

Power and Compliance in Rural Bhutanese Society⁺

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I am very happy to have this opportunity to discuss some questions concerning social organization and the organization of agricultural labour in Bhutanese rural society. Bhutan is an independent country in the Eastern Himalayas, about the size of Switzerland, with an overwhelmingly Buddhist population of c. 600,000 persons. Having never been under any foreign administration, and despite recent modern developments, it has maintained a high degree of isolation through most of its history. It thus offers an opportunity to study a living case of a highly distinctive form of agrarian society.

The materials on which my presentation is based derive from anthropological fieldwork during 1989-95 by Unni Wikan and

⁺ Editor's Note: This paper was written for and presented at Yale University, Program on Agrarian Reform, on 16 April 1999. It was marked, "Preliminary Draft. Not for citation or publication!". We have yet decided to publish it because it is perhaps the first paper on the pre-1958 Bhutanese social structure, and that too by a renowned social scientist. Permission has been given by the author's widow and co-worker, Professor Unni Wikan, Oslo University, Norway.

^{*} One of the towering figures of twentieth-century anthropology, Fredrik Barth (1928-2016) was a Norwegian social anthropologist. He was a professor in the Department of Anthropology at Boston University, and had previously held professorships at the University of Oslo, the University of Bergen (where he founded the Department of Social Anthropology), Emory University and Harvard University. He, along with his wife Unni Wikan, were the first anthropologists to do fieldwork in Bhutan in the early 1990s, and this paper is one of the several unpublished works on Bhutan.

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myself, partly together and partly separately, during fieldwork totalling 12 months for each over the period 1988-1994, mainly as consultants and advisers to UNICEF for its programme in Bhutan. They have been checked against some recent published and unpublished literature by Bhutanese and foreign scholars.

Only little work of an anthropological or historical nature has been done so far on rural social organization and recent history that could give an authoritative picture of village life and institutions, so my discussion must be very preliminary and tentative. Unni Wikan and I have worked as anthropological consultants, mainly for UNICEF on matters of health, hygiene and sanitation, and mother and child welfare, and were asked to provide extensive base-line information on rural society and life to UN agencies and to national ministries. Happily, valuable work is now beginning to be done by Bhutanese scholars in the form of biographic, local histories and family traditions. Karma Ura has published the life history of a distinguished lama and political figure (*The hero with a thousand eyes: a historical novel*, Thimphu, 1995), and other materials. Most notable is the recently published rich and intimate account by Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck, the Queen of Bhutan, of the traditions of her own distinguished family (*Of rainbows and clouds: the life of yab Ugyen Dorji as told to his daughter*, London, 1999). While I base the following account on materials I have myself collected, I have sought to control their validity and representativeness against such sources.

Bhutan presents the image of a Shangri-La to foreign visitors, with well-mannered and beautifully exotic Buddhists living traditional lives in a stunningly beautiful countryside. Native dress is worn in public, and native architecture is carefully protected and promoted. The government pursues a restrained policy of economic development with international financial

support, emphasizing sustainable resource use and indigenous cultural traditions, and deliberate and enlightened social reform. The following account refers to some of the western and central areas of the country, inhabited by speakers of diverse Tibeto-Burman languages who occupy the middle and higher ranges of the country between c. 2,000 metres and 3,5000 metres altitude, and make up the major historical basis for Bhutanese identity.

A brief historical sketch should frame my account. Bhutan was united during the early 17th century by a Tibetan reincarnate lama who assumed the title of 'Zhabdrung' and based his theocratic state structure on the Drukpa Kagyu monastic order. The Zhabdrung continued to head the state through a series of reincarnations but delegated secular government to a Desi appointed from the monk body for the three-year terms of service. District administration, on the other hand, was placed in the hands of prebendal appointments, largely among the secular notables. In 1907, a notable of one of the elite families established a secular regime with himself as absolute king. Progressively, a modern government administration was built up by successive kings, since the 1950s located in the small capital city of Thimphu; but the country long retained the character of a diarchy of the king's court and the monk body.

