

## Dadar: Arrow Scarf

Bhutanese homes usually have a shrine room, and in it is often an arrow with scarves of five colors attached to it, called the *dadar* (མཎའ་དང་). The ceremonial arrow is used for the rituals of gathering and enhancing long life and wealth. The ritual officiants wave the *dadar* in the air while chanting the verses for the ritual, and bless the devotees by placing the arrow on their heads. As the arrow with scarves is often used for increasing the longevity of a person, it is also sometimes called *tседar* (མཎའ་དང་), or longevity arrow. The use of the arrow most likely originated in the pre-Buddhist Bön tradition of Tibet and was integrated into Buddhist practice, like many other cultural practices and artefacts. In the pre-Buddhist spiritual belief, the arrow is a symbol of masculine power just as the spindle is a representation of the feminine power.

The arrow is made from a special bamboo which is straight and sturdy. It is often a bamboo which is collected from a holy site and the holy mountain of Tsari is the most well-known source of such bamboo. Unlike the bamboo for archery, the bamboo for *dadar* is thicker and would normally have three nodes. The bamboo is painted red and threads of five colors are tied around in layers just below the nock and above the feathers. The feathers of a vulture are preferred for feathering the arrow. In some places, the *dadar* does not have a single nock but five stick heads which are made separately and stuck to the bamboo. The *dadar* in some cases is also empowered by inserting mantras and substances of power near its head. A metal tip is added to the end of the arrow. Scarves of five colors and a mirror are attached to the arrow above the feather and below the nock. The arrow is then placed in a stand which is also a box decorated with painting.

During religious rituals such as the ceremony to give bestow empowerment of life or *tsewang* and gathering of long life and wealth or *tseguk yanguk*, the priest holds the arrow near its tip and waves the arrow letting the scarves fly in a swirling motion. The arrow with scarves is used an implement to attract the essence of longevity and wealth. To signify the bestowal of such essence, the arrow with scarf is

gently placed on the head of the devotees who attend such a ceremony.

Mipham Namgyal Gyatsho, a nineteenth century polymath and great Tibetan master describes the symbolism of the *dadar* and its parts in the following verses:

མདའ་དར་རྟེན་འབྲེལ་ཀུན་འཛོམས་འདི། །གནས་མཚོག་རྣམས་ཀྱི་རླུག་མ་ལ། །མདའ་མགོ་ལྷ་ཚོམ་ལྷན་པ་འདི། །རྒྱལ་བ་རིགས་  
ལྷའི་མཚོན་བྱེད་ཡིན། །དུག་ལྷ་གཞོན་པའི་རྟེན་འབྲེལ་ཡོད། །

This *dadar* endowed with all auspicious conditions, a bamboo from holy sites with five heads symbolizes the five families of the Buddhas, and holds the auspices to suppress the five poisons.

མདའ་སྐྱོད་ཚོགས་གསུམ་ལྷན་པ་འདི། །ཚོ་ལྷ་རྣམས་གསུམ་མཚོན་བྱེད་ཡིན། །འཚི་མེད་ཚོ་ཡི་རྟེན་འབྲེལ་ཡོད། །

The arrow body which has three nodes symbolize the three Buddhas of longevity and holds auspices for longevity and immortality.

མདའ་ཚེ་རྩོད་ར་ལྷགས་ཀྱིས་བརྒྱན། །དཔའ་རྩལ་བརྩལ་ཤོད་ཆེ་བ་དང་། །ཚོ་སྲོག་སྲ་བའི་རྟེན་འབྲེལ་ཡོད། །

The tip of the arrow being adorned with hard iron symbolize valor, vigor and courage, and holds auspices for stable life and life force.

མདའ་རྟོང་དགུང་ལ་གཏད་པ་འདི། །མངའ་ཐང་དགུང་དང་མཉམ་པའི་བད། །

The nock of the arrow rising towards the zenith is sign of one's power becoming as high as the zenith.

དར་མཚོན་སྐྱ་ལྷས་བརྒྱན་པ་འདི། །མི་རྒྱུད་དར་ལས་འཇམ་པ་དང་། །མཁའ་འགོ་སྡེ་ལྷས་སྲུང་བར་མཚོན། །

The adornment with silk scarves of colors symbolizes the character of the people to be as soft as silk and the protection by the five kinds of *ḍakini* spiritual beings.

ཐང་དཀར་ཐང་སྐྱ་གྲོ་ཡིས་བརྒྱན། །དཔའ་བོ་དཔའ་མོ་མཚོན་པ་དང་། །ལམ་སྐྱ་བསྐྱ་བའི་རྟེན་འབྲེལ་ཡོད། །

The ornamentation with feathers of a vulture indicates the heroic nature of people and holds the auspices of being well received on the path.

རྩོད་ར་ལྷགས་ཀྱས་བརྒྱན་པ་འདི། །ཚོས་སྐྱོད་སྲུང་མ་མཚོན་པ་དང་། །ལས་བཞི་འགྲུབ་པའི་རྟེན་འབྲེལ་ཡོད། །

The decoration with a hard iron tip symbolizes the protector deities and holds the auspices of accomplishing the four activities.

མདའ་ལ་མེ་ལོང་བཏགས་པ་འདི། །སྤེ་བ་དགུ་དང་སྲར་ལ་བརྒྱན། །ལོ་བསྐྱོར་བརྩུ་གཉིས་ཚང་བ་ཡིས། །སྲུང་བའི་རྟེན་འབྲེལ་མ་ཚོ  
ང་མེད། །

The mirror on the arrow indicate the auspices of being protected by the nine *mewa*, eight *parkha* and twelve *lokhor* animal powers.

ཤེལ་གཡུ་དུང་གསུམ་བརྒྱན་པ་འདི། །དཀར་ཕྱོགས་ལྷ་ལྷུ་གཉེན་གསུམ་རྟེན། །ལ་འཛིན་སྲོང་གོགས་འབྲལ་མེད་ཀྱིས། །མི་ནོར་བེས་གསུམ་འཛོམས་པའི་བད། །

The ornaments of crystal, turquoise and shell symbolize being protected by gods, *ngen* and *naga* spirits and of possessing people, food and cattle.

རིན་ཆེན་རིགས་ཀྱིས་བརྒྱན་པ་འདི། །འབྲུང་བཞིའི་བརྩུད་གཡང་འགྲུག་པར་མཚོན། །

Being decorated with varieties of jewels symbolizes the attraction of the essences of the four elements.

ཚོ་གཡང་འགྲུག་པའི་ཚོ་མདའ་ཡིན། །དཔའ་བོ་མཁའ་འགྲོའི་ལྷ་མདའ་ཡིན། །ཚོས་སྦྱོང་སྲུང་མའི་སྒྲ་མདའ་ཡིན། །དག་ལྷ་འཁོར་བའི་རྟེན་མདའ་ཡིན། །དབང་ཐང་དར་བའི་རྟེན་འབྲེལ་ཡོད། །བསོད་ནམས་རྒྱས་པའི་རྟེན་འབྲེལ་ཡོད། །བདེ་སྦྱིད་ཕྱན་སུམས་ཚོགས་པར་ཤོག །།

This is life-arrow to attract longevity and wealth. This is divine arrow of the heroes and *ḍakiṇis*. This is *la*-arrow of the protector deities. This is the relic-arrow which attracts the *dralha* war gods. This has auspiciousness for the charisma to rise. This has auspiciousness for the merits to flourish. May peace and happiness prevail in abundance.

Karma Phuntsho is a social thinker and worker, the President of the Loden Foundation and the author of many books and articles including *The History of Bhutan*.