Traditional Values in Modern Bhutan

Creative Non-Fiction Writing

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Introduction

Bhutan is a country where the modern world and tradition exist simultaneously and not always harmoniously. As the country evolves, it is important to articulate what traditions should be preserved and venerated. And it is also important to articulate what elements of the modern world should be adopted and celebrated.

Bhutan is also a culture that is expanding from an oral tradition to one that focuses on the written word as well. And Bhutan is a country where story is paramount. This is true of all countries and cultures, to be sure but here, at least to this outsider, the role of stories seems particularly essential; it is the way that families, villages and *dzongkhags*, not to mention the country itself, passes along shared values. It is also the way that change is made known and made understandable.

The 22 stories in this booklet represent the work of 14 writers who gathered in Thimphu in July 2011 to participate in a Creative Non- Fiction Writing Workshop, sponsored by the Bhutan Centre for Media and Democracy. It is the third such workshop sponsored by the Centre, and the first to focus on a specific theme. I have been honoured to be the leader for each workshop.

The writers who participated came from a wide range of backgrounds: students, teachers, tour operators, administrators, researchers, photographers. They came for a variety of reasons, but the thread that bound them together was a desire to tell true stories that are important.

Thus the stories contained in this volume depict Bhutan in many guises. There are stories about long traditions, such as night hunting and *thrue bub*, and there are stories that could not be more up to the minute, like the prevalence of youth gangs and the influence of Korea on fashion and music.

These stories hew to the principles of creative non-fiction, which is that they are true and accurate to the best of the writers' skills and ability. Sometimes the writers have obscured or hidden the identities of the people they are writing about, to prevent unnecessary embarrassment or shame. But you will not find fictional characters or made-up events in these stories.

Each one is grounded in something specific and tangible: a specific ritual, place, person or story, for example, or a way in which a particular element of modernization has affected traditional culture.

The writers, the Bhutan Centre for Media and Democracy, and I all hope that you will find these stories instructive, entertaining, and memorable. Enjoy.

James Bettinger

STORIES ON TRADITION

The Fourth Druk Gyalpo, A 21st Century King

Chogyal Tenzin

In my collection of *TIME* magazines are three of its special annual issues. One of them, TIME 100 of May 8, 2006, is my prized possession. It has profiles on world's 100 influential leaders, scientists, thinkers, and pioneers for 2006. Amongst the 20 leaders and revolutionaries featured in that special issue is our very own His Majesty King Jigme Singye Wangchuck, the fourth king.

In his write-up on our beloved king, Pico Iyer writes, "he rules his people more in the spirit of Buddha than of more worldly princes'. Indeed King Jigme Singye Wangchuck has a Buddha's heart. This is evident in the numerous reforms and kidu (welfare) programmes that he initiated during his 34 years as the king. He travelled extensively throughout the country to get a firsthand feel of how his people lived and know for himself the status of the people's welfare. In another publication, the April 19, 1994 issue of *The Times*, Christopher Thomas describes "King Jigme Singye Wangchuck of Bhutan…as not your average monarch."

The world history is awash with examples of kings and rulers who held on to power even at the cost of lives that they were supposed to safeguard and defend. But our fourth king amazed champions of democracy by sowing its seeds when he introduced decentralisation at the grass root, dzongkhag and gewog levels. He stunned advocates of democracy in 2006 by thrusting democracy into the hands of the people long before Bhutanese even dreamt of asking for it. In most countries, the "rule of the people by the people and for the people" rose out of bloodshed and loss of precious lives. Such unprecedented act on the part of our king is bound to hurt the conscience of the power-hungry despots and make them blush with guilt.

I still remember being part of a big audience consisting of people from the seven gewogs (administrative divisions) of Thimphu dzongkhag, and teachers and students of schools under the dzongkhag on 3rd October 2005. We were assembled at Lungtenphu RBA ground listening to our King brief on the draft constitution and seek feedback on it. That was the first of the several public consultation meetings he chaired on the draft constitution across the country.

Article 2, clause number 6 in particular left people shell-shocked and emotionally-charged and prompted several senior citizens and others in the crowd to earnestly plead the king to reconsider and remove it from the draft constitution. The clause mandated the king to step down "and hand over the throne to the crown prince or crown princess" when he turns 65 years of age. Despite the strong petition by the people across the country, not just in Thimphu but in all other public briefings in other dzongkhags (provinces), he insisted that the clause should stay. He explained to the people that in the interest of the people and the country he had put the clause in the constitution. Reasoning that the clause would serve as a tool to dethrone any evil king in future and warning the people that there was no guarantee that people of Bhutan will always be blessed with good kings who would serve the people faithfully and put the interest of the people first.

In 2006, he sent shockwaves across the country as people watched the news in sheer disbelief when he transferred the reins of the country to the crown prince and announced that Bhutan would have the first general elections in 2008. He was only 51 that time, 14 years before he turned 65 years of age!

In his profile in *TIME* magazine's special issue, Iyer said "King Jigme who gave up absolute power in 1998 and last year sent every household in the land a new draft constitution that allowed for his impeachment is setting a quietly revolutionary precedent. If most politicians are inherently suspect because they seem so eager to grab power and so reluctant to surrender it, what does one make of a leader who voluntarily gives up his position, as if placing his people's needs before his own?"

He was the first leader in the world to conceive the idea that a key criterion to measure the progress of a country with the tool of 'gross national happiness' or GNH. Since then, that revolutionary idea has been guiding Bhutan's developmental goals. Now more countries have borrowed this idea and are wooing this philosophy to implement it in their homelands to ensure that happiness of their citizens are safeguarded as nations race to material progress and sideline general wellbeing of the people. This is fast becoming a pet theme for academicians and researchers worldwide and has spawned numerous books and research articles.

At the initiative of our country and with support from countries charmed

by this philosophy, the UN General Assembly recently adopted a resolution in July 2011 that ushered the "pursuit of happiness" as one of UN's millennium developmental goals. This has propelled our country to the international stage as this philosophy was born here. And the credit goes to our fourth king.

His Majesty is definitely the only true son of Palden Dukpa. Nobody upholds the Bhutanese values like him. I have attended two plan review meetings in the late 1980s chaired by him and several of his addresses to the school students. And in all those speeches, he never used a word in English.

He is the perfect role model in the use of the national dress. Whether walking in the scorching sun in villages or playing basketball or horse riding while engaged in adventurous horse-racing in his younger days, he was always seen in the national dress. I have seen him right from the early 1970s when he was a crown prince to the present day. I have never seen him in any western-style casuals.

Every time a disaster strikes, he is there to comfort the victims organising relief efforts. During the major floods or earthquakes or fires, he has always proved to be the people's king by always being at the scene immediately to comfort victims and rebuild their lives. And for most victims of disasters and calamities, there is no better comfort at such hours of difficulty than having the fatherly beloved king by their side. His presence at such hour of need has provided affected people with the much needed resilience and courage.

A tribute to His Majesty by one Ugyen sums up my devotion to this 21st century monarch:
The Majesty... emanates from having won the hearts and minds of the people who he served rather than ruled. It emanates from his unquestioned faith in the ability of the Bhutanese people to control their own destiny. It emanates from having gained the respect of even peoples living far beyond our kingdom. It emanates from upholding
the highest of virtues that befit a royal King.

I had the fortune to meet our beloved king face to face a few times. First when I was head of Pemagatshel Junior High School when he had come to chair the review meeting of the plan activities. He visited the school to

present the school with cash award and library books in recognition for being nominated as the Best Junior High School in the country. His words of wisdom as he addressed the teachers and the students still inspires me. I remember giving His Majesty a tour of the school campus in the heat of the sun in the afternoon. He visited the school when I was head of the then Nganglam Junior High School. Each time I met him, I was overwhelmed with an excitement comparable to having won a big trophy. Meeting and listening to him has always been a big inspiration to me. I have this eagerness and longing to meet him. But unfortunately, ever since he stepped down, he is rarely seen in public life. Even now I notice that the only time he appears in public is when he goes to comfort people in times of need. Though he left the throne at his own will, his love for the people is evident.

Like somebody said, trying to write a biography of His Majesty King Jigme Singye Wangchuck would be such a daunting task. He has done so much for the country and the people that capturing all he achieved will not be easy. But definitely somebody should write his biography soon so that for generations to come, the people of Bhutan will know that such a fatherly godly king did bless Bhutan ,a king with a difference, a king with the Budha's heart. In a blog, Tshering G2 captures in essence my thoughts on his achievement as the fourth king:

The glorious reign of His Majesty has created unwavering peace and happiness in the kingdom. Under his leadership the country has achieved many progresses in various areas, strengthened national security, established close links with other countries, and started various institutions, all leading to the welfare and well being of the citizens of Bhutan.

Aunty Wangmo

Chholay Dorji

Aunty Wangmo was always a strong, stout woman. At 46, she is a slightly weather-beaten woman. With her three children scattered across the globe, pursuing professional careers and a college degree, aunty Wangmo has been looking after the family farm. Amongst seven of my father's siblings, she is the third oldest and takes care of the family farm in the village of Gyemkha, situated on the outskirts of Punakha district. With her two strong sons and capable daughter gone, Aunty has had to split the household chores and farm work with her husband, uncle Getshe. Despite this, she knows the importance of an education in this day and age and has toiled year after year in the absence of her children. One might consider it conventional wisdom to say that modernisation is good, but it is important to recognise that many people are affected negatively with such process of change.

Aunty's oldest son, Kinley Tshering is a forest ranger currently stationed in Thimphu. Second to him is Ugyen Demma, training in hospitality in Toronto, Canada. The youngest,Thinley Dorji, is pursuing diploma studies in a college in Delhi, India.

It hasn't been easy for aunty Wangmo. The youngest of her children, Thinley, comes home during summer, just in time to help with transplanting of rice. Kinley Tshering however, cannot come home for extended periods of time. Married recently, he has responsibilities of both a husband and an office worker. It is not likely that any of the three children will go home any time in the near future, and as a close relative this saddens me. However, I understand that this is not an uncommon occurrence in modern Bhutan.

Traditionally known as the urban drift, the technical term is rural- urban migration. This has been an increasing trend in recent years. The drastic influx of people to Thimphu is visible in the towns changing infrastructure. Having studied abroad for several years, it surprises me each time I come back to see how Thimphu has grown. As a result, many families in rural areas face the problem of rural-urban migration. In addition to many

young children that leave to go to boarding schools, I have heard of young men leaving their homes in eastern Bhutan to become truck drivers, a job considered prestigious to some because of the opportunities it presents to travel and meet people. But many of their families are left at home, shorthanded. Similarly, many young girls from southern Bhutan move to Thimphu to work as housemaids.

My cousin Ugyen has been in Canada for five years. It has been a tough time for her, being away from her family for so long. She has had to fend for herself by working many different jobs while going to college. I would think it hard to be away from one's family for so long, especially since it is hard enough for me while I was away in college. It makes me feel very fortunate that I can go away from home with the security of knowing that I will be coming back soon. In addition to the obvious problems that rural-urban migration pose such as pollution and limited employment opportunities in urban areas, there are other problems caused by migration. Villages are depleted and there is an increasing number of youth in urban areas who have an abundance of energy and nothing to do.
When I was in school in Thimphu, I would walk uphill for an hour to visit the village. My brother and I would spend a week there with our cousins, helping stack hay on the fields and taking the cows into the mountain early in the mornings. After dinner, we would play with a grotty deck of cards under the dim light of an oil lamp. It was always fun for us to visit the village. Recently, when visiting the village again with my family, things have changed. Now a dirt road leads all the way to our house in the village. This time none of my cousins were home. Replacing them is a television set, a radio, and a huge fridge and electric bulbs hung from the ceiling in all the rooms. My aunt and uncle's lives were definitely made more comfortable by all the appliances but this did not necessarily make their lives any easier.

Stuck on their flaking walls were pictures of my cousins, whom Aunty and Uncle are not sure when they'll meet up with again. Modernisation has brought them luxury goods. But their children had to leave home.

Prayer Flags in Bhutan

Dawa Dakpa

Prayer flags in Bhutan are raised for happiness, bliss, long life, prosperity, good luck and merit. Moreover, they are raised to offer karmic merit to all sentient beings of the world.

Nobody knows when the hoisting of prayer flags came into existence. But erecting prayer flags in Bhutan still remains an important ritual to this day. It has occurred before we recorded history.
Offering prayer flags is believed to guide the soul of the dead away from the netherworld and prevent it from being reborn in the three lower realms: animals, pret and life in hell (Ngyen Song Sum) of the six life cycles: God (lha), demi God (Lha Min), humans, animals, pret and life in hell.
Prayer flags are hoisted outside homes, hung on bridges, hilltops and sacred places of spiritual importance. This is for a very special reason. By doing so, it gives the wind the opportunity to move the flags and activate the blessings.

The wind is considered as an expression of mind and mental energy, which activates the flags. It is also believed that when the shadow of the flags falls on streams and rivers, it carries the blessings to larger water bodies like seas and oceans, benefiting the marine fauna.

The most common prayer flags in Bhutan are lungdhar, lhadhar and mani, which are engraved with auspicious signs and symbols of Ngas (mantra), prayers, prints of buddhist guardian deities and enlightened beings. Lungdhars are raised to drive away misfortune and more recently, while venturing a new business. Lhadhar is similar to Lungdhar, but only taller and larger in size. Traditionally, the Gyeltshen (victory sign) is capped at top. In the past, it was raised by our ancestors and rich families to bring success in their undertakings and to dispel misfortune and obstacles in life.

Prayer flags have five different colours, each with significance. One should know the colours, before planning to hoist the flags. White signifies driving away obstacles, yellow to earn merit, red to crack down on enemies, green to chase away envy and jealousy and blue to get success in business.

The tradition of stringing prayer flags in Bhutan still remains to this day a community affair. However, the process is abridged without people having to print the flags manually at home or by the local printers.

