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HOW CAN BHUTAN
ACHIEVE IT?

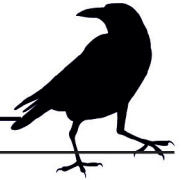
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Nu 100
JULY-AUGUST 2013
ISSUE 8
VOLUME 1

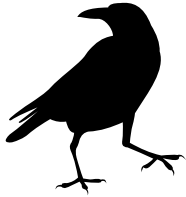
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THE NEW FACE
OF BHUTAN'S DEMOCRACY



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Sir/Madam,

There are lessons to be learnt from *The Raven* on what journalism is about; reporting things as seen or heard without taking sides.

This and its analytical treatment of the real contemporary issues is probably why *The Raven* has established and maintained a serious readership.

Tshewang Tashi, Thimphu

My name is Ford Hamidi and I am from Canada. I spent some time working in Bhutan and became fond of your magazine with its high quality articles and design. I am interested in contributing to *The Raven* in the future.

Ford Hamidi.

Greetings from Munich, Germany.

I am regularly in Bhutan, guiding pilgrimage groups. I heard about The Raven magazine and I am very interested in reading it.

Also, do you have a website, foreign subscriptions?

Detlev Gobel, Germany

The monastic community can be above politics, but not above the law especially when it comes to sodomy.

Thank you for the article.

Namgay Zam, Thimphu.



NOTIFICATION FROM *THE RAVEN*

We bring you good news. The Raven will return to being a monthly magazine after its one year anniversary, October 2013.

To our clients who have paid for annual subscriptions, your subscription will not run out at the end of 2013, but only after all 12 issues you have paid for have been delivered to you.

The Raven focuses on providing in-depth stories on burning social and political issues of our times. The challenges of publishing within Bhutan have been immense and we hope that you will continue to provide us your goodwill and support.

Thank you for your understanding.

Sincerely,

Team Raven.

KUZUZANGPO!

Every time I am on that flight from Delhi to Paro, I am reminded of the specialness of this corner of our world. Looking out the plane window the lofty Himalayan ranges and Mighty Everest peek from above the cotton-balled clouds, the vast Indian plains – desired throughout history by conquerors – is right below, and the roof of the world, though not visible, lies just beyond those towering peaks. Then the dramatic landing into Paro valley; as the plane enters the valley one can almost reach out and touch the ancient monasteries atop those steep hills.

As the plane alights, the surrounding silence is yet another reminder that Bhutan is unlike many countries. Geography and population have been our blessings – well, of sorts. For the most part we have always looked at it as being a blessing. We have always been aware of the geo-political realities and managed to survive within these realities. But incidents during our second general elections were a cruel reminder that being sandwiched between the world's two largest populations in the world (often suspicious of each other) really seems to overshadow everything we do.

Arriving in the aftermath of a very contentious and divisive election made that even more evident – that our local politics is influenced, and can be influenced, by this harsh geographic reality. It seems then that there is evermore the need for us to work on building upon the only thing that has distinguished us as a nation – our sovereignty and integrity – and not compromising it just for the sake of winning an election.

Now that it is behind us, it is time to move on and focus on the issues that lie before us. The Economy, Education, Social Issues, Agriculture, the list is endless.

A hearty Congratulations from *The Raven* team to those who have assumed office. It is our hope that you will live up to the demands of your office and the expectations of those that have put you there. What should be remembered, through the words of His Majesty the Fourth Druk Gyalpo who initiated Democracy in Bhutan, is that we are in service to the people, not to a select few. It is through this sacred duty as office holders that officials should strive to work along with the innumerable Bhutanese who have struggled alongside their Kings and government to make this country what it is today.

"In taking note of the progress that our nation has made over the past thirty four years, I would like to state that whatever we have achieved so far is due to the merit of the people of Bhutan." His Majesty the Fourth Druk Gyalpo.

Sonam Ongmo
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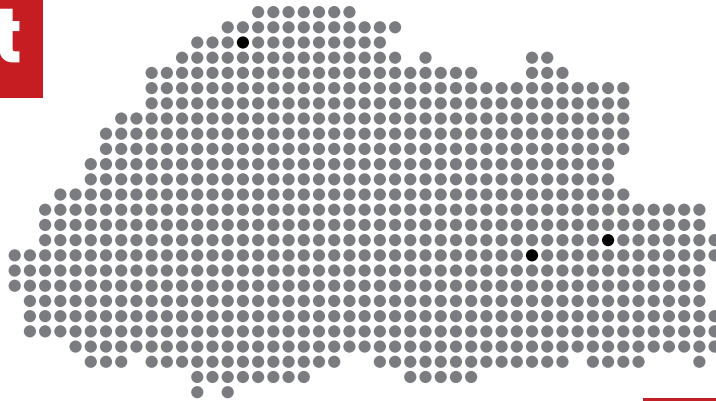
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Printed at: Kuensel Corp. Thimphu.

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THIMPHU

24 new HIV/AIDS cases detected

Twenty four new cases have been detected from December 2012 to June 2013, according to the Health Ministry. Of the twenty four, 13 are male and 11 female. The patients are between 12 to 56 years of age. Currently there are 249 people living with HIV/AIDS in Bhutan.

THIMPHU

RBP's Open Air Prison scheme a success

The Open Air Prison initiative started by the Royal Bhutan Police (RBP) sent a second batch of inmates to Paro on June 18 after a successful trial with the first batch that received positive appraisals. The selected prisoners receive this opportunity because of their 'exemplary behavior.'

The prisoners in Chamgang prison in Thimphu are most happy about the initiative as it is a step closer to leading a normal life after doing jail time.

Coinciding with the auspicious occasion of the birth anniversary of Guru Rinpoche, His Majesty the King granted amnesty to 28 convicts under various prisons in the country, and also approved 121 convicts to be sent for the Open Air Prison.

LADHAK

Ladhak to host fifth annual Drukpa council

Hemis monastery in Ladhak, India, will once more see Drukpa Lineage's enlightened yogis and accomplished Drukpa masters from Bhutan, India, Nepal, Tibet and other parts of the Himalayas along with some volunteers coming in to attend the Fifth Annual Drukpa Council (ADC) on August 29.

BUMTHANG

Three detained for alleged rape of minor

Bumthang police have detained three men who are alleged to have molested and raped a nine-year-old girl. Bumthang hospital had informed the police after the girl, a Class II student, had come to the hospital with her friend for a pregnancy test.

MONGAR

Mass cleaning campaign every month in Mongar

With more than 3,000 people living in and around Mongar town, the municipality has a hard time keeping the town clean. On August 4, more than 2,000 people from all walks of life collected more than five tons of garbage. This will now be a monthly feature.

GASA

Cable sabotage downs Gasa's mobile service

Mobile network service in Laya gewog, Gasa, has been down for almost two weeks now. While tracking the problem, officials found that the fibre cable at Laya base transmission station had been cut down by the locals. The problem will take a while to fix, officials said.

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quotes



HEARD AROUND



Democracy should be based on the ideals of a sound justice system and good governance, untainted by the vices of corruption and nepotism.



HIS MAJESTY THE KING'S address to the Prime Minister and the cabinet ministers.

On PDP's Leki Dorji not getting a ministerial berth

First misstep - leaving out Leki, a far better, stronger, knowledgeable, qualified ministerial candidate.

Kinley Tshering on Twitter.

On Patriotism

Patriotism is not a short and frenzied outburst of emotion but the tranquil and steady dedication of a life time

Karma Choden on Twitter.

Post election

Can we all calm down please. We love our Kings, but taking it to the streets is strategically weak and short sighted.

Chime P. Wangdi on Twitter.



KENCHO WANGDI senior journalist and consultant.



THAKUR S POWDYEL former education minister, commenting on the election outcome to a local newspaper.



DAWA PENJOR Director, Bhutan Media Foundation.



LINGCHEN DORJI, a Bhutanese blogger.

Can't wait for a government free of nepotism and cronyism. In short, a govt. free of any kind of corruption. Looking forward with great expectations.



If the rules of engagement were followed, the result would have been different today.

Bhutan Media Foundation will always work to promote and protect freedom of speech and press.



We Bhutanese are paying a heavy price for being too complacent and too dependent on others.

The Raven

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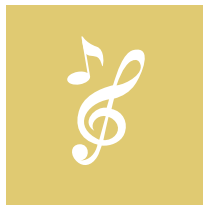
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CINEMA



BOOKS



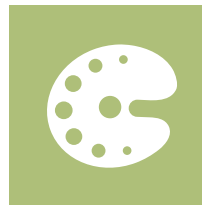
MUSIC



PLAY



DANCE



ART

highlights

KEY → Date ⌚ Time 📍 Place 📍 Venue



BESKOP TSHECHU

FILM FESTIVAL TO TAKE OFF IN SEPTEMBER

- 📅 SEPTEMBER 5-10
- 📍 THIMPHU

This year's Beskop Tshechu will take place from September 5 until the 10th in the capital city Thimphu. Beskop Tshechu is the first documentary, animation and short film festival in Bhutan and is dedicated to promoting and encouraging creative film making in the country.

SPORTS

KING'S CUP

- 📅 JULY 20 - AUGUST 11
- 📍 THIMPHU



The Kings cup that began on July 20 brought about much excitement in the capital for football fans but price of tickets may have been a deal-breaker as many fans did not through the open stadium at changlimethang. Nine football teams from Bhutan, Bangladesh, India and Nepal are playing in the league

LITERARY FEST

MOUNTAIN ECHOES

- 📅 AUGUST 8-11
- 📍 TARAYANA, THIMPHU

The fourth literary festival - Mountain Echoes began August 8. Speakers from across the globe will debate, discuss and read from their works. People from all walks of life can attend the festival.

SECOND PARLIAMENT SITTING

FIRST SESSION OF THE SECOND PARLIAMENT

- 📅 AUGUST 1-2
- 📍 THIMPHU

The first session of the second parliament commenced on August 1. The members took oath of office and also elected the Speaker and the Deputy Speaker.

NEHRU-WANGCHUCK CULTURAL CENTRE

ART EXHIBITION

- 📅 AUGUST 7-15
- 📍 THIMPHU

An exhibition of beautifully produced reprints of original canvases curated by the main artist Anjolie Ela Menon for the Indian council of cultural relations. The figurative artwork of 13 painters presented in the exhibition is a small fraction of the vast spectrum of artistic creativity in India today. The chronological span of this Exhibition covers almost 70 years of Indian art.

THE NEW FACE OF BHUTAN'S DEMOCRACY



*From a Harvard graduate who loved John Lennon's "Beautiful Boy", to becoming a director in the civil service, to serving as the first opposition leader in democratic Bhutan, and now taking over as the prime minister, Tshering Tobgay's journey has indeed panned out like a line from the song, "Life is what happens to you, when you're busy making other plans..." **Mitra Raj Dhital** puts the prime minister under the microscope.*

About five years ago, as Bhutan geared up for its first parliamentary elections, Tshering Tobgay sat in Thimphu's Swiss Bakery, sipping black coffee and speaking breezily about the office he was then contesting for. "I don't know what a good politician is," he had said. "I think it is the ability to see the world through the eyes of the people and be able to fulfill their hopes and aspirations. According to that definition, I will make a fantastic politician."

Those who knew him then will remember him as a man with a not-so-firm handshake. Many thought of him as conniving, with impressive connections and a hunger to get ahead. Others, mainly his fellow party members, despised this amiable 'somewhat dubious' man who'd given up his director-level job to enter politics, for he had been promised a ministerial berth. "He's Lyonpo Sangay Ngedup's stooge", they said.

Tshering Tobgay smiled at all of them. After the elections, when critics said that a two-member opposition would be stamped out by the government, he still smiled at all of them. Even when his party members walked out from the PDP and regrouped with a third political party, he smiled at all of them.

Then, on July 13, last month, even to Tshering Tobgay's surprise perhaps, the PDP was voted to power with him at the helm. He hasn't stopped smiling since.

Those who see him now know him as Bhutan's second democratically elected Prime Minister - his party having won 32 of the 47 seats in parliament. Yet, the handshake is still the same - not-so-firm. Apparently, that is how he would like to keep his grip on power.

Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay has never been the sort of person whose presence commands immediate outward respect. Perhaps because he is the son of ordinary folks - who

worked his way up to the top, step by step. Even now, as he holds the highest office in government, he does not have the haughty swagger associated with people in high positions. He talks quickly, fidgets with his iphone and breaks into a smile every time he speaks, like a boy - edgy at suddenly being cast in the spotlight.


At the first press conference after the election results were announced, he seemed nervous - far from the image of a seasoned politician - as he fidgeted with the papers on the table before reading out his message to the nation. "We already have His Majesty as a national icon and I am an ordinary person. Please don't make me larger than life," he told a few of us aside, after the conference.

"He was never a baddie," says his schoolmate from Dr Graham's Homes, Tashi P. Wangdi. "In fact, he was an introvert. But once he set his mind on something, he'd always get there."

Having served five years as the leader of the world's smallest opposition, Tshering Tobgay, who is now 48, has achieved so much success and admiration that he seems more a strategist than a prime minister.

In the past five years, as a politician, one apparent aspect of Tshering Tobgay that stood out was his ability to adapt. To make up for the opposition's lack of numbers in parliament, Tshering Tobgay wholeheartedly adopted social media, almost at par with today's geekiest, to make sure the opposition was always heard. Some even hailed his blog, which he maintained and updated regularly, as the best assessment of the ruling government. And it was through his blog that we got a behind-the-scenes view into a man whose role then was to balance government - away from the media and the limelight.

Today, many among those not inclined to recognize 'politician' as a



TODAY, MANY
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complimentary term, refer to him, with some pride, as "the only politician who is different." Still, some of Tshering Tobgay's closest friends can't bring themselves to call him a politician, even if he's expertly managed to broaden his electoral base in the past five years.

"Somehow, the title of prime minister will not go to his head," says a childhood friend of his, on condition of anonymity. "He is very grounded. If you look at him closely, you'll always find the same expression on his face no matter what the situation. Only people who are composed and focused are unflinching."

If questioned about India's hand in the election outcome, as announced by the international and local media reports, he will

probably flinch. The reports, some even going to the extent of claiming that intelligence agencies like RAW, CIA and Mossad had a hand in the result, calling him pro-India will definitely make him flinch.

