

## Keynote Address by the Hon'ble Chief Guest

*Sudhir Vyas\**

When I received Karma Ura's invitation to this important event, the theme chosen for the seminar caught my attention right away. It is timely and relevant, for with the compelling changes that have been set in motion in Bhutan – the impending transition from the security umbrella of an enlightened Monarchy to the rough and tumble of democratic governance, the impact of new instruments of information dissemination, TV and the internet, two private newspapers, and so on – we are witness to a definite concern expressed on the influences that these may have on Bhutan's public culture, its national culture.

The term 'Public Culture' has obviously been chosen by the Centre with a purpose. We are not talking here of that inner refinement that characterizes a so-called 'cultured' individual; rather, public culture would be that system of values and norms that comprise the cultural component of national identity, in the way in which the citizens of a nation, individually and collectively, think, perceive and express themselves, the way we educate our children, and the instruments we employ for this purpose. It pervades and defines our politics, society and rhetoric, and in that sense is a source of identity.

The other element in the subject of our seminar is the media. A fundamental institution of democratic governance, the media reflects public opinion, but also plays a vital role in creating and shaping it. Some may argue that the media, to be truly free, should not be restricted by cultural constraints. I am unable to agree with this view. An enlightened media should strive to inform the public, to create and sustain as wide a range of interests as possible and encourage debate –

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## *Media and Public Culture*

all of which involve accurate and impartial presentation of news and views and evaluation of conflicting ideas, but within – and this is crucial – the public culture of the society it serves.

Because the cultural roots of any society go deep in religion, history and the environment, Bhutan, being a small society, derives strength from its distinct cultural identity. And this identity reflects in all aspects of public life: in the market and in street corners, in cinema, sport, entertainment – and the national media. Traditional religious performances are as much a part of public culture as editorials in the newspapers.

Popular taste is an index of culture, but it changes and is affected by new values emanating out of print media, television, internet and cinema, reflecting the reach of consumerism and global trends. Are we seeing a conflict between a globalized, generalized, essentially western-oriented culture and a regional, distinctively Bhutanese one that we would wish to preserve and see develop?

In New Delhi, as you enter the building that houses All India Radio, the following quotation by Mahatma Gandhi catches your eye: “I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the cultures of all lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any.”

No culture can flourish if it attempts to be exclusive. The point then is to see public culture not as a given, static entity but as a developing, living set of values that allows us to respond to our environment meaningfully. The national media in Bhutan in its myriad forms— traditional, folk, print or audiovisual—has an important role to play in supporting such a culture, besides reflecting it. What is then important is the media’s code of ethics: it should not lose itself to the demands of the market and the politics of the day or, for that matter, to cultural dogmatism and an urbanized syndrome. It then promotes a culture of escapism that is limited and partisan, that cannot be termed a public culture. How this can be done will undoubtedly be the subject of many of the presentations at this Seminar. It is not an easy task, but

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under the guidance by His Majesty's vision of maximizing the Gross National Happiness of his people and given their faith and firmly rooted traditional values that are constantly reinforced in daily life, I, for one, am confident of its success.

I would have liked nothing better than to sit and listen to the galaxy of distinguished speakers assembled here. If other demands on time will not permit this, I will look forward to reading the proceedings of the seminar in print, and I do hope that the Centre will bring out a publication on these important questions. It has been a privilege and pleasure for me to be able to join this distinguished gathering this morning and I thank the Centre for Bhutan Studies for giving me this opportunity.



# Stone Inscriptions: An Early Written Medium in Bhutan and its Public Uses

Dr. John Ardussi\*

## Historical Background

Public culture in Bhutan has since the earliest historical times revolved around community life and religion. The two were interlinked in Buddhist teachings brought to Bhutan from Tibet by monks in search of converts in what were once wilderness areas of the Himalayas. The 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries saw periodic episodes of civil warfare in Central Tibet, sparked off by the inroads and depredations of the Mongols from Central Asia. Many Tibetan monks viewed these events as the culmination of prophecies urging men of religion to flee to so-called *Beyul*, or serene Hidden Lands along the Himalayan fringe, of which a few were rumored to exist in Bhutan.

However Bhutan in those days was not the idyllic place of these men's imaginations. Their biographies show that upon arrival, they found Bhutan to be a rather rough, illiterate and rural culture, full of dangers. Hence they employed the teaching of Buddhism as a tool to 'pacify' the land and people.

For example, the famous Tibetan Drukpa monk named Lorepa came to Bumthang in 1248 AD. There, he addressed a crowd of 2,800 people whom he described as "beastlike" (*dud 'gro dang 'dra ba*), "wild, and temperamental" (*rgod-gtum-po*).<sup>1</sup> The local people were said to be fond of eating meat and sacrificing animals.

One century later, the Tibetan Kagyudpa monk named Choeje Barawa fled to Bhutan from the civil disorders in his native homeland of Gtsang, as described in one of his religious songs:

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<sup>1</sup> *Lo ras pa*: ff.67.b-68.a; *ShP-la*, *Chos rje lo ras-pa'i rnam thar*, ff.24.b, 26.b.

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The powerful (families) are now mostly robbers;  
There is no hope for those who want peace and happiness.  
Capture, beatings, torture! Oh, what will happen?  
It is time to go to Bhutan (Lho Mon), a land without strife!<sup>2</sup>

This image of early Bhutan comes to us not only from Tibetan sources. The 18th century history of Bhutan called *Lho'i chos 'byung*, completed in 1759 by the 10th Jey Khenpo Tenzin Choegyal (1700-1767), presents a vivid picture of the social chaos that characterized western Bhutan prior to the coming of the Zhabdrung Rinpoche and his establishment of law and order:

After the manner of the proverbial big fish eating the little fish, vicious men rose up to fight and kill one another. Escorts were needed to go from the upper part of a village to the lower. The rich robbed the poor of their wealth and homes, and forced them into involuntary servitude. Family feuds, fighting, and injury went on unabated. 'The Wang fighting the Dgung,' and 'Fighting between the large and small factions' were common sayings, as enemy factions reduced the country to splinters. What was given to a Lama in the daytime was stolen again at night, while holy men in retreat in the mountains and forests were attacked by robbers. Visiting yogins from India were seized and sold into slavery, religious images were destroyed and made into women's ornaments. By these and other kinds of barbaric behaviour were the holy sites in this Hidden Land destroyed. On account of this, the local spirits rose up against the people, bringing strife and death, so that they took to placating them with offerings of meat and blood. All of these things characterized this land in that era of strife and the Five Defilements.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> 'Ba'-ra Rnam-mgur 112.a: dbang ches 'phrog 'joms byed pa'i mang lugs la // so gsod bde skyid re ba'i snying med po // bskyigs brdungs tshan chu byung na ji 'dra 'ong // lho mon gnod 'tshe med sar 'gro re ran //.

<sup>3</sup> LCB (completed in 1759) 7.a-b, repeating, *verbatim*, a passage composed ca. 1675 by Gtsang Mkhan-chen in his biography of Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal (*Dpal 'brug pa rin po che ngag dbang rnam rgyal gyi rnam par thar pa*

### **The Zhabdrung Rinpoche and the Establishment of Social Order**

As is well known, the Zhabdrung Rinpoche came to Bhutan in 1616 as a political refugee from Tibet, and within a decade he had founded the first unified state government in western Bhutan. One of his most important achievements was the imposition of law and order. In contrast to the anarchy thought to have prevailed before the Zhabdrung's coming, his biographer, Tsang Khenchen writes that

He suppressed all robbery, banditry, and other malicious behaviour including disrespectfulness, lack of compassion, ungratefulness and disregard for fear and injury caused to others. By these [acts of the Zhabdrung] the entire country became peaceful and prosperous; it was like a proverbial Era of Good Fortune.<sup>4</sup>

### **Government Media in 17<sup>th</sup> Century Bhutan**

Every government in history faces the task of communication with its people. The question may well be asked, what means did the Zhabdrung's fledgling government employ to publicize even the fact of its existence? What were its governing policies, and how did it communicate them, to residents within the country and to states on the frontier? I would argue that the formation of a public media in Bhutan began in the 17<sup>th</sup> century with the Zhabdrung Rinpoche's need to communicate these messages. It is instructive to consider what forms this took, and how it developed.

In the first place, we must remember that the governing model adopted by the Zhabdrung was the so-called 'two-fold' system wherein religion and the state were conceived of as being linked together, as parallel entities of government. The Zhabdrung was first and foremost a religious figure. He was the exiled head of Ralung monastery in Tibet together with its monastic patrimony of monasteries and estates that had accumulated since the time of his ancestor Tsangpa Gyare

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*rgyas pa chos kyi sprin chen po'i dbyangs*, folio Nga 2.b-3.a). The Wang and Dgung are believed to have been ethnic groups of earlier centuries.

<sup>4</sup> LNDRR Nga: 146.a-b.

(1161-1211). The original governing structure adopted in Bhutan, I have argued elsewhere,<sup>5</sup> was based in part on this monastic precedent. For the monks in his entourage, in residence at the state monasteries and who were literate, the Zhabdrung composed a written code of behaviour called the *Tsayig Chenmo* (Ch. *Rtsa-yig chen-mo*).

But there were, obviously, no modern means of mass communication. Neighboring states could thus be contacted only by official letter, carried by emissaries or runners. We know from his biography written by Tsang Khenchen (1610-1684), our primary source on the Zhabdrung's life, that following his decision to found a new government congratulatory gifts were sent to him from places on all sides of Bhutan. We have several bibliographies to such communications between the Zhabdrung and rulers in both India and Tibet.

But within Bhutan, personal written communication with the ordinary, illiterate citizenry would have been impractical. Instead, we see from the Zhabdrung's biography that he spent a great deal of time moving his camp from place to place, meeting people and giving blessings and lectures on religion. The Jesuit monks Cabral and Cacella who visited the Zhabdrung in 1627 traveled with his entourage for more than two months before reaching his monastery at Cheri.

But verbal communication was also limited in its reach. For example, the Zhabdrung never seems to have travelled east of Wangdiphodrang.

To extend his message to other parts of Bhutan he appointed personal emissaries and teachers, including his own father Tenpai Nyima who was sent to eastern Bhutan about the time that the Zhabdrung himself first came to western Bhutan.

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<sup>5</sup> John Ardussi, "Formation of the State of Bhutan ( *Brug gzhung*) in the 17th Century and its Tibetan Antecedents," p. xxx.

### **The Introduction of Stone Inscriptions as a Medium of Public Communication**

What might be called the second phase of the Zhabdrung's programme for governing Bhutan began with the period of Dzong construction, beginning with Semtokha in 1629, and ending with Lingzhi and Gasa in about 1646.<sup>6</sup> The two capital fortress-monasteries of Punakha and Tashichhodzong were founded, respectively, in 1637 and 1641. The rationale for these massive buildings was initially defensive, to withstand invasionary forces from Tibet, a purpose for which they were singularly successful. No Tibetan or Mongol army ever gained a foothold in Bhutan during the lifetime of the Zhabdrung or his immediate successors.

From sometime between the completion of Punakha Dzong and the Zhabdrung's final retreat (and probable death) in 1651, we become aware of a new form of public communications medium having been launched in Bhutan, which introduces the main topic of this paper, namely the inscription of public messages on stone.

The first such document to which I call attention is one of the most remarkable physical remains of Bhutanese history, the slate inscription containing the Zhabdrung Rinpoche's written law code. It is a unique monument that has remained nearly intact for more than 350 years, and yet has attracted almost no attention from historians of Bhutan. However, time prevents me today from going much beyond its bare description.

Unlike the *Tsayig Chenmo*, the code of behaviour prescribed to the monks living in monasteries, the Zhabdrung's law code was written to publicly broadcast the rules of behaviour imposed primarily upon the ministers of state and their deputies. No contemporary paper copies have come down to us, and it is preserved today only in the form of the stone slate (*rDo-nag*) inscription panels outside the Small Dzong or *Dzong-chung* of Punakha. The inscription contains

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<sup>6</sup> The founding of Trongsa was the work of the 3rd Druk Desi, Mingyur Tenpa, at an uncertain date ca. 1650.

clear evidence of its having been dictated by the Zhabdrung Rinpoche himself. For instance it bears the title *Khams gsum chos kyi rgyal po dpal ldan 'brug pa rin po che ngag gi dbang po phyogs thams cad las rnam par rgyal ba'i bka' khrims gser gyi gnya' shing zhe bya ba'i gtam*: “The Golden Yoke of Legal Edicts’, [as dictated] by the Dharmarāja of the Three Realms, the Glorious Drukpa Rinpoche Ngawang Namgyal”. Further on in the same preamble the author clearly states that “I, the Glorious Drukpa Rinpoche, the Dharmarāja, He who is Possessed of Magical Power, Destroyer of Enemy For

ces, have erected this of my own intent.”<sup>7</sup> Regrettably, I do not yet have a photograph to illustrate the Zhabdrung’s slate inscription, and I thank His Excellency Supreme Court Justice Sonam Tobgye for providing me with a Choeky copy of the transcription.

Later versions of the Zhabdrung’s legal code had other titles, such as ‘The Pure Mirror of the Two-Fold System [of religious and secular law]’ (a document so far still lost), mentioned in a text completed in 1720, and finally the expanded law code promulgated by the 10<sup>th</sup> Druk Desi Mipham Wangpo which survives in an appendix to the 1759 history of Bhutan by the 10<sup>th</sup> Desi Tenzin Chogyal.<sup>8</sup>

### **Stone Inscriptions on Prayer Walls**

The law codes to which we have referred are rather complex documents, containing many obscure terms and ministerial titles. One would assume that they were not easily

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<sup>7</sup> *Nged dpal ldan 'brug pa rin po che mthu chen chos kyi rgyal po bdud dpung 'joms pa'i rdo rjer bsam bzhin du bzhengs pa yin pas /*. The names Mthu-chen and Bdud-'joms rdo-rje were epithets of power that the Zhabdrung used of himself in his various writings and letters.

<sup>8</sup> See BDRR: 278.a where the title of his law code is given as “The Pure Mirror of the Two-fold System [of religious and secular laws]” (*Lugs gnyis kyi bka' khrims gtsang ma'i me long*). Independent MS copies of the 10<sup>th</sup> Desi’s law code are also in circulation in Bhutan. Their relationship to the version in the *Lho'i chos 'byung* remains to be established.

understood by commoners, at least in all their ramifications. And yet, at their heart, there remain the fundamental moral injunctions common to all Tibetan cultural milieu, such as the prohibition against theft, murder, etc., harking back to the law code attributed to Tibet's first great ruler, Srongtsen Gampo. Furthermore, all of these legal documents presumed the universal applicability of Buddhism and its moral teachings. They served the public purpose to promote law and order, and constitute a clear statement to the reading citizenry of how governance under the so-called 'Two-fold' system was meant to occur.

There is yet another, related form of stone inscription found much more commonly throughout Bhutan, that also served as a medium of public communication. This took the form of inscriptions carved on stone prayer walls, called *mani dangrim* (? *ma ni dang ring*). As we shall see, some of these inscription walls long predate the coming of the Zhabdrung. They are also an architectural form and communications medium in use in neighboring countries sharing Tibet and Bhutan's Buddhist socio-political heritage. They merge in form and purpose with the *chhorten*, and in most instances the two types of structure are found together.

A surprising number of *mani dangrim*, of all shapes and sizes, have survived in Bhutan from centuries past. They line the old public by-ways in both the east and west, sometimes in hidden places along near-forgotten tracks. They were clearly meant to be touched and read by passers-by, and so a comprehensive survey might reveal much about the location of Bhutan's pre-modern paths and roadways. These monuments, too, have been almost entirely neglected by students of Bhutan history, at least in formal publications.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> The first to deal with the topic would appear to be Mr. Dorji Namgyel, in a paper presented at a seminar held in March, 2005 by the National Museum of Bhutan, of which the final proceedings are not yet published. His paper was entitled "*Mani Dangrim: An endangered Tangible Cultural Heritage.*" The only other published study that I know of to date is my own article "A 17<sup>th</sup> century Stone Inscription from Ura Village", *Journal of Bhutan Studies* vol. 11, 2005.

We estimate that the construction of these quasi-religious structures was generally sponsored by a local ruler or other village governing body. They contain written prayers exhorting people to moral behaviour or at a minimum the six-syllable *Mani* prayer or other power mantras, repeated many times. In effect, they continued the ‘pacification’ process and the promotion of law and order, begun by the early travelling monks and later through government sponsorship.

We see in these stone monuments, in my view, the earliest public written medium in Bhutan, in effect a form of government injunction to the citizenry: “Recite the *Mani* Prayer, ‘*Om mani padma hum*’, and you will bring good fortune upon yourself and upon the land.” A seventeenth century biography of the monk Ngawang Samten, who was a life-long attendant upon the 3rd Druk Desi Mingyur Tenpa (r. 1667-1680), tells us how this ruler famously sponsored the construction of many such prayer walls.

For twelve years the great protector of the land Mingyur Tenpa bore the burden of the two-fold religious system [church and state linked together under common rule], sealing up the borders against enemies by constructing strong forts similar to Lcang-lo-can [Alakāvati in Indian Buddhist mythology], such that the enemy could not bear to look (let alone attack). The extent of his authority exceeded even that of the two previous Desi. He subdued malicious beings and established them upon the path of virtue. He filled all the districts beneath his rule with *mani* walls, *chortens*, and temples.<sup>10</sup>

In the balance of this paper, I shall survey several *mani dangrim*, drawing some conclusions based on their common and unique characteristics.

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<sup>10</sup> *Ngag dbang bsam gtan*: 28.b-29.a. See also *Lho'i chos 'byung*: 95.a. I wish to correct a statement in my *JBS* article on the stone inscription of Ura, that was not changed during the final edit. The most likely date of this inscription in my opinion is 1651-1667, i.e. the period of the Desi's rule as *Chos-rtse Dpon-slob*, not the years 1667-1680 as stated in the article.

### **Examples of Prayer Walls from Eastern and Western Bhutan**

The oldest of these inscription walls that I am aware of come from eastern Bhutan. To begin, I show a *mani* wall from a ruined village near Trashigang, identified as Jamkhar, which I take to be identical with the place called *Byams-mkhar* or *Jam-mkhar* in the history of eastern Bhutan called the *Rgyal rigs*.<sup>11</sup> The site is connected with the legendary 9th-century refugee prince from Tibet known as Lhase Tsangma, who became the founder of ruling lineages in eastern Bhutan. The site is located on a low ridge west of the main roadway, about three miles north of Trashigang and south of the modern hillside village called Jamkhar. Alongside the pathway through the site are found old *chhorten* structures, recently vandalized, and a small prayer wall illustrated here (Fig. 1).<sup>12</sup>



*Fig. 1: Prayer wall near Jamkhar in Trashi Yangtse*

A much more important castle site, brought to my attention some years ago by Françoise Pommaret, is the ruined bastion known as Tsenkharla (Ch. *Btsan-mkhar* or

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<sup>11</sup> *Rgyal rigs*: 12.b. The date of this source is given by Aris as 1728, but in my view dates from 1668, i.e. sixty years earlier.

<sup>12</sup> I cover this site in more detail in my forthcoming article entitled "A Preliminary Investigation of Bhutanese Castle Ruins and Caves associated with Lha sras Gtsang ma, in *PIATS 10*.

*Btsan-mkhar-la*), lit. the ‘fortress of the Btsan, the king’. It is located on a high ridge above the Kholong river, about ten miles northwest of Trashigang. This ruin is situated in a clearly defensive location, and could well be the bastion known as *Mizimpa* in eastern Bhutanese history and legend, as local traditions hold it to be. Other than the *Rgyal rigs* this bastion or castle is referred to in only a single historical source known to me, namely the biography of the Sixth Dalai Lama, whose mother’s family claimed descent from the exiled Tibetan prince who built it. In that text written by the famous Tibetan Desi Sanggye Gyamtsho (1653-1705), however, it was not Lhase Tsangma but rather his uncle, the legendary dog-faced ‘prince’ named Chikharathoe who built the castle that this author calls *Mi-zim mkhar*, which is to say an abbreviation for *Mi-zim-pa’i btsan-mkhar*.<sup>13</sup>

In 2002, together with Professor Ugyen Pelgen from Sherubtse College, I collected a small wood sample from the window frame of Tsenkharla and had it dated in the USA by Carbon-14 method. The results show that this mountain-top bastion dates with high probability to the period 1425-1440,<sup>14</sup> and not to the 9th century. As I have proposed in another article, this construction may be tied to the arrival of still another refugee from central Tibet, one of the defeated princes of Phagmodru who then ruled Tibet. It remains to be determined if the *mani* wall located on the trail nearby is from the same era as the bastion itself.

My last examples from eastern Bhutan (Fig. 2) come from the steep, wooded slopes below the monastery of Dramitse. As is the case throughout these eastern valleys, all transportation was formerly by walking or horse along mountain trails connecting the hillside villages and monasteries. The valley floors are steep and subject to annual floods. The old trail up to Dramitse from the valley floor is now bypassed by the motor road, and one would otherwise

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<sup>13</sup> Dalai Lama VI: 149.

<sup>14</sup> The C14 dates refer to the year when the wood stopped growing, i.e. was cut down. We may suppose that the construction took place within five years or so of these dates.

miss these old prayer walls. The inscription wall shown here is highly dilapidated. Yet the decaying artwork exquisitely illustrates the Buddhist notion of Impermanence. None of the walls shown here, however, contain any inscriptions other than the six-syllable Mani prayer and other mantras.



*Fig.2: Prayer wall below Drametse in Mongar*

As we survey prayer walls from the 17th century and later, we find that their inscriptions begin to contain more historical information: the names of people, rulers, and clues as to the date of creation. It is as if the wall's message has evolved along with the sophistication of government, "Recite the *Mani* prayer! Behave in a moral way! But remember, also, who sponsored the wall, who built it, and who paid for it!" Recently I have written about the beautifully preserved 17th century *mani* wall found within the village of Ura. The inscription tells us that wall was created at the behest of the famous Penlop Mingyur Tenpa (r. 1651-1667) and funded by the local ruler of Ura during that era. It also tells us the names of the artisans who carved the inscription and who built the structure as an act of religious piety. This inscription is one of the earliest known to me that can be dated, but our discovery of such walls is just beginning.

Further to the west, and skipping some other interesting inscription walls in the east, for lack of time, I will focus for a

moment on the grand *chorten* and prayer wall at Chendebji, which is located east of Pelela on the roadway to Trongsa. This large monument is said to date from the 18th century, as can be gleaned from its large dedication inscription which mentions a nearby monastery and its patrons. The inscription is yet to be properly studied or published. The text is difficult to decipher due to the heavy protective white-wash, common to these inscriptions.

Numerous large prayer walls are located in the Thimphu valley, including the relatively new one located near the monastic training college above Tashichhodzong.

An enormous prayer wall, with numerous dedicatory inscriptions, lies along the roadway north of Paro. The distinctive feature of this wall is the numerous slate panels which are individually inscribed by a different stone carver. None are dated, however, but local experts may be able to provide further insight into the circumstances of the wall's construction.

A similar prayer wall along the river bank south of Paro contains similar dedicatory inscriptions, though lacking a precise date.

Lastly, there are several massive prayer walls located along the pathway to the now abandoned Dobji Dzong on a high promontory approaching the Ha valley above the roadway south of Paro. I am in the process of translating the inscriptions, which name the sponsors and local officials. It seems to date from the 18th or 19th century, although the *dzong* itself was first constructed in the 16th century.

### **Conclusions**

The mani dangrim or 'prayer wall' is an architectural form having the purpose to communicate prayerful wishes to the traveler. Its architectural roots lie in the Buddhist *chhorten* traditions common to Bhutan, Tibet, and other nearby Buddhist countries. To take but a single example, I show here (Fig. 23-25) pictures of an enormous prayer wall located near Gami in Mustang, along the Tibetan border of northwestern Nepal. Some of its inscriptions, of which I do not have photos,

are said to recite episodes from the history of Mustang. An anthropologist studying Mustang has recently informed me:

The positionality of the wall in Mustang's landscape speaks also to a certain type of territorial marker, one more temporal and political than the place it also occupies within the myth of subduing of the *srin mo* (demoness) - the Mustangi iteration of the archetypal Tibetan myth about Buddhism (and Guru Rinpoche) subduing more indigenous traditions and practices. (This particular mani wall is said to be the intestines of the demoness.) Gami marks one of the borders of Lode Tsho Dun (*glo sde tsho bdun*), the seven principalities of the kingdom of Lo. So, it would make sense that social geography and political territory was marked in this particular way.<sup>15</sup>

The *mani* wall is, altogether, a form of public work, a medium of communication created by local communities to cement the social fabric and to articulate a common dedication to the principles of Buddhism. It is a kind of public message board that communicates an essentially Buddhist theme of mindfulness, devotion, and community spirit. The inscription stones may contain simple prayers, or in their later forms significant historical information about the sponsors, creators, artisans, and their times. It is an endangered cultural heritage worthy of study and preservation.

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# The Marriage of the Media and Religion: For Better or Worse

Karma Phuntsho\*

## Abstract

*This paper briefly explores the 'relationship' between Buddhist spirituality and the various forms of media during the 2500 years of Buddhist history. In doing so, it highlights the flexibility of Buddhism in taking the multiple forms of media as useful means for a spiritual end that culminates in the state of enlightenment. The article also raises the problems and prospects of the new encounter between Bhutan's ancient Buddhist heritage and modern mass media. It goes on to argue that the media is intrinsically a neutral tool and that an educated and expedient use can only further the cause of Buddhism.*

## Introduction

Bhutan's Buddhist spirituality and the mass media culture appear to be disparate, even diametrically opposed, the former being characterised by an introverted and deeply spiritual significance and the latter by an extroverted, superficial and material leaning. The former is ancient and sacred, while the latter is seen as modern, worldly and even diabolic. Religious institutions and persons even look down on media, such as TV and movies, as distractions inimical to spiritual study and practice. They are often classed as works of *devaputramāra*, a celestial enticer who, in Buddhist literature, embodies deception and distraction of the highest kind.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Devaputramāra*, 'the demon of god's son' is one of the four diabolic forces to be overcome on the path to Buddhahood. The other three are the demons of death, aggregates and afflictive emotions. Rather than being external obstacles, they represent the four kinds of internal existential bondages.

However, in a world which is inundated and influenced by mass media and in which the interdependencies between the media and other social systems are forged inextricably, a complete abnegation of the modern media culture is not even possible, let alone easy. The reliance of religious systems on mass media is inevitable for its survival in the larger society. For instance, religious institutions, without the support of the media, will fail to even retain its former audience merely through their services in monasteries.

Moreover, the ubiquity and intensity of the media have turned it into one of the most powerful social phenomena. The media is a major force in running the contemporary society and its impact is considerable in many areas. The perspectives the media takes, or the stress the media puts on certain religious issues, can even affect the message of religions. So, do our religious institutions need to change their perception of mass media? What approach should our religious institutions adopt toward the overwhelming presence of the media? Should we redefine religion and spirituality in the light of our new media environment? How can they make use of media to serve as channels for imparting a religious value education to the public? Similarly, (a question that arose during the conference) what can the media bodies do to preserve and promote religious heritage? How can we inject religious content into the media programmes to further the cause of Buddhism in Bhutan? And ultimately, what does the marriage of media and religion, which inexorably will happen, hold for us?

There are numerous such questions confronting a nation with a long history of deep and peaceful spirituality now suddenly exposed to the frenzy of several forms of mass media. It is neither the objective nor within the capacity of this paper to answer, or even broach, all these questions. I must admit that I am no media specialist or social scientist to provide any effective analysis and answers to these questions. In the following passages, I shall merely outline the history of the various forms of media used for transmitting Buddhism and briefly touch on the recent encounter of Bhutan's Buddhist tradition with the mass media.

Buddhism, as a system primarily oriented with principles and values rather than rituals and routines, is known to be flexible and adaptable to different methods of transmission and widely divergent social and cultural audiences. Methods of imparting and transmitting Buddhist doctrines, and the modes of its reception, have therefore been multifarious and constantly evolving. However, this is not to suggest that such flexibility in the modes of transmission happened at the expense of uninterrupted transmission. An uninterrupted transmission is of paramount importance in the Buddhist tradition.

In Vajrayāna Buddhism in particular, the authenticity of a tradition is mainly determined by its unbroken line of transmission and the authenticity of the tradition in turn ensured the effectiveness of the tradition as a correct path to enlightenment. Thus, continuity and purity of the transmission is fundamental to the sanctity, integrity, and efficacy of Vajrayāna teachings. Hence, it is primarily to ensure the continuity and efficacy of the teachings that modes of transmission changed according to circumstances.

I shall start my discussion of various methods of transmission with the concept of the three transmissions (*brgyud pa gsum*) in tantric Buddhism. It is an appropriate theme to invoke in order to kick off a discussion on media and Buddhism in a Vajrayāna Buddhist country like Bhutan, as it is a Vajrayāna concept which is popularly known among the rNying ma and bKa' brgyud traditions of Tibetan Buddhism.<sup>2</sup> These three transmissions represent graduated stages of conveying the ultimate experience of enlightenment realized by the Buddha from the Buddhas through advanced meditation adepts to the common people.

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<sup>2</sup> These three transmissions, as three sequential stages of passing down the experience of enlightenment to the world, often form the framework for religious histories.

**The Mind Transmission among the Buddhas (*rgyal ba dgongs pa'i brgyud pa*)**

The state of the Buddha, according to Buddhist theories of Buddhahood, is qualified by an unobstructed and spontaneous knowledge of all phenomena. Omniscience is the mark of a fully enlightened being who has removed the veil of ignorance. The fully enlightened Buddhas are thus said to convene and communicate through a shared omniscient awareness. Enlightenment transcends all barriers of duality and differentiation so that the informed, informant, and the message are neither identical nor multiple, and the message is therefore considered to be 'conveyed' fully without a bipartite notion of the subject and object (*yul yul can gyi gnyis 'dzin*) or tripartite concept of agent, object and action (*bya byed las gsum gyi nam gzhas*). It is through such telepathic medium that the Buddhas are supposed to 'communicate and discourse' in the liberal sense of the words.