The Bhutanese polity in the present century has thus been composed of the following politically powerful social categories:

(i) the king and the royal collaterals.

(ii) The monk body -- partly celibate monks, of the Drukpa Kagyu, living in large monasteries throughout the country, partly monks of the Nyingma order, many of whom are not celibate and found scattered through settlements in the

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eastern parts. Monasteries used to own large estates of land, now distributed among the cultivators. Monks are drawn from the population at large, having been given by parent to a monastery at a very young age.

(iii) Lamas (largely non-celibate) of various fame and rank, a few the reincarnate abbots of major temples and monasteries, others living as the heads of communities around temples or small estates.

(iv) Elite families, some formally the owners of large estates, and with histories of association with government.

(v) The mass of the population.

(vi) Since 1961, when the first five-year plan was started and secular schools were established. A modern educated national elite has also developed.

The striking feature of Bhutan until these recent modern changes, however, was that the whole society was based on an agricultural and essentially subsistence economy. Though it constituted a complex, literate, and highly sophisticated traditional Inner Asian civilization, its bases were entirely non-urban and agricultural, only very partially monetized, where all the main units supported themselves in part or entirely by their own agricultural activity. This was true from the King's court and each monastic institution to the most peripheral agro-pastoral households. Above the level of stem family peasant households, and even as an element of many of those households, agricultural work was done primarily by various categories of bonded labour. I shall try to present to you a first sketch of the organization of this agricultural system, and the forms of labour it organized.

Categories of Bonded Labour

Within the mass of the population, there was a range of traditional statuses of very unequal rank and circumstance. Their customary rights and obligations varied between different districts and different lords, but included the following:

Zapa

Slaves, born of *zapa* parents, supplemented till recently by persons abducted and sold by Tibetan traders, and before that also captured from neighbouring Indian areas. *Zapa* were tied to their master's house, sometimes residing in it, sometimes living in small huts around a manor. *Zapa* were fed and clothed by the master and used as labour in the fields, for herding animals, and as domestic servants. They were called every day in the morning for labour and could be required to work till dark; only when their labour was not needed might they, by special dispensation, be allowed in their off hours to engage in work for their own purposes. On large estates, there would be a *drungpa* (*drung pa*: foreman) appointed, usually among the *zapa*, to administer their daily labour.

Drapa (drva pa)

They were serfs, who provided agricultural labour in return for small plots of land. Such persons, and their offspring, were tied to the land and were used for field labour and other farming tasks. They had to feed themselves by cultivating the plots they had been allotted, at times that did not interfere with their duties on the estate. In addition, they might receive small gifts. A person could enter such a status by being given the use of a plot of land by a landowner; but *drapa* could not revoke their status or leave the land.

Garpa (sgar pa)/Garto (sgar lto)

Courtiers of prominent notables and at the court who were members of the notable's extended household and in charge of specialized functions of the manor such as guards, cooks, housemasters, overseers of stores, etc. Any person could join a notable as a *garpa*; at death the *garpa* had to be replaced by another member of the same family. In return the *garpa*'s family would gain security from its link to a prominent notable.

Srungmapa (srung ma pa)

Vassals or bounded peasants. Such persons were farmers who owed their tax (in labour, kind, and money) to royal collaterals and not to the king/government, making them thus subject to a variable number of arbitrary demands for personal services. This category appeared during the reign of the first king and was composed of families who voluntarily sought protection from royal collateral power centres in Central Bhutan, and once having entered into the relationship, they could not withdraw.

Thralpa (khral pa)

Tax payers, i.e., free farmers who owed their tax directly to the government. This is the only status that exists as a legal category in Bhutan today. The tax of such landowning cultivators is comprised of c. 2 months' labour service on call, a land tax that has varied over time, and various specialized other taxes that have been largely been lifted.

