

2008 was a momentous year in Bhutan's history: the country celebrated the coronation of His Majesty the king, launched its constitution, and made the transition to a democracy. But how has the general public dealt with these enormous changes? In this compilation of essays, stories, and photos, the youth of Bhutan share their perspectives on their newfound roles as citizens in one of the world's youngest democracies.



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# More than Just a Vote

Perspectives on Citizenship in Bhutan's Young Democracy



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BHUTAN CENTRE  
for MEDIA AND DEMOCRACY

# **More than Just a Vote**

Perspectives on Citizenship in Bhutan's Young Democracy



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## FOREWORD

The change to democracy brings with it certain freedoms and privileges: freedom of speech, the right to information, and, most notably, the right to vote. Of course, these are core values of any nation that wants to call itself a 'democracy'. But freedoms and privileges cannot be taken to encompass all of what democracy represents and requires of its citizens.

Almost a century ago, the great philosopher John Dewey (1916 – 1997) insisted that democracy was less about government and more about citizenship in which people live and work together for the common good. Today, this necessity of what Dewey referred to as a “participatory democracy” is relevant the world over during a time when governments have failed to follow through with their mandates of preserving equality, peace, and justice. No longer can people rely on their governments after they’ve submitted their ballots; rather, they must continue to hold them accountable as active, informed citizens.

The same is true for Bhutan. In 2008, Bhutan joined the growing number of democracies in the world when His Majesty the Fourth King formally stepped down as absolute monarch with the first elections. He undertook this radical change because he believed that it would be in the best interest of the nation to hand over sovereignty to the people. In doing so, he expanded the roles and responsibilities of each and every inhabitant of the country from being strictly that of a subject to that of a citizen. But what does this expansion entail?

### *The “Beyond the Ballot” Challenge*

To commemorate Bhutan’s gift of democracy, the Bhutan Centre for Media and Democracy (BCMD) hosted a challenge on the theme of “citizenship”. All entrants were asked to explore what it means to be a citizen in Bhutan’s new democracy. Beyond voting for the nation’s political leadership, what are the new roles and responsibilities that confront each and every citizen? Entrants were asked to express this understanding through a written or visual medium (either video or photography).

BCMD received an overwhelming number of entries totaling over 120 from high school and college students, independent writers, and photographers. After a rigorous screening process, judges from civil society, government,

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education, and media were recruited to evaluate the entries for relevance, creativity, critical understanding, technique and clarity.

### *This Publication*

Because a vibrant democracy is built on dialogue and discussion, we at BCMD felt the urge to share some of these meditations on citizenship that were adjudged to be the best. Each essay sheds a nuanced light on citizenship, and the creativity of the writer is reflected in the form –fiction, non-fiction, opinion, and even ode. At the same time, there are many themes that continually recur, for example that citizenship requires a global consciousness; that it involves the ethics of care, compassion and a volunteerism; and, most especially, that citizens are more than just a vote.

Taken together, these essays constitute a benchmark for where Bhutan stands as a democracy for a democracy can only be as strong as the consciousness and conscientiousness of its citizens. We hope that this compilation of reflections inspires further reflection on *your* role in Bhutan's young democracy. No longer can we expect the government to provide the conditions for Gross National Happiness; we must work towards it *together*.

The Bhutan Centre for Media and Democracy

\*These stories represent the views of the contributors and are not the views of BCMD

# Opinion

The articles that follow are the views of the authors and do not represent the views of any organisation.





# A Good Human Being is a Good Citizen

Lotey Om

The meaning of citizenship extends beyond just possessing an identity card. Being a citizen is about love and respect for the nation; it is about abiding by the principles and laws of the government that you as a citizen approved prior to bringing them into power. But being a citizen is not just about passively submitting to those in power; it should also mean raising your voice at the flaws in decision made by a legislative body. It means not remaining quiet when the government makes mistakes. It doesn't even mean you keep complaining. What it takes to be a citizen is your willingness to give opinions, point out flaws (if any), and to work together towards creating more viable solutions.

A good citizen will possess seven fundamental qualities:

- (1) Not being overly opportunistic by misusing government resources;
- (2) Serving the nation selflessly without seeking individual benefit;
- (3) Being compassionate towards those in need and extending a helping hand, where possible;
- (4) Respect for the elderly, courtesy for the youth, and being considerate with peers;
- (5) Pride and respect for the

unique culture and tradition the nation has;

- (6) The attitudes to keep these traditions alive;
- (7) Being wise in adopting foreign cultures.

As much as one may think one's opinions are correct, one should continue to respect and strive to understand the views of his or her fellow citizens. When participating in community activities, activities that may be as small as a cleaning campaign or constructing a bridge – you should always express and interest and willingness to be a part of that event. A citizen should not lag behind in standing up for the rights of his or her own nor should he or she fail to respect the rights of the people.

Sometimes, being a citizen takes as little as having common sense. For example, by not leaving your waste or garbage behind at a picnic spot, you are fulfilling your role as a good citizen by not littering the environment. Others who visit the park after you will benefit from this small, but important, effort to maintain a clean environment. It stands to reason, then, that taking care of public property like parks should be a natural response for any good

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citizen.

When it comes to voting for the nation's leader, we all should keep in mind that it is not the political party that matters most. In the end, it all comes down to how capable that particular person is in serving the needs of our community. Our vote should not be biased towards a party background nor should it be based on a familial or friendly relation. Most of all, it is about being true to ourselves while choosing the leader. Being a citizen (of Bhutan) is not just about beaming with pride while talking about GNH somewhere abroad; it also is about being able to think on the social, economic and environmental is-

sues within the nation and showing enough concern to address those problems. And it doesn't end with just showing concern, we all should work hand in hand towards resolving these issues.

Wearing the national dress, speaking the national language and holding a citizenship identity card may be the constitutional definition of a "citizen", but being a citizen has a meaning broader than these superficial indicators. He or she is a person who is honest and true to himself or herself and to others as a whole. Above all, being a good citizen of any nation and for that matter, of the world is being a good human being.

*Lotey Om, Student, University of New England, Armidale, NSW, Australia.*

# The Common Culture that Unites Us All

Riku Dhan Subba

*"Citizenship is an articulation of an inclusive political association and common culture that unites all inhabitants of diverse ethnicity, religion or race... The state is an association of citizens, all free and all have the same rights and carry respective duties."*

Feliks Gross (1999), *The American Sociological Humanist*

The Bhutanese public has generally been, to a large extent, primarily conservative, traditional and apolitical. Since 1907, change in Bhutan was initiated, planned and controlled solely by the Kings. As a traditionally isolated country, there was neither external pressure from the outside world on Bhutan to democratise, nor have there been any internal demands for greater participation for the people. However, starting from 1998, the fourth Druk Gyalpo King Jigme Singye Wangchuck began to guide the country on a rapid passage to democracy. Every major activity was geared towards empowering the people, decentralising of power, and increasing people's participation. And, in 2008, the country became a constitutional democratic monarchy.

With the gift of democracy, His Maj-

esty the King has bestowed greater, newer and important rights upon the people of Bhutan, as well as responsibilities to determine our own political, economical, social and cultural future. No longer can we afford to be an apolitical, passive and dependent populace; now, we are required to be active, well-informed, and responsible citizens.

When the Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan was adopted in 2008, it granted certain legal and fundamental rights to all of Bhutan's citizens like freedom of speech and assembly, right to information, property rights, and to the free practice of one's own religion and culture. Also, certain social and political duties were conferred such as the duty to participate in the exercise of political power whether as a voter, a candidate or a public official.

However, citizenship is more than these constitutional mandates. How we define citizenship should also be guided by normative principles, values and expectations that all derive from social, economical, historical and cultural context of Bhutan. It is a higher responsibility to remain united and achieve everything as one harmonious family.

On Bhutan's National Day, His Majesty the King Jigme Khesar Namgyal Wangchuck declared to the nation: "Today, we have great aspirations, the peace, stability, security and sovereignty of the nation; strengthening of our new democracy; equitable socio-economic growth to achieve GNH; and nurturing our youth to one day lead a nation greatly strengthened by our hard work and commitment. To achieve all this we need trust and faith in our relationships between the government and people; between institutions of government; and between people ourselves." It is very clear from His Majesty's address that the concept of citizenship in Bhutan involves living cooperatively. Individuals, groups, or agencies with different interests and opinions are obliged to sit down, to engage in dialogue with one another, and to support and understand each other.

In 2008, we, the people, elected the government for the first time in our history. However, though the ability to choose ones leaders is the hallmark of any democracy, our roles as citizens are much broader than simply taking part in these formal democratic processes. As Marina Liborakina, a Russian activist, observed, "As citizens, we are responsible for how we are governed. The main issue is to broaden citizens' participation especially in decision

making on crucial issues of security, peace, and military." Thus, citizenship requires active participation in the management of public affairs that are of great significance to our country. Well-informed, adequately and timely consulted, citizens taking part in the direct decision-making can fully contribute to the sharing of responsibilities with representatives, planning and working together.

Debating public issues, attending community meetings and petitioning the government are some other rights and responsibilities of the citizens. Public debate provides an opportunity for every individual to discuss local issues, and to critically examine them for the purpose of finding adequate solutions. Moreover, non-governmental organisations can assist the government offering citizens especially members of marginalised groups such as youth, women and the disabled a platform to voice their concerns and, in doing so, include them in the political process.

Furthermore, social media networks such as Facebook, Twitter and blogs are facilitating the citizens' freedom of speech. It provides accessible channels for the citizens to take active part in the governance of their country where people voice their opinions on development and raise pertinent questions for the ex-

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change of knowledge and experience on development issues.