**The Sign Transmission of the Knowledge Holders (*rig 'dzin brda yi brgyud pa*)**

In comparison, the advanced saints and yogins, who have not yet obtained the omniscient insight of the Buddha, are said to adopt a symbolic language. They communicate with their audience through signs and tokens, which effectively illustrate the ineffable mystical experiences and concepts. Words are derived from discursive thinking. Hence, when empirical experiences, such as the awakening of the Buddha, are expressed in words, those words obfuscate the essential experience in the process of conceptualisation. The skilled masters therefore utilise signs and symbols as an unspoken language to convey the direct experience of enlightenment without verbal obfuscation. For instance, a crystal is considered much more effective in pointing the nature of the mind than an elaborate description, and the complexity and multiplicity of causation is better demonstrated by a peacock feather than a long sermon.

**The Oral Transmission of the People (*gang zag snyan khung brgyud pa*)**

This is the most conventional form of communication, and language is the main tool. Known as ‘the ear to ear transmission’, it is primarily verbal and auditory, and the message in this case is conveyed through linguistic transaction. It forms the basis of all secondary media such as the written and audio-visual forms. Although it is associated with the transmission from Vidhyadhara to common people, it is not limited to them. The Buddhas, enlightened adepts, and masters mostly teach in this medium.

The historical Buddha is recorded to have imparted his inner experience and wisdom to his disciples in this mode of communication using his melodious *Brahmaghoṣa* voice (*gsung tshangs pa'i dbyangs*). After the Buddha's *Mahāparinirvāṇa*, the Buddhist doctrine was compiled and transmitted orally through many generations of monks. The scriptures were recited, memorised, and retained in memory using various mnemonic tools. The Buddhist canon was passed down from master to disciple in this manner as an oral legacy until they were inscribed in written form several centuries later.

A significant testimony for the orality of the Buddhist canonical scriptures in those initial centuries of formation is one provided by the Buddhist canonizers in the formula ‘Thus have I heard’ (*evaṃ mayā śrūtaṃ / 'di skad bdag gis thos pa*). The scriptures, the formula shows us, were all received orally. Even after the introduction of writing, the oral tradition continued as a primary medium for the transmission of Buddhist teachings. Buddhist scriptures are still committed to memory and a large portion of the meditation instructions are transmitted only orally and have never been written down. Today, the class of orally transmitted instructions, known as ‘ear transmission’ (*snyan brgyud*) constitute some of the most esoteric and powerful teachings. Similarly, oral methods such as authorization reading (*lung*) exposition (*'chad pa*) and debate (*rtsod pa*) dominate Himalayan Buddhist pedagogy and systems of examination. Thus, the Buddhist tradition is

still an oral tradition.

What keeps oral communication still strong and highly appealing despite the profuse development of more advanced and sophisticated forms of media? The reason, I suspect, is the intimacy, spontaneity, and therefore the effectiveness of oral transaction. All other forms of media involve some form and degree of mediation while oral communication is direct and personal. It is the most natural way of communicating, as it is the one to which we are most accustomed. It is the form of communication which is deeply seated in human psychological and behavioural tendency due to our habituation to it since childhood. This can be seen in our preference of telephone over email or other written media, and direct conversation and meeting over those on the telephone.

Although numerous media systems are at our disposal today to share and disseminate information, oral transaction is still very popular. It is a major and perhaps the most favoured conveyance for information. Hence, some modern mass media have effectively replicated the audio-visual qualities of oral communication. The television media to which our population is strongly attracted, for instance, is largely a mechanised extension of the oral practice, where speaker has much greater coverage and the audience remains distant and passive.

However, the main weakness of oral transmission is its instantaneous nature and spatio-temporal limitations. The teachings transmitted orally in the ancient days could not be sustained or duplicated as one can do today using modern devices. Thus, they were accessible only to the immediate audience, who used their mnemonic power to retain the information. The introduction of writing was a milestone in the history of mankind overcoming this problem. The writing of the Buddhist scriptures took the Buddhist message beyond the immediate audience of the oral transmission. The propagation of Buddhism opened a new chapter.

The first Buddhist scriptures are believed to have been written on palm leaves or inscribed on rocks during the Aśoka era in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC. However, the writing of a complete canon happened much later. The Pali canon of the

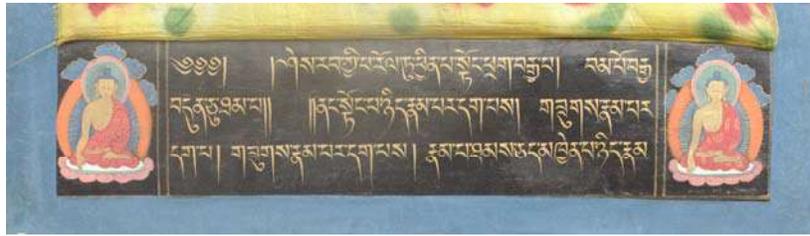
Theravada school is recorded to have been written on palm leaves only between 35-32 BC at the Aloka Cave in Srilanka. One may safely surmise that the scriptures of other *nikāyas* were also written down partially or fully around this period and the new literature, particularly Mahāyāna sūtras, emerging about this time mostly started as written compositions.

Writing has thus been not only an effective method of preserving and disseminating the existent scriptures but an expedient means of creating and distributing new works.

The introduction of writing, it seems, led to a drastic rise in the production of canonical literature in subsequent centuries. There was also an outburst of commentarial and exegetical works since the beginning of the first millennium.

By the time Buddhism reached Tibet in the middle of the 7<sup>th</sup> century, the *Sarvastivada* canon compounded with the Mahāyāna and early tantric writings comprised several scores of volumes, vastly outnumbering the earlier Buddhist canons. The invention of the Tibetan script by Thon mi Sambota, and the development of a written language in Tibet, facilitated the transmission of Buddhism from India to Tibet. The vast state-sponsored-project of translating Buddhism from Indic languages to Tibetan in the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries during the reign of Khri srong lDe btsan, Khri Ral pa can, et al. took place in the medium of a written language that was specially designed for the purpose.

Ever since, the art of writing has been a major medium for transmitting Buddhist teachings and for composing new religious literature. Tibet has been rated the highest country in per capita composition of books. Even after several centuries of the wide use of printing presses, a considerable percentage of the Himalayan literary heritage is hand written manuscripts and long hand writing is still the main method of literary creation.



Although the written media enhanced the preservation and dissemination of the Buddhist teachings by solidifying the rather ephemeral and immaterial oral transmissions, it was the introduction of the printing technology that revolutionized the dissemination of the Buddhist scriptures. Printing gave a new impetus to the propagation of Buddhist teachings.

The Far East Asian Buddhists were truly the pioneers in the art of printing. The earliest printed text known to survive is a sūtra on a single sheet dating around 750-51AD excavated from a stupa in Korea, although printing was already in practice in China for some time then. In 768, a million copies of a prayer book were said to have been printed, commissioned by the empress in Japan during the Nara period. However, the first clearly dated printed book is the Diamond Sūtra printed in 868 at the end of Tang period, now owned by the British Library.

The first printing of Tibetan books happened in the 13<sup>th</sup> century in the court of the Yuan dynasty in China. Sa skya

Pañcīta's *sDom gsum rab dbye* and *Tshad ma rigs gter* were the first books to be printed, followed by a Kālacakra text, which was published to commemorate the demise of Kublai Khan. The first Tibetan canonical printing also took place in Beijing with the publication of Beijing *bKa' 'gyur* at the beginning of the fifteenth century. Xylographic printing in Tibet may have started at about the same time or soon after the printing of Tibetan books in China but it reached its height only in the 18<sup>th</sup> century with the creation of several collections of woodblocks for the Tibetan Buddhist canons. The first *bKa' 'gyur* to be printed in Tibet was the sNar thang xylographic *bKa' 'gyur* in 1731. This was followed by sDe dge, Co ne and lHa sa woodblocks for *bKa' 'gyur* and *bsTan 'gyur*. Much of the Tibetan literature was printed from woodblocks carved for them by the twentieth century.



Although the printing tradition took off in Asia much before the landmark achievement of Johann Gutenberg with his bible in 1456 in Europe, the practice was mostly limited to production of liturgical materials or literary and religious literatures. These printed texts substituted the manuscripts providing similar elegance but at less cost, much like incunabula of the early printing tradition in 15<sup>th</sup> century Europe. However, in contrast to Asia, the printing press in Europe assumed a much greater role with the mass publication of pamphlets and single sheets, most notably used for Luther's challenge of the Roman Catholic Church during the Reformation. The printed material, which were

produced relatively easily and in profusion, became tools in a war of propaganda and the 'press' acquired a new and significant meaning.

The new concept and role of the 'press' had major implications for the Christian religion. The press as an organ for mass production and distribution of propaganda, news and information turned out to be effective vehicle for fast and wide distribution of religious messages and discussion of religious issues. The story of mass media in the Buddhist Himalayas and its relationship with Buddhism however is a different one.

Until very recently, the majority of the Himalayan societies were illiterate and printing technologies remained traditional and primitive. There was no mass media system such as the 'press' in the Tibetan Buddhist countries. Newspapers came in significantly only in the later half of the twentieth century. Thus, the Tibetan Buddhist world did not go through the same history of gradual exposure to and use of mass media as the west. The press, and for that matter any form of mass media, is relatively new to the Himalayan world.

In Bhutan, the first newspaper started in the sixties but the second and third broad sheet newspapers have come out only in the last few months. TV and internet were introduced formally only in 1999 and the second radio station has started only recently. Thus, the encounter between Bhutan's religious and cultural tradition and the press is only beginning. The 'affair' between the press and Bhutan's Buddhist tradition is still in its inception, teeming with enthusiasm and excitement and requiring caution.

What is very significant and a little unnerving for Bhutan is that Bhutan's exposure to mass media is happening in a short period and an abrupt manner. Its media systems have developed in staggering leaps and bounds. With liberalization of media regulations, Bhutan is now confronted with the new newspapers, TV channels, radio stations, internet, and a growing movie industry. Moreover, the easy and spectacular form of media, TV in particular, is becoming popular and capturing the attention of most people. Bhutan is thus seeing a direct shift from an essentially oral society to one that is

predominantly audio-visual, skipping the literary phase. As a result, the once isolated and peaceful villages and monasteries are waking up to a new reality of life bombarded by endless news, propaganda, ads, and blogs.

There has been much talk about the impact of the sudden onslaught of mass media on the Bhutanese society both in Bhutan and abroad. Considerable research has been conducted on the impact of television alone and several papers at this conference discussed the issue of television's corrosive effect on the culture and religion of Bhutan. Many people express anxiety and misgiving that television, or more precisely the overwhelming external influence that creeps in through television, will deface Bhutan's cultural countenance and erode its unique identity.

Mass media such as television, however, is a mixed blessing and cannot be seen one-sidedly as either good or bad. Its introduction has certainly brought evident changes to the Bhutanese world view, their aims and aspirations, values and norms. It has consequently changed the outlook, attitude, and behaviours of the people in palpable ways. Several papers at the conference have demonstrated the negative impact on behaviour and lifestyle through numerous anecdotes and examples. A striking example pertaining to religious behaviour is the case of even old grannies postponing their evening prayers to watch Indian soap operas. For many, media entertainment has occupied the time which traditionally was spent on prayers and religious chores. Thus, mass media has proved to be a distraction inimical to spirituality.

Such behavioural changes are however not the most serious threat to Buddhist spirituality posed by mass media. They only indicate a deeper impact on people's psychology, which is more insidious and destructive than the felt affects on behaviour and lifestyle. Mass media is seen generally as materialistic and intended to flare people's desires and greed through endless advertisements, propaganda and other enticing programmes. It invigorates human vices such as craving, desire, and anger thus exacerbating the dissatisfactory nature of human existence.

Positive uses of mass media to promote Buddhist teachings have also been increasing although their impact is outweighed by the negative ones. Media has helped to make the Buddhist teachings more accessible, enjoyable and interactive through radio broadcasts, TV programmes, newspapers columns, and internet sites. A few people have even ventured to relay the Buddhist message through films. Furthermore, media technology is now being used to both digitally preserve religious scriptures and to reproduce and distribute them at a mass scale with little effort. Thus, media and media technology are both proving to be useful channels and tools for the furtherance of Buddhist spirituality.

It may therefore be argued in conclusion that (1) the media is on the whole a neutral tool, suitable for an educated use. It is neither good nor bad. It is the intention with which it is used and the purpose to which it is put to use that determine the moral value and benefit of the media. It is mainly a medium or vehicle for a message. (2) Direct restriction or suppression of mass media is therefore not necessary or recommendable. Many people argue that Bhutan should have kept TV out and controlled its media tightly. Such prohibition seems only to backfire, as is demonstrated by the recent ban of tobacco. Smoking appears to have increased and tobacco has now become very lucrative merchandise. The most realistic and sustainable solution to counteract the influence of media such as TV would be to kill the desire for it. This can be done through a process of devaluation by making it available cheaply and easily across all sections of the society. (3) Buddhism is a progressive religion, not a static system. Although its core principles like non-violence, compassion, and wisdom remain eternal, its methodologies and modalities have constantly evolved. Buddhist teachers and institutions should learn to adapt to the new social surrounding and fully exploit the mass media and media technologies to further the Buddha's teachings. The main question, therefore, is not what media will do to religion but what religion will do with media.



## Dances in Bhutan: A Traditional Medium of Information

*Françoise Pommaret\**

When speaking today of media, we immediately think of the press, TV, internet, films etc., therefore implying that the traditional society had no media, no form of public communication. This note would like to show that, in the past, the performance of religious dances in public throughout Bhutan had contributed to the dissemination of values and religious ideas; and how, today, they are still used to transmit messages to the public, however with a new concern: the risk of being misunderstood or misinterpreted by outsiders to the culture is now present.

It is well-known that through their contents, media transmit values that are often cultural or religious oriented, and that the subliminal messages that any media conveys, are therefore a reflection of the culture in which the media themselves are produced.

In Bhutan, traditional values have always been largely shaped by Buddhist concepts. The dances are performed on auspicious days and are parts of festivals which have different names according to the places. On these occasions, a whole community, which is usually dispersed throughout a valley, gathers at one place at a given time and socializes, making a traditional 'media event' in contemporary jargon.<sup>1</sup>

Through a religious event and in an entertaining way, knowledge is imparted to the public who are often not highly educated and cannot read, or have no time to immerse themselves in arduous religious texts. In the context of the traditional society, reading religious texts was considered as the task of the religious specialists, and not so much of the lay people who only read or recite their daily prayers.

Moreover it is well-known that images have a much

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<sup>1</sup> Kinga, 2001, 135, made the same remark regarding songs.

stronger impact than texts. A contemporary example of this is the Da Vinci Code book by the author Dan Brown. The book, a huge worldwide success is controversial because of its account of supposed events pertaining to the life of Jesus and Catholic faith. For few months, the discussion remained relatively confined to a quarrel among experts and the upper echelons of the Catholic Church. However, the film based on the book which came out this year, provoked a huge outcry in several countries. In India, in May 2006, Catholic groups have sworn to fast to death if the film is screened in the country as it has been taken to be degrading to their beliefs. Protests have also been reported in other Asian countries.<sup>2</sup> The difference in scale of the protests is, in this case, a vivid example of the impact of visual media compared to written media.

The religious dances have a Buddhist information component and Bhutanese religious dances, *cham*, can broadly fall into three categories: the subjugation dances, the victory dances and the didactic moral dances.

Although dances impart in one way or another religious teachings to the public, their symbolic meaning can be rather esoteric, and therefore their presentation has to be didactic. For any audience, an enacted story is always more captivating, even if it is a well-known story, so the values are imparted without much effort on the part of the audience.

This point is illustrated by taking some examples among the most popular religious dances. Two of them in particular, Phole Mole and the dance of the Stag and the Hounds (Shawo Shachyi)—also called popularly Acho Pento after the name of the hunter's servant—carry a strong message, reflecting the Buddhist concepts of retribution, forgiveness and compassion.

The story of Phole Mole touches everybody because it depicts with a bawdy humour a human trait which is found in all societies: infidelity to one's partner. It is all the more

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<sup>2</sup> Story from BBC NEWS:

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr//2/hi/entertainment/4987116.stm>

Published: 2006/05/16 15:56:59 GMT.

fascinating for the audience because it depicts infidelity among the privileged and ruling class, a human trait which is well demonstrated today by the success of the tabloid press all around the world.

The princesses are unfaithful while their husbands are at war. When the princes come back, they find out and then punish their wives by cutting their noses. This sequence imparts therefore the message of retribution of one's act. However, because of the Buddhist culture, the princes, out of compassion, finally forgive their wives. In many cultures, the retribution is the ultimate value, there is no forgiveness or compassion. This dance therefore contributes to the propagation of two values central to the Buddhist thought.

In the same way, the dance of the Stag and the Hounds narrates the famous story of the conversion of a non-Buddhist hunter to Buddhism by the great 11th century saint Milarepa. Gonpo Dorji, the hunter, is depicted performing non-Buddhist rituals before following his dogs in the chase of a stag. The stag takes refuge near Milarepa who ultimately convinces the dogs and then the hunter to abandon their hunt. Although the hunter tries to kill the saint by shooting an arrow to him, Milarepa does not bear a grudge against him and forgives him, a true altruistic attitude.

This dance/drama, through a concrete and suggestive example, also teaches the public that forgiveness, non-violence and compassion should be extended not only to human beings but also to all sentient beings, which include the animals. It goes further by demonstrating that an enlightened being such as Milarepa is above petty ordinary emotions and that taming one's mind against anger is an example to follow.

The taming of one's emotions, whatever the circumstances, is a core Buddhist message which is imparted during these dances and grounded in concrete examples with which people can easily identify; it is this strength which makes the dance performance play the role of media.

Other Buddhist messages are given by different dances. Bhutanese believe that a person has to see the Drametse Ngacham of Drametse at least once in one's life time in order

to recognize the deities in the Bardo ('intermediate state') through present life acquaintance. Its message concerns a universal preoccupation, the hereafter, but the dance expresses it in the context of Bhutanese beliefs and culture. This idea is depicted still more vividly in the Raksha mar [mang] cham dance based on the *Bardo thos grol* text ('Great Liberation upon hearing in the Bardo'). It is a 'treasure text' rediscovered in the 14th century by Karma Lingpa,<sup>3</sup> and read after the death of a person by the religious practitioners performing rituals. However, when a family grieves of a death or is busy with funeral preparations, nobody listens to a recitation of a text which is meant for the deceased person.

Commentaries of this text are indeed available on the subject. However they are written in a way and in a language that ordinary people are neither accustomed to, nor able to read and they cannot impact the masses as vividly as an enacted story.

In the dance of the Raksha mar [mang] cham, the main performers represent the deities who appear after death. Represented with animal heads, they surround the Judge of the Dead who conducts trials; so the dance is a vivid rendition of what the deceased person is presumed to encounter.

The *Bardo thos grol* explains the necessity of understanding the meaning of these deities.<sup>4</sup>

As for the common worldly folk, what need is there to mention them! By fleeing through fear, terror and awe, they fall over the precipices into the unhappy worlds and suffer. But the least of the least of the devotees of the mystic Mahayana doctrines, as soon as he sees these blood-drinking deities, will recognize them to be his tutelary deities, and the meeting will be like that of human acquaintances. He will trust them; and becoming merged into them, will attain Buddhahood. By having meditated on the description of these blood-drinking deities, while in

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<sup>3</sup> He was the author of the *zhi khro dgongs pa rang grol* cycle from which the *Bardo thos grol* is extracted. See Cuev.

<sup>4</sup> Evans-Wentz, 2004, 132-133.

the human world, and by having performed some worship or praise of them; or at least by having seen their painted likeness and their images, upon witnessing the dawning of the deities at this stage, recognition of them will result, and liberation. In this lieth the art.

Regarding the terrifying deities, the *Bardo thos grol* comments:<sup>5</sup>

If thou recognize not, and be frightened, then all the Peaceful deities will shine forth in the shape of Mahakala; and all the wrathful deities will shine forth in the shape of Dharmaraja, the lord of Death; and thine own thought forms becoming illusions, thou wilt wander in the samsara.

The text does explain the significance of the deities. However it is the dance which makes it possible for the ordinary persons to have access to this teaching, and therefore to be aware of what to expect after death as well as to realize that ignorance is one of the root poisons which cause the human beings to be reborn.

The text continues with the description of the judgment:

The good genius, who was born at simultaneously with thee, will come now and count out thy good deeds with white pebbles; the Evil genius, who was born simultaneously with thee, will come and count out thy evil deeds with black pebbles. Thereupon, thou wilt be greatly frightened, and terrified, and wilt tremble; and thou will attempt to say lies, saying that 'I have committed any evil deed'. Then the Lord of Death will say: 'I will consult the mirror of karma'. So saying, he will look in the mirror wherein every good and evil act is vividly reflected. Lying will be of no avail. Then one of the Rakshas of the Lord of Death will place round thy neck a rope and drag thee along.<sup>6</sup>

Although the text is in this case clear, one has to have access to it, and not only read it, but also understand its contents. As in the traditional society that was largely not the

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid. p.147.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. pp.165-166.

case, the dance played an important role as an educational tool and mass communication. It is an alternate means and provides an ideal opportunity for visual information as well as entertainment, therefore filling two of the criteria of a good media.

While watching the Raksha mar [mang] cham, the audience can identify with the characters such as the man who committed sins—who never carried a leg of meat? —as well as with the virtuous man—who never erected a prayer-flag? The animal-headed judges, frightening and roaring, surround the deceased person; the black and white pebbles represent clearly the sinful and virtuous acts, the black and white paths are simple enough symbols of the way to hells and heavens. The black demon is scary, all noise and agitation, the white god is soft spoken and calm, the fairies have beautiful ornaments. All the characters and symbols are cultural archetypes set in a way that it is as simple as possible for the audience to understand the judgment and the consequences of one's actions hereafter.

Besides these dances which are didactic in the main, the dances of subjugation, whatever their particular name or esoteric meaning, carry an idea that is central to Tantric Buddhism: the liberation of evil spirits from their present bad incarnation and the duty to lead them to a better sphere. This is done by dismembering an effigy in a ritual killing called *grol*; the practitioner who performs this killing ritual, must do it not out of anger, but with the right compassionate attitude. The esoteric meaning of these dances is deeply embedded in Tantric Buddhism concepts.

While they can be understood by Bhutanese who are brought up in the symbolic world of this religion, their message is totally 'alien' to foreigners coming from other religious backgrounds. This partly explains the fact that these subjugation dances, also performed in other parts of the Himalayas, were called 'demon' or 'devil dances' by Christian missionaries from the 19th century onwards.

The *atsara* and their antics during the festival also illustrate this point. They are indispensable in the Bhutanese religious festival context. Their name itself derives from the

Sanskrit *acarya*, philosophy masters, and they teach that masters can appear under any form, even as a bawdy jester. The *atsara* are there to assist the dancers, and entertain the public during or in the interval of rather solemn dances. Like a talk-show host on TV today, they transcend the hierarchy of the society and have a mass appeal with their mockeries and sexual jokes, but they know their limits in the context of Bhutanese society.

However, when they encounter foreigners during the festivals, they step into another world where they have no cultural Bibliography and therefore no boundaries. The way *atsara* perceive foreigners and how foreigners perceive *atsara* is a reflection and distortion of each other's culture through mutual ignorance. If we speak in contemporary terms, for the foreigners the *atsara* are just clowns and their religious function is not apparent.

Therefore in the religious dances, as in modern media forms, the meaning of the images can be easily distorted, used for a totally different purpose, and misunderstood by people who are not familiar with the religious and cultural ideas.

The dances, by being performed throughout Bhutan, also disseminated cultural values and therefore, like Dzongkha programmes on BBS today, contributed in forging the country's identity. For example, the Drametse Ngacham which was awarded in 2005 the title of Master-piece of Intangible Cultural Heritage by UNESCO, came to represent an aspect of the identity of Bhutan. At the beginning, it was a dance taught in the 16th century by Khedup Kuenga Gyeltshen, a descendant of the treasure discoverer Padma gling pa (1450-1521) after he had a vision of Guru Rinpoche's palace in the remote village of Drametse (Eastern Bhutan). The dance became the symbol of this community, hence its name and for two centuries, it did not go out of the confines of the Drametse Thegchog Ogyen Namdrol Choeling monastery courtyard. This dance was introduced in other parts of Bhutan only towards the end of the 19th century when it was performed in Talo monastery in western Bhutan for the first time during the visit of the Zhabdrung Jigme

Choegyel (1862-1904) who was from Drametse. Later, it was introduced in Trongsa at the initiative of the second king (Jigme Wangchuck reign: 1926-1952). Thereafter, with its powerful visual content and religious value, the dance gradually spread to the rest of Bhutan, thus disseminating information about the Pad gling lineage and religious teachings.

In fact, all dances performed in public, including folk dances, can be seen as traditional media. Folk dances, such as the Wuchubi zhey of Paro, Nubi zhey of Trongsa, the Laya dances, the Gon zhey of Gasa, or the Ache Lhamo of Merak Sateng, to name a few, have historical and religious contents which go beyond their local community. They reflect historical or mythical events which contribute to the knowledge of Bhutan's past.

Because they are nowadays performed more frequently around the country or on TV programmes, these dances, once confined to their respective region of origin, have two important outcomes, besides entertainment: Bhutanese learn about the customs, history, and beliefs of a part of the country they may not be familiar with; at the same time, the dances become part of the mainstream repertoire and thus contribute to national identity.

Mass impact, concrete and relevant examples, easy communication and cultural values messages are criteria which give some dances, either religious or folk, a real media role in traditional Bhutan.

Phuntsho Rabten wrote about the modern media in Bhutan:

As media audiences have different individual backgrounds, intelligence, interests and attitudes, these invariably influence their perceptions and interpretations about the incoming message and therefore the impact varies.<sup>7</sup>

The same can be said of religious dances. In contemporary Bhutan which has opened to the outside world,

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<sup>7</sup> Rapten, 2001, p. 189.

the dances can still be a powerful vector of values and play an educational role, especially if they are supported by modern media forms. However seen by people of different cultural backgrounds and in the context of the invasion of global media networks, their interpretations and impact might be experiencing a challenging change of focus.

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## Culture, Liberty and Happiness

*Karma Ura\**

### Introduction and Key Concepts

In today's heightened and perplexing intercultural world, both really and virtually, culture should become an important issue. Apart from anthropologists and traditionalists, culture has had a marginal role in development thinking. Nor is culture, it seems, given such importance in the international political and economic order. An analysis of cultural liberty has to be seen within the context of global problems to which the analysis is addressed implicitly. As I perceive, the three dominant global problems are: inequality of income, environmental deterioration, and conflicts not only between human beings but human beings and other life. Promotion of cultural liberty around the world is particularly meant to promote democracy and human rights, and through them peace and development. Conflict usually means violence. Absence of conflict (understood as violence) does not mean collective happiness, which is also a self-evident value and for which much more positive conditions are needed to be felt. The Bhutanese government's agenda has attempted to encompass the global problems mentioned above locally within Gross National Happiness. There is the beginning of a search for gross or collective national happiness, it being understood that happiness can become elusive while individuals become perfectly 'better off' through modernization. The challenge is how to transcend various problems of material poverty while simultaneously creating conditions for happiness.

My intention here is to explore mainly the relationship between culture and globalization, and also to a limited

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extent the ties and differences, if any, between cultural liberty and happiness. This paper attempts to relate the concept of cultural liberty to the idea of Gross National Happiness in-the-making. However, I would like to underline strongly that the culture discussed is not about the particular culture of Bhutan; it is about culture in general and in abstract. Likewise happiness referred to here is not about happiness in Bhutan, although Bhutan's Gross National Happiness provides the frame for seeking solutions for some of the contemporary problems, not only in Bhutan but also elsewhere in the world. The perspective of Gross National Happiness, however skeletal its concepts may be, is used in this essay to view and analyse contemporary problems beyond Bhutan. Thus, I need to point out clearly that the essay is not about implications of Bhutanese culture on Bhutanese happiness or vice versa.

But an essay tracing the relationship between culture, globalisation, cultural liberty and happiness is easier if there are clear conceptions of both cultural liberty and Gross National Happiness (hence abbreviated to GNH). This is not the case. GNH is in a conceptually formative stage, and is open to different conceptualisations and interpretations, and even contestations. Within Bhutan, GNH has been variously perceived: as statist narrative of policy evolution that provides a narrative frame; as a legitimisation of policy bundle at any given moment to suggest that the current policies subsumes GNH without any need to explain what it is independently of policies at a given time; as a normatively defined goal for the country towards which its sub-units should navigate and gravitate; as a self-representation or identity of the state in comparison to the 'imagined or real outsider-audience' when its bureaucratic class who explicates it confronts them, really or imaginarily; as a search for extension and application of Buddhist ontology to development practice and to contemporary governance.