Today, machine printed flags have dominated the market and all that a family needs to do is buy it, get it blessed by high Lamas and set out for stringing up in sacred places. However, it is said that homemade flags are better because of the skill and the time involved in, whereas in machine printed flags, some texts go missing.

Hoisting prayer flags benefits in four different ways, through sight (Thongdrel), sound of the fluttering flags (Thoedrel), thought (Dendrel) and touch (Regdrel).

Folk Traditions: Sometimes we must let them die

Dendup Chophel

I initially imagined this as a one-line preface to a paper I have written on the folklores of Bhutan. Then reflections struck me that could make this piece an essay by itself. This is about some elements in our society that we conveniently cling to as parts of our tradition, but are actually excuses for our debased ways. As it is, not all that are old are gold.

Evolution dictated we lived our lives by certain principles and standards. Over time, these became a way of life for us. They became an all-encompassing preoccupation we had to live with. Some of these have become so old, it became tradition and we can now no longer think of our lives without them. There is a traditional way of doing anything and everything related to our lives.

Tradition has been the corner stone around which our lives revolves. They have served us in times of hardship and in troubled times when we might have otherwise broken down. Traditions have made us considerate of the wisdoms of our parents just as much as they have made us value the goodness of our own soul. Traditions have made us value our environment for they were the stuffs that alone made life possible during the early days of human evolution. Traditions have taught us to be gentlemen and treat our women folk with care for in the wilderness of the yore, the strength of even the strongest man was often too insignificant. Traditions have given us a common faith and a common direction to forge for ourselves a common future.

Yet, sometimes, we must let go of our traditions. Some of them have outlived their purpose, some have become redundant, others no longer serve the purpose they were meant to, while others are plain rust on our souls. They not only add to the already excess burden of cultural baggage that we carry even as we as we struggle through a new leg of evolution, but worst, they blind us from reaching out to the newer possibilities that human ingenuity affords us.

New times dictate new solutions or at least adaptations of the older ones.

It is neither prudent nor desirable to hold onto things simply because they are ancient. There are many practices, beliefs, customs and superstitions that go by the name of tradition in our society today.

When women are made subservient to their men and deprived of privileges taken for granted by men, when they are both made pawns in the fiefdoms of the affluent few, when children are fed alcohol for traditional nutrition, when national sport is drunk deadly, when bad hygiene is tolerated as old habits, when bribes go by as traditional gifts and when social miscreants go as upholder of these traditions, it is time to see how long we can live with these ghosts from our past before we bury them for good.

These traits in our traditions stick out like a sore thumb and their flaws are obvious for all those willing to see. However, there are emerging trends which are more subtle and need careful introspection before pondering their demise.

Every element in a society has relevance. They serve a purpose that furthers a society's cause. In the days of the yore when everything came by just a little harder and scientific knowledge as we now know was still in its bud, people's faith in divinity alone kept them alive. Practices and rituals emerged to propitiate the divine thus amplifying their faith. And when all you have is your faith and a strong deference to it, things worked out or so the people liked to believe. Some of these were animalistic while others derived from Buddhism. Either way, time has now provided us with newer possibilities to life and has rendered these expressions of faith unrealistic at best and redundant at worst. We have now technological answers to most of our questions.

Everything has a shelf life and for the part that advancement in knowledge has enlightened us on our life dilemmas, tradition has past its sell-by-date. Together with these solutions, our attention and pre-occupation must increasingly be diverted towards furthering our knowledge.

Things we now know were just make-belief must give way to scientific study to increase our chances of survival when a moment of complacency or a wrong step could push us to the brink.

We have come to a stage when we as individuals and as a nation face multiple issues of evolution, some of which concern our very survival,

on both counts. In such a scenario, we must make rational choices that must of course take into account our sentiments that have thus far been revered, choices which must shun elements from the past that we can no longer afford to carry into the future, never mind those which are crude or plain malignant.

We are already becoming aware of our ancient traditions and rituals which far from serving their original purpose of faith has become spectacles put up for the viewing pleasure of people who cannot care less for their intrinsic value, put up by people whose sole motive has become money. It is simply demeaning to our past heritage which was no doubt great in its time. These things happen because it is no longer possible for us to value them as we had in the past for the other pre-occupations that have naturally come up. If only we could understand that anything is better than such cheap commercialisation! Our past deserve better than that. We must come to terms with the fact that some parts of our past have been irrecoverably lost while others are going down the same dreary path, and acknowledge as much.

We cannot possibly hope to maintain our rituals, practices and heritage in their original form with the same good faith without running the risk of being overwhelmed by commitments we cannot reasonably oblige. But we can always let them die and 'rest in peace' as we do with our ancestors. We can preserve their remnants as antiquated exhibits with befitting epithets in the museums for the benefit of anyone who might be interested. We would be fooling ourselves if we think that what we put up for tourists in their five star venues is tradition. Needless to say, it is a mockery of ourselves and an otherwise proud part of us.

At this point, distinctions must be made between faith which for us is our Buddhist leanings and traditions which are propped up conveniently as faith by people who stood to benefit from it. There are very few things in Buddhism that cannot stand up to scrutiny, but very few of our folk traditions will actually measure up to the rigorous modern standards. I am not for a moment suggesting here that we should get rid of, en masse, our proud tradition which has nourished our soul and continue to be our guiding star even today. However, we must believe that with the advantage of hindsight and wisdoms that we have landed over so many centuries, we can now find better ways of accommodating traditions that are still relevant to us and preserve the rest as part of a tradition that was once us.

I am fully cognisant of the fact that I have been ill-informed at times which resulted in undue generalisation and confused readings. However, my effort has been to provoke a thought and if you have come till here without skipping too many lines, I would think it's quite a success.

Things Fry

Dechen Yangzom

"Atsa oi, so hot," was the first thing I said while eating ema datsi, my first Bhutanese meal after a few years. "Atsa oi, so hot," is a phrase I continue to use to this day. I never realised the impact of chillies on Bhutanese palate before I left Bhutan at the age of 11.

French fries from McDonald's became my favourite the moment I arrived in New York. With fast food available in every nook and corner of the city, I was surprised to see the weight of people depending on hamburgers and pizzas for their daily sustenance. "Very unhealthy," I thought, especially since I was accustomed to organically grown food and home cooked meals in Bhutan. Drinking coke like water and taking desserts as a snack would have been a privilege in Bhutan and it fascinated me that in America, this was just like fish drinking water. The abundance of food thrilled me, "Who eats this much?" I thought to myself.

I was eleven when I left for America. Nothing particularly struck me as so fascinating in America before I left, except I expected a better quality of things like the ones I saw in Hollywood films. However, never did I expect the magnitude of the size of things in America , especially that of food. For all I could remember, ordering a small drink of coke in a Thai McDonalds, while I was transit in Bangkok, was as twice as small as the first small drink of coke I had in New York. I reasoned, it was no wonder people were twice as big too. "Why does everything need to be big?" I solicited.

Hamburgers, pizza, ravioli, spaghetti and meatballs, pasta and French fries were a regular meal at both my middle and high schools. "Did I ever get tired of them?" Of course I did, however, with my stomach growling like a hungry dog, I couldn't help but eat what was given to me. Beggars just couldn't be choosers at the time, especially when you are a young student. Although I did not particularly like the meals, there was not a single piece of French fry left on my plate, I always had the oomph to eat all of it up. Though most of the meals in school were Italian, inspired by tomato and with it's sauce emphasised to a great extent, soon enough, I got tired of everything and started munching on food from Chinese restaurants.

Everyday I would take around 50 cents to school so I could buy some Chinese fried rice, which was around 50 cents on discount for students. Though monosodium glutamate was a regular feature in the Chinese dishes, it made the food delicious and it made me thirsty. Everyday, I would try out different Chinese dishes and learned that it was a food I could eat now since my tolerance to chilies was lessening at a rapid rate. I figured it was just like Bhutanese food, with rice as one of the main components, but sweeter and not as hot. Plus, there was something special in Chinese food that made me feel like at home in New York. Though my Chinese friend would always tell me, "this isn't real Chinese food," I considered everything to be relative and that there really wasn't something that was real or fake. Simply put, things were just labelled so we could find it. However, I now think that labelling things actually leads one to more confusion and stubbornness, than clarity.

Reading Henry David Thoreau's, 'Walden,' and in emulating his experimental living, I started a vegetarian diet cutting off all meat products as well as eggs just to live a cruelty free lifestyle which I had much control over. It never was very difficult to live as a vegetarian in New York. With the abundance of food all over the city, and with some catering specifically to vegetarians like tofu and vegetarian burgers, sausages, and other vegetarian products based on soy, it was easy to get my daily supply of protein without worry.

Even in college, I had a rice cooker in my room, where I used to cook both my rice and vegetable curries in. I would always use tofu in making my blend of vegetable curries as healthy as possible. One thing about living in New York was exposure to different foods from around the world. Likewise, I would always buy some Korean seaweed which I would take with my meals and would taste like sushi, except without the meat inside. Though my college had all the aforementioned junk food from high school, there was also a healthy section where I got my dose of vegetables and protein. My exposure to Greek food also came in the form of pita bread, garlic or red bean hummus and baklava, which has a cultural origin worth investigating since it too doesn't yet have a definite origin or so my American friend said.

However, if I had to pick a bread country, or "fromage" country as they call cheese in French, I would pick either Switzerland or France. During my stay with a host family in Switzerland, nothing really was dairy free.

All the meals had it and bread, which as a student on tight budget, realised was the man's best food along with chocolates. Though there was a huge amount of cheese in Swiss supermarkets, they weren't the cheapest products considering the amount of work expended to make them. While breakfast with the host family consisted of bread, jam and butter as a regular feature, bread, cheese and butter did not fail to feature as a regular side dish for lunch and dinner. Moreover, in my experience living with a Swiss/French family, no dish was free of dairy. My pimples shouted loud and clear that I was consuming them in excess.

Likewise, if my host lady made a tromphet de la mort mushroom dish, she used a cheesy sauce. If she made a traditional swiss baked potato dish, it was topped off with some cheese. Fondue, dipping pieces of bread into melted cheese, was also occasionally and a thoroughly enjoyed meal. The amount of wine that my host family drank would have been a taboo in Bhutanese society. Although I would always decline the invite, I was surprised to see how much of wine my host family was able to consume especially since it really was a taboo in Bhutanese society. After a while, I got fed up of being asked and declining, but they never stopped drinking.

" The theory of relativity once again called," I thought, "that which some people considered was actually taken for medicine." But I never stopped eating my bread in Switzerland, especially since I was on tight budget; I had no choice but to be economical. I am sure even a bum could eventually buy a loaf of bread without much trifling matter. After a couple of months in Europe, I left for New York where my diet comfortably fit into its normal routine. And then after a few more years in New York and after my college graduation, I flew back home to Bhutan.

Today, every where I go, I see that chilies have a powerful nature to call for attention and many seek it when it's out of their reach. Not only is it at home but it's at the office canteen and each and every house I have been to. Even little kids have started eating them, "don't eat chillies, you'll get ulcer," I told my little nephew as I narrated my story to him, but he wouldn't listen. He explained to me that without the chilies, food was bland. In a predominantly Buddhist society, the one that talks about letting go of attachments, I thought, chilies, though passive and subtle, was one of them to let go of, If every Bhutanese had their mind on the verge of realising their true nature, the smell of fresh ema datsi certainly would be its first peril.

Journey of his Career

Karma Tenzin

Karma was surprised. Many officials from the dzongkhag and gup came to his house. When he reached them, their gup was pointing to him. His parents were begging for his relief but they turned deaf ears. The gup said, "you need to be prepared, we would leave tomorrow early in the morning." His parents were crying and begged for his relief. The villagers were busy with their daily works, no one to hear them but to follow the instruction. He was confused and found his life would be miserable from that moment on.

As usual, the rooster gave the time for mother to wake up and prepare breakfast for the family. Karma opened the window and peeped around the village. He was nodding his head with tears and was very emotional. Suddenly he saw the official come to his house with few boys and girls. He ran to his parents and wept a lot, but he had no option but to leave home.

After a long exhausting walk for a day, he reached a place which was totally new to him. The officials introduced him to the teacher and left him alone. He was left with confusion and fear in his mind. The academic year started with introductions in the class. His teacher was strict and never gave any attention to his students. He was never happy in the school but had to manage with every difficulty along the way. Students had to tolerate very strict disciplinary actions each day. He faced a lot of dietary problems with the food they provided them. It was always kharang(grained maize) and potato curry.

However, he managed to complete tenth standard and became a teacher. He was enjoying his career because his students were committed and hard-working. They were punctual, dedicated, intelligent and respectful. They had no objection with any work provided to them.

He is still a teacher in this twenty first century. He goes to school as usual and teaches his students better than he did in the past. He is a very experienced teacher in this modern world but never happy with the transition he made in the education system. Now the time has come when teachers need to respect his students because of their family background. Money

and power cannot improve his/her character but can destroy the whole scenario of love and happiness in the country. The number of drug addicts and gangs are increasing every year in our country and are lacking in discipline and role models.

Once, in the school, his friend thrashed a student in the class but the very next day the student came with his parents and fought with him. The case was forwarded to the principal and the teacher was advised to follow the rules that teachers are not allowed to thrash students. So there is little room left for teachers to correct their students. Would the law alone help to improve the character of the child?

Such was a Woman

Kesang Om

As a tradition is passed down so are stories told, with time people cannot tell right from left and thereby, make the worst of choices. A shattered boy Dorji who struggled for motherly love, shares his story amongst a group of friends.

"Usually such behaviours are expected of the males," a stereotypical view stated by one of the friends, Ugyen Tshomo. Wives leave their house the moment their family sets out for school and work. From 9 a.m in the morning to late in the night, women along with other jobless males get together at a house to gamble. The place to gamble has a hotel downstairs and a spacious area upstairs to play. The host of the hotel would be compensated at the end of the night with some cash from happy winners and as well as few from the ones who lose. Wives would finely dress with accessories for their job of the day, putting on cosmetics to look younger.