There is no change in expression. He looks up at me, probably doesn't like the question, but doesn't lose focus. "India and Bhutan are good friends. India would never interfere in our electoral process and strain the friendship. It is a friendship built over a long period by wise and benevolent leaders and a friendship that has stood the test of time. These are all conspiracy theories," he says, looking at me again, as if ready to take the next question.

"We are a small society," he says, "We must all be united. We must not let elements such as these sow seeds of doubt

and create divisions among us."

After assuming office as the opposition leader in 2008, he had written on his blog that Bhutan's first asset was the monarchy. "This important institution, which is the essence and very basis of our Kingdom, must be protected, nurtured and cherished by all Bhutanese – in body, speech and mind – so that future generations can enjoy what we today take for granted." The second, he said, was obviously the constitution. "This sacred document, gifted to us from the Golden Throne, must be defended – rights enjoyed and duties fulfilled – by all Bhutanese, for all time."

Yet, somehow, even today, people have divided opinions about Tshering Tobgay. While some feel he has enough strategic flair, others say that he likes to portray himself as someone being above the snobbery - shaking everybody's hands everywhere, for instance. But those close to him vouch that his handshakes are genuine.

"He is a private person. And when he meets people, he is genuine in his interactions. That is the way he is," says Tshering Tobgay's brother. "But somehow people always read too much into it."

For example, if he rejected the pilot vehicles and police personnel allocated for his personal security, it is because he is uncomfortable under such surroundings, opines another friend. "He could have easily agreed to it all, but he didn't. And, that speaks volumes of his character. That speaks volumes of the kind of example he wants to set."

Indeed, Tshering Tobgay is accustomed to frugality. When he resigned from his cushy government job to become a politician six years ago, he was not uncomfortable depending financially on his wife as long as he could concentrate on strengthening his party's efforts.

"It will be a loss for the country if PDP doesn't come to power," Tshering Tobgay had said to me in 2007. "I think the country will regret it because the PDP



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PRIME MINISTER TSHERING TOBGAY ENROUTE TO A RURAL VILLAGE DURING THE CAMPAIGNING PERIOD.



structure is very strong on democratic principles.”

Nevertheless, given his party’s humiliating defeat then, as the opposition, he adhered to the constitution, offered alternatives, and took relevant action when he believed the ruling government was not sticking to the

country’s laws, even suing them and winning the first constitutional case in his favor.

Today, Tshering Tobgay leads a party that has won an election with more than a two-third majority in the parliament. He has proven he is a ‘fantastic politician’.


But his party has also been given the opportunity and the mandate to fulfill the hopes and aspirations of a nation and its people. What Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay does hereon and how he goes about his dealings will make it known exactly how fantastic he is as a statesman. 

PHOTO ESSAY



FREELANCE PHOTOGRAPHERS **UPASANA DAHAL** & **LHENDUP** BRING TO YOU PICTURES FROM AROUND THE COUNTRY BEFORE AND DURING THE GENERAL ELECTION





PHOTO ESSAY





PHOTO ESSAY





JYT : A Man Who Will Be Forever Remembered

A few years or decades down the line, a line in the history books of Bhutan will read “Jigmi Yoezer Thinley was the first ever democratically elected Prime Minister of Bhutan which held its first parliamentary elections in 2008...” What the concluding paragraphs will look like will depend hugely on the person who writes the article or the book.

The writer’s personal inclinations will matter a great deal. If he or she didn’t have a big problem with the resignation of Jigmi Yoezer Thinley, the tone of the piece will assume a favorable approach towards what JYT has done for Bhutan during his service spanning four decades. On the other hand, if he or she wasn’t happy with

the way JYT ran his government or chose to bring an end to his political career, the concluding remarks will be of stinging condemnation. He will be accused of being power-hungry, and a bad loser.

By then more rounds of judgment will have been passed by the people. Debates, arguments, defenses for one’s stand, blame and criticism would all be safely buried in the hearts and heads of the people, not to forget the web pages of social media and various websites.

Nobody would have expected this – submission of the resignation letter by JYT. But it has happened. News reports have confirmed that the Speaker is considering the resignation letter submitted by the first democratically elected leader who was unanimously sworn in. As I read the news, my first reaction was

“Why could he be doing this?” His reason that he wants to give an opportunity to younger people to come up and take his place, but that didn’t quite convince me. I am assuming he intends to keep the real reason away from the public. That’s purely my presumption though. Then I asked myself, “Is he doing the right thing by resigning? Is he not exposing himself again to the scrutiny of highly volatile minds of the Bhutanese public? Won’t he be blamed for such a decision on his part?”

We have seen and known ourselves better than ever in the recent elections. Inside out. We proved beyond doubt that we



can get really dirty in politics as any other country in the world. We have shown that politics can divide and take us to dangerous points, to dangerous and risky situations compromising our country's peaceful existence. JYT's resignation, I am sure, will not augur well with the majority of the public. It will give rise to another round of endless debates and flurry of criticisms.

People will question his integrity. They will say, "Why couldn't he just stay in the Opposition for the next five years? He liked power only, it is clear. He just wanted to be the Prime Minister and nothing less." His dignity as one of the most capable persons Bhutan has seen in its history is under scrutiny purely because of his decision to resign. I am afraid he is providing more fuel to his critics, who had done enough already. Not to forget the trend of anonymous twitter accounts, bloggers and social media users, paid or unpaid. We will never know.

However, it is important that we ask ourselves: "Isn't it unfortunate to condemn this man through and through merely because he resigned after his party lost?" Whatever happened or happens; had happened or is happening, we cannot deny the service JYT has done for the nation. He served in different capacities that spanned four decades of his life. Yes, he was an ordinary man but a different

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one at that. Bhutan hasn't seen much of such individuals so far. If we are not good enough to say, "He played a major role in shaping Bhutan in its modern existence," we should at least be thankful enough to say, "He helped Bhutan a great deal. He deserves that much at least."

I was watching the common forum of Nanong-Shumar constituency before the general elections. He said in his introductory speech, "In my life, firstly due to the guidance of the seniors, secondly, because of the prayers of my parents, and thirdly, due to blessings of the Triple Gem, I got some incredible opportunities to take up great responsibilities. The dearest and the most unforgettable amongst them all is to have had served his Majesty the Fourth King of Bhutan as a Chamberlain in 1974. Since then, I have had the privilege of serving the *Tsa-Wa-Sum* in important positions. I can't say whether I will be able to come back to serve the people or not hereafter. If I happen to come back, I will continue to serve the country and people with utmost dedication. And if I don't succeed in coming back, the people of Bhutan will know, one day, that Jigmi Yoezer Thinley was not wrong and had served the nation with much love and dedication."

As I read about his looming resignation, I remember the above lines clearly. I, without any reservation, say that he is one rare personality Bhutan has ever seen. We will be blessed with a few parallels, may be, in the future. Let us be hopeful. It is really unfortunate to have the illustrious career and life of the man marred by the debatable fashion of resignation he has chosen to exercise, though perhaps for reasons we still do not know and maybe will never know. But if we are the true sons and daughters of Bhutan and if we have been to the corners of the country where the reality of life can be seen and experienced,

YES, HE WAS AN
ORDINARY MAN BUT
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we will know how much change the country has experienced.

For now, since he has decided to resign, I would like to offer my heartfelt thanks and gratitude for the service he has rendered to our country. When we bid him farewell from the parliament, it doesn't mean that all people will be discarding him out of their hearts. He will remain in the hearts of many, except a few, Bhutanese forever. But, no man in Bhutanese history, apart from our beloved and visionary Kings, would have been successful to gain universal love and respect. My only wish is that he gets a good farewell because he simply deserves it. I wish him the best. 🐦



Langa Tenzin is a fourth Year Law student at the NALSAR University of Law in Hyderabad, India. He is interested in reading, writing and sketching. He blogs at www.langatenz.in.

GENERATION IN-BETWEEN PITH INSTRUCTIONS FOR UNDERSTANDING BHUTAN'S YOUTH

By MANNY FASSIHI

Kencho Dorjee doesn't believe you need a college degree to bring about positive social change. A recent high school graduate, he's been dabbling in a bit of everything to make a difference: he volunteers at the patient guesthouse near the hospital; serves as a radio jockey at Kuzoo FM; attends public speaking classes to enable him to inspire others to action; and recently finished a stint as a youth worker at the Election Commission to promote voting.

Instead of going directly to college, he chose to take time off after high school graduation to commit to his own personal growth and understanding.

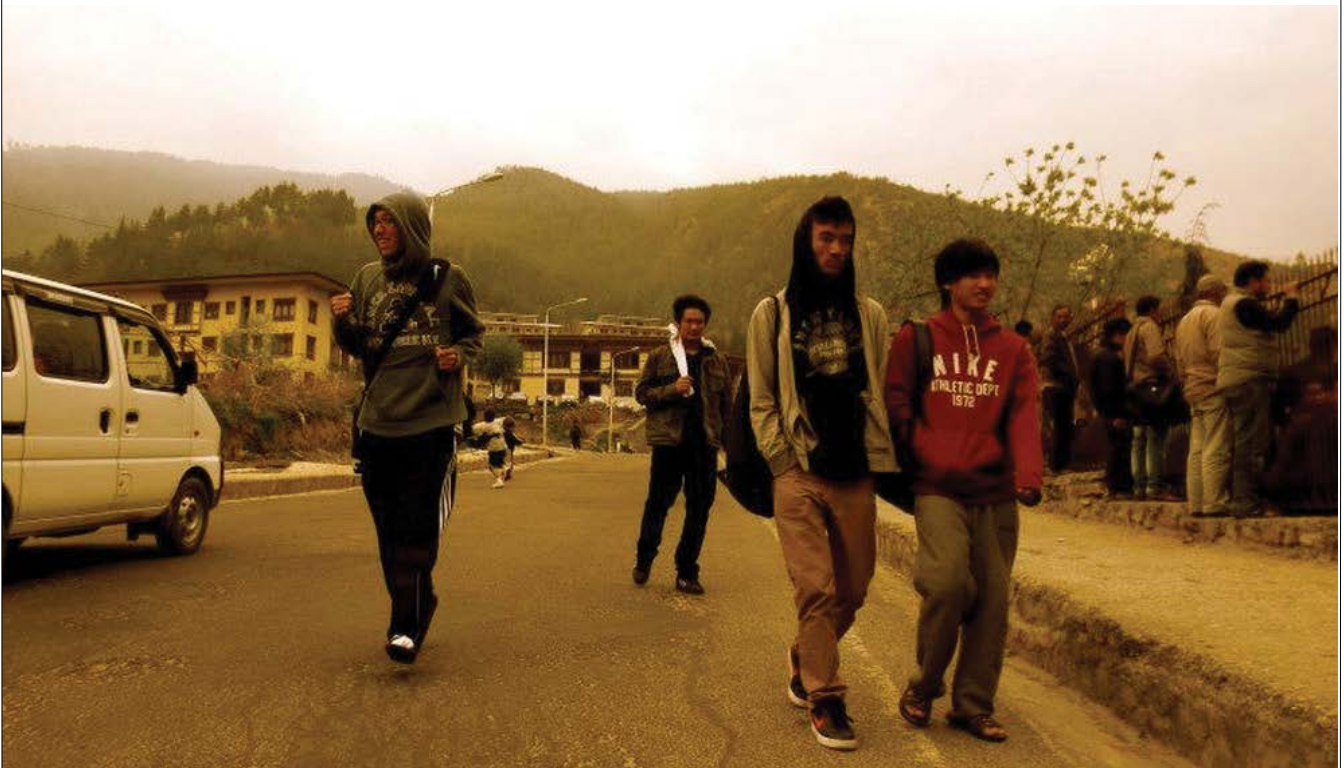
"I decided to take a year off be-

cause the school routine and school books didn't bring out the best in me. I wanted time to follow my interest and see where it takes me, and it really helped me realize my strengths and understand myself."

Recently, he and his friends in Go Youth Go (GYG) successfully organized the first-ever youth fashion show to an audience of over 400 plus and raised Nu 50,000. "We wanted to give [the] youth a platform where they could showcase their talents," he says. After being dismissed from the Royal Textile Academy (RTA) fashion show during tryouts, he was especially motivated to take the idea forward and prove that youth like him could walk the platform. There is a new genera-

tion of Bhutanese emerging - one emboldened to act as individuals and diverge from prescribed paths. What is different about their time is that the transition of the individual from youth to adulthood intersects with the transition of the world towards a more integrated, more interdependent globalized society - a society Bhutan, through development, is becoming a member of. Bhutanese youth today are in transition not just from childhood to adulthood, but in transition between two different ways of life.

This transition can be misunderstood and mistaken for choosing modernity over tradition, for abandoning what is sacred for what



 YOUTH WALK DOWN AFTER A GAME OF BASKETBALL AT THE SWIMMING POOL COMPLEX IN THIMPHU

is mundane and materialistic. Bhutanese youth, like Kencho, certainly seek self-gratification like their Western counterparts. But, they differ in an important area - they still care about their heritage.

“I am proud to be Bhutanese. To be a Bhutanese, it means to be happy at anything I do. It means to be positive and always smile. Most importantly, it means to appreciate the culture and respectfully carry and pass down the tradition and values to the next generation.”

To some extent, they have taken on a bi-cultural identity: one rooted in their local culture and the other stemming from an awareness of their relation to the global culture. Negotiating these two cultures is no easy task. This challenge is at the heart of youth struggles today.

Through my work at the Bhutan Centre for Media and Democracy, I've had the privilege of being able to work with youth like Kencho over the past two years in a number of different settings, both formal and informal. During this time, I feel I've been able to build empathy with the challenges [the] youth face; wonder at their fortitude; and be surprised at the ways they've been able to innovate. I cannot claim to have a complete understanding of 'youth'. Existentially, youth in Bhutan reside in multiple worlds: youth who have grown up in Sakteng are socialized in much different ways than youth who have studied abroad in high schools such as Woodstock. The world of youth I'm more familiar with is the latter – the urban-dwelling, highly educated, so-called-modern Bhutanese youth. I would like to offer some reflections in the form of 'pith instructions' for those wishing to work with these youth or understand them better.

Meet youth where they are

Suspend your expectations about what youth 'should' be. Youth are of-

ten discussed in the context of deficits: unemployed, allowing Bhutan's values to erode, becoming involved in delinquent behavior, not taking responsibility, and so on. They are a problem to be solved by parties, by organizations, and teachers who will mold them into the citizens they want them to be: disciplined, respectful, scholastic, and, preferably, quiet.