Among anthropologists, culture as a concept is contested and that means the content of what is viewed as a particular culture will vary over time and place, and by individuals. Thus, both the topics I want to relate, Gross National

Happiness and culture, have far less shape and form than favourable to my attempt to relate them. I mentioned about the formative stage in which gross national happiness is, but the definition of culture seems no less certain. Wright (1998:8) mentions that “by mid-century, Krober and Kluckholm had found 164 definitions in their famous review of what anthropologists meant by culture” (1952: 149). Invoking current meanings of culture as a set of meanings and ideas, Wright says that: “‘culture’ is a dynamic concept, always negotiable, and in process of endorsement, contestations and transformation. In a process of claiming power and authority, all are trying to assert different definitions which will have different material outcomes” (Wright 1998:8-10). This new concept of culture<sup>1</sup> rejects any culture as being unchanging, authoritative, and bounded. It does not accept, contrary to the old concept of culture, that there are timeless consensus meanings in a society. Rather, the new concept of culture suggests that meaning is produced by opposing discourses mounted by different groups. It leaves open the idea that the shifts in the meaning of key terms occur. Of course, everything is a matter of definition and who and how something is defined is itself a historically contingent matter in social science. Defining culture is often an act of politics and politics is about shaping meaning in a society. Hershock (forthcoming book: Chapter 5:9) has suggested that politics is not only about managing

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<sup>1</sup> Susan Wright writes that “In sum the characteristics of new ideas of culture are: ‘culture is an active process of meaning making and contestation over definition, including of itself’ (Street 1993:2) people, differently positioned in social relations and processes of domination, used economic and institutional resources available to them to try and make their definitions of our situation ‘stick’, to prevent other’s definitions from being heard, and to garner the material outcome sites are not bounded -people draw on local, national, global links the way clusters of concepts form is historically specific, and ideas never form a closed or coherent whole in his hegemonic form, culture appears coherent, systematic, consensual, like an object, beyond human agency, not ideological - like the old idea of culture” (Wright 1998: 10).

asymmetries of power but that it is ultimately about making meaning within such asymmetries.<sup>2</sup>

With the foregoing discussion, three key terms—culture, liberty and diversity—can be now tentatively defined. A culture according to current definition is a loose set of ideas and meanings (and their material expressions) that are subject to change because of contest between opposing discourses. Individual liberty can be understood in the standard liberalist way as mere absence of ‘illegal or unconstitutional’ coercion while making any choice. The term diversity can be best understood as it is done in ecological terms. “Diversity measures the resilience of a self-sustaining ecosystem” (Hershock, forthcoming book. Ch. 5). When this concept is applied to cultural diversity, it can be understood as the extent of “interdependencies by means of which individual members contribute to each other's welfare” (Hershock, forthcoming book. Ch. 5), materially, emotionally, and spiritually. If we push this notion of diversity further, it seems that diversity is indeed necessary for us as individuals to contribute and be contributed to. When there is no diversity, there will be no space to contribute in any meaningful way to each other. And it is only through the meaningful diversity and interdependence, “not mere co-existence”, as Hershock writes, that we can increase our welfare, which is always a relational matter.

Cultural liberty, which needs to be distinguished from culture, although both culture and cultural liberty are interrelated, is far more explicit and explicated. The UNDP devoted its admirable annual, 2004 Human Development

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<sup>2</sup> Hershock (forthcoming book. Chapter 5:9) “...Power has normative force in the sense that it is exerted in order to frame (if not determine) situation in meaning. This, indeed, is why politics is so often an intensely emotional: it involves arriving at substantially and effectively shared public emotions. To be empowered is to be freed toward what is desired and the opportunity of making it our own. Power implies choice, and politics reveal the imaginings of the chosen.”

Report to the issue of cultural liberty.<sup>3</sup> *Human Development Report 2004* is a valuable navigational tool both in theory and practice with regard to cultural issues. In terms of ethnic conflicts and identity-based politics that have been the site of conflict and confrontation within and between nations, the report sharpens our focus on a global problem. In the last 59 years of its existence, the UN has had to respond to ethnic conflicts through various ways including mediation, negotiation, sanctions, and peace enforcement (Carment and James, 1998). As ethnic diversity rises within a state due to the inflow of culturally different groups, the tasks of conflict prevention, reduction, and resolution with immigrant groups with other particularistic traits have become vital. The *HDR 2004* enhances our knowledge about cultural issues and its analysis and prescriptions provide broad basis for individuals, institutions, and states to design solutions. I greatly admire with the general ethos of the report. It advances global vision and suggests new frames of state and governance. It does not privilege any culture or polity above the other, against a world which is often hierarchically structured. It has no special targets; nations where cultural liberty is upset or flourishing are mentioned as far as evidences are collected. Its only universalising project is human development by strengthening liberty and choice of the individual, not even the group or collectivity that is constituted by a culture.

The principle message underlying cultural liberty and that of the *HDR 2004* is that the best way for peace between and within culturally different societies lies in promoting

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<sup>3</sup> UNDP, '*Human Development Report 2004 Cultural Liberty in Today's Diverse World*'. UNDP (2004) pp.285, is the most comprehensive document to appear on the subject. Its non-technical language makes broad audience possible. Its magisterial survey of evidences takes the readers to all the corners of the globe where cultural signposts (indicators) of tight spots and good-practices are flagged. The reports explodes so-called myths fuelling tensions, mistrust and conflicts over cultures, and it frames challenges and remedies.

cultural liberty. An articulation of cultural diversity as a possible outcome of liberty, as well as liberty as a precondition of any society, projects a future of meaningful global diversity. This view of the world, for example that which *HDR 2004* paints, opens more space in all directions—politics, economy, law, religion, etc., by not privileging or enforcing one priority value, or one system, over another as long as individual liberty is respected in any society. Such an ethos of cultural liberty can lead to a better, alternative kind of relations between and within states.

### **Self, Identities, and Happiness**

As I understand, the *HDR 2004* powerfully reinforces the picture of an individual as the choice-maker that is part of political liberalism and value pluralism.<sup>4</sup> A belief in value pluralism implies that there are many types of moral reasons or sources of morality and that the heterogeneity of moral sources means that there cannot be an all encompassing value or a single good or value that can override all other values or goods in all circumstances.<sup>5</sup> The breadth of the

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<sup>4</sup> Galston (1999:770) succinctly summarised the basic features of value pluralism by the following: Firstly, statements of value pluralism are claims about the structure of our moral universe or “objective structures of the valuational universe”. Secondly, value pluralism is different from relativism given that value pluralism, in contrast to relativism, believes or defines a minimum condition that must be met in any society in order to allow for moral decency. Thirdly, above the minimum conditions that must be adhered in all societies, value pluralism recognises that there are heterogenous “moral and non-moral goods”. Fourthly, such goods or values cannot be ranked and ordered across individuals and societies who are different. Fifthly and finally, value pluralism says that “a single good or value, or set of values or goods” is paramount in all circumstances. So it rejects this single dominant value for all circumstances.

<sup>5</sup> Galston (1999) specifies at least five competing values or moral claims. These are (1) particularistic duties, (2) aggregate consequences, (3) universal (deontological) rules of conduct, (4) perfectionist-achievement values and (5) commitments to personal understandings. He attributes the first three

choice is to be limited only by respect for human rights of others. If an individual's choice leads him to abutting or knocking against the walls of social, political, and cultural constraints of a group, the walls are to be removed, not the individual. The balance that has to be negotiated in the relationship between the group and the individual is the core of the report's subject, although how an individual has to negotiate through the maze of changing and conflicting identities within himself receives far less focus.

The *Human Development Report 2004* reminds us about the multiple identities of an individual and defends cultural liberty and multiple identities. The acknowledgement of multifaceted, multiple identities could lead to a lesser urge to construct imagined cultural boundaries around ourselves. Our plural identities cannot be understated for peacefully coexistent but diverse social and political orders. Reading the report provokes an imagination of our world reversing the accelerating path to sameness and diminishment of meaningful diversity, while the methods to this goal of meaningful diversity has to adhere to respecting individuals within any society. The concept of multiple identities of an individual is in fact somewhat new in the discourse of culture. Sokefeld (1999) has drawn our attention to the fact that if our identities are plural or multiple, we need to have a conception of self as a kind of manager of these identities.<sup>6</sup>

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claims to Larmore (1987,1991,1996) and the last two moral claims to Thomas Nagel (1979). At the same time, Galston reminds us that there may be conflicts in alternative choices within the same value.

<sup>6</sup> Sokefield mentions that western anthropologists have worked on the assumption of there being a self among themselves in a Cartesian self. Such selves were considered: "subjects in the dual sense of being subjected to the conditions of the world and, simultaneously, being the agent of knowing and doing in that world. The belief in this subject became a priori for the possibility of knowing the world" (Sokefeld 1999: 417). But he mentions that the non-westerns subjects of anthropologists were considered not to have self, but only identities as sameness over time. This was because Western anthropologists subsumed non-westerners "under groups to which they belong". In the extreme case, this lead to the conclusion that non-westerners

But others (Fuchs in response to Sokefeld, 1999: 433-434) suggest that the self is constituted by identities.

The conceptualization of multiple identities and complementary identities is a significant contribution that emphasises continuity and commonalities between cultures and individuals. This is a major direction in moving away from conceptualisations of culture as differences and boundaries. Multiple identities of the members of a society may not perfectly overlap, or be shared. It means that in the set of multiple identities, each individual will be characterised by differences as well as commonalities with others. Two types of conflicts are possible. The first type of conflict is between individuals or groups of individuals with more or less similar traits because the identity differences that they have fuel or cause conflict. But I wish to focus here on the second type of identities' conflict. This second type occurs within an individual because certain elements of his multiple identity conflict with the other identities he has. It is usual in anthropology nowadays to say that identity is not a basic indivisible concept, because the multiple identities and the relationship between multiple identities of an individual keep on changing. This leads to what Sokefeld has described as the self<sup>7</sup> being confronted with conflicting identities. The *Human Development Report 2004* did not consider this aspect of the conflict between self and cultural identities or any identities exhaustively. Without being fixated on the nature of self as a Buddhist usually does, it would be fair to say that *HDR 2004* does not talk about conflict and ambiguities within multiple identities of an individual. I feel that contradictory identities

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did not have self-consciousness (Sokefeld 1999:419). He argues for accepting self as a universal.

<sup>7</sup> Following Harris, Sokefeld notes that self, person and individuals are used in a confusing way but no thorough analytical distinctions have been made so far. Harris has suggested that self refers to psychological aspects, individuals to biological aspects, and persons to social aspects. Sokefeld used self to mean individuals and persons (Harris cited by Sokefeld 1999:428-429).

that rip through a self is the basic challenge, and without getting a picture of this we are likely to simplify cultural problems as external ones among and between people. How strong a self is in negotiating through conflicting identities is key to stability and mental coherence. Often, dissolution of a culture will negatively affect the personal identities of its members. At the same time, being absorbed or integrated against one's wish by force of circumstance into another culture may spell discontentment. The process of revising or switching identities of an individual is often challenging and stressful to the self, and can undermine peace of mind silently, yet there may be no overt social and cultural conflict. The process of change adversely affects especially those who cannot negotiate a positive relationship between the self and identities. Unlike external masks which we easily wear to suit different 'operas', the self has to cope with adjusting rapidly to many identities and roles to fit oneself into circumstances. Sokefeld mentions that this enactment of different identities is possible only with reflective sense of the self which he defined as "being distinguished from others" ie, awareness of what one is doing by enacting one's identity while being aware of being distinct in other identities. In Sokefeld's study, "the consistency of the self rests on the ability to describe one's self in a more or less consistent way" (Sokefeld 1999: 424).

Identities conflict within individuals is high when their society faces extremely rapid cultural change due to profound and sometimes capricious forces of change within which individual choice or liberty does not have much of a role. In such a situation that is not a gradual evolution, large scale shifts in pattern of relationships take place and interdependencies may be broken for sometime before a new kind is regained. Breakdown in relationship is at the centre of suffering and unhappiness. Bonding, or what has been called social capital, which is important, is eroded. One's own culture as a context of choice for life plans is weakened. An individual faces greater ambiguity in reconciling his or her expanding multiple and conflicting identities and that breeds identity conflicts within himself, and perhaps also adds to

pain and stress and even meaninglessness and unhappiness. What I have described is not conflict between cultural groups, but within an individual, whose happiness has to be ultimately understood in terms of the meaning one feels and in terms of relationality with others (Hershock, forthcoming book, Chapter 5). When circles of overlapping interdependencies between citizens are weak, that is the time a state is weak and Gross National Happiness is low. Cultural homogeneity in itself does not seem to be a strong explanation for unity, power, flourishing or strength of any country.

However, we have to enter a broader discussion on the concepts of self because that itself may be culturally varied. All concepts of self are views on human nature, both what it is and what it should be. Different societies may have different empirical as well as idealized views of human nature. The concept of self in political liberalism implied in the Human Development Report 2004 emphasises the individual as an autonomous chooser also of cultural identity and personal development. So this particular concept has political and economic implications: all institutional frameworks are created to fulfil the individual's own goals and aspirations; the individual is responsible for his choice and is socialised to be guilty and culpable when he commits transgressions. He is responsible for himself and towards himself (Pollis 1965). Problems with the concept of self as autonomous chooser (agency) arises if there are divergent concepts or views of self in different cultures that then makes social and political institutions and structures function in a different way.

For example, groups created by voluntary associations presuppose the concept of self as the basic unit of autonomy. Such groups are formed to pursue associational interests through political processes and are seen as a prerequisite for competitive democratic politics. Some have argued that an acceptance of the self as autonomous is necessary for democratic political system. Others do not think that it is a crucial assumption.

Liberty is based on the assumption of autonomy which is defined as conscious choice or reflection. Only if an individual

has no space to make choices consciously is the person without autonomy. This raises a further problem: if a person makes a choice due to socialisation, that is unawareness of the choice or decision he is making, which may seem to be a contradiction in terms, the person may be said to lack autonomy in a weak sense. Choices that individuals make are framed by current conceptions of what is normal, acceptable, and expected, and such frameworks exert powerful influences on the degree of autonomy and choice individuals are capable of making.

However, if a certain society's conception of self lacks any construction of an autonomous individual, it creates room for alternative group-oriented concepts of self which must be distinguished from groups created by individuals who have a concept of self as autonomous choosers.

Group-oriented concepts of self have the image of an individual being involuntary and un-autonomous within a group, and subordinated to the group. Of course, one can understand the notion of a group-oriented identity for human beings not as evolutionary organisms but social and political beings. The problem that anthropologists face in accepting group-oriented concepts of self vis-avis culture is that: "so long as we think of humans simply as individuals subjected to a collectivity... change of the sort to which human history so richly attests becomes curiously distant and difficult to comprehend...human sociality evolved through the selective advantage conferred upon individuals who possessed increasingly powerful sociality... sociality be a trait of individuals...The individuals here are conceived solely as part of the process of evolutionary change-or-continuity" (Carrithers, 1990:191-192). But this view of social evolution in terms of sociality is also contested.

From a Buddhist point of view, the view of self neither affirms group dependence nor individualistic independence. It is said that self exists conventionally but not in an ultimate sense. In the ultimate sense, there is no self and no personal identity over time, as we normally think separate entities exist over time (Inada 1988, 1997). Another way to understand the lack of separate self is that there is nothing

permanent and this can be revealed by focusing on the moment-to-moment continuum of existence. Inada writes:

As such, nothing permanent resides in the continuum, nor is anything made permanent by cycle or moment in question. The continuum is more like a symmetrical series of intersecting and overlapping phenomena. But within this context of things, it is so easy to refer to a permanent nature of a self that is directing the compounding activity... to set the self apart from the activity itself is to commit a fallacy of misplaced abstraction or simply beg the question. The self, therefore, does not exist in the moment-to-moment continuum; if reference is made to it at all, then it would have to be in terms of what has already transpired (Inada 1988:263-264).

But there is an illusion of the self existing through time, when any of the five impermanent aggregates are causally related and when such 'conceptual fiction' or illusion is produced by convenient linguistic designation as 'self', 'person', 'I', 'you', 'he', etc (Inada 1997: 10-14). If we use the postmodernist Derrida's vocabulary here, we could say that the pronouns of this type are signs pointing to entities which are not present. But what the absent entity points to is another question. Further, in Buddhist moral concepts, the notion of lack of self is shown to be consistent with rebirth, to comply with the doctrine of karma and cosmic justice.<sup>8</sup>

However, what the concept of lack of self means normatively in everyday legal and constitutional terms is not spelt out anywhere, it seems. All that can be drastically concluded here is that if the Buddhist reductionist philosophical point of view is to be taken seriously, there no person and identity as we postulate in liberalism which claim the existence of self. We can further deduce that in our

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<sup>8</sup> An eminent Buddhist scholar, Samten Karmay, has questioned whether the doctrine of no self actually took root in Tibetan cultural area. He uses the widespread belief in *srog* (life force or vitality) and the rituals associated with it to be in tension with doctrine of no self. Although I remember this argument he has noted in an article, I have forgotten where I read it and therefore I cannot give any reference here.

ordinary thinking (that is in conventional sense) of self and personal identity, what we construe and apply in law and other ordinary affairs of life is incomplete. So an institution like law that is based on premise such as conventional sense of self (conceptual fiction) must also be conceptual fiction, not ultimate justice that is provided only by karma. A glaring problem (for me) is that if a virtuous activity is performed by a person who is a conceptual fiction, how does that accrue rewards and punishment. The problem is resolved at the level of conception where the 'original mind' is said to be inherently compassionate, loving, and kind.

Taking a Buddhist perspective, Hershock (forthcoming book Ch.5:11-13) poses the question whether an increase in autonomy in the sense of political liberalism results in the disparate ends between individuals, or groups and whether the differences have to be contained by rule of law. He notes the tension between equality and liberty, and between private and public spaces. He is of the view, moreover, that pushed to its limit, both autonomy and equality can be pursued only if both conflicts and contribution to each other are reduced through rule of law. What we ideally need is not an institutionalized reduction to contribute to each other. His argument is that if differences between individuals are non-existent, for example, through institutional equalization of inherently different individuals, logically, there is no way individuals can make any contributions to each other. "No meaningful change in relational quality is possible in ignorance of the karma of presently obtaining patterns of interdependence as well as the patterns of denying this interdependence in the assertion of either independence or dependence" (Hershock forthcoming book. Ch. 5:16). Hershock sees a danger that "the logic of autonomously exercised freedom of choice" could lead "interdependent relationships into mere co-existence".

### **Liberty, Choice, and Value Pluralism**

*Human Development Report 2004* acknowledges that we have multiple identities. But some of these are inherited as

members of groups into which we came about without choosing to be so, like being born in a certain community and to certain religious beliefs, customs, kinship, values, etc. We are born diverse but socialised to be alike under dominant values. What is emphasised in *HDR 2004* is that to continue living with such multiple identities still involves making choices. Individuals can change certain identities when they become aware of other forms of life. What the *HDR 2004* strongly argues is that individuals should be given liberty to change their identities and that institutions and processes must give an indispensable place to liberty. The argument is that continuous, conscious, and voluntary identification by an individual is necessary with respect to a certain way of life, that is libertarian. While voluntary identification may be necessary to sustain cultural liberty, whether liberty is valued for its own sake or whether liberty is valued for human flourishing is not clear. The argument put forward in the *HDR 2004* is that lack of cultural liberty and freedom stunts human development and that is by definition diminishment of human potential, human flourishing, and human development. We need to make a link between human flourishing and individual liberty clear. When arguments about human flourishing are generally based on indicators of economic success and political liberalism, which are further based on arrangements like free market and political liberalism, it is very difficult to disentangle claims about certain institutional flourishing from human flourishing. It is equally easy for institutional discussions to occlude long-term human happiness issues.

A discussion of individual liberty and human flourishing also leads to a discussion about diversity. With more liberty, one may expect more diversity. Diversity may threaten solidarity, especially if diversity is developing too fast and is perceived as dissent and deterioration. Once again, value pluralism would see diversity as a reflection of the existence of individual liberty. But we should distinguish here between allowing individuals to change their identities consciously by their own choice and allowing powerless individuals to be changed by profoundly pervasive forces such as marketing

and media that seeks to seize onces consciousness and attention before one is even conscious and attentive to change.

Rich cultural heritage provides the options and choices for us to select life plans. So not having a rich and intact culture is a diminishment of choices. A state which cannot defend its cultural richness is thus one where the choices of its citizens are constrained. According to this line of argument advanced by Kymlicka, culture is not valuable for its own sake but as a means of, or precondition of, maintaining self-respect based on one's own life plans (Kymlica quoted in Danley 1991:171). Danley also cites Mill's arguments for happiness. Mill advocated most probably, Danley says, cultural diversity instead of cultural conformity as one of the two conditions for happiness given than cultural diversity allows individuals alternative choices or options for their life plans. Self-respect means that any plan in our life is worth carrying out. In this context, the argument for cultural diversity, and thereby defense of a particular culture, is based on cultures as a context of choices.

Value pluralism's fundamental point that is shared with political liberalism is that there should be minimal conditions which should include negative liberty (absence of coercion of any kind). The emphasis on liberty and choice, *per se*, has been criticised also by John Gray (1995).<sup>9</sup> The central thrust of his criticism was based on the fact that making choices is not a crucial feature of our life because we are what we are in which making choices has not been so critical. We happen to be in societies. This means that there is nothing logically self-evident about choice. So the assumption that choice is crucial

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<sup>9</sup> Gray's criticism was that negative liberty is not necessarily part of value pluralism. Galston tried to show that value pluralism and political liberalism, as defined by Berlin (1969) view), are consistent. At the heart of both, Berlin wrote, was individual liberty, essentially negative liberty: liberty not be coerced to do something. Gray attempted to show that Berlin's pluralist stance is not fully consistent with political liberalism (Gray 1995; Galston 1999:760).

to value pluralism and liberalism is not deduced from human nature. As Galston says, “We cannot move directly from the inescapability of choice to the valuing of choice that liberalism implies, a link Berlin too casually implies” (Galston 1999:774).

However, states are not completely free, for obvious reasons, from leaving individuals to make their choices and chose their values. Often they have to take a range of incomparable values and prioritize them in spite of the fact that there may not be a completely logical and rational basis for rankings among values. They carry out some ordering of values on various grounds such as the need for social order, law, and solidarity. States often seek limitations on individuals’ cultural liberty for the cause of collective success. Political institutions often assert that enforcing certain cultural traits in their society, and thus restricting liberty, is necessary for economic and social successes. Sometimes, and only sometimes, these assertions are proven by their ability to secure comparatively higher economic growth and better material living conditions for their citizens.

### **Unity, Diversity, and Homogeneity**

States are in a paradoxical situation with regard to culture. On the one hand, culturally oriented states seek cultural promotion. Such tendencies manifest in their policies of education, media, tourism, etc. that attend to cultural heritages or particularisms. On the other hand, in our current times of racing towards globalisation and integration, most governments promote open-air and open-trade policies that tilt the balance radically in favour of cultural diversity reduction and even negation. We clearly see evidence of cultural implosion in terms of lifestyles, languages, and knowledges. These two aspects of policy bundle often lack coherence, leading to contradictions. The spread of certain digital technology is often cited as a new avenue of promoting and preserving cultures, but that is preservation digitally and virtually, not really as a mode of actual living.

Yet as Walzer pointed out, states make the world of

common meaning possible (Walzer 1983 cited in Bader 1995: 218) and each state does endeavour to do that. And it would seem that no state can be completely free from the task of creating a certain degree of common identity and meaning, although the task is probably becoming far more challenging in a globalizing world where identities continue to meld and be challenged.

It is an old, comforting belief that if we live in a space where there is “common meaning, shared language, common cognitive and normative frameworks” (Bader 1995: 218) we can be closely affiliated as citizens or members, and bring collective consciousness as a distinct community. Common meaning means mainstreaming historical memories to national narratives, and implies development of something over and above local histories and memories. Hence, local history and identities are not necessarily preserved to the same degree as national identity and history.<sup>10</sup>

The belief in cultural unification and homogeneity is probably pursued partly for national unity, and unity is pursued for the security, strength, and independence of decision-making. However, we must begin discussion on this issue by pointing out that complete sovereignty of a nation is itself a dramatic myth. The unity and powers of all sovereign nations’ are in fact not absolute in any sense. A state shares its powers internally through subsidiarity, federalism, decentralisation, and so forth. At the same time, a state shares its powers externally with supranational institutions. States have joined movements towards formation of regional associations and communities that diminishes their monopoly of legislations and decisions. Both internal and external power-sharing arrangements are further constrained by international laws. These external limitations on a state’s sovereignty have resulted in what is called domestic democracy deficit (Habermas, 2003). The divisibility of a state’s powers, both internally and externally, even in a

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<sup>10</sup> The belief in common meaning led many states to unavoidable dilemmas in multi-cultural and multi-lingual units within a state.

culturally homogeneous nation means that its culture is really not the basis of strength and unity, as a state's power cannot be mobilised solely on the basis of a relationship between the state and its culturally homogenous people.

Just as a state's sovereignty (power to make decisions) is not unitary (singular), the notion of citizenship in a state does not coincide completely with the set of traits of a multicultural nation. In a culturally diverse nation, citizenship cannot be bound to any culture. In an increasingly globalising world, citizenship may not even be bound to a nation. In the EU, for example, some elements of citizenship, for example freedom of mobility and work is granted on an EU-wide basis.

Habermas ((1992) cited in Bader 1995: 223) has argued that national identity in terms of culture should be divorced from citizenship because citizenship since the French Revolution has been mainly a democratic concept. In a Habermasian democracy, there is no particular history, no particular culture, perhaps only a common language and a political community (Bader 1995, 232). However, Bader has raised a question as to how individuals can be motivated to democracy when they are divorced from their cultural identities.

If we use certain criteria like military, economic, or political power, a state containing homogenous culture has not necessarily been stronger or more successful than a heterogeneous state and vice versa. Even if a state is culturally homogenous, that in and by itself does not guarantee that there will be complete harmony, equality, and unity amongst its people. We can conceive of conditions under which exclusion thrives under class system, caste system, gender discrimination and domination, even in a culturally homogeneous nation. As in every community, or even in a family some of the times, a homogenous nation is also often marked by conflicts and dissension.

*Human Development Report 2004* mentions that cultural hybridisation has contributed to rejuvenation, and conversely, homogeneity and purity may often lead not to organic growth but ossification. Of course, how much of

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hybridisation and crossing strains has to take place has to be judged carefully by taking account of the relative penetrative power of each culture. Both the speed and scale of change need to be considered. Too fast a cultural change can bring dislocation in the society where parts of it do not meld but become antagonistic to each other. Sudden change at a mass level breaks down bonding and cohesion, unity which are valueable asset to build a community. If it is swept away by sudden cultural change, it can unleash a disintegrating effect.

### **Cultures and Globalization**

From a developmental point of view, one is interested in the importance of globalisation as a process promoting international equality. In *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*, its author, Friedman (1999), argued that globalization is a given, reifying it almost to a natural force. However, if globalisation were to benefit citizens everywhere, it would have to contribute towards global equality of income or distribution of resources, greater environmental preservation, and peace.

Bader (1995) has argued that we happen to be citizens of a particular nation entirely due to accidents of birth and descent that then determines what our country has to offer as life chances, privileges, and rights of a citizen. If life chances for individuals are so vastly unequal simply because of accidents of birth, and individuals are not responsible for their births or choice of country, in a sense they have moral claim to globally equal resource distribution. And if immigration does contribute to global equality, it seems that it is a means to a better or just world. Adverse immigration conditions indicate a lack of attention to global collective welfare (Bader 1995:214-216).

As we know, movement of capital is more free than labour. Immigration is at the end spurred on by inequality and poverty. However, almost all governments today, for fear of stress and strain of introducing foreigners into the body of polity and economy, opt for investments and trade as ways of addressing international iniquity. The conditions for entry of immigrants, refugees, and workers are tough enough to

discourage everyone except the clever and the well-off. Yet a century or so ago, in colonial times, movement of people was very prevalent from some of today's northern countries to the lands of the indigenous people who have become minorities in their own homelands. Restrictive immigration policies today are mainly defended and legitimated on grounds of cultural self-determination and protection (Bader 1995, 213), and by fear that immigrants will flood the host countries because both the size and growth of population are smaller in today's host countries. The necessity for tight entry policy is particularly strong and obvious for countries with small population like that of Bhutan.

Kenneth Waltz (1999:700) has noted that "the main difference in international politics now and earlier is not found in the increased interdependence of states but in their growing inequality." He was talking about "distribution of capability across states", but it is also true of income equality. The measures of interdependence of states he uses is trade and capital flows as a percentage of GNP. With respect to the mobility of labor, Waltz mentions that we have reached only about 1910 level, although the rate of migration is rising. In spite of a tendency for rising mobility of labor, legal and physical doors for immigration to developed countries are getting relatively tighter and narrower. *Human Development Report 2004* advocates liberalisation of immigration on the grounds that it brings similar gains to the host economy as lowering trade barriers does (p. 102) and suggests rather optimistically that anti-immigration is like "fighting against the tide of globalisation". In dealing with immigrants, the past practices of differentialism and assimilation are argued to be outmoded and the report argues in favour of multiculturalism. Multiculturalism supports value of diversity within a society, and it does not exclude participation of any members of society in civic and socio-political sphere because of someone's cultural identity.

Regardless of lower mobility of labour from south to north, the spread of commercial interests backed by corporations as part of globalization has threatened indigenous peoples and their knowledge and cultural

properties. Michael Brown (1998) has explored the implication of cultural appropriations of intellectual property rights. Benedict Kingsbury (1998) has inquired into the concept of indigenous peoples in international law. Territories of indigenous people are being mined and their resources extracted with no just compensation. Indigenous knowledge associated, for example, with crop genetic resources and herbal medicines are stolen, patented, and trademarked. *Human Development Report* (p. 86) mentions that “A March 2000 study concluded that 7,000 patents had been granted for unauthorized use of traditional knowledge, or the misappropriation of medicinal plants.”

