

Brief narration on Thangbi Mani, Bumthang.

Thangbi lhakhang is one of the historically significant temples in Bumthang. It is situated in the north of Kurje at an altitude of 2730m and is surrounded by the beautiful village of Thangbi. The Lhakhang (temple) was built in 1470 by the 4th Shamar Rinpoche called Chokki Drakpa (the red hat Karamapa; 1453-1524)

Toward the north of the Thangbi lies two clustered villages of Goling (2740 m) and Kharsath (2750m) within the radius of 2 km.

Further north on a higher elevation Shukdrak Monastery (2950m) founded by Guru Pema Sambhawa is perched on a mysterious cliff overlooking the beautiful Thangbi valley. A very pleasant one-hour walk from road head takes one to the Secret place.

Thangbi Mani is a four-day festival which is a display of the rich tradition and celebrates the cultural heritage of this ancient Lhakhang. It is held annually from 14th to 17th of the eighth month of the Bhutanese calendar. The people from the three villages of Thangbi, Goling and Kharsath have been organizing the annual festival since its inception. The tradition which prevailed a long time ago is now gradually fading away. In earlier days people of all walks of life in that community actively participated in making this festival a great success. But now, due to changing social values and out migration of some of the sponsoring households, the valuable tradition is being threatened. The contribution from the community is not sufficient to meet the expenses of the festival. As a result, the festival is losing its original grandeur and significance. In order to revive and sustain the festival, a committee is being formed to coordinate the organization of the festival. The Gomchens (lay monks) of this monastery perform rituals for the entire festival, while some young men and women perform mask and folk dances.

Thirteenth of the eighth month of the Bhutanese calendar is a preliminary day when all the people in that community flock together to witness the rehearsal of mask dances at the courtyard. The next day starts the main event of festival by making offerings to the local deities. On the same day at around 7:00 pm all the mask dances scheduled for the following day is presented to public and guest as well, which perhaps last till midnight. The day's event is flagged off by performing burning ceremony (Ginsek) thus driving away or subduing evil spirits.

On the following day i.e 15th (full moon) of the eighth month of the Bhutanese calendar at around 10.00 a.m. a ceremonial procession from the Temple marks the start of the festival. Mewang ceremony (fire blessing) is performed in an open ground. The Gomchens perform purification rituals while all the people and guests jump over the flames to get themselves purified from their sins and evil deeds. It is believed that if one is able to jump over the flame three times he or she is protected from ill luck and misfortunes are removed for that entire year. That is why people of all walks of life attempt to jump across the flame three times to be blessed for the whole year. Then mask dances and folk dances are

performed as scheduled in the enclosed courtyard of the Temple. Of all the dances Goem Bernak is believed to be the most secret Dance (Tercham).

The legend says when Karma Pakdhi, (1204-1283) the 2nd Karmapa was tortured by one of the kings in China by habging him by his beard. The Mahakali (Lham Rangjungmo), the female protecting deity of Karmapa, reported this incident to Goembernak (Black Mahakala) the male protecting deity who remained undisturbed. When Goembernak knew that his master Karmapa was on the verge of dying he came down heavily on the Chinese king. He manifested himself to a giant sized-figure, stretched his one foot and placed in front of the palace of the king of China while his other foot was firmly pegged in Tsurphu (Tibet). Goembernak's Trouser on one foot was folded up to the knee level while he had no time to fold the other trouser. He shoved his sword under the palace of the Chinese king and caused tremor to the palace threatening him to destroy his palace if his master is not released. The king of China frightened of the consequences, freed karmapa along with hosts of valuable items offered to karmapa as forgiveness.

*It is said that Karmapa flung the entire valuable into the lake in front of the king's palace in China to be transported to lake in Tsurphu monastery in Tibet from where he would retrieve them. **The Goem Bernark dance is then performed to commemorate victory over the king of China and the uniqueness of this dance is that dancers perform this dance with one trouser folded up to knee level while the other trouser is let loose.***

There are significant traditions which are worth mentioning. These events take place simultaneously while dances are being performed:

- The temple is in the form of U shape in design. At the two projecting courtyards mats are laid and two tiny tables with jugs of Chang and a cup remain filled all the time on both side. Some men drink the Chang occasionally and refill. The cup is supposed to be full all the time. The designated as on the right belonged to the senior men of Kharsath while the Left side belonged to the man of Goling. They are supposed to be the chiefs of the community. Around the men sits the ladies and children of the respective village. In olden times if outsiders step on the mat they imposed nominal fines.
- From these two sides there is a time that the men throw buckwheat dough balls on the spectators with screaming noise. This is to eliminate the harmful desires of the evil sprits and warding them off from the auspicious gathering. Quite often it happened that the spectrators react and threw back the dough balls when such things happen in the past it was considered a bad omen and sometimes the community leaders imposed fines on the culprits. The fine usually consisted of a bottle of Chang (locally brewed wined) and an apology to the community leaders.
- Another interesting edge old tradition which is still very active is offering of Chang and Puta (buckwheat noodles) by the community girls to our honored guests. The girls offer Chang and noodles even to the strangers. If

you get such treats whether you enjoy or not it is customary that you give some cash present to them (today the money they collect by entertaining guests goes to the community fund). There is a significant historical background that the community in this valley produced quality buckwheat noodles. During the reign of the Second King, His Majesty Jigme Wangchuk, he always ordered Puta from the households of Shukdak Gonpa the far end of the valley. The king sent his Courtiers to Shuda Gonpa quite frequently to fetch Puta when he desired for a change or when he had Royal Guests.

Next day, dances will resume and ends by the evening.

The festival finally comes to an end by performing closing ritual where all the people of that community gather to receive blessings and pray for the well being of all sentient beings for the year to come.

Programme of the Thangbi Mani 2007.

On the afternoon of 24.09.2007 (13th of the eight month of Bhutanese calendar rehearsal of mask dances will take place at the courtyard of the temple.

Day one 25.09.2007 (14th of the eight month of the Bhutanese Calendar)

Ritual offering by the Gomchens for the whole day.

At 7.p.m Dances will start.

Dri cham (sword dance)

Wilim

Geom. Bernark (tercham)

Ginsek (burning ceremony)

Shazam (stag dance)

Gekdroe(warding of evil sprits) around the village.

Day two 26.09.2007 (15th of the eight month of the Bhutanese calendar)

Ritual offering starts early morning in the temple.

At 10.00 a.m Ceremonial procession starts

Mewang (Fire Blessing)

Shanak (Black hat dance)

Folk dance by the village girls

Tshokcham (offering dance)

Wilim

Folk dance

Geombernak (tercham)

Folk dance

Ngaging (drum dance)

Folk dance

Pholey Moley (dance of the heroes & heroin)
Atshara (jesters dance)
Folk dance
Shazam (stag dance)

Day three 27.09.2007 (16th of the eight month of the Bhutanese Calendar)

10.00 a.m dances wil resume.
Shazam (stag dance)
Folk dance
Dricham (sword dance)
Folk dance
Ajo Phento (skit of stag & dog)
Folk dance
Jachung Buechung(guarada)
Folk dance
Tsara (Jesters dance)
Folk dance
Wang (Blessing)
Khandoms dance (dance of dakinis)

Day four 28.09.2007 (17th of the eight of the Bhutanese Calendar)
Closing ceremony for the communities