The constitution and other constitutional bodies like the Election Commission and the Anti-Corruption Commission of Bhutan have been established to define and limit the government's power so that it remains accountable to the people.

In general, citizenship demands us to be concerned and to care about the world around us, and then to act to improve the world. From nurturing our environment and protecting it from exploitation, we ought to raise issues relating to negligence of underprivileged groups and to fight against discrimination and injustice in our society. As citizens, we have duties and responsibilities to care and respect other fellow citizens, their cultures and ideas. As we love our country and abide by the law, the state in return upholds our rights.

However, citizenship is not limited to one's country; we are also the citizens of the international community. We have the responsibility to care about other citizens of the world and to have an understanding of their cultures, histories and ideas. We live in an increasingly interconnected world with crucial transnational dimensions, and it is every citizens' responsibility to be informed about how geopolitical realities shape life today.

In conclusion, citizenship is a common culture that unites all the citizens of diverse backgrounds to carry the same rights and duties. Citizenship builds a strong civil society marked by harmony, understanding, cooperative living and trust to achieve our aspirations and to find peace, economic prosperity and, ultimately, Gross National Happiness.

*Riku Dhan Subba, Programme Officer, Department of Youth and Sports, Ministry of Education.*

# Every Thumb Makes a Difference

Sonam Tshering

Citizenship in Bhutan's new democracy means the ballot day. The ballot day marks a citizen's responsibility to secure liberty, to ensure justice, and to promote unity and happiness in the country for all times. It also means that a citizen shall ensure that the Government promotes and protects the interest of the nation, maintains the peace, strengthens sovereignty, follows principles of good governance and allows people to directly participate in the country's development, uphold the rule of law in the country, and preserve environment and culture at all times.

Citizenship is the test to gain the right to life, liberty, information and freedom of speech, opinion, to health and education, and the preservation of environment and culture. Though these blessings are guaranteed by the Constitution, citizens must strive to protect them every time they cast their ballots.

In a new democracy, citizenship is like a seed; in the end, we reap what we have sown. The seed was first sown in 2008 when we had the first general elections. Since then, the changes that have taken place have been the result of our citizenship.

The day we cast our ballot is indeed the day that actually begins our journey for the next five years. In a democracy, citizens decide what is best for them. Citizenship is a key to open the door of peace, and constitutes an opportunity to promote the principle of Gross National Happiness. It also means the opposite; for instance, a vote that is influenced by greed, selfishness, favouritism, or bribery is like a key that opens the doors of poverty, political breakdown, misery, unhappiness and corruption.

True citizenship can bring unity, foster tolerance, mutual respect, compassion, promote a spirit of brotherhood and harmonious living, safeguard public property, appreciate, preserve, protect and spread culture and heritage of the country, and develop the sense of community and leadership.

Unlike during the monarchy, when citizenship was defined by the passive presence of an individual in the country, citizenship in a democracy means participation in elections. Elections enable people to press the right button, to institute the foundation of true democracy or ruin the nation by casting the ballot in a misguided manner. Through the

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ballot, we elect a government that could be corrupt and motivated by selfishness, or we elect a government that believes in free and fair elections, a government that believes in the needs of each individual irrespective of caste or creed, class, gender, or age, and does not tolerate corruption while carrying out their duties.

In the end, what citizenship really means in Bhutan's new democracy is that every thumb makes a difference in the nation's journey.

Not only does citizenship mean the choice to think and rethink, but also the authority, prerogative, privilege and opportunity to exercise our franchise and lead our nation on the path to Gross National Happiness. The result of each ballot will reveal the ability of each and every citizen to determine the nation's future and decide the direction of Bhutan's socio-economic development. Therefore, let's cast our ballot to elect the best leader and let's cast our ballot to build our nation, today and tomorrow, for generations to come.

*Sonam Tshering, Asst. Legal Officer, Bhutan Narcotic Control Agency.*



# Gompo, the Tea Drinker

Dechen Yangzom

In the name of identity, the weight placed on being a citizen cannot be challenged. As long as you are a citizen, it does not matter what class you belong to; first or second-class, you are given the job of a tea drinker.

As a citizen of Bhutan, you will be known as a “Bhutanese”. Following this, you accept the fact that you are given the name, “Bhutanese”, by law. In this case, the law will function like the Lama who will give my son the name “Gompopa”. As Gompo grows up, he will try to grow into a Gompo. What Gompo will not gather when he is born is that he will have to perform as a citizen.

If Gompo does not act, he will not be judged. As a result, his potential goodness could be unknown. However, if Gompo acts prudently, his goodness should naturally manifest itself. However, acting prudently is not as easy as it sounds. Prudence entails analytical skills, which can only come with education. Therefore, a citizen can only become a pro-active citizen if he or she is given an education. The education should help him or her decipher the virtuous from the non-virtuous. However, a canny citizen will be

conscious of society’s inequalities. A bad citizen, on the other hand, will try to harm someone with a good heart engaged in a virtuous deed. Nevertheless, if Gompo were a good citizen who suddenly had his reputation tarnished because of someone’s bad intentions, his goodness would never fade away. As a good citizen, Gompo should always be encouraged to help others. As long as the outer obstacles remain external to him and do not have an impact on his basic goodness, he will remain a good citizen.

At this point, your citizenry will be assessed in terms of “good” or “bad”. In Gompo’s case, he will become a “good” or “bad” Gompo. All of this depends on how Gompo will act within the society of judgmental men. Being labeled “good” or “bad” by other people need not be a salient concern; a responsible citizen will be his or her own judge, and will not be discouraged by other people’s shallow verdicts.

However, of greater importance than being a good Gompo or a good Bhutanese will be being a good *global citizen*. This by far will be Gompo’s biggest challenge. Not only will he have to act, he will have to *adapt*. Gompo will realise that his actions

will affect the world. If Gompo litters on the streets of Thimphu, he is littering the streets of the world. If Gompo drives a hummer polluting the Bhutanese air, he is one of many melting the Himalayan glaciers. If Gompo wants to become a good citizen, he will definitely have to understand and identify the links of interdependence that bind our world. All of these links will have an affect on him, on his future children, and even on their children.

Being a good citizen locally or globally being of service to others does not mean only helping the poor. It means helping a grandfather climb up the stairs, or giving up your seat to a pregnant lady on a bus. It also means recycling bottles and buying something else with the two ngultrums acquired from selling them. It means throwing your piece of gum in a trashcan; and if it does not fall inside the trashcan, it means picking up the chewed gum and placing it directly in the trashcan. Being a citizen means on being good.

Furthermore, a citizen should be careful not to become a stupid citizen. Kindness is a virtue but not all kindness is a virtue. Good intentions, when led blindly, do not always yield good results. If you generously offer a drug addict some more drugs, kindness must be ruled out, for that is actually harm-

ing the person's ability to act as a good citizen. When you are being kind, you must reason whether you are actually hurting or harming the person. However, helping a drug addict pro-actively is something that a good global citizen will be encouraged to do; giving drug addicts second chance can awaken their capacity for responsible citizenship.

Some say, "ignorance is bliss". A truly good citizen, however, would understand that this is blissful only in the short-run. In the long-run, truly understand the problems that confront you. Using this understanding, you then face the problem in the hopes of solving it. Thus, a truly good citizen for the global community will be fearless, tolerant and then compassionate beyond logic.

Thus, being a citizen, you are given the role of a tea drinker. When Gompo drinks tea, first and foremost, he should share it with his friends. If his cup is full, he will have to hold it carefully. Just like a hot cup of tea keeps one warm on a cold wintry day, the role of citizenship should warm up your heart to keep the world intact.

However, your tea is to be taken sincerely. Spilling the tea would not only leave one with no tea; it could also burn a person. A tea drinker should be alert when taking tea. If

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the tea is put aside and ignored, it might cool down and fail to serve its purpose for a cold wintry day. An irresponsible tea drinker would

not only have no tea to drink; eventually, he or she will be left in destitution, just as an imprudent citizen would be left in deprivation.

*Dechen Yangzom, Child protection, UNICEF.*

# A Young Citizen's Voice in a Younger Democracy

Lilly Yangchen

The word “citizen” is defined as “a person legally recognised as a member of a country” (*Oxford English Dictionary*). In my opinion, a citizen is an inhabitant of a country who enjoys certain rights stated in the Constitution of a country and who is entitled to fulfill the responsibilities that come with being a citizen.

However, rights and responsibilities do not completely define the person as a rightful citizen of the country. Every citizen must work towards achieving the common goals as enshrined in the Constitution, which will ultimately lead to the good of the country.

Since 2008, our country Bhutan has transitioned to democratic constitutional monarchy, in which the King, as the head of state, no longer has absolute authority. Besides this change in governance, the significant change came upon the citizens. We, the Bhutanese, received the rights along with the responsibility to uphold those rights. We have been given the choice to vote for the right leaders, the choice to choose our own government.

This movement has given every Bhutanese (above the age of 18) the

opportunity to feel the pride of contributing to our nation's development through the use of his or her vote. Unfortunately, I am still 13 and have a few years before I can cast my vote for my leader of choice. However, this does not mean that I have no role to identify myself with. For instance, seeing my elder family members casting their rights during both the national and local elections made me feel a strong sense of belonging to a family that is enjoying the democratic rights of a new democratic country.

Today, my role is as a youth of the country; someone who is a “future citizen” of the country. In our own little ways, we youth can exercise our rights be it in the schools or during the camps. We are encouraged to practice the art of voting in the school to choose our own school prefects and representatives whom we feel are more capable than the rest.

Besides the excitement that comes from exercising one's rights the feeling that comes when one is able to choose one's own candidate is that of relief, satisfaction and pride. Perhaps, I am right to be excited to turn 18 in few years and be a more rightful citizen of my country.