What are indigenous knowledge, cultural productions, and cultural properties, that may include intangible things and to which such legal instruments can be plausibly applied, are the nub of the problem. There is a belief, regardless of the viability, that copyright and intellectual property rights are the legal instruments to control cultural properties. Copyrights and patents are supposed to protect private ideas and creations. Such laws give the private persons or legal persons compensation for their work when their works enter the so-called public domain. Application of patents and trademarks would prevent unauthorized use of such cultural properties, but only for a period of time, after which they can become part of public domain. Contrary to expectations of some cultural groups, patents and trademark laws as they are today will not give permanent right of cultural ownership (Brown 1998:204) as they have finite terms: patents for 17 years and copyrights for author’s lifetime plus 50 years (Brown 1998:196). But there are two problems that need further attending. First the concept of intellectual property, which is wedded to private property and solitary invention, sits uneasily with cultural forms which are collective patrimonies and dynamic. Moreover, current intellectual property laws cannot cope if the definition of cultural properties is so wide as to include both ideas and their expressions within a cultural heritage. Brown’s example about musical performance within certain cultures which may not have any written musical scores demonstrates the

complexity it presents to intellectual property laws. He thinks, however, that radical change to intellectual property laws is an unworkable solution to preservation and control of cultural properties and suggests more options like “creative licensing partnerships between native communities and corporate interests...”, provided of course the corporations are in the first place sympathetic to the conservation of cultures.

Second, political liberalism based on individuals as autonomous choosers are ambivalent about group-based rights “which do not fit into the structure of liberal thought” (Kingsbury 1998; 426), except as some kind of civil society. Indigenous people are defined provisionally by three criteria: consisting of nondominance within the area, cultural affinity with the area, and historical continuity until colonisation (Kingsbury, 1998:454). It is rare to have bounded or distinct areas occupied by specific native minorities as in America and Australia, which we can call indigeneous people (Comments by Descol in Brown 1998:209). In non-colonized nations, there seems to be rarely any concept of indigenous and non-indigenous people, a terms which has roots in the colonial period. But defining who indigenous people are seems to be a problem beyond liberal thinkers alone. Several states in Asia<sup>11</sup> have rejected recognition of indigenous collective rights, because it seems that recognising more than one peoples in their states and accepting indigenous legal and political systems with ‘indigenous people’ will have radical consequences.

### **Diversity Vs Human Development Priorities**

As far as democratic or political liberalist states are concerned, they have no set goals, because the basic principle is that individuals are free to do what they value and what

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<sup>11</sup> Kingsbury (1998, 433-436) mentions that Asia, India and China, for example, have rejected the concept of indigenous peoples. Both China and India seem to have argued that indigenous peoples are those “peoples who came first, (or at least earlier than those who are now dominant)... and it is impossible to say who came first”.

gives them meaning. The state does not have a collective end to pursue except to maintain, broadly stated, the democratic principles of equality and liberty. The end is up to the individuals; the means must be democratic.

The contention of UNESCO's (1995) report *Our Creative Diversity* has been that the neglect of culture, which it defined (using the old definition of culture) as inclusive of all domains of life including economy, in development discourse and practice has led to some degree of failure of development (Wright 1998:11). The old idea of culture in the UNESCO report is that of a bounded culture, which led it to recommend cultural diversity on the basis of ethnic groups or a 'people'. But Wright criticises this standpoint of the report and shows that any definition of concept of culture is not a 'given' and its definition is a 'construction' made by definers and is susceptible to the "political process of contestation over the power to define key concepts..." (Wright 1998:14).

Hershock writes that:

All suffering is pivots on the experience of meaninglessness. We all know that it is possible not just to endure, but to learn and grow from even the most extreme hardships. Very often, it is in the most dire straits that we learn how compassionate we can be, how appreciative of every small nuance in our relationships with others. In yet, each of us also knows precisely what it is to feel that though we are still going through the motions of living, our lives have already ended. This feeling of profound impasse, their sense that there is no point in going on, no direction promising an exciting and meaningful continuation of our story, announces not the factual nature of our situation but the extreme poverty of our dramatic resources—our blocked or depleted capacity for meaningfully revising our situation and appreciating our unlimited intimacy with all things (Hershock 2000:23).

From a Buddhist point of view, many scholars have shown that human rights are consistent with Buddhist teachings while others have seen the limitations of human rights as a culturally and historically contingent idea. Hershock (2000) points out that human rights as a purely conceptual entity considers all human beings as equal and

independent, and thus in defining ourselves in such universalistic or generic terms as right bearers, devoid of our cultural and social connections, we ignore all the particularities that define us. One of the consequences of such a view of human beings, he sees, is that rights are about “mediating between claims of groups or states and those of individuals” (p. 17). In any case, the central plank of his Buddhist discourse on rights begins with the Buddhist notion of all things—individuals, cultures, environments, etc—as having no essential or fixed natures in and by themselves. For example, human beings exist neither inside nor outside the five *khandas*: “a human being is irreducibly relational”, “arising as a quality of relationship between ‘beings’ and ‘the environment’” (p.18). His structure of a moral universe is based on karmic value and intention, where everything (meaning, the ideas, events, experiences, actions, objects) is interdependent and relational, as part of the evolving meaning of our lives. We contribute to meanings in others’ lives as and while they contribute to ours in what he calls “the creative continuation of a shared narrative”. Given that Buddhism is concerned with the conditions of pain, Hershock points out that “both suffering and its resolution must be understood as native in nature—as a function of the interruptions and healings of our dramatic or meaningful interrelationships... that is, from a Buddhist perspective, suffering arises only when our narrative moment, the meaningful flow of our interdependence, is radically diverted, interrupted, or blocked” (p. 22). If I understand Hershock correctly, our interactions can be either based on rich direct personal interrelationships or organisationally or institutionally mediated interrelationships. When the organisationally mediated inter-relationships are on the ascendant, naturally free personal relationships are displaced by control and atomised by security institutional regulations. He mentions human rights as organisationally mediated relationships whereby different domains of rights are secured. His contention is that the focus on regulatory institutions like human rights steers individuals away from meaningful interdependence because institutions designed for control at

the end are not conducive to “adding value to our already meaningful pattern of interdependence. Human rights, then, will to insure... the conservation and development of our resources for dramatic virtuosity.”

Hershock (2000) has suitably charted out a fuller evaluation of human rights in a new original light of subtle and rich interpretations of old Buddhist concepts of interdependence, no essential natures, karmic values, and the Eightfold Path. If I simplify it to a bare thread, that cannot do justice to it, his interpretations of Eightfold Path stress freedom from ideological, institutional, and technological dominations that diminish our capacity to freely and spontaneously direct our attention to realise more meaningful and responsive relationships with one another (p. 29).

### **Unity between Human Rights and Cultural Liberty**

There is a serious attempt to reconcile and harmonise human rights, cultural identities, competitive politics of liberal democracy, biased WTO-blessed international trade, and investment regimes. Throughout, the report resonates with the message that an individual must be free, and must have the right, to choose, change, and revise various elements of his multiple cultural identities if he wishes to. The entire discussion is suffused with human rights as free choice, and free choice as cultural liberty. The core ideal of liberal democracy is its fabric. Free choice of identities is argued as being central to human rights and human development. All institutional arrangements, local or global, therefore must allow for individuals to exercise a free choice in cultural matters to be consistent with human rights. Human rights trumps over or subordinates cultural liberty, in the book. Actually, at one point, the report goes so far as to say that cultural diversity is not an end in itself but an outcome of freedom and choices (*HDR 2004*, p. 89), and that human rights is also one of the five family members of universal or global ethics. According to the report, global culture equals universal ethics of human rights and responsibilities.

Is there a consonance between human rights and

cultural liberty? One would like it to be there. If we believe that an ethnic nation or an ethnic people “have comprehensive rights in its own cultural productions and ideas” (Brown 1998, 195), these may include their own notions of right and wrong. If we limit ourselves to cultural diversity and moral relativity, it is hard to reconcile human rights with cultural liberty of individuals within a single culture where such human rights may be violated as part of their culture. And if we believe also that there is no evidence for cultures to be ranked as better and worse (*HDR 2004*, p. 90), we have no ground to advance global ethics of human rights into any particular cultural group. On the other hand, acceptance of human rights as a universal standard that should arbitrate or evaluate intercultural diversity in the political domain, overtly calls on all ethnic nations and peoples to converge on the liberal political state, which is exactly why it is seen as controversial by some cultural entities.

We are aware that people everywhere do not see it as a universal standard, because every standard is a standard from within a particular worldview (Cleveland cited in Brown 1998: 207). Individual choice and rights cannot be universalised through power relationships, or by force on others. We can say that tolerance is necessary. But we can also ask as to whose tolerance we are talking about. I personally think that human rights are the bench mark for all societies. But cautionarily, all are aware that human rights, especially in its specifications of economics and politics (as part of the second generation rights), are rejected by particularists.

### **Multi-religion**

Secularisation was often seen as a dependant variable, dependent directly on modernization (Chaves 2004:765). In these days of science, individualism, and globalisation, it is certainly a widespread assumption that religion has a marginal role in politics and society. For a long time, academics who subscribed to modernisation theory believed

that modernisation will lead to lesser role of religion in politics. Numerous prominent political events driven by religion have forced a reevaluation. Likewise, secularization,<sup>12</sup> which predicted the diminishment of religion as a social force, has also drawn doubts. Following Dobbelaere, Chaves (1994) characterised secularization as: domains gaining autonomy from religious institutions whereby religion is reduced to one sphere among many, the conformity of religious institutions with the secular framework, and the decline of religious practices among individuals. Chaves, in keeping with his definitional focus on authority, redefined all three dimensions of secularisation to a reduction in the scope of control by religious authority in the institutional sphere, the organisational level, and individual level. He made religious authority an object of secularisation rather than religion itself (Chaves 1994:757-770).

The persistent role of religion has to do with several factors, but in political terms, it would seem that the religious organisations which already exist lend to political mobilisation, mass media, and public influence (Fox 2004:57). His explanation for the rise of the religious resurgence is that "... in many ways, religious fundamentalism is an organized criticism and rejection of modernity. Fundamentalists reject the replacement of religious morality and explanations for the world in which we live with scientific and rational explanations and moral systems" (Medelsohn, 1993; Tehranian, 1993 cited in Fox 2004:58). According to Fox, at present, religion is being used

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<sup>12</sup> Chaves (1994) defines secularization as declining scope of religious authority. He distinguished his definition from that of secularization as declining religion. Chaves says that actual or potential use of physical violence is key to political authority. Likewise, he points out that "An authority structure is religious as long as its claims on obedience are legitimated by some reference to the supernatural referent... Secularization as declining religious authority, then, will referred to the declining influence of social structures whose legitimation rests on a reference to the supernatural" (Chaves 1994:756).

politically for (a) providing legitimacy to governments or resistance to certain governments and (b) justification for terrorism or war. The religious conflicts are difficult to resolve because articles of faith are not negotiable.

The presence of religious conflicts suggests that religion is an important factor in modernity: it will not disappear. Even if the conflicts are not religious in nature, Fox says that religion may influence the conflict when the two conflicting groups belong to different groups. Studying findings of conflict studies for the 1990s only, he suggests that “religious conflicts are a significant minority of conflict” contrary to Huntington’s predictions if civilizations are equated roughly with religions. Jonathan Fox (2004), using state failure data set for the period 1950 to 1996, has studied religious conflict for that period. His study suggests that non-religious conflicts are much more numerous than religious conflicts in the period since 1960 (Fox 2004:64). However, the number of religious conflicts has remained steady and has not declined. Among the religious conflicts, the most common are shown by Fox to be between two Christian groups, followed by two Muslim groups. But the number of inter-religious conflicts are highest between Muslims and other religious groups (Fox 2004:67-69).

Only four countries have state religion and they all happen to be Buddhist. All other countries, theoretically, are said to be secular. The secular nature of a state is considered universal whereas religion is considered particular and local. But whatever the exact nature of the state, the important thing is that no religion is going out of the public space, and it cannot go out of the public space in any democracy.

Secularism, by which is meant the separation of politics and religion, is supposed to provide public scope for rightful difference in multilingual societies. From a Buddhist point of view, Hershock writes that:

The Buddha did not argue for or against any particular form of government... he consistently and powerfully advocated committed revision of the meaning of political and social relationships, focusing in particular on the dramatically significant interplay of values and intention...

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Buddhist teachings aimed at opening up an entirely new kind of space—a new dimension. Taking up the Middle Path was not aimed at coming to rest at a point of perfect balance among competing and thus mutually limiting viewpoints, but at abandoning the very terms and conditional circumstances of the competition itself (Hershock forthcoming book: Ch. 5:3-4).

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## ***Cultural Maintenance and Promotion: The Print Media's Role in Providing Space for Knowledge and Discourse***

Dorji Thinley\*

*A person who gets deculturalised - and I nearly was, so I know the danger - loses his self-confidence. He suffers from a sense of deprivation. For optimum performance, a man must know himself and the world ... I may speak the English language better than the Chinese language because I learnt English early in life. But I will never be an Englishman in a thousand generations and I have not got the Western value system inside; mine is an Eastern value system.*

*- Lee Kuan Yew, Prime Minister of Singapore, 1978, (in Pennycook 1994: 247).*

### ***Abstract***

This paper is a discussion of the role of print media in Bhutan in providing public space for cultural knowledge and discourse. Increased exposure to global cultures and consumption of mass media has spawned the growth of a modern cultural trend that challenges the survival of the material and non-material contents of Bhutanese cultural identity. External threats to indigenous Bhutanese culture must be approached intelligently and wisely. The print media in Bhutan serves as an effective mediator between the persistent winds of an aggressive global culture and the small, vulnerable Bhutanese culture. To the English-using Bhutanese population, and to foreigners keen on Bhutan, Kuensel (Bhutan's print-based national newspaper), and Tashi Delek (Druk Air's in-flight magazine) are a potent source of cultural knowledge and a forum for cultural expression and exchange, both, therefore, supporting the general quest for cultural maintenance.

Article 4 of the draft Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan provides for the state's responsibility to preserve, protect and

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promote the Bhutanese cultural heritage, and through it, to enrich the cultural life of the people. The media's role in this national endeavour is critical. This paper will discuss the need for cultural sustainability in terms of three domains of culture: literary heritage, spirituality, and folklore. The discussion is based on an analysis of cultural contents selected from *Kuensel* and *Tashi Delek* and is grounded in perspectives drawn from contemporary discourse on the role of media in cultural sustainability.

Maintaining and promoting Bhutan's rich literary culture is critical to the experience of Gross National Happiness, because literature is the content of the language a people speak and language facilitates communal bonds. English is being embraced by the Bhutanese as a language of opportunities, of lateral and vertical movements in life. It is already the dominant language of the mass media. The consuming power of the mass media laden with consumerist values will continue to impact the Bhutanese psyche. The print media such as *Kuensel* and *Tashi Delek* (and now *Bhutan Observer* and *Bhutan Times*) can mediate between the influx of values from dominant cultures and values which are native to the Bhutanese. Values carried through the mass media, especially films from India, Mumbai and Hollywood, the television, newspapers, magazines, and now the internet, will continue to provide sensual gratification that modern minds seek. The home-based literary contents of *Kuensel* and *Tashi Delek* at present provide literary materials that not only disseminate knowledge about the Bhutanese literary tradition but also present the social, cultural, and pastoral values that have sustained community life for centuries.

Spirituality is based deep in the Bhutanese concept of development, particularly in the context of gross National Happiness. The deluge of sensual materials, ideas and concepts carried through the mass media will create restlessness, arrogance, and egocentrism in modern minds. The public space that *Kuensel* and *Tashi Delek* provide for spiritual materials through news stories and headlines, articles, reviews, vignettes, views and comments provide not simply knowledge about the Bhutanese spiritual culture, but also a public platform for dialogue, discussion, and reflection. The paper analyses the content of materials in *Kuensel* and *Tashi Delek* that deal with spirituality such as discourses, monuments, profiles, stories,

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and legends.

The word 'folk', hence folk culture, folklore, folk dance, is often used in a deprecating sense. In this paper I refer to it as meaning people, and folk culture as the customs, traditions, and values that belong to a group of people whose communal life derive meaning and sustenance from a common bond of cultural norms, standards, and values practised for generations. Kuensel and Tashi Delek at present provide reasonable public space for knowledge diffusion, articulation, and dialogue on various aspects of folk culture in Bhutan. This paper looks at manifestations of folk culture as they are presented in these two media and what impact they might have on public culture. The manifestations of folk culture include song, dance and music, customs and traditions, art and craft, beliefs and superstitions, and ways of life as they are carried through the print media in Bhutan.

The discussion of the paper will relate the need for cultural sustainability to the development concept of Gross National Happiness. It argues that the maintenance of the Bhutanese literary, spiritual, and folk cultures through dissemination and articulation in the print media will help contain the overriding influence of modernist cultural values based on ruthless egotism and commercialization of human values.

The paper also looks at the role of print media in cultural dissemination and maintenance in a democratic setting. The heavy incursion of non-Bhutanese cultural materials through the mass media inside and from outside Bhutan will influence public knowledge, desire, and lifestyle; hence the need for the print media to recognise its social and cultural responsibilities.

This paper suggests the need to reinforce the present role of the print media in disseminating knowledge on Bhutanese culture through news stories and headlines, research and non research-based articles, viewpoints, vignettes, profiles, and the like. Government policy on the role of the print media must recognise the latter's role in disseminating, if not generating, cultural knowledge and promoting cultural discourse. Without the media's positive role in the cultural domain, chances of its corruption and degeneration may be high, let alone its role in evolving a positive public culture in Bhutan.

### **Introduction**

*The role of the print media in the process of national character building is too significant to be pushed aside as not worthy of academic discussion. It is even more significant now especially as the Bhutanese society transitions from being an oral society to being one that is increasingly dependent on visual media. The significance becomes greater as the Bhutanese begin to see their own roles in a changed political setup which requires individuals to use greater amounts of personal judgement and decision based on knowledge acquired through the print media. The print media's role becomes most significant owing to the singularity of its reach and influence among the reading public. In Bhutan this singularity is caused mainly by the lack of a rich canon of secular literature in the country, in the form of poetry and prose. This literary gap has in some way been filled by the print media, particularly Kuensel, and to some extent Tashi Delek. Two other newspapers, Bhutan Times and Bhutan Observer, launched on 2nd May and 2nd June 2006 respectively, further increase the role of the print media in the evolution of a public culture. The role will be deep especially in "an oral society that has not developed a strong literary tradition" (Kuensel 28 September 2005:2) that moves with uncertainty towards a literate culture where reading, writing, and inquiry become inevitable tools of survival. The significance also increases in a society where, in the absence of a rich literary tradition, the reading public read nearly every single word that is printed in a newspaper and takes in everything with a high degree of gullibility. The up side of this is that the readers' deep engagement with the text of newspapers could be drawn upon as strength, and this must encourage newspapers and magazines to enrich the intellectual content of their publications. This process will, over time, have a deep educational impact on the public mind and attitude.*

*The preservation and promotion of cultural heritage is one of the four pillars that support the development concept of Gross National Happiness. Bhutan may not be a cultural giant among nations in the twenty-first century, as France or Italy was during the Renaissance, but it could present a cultural*

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*paradox in the form of an intelligent ability to survive in the global cultural cauldron in which the ancient customs, traditions and values are being rapidly replaced or displaced by the powerful, and often invisible, forces of a global culture characterized by the cult of sensuality and material restlessness, a movement often termed as cultural imperialism. The paradox is already becoming too conspicuous in the case of Bhutan, as is evident from the growing amount of interest the world is showing in how the country is able to keep its heritage alive between two of the world's cultural giants, China and India. The Bhutanese Prime Minister, Lyonpo Sangay Ngedup, in his inaugural address to the meeting of the BIMSTEC member countries (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, and Thailand) meeting on 22 May 2006 said, "It is to culture that we owe our unification and unity as a people and state. It is what keeps us together and it is what gives us the will to guard and preserve our sovereign being" (Dorji 2006:11). The need for cultural maintenance and promotion in the case of Bhutan is not political rhetoric. It is a national agenda, a goal sought at various levels through government and non-government initiatives. The cultural goal finds articulation in the goals of education for schools from primary through higher secondary. At times the articulation may sound obsessive, but it is perhaps this compelling sense of being cultured, the deep recognition of its continuity as a living tradition, and the ability to live it actively, that have helped Bhutan to protect itself from the ravages caused by the advent of a world culture that is fundamentally hostile to identities, values, and spirituality. The Bhutanese government's commitment to the need to save its own heritage against the global cultural blitz is expressed in these words:*

*Today, it is the culture and tradition bequeathed to us by our ancestors that can protect us from some of the negative and indiscriminate forces of modernisation and enable us to retain our identity and dignity in a world in which 'culture' is increasingly defined as a global commodity (RGOB 1999:65).*

*Bhutan is becoming a cultural destination of the world. Already the BIMSTEC has, as part of what it calls the 'Paro*

*Initiative', endorsed the establishment of a cultural centre in Bhutan (Dorji 2006:11). This increases the risk of stagnating and destroying the inherent values of culture as a way of life, a living entity, and making it a tourist product. But as the Bhutanese Home Minister, Lyonpo Jigme Thinley said, while tapping into the possibilities a cultural industry might provide, efforts must be made to avoid the "vulgarisation of culture", a phenomenon that has denigrated cultures in many parts of the world. The print media can play a mediating role by objectively looking at the positive aspects of global culture and by informing and educating the public on its negative aspects, and thereby creating a deeper understanding of and appreciation for indigenous cultures.*

*Braj Kachru, the noted American linguist, locates Bhutan in what he calls the expanding circle of the "concentric circles of Asian Englishes" along with countries like Myanmar, China, Japan, Thailand, Brunei, and South Korea; which means that English in Bhutan is viewed "primarily as a foreign language" (1998:94). On the contrary, English had already taken on the role of a second language much before 1998, as a language of the curriculum from primary up to university, as a medium of official communication along with Dzongkha the national language, as a language of print and electronic media, and as the language of global participation, although the term 'second language' is not used officially even now. Kachru's location of English in the expanding circle contradicts fact, even if we look at the status of English in 1998, the year his paper was published. Yet in effect, the escalating growth of English, as is the case in countries in Kachru's expanding circle, is phenomenal. It will continue to be so. The growing popularity of the print media in Bhutan may be viewed alongside the growth and expansion of English as a powerful language. In 2005 there were 145,817 students (MOE 2005:1) studying in educational institutions in the country from primary to university who use English. Hundreds of students studying in schools and universities in India and elsewhere use English and learn other languages. Most of the country's over 17,000 civil servants are probably active or passive users of English. In the absence of any official figure on the demographics of*

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*English usage, actively or passively, in Bhutan, these numbers help to make an educated guess. Close to 1.6 lakh people in Bhutan, which is about 26 percent of the country's total population of 634,982 (Dorji 2006:1), use English. Including retired civil servants, military men, private sector employees, those in the monastic community who use English, and others, it may again be guessed that close to 26-30 percent of the Bhutanese population use English as a 'second language'. English will continue to grow in its popularity among the Bhutanese because it is a language of convenience, of education and opportunity, of modernisation and business, of the mass media, and of global participation. Unlike in most countries where it has been adopted as a second language, yet is often scorned by its users because of its colonial stink, English in Bhutan is viewed by its users—active, passive, and potential—as a respectable pathway to opportunities. This makes the market potential of the domestic print media in English extremely promising. Along with the promise is also seen the possibility of an influx of media from outside the country that the English-educated populace increasingly consumes.*

*To the large English-speaking Bhutanese population, and to foreigners keen on Bhutan, Kuensel and Tashi Delek serve as a reliable source of cultural knowledge, a popular forum for cultural expression and discourse, and an enduring means of culture maintenance.*

*This paper is based on an analysis of the cultural contents of 5 articles each of Kuensel and Tashi Delek published during 2003-2005 to identify cultural knowledge and values that can impact the public psyche, and hence public culture, in Bhutan. The discussion of the role of the print media in cultural maintenance and dialogue is grounded in perspectives drawn from popular discourse on the role of media in public culture. The analysis of media articles is supported by views of a sample of readers of the English edition of Kuensel on its role in supporting the desire for cultural expression and dialogue. Data for this was gathered through a questionnaire entitled *The Role of the Bhutanese Print Media in Cultural Sustainability* distributed to a random sample of 20 regular*

readers of the English edition of *Kuensel*. The respondents are identified in this paper as R<sub>1</sub>, R<sub>2</sub>, and so on.

***Print Media and Cultural Sustainability: Literary, Spiritual, Folkloric***

*There is general agreement that the media has the capacity to influence audience attitudes, and that it exerts influence on social life (Corner 2000:379 in Igglesden 2002: 21; Kuensel 4 February 2006:2; Rozumilowicz 2002 in McConnell & Becker 2002:11; Kuenselonline 19 February 2005). The need for cultural maintenance in Bhutan at the moment is not political rhetoric but a serious development priority, which is evident when the government says that it is a “living manifestation of civilisation” and that, “as a system of values and norms, it is reflected in our way of thinking, in our attitudes toward the world and to life ... how we make moral and ethical choices and distinguish between what is wrong and right” (RGOB 1999:65). Article 4 of the Bhutanese constitution states that “The state shall endeavour to preserve, protect and promote the cultural heritage of the country, including monuments, places and objects of artistic or historic interest ...to enrich society and the cultural life of the citizens” (Draft of the Tsa Thrim Chhenmo as on 18<sup>th</sup> August 2005:8). The print media can provide a powerful public voice for indigenous culture. As a public service media, *Kuensel* must continue to be a virtual public classroom, a platform for display of indigenous cultures, and it must guard itself against temptations to indulge in mindless commercialism and politicking, a weakness many newspapers in the region have suffered.*

*The present role of Tashi Delek, although an in-flight magazine of an airline, in mirroring Bhutan’s cultural tapestry for the Bhutanese themselves and for the outside world seems impressive. Its role may not be recognized by the government or by the society but even a casual reading of its many colourful pages gives one the impression that it is among the mediums of cultural knowledge, expression, and in a minor way, a means of cultural maintenance and promotion. *Kuensel*’s commitment to its cultural responsibility is evidenced by its editorial when it says:*

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*In the end the Bhutanese media must be seen as a credible and responsible entity, not as a power block and certainly not as a tool for politicians and business houses. The section of society called public intellectuals has a critical role to play (Kuenselonline, 19 February 2005).*

*Senior citizens, academics, culture bearers, writers and researchers, the academia—all must work to evolve a discursive community that will create a public space of common concern dedicated to disseminating cultural knowledge, articulating cultural aspirations, and advocating cultural maintenance and promotion. This paper looks at three popular domains of culture, namely literary culture, spiritual culture, and folk culture and discusses how the print media, particularly Kuensel and Tashi Delek, can create, as it does now, adequate public space for disseminating cultural knowledge and facilitating popular discourse.*

### *Literary Culture and the Print Media*

*Oral and written canons of literature constitute an important domain of a country's cultural heritage. Literature in its varied manifestations like poetry, fiction, drama, non-fictional prose forms such as essays, biographies, and memoirs reflect the spirit of a nation, its character, its dreams and aspirations, its problems and predicaments, its values and standards. In simple terms, a country's literary tradition is a reflection of its culture. Referring to the lack of a "strong literary tradition" in Bhutan, a Kuensel editorial (June 4, 2005:2) remarked that "The absence of a good literary tradition would not only mean the lack of academic credibility but a superficial society". This argument becomes convincing when we look at how countries with rich and vast literary traditions are often the ones that set the trend for the development of literary canons. We also see how countries with rich literary outputs are normally respected as cultured and civilised. Russia is known by the fame of Alexander Pushkin and Leo Tolstoy as much as by Sputnik, England by William Shakespeare and John Milton as much as by Isaac Newton and Stephen Hawking, and India by Rabindranath Tagore and Satyajit Ray as much as by C.V.Raman or Bollywood. Great literature from China, Japan,*

*Germany, India, Russia, France and many other countries have contributed to world literature through translations.*

*During 2004-2005, five reviews of literary writing rooted in Bhutanese culture by Bhutanese writers in English were published by Kuensel: Telling tales as they were told by Dorji Penjore (Kuenselonline 12 April 2004) ; A dog's tale by Kinley Y Dorji (Kuenselonline 16 Novemer 2004); The Boneless Tongue by T.S.Powdyel (Kuenselonline 23 February 2005); Documenting well known myths by Ugyen Penjore (Kuenselonline 5 May 2005); and Bhutanese Beliefs by Gopilal Acharya (Kuenselonline 27 September 2005). For a small population of 634,982 people, the output is at least good enough to be able to inform and educate readers of Kuensel on the content and quality of Bhutanese literature and to create public consciousness about the need to evolve a vibrant literary environment and culture. Kuensel will have to continue to provide adequate space for Bhutanese literature in the form of book reviews, academic discourses, and authentic research reports by its journalists and by those outside it. The article called A yak herder and a yak song by Kencho Wangdi (Kuensel 27 December 2003:5) is a brilliant example of how authentic research by the print media could become material for public consumption, material for classroom teaching and learning, and inspiration for further research. An important aspect of Bhutan's rich oral literature is exposed through this well-researched article. An extract from it illustrates the point.*

*Composed in the high mountains, "Yak legpai lhadar gawo" tells the story of the tragic parting between a yak herder and his yak, Legpai Lhadar Gawo (the handsome and magnificent yak) who was to be taken on orders from a powerful lord and killed for meat. Lozey is the battle of wits and words through poetry and verse between opponents on subjects of love and challenge, or difference of opinion, where the parties involved use metaphor and symbols to outdo one another, until a winner or draw is declared.*

(Kuensel 27 December 2003, p.5)

*This study has not attempted to find out what pedagogical use teachers in Bhutanese schools put such materials to. But such a study would yield interesting facts, especially so because teachers and curriculum writers generally mention the lack of adequate literary materials by Bhutanese writers. Bhutanese oral tradition provides a rich tapestry of creative expressions comprising mainly of genres such as folktales, poetry, epics, biographies, myths, legends, ballads, proverbs, beliefs and superstitions, heroic tales, jokes, popular gossip, riddles, songs, sagas, which provide a rich fund of cultural knowledge. The Bhutanese government, for instance, asserts that “There are differences in folklore, myths, legends...poetry...that together add richness to the nation’s cultural tapestry”, and that “These must be inventoried and recorded before they are lost forever” (RGOB 1999:66). Much work remains to be done in researching and translating many popular literary genres that may be lost from oral memory, and hence need transmission from mouth to print. The globalization of English and the insinuating spread of the mass media will increasingly challenge the survival of Bhutan’s rich oral literature. Davis Crystal (1997: 18) says this of the oral heritage:*

*Oral testimony, in the form of sagas, folktales, songs, rituals, proverbs, and many other practices, provides us with a unique view of our world and a unique canon of literature. It is their legacy to the rest of humanity. Once lost, it can never be recaptured.*

*As a public service media, Kuensel must make sustained efforts in research in Bhutanese oral literature, which would support the people’s desire to articulate their cultural values and establish a unique Bhutanese literary identity. It will also help to create an interested international audience for Bhutanese literature, and to preserve and promote the kingdom’s vast literary heritage. Kuensel has popularised Bhutanese writing in English, paradoxically, much more than any academic institution at the tertiary level in the country*

seems to have even attempted, something academics in the Royal University of Bhutan could start. Concerns have been expressed about the lack of “quality materials by Bhutanese authors” writing in English, even as the Ministry of Education encourages the inclusion of Bhutanese writing in English in the revised English curriculum for schools in Bhutan (Wangmo 2005:3). Nicole Pluss, visiting Australian author of children’s literature suggested to educators in Bhutan that “oral stories would be preserved if written down and this will provide children with ideas and determination to get their works published” (quoted in Dema 2005:3). All this was not known without the print media’s role.