Animosity in the house is greatly felt when the mother returns home drunk at late night. Firstly, it brings shame to the family and especially to the husband who has to get a hold of her from the arms of the person carrying her. The situation worsens when she begins creating chaos, shouting, breaking things, and abusing her family.

"Since we are living by paying rent, it gets hard on my father to explain the holes in the walls which my mother creates by hitting hammers on it and sometimes my father gets so frustrated that he calls the owner at the moment of the fight and tells him that she is destroying the house and that she will pay for it all", Dorji explained. At times, it stretches to an extent where the family gets equally frustrated and leaves no choice for the father but then to call the police in the middle of the night before he does something hurtful to his wife.

It is then when all attention goes to the mother and she neglects the effect it would have on the growth of the child and ultimately due to depression, the child adapts to unhealthy means of living, forming gangs and using drugs. Dorji cries while expressing, that when all his friends have a family

that they can turn to, he can see only one road: drugs, where he can simply be lost.

Bhutan Observer interviewed, Major Dorji Khandu of the Narcotic Drug and Psychotropic Substance Enforcement Unit of the Royal Bhutan Police and found that most youth abuse drugs because of the lack of proper parental guidance, "most of them are dependents, who come from broken families, or are raised by a single parent".

It is not only the story of one broken boy but thousands of youth who face similar situations. At times, it would lead to divorces, hence worsening the up-bringing of the children.

Mountainous ridges gently embrace and protect villages from attacks or invasions, keeping it warm and treating it with the best possible resources. Similarly, the love of a mother must protect her children. A mother is no different from the protective ridges and a child is no less carefree than the village. However, there are times in the village when the mother acts as the boar causing tremendous trouble to the community and to the villagers.

The early rooster's is sound would be first heard by the mother and then by the rest of the family members. It requires a lot of commitment, dedication, sincerity and patience to handle teenagers along with household chores and the husband. But never failing in her duty, she always completes her work to the fullest. Life becomes harsh when the husband has to work under the blazing sun, depending upon the weather, for their harvest and the wife has to take care of the domestic matters. Whatever the matter be, at the end of the day, the family would go through the hardship as a family-united and together. Such was the situation during those days.

Now with the ever-so-fast changing world and the passing years, the trend of caring mothers is lost, either it has flown down the river or is trapped in the earth and now a mother loving her child can only be seen in movies or story books. We find posters in hospital and basic health units conveying the message to avoid domestic problems and usually the husbands are portrayed as the villain and the wife as the victim. But is it really that way these days? As if the sun has lost its shine, shinning with no luster similarly a mother is present in the house but her presence is hardly felt as she is working hard at gambling and drinking away their hard earned money.

One can argue, that with change in time and with modernisation's influence, people find it as a better way of spending their time. It can also be said to be a way of gathering with friends and at the same time having fun .

Where are those days when the home cooked meals were the best and tasted even better when the entire family would sit together? Does modernisation have such an impact that a mother's responsibility is just to give birth?

Sadly a home is now just a house.

The Joy of Building Rammed Mud Houses

Kinley Rinchen

The traditional way of constructing a rammed-earth wall for houses portrays an exciting drama with a lot of values. It is in fact too beautiful to let it erode. It displays an interesting scene where we can observe joy and merriment at work.

I could not help myself from appreciating the beauty of the events nor could I just keep it to myself.

It was in the winter of 2001 when I helped my childhood friend, who was constructing a house. It was in my village at Kempa in Paro, where house walls are normally built with rammed earth. I was involved right from the beginning till the house was almost complete. I was asked to be a part of the group for preparing the earth. There were three of us. We had to dig the earth, loosen it and mix it with the right amount of water and make it ready to go up for the wall.

The foundation wall was already laid by masons a stone wall of about two feet raised above the ground. The earth wall was only to be built on top of the foundation wall. The engineer for the wall locally called *Pa Zop* was assigned with the task of preparing cubicles to ram the earth. Carpenters had already completed their jobs of building about two pairs of *Pashis*. Each *Pashi* was made up of three planks fixed with each one attached over the other. Each plank was about one foot in breadth, one and a half inches thick and about ten feet long. The *Pa Zop* came with some helpers to fix the two *Pashis* on each side of a wall. A pair of Pashis were immediately laid on the foundation wall with the help of wooden notes, tied up with the rope. The alignment and tightness of the Pashis were managed with the help of wooden wedges, which were shoved in all angles of the planks. The *Pashis* were fixed to form cubicles of about two feet in width. Each cubicle could accommodate up to three persons. The *Pa Zop* had to ensure that the Pashis were straight and to scale.

After the *Pashis* were laid on the foundation wall, a group of girls appeared to ram the earth in the cubicles. Each girl came with two *Lathis*. *Lathis* are

made up of wood with one big, round and flattened end that tapers as it reaches to the other end, that will be used for holding it. It appeared somewhat like a microphone but in a much bigger version. Each *lathi* would weigh about two to three kilograms.

About three to four sacks of earth prepared by us were poured in each cubicle. A pair of girls moved in. Since it was just the beginning, the inaugural ceremony had to be initiated. A lady who could sing well was invited for the inaugural ceremony. She was given a *Lathi* that was decorated with a *Khadar* (white scarf) on the handle.

Following the advice of the astrologer the ceremony began at nine thirty in the morning.

The inauguration began with the lady singing verses of religious significance. She started singing in a melodious tune 'Om-Sa-La-Maney – Pame-Chela- Hung-ray', a Buddhist mantra. The other girls followed after her as they rammed the earth in the cubicles in a rhythmic way and revolved in the cubicles. She then began on the next line 'Hung Lo……'. People told me that the verses were recited to invite Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyel from Tibet, and praying for his blessings. The other girls remained silent and joined in on the chorus by reciting the first religious mantra in a sing-song manner.

It was a momentous occasion where Buddhism is blended well at work. The ceremony was mainly a prayer to receive Zhabdrung's blessings for the house. It took about an hour to complete the inaugural ceremony. When the ceremony was over, refreshments were served. The ceremonial lady then left the site. The girls remained at the house to continue for the day.

When the work resumed, girls in the cubicles still continued to be the centre of attention. They would sing various songs and also show their poetic aptitude. I wondered if they were working but needless to doubt as one could easily see their movement, raising of *Lathis* and banging with loud thuds at regular intervals, everyone almost at the same time. They would sing to lure for competition with people around, and when they could not get any responses they would turn their attention towards the road to those who were walking.

Sometimes I found them even singing strong songs to people passing by for want of some retaliation. The English translation of their verse would be:

This year must be the year of crow
As the road is full of crows

They used it when they saw people passing by were darker in complexion, comparing them to crows by its colour.

Some people would react, singing in a similar manner by comparing them with anything that people on the wall looked like. One that I could remember well was:

This year must be the year of frog
As the wall is full of frogs

The Passer-by must have seen short and fat figures on the wall, and they were compared to frogs by the shape of their bodies.

The insulting competition went on until one side gave up, which was normally the passer-by as they had to continue to walk.

It was then that I felt a sense of joy at work. It was different from many work places where people kept working while hardly ever talking. It was like a dance event, singing competition, poetic talent competition all happening at the same place. We sometimes participated by cheering the teams.

Sometimes we got too engrossed that we even forgot to supply the earth. The girls would remind us to get the refill by singing:

Diggers please get us the earth
The wall is turning into a rock

And when we failed to respond immediately they repeated the verse and added more lines:

Diggers please get us the earth
The wall is turning into a rock

Diggers with wooden ears that fail to hear
Do you want us to bring you an iron hook?

We rushed to fill up the cubicles with earth.

The session continued till the day ended. The cubicles were over three feet high, it took the girls half a day to fill and ram all the cubicles. When it was done, it was the *Pa Zop's* turn again to fix another *Pashi* on the wall. The work resumed after an hour's lunch break.

In the evening, dinner was served and most of the workers left the place. The day's work accomplished the filling of two Pashis, which means the completion of a wall three feet high and twenty feet long. The *Pa Zop* would have another Pashi made ready for the evening. The lights were also fixed, and at that time only those who were busy during the day would turn up. It was very interesting as they would only come to help, and the owner did not need to pay for the evening workers. The event continued in a similar manner as if it was still day.

By about mid night the *Pashis* were filled and the helpers were served with supper and set off to sleep in their own houses.

I also used to stay till mid night. When I went home, my mind was full of emotions. I did not feel that I was coming from work. Rather, I felt that I was out from some cinema hall. I did not feel tiredness, instead I was eager to begin the next day.

The tradition of building rammed earth walls was a wonderful one. I realised it was a wonderful way to make people work with enjoyment. It had a different way of monitoring and ensuring that each one did their own share. And it did not require a supervisor. Moreover, because it was such fun, many young people turned up during the evening shift to help, and it provided a sense of togetherness in the community. It also reduced and ensured faster completion of the house. I felt it was a wonderful tradition.

However, the advent of modernisation is now eroding this beautiful tradition. Many houses now are constructed differently. Some skilled men with machines completed the whole structure. Although, it looks beautiful, it simply does not have space and environment to integrate the beautiful event of joy at work as in the rammed-earth wall.

What else could one do rather than remembering the dying beautiful tradition of building rammed-earth houses.

The Annual Ceremony

Namgay Tshoki

Chogu is a ceremony that is celebrated once every year. It is a day that is awaited by every family with anticipation, zest and excitement.

For Aup Tsheri and Aum Pem, parents of nine and grandparents of sixteen, that day is the day they get to pay respect to the age-old tradition and play the part of the perfect hosts. Sons and daughters of Aup Tsheri and Aum Pem, along with their spouses, children and family members attended the ritual. Guests consisted of family friends and people from the neighborhood. It is also a wonderful occasion for a happy family reunion.

The chaos of guests pouring in, the chanting of the monks and the ritual music played seem to suppress the raw noises around and somehow almost magically and mysteriously filled the room with a sense of peace and utter happiness.

While half the family brought in good food, washed mountains of dishes, readied the vegetables for cooking and carried the cooked food from behind the house up to the house, the other half did most of the serving.

Aup Tsheri and Aum Pem, along with their elder children and guests, spent most of the time chatting and eating. Wangdi, their third youngest son was a videographer and spent his time going around trying to capture moments on film. As the families, friends and guests sat down to eat, the elders are seen sitting nearby the window, middle aged ones in the middle of the floor, but the most excitement occurred near the doors. The little ones in the family were seen writing on the floor, like caterpillars, some clinging on to their mothers and the naughty ones would occasionally burst into the room. Amongst them was Karma, in a Karate pose with his lips pouted, eyes focused, right leg raised and hands clasped shouting Ya Ha ! all the while driving on an imaginary truck manoeuvring around the many seated people.

The senior monk presided over the ritual ceremony. It was he who also managed to mobilise the other monks. As the ritual ended in the evening with the singing of the long drawn prayer most probably dedicated to the

goddess of wealth, Lhamo Yangchenma ; Aup Tsheri and Aum Pem's family took turns to do prostrations and offerings of *Nyendhars* in front of the beautifully decorated altar, beginning with Aup Tsheri and Aum Pem and followed by the elder ones in the family and then by nieces and nephews.

I personally felt most satisfied to see what a loving, caring and a happy family I have.

Life's Many Journeys

Sonam Jatso

In life we take many journeys and walk down many paths. Life is forever changing and we live through its twist and turns and many transitions. My mother's love is the common thread that connects many journeys of my childhood life.

Even today, two decades after my mother left this world at a prime age of 47; I miss her dearly and think of her almost every day. I often find myself wondering, "How could someone love so much?" and "Do all mothers love their children as much as my mother loved me?" This question started bothering me more as I began dealing with my own children. Quite often, I find myself losing my patience and temper at my children's innocence but never ending, and seemingly unimportant, questions.

At a young age, I started living two extremely different lives. At the time, our remote village in Kurtoe, close to the Tibetan border in the north-eastern Bhutan, did not have a school. So my parents sent me across the country to a boarding school in the capital city, Thimphu.

Every year, I spent nine months in boarding school where I had to take care of all my needs. Early in life, I learned that I was solely responsible for my own life; that I needed to study hard to pass exams. That I needed to wash my own clothes and get up in time for morning prayers. That I needed to make my own bed and clean my own plates. Nobody else was going to do it for me. I also learned to enjoy the boring food of mostly "Bulgar" and potatoes. I followed all the school rules and regulations and tried not to get myself in trouble. I learned the value of true friends. Some of my best friends, still today, are from that school. At the same time, I also learned to live in harmony with students from different parts of the country with different social backgrounds and character.

During the remaining three months of the year, I lived a different life. I started the tradition of visiting my village every year. Given the inhospitable terrain and lack of a motorable road, it was extremely difficult to travel back and forth between Thimphu and my village. Looking back, I still don't understand how I managed to undertake that torturous journey,

every year for eight years. It must have been my parents 'unconditional' love and my own love for them and the life in the village that gave me the courage.

My first trip to Thimphu, with a few days of rest in Bumthang and Tongsa, took about 22 days. Most of the journey were on foot, crossing several mountains that were above 10,000 feet. We had a long caravan of horses carrying at least a month's food supply and camping materials. We camped in open meadows, under big trees, in yak herders' huts, and spooky caves. Every day we trekked from early morning till dusk over high mountains passes, through deep river valleys, thick forests and small villages. It was one of the most difficult journeys I have taken in my life. Crisscrossing roaring rivers and constantly climbing up and down steep mountain slopes, we walked on trails that were filled with leeches, wet mud and slippery rocks. It also took us through some of the most magnificient forests, awe-inspiring meadows, and scary cliffs. Though a tough journey, it was an unforgettable experience.

On my later trips, I managed to mobilise enough money to take the southern route via West Bengal and Assam in India. On this route, we didn't have to climb many high mountains and the entire journey took only about two weeks. It involved 4-5 long days of driving within Bhutan and through India to get to Mongar, the main district of eastern Bhutan. From there, another five days of trekking brought me to Lhuntse and another three days to my village.