Besides the problems of local variation and a diversity of terminology (simplified to the point of elimination in the above), I am facing a more intractable problem in choosing my

ethnographic or historical moment for this enumeration of statuses. On the one hand, there is a recent history of changing forms, the most significant being the abolition in the late 1950s of all legal basis for the unfree statuses listed above – but not for their frequent voluntary extension into the time of fieldwork in the 1990s. Furthermore, there are the enduring memories and practices of inequality and stigma attaching to these statuses and descent from persons of these statuses, which allow me as an anthropologist to observe something of the institutions of former times. The traditional statuses thus remain (variably) relevant, and sometimes decisive, for social relations of dominance, resistance, and compliance in agricultural labour relations even today.

It is a consistent feature that the duties imposed on all these disadvantaged statuses had to do with labour services – not e.g., crop shares, monetary payments, or political support. This reflects the critical role of labour in Bhutanese agricultural production. In the marginal conditions imposed by high elevation, technological simplicity, and essential self-sufficiency, the output from agriculture is not very high. A major problem is to maintain the productivity of permanent fields. In the easternmost parts of Bhutan, shifting agriculture provided the main answer before the recent introduction of artificial fertilizer; in the culturally dominant areas of the centre and the west a particular combination of forest, livestock, and field management has been developed. Basically, nutrients captured by natural forest and grasses are harvested over large areas by people and by grazing domestic animals and brought into farmed area in the form of pine needles and straw as absorbent in barns and cowsheds, cattle feed, mulch, firewood, and manure. Without this very labour-intensive nutrient transfer from off-farm sources (and in the case of many fields, periods of fallow), soil fertility simply cannot be sustained. In addition, cattle provide draught power for

ploughing and transport, and excess herds increase the supply of butter, a form of value that functioned as a medium of exchange and constitutes a major form of offering/sacrifice at shrines and monasteries.

Units of Agricultural Production

Most peasant agricultural production took, and still takes, the form of subsistence farming on privately owned land, pursued by households based on matrilineal stem families. Usually the property passes undivided to one daughter; occasionally two sisters may divide the land and even the house and live in separate households within the same building. Only in cases where there is no daughter does the house and property pass to a son, producing male owners of houses in c. 20% of the houses in villages I have surveyed. Elite estates, on the other hand, are normally inherited by a son, or divided among the offspring of the owner.

The welfare of a peasant household is heavily dependent on its labour resources. Thus, the main farmer/manager in the matrilineal stem household will be the in-marrying husband; and periods of (modest) family prosperity characteristically come about when an energetic husband/father can direct and coordinate children and capable members of the senior generation as herders, forest product collectors, and seasonal labour. Grown and still unmarried sons, unmarried brothers or brothers-in-law, as well as unmarried wife's sisters, provide the labour surplus that can further enhance wealth. But where family development or illness reduces the labour force, the wealth of the household declines over a few years, and some fields may even go uncultivated. Alternatively, additional labour may be brought in as temporary extensions of the household in the form of more distant poor kin or transient

lower-status farm labourers from distant areas. The wealthiest farming households, however, each maintained their surplus through the permanent servitude of from one to a dozen *drapa* and/or *zapa*.

This, on a vastly expanded scale, provided the basis for the organization and wealth of (2) elite manors. Most spectacularly in the case of the royal households of the two first kings, such residences ran into several hundred persons, mainly *garpa* and *zapa*; in addition, there would be extensive settlements of *drapa* in the locations of the major landed properties, communities of yak-herding *zapa*, and nomadizing *zapa* in charge of large herds of cows and oxen. In the case of the prominent elite households, the corresponding numbers could run to 30-40 adult *zapa* and *drapa* around the manor, with one or a few camps of cattle-herding and yak-herding *zapa* – besides, in some historical periods, the more numerous but economically less integrated *srungmapa* “vassals”.