And, if they don't comply, they are to be thrown 'away' - out of school, in prisons, out on the streets. The zero tolerance policy is a clear example of this approach to dealing with youth. We know, of course, there is no 'away', no rug to sweep these 'unmanageable youth' under. The positive correlation between unemployment and crime is explanatory on this point.

Do not let your frustration lead to neglect. Lama Shenphen, a social worker in Thimphu, believes that many adults have distanced themselves from youth to the point of no longer engaging with them:

“I met a group of kids who were only around 12 or 13 years of age. They were all high and trying to rag cell phones, but not a single adult engaged them or tried to talk with them. They just watched. Personally, I've never seen that kind of lack of engagement anywhere in the world.”

All so many of these young people want is someone to talk to; someone who can listen, without passing judgment, reassure them, and respect them. Their dream may not be the dreams you have for them; you may want them to take up blue-collar jobs or work in their village and they may want a white-collar desk job in Thimphu. They may have tattoos of skulls coloring their body. Their hyper-sculpted, Japanese-like hairstyles may seem outlandish.

But however they may appear or come across, Bhutanese youth are essentially good and gentle in nature, and are not to be feared. Accept them. Understand their behavior and what



YOUTH SEEM TO BE STUCK IN THE FUTURE TENSE. THEY WILL BE THIS. THEY WILL BE THAT. AT ALMOST EVERY SPEECH GIVEN TO YOUTH, YOUTH ARE REMINDED OF THEIR STATUS AS “THE FUTURE.”

motivates them. But also challenge them and encourage them to reflect. Most importantly, do not give up on them. They need you to believe in them. I came across a student at Yangchenphug Higher Secondary School who wants to be a fashion designer, but feels her aspirations are not validated by anyone and felt depressed about it. A little bit of encouragement, of telling her that it is legitimate to pursue a life of innovating the way people dress, and her eyes lit up again.

Create space for youth to express themselves

With democracy comes freedom of expression, freedom to voice out opinions even in the presence of authority. This freedom, while enshrined in the Constitution, still comes at odds with youth attitudes of silent deference to authority.

I've sat through quite a few discussion forums where youth are asked to share their views, opin-



↑ KENCHO ASSISTS A NUN AT THE MEMORIAL CHORTEN

ions, and offer feedback. Here's how they often tend to go:

"Our plan is to..."

[long-winded proposal with 45-minute powerpoint with haughty, highfalutin language]

...what do you think?"

[20-second pause with youth looking down, some biting their tongues, staring anywhere but where the focal person is standing]

"It's okay, sir (Tub-be)."

"Great!"

So youth have no views.

Might as well not consult them, right?

Wrong!

Sangay Khandu, a member of the National Council from Gasa, explains how this mode of communication is ultimately detrimental to both sides:

"When a senior leader comes to a school and sits down and says 'what do you wanna ask?' the first question is very difficult to get an answer, and that has to do with the fact that young people still feel hesitant to ask questions. And logically, hesitant to raise concerns. And so, when the director says

'everything okay in schools?' and you don't say 'no', because of this the director will think you have nothing to say. He'll say, 'well I asked, but they didn't say anything.' And the students will feel, 'Oh well the director just asked once, I was too nervous, he didn't give us enough time.'

So both sides feel resentment. I think our people, when we want to talk to young people, have to understand that these are young minds, and we have to make them feel comfortable, then talk to them."

Standard approaches to consulting - that is, directly asking them what they think - just do not work with Bhutanese youth. If you really seek both the cooperation and participation of youth, you have to first become conscious of your relationship to them as a senior, elder, or member of authority. A combination of respect, shyness, and unfamiliarity with being asked their opinion limits their ability to express themselves.

What works? Creating an environment where young people can feel safe and comfortable and re-

spected, and are able to dialogue, debate, and work constructively. Begin with a warm-up exercise that encourages participants to get up and move around; be clear in your language and set a relaxed tone; try dispelling nervousness by saying, to the whole group, the difficulty of communicating to authority; have them write questions on paper and then submit them to the front.

Recognize their Biculturality

It's worth underlining this point, as it touches on one of the main fears of the elder generations - the loss of Bhutanese culture. I believe that Bhutanese youth continue to develop their local identity based on local circumstances. This is the identity they are most likely to use in daily interactions with family, friends, and community members. Psychologically, they remain collectivistic, seeking the secure network of persons who have enduring obligations to one another. Rarely will you ever see youth walk alone anywhere, even to the bath-

room. They roam in packs, as they depend on one another to keep each other company at all times.

This is, perhaps, why Facebook has become so popular; you never have to be apart from your group. In tandem with the local identity comes a global identity, which allows them to communicate with people from diverse places via modern medias. TV has been crucial in the process of promoting a global identity in youth, as it provides exposure to people, event, and information from all over the world. Denims, as a symbol, suggest this connection to the global, as having arrived in modernity. As Bhutan continues to become connected via the Internet in all 20 dzongkhags, this will only accelerate.

Although local identity is retained, there is no doubt that local cultures are being modified by globalization, specifically by the introduction of global media, free market economics, democratic institutions, increased length of formal schooling and delayed entry into marriage and parenthood. Values of individualism, free choice, expression, and tolerance for difference are gaining prominence as Kencho's story shows – educated youth no longer feel bound to opt for a life in civil service. This has left some youth in a state of confusion: the images, values and opportunities they perceive as part of the global culture undermine their belief in the value of local cultural practices; and yet, global culture seems too foreign to everything they know from direct experience. How one resolves this confusion is unclear; perhaps it is a matter of unconscious self-selection to the culture one feels most strongly connected to.

Catalyze their agency

Last week, I met a group of out-of-school youth in Changjiji who'd reportedly had given up on any systems within Bhutan working in their favor. Their friend had been rejected for a loan to start up a car wash; they

had been rejected to start up a rehabilitation centre; and lacked any opportunity to play football, their passion, since the nearby school field charges Nu 1,100 for a one-time use and registration in the football league is too costly. Their resultant belief: "Money is the only solution to our problems." This feeling of disempowerment and apathy is not uncommon. The good news is that these youth are wrong – there are people willing to work with and enable youth. My friends and I approached the school principal, who, after hearing their story, was highly sympathetic to their cause. "Such an effort could not only go a long way towards engaging the youth, but also to curbing crime and unproductive activity," he said.

He agreed to offer the field for free with a caveat – they organize, establish a focal person, and meet with the principal once to establish terms of use. In the past, the school had had problems with youth getting into fights at the field and, without any organized system, felt the only option was to charge youth interested in using the field. We told the group of youth about this and noticed a shift towards optimism. We are now in the process of assisting them to get organized and form a team.

Youth need to be shown that, with a little resilience and openness to cooperate, the system can work for them.


Youth are not the future – they are the present.

Youth seem to be stuck in the future tense. They will be this. They will be that. At almost every speech given to youth, youth are reminded of their status as "the future." The stock phrase: "The future of our nation lies in the hands of our youth."

The reality, of course, is that youth, constituting a large demographic majority of the Bhutanese population, are very much a present force. They cannot be stored in some time vault only to be opened at some time in the future. They must be nourished and enabled now.

WHAT WORKS? CREATING AN ENVIRONMENT WHERE YOUNG PEOPLE CAN FEEL SAFE AND COMFORTABLE AND RESPECTED.

Many youth, like Kencho, are ready to be part of the solution. Phub Dorji, a recent YHS graduate, is trying to establish a National Youth Parliament, a council of youth representatives from across Bhutan that would enable young people to use their energy, passion, and voice in creative ways to bring about social change. At our latest workshop, youth went around Thimphu conducting community-based research and documenting the needs of communities such as Changzamtog, Changidaphu, and Hong Kong Market. Some groups even helped elderly people find employment with local businesses.

There is a Swedish saying that if the Stone Age children had followed their parents, then we would still be in the Stone Age. Certainly not all change is growth, nor is all movement forward. But youth are changing and moving. Where they go will depend on how we respond to the present conditions. Will we beat, suppress, and punish them into conformity? Or enable them to flourish, to take on their roles as active citizens, and build a better Bhutan? 

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LONDON CALLING

By UPASANA DAHAL



A course offered by Reuters on photography in London was very enticing. Just the thought of being in a city, with so much history, heritage, culture, and art, stirred up the wanderer in me. But first I had to complete the formalities and obtain my visa, a cumbersome process for many Bhutanese traveling overseas.

Delhi was like an oven in the

summer, but what was even more excruciating than the Indian heat was the process of obtaining a visa. The man behind the desk, in the British Embassy, with a stiff upper lip, politely refused to grant me one.

“We only accept internet applications,” he said, without even blinking.

I looked at him, his desk,



THE CITY HAS A MIX OF PEOPLE FROM ALL OVER THE GLOBE.

the wall behind him, and finally asked him: Will you give me a visa if I manage to bring over my application on time today? He didn't seem too sure.

As I left the embassy, clicking away at the auto-rickshaw crackling in the distance, I was determined to get this done with. Backpack journalism, was



one course I had always longed to attend. Now that it was within reach, I wouldn't let it slip, and no man sitting behind a desk would stop me.

My perseverance paid off. The very next day I was on a plane headed for Heathrow Airport. With the earphones glued to my ears, I was smiling as the aircraft steadied in the burning sun, above the clouds. I shut my eyes, listening to *Don't let me down* by The Beatles and began conjuring up images of

London – the castles, museums, cobblestoned streets, the black taxi cabs, the pubs.

Just a few hours in the city, I realized that there was no shortage of ways to get around. In short, you can descend into the underground and into the Tube, hop onto a bright red bus to see the sights, or hail one of the ubiquitous London black cabs. The double decker buses are everywhere too and offer a fantastic view from the top deck. But, being a photographer and a hippie at heart, I decided to just get out there, be in the moment, and explore the city on foot. And that seemed the better way to do it.

Over my stay, I had managed to create my own unique tour of London. Londoners are absolutely fun – friendly and courteous, with or without stiff upper lips. The city has a mix of people from all over the globe and people of every color. At first London, like many big cities can appear intimidating, but once you know how to navigate the area, getting around is easy.

For tourists the London Eye, a giant observation wheel erected in the Jubilee Gardens on the South Bank of the River Thames is a major attraction. It is a 135 meter tall structure built as part of London's Millennium Celebrations. Going up in the eye offers spectacular views of the city. From there the Big Ben is just a hop, skip away and you can find your way to Trafalgar Square for an afternoon at the National Gallery.

Trafalgar Square commemorates the glorious naval victory of the British under the leadership of Admiral Nelson

Trafalgar Square commemorates the glorious naval victory of the British under the leadership of Admiral Nelson over Napoleon's French fleet.

over Napoleon's French fleet in the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805. Undoubtedly the largest square in the city, it is often considered the heart of London. Since the Middle Ages, Trafalgar Square was a central meeting place. At the middle of the square stands a tall column, a monument honoring Admiral Nelson who laid down his life in the battle. The column is guarded by four lion statues at its base. There are a number of statues and sculptures in the square, with one plinth displaying changing pieces of contemporary art. The square is also used for political demonstrations and community gatherings, such as the celebration of New Year's Eve.

Since Picadilly Circus and Leicester Square are a short jaunt away from there, I found myself wandering around Covent Garden, picking up knickknacks I never knew I needed from the street

TRAVEL

vendors.

The Tower of London Museum is another landmark, located in the center of the city. It is a historic castle on the north bank of the River Thames. It was founded towards the end of 1066 as part of the Norman Conquest of England. The White Tower, which gives the entire castle its name, was built by William the Conqueror in 1078, and was a resented symbol of oppression, inflicted upon London by the new ruling elite. The castle was used as a prison from 1100 until 1952. There were several phases of expansion, mainly under Kings - Richard the Lion heart, Henry III, and Edward I in the 12th and 13th centuries.

But what is even more fascinating is that The Tower of London has played a prominent role in English history. It was besieged several times meaning that if one had control over it; one had control over the city. The Tower has also served as an armory, a treasury, a menagerie (collection of wild animals in captivity), the home of the Royal Mint, a public records office, and the home of the Crown Jewels of the United Kingdom for which it is famous now. Even the controversial Kohinoor diamond, which many believe was stolen from India, can be seen at the centre of the royal crowns displayed among the exhibits. Around the tower of London one can spot many Ravens - they



have their own special place there believed to be protecting the crown jewels and the tower. They have existed at the Towers from the time of King Charles in the 16th Century. Many believe that the “Towers Raven mythology is a Victorian Flight of Fantasy.” But, fantasy or not, many seem to believe in it why they are there.

The Buckingham Palace, was constructed by the Duke of Buckingham, John Sheffield and called the Buckingham house. It was bought from the Duke by King George III, for his wife. In 1826, King George IV instructed the famous architect John Nash to convert it into a palace. But, sadly, King George IV as well as his successor died before the palace was complete. Queen Victoria was the first to reside in the Buckingham Palace. Interesting sights at the Buckingham

↑ HOP ONTO A BRIGHT RED BUS TO SEE THE SIGHTS, OR HAIL ONE OF THE UBIQUITOUS LONDON BLACK CABS, OR SIMPLY DESCEND INTO THE TUBE.

London is a city that has so many layers of history to it and it is a city that speaks to you from all these different eras gone by. If you listen closely, you might just hear it calling.



palace are the changing of the guards, and seeing the soldiers in the tall furry hats.

If you are interested in Museums, London's Tate is definitely a must. The museum holds the National collection of British art from the 1500's until today and many international, modern and contemporary collections.

While there are innumerable great sights to see in London, for a young budding photographer like me, Camden town was the major attraction. From Markets to Music and funky art, Camden town offered the eclectic experience. The bohemian town has attracted

singers, writers and poets from Dylan Thomas to Amy Winehouse, who made their homes in this inner part of London.

London is a city that has so many sides to it that it can at times be overwhelming. This town that produced greats of English Literature like Chaucer, William Shakespeare, and Charles Dickens; a town that gave birth to the era of the romantics – the artistic, literary and intellectual movement in reaction to the industrial revolution and against aristocratic social and political norms. The impact of this movement on the politics and on society changed

TRAVEL DETAILS



By Flight

From Paro it is a 4-hour flight to Delhi or Bangkok, from where you can board the connecting flight to London.



Accommodation

Bhutanese travelers can find hotels at every corner and to suit every budget.



Climate

Best time to travel (June - September).

much the world then and continues to highlight the importance of art and literature on politics and the world.