Even as a youth, I do not feel outside of the politics of our country. I am an ardent follower of the national news and keep myself updated with all the news and happenings around. I certainly feel that the noble vision of our Fourth Druk Gyalpo shifting our country to this new system of democracy was really far-sighted. Today, we Bhutanese enjoy huge pride and satisfaction in seeing the present government functioning effectively and efficiently. The leaders chosen by our people are working hard to carry out the responsibilities given to them and even the citizens are working hand in hand with the leaders to achieve the national goals.

However, the rights of a democratic citizen are often misunderstood. Every other day, we hear unkind stories of how people, in the name of their rights, mislead others and create chaos in the region. This was evident especially during elections. Bribery and corruption were practiced to lure people into making the wrong decisions. Such negative practices will hamper our society. As also told by the elders, families and friends become enemies if they don't belong to the same party or if their candidates come from dif-

ferent families. I get scared hearing such stories. As a citizen of this peaceful country, I hope our people can work together to maintain the peace and to develop our country more and more.

Every country in the world is fighting for democracy. We Bhutanese are fortunate that the transition happened so smoothly and effectively. We must thank our leaders for their visions and hopes, with which we citizens enjoy the rights as stated in our Constitution. Every Bhutanese citizen has the bigger role to play in achieving the goal of Gross National Happiness. To achieve this, we must be good democratic citizens and we should know how to exercise our own rights.

Therefore, to be a good citizen of a democratic country, I personally feel that we should know how to hold our rights in one hand and the responsibilities in the other. Voting is one thing, carrying out the rights is quite another. Only then can we, leaders and citizens alike, yield the joys of democracy.

Today, I am a youth of the country. Tomorrow, I will be a citizen and my wish is to be a good citizen.

*Lilly Yangchen, Student, Lungtenzampa Middle Secondary School.*

# The Heart of Citizenship

Kinley Rinchen

At first glance, being a citizen is matter of legitimacy. This legitimacy often comes in the form of an endorsement from the state that indicates that 'yes, this person is a citizen'. Following the law of land, either by birth or naturalisation, citizenship is a title received upon being registered in an official record. However, upon closer examination, it means much more.

For some, it means identity and security. As a citizen, an individual has a nation to claim as home and its laws as guardian protectors. Otherwise, one becomes like a lost child without identity, feeling homeless and vulnerable to various kinds of threats to life. Being a citizen at the level of legitimacy at least saves one from being like a lost child. However, limiting citizenship to a matter of state-branded legitimacy does little to differentiate a citizen from a refugee; all that separates the two is mere paperwork.

For some, being a citizen means having access to various welfare schemes and benefits that its nation has to offer. It is this view that motivates many people from developing nations to vie for citizenship in developed countries, especially in the US. If viewed holistically, these

citizens are nothing more than parasites whose purpose of living is to be fed by a nation. This perspective of citizenship may mean a lot to an individual, but to nation it means nothing but burden.

Then, there is another aspect of viewing at citizens as the bearers of 'rights', as individuals whom the state must serve by allowing them to pursue and practice certain inalienable freedoms. The establishment of democratic systems provides the enabling environment to empower citizens and mobilise participation. Nevertheless, these freedoms can be misused at times. What if one tends to exercise his or her individual rights, and then goes on to disturb their neighbours? What if one believes that the road is for everyone and jay walks? What if one sings aloud while his or her neighbours are in grief due to some misfortune?

Strictly speaking, to be a citizen in the truest sense is much more than legitimacy, access to national resources, and practicing rights. It means attaining other critical qualifications in terms of moral values, principles and sense of responsibility that goes much beyond fulfilling individual needs.

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No one denies that our Kings are the true citizens of our country who will never be wiped out of the hearts and minds of this nation. But when we reflect on our roles as citizens, we tend to get lost in these technical definitions about legitimacy. We forget that we should not only admire our monarchs, we also need to emulate them. We ought to reflect on the qualities that our kings possess, on their selfless service and their sincere dedication to the happiness, wellbeing and security of this nation and then try to manifest these qualities in ourselves.

Ultimately, this is what differentiates true citizens from the other, more mundane types of citizenship: the compassionate intention to serve the nation. Being a citizen means not just belonging to a particular nation; it is the purpose of being in that nation that counts. To be a citizen means acquiring qualities and a caliber of thinking, behaving and speaking that best enables you to benefit the country in your own individual way.

So, to be a citizen means to be helpful to others so that society feels one's warmth and presence. It means refraining from speech and deeds that are harmful to the society as a whole, ensure peace and

security of one's community and nation in general. While democracy assures freedom of speech and participation, citizens must remain accountable to each other at all times by ensuring the fruitful and healthy use of their freedoms. Respect for others must be at the centre of our conscience while exercising our freedoms, as it is a fundamental element to uphold social harmony.

To be a citizen also means being socially and politically engaged instead of strictly acting as subjects of our elected leaders. You should engage in your own way to enhance community and social vitality.

It is crucial that all citizens make a nation together, for every citizen has an important role to play. If one fails to value it, then one is likely to become a marginalised citizen a circumstance in which the individual may see himself or herself as part of the whole, but that whole may refuse to consider the individual as a part of it.

Therefore, it is the possession of the heart that bears the qualities of selflessness, kindness, and caring for the community and nation that makes one a real 'citizen'.

Indeed, it means a great deal to be a citizen.

*Kinley Rinchen, Royal University of Bhutan.*

# Shackles on My Feet

Dawa Tamang

If I had shackles on my feet, would that make me a good citizen?

In the minds of the general public, the term 'citizenship' often triggers an association with rights and entitlements. Rarely does 'citizenship' evoke a notion of 'service' or something greater than the individual. This leaves us with an idea of citizenship that we can conclude is somewhat one-sided and distorted.

Consider my own case: I am a Lhotsampa, my father is from Tsirang and mother from Trashigang, leaving me with a Lhotsampa surname. Should 'where you are from' define your role as a citizen? In my view, it cannot, should not, and often does not. Whatever your creed, colour or race, you can still be a good citizen.

Perhaps, you may say, a good citizen is measured solely by their economic role in society regardless of their background. But will immensely contributing to the nation's GDP make me a good citizen? No! Because, a man with wealth who treats his fellow citizens as assets and not as human beings can never fall into the category of a truly good citizen.

I should not feel shoddy about myself because of my mixed ethnic background. Instead, I should bridge the gap where difference might occur and be the means to unite people. Today, I see myself as a symbol of love, the result of a union of two people who overcame endogamy and did not actually care about the cultural differences between them. This, to me, brings real meaning to our nation's motto of "One nation, one people".

So, we can see that background should not matter. But what about power? Will I be a good citizen by becoming the Prime Minister? I will not if I only think and act in my own interests, and legislate and execute deeds that would benefit nobody but me. Will I be a good citizen by serving the government? It might, but not if I see the government as a mass-recruiting firm that would allow me to hire only my friends. Instead of practicing nepotism, I should employ those who are more deserving candidates.

Will I be a good citizen if I am more religious? Yes, I should be religious, but I should not use religion and God to advance my worldly status. Additionally, one should not be good solely for the expectations of



glories of heaven, fear of hell and life afterwards. One should be good from his or her heart and practice nonviolence as a reflex. One should never forget to live this life to the fullest, living each day as though it were his or her last.

Will wearing the national dress, possessing a citizenship identity card or passport make me a good citizen? That surely makes me a citizen, formally speaking, but it does not guarantee that I will be a good citizen. To be a good citizen, I should love my nation sufficiently to the point that I am ready to take a bullet for it to preserve its sovereignty.

But a good citizen goes beyond the demands of a patriot, one who only praises his nation. Yes, nationalism should be there, but we should not be blinded to the point that it causes xenophobic reactions. One should understand the importance of having sound relationships with neighbouring nations. If I were a German during the Second World War, I would not have succumbed to the jingoist rhetoric of the fascist Nazis with their promise of a "Third Reich". Before we become citizens of any nation, we must remember that we are citizens of the world first.

Good citizens should also preserve culture, agree or disagree; culture

and tradition enable nations to attain sovereignty. A good citizen should also know about his country's history, but should not try to relive it, however glorious it might be. Our globalised and increasingly interconnected world has no place for a person who thinks he is a crusader, even for the descendant of Saladin himself.

I can only be labeled as a good citizen if I am not corrupt, for corruption creates imbalances in society. If I am to be corrupt with copious amounts of public money, I am creating nothing but voids. And to fill up those voids, somewhere a starving family's father (whose indigence I will be the cause of due to my greed and corruption) will take the law into his own hands and may start shop lifting, mugging people or even commit crimes of greater magnitude and intensity. One should always remember that that one would hinder the natural flow of money if he were to take refuge in corruption, which not only hampers individuals who have the right to that money, but also creates disturbances in the balance of society.

I should not shirk any responsibilities and pretend to be someone I am not. I should not be optimistic all the time. I should also be skeptical and a critic at times, if being so benefits my nation. If I were in

the Middle East and were called to stone a woman who allegedly practiced adultery, should I join the herd or stand up to voice my objections? Sometimes, you have to go against popular beliefs especially when these beliefs only create needless suffering.

To fully exercise one's rights and citizenship, one should vote. A good citizen withers when he or she remains idle and fails to perform his or her fundamental democratic duties. To fail to vote is to fail to let your voice be heard in the chorus of justice. In giving one the means to choose one's leaders who will decide the future of the nation, a vote

is something sacred, something I cannot give away for anything – not for iPhones or iPads. We as citizens have this tremendous power, and we should be vigilant with it.

I only ask you to be a good citizen because if one is a good citizen then he ultimately becomes a good human being and an active citizen.

