

GARGYA 'GRAM NAG: A BANDIT OR A PROTO-REBEL? THE QUESTION OF BANDITRY AS SOCIAL PROTEST IN NAG CHU¹

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The Tibetan notion of *jag pa*, which has the same meaning as the term 'bandit' in English, is widespread in Tibetan society and literature, but has rarely been researched. Anyone who has lived in Tibetan society would have heard stories of bandits. Sometimes these stories are based on true events; often they have no identifiable characters and have acquired mythic status. We find encounters with bandits described in numerous *rnam thar* or biographies and in other literary sources, as well as in reports left by traders, travellers and pilgrims on the Tibetan plateau, including many by Western travellers in the early years of the last century. The incidence of banditry in Tibetan society thus seems to be well documented. But who were these bandits in Tibet and why was their profession so prevalent in Tibetan society? Is the *jag pa* to be understood as a criminal menace to society, a kind of folk hero similar to Robin Hood, or a prototypical form of the revolutionary?

One of the most famous cases involves a group led by *Jag pa 'gram nag* (Black Cheek Bandit) who is said to have terrorised much of the Nagchu area to the northeast of Lhasa, which lies on the Sino-Tibetan trade route, in the first half of the 20th century. Black Cheek and his men were said to have robbed many on this important trade route and can be said to have virtually held siege to it. The Lhasa government is reported to have dispatched an expeditionary force in 1942 to suppress Black Cheek and his men, led by a young monk official named Phala Thupten Woden (Pha' lha thub bstan 'od ldan), who went to become the Lord Chamberlain (*drung yig chen mo*) to the 14th Dalai Lama and organised his escape from Tibet in 1959.

In this paper, I want to explore the background to the framing of Gargya Dramnak (if we use a phonetic form of his name) ('Gram nag) as a bandit. One of the most detailed accounts that describes him as a *jag pa* is an oral history interview with Pala Thupten Woden after he went into exile in India,² in which Phala positions himself as a restorer of peace, eliminating the scourge of banditry in Nagchu. In his narrative, Gargya's actions represent criminality. But to assert this as an accurate representation of social reality in Nagchu in the first decades of the 20th century is problematic, and raises questions on the framing of the bandit narrative in Tibetan social history. Like any derogatory social category, the meaning of the term is positioned through engagement with prejudice and the denigration of the other. In the use of the term *jag pa* in Tibetan, the label

1 I would like to thank Dechen Pemba and Robbie Barnett for reading a draft of this paper and for their valuable suggestions. I also like to thank Sonam Chogyal and Dondrup Lhagyal of TASS for providing me with sources on Hor Sogu.

2 *Sku tshé'i lo rgyus hrag bsdu: mgron gnyer che mo pha lha thub bstan 'od zer*, Oral History Series No 2. Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, Dharamsala, 1996, p.107 (hereafter cited as Phala, 1996).

serves both as a legal category describing a form of criminality, where certain actions are deemed banditry and legal remedies are prescribed, and as a form of meta-language, where it is not a particular action that describes banditry but an individual or group that is classified as bandits. The latter use is similar to the contemporary practice of using the term “terrorist” to depict an enemy of the state where there is no action involved, but only a characterization of an individual or group. This distinction is important to bear in mind when discussing banditry in Tibet, and people in central Tibet often use the term *jag pa* in a similar sense to refer to Khampas (those from the south-eastern part of the Tibetan plateau), people from Nagchu, or, as in this case, for certain groups that are nomadic. The uncritical acceptance of the term *jag pa*, especially when used by the privileged classes, reflect class and social prejudices rather than an actual knowledge of specific actions or behaviour.

Similarly, the characterisation of bandits as a form of the Robin Hood archetype is also based on selective memory, valorising bandits for their courage and audacity. Besides its other connotations, the term *jag pa* also carries inherent associations of courage and audacity. A bandit is defined by bravery (*blo khog*), in contradistinction to a common *rkun ma* or “thief,” who is defined by lack of courage, since he perpetrates his crime at night and unseen, while a bandit confronts his victims face to face.³ Among the people of his broader community, the group of nomads living on the northern Tibet grasslands, known as the Hor Sogu (Hor tsho ba so dgu), and to some degree amongst his co-religionists, the followers of the Bon po religion, Gagya has become a folk hero and a symbol of Bon po’s resistance to Buddhist colonization. This narrative involves forgetting that many of the victims of Gagya’s raids were not Buddhists but fellow Bon pos and members of other clans among the Hor Sogu. His folk hero status is thus a revisionist projection based on remembering only his death at the hands of Buddhists, conveniently forgetting his wider history.

The British Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm coined the influential term “social bandits”, arguing that banditry is epidemic in rural areas when such regions are irreversibly transformed by their incorporation into a capitalist economy and the legal framework of the nation state. In this view, the actions of bandits are essentially a form of social protest and resistance to structural injustice, a universal phenomenon that is a product of social conditions. Hobsbawm differentiates between several types of social bandits. One is the “noble robber”, typified by Robin Hood, righting wrongs and driven by concern about the “social redistribution” of resources, while another is the “social bandit” driven outside the law by injustice, exacting revenge and redressing grievances.⁴ Banditry is seen here as an expression of contempt and resistance to hegemonic power.

3 This seems to be a common differentiation in many societies and culture. In European history, English Highwaymen were seen as “an icon of national courage and resistance”. Gillian Spraggs. *Outlaws and Highwaymen: The Cult of the Robber in England from the Middle Ages to the Nineteenth Century*. London: Pimlico, 2001, p.5.

4 Eric J. Hobsbawm first used the term in *Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movement in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1959). The term was further detailed in *Bandits*, London, Liedfeld and Nicholson, 1969.

Following from Hobsbawm's work, social historians have sought to provide a more nuanced understanding of banditry by placing it in the context of "agrarian protest and rural violence",⁵ and by seeing it as a common form of peasant resistance in the face of oppression and economic hardship. Hobsbawm's thesis has been vigorously criticised by some social historians and notably by the social anthropologist Anton Blok, who argued that it relies on a notion derived from the Robin Hood story and other fictional heroes and folk tales.⁶ Scholars of Latin America, for example, have argued that real flesh and blood bandits do not correspond to the mythic caricatures depicted by Hobsbawm, and that social bandits do not exist in reality.⁷

It is difficult, if not impossible, to conduct a comparative study of the type of banditry found in Tibet with banditry in other societies, since we simply do not have enough sources on the Tibetan cases. In the case of Gagya Dramnak, we see some of the elements identified by Eric Hobsbawm as typical of banditry by "social others", namely events occurring at a transformative period during incorporation into the framework of a nation state, and the transformation of Gagya Dramnak's image today into a type of folk tale, similar to that of a fictional hero.