London is a city that has so many layers of history to it and it is a city that speaks to you from all these different eras gone by. If you listen closely, you might just hear it calling. 🐦

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ELECTION AFTERMATH: A MILESTONE OR A MILLSTONE?

I arrived in Bhutan a few days after the second general elections – a milestone in the journey of our country’s fledgling democracy.

A milestone unfortunately marred with ugly accusations hurled at each other from both sides of the two political parties that had contested – The People’s Democratic Party and Druk Phuesum Tshogpa.

The air over Thimphu, I found was heavy with mistrust, fear, whispers and confusion. The rumor mill was busier than usual and many had taken to social media to air and battle out their differences. The most insidious of these posts and comments on social media seemed to come from those who have much to gain from inciting fear and hatred by branding people as “anti-nationals” and “Ngolops” thereby expressing their hate and hoping they appear “patriotic.” Some of these posters were ostentatious enough to let others know that they were the only ones concerned for the King and country.

Having split my life between Bhutan and living overseas for over a decade now I can only speak from what I have witnessed outside and from the experiences of what others in the world have gone through before us in history. When segregation is promoted and a group of people are targeted and branded as traitors simply because of their race, religion, caste, color, choice of a political party, and for speaking their thoughts, then it means that people promoting it are ignorant enough not to understand what a functioning democracy is. This behavior actually undermines the democracy it pretends to promote. It, therefore, makes me wonder, is it a true democratic culture that we aspire to build or do we want to become a caricature of a democracy like those we see all too often around us in the region. A caricature where a small few inspire outrage and violence because they cannot tolerate the views or differences of those in the community.

Without fail, those inculcating this climate of fear have vested interests to control the dialogue and outcome for the larger population because this is what fear-mongers do. If leaders and a government heed to the divisive calls of these small-minded inciters then our country will likely go down the path of many other nations that have suffered immensely from these consequences. We are not starving for examples either. There are plenty of them out there in the world today where categorization of a group of people through hate speech, fear, and incitement can have such unthinkable consequences.

The individuals who have called to “hang” certain people or demanded the death of certain individuals only goes to show that we have amongst us, ignorant blinkered individuals who have no understanding of the consequences and implications of their words and actions. Individuals who in fact look to nations beyond our borders not to learn to curtail them within our borders, but to promote violence/

imprisonment/hanging/death-threats on their adversaries through hate speech. What is worrisome is when they see nothing wrong in doing it or think it is justified because of their cause.

While thankfully our differences and the election results have not ended in such an outcome, we are no strangers to such a situation. I come from a generation that once experienced that difficult time in our history when there was a painful atmosphere of segregation and mistrust. Our Lhotsham brothers and sisters can tell of how being labeled “Ngolop”, or being branded traitors simply for being Lhotsham or through guilt by association; because they were related to someone who plotted against the government, were made to feel in the 90’s. What is disappointing is that even after 20 years, some of us have not progressed in our thinking about the treatment of our fellow citizens.

Is this the kind of democracy that we aspire for, one in which we only have contentious elections but none of the functionalities that will help us grow and become a great nation; an example to the world; one in which, not just us as Bhutanese, but the architect of our Democracy, His Majesty the Fourth King of Bhutan, would be proud of?

But it is not surprising that the second elections culminated in this.


We Bhutanese are still green and wet behind the ears in what it means to have a function-


ing democracy. It is not just we the people that are in the learning process, but so also are our governments and its members. And as we continue to embark on this process of nation-building, we should not lose sight of the fact that disrespecting the constitution, spreading fear, indulging in unethical practices for party politics and promoting corruption will not a great nation make. Instead, the unethical practices we may indulge in simply for party politics will leave the country vulnerable and exposed to those who wish to take advantage of us.

There is no ideal form of government out there, but

“Democracy” with a constitutional monarchy was chosen for us. His Majesty the Fourth King when he stepped down from the throne deemed it the best form of government for the country. His Majesty the Fifth King, meanwhile, has said that it is a responsibility that each one of us should shoulder.

And how do we do this? By inculcating the democratic values within ourselves and within the system. By tolerating our differences be they racial, cultural, political, religious, or sexual. We strive to promote basic freedoms and civil liberties so that people can live free of fear.

It is at critical times like these when a nation is hurting from finger-pointing, from accusations and rumors being flung left and right; when people are unsure of the truth, that puts to test our individual characters and of who we are as Bhutanese. Because people, not just leaders, of honorable and good character work hard at building trust and nation building, not tearing it apart. 



It is not just we the people that are in the learning process, but so also are our governments and its members.



QUALITY EDUCATION HOW CAN BHUTAN ACHIEVE IT?

By Matthew Schuelka

A student at a school in Thimphu is asked to stand up and present an answer, and the fear is written all over her face. She does not know the answer, and it is obvious that the teacher has called on her because of it. The student tentatively stands up, looks down towards the classroom floor, and mumbles an almost incoherent answer. The teacher shakes his head, then berates her in front of the class for giving a wrong answer. He knew that she would give the wrong answer, and means to make an example of her. He tells the class that this student is ‘lazy’ and does not pay attention in class. The other students in the classroom laugh, make fun of the student standing up, until the student is almost in tears. The teacher again asks for the answer, and again the student does not know. He hits her on the head with his book, and asks the question again. Eventually, she is made to sit down by the teacher and the student looks deflated and defeated. When I ask her about this experience, she says that she is determined never to participate in class again.

The above story is not fictionalized, but rather a scene I witnessed many times in Bhutanese schools.

The identified need and advocacy for Gross National Happiness (GNH) in the Bhutanese classroom is laudable. Inculcating values in the classroom, focusing on the learner instead of the teacher as

the generator of knowledge (i.e. ‘learner-centered pedagogy’), and making the school a positive place to learn are all noble attempts to locate and place GNH in education. However, there seems to be a very serious disconnect in the Bhutanese education system. Instead of an inclusive class-room setting that should support all learners, the education system gives exam after exam, segregating the ‘good’ students from the ‘bad.’ Instead of creating a positive place to learn, students are ruled over by fear, intimidation, and ridicule. Corporal punishment is still a feature in many classrooms, and facilities and resources at schools are woefully inadequate.

Before I argue for why these things are happening and possible solutions, let me explain that this article comes out of a year long ethnographic study of Bhutanese schools. Specifically, I did my research on youth with disabilities in Bhutan. This is important to highlight because the dilemma in Bhutan at the moment is how to educate all children in the classroom. While Bhutan has mostly met its education targets for the Millennium Development Goals, it yet has to figure out how to provide a quality education for a diverse group of learners.

Education serves a variety of purposes in society. Amongst many things, it creates a national identity, supports a more informed democratic citizenry, teaches values, and prepares the youth for life. In



STUDENTS
LINED UP FOR
THE MORNING
ASSEMBLY

Bhutan, the education system can do all of these things, all the while maintaining a GNH focus.

One of the major issues, and the primary factor in holding back quality education in Bhutan, is the strong influence of the Indian education system. The Indian education system, itself, is a product of the colonial British, at a time when the purpose of colonial schooling was to segregate society into the educated bureaucrats and the uneducated manual laborers.



This archaic system is heavily reliant on the teacher as the supreme authority and bearer of knowledge (i.e. 'teacher-centered pedagogy'). Another feature of this system is its preference for rote learning – memorization, plagiarism, and test taking.

While in the past Bhutan may have adopted such a model because most of the teachers were Indian and the Bhutanese system was based on theirs, it is time to move past that and become current with the times.

Bhutan does not share India's colonial history, and need not buy into a colonial education system ill equipped for the 21st century. Whatever the reasons for this policy adoption – and there are legitimate reasons as well – Bhutan grew up on India's education system and it seems to have a hard time getting rid of it.

There have been recent efforts to 'Bhutanize' the curriculum, infuse GNH into the classroom, and better align the education system to the needs

and challenges of this century. The Royal University of Bhutan broke away from Delhi University in 2003, curriculum reforms in the 1980s and 1990s made education more Bhutanese, and more recently there is the Education for GNH reforms from the Ministry of Education. Education reform is a very tricky business because it does not happen in a vacuum, meaning that you cannot just erase the past and start over.

Reform takes a huge amount of political will, resources, and commitment by all stakeholders. Teachers and Principals need to know that a new approach is better than the old, and policy makers need to be convincing about this.

The other feature of effective educational reform is that it does not happen overnight. Deep and true reforms sometimes need at least a generation in order to be completely implemented. One cannot be impatient when it comes to making changes to a complex social institution – especially in Bhutan.

In my opinion, the best chance of making sustained changes in education is through the teacher training colleges. By training new batches of teachers with progressive and the most up-to-date teaching practices, we can infuse quality education in the schools and classrooms to demonstrate to the older generation of teachers, and to the next generation of Bhutanese citizens, that education can be positive, a fun experience, and done with quality. It is only by exposing teachers to these progressive techniques that they will understand that education is not just for bright and obedient students. These teacher training colleges – in this case, Paro and Samtse – should take the best students from Class 12, give them a full 4-year college education in subject content and pedagogy, and feature plenty of opportunities for classroom experience.

Once these teacher trainees graduate, they should be given a high salary so that the economy and society recognizes the value of the teaching profession and the role of education in Bhutanese society. This strategy has been very effective in Singapore, South Korea, and Finland in raising the value, quality, and prestige of the teaching profession. In these places, teachers get paid on par with lawyers and engineers. Yes, this will take much more money – which can be found in a variety of sources – but education is an investment in the future, and isn't that worth the cost and sacrifice today?

The other reform that can fundamentally and effectively change the education system is the elimination or reduction of exams. (Some would even argue for the elimination of all marks in school, which has been proven effective elsewhere. However, in this article I do not intend to be too radical). I question whether the stress, competition, and segregative effects of high-stake exams are really creating a GNH society. How is exam taking a skill that is relevant to adulthood – except for maybe taking the Royal Civil

Service Exam? The majority of Bhutanese adults – especially in 2013 – will not work for the Civil Service. So what skills will today's youth need as adults in Bhutan? They need to be able to think critically, analyze, evaluate, be creative, and communicate effectively. We should be preparing children for life, not for exams. They need to be able to apply knowledge, not just mimic it. They need to be entrepreneurial. Assessment should be formative and authentic – meaning that assignments should reflect applicable real-world skills and student allowed to practice and improve continually, rather than be judged one time on one test.

Finally, I would like to suggest that Bhutan can learn more from better models. Specifically, I think that Finland could serve as an appropriate blueprint for Bhutan moving forward. As mentioned above, Finland has elevated the teaching profession in both quality and professionalism. This is a small country in Europe with limited resources, and yet has still managed to become

one of the top performers in international tests such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). What is more remarkable is that Finland has done this without making their schools harsher, more rigorous, stricter, and more competitive. Rather, Finland has made a conscious policy decision to focus on educational equity and eliminate examinations from its educational system. Many educational researchers are now studying Finland because the Finnish success story seems to fly in the face of conventional wisdom. The two best books on the Finnish educational reforms that can better make my argument are Linda Darling-Hammond's *The Flat-World and Education* (2010) and Pasi Sahlberg's *Finnish Lessons* (2011).

Is not equity and a positive and nurturing school environment really at the heart of Education for GNH? By encouraging students to engage in the classroom, to feel like they are part of a community that cares for them, to learn the skills that will get them a steady job, or even create jobs, so that they can provide for their family – these are the features of a GNH society that education can provide for Bhutan. The problem here is that for the longest time, the education system has been quite disconnected from Bhutanese society. It is time to make Bhutanese education matter to Bhutan's future, rather than letting it sit on the sidelines as Bhutan negotiates itself and its identity in a globalized world.

Matthew Schuelka was the Head of the Political Science and Sociology Department at Royal Thimphu College. Currently, he resides in the United States and continues to do research on the Bhutanese education system at the University of Minnesota.

The other feature of effective educational reform is that it does not happen overnight.



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FICTION

The Lovecarnation of Dangphu & Dingphu

By JURMI CHHOWING



A lifeless monotonous scent hung in the air. The aroma in the air complemented the dead-end highway that lead nowhere. There were no telling talismans. It was complete inertia. There was nothing to do. Vertigo. Indeed there was such an abundance of idleness the imminent sign in plain sight was one proclaiming “nothing can be done”.

The belly’s full and the womb’s a full moon. It now waxes and wanes. It’s lyrical, and as if picking up the vibe the tides touch, kiss and caress the shores of the babe in the *cul de sac*’s safe banks and within the little unborn is ready to get out of the protective pool. Enough surf. Enough waves. Let’s see what gravity feels like. That’s how it is. That’s how the seed grows. We live immersed in water. And then one fine day Dangphu had enough and took the first step - out of the water and onto an unknown and hostile sphere called the earth. He walked. And the hostility he encountered were some of the most astonishingly beautiful creations he’d ever seen. Ironic. Paradoxical. Sardonic. And bewilderingly beguiling.

The sand. The gravel. The pebbles and stones onto the huge gigantic rocks and boulders. The bush. The brushes and the plants. What were these green beings that stood firm and rooted yet swaying to the commands of the gentle passing breeze or a sudden gusty wind? The plethora of flowers containing every imaginable color emitting fragrances stirred in him something peculiar. Dangphu had never known such a sensation. He couldn’t tell what was happening but he didn’t worry. Anything that smells and looks and feels that fragile and beautiful are things one does not worry over. He saw insects; bees, ladybugs, grasshoppers, dragonflies and butterflies amongst a sea of minuscule beings. Fascinating. Beautiful. Indescribable.

The blue sky engulfed him, along with those cotton-ball clouds moving gently leeward with the high wind. The vastness of the skies didn’t scare him. He felt calm, relaxed, and completely at ease and at peace. It was a whole new world. Then something melodic pierced the quiet air. It was the sound of birds of prey circling high up in the skies gliding with the wind and the breeze, and absolute freedom.

Their sharp shrills made him smile. He kept walking, but did so at a pace that moved with his surroundings. When dusk fell and the silver moon arose in a perfect crescent, he fell where he stood, paralyzed by the sheer sight of what he was seeing. His gaze was firmly placed upwards. The evening star made her twinkling appearance; a faint light at first sight that twinkled invitingly against the gradual unfolding darkness of the night. The sun was long gone. And as abruptly the crescent glow of the moon was surrounded by one, two, three, four and more glittering jewels. They seemed to be coming from all directions in what was just a vast blue sky a couple of hours earlier. Dangphu sat transfixed. Mesmerized. He was under a spell that was so positively strong he didn’t even notice the fact that he’d hardly eaten anything the whole day.