So, if I had shackles on my feet, would that make me a good citizen? If I knew that I deserved it and I agreed that being in shackles shall benefit my nation, I would be a good citizen. Palden Drukpa. Lha Gyalo.

*Dawa Tamang, Civil Engineer.*

# The Essential Union of Citizenship and Democracy

Tenzin Gyeltshen

Three years after making the transition to democracy, where do we stand today? While we are a democratic nation, we are not yet fully democratised; we know what democracy *is*, but we do not *do* democracy. To understand what it means to 'do democracy', we must explore the idea of citizenship. Citizenship is the state or condition of being a citizen. A person shall be declared a citizen if he/she enjoys all the fundamental rights. And democracy is about the values of citizenship. Democracy ensures that a person enjoys his/her political, economic and social rights. It acts as a platform for enjoying the simplest of rights, even for the poorest of people. Additionally, democracy does not distinguish between poor and rich. Thus, equality ought to prevail in the society.

The concept of citizenship is closely linked with the idea of democracy. Citizenship is only justified in a democratic setup. Hence, we should be able to differentiate between the notion of a citizen and that of a subject. A subject is submissive to the state, in which the right to govern is only enjoyed by certain privileged people. But citizenship is about being a part of the very community where you live in. And in that com-

munity, everyone enjoys the right to rule. Moreover, they are not discriminated based on their religion, race, and gender. This is one of the powerful messages of a democracy; that even the weakest can become the strongest.

Bhutan seeks to establish a vibrant democracy, one that advances some of humanity's greatest values. His Majesty the Fourth King introduced the idea of democracy because, deep inside, he knew that a democratic setup could make Bhutanese people happier. What democracy has given the Bhutanese people is the realisation that they form an important part of the society. When people actually realise their importance in the society, they are certain of their fundamental rights. And fundamental rights are an assurance of citizenship. With fundamental rights, however, come fundamental duties. A good citizen will perform his/her fundamental duties: she/he will obey the rules set up by government; she/he will respect the constitution of the country; pay taxes; render services required; and demonstrate loyalty and dedication to the country. But loyalty does not simply mean unquestioned acceptance; a good citizen should also question and criticise the govern-

ment when reason demands it. By doing so, she/he continues to demonstrate the love for her/his country, for there is always a risk that the government may mislead the people. If a citizen fails to perform her/his fundamental duties, democracy fails.

In a country like ours, if people are to be treated as citizens, they have to be much more politically active. We are indeed a parliamentary democracy and if people do not get actively involved in the political realm, the concept of citizenship holds no meaning. Just as democracy is by the people, of the people and for the people, so too is citizenship: it is by the people because it is defined by both rights and duties; it is of the people because it is about fundamental human values of justice and equality; and finally, it is for the people because it gives them a realisation of being an important part of the society.

In a political setup like ours, though freedom of speech is guaranteed, some people are afraid of speaking up. They fear the consequences of expressing their opinions, especially when they could be construed as criticising the government. If this fear is present, democracy fails, and when democracy fails, the values of citizenship cannot be realised. However, as democracy has taken its roots, people are beginning to

speak up and criticise the government or any person responsible for that matter.

Citizenship is about equality, liberty and justice. If people are not treated equally and are denied of their liberties, then injustice triumphs, while faith is lost in the democratic process. If Bhutan were really a vibrant democratic nation, today there would not be inequality between men and women. Men dominate over women in every field. We have very few women in the parliament, and in government in general. So, are our women good enough to be considered citizens? No, for they are treated unequally against men. Having assured and guaranteed their right to vote merely does not make women citizens. Citizenship is basically concerned with certain rights, and democracy is the platform for people to realise these rights. Yes, we are part of a democratic nation, and so should rightly be labeled as 'citizens'. If our rights are protected and guaranteed, we shall render our services to the state and the government.

For democracy to flourish in Bhutan, people must be involved actively in the political realm. We should wholeheartedly accept this gift of democracy from our beloved Fourth King and be good and responsible citizens.

*Tenzin Gyeltshen, Student, Sherubtse College.*

# Fundamental Guidelines for any Bhutanese Citizen

Kelden Kumar Drukpa

Bhutan has transitioned from a monarchy to a democratic government very recently. So what kind of expectations do the people have from the change? What kind of role is carved out for me in the process of our country's development? Does my role as a citizen also change as per the change in the system of governance?

I strongly think not.

I think our Fourth King gifted the people the democratic form of government hoping that people would be more independent in considering the benefits of the nation. So our role as citizens remains the same, but we have to face more demands and responsibilities than ever before.

For me, a young Bhutanese student, being a citizen means someone who upholds the following roles and responsibilities, someone who constantly works to be a better citizen:

## *Save resources like water and electric power*

I will switch off all the lights and power units and close the taps when not in use because it is a slow drain from our country's natural resources.

## *Save food materials*

I will use only what is necessary because 23% of Bhutanese people live below the poverty line and are in the danger of starvation. Weak and hungry people will not make good citizens nor will they be productive.

## *Plant more trees*

Industries and factories use a lot of trees as raw materials. Therefore, it is the job of all citizens to take responsibility so that we all give back what is taken out of our environment. We cannot be careless about the trees in Bhutan since our life depends on our environment's health.

## *Worship work*

The timeless secret for a long, happy and successful life is to love our work. There is no substitution for hard work. For me, the best way I can contribute is by being a good student. I must study hard so that I can help and make a valuable contribution to my nation later.

## *Developing skills*

Norman Cousins noted that, "The tragedy of life is not death but what we let die inside of us while we live." I will try to develop skills and take time to discover what my personal gifts are and then use them for the benefit of my nation.

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***Respect the tradition, culture, and history of our nation***

No matter how developed our nation becomes, it will not be complete without the knowledge of our tradition, culture and its history. These provide us with the foundations for our identity. If we lose our respect for the main roots of our nation, it will result in the failure of our country regardless of the system of governance as the feeling of oneness and belonging will no longer have a common source.

If I am able to follow all of the above roles, I believe that I have become a good son of my country. Contributions to the country's process of development can come from anyone whether rich or poor, literate or illiterate. If I am able to be a good student and be a role model for my friends, I think I will have fulfilled my role as a citizen. And that is what any form of government ultimately needs to succeed: a good citizen.

*Kelden Kumar Drukpa, Student, Chapcha Middle Secondary School.*

## Lessons from a Naturalised Bhutanese

Namgye Phuntshok

The classroom was blaring with all types of noises. The girls were gossiping and giggling while most of the boys were singing along to a melody on someone's music player. I kept looking at the closed door; perhaps I was the only one anticipating Sir John's arrival.

Jonathan Cole was our English lecturer. We addressed him as 'Sir John' – something that he did not encourage. All the same, he found this designation to be amusing, and would chuckle every time we called him that. Often, he described how he loved Bhutan for being the only place in the world where one could be called 'Sir' without actually being knighted.

Sir John entered the class and the commotion dissipated. Everyone got up while hailing a "Good morning, Sir" in unison. I gaped at how promptly the whole class transformed into an army of disciplined students. He scanned the whole classroom and said with a smile, "*Kuzu zangpo*, my dear students." It was neither out of fear nor out of pretence that we truly respected him. He commanded a special aura, something that made us contemplate the important issues in life. He would not

just teach us English through dull, mechanical exercises; he would engage us in other ways, by teaching us philosophy for example.

Though born in England, he had spent most of his life in Bhutan. His initial plan was to seek a little adventure in Bhutan and return home. When asked if he'd ever considered returning home, he would ponder a bit and then reply, "But I am home." He had grown into our little Bhutan and a little bit of Bhutan had grown inside him. He knew that the *gho* wasn't a skirt; he mastered the art of eating by hand; he had grown fond of melodramatic Bhutanese movies; and he had even developed a *doma* addiction (not that he was proud of the last one). Above all, his love for the country was more than that of an awed tourist. He genuinely felt great admiration and passion for the Bhutanese way of life. In that essence, he was a true citizen of this country. Thus, he earned the moniker "The Blond Bhutanese".

The hour-long class flew by with a grammar lesson, a lot of laughter, some wise guidance, and a *boedra* verse performed by our very own blond Bhutanese. After the exodus of the students from the classroom to god-knows-where, I was alone.

I stared at our national flag from the window. The wind was strong, giving the flag a rather picturesque flight. I felt a pat on my shoulder right before I heard someone say, "Isn't it breathtaking?" I looked back, it was Sir John. I stared back at the flag and answered, "It always was."

Sir grabbed a chair and sat next to me. "Wai Namgye, Do you know that every time I see that flag I get the same feeling I got when I saw my wife for the first time." I giggled a little, although he was very serious about what he had said. He playfully punched me on the shoulder and asked, "Is it weird for a foreigner to feel what I feel for this country?" I rose up and shot back, "Sir isn't a foreigner. You have been here longer than I have lived. And yes, it would be weird for a foreigner to love Bhutan more than his own motherland but you aren't a foreigner. You are more of a Bhutanese than I have ever been." He gave me a confused smile. He stood

up and turned around. After an eerie silence he said, "Thank you."

"I guess I will do it."

"Do what?" I anxiously asked.

"Apply for citizenship. Is it a little too audacious of me?"

I smiled and confirmed, "No sir, not at all."

Could he become a Bhutanese citizen? He was always an inspiration. He was a Buddhist by choice. He constantly reminded us the importance of *Tsawa Sum*. During the *Tshechu* he would be the only blond non-tourist in the crowd. He often organised cleaning campaigns in school. He eagerly watched the 2008 voting results although he didn't have the right to vote back then. He could probably score higher than me in a Dzongkha test. Looking back, there was no question about it. He was as Bhutanese as he could be, as anyone could be. Although he has taught me a lot of things, the one thing I will never forget is how he taught me to be a Bhutanese.

