

Mago: Threshold of the Home



Buddhist astrologer praying for good fortune and prosperity in house
Photographer: Rinzin Dema

The main door, which is known as *mago* (མགེལ་པོ་), is one of the most important aspects of a Bhutanese building. It is the gateway for all good things as well as bad things that may enter the house. A good door will have high influential power to allow the flow of good things and block the entry of bad energy into the house. For the well-being and prosperity of owners, it is very important that main door has to be positioned in the most auspicious direction. The door should be maintained with utmost care.

The direction of the door is usually dictated by various Buddhist astrological instructions in relation to the function of the building and the date of the owners' birth. For good

fortune and prosperity, in the case of a family house, the local belief is that the outer door should face a direction according to the birthdate of the male head of household and the direction of an internal door should be installed according to the birthdate of the female head of household. As per astrology, which locals attribute to Manjushri, a *mago* facing to the east is auspicious for those with tiger and rabbit as their birth animal signs, while west is inauspicious for them. *Mago* facing to the east/south is auspicious for those born in horse and snake years while north is inauspicious to them. For rooster and monkey, *mago* to the west/south-west, northeast, northwest are auspicious, but they should avoid having a door in the south. For dog and pig, *mago* to the southwest is auspicious, but it is inauspicious to have it facing the southeast, southwest, northeast and northwest. For rat and dragon, *mago* to the south, southeast, southwest, northeast, northwest is auspicious, and inauspicious to the east, southeast, southwest, northeast and northwest.

The animal sign of the head of the family is usually referred for the purpose of checking auspicious direction for main door and the direction taken with reference to the center of the building. The main door must be erected on an auspicious day with *lhabsang* (ལྷ་བསྟོན་) ceremony. The first person entering through the door must with excellent attitude and integrity have both parents alive. It is best for any house to have separate entrance and exit doors but they should not be set in a straight line. The exit door should be smaller than the entrance, and it should have only one shutter. It is said that the three or more doors should not be in straight alignment, as it would facilitate free outflow of wealth from the house. The main door should not open to face directly onto street lamp posts, street sign, tree, toilet, a mirror inside the house or the kitchen inside the house. There should not be walls in front of the main entrance. Any shadow should not fall on the main door. Again, the main door should not have any underground tank or canal under it and there should not be any abandoned or wrecked buildings in front of the main entrance. It is best to decorate the main entrance with auspicious signs.

The doors of homes are typically simple. However, the *mago* in dzongs, temples and palaces are elaborately decorated with intricate carvings on the door frames. Sculptures of the heads of auspicious animals such as the snow lion, garuda and sometimes even small statues of deities are placed above the door or in between the wooden designs above the doorframes. The size of the *mago* usually depends on the building design, size and significance. However, the sizes of the *mago* for those in a dzong or temple is installed with various layers of wooden designs. Great care is taken by local carpenters to ensure that the proportion of timber frames in a traditional door especially the entrance door should be designed correctly.

Sonam Chopel is a researcher at Shejun Agency for Bhutan's Cultural Documentation and Research.