

Traditional Forms of Volunteerism in Bhutan

Tashi Choden

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By Tashi Choden

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Preface

Traditional Forms of Volunteerism in Bhutan is a brief introduction to some of the various forms of volunteerism, social engagement and responsibility that we find in the country. The premise here is that volunteerism in Bhutan is rooted in its traditional beliefs and practices, and that emerging trends are a continuation of these traditions of community participation.

This theme is perpetuated in brief presentations on *Community Benefaction of Anim Jitsem* and *The Choethuen Tshogpa*. These associations serve as examples that further the notion of volunteerism and social consciousness, as illustrated by the growth of various *tshogpas* and associations, which, while modern in organization and structure, are nonetheless a continuation of the traditional Bhutanese ways of helping each other.

I remain ever grateful to the individuals who spared the time and shared their intellectual resources toward writing this monograph. In particular, I would like to thank Mr. Karma Ura, the Director of the Centre for Bhutan Studies, Ap Namgyel from Paro, and all my colleagues at the Centre for their valuable feedback and comments. I would like to express my appreciation to Dasho Zhamling Dorji for his articulate commentary on the Choethuen Tshogpa, and to Anim Jitsem for sharing her personal experiences of being a beneficiary of the kindness and goodwill of her community.

Tashi Choden
May 2003

Introduction

Volunteerism in Bhutan is deeply grounded in its traditional belief systems and community practices in which much emphasis is placed on the principles of national self-reliance, community participation and social cohesion. In order to recognize activities that qualify as traditional forms of volunteerism in Bhutan, we need to be clear at the outset on what volunteering and voluntary works have meant in the past.

As a small, mountainous country with a rugged terrain, conditions for Bhutanese society were quite difficult in the past; while we had a rich pristine environment, the resources that people could use were, to an extent, limited. Under such circumstances of difficult living conditions coupled with a small population, Bhutanese people and society depended very much on helping each other.

Traditionally, in Bhutan, one of the biggest works any family or individual has to undertake is the building of a house. The other times when people face difficulty and need help are when a family member dies. In these times, our society evolved a system whereby the entire community would help those who faced difficulties by contributing voluntary labour. Such instances include the free provision of labour by every household towards the construction of houses, or rebuilding a house gutted by fire or destroyed in other natural calamities.

During times of death, the entire community in villages would come forth with help in the form of money, food grains, emotional support, religious services and manpower. These two basic forms of traditional volunteering in Bhutan

are based on being responsible and helpful to one's own community and society.

In carrying out major projects in the community such as building and repairing monasteries, the entire community would come forward to provide resources and effort towards completing the project. At the *dzongkhag* and national levels too, the same spirit of responsibility was demonstrated when major monasteries or *dzongs* had to be built or repaired. Taktsang was surely built that way, and even today manpower has been volunteered and organized by the people towards its restoration after its partial destruction by fire.

Some of us may argue that these forms of contribution to major projects are not really voluntary. But if we look at it from the traditional point of view, we can see that these forms of cooperation are really a continuation of the Bhutanese way of depending on ourselves to promote the welfare and interest of the villages, *dzongkhag* and country. When development works in the country started in 1961, the government provided money and material, while people in their respective *dzongkhag* and *gewog* contributed labour for a variety of projects such as schools, health centres and irrigation channels.

The Concept of Volunteerism from a Buddhist Perspective

If we reflect on the Buddhist way of life that we lead in Bhutan, a sense of voluntary work wherever it is genuinely required is an inbuilt part of our philosophy of life. On a broader level, compassion together with kindness and love form the essential Mahayana attitude oriented towards providing well-being and happiness of all sentient beings,

whether they are human or non-human, friends or enemies, rich or poor. As Buddhists, we look upon the concept of *Jimba* as a highly noble value that should be practised by all. What is *Jimba* after all but selfless acts of charity to the needy, and sacrifice for a good cause. It has been customary for our forefathers and present day members of Bhutanese society to give alms to the needy. It is often that the laity supports many individuals such as *gomchen* and *anim*, in the form of cash, ration and other basic material necessities.