However, we see less overlap with the descriptions of banditry given by scholars in Europe, China and Latin America, which tend to stress its emergence among the peasantry and its associations with the economically marginalized and landless, mostly young unmarried men who have come to sever their ties with their kinsmen and the larger community. Phil Billingsley, for example, writing about bandits during the Republican period in China, noted that the majority were property-less men or peasants with very little land who were forced to supplement their income by banditry.⁸ But the type of banditry practiced in Tibet is not caused by economic deprivation or by actions taken by a particular social or outcast group, and, at least in the Nagchu cases, poverty is not the main reason for the raids. Gagya came from a wealthy and influential family in Nagchu. Among the nomads in that area, the term *jag rgyab* (to rob) does not have negative moral connotations, being very similar to the English words "to raid" or "raiding". In this context, the practice of *jag rgyab* has a similarity with reciprocal cattle raiding amongst pastoralists in pastoralist communities in Africa, where reciprocal cattle raiding is seen as a form of exchange or redistribution during times of severe ecological hardship.⁹

Among the Nagchu nomads, two forms of violent raid are found. Some of Gagya's raids were a form of retribution or retaliation against prior attacks or to reclaim debts. In these incidents, the

5 Gilbert M. Joseph, "On the Trail of Latin American Bandits: A Reexamination of Peasant Resistance," *Latin American Research Review* Vol. 25, 3 (1990), pp.7-53.

6 Anton Blok, "The Peasant and the Brigand: Social Banditry Reconsidered", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 14:4. September 1972, pp.494-503.

7 Richard W. Slatta, "Eric J. Hobsbawm's Social Bandit: A Critique and Revision", *A Contracorriente, A Journal of Social History and Literature in Latin America*, 2004, 1:2, pp.22-30.

8 Phil Billingsley, "Bandits, Bosses, and Bare Sticks: Beneath the Surface of Local Control in Early Republican China", *Modern China* 1981, 7, p.237.

9 Michael L. Fleisher, *Kuria Cattle Raiding: Capitalist Transformation, Commoditization, and Crime Formation Among an East African Agro-Pastoral People*, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 2000, 42:4, p.746.

victims are known and there is a history of feud that has to be settled by violent means. He and his men also took part in predatory raids that were aimed at accumulating wealth and resources, where some victims were known and others were unknown, but such predatory raids were not documented and we have to rely on oral sources for knowledge of those.

To understand the framing of Gagya as a *jag pa*, we need to explore the social and political situation of the Nagchu area in the first decades of the 20th century. It was a particularly turbulent time in Tibetan history, during which the Lhasa government sought to transform the Nagchu region by eliminating the local political structure and, in effect, colonizing the area, thus generating resistance. But the assertion of Lhasa hegemony alone cannot explain the emergence of banditry in that time or the general prevalence of banditry among Tibetan nomadic groups. The act of carrying out raids against neighbouring clans and trading caravans is common practice, a tradition tied to local survival strategies and associated with a culture of machismo and manliness. It is equally related to the culture of revenge (*dgra lan* or *dgra sha*), according to which all actions taken against you and your kinsmen must be avenged, and failure to do so will result in severe loss of status: a man's honour (*lags rgya*) is judged by his ability to avenge wrong done to him or his kinsmen. We will see that all these socio-cultural elements are present in our story, and that the depiction of Gagya Dramnak as a bandit conceals a complex situation that was emerging at his time in the Nagchu area. We thus need to understand some of the background from which Gagya Dramnak emerged, and the socio-political milieu in which his actions unfolded.

Hor Sogu: the 39 Tribes of Hor

The community which Gagya belonged to was known as the Hor Sogu (Hor tsho ba so dgu) or the 39 Tribes of Hor.¹⁰ The Hor Sogu occupied areas which are today known as Drachen (Sbra-chen), Driru ('Bri-ru), Nyenrong (Snyan-rong), and Sog (Sog) counties in Nagchu Prefecture, and Tengchen (Steng cheng) county in what is now Chamdo Prefecture, all within what is today referred to as the Tibet Autonomous Region. The Hor Sogu, whose members are known as Hor pa, are divided into two groups: the Upper Tribe (Tsho stod), occupying the Drachen, Driru and Nyenrong areas, and the Lower Tribe (Tsho smad), which lived in the Tengchen area in present-day Chamdo Prefecture. The Lower Tribe is also known as the Khyungpo, though they are strictly speaking not considered as members of the Hor Sogu.¹¹

The two groups claim different identities. The Upper Tribe traces their origins to descent from the clan of Genghis Khan. The Lower Tribe or Khyungpos were not regarded as Hor pas but seem to have been incorporated into the Hor Sogu through conquest so that by the early

10 The term Hor in Tibetan generally refers to Mongols. The Hor Sogu of Nagchu should not be confused with Five States of Hor (Hor khog lnga or Hor ser khag lnga) located in what today is called in Chinese the Ganzi prefecture (Tibetan: Dkar mdze), made up of Hor Rta 'u, Hor dKar ,mdzes, Hor Brag 'go, Hor sTong skor, Hor Tehore. See *Dung dkar tshig mdzod chen mo*, p.2140.

11 Samten Karmay, "The Thirty-Nine Tribes of Hor: A Historical Perspective", in *The Arrow and the Spindle: Studies in History, Myths, Rituals, and Beliefs in Tibet*, Vol. 2, Kathmandu, Nepal, Mandala Book Point, 2005, pp.181-204.

part of the 20th century they had come to be regarded as a part of it.¹² The size and strength of each tribe differed greatly. The Drong Shog ('Brog shog), the largest tribe, consisted of 636 families in the 1920s, while the smallest group, the Ral sum, (Ral gsum) had only 27 families.¹³ The two groups were also marked by differences in their modes of livelihood, as the Upper Tribes were predominantly nomads, while the Lower Tribes, as their name suggests, were sedentary agriculturalists. The territory of the Hor Sogu was relatively wealthy in resources, and it was the largest centre of wool production in Tibet, with wool from the region being exported as far as India and China. The territory was located on the main trade routes to Lhasa from Xining in the north-east and Dartsedo (today known as Kangding) in the east. The trade routes were a lucrative target for raids by the nomads of the Hor Sogu and, as we will see later, these raids were the cause of friction between Lhasa and the Muslim rulers of Qinghai. The Hor Sogu was held together by a loose confederation under the nominal leadership of the *Hor sphyi khyab rgyal po* (The King of all Hor). At the time of Gagyā Dramnak, the King of Hor Sogu was Norbu Wangyal, (Nor-bu dbang-rgyal), the head of the Yi tha clan, who became the King of Hor Sogu in 1907. His family became the most powerful one among the Hor tribes after civil war between them led to the royal family of the Hor Sogu being destroyed and to the loss of all its power.