Once I arrived in the village, my parents, especially my mother, treated me like a prince. I became the centre of all the attention in my family. My mother took care of everything. I didn't have to wash my clothes; I could go to sleep and get up at whatever time I chose to do so. Everyday, she prepared several special dishes for me. Throughout the year, she would save meat, red rice, butter, cheese and eggs so that she could prepare special meals for me when I visited the village. Every morning, before I got up, I would get a mug of fresh hot milk. Every week she would prepare a special hot stone bath for me with herbal leaves in it. Since I enjoyed playing archery, almost every week, she would have my elder brother invite young boys in the village to play archery with me.

It took a while, but as I grew older, I began to see the real life that my parents and others in the village lived. Life in rural village in Bhutan, even

today, is difficult. People there walk in snow and morning frost without shoes. Every day they get up before dawn to work their fields and do not get back home until late after dark. In spite of all the hard work, they hardly produce enough to provide three proper meals a day for their families.

As our country moves forward, we need to make sure that our development benefits all sections of our society, in particular, our people in rural villages. This was one of the reasons I joined politics and contested in the 2008 Parliamentary elections.

Towards the end of one of my later visits, I saw Mom washing my clothes. As I walked closer to her I saw tears rolling down her cheeks. But as soon as I got near her she turned away and quickly wiped the tears. She didn't want her son to see her cry. Later in the evening, Dad told me that she was crying because I was going to leave soon. He also added that every time I left the village, Mom would hardly eat anything or talk to anybody for at least a week.

After I returned from my village, it always took a while for me to readjust to the life of a student in a boarding school.

After high school, I received a special scholarship from the government to study in one of the best colleges in India (SRCC). It was altogether another experience traveling to India and studying there. On my very first journey to India, traveling in a crowded train for 36 hours from Jalpaiguri to Dehli, I lost all my money and most of my belongings. Almost every Indian who saw me in the train wanted to steal my money and my belongings. At every station the train stopped, the railway clerks and policemen in that area got into the train and demanded money from me. Saying that foreigners were not allowed to travel on an Indian train, they threatened to throw me out if I didn't fulfill their demands. All the other passengers kept quiet and enjoyed the spectacle of their corrupt policemen and railway officials harassing a completely lost boy from the mountains.

Once in Delhi, the Bhutanese Embassy helped me find the college. During the months of June and July, the unbearable heat, 45 degree Celsius, almost killed me. Every night, to go to sleep, I had to soak my bed-sheets in cold water before lying down to try to sleep in that terrible heat. I also encountered some really rude Indians during the first few months in Delhi. One day, just outside the college, a group of young men sent a huge

dog after me. In the burning heat I ran for my life while the men enjoyed a good laugh, watching me escape the dog. However, during my second and third years of college, I met some wonderful young Indians and we became great friends.

In the meantime, back in the village, my beloved mother passed away due to a jaundice related disease. At the time, our remote village didn't have any health facilities. She prayed to God to keep her alive till I came back home on a vacation from India. But unfortunately, her prayers were not answered. When she finally realised that she was going to die soon, with the help of my sister, she took off all her clothes and after a hot stone bath, she spent the last days of her life wearing one of my grandfather's maroon robes. Our grandfather was a Lama (Buddhist Teacher). She told my sister that a woman's life, especially as the head of a family in a village, was difficult and she wanted to be reborn in her next life as a man, preferably a monk. She left me her most precious gold "Dorji" which was given to her by a great Tibetan Lama. She always wore it around her neck.

My brothers and sisters didn't want to disturb my studies in India, so I was kept in the dark. I learned about my mother's death only when I got back to Thimphu on a vacation. By then, there was nothing left of my mother. Her body was cremated and all her after-death prayers and rituals have been completed. For a couple of days, I lived in a state of shock and disbelief. She was just 47 years old! God was unfair and I felt a strong sense of guilt. She brought me to this world and gave me so much love and everything I needed. But I was not given an opportunity to give anything back to her. I wanted to take her on pilgrimage to sacred Buddhist places in Tibet, Nepal, and India; I wanted her to learn about other places and people in this world. Living her entire life in the village, she knew a little bit about Tibet and India, but she thought Bhutan was the biggest country in this world. I dreamed of providing a comfortable life during her old age. But all of sudden, all my dreams were shattered. Finally I pulled myself together and visited all sacred temples in Paro including Taktsang and offered butter lamps and prayer flags for her next life.

I went back to India and spent the rest of my vacation alone in my college hostel. Thereafter, I didnt go back to my village for almost 15 years. I was afraid that the village would remind me of my beloved mother. But now I have come to terms with reality. I have started visiting my village again and I take my children with me. I want them to learn about their grandparents

and our village. I also want them to learn about their dad and his early life growing up in an isolated village.

Today, I don't have a single photo of my mother but her loving memories remain fresh in my heart. Hardly a day goes by that I don't think of her. It reminds me of my own mortality. One day, like her, I'll be gone. But unlike my other journeys, this will be a long trip to an unknown world to my next life and hopefully with a return ticket to this precious human world.

A Pig on the Altar

T. Sangay Wangchuk

"Your lunch is all ready and do not infuriate the spirit of the oven", said grandma as she joined the other ladies and children of our farmhouse. I have seen her do this once every year. She would cook the lunch and leave them on the traditional earth-rammed oven. It would break grandma's heart if we showed any signs of disrespect to the oven. She made sure that the spirit of the oven, locally named as *Thabgi –lham*, is offered the first of the cooking at all times. I had reached my late teens by then and it was another day for the men to learn some practical activities of rural livelihood. The men folk included my two uncles, a cousin, a neighbour and me.

That day, grandma took all the younger members of the family and the ladies with her. They were headed to a temple to offer butter-lamps and incense sticks. *Chelka (the white forehead)* a full grown family pig met his end that day. I still get goose bumps with this recollection. Grandma and her retinue went to pray for Chelka's soul. I had helped grandma and the aunts in rearing Chelka right from his cute piglet days. I literally saw him being born. He was a playmate for most of the household. His piggy acrobatics had always been the talk of the family; but being born as a pig to a rural Bhutanese family has its price. It must, at some point in time, sacrifice itself to the family. That day was Chelka's turn; there was no way out unless something freaky happened. And freaky things do happen. Two years ago, a pig resurrected and ran off into the woods never to be found. Rural folks call such incidents work of the Earth Goddess. My folks believed a lot in the ways of the supernatural.

Chelka's fate was sealed that day. The men were supposed to steel themselves as they crushed Chelka's forehead with wooden clubs. "The first blow should be the hardest one. We must paralyse the animal so as to die painlessly", an uncle remarked. I always heard him say this whenever we killed a pig. Buddhism has a big influence on the Bhutanese. We believe in the circle of Karma. We kill a pig now. And the pig will be reborn to kill us, not necessarily as a human being though. It could be in the form of a bacterium, a virus or a mosquito laden with malarial poisons. But rural livelihood is mostly about the food-chain. We eat others and get eaten in turn.

One may argue that this is not a Buddhist canon. And yes, the truth is much of rural folks live within the commands of animism. The fusion of Buddhism and animism is creatively woven in the Bhutanese society. The animist code of belief has saved Bhutan from serious ecological damages. The animists honour the forces of nature. The excessive use of natural resources is against an animist's faith. The sustainability on this planet is what an animist believes in. To put it in a nutshell, an animist considers himself or herself as food for others. Therefore Chelka's death means passing through this cycle of the food-chain.

Our neighbour was the tough man of my village. He landed a thunderous blow on Chelka's snout. The animal squealed with a deafening retort. "Come on; club him like the summer rain. Beat him before he comes off the shock", shouted one of my uncles. We diligently obeyed his instructions and squeezed the life out of Chelka. The pig lay dead and the neighbour uttered a Buddhist prayer. He wished the soul of the pig to find a better rebirth. We carried the carcass to the nearby stream. The first thing we did was pull out a clump of hair from the small of the pig's backside. This hard bristle makes a good material for a painter's brush. Subsequently we covered the carcass with hay and twigs that enabled in burning the rest of the hairs. One of my uncles scraped off the remaining hairs with the aid of his sharp hunting knife. A professional would cut open a pig from the belly. This makes collection of blood easier before we cut any parts of the anatomy. The blood is a chief ingredient to make blood-sausages. There is also this crazy rural belief that hot pig blood cures warts. So we had the opportunity to apply this remedy whenever we killed a pig. The stomach and intestines are to be removed with dexterity. My uncles would be mad if we punctured the stomach or the intestines. Homemade sausages, especially from a pig, is always a village specialty. The bladder is also an essential part as it has varieties of uses. A young boy would be immensely happy to have one to make a hand-drum.

After removing the internal organs, the carcass is overturned. By tradition, the slaughterers take a chunk of meat from the rump. The length is measured from the tip of the middle finger to that of the thumb, basically around six inches. The breadth is the size of the palm minus the thumb. This must be cut from the rump along with the tail.

This prize is called a *Deekay*, literally translated as the 'Sinner's share', how interesting! After all these, the flesh on the frontal side is cut. This frontal

piece has lots of fat accumulation which is extracted and offered as oil lamp in a temple or at the home altar. The belief is that the soul of the deceased must be aided to have a higher level of rebirth.

From the main body, the head gets decapitated while the rest of the body is cut into six parts namely, the two forelegs, two hind legs and the two sides of the ribs. Further slicing is carried on to these parts. The slices are commonly named as *Seekarm* or wind dried pork- a Bhutanese delicacy. Whatever bones that remain are chopped into cubes and dried. The remains of the limbs are dried and they become delicacies when the larder runs out of meat. As for the head, it is well decorated with coloured-butter and put on the altar as the family celebrates the annual family ritual. This ritual is something like harvest festival. All the family members are called to enjoy the feast from a sacrifice of another being, such as Chelka. Alongside these festivities, the guardian spirits of the land are propitiated, the monks conduct the ceremonies. At the end of the ritual, the head of the family, usually a matriarch would seek pardon for all the killings done during the yearlong farming activities. To mark the completion of the ritual, a white flag with stripes of blue, red and yellow is erected on the rooftop. The animists take this as the flag of truce with the spirits of the sky, the earth and the underground.

I still remember that year when Chelka's head was placed on the main altar as the ritual progressed. As farmers, there is no time to renounce the world. We must work to feed and to be fed. That is the rhythm of our life. Non-killing makes sense and nobody wants to kill another being, especially some cute acrobatic pig like Chelka. Throughout my life I have had too many dosages of Buddhist teachings. Killing is loathed. Yet, I still can't shake off the animist philosophy that we are all in the food-chain. I do not mind dirtying my hands to kill the food I must eat. After all, we killed Chelka as our food and we gave respect for its sacrifice. A pig on the altar is a symbol of rural sustainability and respect to our food chain. But am I losing it as I drive on the highways of Buddhism and Economics?

STORIES ON MODERNITY

Memory of a Thrue Bub

Chogyal Tenzin

In the 1960s, the people of my village in Punakha, would say that only three of the 12 national holidays held special meaning for them. On those three days, work gave way to feast and fun. *Thrue Bub* or Blessed Rainy Day was one such day. The day usually falls on the seventh month of the Bhutanese lunar calendar, around September.

Thrue Bub is the day, every year, when showers of blessings from heaven sanctify the open water surfaces on earth. The belief is bathing in water so blessed can cleanse us of our sins and obscuration. For this bath, water in the open outdoors, such as springs, rivers or lakes, is preferred. Water in the house, in containers covered with lids, did not receive the heavenly blessings. In the absence of streams, rivers or springs nearby, people leave water in a container uncovered on the veranda overnight. This is used for the early morning bath. My village was blessed with a stream that served as a source of water for household use, for watering paddy fields and for the bath on Blessed Rainy Day.

For the farmers, Thrue Bub offers a respite from the backbreaking labour of rice transplantation (known in the village as *chang laa*), followed a few weeks later by the weeding of the paddy saplings (called *jaa eue*). Memory of the previous year's Thrue Bub flashed as I stooped down in the paddy field to pull out the weeds from the watery beds of the rice saplings. The blades of the young rice left bare skin pricked and caused small scratches on my face, arms and legs. When water or sweat touched those scratches, it caused sharp pains. By eight years of age, children did their part to help adults in the household chores and on the farm. Only winter offered us the opportunity to play. And that too happened as we took the cattle to graze in the forests or on the paddy field.

I was returning from the stream with a big pot of water, balanced on my nine-year old head, when I passed Azha Lopen and Aap Dorji talking about Thrue Bub. I heard Azha Lopen mention, at the hour of the Tiger the heavenly showers of blessings would descend. That would be around 3 to 4 a.m. by present-day watch. Taking a bath at that auspicious hour would be most effective in washing away the sins. For as long as I could

remember, the time always came early in the morning, but at varying times each year.

In those days there were only two ways of marking time after sundown. First, by the series of the crows of the roosters each family owned. They referred to time in the wee hours as first crow, second crow and so on. The second way was the 12-animal cycle, in which the entire day and night was divided according to Bhutanese astrology. During the day, the sun acted as the universal clock.

As the big day approached, excitement heightened. Men readied for archery or *degor* tournaments. They dusted off their quivers of arrows and prepared their bamboo bows by polishing, stringing and testing them. On those special days, top archers of our village contested with archers from the neighbouring village. A day before Thrue Bub, women carried fresh, home-grown vegetables on their backs to Punakha and sold them. The money they made was used to buy meat and other special items for Thrue Bub. For me, the day's novelty came in the form of a day-off from the heavy work in the paddy field in the scorching heat of the sun. And there was the special porridge and delicious mouth-watering meals to feast on. Only on such occasions did beef, pork and dried fish appear on the menu. It must have been around the second or third crow of the rooster when my uncle woke me. It was time for the bath in the stream less than half a mile away from our house. Thrue Bub would be incomplete without the bath. It was the essence of the day. He led my aunt, my sister and me into the chilly darkness outside. We manoeuvred our way through the rough uneven footpath, worn by the constant movement of village folks and cattle. Uncle carried the fire torch in his right hand, raised high. I walked right behind him still rubbing the sleep from my eyes.

