

Lakor: Shared Labor

Lakor (ལཀོར་), wherein neighbors share labor, is common in Bhutanese villages, where the principles of community participation and social cohesion are very important. As a mountainous country with rugged terrain, conditions for cultivating food or carrying out large projects can at times be difficult. Under such circumstances coupled with a small population, Bhutanese people and society depend very much on helping each other. Relatives and neighbors organize activities in turn, so that a member from each household contributes labor to a given project. It is common practice in Bhutanese villages and communities for people to work in each other's fields in an organized and systematic manner on the basis of reciprocity.

In the case of rice production, paddy plantation and harvest will be carried out in the each household's fields with help from other residents of the village. The usual arrangement is that the host will provide food and drinks for all the helpers over the duration of the work. Similarly, collective help may also be accorded to those households unable to finish off a given seasonal task in time. Those who have already completed the work would come together to help the household which has not completed their tasks. This ensures that crop production is not affected by delays, and no payment is required. The person receiving the help is required to provide food and drinks. Some residents may also have connections in other villages that may be called in to assist with the projects for a day or longer. In some cases, the owner receiving help gives workers a certain amount of grains compensate for the number of days they worked.

When a family or individual builds a house in the village, similar modes of collective and systematic help based on reciprocity also take place during the construction process. It is common to see a group of women in western region of Bhutan pounding mud walls to a rhythm, singing as they carry out the work. This practice is also part of the labor contribution that each household makes towards the construction of any houses in their community. If a given household does not have the human capital to contribute, they hire someone to make their part of the contribution to the construction. In some cases, the helpers do not charge for their work.

In some places, the helpers begin towards evening as this is when people are free after their work on the farms. The communities also provide a free labor towards rebuilding any home gutted by fire or destroyed by other natural calamities. During times of sickness or death, every household in the village expresses solidarity in a number of ways. Help is extended to the affected family, where the entire community would come forth with help in the forms of providing emotional support, arranging the rituals, carrying out various household and other chores, and/or in the form of cash and other contributions. Even when babies are born, local people welcome the new member of

the community with simple contributions such as a bowl of rice, eggs, and/or *ara* (ཨ་རག) given to the family. Nowadays, many such gifts are replaced by modest cash donations or clothes bought from shops.

Across much of Bhutan, individuals, groups, communities, and the state itself regularly carry out many activities related to religious services by conducting religious ceremonies in the community temple. While most villages have an annual *mangkyi rimdro* (འཕའ་རྒྱ་རིམ་དྲོ) or community rituals or ceremonies, some have special festivals and events.

Other common causes found throughout Bhutan where people volunteer their service or contribute resources are the construction of new religious monuments, renovation of existing ones, and looking after sacred monuments. Such services are also part of the system of the community. This is seen not only as a duty that furthers the Buddhist merit of an individual, but also contributes to the well-being, protection and prosperity of the community as a whole. In essence, it is a promotion of social responsibility wherein people are encouraged to look after each other.

This sort of practice may be seen as a sort of self-help activity organized by the community in addressing certain shortfalls they face. However, such practices have seen a gradual decline since the coming of planned development in the country with widespread currency use and market economy.

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