(3) Monasteries and major temples showed a different pattern. Here, of course, the dominant monk population of the institution would be larger, running into 900 in the case of the largest monastery in Punakha. I have no systematic evidence of what the size of the attached population of *zapa* may have been – and there are to my knowledge, no persons functioning in such a status in any monastery today – but their uses seem to have been both as servants within the monastery and as farm labourers. Beyond that, each monastery or temple was surrounded by a settlement of *drapa* serfs, many of them still in place. These *drapa* were the devotees and supporters of the leading teachers in the sacred institution: they would thus both be religious disciples, or lay monks of the Nyingma order, and they would serve as labour and performers to produce the large annual rites and ceremonies staged by such institutions. Being dedicated to religious institutions and performers of

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religious works, the general social status of these *drapa* was higher than that of the *drapa* of secular elites.

The wealth of monasteries and temples was sustained by other sources in addition to the agro-pastoral production they organized, mainly a flow of donation, gifts of land or wealth pledged at death, and payments (in kind and in other forms of wealth) for major ritual services. Now after land reform, monastic estates have been reduced to small fraction of their former size, and the government provides the major part of the institutions' running expenses over the national budget.

Conditions of Servitude

In addition to the hard labour, poverty, and lack of freedom suffered by *zapa* and *drapa*, they were also highly stigmatized by the rest of the population – so much so that the King, at the time of his abolition of the statuses, also made it a punishable offence to call anyone *zapa* or *drapa*. This, naturally, makes it difficult to collect accounts and traditions of their life and social position. But the following extracts from the recollections of older people give a sense of their situation.

In the first, an old woman *zapa* belonging to one of the most influential farmer household of a village is speaking:

Did you get the same food as other members of the house were eating?

Dasho (a title of esteem) and his children would be eating separately. For the rest of the family, we would get together and eat. So, it was the same food. Special food was prepared for Dasho and his children. All the other adults in the family eat the same food.

Were you treated like family members?

We were all treated like family members. We are all members of the Dasho's family. However, we cannot be equal to Dasho, his wife and children.

So, you were not treated equally?

That cannot be. Dasho and his children are fortunate and endowed with merit. We cannot be treated equally. If we claim so, it shows lack of loyalty and sincerity and lack of faith in the law of cause and effect. They are superior and we are inferior. It is our karma that made us. We cannot claim more than what heaven has given us.

Some comments may be useful to explain these remarks. Firstly, the concept of "family" that the informant uses does not carry the sense of being of one blood, but is one of "being of one happiness-and-suffering", i.e. an intimate sense of joint living. "The law of cause and effect" and "karma" are two expressions for the same concept: that a person's life circumstances are the effect of actions in previous lives that have produced a legacy of merit and de-merit accumulated from those earlier incarnations.

Pursuing these Buddhist philosophical premises as I have heard them expressed in daily discourse in Bhutan leads to the following exegesis. Within the framework of a concept of karma, all the hardships of a *zapa's* life will have an embracing cosmological legitimacy: The circumstances of every person's life are deserved, and whatever oppression one suffers is the punishment for wrong acts committed in previous lives – i.e. the *zapa's* sufferings are the fruits of her own previous actions. The fact of having been born as a human being, and not as one of the multitude other life forms of sentient beings, is already an enormous boon: As a human being you can seek

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enlightenment and make moral choices, and thereby improve your karma and the conditions of your future lives, whereas all lower life forms are simply serving out the appropriate punishments for their previous actions, with no opportunity to change their karma by accumulating merit. Human life is likewise, in its essence, suffering; but it comes with the option of pursuing the goal of detachment and seeking enlightenment and accumulating merit. The moral prescription for the *zapa* person in this situation seems to be one of simple compliance, combined with a continuous struggle to act in a manner that gives merit. A *zapa* is, however, somewhat poorly positioned for such purposes, as he or she will be forced to perform tasks that reduce the person's merit, such as ploughing and beating/harrowing the clods turned up by the plough, and thereby killing sentient beings living in the ground. But such acts by a *zapa* can again be seen as aspects of the person's karma and thus may not truly reflect the person's own choices – whereas the adoption of an attitude of compassion towards all these sentient beings (including evil spirits and demons and, of course, oppressive masters) represents enlightenment and will thus enhance the person's merit.