The daylight woods and forests, along with the songs of the feathered flying brethren now dissolved, quiet as the sea he knew. The only orchestra at play was the insects and creatures of the night.

The nocturnal sound was magical. Sitting under a huge Baobab tree, Dangphu watched the curved moon and the twinkling stars even as his ears stayed pointedly tuned into the sounds of the night. It stirred him. He was totally still - almost motionless. He could not fathom anything but that didn’t matter, he was already under the magical spell of the sound of the earth, the heavens above and all that lives and dies and is reborn again in a continuous vacuum of emptiness and form; form and emptiness. But that was the least of his bother. His receptivity to everything; from the glittering star-lit skies to the comfort of feeling his own sense of worth, literally, gave him a feeling of such peace and rest he could hear his own heartbeat, feel the bones in his body, and even tell the flow of the blood from his toes all the way up to his knees, thighs, the waist, and to his stomach up to the chest and to his shoulders and arms to the end of his fingertips and on to the head, to flow back down the channels to the heart, and just as he was about to touch the untouchable, a star shot across the glittering night and went down in a south-easterly direction leaving in its trail a glimmering luminosity that made him sit all the more solid underneath that Baobab tree.

He took in a long and deep breath; swallowing the fresh midnight air, and for the first time in his life, he suddenly became aware of the air going in and coming out of his lungs. Dangphu was as suddenly aware of himself and that mindfulness brought about the recognition of all that he’d seen, touched, heard and felt.



Then she stretched her hand out, inviting him to hold her hand. They both rose up, eyes firmly locked onto each other.

The interconnected web of life was revealed, and together with that the universal nature of beings. Dangphu began to drift, peacefully drowning into a slumber he'd never known.


The dream seemed as astonishing, bemusing, confusing and wonderful all at once. There was the presence of a woman who glowed and glimmered, radiating a smile so pure and true as if she was the source of all the joys he'd felt this most perplexing day. She was smiling at him from what felt like a distant figure; sparkling, luminous and familiar. She was so close to him he could almost feel the features of her face. Her eyes sparkled and twinkled. And all the delicacies on her face shone with compassion. She moved effortlessly. Her grace made him both happy and humble. He was kneeling at her and she in turn was facing him in a bowing fashion, emitting such empathy he got a feeling she could read whatever was happening to him without uttering a single word.

Then she stretched her hand out, inviting him to hold it. They both rose, eyes firmly locked onto each other. Everything he'd experienced today reflected back from her pupils. And then he heard the sweetest voice. She was talking to him and he understood, even though he'd never heard such sounds before, he somehow understood and spoke the tongue.

"Dear Dangphu, I've been waiting for this moment for such a long time and now that you are finally here, I'm so happy," she said. "I know what you are thinking... my name is Dingphu. We've met so many lifetimes. Once I was a Blue Poppy flower and you the honeybee. In another I was a small brook and you were a fish, a trout. We were also tree and bird, sands and stones, deer and grass. And then we came back, always, in some form or another." He listened, enthralled.

"You refused to hunt me once when I was a Blue Sheep and you the Snow Leopard. But there was nothing bad about these incarnations. The reason we kept meeting, as we did right now and its cause was very simple. We helped each other in all our avatars. I helped you get away from a fisherman in that brook. When I was barren as a tree in the autumn of her life, you spread what little seeds I was able to fruit and even built your nest in my crevice. As a flower, I'd store the nectar just for you. Each time we helped one another our bond grew closer and closer.

We were never far apart. It's been many avatars but that sharing and caring gave us more intelligent forms. I knew we'd both come back as man and woman in the human realm when the time was right. That time is here and now. It's the reason why you left the water world and ventured out. It's also the reason why I stayed on land, for I knew this moment would happen. So did you, you just didn't know how but the question of why you took this path was always within yourself."

Dangphu smiled. He finally understood the waves for the water and the water for the waves. Instant Karma took care of the rest. 

*The writer is a freelance journalist.
He maintains a blog at iamdrukpa.blogspot.com*

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FEATURE

Empowering Rural Communities Creating conditions for rural prosperity

By *NGAWANG PHUNTSHO*

READ BHUTAN IS PART OF READ GLOBAL, A NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION DEDICATED TO EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES WITH THE KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS ESSENTIAL TO BUILD MORE PROSPEROUS FUTURES

“**R**ead Bhutan?” my friend Choezin asked me. “Oh, isn’t it the new magazine?” And that is not a new question as almost all my friends ask the same question when I tell them that I work for READ Bhutan. Following this question, I always wind up expanding the acronym - READ - Rural Education And Development, and explaining a bit about what it is that we do.

Some friends joke and tell me: “You don’t do anything but read and read? That must be boring!” But it is precisely because of such reactions that I am glad that I am working for READ to help make reading not boring and to help people realize the importance of it.

I have always been interested in making a difference to Bhutanese society and so working for READ allows me to do this through an important component, which promotes education and empowers communities through reading. In fact, it was READ’s motto of “Inspiring Rural Prosperity” that inspired me to join this organization.

Organization Background

READ Bhutan is part of READ Global, a nonprofit organization dedicated to empowering communities with the knowledge and skills essential to build more prosperous futures. READ Bhutan helps build



community libraries in the country, which cater information and resources to the communities. Today we have successfully set up five community library and resource centers across the country.

READ model combines education, enterprise and community development to help uplift rural communities out of poverty. Our centers house libraries, computer labs, women and children's section and we conduct early childhood development programs, vocational training programs and programs that aim to address women empowerment. READ Bhu-



tan libraries are the only community libraries in Bhutan. Bhutan does not have a public library system except for a small public library in the capital, Thimphu. Today more than 18,000 Bhutanese people have access to READ centers.

We believe that information is powerful and when people have information at their fingertips, they are in a position to make informed decisions in the community and improve their lifestyles. As a result a community can bring about better social changes. A village needs critical information on health, hygiene, childcare and education. Generally in Bhutan, reading is a poor habit. Students only read textbooks. That way many children graduate from high schools and even colleges without having read a single book.

READ Bhutan hopes to gradually make community learn to read and develop reading skills in youth. It is found out that those students with better reading skills do better at schools. READ Bhutan is the only organization in Bhutan working in establishing and promoting community libraries.

Bhutan is traditionally an oral society and only the clergy and a few government officials were educated or literate till the 1960s - when the modern or current day education system was introduced. Today it is still largely a non-reading society where the culture of reading is quite minimal. READ Bhutan's community library and resource centers, the only community libraries across the country, has reading programs as part of their regular activities. We have "After School Reading", "Peer Reading Group", "Reading Competitions" in both English and Dzongkha, "Story Telling" among many others.

And the challenge as stated earlier is the lack of reading culture in Bhutan and therefore lack of importance attached to public libraries. READ Bhutan is a pioneer in that sense,

because we are working and transforming one community at a time to establish community libraries and encourage reading by providing interesting and relevant books, by creating an inviting and non-intimidating environment, by having engaged librarians who are from the community and constantly in touch with the children and the parents. Thus far we have been very successful in getting children interested in books and getting them to read.

A READ Center

A READ center houses libraries, computer labs and we carry out early childhood development and vocational training programs and programs that address women empowerment. Our Centers are designed to serve the communities. We have resources for all - adults, children, students, teachers, women and even those who are illiterate. Each Center provides the following valuable educational resources:

A library with 3,000-5,000 books, magazines and newspapers in English and the local language.

An information technology section with computers, Internet access (where available), and computer skills training

A women's empowerment section providing a safe space for women and girls to attend classes, participate in trainings and receive medical exams.

An early childhood section providing child-friendly furnishings, educational games/toys, and reading materials

A multimedia and communications section providing TV, video, DVD player, telephone, fax and copying services

A training/meeting hall where staff and partners conduct programs on literacy, health, livelihood skills and more.

Today we have five centers spread

across the country:

Different Programs

Our programs focus on creating a culture of learning for all ages. An important component of every READ Center is the various trainings and workshops provided. The Center and core infrastructure serve as a platform for relevant programs in the community. In partnership with other NGOs and governmental agencies READ Bhutan implements various training program; the key themes for programs and trainings include, among many others:

Literacy – Classes on literacy skills and retention are offered, and

can include training on accessing literacy-enhancing websites for learners to continue to improve on their own. Additionally, reading groups encourage women and girls to teach each other to read. In addition, some Centers also conduct writing workshops

Livelihood Skills – Training courses on various vocational skills that are relevant to particular communities are offered at READ Centers. These can include: accounting and finance, alternative energy use, sewing, agriculture, small-scale bee-keeping, mushroom farming,

etc.

Information Technology – Centers provide trainings on development of computer and Internet skills, from basic skills such as how to use a computer and the Internet to more advanced skills such as Microsoft Office software, or how to set up local Internet networks. Some Centers will also begin developing programs to use mobile phones to access information as well as running community radio stations – which can be used to deliver information about training programs, health matters, legal issues, as well as serve as a tool in literacy development and provide income through advertisements.





Women's Empowerment

Within the women's empowerment section of each Center, trainings are offered on health, women's rights, and other gender specific topics.

Health Services & Education

Each Center has reading materials on health issues with a particular focus on women and children. READ in partnership with Government agencies and our NGO partners provide a range of health-related activities at the Center, such as: monthly check for mothers and babies, and reproductive health awareness programs for women.

Programs Lined up for 2013

The following are some of programs and activities that READ Bhutan will undertake in the year:

Post-Literacy Programs for adults.

Reading and Writing workshops for children and adults.

Menstrual Health Management and Awareness for women and girls.

Capacity building and awareness programs on civic and political participation of women.

ICT trainings for development, such as using technology for education and for livelihood trainings.

Mobile Libraries based out of READ Centers to reach deeper into remote rural areas.

Education through Art by conducting art camps for youth
 READ Bhutan also plans to establish a few more centers in the country in the year.

Sustaining Business Enterprises

We have seen that both self-reliance and empowerment are key factors in the success of a READ Center. Communities co-invest 10-15% of project costs, vesting them as committed partners and en-



READ'S SUSTAINING ENTERPRISE AT RONGTHONG

uring the long-term sustainability of the Center. Additionally, at least one profit sustaining enterprise is launched with each READ Center, providing a vehicle for the community to cover the costs of maintaining the center. Chosen by the community, these enterprises also create local jobs and meet local market demand. Examples include farm tractor rental services and poultry cooperatives. Communities use profits from sustaining enterprises to cover librarians' salaries, internet and electricity costs, buy new books and resources, and provide maintenance and ongoing operational support for the Center. The net result is a strong sense of pride and ownership for both the Center and the sustaining enterprise. 🐔

Ngawang Phuntsho is the Development Officer of READ Bhutan. He regularly contributes articles to local newspapers. He is the author of two books.

WHAT'S **NEW**

Trends

KEY

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Nu.
25,500



Nu.
3,500



WHAT 'S YOUR QUIRK?

National Footballer Thinley Rabten a.k.a Kalou
Club: Yeedzin FC.

Age. I'm 23. **Where are you from?** I am from Tashigang but I live in Thimphu. **How would you define life?** Life is a song - sing it. Life is a game - play it. Life is a challenge - meet it. Life is a dream - realize it. Life is a sacrifice - offer it. Life is love - enjoy it. **What are you eating now?** As a footballer I am supposed to maintain a healthy diet but I eat almost anything and everything. **What do you hope to achieve?** I want to work hard and be among the best footballers in the country and beyond. **Entertainment to you?** Soccer, movies and going out with freinds. **How do you define love?** Raw passion perhaps. **Your interests?** Making new friends. **Where did you train to be a footballer?** As a kid, I'd attend football coaching camps during my winter and summer breaks. Then, after finishing school, I joined the Changjiji football Academy. **One thing you'd like to change about yourself?** I wish to spend more time with my family. **Your favorite celebrity?** Didier Drogba **Like?** winning and lifting cups. **Dislike?** I dont like it when my team mates don't give their best during a game. **Quirks?** I have to kiss the ball everytime I get on to the field.



SESHY SHAMU



(Chanterelle mushroom)

Nutritional Facts

Amount Per 100 grams

Calories	38
Total fat	0.5 g
Sodium	9 mg
Potassium	506 mg (14%)
Total Carbohydrate	7 g
Dietary fiber	3.8 g (15%)
Sugar	1.2 g
Protein	1.5 g (3%)
Vitamin A	0%
Calcium	1%
Vitamin B-6	0%
Magnesium	3%
Iron	19%



Amongst the many edibles nature has bountifully provided to the Bhutaneese, one is the *cantharellus cibarius*, a foraged delicacy.

Locally known as *Sishey Shamu*, these mushrooms are available almost everywhere in Bhutan. The mushroom gathering season is very short and the prices for the chanterelles are quite steep in the local markets, depending on the amount collected.

The fungus is probably the best known species of the genus *Cantharellus*, if not the entire family of *Cantharellaceae*. It is orange or yellow in color, meaty, and funnel-shaped. On the lower surface, underneath the smooth cap, it has gill-like ridges that run almost all the way down its stipe, which tapers down seamlessly from the cap. It has a fruity smell, reminiscent of apricots and a mildly peppery taste and is considered an excellent edible mushroom.

Often found in beech forests among similar species and forms, these mushrooms are high in nutritional profile such as antioxidants, vitamins and fatty acids.

Though records of chanterelles being eaten date back to the 1500's, they first gained widespread recognition as a culinary delicacy with the spreading influence of French cuisine in the 1700's, where they began appearing in palace kitchens. For many years, they remained notable for being served at the tables of nobility.

The golden chanterelle is perhaps the most sought-after mushroom, and many chefs consider it on the same short list of gourmet fungi as truffles and morels. It therefore tends to command a high price in both restaurants and specialty stores.

There are many ways to cook chanterelles. Most of the flavorful compounds in chanterelles are fat-soluble, making them good mushrooms to sauté in butter, oil or cream. They also



Even when dry, the mushroom maintains its aroma and consistency.

contain smaller amounts of water- and alcohol-soluble flavorings, which lend the mushrooms well to recipes involving Bhutaneese cheese. Many popular methods of cooking these mushrooms in Bhutan will be to include them in sautés, soufflés, cream sauces, and soups. They are not typically eaten raw, as their rich and complex flavor is best released when cooked.

The Bhutaneese are also known to preserve Chanterelles by drying them out in the sun. Even when dry, the fungus maintains its aroma and consistency.