The mass media, particularly through the powerful medium of English, will bring in tantalising materials that pander to sensuality, consumerist egocentrism, and market libertinism, which will challenge the cultural contents of the public service media in Bhutan. The risk is further enhanced especially when English becomes not just a second language, but a powerful language, a virtual lingua franca among the educated population; and as they show greater interest in more enticing materials that can be accessed via other media like television, internet, and movies from India and Hollywood. The print media in Bhutan can counterbalance it by providing sufficient public space for cultural knowledge, expression and dialogue with the clear purpose of maintaining and promoting indigenous literary traditions.

Preserving and promoting the literary traditions should be viewed as a cultural imperative because “Written literature and orature are the main means by which a particular language transmits the images of the world contained in the culture it carries”, as the noted African writer N.W. Thiong’o (1986:205) puts it. The mass media’s insidious invasion of local cultures must be understood as too real to be avoided. Kangas’s (2000:x) claim that “Some of the direct main agents of linguistic (and cultural) genocide today are parts of what we call the consciousness industry: formal educational systems and the mass media” perhaps needs not much evidence. In the era of parliamentary democracy the media will be tempted to interpret the statutory rights provided for in the constitution as

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*license to report and publish anything that makes quick money. Of course, the media policy will guard against this. The English language and the culture it imports with its power and appeal will need to be counterbalanced by rich cultural material transmitted through the same popular medium, as Kuensel and Tashi Delek are doing at the moment. Referring to the influence of English in India, British writer Salman Rushdie says, "Assisted by the English language's enormous flexibility and size, they (Indians) are carving out large territories for themselves within its front...They use it as one of the tools they have to hand" (in Crystal 2000: 135-136). The Bhutanese can harness the resources of the English language and make it what the Indian writer Raja Rao calls the "language of our intellectual make-up" (in Crystal 2000: 135-136). Cultural imperialism through the medium of English must be dealt with through the same medium. The print media's role is critical.*

*A nation without a reasonable amount of literary wealth and a visible culture of creativity, imagination, and sensibility, will in the long run be a nation of robots, faces without humanity. For a small country like Bhutan, literature—both religious and secular—must form part of our cultural imperative, for without it culture fails to mirror the nation's inner voice, its spirit, its psyche, its aspirations, its dreams, and its consciousness. There is agreement among literature interpreters that the literary arts in the form of poetry, fiction, dramatic compositions, ballads, songs, memoirs, biographies, essays, and the like in their totality communicate culture. Without culture, a nation becomes emotionally, intellectually and spiritually sterile and impoverished. If the emotional, intellectual, and spiritual health of a people, besides material comfort and convenience, are central to a nation's wellbeing and happiness, then the argument that people must continue to tell stories, sing their songs and ballads, and say their poetry, becomes quite legitimate. Literature, as a carrier of cultural values and popular aspirations, problems and predicaments, impacts the way a people think and behave; it also helps people to develop a sense of who they are, where they belong, and where they are heading; and it also instils in the minds of a people a sense of nationhood and oneness. In fact, literature*

*helps to build national solidarity and an enduring sense of identity. Many African writers writing in English have argued for cultural sensitivity and consciousness through African literature. This may be generally applied to highly vulnerable societies where the risk of facing the heavy onslaught of cultural imperialism is quite high. This makes the task for the print media such as Kuensel and Tashi Delek very challenging.*

#### ***Spiritual Culture and the Print Media***

*One of the ingredients of the cultural aspect of Gross National Happiness will be the search for a balance between selflessness and selfishness, between taking and giving, between grabbing and sharing, between coldness and kindness, between self and other. The invincible forces of the modern globalised culture will tempt the Bhutanese, through subtle means, into uprooting their spiritual convictions in the process of a restless search for instant gratification of the senses; a process that will gradually turn individuals into intellectual machines that know only the self; human beings whose sole occupation is to indulge in what the great American writer Aldous Huxley calls “monomaniacal vices”.*

*The role of traditional institutions in promoting the individual’s inner wellbeing must be recognised: “Throughout our history monastic and religious bodies have tended not only to our spiritual but also to our material well-being” (RGOB 1999:70). The “unambiguous cultural imperative”, the third pillar of Gross National Happiness, underpins the fact that cultural preservation and promotion means not only recognising, inculcating, and appreciating the Bhutanese cultural heritage but also recognising “its role in meeting spiritual and emotional needs of our people and in cushioning ourselves from some of the negative impacts of modernisation” (RGOB 2005:70). Some of the ominous forces of modernisation that will increasingly challenge Bhutanese society, especially through the globalisation of culture, will be the disintegration of the family, erosion of social and communal values, desecration of the institution of marriage, displacement of the finer and more subtle aspects of culture and civilisation by the mindless worship of matter, and the restless search for self-*

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*aggrandizement and ego inflation. Robert Thurman, the American Buddhist teacher says:*

*And what happens in total democracy where there is no spiritual reality available is that the god that dominates is the god of money. And the parliamentarians and the congressmen become bought and sold. Just go to my country, they worship only money (Kuensel, 16 November 2005:5).*

*Spirituality, which simply means dedication to god, religion, enlightened beings such as bodhisattvas, and spiritual things or values, must continue to be one of the defining qualities of the Bhutanese national character. The Bhutanese spiritual heritage comprising such tangible treasures as the sacred texts, religious monuments, holy sites, sacred art and painting, and living manifestations of active spiritual culture such as religious discourses, acts of beneficence and compassion, self-sacrifice, fight against the ego, and renunciation and simplicity, must find adequate space for dissemination so that the deeper aspects of culture nourish the popular psyche. In the narrow sense, this might sound as proselytisation, but centuries of Bhutanese experience demonstrates that the spiritual values of compassion, holiness, beneficence, renunciation, and egolessness do not generate communal hatred, cultism, and narrow sectarianism, but contribute to social amity, harmony, and individual happiness.*

*Sceptics have often commented that Kuensel's only business is advertising. When Bhutan Observer was launched on 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2006, the comments on its maiden issue were generally on its quality of ruralism and breakaway from the traditional media bias towards urbanism. It may not be fair judgement to say that Kuensel has focussed reader attention only on urban issues. The fact is its reporters have traversed the length and breath of Bhutan to write about things that Bhutanese scholars, researchers, and academics have not been quite successful in doing, in many instances. Besides the 'Vacancy Announcements', the 'Advertisement', and the 'Classifieds', Kuensel has demonstrated genuine commitment to being a public service media through its proven efforts to report on various aspects of Bhutanese culture, including the*

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spiritual heritage, be it a story on the installation of a Serto (golden pinnacle) on the Utse of the 500-year old monastery of Khochung in remote Kurtoe, the sacred songs of Talo Tshechu, the preservation of the Drametse Nga Chham, the dissuading of animal slaughter, the legend of Taktshang, the birth of a reincarnate lama, or the passing away of an eminent spiritual master. The passing away of His Holiness the late Nyinzer Tulku was commented upon by the Kuensel editorial in an emotionally poignant manner, paying a befitting tribute to an enlightened Buddhist priest who “did not differentiate the type of vehicle that came to receive him” and “was not particularly impressed by luxury vehicles...was seen happily riding a tractor or a scooter to go to a farmer’s house” (Kuenselonline 15 June 2005). The following extract from Table 1 illustrates the kinds of spiritual materials Kuensel is able to present. Bibliography are made to at least sixteen spiritual concepts. In the absence of scholarly works in English on these aspects of Bhutanese Buddhism, Kuensel stories provide a credible public platform for dissemination of cultural knowledge and education.

*During Tshechus, the atsaras wear a cloth phallus as part of their head gear; the dagger in five different colours - white, yellow, red, green, and blue, represent the different manifestations of Jampalyang, the goddess of wisdom.*

*Bardo - the intermediate state of consciousness after death; the soul wanders in the bardo and must face judgement before Shinje Chhogyel (Lord of Death).*

*The collective sound from the recitation of prayers and bazagurus from inside the ponds ...*

*Talo tshechu; the inspiration to build the Talo monastery was drawn from the Samyi monastrey in Tibet; the Manisum songs are blessed by the Zhabdrung, and only Talops are allowed to learn the songs and perform them; if the songs are not performed properly it can bring misfortune such as natural calamities and diseases.*

*(Kuensel 1 February 2003; 6 December 2003; 10 January 2004; 22 January 2005; 2 April 2005)*

*In-flight magazines generally look like pamphlets and brochures departmental stores publish to promote sales. Tashi Delek reads like a rich travel guide to Bhutan, with pictures of the landscape, of art and architecture, of dzongs and monasteries, chortens and prayer flags, monks and farmers, dances and legends, mountains and valleys, streams and birds. Margaret Gee concludes her essay *Amazing Land of the thunder dragon in Tashi Delek* (April-May-June 2006: 10) with these words:*

*Everywhere you go in Bhutan you experience and witness Buddhism at close quarters...Such intense is their faith in religion... As tourists we may be unwittingly changing Bhutan but believe me for outsiders even a flying visit to Bhutan is a transforming experience.*

*The following extract from Table 2 illustrates the richness of spiritual information, concepts and themes Tashi Delek presented through five articles and stories in three issues between 2003 and 2005.*

*... a Bhutanese does not view a painting or a sculpture as a work of art - for him it is a religious work; many artistic styles of thangka painting - karma gardri style which has a Chinese touch, Tshangdri style which originated in the Tibetan region of Tshang, khamdri style of the Kham region, the mendre style, and chendre style (the art style of Gangkhar Chentse); the mortal remains of Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal; eternal meditation; nirvana; Palden Lhamo - Bhutan's guardian deity; Lam Ngagi Wangchuk; the omnipresent smell of incense in the Dzong; Master of discipline; Dorji Lingpa, the famous terton (revealer of treasures); the region in which the Zhabdrung arrived was Laya; the chorten with the footprints of Zhabdrung; Layaps and the old faithful hairy yaks.*

(Tashi Delek Oct-Dec 2003; January-March 2004; January-March 2005)

The extract presents numerous aspects of Bhutanese Buddhism such as history, legend, tradition, art, philosophy, mysticism, and belief. Tshering Penjore, Druk Air's marketing manager says that 90 percent of Tashi Delek readers are foreigners. Given the high level of curiosity and eagerness with which visitors experience Bhutan, it may be assumed that the rich culture-laden articles and stories that are published in Tashi Delek educate culture enthusiasts a lot more, in some cases, than can Bhutan's tourist guides who have in the past established notoriety for saying anything that reciprocated learned queries from eager tourists. Tashi Delek represents numerous aspects of Bhutanese culture and landscape in splendid colours and authentic stories through its two content sections called *News from Bhutan*, and *Glimpses of Bhutan*, all of which provide the Bhutan enthusiast a good primer on important aspects of the country and its people.

*News from Bhutan* (Tashi Delek July-September 2004, p. 20-21)

*Drametse monastery renovated*  
*Golden bowls for Punakha Dzong*  
*Historic Rigsum Gompa restored*  
*Bhutan Pavilion in France*

*Glimpses of Bhutan* (Tashi Delek January-February-March 2004, p.38-41)

i. *The impregnable Dzongs* (Gasa Dzong, Wangdue Dzong, Punakha Dzong, Trongsa Dzong, Jakar Dzong, Thimphu Dzong, Drugyel Dzong).

Spiritual culture is a delicate and sensitive heritage, so efforts in dissemination and popularisation, especially through the mass media, may need learned discretion and wise handling. This may especially be so in the case of the philosophical and mystical teachings and practices of Buddhism. Mindlessness may lead to the vulgarisation of

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*culture. Visual representations of the tangible aspects of spiritual culture such as dzongs, monasteries, caves and mountainsides, art and painting, flags and stupas, should be given adequate space for public consumption, as Kuensel and Tashi Delek are doing at the moment. On the role of the print media, most of the eighteen participants who responded to the questionnaire used in this study said that the print media must promote the Bhutanese spiritual heritage. These statements provide some insight into popular aspiration as expressed by the respondents.*

*... Celebration of local and national cultural activities such as Tshechus ... description of the values and history of certain artefacts, religious sites, buildings and historical figures and their life histories. [R1]*

*... The print media must make more and more coverage on our Lhakhangs, Goendeys, Dzongs, visual/oral traditions in the countryside (villages, etc.) It should also invite/publish articles on the theme by both national and international authors. The media should also promote discourses on these values. [R14]*

*Many countries have, in their quest for development and modernisation, wittingly or unwittingly compromised their spiritual moorings thus resulting in the loss of their convictions and identities. Spirituality is perhaps the most fundamental strength on which the Bhutanese identity has depended for so long. The ancient spiritual values of compassion, of self abnegation, of the primacy of the Bodhisattva mind, of the humility of the self and importance of the other, of recognition and respect for the transmitters and custodians of spirituality, and the texts and physical entities of spirituality have all been elemental to the mental and physical wellbeing of the Bhutanese people. Social and political institutions have been motivated and guided by the fundamental knowledge that every human effort is spurred by the desire for happiness and that human institutions exist for advancing it. The sombre aspects of modernisation such as the disintegration of the*

family; denigration of marital obligation and fidelity; and mindless disregard for religious monuments, artefacts, classical texts, and other manifestations of spiritual culture, will continue to tease Bhutanese cultural values and challenge their strengths and convictions. The desirable future may be one where students, farmers, office-goers, technocrats, bureaucrats, politicians, monks, and nuns, in their search for happiness for themselves and for others, continue to seek refuge in the deep waters of Bhutan's ancient spiritual wisdom. The mass media, which has already made deep inroads into the Bhutanese cultural psyche, lifestyle, and habits, particularly among the younger generation in the urban centres, generates a psychological culture of restlessness, sensuality, arrogance, ruthless egocentrism, and literate ignorance, which should be resisted through careful and even passionate assertion of the Bhutanese cultural arsenal. The print media and school and university curricula have significant roles to play in this counter-balancing process.

#### **Folk Culture and the Print Media**

Literature interpreters and folklore scholars have presented various definitions of the word 'folk'. Many folklore scholars emphasize the quality of ancientness in their definitions; hence the word has often come to mean the "carriers and transmitters of folklore" who were "illiterate peasants or, to some extent, tribal peoples" (*International Encyclopaedia of the Social and Behavioural Sciences* 2001:5712). However, more recent definitions use the term as referring to a tribe or nation, or the common people of a nation. Some folklore scholars agree that "all human beings in some way or another are involved in the folklore process, as performers, watchers or audiences" (*ibid.*). So in fact there is nothing derogatory in the meaning of the term as it is understood today. This definition clarifies the concept of folklore better, and shows that "in its broadest sense" it is the "part of the culture, customs, and beliefs of a society that is based on popular tradition", and that it is "produced by the community and is usually transmitted orally or by demonstration" (*Encyclopaedia Americana International Edition* 2004:498r).

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*What is the status of folk culture in Bhutan? The Bhutanese government seems clear about this aspect of the Bhutanese cultural heritage: "Our heritage covers not only historical sites, architecture and physical artefacts but also our rich tradition of folklore, traditional crafts, arts and sports" (RGOB:66). The government's reference to folklore as an important area of the country's heritage is encouraging, particularly at a time when the softer aspects of human culture and civilisation are either neglected, vulgarised for tourist consumption, not understood or recognised, or discarded as economically useless in many parts of the world. Bhutanese folk culture, which will include the arts and crafts, dances, sports, beliefs and superstitions, holiday and religious celebrations, and various forms of other customs and traditions, the totality of which lend meaning to social life, must be preserved and promoted. Kuensel and Tashi Delek's role in this regard is noteworthy. They have represented some of the Bhutanese folk culture that face the risk of being pushed into oblivion, especially from the memory of the younger generation who are increasingly exposed to the superficial trappings of global culture transmitted through the mass media. The folk traditions of pottery making, the festival of the Gomphu Kora Tshechu, the Drametse Ngachham—a masterpiece of humanity, the art of Desho (paper made from the daphne bark), Yaklha (the tradition of appeasing the yak deity) in the Ura village of Bumthang, the symbolism of the phallus, water therapy, the hot springs of Gasa, Bhutanese beliefs and superstitions, the Tshechu, Ara (spirit brewed in Bhutanese homes), Khuru (Bhutanese traditional darts), have all been written about by Kuensel and are aspects of Bhutanese culture that seem vulnerable in terms of the risk of their being affected by the dreadful tide of globalisation.*

*With the launching of Bhutan Observer, the second private newspaper in the country, whose focus from the first issues seems to be on rural life, it is hoped that the representation of folk culture will expand in the print media and become more vibrant than it is now. The print media's research departments must identify those aspects of the country's folk culture which remain untouched, hence more vulnerable to the phenomenon*

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of loss and displacement. Folk culture, as one participant in this study said, should be presented by the print media in order to:

Sustain and promote the originality of our cultural heritage;  
Create awareness among the younger generation;  
Expose for appreciation by foreigners;  
Enhance the Bhutanese identity. [R8]

Another participant said this of the role of print media in preserving and promoting folk culture.

Endangered 'heritage' like cultural values, objects, etc., can be documented, photographed, and preserved for future reference... With the publication of folk cultures, readers will get to know the cultures of particular localities...our country's cultures will be known by outsiders... Expose our unique cultures to the outside world. [R9]

The five articles in the three issues of *Tashi Delek* (see Table 2) present a rich tapestry of Bhutanese folk culture, which include a wide range of concepts and themes such as the ethnic characteristics of the people of Laya, the customs and traditions of the Lhops or Doyas of the south, *thangka* painting, the life, art, and culture of the palace of Ugyen Choeling, the *Tsha chhu* (hot springs) that cure and heal, and many more. Many participants in this study said that the print media, by presenting Bhutanese culture through its articles and stories not only creates awareness among the Bhutanese themselves, but can also help to create a unique identity for the country and "protect them from being drowned in the current of neo-colonialism, and from losing their cultural roots" [R1], thus "reinforcing the concept of Bhutanese identity in the global community" [R17].

The hot Bhutanese chilli is already being contested by sausages from Bangkok, *suja* by coffee, the *Adha Marthra* by jeans and T-shirts, evening prayers by WWF, visits to monasteries and spiritual guides by bars and discos, and visits to ailing mothers and fathers in the village by frantic search for a trip to Geneva or Canberra. These are inevitable symptoms of modernisation and economic prosperity. In the absence of proper education in our own folk heritage and its

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*deeper cultural meanings and symbolism, children would like to spend time on sensual materials and hanker after visual stimuli that sedate the senses. A society where people are restless and continually seeking excitement and sensual gratification, the state of happiness is bound to be low. Social customs and traditions, beliefs and values, arts and crafts, sport and leisure should be popularised through careful adaptation and modernisation. The recognition and appreciation of folk culture through education and media presentations will enable the Bhutanese to continually look within themselves, trace their roots and build convictions in their own identity as a people. This way, the darker forces of globalisation will find it hard to tempt the small and the vulnerable. One way of avoiding becoming ‘cultured apes’ is perhaps by being wisely aggressive about one’s own culture.*

**Table 1: Content analysis of articles published in Kuensel (2003-2005)**

Issue details	Title of article & author	Thematic categorisation		
		Literary (oral & written traditions)	Spiritual/ Religious	Folk (customs/ traditions, lifestyle)
Kuensel Volume XVIII, No.5 (p.5) February 1 2003	Of Phallus: an arcane symbol - by Gopilal Acharya	The worship of the phallus was believed to be in practice even before the arrival of Guru Rinpoche and Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal ... What we	During Tshechus , the atsaras wear a cloth phallus as part of their head gear; phalluses hung	Hanging phalluses on the wooden eaves of a house; the phallus comes in various shapes and sizes, carved in wood, metal, stone and cloth;

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		<p>know about it is what we heard from our forefathers. The phallus was in the centre of and played a primary role in all Bon rituals...</p>	<p>form the eaves of a house also have a dagger (reldri) tied to them; the dagger in five different colours - white, yellow, red...</p>	<p>commonly used to ward off evil spirits; phallic ritual...</p>
<p>Kuensel Volume XVIII, No. 48 (p.5) December 6 2003</p>	<p>The influence of Buddhism on the Bhutanese trial system – by Kinley Y Dorji</p>	<p>Even a thousand Buddhas cannot wash away your sin, even the fastest hare cannot overtake your sins; Bardo thodrol (Book of the Dead).</p>	<p>Bardo - the intermediate state of consciousness after death; the soul wanders in the bardo and must face judgement before Shinje Chhogyel (Lord of Death).</p>	<p>Tshechu; raksha mangcham which portrays an elaborate trial; Nyalbum—the accused; Lha karmo—defence counsel; Daynagchung—the prosecutor; the silken knot ...</p>
<p>Kuensel Volume IX, No.2 (p.5)</p>	<p>The healing waters of Gasa - by Kencho</p>	<p>Tshachus were held sacred by the Bhutanese, many</p>	<p>The collective sound from the recitation</p>	<p>Tshachu; Gasa tshachu is believed to cure rheumatism,</p>

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January 10 2004	Wangdi	believing them to have been touched by divine hands.	of prayers and bazagurus from inside the ponds ...	arthritis, ulcers, indigestion, skin diseases; it is nature's way of healing people.
Kuensel  Volume XX, No. 4 (p.5) January 22 2005	Kushuthara weaving: a vibrant tradition - by Samten Wangchuk	According to the book <i>Textile Arts of Bhutan</i> by Susan S. Beans and Diana K. Myers, the kushuthara has its origins in the Kushung tunics used in some parts of east and west Bhutan; there are three types of kushuthara - the ngasham ...	-	... women folk weave the kushuthara in small groups; backstrap looms; all the women in Khoma can weave the kushuthara.
Kuensel  Volume XX, No. 19 (p.5) April 2 2005	Manisum: the sacred songs of Talo Tshechu - by Ugyen Penjore	Zhungdra - classical song sung in a meditative style without music; the Manisum was composed by Zhabdrung Jigme Chogyal	Talo tshechu; the inspiration to build the Talo monastery was drawn from the Samyi	The Zhungdra performance—particularly the three songs (Manisum) is very close to the heart of the Talops; women of the dance troupe

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		(1862-1904); the three songs of the Manisum trilogy - handwritten on ancient scrolls, are Samyi Sala, Drukpai Dungye, and Thowachi Gangi Tseley ...	monastrey in Tibet; the Manisum songs are blessed by the Zhabdrun g, and only Talops are allowed to learn the songs and perform them...	must refrain from sexual intercourse three days before the Tsechu to maintain the sanctity of the Tshechu...
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**Note:** Words and phrases in the table that describe cultural themes, ideas and concepts have for the most part been reproduced verbatim from the five articles mentioned in the table. For convenience of reading, quotations marks and Bibliography to source have been avoided. Also, minor adaptations have been done for convenience of grammar, without altering the sense.

***Bkra shis bde legs (Tashi Delek): Cultural role of an In-flight Magazine***

It may seem rather bizarre to attribute a cultural role to a passenger airline's in-flight. If it does play a role, then it is legitimate to know what that role might be. Not knowing incurs the risk of letting the media, no matter how small or insignificant, to do what the mass media in general have done to traditional cultures. Tashi Delek, the in-flight magazine of Druk Air (Royal Bhutan Airlines), is a quarterly publication with about 8000 copies circulated each quarter for use by air passengers. Tshering Penjore, Drukair's marketing manager says it is a "well read magazine", and 8000 copies of it "do not last one quarter". In 2005 Druk Air carried about 96,285

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*passengers (information from Tshering Penjore 1 January 2006). Assuming that all the 96,285 passengers who travelled Drukair during the period had at least looked at a few pages of the magazine, if not read it closely, it may be inferred that some content of 32,000 copies of the magazine were at least seen by that many passengers, who would have therefore gathered some impression on Bhutanese culture. Tshering Penjore says that 90 percent of the readers of Tashi Delek are foreigners. In the absence of any credible magazine published within Bhutan, it is not surprising that the content of an in-flight magazine is so rich, so academic, that for first-time visitors it can serve as a reliable guide and a kind of first-impression book. In a way Tashi Delek has provided space for foreigners visiting Bhutan to write about their impressions of the culture, landscape, and people of Bhutan and their intellectual friendship with the country.*

*As powerful media, Kuensel and Tashi Delek will continue to inform and educate not only the Bhutanese but also the outside world. The versatility and flexibility of the English language makes it easy to harness it and use it to the advantage of the Bhutanese idiom and cultural psyche and their peculiar experience. Thus the sombre imports of globalisation transmitted through the mass media is counterbalanced by a rich exposition of the Bhutanese culture and its peculiar experience through the same medium. It has been rightly said that “The media in Bhutan must be conscious that it serves a small vulnerable society that survives on the strength of a distinct cultural identity” and that it must be sensitive to the “cultural and social complexity in the environment of rapid political transformation” (RGOB 2005:52).*

**Table 2: Content analysis of articles published in Tashi Delek (2003-05)**

Issue details	Title of article & author	Thematic categorisation		
		Literary (oral & written traditions)	Spiritual/ Religious	Folk (customs/traditions/lifestyle)
Tashi Delek Volume VIII, No. 4 October-December 2003	i) <i>Thangka Painting: Art Interlaced With Buddhist Values</i> (p.10-14) - by Tashi Dorji	There is a belief among the Tibetans that every hundred years, a Jangchubse mba is born in Bhutan. A thangka painted by a Jangchubse mpa needs no consecration and is a precious possession for any Buddhist.	Thangka painting; thangkas are an integral part of Mahayan Buddhism; a Bhutanese does not view a painting or a sculpture as a work of art—for him it is a religious work; many artistic styles of thangka painting—karma gardri style which has a Chinese	Thankgkas (religious scroll paintings) are one of the thirteen Zorig Chusum or the traditional arts and crafts of Bhutan. Bhutanese art has three characteristics i.e. it is anonymous, it is religious, and it has no aesthetic function. A Bhutanese does not view a painting or a sculpture as a work of art—for him it is a religious work ...

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			touch, Tshangdri style which originated in the Tibetan region of Tshang...	
Tashi Delek  Volume IX, No. 1 January-March 2004	i) <i>The Legends of Punakha</i> (p.32-36) - by Gustasp Irani	<i>Punakha Dzong and its place in Bhutanese legend and folklore.</i>	<i>The mortal remains of Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal; holy relic; eternal meditation ; nirvana.</i>	<i>No one is allowed to enter the sanctum except a handful of senior monks who treat the mortal remains (of Zhabdrung) as though he were still alive bringing him meals and all other means of sustenance; why the Bhutanese wear white sleeved robes...</i>
	ii) <i>In the Labyrinths of Trongsa Dzong</i> (p. 16-20) - by Danuta Zasada	<i>The legend of "Trongsa"; the name sounds curious: something exotic; may</i>	<i>Palden Lhamo— Bhutan's guardian deity; Lam Ngagi Wangchuk ; the</i>	<i>Traditionally dressed: gho; kera; kira.</i>

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		<i>be it refers to a musical instrument.</i>	<i>omnipresent smell of incense in the Dzong; Master of discipline.</i>	
<p><i>Tashi Delek</i></p> <p><i>Volume X, No. 1 January-March 2005</i></p>	<p><i>i) Ugyen Choeling Palace (p.7-10) - by the president of www.rainbowphototours.com</i></p>	<p><i>I found Ugyen to be a walking historical library of the Tang valley; the third floor houses a library comprising rare documents —of over 500 manuscripts and xylographs collected over generations .</i></p>	<p><i>Dorji Lingpa, the famous terton (revealer of treasures)</i></p>	<p><i>The rooms in Ugyen Choeling palace capture lifestyle in the palace household; artistic expression like weaving and wood-carving; specimen of rock salt, borax, dye and brick tea; saddle packs and horse bells; yarn and comb used in weaving, carpentry, wood-carving, leather processing, grain silos...</i></p>
	<p><i>ii) Laya - the Land of yak breeders (p. 28-31) - by T.S.Powdyel</i></p>	<p><i>Laya and in particular Bhutan has a reason to be grateful</i></p>	<p><i>The region in which the Zhabdrung arrived was Laya;</i></p>	<p><i>Worshippers of the dra-lha; the practice of polyandry; the women keep their</i></p>

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		to the fox for it helped Shabdrung Nawang Namgyel to arrive in Bhutan; as a tribute to the fox ...	the chorten with the footprints of Zhabdrung; Layaps and the old faithful hairy yaks.	hair long and wear peculiar conical hats, with a bamboo spite at the top, held on a beaded band.
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**Note:** Words and phrases in the table that describe cultural themes, ideas and concepts have for the most part been reproduced verbatim from the five articles mentioned in the table. For convenience of reading, quotations marks and Bibliography to source have been avoided. Also, minor adaptations have been done for convenience of grammar, without altering the sense.