The main centre of the Hor Sogu was at Bachen (Sbra chen rdzong or sBra gur chen po, the Great Black Tent) where the monastery of Akar (A dkar) is situated along with the fort or castle (*rdzong*) where the King of the Hor Sogu resided. Each tribe had its own hereditary chief, who often served as ministers (*blo chen* or *blo po*) in the King's court, but was headed in practice by an elder (*rgan po*) who had the most contact with ordinary members of the group and made most of the day-to-day decisions. Each tribe acted as an autonomous community and the primary loyalty and identification of the members were with their own tribe.

The people of the Hor Sogu assert a unique history and identity. The term Hor generally refers in Tibetan to Mongols and the Hor Sogu claim they are descendants of a wandering Mongol Prince and his men, who were themselves from the line of Genghis Khan. Local tradition divides their history into three periods, the Mongol period (*Sog dus*), the Chinese period, (*Rgya dus*) and lastly the Tibetan period (*Bod dus*). The Mongol period dates from 1637 to 1728, when the Chinese period began as a result of the posting by the Qing emperors of Ambans to Lhasa, under whose jurisdiction the region was administered. The Tibetan period refers to the years from 1912 to 1942, when, following the collapse of the Qing, the whole of Nagchu came under the control of Lhasa government and was administered by the Hor sphyi khyab, the Governor of Hor.¹⁴

12 For a full list and division of the tribes see, bKra ba, "Hor tsho pa so dgu'i snga physis'i lo rgyus rag tsaṃ gleng ba" [A Brief Account of the History of the Thirty-Nine Tribes of Hor], in *Bod kyi lo rgyus rig gnas dpyad gzhi'i rgyu cha bdams bsgrigs* [Selected Cultural and Historical Materials of Tibet], Vol. 3 (1990), pp.180-187.

13 bKra ba, 1990, pp.180-87. The list of number of families is based on a census conducted by the Tibetan government in 1924 during the time of Hor Chikyab Yuthok Khenchung Wangdu Norbu, (G.yu thog Mkhan chung Dbang 'dus nor bu).

14 bKra ba, 1990, p.178.

For the purposes of this paper, I am only concerned with the period which the locals call *Bod dus*, the Tibetan period, as it corresponds to the life of Gagyā Dramnak.

Another very important factor that has to be highlighted is that the population of the Hor sogu not only claim separate historical origins, but are also marked as distinct by religion, being mostly Bonpo or followers of the Bon religion. The region formed one of the strongholds of Bon tradition in Tibet. One of the most sacred mountain ranges of the Bonpo, the Nangchen Thangla range, is situated in the southern part of the Hor Sogu.¹⁵ Most of the monasteries in the Hor Sogu were Bonpo establishments, except in Khyungpo areas where there were a few monasteries affiliated with the Kagyupa (Bka'-brgyud-pa) and Nyingmapa (Rnying-ma-pa) schools of Tibetan Buddhism. The people of the area were the main source of patronage for Bonpo monasteries throughout central Tibet, and it appears that many Bonpo lamas moved into the Hor Sogu area because of the lucrative sources of patronage and resources that it offered.¹⁶ What is interesting to our story is that the region never had strong penetration by the Gelukpa (Dge-lugs-pa), the Buddhist school associated with the Lhasa government. The only Geluk monasteries of any significance were Sog Tsan dan *dgon* and Rab brtan *dgon* in Rongpo, which were founded in 17th century at the time of the 5th Dalai Lama, and which are located in the Khyungpo region, not in the heartlands of the Hor Sogu. Religion as well as political and social organization thus marked the uniqueness and separate identity of the population of the Hor Sogu.

In 1904, in the aftermath of the British invasion of Tibet, the 13th Dalai Lama fled Lhasa to Mongolia. During his flight, he passed through Nagchu. In the Dalai Lama's biography, he gives a description of his journey and describes an incident when he and his party encountered a group of brigands, but, as the brigands approached the party, a cloud of mist descended and the travellers were concealed from a possible attack. Evidently, even the Dalai Lama and his entourage shared a fear of raids from hostile groups when travelling in the territory of the Hor Sogu. The region did not owe allegiance to the Dalai Lama's government, nor did they hold religious reverence for the Buddhist lama. There existed strong religious hostility between these groups, and the Lhasa government viewed the region as a *Mun nag*, "dark land" (not yet civilised by Buddhism).

Another fact that drew conflict between the Lhasa government and the Hor Sogu was the Hor's allegiance to the Qing, rather than to Lhasa. The region had come under Qing control in 1725, when a High Commissioner based in Khyungpo Tengchen had been appointed. Although no Qing garrisons were stationed within the five areas of the Upper Tribe, known as the Tsho pa stod shog lnga, they were subject to the orders of the High Commissioner in Tencheng.¹⁷ The garrison there was not under the authority of the Amban in Lhasa, but that of the Qing

15 The five holy mountains of the Bonpos are known as the *Bon gyi ngas mchog rangs ri chen po lnga*. The range is also holy to the Buddhists, who know it as the *Lha chen rdorje 'bar ba rtsal*.

16 Dondrup Lhagyal, "Bonpo family lineages in Central Tibet", p.422. In Samten G. Karmay and Yasuhiko Nagano (eds.) *New Horizons in Bon Studies. Bon Studies 2* (Senri Ethnological Reports 15), 2000, pp.429-508. Osaka: National Museum of Ethnology.

17 Shes rab rgya mtsho. "*Hor tsho so dgu'i nang tshan Khyung po dkar nag ser gsum dang de'i ya gyal nag ru dpon tshang gi lo rgyu rags bsdus*" [A Brief Account of the Three Tribes Known as White, Black and Yellow Tengchen of the Thirty-Nine Tribes and a Brief History of the Family of the Chief of Black Tencheng] in *Bod kyi lo rgyus rig gnas dpyad gzhi'i rgyu cha bdams bsgrigs* [Selected Cultural and Historical Materials of Tibet], vol. 8.

High Commissioner stationed in Xining, and it was only in 1851 that the administration of the Hor Sogu was transferred to the Amban in Lhasa.¹⁸

The Hor Sogu's allegiance to the Qing was demonstrated in two tax obligations to the Amban in Lhasa. To fulfil that obligation, the Hor Sogu sent annually a number of horses and men to serve in Qing garrisons that were stationed in Central Tibet.¹⁹ In 1907, in a memorial to the Emperor, the Amban Lian Yu sought to strengthen the Qing position in Tibet by increasing the number of soldiers and proposed that the number of Qing armed forces in Tibet should be increased to six thousand, with 40% of the soldiers recruited from among the Hor Sogu; the Amban specifically mentioned the assured loyalty of the Hor Sogu. In 1909, the Qing army under Zhao Erfeng could not have reached Lhasa without the additional troops he mustered from the Hor Sogu, who fought alongside the Chinese troops. The Hor Sogu remained loyal to the Chinese even after the collapse of the Qing and continued to support the new Republican government.

