

## Myth, Legend and History Surrounding Dungsam\*

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### Dungsam

Earlier the entire regions which presently fall under Pemagatshel and Samdrup Jongkhar districts were popularly known as *Dungsam*. The term is still used both officially and locally. Two oral sources explain the meaning of Dungsam. According to one source, out of many high hills surrounding Pemagatshel, there are three conch-shaped hills. So the word Dungsam originated from the three hills. In Shar chop dialect, *dungkar* is a conch or simply *dung*, and *sam* means three; so Dungsam literally means three conches.

The second source has it that there was a *tsho*, a lake, called Dungshtsho Karmathang on a hill above the present day Khar. Tertön Pema Lingpa (1450-1521) was known to have revealed a *ter* (a sacred hidden treasure) from Dungshtsho Karmathang. Later when the lake dried up, humans settled there, and these settlers became ancestors of the Khoche nobility in Dungsam. Thus, they came to be called Dungshtshopa – the people of Dungshtsho. So Dungsampa is the corrupted form of Dungsapa; Dungsapa itself being the corruption of Dungshtshopa. The word Dungsam was recorded and widely used since the time of the First Zhabdrung, Ngawang Namgyal (1594-1651?), and the nearby villages happened to be called Dungsam. In western Bhutan, a Dungsampa is understood to be either from Dungsam Nganglam or Dungsam Pemagatshel.

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The regions was an independent political entity until they were merged with Zhongar following the surrender of the petty rulers of the regions to the Drukpa Kagyud force led by the first Chhoetse Penlop Chhogyal Minjur Tenpa and Lam Namsey who were acting under the command of the Unsurpassable Lord, the First Zhabdrung.

Until 1970, Pemagatshel and Samdrup Jongkhar were known as Dungsam Khoi Dung and Dungsam Kothri respectively. It was His Holiness Dudjom Rinpoche who thus christened the two districts. Dungsam comprised of prominent villages like Dungsam Dewathang, Dungsam Nganglam, Dungsam Dechheling, Dungsam Khar and Dungsam Khoi Dung. It was well-known as a trade route to India for the people of eastern Bhutan. From the time of Zhabdrung it was recognized as one of the four gateways to Bhutan: Shar Dungsamkha. The three others are Pasakha in the south, Taktserkha in the north and Dalingkha in the west.

Dungtsho Karmathang was blessed with the sacred visits of Mipham Tenpai Nyima (1567-1619), the father of Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal. By then the Dungtsho Karmathang had dried up and a settlement had already started. Tenpai Nyima founded the Dungkar Goenpa and fathered the son from a virtuous lady. The son went to Tibet at a young age, only to return to Bhutan to play an important role in country's history. He was Tenzin Drukdra whom most historians believe him to be a Tibetan. A mysterious epidemic struck the settlement at Dungtsho Karmathang, and the people died except for two khoche brothers who escaped to others places. The ruins of Dungtsho Karmathang can be still seen submerged beneath the earth today.

#### **Khoi Dung or Khe Dung?**

Before Pemagatshel got its present name, it was known by two names: Dungsam Khoi Dung and Dungsam Khe Dung. The former means the village of Khoi, while the Khe Dung literally means the village of stool. The former name could be

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correct because when the Bangtsho Chhoje was the ruler of Dungsam Khoi Dung during those days, the Khoipa were considered as untouchables, and they were forced to work as slaves. Most of the Khoipa or the untouchables were believed to be captives brought from the Assam Duars. So, Khoi Dung was the village occupied by the Khoipa under the rule of Bangtsho Chhoje, and the Khoi Dung denotes the villages of Khoipa.

After the Third King abolished the serfdom, the Khoipa were freed. It is said that after this reform, Bangtsho rulers even lost touch with their underground fortress of Bangtsho Chhoje at Kheri Goenpa in Lhuntshe. This underground fortress now remains in ruins. Barma of Samdrup Jongkhar who belongs to the lineage of Bangtsho Chhoje has reconstructed a lhakhang at Bar Goenpa opposite Chungkhar facing Zobel and Shumarthung. Geshey Pema Tshering who was the previous incarnation of the 70th Je Khenpo, His Holiness Trulku Jigme Choeda, had established his *dhensa* (residence) at Bar Goenpa. Lam Pema Tshering passed away there and a kudung chhoeten was constructed near the junction of two *zhunglam* where traders from Zhongar and Trashigang travelled to India. Kudung chhoeten was renovated, and consecration ritual was conducted by His Holiness himself. Lam Pem Tshering was supported by his devoted patron, the then Zhongar Dzongpon Kunzang Wangdi who came from Chungkhar Chhoje, a descendent of Lhasay Tsangma. He was also related to Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal through the offspring of Tenzin Drukdra.