**Guarding against Political Pressure**

The media’s role in public education, particularly in the political consciousness and decision-making domain is widely recognised. There seems to be very little discourse on its role in cultural education and consciousness, which is important for Bhutan. In the era of parliamentary democracy, it will be imperative for Bhutan to have an increasingly “active, engaged citizenry” who can “participate actively in public debates on policies and programmes” of the government (Dessallien 2005:73-74). The print media can provide active space for collective engagement in cultural discourse. The demand for representation of cultural aspirations will increase in the future, particularly in a democratic environment, as representation of interests and aspirations through the media is the “basis for any democratic culture and political system” (Splichel et al. 1993:3).

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A media impact study commissioned by the Ministry of Information and Communication in 2003 revealed that the impact of media was “visible in the social, cultural, and political aspects of Bhutanese life...” (Wangdi 2004:1). Minister of Information and Communication, Lyonpo Leki Dorji said that: “Coverage must be more comprehensive. There is a need for specialised media coverage for certain sections of the society” (in Wangdi 2004:20). Freedom of the press, as enshrined in article 7 of the Bhutanese constitution, says that “There shall be freedom of the press, radio and television and other forms of dissemination of information, including electronic” (Draft of the Tsa Thrim Chhenmo as on 18<sup>th</sup> August 2005:8) would tempt the print media to behave licentiously and forget their social and cultural responsibility and indulge in commercial and political sensationalism. This will be particularly true when political parties pressure the media to advocate and popularise their own agendas—social, economic, political, or cultural. This is where a strong media legislation and policy, understood and appreciated by the democratic polity, and independence of media in performing their roles in the full spirit of law, will be most critical. Culture, if the role of the media in this domain is not legislated, could become a victim of exaggerated portrayal of political stardom and muscle power, as seems to be the character of media in many democratic societies. A socially and culturally irresponsible media can contaminate the deeper aspects of culture through trivialisation and vulgarisation. The road ahead for print media in Bhutan, in this arena, looks good.

### Concluding Remarks

Literary heritage—in written and oral forms—spirituality and folklore form significant constituents of the Bhutanese cultural landscape whose values must continue to be recognised, understood and appreciated. For this to happen, space must be provided for the dissemination of cultural knowledge and information, for discourses on cultural concepts and themes, and for expression and articulation of cultural aspirations and desires. The print media, like Kuensel and Tashi Delek can be active agents that can facilitate this process, as it has a virtual

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*ability to enrich public culture and collective consciousness. The globalisation of English, and the powerful influence of the culture it imports with it, will challenge the values and attitudes that define Bhutanese society and culture. The influence of sensual materials imported through the mass media and through the powerful medium of English will indeed be deep and pervasive. And more so over time, if these external influences are not counterbalanced or mediated by an assertive projection of the Bhutanese culture. In a democratic setup the media will come under increasing pressure from political organisations and interest groups to advance the latter's interests and priorities. The temptations for the media to succumb to political muscle power for short-term gains will be high. The temptations will be more in the absence of media legislation and lack of support from the people. The prevention of vulgarisation and trivialisation of culture will be a big challenge for the government and the people. So the media cannot afford to work in isolation and in total independence of regulations and public opinion and support.*

*Kuensel and Tashi Delek are good examples of how the print media can help to educate the Bhutanese and outsiders on various aspects of the kingdom's cultural heritage through research publications, occasional papers, reflective articles, academic discourses, visual representations (e.g. Tashi Delek's "Glimpses of Bhutan"), and the like. This paper suggests that the government must institute a national award for excellence in cultural promotion (e.g. Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuk Award for the Advancement of Culture), contestants for which will include the mass media, writers, researchers, educational institutions from primary to university, NGOs, the entertainment industry, and others. Spiritual culture is a delicate and sensitive heritage, so efforts in dissemination and popularisation, especially through the mass media, may need learned discretion and wise handling. This may especially be so in case of the philosophical and mystical teachings and practices of Buddhism. Mindlessness may lead to vulgarisation of culture. Visual representations of the tangible aspects of spiritual culture done with care and discretion will help to express and articulate the heritage and make it more*

accessible to people. Kuensel and Tashi Delek can provide excellent archives for writers and researchers engaged in work on Bhutanese culture.

The younger generation needs intellectual feed that has cultural values and deep perspectives. The print media's role in educating young minds on the distinct manifestations of Bhutanese culture—be it the literary canons, spirituality, or folklore, will be immense.

Readers of the English edition of Kuensel, who responded to the questionnaire used to assist the writing of this paper, agree that the print media through their documentation and presentation of culture will help to expose and promote the Bhutanese cultural identity and uniqueness to the outside world. The influence on public culture of publications with small or specialised readership coverage, such as Tashi Delek, should not be underestimated, especially if the materials published are grounded in research and scholarship and their authors are of some repute. The tantalising title of R.A. Kocour's article "In a World Gone Mad, There's Still Bhutan" published in Tashi Delek (2003, July-September:10-21) caught the imagination of high school students, and many adults, who flaunted the phrase in their speeches and writings. Such is the influence of the print media.

The media must play a proactive role in the cultural sphere, as it will in the political sphere. This desire is in fact expressed unambiguously by the government when it links the media's role to the country's social, cultural and political imperatives: that the media in Bhutan must be conscious that "it serves a small vulnerable society that survives on the strength of a distinct cultural identity" and that it must be sensitive to the "cultural and social complexity in the environment of rapid political transformation" (RGOB 2005:52). Good actions can emerge from good intentions.

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## Relationship between Media and Buddhist Culture: The Case of Conch and its Colour

*Wangchuk Rinzin\**

The relationship between media and Buddhist culture are of the same nature, of cause and effect, and of the theory of interdependence. Like the conch and its colour, they are inseparable and cease to exist on their own.

Mgon po klu sgrub, the founder of Buddhist philosophy, while talking about the relationship between media and Buddhist culture, some 1900 years ago, had spelt out the following in his *Dbu ma rtsa ba shes rab*:

*rten cing 'brel 'byung ma gtogs pa//  
chos 'ga' yod pa ma yin no//*

All comprehensible phenomena are based on the theory of cause and effect and summarized in the three kinds of understandings (the non-living ones composed of numerous atomic particles; the living possessing mind capable of comprehension; and the neutral, a buffer zone between living and non-living). Yet their origin is inter-dependent. They are not born out of emptiness and cannot exist on their own.

Of the different views, as perceived by different schools of Buddhism and the scientists and heretics, which are innumerable, I intend to bring to light an array of views based on the general outlook of Mahayana Buddhism concerning the relationship between media and Buddhist culture. These views are something that we cannot do without, for not only realizing our present welfare but also for our ultimate realization of enlightenment. Just like the conch and its colour, media and culture are two inseparable entities. Therefore, I will summarize the relationship between media and Buddhist culture.

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According to the nature of phenomenal changes, media can be categorized as *rang bzhin khams kyi stobs las 'byung ba'i brda brgyud* (self-born and ultimate media) and *kun rdzob rten 'brel rdzas sbyor gyi nus pa las 'byung ba'i brda rgyud* (conventional media born due to nano-technologies).

As regards the self-born and ultimate media, an excerpt from rGyal tshab byams pa mgon po, in *Rgyud bla ma*, says:

*rdzogs sangs sku ni 'phro phyir dang//*  
*de bzhin nyid dbyer med phyir dang//*  
*rigs yod phyir na lus can kun//*  
*rtag tu sangs rgyas snying po can//*

From the tiniest of insects to Buddha *Amitabha* himself, all living creatures possess the seed of Buddha nature. All animals possess 32 marks of a great man and 80 physical perfections of Buddha. There is no difference in the Buddha nature of the divine beings residing in the Buddha land, and the ones who are cycling in the *samsara*. All animals residing in the six realms possess the seed of Buddha nature from times immemorial, and therefore, possess the potential of Buddhahood at all times.

Even, Lord Buddha himself was enlightened as *Dharma kaya* from primordial times. He, at all times, in his perfect abode of *Wogmin* or *Akanishta*. Through his perfect body, *sambokaya*, adorned with the 13 precious ornaments; the perfect entourage of disciples, who attained the ten stages of *bodhisattvas*; his perfect doctrine, the pure Vajrayana Buddhism; the perfect time, turning the wheel of Dharma at all times; and through the numerous and diverse manifestations, *Nirmanakaya*, he strives for the benefit of all sentient beings. This is what is called ultimate media.

The following lines from *Dbu ma* make it clear:

*slar yang mi gyo sku lnga khyod kyis srid gsum byon nas*  
*sprul mams kyis//*  
*gshegs pa dang ni bltams dang byang chub zhi ba'i 'khor lo*  
*'ang ston par mdzad//*

The Buddha, by nature, is stable and unwavering from the Dharmakaya, yet, through the media of the three kinds of

magical and miraculous exhibitions, through his numerous physical manifestations, while in the southern realm of human beings as a prince of King Zeytsang (Sudhodana) and Queen Juma Lhazey (Maya Devi), he acts as a protector and a source of refuge for the people, at the same time, gaining enlightenment in the western realm, and turning the wheel of Dharma in the eastern realm. Like Brahma, the king of gods, on the throne he is stable and unwavering, where, through his miraculous media of body, every god sees him/her at all times.

Through his miraculous media of speech, he preaches his doctrine to multiple audiences of gods, demi-gods, spirits, human beings and all animals; each of them hearing in their own medium of language, making it easily comprehensible while, at the same time, turning the wheel of Dharma.

Through his miraculous media of mind, like the wish-fulfilling tree of the gods and the precious vase which fulfills the wishes of all, the Buddha also, due to his past prayers for mankind and the power of his compassionately awakened nature, disappoints none.

Buddha, having known the grasping competence of different people through his clairvoyance, taught the *Hinayana* and *Mahayana* (as the two vehicles of Buddhism) options to people, to choose the best for them. To understand this miraculous nature of media is one of the guiding principles of Buddhist philosophy.

The Buddha and the Bodhisattvas (who have attained complete liberation from the cycle of sufferings) have abandoned the defilements of attachment, anger, ignorance, and the comparatively minute unidentifiable defilement of self-attachment and accomplished the knowledge of the past, present and the future as if in possession of the magic crystal ball.

These Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are born with the peculiarities of ultimate media, clairvoyance, and miraculous powers. These qualities are inborn in them. For example, the twelve activities demonstrated by Buddha Shakyamuni, for the benefit of all sentient beings, after his arrival in this *samsaric* world, are clearly mentioned in *Rgyud bla ma*:

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*Chos kyi sku las ma gyo bzhin//  
Sprul pa'I rang bzhin sna tshogs kyis//  
Skye ba mngon par mkhyen pa dang//  
Dga' ldan gnas nas 'pho ba dang//  
Lhums su bzhugs dang bltams pa dang//  
Bzo ba'I gnas la mkhas pa dang//  
Btsun mo'I 'khor gyi rol pa dang//  
Nges byung dka' ba spyad pa dang//  
Byang chub snying por gshegs pa dang//  
Bdud sde bcom dang rdzogs sangs rgyas//  
Mya ngan 'das par gshegs mdzad mams//  
Yongs su ma dag zhing mams su//  
Srid pa ji srid gnas par ston//*

Even though the basic nature of Buddha himself is immovable from the truth body (*Dharmakaya*), he, through his emanations of media skills or by exercising his divine power of sight, can foresee the sufferings of all kinds of living beings. Through his divine power of hearing, he can hear the sound of even the smallest insects and understand the different languages, both articulate and inarticulate, of all living beings. Through his knowledge of understanding others' mind, he understands the thoughts of all living beings. Through his miraculous knowledge, he knows the events of others' former lives and future possibilities of existence and also the circumstances under which he will die and be reborn. By exercising one's miraculous knowledge, it is possible to move one's body without being visible. He possesses the power of remembering the acts of one's former existence or lives. Exercising one's knowledge of decay and destruction, one can quickly attain the state of the omniscient by purifying oneself of all mental impurities. By exercising one's power of knowing all living beings, one can perceive the stages of one's moral perfection or culture.

Such an enlightened being, as Buddha, set foot on this earth. Using his miraculous power of ultimate media, for the

cause of the sentient beings, he firstly, had the noble thought of liberating all sentient beings. And to achieve this, he took rebirth in the form of noble kings, king of the different animals—the king of geese for instance—for five hundred generations. During these periods, he practiced and accumulated good merits through generosity, morality, patience, perseverance, and meditation. Through wisdom he accumulated the non-conceptual merits. He accumulated all the merits through three aeons. And from the joyful realms of the gods, in the form of an ash-coloured, six-tusked elephant, he entered the womb of Queen *sgyu ma lha mdzes*. After ten months the queen gave birth to Lord Buddha from her right ribs. No sooner was he born, he took seven steps in all four directions and then uttered the following line:

*Nga ni 'jig rten 'di nang mchog yin no//*

I am the most precious one in this world.

Henceforth, through his different deeds in the three realms, he demonstrated infinite miraculous emanations. They are all examples of ultimate media, devoid of its original nature, like magic and dreams. The Buddha himself said:

*Nga ni ci yang ma gsungs par//*

*Sems can rnams la khyab brdal snang//*

Neither was I born in this world nor had I attained enlightenment at Bodhgaya; I did not preach religion in true sense, but people heard a lot of teachings in their own capacities.

In Rgyud bla ma,

*Bde bzhin gshegs pa mkha' bzhin dam pa yi//*

*Dbang po drug don nyams su myong ba'I rgyu//*

Originally, the Buddha's nature is like an empty sky and his activities like clouds and rain. Likewise, whatever we see are the functions of six objects (form, sound, smell, taste, touch, and invisibility) and six subjects (eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind). These are demonstrations of the miraculous form of media used by the Buddha. For instance, in *Mkhas 'jug by 'jam mgon mi pham rin po che*:

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*Sangs rgyas phrin las rtag khyab lhun grub ste//  
Rnam par mi rtog bzhin du 'gog med snang//  
Gang zhig brgya byin mnga dang sprin bzhin dang//  
Tshangs nyid yid bzhin rin chen nor rgyal bzhin//*

And, in Dbu ma rtsa ba shes rab:

*Bdag las ma yin gzhan las min//  
Gnyis las ma yin rgyu med min//  
Dngos po gang dag gang na yang//  
Skye ba nam yang yod ma yin//*

Neither from oneself nor from another object,  
Nor from both, nor without any cause,  
Does anything whatever,  
Anywhere arise.

These are not originally conceived, but perceived by our senses. For instance, Brahma, the king of gods, can alone manifest into thousands of similar forms and through the big drum of dharma of the Gods, the gods can hear the teachings of their own choice through melodic sound, even though, it is no different emanating from the same drum. This is how I understand ultimate media.

I shall now talk about the conventional media. It is, of course, based on the Buddhist perceptions. In *Spyod 'jug* by *rgyal sras zhi ba lha*:

*Ji srid rkyen rnam 'tshogs gyur pa//  
De srid sgyu ma'ang 'byung bar 'gyur//*

All inner and outer phenomena are based on the theoretical media of cause and effect and the result is the information that is passed on. It is all interdependent. Hence, in the Buddhist perspective, interdependence is the ruling factor, which is also clearly mentioned in the teachings of Buddha and also in many renowned scriptures which ensued after the teachings of Buddha. All inner and outer phenomena originate due to interdependence. Had it not been for these cause and conditions, it has no entity of its own. It is not as if it suddenly falls from the sky and begins to exist

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on its own. According to *Mkhas 'jug by 'jam mgon mi pham rin po che*, all inner phenomena originate from the 12 causes and 6 conditions.

The 12 causes are:

Ignorance;  
Compositional factor;  
Consciousness;  
Name and body;  
Six sense-organs;  
Contact;  
Feelings;  
Desire;  
Sensual enthrallment;  
Procreation;  
Birth;  
Old age and death.

The six conditions are:

Earth;  
Water ;  
Fire;  
Wind;  
Sky;  
Consciousness.

The seven causes of the outer phenomena are:

Seed;  
Seedling;  
Leaves;  
Plant;  
Trunk;  
Flower;  
Fruit.

The six conditions are:

Earth;  
Water;  
Fire;  
Wind;  
Sky;  
Season.

To grow and develop from the seed to the fruits, the six conditions must work together. Only because of the presence of these media of cause and conditions and their dual efforts, does the seed grow and develop to a plant, grow flowers, and gradually bear fruits. The *Mngon pa* and *Mkhas 'jug* cite six objects, six organs and the six consciousness constituting the 18 elements, the presence of which results in the flow and communication of information.

For example, when we see the outer object as a beautiful form, the inner sense of sight perceives it as a beautiful form and the eyes see it so and we know what we see is a beautiful form. Conversely, if what we see is not something pleasant to look at, a similar message is conveyed and we don't appreciate what we see. Of course, what is beautiful and what is not lies in the eyes of the beholder. Similarly, if the object we see is neutral (neither good nor bad) our feelings also remain neutral. It is only the combination of object, organ and consciousness that gives rise to the flow of information and communication through the media mentioned above and the ones following hereafter.

Likewise, if we hear an external sound, the inner hearing perceives it as either pleasant or not, and the external organ (ear) hears it so. If the sound is pleasant we get a feeling of comfort and if otherwise, the feeling also reverses. Similarly, if the outer object is a smell, the inner sense of smell perceives it and the external organ (nose) smells it as either pleasantness or foulness. The feeling you derive again depends on whether the smell is foul or pleasant.

Similarly, if the outer object is the taste of any food or snacks, the inner sense of taste takes control and the organ of taste (tongue) feels the taste. The feeling you derive again

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depends on your choice and experience. If the outer object is touch, the inner sense of touch perceives and conveys the message to the external organ (skin) which comes in contact with the outer object.

Therefore, all the outer objects, inner sense and the sense organs must work together in a coordinated manner for the message to be passed. They are all interdependent on each other. Were they to exist on their own, they carry no functions yet when all of these work together, they become the integral part of our lives.

Lord Buddha said:

*Chos mams thams cad rgyu las byung//*

*De rgyu de bzhin gshegs pas gsungs//*

When all the causes and conditions of media are fulfilled, we are able to see with our eyes, hear with our ears, and feel with our hands. Today, with the help of television, radio, telephone, mobile, and magazines, among many, we are able to see different places at the click of remote controls, which are thousands of miles away beyond seas and oceans, with our eyes. We can have breakfast in New Delhi, lunch in Rome, evening tea in Europe, and dinner at New York in America. A wife in Thimphu can easily talk to her husband in Washington, and we can of course watch the World Cup football match in our sitting and bedrooms. In a way, these are all manifestations of the feats achieved by Lord Buddha some thousands of years ago.

What was thought to be impossible yesterday are possible today and what we perceive to be impossible today will one day become possible in the near future. Lord Buddha himself said;

*Ma 'ongs dus kyi mtha' ma//*

*Nga ni yi ge gzugs su byon//*

In the years to come,

I shall come to the world in the form of alphabets.

And as mentioned in *Mkhas 'jug*; the Buddha himself had promised of this unchangeable Vajra speech.

*Tshe dang dus dang nyon mongs dang//*

*Lta dang sems can snyigs lng'o//*

In the future, amidst change and development, the Buddha will take the form of words and pictures (what we today call television, newspapers, and magazines) in order to teach the sentient beings about the media propounded by Buddha himself. I feel that I may not have to go in much detail to explain this. Citing an example from the times of Buddha himself, Buddha was once requested by one of his principal supporters; King *gzugs can snying po*, to be allowed to make a life-like portrait of the Buddha. Buddha immediately consented and the best of all painters were summoned and involved in this noble venture. However, as experienced as these painters were, they were not able to get the correct measurements of Buddha's body features. It seemed to be growing on some days and shrinking on some other days. The Buddha then made a reflection of his body on the water and then asked the painters to draw based on the reflection. The images that we see today are a result of this media. The cause is Buddha's prayers, the condition the pool and the king's devotion.

Similarly, all these technological inventions which have become indispensable aspects of our daily lives are a result of the five hundred great prayers by Buddha when he was a bodhisattva in the service of sentient beings as mentioned in *Bzang spyod smon lam*. Of course, we find it difficult to believe and find explanations on many occasions. This is also evident in *Spyod 'jug*. How skillful and flexible a person may be, he can never climb on his own shoulder. We can see the outer world with our eyes but it cannot see itself.

Different mechanisms of media are inbuilt in human body. Therefore, Lord Buddha and his disciples *slob dpon phyogs glang* and *chos grags* stated in their valid cognizable treatise that what can be objectively visible is *mngon sum tshad ma*, what is invisible but can be conjectured through mental visualization is *rjes pa tshad ma*, and what cannot be

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conjectured but can be understood is *lung tshad ma* (through scripture). These three *tshad ma* help to communicate the phenomena of nature; whether they are what they are or not. *Tshad ma rnam 'grel* mentions the following, with regard to the above three:

*Tshad mar gyur pa 'gro la phan bzhed pa//*  
*Ston pa dbe gshegs skyob la phyag 'tshal lo//*

The four valid reasons support that Lord Buddha is the most supreme and perfect source of all logic. They include his awakening mind that strives to benefit sentient beings; teacher of all sentient beings; attainment of final realizations; and the supreme protector of all sentient beings. For instance, the presence of water birds indicates the presence of water; the smoke indicates the presence of fire. Such kind of media follows the right path that is vital for all people to tread.

Therefore, like the conch and its color, every phenomenon is interdependent and the moment they are separated, they cease to exist on their own. Today we notice a lot of new technological inventions. Just as the sun cannot be covered with our palms, we cannot stop these inventions. What is important is that these inventions be put to correct and useful purposes.

Chos rje rtsang pa rgya ras said:

*Legs pa'I phyogs su rten 'brel bzang po bsgrigs//*  
*Phun sum tshogs pa rang gis byas pas chog//*

To create right conditions for excellence,

Its good enough to do our best.

We do not have to go beyond ourselves to look for new ideas and inventions, it is all within ourselves. It is all a matter of discovering things within ourselves. If we work according to situations, all our efforts will bear fruits of success and accomplishment.

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# Cultural Imperialism and Linguistic Change: Impact of Cultural Imperialism on Dzongkha Borrowing

Kinley Dorjee\*

## Abstract

*In spite of substantial exertion by the government, school and language purists to refine Dzongkha, one still hears locutions such as: “Taxi thopchi-ga?” (Got a taxi?), “Party minjo - ga?” (Are you not going to party?), “Sha kg chi” (a kilogram of meat), and ad infinitum...*

*The interlocutors barely realize that they are employing lexical items that are borrowed from foreign languages to communicate in Dzongkha.*

*Language purists are concerned with this threat of linguistic imperialism, but the relentless pursuit of speaking pure Dzongkha seems to be problematic with many speakers. One of the main factors that trigger this trend is change—social and cultural change. As David Crystal (1987) rightly says, “Language would stand still only if society did.”*

*Languages are always in a state of flux, because societies are, and society entails one’s customs and practices, beliefs, attitude, way of life and the way people organize themselves as a group.*

*In this paper I intend to dwell on an investigation into:*

- Influence of cultural change on Dzongkha language;*
- Why does Dzongkha borrow words?*
- Sources of borrowing;*
- Types of borrowing- Loan words, loan blends, loan translation;*
- Cultural implications of borrowing in Dzongkha, and future prospects.*

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### **Introduction**

In general, people do not pay much attention to the behaviour of others, unless it is dramatically different from the norm. A person can continue doing something marginally odd for a long time, without calling attention to him or herself. However, once people notice the oddity, they tend to over-react. This phenomenon occurs with eating habits, cleanliness, dressing style, or other mannerisms. People either do not notice anything odd, or, if they do, they place the individual concerned into a category of deviant behaviour which probably exaggerates the situation considerably: “The boys dress up like *chhilips*”; “Dorji has started celebrating his birthday now”; “young boys and girls love to party these days”; “Karma’s house looks like an English home”.

The same thing happens with language. People either do not notice the minor deviation from the norm, or they over-react to it, and make comments such as: “Dorji uses lots of English words in his Dzongkha”; “Dema can never complete a Dzongkha sentence without an English word”; “Sonam speaks Dzongkha with an English accent”; “Deki always speaks in English and Nepali” (because she cannot speak in her mother tongue—Dzongkha), when they come across locutions such as: “party *minjo ga?*”; “*choe-gi gari* workshop-*na kegobey*”; “*choe-gi* birthday party *nam-mo?*”.

### **Society, Culture and Language Change**

Any living language changes with time. The phenomenon of language change probably gains more public notice and criticism than any other linguistic issue. Many of the changes are revealed when languages have written records. The best example of language change may be seen when one does a comparative study of Old English and Modern English. The widely held belief about language change is that change must mean deterioration and decay. Language purists do not welcome language change. But it’s evident from literature that there is hardly anything purists could do about change, because in order to stop language one needs to stop social

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and cultural change. Society and culture in turn entails peoples' attitude, taste, practice, custom, belief, peoples' way of life, and the way people organize themselves as a social group. As the speakers and their social environment and practice change, so do the words they use, both in form and meaning.

The following illustrations show how different foreign practices have contributed to change of Dzongkha at differing degrees.

A Waning Practice



Traditional Plough

An Emerging Practice



Power Tiller

In many regions in Paro and Thimphu the traditional practice of plowing land has been increasingly swapped with power tiller, which might trigger the loss of many Dzongkha lexemes such as: *khami*, *ngashi*, *thoop*, *shé*, *ngadu*, *doori*, *péshi*, *pétha*, *khakú*, etc.

An Obsolete Practice



Sang

The Current Practice



Kg

Unlike the ploughing practice, a borrowing of a foreign practice like this has brought about diminutive change in Dzongkha; *sang* is obsolete now, and it is replaced with the foreign word *kg*, thus the locution *maar sang chi* has come to *maar kg chi* (a kilogram of butter).

A Detested Custom



Traditional Dance

A Trendy Custom



Current Trend

Borrowing in the former two illustrations is purely due to technological development, thus triggered by the 'need-filling motive'. But in case of the third illustration it's a sheer

instance of admiration and high regard for foreign culture. This is apparent in every Bhutanese community and society, irrespective of education and social standing, thus driven only by the second type of motive for borrowing, called the 'prestige motive'.

### **Views on Borrowing and Language Change**

People have differing views on language change. Here are two of the contradicting views by two linguists on language change:

Time changes all things: there is no reason why language should escape this universal law.

- Ferdinand de Saussure.

Some method should be thought on for ascertaining and fixing our language forever... I see no absolute necessity why any language should be perpetually changing.

- Ernest Weekley

Singye Namgyel, (2003) found that the attitude of high school students on Dzongkha borrowing from source languages like Nepali, English, and Hindi as a deterioration to the national language. Now, this is paradoxical. Besides many other factors, adoption of foreign culture is one of the causes for language change, and there is a remarkably high tendency with the Bhutanese youth to emulate and acquire foreign culture. In fact, generally speaking, every community in our society: civil servants, students, parents, business men, or elite society, has a fondness for an exotic culture.

### **Borrowing**

Though all aspects of language structure and use (phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics) are subject to change, I shall restrict my analysis on Dzongkha lexical change as a result of borrowing.

According to S. Kemmer (n.d): "Loan words are words adopted by the speakers of one language from a different language." Many linguists use 'loan words' and 'borrowing'

metaphorically, though some others would refer 'borrowing' only to the 'process' of speakers adopting words from a source language into their native language, and 'loan words' to the borrowed items.

Linguistic borrowing is little different from ordinary borrowing, in that there is no literal lending process taking place. There is no transfer from one language to another, and no 'returning' words to the source language. They simply come to be used by a speech community that speaks a different language from the one they originated in.

### **Conditions for Borrowing**

In order for a language to borrow from another language certain conditions must be met. These are the conditions required in many of the instances of borrowing:

Two or more distinct languages come into contact.

As a result there is cultural contact.

Speech community is either bilingual or multilingual.

The speaker of the borrowing language must understand, or he thinks he understands the particular utterance in the source language.

The speaker of the borrowing language must have some motive, overt or covert, for the borrowing.

The first four conditions do not need much discussion, as these seem very apparent from our experience with language. The last condition is more difficult to understand, and deserves more insight. This condition may be further analyzed under 'reasons for borrowing'.

### **Reasons for Borrowing**

In many instances of borrowing, there seem to be two reasons: 'the prestige motive' and 'the need-filling motive'.

#### *The Prestige Motive*

People often admire and emulate exotic cultures. Given

an option to choose between attending a traditional ceremonial occasion and a contemporary dance party, many youth of today would prefer to attend the latter to the first. As in this respect, the speech of the exotic culture is also emulated and acquired. I presume 'prestige' as one of the motives behind Dzongkha borrowing many loan words particularly from English. This is even more obvious from the findings of Singye Namgyel, (2003).

In all of the respondents' attitudes English is regarded as a language of education, social status, social position, and prestige. Besides seeing it as the prestigious language, many informants regard English as the language of information technology, international lingua franca, and library language.

#### *The Need-filling Motive*

Modern education, technological development, international relation, trade and commerce, etc., could be some of the motives behind Dzongkha borrowing under the need-filling motive. When new experiences, practices, and items enter the language, these bring with them new loan words into the language system. The word *sang* 'weighing instrument' for instance, is becoming obsolete. People no longer say, "*maar sang chi*", 'one (measuring) unit of butter'. The phrase has changed to *maar kg chi* 'one kilogram of butter'. This is a distinct instance of how new experiences and practices replace the old word with a new loan word. We should not be surprised if *khami* 'plough' and *ngashi* 'yoke', as the traditional words related to the practice of ploughing the field with a pair of oxen, is slowly replaced by 'power tiller', because many farmers do not follow the traditional method any more.