After the Dalai Lama returned from exile in India in 1912, the collapse of the Qing was marked by the expulsion of the Qing garrisons from Tibet. The Dalai Lama instituted a series of reforms that sought to strengthen the country and bring different parts of Tibet under the direct control of the Lhasa government. In his 1932 statement, regarded as his Last Testament, the Thirteenth Dalai Lama even stressed the need to bring outlying areas of Tibet under the strong control of Lhasa. The 13th Dalai Lama's attempt at nation-building and at instituting direct rule by Lhasa in such outlying areas was one of the sources of conflict in the early 20th century between the centre and peripheries.²⁰ The best-known example of that tension was the conflict between Lhasa and Shigatse, the fiefdom of the Tashilhunpo monastery, which led in 1923 to the flight of the Panchen Lama to China, where he and his successor remained for the next quarter-century. Much less known were the attempts of Lhasa government to bring other outlying territories under its control, which also led to long and complex conflicts.²¹

The territory of the Hor Sogu was one of the regions over which Lhasa sought to extend control at this period. As noted, territories under the control of the Hor Sogu were under the nominal administration of the Amban in Lhasa and during this time were virtually autonomous. The Qing presence in the region was manifested through the garrison at Tencheng area until 1912, but in all other respects The King of Hor had absolute jurisdiction in settling disputes. Lhasa's extension of its authority in the region happened in three stages. Firstly, in 1912, the Tibetan army dispatched five senior Depons (*mda'dpon*) headed by Depon Ragashag (*Mda'dpon*

18 Dungkar Lobsang Trinley, *Dung dkar tshig mdzod chen mo* (Pe cin: Krung go'i bod kyi shes rig dpe skrun khang, 2002). Also, Shatra Gaden Paljor, Chabtsom Chime Gyelpo and Seshing Lobsang Dondrub, "De snga'i bod sa gnas srid gzhung gi srid 'dzin sgrig gzhi," Vol. 4, 87, *Xizang zizhi qu gaikuang*.

19 At the Simla conferene, Shatra's notes mentions that the only tax obligation to the Amban was the annual tribute of two horses. At the meeting Shatra also presented three documents showing that the Lhasa government levied taxes in the Khyungpo region. See: Bshad sgra dpal 'byor rdo rje, Shing stag, Rgya gar 'phags pa'i yul du dbyin Bod Rgya gsum chings mol mdzad lugs kun gsal me long. This is Shatra official account of the Simla Convention of 1914, (Shing stag, Wood Tiger year).

20 *The Political Testment of the 13th Dalai Lama*, Kalimpong, 1958, pp.7-8.

21 Tsering Shakya, "The 13th Dalai Lama, Thupten Gyatso," Martin Brauen (ed.), *The Dalai Lamas: A Visual History*, Serindia Publications, 2005, pp.136-161.

Ra ga shag) to expel the Qing garrison from Tencheng and to capture Qing soldiers who had fled from Lhasa. The expulsion of Qing troops meant that in principle the Hor Sogu's territory had come under the effective control of Lhasa. The Tibetan troops met with fierce resistance and Lhasa's assertion of power was not a smooth transition. When the Tibetan troops entered Tencheng, the Gang ri (Sgang-ri) and Ga-tha tribes sided with the Chinese, while the Karu (Dkar-ru) tribe fought on the side of the Lhasa troops.²² It was not until 1915 that an army led by Kalon Lama Jampa Tendar, who headed one of the best trained and equipped sectors of the Tibetan army at the time, managed to gain total control of the Hor Sogu.

After the pacification of the region, Lhasa granted the whole of the territories of Hor Sogu as a *choe zhi* (mchod gzhis) or "religious estate" to Sera Monastery. This meant that Sera monastery had absolute authority to exert revenue from the inhabitants and to administer the law. This had far-reaching repercussions and was to become one of the main sources of tension and conflict in the region. As noted earlier, the majority of the population were followers of the Bon religion, and the contempt in which adherents of Bon were held by the Gelukpas was well known. Sera monastery was one of the most important centres of Gelukpa orthodoxy and it was impossible not to expect its members to be deeply contemptuous of the Bonpos. For the Sera leaders, the region offered not only a lucrative source of revenue but also an opportunity for proselytising the teachings of the Gelukpa school, and in 1914, they dispatched a number of monk officials to administer the region. When the party reached Gare Yutso (Ga-re'i g.yu-mtsho) to the north of the Khyungpo territory, they were ambushed and the abbot and his escort were killed.²³ Sera made repeated attempts to gain control of the region but the local people refused to submit to their authority and repelled them. Sera was finally forced to abandon the land bequeathed to it. Similar problems faced the Lhasa government when in 1916 it created the post of the Hor sphyi khyab (the Governor of Hor), who was to serve as the main civil and military authority in the region. From the very beginning the actions of the Lhasa government were unpopular with the local population. They were seen not only as usurping the power of local tribal leaders and the authority of the King of Hor, but as an attempt to destroy the Bonpo faith.

Another source of the contention was the treatment of the Hor King. In 1916, the Lhasa government created the position of Governor of Hor, as we have seen, but later in 1940s changed the title from Hor sphyi skyab to Jang Chikyab (*Byang sphyi skyab*), the Governor of the North. With this, the whole of the northwestern area of Nagchu, including an important trade route, came under the jurisdiction of the Chikyab. During the time when the Lhasa aristocrat Yuthok served as Hor Chikyab in 1916,²⁴ a census (*sa rta zhib gzhung*) of the households (*them dud*) of the Hor Sogu was carried out; a second census was conducted in 1924. The first found that there were 6,367 households in the Hor Sogu territory, and that at that time the Gar khong

22 *Hor tsho so dgu'i lo rgyus mdor bsdus*, Nag chu sa gnas srid gros lo rgyus rig gnas dpyad gzhi'i rgyu cha rtsom sgrig khang, 1990, pp.26-27.

23 *Bod ljongs nag chu sa khul gyi lo rgyus rig gnas*, Nag chu sa gnas srid gros lo rgyus rig gnas dpyad gzhi'i rgyu cha rtsom sgrig khang, 1990, p.27.