Around the 16th century the great Nyingma Master Jigme Kuendrel alias Jangchub Gyeltshen who was the core disciple of the great saint Jigme Lingpa (eighteen century) returned from Tibet and founded Yongla Goenpa as prophesized by the Dakini. This sacred site was blessed by visits of many great Buddhist luminaries like His Holiness Dudjom Rinpoche Jigdrel Yeshey Dorji, Terton Pegyel Lingpa, Lam Pema Longdrel, Lama Dorji Gyeltshen alias Lam Phucha, Lama Sonam Zangpo alias Meme Lama, Dungsey Rinpoche Thinley

Norbu, Nyulshu Khenpo, Lhalung Thuksey Rinpoche and many others. Yongla Goenpa is known for its unfailing protection against the southern adversaries. Indeed there is a saying:

འཕར་རྒྱུད་རིགས་གསུམ་དགོན་པ་དང་།

འཕར་ལྗང་ཡོང་ས་ལ་དགོན་པ་གཉིས།

རྒྱ་དང་བོད་ཀྱི་ལ་གཞོན་ཡིན།

*Rigsum Goenpa in the upper east  
And Yongla Goenpa in the lower east  
Are the two protections  
Against Tibet and India*

In 1970 when His Holiness Dudjom Rinpoche conducted a *wang* on a place where Pemagatshel Dzong stands today, the Gup of Shumar Gewog, Ugyen Tshering requested Dudjom Rinpoche to give a suitable name for Khoi Dung. Rinpoche looked around the valley and wrote Pemagatshel on a piece of paper and gave it to Ugyen Tshering. Since then Pemagatshel was declared as the official name of the place and district as well. If one stands near the Dzong and look around, one would see the hills fencing the valley with Redingla Goenpa in the west, Kher Goenpa in the north, Yongla Goenpa in the east and Dungkar Goenpa in the south and instantly one would realize that the hills resemble a fully blooming lotus (*meto pema*). Similarly, Rinpoche christened the then called Dungsam Kothri as Samdrup Jongkhar.

After Pemagatshel became a new dzongkhag, the people felt the need for a dzong. A proposal to build it in Yurung was rejected by the people since it would entail additional tax and labour contribution. The present Dzong was built during the time of home minister late Lyonpo Tamshing Jagar, and Parop Dorji was then the Dzongda.

The district is divided into seven gewogs: Chimong, Chongshing, Dungmed, Khar Shumar, Zobel, and Yurung. Shumar is the biggest, while Nyaskhar, Laniri, Mikuri,

Shemshem and Chimong are the remotest. Yurung is a remote gewog without motor roads. It is shaped like the palms of Lord Buddha. It has an old school built around 1960s where many senior civil servants got their education. Khangma village which is located opposite Yurung is known for a big chhoeten which is believed have been built with assistance of khandom. Maize is the staple crop. The main cash crop orange can be grown in almost all parts of the region. Potato and chilli are also cultivated. Other vegetables and cereals are grown both for consumption and market.

### **Who was Dungsam Ja Dungpa?**

Not even the name of Dungsam Ja Dungpa is known, forget about his life and family. The people who had some knowledge about Ja Dungpa are long dead, and sadly those histories are beyond retrieval. The present account of Dungsam Ja Dungpa has been derived from whatever the people could recount. Some readers may not agree with the present account.

Dungsam Ja Dungpa is from Khangma. He lived with his wife, two sons, sister and a maid called Ja Zam. He had a big house and was known for wealth. It seems that the people addressed him as Ja Dungpa, but not by his actual name. He was appointed by Chhoetse Penlop to collect taxes from Dungsam and Duars; so he was respected as much as he was feared. Taxes collected in form of textiles, tea, salt, fruits and grains were deposited either directly to Chhoetse Penlop or Zhongar Dzongpon. He also functioned as the Governor of the Duars (*Ja* means India and *Dung* is the Governor or Dungpa). The whole stretch of southern plains of Assam and Bengal bordering Bhutan was once under Bhutan until it was annexed by the British India during the Duar War, 1864-5. Dungsam Ja Dungpa must have been a loyal and dedicated servant of Chhoetse Penlop. There are folk songs dedicated to him and they are widely sung even today. There is no oral information on who preceded him as Ja Dungpa; but

certainly no one succeeded him after his brutal death. By then Pel Thongley's supremacy had been well established.

### **The Death of Ja Dungpa**

Dungsam Ja Dungpa's sister was married to Pel Thongley who had a castle on the base of Lha Nang Zor – a rhino horn-shaped hill above the Urichhu on the way to Yurung. During the marriage, Ja Dungpa gave a plot of land in Khangma as a present and asked the newly-wed couple to construct a house. But no house was built there.

Ja Dungpa frequented the Assam Duars for official work and stayed there for many days. During one such visit to Assam Duars, Thongley took advantage of his absence and started an illicit affair with the maid servant. Ja Dungpa's maid was an Indian who was believed to have been brought from Assam Duars. This affair enraged his wife, Ja Dungpa's sister. She failed to stop Thongley from continuing the affair. In the end she suffered from mental disorder. The news enraged Ja Dungpa too. The relationship between Ja Dungpa and Thongley was strained beyond reconciliation. When they met occasionally, there was no former cordiality and warmth. Further, growing supremacy of Pel Thongley added salt to the injury and their hatred for each other grew so intense that eventually they took to fighting where Ja Dungpa met a tragic death.