Loan words from Hindi, Nepali, and also English, are borrowed to fulfill the need-filling motive. The informants of Singye Namgyel, (2003) seem to suggest that borrowing from Hindi and Nepali is for need-filling motive rather than for the prestige motive; as it is evident from their, "attitudes on other foreign languages":

"Nepali and Hindi... Our country is filled with foreigners,

so in order to deal with them I learn foreign languages.”  
(ID-382)

“Hindi, it is important as sometimes we have to deal with  
Hindu labourers.” (ID-420)

“It is an important language for us because we have often  
interaction with the Indians in terms of trade and even  
visiting... people visit India for business.” (ID-701)

The author, too, has reported that among foreign  
languages, Hindi was predominantly used as a language of  
business. Unlike English, Hindi and Nepali are regarded as  
languages of business and communication.

### **Some Examples of Dzongkha Loan Words**

As one walks down the street, travels in a bus, sits in a bar,  
listens to two old friends conversing, eavesdrops on a pack of  
women gossiping, or enters a shopping complex, one  
repeatedly hears exchanges with these locutions:

*Thimphu jomi taxi duga?* ‘Is there a taxi going to Thimphu?’

*Tæm mindu* ‘I have no time’.

*Pura zada.* ‘You can eat all’.

*Kho Mi paka yœ* ‘He is a good man’.

*Baza minju-ga?* ‘Are you not going to town / market?’

*sathay-gi pagarasi ma-thop* ‘I could not find my land-tax  
(paper) receipts’.

*Ema KG sum basho* ‘Bring three kilograms of chilly’.

*Gari mathop saa* ‘I didn’t get a lift’.

Words such as: *taxi, tæm, pura, paka, baza, pagarasi,*  
*kg, gari,* etc., are not native words. Many interlocutors barely  
realize that foreign loan words have been employed into their  
language system.

Like many other languages (with English as an exception)  
Dzongkha, too, is resistant to borrowing. Language purists  
make their utmost attempt to stop borrowing through ‘loan  
translation’. The general stance on Dzongkha borrowing is  
apparent from these resisting remarks by the two student  
informants in S. Namgyel, (2003):

“So we don’t speak fluent Dzongkha, English or Hindi, but it becomes a mixture. Sir, I think this (mixture) should be discouraged especially in the schools.... I think it will be very difficult for them to learn one proper language.”

(ID-704)

“Speaking other languages like Nepali, Hindi, etc., is damaging our National language more.” (ID-360)

### **Types of Borrowing in Dzongkha**

Depending on the degree of complexity of the two languages—the borrowing language (Dzongkha), and the source languages (English, Hindi, and Nepali)—different types of borrowing has taken place. Depending upon what aspect of the word is borrowed, borrowing in Dzongkha may be analysed as: ‘loan words’, ‘loan blends’, and ‘loan translations’.

‘Loan words’ are those foreign words borrowed into Dzongkha with the same ‘form and meaning’. Words such as: *taxi*, *tam*, *gari*, *paka*, and many more are borrowed in this manner. Thus, they are loan words. Many of these words undergo pronunciation change while others are borrowed without any modification.

‘Loan blends’ are little distinct from loan words, in that the former borrows the meaning and only a part of the form from the source language. In Dzongkha, *pagarasi* and *atali* are two examples of loan blends. In both, the meaning is borrowed from English but the forms are adapted to native words.

‘Loan translations’ occur when the morphemes in the borrowed words are translated item by item. In this type the meaning is borrowed from the source language, but the form is native. ‘Loan translation’ is what many language purists resort to when a foreign word is about to enter the language with the new practice or item. Dzongkha purists have been doing loan translation whenever a new item enters the language. Normally loan translation occurs with phrases and compound words.

The Dzongkha, *dem-dom* ‘post-box’, *jang-thong*

'television', *gelyong-sherig-pekhang* 'national institute of education', and *jithin-ang* 'telephone-number' are just a few examples of loan translation by the purists.

Loan translation, if not done in time, may not survive. The reason is that by the time loan translation is done the loan words would have deeply rooted in the language. They would have already completed the process of adaptation and naturalization. *Jang-thong* and *jithin-ang* are examples of such delayed loan translation. In spite of the native words, people still prefer the loan words (*TV* and *telephone number*) to loan translation. Such loan translations may hardly subsist in the future.

### **Phonological Mutation**

When a language borrows words, the phonological aspect of the word undergoes change. In the case of Dzongkha borrowing, I recognize three main factors for mutation of the loan words: phonemic inventory, syllabic structure, and consonant clusters/distributions.

The English 'free' /**fri:**/ has changed to Dzongkha *phi-ri* in *Ńgi Ńgowa chen chi phiri thop* 'if you buy two you get one free'. The first change, the change of the English voiceless labio-dental fricative, /**f**/, to the Dzongkha voiceless aspirated bilabial plosive, /**ph**/ is because of the first factor, phonemic inventory. In the Dzongkha phonemic inventory, there is no /**f**/ phoneme. As a result, it is automatically changed to the nearest Dzongkha phoneme /**ph**/.

The second change; change of the English monosyllabic /**fri:**/ to the Dzongkha disyllabic *phi-ri* is because of the second and the third factor. Dzongkha presumably has short monosyllabic words with CVC (consonant vowel consonant), CV (consonant vowel), and VC (vowel consonant) syllabic patterns with very minimum, and/or no, consonant clusters unlike English, ['strengths' /**streŋθs**/ (CCCVCCC),] which has as many as three consonant clusters. An extra vowel sound is inserted in between the consonant clusters to adapt the syllabic structure of the new word with the Dzongkha syllabic structure.

Other examples include; *i-si-ku-li* from English 'school' /**sku:l**/, ( no / **sk** / consonant clusters in Dzongkha).

Languages having similar phonological patterns are likely to borrow faster than languages with dissimilar phonological patterns. This may be one of the reasons why English could borrow more than 50 percent of its vocabulary from other languages.

### **Semantic Change of the Loan Words**

Borrowing often results in a semantic (meaning) change of the borrowed items. With phonological mutation the loan words also undergo semantic change. Loanwords like; *chuti*, *paka*, and *baza* seem to be having only the specific or literal meaning in Dzongkha, rather than the broad or metaphorical meaning of the source language. In Dzongkha the words simply mean; *holiday*, *good and market / town* respectively. In Hindi one could say; *mai tera chuti kardung ga* 'I will defeat / fix you' (in a game), *mai paka ayung ga* 'I will surely come,' and *bazari aurat* 'a cheap woman.' [By the way, the word *baza* has been borrowed indirectly from Persian via Hindi, which may be called indirect borrowing]. These metaphorical meanings seem to have lost in the process of borrowing. This is one type of semantic change called 'narrowing.' [The meaning is narrowed down to the literal meaning.]

Look at this sentence; *nga chœ-gi atali yin-nā?* 'Am I your servant?' The English word 'orderly' seems to have extended or broadened its meaning, and there is a shift in the meaning of the word. In English the word may simply mean, 'an attendant to a superior officer in the arm-force'. In Dzongkha, we often hear one friend, jokingly, remarking to other friend, *nga chœ-gi atali* 'I am not your servant'. This is a distinct case of semantic broadening/extension of the borrowed words. (The meaning is extended to a metaphorical usage.)

### **Repercussion of Dzongkha Borrowing**

I am always sorry when any language is lost, because languages are the pedigree of nations. -Samuel Johnson.

*Language Death*

By language death I do not mean the gradual alteration of forms and meaning of Dzongkha over time. It has to do with a more dramatic and less normal event, the total disappearance of the language. When a language dies, it is not because a community has forgotten how to speak, but because another language has gradually ousted the old one as the dominant language, for political and social reasons. Typically, a younger generation will learn Dzongkha from their parents as a mother tongue, but will be exposed at a young age to another more exotic and socially useful language at school and workplace.

In this situation, one of two things is liable to happen. The first possibility is that speakers of Dzongkha will continue speaking it, but will gradually import forms and constructions from the socially dominant language, until the old one is not identifiable as a separate language. This is in reality an extreme case of borrowing. Dzongkha might commit suicide. It slowly demolishes itself by bringing more and more forms from the prestige language, until it destroys its own identity. Language death is a social phenomenon, and is driven by social need and prestige. A socially prestigious language gets used in more and more circumstances, so that previously bilingual speakers have little opportunity to practise the old language.

*Cultural Impact*

Language is the basis of culture. If the language is lost, the culture is also in danger of being lost. And one's culture is the basis of one's identity: personal, social, national, thus there is a danger of one's identity being lost.

The answers to questions like: Who are you?, Where are you from?, What is your religion?, and many more, are often partially answered by what language one speaks. One would only have to speak to provide the interrogator with innumerable clues about one's personal history and social and cultural identity. The linguistic signals we unwittingly transmit about ourselves every moment of our waking day are

highly distinctive and discriminating. More than anything else, language shows we 'belong', providing the most natural badge of social and cultural identity.

### **Assumptions and Future Prospects**

Owing to the fact of the inevitability of human language change, I would assume the following prospects about Dzongkha:

Dzongkha will continue to borrow from foreign languages.

Dzongkha will go beyond lexical borrowing, and resort to syntactical and grammatical borrowing.

Loan words that are deeply rooted into our language and culture will persist.

'Loan translation' is a favourable substitute for loan words for cultural significance.

There will be a cultural misrepresentation and corrosion as a result of borrowing.

Excessive borrowing could result in language death.

### **Conclusion**

Elders may call it a decay, youngsters may take it as a fashion, and purists may show their utmost resistance, but changes in language (must) happen, as change means growth, vigour, and liveliness. Ernest Weekley has very rightly remarked this about language change, "Stability in language is synonymous with rigor mortis." So stability and constancy are signs of death.

Many loan words that have now entered Dzongkha would presumably persist, and thus become naturalized. Words like; *pagarasi*, *pura*, *chuti*, *gari*, *haaptha*, *atali* and many others are already naturalized, and are used very actively by different sections of the society. Words such as- *baza*, *iskuli*, *tam*, etc are in the process of naturalization. These loan words are used side by side with the native corresponding words; *thomhka*, *lobda*, and *duotsoe*, respectively.

Loan translation is one of the ways to resist to borrowing.

It needs to be done as soon as a new practice or item enters the language. If translation is delayed we would have the following results: *gari-numkhor* 'vehicle', *taxi-lhakhor* 'taxi', *delkhor-bas* 'bus', and many others. People do not use the loan translated words any more.

As a cautionary note to the language purists, it's worth mentioning about a bizarre situation in Kupwar, India. Gumperz and Wilson, (1971) found that in Kupwar (roughly 200 miles south-east of Bombay), three distinct language families, Indo-European and Dravidian came into contact. Three languages are in common use: Kannada (Dravidian), Urdu and Marathi (Indo-European). These languages have been in contact for more than six centuries, and many of the inhabitants are traditionally bilingual or multilingual. The Kupwar situation is strange, in that though the three languages were in contact for more than six centuries, borrowing of vocabulary has been rare, which is unusual, because vocabulary items normally spread easily. The language purists seem to have felt the need to maintain their ethnic identity by keeping separate words for things in different languages, due to social pressure. Meanwhile, the syntax (sentence structure) of all three languages has crept closer and closer together, so that now the Urdu, Marathi, and Kannada spoken in Kupwar are fairly different from the standard form of these languages, with Urdu in particular having changed.

When speakers become so resistant about lexical borrowing, language might resort to other types of borrowing such as: grammatical borrowing, semantic borrowing, and morphological borrowing. As one may have already noticed, the instances of intonation borrowing in Dzongkha from English:

*Tiru gon - na?* (With falling pitch on the question word 'na'),  
'Do you need money?'

*Tiru go?* (With rising pitch on the verb 'go'), 'Do you need money?'

The question word, 'na' in (1) has been disappearing in

many of the youngsters' speech, but the intonation on the verb, *go* in (2) is raised so as to appear similar to that of English:

You need money. (Falling intonation on 'money') – Statement.  
You need money? (Rising intonation on 'money') - Question.

The borrowing of intonation has been a current trend with young speakers. Elder speakers seem to be unaffected by this trend—*Tiru gon-na?* instead of *tiru go?*— with rising intonation.

Dr. Stephen A Watters in his paper “Property Concepts in Dzongkha” (10<sup>th</sup> Himalayan Language Symposium, 1<sup>st</sup> – 3<sup>rd</sup> 2004, Thimphu) has presented further interesting facts about Dzongkha borrowing in *Pasap* dialect under Chukha Dzongkhag:

*nga kho - lu ngo.she-θ* “I know / recognize him.”

I he DAT face.know (he's an acquaintance)

The Dative case ‘*lu*’ agrees with the *object* complying with the Indo-European (Hindi) agreement:

mai us- ko janta hun

I he- DAT know/recognize.

But in accepted (standard) Dzongkha the case agreement is with the subject, and it's a Nominative case as in (3):

*nga -gi kho ngo she.*

I NOM he know.

In a world where humans grow old, tadpole changes into frog, and milk turns into cheese, it would be strange if language alone remained unaltered.

Jean Atchison, (1986)

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## Roar of the Thunder Dragon: The Bhutanese Audio-visual Industry and the Shaping and Representation of Contemporary Culture

*Tshewang Dendup\**

A Bhutanese journalist recently remarked that these days, the phones don't ring, they sing. And when the phones do start singing, don't be surprised if it is a Bhutanese song coming out from the latest Motorola or Nokia phone tucked in the inner folds of the *gho* or a Gucci bag slung over a Hong Kong brocade *tego*.

Walk along Thimphu's Norzin Lam and try not to notice the huge posters announcing the screening of the latest film. Stroll further and the bustle of the street is laced with the sound of Bhutanese songs coming from the stereos and radios of shops and restaurants. So you might try to extricate yourself from this bazaar of sounds and symphonies and you hop into a taxi only to be greeted by the popular call in music request show of the Bhutan Broadcasting Service Corporation coming from the Maruti's stereo.

Whether traveling to Phuntsholing in a comfortable Japanese Coaster bus or watching TV at home, one cannot escape the presence of modern Bhutan's audiovisual industry. The songs being played, the films being screened, the albums being sold may not be, to the discerning critic, works of art worthy of appreciation or a review in the papers. However my argument is that they are being consumed by the masses and therefore the industry deserves a closer scrutiny as it both shapes and represents contemporary culture.

In the draft Constitution, Culture is covered under Article

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\* The author is a senior producer working with the Bhutan Broadcasting Service Corporation Ltd. The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not represent that of the BBSC.

4. The Article is reproduced here in entirety.<sup>1</sup>

Article 4:

The State shall endeavour to preserve, protect and promote the cultural heritage of the country, including monument, places and objects of artistic or historic interest, Dzongs, Lhakhangs, Goendeys, Ten-Sum, Nyes, language, literature, music and religion to enrich society and the cultural life of the citizens.

The State shall recognize culture as an evolving dynamic force and shall endeavour to strengthen and facilitate the continued evolution of traditional values and institutions that are sustainable as a progressive society.

The State shall conserve and encourage research on local arts, custom, knowledge and culture.

Parliament may enact such legislation as may be necessary to advance the cause of cultural enrichment of Bhutanese society.

The Bhutanese audio-visual industry plays a critical and important role in the creation of cultural products, which are consumed by the masses. The industry's significant role in the preservation and promotion of culture is worthy of state support. Although comprehensive data is not available on the industry, available data and anecdotal evidence prove that the industry is growing and playing its own role in shaping and representing contemporary culture in Bhutan

I shall now give a brief outline of some of the media in Bhutan linked to the audiovisual industry.

**Bhutan Broadcasting Service Corporation**

A prominent player in this field is the national radio and TV station, the Bhutan Broadcasting Service Corporation.

***BBS Radio***

The BBS Radio broadcasts in four languages from 7 in the

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<sup>1</sup> The Draft Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan.

morning to 6 in the evening. With its nationwide FM network<sup>2</sup> and a 50 kilowatt short-wave transmitter, the BBS radio's reach is unrivalled.

One of the major components of the BBS Radio content is music. All the four language services (Dzongkha, Sharchhopikha, Lhotshamkha and English) have dedicated music request shows, which cater not only to the nation but also have a listener base in the neighbouring countries.

From the volume of mail received by the different language services from their listeners, it would be safe to surmise that music shows could very well be in the upper ranks of the ratings.<sup>3</sup> As the national radio station, BBS Radio plays an integral part in the broadcast of music, taking works of Bhutanese singers and musicians right into the homes of thousands of Bhutanese households.

### ***BBS TV***

The BBS TV also has dedicated programs on entertainment. The *Trowa*<sup>4</sup> program features interviews with singers, musicians, actors, composers, directors and other performing artists. The *Trowa* Unit is also responsible for the production of music videos, which are popular with the viewers. BBS TV also buys music videos, films, serials and other products from private audio-visual firms. BBS TV broadcasts for ten hours a day and since the 20<sup>th</sup> of February 2006, has gone satellite. This would mean that at least 44<sup>5</sup> towns in Bhutan can now

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<sup>2</sup> The BBS Radio's FM network reaches all the twenty dzongkhags in the kingdom. BBS has a network of 5 FM transmitters and 19 FM transposers stationed in strategic passes across the kingdom enabling the station to relay its broadcasts to the 20 dzongkhags. BBS Radio's FM signal can be received in all the 20 dzongkhag headquarters. BBS Radio's FM signal reach on the national highway is estimated at 75%.

<sup>3</sup> The latest audience survey carried out by the BBSC is not yet made public.

<sup>4</sup> *Trowa* programs have featured interviews with musicians, singers, actors, producers and comedians. *Trowa* is broadcast on Wednesdays and Saturdays at 7.30 PM and Thursdays and Sundays at 8.30 AM.

<sup>5</sup> There are 44 cable operators in Bhutan according to the Association of Private Cable Operators. All cable operators in Bhutan are required to carry

## *Media and Public Culture*

watch BBS TV directly. Through its broadcast of programs and content related to music, films and drama, BBS TV has become a key player in the audio-visual industry of Bhutan.

### *Tshechus*

The annual *tshechus* held in different districts, towns and villages are also live venues of performing arts. Besides the religious ceremonies and dances, *tshechus* also feature the best of the community's performing artists. With thousands of tourists visiting the country each year, the *tshechus* are an effective platform to showcase the rich cultural heritage of the country. In fact, Bhutan's "unique culture" is the lead factor in attracting tourists. A study conducted by the Department of Tourism in 2004 found out that 34.4 percent of visitors were attracted to Bhutan because of its "unique culture".<sup>6</sup>

### *Cable Operators*

There are 44 cable operators in Bhutan. Out of these, 36 are registered with the Association of Private Cable Operators. While the cable operators have to feature BBS TV on their menu, some operators also have their own channel where Bhutanese content is featured. From older Bhutanese movies to latest music videos, these channels have also emerged as an outlet for Bhutanese music and films. Cable operators in Thimphu, Phuntsholing, Paro, Tsimasham, Wangdue, Punakha, Mongar, Samdrupjonkhar and Gelephu have their own channel. In Phuntsholing, Tshela Cable also has video on demand facility for customers.

### *Recording Studios*

While the BBS has a state of the art music recording studio, many private firms have set up their own business in Thimphu and other parts of Bhutan. It is estimated by

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the BBS TV channel on their menu.

<sup>6</sup> International Tourism Monitor. Published by the Department of Tourism, Ministry of Trade and Industry.

industry professionals that nine of these studios are well equipped and active in the business. Currently there is no record of the number of albums that have been released in the Bhutanese market.<sup>7</sup>

#### *Film Production Companies*

The first Bhutanese movie, “Gasa Lamai Singye” was produced by Ugen Wangdi of Ugetsu Communications in 1989.<sup>8</sup> From 1989 to the end of 2005, a total of 60 movies have been produced.<sup>9</sup> The Motion Picture Association of Bhutan, established in 1998 boasts a membership of 36 film production houses.

#### **Shaping and Representing**

A gentleman from India walked up to the stage in one of the bars in Thimphu. The musicians were ready to switch from Bhutanese *rigsar* to the presumed Indian taste of the customer. The musicians and the clients were treated to the Indian gentleman’s rendition of popular Bhutanese *rigsar* songs.

In Tawang, Arunachal Pradesh in India, promotional posters of Bhutanese albums and films adorn the walls of shops. Also available are pirated copies of Bhutanese music tapes.

These anecdotes show that the reach and the popularity of the offerings of the Bhutanese audio-visual industry is not only confined to Bhutan.

In Bhutan, Bhutanese songs dominate the repertoire of our school children. With the majority of the albums and films produced in Dzongkha, the role of the Bhutanese audio-visual industry in the promotion and preservation of the

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<sup>7</sup> There is an acute absence of data on Bhutanese music industry. The author is in the process of compiling a list of albums produced by the different audio-visual production companies.

<sup>8</sup> As accepted by the Motion Picture Association of Bhutan.

<sup>9</sup> Data provided by the Motion Picture Association of Bhutan. Please see Annex 1.

national language Dzongkha has been widely acknowledged.

The growth of the audiovisual industry according to Kinley Dorji<sup>10</sup>, the general secretary of the MPAB, has been very rapid. Of the 60 films that have been produced and the unrecorded numbers of albums released in the market, from the conceptual stage to the final production and even distribution, it is very much the work and the creation of the Bhutanese.

Bhutan's first film "Gasa Lamai Singye" is based on a traditional homegrown theme, a ballad. Bhutanese films that immediately followed, mirrored Bollywood and Hollywood films. But Ugyen Wangdi, of "Gasa Lamai Singye", himself, as the pioneer, would not condemn or criticize the quality of some of the films that came after. Filmmakers have to cater to the taste of the masses to survive in the business, he says but there is also room to evolve and inject originality and creativity from the vast pool of Bhutan's rich culture and tradition.<sup>11</sup>

The popularity of Bhutanese movies should not have taken us by surprise. After all, ours is a society and culture where the visual and performing arts is a key ingredient in our day-to-day life.

Khyentse Norbu who wrote and directed "Travellers and Magicians" has said that for "centuries Buddhism has adopted the method of statues and artistic representation in order to express messages of compassion, love, wisdom. Film could be seen as a modern day *thangka*, a traditional Buddhist painting. Film is one of the most powerful mediums that we have today."<sup>12</sup>

The Bhutanese film industry has pumped some 60 films into the market. And over the years, the avid moviegoer in Bhutan can notice a definite shift in the content and style of Bhutanese movies towards more Bhutanese themes and approaches rather a mere reflection of Bollywood and Hollywood. Many of the films released in the recent years are

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<sup>10</sup> Personal Communication.

<sup>11</sup> Personal Communication.

<sup>12</sup> [www.travellersandmagicians.com](http://www.travellersandmagicians.com)

based on local folklore, legends and history.

For example, “Dangphu”, with its story based on Bhutanese history, intended to be shot over 36 days, but required 30 more days of shooting because the producer Tobgay wanted to maintain the authenticity of his locale. The film, a historical testimonial of the difficulties faced by people from the burden of different taxes, impressed viewers with its setting, costume, music and authentic dialogue.

One of the most visual and active components of Bhutanese culture being regularly represented in film is textiles, described by many as a living culture.

From “Chorten Kora” to “Muti Thrishing”, the costumes in contemporary Bhutanese films showcase the finest of Bhutan’s traditional and modern textiles. The father of the lead actress wears his *lungserm* and the actress herself dons a *seshoo kira* with the latest *pesar* design, rendering the screen into a ramp to display the rich tapestry of Bhutan’s textiles and culture.

It would be important to note here that weavers continue to weave and thus keep a tradition alive not because there is a surge in demand from the increasing arrivals in tourism but because there is a demand from the Bhutanese people themselves. Watching a Bhutanese movie where the colors of the frame are enriched by the rich costume of the cast only enforces the living and evolving nature of our culture. This crucial component of our culture does not become a frozen anthropological entity but a living organism.

And it is not only textiles that get represented in the screen. This year’s box office hit was “Druk Gee Goem”, “Guest of Bhutan”. The film, set in the alpine region of northern Bhutan is a romantic comedy. The lead actor, a tourist on a trek, loses his way and injures himself. A yak herder rescues him. The yak herder lives alone in the wind swept pastures. The tourist is lifted by the yak herder and carried to the tent for care and nursing. The yak herder is a woman. The woman yak herder is also the producer of the film. “Druk gee Goem” was a hit at the box office in Thimphu

and ran from the 24<sup>th</sup> of March to 3<sup>rd</sup> May.<sup>13</sup> “Druk Gee Goem” is therefore important in its portrayal of women in Bhutanese society; independent, resourceful and strong enough to carry a New Zealander on her back.

In 2005, a group of young Bhutanese embarked on a month long tour of eight *dzongkhags*.<sup>14</sup> Under the auspices of the Youth Development Fund, this group called “Young People on Wheels” entertained people from Gasa to Dagana. Their activity was a noble one; to inform and educate the people on HIV/AIDS. Through songs and dances, skits and plays, they took the messages to a cross-section of Bhutanese society. They were accompanied by two leading Bhutanese singers, Nguldrup Dorji and Rinchen Namgyel. Everywhere the troupe went, they were welcomed by the people who came in droves to see them perform. This innovative approach to advocacy used popular Bhutanese songs and “pop singers” to catch the audience. The young people danced to Bhutanese songs set to funky modern rhythms. They wore their *ghos* and *kiras* and entertained the crowds with moves that were a fusion of the old and the new. Their act is a modern day manifestation of the young people of Bhutan trying to carve a distinct identity, an identity containing the essence of our tradition and the offerings of modernity. Significantly, the songs, skits and dances offered by the “Young People on Wheels” were a creation of this group of Bhutanese youth.

### **Opportunities and Challenges**

Bhutanese films have been shown from theaters and festivals in North America to plastic tents pitched in the paddy fields of Gom Kora in the eastern district of Tashiyangtse. *Rigsar* songs can now be downloaded from the web. You can walk into restaurants and bars in Thimphu and sing the songs of your choice with musicians in their *ghos* and *tshoglhams*. The

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<sup>13</sup> Dates courtesy of Mr. Karma, Manager, Luger Theater.

<sup>14</sup> “Young People on Wheels” was filmed and made into a documentary by Dechen Wangmo Roder, an independent filmmaker. The documentary, in Dzongkha and English, was broadcast on BBS TV.

film industry has also helped in spurring the sales and growth of the music industry. The sale of the soundtrack of “Muti Thrishing” has crossed the 12,000 mark.<sup>15</sup> Sales of the soundtrack of last year’s box office hit “Chorten Kora” are also estimated at 11,000 plus.<sup>16</sup>

From a total of 113 licenses issued by the ministry of trade and industries, 96 audio-visual production houses are still operational.<sup>17</sup> In 2005, at the Luger Theater in Thimphu, Bhutanese movies maintained around 80 percent domination over foreign language films.<sup>18</sup> The shelves of the music shops in Thimphu are filled with tapes and CDs of Bhutanese artists. Even in the bucolic setting of Tangmachu in Lhuntse district, Bhutanese audiotapes sit comfortably alongside dried fish and cooking oil bottles in the shops.

But the industry is grappling with a set of problems as unique as its content.

### *State Support*

The film festivals in the initial years were sponsored by the Dzongkha Development Authority primarily because the DDA recognized the role of the industry in the preservation and promotion of the national language, Dzongkha. This year for the first time, a private firm sponsored the festival and awards. Residents of the capital were treated to an open-air bonanza at the clock tower with the event featuring presentation of awards and multiple performances by leading Bhutanese artists.

Today licensed audio-visual houses can claim exemptions from customs duties and sales tax when importing audio-visual equipment. While the government charges a 30 percent sales tax on ticket sales of foreign language films at the Luger Theater, Bhutanese movies are exempted from this tax.

The Motion Picture Association of Bhutan is working

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<sup>15</sup> Information provided by TG Media and Infotainment.

<sup>16</sup> Information provided by Bhutan Multimedia

<sup>17</sup> Data provided by Ministry of Trade and Industries.

<sup>18</sup> Please see Annex 2.

towards gaining industry status. One of the immediate gains after obtaining industry status would be the easier availability of financing and loans for productions. In the past, Bhutanese producers have sold their businesses and mortgaged their land and property to avail loans for the production of their films.

The MPAB hopes that gaining industry status will also enable producers to insure their equipment. Some production houses have cameras worth Nu. 450,000.00

In May 2006, Bhutan hosted the first ever BIMSTEC ministerial meeting on Culture. The BIMSTEC group consists of Bhutan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Thailand. The ministerial meeting agreed to set up a Cultural Industries Commission and an observatory to promote cultural industries among member states.

Bhutan's Home and Cultural Affairs Minister Lyonpo Jigmi Thinley said the Cultural Industries Commission would help the Bhutanese film industry get a boost with the setting up of the commission as the films would get wider recognition and support from the region. The industry could also benefit from training opportunities in audio-visual industry in other BIMSTEC countries where they are already ahead in the field. The Commission, amongst others, is expected to frame supportive legislation and regulations and provide access to financing and loans for the industry.<sup>19</sup>

### *Screening Halls*

Bhutan has seven cinema halls; two in Phuntsholing, one each in Samtse, Gomtu, Samdrupjongkhar, Gelephu and Thimphu.<sup>20</sup> At the time of writing, there are five movies ready

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<sup>19</sup> Press Conference with BBSC and *Kuensel* Corporation, May, 2006.

