

A Bodra Song: Trashi Chödzung: A Massive Fortress



Thimphu Trashi Chödzung

Most of the *bodra* (བོད་ལྗང་) songs in Bhutan are commentaries on and descriptions of nature, *dzongs*, monasteries, and *lhakhangs* and ordinary houses. The *bodra* songs are popularized by *bo garps* (བོད་གཤམ་), who were courtiers serving the government. Two explanations are given for the origins of *bodra*. The first one claims that they were popularized by *bo garps*, who travelled through villages on official assignments. The songs they sang were called *bodra* or the melody of the *bo garps*. The second version explains that pilgrims and traders who travelled to Tibet composed songs by imitating and adapting Tibetan songs. Therefore, the name, *bodra*, which means, the melody of Tibet. This second explanation is unlikely as the language, rhythm and tune of Tibetan songs are very different from Bhutanese folk songs.

The Thimphu Dzong is popularly known as Trashi Chödzung, and stands on the west side of the Wangchu river. Trashi Chödzung means the “The Fortress of the Auspicious Religion”. In 1216, Lama Lhakpa Rinchen Gyelpo built the Do-Ngön or Blue Stone Dzong on a hill above Thimphu, where Dechen Phodrang now stands. The *dzong* was offered to Zhapdrung Ngakwang Namgyel by one of the descendants of Lam Lhakpa. Zhapdrung rebuilt the fortress in 1641 and renamed it Trashi Chödzung and made it the summer residence of the Central Monk Body, which was established in Punakha. In 1694, the 4th Desi Tenzin Rapgyé enlarged the *dzong*. In 1747, the *dzong* was enlarged at the initiative of the 13th Desi, Chogyal Sherap Wangchuk. As the old Trashi Chödzung, now called Denchen Phodrang, was too small to accommodate both monks and civil officials.

Thus, the sixteenth Desi ruler, Sonam Lhündup, built larger *dzong* lower down in the valley for the civil officials. The dzong was consecrated by the 13th Jé Khenpo, Yonten Thayé, who named the new dzong Sonam Phodrang. Following the death of the Desi Sonam Lhündup, the name was changed to Trashi Chödzung.

In 1961, the seat of government was moved from Punakha to Thimphu was declared as the capital of the Kingdom of Bhutan by His Majesty, the Third Druk Gyalpo Jigme Dorji Wangchuck. When the Third King moved the capital to Thimphu, King Jigme Dorji Wangchuck began a five-year project to renovate and enlarge the *dzong*. The entire *dzong* was rebuilt in traditional fashion, without nails or written plans. Trashi Chödzong was rebuilt through a labor conscription system called *drukdom* (འབྲུག་བཟོ་མཁའ་) a cluster of six from which one person from a group of six men between 17 to 55 years of age worked for seven months of the year. Zopön Parpa Ösel oversaw the overall renovation works. In 1969, the Earth Bird year, the *dzong* was consecrated by Jé Khenpo Thizur Thinlé Lhündup and Dorjé Lopön Nyinzer Trulku.

There are thirty temples and shrines within Trashi Chödzong. The dzong once housed the National Assembly and at present the rooms inside the Trashi Chödzong are typically allocated half to administrative functions (such as the throne room of His Majesty the King, the Ministry of Home and Cultural Affairs, and the Ministry of Finance) and half to religious function, primarily the halls and residences of the Jé Khenpo and the Central Monastic Body. This division between administrative and religious functions reflects the dual system of the religious and administrative branches of state.

Dzongchen Laso Trashi Chödzong is a foremost example of *bodra*, and was composed by Tsetan Dorjé in 1966. Tsetan Dorjé was a Tibetan musician who fled to Bhutan in 1960. He composed 30 *bodra* songs and served the Third King for over a decade. A prolific composer and excellent singer, he composed over 60 *drukdra* (འབྲུག་རྒྱུ) songs, including “Druk Zamling Chitshok” (འབྲུག་འཛམ་གླིང་གྱི་ཚོགས་), which was written to commemorate Bhutan’s entry to the United Nation on September 21, 1971.

He composed *Dzongchen Laso Trashi Chödzong* to celebrate the renovation of the glorious fortress of Trashi Chödzong. The song describes a beautiful medieval fortress:

ཚོང་ཆེན་བཟོ་མཁའ་ཚོས་ཚོང་། །འབྲུག་གི་རྒྱལ་མ་ལྷོ་བ། །
རང་དབང་ཚོབ་པའི་རྒྱལ་ཁབ། །བཟོ་མཁའ་པར་ཤོག །
རང་དབང་ཚོབ་པའི་རྒྱལ་ཁབ། །གཡང་ལ་ཆགས་པར་ཤོག །

The massive fortress, Trashi Chödzong,
Is the capital of Bhutan.
The independent nation,
May it be auspicious!
The independent nation,
May it be prosperous!

གཡམ་སུ་གཡམ་ལ་བཞགས་པ། །ལྷ་མ་རྒྱལ་བའི་སྤུལ་པ། །
ཐུགས་རིག་ཞི་བའི་ངང་ནས། །ཚོས་ཀྱི་བཟང་པར་དར་སང་། །

The one sitting on the right
Is the lama who is the incarnate Buddha.
Through peaceful state of his mind
The dharma has spread widely.

གཡོན་གྱི་གཡོན་ལ་བཞུགས་པ། །དྲག་པའི་གཙོ་འཛིན་དཔོན་སློབ། །
ཐུགས་རེག་ཁོ་བའི་ངང་ནས། །ཕྱི་ཡི་དྲུ་རྣམས་བཀག་སོང་། །

The one sitting on the left
Is the Chief of Armed Forces.
Through the fierce state of his mind
The external enemies are vanquished.

དབུས་ལྷ་དབུས་ལ་བཞུགས་པ། །ཚོས་སྲིད་གཉིས་ཀྱི་མངའ་བདག །
ཐུགས་རེག་བྱམས་བརྗེའི་ངང་ནས། །འབངས་རྣམས་ཡར་རྒྱས་གནང་སོང་། །

The one sitting in the middle
Is the King, the religious and secular head.
Through the state of his affectionate mind
The subjects be led to prosperity.

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