Another account has it that Thongley arrived at Dungsam with a large force and built a gigantic castle. This instilled a sense of fear and respect amongst the people. Moreover, his sharp intelligence won over the leading figures and the people of Dungsam. This event naturally made Ja Dungpa envious of him. Later, Ja Dungpa came to know that Pel Thongley wanted to marry his sister. The former approached him and the marriage was accordingly arranged. But Ja Drung lied that his maid servant, Ja Zam was his sister and Thongley married Ja Zam. Ja Zam means an Indian girl. Thongley believed and accepted Ja Zam. Ja Dungpa gave him a plot of

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land in Khangma as present. The actual intention of Ja Dungpa to mend their relationship through a nuptial tie is not known. Some say that he wanted to know Thongley's weakness and then overcome his power. The others say Ja Dungpa bribed the Indian girl to poison Thongley after the marriage. Slowly, Thongley came to know his wife's identity before Ja Dungpa could achieve his plan. Thongley took it as an insult to his power, and the fight ensued between the two in which Ja Dungpa was killed.

Carrying a *dob* (a wooden bucket), Ja Dungpa's wife went to the spot where her husband was killed and collected his blood. She mixed it with water and splashed it over the land given to Thongley by her deceased husband. She cursed the land with extreme anger and hatred. She prayed that henceforth this particular land should not yield any harvest and that any family trying to cultivate it should meet the fate of her husband. This story has been transmitted orally from generation to generation and nobody has ever dared to cultivate the land. Today, the people of Khangma call this land as *monang sa*, meaning the forsaken land.

After his death, Ja Dungpa's family was broken. Feeling insecure to live near Thongley, they left their house to an unknown place. The news of Ja Dungpa's death never reached the authority in Trongsa, Zhongar or Wangdichholing which were considered the seat of justice in the eastern region. It was said that his wife decided to report it to Wangdichholing, and left her house and properties. She took whatever she could carry, but left her two sons inside a small hut which she had built of twigs and leaves. The hut was full of her lustrous gems and gold, hopes and aspirations and virtually everything. It is not known whether she mother met with the higher authorities in Wangdichholing or Zhongar. Some accounts have it that she filed a case against Pel Thongley.

### **How Two Son's Avenged their Father's Death**

On the way, somewhere in Kengkhar, she cut a bamboo shoot and planted it upside down in the soil and made a prayer thus: "You [bamboo] grow in the manner I have planted to foretell that my sons can avenge the death of their father." So praying so, she went to Kengkhar and settled there. True to her prayers, the bamboo had grown in the same way she had wished. People say the bamboo still exists, quite distinct from the normal bamboo.

The sons grew up into a man. They became good archers who could hit any target with unerring precision. They could even hit an egg kept on a palm from a reasonable distance. This skill increased the mother's confidence. The mother had no doubt that her sons could really fulfill her wish. So, one day, she blessed her sons and the boys set off from Kengkhar to Lha Nang Zor. They were to make a fire on the top of Khangma Poktor and let the smoke rise to signify that they had killed Thongley.

### **The Coming of Thongley to Dungsam**

At Kengkhar the mother kept on looking for any sign of smoke coming from Khangma Poktor while her sons waited to shoot Thongley. At last one of the sons hit Thongley and killed him. This was what their father had wanted to achieve long time ago, and this was what their mother wanted now. They proved to be the true sons of their parents. The boys immediately ran towards the top of Khangma Poktor, and no sooner did they make fire than they went home. At Kengkhar the mother upon seeing the smoke also ran to receive the sons. They met at a place where the boys said that they had removed Thongley from the earth (*Thongley Ra mun ma rang kang ti wa*). The mother out of sheer excitement jumped three times and shouted *ra mun ma, ra mun ma, ra mun ma*. Today this place is called Kengkhar Munma. Nothing is heard about what happened after that. It is believed that the boys returned to Lha Nang Zor after a few years.



There is an interesting story about Pel Thongley. One day when a woman was crossing a bridge, a baby slipped out of her hands into a river. She tried to rescue but to no avail. As destiny would have it, a fisherman caught the boy in place of a fish. The baby was no other than Pel Thongley – the great great-great grandson of Lhasey Tsangma.<sup>1</sup> The fisherman did not have any child and he believed the boy was a reward for his prayers. The fisherman's wife was so happy to get the boy. They took a good care the boy as their own. The boy grew up to become a healthy and handsome man. He was so handsome that people were naturally attracted to him. The boy was thus named Pel Thongley རོ་མིག་དབུ་དང་ལྷན་དུ། མཐོང་བ་ཙོམ་གྱིས་ལེགས་

བ། དབུ་མཐོང་ལེགས། Apart from this, no oral information is available about Thongley's childhood. History simply has it that he was the king of Dungsam and that he belonged to the lineage of Lhasey Tsangma.