Bhutanese society has always looked upon virtuous action and giving away our possessions without expecting anything in return as the highest form of selfless action. Indeed, when we say our prayers, we pray for the salvation and well being of all sentient beings. The concept of volunteerism, therefore, is deeply embedded in Buddhism.

If we contemplate on the concept of volunteerism in Buddhist context, we find that it is an act of empathy that comes purely out of one's own will without any external coercion or enforcement, and without any expectation of profit or gain to the act. We find these qualities outlined in the various *Paramitas* or transcendent perfections, particularly the *Paramita* of Generosity.

An overview of the *Paramita* of generosity may provide a clearer picture of what is meant by saying that volunteerism is rooted in Buddhism.

The nature of generosity is to have no attachment to material wealth and to have a giving, open-handed attitude toward others. There are three kinds of generosity: the

giving of material possessions, the giving of protection from fear, and the giving of the sacred Dharma.¹

The gift of material things²

The first kind of giving is ordinary generosity, which involves the donation of food, clothing, livestock and the like. Next, great generosity involves giving away things that are deemed profoundly dear and precious to us, for example, the lives of our own spouses or children for a great cause. The third kind, peerless generosity, is the most difficult of all since it involves giving up our limbs and organs and other bodily parts in a way that is completely free of attachment. Under the gift of material things, we are implored to train ourselves in giving away small things until we overcome, gradually, our possessiveness with increased generosity, and we are able to practice peerless generosity.

The gift of protection from fear³

The gift of protection from fear is the protection of those who are suffering in various ways, whether they are people being tortured, punished, or endangered by disease and evil forces, or wild animals being hunted, or livestock destined for slaughter. It is also the training of our minds in the aspiration to liberate all beings from the endless sufferings of *samsara* or the source of constant fear so that they may progress towards the state of *nirvana*. The point stressed here is that generosity should be practised according to one's true capacity so that later on there is no regret over having overspent or

¹ Quoted from the *Treasury of Precious Qualities, A Commentary on the Root Text of Jigma Lingpa* (Pg. 191-194). Shambala 2001.

² Adapted from the *Treasury of Precious Qualities, A Commentary on the Root Text of Jigma Lingpa* (Pg. 191-194). Shambala 2001.

³ *Ibid.*

overstretched one's own ability; one should not give at all if it is done so in a spirit of hostility, jealousy, boastfulness, or with other impure intentions.

The gift of Dharma⁴

The gift of Dharma is to impart instruction to others according to their mental capacity. *Dharma* basically refers to the 'cosmic law' or the 'great norm'; it is modifying our behaviour according to the law of *Karma* or cause and effect. Thus, dharma expounds on the norms of behaviour and ethical rules; it concerns mental content and reflection. We should consider the altruistic attitude as the main practice, by encouraging beings to engage in positive action so that they may be closer to liberation. In simple terms, liberation is release from suffering, death and rebirth; it is *Nirvana* or the highest, transcendent consciousness.

This brief look at some aspects in Buddhist thought opens up the discussion that such qualities could be equated conceptually to the act of volunteerism. This short reference, however simplistic, to the *paramita* is to highlight an aspect of the wealth of concepts and ideas in our cultural heritage that can be explored further to enrich our conceptual understanding of what volunteerism is.

The Continuing Spirit of Volunteerism and Social Responsibility

Drawing attention away from the conceptual discussion let it be reiterated that Bhutanese society has always looked upon

⁴ Ibid.

altruistic deeds without any expectation of reciprocity as the highest form of selfless action.

With such a philosophy and way of life as part of our tradition, compared to our forefathers who had to live under far more difficult conditions, today we should be able to take up voluntary work and services far more actively and vigorously when the country is on the path of rapid development and progress.