24 Full Name Khenchung Wangdu Norbu, (Mkhan chung Dbang 'dus nor bu).

(*Sgar khongs*) was the largest tribe with 516 households, with the group divided into four bands, each headed by a gen po (*rgan po*) or elder. The smallest tribe at that time was the Tapa Norma (Rta pa nor ma) which had only 16 households and was without a tribal leader.²⁵

Between 1916 and 1942, ten Lhasa officials of the fourth rank (*rim bzhi*) served under one or other of these titles as the Governor of Nagchu.²⁶ A monk-official and a lay official always shared the governorship, with one or other serving as the leading figure according to seniority. They were supported by two thousand Tibetan soldiers. During the time of the first Governor, a monk official called Khenchung Dragpa Namgyal (Mkhan chung Grags pa rnams rgyal),²⁷ the King of Hor was stripped of his powers and was reduced to the status of a tribal leader of the Drong shog. The loss of the King's status was marked by the removal of the King from his official residence and by the installation of the Governor in the castle.²⁸ Dragpa Namgyal was noted as the most brutal of all governors. He is said to have executed scores of tribal leaders and amputated the hands of those who fought against the Tibetan army.²⁹ He was equally brutal in the treatment of his soldiers. When touring the Zogang (Mdzo sgang) area near Chamdo, he executed a Gya Pon (*brgya pon*, Commander of One Hundred Men) called Tenzin Legshe (Bstan 'dzin legs bshad) and amputated the legs of nine Chu Pon (*chu dpon*, Commanders of Ten Men) for negligence in fighting against the Chinese.³⁰

The rule of Dragpa Namgyal is remembered today by the local people as a pogrom against the Hor Sogu. He sought to eliminate the last remnants of Chinese rule in the region, as well as to exact retribution on the population for the killing of the officials from Sera Monastery. He began by searching for the tribal leaders who had sided with the Chinese and then executed or mutilated them and their chief followers. Those families who had supported the Qing were executed and their estates confiscated. In one village, Gat Tha, it was reported that of 47 families, only 28 survived the campaign, and in some oral accounts I received it was said that in some areas the entire male line of a family was executed.³¹ Besides this, the governors also sought to convert all the Bonpo monasteries into Gelukpa establishments.³²

25 *Bcings 'grol sngon du nag chu sa khyul gyi tsho gshog so so'i ming dang them grang 'go dpon mi grang bcas kyi tho byang*, Bod ljongs nag chu sa khul gyi lo rgyus rig gnas, deb dang po, pp.117-152. Later Tapa Norma was absorbed into the Yi tha Tribe.

26 bKra ba, 1990, p.189.

27 Biographical detail of Dragpa Namgyal, see: Shag ru shes rab rgya mtsho, *mkhan chung grags pa rnams rgyal gyi 'byung khungs dang des hor spyi byas pa'i lo rgyis rags bsdus shig*, Bod kyi lo rgyus rig gnas dpyad gzhi'i rgyu cha bdams bsgrigs, 2003, Vol. 23, pp.122-135.

28 bKra ba, 1990, p.191.

29 *Hor tsho so dgu'i lo rgyus lo rgyus mdor bsdus*, Nag chu sa gnas srid gros lo rgyus rig gnas dpyad gzhi'i rgyu cha rtsom sgrig khang nas bsrin, (no date cited), pp.52-59.

30 Shag ru shes rab rgya mtsho, 2003, p.124.

31 This account could be highly plausible, after the 13th Dalai Lama's return from India in 1911, a number of Lhasa officials were executed, most notably is Tsarong Shape was accused of collaborating with the occupying Chinese force and was brutally beheaded along with his son at the foot of Potala. Another five government officials were executed in the same manner.

32 bKra ba, 1990, p.201.

Nicholas Roerich, the Russian explorer and Tibetologist who stayed five months in the region in 1928, observed the tension between Lhasa officials and the local people, writing that local people resented Lhasa's intrusion and were reluctant to perform corvée labour.³³ At the time the Governor was Kabshopa Chogyal Nyima, (Ka shod pa Chos rgyal nyi ma), of whom it is written in an unpublished biography that when he came to take up his post, "he soon discovered that the real power in the area lay with the local tribal chieftain called Gagya Tendar."³⁴ During Kabshopa's time there, a popular uprising took place in Hor under the leadership of Gagya Tendar, as a result Kabshopa was recalled to Lhasa.³⁵

The local people came to view Lhasa's rule with terror; they were cowed into submission. But they also faced harsh tax obligations that were imposed on them by these new governors. These included every household having to send a man to serve in the army. The governors met with strong resistance – Dragpa Namgyal and the Governor in 1935, Khenchung Thupten Pema (*Mkhan chung* Thub bstan padma), were both assassinated. The Lhasa appointees never succeeded in pacifying the Hor Sogu.

In 1941, when the post of Hor Chikyab was abolished and the new administrative region of northern Tibet was created, the Governors attempted to break up the territory of the Hor Sogu by putting it under a new system of dzong (*rdzong*) or district administration. It was divided into six dzongs,³⁶ each administrated by a lay and a monk official who were under the command of the Jang Chikyab. It was during this situation of tension and change that Gagya Dramnak came into prominence as the central figure in the region's history.

The Gagya Tsang

Between 1912 and 1943, it was not only the attempts of Lhasa to extend its control, with the resultant fracturing of traditional power and structure, that dominated politics in Hor Sogu. A second underlying strain was the intense rivalry between prominent families and the inter-tribal conflict that resulted. After the Tibetan government eliminated the King of Hor, the Gagya tsang or family of Gagya rose to become one of the most powerful families among the Hor Sogu. We know a great deal of the family's history because the house of Gagya produced two of the most important figures to emerge in the Bonpo community in Hor in the first half of the 20th century. One was Gagya Dramnak's elder brother, Khyungtrul Jigme Namkha Dorje, (Khyung sprul 'jigs med nam mkha'i rdo rje, 1899-1955) who became one of the outstanding

33 Nicholas Roerich, *Heart of Asia: Memoirs from the Himalayas*, Rochester, Inner Traditions International, 1990, p.64.

34 I would like to thank Kabshopa Jamyang Chogyal for allowing me to read the manuscript.

35 Kabshopa had Gagya Dramnak's father arrested and subjected to public whipping. There are conflicting accounts of Kabshopa's conflict with Gagya family. According to local sources, Kabshopa wished to have a precious gem owned by Gagya Tendar. When the latter refused to sell it to Kabshopa, the Governor accused him to be a bandit.

36 Tengchen dzong, Setsha dzong (Ser tsha rdzong), Tridodzung (Khri rdo rdzong), Bachen dzong, Nyenrong dzong and Driru dzong.