Pel Thongley was a handsome, brave, wise and talented man. Being from the lineage of kings, he was destined to become a king himself. He was accepted as *garpa* (medieval court attendant) by a Deb. His service impressed the Deb and won his trust and confidence. Thongley was later sent from the base of the golden throne as the *pon* (king) of Dungsam. Thongley pledged his sincerity, loyalty and dedication to the Deb and took his leave with a few servants.

Dungsam was then sparsely populated with a few scattered houses. When Thongley arrived at Dungsam he urgently built

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<sup>1</sup> The oral account of genealogy of Pel Thongley begins from Nyathri Tsenpo to Namla Thridhuen, followed by Bargi Tengnyi, Sala Lekdru, Chhula Dheygay, Tshigla Tsen-nga, Tathothori Nyentsen, Namri Songtsen, Songtsen Gyampo, Gungri Gungtsen, Mangsong Mangtsen, Mangjay Lungnam, Thridhey Tsugten, Thrisong Detsen, Muti Tsenpo, Lhasay Tsangma, Thongley Tsen, Thriten Pel and Namkoe Dhey. Pel Thongley's father was Namkoe Dhey, and his descendents were Yoebar, Tshawo Changpo and Bangtsho.

his own castle. He thought of building on the land that might not be of any use in the future.

#### **Building of Lha Nang Zor Castle**

Like his ancestor Lhasay Tsangma who prayed for a bridge across Kurichhu, Pel Thongley also made a prayer to the god to prophesize a place for his settlement. After crossing Urichhu, he was climbing towards Yurung when he heard an unfamiliar voice from the sky. He took it as a prophecy and stopped to settle on that hill. He named it Lha Nang Zor - a god-given hill. He began constructing a castle on top of a hill resembling a precious rhinoceros horn. It is not known who were carpenters and masons. From the walls of the ruins, it is evident the castle was not the hands of professional carpenters or masons. This could be one reason why the castle did not last long. The masonry looks as if stones were piled one upon the other.

The castle at Lha Nang Zor served the purpose of any other dzong. It had been comparatively smaller than the dzongs built by Zhabdrung. It did not have any feature of the seventeenth century dzongs. Any way, it was from this hill that the reign of Thongley brought stability, peace and prosperity to the regions. Thongley was wise, just, humane and efficient, so the people believed. Some older generation vaguely recall their grandparents referring to him as Meme Thongley.

The oral account is full of Thongley's hunting adventures in the forest of the present day Shali. So he must have been an avid hunter. One day he forgot to pick up his hunting bow after taking a rest in the forest. The place was later called as *Shali* which literally means 'a hunting bow'.

Likewise, Thongley is associated with the names of other places. Shumar (*shugmar*) is the name of a place where he seriously fell ill. *Shug* means seriously, *marwa* means fell ill. Maan is a place where his physician arrived and treated him.

During his reign from Lha Nang Zor, Thongley had two groups of servants. Nangkorpa were the inner servants who discharged the internal chores, while Chikorpa performed the external duties. Later on, the place where Nangkorpa had settled came to be known as Nangkor. The settlement of Chhikorpa spread as Shumar.

#### **Who Built Shalikhhar Dzong?**

The road from the north of Kheri Goenpa winds through the villages of Gonpung and Gamung; then to Mongar and Wangdichholing. Until the early 1960s, it served as the main *zhunglam* between the centre and Samdrup Jongkhar. It was traditionally trodden by officials both in times of peace and civil strife; the local people travelled it for trade. It was through this traditional route that Trongsa Penlop, Jigme Namgyal led the Bhutanese troops to fight the British aggression at Dewathang, then called Dewangiri.

It is not clear who built Shalikhhar Dzong. But some oral accounts attribute it to Thongley. Since Lha Nang Zor's castle was pretty far from the *zhunglam*, Thongley failed to control the travelers, especially during times of political emergency. The existing code of protocol prevented higher authorities to climb up to Lha Nang Zor and meet Thongley. It was also a waste of time. Thus, this difficulty made Thongley to shift the castle to a different location. Another oral evidence points that after killing Ja Dungpa, Tongley built Shalikhhar Dzong to formalize and ease the tax collection, and then deposit them to Zhongar and Wangdichholing efficiently.

While residing at Lha Nang Zor, Pel Thongley cultivated nearby fertile plain where Shumar primary school is presently located, as his kitchen garden. Later when Shalikhhar Dzong was built, its dzongpon continued the practice. The dzongpon must have been Thongley himself because there is no logic for other dzongpon to use this particular land which is far from Shalikhhar. This evidence also points that it was Thongley who built Shalikhhar Dzong.

There is also a semantic evidence to prove that Shalikhhar Dzong was built by Thongley. The term *Khar*, was used wherever the descendents of Lhasey Tsangma settled such as Tsenkhar, Bengkhar Wengkhar, Domkhar, Chungkhar, Kengkhar, Chaskhar, Jamkhar. Had the builder been others, it would have been named Shali Dzong.

