

Haa Festival at Menbi, Lhuntse

The people of Nyabi, Zhungkhar, Dangling and Maenjabi communities celebrate a local festival called Kesabi Haa (ཀེས་བཟུང་མ་). It starts from 17th day of the 7th month of the Bhutanese calendar and ends on 19th day of 7th month of the Bhutanese calendar. It is an annual event for these communities. According to local lore, the festival is believed to be the consecration ceremony of Kesabi temple built by Lama Rigdzin Jigme Lingpa. People also sing Bro (ཐོ) song, which too is believed to be the offering of song made to god during the consecration ceremony of the temple.



Nyabi village in Menbi gewog, Lhuntse
Photographer: Sonam Tobgye



Zhungkhar village and Dangling village on other side
Photographer: Sonam Tobgye

Kesibi temple was built by Lama Rinzin Jigme Lingpa. It is believed that the Lama initially planned to construct the temple at Tasibee but later decided to construct the temple at Kesibi, after his horse habitually came down hill to Kesibi for grazing. Today the temple is owned by the community of Zhungkhar, Dangling and Nyabi. Every year the people of Zhungkhar and Nyabi celebrate their annual festival called Kesibi Haa at the Lhakhang.



The people of Zhungkhar village gather at the Kesibi temple to witness the dance of Gonpo and Gonmo
Photographer: Sonam Tobgye

Day one

The day after the offerings are made through Duegi tangrab (བདུད་ཀྱི་གཏང་རག) at Baypazur village, the celebration of Haa festival starts at Kesibi Lhakhang. It falls on the 17th day of 7th month of Bhutanese calendar. The first day celebration is called as Nubcham (རུབ་འཆམ) by local people. In the morning, every household visits the temple to offer *tshog* (ཚོགས) or meal offering to god. On the first day, early in the morning, 10 people, 5 Bro male and 5 singers ladies chant and sing above the Chalibee village. In the afternoon, the people of Zhungkhar gather at the Kesibi temple to witness the group dance of Gonpo (གཤོན་པོ) and Gonmo (གཤོན་མོ). Only people from Zhungkhar witness the dance.



10 people including 5 Bro male and 5 singer ladies chant and sing
 Photographer: Sonam Tobgye (former researcher of Lhuntse)

Day two

On the 18th day of the 7th month of the Bhutanese calendar, the people from Nyabi, Zhungkhar, Dangling, and Maenjabi and from other communities meet for the main Haa celebration. Community resides in-group nearby the temple with delicious foods and beverages. The groups are known as Doksa by community. The main doksas are Zhungkharpai doksa (གཞུང་མཁར་པའི་དྲག་ས), Danglingpai doksa (གངང་སྐང་པའི་དྲག་ས) and Nyapai doksa (ཉའི་སྤེལ་པའི་དྲག་ས). On this occasion, there are typically three performances - The Bro (བློ), Tshen cham (བཅོན་འཆམ) and Gonpo Gonmo cham (མགོན་པོ་མགོན་མཚན་མོ་འཆམ). The first half of the day is engaged for Bro and Tsan cham and the rest of the day by Gonpo Gonmo dances and Bro.



The three performances- Bro, Tsan cham and Gonpo Gonmo cham
 Photographer: Sonam Tobgye



The first half of the day is engaged for Bro and Tsan cham
Photographer: Sonam Tobgye

It is believed that when Lama Rigdzin Jigme Lingpa completed the construction of the Kesibi Lhakhang, the group dance of Gonpo and Gonmo was performed during the consecration ceremony to pray for the wellbeing, good health, timely rainfall and good harvest. The five-member dancers comprise of the dance leader, Gonpo, Gonmo, local deity called Choesung (ཚོས་སྤང་), and Yamphala (ཡམ་ཕ་ལཱ་), who is believed to be Lama Rigdzin Jigme Lingpa himself.



Yamphala, believed to be Lama Rigdzin Jigme Lingpa
Photographer: Sonam Tobgye

The local elders evoke that during the festival at least life of one person used to be taken away by the demons. Lama Rigdzin Jigme Lingpa's meditation found out that, there was *tse*n (demon) dancing at the place called Taigapcha, which is above the Kesibi temple, who actually took life of the people. Lama Rigdzin Jigme Lingpa went to that place to get hold of the demon. He wanted to drag the demon to the place where people were witnessing the Haa festival to subdue it. But the *tse*n refused to face the community and bunged in the forest above the present temple. This is the reason why the *tse*ncham starts from that forest. The dances, both Bro and Gonpo Gonmo make round to all doksa, where people make offerings and seek blessings.



People seek blessings from Gonpo Gonmo dance
Photographer: Sonam Tobgye

Day Three

The final day of Haa celebration at Kesibi temple will be marked with all replicas of dances in the form of masks being taken into meditation room. People can observe and seek blessings from these secret dances only once a year. Rituals are performed by local monks, where people pray and wish for this festive convergence next year on the same day and get blessings for long life.

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