And indeed, one could say that this spirit and philosophy behind the traditional forms of volunteering in Bhutan is being manifested again in the voluntary activities that have started to take place in the country in recent times. We have right before us an example provided by the services of the Youth Development Fund (YDF) under the royal patronage of Her Majesty Ashi Tshering Pem Wangchuck. Following a royal decree, the YDF was launched in June 1999 under the education department with a grant of USD 1 million as its starting capital from the government. It was later established as an NGO in September 2001. This fund was created in order to address the development and welfare of Bhutanese youth. Amongst others, it has extended support to the Voluntary Artists Studio, Thimphu (VAST), and the vocational centre for disabled youths.

Another example of social consciousness and contribution has become evident following the awareness created among the people by Lyonpo Sangay Ngedup, the Minister for Health and Education Services, through the health walk. In keeping with the WHO 'move for health' theme, a team of seven men covered 560 km along the traditional route from Trashigang to Thimphu from 25th September to 10th October 2002. Through

this walk, about Nu 78 million was raised towards the Bhutan Health Trust Fund⁵.

Although these are not examples of voluntary organizations as such, they are nonetheless exemplary of the continuing spirit of social responsibility and services that have been passed on to us through the ages. They also represent the creation of awareness among people, of their individual and collective ability to be socially engaged and responsible. Such features are also evident in the patron-beneficiary relationship in Bhutanese society; these may be illustrated through the following story of one nun in particular.

Community benefaction of Anim Jitsem⁶

Anim (nun) Jitsem has been living in Dechenphodrang for the last four or five years. She is the *kyonyer* (caretaker of a religious site) at the Zangtopelri Lhakhang where Her Majesty Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck installed a *mani dungkor* (prayer wheel). She looks after the day-to-day matters of the *lhakhang* such as making offerings, ensuring that butter lamps are kept burning day and night, wiping the offerings bowls clean for the next day, turning the *mani dungkor*, and chanting prayers. She observes special, religious days such as *Lhabab Duedchen* and *Zhabdrung Kuchhey* at the *lhakhang* by offering *tshog* for which she goes shopping to the market. Most other times, she does not go anywhere except for occasional visits to her friends and benefactors.

Since she does a little bit of kitchen gardening in the course of the day, and because people who sometimes come to visit

⁵ The Health Trust Fund was initiated in 1997 and formally launched in 1998.

⁶ Interviewed on April 6, 2003.

bring her vegetables, she hardly feels the need to buy her own vegetables. Besides the two-room house in which she lives behind the *lhakhang* (where she is not required to pay electric and water bills), Her Majesty provides her with red rice and a basic salary every month.

Looking back over the last few decades, Anim Jitsem recalls the many people who helped and supported her immensely throughout her life.

A life of hope, appreciation and reciprocity

Born Chotey Zam, Anim Jitsem and her elder sister were the only surviving children of ten. Her father had passed away before she was even born, and her mother died when she was about six years old. She and her sister lived first in Punakha, then for a short while in Thimphu until her niece passed away, after which they moved back to Punakha. It was then, at the age of 29, that she joined the nunnery at Jachhukarma. She was given a religious name, Kencho Dem. In time, people started to call her Anim Jitsem as an expression of fondness (besides teasing her about looking like a mouse), and her real name has hardly been recalled since then. After three years there, her sister passed away and she moved to a nunnery in Hongtsho Tashigang where she lived for five years; at that time, her main support came from Gup Samten in Punakha. Following this, she moved to Dorjdrag in Thimphu.

When she first arrived in Dorjdrag, one of the first things she did was to build her *tshamkhang* (retreat/meditation house). There were about nine *anim*s there, and each one of them had built their own *tshamkhang*. She built hers with the help of the *gomchhen*, *anim* and monks living there. For about a year, they collected wood and materials from the forest. They cleared an

area believed to have been the spot where Lam Samtey Ngawang Nob had lived about a century ago (a short story revolving around this *lam* is narrated in the footnote).⁷ She

⁷ *How the tsham (persons in retreat) of Dorji Dra got their entitlement to 12 drey of wheat (as narrated by Anim Jitsem).*

According to local folklore, over a hundred years ago, there was a *lam* called Samtey Ngawang Nob who stayed in meditation in Dorji Dra. On auspicious days he would turn into a bird and bask in the sun. At other times, he would roam about in the forests.

