

Lomba: The New Year of Paro and Haa Regions

The New Year (ཚེ་གསལ་རབ་) celebrated in Paro and Haa is commonly known as Lomba (ཚེ་འབག). It is one of the most special occasions in these two western districts. It is very hard to trace the history of this occasion as there are no definitive records. Some believe that this Lomba celebration began with human settlement when people started working for food. Some believe that Lomba began with the arrival of Phajo Drugom Zhikpo in the 13th century while some think it started even earlier. Despite the obscurity of its origins, Lomba is an important occasion and a tradition which has continued for many centuries in Paro and Haa.

Lomba usually falls in late autumn when all crops have been harvested and people get some free time before they begin the next season of work. It is on the 29th day of the 9th lunar month in the Bhutanese calendar and it is celebrated for at least five days. In Paro, Lomba celebration goes on until the 2nd day of the tenth month while in Haa it often goes on until the 15th day. Lomba indicates the passing of the old year and the coming of the new year. Lomba is a family time full of joy and displays of prosperity to welcome a new prosperous year. Lomba is also an opportunity for young people to have fun. On the evening of the 29th day of the lunar month, children used to go around the village shouting 'Lolay, Lolay' (ལོ་ལེ་གསལ་). Young boys go around the village homes carrying a long stick with basket hanging on one end. They sing Lolay Lolay until the owners come out and place a höntö (regional style of dumpling) in the basket. Lo ley is a rhyme, which is the wish for a good New Year.

For the people of Haa, höntö (ཚོན་ཏེ) is a special food and is an important part of the Lomba events. Because Haa is too high and too cold for rice to grow, buckwheat and wheat are staple foods. Höntö is a steamed momo-like dumpling made with a mixture of dry turnip leaves, amaranth seeds (*zimtsi*), and chili prepared in fermented cheese and wrapped in a dough made of buckwheat flour. Höntö were traditionally offered to the nobility as a gesture of respect and goodwill. In Paro the staple diet is usually rice and meat. Meat is an important part of Lomba diet, with a wide variety served such as beef, pork, chicken and sometimes yak meat, intestines are stuffed with rice and butter called jomju (ཚོམ་ལྗུ་).

During Lomba, residents perform a small ceremony at home to drive off the evil and bring health, happiness and prosperity in the New Year. In some communities, people make offerings to the deities. If offerings are not made properly, the local deities may get annoyed and cause harm. Therefore, there is great spiritual significance to the offering. Lomba is considered as common birthday for the Parops and Haaps. Every Paro and Haa resident considers himself or herself one year older after Lomba.

Today, Lomba celebration has changed a lot. As more people move from the villages and live in the towns where they are not likely to get a formal holiday for Lomba.

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