

Yak Lekpé Lhadar: A Sentimental Song



The following story of Yak Lekpé Lhadar was told by by Damchoe (now 64 years old) from Neglug village in Laya. I met him in January 2014 while research on the Aulé of Laya.

The folk song, *Yak Lekpé Lhadar* (གཡག་ལེགས་པའི་ལྷ་དར་), is a sad story of a yak by that name. The sentimental song reflects how nomads rear their yaks as they do their children. The song mentions how the yak is given a name, looked after affectionately and involved in a deep bond with the nomad but is tragically taken to be slaughtered for meat. The yak called *Lekpé Lhadar* tells the story of separation between a yak herder and his yak. *Lekpé Lhadar*, a name which praises the yak, roughly translates as the handsome and magnificent yak. The yak was to taken on orders of a powerful lord to be slaughtered for meat. The song captures the sadness of parting, as described from the perspective of the slaughtered yak.

Lekpé Lhadar is handsome and magnificent yak with long hair hanging down to its hoofs. The patch of white hair on his face makes him stand out, and yak herders consider him a lucky yak. The yak roamed the lush meadows high up in the snow-capped mountains and has a special bond with the herder. He was a free and happy yak until his turn came to be face the butcher in order to satiate the voracious human appetite for yak meat.

According to this story, the song was composed by Ap Chuni Dorji, a yak herder from Soe Jangothang in Soe, Thimphu. The lyric of the song was written in classical language, and those who understood it would have their eyes well up with tears, when the song

was sung. The story of the yak is narrated through the song. Many years since the song was first composed and sung, it continues to render many hearts heavy among those who can comprehend the story told by the song.

The song *Yak Lekpé Lhadar* has been shortened from its original and various singers have focused only on the romantic theme leaving out the many interesting elements of the song. But the actual song ran for more than one hour. The song was a tribute to yak, and as a celebration to a herder's true friend in the mountain. The Dagala yak herders also pay a great respect to the *Yak Lekpé Lhadar*. People believe that no one lived in Dagala range initially. There were no *tsamdro* (རྩམ་དྲོག) pastures and yak. A *dud* (བདུད) or malevolent spirit did not allow either man or animal to live. As prophesied, the god of yaks sent *Yak Lekpé Lhadar* from heaven. *Yak Lekpé Lhadar* started to clear yak trails and grazing land. Trails along which *Yak Lekpé Lhadar* traveled became path for yaks, and places where it slept became grazing land. So the number of grazing land is equal to number of nights the *Yak Lekpé Lhadar* halted. It was *Yak Lekpé Lhadar* who showed herders, the ways of rearing yaks and making cowsheds. The present road from Dagana to Tsimalakha was believed to be made by *Yak Lekpé Lhadar*. This song is used as a poem that attribute human emotion and teach natural expression of the Buddhist tenets of protection for all forms of life.

This folksong is the most popular among the highland herders. The herders repeatedly sing this folksong, when they had to sacrifice their yaks for the *Ihasöl* (ལྷ་གསོལ) ritual.

The song goes:

སྣ་གཡག་ལེགས་པའི་ལྷ་དར་གཞིལ་ལེགས་ས།
གཡག་ལེགས་པའི་ལྷ་དར་ལྷ་ཅུང་འདི།
སྣ་གཡག་སྐྱེས་ཡུལ་འགོ་ཡུལ་བཤོད་མི་དགོས།
གཡག་སྐྱོས་ཡུལ་འགོ་ཡུལ་བཤོད་དགོས་ན།
སྣ་མཚོ་མ་གངས་རི་དཀར་པོའི་གཞིལ་ལེགས།
ལྷ་དར་གསེར་གཤོག་ལ་རྒྱས་མཚོ་ས་ལ།
སྣ་ཡར་མེ་ཉྱེག་བབས་ཅུང་ལེགས་ས་ལྷོ།
གཡག་རང་གྲི་པ་ཡུལ་འདི་ལྷ་ཡིན།
སྣ་རྩ་ཐ་བ་གངས་ལས་ཟན་སྐྱོར་ཟ།
ཅུ་འབྲང་པ་དོམ་ཅུ་མཚོ་ལས་འབྲང།
སྣ་ཉམས་དགའ་བའི་བག་སྐྱོ་རྒྱུ་པ་ཅིན།
ཡར་བྲང་ཐང་རིམ་གྱིས་མཚུག་ལས་སྐྱོ།
སྣ་དམང་བསང་དང་རིམ་གྱིས་བསང་དུ་ཡི།
ང་ལས་དབང་ཅན་གྱི་ལྷ་དར་འདི།
སྣ་ན་འཕུལ་ནི་ལྷ་དར་ང་འཕུལ་བས།
ང་ལས་དབང་ཅན་གྱི་ལྷ་དར་སྐྱོ།
སྣ་ཆེ་བ་དབང་ཆེན་དཔོན་པོའི་བཀའ་ཆེ་ཆོ།
སྐྱོ་བར་རྒྱུ་ཉོ་ཤེལ་བཏགས་མི་གཅིག།
སྣ་ང་ལྷ་དར་ལེན་པར་མཚོང་འོངས་རྒྱག།
ང་ལྷ་དར་མ་འགོ་ཚད་མི་འདུག།
སྣ་ན་བསྐྱོར་བརྒྱབ་བསྐྱོར་ལས་བཞུགས་ཅུང་རང།
གཏམ་བསྐྱོར་བརྒྱབ་ལྷ་དར་ང་རང་ཡིན།
སྣ་ཡར་སྐྱོད་པ་ལྷོགས་ལས་ལ་བསྐྱོར་སྐྱོད།
ཡར་ལྷོགས་ལས་ལ་བསྐྱོར་སྐྱོད་ཚོ་སྐྱོ།
སྣ་གངས་བསྐལ་བའི་རྩམ་མཐའ་མཚོ་མི་མཚོ།
རང་ལྷ་དར་སྐྱོག་ཤིང་དམའ་མི་དམའ།

How beautiful is *Yak Lekpé Lhadar's* face!
Yak Lekpé Lhadar- the god-sent calf!
There is no need to describe my place and paths,
If I were to explain my place and paths,
It is on the high snow-capped mountains
And the highland meadow of sershog flower
Where flower buds blossom. There, my home is.
I graze on mountains grass,
And drink fresh water of glacial lakes.
Should I dance my happiness,
I dance along the base of distant meadows.
One by one, the whole herd was slaughtered!
And I, the unfortunate *Lhadar*
It is I, *Lhadar* who feel sad.
A heavy command of a powerful lord came,
A man with a sword fastened at his waist
Came to take me, *Lhadar*.
Lhadar has no choice not to go.
When turn to be slaughtered is set
The turn fell on me, *Lhadar*.
Crossing Mountains, a highlander came.
And when the highlander came,
The snow-covered peaks above, how high?
And *Lhadar's* tree of life, how low?

The English translation was done by Dasho Dr. Sonam Kinga, Dorji Penjore and Jigme Drukpa.

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