Some Bhutaneese chefs profess that reconstituted chanterelles are actually superior in flavor to fresh ones, though they lose in texture whatever they gain in flavor by becoming more chewy after being preserved by drying. Dried chanterelles can also be crushed into flour and used in seasoning in soups or sauces. Chanterelles are also suitable for freezing, though older frozen chanterelles can often develop a slightly bitter taste after thawing. 🐦

By NGAWANG TASHI



REVIEW RESTAURANT



Jimmy's Kitchen

In one of the most crowded corners of the heart of Thimphu town, a stones throw away from one of the branches of the Thimphu Municipal offices and right beside the busy supermarket, 8 Eleven, there's a signboard that stands out in big red letters, among many other signboards, begging for attention. It says, 'Jimmy's Kitchen'. On entering the building the lure of the signboard seems to put you on the path of some unimpressive shops to the left, a tyre shop to the right and at the end of the hallway: Jimmy's Kitchen. The place is brightly lit and modestly furnished in a space that is large enough to accommodate 20-25 people. I was greeted by owners and partners of the restaurant - Deepesh and Geeta, and a very friendly waitress.

Once seated, I asked for a menu but was told they didn't have one because they only served Burgers with fries and Momos (Dumplings). The most sparsest offering I have ever encountered in a restaurant. I must have been hungry as I ordered one of each. While I waited for my food, the partners kept me company and we struck up an amiable conversation during which I learned that Deepesh's wife is their chef. I also learned that two hired hands had left without warning, leaving them un-



WHERE

Nest to 8 Eleven, below the Imtrat Hospital

SPECIAL

Burgers & dumplings

TIMING

10 am - 8 pm

CONTACT

17118404, 16918017

People can't get enough of the Momo's and I now know why. Jimmy's kitchen should be called Jimmy's Momo's and maybe, just may be, they should have only that on the menu.


derstaffed and overwhelmed – this seems to be a common scenario in the restaurant business in Thimphu. With that constraint, it seemed that the austere menu was a good idea.

My plate of freshly steamed Momos arrived first accompanied with a large bowl of soup; a standard accompaniment of veg/meat broth garnished with a little parsley. A soup that I didn't really care for much owing to the fact that Momo soup accompaniments are always quite bland and boring, no matter where I have it.

Before I could even begin on the Momos, my order of Beef Burger with fries arrived as well. I was surprised that the Burger was presented to me packed in aluminum foil with fries on the side. I reminded myself that presentation is important but is not everything, and proceeded to uncover the large mass of it. The bun as expected, was pretty thick

and didn't fall apart like most others made locally and the beef patty in-between was just as thick with a thin layer of shredded lettuce, caramelized onions. One bite into it and I was overwhelmed with the taste of pepper. I decided to give it a second chance and took another bite but it was no different. Too much pepper. Deepesh, one of the partners, looked on as I ate and immediately ran to the Kitchen to ask his wife how much pepper she has used. She followed him out, with a pepper dispenser in hand, and showed me how much she used. Deepesh tells me that their Burgers actually do very well.

Maybe it was just my bad day. I turned my attention to the fries and I got lucky. They turn out to be crisp and perfectly fried, Delicious!

My Momo's were still very warm and finally at the right temperature I dipped the first one in the chili sauce provided and took a bite into it and considered myself lucky again. They tasted good. It was stuffed with meat and just the right amount of onions – unlike most other places that give you largely onion Momos when asked for beef/pork Momos. The oil was just right too and I devoured the rest of them, all the while contemplating ordering another plate. I saw two hot cases leaving the restaurant and was told it's one of many take away orders that had been coming in all morning, and it was barely 11:30 am. Apparently, people can't get enough of the Momo's and I now know why. Jimmy's kitchen should be called Jimmy's Momo's and maybe, just may be, they should have only that on the menu. 

By KESANG P. DORJI





REVIEW MOVIE

Synopsis: Set in the 1970s, the story follows brother and sister Kuenphen and Jamyang where, in a remote village of Bhutan, they learn traditional archery from their old warrior grandfather. The respected but eccentric old man uses a heavy hand and strict discipline to train young Kuenphen in the art of traditional archery. It becomes clear that Kuenphen has opportunities to further his interests while sister Jamyang is expected to stay home and follow the traditional women's way of life like her mother. But the norm for a young woman – staying in the village to weave, cook and get married – is a fate the young woman is not willing to accept without a fight.



WRITER / DIRECTOR / PRODUCER

GREG SNEDDON

BHUTANESE PRODUCER

TSHERING DORJI



Did you ever want to leave this place
and go to the big city?

Set in the 1970s, the 'Arrows of the Thunder Dragon' follows a brother and sister Kuenphen and Jamyang where, in a remote village they learn traditional archery from their old warrior grandfather.

The respected but eccentric old man uses a heavy hand and strict discipline to train young Kuenphen in the art of traditional archery.

It becomes clear that Kuenphen has opportunities to further his interests while sister Jamyang is expected to stay home and follow the traditional woman's way of life like her mother. But the norm for a young woman - staying in the village to weave, cook and get married - is a fate the young woman Jamyang is not willing to accept without a fight.

When Kuenphen has to leave the village to take his mother on a 3-day walk to the old castle for medical treatment, Jamyang's own desire to explore the wider world is awakened.

Filmed entirely on location in the breathtaking mountains of Bhutan, many of the actors are local highland village people.

This beautiful story from the ancient Buddhist Kingdom that originated the concept of 'Gross National Happiness' examines the gentle toughness required to overcome all odds - and win at the most.

The idea for 'Arrows of the Thunder Dragon' was conceived by Greg Sneddon during a visit to Bhutan. When Greg returned to Australia, he began writing and pre-production for a 90 minute cinema feature film.

By early 2011, Greg had been introduced to local Bhutanese television producer Tshering Dorji. Tshering was excited by the draft script and sought to work on the film.

Greg and Tshering became partners and agreed to self-fund the production of the film up to a standard suitable for international cinema release.

'Arrows of the Thunder Dragon' was shot over a two year period at various remote locations in western and central Bhutan. Internationally acclaimed editor Jill Bilcock an Australian film editor who worked on films such as Moulin Rouge, Road to Perdition and Romeo and Juliet, saw a rough cut and agreed to edit the film.

Production of the film was entirely self-funded. This gave an ad-

vantage of a streamlined creative workflow where Greg was able to quickly modify the script according to changes in circumstances as the Bhutan shoots ran into many challenges. The downside of self-funding was the difficulty of finishing of the film up to the high standard required for subtitled International DCP release.

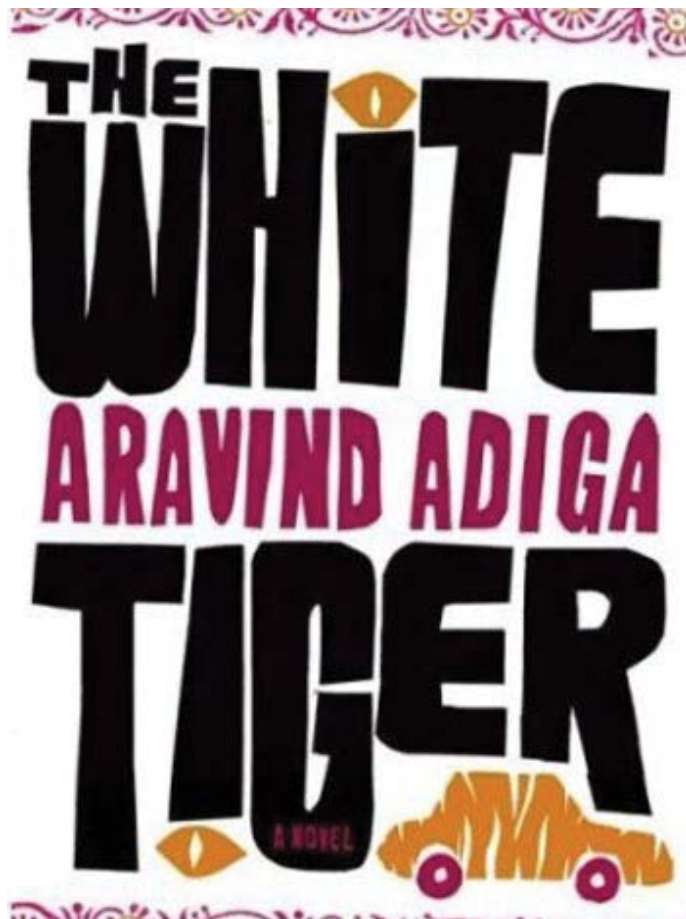
Now complete, the film is signed with international distributor Wide Management. It has had market screenings at the Berlinale and Cannes Film Festival. There hasn't been any public screening of the film as yet. 🐦

PRODUCTION CREDITS

Writer & Director - Greg Sneddon
Producer (Bhutan) - Tshering Dorji
Producer (Australia) - Greg Sneddon
Cinematographer - Leki Dorji
Editor - Jill Bilcock
Shot on RED 4.5k in widescreen



REVIEW BOOK



PRICE
Nu. 600

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DSB Book Store, Thimphu

The White Tiger

The vast sub-continent of India that lies just across our borders is a place that is not unfamiliar to us Bhutanese. But despite our familiarity with its culture, traditions and people, there are many things about India that we still do not understand; that don't make sense. The population, poverty and the human condition; the chaos, confusion and the endless struggle for survival over every kilometer of that country can make one become pretty philosophical when trying to make sense of it all.

Part of that answer, in trying to make sense of life in India, can come from the *White Tiger*, a book written by Indian journalist Aravind Adiga from Chennai who worked as South Asian correspondent for *TIME*.

The *White Tiger*, a debut novel, was first published in 2008. It won the Man Booker Prize the same year and made it to the *New York Times* bestseller list.

Today some private schools in New York have even introduced it to their reading list for grade nine students.

An easy read, *The White Tiger* is about a young man named Balram Halwai who comes from a small rural village called Laxmangarh – a village confined to “the darkness.” Laxmangarh is a place we all know. It is any village or place in India that we have all seen, driven by, or been to and Balram is any Indian man that we may see or have met on its streets. This would be the story behind that man. Balram narrates this tale through a series of letters written to the Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao.

Darkly comic and hilarious at times, Balram tells the premier about his quest for freedom and his daily struggles to make a living, become someone or somebody in the multitude of lives that struggle for the same in the world’s largest populated country. The failure of the Indian system right to the grassroots results in him attending a school where no lessons are taught because teachers don’t get paid. How the social struggles in every aspect of his life prevents a smart kid like him from getting ahead in life to make an honest living. Caste, religion, social hierarchy, stigma, mafia, dowry, name

it, all the social ills in India’s society that traps a young man or woman from ever getting a head. The only way to get out of this “Rooster Coop”, the term he uses for the social set-up, is by breaking the rules and committing a crime. In his case he decides to kill his boss, a young Indian, who has employed him as a driver.


Balram escapes the “Rooster Coop” and aspires to live his dream as an entrepreneur but also becomes a part of the very corrupt and failed system that he always sought to escape.

The White Tiger, which can have you laughing at times, is a must read for all South Asians who may not experience the corruption and social baggage to the extent our fellow Indians do, but definitely experiences or witnesses some level of it.

What is most enjoyable is reading this story from the perspective of the average Indian man – a villager, servant, driver, criminal and aspiring entrepreneur who has mastered the art of survival in one of the densest human jungles.

“Hundreds of pale hens and

The White Tiger, which can have you laughing at times, is a must read for all South Asians who may not experience the corruption and social baggage to the extent our fellow Indians do.

brightly coloured roosters stuffed tightly into wire-mesh cages, packed as tightly as worms in a belly, pecking each other and shitting on each other, jostling just for breathing space; the whole cage giving off a horrible stench...The roosters in the coop smell the blood from above. They see the organs of their brothers lying around them.” - *The White Tiger*. 

By SONAM ONGMO



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Zero Point Eight Meters

This is the story of how a man mapped the Holy City using a rosary and a prayer wheel. Narrates Tshering Tashi



The 'Great Game' was played for almost a century. It began in 1813 and lasted until 1907. Britain and Russia were the two players in this game. And, the strategic rivalry was over the dominance of Central Asia.

At that time, Central Asia was a black hole and unknown to the West. Countries like Tibet and Bhutan were un-mapped.

The restricted entry, hostile terrain and the suspicious nature of the inhabitants made it impossible for any outsider to collect information in order to make maps.

So, the knowledge of regional geography was the key to the success of the game - if one was to win. And, the British to outdo the Russians came up with a simple yet effective method - Zero Point Eight. A simple surveying technique to secretly explore and survey Tibet in order to produce maps and come on top of the game.

Tibet was a closed country at that time but allowed entry to Indian traders living in its borders.

The English used these Indians to carry out their exploratory works. In 1863, the British Intelligence trained such three pundits in surveying methods. Nain Singh, was one of these surveyors.

For two years, Singh was trained in two simple surveying techniques. The first such technique involved the mindful recording of measured footsteps to help measure distance. The second method was boiling water to find out one's altitude.

By the end of the two-year training, Singh could walk in a constant manner and irrespective of the terrain; each footstep of his was always to 0.8 meters. And so, 100 of his footsteps were equal to 80 meters.

This later became the standard training procedure for all surveyors including the Bhutanese who were called the *chainmen* back then.

Anyway, almost half the equipments that Singh used for his mission were Buddhist ritual objects. While the two fundamental tools were the rosary and the prayer wheel, the other three more complex objects were the compass, sextant and a thermometer. All objects were small and therefore could be easily hidden.

The rosary was used to keep count of his footsteps and also served as a clicker. But if you counted Singh's rosary it had only 100 beads instead of the normal 108, with every tenth bead being slightly larger in size.

And, after every 100 paces, a bead was dropped.

This was done to simplify calculations. So a complete count of the rosary represented 100 paces, or 80 meters. 2,000 of these steps measured a mile. In this manner Singh could keep track of the distance he covered.

The second equipment - a prayer wheel, served as a logbook. In the Himalayas including Bhutan, the prayer wheels are a common sight and don't arouse any suspicion.

The prayer wheel is usually a copper cylinder, filled with scrolls of prayers. Devotees hold it in their left hand and spin it clockwise to spread spiritual blessings and in so doing, accumulate

merit.

Like the rosary, Singh's prayer wheel too was cleverly modified. Instead of the usual scrolls of prayers it had rolls of blank paper for the surveyor to record his observations. Also, it concealed information to guide Singh on his mission. Information like, important landmarks, lakes and so on.

