey Goenpa several of the Je Khenpos/ Chief Abbots of Bhutan studied there and were qualified to become Je Khenpos.

Tenzi Legpey Dhendup had performed the Kagya Thordo ritual at Punakha Dzong. In recognition of the four great deeds that Tenzi Legpey Dhendup performed Geshe Tenzi Rebgay presented Chitokha (a small hillock, literally meaning the point of a needle) to the Gangtey Trukku as a winter retreat. During Tenzin Legpey Dhendup's time the monastery at Chitokha was almost the size of Gangtey Goenpa. But due to the occurrence of two major earthquakes in that area most of the monastery was destroyed.
After the first great earthquake the II Trulku rebuilt the monastery. The second great earthquake occurred during the time of the seventh Trulku. King Jigme Wangchuk, the second king of Bhutan helped re-build the Chitokha Monastery. Just as the Central monastic body, moves from their summer retreat in Thimphu to Punakha Dzong during winter, the retinue of Gangtey Goenpa too moves to Chitokha the point of a needle, in the winter months. When the entire monk body of Gangtey Goenpa moves to Chitokha for the summer during the ninth month of the lunar calendar, a procession similar to the Great Punakha Procession takes place here as well with as much pomp and splendour as the Punakha Procession. The monk body remains there till the second month of the lunar calendar.

The disciples of Tenzi Legpey Dhendup founded several monasteries of which the popular ones are the Chamdah Lhaghang in Chukha Dzongkhang district, the Datong Goenpa, the Nephu Goenpa and the Donkola Goenpa in Paro. These monasteries were to become established seats of the Peling tradition. They also moved to the eastern part of Bhutan as well as to Adarokha below Phobchika Valley. A large village comprising the families of the one hundred and forty gomchens lay monks who take care of the monastery surrounds the Gangtey Goenpa. Gangtey Goenpa is now under the control of the Royal Government and is directed by the ninth Gangtey Trulku.

The lineage of the current Gangtey Trulku may be traced as follows:

(a) Getshey Pema Thinlay
(b) Tenzi Legpey Dhendup
(c) Kuenzang Thinlay Namgay
(d) Tenzi Seshay Namgay
(e) Ugen Gelay Namgay
(f) Ugen Tenpai Nyima
(g) Ugen Tempai Nichen
(h) Ugen Thinlay Dorjee
(i) Kuenzang Pema Namgay
In an interview with the researcher in 1998, the Gangtey Trulku (Trulku Kuenzang Pema Namgay) said:

With the title of the Trulku come responsibilities - responsibilities towards the Buddha Dhamma, the Monastery, lay people, my followers at Gangtey Goenpa, Phobchikha Valley and all over the globe. It is not an easy job handling such responsibilities. Unlike an appointed Lama/ Kay lam I cannot abandon my monastery or my people and up and leave as and when I desire to do so. I do not have a choice in the matter, I am bound to stay at the Goenpa and not only stay here but also look after the well being of everyone here, whether I like it or not.

This is not to say that the Trulku was trying to shirk from his responsibilities or that he was expressing his unhappiness at having to remain there at the back of the beyond all his mortal life. This was the Trulku’s way of explaining the responsibilities that go with being the Trulku of such an important lineage.

He also added:

Moreover, the Trulku is not really free to follow his own whims and fancies. He is governed by the rules and regulations of the Royal Government, but more important than that he is bound by the deep concern for the welfare of his people which is reciprocated by the love, respect and devotion showered on the Trulku by his people. It is not enough to be born a Trulku. A Trulku has to work very hard to prove his worth to all the love, respect and devotion showered on him.
In short, even someone like the Trulku whose ancestry goes back to Terton Pema Lingpa needs to earn the respect of his people. His title comes endowed with the additional responsibility of promoting the Dhamma for the sake of all sentient beings.

He explained the propagation/promotion of the Dhamma as including the twin concepts of Kipa and Dawa, meaning peace and happiness. The Trulku did not fail to remind us that the whole purpose of the Buddha Dhamma is to generate peace and happiness. The Trulku also discerns between two branches of the Dhamma:

(a) Lung: involving the teaching and learning of the Dhamma and
(b) Tokh: involving the practise of the Dhamma.

He said that both these two branches have to complement each other. Hence, for the teaching and learning of the Dhamma there are Lobdars and Shedras, while for the practice of the Dhamma are the Gomdays and the Drupodays. But what are these Shedras and these Lobdars, the shedras are institutes of higher learning while the lobdars are akin to our primary schools. The young novices attend the lobdars (also called the Zhindrim lobdar) for five years. After that they enter the shedra where he, would have to study for nine years.

When he completes his studies at the shedra, a novice, would get the degree of an Acharya/Lopon. In keeping with the establishment of the shedra and the dhrupdays at Gangtey Goenpa, for the spread of the essence of the teachings of Lord Buddha, the Trulku also pointed out that:

Merely observing these rituals and practises alone does not comprise the Buddha Dhamma. In order to understand the Buddha Dhamma one has to know the essence of the Buddha’s teachings.

The Trulku’s desire is to promote the shedras and the Dhuptays. The Dhuptay is a religious practice akin to a solitary retreat, involving the dedication of the self as an offering to a Kagyukpa deity, normally Lhamo. This practice is meant for the subjugation of the evil spirits that are obstacles/impediments to the dissemination of the
Buddha Dhamma. A dhrupday involves meditation and contemplation of three years and three months at the end of which a three-day dance ritual is held in honour of Peden Lhamu. The dhrupday involves costumes that are especially designed for the dedication of Penden Lhamu and is chiefly a Kagyukpa tradition.

The Gangtey Trulku wants to promote the shedras and the dhrupdays as well as undertake restoration activities at the monastery. Most of this old monastery is being eroded by the passage of time and seepage. The frescos and murals on the walls are being effaced by seepage as well. The Trulku however, has never stopped working against the hands of time. He has established a nunnery (Anim gi Dhashap) where the nuns are taught how to draw, paint and embroider religious art and motifs.

This dissertation proposes to study the tradition of the Terma and the Terton, and Terton Pema Lingpa in particular. It will also examine the Gangtey Goenpa/ Gangtey Monastery in detail and will study the Norbu Gyamtsho Mandala/ Khilkhor, (one of the Termas discovered by Terton Pema Lingpa), as a reduced model of cosmology. The definition and understanding of the term mandala/ khilkhor, the concept of the mandala principle will be dealt with in Chapter 2.
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