In those days, the grounds in Samteling were filled with wheat fields, fenced in by the owner. Manifesting himself as a deer, Lam Ngawang Nob would occasionally feed in this field, much to the exasperation of the landowner. No matter how hard he tried, he was unable to get a hold of this deer, which would run off the moment he made an attempt to catch it. Eventually, the owner heard that the deer was actually a man. This made him even more determined to kill the pest. So one day, he waited in hiding for the deer to come, and quietly sneaked up behind. The deer started to run; it ran and ran, and the man chased and chased. At last the deer reached his home, and barely had time to turn back into his human form with the man close at his heels.

The panting landowner immediately accused the deer-turned-man of stealing his wheat all the time. He demanded compensation and an end to this behavior. However, the *lam* denied the charges and the exchanges soon escalated into a heated argument. The *lam* had forgotten to wipe his mouth and was unaware of the wheat husks that remained stuck to his chin.

His profuse denial enraged the landowner who finally left the place and went to report the matter to a figure of authority. But the latter said, "How can you take on that attitude against a *lam*? Fine then! I will make an arrangement for you whereby you will not have to see him ever again in your field. From now on, a portion of your harvest, amongst other things, shall be offered to Lam Ngawang Nob, he will not have to come to your field, ever".

And that, it is said, is how the *tsham* (people in meditation) at Dorji Dra began to receive their yearly entitlement to 12 *drey* of wheat, salt and other

had no way of paying for their services but she frequently cooked for them. Eventually, they completed her *tshamkhang* – she had five rooms in case another person would need a place to stay over the course of time.

During the early years of her stay there, many people came and left over a period of three years for *woola* (labour contribution to build something collectively) – a *shedra* was being built at that time, and it was more often than not that someone or the other would come knocking at her door to borrow utensils or vegetables. She never refused, comparing her own situation as being similar to theirs.

Over time, Anim Jitsem started to build a small *chhoeten* (stupa) with help from about twelve of the monks there. Although it was winter and the *shedra* was closed for break, these monks agreed to stay behind. They worked hard to collect stones while she cooked and fed them. Later, she built two more *chhoeten* in this manner.

Throughout the time that Anim Jitsem lived in Dorjdrag, she sought her provisions during her annual round of *soengyum* (alms) in Punakha and Thimphu – this usually took about a month or more. Soon after harvest, she would come down to Baep Samteling and Joshina where she collected her first stock of ration and then moved on throughout the valley. Keeping her stock in the care of several hosts, she would go to Punakha; before returning to Thimphu, she always kept her supply with Gup Samten who would look for people to take it to Thimphu by car and then to Dorjdrag as back loads. All of

items of food. Lam Ngawang Nob himself used to eat only on certain days, so he would give most of his share to people who had nothing to eat.

her things would not reach home in one trip because she refused to have them carried on horseback, pointing out that most times horses suffer greatly at the hands of inconsiderate owners. Although it then became more difficult to transport her stock for the year, there were always people who offered to carry her things a little at a time. For the few days that she spent with each of her hosts, she would almost always roast *zaow* for them and tell tales of Ap Wangdugay to the children.

Anim Jitsem fell ill several times in those 35 years at Dorjdrag, and each time she had to be carried down to the hospital. There was never a lack of help from her benefactors and friends who tended and cared for her. Her worries about death were consoled with assurances of a proper cremation. People at the hospital always commented that there was no one who had as many visitors as she did, especially monks! She would explain that most of them were from Dorjdrag who had meals from her, and helped her to build *chhoeten*.

Very recently in 2003, Anim Jitsem offered her *tshamkhang* and three *chhoeten* to the *shedra* in Dorjdrag. (A few monks had already been living there since she moved to Dechenphodrang). Besides this gesture, she has saved about Nu 12,000 in the bank, which she will use to have *kanjur* read at Dorjdrag.