*Namgye Phuntshok, Student, Royal Thimphu College.*



# Embracing the Gift

Pemah Wangchen

Walking on the streets of modern day Bhutan is a different experience from what it was just a few years ago. Today, the people are more aware of who they have become as a citizen or who they want to be. They have earned the power to change and nurture it into what seems most suitable. This democratic age has influenced the behaviour of the people and their actions. People have become much friendlier and have adapted to helping each other in so many ways. For instance, just yesterday a schoolboy helped an old lady carry her baskets. A little girl picked up rubbish on her way to school. Such tiny efforts that shape a person into a good citizen really do come from within. Sometimes, I wonder if it is in our Bhutanese blood.

The change in the government influences the change in peoples' mind. We can now notice so many non-profit organisations and firms growing to empower the people. Whether it be a student or an employee, everybody wants to do their part. We read in the papers and we observe on TV about the series of campaigns taking place in different parts of Bhutan. Many people have chosen to actively participate in social developmental services or

educational programmes, where they centre the importance of being a part of the government and using their rights as citizens in the most profound ways.

The atmosphere of schools is also more likely to become democratic. No longer limited to the classroom, the opportunities for learning will grow with the expansion of extra-curricular activities. The reason for the expansion will not be for the provision of entertainment or some sort of brainwashing, but rather to enable students to gain independence in learning values, being co-operative, and becoming better citizens in the future.

The government will be spearheading many aspects of development, so citizens ought to stay abreast with everything that is going on and will go on in the future. Most citizens might still be overwhelmed with the fact that the media plays such a crucial role in bringing out every single detail of current affairs in print and sometimes criticising these affairs. In reality, the media is embracing the independence of a free press, and guiding us in going forth. Truly, this is the primary function of the media in a democracy: spreading awareness as well

as opening dialogue and provoking conversations.

A citizen in a democratic country is an identity seeker. The person will have to decide on what is right. Tackling these decisions will be exhausting and every citizen will feel the weight pulling them down. Only then shall they call themselves citizens and feel the triumph as a whole.

When you are a citizen of a country, you begin to wonder what your responsibilities are and how you can prove your loyalty. Doing that is not as simple as thinking it. In a family, there are errands one must run. We show our respect to the people and the things around us. We start with our family, slowly build up to our neighbours, and then further expand into the community. Thus, in working together, people open up relationships. There may be times when communities clash with each other or disagree. Though this is bound to happen, we as humans must act like humans and deal with each other using care and warmth. Accepting our differences, inviting our similarities, and strengthening our ties will gradually rest all the issues on equality. This will build a nationalistic bond, which I greatly feel is an essential part for democracy. At the 2010 national day, His majesty the king said

“It really is important that we know our surroundings and become familiar with all the development around us. The better we know our community, the better we know ourselves”.

Although people are aware of their surroundings, to some extent they fail to notice the benefit of voting. Voting is a subject that could be expanded to fill volumes of books. In a nutshell, voting is much more than choosing the ruling party; it is a citizen’s exercise of authority and trust. It is our freedom and our right, our primary goal, and our responsibility to make our voices heard. In some countries, people do not even have a voice.

We Bhutanese, on the other hand, are fortunate enough to possess this higher right, and in possessing it, we must use it as though it is the last breath in our entire life. When I asked people why voting is important, they say that voting is not a choice but an obligation and a self-imposed one. Voting is our token of gratitude to the government for granting us this great power.

A person may think that he or she is insignificant: that their voice need not be heard; and that what ever the government and the other citizens choose to do is none of their concern; and that everything they need will come to them from the

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government. Here, we would benefit by following the advice of His Holiness the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama:

We can escape the responsibilities tied to being a citizen, but we cannot escape the feeling of regret that we were not a part of some experi-

ence that gave our country its glory.

Therefore, we must realise the greatness of being a citizen in an independent country where the people's voices, when taken together, can be as magnificent as that of the King himself.

*Pemah Wangchen, Student, Yangchenphug Higher Secondary School.*

# Rights, Responsibilities, and Choices

Sherub Zangmo

It's important for those living in Bhutan to understand that the intent of the Constitution was not to grant people rights; in fact, it is quite the other way round. In truth, the Constitution was written to define and limit government so that a sovereign individual could be free to exercise his or her rights.

Whether you are a citizen of the world, your country, your state, your community, or your family, being a citizen implies rights and responsibilities. The rights and responsibilities are different for each community you belong to. But no matter which community you belong to as a citizen, you have the right to fully participate in that group, as well as the right to be informed about that group, to care for the other members of that group, and to care for the world in which the group lives.

What does this mean in practical, everyday terms? As a citizen of the world, you should have human rights and a voice in international matters. You have the responsibility to care for the world, so our environment can be preserved or improved for future generations. You have the responsibility to care for other citizens of the world and

to have an understanding of their cultures, histories, and ideas. As a citizen of your country, you have all the rights conferred to you by the Constitution of Bhutan.

You also have the responsibility of respecting your fellow citizens and their different cultures and ideas. As a citizen of your state, your rights and responsibilities are much like those you have as a citizen of your country. However, your rights emanate from your state's Constitution. As a citizen of a community, your rights and responsibilities are more local and personal. Caring for your environment and others in your community is a more immediate responsibility, recycling, by picking up litter on your street, or volunteering are the glue that keeps a community together.

Volunteers fill in the gaps. If these gaps were not filled, our communities would suffer. Volunteers do many things in many different ways, such as helping to clean up their community, tutoring, or helping a child. Without volunteers, many jobs would not get done. Imagine what your community would be like without the help of volunteers.

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As a citizen of a family, your rights and responsibilities are the most immediate and personal. You have the responsibility of making a contribution to your family. This need not strictly be a financial contribution; it could (and should) also include contributions of work or attention. You have the right to have contributions from others in the family, too, and a voice in family decision-making.

At the smallest level of citizenship, it is easy to see what the rights and responsibilities are. As we move out into larger circles of community, however, it becomes more difficult to know what we should do. Nevertheless, whether we consider ourselves citizens of a family or citizens of the world, the principles are the same: we are always obligated to care for the people and our surrounding environment.

*Sherub Zangmo, Student, Royal Institute of Health Science, Ministry of Health.*

## Serving the Country

Karma Thinley Chophel

What is citizenship? Do dictionary definitions, such as “The state of being citizens of that nation by birth itself or through migration processing legal rights and privileges”, paint a full picture of what citizenship actually is? No, it means much, much more. To unfold the veiled meaning of this loaded term, we need to combine the power of our minds and hearts, for citizenship is a sacred gift. It is a gift of society and ultimately the gift of God too. It is given to us not by chance but for a purpose: to enjoy and develop an appreciation of our status, but only after selflessly serving others, our environment, and all sentient beings.

Being a citizen, we should always be prepared to uphold the responsibilities that are entrusted to us, and to be accountable for whatever we do. But the responsibility one should have a positive impact. As we are responsible for the development of our nation, we must do everything we can to uphold these responsibilities in a steadfast manner.

Citizenship requires that we expose our bravery and become the armour for our nation’s security and sovereignty. It is when we are in the state

to resist any onslaught of other nations. Though we might not be successful, we need to perform with a full heart, for our mind’s stamina will be the ultimate measure upon which we will be adjudged where we face challenging and even controversial times.

Despite the citizenship someone possesses, one can still violate the law and indulge in corruption and terrorism. We hear of some countries’ leaders who inflict great pain upon their country’s women and children: they are dragged into the darkness of war, deprived of their right to education, and denied their basic human rights. Often, these heinous acts are done in the name of tradition or religion. It is hard to believe that such things happen even in this century. If these acts continue, how can one appreciate the gift of citizenship? How is one going to mark the height of his or her presence as a citizen of one’s country when one does not mean anything to the country?

Citizenship in this democratic world is not like that of a stagnant pond which will only produce a wave of action when the wind of command and order strike the water. Rather, citizenship is more like

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a free stone falling into the pond to cause the ripple of happiness throughout the country. Unlike the of world monarchy, citizenship in this democratic world is quite complicated. No longer can we solely rely upon the head of state to bring change; we must also work to bring change ourselves. Steps can only be taken after a rigorous process of reflection and analysis.

Citizenship is all about not losing interest in our nation. At all times, we should have our nation's interest in our hearts and try to play a part in its development. This does not necessarily mean that we have to take on immense tasks or try to commit great acts; as Mother Teresa wisely observed, "There are no great acts; only small acts done with great love." All we need to do is to give as much care and attention as we would give to the things we regard as important. In the end, it will be by those small things we shall be judged. Moreover, we need to do them with heart and mind. Our small contribution to our com-

munity will ultimately be a contribution to the nation and even the world, for the world is ultimately a composite of many, many small communities. Therefore, no small act ever goes in vain.

When all is said and done, I feel that the sense of belonging is the foundation for citizenship. When we have a sense of belonging to our country, we feel that it belongs to us as much as we belong to it. Naturally, we become patriotic and help the nation in as many ways as possible. Citizenship consists of no distinctions, be it rich or poor, ministers or labourers. After all, we are citizens of the same nation under the same umbrella of the constitution. Being a citizen means being a dutiful man and dedicating any work for the benefit of others. Who knows how to sacrifice his or her time for others, and knows how to live life in service to others in the country, and around the world. Just as Jawaharlal Nehru said: "Citizenship consists in service to the country."

*Karma Thinley Chophel, Student, Chapcha Middle Secondary School.*

## Citizens United

Gelay Phuntsho

We are the children of the land of the Thunder Dragon. For nearly a century, we lived under the peaceful rule of our king and his forefathers before him. It has been a few years now since we have stepped into the world of democracy, and still we go on with our lives, minding our own businesses.