As we navigated our way through the rough footpath, lighted by our blazing torch, we saw two or three torches ahead of us moving in the same direction. We met Uncle Gomchhen, aunt and their two sons returning after the bath. Through the faint light of the fire torch I could see their youngest boy, Aauchu, shivering as he walked ahead of his mother.

After a short walk in darkness, we reached the stream. It was alive with children shrieking 'aachhuchhu'. Some were trembling in the chilly, early-morning breeze that hit their wet, naked skin. A few squatted on the big rocks in the stream. Older men hummed prayers as they splashed cold

water on their heads. Since ours was a closely-knit village of about 20 households, I knew everyone at the stream by name. That was the only time when men, women and children stormed this stream at this hour to get rid of their sins.

I removed the top half of my *gho* (national dress for men) and tied it over my waist. Then I braved the cold waters and waded knee-deep barefooted into the cold stream. I was always barefooted. I never owned shoes or slippers. Cupping my hands, I scooped the chilly cold water and poured it over my head. I gasped as the cold water met my warm skin. A thin stream of water ran down my spine raising goose bumps. Each time I bent down to scoop water from the stream I dreaded the splash of cold water on my head. We didn't use soap. I never saw soap those days. Finally the bath was over. I shivered as the chilly early morning breeze brushed against my half-naked, wet body. The helm of my gho was drenched. It must have dipped into the water when I lowered myself to scoop the water several times.

It was nearly daybreak when we got back to the house after the wash. Uncle started the fire in the oven. The big black pot where *thugpa*(porridge) was usually cooked was the first one to be placed on the oven. Men usually cooked the porridge on such occasions. Aunt engaged herself in other chores. Whether it was Thrue Bub, Losar (New Year) or Nyilo (winter solstice), it was always my responsibility to clean the house, fetch water from the stream, and feed the cattle and the pigs. I was a nine year-old, dirty-looking orphan at that time.

Thugpa was finally served. We sat around the big pot with the steaming hot porridge. The ingredients for this dish were rice, oil, chilly, salt, some pork and a few pieces of dried cheese. As I began eating the thugpa, I looked sideways at Uncle for signs of disapproval. He was a strict disciplinarian in his late 60s. I had to eat the porridge without slurping. He used to say only pigs slurp while eating. I still remember holding my empty cup near the black pot five or six times for second helpings. Next in the course was *suja*,(butter tea) rice and a special curry. I was full when it was all over. It was such a big treat. I could hardly bend myself, I was so overfed.

After breakfast I descended the steep wooden ladder and went to the barn, directly below where we lived. One by one, I untied the rope that tethered the cows and the bulls and herded them out into the open. Other youngsters in the neighbourhood were also doing the same. The bellow-

ing, the bleating and the mooing of the cattle filled the morning air. The size of the herd grew. There were five or six of us behind the long line of bulls, cows, and calves of various sizes. We were on our way to the forest not far from our village.

After a slow march of the cattle, we reached the forest. The animals wandered in different directions driven by the sight of fresh green fodder here and there. We left them to graze on their own and started our trip back to the village. We walked, we ran, trying to outdo each other in a spirit of childish contest and show-off. I nearly lost my balance as one of the stones on the mule track, on which I stepped, dislodged. It rolled down the steep slope below the footpath.

By the time we reached the archery range all the archers of both teams had assembled. They were dressed in their best, but all barefoot. The simple village-style *marchhang* opening ceremony was over. The tournament was in progress. Some women served *bangchhang* (a locally brewed alcohol) to the men. A few sharpshooters from the opposing team surprised our players with a few *kareys* (hits on the target) at the onset of the game- an indication that they were superior to our home team. The opponents won the previous year too.

More spectators poured into the archery ground. Children and adults streamed in small groups. It seemed everybody from our village had come to witness the contest. A few villagers from the opposing team's village had also arrived to support their team. Many dressed in their best. They were all in high spirits. A group of women danced. Occasionally the song and the dance gave way to *dhachham* or songs and dance to cheer the team to boost their morale. When the turn came for the players of the opposing team to shoot, the dhachham manifested into aggressive jeering and teasing. It was a deliberate act to distract the opponent archers to make them loose aim. This happens at all archery tournaments across the country.

Even as a child, archery never captured my imagination. I was never an archery enthusiast and my passion in the sport, even as a spectator was nil. So I didn't stay too long to watch the ongoing tournament, besides, I had the cattle to worry about. For the other children, either their elder siblings or their parents would take their place to graze cattle. But for me, rain or shine, grazing the cattle, herding them home, tethering them and feeding them was my job. I had no elder siblings or parents to take my place.

I went back to the forests to check on the cattle to ensure they didn't stray too far off. It took me a long time before I could gather the bulls and the cows together. They had wandered all over the place. I watched the cattle munch the young shoots of the plants and the wild fodder. I saw a few monkeys jump from one tree to another, high in the canopy of the forest. There were a few birds and squirrels here and there.

After what felt like ages, a few boys and adults arrived. They came to round off the cattle. We allowed the animals to graze till one of the adults decided that it was time to take the herd of cattle home. As we walked behind the long queue of cows, bulls, calves and one or two dogs, I saw the Thrue Bub sun go down. For a nine year-old orphan, it was goodbye to the feast and holiday.

The Chhoko

Chholay Dorji

I awoke, still groggy, to the loud blares of the *dungchen* (long Tibetan trumpets) and the steady thump of the *tang du* (drum) upstairs. Feeling irritable I looked at the clock, half-past five. My father shouted for us from outside, my little brother stirred in his bed, letting out a groan. I could tell we shared similar sentiments. I often wondered why we had to go through so much trouble for the monks, who sat in our house, making a racket.

The annual chhoko, an elaborate daylong ritual, is an important Bhutanese tradition. However, within my family, only Angay (grandmother) seems visibly enthusiastic about the ceremony. My parents consider it important as well, but only to a certain extent. In contrast, my younger brother and I never really cared much for the ritual. In fact, we always dreaded the idea of having a chhoko at home because this meant waking up early. In addition, the television at home was below the altar room, so we had no entertainment for the day. The only thing we actually looked forward to on chhoko days was the desi (saffron rice), usually served in the afternoons.

Up in the altar room, I sat sullenly among the monks as they chanted, the thumping drums giving me a steady headache. I made my poor brother sit up in the altar with me so I would not have to endure the ordeal alone. We went downstairs soon after eating with the monks, and it irritated me immensely to see the younger monks playing with our toys. While my brother and I could not care less about hosting the chhoko at home, my parents understood and believed in the significance of the ritual to an extent. This is why they organised and partook in the annual ceremony; however, they also did this in part for my grandmother, for whom the ritual is of utmost importance. It was always extraordinary to see my grandmother who suffers from back arthritis scurrying up and down the stairs during the choko, she would be the most active in the household that day, a rare sight.

Angay always wears a good-natured expression. She carries with her the deep-rooted culture of Bhutan that for a long time remained intact due to the country's isolation. In her I see traces of Buddhist traditions, not just through her meditative practices, but also through her disposition.

I feel these traditions she carries with her are like secrets of the past. They are not deliberately concealed, but they have grown old like her. As television has brought with it elements of the modern culture, they have infused the minds of the youth, subsequently becoming a part of mainstream Bhutanese culture.

The aforementioned "secrets," therefore, are only secrets to the Bhutanese youth .very much alive in the minds of the elderly, these traditions also continue among my parents' generation. Their generation is an interesting one. Having experienced both contemporary Bhutan and older Bhutan, the country belonging to our forefathers before it opened up to the rest of the world. It is their generation that has lived through the rapid changes, resulting in the Bhutan of today.

It has been years since I last attended a chhoko, but this is because I have been studying abroad for the last six years. My parents are trying to organise a ceremony a month from now and, strangely, despite my prejudiced memories of past experiences, I am looking forward to the upcoming chhoko. I realise, the last time my whole family was together was years ago, during a similar occasion.

A Journey of Thousand Miles Begins with One Step (Laya)

Dawa Dakpa

Laya, (3880m), a place blessed with natural beauty, is circumscribed by hefty and fascinating mountains and hills. Upon reaching Laya, you can find the enchanting Gangchen Ta (Tiger Mountain) on the left and Massang Gang on the right side both peaks capped with snow. The texture of the clouds is as beautiful as a daisy flower, dropped from heaven. It was an unforgettable moment of natural beauty, which my four friends and I experienced during our trek to Laya.

Our trip to Laya began from Gasa at 8 in the morning. Normally, a trekking group consists of a cook, guide, leader and horsemen, but in our case, we were five: Kinga the narrator, Tanka the jester, Thukten the complainer, Sonam the yummy preparer and myself, the laziest of all. We call ourselves the five adventurous travelers. When it was time to head for the hills, we primed our rucksacks, filled with food and other necessities. We started our trip walking up the hills.

" Awoo awoo," Kinga leads the way. We started walking, but one of our friends was missing. Now, Thukten started complaining, we will be late guys, "jho bha jho ga menna." (hurry up) There was no sign of our missing friend.

We waited for a while when all of a sudden, a sound from the bushes emerged, "ala la la la, pho na de ba ra ma sub. Sorry friends, I had a severe stomach ache. I couldn't ask for a break, and the unwanted excretion was on the verge of coming out," said Tanka. The high altitude climate being not really feasible for Tanka, so he was undergoing severe bellyache and went for discharge in the bushes.

Now this time for real, we started walking. We sang the song, "druk zhung de na gawa lu," lucky to born in the peaceful realm of Bhutan. The song continued for a while and stopped. All my soul mates were walking on their own pace. Some far above and some far behind with fast breaths in and out. We walked along the river, one of the tributaries of Mo-chu and

through a dense forest of rhododendron and silver fir.
As we neared the top of the Balela pass (3740m), clouds began to roll in and by the time we were having our lunch at the top of the pass, it had begun to rain. "The rain won't let us eat well," said Sonam."It's better we keep moving guys." We carried on walking in the agonising rain. Partaking in our lunch while walking in the rain may be the most disgusting moment we had in our journey.

"Awoo awoo," Kinga shouted and again led the way. It is believed that, if we shout while crossing a thick forest, the bombardment of wild animals against humans will be mitigated.

After, we crossed the pass and walked down into the valley, we were much more relaxed. By then, it was 4:00 p.m. It was getting dark so we increased our pace. There was no time to stand and stare. Everyone was zeroed in on walking, silent as a grave.

"Da ban nyam soo dho ma", said Kinga. "We must reach Koena, before it gets too dark."

We could hear many assorted noises and the ruckus of unknown creatures while walking through the woods. After walking without a break for an hour, we could make out a tiny fire far in the distance. We proceeded without rest. Eventually, we reached the location, which we were looking forward to for hours during our restless walk. We had arrived at Koena, a place where travelers hold their night.

We met with some tourists, who were heading for Laya like us. After reaching Koena, we finally could breathe in peace and we relaxed for a while. Sonam began to prepare dinner and everyone gave a helping hand.

After partaking in our evening meal, everyone promptly went to bed. Everyone was exhausted, owing to the tireless walk we had in the woods. We slept like logs.

I had a dream in which I was walking alone in the dark forest. I was lost in the middle of nowhere. I shouted, "Kinga! Sonam!" but no one heard my voice. I walked and walked. Finally, I reached a cave and rested until I fell asleep. I could hear the chirping sounds of the birds and the coursing of a stream passing downhill in the valley. Outside the cave I could hear

someone shouting my name, "Dawa! Dawa!" For the third time, "Dawa!" I woke up and I found all of my friends ready, and prepared to head for Laya. Kinga had been trying to wake me up.

"Ooh! I was really scared. I had a nightmare, Kinga," I said. He replied, "Be quick, Dawa, every one in the camp is primed to head for Laya. You are the last."

So, I washed my face, had my meal and made myself ready to head for the hills. After sometime, we started walking, similar to the journey we had the day before. We crossed so many hills and streams and we walked through the woods. The view of the hills was indescribable. I had never dreamt in my life that I would get to see such a lovely place.

By sunset, we reached Laya. We were astonished by the development the area has gone through. We reached our camp and fixed our luggage at one corner of the house. We went for a stroll in the local vicinity.

We could see Layaps holding mobile phones. Solar panels were over most of the area. A multitude of development had come to Laya. In one of the houses, we were so amazed to see a group of people watching movies.

"This is out of our expectation," we all thought in our mind.

We went back to our camp and began to prepare our evening meal. After dinner, we had a chit-chat inside our camp. We especially paid attention to a story about how a man lost his way while traveling to Laya, narrated by Kinga. Soon every one fell asleep. I was the last one, as usual.

I thought in my mind:
Walking through the hill,
The air so chill.
The splendid moon shining from behind the cloud,
I saw all my friends snoring aloud.
Finally, we reached Laya,
The best among the great Himalaya.

And then I slept.

The next morning, everyone woke up early. We went to see the village

and spent some time with the villagers. It was interesting to see when Ap Dorji, ploughing his field, calling his wife on his mobile phone for tea. Modernisation has made changes. Then we saw a boy listening to western songs on his iPod.

The Layaps have a distinct culture. Although modernisation has changed some things, they are still determined and self-sufficient people. They have a unique dress that differs from other Bhutanese attire. After a day with the Layaps, our time to head downhill to Gasa came upon us.

Actually it is a two day walk from Laya to Gasa, but we attempted to do it in a day. The next morning, we started our walk at 6 o'clock in the icy air of Laya. The air was thin, the weather was breaking, and the elephantine mountains surrounded us.

We walked through the diverse terrain and mountain hamlets all the way down to Gasa. We were blessed with a golden opportunity to witness the true essence of natural beauty during our entire trek. The trek itself was amazing, challenging, and frustrating, and the scenery along the rivers was marvelous. However, the most memorable moments were found in our personal interactions.