Bon scholars and masters of the period and founded Gur gyam monastery in Ngari in far western Tibet. His biography (*rnam thar*) contains a wealth of history about the Gagyatse family. It belonged to the Gagyaru tribe (Ga rgya ru tsho ba) who consisted of the eight tribes known as the Upper Tribe. The group was originally based in the Drong Shog area and in earlier times, the head of the family, Gagyatse Dragpa, who was Gagyatse Dramnak's grandfather, had occupied a leading position in Amdo (north-eastern Tibet) as a Tongpon (*stong dpon*). Later, when the Gagyaru tribe was forced out of their home territory, the family migrated to Bachen, where the seat of the Hor King was based. One of the daughters, Trigyal Jechen (Khri rgyal rje chen), married the 12th King of Hor, and from then on a member of the family held the position of Lonpo or minister at the court of the King. On the mother's side, the family could also claim noble lineage, since she was descended from a Mongol tribal leader known as the Red King (*Rgyal po dmar po*), who had fled to the Hor region and ruled the Jangthang (Byang thang) or northern grasslands area of Tibet.³⁷

According to their own legends, the family has a strong spiritual connection with the local Bonpo protective deity and is said to produce a man of super quality every third generation. In fact, the family produced two sons who are remembered and valorised by Bonpos from that area today. Gagyatse Dramnak was one of seven sons born to Gagyatse Sonam Tendral and his wife Namtso, who also had one daughter. They had married into the Patsang family, one of the longest and distinguished Bon po families.³⁸ Gagyatse Dramnak was born in 1908 and given the name of Konchok Gyaltzen (Dkon mchog rdo rje), but he came to be commonly known as Gagyatse Dramnak on account of a black mole the size of a thumb on his cheek. His elder brother, Khyungtrul Jigme Namkha Dorje, later to become an outstanding Bon scholar, should have succeeded the father and become the head of the tribe to serve at the Hor royal court, according to family traditions; however, from an early age Khyungtrul wanted to follow a spiritual path and refused to take responsibility for the family. The family's original plan was for Gagyatse Dramnak as the younger son to follow a spiritual path. He was enrolled at Akar monastery during his early teens.³⁹ In fact, at birth Konchok Gyaltzen was said to be the son of the local mountain deity (*yul lha'i rdzus bu*), Pawa Dragnag Dorje Dradul (*Spa ba brag nag rdo rje dgra 'dul*). He certainly possessed the wrathful character of the spirit. Those who knew Gagyatse Dramnak portray him as a ruthless and cunning figure. He is described as "a man who envied those in power and bullied others," and he was also said to be "faithful to his friends and defiant of authority." The Lhasa officials depicted him as a *jag pon* or bandit leader. Recent writings about him based on oral sources describe

37 *The Biography of Khyung sprul 'jigs med nam mkha'i rdo rje, Being the text of "khyab bdag 'khor lo'i mgon mkhas grub 'jigs med nam mkha'i rnam thar bad brgya'i rman bya rnam par rtse ba"*. Dpal Idan tshul khrims & Zal gdams, Nams mgur of Khyung sprul, Tibetan Bonpo Monastic Centre, Solan, HP, India, 1972, (here after cited as Khyung sprul, 1972). I would like to thank Dr. Charles Ramble for providing a copy of this biography to me.

38 See: Dondrup Lhayal, 2000, pp.456-460. Pa (sPa) is one of the five great lineages of Bon. The Pa lineage was original based in Ngari (Mnga' ris) and Tsang. The family was driven out of their home territory during the reign of the 5th Dalai Lama. In the 18th Century Pa masters founded the some of the most important monasteries in the Hor region.

39 Akar monastery was destroyed during the Cultural Revolution; only ruins remain.

him as “fond” of banditry and “delighted” at the opportunity to lead raiding expeditions against other tribes. The Gagya family is said to have deeply resented the Tibetan government’s usurping of the power of the Hor King. Thus, from the very outset of Lhasa rule, Gagya Dramnak found himself in opposition to Lhasa.

On the surface, it would appear that this opposition to the Lhasa government should have found widespread support among the Hor Sogu. However, despite the general unpopularity of Lhasa rule, the Hor Sogu was infected with internal feuds. In the complex web of conflicts that marked inter-tribal relations, Gagya Tsang was at the centre of internecine feuding that led to a general mistrust of the family. He earned his reputation for fearlessness during his youth, but at the same time sowed the seeds for many of the feuds that he was later entangled in. When he was only sixteen years old, he was sent by his father to collect a debt from Jo Butra (*’Jo ’bru khra*), the tribal chief of the Dongtoe clan (*’Brong stod*). Jo Butra, thinking that the elder Gagya had sent a boy to do a man’s job, hoodwinked the boy by telling him that his father was mistaken and that the debts had been paid. Gagya Dramnak returned to his father’s camp empty-handed and was admonished by his father with the remark, “the Gagya family does not seem to have a son,” meaning that Dramnak had acted like a woman. In a society where manliness is highly prized, the father’s remark deeply humiliated the young Dramnak. He vowed to exact revenge on Jo Butra for this humiliation. The following year (1924), when Dramnak was sent by his father to Dongtoe area, he saw this as an opportunity to exact revenge on Jo Butra and killed him. Only 16 years old at that time, his fame quickly spread throughout the Nagchu area and marked him as a man of importance.

If we examine the cases where Gagya Dramnak was involved in raids, they mostly fall into three types: retributory, restorative and predatory. As noted before, in the usage found amongst the Hor Sogu, the term *jag* is used both for predatory raids, which can be defined strictly as banditry, and for the other types. I define retributory raid as mostly connected to restoring honour, while restorative raids are concerned with revenge or redressing balance in cases of what are perceived as unjust past actions. Predatory and opportunistic raids are purely driven by greed and are a means of acquiring wealth and goods through violent means. All three types of raids are connected with the nomadic culture of the Hor Sogu and values of manliness (*pho rab kyi ngag tshul*), where a man is judged by his bravery (*dpa’i ngar*) in carrying out retributory or restorative actions. Another source of feud and conflict was the loss of livestock: for a nomadic community, where livestock are the most prized possessions and their protection is paramount, the loss of livestock affected not only wealth but threatened the prestige of a family. Many of Gagya Dramnak’s raids on other tribes and families were in retaliation for prior attacks on him or his family. These attacks generated a circle of violent feuds that had in turn to be settled by the exaction of retribution. This is not to say that Gagya was not involved in predatory raids, but these are less well documented and often the victims were unable to identify the attackers. In the cases that we know of concerning Gagya Dramnak, we find that notions of prestige, honour and revenge were important motivational factors.