The sextant, on the other hand, is an instrument used to measure the altitude of a celestial object above the horizon. Singh had no difficulty in carrying the few small instruments amongst his merchandise.

However, it would be the two Buddhist ritual objects that would determine the success of his mission. It helped in surveying as well as removing suspicion.

Then, the Tibetan's were wary of foreigners and did everything to keep them away. This was triggered by the 1792 invasion of the Nepalese who

It would be the two Buddhist ritual objects that would determine the success of his mission. It helped in surveying and removing suspicion.

raided and plundered the monasteries.

As a result of the Nepalese invasion, the British were denied entry into Tibet and so many of their missions had failed.

Then in 1862, that there was a breakthrough. A young engineer working for the Survey of India, came up with the ingenious plan of using *pundits* derived from Hindi, meaning a man of learning.

Enter Captain Montgomerie

Left with no other alternatives, the British command allowed Captain Thomas G. Montgomerie (1830 - 1878) to go ahead with his plan. His plan was simple and based on his personal observations: "When I was in Ladakh I noticed the natives of India pass freely backwards and forwards between Ladakh and Yarkand in Chinese Turkestan."

The young Captain formed a team of a few sharp Indians residing at the frontiers. They were trained in clandestine surveying techniques while their identities and accomplishments remained undercover for years on end. It was only in recent years that the identities of these great adventures were revealed and their stories made public.

Despite the precautions and ingenuity, some of these *pundits* were deported after torture while some even lost their lives. Singh is one of the few success cases.

The Pundits

At the time of recruitment in 1863, Nain Singh (1862-1882) was a 33-year schoolteacher at Milam on India's north-eastern Himalayan frontier with Tibet. Singh could speak Tibetan fluently.

During the course of the two-year training, Singh learnt the use of sextants, which he concealed in his custom designed

clothes. These were kept in secret pockets cleverly sewn in the lining of his robes.

In addition, he learnt how to use thermometers for measuring altitude. The mercury required to set an artificial horizon for taking altitude readings were hidden in sealed shells. When needed it was poured out onto the standard begging bowl, they carried.

At a barometric pressure of 29.92 inches of mercury (standard pressure at sea level), and an altitude of 500 feet (above sea level), water boils at about 211.2°F or 99.5°C

For example, in Thimphu, the boiling temperature of water is 92.08°C, which is equivalent to 2300 meters.

Coming back, Singh's code name was the Chief and his cousin was called, the Second *Pundit*. These names stuck with them, and all Indian surveyors were referred to for many years by the Survey as *pundits*.

It was only in 1865, two years into the training, that the two cousins

crossed the border into Tibet. They were disguised as *Bashahris* who were given limited access.

They started from Nepal and headed north towards Tibet. Posing as traders, they joined a large caravan heading to Tibet. However, the caravan group robbed them in the darkness of the night and vanished with all their belongings except for the box that contained the survey equipment. The false bottom of this box had all their equipments. The entire summer of 1865, they journeyed to Lhasa.

After days of begging for food, in January 1866, they finally reached the 'forbidden' city. To blend into this holy city and to effectively complete their mission, they disguised as a pilgrims.

In Tibet, Nain realized that the prayer beads and the wheel were actually convincing tools to carry out his mission with.

Each time someone approached, he would whirl the wheel around and thus pretend to be in religious contemplation. This was enough to dissuade others from breaking into a chat. Another approach was to recite poems as if in prayer. Singh



THIRD EYE

had been lucky so far and had managed to conceal his identity. But, one day, in Lhasa, he witnessed a public beheading of a man who had entered without permission. This frightened him terribly that he left the city to live the life of a recluse for a while.

One account of his experience states that two Kashmiri merchants living in Lhasa found out about his identity. But, they were kind enough not to report him in to the authorities.

Singh, developed a friendship with them and over time, even pledged his watch as mortgage for a loan from them. For several weeks, he lived in the confines of a little inn and continued to work mostly at night.

From the angular altitudes of stars, he even calculated the latitude of Lhasa, while boiling water to calculate the altitude. Modern GPS record the altitude as 3540 meters above sea level. He was off only by 300 meters.

Singh spent three months in the Holy City. He managed to count every single pace of the



↑ THE TIBETAN PLATEAU

way. In addition he took in-numerable clandestine compass bearings and other observations. He took 20 separate observations, both solar and stellar, enabling him to establish its exact latitude (the pundits were not trained in the far more difficult skills required for calculating longitude.)

After three months he sensed a local trader's suspicion. So, in the month of April, he embarked on his return journey home.

He travelled with another caravan and during the two-month travel, he clicked his rosary and tracked the course of Tsangpo River for more than 800 kms. This river happens to be the source of the mighty Indian Brahmaputra.

His journey also took him through the holy Lake Manasarovar (4,556 m). This fresh water lake remains frozen in the winter and is almost 1200 miles from the holy city. Eventually, after months of travel, one night he slipped away from the caravan to return to India. On 27 October, 1866 he safely returned to Dehra Dun, the Northern headquarters of the Geometrical Survey of India, carrying

with him scrolls of data collected.

In Dehra Dun, Captain Montgomerie with the newfound data drew up a map of Tibet. This linear route survey was the common technique used by the British to map India and much of the world.

Nain calculated the location, altitude and distance fairly accurately. Using his data, the English cartographers managed to map the Himalayas, with remarkable precision.

Modern GPS record the altitude of Lhasa as 3540 meters above sea level.

Nain Singh's calculation was off by a mere 300 meters. Singh's observations showed Lhasa at 29.39' degrees. Today's atlases put it at 29.41'. Altitude calculations showed the Tibetan capital at 11,700 feet. Today it is generally given as 12,000 feet.

Today, their efforts are little known but if you consider what they did, they could be counted amongst the greatest and most daring explorers of the 19th Century. 🐦

Lake Manasarovar remains frozen in the winter and is almost 1200 miles from the holy city.

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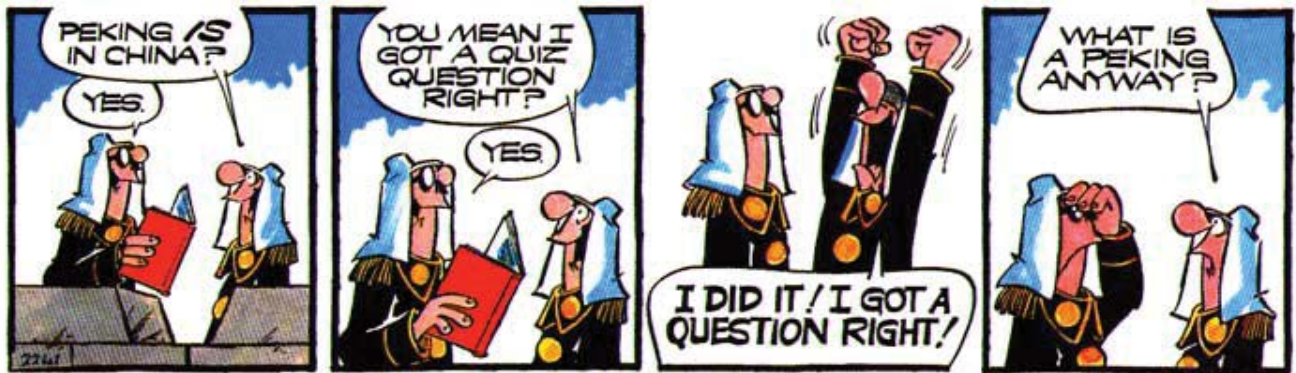


LEISURE

Calvin & Hobbes



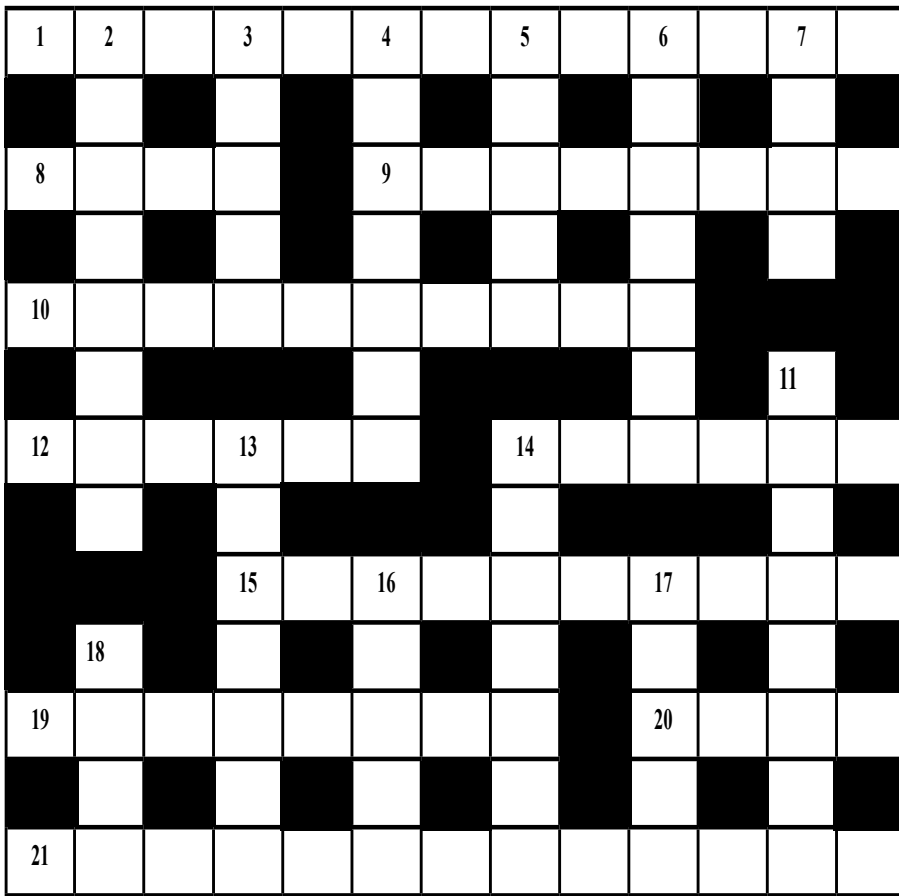
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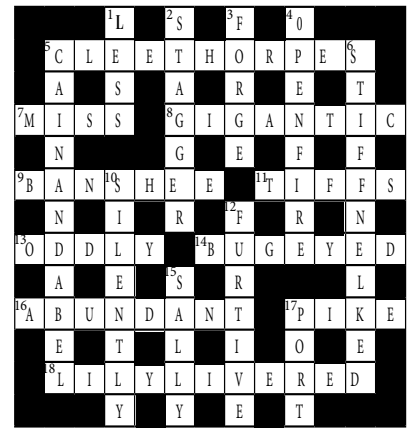
Beetle Bailey



QUICK CROSSWORD



Last Month's Solution



Solution Next Month

Across

- 1 Camera equipment that magnifies image (9,4)
- 8 What you take it on? (4)
- 9 Diluted fruit drink (8)
- 10 Oven with a turning spit (10)
- 12 Spry (6)
- 14 Cheerful and easy-going (6)
- 15 Likeness (10)
- 19 Symphonic music — as if in no (anag) (8)
- 20 Deadly sin of extreme passion (4)
- 21 Embassy's mail container (10,3)

Down

- 2 Modern Abyssinia (8)
- 3 Feeling when tired of life? (5)
- 4 Papal office (4,3)
- 5 Not so wild (5)
- 6 Light in a protective casing (7)
- 7 Thickened enlargement (4)
- 11 Florid and fanciful composition (8)
- 13 Neither Happy, Sneezy, Dopey, Grumpy, Sleepy nor Doc! (7)
- 14 Chivalrous (7)
- 16 Two crotchets in one (5)
- 17 Holy remnant (5)
- 18 Italian Job car? (4)

LIVING WITH SEWING MACHINES

If anyone has tailoring in his blood, it has to be Mohammad Alam. His hands are small and steady; his face - covered in a white beard - is stern and frail. He can look at a person and assess their measurements. But what is even more interesting is how he made his journey to Bhutan some 50 years ago, says Mitra Raj Dhital

The sign board on a narrow lane in Thimphu reads 'Alam Tailors.' The shop was once always centrally located and saw as many customers every day. But after its move, it has been relegated to a little side shop reflecting changing times and needs. Nevertheless, Thimphu residents will find tailor Mohammad Alam even if he sets up shop outside town, for Mohammad Alam is part of the history of Thimphu. He has dressed five generations of Thimphuites now.

Today, time and age and a strong penchant for alcohol has taken a toll on his short but sturdy frame. He looks tired and worn out as he watches the next generation - his son at work. He justifies his state of affairs by the sheer number of clothes he has stitched for the who's who of Thimphu in his 45-year stay here. He may not be the Armani and the Versace of the fashion world but back in the day, he turned ordinary mortals into extraordinary beings with his tailoring skills.

"I have made clothes for the Royal family and for Lyonpos. I must have stitched or mended at least one item of clothing for almost every person residing in Thimphu," he says, with a faint twinkle in his eyes as his mind wanders to the days of old.

In the early 70s, dog collared shirts and bell-bottomed

➔
MOHAMMAD
ALAM



(flaired) pants were the rage in the capital city. Inspired by Bollywood heroes like Rajesh Khanna, Dharmendra and Amitabh Bachchan, residents of Thimphu emulated their favorite stars. The wider the pant legs, the better. And for that, there was always one person they would flock to – Mohammad Alam - Tailor extraordinaire.

“It was exciting to see a tailor in Thimphu in the 60s,” says retired civil servant, Dorji Dukpa. “And, when Alam’s shop appeared, all of us would flock to it to stitch not only clothes but quilt covers and curtains too.”

Then, the handful of stores in Thimphu did not carry off the rack clothing and ready-made trousers, even shirts and dresses were hard to come by. Bedsheets and quilts weren’t readily available, he added.

However, Mohammad Alam’s tailoring career did not begin in Thimphu. As a young lad, Mohammad Alam set out for Tibet from Motihari, a nondescript village in Bihar, in 1958 with his father – Khalil Miya.

Joining a group of other business prospectors, he and his father made their way to Sikkim and from thereon by horseback up the Nathula Pass to Tibet. In Phari, his father set up a makeshift shop, with a worn-out sewing machine, at the local bazaar and even ventured into other nearby parts as a mobile repair shop?

“Business was picking up but then the Chinese occupation took place. Tibetans and Indians alike, we had to immediately flee,” remembers Alam, who, along with his father, made that treacherous trip over the Himalayas with great difficulty before they managed to reach Kalimpong.