We reached Gasa by 6 pm. We stayed the night at a friend's house. The very next day, we went to the hot springs. Three hours soaking in the hot spring certainly helped loosen our three days' worth of trail dust.

Eventually, we came back to Thimphu. We sang the song, "Druk gi gyelkhap gha me gha," the peaceful country Bhutan. As we were enjoying Thimphu from a hotel, we spent a lot of time reflecting on our trek, with hot coffee on the table. Those four days were like nothing we had ever imagined. The memories of the special trek will remain with us for a lifetime.

New-Age Tertons: Prospects and Challenges of Archeology in Bhutan

Dendup Chophel

One fine day when the sun was shining brightly on all sentient beings, a man who claimed sainthood jumped and immersed himself into the burning lake of Mebartsho. His retinue of followers were filled with a mix of awe, wonder, guilt, fright, anger and some with sheer disgust. Choekhor Deb, the undisputed ruler of Central Bumthang had ordered Pema Lingpa to retrieve a treasure as a vindication of his claim to the Terton status. The Deb chose that particular spot because the lake was notorious for boiling as if on fire. It would consume anything even remotely disrespectful, let alone someone, who with absolute disdain, dived into its very depths. He knew that if the claimant was an impostor, he wouldn't make it through this ordeal. It was, of course, so much the better for the charismatic Pema Lingpa who was by now gaining considerable sway over the people of his prefecture.

On his part, Pema Lingpa claimed that the time was not ripe for this undertaking and that misfortune might fall on all concerned if they still decided to go through with it. So he importuned the Deb to defer the test of his authenticity. Naturally, the Deb would have none of what he presumed to be escape tactics on the part of a foe who was now becoming too powerful to let off the hook. Pema Lingpa was adamant too, and was confident in his own guiding vision to see him through any ordeal, so he finally agreed to the test. However, his circle of followers intervened and tried to bring the force of numbers to the Deb so that he would relent on his demand. On the other hand, some pleaded on behalf of the Deb and assured the Lama of their abiding faith and support even if he were to bypass the task.

Both were stubborn men though and neither would go back on their words. So, when Pema Lingpa leapt into the lake bearing a lit butter lamp on his palm, his followers felt guilty that they were unable to prevent the Lama from attempting a task that he was reluctant to get into in the first place. Their reverence for the Lama grew by measures while for the Deb, they felt nothing but disdain and anger for having pushed a great saint like

Pema Lingpa to do such a task.

The legend of Pema Lingpa still reverberates in the valley of Bumthang, the home and workplace of some of the greatest Tertons who were destined to hunt down treasures set aside for them by their spiritual predecessors. Legend says that Pema Lingpa did eventually come out, not only alive, but with a treasure trove in one hand and the lamp still lit miraculously in his other hand. Pema Lingpa went on to become one of the five distinguished Tertons and the first from Bhutan.

Tertons are a celebrated class of religious treasure (*terma*) discoverers. By virtue, they are also great scholars in advancing the understanding of Buddhism in general and specifically the Nyingma tradition to which most of them belong. They unearth religious texts of great significance believed to have been strategically placed by the great 8th Century saint, Guru Padmasambhava in furtherance of Buddhist understanding, as and when their times were ripe.

Pema Lingpa, in particular, discovered many such *termas*, which today stand as the basis of our history, for in them were supposed entries of the time when Guru Rinpoche visited Bhutan in the 8th Century. We are left with no other records of this time. However, the Terton's role in our evolution goes beyond that. The texts they discover are also divination of events that will come to be, both good and bad, and thus they act as timely guides to preempt disasters and pave the way for good things to come.

The way they function is nothing but miraculous. Through visions from the Guru himself, the Terton will be led to the particular spot of the treasure in inhospitable terrains like on a rocky precipice or in deep lakes. Once the guardians with whom the treasures were entrusted are done with their due process of verification, they hand over the *terma*'s ownership to the rightful claimant. The Tertons, in turn, propitiate these caretakers of great powers, and as thanksgiving, leave their own marks as replacements for the objects taken.

The particular incidence that occurred in Bumthang has taken special significance in recent times. The legend goes on to say that people were filled with piety and a deep respect for the Lama. However, after noticing what was apparently only a worthless wooden box, the Deb unsheathed his sword and with a hefty swing, struck the box into two halves. What

emerged took his breath away, quite literally. A golden statue that was sliced through its torso slapped the face of not only the Deb, but that of Pema Lingpa too, at one stroke. In a flash, the statue flew away and vanished into thin air, but not before he reprimanded the unthinking actions of both the men and bound them with a curse that will shorten the lifespan of the Lama and eliminate the very lineage of the Deb. Indeed, this curse took effect. Pema Lingpa died before his professed time and the Deb faded into oblivion. His fortress and seat of power lies in ruins in the upper reaches of the Bumthang valley.

It is an interesting parallel, thus, that when Bhutan's first modern archeological digging was done, it was on the ruin of Drapham Dzong, a spot which is so intricately linked with the famous treasure revealer. Archeology today has come to throw light on aspects of our past of which we are apparently left with no other reliable records. Through various scientific tools of dating materials and their ethnographic abilities to put things into context, archeologists establish the truths of our past, as well as ceramics or charcoals can tell them.

Both of these forms of discovery are means to unravel the mysteries of our past. By unearthing pieces of important information, these two types of historians are then able to interpret them, the archeologist through his lab technology and the Terton through his guiding spiritual visions. It must also be noted that both of these mediums of history can be prone to manipulation and manufacturing of facts to suit various ends and various classes of people; the discoveries are subject to the integrity of the people involved.

While modern science has time and again opened itself to scrutiny, analysis of *Termas* by independent scholars has revealed evidence of doctoring texts to the advantage of the Tertons and their traditions. While Pema Lingpa himself is beyond reproach for he had proven his grandeur with words and deeds, the medium of the Terton can become a dubious play of faith in the hands of a lesser man. The *Termas* are supposedly written in secret codes to which only the Tertons have access and thus, a less scrupulous being can interpret the *Terma* as he likes. It might be just an unwarranted observation, but today the charm of the Tertons, as they were traditionally perceived, has just about vanished.

Modern archeology has its limits too, particularly in the Buddhist setting

of Bhutan. While archeology is incumbent upon the existence of material remains in their original setting, Bhutanese live by a different model. Going by the law of impermanence, we acknowledge that everything, living or constructed, must ultimately return to its original state of non-existence and so, far from taking care to preserve monuments, we actually pull them down so that new forms can emerge in their place. We take care to eliminate any trace of a being once its soul has departed, contrary to the goals of an archeologist.

Archeology has served well in Western settings where burial mounds and ancient monuments have been preserved. These are the locations from which major historical breakthroughs are made. However, these things are quite absent in Bhutan. If the first archeological project was anything to go by, we may never know much beyond what we are already aware of.

While the Drapham Dzong projected all the makings of a classic archeological undertaking, the results were more sobering. It is quite well known that the Dzong was destroyed sometime in the 1600s during the period of the Bhutanese unification. With an accuracy of plus or minus 100 years, it's unlikely that we will ever know anything of substance from this test. Against expectations, there were no treasure troves to be dug out, as would an Indiana Jones, from centuries of oblivion which, of course, was only proper in the Bhutanese context. So, for now, the legend of the Choekhor Deb remains just that, a legend.

However, it is yet too early to write off archeology. There is a large void in our understanding of ourselves as a nation. There was a life before the pre-Buddhist period of the 7th Century but little is known about our people then. This gap could well be bridged by modern excavation sciences. It is well known that archeology is best suited for prehistoric times because the accuracy level of the science seems most acceptable when the period in consideration spans larger ranges of years. In any case, we will be willing to take anything on a subject like ancient history that we would otherwise have no hope of ever being enlightened on.

Tring Tring

Dechen Yangzom

"Dearest Meme," I wrote my grandfather, "we're having a water crisis, Meme. My friends have been coming over to shower these days and I'm getting irritated with the city!" I paused, in the middle of aiming to convey my frustration over to my grandfather, and wondering what better news and gossip I had to give him, I was leapt over by a call on my mobile phone.

Wondering whom the call could be from, I answered only to realise in much disbelief that it was from my grandfather who lives in a remote village in the eastern part of Bhutan. I had never imagined my grandfather to carry such complex electronic devices for a simple life he leads in the village. However, after inquiring him about having a cell phone, I found out my grandfather was one of the last people in the village to get a mobile phone and that was just a few months ago.

When I left Bhutan twelve years ago, the popularity of television was just beginning. However, coming back after those twelve years, it was an expected sight to see the television industry booming. What was not expected though, was the popularity of cell phones in the country.

Though my little nephew does not own a cell phone, he certainly knows how to use one. He can stroll through the whole menu, take pictures and even dial the numbers. What he doesn't realise at the moment is that he is leading a life that is much faster than the life of his great grandfather.

And grandfather, though he stands as a part of the oldest generation in Bhutan, he is still in tuned to the caller back tunes that are a part of B-mobiles business. Each time I call him, he has a different caller back tune. Though this is modernity at a smaller scale, I'm surprised how it has gripped onto my grandfather who has been a villager all his life.

Although my grandfather is happy with a simple Nokia phone, my friends and family in Thimphu are not. They need the latest phones like the Androids or the iPhones.

When a simple phone is just within reach, the people who I believe are brainwashed by the latest gadgets have to go out of their way to get the phones, not only do they seem to bother a whole lot of people for it but they spend a great amount of money which could be spent on charity.

Thus, sadly, conspicuous consumption has slowly taken authority over our small society. Though modernity should be welcomed in our lives, balance is key in sustaining anything for a long time. However, those who can afford the latest gadgets do not stop themselves and the society shakes, which cause an imbalance.

When City Corporation explained to me that they do not have enough money to correct the water shortages in the city, I am left in disbelief. While so many people can afford the latest phones, "the water shortage is still there, Meme. Some of my friends still come over to shower, and "Hello…meme, can you hear me?"… richer people are going up the hills in search of private water sources, aren't they too bold to claim ownership of a universal element?"

Modernity of Bhutan

Karma Tenzin

When today's children are taught our country's history depicting our ancient civilisation, teachers hear involuntary grumbles and see most of the children blankly staring at each other in utmost disbelief. The children just can't imagine that our advanced country underwent a very challenging process of civilisation. The concrete understanding is that the period of that ancient civilisation existed less than a century ago and right now our country is enjoying all aspects of modernity. So, there is misunderstanding in what is said about our previous civilisation and what we enjoy today because it is difficult to understand that our country has developed on par with other developed nations in a period of less than a century. However, it is credible because it is history, it has happened and in reality we are enjoying the outcome of the sacrifices that occurred during that transitional period.

The pinnacle of the modernity that is being enjoyed by the people today is the new form of government, the Democratic Constitutional Monarchy. Eligible people are bestowed with equal franchise to change the future of our country and this has directly solidified the nation in manifold fields to rise to the height of the most developed countries. More recently, the local government elections were held and through that process the governance of the country was further strengthened. Tashi Tobgay, a student of Rangjung HSS, expressed his optimism about this modernity by saying that the 'ballot is stronger than bullet'(Kuensel, 2010).

A few years back, Kuensel and Bhutan Broadcasting Service were the only newspaper and radio services in the country. In 2010, on February 19, a Dzongkha weekly 'Druk Yoezer' hit the stands besides Bhutan Observer, Bhutan Times, The Journalist, etc and today, the number has increased to 8 newspapers, of which two are national language publications (Kuensel, 2010). Kuzoo Fm and Radio High are radio services recently introduced in the country. Sherubtse College itself enjoys its local FM named Sherubtse FM. With our newly granted freedom of speech, human rights, and fundamental rights,these modern media outlets are being implemented justly. Today, people are well informed about their rights, although their commitment to the related responsibilities is certainly doubted. The courts saw

a huge number of matrimonial, and harassment cases. The media sectors are informed about the breach of any rights of them or any failure in what was entrusted to anyone or any organisation, is informed to the above concerned authorities or at least to the media personnel.

A well received Bhutanese joke is, "If there was this mobile, Changyuel Bumo Galem would not have died that way." Mobile phones are even being necessitated by the potential in it to save time and life. The off-hour clinic, known as the Special Consultation Service, began from October 14, 2011 and now people can conveniently avail health services with just a call. The observed life-expectancy 75 for male and 78 for female in 2010 is expected to rise (Kuensel, May 16, 2011). Besides using mobile phones to call, people are using their phones almost like a computer because they are connected to the internet and can discuss through various virtual forums, surf and chat through many interactive web pages, etc.

Desktop computers have become necessities too. The government has provided broadband service and it is even working round the clock to raise the bandwidth. Wireless networking services are in use too. Fibre optic wires are also being installed in the country to enhance the effectiveness of the internet services. The Cabinet held its first ever Virtual meeting through video-conference on October 5, 2011. Labour Minister Dorji Wangdi stated that community information centre services are to be introduced and even informed that out of 300 G2C services to be installed, 72 of those are underway in the first phase (Kuensel, 2011, June 8)

In terms of education, the country has a teeming number of community, primary, lower secondary, secondary and higher secondary schools. Three colleges and many institutes are established. Students are provided with modern subjects, appropriate syllabi, adequate modern accommodation and laboratory facilities, internet services, and competent teachers and lecturers. Very recently, the colleges and institutes became autonomous. Students are offered the opportunity to get trained in revered institutes abroad. Thousands of students graduate from various fields and serve the country. Many young and highly qualified students join the country's government. Female representatives in government services, though once, very rare, has risen to a huge number.

The eras of resin, torch and petroleum lighting are long gone. Traveling during the night had been dreaded earlier with orthodox belief of devils

patrolling throughout the night. Such an eerie belief is now not heeded as almost every nook of our country is electrified. The nation- wide electrification is still in process. Very soon, albeit it would be night, the difference between day and night will exist only in dictionary.