Although Anim Jitsem is on her own without any family or relatives, the number of people who have helped her are many. Over the years, she has had about eleven separate individuals and families who provided her with money, clothing, food, and various other forms of support. On account of her friendship with the family of one of her patrons, she was able to go on *neykor* (pilgrimage) to Dorjiding (Bodh Gaya) in India two times. At the present moment, she

has two patrons who continue to support her regularly, and many of the others still give willingly on the rare occasions that they meet.

Recent Trends in Voluntary Activities

Elsewhere around the globe, volunteer programme management as a professional field is not that old in itself and it certainly is not so in Bhutan. The emergence of bodies that can be called voluntary organizations according to global understanding is very new in our country.

Nevertheless, in the continuing spirit of social responsibility, we have seen the establishment of several such organizations like the Royal Society for the Protection of Nature (RSPN) in 1987 with a mission to "inspire personal responsibility and actively involve the people of Bhutan in the conservation of the Kingdom's environment through education, applied research and information dissemination; and in collaboration with concerned agencies and indigenous institutions".⁸

Similarly, the Royal Society for the Protection and Care of Animals (RSPCA) started in 1999 with a mission to "inculcate in all Bhutanese Citizens a sense of moral responsibility for the proper care and humane treatment of any and all animals through increasing awareness on the plight of animals and education on proper animal care by way of demonstration and information dissemination".⁹

The Volunteer Artists Studio, Thimphu popularly known as VAST was established in 1998 by a group of working artists

⁸ From *IYV 2001 In Bhutan* at <http://www.undp.org.bt/UNV/iyvrep.html>

⁹ Ibid.

with a mission to promote the importance and value of art. It provides guidance and assistance to young artists to explore their full potential, and to share social responsibilities through artistic actions and other socially useful productive work.

However, it makes sense that volunteerism and the nature of entities that fulfil such functions should be considered in the (Bhutanese) cultural context. We should not confine ourselves to the concept of voluntary and non-governmental organizations as understood globally. If we should go strictly by the idea that such works occur only through legally recognized, non-profit making bodies, then there would be not many that would qualify as voluntary acts in Bhutan. We need to accept that volunteerism comes through various other channels such as hospitals, universities and schools, social clubs, semi-formal associations and many more loose networks.

One such association is the Choethuen Tshogpa under the patronage of the present *Je khenpo* (the chief abbot of Bhutan), dedicated towards renovating and looking after many sacred monasteries all over the country. Its members include people from villages, the business community, and the civil service. Material contribution comes from those who have the money and resources, while physical labour is offered by less wealthy members.

A more detailed look at this *tshogpa* provides some ideas on the formation and functioning of such bodies. It serves as an example of the many contemporary associations in Bhutan that still have no legal charter or binding legislation, but continue to fulfil various social functions in a manner that is clearly representative of the oral nature of Bhutanese society.

The Choethuen Tshogpa¹⁰

Background

Prior to the formation of Choethuen Tshogpa, the Tenpai Zhabtog Tshogpa had been set up in Haa, Paro and Thimphu. It functioned for several years under the patronage of the *Je Khenpo* with many members from these three *dzongkhag*; funds were raised through their collective effort. Eventually, there were some lapses in the Tshogpa that led to its dissolution. However, the essential function of the Tshogpa was kept alive through the formation of Choethuen Tshogpa in August 2002, under the guidance and patronage of His Holiness the *Je Khenpo*, Trulku Jigme Chhoeda. Very few members of the Tenpai Zhabtog Tshogpa are now members of the Choethuen Tshogpa.