#### **Zowo Ngan Tempa - the Great Builder**

While the builder of Shalikhhar Dzong cannot be ascertained, Zowo Ngan Tempa was the master mason. He is from Shumar Thung, a small village which is not far from Kheri Goenpa. He was known to be quick and light-bodied. A unique chhoeten built in Shumar Thung bears witness to his architectural skill. This living masterpiece still evokes an echo of Zowo's skill. A similar chhoeten is believed to be still intact, withstanding the cruel test of time somewhere in the forest near Tshelingore. Had Kolokpo, the last Dzungpon safeguarded Shalikhhar Dzong, it might have stood as another living masterpiece, much more glorious than the others. The Dzong was later destroyed and both man and nature began to encroach it. No other details are available about Zowo Ngan Tempa.

#### **Destruction of Shalikhhar Dzong**

One reason for shifting his castle to Shali must be purely strategic. Thongley must have wanted a *Dra Dzong* (enemy fortress) to watch over the enemy intrusion. This was why Shalikhhar Dzong was built on the top of a hill overlooking the valleys.

Several attempts were made to conquer the Dzong. There is a story that once the Tibetans came from Tawang to Dungsam through Trashigang. On the way to India they thought of capturing Shalikhhar Dzong and descended from the present day Pangkhar opposite to Shalikhhar Dzong near Chungkhar.

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When they looked up from the ravine, Shalikhhar Dzong looked as if it was hanging in the sky and thus, they exclaimed:

ཤལི་མཁའ་པའི་རྫོང་།  
ས་རྫོང་མ་རེད་གནས་རྫོང་རེད།

*The Dzong of Shalikhhar,  
Is not on Land,  
But in the Sky*

So, they had to retreat and continue towards India. There is a second story of an attempt to destroy the Dzong with a big round boulder called the Pungdo of Masang. The stone is believed to have been flung from Khangma to destroy the Dzong. Luckily, the boulder landed just a few steps away from the Dzong.

It is not known why the Dzong was under a constant threat. The Indians also made a several attempts to destroy it during the British rule, mostly by Kacharis, Assamese and Bengalis. At that time Lama of Yongla Goenpa played an important mediator role. But a friendship between the Shalikhhar Dzongpon and Lama of Yongla Goenpa abruptly turned sour. It is believed that the Dzongpon once addressed the Lama by his nickname Phucha. This Lama must have been Lama Dorji Gyaltshen, son of Garpa Shesha. The Lama was mostly known by his nickname, but he was never addressed so, at least in his presence. The enemies took advantage of this sour relation and advanced to the Dzong. The Lama who felt insulted and hurt did not speak any good word in favour of the Shalikhhar Dzongpon. Out-numbered by the Indian forces, the Shalikharpa failed to retaliate. Properties were destroyed and religious images desecrated; statues were beheaded and made into *thab lung* (oven-stones); religious texts were made into carpets; countless valuables taken. The Dzongpon's few attendants were killed, while his wife and her maidservant escaped through a window and went to Shar – the present day Tawang in Arunachal Pradesh, India. Kolokpo is believed

to have committed suicide by jumping off from the third storey. The enemies finally razed down the dzong to the ground.

The Dzong was destroyed during the reign of Dzungpon Kolokpo. It is not known what made the enemies to destroy the Dzong. The people of Shalikhari neither have a dispute nor instigate others to deserve such destruction. It is possible that the Indians coveted Dzungpon's enormous wealth. After the Dzong was ransacked, they took away a lot of properties while a mountain of grains was burnt to ashes along with the Dzong. It is believed that Peling of Wooling warned Shalikhari Dzungpon about the Indians attack; but it seems the Yongla Lama did not pass the message to Dzungpon.

There is another story about the downfall of the dzong and this version has the same ending. But it begins differently with the war between Bhutan and the British India in Dewathang.

The Bhutanese troops were led by the then Trongsa Penlop Jigme Namgyal, the father of the First King Ugyen Wangchuck. On the way Ugyen Wangchuck visited Kheri Goenpa and Yongla Goenpa to offer prayers. When he lost his way in the jungle of Yongla Goenpa, a white bird appeared and showed him the way. It disappeared when he was on the right road. During the war, the British positioned their gun at the route used by the Bhutanese in direction of Yongla Goenpa, and kept one gun operator on duty. But at night a short black man would appear and reverse the position of the machine. In the morning, the enemies were surprised to find the operator dead. This happened for several consecutive nights, but the British did not want to retreat. It was only when Jigme Namgyal's arrow hit the head of their general from a reasonable distance that they decided to retreat nervously at once. Some jumped over deep ravines, while others were killed. Some managed to live for some hours with Bhutanese arrows either on the back or legs; some escaped unhurt.