The prophecy of Guru Padmasambhava has now materialised. In the olden days, they walked and ran, yet reached so late. Now, people sit but reach anywhere in incredibly short periods of time. After the advent of road and runway, the land and air transport boosted. Dozens of cars hit the road everyday (Kuensel, March 17, 2011). Today, there are five airplanes in the country and the airway extends to the southern countries. Domestic Air Service is to be ready soon. Tashi Air and Drukair were selected on December 14, 2011 for it (Bhutan Observer, Feb 4, 2011).

The customs and traditions of the country are actually dwindling fast. *Ghos* and *kiras*, the traditional dress code, would be now better referred to as occasional costumes. Juveniles fancy western dresses and hairstyles anyway; no matter how exposed you are, how odd you look, and how it breaches our noble tradition, it just doesn't matter to these citizens. TV programmes like 'Superstar' really work hard to uphold and promote the waning traditional songs, national language and dress. Yet many roam in the market resorting to alcohol, substances and congregating in threatful gangs. Youth contribute the highest percentage in population of the country, but their contribution, though it has a high potential, does not contribute to the country's development, not even a meagre amount. Forget about the development, how can a country, even meet its fundamental needs when the people are divided?

Though the unemployment rate has lowered from 4 to 3.3 percent still the number is alarming. This will guarantee the continuation of youth falling victim to various socially corrupt actions and practices. The issues of the capital city, Thimphu, like inadequate housing, rough traffic flow, etc will be exacerbated by these youth growing in number and in animosity.
Our country has, indeed, leapt to very great height of modernity in a short time span. The intense craving for comfort and luxury passed down from many generations is now being fulfilled. We cannot deny the grave issues and just take the country at face value. However modernised our country can be at its current state, it is not secure and final. Citizens need to be edified well and made responsibly responsible. Our country's living index fell from 75th in 2010 to 90th this year. Modernity is not just in one aspect,

but composite of all. Therefore, our country really needs to scrutinise contemporary modernity, then work on it pertinently.

Future of Bhutan is in the Hands of the Youth

Kesang Om

I was a child in the capital, experiencing the changes around and mistakenly thinking that my wants were my needs but with time I grew up. I set out on my own to study in the east, but what surprised me the most was coming home from my first year. It was not how many new buildings I found around the corners but rather the number of students that loitered around the town, late at night, in groups, during weekdays. It has not been that long, since I graduated from high school and during my days the scenery was different, seeing the rapid changes in the youth of Thimphu definitely gave me a fright.

It was not any ordinary group that would hang around the town but rather the groups that would choose the dark alleys to park their gangs. Their look did most of the talking and they mostly preferred the colour black and shining chains around their pants. It seemed that they were trying to make statements from the different standing hairstyles to the name of the groups, which were usually picked out from violent movies such as "Crows Zero", a Japanese movie based on fights and gangs. I believe that the young peers find it "cool" to have attitudes and getting involved in fights.

The issue of youth gangs has become a major concern now that the whole of Dechencholing falls under a gang called MB boys, which stands for Mass Brothers. "I don't get involved in fights but I feel protected when I am in a gang since everyone else is," said Choki Dorji, a passive member of the gang. Other gangs such as the TT Boys (table tennis boys), CLB (cool looking boys), Do or Die gang, Dirty gang, Freedom Fighter, Chang Jiji boys and Fight for Defense are some of the popular gangs in the capital.

Nima Dorji confessed that he was a gang leader when he was in junior high and the reason was that he did not like boys teasing girls. So the girls would sometimes go to him for help. One of the schools which is popularly seen in the papers in regard to the gang fights, Lungtenzampa Middle Secondary School (LMSS) is currently having gang issues. The

Vice Principal Sonam Tshewang also encountered an odd situation where he found his female students fighting over a gang leader. When the school begins to terminate the students for forming gangs in the school and for fighting, the parents would plead to the disciplinary committee to accept their children.

When asked if it was only in LMSS, the response from a student was "no, gangs and fights are there in every school, be the most standard school as Mothithang or Yangchenphug Higher Secondary School",said Kezang Euden. Be it public or private, youth find the need of friends' protection and therefore, join gangs.

Formation of gangs are slowly giving way to rape, 'in 2007 a total of 40 cases of sexual abuses and rape were recorded, including the rape of a 28-month-old infant. There were also two reported cases of gang rape,' according to the Bhutan Observer.

A few years back, Bhutan was dealing with the issue of stray dogs barking at night and following the early morning joggers but now a bigger issue has arose, now the joggers are followed by strangers and even worse, at night robbery takes place. Which is less haunting, stray dogs or being followed by strangers?

Gang membership leads easily to the use of drugs. Twenty two-year-old Sonam, who has just come clean from the use of drugs, said that he started substance abuse by smoking at the age of 14. He wanted to be part of his "group of friends", and abusing drugs seemed necessary. Eventually, the habit made him a problematic student and a disobedient son.

Bhutan Observer talked to Lama Shenphen Zangpo, a Buddhist teacher and avid social worker, who conducts a nightly drug and alcohol outreach programme in Thimphu, where he said, "I have noticed several common trends. In many cases, the youth come from broken families, not just simple cases of separation, but from households where the father has found a second wife and abandoned his original spouse and children. This causes a lot of confusion in a growing child, which often leads to anti-social behaviour and abuse of alcohol and illegal drugs."

Phub of Yangchenphug Higher Secondary School said that there are very few recreational centers where the youth can enjoy healthy activities.

However, the culture of respecting the adults and staying home, helping the parents and guiding the younger siblings can rarely be found. Family meant the world but now the outer looks and friends are given the first priority.

While comparing with that of the rural place students are more dedicated to their family and their studies. Bhutanese youth are getting 'westernised' than 'modernised'. Once there was a time with no television or radio it was the time when the family bond was the strongest and the children were-children and not gangsters. But with time and change in the economy, the family breaks into acquaintances and the youth gets involved in things that are not appropriate for their growing age such as joining gangs, doing-drugs which will have affect them and their future in a long run.

Thimphu sans 'Communal Living'

Kinley Rinchen

It was 6 July 2011. I was invited by a friend to the inaugural ceremony of her new house. Having coincided with a busy day, I decided to show up only during the lunch hour. At one o'clock sharp, I rushed to the nearest shop looking for a *khadar* (white scarf) and a present. The shopkeeper showed me different types of khadar. I chose the one patterned with Eight Lucky Signs, as it would be the best for the ceremony. I hopped from one shop to another looking for a nice and beautiful present, but to my dismay I could not find anything interesting. Finally, in despair, I decided to buy an envelope to offer some cash instead.

The house was on a hillside about two hundred metres above Changangkha Lhakhang. I parked my car near the lhakhang and climbed up the slope on foot assuming the parking lot at the house would have been already crowded out.

As I reached near the house, I was flabbergasted by the way the house was adorned. It was a three storied building, aesthetically designed with the blend of both traditional and modern architecture. The wall was painted with sweet mud colour and the windows with Bhutanese paintings but well matched and soothing to the eyes. Some colourful scarves which hung around the roof were swinging beautifully in the air. A traditional tent was pitched right outside the house with a group of dancers entertaining some guests who were sitting inside the tent.

As I approached nearer, I was greeted by the eldest daughter and was received with a warm hug. Since I was familiar to everyone in the family, I preferred not to be formal. I stayed outside chatting with the husband of the eldest daughter.

'What would you like to have, Aue Kinley?', asked Chimi, the second youngest daughter, with welcoming eyes, seemingly a little busy. 'Just a glass of squash and I will be fine', I replied. She immediately brought me a glass of orange juice. I thanked her and told her not to worry about me but to attend to other guests, for I never felt like a guest myself.

After some time, I was ushered to the shrine room, which was located on the top floor. There, amongst heaps of presents and a big mould of Khadar, the father received me. I offered the khadar, the envelope, and exchanged some kind words.

Then, I turned towards the rich shrine, which I felt was even more elaborate than those found in some temples. The central shrine was filled with a lot of different Buddha statues flanked by a twenty-one-Tara statue built on a lotus flower on the left and a pile of well arranged holy relics on the right. I offered my prayer for the family to be blessed with happiness. Then, I turned and made my way out of the shrine room into the kitchen but could not grab anyone's attention. It was like a bee hive, everyone too busy. I gave up and went to the verandah that overlooked the Thimphu valley.

Wow! What a location, I felt. It provided a panoramic view of the Thimphu valley. I could see the valley cramped with concrete structures, hustling vehicles all around. So, I avoided the view of the city and gazed at the river meandering lazily at the side of the valley. My eyes followed the current of the river north, I saw Tashichhodzong and the SAARC building standing out to exhibit our rich traditional architecture. It was eye-pleasing. I was also amazed to see a number of spots where people were enjoying archery. It appeared to me like scenes of happiness were displayed everywhere.

I realised that even as I was in an inaugural ceremony, I was also in another place portraying happiness, and I was enjoying it. The dances were in full swing, and the crowd began to grow. I did not attempt to mix myself with the crowd. I preferred enjoying the beauty of the day, and the view of Thimphu valley. It drove me into a very romantic but pensive mood.

Unexpectedly though, my mood had a U-turn as I continued to follow the river northward. I saw a dark cloud of smoke rising up the sky. It was from the cremation ground. A soul lost! I felt a strong gush of cold blood through my veins that tensed my mood imagining the predicament, lots of tears and grief stricken hearts. I was scared that the sight of the smoke might change my mood.

I immediately looked southward trying to avoid the scene, but the hospital building towering high was pinnacled at me as if it was trying to say 'Look, I was right here'. Again, it forced me to visualise the ordeal in that huge

artificially beautified structure, full of tense and silent companions, helplessly listening to voices of pain stricken folks.

It made me ponder how Thimphu had changed so fast. Thimphu seemed to be losing the sense of communal living and togetherness. Scenes of sickness, celebrations, enjoyments and funerals were all happening simultaneously and very close, yet one did not seem to distract the other.

I remembered it was not the case before. Our tradition dictated that when a family lost a member, the whole village would mourn for the family and there would not be any celebrations. Even the small dances organised during the annual rituals would be done away with for that year.

Where was that beautiful community of a warm and caring environment? I wondered…but a voice within me said 'Forget it. When even the next door neighbours were strangers, the communal living in the whole valley would be a joke in Thimphu.' Thimphu had changed so fast I realised, and 'Thimphu would not care about it' repeated the voice within me.

'Aue Kinley, why are you all alone here? Please come for lunch', the call of the host lady pulled my thoughts back. Dances were still going on in full swing, guests were busy emptying their plates and cups and I crept into the line to grab a plate.

Deep down, I realised 'communal living' was a long lost thing, though so dear to our society, it seemed to have promised to never return to Thimphu.

Are We Happier Than Our Forefathers?

Namgay Tshoki

Comfort, luxuries, sources of entertainment, means of communication and fast transportation; technological advancement has provided us with tools that make life easier and more convenient. The world is evolving at a tremendous pace and it has become one place where we have almost every comfort, facility and pleasure imaginable.

Although a world of comfort, opportunity and possibility of accumulation of riches, our world is also one of frustration and dejection because of the very qualities of the possibilities that are offered and the overwhelming desire to be successful, and therefore be able to be fully accepted in this world. A failure to live up to one's own expectations, and those of the others, leads to a sense of worthlessness and insecurity. This unfulfilled desire to belong and have 'power' may lead people into depression. This may be one explanation for the increasing suicide rate and increasing number of crimes, especially against women, that have been recorded in Bhutan.

I am not implying that, here in earlier times, there wasn't a sense of competitiveness or that people weren't ambitious. All I want to say is today, the competition and the need to excel have become so intense that we tend to feel worthless if we are unable to achieve success in our lives in terms of money and fame. In fact, the competitive spirit is such these days that even games and sports are not played for leisure and entertainment alone, but winning becoming all too crucial. The need to be more successful than the rest has become our highest goal in life.

Our relatives living thousands of miles apart, are just one phone call away, or rather, we just have to log on to a social networking website and share not only thoughts and feelings, but also photographs and videos. Social networking sites are a wonderful way of staying in touch with people but at the same time, they take us into the world of 'virtual' relationships - we spend a lot of time chatting with people who are often just acquaintances or at times, even strangers. The culture of visiting friends and relatives, and celebrating festivals and other joyous occasions together is slowly dying out. Thus, we do not really have that kind of a relationship that our ancestors had and that does rob us of the means to effectively vent our

frustrations.

Modernisation has led to the rejection of certain traditional ideas. There is movement towards extreme individualism and a shift away from close-knit families and communities. Individualism has undoubtedly helped to make people more assertive and desirous of taking on responsibility for their lives, but it has also weakened the concept of shared living. As a result, there is little emotional bonding with people who surround us which is an unhealthy situation as emotion is a very powerful aspect of being human - this I feel, is the greatest loss in the process of modernisation and advancement.

In earlier times, family life, moral values and spirituality held much more significance than they do today. Life was simpler and there was much more time for leisure and also, introspection. Our forefathers were certainly more at peace with themselves than we are. Today, the basic necessities of life are not just food, clothing and shelter, but also education and satisfactory professional life. While on one hand, it is a great change and has resulted in people becoming more aware while having opportunities to make their lives productive and their existence more meaningful. On the other, life has become full of anxieties, tension and restlessness. Our forefathers were, no doubt, more content and relaxed than us in general and more satisfied with what they had. So, have these changes, whether in terms of education or successful careers or in terms of the luxuries and the means of entertainment and pleasure that we have, really made us happier than our forefathers?

Bad Karma

Sonam Jatso

Karma never walked that fast in his life. He completed a three-hour journey within one and a half hours and without even a trace of sweat on his face.

It is almost midnight, it is dark, quiet and a little chilly outside. Karma hears the distant sound of a barking dog in the next village. Using his flashlight, he surveys the two-storied farmhouse in front of him. The foundation and walls of the first floor are made out of stones with just two narrow windows. The second floor has more windows that are much bigger than the ones on the first floor.