The following are fragments of a second account, collected in the field from an elderly man reminiscing about his time as helper to his father, who was one of the officials in charge of the stores at the court of the second King. The complexity of the palace household as a unit of production and consumption is indicated by the number of officers:

The *zapa* would do manual work like herding the bulls, ploughing the fields, cutting grass, gardening etc., over them, there was a man appointed as the overseers of the *zapa*, who was capable enough to supervise them in these works. The *drapa* would also have an overseer and they would do field work like harvesting, digging and smashing the clods. The *drapa* were given small areas

of land as their *tozhing*, (lit.: food-field), and the loan of a bull to plough that field. When there is important work to do in the house of the lord, they must also do that. At other times, they worked on their own field and did not need to work for the lord. The lords, on their part, had to give the *drapa* nothing except small gifts and presents occasionally. The *zapa* must be given food and clothes by the lord; as for work, the *zapa* had no right to work for themselves without the permission of the overseer. When the overseer whistles, the *zapa* must come to work...

The *garpa* were those people from other regions who joined the court of the king at their will simply because they needed a family for support. There were also *garpa* who were forced to replace their father or uncle who was a *garpa* before: men who had to carry the hereditary duty involuntarily...

During the rule of the First King the direct subjects of the king were known as *thralpa* while many people in the eastern and central regions were known as *srungmapa* who paid their tax and did their labour for the lords at Wangdicholing and Lam Pelri. To oversee the labour and collection of taxes from these *srungmapa*, an overseer was appointed. In the eastern part, most of the people were *srungmapa*. They had to do all the labour necessary to their lords: taking the cattle to the warmer regions in the winter, and in the summer irrigate the fields, harvest, pound, and transport rice to Wangdicholing. The *drapa* had to do the transplanting of paddy and guarding of the fields from wild animals... The *srungmapa* initially submitted themselves voluntarily. This happened because a lot of them faced harassment and ill treatment from other powerful families. In the olden days, they did not have a social order like we have today, and thus the powerful ones would lawlessly harass others. So they had to find strong support for social security. People became *garpa* for the same reason. In many cases, the families suffered from many enemies if they did not have a *garpa* working for a prominent family of lords.

Both *srungmapa* and *drapa* would come and work under the supervision of a *nyerpa* (treasurer) at the time of harvest. With the treasurer was also another *garpa* called *jajabpa* (bya' rgyab pa:

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the paddy authority). Before bringing the harvest to the stores, the treasurer would report to the lord how much paddy the field had yielded and how much is available after covering the necessary expenses in grain. Then, he and the *jajabpa* would summon the *srungmapa* and *drapa* and entrust them each with a certain amount of paddy to be transported. The paddy was strictly measured and the exact amount would have to be submitted to the treasurer.

Among the courtiers, there were some who stayed in the palace serving the lord and some who went out for official tasks. Those who stayed were people like cooks, attendants, horse-masters etc. The horse-master would have servants from *zapa* and *drapa* to lead the horses and mules. The *garpa* who preferred to go out to work were usually assigned to oversee the cultivation of wheat and barley. A senior officer, a chamberlain, also supervised them. These *garpa* would only have to work as supervisors from the beginning of cultivation until harvest of wheat and barley, which would normally last around three months.