His father reopened the business in Kalimpong, but it wasn’t as attractive because of competition from fellow tailors. And soon, his family’s only sewing machine had to be sold.

“Life had taken a difficult turn,” he says. “We were left with nothing and my father without his machine had to resort to manual labor.”

By chance, one morning, his father met a Bhutanese gentleman passing through on business. And so, tweaked by the possibility of once again crowning new frontiers, the father-son duo made their way to Phuentsholing in 1962. But, as a birthing border town, his father was not happy with competitors, both from across and from those flocking in.

They continued up into the interiors, making another difficult journey into virgin territory finally arriving at Thimphu. They decided to stay. This became home because Mohammad Alam had more of a monopoly in his field as there was no other tailor to match his skills in making modern clothing. He held complete sway over the tailoring business.

“I think my father liked the altitude, the place, the people and the fact that business was good and decided to settle here,” he smiles. “Without any money to buy a sewing machine, his father worked as a daily wage laborer in the GREF (General Reserve Engineer Force).

Young Alam, while his father was at work, started selling balloons in the capital’s vegetable market.

“The subji bazaar then was



Joining a group of other business prospectors, he and his father made their way to Sikkim and from thereon by horseback up the Nathula Pass to Tibet.

THIMPHU CITY HAS ABOUT 12 TAILORING SHOPS AT PRESENT.

where the Changlimithang stadium is today. Over the years, the subji bazaar moved to where the Chubachu petrol pump stands at present, and finally to its current location.”

Today, inside his workshop, bolts of woolen suit material, bright cottons and rolls of curtains of different hues line the walls. His son Nasheruddin, commonly known as Motte, in a tight shirt and loose-fitting dress pants, with a tape measure slung around his neck and teeth stained from chewing doma, stands over a length of Thai silk marked with chalk in two shades of blue. Nasheruddin has taken over the business from his father Mohammad Alam. Having grown up on the streets of Thimphu, Motte speaks fluent Dzongkha complete with idioms.

Nasheruddin has worked out of this shop near the police station for the past 10 years. Currently, he operates another shop not too far from here in Hongkong market, and comes in only to assist his younger brother, assigned this workshop, every once in a while.

He works hard knowing that to start up a shop wasn’t a walk in the park for his father Mohammad.

“I knew that sewing was what my forefathers did,” says Mohammad Alam. “So, even if my father wasn’t sewing anymore, in the evenings, after I’d return to the labor



↑ **MOHAMMAD ALAM WITH HIS SON NASHERUDDIN**

camp from selling balloons, I would sit with the one and only tailor in the GREF camp and learn the craft." It would over the years, serve as a blessing in disguise.

In 1967, Mohammed Alam was granted a license by the government to set up a tailoring shop.

"The rent then used to be just Nu 30," he smiles.

A great deal has changed since then. "Most people were not educated those days and you did not see cars around like you do today. People traveled on horses and all the houses were made of mud," Mohammed reminisces over the past. He stands testament to a changing and evolving Bhutan. And over the years they also saw many tailors flocking in, leading to serious competition in their business.

"These days people don't come to the tailors to stitch clothes. They buy readymade garments." But a good tailor is hard to find and so also an

old name.

"I don't remember how many ministers have come and gone since I've come to Thimphu. I think I will always be here. I call this place my home. Today, I have grandchildren who go to school here and can speak in Dzongkha and English," says Mohammed. His sons may have taken over his business now, but he still drops in to the shops everyday. His health, he says, is improving because he has stopped drinking. "People like Mohammad Alam may be seen by today's generation as an Indian tailor, but to us he is as important as any Bhutanese who has contributed to the development of this city," says an elderly customer present in his shop.

Like Alam's family, there are many more such families who emigrated from the northern Indian state of Bihar, bringing with

them venerable family traditions. As we sip tea in the small room used for ironing clothes at the back of the shop, Mohammed, can't think of Bihar has his home. It is here in Thimphu where he came and lived and carved out a life for his family and now his grandchildren.

If anyone had tailoring in his blood, it has to be Mohammad Alam. His hands are small and steady; his face – covered in a white beard – is stern and frail. He can look at a person and assess their measurements – chest, waist, hips. I ask him what measurements I would be. He turns to look me in the face for a brief moment, then looks at my shoulders, chest, waist and then rattles off a series of numbers. His son Nasheruiddin takes a measuring tape and measures me. I check his measurements he's made of me against Mohammeds numbers – they're spot on.

"I can tell," Mohammad says, grinning from ear to ear. 🐦



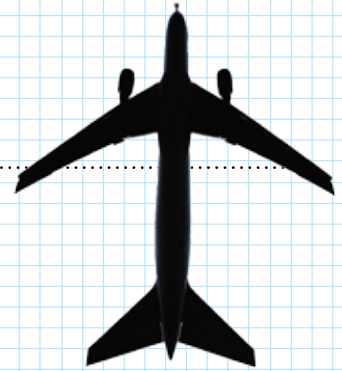
Conference

On June 4-5 the Royal Thimphu College hosted the International Conference on Leveraging Cultural Diversity in collaboration with Helvetas Swiss International Intercooperation with support from the EU.



Special Education Program

Her Majesty the Queen Mother Ashi Tshering Pem Wangchuck, Co-chair of the Bhutan Foundation, handed over educational materials for the Special Education Program to the Education Ministry.



Vacancies in the civil service for this year have decreased by 59 seats from the previous year, according to a Royal Civil Service Commission (RCSC) announcement. On the other hand the number of university graduates has increased by over a thousand



Keeping the City clean

A group of friends who get together, every Sunday - between 4-5 pm, to voluntarily clean the Clock Tower Square.



12 Households not Relocated

It has been almost two years after their relocation but the 12 households relocated to Majwa village with promises of safe drinking water and electricity by the Dzongkhag are still deprived of electricity services which has made life difficult for the residents of the village.



A total of 235.89 kilograms of Cordyceps worth Nu 169.60mn were transacted in seven different auction sites across the country in 2012



The Initial Public Offering (IPO) of each share was provided by the Dungsam Polymers Limited Company at Nu 165, which is 65% over its face value.



Cordyceps collectors

The increased number of Cordyceps collectors pose a threat to the sustainability of the resource. A survey conducted by the Ugyen Wangchuck Institute for Conservation and Environment (UWICE) found that the collectors were ignorant about the threat but at the same time seemed least bothered by it.



Alternative cash crop

A large number of farmers in Bumthang have taken up sunflower cultivation as the best alternative cash crop. With declining yield from Potatoes, farmers are looking at it as an alternative to earn cash income.



Five suspects of the II who were involved in a series of Chorten vandalism and Lhakhang robberies were sentenced to life imprisonment. The verdict was passed by jointly by the Drangpons of six Dzongkhags.



After Pakistan, Bhutan is the second country that is vulnerable to Glacial Lake Outburst Flood (GLOF) in the SAARC region. The region has over 7,683 glacier lake of which nearly 3,000 are in Bhutan.

JYT's resignation creates room for a by-election



The former prime minister and Druk Phuensum Tshogpa (DPT) President Jigmi Y. Thinley submitted his resignation on July 31. He submitted his resignation through the National Assembly secretary to be addressed by the speaker.

The letter is subject to acceptance by the speaker, who was elected only recently on August 2 during the first NA sitting of the second Parliament.

The NA Act states that if a member wishes to resign from his or her seat when the house is not in session, it should be through the secretary general that the resignation be routed.

“While I’ll be guided by law, there are many concerns. What if the law is not so clear, what happens then?” said newly-elected NA Speaker Jigme Zangpo upon knowledge of the the DPT President’s resignation.

The NA Speaker cited the example of 2008 elections where the People’s Democratic Party (PDP) won only two of 47 seats but did not set a precedent for resignation.

What if they had wanted to resign, he asked.

Coming back to the present, if Jigmi Y. Thinley’s resignation is accepted it would mean that the office of a member is vacant and that too much before the expiration of its five-year term.

Under such circumstance a writ for an election would be issued within a month of its occurrence to fill the vacancy. The same laws in the election Act would apply in the case of a by-election, which would apply to the real elections.

The election Act states that the election of a member to fill the vacancy would be held within 90 days from the date of the vacancy. The NA Act states four reasons (resignation, death, disqualification or removal, or expiration of term of office) for a seat to be considered vacant.

Subsidies on LPG and Kerosene to be restored

The subsidies on cooking gas and kerosene have now been reinstated in the country bringing a huge sigh of relief in many of the Bhutanese households for whom the earlier news of subsidy removal by the Indian government came as cause for panic.

With this presumably ‘welcome news’ an LPG cylinder in Thimphu will now cost Nu 504 and not Nu 1,196, as was the price following subsidy withdrawal at the end of June. And a liter of kerosene is now Nu 15.35, a generous drop from the un-subsidized rate of Nu 56.95.

After the end of the Tenth Plan on June 30 the prices of these essential commodities increased proportionately with the withdrawn subsidies.

As preparatory measures many residents resorted to buying electric appliances like rice and curry cookers, electric boilers etc.

On July 20, Indian media reported that India’s foreign secretary Ranjan Mathai had instructed the petroleum ministry officials to reinstate the subsidy on both fuels from August.

During a meeting on July 29 with Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay, Indian ambassador to Bhutan, V.P Haran had also assured the subsidies would be restored by the first week of August.





A Performance-based term for Ministers



It looks like the five years term will not be a breeze for ministers under this government as the People's Democratic Party (PDP) has already come up with punitive parameters under which 'performance' seems to be key and cornerstone.

The PDP has come up with a Draft Code of Conduct for its elected MPs including the ministers which allows for the replacement of Cabinet Ministers in the event that they fail to perform or make headlines with major controversies.

The Draft Code of Conduct has around 18 general points for all elected members and three additional points for Cabinet members.

"If any Cabinet member fails to abide by this protocol, he/she shall be asked to step down or removed from the post by the Prime Minister, based on the recommendation of the Executive Committee," states the draft code of conduct which has been given in-principle endorsement by the sub-committee. However, some changes are expected before the Executive Committee (which includes the Prime Minister) gives a final approval.

The Code of Conduct was drafted by a seven-member special sub-committee which also includes PDP General Secretary Sonam Jatso and PDP Spokesperson Tandin Wangmo.

PDP's Economic Stimulus Plan

A national level task force has been formed and mandated to finalize the newly instituted People's Democratic Party (PDP) government's Economic Stimulus Plan (ESP).

The task force has been mandated to finalize the ESP within a week. According to a news release the task force will propose arrangements to closely monitor its implementation.

One of the main priorities of the ESP is to find ways to inject sufficient liquidity into the banks to enable them to lend more, especially in the areas that are of concern for the economy and the nation.

MOST DISCUSSED

58

Percent that's the crime rate Thimphu has reached and is the highest in the country.



3,567+

The number of graduates who have signed up for the preliminary examinations to appear for the Bhutan Civil Service Examinations.



68.27

The cost of a liter of petrol today in Gelephu after the latest revision of more than Nu 2.



1,753

The number of dogs sterilized and vaccinated in Thimphu city during a month-long campaign.





Title: *Stirrups*

Medium: *earth Pigments*

Size: *24 by 20 inches*

Artist Phurba Namgay started out as a traditional Thangka painter and is now a sought after master artist focussing on contemporary renditions of American space rockets soaring through traditionally painted clouds. His works in traditional pigments and acrylic also include this piece titled *stirrups*.

This and other artworks are available at the Tertton Art Gallery in Thimphu.



TERTON
GALLERY

BY KELLY DORJI

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Picture this. Somebody, under the guise of anonymity, puts up a post on a popular social media site stating that a certain high-ranking government official has cheated the public in a certain dzongkhag and amassed a fortune for himself. The post goes on to say that his wife, also a certain high-ranking official but based in Thimphu, with even higher connections, is in cahoots with her husband.

How do you think the Bhutanese public will treat this issue?

Here is what might happen. When the post first surfaces, it will within a short span of time, thanks to social media forums and smart phones, reach from one ear to another. Then, in offices, homes, and casual joints, the characters of the high-ranking officials involved will be dissected and scrutinized. Within a day or two, the post will be the talk of the town. Finally, a reporter waiting for the story of his life will decide to get in touch with the dzongkhag's public and perhaps even with the protagonist of the post. When the real story appears in the mainstream media and it becomes clear that the officials in question haven't pocketed a chhetrum, the Bhutanese public will tire of the talks. Yet some will claim that they knew it was all untrue right from the start and others will, in spite of the newspaper report, insist that the original post is true.

Enter Phase II. One such dissatisfied reader who harbors a personal dislike for the officials in question assumes a fictitious identity in another social media forum and makes another post backing the earlier one. The writer boldly states with matter-of-factness that the evidence for the fraud was hushed-up easily because the high-ranking official's high-ranking wife is having an affair with her very powerful boss in the ministry who made some very powerful phone calls to make the facts disappear.

Now what do you think might happen? My guess is that the reporter waiting for the story of his life, after making another phone call, would be roundly criticized, verbally abused and, if he still went ahead with the story, scarred by the entire experience. Some other high-ranking official in some other agency would get up and talk about the sensationalism surrounding speculative stories and condemn the newspaper that carried it. The newspaper, in turn, would say in its pages that it is being marginalized by the agency and, with the accusations and counter accusations going public, the Journalists Association of Bhutan (JAB) would be approached by both the parties to conduct a thorough enquiry.

Observing all this, some blogger would say that the newspaper under enquiry is backed by a certain political party, therefore the one sided reporting. Then would ensue a Facebook battle where different factions begin insulting each other along political lines.

Now, suppose that the high-ranking officials, or the very powerful boss in the ministry, or the reporter are people you know. Suppose their lives, including the newspaper owner's, have been turned upside down, all because some anonymous person didn't realize the implications of his post.

You probably get my drift. For the past many years, a lot of people have been victims of anonymous posts in Bhutan. Some, because of their own doing, others simply because they were open to target. And the end consequence is borne by our society which, as small as it is, suffers unnecessary subdivision.

I write this not merely out of concern for maligned individuals and organizations but because these sites, whether one likes it or not, are carriers of social change. And this change is inevitable. Social media is here to stay, along with its divisive consequences. We cannot quell this tide. The only way we can use it constructively is to understand that mainstream news providers are accountable for their content. Social media forums are not. Their purpose there is always questionable. We therefore need to become conscientious consumers, to digest anonymous posts and unaccountable forums as entertainment, not news.



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