Karma slowly walks towards the house. He plants the flashlight in his mouth and carefully climbs up the stone wall. Near the windows, he loses his balance and nearly falls when a small wooden peg in the wall that he steps on breaks under his weight. A few minutes later, with his left hand holding the outer frame of the window, he uses his right hand and his knife to gently push open the wooden shutters of the window. Switching off the flashlight he places the knife back in its cover and gently slides his body through the window into the room.

He quietly stands near the window for a few minutes to catch his breath and to plan his next move. He can now hear two people snoring heavily at the right hand corner of the room. Covering the flashlight with his left hand, he uses the dim light that passes through his fingers to find Dema.

Karma met her at the "Tsechu" festival during the day. He saw her walking with a group of young girls towards the festival ground in the temple. She looked beautiful in her white Kishuthara (special hand-woven Kira) and a bright red Tego (jacket) with a deep blue Wonju (blouse). He followed them and, while watching the masked dances, he sat near her and gradually started a conversation by offering a few oranges to her and her friends. Before the day's programme ended, he managed to find out the name of the village where she lived and the exact location of her house.

After Karma got back home, he started making plans to visit Dema that

night. As usual, at around 6 pm, his whole family gathered in the kitchen, sat in a circle, and ate dinner. Pretending to go to bed early, Karma quietly sneaked out of the house and walked to Dema's village.

There are many people sleeping in the room. Seeing the girl on a first visit is a big challenge. There is always the risk of crawling in the bed of the girl's father. Luckily, Karma sees Dema's red Tego neatly folded next to a person sleeping in the left corner of the room. He crawls towards the corner and slowly gets into her bed. They spend the night talking and getting to know each other. Before dawn, Karma stealthily crawls out of the window, climbs down the stone wall, and walks back to his village.

Thereafter, Karma continues to visit Dema almost every night. But now he doesn't have to climb up the wall. Every night, after her parents and sisters go to sleep, Dema quietly unlatches the door for Karma.

Popularly known as 'Night Hunting', until a few decades ago , this was a normal common tradition of courtship, romance and marriage in rural villages of eastern and central Bhutan. But now, with modernisation, globalisation and outside influence, the night hunting culture is quickly losing ground.

Once a boy and a girl in a night hunting courtship decide to get married, they pretend to oversleep in the morning and let the girl's parents find the boy in their daughter's bed. Then, they formally talk to the boy's parents and, without much fuss, the couple gets married. However, sometimes if the girl is not interested in the boy or if she is already seeing somebody, she would politely ask him to leave her alone. If that doesn't work, she would threaten to wake her dad up. Then the boy has no choice but to make an immediate exit.

Today, our boys and girls don't need a village festival. They meet each other in schools, colleges, discotheques, and at work. Some even meet through matchmaking websites, online chat, and social media sites like Facebook and Twitter. At most Tsechu festivals, we now have more tourists and elderly people attending than youth.

Most young Bhutanese go to Tsechus to either show-off their expensive silk Ghos or Kiras (national dress) or as a tour guide. Thus, our unique culture of night hunting is quickly becoming a mere story for visiting tourists.

Unfortunately for Karma and Dema, their night hunting episode doesn't really have a happy ending. Dema breaks off with Karma and marries a son of her father's rich friend in the village.

Fate and tradition play different roles in people's lives. A few years later, another Karma from a rural village in eastern Bhutan visits his brother Dorji, a civil servant, in Thimphu. One night, at around mid-night, a policeman knocks at Dorji's door and takes him to the police station. That night, Karma had quietly entered the flat next door and had crawled into Jessica's bed. Jessica is from Singapore and works for a travel agent in Thimphu. She called the police and filed a charge against Karma for attempted rape.

The Wicked Marriage

Sangay Wangchuk

It was the month of December. Thimphu streets were dimly lit because so many of the lamp posts had taken beatings from the city vandals. The cold north wind whooshed and spiraled around a man I will call "Dorji Soso." This cold north wind snaked down through the Thimphu valley. It had traveled through the high passes of Yale-la and Nelay-la that rise almost 4800m above sea level. Those valleys and mountains of Lingzhi hold many stories of snow leopards, wonder-worms and other alpine life. Well, coming back to our story! Dorji Soso is somebody I have known for a long time. What I like best about this person is his strength. It is not his physical strength but the inner one that helped him survive his fallen state.

Dorji Soso looked at his left wrist. To his misfortune the watch was not there. He continued his way home with a heavy head. He had had a bad day. The mixture of beer and whisky took its toll on him. As he walked with heavy footsteps the familiar sound of the city police bell resonated through the valley. It is customary for Thimphu police to time their bell through the night. Dorji Soso counted the eleventh striking of the bell. "Man, it is almost midnight again," he muttered to himself.

As he walked, several pangs of regret ran through his already heavy head. A couple of stray dogs barked at him. He had disturbed the capital city's ever increasing dog population. The dogs had actually curled themselves on dead cannabis plants that grew wild around Dorji Soso's house. Soon the whole valley echoed with whimpering, barks and howls. He wanted to join the howling. He halted as he entered his door to see a 60 watt bulb glowing in the corridor.

He was surprised to see his wife and two children all dressed. They had their bags packed and the children looked unhappy. Dorji Soso had been warned several times by his wife about their marriage. He had taken her words for granted and never taken heed when she would say, "We are leaving you to your world. It seems that our marriage is not important to you. You care a lot about the other," said his wife. They took their bags and headed off in the dead of the night. Dorji Soso was shocked and remained in the living room sofa for a long time. He wondered where his

family was going. He felt ashamed of himself for letting the unthinkable happen. He felt lonely and pinched himself several times. "Is this real or am I dreaming," he thought. Dorji Soso finally saw how it is to be without a family. They had stood by him in bad times. Now his luck had reached its bottom and they were gone. He peered into the starless night and felt a numb sensation in his head. He went to sleep hoping to straighten everything the next day.

Next morning Dorji Soso sat for a long time on his bed, all alone. The familiar scent of the Bhutanese bed tea was not there. He looked around. His eyes rested on two paintings done by his children. They were images from 9/11. It had been three months since the Twin Towers were blown down by evil men of the world. "I am bad just like those men, the Marriage has destroyed my Marriage," he moaned.

Marriage is a name for a game of cards. Three years ago Dorji Soso got introduced to the evils of this game. He got addicted. It took his time and money. The worst happened. His marriage was at stake. Dorji Soso always enjoyed this game which he called a Brain Twister. He started the game hoping that his brain will be kept afresh. He was mesmerised by the strategy and power of memory involved in the game. Soon the evil side of the game manifested with the stakes rocketing. Within a span of three years he lost a lot of money. He was always at loggerheads with his administrative officer at work. Dorji Soso spent fewer hours at his office. He lost his image of the bright hardworking officer that he once was. As time went on he was nicknamed the Borrower. When his pay cheque arrived every month, there would be a dozen friends waiting to take what he borrowed. So when he gave the remaining pay check to his wife there was always a need to invent stories. His wife called him the Story Teller.

Dorji Soso was unhappy with the evil that gripped him. He even took oaths not to gamble but it was an addiction. He was drawn further into this unknown sea of gambling. He always played wishing to win, but most times he was the loser. He saw divorces happening because of the game. He saw the problems faced by children of addict-gamblers. He read a lot about the evils of gambling in newspapers. One time a lady drove home after a late gambling session. Her car went off the cliffs. She died leaving behind stories and heartaches. Dorji Soso saw many physical fights over the gambling table. Men fought with men, men with women, and women with women. He saw women selling family heirlooms. He saw men losing

their treasured cars. Some gamblers sold their land and real estate at the gambling table.

Dorji Soso would have been dragged into the messy world of gambling to his end if his wise wife had not done left him. If she had not walked away that night with the children, Dorji Soso would still be at the gambling table. He would be covered with the smell of cigarette fumes and alcohol. He would have lost his family. He would be a failed man combing the streets of Thimphu. In gambling you can never win. The stakes are the loss of someone. And that someone's heart will be bleeding even when you celebrate the win. "What is the use of winning somebody's loss," a Buddhist will always caution.

Gambling in Bhutan came with new changes, our entry into the global family. Like any other change, it must be faced, studied, experienced and then refined. The thought of losing his family made Dorji Soso give up gambling. That is wisdom because no other intervention can stop folks from playing the game. To stop, the call must come from within just like Dorji Soso's. A strong family will always saves one from the hell and so, Dorji Soso's family saved him from the Wicked Marriage.

Am I an Old Story?

Tashi Choden

A few weeks ago I asked my younger brother about the way he dresses up and prepares himself to hang out with his friends.

" Yeshey! *Zai! Ga chi rang baow mo?* (What are you doing?) I have observed that you have been standing in front of the mirror for almost an hour!"

"*Wai*, Can't you see? I am trying to make myself look like Gan jun Pyo," he replied with broad smile.

"Who is Gan Jun pyo?" I inquired and he replied in a sarcastic manner, "*Ah! Che gi meshay bu?* (Don't you know?)"

Hesitantly, I replied in a low voice saying that I was not aware of that character. Later he educated me about the so-called "Gan Jun pyo." Suddenly, his hairstyle siezed my attention. "Yeshey! What happened to your hair? You look like a Golden Langur? See for yourself in the mirror?," I started teasing him.

"Wai! I applied hair colour? Everyone says it suits me and Gan Jun Pyo too has coloured his hair. I know you are jealous and making that comment. Am I right?," He asked me.
" *Sorry, No way*! I am happy with what I have and I don't want to look superficial like you. You might feel proud for yourself but I won't appreciate it. Try to be decent and act normal," I replied with a smile.

Reluctantly he countered,"Okay! But I am not going to change my hairstyle and dress code because it's the fashion and everyone is doing it. I am happy with what I am doing. You are really irritating. I need to leave; my friends are waiting for me."

"Don't you think you are wasting your time straightening your hair every time?," I asked.

"No! I have divided the time equally. Hmmm. I need to leave now." He rushed out.

At that very moment I realised that Korean influence is a part of youths' life today. I came to the conclusion that everyone has turned out to be wannabes and I guess he is trying to be one of them.

It is not just the influence on boys; the similar question also arises for the girls. As a part of my observation, I have seen girls act the same as boys. I would say this is good - there is gender equality but is it worth seeing your own siblings wearing clothes or should I say rags that expose every part of their body? Do you like seeing young beautiful girls drinking as much alcohol as boys and demonstrating unacceptable behaviour? I don't think so, but what can I do? My individual actions may influence one or two people but it is not at all possible to make an impact on the whole country.

I was annoyed by the way my siblings dress up themselves and in frustration I shouted at my sister.
"Passang! Why can't you wear better pants rather than this mini skirt and shorts?," I shouted at the top of my voice, almost tearing my vocal cord.

"Azhim! As I told you before, I can't bear the heat and I am comfortable with it," she replied furiously.

"But don't you feel uneasy, while walking around?," I inquired.

"Wai! Ga chi bay? (Why should I?) Don't you know it's the fashion nowadays? And everyone is wearing it; it's not only me. You are really outdated," saying this, she disappeared.

"Passang…Passang!" I called out but my voice was unheard.

Bewildered, I plunged myself on my bed and thought for a while. Gosh! Am I really obsolete? "Yes" I could be but I am on track, I tried to comfort myself. With a lot of curiosity, I asked some girls about why they behave that way and I got various answers that were quite convincing. They needed to fit in with the changing society. It was necessary for them to fill in the gap and catch up with their young friends. Besides their justifications and explanations, I still had queries popping in my mind. Are these kids aware of their future? Are they worried about what they will be doing in future? What could be their aims and their destination? Are they really innocent about their lives? I asked so many questions to myself but almost all of the questions didn't have an exact answer.

I started realising the fact that our country, "Bhutan" is changing and it has entered the boundry of development. Development has reached every nook and corner of the country, regardless of cast, religion, culture, colour and limited precincts people are getting an oppurtunity to taste the juice of modernisation.

Everything is changing at a fast pace, from a dusty road to a black tarred road, simple two storied Bhutanese home to tall buildings almost reaching the sky, simple hand woven fabric kira and ghos to machine made nylon kiras.

Gone are the days when people were naive, when people just talked together, read, narrated stories and gardened for self-consumption. There were days when one could see young boys playing with bamboo bows and arrows shouting "Kari Kari" playing around the rice fields, and little girls with their best kira singing and dancing, but with modernisation, young kids now only know the toys from the Cartoon Network.

Youth seem to be busily playing snooker, carrom board and puffing cigarettes with their friends. They seem to be completely driven away by so-called modernisation. Due to more exposure, the mindset of our generation has drastically changed. They love to present themselves in the best way they can. No more traditional tegos and dull kiras now, it is substituted by modern colourful half kiras with jacket tegos with the wonju affixed within.

More recently,I found many youths intriguingly different in the way they behave and talk with their friends."*Yo! Wats up man?* " is what our young generations utter to greet each other? The way of greeting "Kuzu Zangpo" has faded among our youths. Altering their hair colour from black to yellowish or golden colour and from simply having short hair to oddly cut hairstyles with no proper edges has become fashionable amongst the youth.

Teenagers of the past and the present differ in various ways. The ones that lived in the past were more mature and responsible. The ones that live in this modern era are immature, irresponsible and least bothered about the time that they are wasting. Our parents, when they were young, were more concerned about their survival, savings and how they were going to raise their children. But the youths of these days have less or no worries about

their survival, they do what they wish and most importantly they do not have respect for the elderly.

The only concern they now bear in their mind is the way they present themselves and their superficial look. They watch a lot of movies and get so influenced that not only their physical appearances change but also the way they behave. Violence is a fashion and its existence is seen in every corner.

The contemporary world is totally different to that of the past. The youth today are ignorant about their culture, tend to be dependent on others and pay more attention to others' culture. However, the most important issue is "Will our identity survive in the long run or not?"