

Phobjikha Dialect in Gangteng

The Phobjikha valley is home to many prominent schools of Buddhism, and is most notably a base for the Dzongchenpa, (ཚོགས་ཚེན་པ་) or School of Great Perfection, a branch of the Nyingma (རྟིང་མ་) school. Its most famous proponent was Künkhyen Longchen Rabjam (ཀུན་མཁུན་ལོང་ཚེན་རབ་འབྱམས་; 1308-1363), who revitalized *Heart Drop Teachings* of the Nyingma School. Out of eight Buddhist centers that he established within Bhutan, Nyenlung Drechak Ling (ཡུན་ལུང་འབྲས་བུ་ཆོས་ལུང་) was established in the valley. His disciples further promoted the Great Perfection teachings in Bhutan, in particular Trulku Peljor Gyeltsen (ལྷུ་སྐུ་དཔལ་འབྱོར་ལྷུ་མཚན་) who built two temples known as Kewang Lhakang (ཁེ་དབང་ལྷ་ཁང་) and Damchen Lhakang (དམ་ཅན་ལྷ་ཁང་).

In the fifteenth century, the great (གཉེན་རྗེ་པུ་རྒྱལ་པོ་) Tertön Pema Lingpa (1450-1521), regarded as re-incarnation of Longchen Rabjam visited the valley. He predicted that “in the future my teachings will take firm root in the hills above” ལྷག་ཡར་གྱི་རྗེང་ལ་ མ་འོངས་པའི་ནང་ ངའི་བསྟན་པ་དར་བར་འགྱུར།. As predicted, the line of Gangteng Trulku (རྒྱང་རྗེང་ལྷུ་སྐུ་) was established at the end of the 16th century with the birth of first Gangteng Trulku Rikzin Pema Thinlé (རིག་འཛིན་པུ་རྒྱུ་ལམ་), Pema Lingpa’s grandson. He was instrumental in establishing the present Gangteng monastery, which was extended by the subsequent incarnations, especially second Tendzin Lekpé Döndrup (བསྟན་འཛིན་ལེགས་པའ་དོན་གྲུབ་) in the 17th century.

Residents of Phobjikha, or Phobjibs, originally had two classes of people: the upper class that formed the nobility and the ordinary class. The nobility constitute the minority position and trace their mythical origin to Jowo Durshing (རྗོ་བོ་དུར་ཤིང་), the chief local deity of the region who resides in Durshingang (དུར་ཤིང་གང་) in the Black Mountains. Tradition maintains he had an affair with a lady known as Angé Lhacham (ཨང་ལྷ་མ་ལྷུ་མ་), Lhacham being an honorific name for a respected woman. She gave birth to a daughter who started this lineage although the girl’s name is not known.

Phobjibs speak a language known as *Henkha* (ཉེན་ཁ), also as Nyenkha (ཡེན་ཁ) or ancient language. The word ‘*Nyenkha*’ (ཡེན་ཁ) was derived from an older term *ngyen lung* (ཡེན་ལུང་) meaning ancient region, which Longchen Ramjam used to refer to this area. The semi-nomadic herders of Sephu north of Phobjikha valley speak this language.

Gangteps in the winter settled in Shar Chitokha, a four hour drive from Phobjikha valley. In the past, Gangteps were engaged in serving lamas and their monasteries and were known as *lam drapas* (ལྷམ་གྲུ་པ་). Though they no longer serve as *drapas* (གྲུ་པ་) they live in Gangteng and serve as priests in the monastery. The people of Gangteng speak a language known as *Shakha* (ཤ་ཁ). Gangteng gewog is bordered by Sephu and Dangchu gewog in the north, Phobjikha gewog in the east, Bjena gewog in the west and Athang

gewog in the south. Bjenabs are settled in the gewog of Bjena but migrate to Phobjikha during summer. They speak Dzongkha (ཇོང་ཁ). Athangpas are people who reside in Athang gewog, a day's walk from Phobjikha. They are also seasonal migrants and speak a language known as *Athangpikha* (ཨ་ཐང་པི་ཁ). Weavers from Athang gewog particularly renowned for Athang Rachu (ཨ་ཐང་རཱུ) and Athang Mathra (ཨ་ཐང་དམར་ཁ) clothes. Adaps or Athangpas are known to have two distinct social classes: the noble Ada Saymo and the ordinary Adaps. Atha Saymo (ཨ་ཐ་སཱམོ་མོ) trace their origin to (ཞབས་དུང་འཛིགས་མེད་རྗེ་འུམ་ལྷན་པོ་ལྷན་པོ) Zhapdrung Jikmé Norbu (1831-1861). During one of his visits to Ada village he encountered a lady named Dechen Tshomo (བདེ་ཆེན་མཚོ་མོ) and married her. From her was born a daughter who started Ada lineage. The majority of the remaining population are considered ordinary Adaps.

The name Phobjikha is believed to have been given by Lama Drukpa Künlé (1455-1529). While he entered the valley he found it a wide tract of land that seemed to extend in size, so he named it Phobjikha, or expansive valley. Another story connects its origin to Gesar of Ling (གླིང་གེ་སར་) from eastern Tibet. Lingkarthang, a small plain situated in front of Gangtey monastery, is said to be Gesar's birthplace and the valley one of the many battlefields. This is a purely oral tradition.

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