After the British had retreated, Bhutanese forces returned home and carried a *tob* (cannon) seized during the war to Wangdichholing. After crossing Shalikhhar Dzong, they took rest under a tree called Buramshing at the base of Kengkhar near Drangmichhu. As they continued their journey, the *tob* incredibly became so heavy that they could not carry it.

Meanwhile, the enemies followed them. It is not known what happened to these Bhutanese, except that the *tob* became miraculously lighter on the shoulders of three or four Indian sepoys. Carrying the *tob* the Indians had crossed the Shalikhhar Dzong and took rest on slope of the opposite hill. Dzongpon Kolokpo knew that the Indians had recovered the cannon from the Bhutanese and he, at once, fired his *mendha* (gun power) from his chamber. The fire missed the target and hit a stone on which one of the officers was resting. The scar left by the *mendha* on the stone can be still seen even today. The Indians were angered by the gunshot and they soon surrounded the Shalikhhar Dzong. The forces of Dzongpon were numbered and the Dzong destroyed.

#### **The One Who Cannot Properly Pronounce Words**

Little is known about Dzongpon Kolokpo. He was Zhongar Dzongpon before becoming Shalikhhar Dzongpon. When he was in Zhongar, it is believed that he asked his attendants to bring a girl. The attendants went out and brought an ugly lady. When the attendant reported that they could not find a beautiful woman, he replied, "If she is ugly, cover her face with a cloth and bring her in." So they did. Then he made his attendant to witness his sexual intercourse with the lady. He would ask him from time to time how it was progressing. The attendant replied, *lung ngig tsing chamkai joktang nufa prusken nubla la* (your genital is entering as if a potato is squeezed in between two stones). Kolokpo exclaimed at last, *thum thai, thum thai*. Actually, he should have pronounced, *thub thai thub thai* (leave it, leave it). The people believe that he was bad in pronouncing words; even when he was a

Shalikhhar Dzongpon, he was known as Tal Toloe – the one who cannot properly pronounce words.

During one of her rituals performed in 2003 the spirit of Kolokpo spoke through a *pamo* (shaman) from Shumar Gomchu, saying that he has taken rebirth as the Neypo (serpent guardian) in the ruins of Shalikhhar Dzong. In the spirit's recitation, it said, "My body is so huge and long that I can't even slide and move to have sun light even for a while."

It is believed that a person who gets frightened while passing near the ruins would become inactive and lose the power of pronunciation. A *serkem* (libation) had to be offered to restore the person. This is because Kolokpo himself was not good at pronunciation. In 2001, Morong Rinpoche subdued the Neypo. The Neypo transformed into a young man appeared in Rinpoche's dream with the life-force (*sog*) of a pregnant lady who was admitted to the Pemagatshel hospital and requested the Rinpoche to follow him. The Rinpoche knew the intention and followed Nyepo. After reaching the ruins, he subdued the Nyepo, and asked it not to bring any more suffering to the people. The life-force of the pregnant lady was restored. Since then, nobody has fallen victim. It is said that *Phag Zipa* – the caretaker of Kolokpo's pigs also mispronounced words like his Lord.

#### **The Ruins of Shalikhhar Dzong**

The ruin of Shalikhhar Dzong is located to the north of Pemagatshel Dzong. The nearest villages are quite far from the ruins: Gonpung and Serkhangpa lhakhang in the north, Dur Dur in the east, Khari in the south and Senang in the west. It can be reached from Nangkor and Je Brangsa, but the shortest and the easiest route is from Kheri Gonpa along the tractor road. Until 1960s, this route formed a part of the main zhunglam between the central government and Samdrup Jongkhar, passing through Wangdichholing, Zhongar, Shalikhhar and Dewathang.



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The main entrance gate – *gorekha* – faces east in the direction of Dur Dur. To its left is Chungkhar separated by a deep ravine. If viewed from below, Shalikhhar Dzong looks like Trashigang Dzong as seen from Chagzam. To its left is a village called Senang on the slope separated from Khangma and Lha Nang Zor by Urichhu.

It must have been a big dzong built with lots of human labour and difficulties. The courtyard walls are about five meters high, and the stones used were of good quality. The walls of the ruins were intact in late 1960s before the local people removed the stones as *zur lung* (stones used in sides of a house) and transported them for building Shumar Dzong. The Shumar Dungpa was then under Zhongar Dzongpon. Shumar Dzong was also later destroyed and its old timber was used to construct the office of the first Dzongda Parop Dorji before Pemagatshel Dzong was built. The people of the nearby villages continued to carry away the stones for constructing private houses. This further deteriorated the ruins to an unrecognizable shape. Some people believe that these stones are limestone, while others say that they are marble. There are rumours of mining the whole ruins.

At the base of the ruins there is a small valley which looks like a dried lake. One source has it that it was a pond for keeping ducks, while another oral source says that it was Dzongpon's pigsty. The former seem farfetched because there is no sign of an enclosure at the other end, and more over, water was scarce during those days, and more surprisingly even today.