Those who served in the palace were called *jarok* (ʼjar rogs) or *chayok* (phyag g.yog: servant, helper). Some were private and inner attendants, and some worked in the general mess, etc. One was in charge of storing the flour, called flour-treasurer; another was in charge of grinding flour in the mills, called mill-treasurer. There was one called wine-treasurer, who would take care of wine and alcohol. The female *drapa* were assigned the work of making wine and spirits. As for weaving, the *drapa*, and people from neighbouring places, would come to weave. There would also be a responsible person to act as their supervisor. Then there were persons to gossip and entertain the lords, called *kadrolpa* (bka' grol pa).

As for herding the bulls, the *zapa* would do it in turn. When it was time to plough, the *zapa* overseer would come to the field and the *zapa* men must reach the field with the yokes and ploughs... The overseer would know how many bulls were needed, for how long, for each field. There were grazing pastures for the working bulls, called *langbrok*, some to be used during the time of wheat

cultivation and some during the time of barley. When the *zapa* herding the bulls bring those bulls to the field, the men whose job it was to plough must yoke the oxen they were assigned. The women *zapa* would do such things as fetching water, collecting firewood, weeding etc. After the ploughing, both *zapa* and *drapa* must come to smash the clods and bring and spread manure... There were no such things as weekends. They would get one or two days off when there was not much work to do, but usually they would have to work continuously. For special occasions like holy days or festivals, the overseer would let them go to such events. So the work for *zapa* and *drapa* was almost the same. It is only the difference in their names, and their rights. The *zapa* got clothes and food and *drapa* got only presents bestowed by their lord, use of a plot of land. This is the way work was done in Wangdicholing that I can remember. This is it”.

Finally, an account I have obtained from a member of a hereditary lama family in the east-central part of the country, describing the way their formerly bonded labour was organized:

The former *zapa* of our community are descended from two girls offered as maids to the first lama who settled here, eight generations ago. *Drapa* are different. *Drapa* began like this. As the lama became more known, many people from far and near came to get religious teachings. They heard that lama was good and thus came to be his student and gradually settled here. As they stayed on, some got married to local girls. They would then construct a small house for themselves. Whenever there is important work going on with the lama, they would volunteer to help the lama doing that work. So there grew up a community of *drapa* around the temple...

The rights of the lama are such that, if there is lama's work today, then all the *drapa* can be summoned to come and help in the work. If a large field is to be dug or a forest cleared for cultivation, then all the *drapa* must come and help the lama in his work. If there is a ceremony going on in the temple, the lama calls all of them to come and to do the preparation. Some would come to pound rice, some grind wheat and such, some collect firewood,

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some prepare wine and spirits, some pound beaten rice and corn, etc.; When the ceremony begins, those who know the rituals would participate in it while those who don't would serve as cooks and helpers in serving food. These were the duties of our *drapa*. Since *drapa* come from places far away, they do not possess land in the region. So the lama provides them with a small piece of land. The land could be as much as what could be ploughed in a day by an ox. The lama would instruct them to build their house on the plot and cultivate it. When the lama had to pay land tax, they would also help the lama by contributing. This is called *thralrup* (khral rub): it is like a donation.

The tradition of the earlier lords was that they would send *kedum* which are sacks of cotton. For instance, there would be one sent from the house of Wangdicholing and Lampelri. *Garpa* (courtier) would send to distribute the sacks of cotton among the *srungmapa* families here. The bags of cotton would be distributed among his special subjects. The distributed share of cotton is called *tadthag* (stod thag), "entrusted weaving" as the cotton was entrusted as material to be woven into a certain size of cloth... Sometimes, the amount of cotton distributed would be far less, often due to corruption of *garpa*, than that was needed for the size of cloth ordered. People must add cotton to it and weave the right size of cloth. In the case of the lama, he would divide his royal assignment among his capable *drapa*. So the cloth from *drapa* doing the weaving for the lama would be measured and then packed in order to be sent to Wangdicholing and Lampelri... To make up the amount, cotton had to be cultivated, or one would be in trouble when the *tadthag* came. Later, when cotton could be imported from India, people often bought the Indian cotton and added to the trod-thang cotton....