A touch of madness came over me as I reflected on the first three years of democratic governance. I wondered: "What makes us a citizen of Bhutan?" I follow the path of the Buddha, and have taken the cultural and traditional heritage of Bhutan to heart. So is that enough to make me a citizen?

I have started to notice people clicking their tongues and shaking their heads in disapproval whenever the country's problems are aired on the television. But is this what we should be doing? Our king has given to all of us; not just you and me, the reins to the country in hopes that we, his blessed children, take the kingdom forward into a bright future shaped by our hands. Have people simply become too accustomed to deferring to our king that now all we want to do is stand in the crowd just to cheer?

Throw away those sinful dreams because this is reality, where everything you do affects everyone around you. Even a single word can change the world. What, then, can we as citizens do to help the country on the path to glory?

The answer is simple: everything! We have in our hands the power to mould the country to become a flourishing nation. It is high time that we use the gift of democracy to guide the nation in the right direction.

Some people may disagree with me at this point. Perhaps you are thinking: 'What does he know about it? He is just a kid.'

Yes, I am just a kid and I have limited knowledge of how democracy works. But it is time we all grow up, spiritually and mentally, in order to ponder the role each of us has to play in society. Even if we are not qualified to become an elected representative, it does not matter. We can elect someone who is qualified and has the same visions as we do, but even doing that is not enough. We have to become more politically aware of the changes that are taking place around us due to changes in the political structure



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of our government.

At the grassroot level, people are illiterate in the concept of democratic form of government and so it falls upon all those who have the knowledge to educate these people. Even if you can educate just a single person, it's more than enough. Like ripples created in a pond by throwing a small pebble into it, the knowledge can spread to every one in time.

The government and various non-government organisations are already working to help the people that are at a disadvantage, but we should also do our part. It doesn't matter if someone is rich or poor. In the end, we are all the same; we are the citizens of Bhutan. If you look deeply into your heart, you will see what connects us all – a burning feeling of patriotism and love for our country.

So let's help out our brothers and sisters who are in dire financial need by volunteering at every available opportunity. The next time you hear there is a cleaning campaign on a Sunday, do not hesitate for a second, thinking 'It's not my problem' and 'Why should I waste my precious Sunday on cleaning someone else's mess?' If our own brother or sister had created a mess in the house, wouldn't we forgive them and help them clean up the mess?

The future lies before us, and the climb to the summit will not be easy. To get there, we will need to take hold of each other's hands and pull up those who are about to fall. Once we arrive, our hearts will swell with pride, as the pure white dragon soars high in the sky towards the magnificent future we helped create.

*Gelay Phuntsho, Student, Alpha Arts & Science College, Chennai, India.*

# Picture Citizenship

Citizenship through pictures and graphics





*"We might witness alcholic nuisance every 5 days while a domaholic nuisance every 5 mins (At least I do)*

*Being a citizen definitely doesn't mean this. Along with Tobacco and Alcohol, Doma Ban is required too." Deepika Adhikari, Ministry of Health*



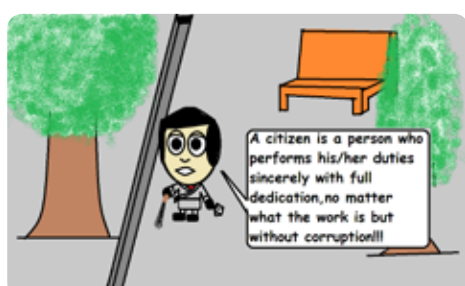
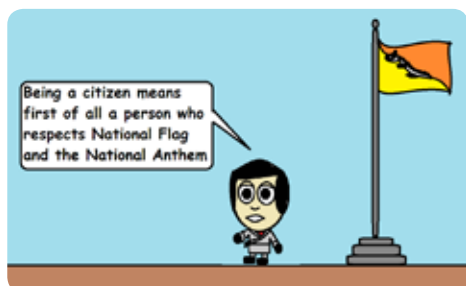
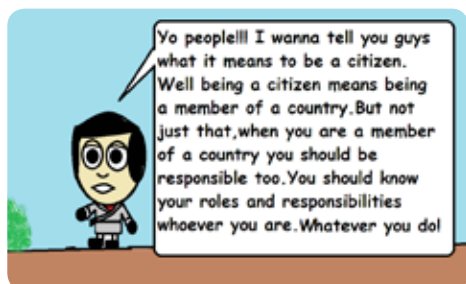
*" Being a citizen means exercising the individual rights responsibly for the benefit of self, society and nation." Karma Gyeltshe, Youth Development Fund*



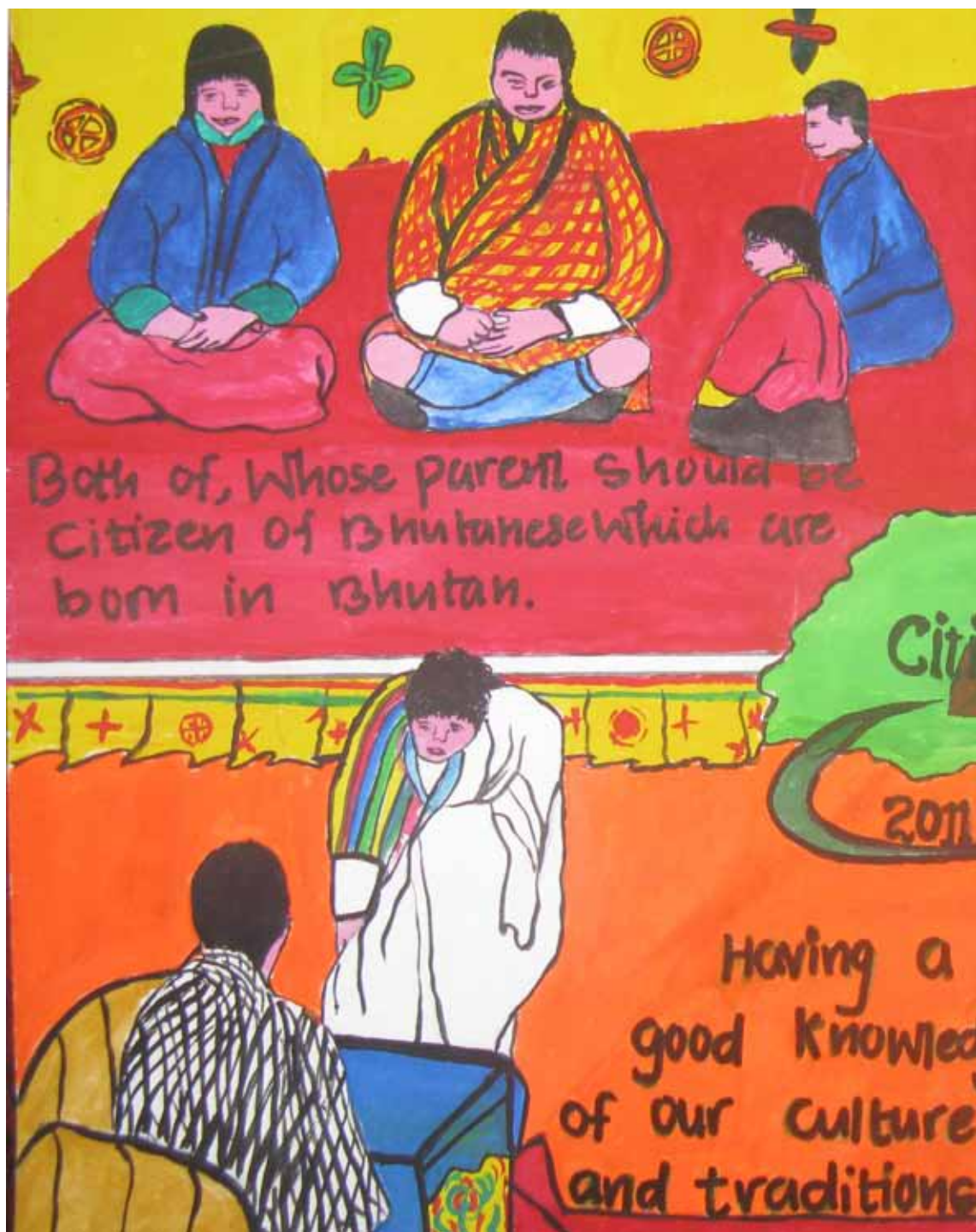
*"Despite the country's economic development, the life of this road worker in the east and others like him contribute to remain the same."* Gyem Namgyal, Bhutan Observer