Two well-documented raids carried out by Gagya Dramnak were illustrative of the raiding culture among the Hor Sogu.⁴⁰ The Gagyatsang family was involved in a long-festering feud with another tribal leader, Pon Mingyur (Dpon Mi 'gyur) of the Gegye Ribar tribe (Dge rgyas ri bar). According to oral sources, this originated from an incident when men from Gegye Ribar, under the instruction of Pon Mingyur, robbed a herd of horses belonging to the Marshok clan who were members of the Drongshok ('Brog shog) tribe. In the ensuing fight, the Marshok clan killed Pon Mingyur's men including his cousin Samdup. For the killing of his men and his cousin, Pon Mingyur ordered a raid on a tea caravan belonging to the Drongshok tribe and his clan staged further raids on the Marshok clan by stealing livestock belonging to them.

Gagya Dramnak's family did not suffer particularly from Pon Mingyur's raid, but the Marshok clan belongs to the same confederation as the Gagyatsang, and the raids were said to have been accompanied by insults and ridicule towards the Drongshok tribe. When the Drongshok met to discuss what actions to take, Gagya Dramak volunteered to lead a revenge raid against Pon Mingyur. This led to a series of attacks and counter-attacks between the two groups. Each attack increased the number of clans involved and the issue became more and more complex. During the ensuing raids and attacks, different clans would be accused of aiding one side or the other and would themselves become targets of raids. The inter-group raiding lasted for decades without any resolution and the retaliatory attacks destroyed the Ribar clan.

The second documented case of inter-family conflict involving the Gagyatsang was the long-running dispute between the family and Tshabshi Anam (Tshab shis a nam).⁴¹ This feud, legendary throughout the Hor Sogu, and the tense relationship that ensued, affected social order in Nagchu throughout the first half of the 20th century. The origin and the source of the feud are complex and go back to disputes over taxes and loans. Tshabshi Anam was a member of a wealthy and aristocratic family from the Wontha clan and a member of the Kharmar tribe, who was said to be clever in speech and courageous, but full of "bad intentions" and "secret plans".

The dispute had not begun as one involving the Gagyatsang. Tshabshi Anam was said to owe some money to the Wonthatsang of the Dukju clan, but this family, unable to obtain repayment from Anam, sold the loan to Gargya Tendar. After repeated failure to obtain their money from Anam, the Gagyatsang appealed to the Lhasa-appointed governor, Kabshopa Chokyi Nyima, who adjudicated in their favour. During the judicial hearing, it was said that Tshabshi Anam humiliated the Gargyatsang with his oratory skills, leaving Gagya Tendar speechless and disgraced. Gagya Tendar thus vowed to take revenge on Anam, saying that peace would not be restored until his (Anam's) death. On his deathbed, Gagya Tendar made his son promise to avenge the slights inflicted on them by Anam in order to restore the honour of the family.

40 "Rib a dang Ga rgya 'krugs pa'i skor", in *Hor ga rgya 'gram nag gi lo rgyus rags bsdu dang ga tshab 'bkrugs pa'i skor*," Nag chu sa gnas srid gros lo rgyus rig gnas dpyad gzhi'i rgyu cha rtsom sgrig khang nas bsrin, (no date cited), pp.129-55.

41 "Tshab shis Ga rgya dgra lan slog pa'i skor", *Hor ga rgya 'gram nag gi lo rgyus rags bsdu dang ga tshab 'bkrugs pa'i skor*," Nag chu sa gnas srid gros lo rgyus rig gnas dpyad gzhi'i rgyu cha rtsom sgrig khang nas bsrin, (no date cited), pp.104-113.

After the death of his father, Gagya Dramnak fulfilled the deathbed promise made to his father and raided Tsabshi Anam's camp. When, he found that Anam had already fled, leaving his seventeen-year-old son and seventy-year-old father at the camp, Gagya and his men killed both the son and the father. It is said that Gagya left a note saying that he had not meant to kill the father and that his death had been an accident. He left 10 dri – ('bri) or female yaks – as payment. The Gagyatsang feuds with Pon Mingyur and Tsabshi Anam permeated throughout Hor Sogu society and, because of the web of tribal alliances, drew all groups into retaliatory raids, where the raiding parties were made up of kinsmen and clan members. None of these raids were directed against Lhasa authority, nor were they expressions of social discontent.

The imposition of Lhasa authority, although it was greatly resented, in fact presented the local tribes with a complex situation. On the one hand, as we have seen, when convenient the families were willing to submit their disputes to the Lhasa-appointed governor for adjudication. But at other times, more often than not, they ignored the authority of the governor. The Lhasa rulers found themselves in a difficult situation and were unable to provide effective security or to coerce tribal leaders into submission. Under successive governors, relations with the tribal leaders remained precarious. There were attempts to incorporate the prominent ones into the military and the administration of the region: the Drongshog Pon ('Brog shog *dpon*), the head of the Drongshog tribe, was appointed as a Datsab (*mda' tshab*) or Honorary General by Lhasa because he belonged to the family of the Hor King; other tribal leaders were appointed as Gya Pon, a lower rank.⁴² However, these were merely symbolic titles, and the tribal leaders and their men remained separate from the Tibetan army.

This situation was exacerbated by the fact that Lhasa officials saw their appointment to the Hor Sogu as a source of self-aggrandisement and as an opportunity to enrich themselves. The governors exerted high tax obligations, leading to resistance from the local population which in turn was used to justify the confiscation (*gzbug bzhes*) of property and imprisonment. The draconian measures taken by the governors prompted the tribal leaders to appeal to the Lhasa government directly, and the reports reaching Lhasa forced the government to recall two governors back to Lhasa to face investigation. But this failed to change the situation, and the habitual venality of the Lhasa officials meant that all their decisions were viewed as self-serving. Accordingly, they were in no position to resolve intertribal disputes. With the failure of successive governors to pacify the Hor Sogu, retaliatory raids between the tribes became endemic between 1930 and 1940.

As noted, there were many raids that were of a different type: attacks on trading caravans passing through the territory of the Hor Sogu. These predatory raids often attacked caravans coming from Qinghai, with merchants who were mostly Muslims. This had serious repercussions for Lhasa, as the Muslim traders appealed to Ma Bufang, the Muslim warlord ruler of Qinghai, who had been fighting with the Tibetan army in North Kham. Ma, on the pretext of securing the trade route, began to send troops into the Nagchu region. This was a major problem for the Tibetan government, as it did not want to face a war with Ma Bufang so close to Lhasa.

⁴² bKra ba, 1990, p.197.