The *zapa* would work for the lama. As for the sons of the *zapa*, if there were two sons, one must always work for the lama. If there is only one, and the parents are old and wretched, they need not do anything. But they may come to help during ceremonies and when there is much work, out of commitment and sympathy... If a family of *zapa* had one son and one daughter, the son would work for 15 days and the daughter for 15 days. It is easier for girls

to work: if they know how to weave they do that and if not, they help in punning and dyeing. The men must plough the fields with the bulls. If they collect firewood, or dig fields in groups, one man from the temple would accompany them to supervise the work. On such days, they would also be fed special food and drink. I did the supervising many times. There were 36 *zapa* at the time tied to the temple...

Every year, clothes were given. It was called *logo*, annual garment. We would give new clothes if we had, or else old ones that we had worn ourselves.

Extracting Compliance

In such a pattern of organization of agricultural labour, the problem of discipline and compliance is critical. The contrast to share-cropping contracts is instructive. The sharecropper is ipso facto serving his own interests by working hard and effectively, and the extraction of the owner's share takes place at the moment of harvest only. Bonded labour, on the other hand, has no interest in the product, and must be directed and supervised as every unit of labour is extracted. Supplementary sanctions may take the form of bonuses and fines. It could also take the form of force and of giving them into slavery under a more prominent lord. In Bhutan in the case of *srungmapa*, who composed households of cultivators, fines were used, as they were against delinquents in the population at large.

Sometimes, a *garpa* (courtier) would be sent to their home to collect fines.... There was no fixed norm for the fines and so they would vary from person to person and the types of offences. The *garpa* known as *chadpa'i garpa* (*chad pa'i sgar pa*), "gar-pa-for-fines" would come and squat on a mat before the oven and demand an incredible amount of fine (as well as hospitality). They would obstinately stick to the mat and refuse to move unless their wishes were satisfied.... Sometimes the family did not have enough money, grains or clothes to pay and the *garpa* would

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therefore stay on, demanding, for months continuously.
(Informant III)

Several such incidents are vividly described by Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck (1999).

The small gifts that are reported to have been given during the year can be seen as a form of encouragement to *zapa* and *drapa* to do their work well. The informant II, reporting on a large estate, notes how ... “the quality and amounts of annual clothes and gifts would depend upon the records submitted by the supervisor about how well they served the lords.” But with the level of poverty that characterized the lives of *zapa* and *drapa*, the threat to seize property as punishment for non-compliance would have little force, and withholding beyond the bare minimum of clothing and meals to extract labour would be self-defeating. Unless the labourer in such a relationship decides by his own volition to work up to the level of conventional standard, it seems to me that the only available sanction is physical punishment.

This was also the ultimate sanction to secure the permanence of the owner’s rights to the bondsman’s labour.

Could they flee and escape somehow?

They could not. Let alone escaping, even if they said that they wished to leave, they would be reprimanded very severely. If they escaped, the lord sent men to chase and arrest them. They were punished very harshly and sometimes a mark would be drawn on their faces so that they cannot escape again... So, there were not many who would revolt and those who did were severely punished... The lords of former days were cruel. People are very fortunate nowadays... That is all about the lords and their activities. They could live only by making cows, horses, *zapa*, *drapa* and their *srungmapas* work. (Informant III).

When the King in the late 1950s ensured legal freedom to everyone, and land allotments to the landless, there was large-scale exodus of former *drapa* and *zapa* from the communities in which they had been bonded. Yet I have also found that some former *zapa* and *drapa* have chosen to remain with their former masters and continued the same relations of labour as before - so there is direct evidence, both of discontent and acceptance. Comparative materials on compliance and resistance in similar bonded relations would be very useful for reconstructing the salient features influencing this system of labour. I would very much appreciate a discussion that clarifies for me important factors to look for in these materials.