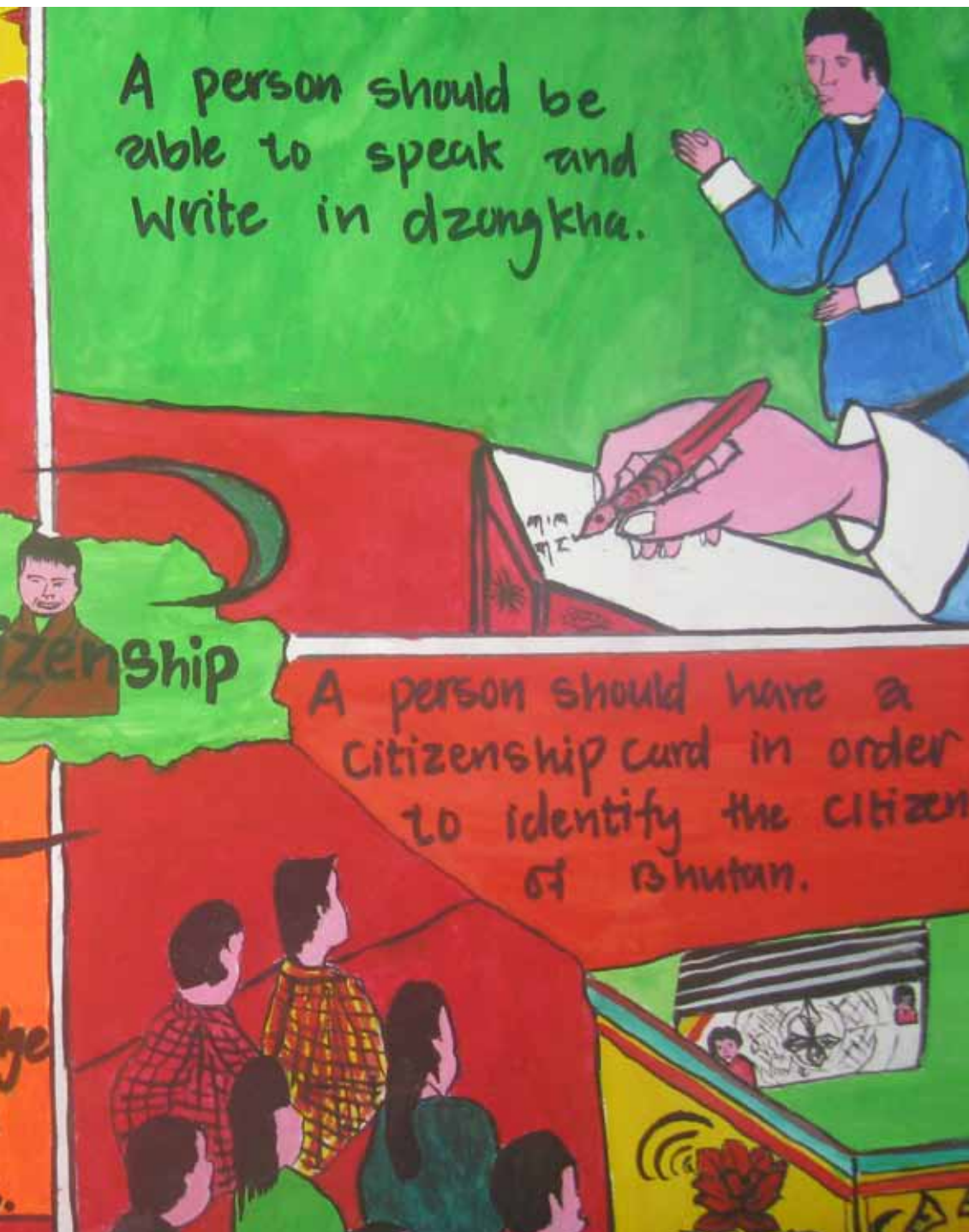


*"Being a citizen, anywhere anytime"*  
Lungten Dorji, student, Motithang Higher Secondary School









Tshewang Tashi, Student, Rinchen Higher Secondary School.





# Fiction

Stories are scenarios fictionalised by the authors and are not reports on real events and people.



## Democracy and the Challenges Ahead

Yeshe Nidup

Right after office hours, I walked straight ahead to the bar that I usually go to after a tiresome day. That day, I saw a group of middle-aged gentlemen sitting together in front of some bottles of beer. I ordered my own bottle and occupied my permanent place in the corner. After drinking half a glass of beer, I heard the group exchanging their opinions on how democracy had been functioning on a new soil. Thinking that I could learn more from them, I picked up my glass and walked towards them to join in.

"May I join your seminar please?"

"Sure, if it interests you," said Dorji.

"May we know your official name please?" asked a tall and grotesque man, Dawa.

"I'm Yeshe Nidup, programme officer working under the Ministry of Education," I lied although I was working under the election commission. I told them a lie, however, for good reasons; I did not want to stop their conversation.

Then a short, fat man began, "I'm Karma, assistant Human Resource Officer under the Ministry of Health." He continued, "Did you

all know what happened during the election campaign? Candidates toured many villages using slogans such as 'We are the servants, you are our master.' But after election, they soon became Dashos and were too busy searching for their own servants."

"Did you watch the live telecast of the first National Assembly?" asked Phuntsho.

"I was studying in Philippines exactly when the assembly convened. Would you mind sharing the gist of the meeting with me?" Kelzang asked.

"The elected members fought tooth and nail for their own salary perks, future benefits, sitting allowance and many other incentives. They did not talk much about the promises made for the people in their constituency," said Phuntsho.

"How come they are like this? If they do like this they will be fooling the innocent people," said Kelzang furiously as he was about to crush his wine glass.

At this point, I decided to intervene in the conversation. "Anyway, did you all cast your votes?" I asked.

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"Yes, I live very close to my home town. So I did not miss the opportunity," Dorji said.

"No, I could not vote because I'm from a remote village," said Kelzang.

"But you could have done so through postal ballot," I interrupted him.

He offered a justification: "I had actually done that but it failed.

"I did not cast a vote because none of the candidates were familiar to me and they were not of my choice," Dawa said.

"My friend told me that one of the candidate was cunning and corrupted. So I voted for the other candidate," Phuntsho said.

I explained to them that casting a vote is one of our fundamental rights, something that no one can change. What voting does is to ensure that our opinion is taken into account while appointing the leaders who will hold the reins of power. People who are elected have the power to formulate policies that are instrumental in shaping the future of citizens and hence the future of the nation itself. It is our primary responsibility to participate and cast our votes mindfully. In a democracy, a vote is much more important than life itself.

"The Government is useless, there is nothing they can do to make our lives better, the rising prices, the unemployment, the escalating crime rate...they have no answers," grumbled all of them in unison.

"Well, if you are really concerned about all these things, you should have voted! Maybe a better candidate would have won, and maybe he would have taken some effective measures for improvement. Unless you vote, you just can't blame the government, because you have failed your duties!"

I looked at my watch and it was almost quarter to eight. I had to leave because I knew my wife would not open the door if I was late. Additionally, I did not want to miss the English news of the BBS. I reached home just five minutes before eight. I quickly took off my gho and sat right in front of the TV. Shortly, the news began. The news bulletin rushed off very quickly like a lightning flash—es followed by the news in detail:

*The opposition party has put up a petition to the high court against the ruling party for misusing government funds amounting to Nu 3 billion. The petition containing detailed reports was submitted to the chief justice, duly signed by the opposition leader and the members." The reporter said, according to the court the ver-*

dict will be reached after one month.

*People from three western Dzongkhags have unanimously started a protest against the Prime Minister, saying that he is biased. They are even arguing that they do not want a Shar-chop prime minister in the future. The leader of the protest say that the government has given comparatively more budget to the eastern Dzongkhags than the other Dzongkhags. "The main purpose of the protest is to bring equity and justice," said one of the protesters.*

*A group of people from Kulagangri has submitted a written complaint to the Anti-Corruption Commission about their Gup, who has been suspected of misusing public funds. The people demanded prompt action in the interest of the community.*

Then rest of the news began to bore me, so I turned off the TV and went to sleep.

The next day, I visited the same bar at the same time, with the hope that I would meet the same group of gentlemen. But to my dismay, I found a bunch of ladies chatting about clothes. They sounded like fashionistas not citizens. They were dressed with fancy garments, some exposing a great deal of skin. I wondered how these ladies were going to preserve culture and tradition

with such styles. I thought that they had conflated the rights in a democracy with the freedom they wore on their body. The question continued to click in my mind, but I dared not tell them, as some of the ladies were clearly unapproachable.

The next day, I was going around the country to compile the report about how the election had been proceeding in different sections of the kingdom. Although it required me to travel through rugged terrains, climb stiff cliffs and pass through dense forests, the experience was extremely enlightening. The following presents a gist of reports compiled from my tour:

- A grandmother said, "I did not know what we were doing, but I went and pressed my thumb on the box that I had never seen before."
- In one village, a group of people had joined together and casted a vote against their candidate who was their age-old rival.
- In another village, some voters had received their vouchers and treats from the candidates begging their vote during the election.
- In some part of the region where voters were a bit too naïve, they were coaxed by the middleman into conceding their vote. Their right to vote

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- was taken by this single man. In one region, the voters voted according to their ethnicity, discriminating against other ethnicities.

With this huge amount of data, I came back to my office. The moment I returned, the verdict of the case between the two parties was ready. When the verdict had passed in the public, it exploded like a volcanic eruption. The court found that there was not enough evidence to prove that the offender was guilty. In light of this, the court demanded that the opposition party pay a sum of Nu.1 million for defaming the government and its members.

The case was solved right under the nose of the chief justice in the high court. All of the supporters of the ruling party celebrated the victory while the supporters of the opposition party were disheartened.

My thoughts were always obscured by one question: what would be the situation of our democratic nation after a few decades? In my office, I pondered over this question but still could not get a clear picture. However, I could see from the present scenario that it could be one of the most awful democratic nations. Mind you, friends, democratic nations the world over have bitter tales to tell.

*Yeshi Nidup, Teacher, Gesarling Lower Secondary School, Dagana.*

## Raise Your Voice

Yeshe Choden

Ap Dorji, a farmer, lived in a remote village in Bhutan where there were no roads or health facilities. Isolated from urban centers such as Thimphu, the villagers were all in desperate need of a means to transport their goods to the market so that they could earn money to fulfill their basic needs. Additionally, they required a Basic Health Unit (BHU) since many children suffered from deadly diseases.

A new hope arose in the hearts of the villagers when political parties made visits to their village, promising to fulfill their needs if the villagers voted for them. After these visits, each household gathered to discuss which party would be best to vote for. The discussion began with an observation by Ap Dorji:

“I think we should vote for the ‘Red Party’ because they promised to construct a road for us. They also offered to bring a BHU, something we absolutely crucial for us to have.”