Organization and structure

The Choethuen Tshogpa has a fifteen-member executive committee with Lam Tshering Wangdi as the President, Lam Wangdi of the *dratshang dagchong* and Dungtsho Pem Dorji as the Vice Presidents, and twelve other executive members. The committee members are all based at the Tshogpa's *tewa* (centre) in Thimphu, with a small office that has been set up with an accountant and a *dungyi* (clerk). It is located behind the BCCI (Bhutan Chamber of Commerce and Industries)

¹⁰ Dasho Zhamling Dorji, from Krutoe Zhamling, provided the information on Choethuen Tshogpa in an interview on 22nd April 2003. Amongst various other posts held in the civil service and armed forces, he served as *Ramjaam* in the High Court, and *Dungpa* of Tsimakoti in Chhukha, and Trashigang Bidung. After resignation he worked privately in construction and business. Dasho Zhamling Dorji is currently the Vice President of BCCI, and is the BCCI *chimi* to the National Assembly.

offices where the late Dasha Dorji Tenzin allocated a room in the building of the Zhabtog Lhenkhang; the rent is paid by the latter.

The Choethuen Tshogpa has been established in each of the twenty *dzongkhag* in the country with their respective *Lam Neten* and *dzongda* as co-chairpersons (in some of the *dzongkhag*), and their funds are managed independently. However, there are some *dzongkhag* where the Tshogpa does not have registered members. This is because the whole organization is still fairly new and in a process of establishment. As such, the total number of members all over the country has not been fully recorded as yet. There are registered members in those *dzongkhag* that the *Je Khenpo* and the President of the committee have visited; these visits are ongoing. Members of Choethuen Tshogpa include people from all walks of life, with those registering for the first time depositing an initial fee of Nu 100.

In some of the *dzongkhag*, the *gup*, *chimi*, *mangmi* and *tshogpa* are also members. It is acknowledged that without their participation and services, it would be difficult to strengthen the Choethuen Tshogpa. These individuals at the *gewog* level are instrumental in identifying various tasks that the Choethuen Tshogpa decides to take up; they submit project proposals to the executive board. The board then reviews each proposal, whether it is required, feasible and necessary, and then submits it to the *Je Khenpo*. Works are implemented upon approval from His Holiness.

With the committee's decision that the Choethuen Tshogpa should be a legal body and not left as an informal organization, seven individuals were selected from amongst the members to draw up a *chatrim* (regulation). While most of

the articles have already been drawn up and finalized, there are a few sections that the committee needs to revise. The *chatrim* will require careful review before submission to the National Assembly in the near future. For example, there was initially a set minimum amount of Nu 200 that individuals were required to contribute each month as registered members; the payment could be made each month or as a lump-sum amount every six months. The *Je Khenpo* advised that this arbitrary figure be done away with, because every person's capacity to pay would differ: some would find it difficult to pay Nu 50, whereas others might easily offer Nu 1000 or amounts in lakhs. It was then decided that the amount each individual contributed would be left entirely up to his or her own decision and ability to pay.

While its *chatrim* was still being drawn up, one arrangement had been that provided a registered member contributed the monthly amount of Nu 200 without fail for at least 10 years, that member would be compensated in his or her time of difficulty such as sickness or death. Presently however, the committee feels that this arrangement may need to be changed as part of the *chatrim* amendment.

Aims and objectives

The main purpose of the Choethuen Tshogpa is to safeguard and promote the teachings of Buddhism in the country. This is what it has set out to do, with the concern that while the country is in the process of modernization, there is a possible danger for Buddhism and spirituality to lose ground.

The various objectives that it pursues towards this end include the initiation and organization of *chhoe* and *wang* from the *Je Khenpo* to the people throughout the country. It also

takes upon itself the responsibility of restoring *lhakhang* (temples) and *goendey* (retreat centres or monasteries) that the government and local people are unable to manage. Similarly, the building of new *chhoeten*, *lhakhang* and religious statues whose *lungten* (prophecies) were foretold in the past, would be sponsored by the Tshogpa where the government and individuals are unable to gather enough resources towards such ventures. Although the *dratshang* and *goendey* receive ration from the government, and many people also support monks, *gomchhen* and *anim*, there are those who are not as privileged; the Choethuen Tshogpa will endeavour to support such individuals.

Funds

At the present moment, the Choethuen Tshogpa fund is modest since it is an organization in its infancy. It has taken on the sale of lotteries as one of the initial means of raising funds. So far, lottery tickets worth approximately Nu 7 lakhs have been printed although the sale of all the tickets is not at all ensured. About 4 lakhs worth have been distributed for sale in government and corporate offices, institutions, shops, and various other places in all *dzongkhag*. With funds collected so far from the sales, the Tshogpa has already begun giving donations and started work on various undertakings.

