

Keynote Address by Her Royal Highness Ashi Sonam Dechan Wangchuck

To be among you this morning for the opening of the National Storytelling Conference makes me very happy. This wonderful initiative is truly commendable, and I would like to thank everyone involved in working towards recognizing, reviving, and promoting our rich oral traditions.

As a child growing up, my brothers, sisters and I would sit in a circle as our grand mother would tell us exciting stories of adventure, travel, bravery, tact, and justice undoubtedly intended to mould our moral values. We would sit quietly in awe as we listened to those stories, and I look forward to passing those stories to my children and grandchildren someday.

Storytelling is a special bond between elders and children and a means of one generation passing on our tradition, culture, and moral values to the next. Community storytelling reinforces social bonds that connect individuals to their community, through shared experiences of traditional knowledge and heritage. In this way, each member of the community possesses a piece of a common knowledge that could enable better understanding of the time and the society that they live in. For instance, satire, and nuances of certain communities can be captured in stories that reflect the times.

Another aspect of storytelling is its purpose of history. The author becomes the storyteller and the facts become their truth. As stories are passed on from one generation to the other they become unique to the storyteller but at the same time, share a common thread of the past. It is continuity at its most alive and its best.

In today's society it is a pity that one of the oldest and most powerful expressions of individual and cultural creativity, traditional storytelling had been taken over by other means of mass media such as television and the internet. Today, young children rarely sit around their grandparents and elders and listen to stories. In fact, in most urban areas, social relationships are often weakened by these new forms of media. With the rise of these new technological storytelling mediums, the cultural prominence of traditional storytelling as an art form is transforming.

The need to make storytelling a widespread practice in our culture has many positive benefits. Oral history and culture found in songs, music, dance, lozey, and folktales are an integral part of a unique Bhutanese culture and identity. Storytelling is an important part of this history and culture. Its dynamics, warmth, and spontaneity are unique to itself. It is a valuable source of shared memory, and for the younger generation a better understanding of the past.

All of us must make an effort to re-tell those stories we heard in our childhood as a first step towards helping revive our precious oral traditions.

Thank you, and Tashi Delek.