Although Ap Dorji’s wife agreed with him, she felt that they should consider the alternative:

“Indeed, dear husband, you are right. But the proposal of the ‘Blue Party’ is also not so bad because

they said they will build us an irrigation channel, which is equally important.”

Ap Dorji disagreed:

“We are more in need of a road and a BHU than an irrigation channel. Besides, we can use the old drains instead of a new channel. The offer of the ‘Red Party’ is better than the ‘Blue Party’, so we should vote for the ‘Red Party’

The next day, Ap Dorji decided to discuss the matter with the other villagers. He went from one house to another, arguing every time that it was in their interest to vote for the party that would bring a road and a BHU.

“Now, we are in a democracy, we must choose the best possible government, one that will bring the greatest benefit to our village. This being the case, we should vote for the ‘Red Party’ because they are the ones who can satisfy our most pressing needs.”

By the end of the day, Ap Dorji had convinced all of the villagers to vote for the ‘Red Party’.

After several months, the day finally arrived for the people to vote. That night, the winner was announced



on the news. Just as Ap Dorji had hoped, the 'Red Party' emerged as the runaway winners. People were excited for the Red Party's projects to get underway, as promised. The Red Party, on the other hand, was slow to respond.

One year passed and still there was no sign of any construction. The villagers frequently complained, but were helpless to do anything about it. What could they do to get the party's attention? Who could help them? Nobody would dare challenge the government.

One night, Ap Dorji was having a conversation with his family shortly after they'd finished their dinner. "We villagers are helpless. Those people in power don't practice what they preach."

His wife shared his frustration. "Politicians can never be trusted."

Ap Dorji's two children were also there listening to them. Suddenly, his daughter inquired: "Apa, why don't you inform the media? I learned in school that the media can raise people's voices and can reach

out to the government."

Ap Dorji sat there thinking for some time. His daughter was right! "Yes, we can do that or at least we can try."

The next day, Ap Dorji and some other older villagers went to the newspaper office and they expressed their grievance with the 'Red Party'. Upon hearing the story, the reporter noted everything down and said, "Thank you for your story; it will definitely feature in tomorrow's newspaper. If there's anything else you'd like to share, please don't hesitate to tell us in the future. After all, it is our job to serve the public by shedding light on their stories!"

Ap Dorji returned to his home and waited for the next day's paper to arrive. Sure enough, the paper came and his story was printed on the front page.

Barely a month later, the construction work on the road started. The villagers were happy and thanked Ap Dorji for his outreach efforts.

*Yeshi Choden, Student, Yangchenphug Higher Secondary School.*

# Integrity Goes a Long Way

Kesang Om

"I do not want to be late for the first assembly," Wangmo insisted, hurrying her friends from their rooms to the Wednesday assembly, her first ever assembly as a college student. The Director congratulated the incoming students for qualifying for Sherubtse college and highlighted the rules and regulations that the students were required to follow.

Wangmo's excitement was not without good reason. Qualifying for Sherubtse was a huge milestone for her probably the biggest of her life. Had she not qualified, her life would have taken a completely different turn. During her high schooling at Paro, her parents told her that if she did not qualify for further studies, she would have to marry an old landlord, Ap Gyem Dorji.

Wangmo was terrified at the idea of having to stay with two of his other wives and five children and worst of all, to call a man who has no self-respect and whose stomach, which could easily be mistaken for a pillow, as her husband. It haunted her, but it also drove her to succeed. Without a second thought, she spent sleepless nights studying and it paid off.

During her orientation, she was in-

troduced to the various clubs of the college. Out of all of them, she was most drawn to the club that dedicated their hard work in serving the disabled and abandoned elderly people. The club undertook projects that involved social work and regularly donated clothing and food. Every Sunday, the club members would visit the most rural places of Kanglung to provide them with their basic necessities.

Every time the club gathered for meetings the newly elected coordinator, Gyeltshen would say things like, "We have credits in lower market and upper market. We are low on our budget, so we need to host a variety show" or "We need to buy more clothes for the poor so we need more money, we have to go ask for donations". Fundraising was always an issue in their line of work.

The members were in general agreement. "Our coordinator is right; let's dance on *chi sem chi lu*." And so, they would put on shows that would help raise funds that would go towards supporting all of their efforts.

Once when Wangmo was on a walk with one of the core members, he

received a call. "It's Karma," he told Wangmo,

"What is it?"

"Wai, Penjor! Come to Shangrila now, every one is here to party."

"I don't have money and I am on a walk with Wangmo."

"Do not worry about the money – I have it."

"Do you mean like last time? We should not do that."

"Haha, don't be boring now. We have a total of Nu.3,000 from the variety show, so come fast!!!"

When he turned to Wangmo, she stood there with a plain look on her face. She'd overheard their conversation, and was at a loss for words. When he tried to explain to her, she ran to her hostel confounded and full of rage.

The next morning, she went to Karma to confirm his unseemly behaviour:

"Beautiful, even if it's true what can a fresher like you do." Slowly, he began to approach her. Moving her hair to the back of her ears, he beckoned to her, "Join us!"

"Over my dead body!" she cried. "Action will be taken and you will be sorry."

Without hesitating, she stormed to the Director's office. Halfway there, she stopped, something was missing. She knew that without any evidence, there would be no way to call Karma's integrity into question. Besides, Karma was well known in the college, though mostly because of his father's generous donation of textbooks to the college library. His father was a politician, and there was no one more powerful than a politician in a democratic society. Moreover, the students were under the fragile illusion that a coordinator was someone honest and hard-working. Gyeltshen was always active with his club regardless of the intention. Wangmo needed solid proof if she wanted to indict Gyeltshen.

Her fears were soon confirmed; she tried to share the news with her friends and club members, but no one was willing to listen to her. Nevertheless, she continued to participate every Sunday. This persistence, was her way of showing her commitment to the club. It was a testament to everyone that she would not back down from exposing the ongoing corruption.

Weeks passed by with no proof. Still, Wangmo would not relent; she even went so far as to post a letter to the Anti-Corruption Commission of Bhutan, requesting them to audit their college club.

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But one morning, her persistence finally paid off. Unexpectedly, she received a call from Penjor. "I want to be your witness to this corruption," he declared. "It's been going on for too long."

When they went to approach the Director, they were met with disappointment. The Director had left to attend an important meeting in Thimphu, and would not be returning for another week. They would have to wait it out some more.

Soon, the word was out that Penjor was siding with Wangmo against Gyeltshen. Gyeltshen was well aware of his faults and wanted to discourage Wangmo's only witness. "Penjor, if you complain against us then you will be equally punished," he warned him. "You were there enjoying all the gatherings till now. So if we get expelled, so will you."

After a long pause Penjor looked into Gyeltshen's eyes and asserted, "I am not scared of the consequences."

"Sure you are not scared, but what will you tell your family? You're the only hope for your poor family. Your mother will break into tears, your father will be disappointed, and who will your siblings look

up to? Who is going to take care of your family, then? Have you thought about that?" Having given him more than a few reasons to rethink his planned betrayal, Gyeltshen walked out of Penjor's room.

When the Director finally returned, he called Karma and Penjor to his office. Penjor, however, did not show up. Without her key witness, Wangmo had nothing. The Director then began to scold her for failing to provide sufficient evidence for her strong claims. "Everyone is innocent until *proven* guilty, Wangmo," he said. "You can't just go around charging people with dishonesty without a way to prove it."

Just as he spoke, agents from the Anti-Corruption Commission arrived with proof that the unit had no record or report for the events held by the club nor receipts for the things purchased for the old people. When he was asked to explain this lapse, Karma was speechless. When he had nothing to say, the Director called his father and told him that Karma and his friends were going to be expelled from the college.

Days later, the news reached Thimphu. The king publicly congratulated Wangmo for her honesty and bravery.

*Kesang Om, Student, Sherubtse College.*

# A Star Always Shines in the Sky

Pema Dorji

In Wangdi, there lived a farmer named Ap Dawa. To make his living, Ap Dawa sold vegetables. He never felt anger towards anyone who insulted him, or claimed that he knew nothing of the outside world. Nothing could really ruffle his feathers; he was content with himself, through and through.

One day, when Ap Dawa was circumambulating a chorten near the river, he overheard three suspicious-looking men conspiring to steal the principal statue of the chorten. "We will rob the area on the fifteenth of April, when everybody goes to light butter lamps on the hillside temple," one of them murmured. Frightened, Ap Dawa hid behind some rocks so that they would not see (and possibly harm) him.

After the bandits scurried away, Ap Dawa rose to his feet. The thought that people would steal sacred objects came as a huge shock to him. Why would anyone do such a horrible thing? As citizens of Wangdi, they would bring bad fortune to the valley. Rotten tomatoes in a basket spoil the others, after all. Ap Dawa resolved that he would not allow this to happen even if it meant risking his life.

As the days passed, Ap Dawa's worries amplified. But he had a plan. By the time April 15<sup>th</sup> rolled around, Ap Dawa told his wife he was ill. "Though I am sick, you should still take the children to offer butter lamps at the hillside temple," he insisted. "I will stay at home today."

At noon, he called the police to inform them of the robbery that was to occur: "Anytime now, the bad guys will be on their way. Please hurry up, as there is limited time."

Trusting Ap Dawa, the police immediately rushed to the chorten. When they arrived, they caught the robbers in the act. "Freeze!" they shouted. Unarmed, the robbers complied, and were taken to the police station in handcuffs.

To recognise Ap Dawa's courage, the police publicly thanked him during the next village meeting: "Ap Dawa is an example of a true and trusted citizen; someone who is willing to put everything on the line in order to protect what is most valuable to us."

*Moral: If the gold is in the ground, the glitter can be seen.*

*Pema Dorji, Student, Yangchenphug Higher Secondary School.*