The place has only one drinking water source in Dewpari some kilometers above Dur Dur. A long canal was dug to bring water from a small reservoir. Where it was difficult to dig canal, bamboos were used in absence of modern pipes. Long cylindrical bamboo containers called *gongdong* were also used both for carrying and storing water. People had been using *gongdong* until late 1980s, and they are still being used in some remote villages.

There was a big *mani dungjur* (prayer-wheel) in the corner of courtyard as one enters the courtyard from *gorekha*. The courtyard looks like an undulated plain. There is no trace of a prayer-wheel today. The courtyard floor rises gently as it nears the *utse* (copula). The walls of the three storeys *utse* have been pulled down while removing *zurlung* in the early 1970s. The bases of surrounding walls are covered by dried leaves and bushes. Not many people dare to approach it except for some brave cattle herders.

There is a square plateau-like leveled field as one moves on straight. It must have been another courtyard or the floor of another room. The walls are intact on either side. This is followed by rows of several blocks of ruined houses. While it is difficult to even guess how long it took to construct *Shalikhhar Dzong*, it took only a few hours for the fire to bring it down. The ruins sleep quietly under bushes unknown to most people.

#### **Per Khe: The Evidence of Iron Work**

People believe that there is a deposit of *perkhe* (iron residue) on a slope that stretches down to *Senang*. There is a local story about a blacksmith's house called *gartsang*. It is not sure whether iron-ore was mined before or after the construction of *Shalikhhar Dzong*. If there was a mining activity before, iron nails must have been used for construction. However, iron had been used to make weapons and household items. Not a single piece of wood can be found which might otherwise reveal some evidences of use of nails. Nothing can be said about the materials used for roofing either.

*Shalikhhar Dzong* had played an important role in the country's history. It served as the enemy-fortress to watch any external intrusion into our country from the east. It had been used as the half way terminus by the travellers between *Zhongar* and *Dewathang*. From this place also spread one of

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the four highly respected nobilities in Dungsam called Shalikhhar Choeje originated from this place. The other nobilities are Choeje of Dungkhar, Chungkhar and Bangtsho. These four nobilities are considered equivalent to other nobilities of the other parts of the country like Dung nobility.

While Choeje of Chungkhar, Bangtsho and Shalikhhar all belonged to the descendents of Lhasey Tsangma, Dungkhar Choeje is believed to be a mixture of Gya clan and Dung, tracing its root to Tenpai Nyima, the father of Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyel and Barkey, the son of a Naga King of Makulung Tsho respectively. Today the descendents of Dungkhar Choeje have spread to Dungsam and their nobility is now called Khoche.

Meanwhile, there is no one who claims to be descendents of Shalikhhar Choeje in Pemagatshel. Some elders believe that a few descendants of those who ran away during the downfall of the Shalikhhar Dzong must be surviving in Tawang.

### **A Myth about the Pungdo of Masang**

A several stories of failed attempts to destroy Shalikhhar Dzong are still being narrated. The most interesting one is about Masang who threw a pungdo to destroy the Dzong. A pungdo is a big round boulder, an equivalent of a modern day sport, shot-put.

There were two Gyelpo – Thinley Zangpo and Norbu Zangpo – who were brothers. The former resided somewhere on a steep cliff of Pangkhar, and the latter on a cliff between Guyum and Mande. Their abodes were separated by a crow fly distance of two kilometers. It is said that the two brothers could communicate with each other until the building of Shalikhhar Dzong on a hilltop disrupted their direct communication (conversation), and their welfare also declined.

So one day, Norbu Zangpo invited Masang from Zhongar Chaskhar to help him destroy the Dzong. Masang agreed and

ordered that Norbu Zangpo should cook him one *mon* (80 kg) of rice and a pig for his meal. He further instructed a lady from Yurung to do the cooking. But the lady from Yurung hid one thigh of pig and one *khaw* (roughly 1½ kg) of rice. She thought that Masang cannot eat such a huge quantity, and secretly kept them for herself.

When Masang arrived, he unbelievably gourmandized the whole food, and did not leave anything. He then took an aim and threw a big boulder towards Shalikhhar Dzong. However, the boulder missed the target by a yard, and landed at the foot of the Dzong. The failure was attributed to the lady of Yurung who hid a thigh of the pig and a *khaw* of rice; otherwise the Dzong would have been destroyed.

Another story narrates that the Dzungpon of Shalikhhar Dzong levied heavy taxes on the people living under his jurisdiction. Particularly, the people of Khangma, Yurung and beyond had to carry back-breaking loads while depositing taxes to the government. So they thought of removing their Dzungpon. But they found it difficult either to assassinate or fight against their powerful Dzungpon. Then, someone spoke about a giant called Masang whose fame and strength was well known in the vicinity of Zhongar Chaskhar. All of them agreed and Masang was invited. Masang ordered the hosts to arrange him a feast of one whole pig and a *mon* of rice. The people requested a lady of Yurung to prepare the meal. She agreed. From here the story is similar to the earlier one, except that *pungdo* was thrown from Khangma.