Besides the monthly contributions from members, non-members have also given donations following death in the family to conduct memorial rituals for the soul of their parents and forefathers, or for the welfare of animals. They contribute not only in monetary form but also as offer of land, or other material things. For example, during a recent *chhoe* given by His Holiness in Gelephu, a couple there offered a big piece of

land to Choethuen Tshogpa. Plans are already underway to develop the site by building *lhakhang* and a *geyney ngeykhang*.

Achievements, activities and future plans

In the first month of the Bhutanese year this year, His Holiness instructed that the recitation of various prayers begin in each of the twenty *dzongkhag*. *Tshogbum*, *Kanjur*, *Goen Tongchha*, *Channa Kado Thruesar*, *Duetsen Tsam Thruesar*, among others are being read this year with sponsorship from Choethuen Tshogpa for protection of the people and country from various elements such as the implications of the militant presence in the country.

Up to now, the achievements of the Tshogpa include the completion of *kurim*; work has already begun for the construction of a *geyney ngeykhang* in Gelephu; a *lhakhang* is being built in Kurtue Autsho and in Mongar Gaylpoizhing; an advance of Nu 25 lakhs has been made toward the making of a *ku* (statue) in Trongsa Tashiling – according to prophecy, this statue will benefit all sentient beings as well as the country; there are plans to build a 100 feet statue of Guru in Tsirang.

Another plan of the Tshogpa is to build a *dratshang* in Hejo, Thimphu near the cremation ground - this *dratshang* would have facilities for printing *pechha* (religious scriptures) in the ground floor; there would be space elsewhere to keep a number of monks available at anytime for conducting rites at the cremation ground because they are needed very often – this was proposed to the government which in turn has given land to the Choethuen Tshogpa.

One major proposal of the Tshogpa is to start a Dharma centre – this is to educate and make people from all walks of life understand the intellectual content of Buddhism and *chhoe*; it aims to clear the misunderstandings that lay people tend to have about Buddhism in Bhutan where many think that it is only about rituals, and fail to comprehend the essence and meaning behind the external practices. It would be a kind of retreat centre where people can meditate for short periods of time; there would be talks and *thru*e given by *lams* who would give guidance on meditation techniques and ways to practice *chhoe*.

If these plans follow through and work out well, similar centres would be set up in all other *dzongkhag*. Such centres would benefit people from all walks of life; people would not have to go into retreat or *chhoe* all at once for long periods of time; they would have the choice of learning and understanding first while still leading a secular life.

The Tshogpa hopes to improve and promote its status and credibility not only within, but also outside the country. It strives to share and clarify the Buddhist traditions with those who seek the dharma.

Conclusion

In Bhutan, individuals and groups of people at some time or the other come forth on their own initiative to offer their services in various capacities. We see many clean-up campaigns and community services being carried out by students during vacation from schools and colleges. During national graduates' orientation, there have been efforts to raise

funds for the handicapped and needy, as well as labour contribution towards renovation of monasteries and *lhakhang*.

The Choethuen Tshogpa and *Community Benefaction of Anim Jitsem* are only two examples of such voluntary services and associations in Bhutan, which are not always institutionalised or carried out by entities that are formed as legislated bodies. These two cases are representative of trends in volunteering, the formation of various associations, and how they function with or without legal status in the country.

While we see the emergence of more formal organizations, the presence of looser networks and their missions are also far-reaching. All these activities can be viewed as a continuation of the traditional ways of volunteering and community participation in Bhutan.

As citizens of our country, we need to be aware that we have the ability to share the responsibilities of serving our community and not depend on the government to do everything for us. Therefore, we should all take on responsibilities in our various capacities to encourage and promote volunteerism in Bhutan; after all, the ultimate aim of volunteering is to promote the interest and welfare of the community and society by ourselves.

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