Gagya Dramnak was at the centre of this growing mesh of problems facing Lhasa. He was by this time in his thirties and at the height of his power, both within his family and his tribe, but also among the Hor Sogu in general, to whom he had become a strong man who could impose his demands at will. For the Lhasa authorities, Gagya posed a security threat both in terms of refusal to accede to Lhasa's rule and as the seeming source of internecine feuds in Hor.

The Killing of Gagya

As Gagya defeated family after family, many of the smaller ones either sought his protection or fled. As his raiding became increasingly troublesome for other tribes who resented his growing power, they began to seek the support of Lhasa troops to eliminate him. But Gagya commanded three hundred well-armed men (*a phrug*) and for years, the Governors of Hor repeatedly failed to arrest Gagya because of fear of reprisals from his men.

In 1941, under Lhasa's new administrative system, Phala Thupten Woden became the first Governor of the North (*Byang spyi*), based at Nagchukha. Phala was one of the rising monk officials in Lhasa and the governorship was his first senior appointment. He arrived in Nagchu determined to bring order, and, in the interview recorded after he came into exile in 1959, Phala states that Gagya Dramnak "was the bandit general of the region, [and] commanded three to four hundred followers who killed and robbed both nomads and travellers. Although Gagya caused tremendous hardship to the people and created chaos in the region, due to the ruthlessness of Gagya and his men, all the people of the region remained mute and the officials in the region could not resolve the problem."⁴³ Phala claims that soon after arriving in Nagchu he wrote a letter to Gagya promising amnesty as long as he agreed to abide by the law. A few days later, Gagya visited the Governor with gifts. The meeting was a disaster: Gagya declared that he could not change his way of life and that raiding was part of his livelihood. Phala's attempt to assuage him had been unsuccessful. For the next year, Phala plotted to eliminate Gagya's influence and isolate him.

In late 1941, Gagya and his men raided the Tibetan garrison in Bachen and pillaged the surrounding nomadic camps. Tsedrung Karkhang (*Rtsi drung Dkar khang*),⁴⁴ the head of the garrison in Bachen, sent an urgent message seeking reinforcements. Phala's response was to wait and see: he told the garrison not to retaliate, since Gagya had the support of the local people. In an interview, he claimed that he had decided to wait for an opportune time to attack Gagya. As to how that moment came, there are two slightly differing accounts. One is the lengthy oral account given by Phala, while the other is eyewitness testimony of the final days of Gagya. According to an eyewitness, Phala invited Gagya to the garrison at Bachen Dzong on the pretext of gambling. During a night of gambling Gagya became intoxicated; as he went down the stairs, Tibetan soldiers ambushed him. During the scuffle Gagya was stabbed to death. Phala gives a

43 Phala, 1996, p.107.

44 His full name was *rTsi drung Dkar khang ngag dbang thar pa*.

very different version, which may be more accurate. It also reveals something of the thinking surrounding the execution of Gagya. According to Phala, Gagya had only been wounded during the scuffle, but not killed. He was imprisoned in Bachen Dzong, and during his time there Phala demanded his submission. Gagya, however, remained defiant.

Phala claims that he was advised to execute Gagya by a monk officer named Zhalngo Lobsang (*Zhal ngo Blo bzang*).⁴⁵ Phala recalled that, as soon as he agreed to have Gagya executed, Lobsang replied, “It is already done”.⁴⁶ But Phala includes another detail about the thinking of the Lhasa officials concerning their prisoner. At one point, he recalls, during his incarceration, Gagya asked for drinking water. Phala notes that, knowing that Gagya was a Bonpo, he ordered the guards to give him water to which had been added Chinten (*byin rten*), materials sacred to followers of Buddhism.⁴⁷ In the statement, Phala emphasizes Gagya’s faith, implying that he was finally defeated not just in terms of politics, but in terms of religion too.

At the time of his death, Gagya was thirty-seven years old. His body was displayed at the gate of Bachen Dzong to intimidate the locals, and the execution of Gagya did not bring immediate retaliations for the Lhasa appointees. However, it created a lasting resentment of Lhasa authority in the territory of the Hor Sogu. According to the Lhasa government Gagya was a troublesome bandit, or, as Phala called him, a “Bandit General” (*jag pa’i sde dpon*).⁴⁸ The people of the Hor Sogu and the Bonpos had an ambivalent view of him, seeing him on the one hand as representing the resistance of the people of the Hor Sogu to the imposition of Lhasa’s rule and occupying the position of a “primitive rebel”. Few of his raids, as far as we know, were against the Lhasa government or its representatives, apart from the one against Bachen Dzong; he *represented* opposition, but mainly in the form of defiance rather than attacks. He was, however, no Robin Hood. Many of the raids occurred in retaliation to prior attacks in order to reacquire stolen livestock or reclaim unpaid loans. These types of the raids were very common in Tibetan nomadic communities. The raids were not simply the action of a single bandit group but carried out by groups of young men who were united by close ties of kinship or by tribal alliances sanctioned by their elders. The targets and victims of Gagya’s banditry were thus the local population, and his raids were not motivated by any wish to redistribute of wealth, or by robbing the rich to give to the poor.

But Lhasa’s primary problems, however significant Gagya and his raids seemed at the time, were in large part of its own making. Before Lhasa imposed its rule, disputes and feuds in the area had been settled by the King of Hor. But the elimination of the King by the new regime had left a power vacuum among the Hor Sogu and this contributed to the tremendous and long-running political upheaval experienced there throughout the first half of the 20th century. By creating fractures in the traditional tribal structure and destroying the social hierarchy, Lhasa’s

45 *Zhal ngo* is generally the term used for the monk who is the chief disciplinarian in a monastery. In Tibetan army, the term is used for the commander of twenty-five men.

46 Phala, 1996, p.113.

47 Phala, 1996, p.112.

48 Phala, 1996, p.107.

colonisation of the region left space for an opportunistic strong man to emerge. Its rule was unpopular, and there were a number of small uprisings which were ruthlessly suppressed. Even long after Gagya's death, there were signs that deep-seated resentment was still rife: when the Chinese Communists entered Nagchu from the north in 1950, the majority of the local population supported the People's Liberation Army and the Communists found fertile recruiting grounds there. Even today, a half-century later, we find that many of the elite Tibetans in the upper ranks of the Communist Party in the Tibetan Autonomous Region come from the Nagchu region.

The bandit raids of Gagya and other Hor pa leaders came to be framed locally as part of the history of widespread resentment towards domination by Lhasa in the early decades of the last century. This greatly helped those who later came through Nagchu on their way to depose that government, in turn. But the record shows that at the time the practice of raiding largely reflected internal local tensions, practices and reputational concerns within the community of Hor Sogu, and had little to do with social protest or redistributive justice. The image of the proto-rebel, like that of Robin Hood, accrued over time through processes of memory and re-imagination.