#### **Who was Masang Then?**

Long, long ago Brokpa of Merak and Sakteng assassinated a Tibetan Deb called Yabu Zangpo and ran away via Tshona Sewakhar. On the way, they prayed to the gods above for protection. Their prayer was answered. The god-king, Lhayi Jain Wangpo ordered the god-son, Guseng Langling, to come down in disguise, and so he did.

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Guseng Langling landed at Lho Dungscho Karmathang in Pemagatshel. It is not sure whether the Brokpa asked for any help from Guseng Langling. But it is said that he ruled the under-world of Dungscho Karmathang (Luyul/Muyul) for sometime. There, he was called Mu Tsan Lhanyan Chhenpo. He traveled from Dungscho Karmathang and reached a hilltop from where he clearly saw Wangsengla. Reaching Wangsengla, he saw a beautiful lake called Mukulungtsho where he built his palace and reigned over both the under-world and humans. Guseng Langling could transform into both human and the serpent king, klu.

One day, a young, beautiful Sharchhop girl made her way down to Dungsam Khar as a bride to the Khar Gyalpo. At dusk, she reached at Mukulungtsho and took refuge at the lake shore. As fate would have it, the serpent king Guseng Langling slept with the girl. When she reached Dungsam, she was already pregnant. She later gave birth to an illegitimate male child. So, the child was named Barkey – born from the middle without a father. But she alone knew her son's father.

Barkey grew up and attained his youth. One day, he made his way to India for a trade and reached the lake of Nyey Tsang Long. Since he was the son of a Lha Tsan, the inhabitants of this lake did not allow Barkey to proceed further. The evil serpent (klu) of this lake was his father's enemy. Desperate and annoyed, Barkey returned home and questioned his mother about his father. The mother at last revealed his identity, "You are the son of the Lha Tsan of Mukulung Tsho."

Barkey immediately went to Mukulung Tsho and called for his father. A young man attired in a silk robe came out of the middle of the lake, and replied, "Yes, I am your father. What can I do for you?" Barkey narrated in detail about the evil serpents of Nyey Tsang Long Tsho. His father gave him a locked box, and asked him to open it only when he reached the lake of Nyey Tsang Long. So Barkey returned. On reaching Threphu, Barkey opened the box a little. No sooner did he open it than the serpent of different shapes and sizes

started to come out. He quickly closed the container and hurried down. On reaching the lake he opened the box. Incredibly, thousands of serpents rushed into the lake and the next moment it dried up. In the middle of the dried lake was a copper bowl lying up-side down. The young and curious Barkey went there and opened it. Instantly, a maid servant of the klu who had remained hidden there hit Barkey on the forehead with a copper ladle. Unfortunately Barkey ended his life there. His brain was eaten by a fish and his spirit too entered the fish and thus, he was transformed into a fish.

The fish followed Bronolachhu below Khar which joins Drangmechhu, also called Gongri. Then to Zhongar Meilpachhu and finally it reached the river of Chhankhoi where it got trapped in a fisherman's net. The fisherman was a widower. He did not kill it but took it home alive since it spoke human words. He kept the fish in a wooden tub full of water.

One day, when the fisherman returned home from his work he was surprised to discover that someone had fetched water for him. At another day, a fire was burning in his oven. He wondered who it could be. So, the next day, he pretended to go out and watched secretly.

To his greatest surprise, a young man appeared from the wooden tub and removed his scales. The young man started to burn fire, fetch water and prepare meals. The fisherman thought of adopting him as his son and instantly picked up his scale and threw it into the fire. Thus, this is how Barkey, once again resumed his human form. He was named Repa Tobchhen – a giant with long hair.

This giant, Repa Tobchhen was Masang. He was also called Chhali Masang because his wife was from Chhali. He also lived in Chhali for sometime. His footprints can be still seen on stones in Chhali, Gonpung and Gamung and Dagor. Masang liked to play archery, and there is a long rectangular

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stone slab in Gonpung which is believed to be his target. The other target is at Kengkhar Brongphu, which is about half day's walk from Gonpung. Thus, Mansang's archery range is incredibly long. He is also known to have constructed a bridge using a long single stone-slab somewhere in Bumthang.

Repa Tobchhen alias Chhali Masang built a castle in Yutungla and ruled over Bumthang Ura and Zhongar. As Chieftain he overburdened the people with the work of cutting and leveling a hill between Chhali and Zhongar so that he could see Chhali and enjoy early sunlight. This task enraged the people and they secretly discussed to get rid of him. An archery match was arranged at Kabithang and Masang was invited. Masang knew about the plot, yet he could not decline the invitation. He went to Kabithang only to be hit by an arrow which pierced through his heart. Before he died, he said, "There will come a time when you will remember me; so look for me in Yarlung Drogme Chhey (Tibet). I will be reborn there for your benefit." So Masang died, leaving behind many remarkable episodes and stories that people still love to narrate and listen.

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