<sup>20</sup> The Luger Theater was built in 1969. Plans are afoot to dismantle the theater and build a multiplex. The Luger Theater has 354 seats in the second class and 268 in the first class. The balcony seats 275. For the screening of Bhutanese movies, Luger Theater charges Nu.5,000 per screening (evening shows) in the first week. The rate drops to Nu.4,000 for the weeks after. Matinee shows are charged a flat rate of Nu.2,000. Ticket prices for the

for release and awaiting screening. Thimphu has emerged as the preferred choice for premieres of Bhutanese movies. The performance of the films at the Luger Theater as a central screening hall for Bhutanese films is a litmus test of how the film will fare nationally. With no other theatres in the capital city, the simultaneous release of these films for an eagerly waiting audience is not a possibility.

In the Bhutanese movie industry, the producer also becomes the distributor. The screening at Luger and other venues is an operation in itself. For the movie to hit the screen, the producer has to ensure that tickets and posters are printed, posters designed and staff hired to sell tickets among a host of other activities. Bhutanese movies are shot on digital video. The master tape is closely guarded. At the Luger Theater's balcony seating, a Digital Videocassette deck connected to a projector and sound system takes up seats in the front row with the producer or director or sometime even the cast seated near the projection equipment.

At the Luger Theater, "Chorten Kora" ran from 16<sup>th</sup> September to 23<sup>rd</sup> October.<sup>21</sup> The movie traveled to theaters in Phuntsholing and Gelephu. In Gomkora, Tashiyangtse, "Chorten Kora" was screened in a makeshift tent pitched in the paddy fields.

Residents of Paro will soon get a private theater where they can watch films and other performances. The MPAB, through the support of the BCCI has approached the Ministry of Works and Human Settlement for the allocation of theater space in the urban areas. The MPAB has already received applications from Bumthang and Chukha.

### *Piracy*

Tobgye of Mila Communications once sent 12 DVDs of his

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balcony seats for Bhutanese movies range from Nu.80 to Nu. 100. First class tickets range from Nu.60 to 50 while second class tickets have been priced at Nu.50 to 40. In contrast, the ticket prices for foreign language films at Luger are Nu.20 for balcony, Nu.15 for first class and Nu.10 for second class.

<sup>21</sup> Dates courtesy of Mr. Karma, Manager, Luger Theatre.

film, Kangyel through a friend who was traveling to India. The friend was told to sell the DVDs in Dharamshala and Dehradun in India where there is a sizeable Tibetan population at the wholesale rate of Rs.250. The DVD retails in Thimphu at Nu.300 per copy. The friend came back with all the 12 DVDs. Pirated copies of the DVD were available for Rs. 150.<sup>22</sup>

This spurt in the piracy of Bhutanese movies has deterred Bhutanese producers from releasing their films in DVD and VCD and other formats. Video rental shops in Thimphu do not stock a single Bhutanese feature film.

For the music producers, the lack of an institutionalized distribution system also contributes to piracy of their albums and hence the resulting delay in the distribution is a perfect scenario for pirates to penetrate the market.

The MPAB has been discussing the issue of piracy with the Intellectual Property Division of the Ministry of Trade and Industries. The first copyright law of Bhutan was brought into force on the 17<sup>th</sup> of July 2001 but the industry is still looking at ways, including collaboration and partnership the IP Division, to fight the scourge of piracy.

### **Conclusion**

Worldwide, films and music are powerful tools that shape and represent cultures. After the arrival of TV in 1999 there has been a significant growth in the Bhutanese audio-visual industry. A look at the audio-video and film production licenses issued by the Ministry of Trade and Industry shows that a majority of the production houses and studios came up after 1999. With technology becoming more affordable and better by the days, the industry can only grow further.

The National Assembly of Bhutan's 85<sup>th</sup> session is presently underway. One of the bills to be tabled at the parliament is the Media Bill.<sup>23</sup> Bhutan already has two private

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<sup>22</sup> Personal Communication with Mr. Tobgye of Mila Communications.

<sup>23</sup> The draft Media Bill is available on the website of the Ministry of Information and Communications at

newspapers. Once the media bill is passed, it will pave the way and give the green light to private radio and TV stations.

In these changing circumstances, Bhutanese artists, actors, musicians, technical professionals and the audio-visual production houses will have a bigger stage of operation.

Behind the BBS building, construction is underway for a multi-million Ngultrum state-of-the art TV station. By 2007, BBS Radio will start broadcasting on a digital short-wave transmitter twice as powerful as the present 50 kilowatt one. The FM network, which already reaches all the 20 districts in Bhutan, will be further strengthened.

The General Secretary of the MPAB Kinley Dorji says the most critical and important factor spurring the growth of the audio-visual industry is the support from the Bhutanese audience and consumers. The price of tickets for Bhutanese movies and audio tapes and CDs which is higher than foreign language films and albums, have not deterred the masses from soaking in the offerings of the Bhutanese audio-visual industry.

The Bhutanese audio-visual industry, while it waits to gain industry status, continues to blaze forward. In the process, the industry has played its own significant role in shaping and representing contemporary Bhutanese culture, even preserving the traditional and cultural heritage of the country.

While further state support would propel the growth of the industry, the hope would be that the benefits would also trickle down to the consumers. A close collaboration between the state and the industry could lead to more Bhutanese being able to access the products of the audio-visual industry. For the masses that continue to support the industry, the state and the industry could also look at ways to reduce the prices of the tickets and albums.

As a new media, the audio-visual industry is today proving to be an effective platform for Bhutanese artists to

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<http://www.moic.gov.bt/pdf/bicmact.pdf>

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represent the country's culture in a uniquely Bhutanese way and warrants further support and encouragement from the state.

**Annex One**

List of Films produced till 2005 provided by Motion Picture Association of Bhutan

*Films produced before 2001*

Gasa Lami Singye  
Miye Dungyel  
Goukor  
Phama  
Jigdrel  
Senten Zuki  
Bu Tashi  
Tshengoen Laythro  
Atta Khawjay  
Rangdroel Yangdoen  
Khorwa  
Rewa

*2001 films*

Tsewai Phama  
Thruelshi  
Jigten Semgi Thruelnang  
Lungten  
Sergi Chompai Metto  
Ngendrog  
Kangyel  
Chepai Bu

*2002 films*

Tshangpa  
Choe Dang Jigten  
Sampau Rewa  
Nganrog Tsedungchen

Lay Dang Moenlam  
Dungshi Baw  
Tago

*2003 films*

Khorwa 2  
Khachem  
Ashi  
Travellers and Magicians  
Hingtam  
Tsheyi Lhamo  
Yue Gi Bum  
6 Boys  
Sherig Yenten  
Khorwai Melong  
Nyenda Dra  
Yeshi Khandro/ Yue Gi Bum 2  
Baap

*2004 films*

Hingtay Pai Bhu  
Wai Charo  
Lay Gi Lung  
Hingi Nazu  
Lhadar Gaw  
Appa  
Lengo  
Sem Nginggi Charo

*2005 films*

Muen Sel  
Jigthar  
Kikhor  
Chorten Kora  
Ray Moen  
Ratho Namgay  
Perfect Girl/ Muti Thrishing

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Dangphu  
Mitshe Throthue  
Logyoe

**Annex Two**

List of Films screened at the Luger Theater in Thimphu in 2005.

	Lengo	31 <sup>st</sup> December to 30 <sup>th</sup> January 2005
	Bu Yonten	12 <sup>th</sup> February to 20 <sup>th</sup> February
	Wai charo	3 <sup>rd</sup> March to 13 <sup>th</sup> March
	Hingtam	25 <sup>th</sup> March to 5 <sup>th</sup> April
	Chepai Bu	6 <sup>th</sup> April to 12 <sup>th</sup> April
	Muensel	14 <sup>th</sup> April to 8 <sup>th</sup> May
	Jigthar	20 <sup>th</sup> May to 12 <sup>th</sup> June
	Kikhor	1 <sup>st</sup> July to 1 <sup>st</sup> August
	Raymoen	21 <sup>st</sup> August to 15 <sup>th</sup> September
0	Chorten Kora	16 <sup>th</sup> September to 23 <sup>rd</sup> October
1	Lengo rescreening	24 <sup>th</sup> October to 2 <sup>nd</sup> November
2	Tarayana film medley	3 <sup>rd</sup> November to 9 <sup>th</sup> November
3	Muti Thrishing	10 <sup>th</sup> November to 22 <sup>nd</sup> November
4	Ratho Namgay	28 <sup>th</sup> November to 11 <sup>th</sup> December
5	Dangphu	11 <sup>th</sup> December to 2 <sup>nd</sup> January 2006

Information courtesy of Mr. Karma, Manager, Luger Theater.



## **The Microsoft Unlimited Potential E-centers in Bhutan: Using ICT for development**

*Lektsho Yangden Dorji\**

### **Abstract**

*This paper will present the potential effects specific to the Microsoft Unlimited Potential community E-centers, as a creative and innovative Information and Communication Technology (ICT) solution to rural development in Bhutan.*

*It will also explore the impacts that Information and Communications Technologies (ICT) have on four other aspects of development, namely economic growth, political evolution, good governance, and gender equity.*

*While evaluating the impacts of ICT in general and E-centers in particular on development in Bhutan, this paper will concentrate on the potential value of ICT as agents of change in enabling development, based on the past experiences of such use of ICT in other developing countries.*

*This paper will also argue in favour of the use of ICT to serve broader development purposes in the ongoing debate about the need and effectiveness of ICT in the developing world, where it has been argued that other areas such as health care and education deserve higher priority.*

### **Information and Communications Technology in Bhutan**

The reach of media and information across Bhutan, especially in the rural villages, is scarce and difficult as its population is scattered across a mountainous terrain. Yet, the Bhutanese government is aware of the tremendous impact Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) have in enabling development and the need to utilize the resources that ICT

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offer that can benefit her people and begin Bhutan's integration in the global knowledge economy. As a result, several policies have been put into place, which reflect this growing sensitivity to the role ICT play in development efforts. The Bhutan ICT Policy and Strategies document lists, among significant policies: the Telecommunications Act; the Copyright Act; and an Information, Communications and Media Act; all of which serve to strengthen the regulatory environment in which ICT can be used and developed.

In terms of infrastructure, Bhutan's current teledensity has been estimated at 4.3 percent nationally, with a significant discrepancy between urban (15%) and rural areas (1%). Teledensity in an area measures the number of landline telephones in use for every 100 individuals living within that area. A teledensity that is greater than 100 means that there are more telephones than people. The ICT infrastructure backbone of the country lies in an East-West microwave radio, which is further connected to the Indian border through an optical fibre link.

In terms of international connectivity, Bhutan is connected through a satellite earth station in Thimphu to the rest of the world. In addition, all the district headquarters are connected to each other either via the microwave backbone or through the radio links. There also exist cable TV networks operating throughout the country and plans to connect all villages in the country through telephones (BIPS, 2004).

The above scenario shows that rural communities are connected not only to one another but also to the wider world. How Bhutan exploits this connectivity for its development is now the interesting and important question to consider. However, before looking into ways in which Bhutan may employ such connectivity for its development goals, it is helpful to understand ways in which ICT can impact development.

### **ICT and Development**

There has been much emphasis on the need to close the 'digital divide' in the developing world in order to allow the

benefits of ICT to seep in and ultimately alleviate poverty in the developing world. The closing or widening of the 'digital divide' however, is not an effective measure of the success of ICT in a country if one heeds McNamara's (2003) view that such measures are at best 'proxies' for the more significant impacts ICT have in a country. Based on a concept of ICT as a tool that enables change, more appropriate and informative indicators would be what has been termed as 'indicators of change', such as increased efficiencies in markets and governments, improved performance of the economy, higher rates of literacy, and fewer number of diseases in communities with access to ICT. It is through changes such as these that we fully appreciate the role of ICT in enabling development.

Such indicators of development provide a more holistic and perceptive approach when assessing the real value ICT have on a country. However, at present the impacts of ICT in a country are assessed largely by simplistic measures such as the number of PC per household or the bandwidth in a country. For example, foreign firms and companies decide whether or not to make an investment based on such indicators. In either case, whether the impacts of ICT are measured through qualitative or quantitative indicators, the need for ICT indicators and the use of these indicators in affecting economic growth, and thereby development efforts, reflect the growing importance attached to the value of ICT penetration in a country.

In this paper, I employ qualitative indicators to depict the impact ICT have in assisting various fields of development, since the application of ICT must be viewed in a broader context if it is to successfully influence development and not just 'decrease' the digital divide.

This paper recognizes that there has been, thus far, no significant methodical study on the role of ICT in assisting development, with most of the literature being anecdotal accounts and not based on precise indicators of success. The relatively early introduction of more advanced ICT such as computers and Internet access in developing countries has also been an impediment in assessing impacts of ICT in

development. There is, however, compelling evidence in the form of comparative studies, anecdotes and accounts of lessons learned, suggesting the multi-layered and widespread role of ICT in ensuring development. It is based on such evidence that I examine how ICT can act as agents of change in various fields of development.

### **ICT and Economic Growth**

The integration of the global economy after the cold war, in the new era of globalization has brought about tremendous change in the way we acquire information, in the way we do business and in the way governments and other institutions operate.

Local economies are increasingly affected by global trends. Even in Bhutan, the tourism industry suffered a setback after the 9/11 terrorist attacks in New York City. Increasingly it is not local governments or local environments that impact the economy but events happening thousands of miles away in distant countries. The impact of the attack in New York City provides an example of globalization and the reach of globalization in every corner of the world. Globalization has been facilitated through advances in ICT which have eliminated barriers of time and distance and increased access to global markets. This access to global markets is rendered possible through what Friedman (2000) calls “the democratization of information”. The democratization of information refers to the ability of every consumer who is connected to the Internet to have instant access to the information they require, whether it is information on interest rates, value of stocks and bonds, or government forms. This manner of doing business has revolutionized the economies of the developed countries, through increased efficiency, transparency, and competition.

Similarly the economies of the developing countries can benefit from the use of ICT, thereby resulting in increased information flows in and out of domestic economies and improvement in the efficiency and transparency of the economy, both of which render the economy more competitive

and responsive. The access of local economies to global markets is dependent on the ICT infrastructure of a country. It is therefore vital that there are adequate ICT not only to increase the efficiency and transparency of the economies, but to diversify the economy through increased access to global markets for various commodities and services and additionally to render the economy more alluring to investment from foreign firms and companies through foreign direct investment, in order to ensure sustained and rapid economic growth.

Developing countries, including Bhutan are liberalizing their economies and opening up to foreign investment. In today's globalizing world, this is more of a necessity than a choice, if one is to ensure sustained and rapid economic growth. This can occur only if the economy is attuned to the business practices of the developed countries, where ICT are employed to ensure maximum efficiency.

Therefore the important correlation between economic growth and ICT penetration in a country must not be undervalued, if an emerging economy is to maintain consistent growth.

#### **ICT and Political Evolution**

ICT can play a vital role in the political processes in developing and developed countries by fostering participation, empowering citizens by informing them of their basic rights and providing a voice for the disenfranchised. In rural communities, the effectiveness of ICT becomes all the more apparent since rural communities are often isolated and marginalized when it comes to accessing information and communicating their needs and interests.

ICT provide a mechanism for citizens to express their opinions and concerns, thereby helping to ensure that their voices are heard in decision-making processes about policies that affect them. This can lead to governments and institutions becoming more responsive to the needs of the people they're serving. ICT offer the additional advantage of allowing diverse views to be heard. The Internet, for example,

with websites that communicate information indiscriminately, provide differing and dissenting views about political or social issues such as gender equity and environmentalism.

ICT will have a particularly large and meaningful role to play in Bhutan's democratization process. ICT in the form of print and broadcast media as well as Internet news websites can serve to ensure accountability in governments, increase participation at all levels of society, and enhance public debate through the inclusion of diverse views. For example, the recently launched website of the Anti-Corruption Commission in Bhutan provides a forum whereby corruption and abuse of power can be instantly reported, anonymously if preferred. This strategy is expected to go a long way to improving citizen participation and boosting public debates.

The media, as ICT tools assisting Bhutan's democratization process, will not be limited to providing information but will shape public opinions on political and social issues. In this context, the diversification of media sources in Bhutan, with the introduction of two privately owned newspapers in addition to the only newspaper *Kuensel*, provides an opportunity for varied reportage, presenting different stances on political and social issues, and offering readers an interesting mix of opinions which should ultimately help them shape their views in informed and reasoned ways.

An important consideration noted by McNamara (2003) is that "thoughtful government policy and smart regulation" should not be eliminated with the possibilities presented by ICT and by liberalization and privatization of the media sector. Here again, we see ICT as an enabler, as tools for further use under a broader context.

### **ICT and Good Governance**

Achieving good governance requires efficiency, accountability, and transparency in the day to day functioning of governments. ICT can help create more efficient and effective governments in developing countries by easing administrative procedures, by improving information flows within and

outside governments as well as exposing government officials to global knowledge relevant to their fields.

In developing countries, information flows within governments are very poor, compounded by rigid bureaucratic procedures that render access to information very difficult. ICT can improve this access, with information being digitized and made available online. Bhutan has begun the process of information sharing in the government. The commitment to information sharing in the government in Bhutan has been reflected in an important policy document, the Good Governance Plus document.

Administrative procedures in governments in developing countries are extremely time-consuming and imbedded in bureaucracy. The automation of administrative procedures renders governments much more effective and efficient. It could also help deter corruption, since government documents, registration forms and permits will no longer have to be administered through a bureaucrat but will be easily available online (McNamara, 2003). This is of particular relevance to improving the government procedures of developing countries like Bhutan, where farmers have to walk miles to get a permit to cut trees for their own consumption, where entrepreneurs need to go through several bureaucratic procedures to register a business, and where visitors take weeks to process visas to enter the country.

Governments who are under obligation to share information will be forced to be more transparent, for example about information about resource allocation or policy decisions. The sharing of public information can empower citizens and make governments more accountable and less susceptible to corruption.

However, the ways in which governments respond to these new technologies are beyond the influence of ICT. Several governments with hierarchical structures and rigid bureaucratic cultures have faced sizeable resistance to the effective use of ICT in governments according to a 2003 synopsis on e-Governance.

### **ICT and Gender Equity**

The introduction of ICT in developing countries, more prominently so in countries in Africa, brought about the realization that ICT can be used as a productive resource, the same way land and capital are used as productive resources (Hafkin, 2000). The access of women to ICT is crucial to empower women, in much the same way that access to other resources empowers women because they acknowledge and support women's economic and political roles.

However, women's access to ICT is not assured. Growing evidence suggests that ICT are not gender neutral, although many proponents of ICT have emphasized their 'liberating potential' and their ability to surmount hierarchical social structures. Women are constrained because typically they do not have the time, knowledge, or income to access ICT and benefit from them.

According to Rathgeber (2000), one of the ways of addressing this disparity in the access and use of ICT by women is by incorporating a gender dimension in ICT policies. For example, software could include gender-sensitive content and information relevant to women's needs. Information could also be designed in ways that are accessible by non-literate women.

In developing countries including Bhutan, women's access to ICT could mean that women will be better informed about farming methods, public health issues, and government procedures available online. In addition, access to information could empower women by giving them a political voice and thereby ensuring that their opinions and interests are heard.

In Bhutan, the government is committed to enhancing gender parity. The decision by the Bhutanese government to bring state parties to the "Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women" attests to this commitment. Evidence indicating the unequal access of women to ICT in other countries must provide cues to the additional attention needed in Bhutan in devising strategies to addressing disparities in women's access to ICT, whether it

is through developing original software, relevant content or creating awareness.

### **E-centers in Bhutan**

Numerous developing countries, in particular in Africa and the Indian subcontinent, are experimenting with community E-centers to increase rural communities' access to ICT's. Community E-centers were envisioned to empower rural communities through the dissemination of vital information and knowledge, whether in farming techniques, distance education, or citizen rights. Similarly in Bhutan, the Department of Information and Technology is collaborating with several international partners and governments to introduce community E-centers in the country. Under the Microsoft Unlimited Potential project, a total of 60 community E-centers will be established, concentrated mainly in rural villages, in regions with low population density and low purchasing power, where Best and Maclay (2000) report that the services of ICT are generally unavailable mainly because they are beyond the reach of commercial interest.

The Unlimited Potential project will thus support the changing media landscape in Bhutan from a traditionally passive recipient model in which community members received information largely through the radio to a more proactive and consumer-oriented model with community members becoming involved in the process of acquiring and shaping their information needs through the community E-centers.

A comprehensive study assessing the definite impact of the community E-centers on socio-cultural, economic, and political spheres in Bhutan will require a prolonged period of time and is still somewhat an early undertaking at this stage of the implementation of the various E-center projects. However, potential effects of the E-centers are predicted in this study, drawn mainly from direct observations during field studies in India undertaken by the author and on studies reporting the E-center experiences of other developing countries, so as to understand and recognize the ability of E-

centers in facilitating and supporting rural development in Bhutan.

### **Potential Impacts of E-centers on Rural Development**

Before pronouncing the potential impacts E-centers can have in assisting rural development, it is worthwhile to understand the components of poverty that could be affected by ICT so as recognize the potential role E-centers could play in supporting the rural poor and rural development.

McNamara (2003) studied the poor and found that they lacked information about significant aspects of their lives. He concluded that increased access to information about resources, job opportunities, markets, and prices could lead to the betterment of their livelihoods. The poor also lacked access to essential knowledge such as knowledge about disease prevention, agricultural methods, and environmental management. All of this information, which is vital to the improvement in livelihoods of the rural poor can potentially be accessed in rural communities through E-centers, if E-centers provide content relevant to local need.

The poor studied by McNamara also lacked power and influence in government and the private institutions that affected their lives. E-centers would provide opportunities for rural communities to voice their opinions and interest through interactive websites, debate forums, and Internet polls.

This lack of access to basic information and to communications that could considerably improve the livelihoods of the rural poor and the lack of voice and power to shape the decisions that will affect them, has been characterized by Amartya Sen (1999) as “the lack of opportunity to make the choices that constitute freedom”.

We can thus conclude that the lack of information which could be accessed through ICT exacerbates poverty. This is because if information flow to the poor is restricted, then information about job and income opportunities, crop prices, better agricultural techniques, as well as public health information remain inaccessible, aggravating their

impoverished status. The larger environment of the poor is also affected by the lack of information and access to ICT. For example, an economy with limited information as was discussed earlier in the paper, functions poorly since lack of information and communications adversely affects investment. Lack of information due to inadequate ICT can augment the inefficiency and lack of transparency of institutions, government or private, rendering them more susceptible to corruption.

E-centers seem to provide the potential for an effective solution to the complex predicament facing the rural poor, which is often exacerbated by lack of access to vital information. There are many ways in which community E-centers can address this predicament, whether it is by giving them a political voice through E-governance, or by helping them boost the local economy through E-commerce, or by improving the health of the community through access to public health information.

One of the potential benefits of E-centers in rural communities in Bhutan is that they will help build on the government's political decentralization process through E-governance. While this process might take many years to come into effect, community members will be able to participate in decision-making that affects their livelihoods through increased access to vital information through their community E-centers. This will become all the more important in Bhutan with the introduction of parliamentary democracy in 2008, where an effective community E-center can offer much needed public information, rendering the functioning of the government more accountable, transparent, and efficient with information being readily accessible to the public.

In addition, as Hilda Munyua (2000) aptly notes in her paper, in which she examines the impact of information and communication technologies on rural development and food security, having access to information could affect the way communities formulate policies and execute them, since an informed and educated community would be able to formulate better policies and strategies.

Having access to information online can also be translated into economic gains, as can be seen in developed countries where electronic commerce means the transactions of multi-million dollars deals online (Gurstein, 2000). It is evident from the dominant role that E-commerce plays in the present global economic scenario that rural economies could substantially benefit from the opportunities that E-commerce presents. For example, farmers in South India have online access to the various prices offered for their agricultural commodities such as vegetables and grains at their community E-centers, thereby enabling them to sell their commodities for the best price.

While the use of E-commerce could seem a little premature in Bhutan at this stage because of the relatively underdeveloped local economy, in the future years, it can be expected that community E-centers will become a hub of commercial activity with the export of traditional Bhutanese artifacts, textiles, and agricultural goods and the provision of tourism services. The rural communities could, in addition, use the services of their community E-center for managing their businesses through book-keeping and accounts management.

Other benefits of the community E-centers are that they could be used to improve existing services in health and agriculture. Community E-centers can help educate the public and disseminate information regarding public health through interactive multimedia animations designed for such purposes. In a village in Chennai, the author observed that the community E-center served as a facility for telemedicine where a patient's basic vital signs such as heart beat and blood pressure were taken and sent, along with other information about a patient's medical history, to a doctor who was thus able to 'examine' the patient virtually. Such usage of the community E-centers in Bhutan could prove to be particularly beneficial considering that the reach of the medical experts in rural communities is quite limited.

Other significant advantages of the E-centers will be their potential effect on agriculture, which is the mainstay of rural communities in Bhutan. E-centers can work with the current

agricultural extension units in providing knowledge about the best global practices in order to increase and contribute to the community's knowledge about farming techniques, agricultural practices, seed varieties, soil management, pest control, and diseases, as well as agro-meteorology.

In Trivayaru, in South India, farmers consult their community E-centers in the event of a disease outbreak. If the information required is not available on the local website which contains general information, questions are transferred to an agricultural scientist through video-conferencing.

Another positive impact of the community E-centers, as discerned in India, is the enhancement of gender parity in decision-making as a result of having access to crucial public information. Bhutan is fortunate in that women enjoy equal social, economic, political, legal, and voting status with men. Although there is strong commitment in the government to enhance gender parity, the recent trends in leadership in Bhutan show that women are under-represented at decision-making levels, both in the communities and at the national level. The establishment of E-centers could advocate the empowerment of women with essential information by promoting and supporting them to shape their political voice and participate meaningfully in their communities.

Perhaps the most visible impact of the E-center in communities in Bhutan will be on communication patterns through the use of e-mails, chats, and discussion groups. Oral traditions while being impacted will not be obliterated since there is opportunity for oral as well as other public culture to be documented, preserved, and disseminated through the community E-centers. Communications at the E-center will not only contribute to networking but can also substantially result in the scaling up of development projects in the community.

### **Challenges and Strategies**

Some of the challenges facing the success of ICT delivery in rural communities in developing countries are related to inadequate models of community E-centers assuring

economic sustainability. Lack of relevant content for rural communities is another concern, and finally a lack of knowledge and awareness of the potential benefits of community E-centers creates a difficult environment for ICT's to flourish.

Best and Maclay (2002) proposed a market approach driven by the private sector and entrepreneurs in order to address the economic sustainability issue facing community E-centers. But this private market driven approach does not seem well-suited to Bhutan at this time. There are two significant shortcomings if this approach is to be adopted in Bhutan. The first is that E-centers in Bhutan were envisioned as a public service. Therefore the primary focus of the E-centers is to provide services that would benefit the public, not as a revenue-generating asset. Assigning community E-centers as public property, the profit aspect becomes minimal, and community E-centers would levy only nominal charges for the use of the centers.

The second shortcoming is that if community E-centers are to be privatized, it would eliminate the possibility for ownership of the project by the community, which is a core component of its social sustainability. As a result of these considerations, the model of community E-centers adopted in Bhutan is a hybrid of the business and social models in which the government and other donors provide assistance and subsidies for the operational activities of the E-centers in order to establish an initial enterprise, and where the centers also levy minimal charges in order to render them economically sustainable in the long run.

Concerning the issue of relevant content in the community E-centers, the author has observed that relatively successful models of community E-centers in India carried out detailed information needs assessments in order to deliver information and content that was demand driven and knowledge specific. Similarly in Bhutan, such needs assessments are being replicated, in order to facilitate the provision of information relevant to local needs.

The third significant challenge facing the effective delivery of ICT services is lack of knowledge about the benefits of ICT

and illiteracy. This challenge can be addressed through initiatives to build human capacity and training in technical skills. The national population and housing census of Bhutan conducted in 2005 indicated that 59.5 percent of the population was literate. This achievement is a result of the sustained efforts in the education sector since planned development was initiated in Bhutan in the 1960's. Although this accomplishment bodes well for harnessing the potentials of ICT, there exist still a large percentage of rural communities that are illiterate in Bhutan.

The 2005 census also showed a discrepancy between urban and rural areas when assessing the literacy rate. The Microsoft Unlimited Potential project in Bhutan aims to address this divide by providing training for rural communities in basic computer fundamentals. Another strategy that is relevant for illiterate people is developing innovative software such as image and voice based technologies.

One of the particularly insightful strategies proposed in a concept note on "The Real Access/Real Impact framework for improving the way ICT is used in development" is the need for political will combined with public support in order to effectuate the wide-ranging use of ICT. The importance of the need for political will in the case of Bhutan is particularly pertinent, since the government is the main drive behind socio-economic development activities. However, as suggested in the concept note, political will solely cannot translate grand visions for an ICT focused approach into practical steps that implement such approaches. Therefore, public support of such policies and activities are crucial to ensure ICT-led development. Public involvement in designing and implementing such policies and activities creates awareness of the stake they have in ICT-led development and informs them as to the relevance of such policies and activities in their lives.

### **Conclusion**

In the ongoing debate about the need for ICT in developing

countries, many have argued that certain areas in development require greater priority, such as the health and education sectors. This view has been well countered by Rathgeber (2000) who suggests that such views are based on “a linear approach of human development, in which advancement is seen as a progressive, step-by-step process”. In addition to concurring with Rathgeber’s argument that such views are confined, it is also appropriate to acknowledge the ability of ICT to engage in a wide-reaching and all-inclusive manner while influencing socio-economic development. Therefore, instead of a linear approach, a parallel approach of developing ICT at the same time as development in education and economy will be synergistic so that developments in ICT will promote development in these other areas and those developments will simultaneously promote the use of ICT.

This paper has attempted to demonstrate the numerous ways in which ICT can impact development in several areas such as economic growth, gender parity, good governance, and political evolution, with particular reference to Bhutan. ICT, as Best and Maclay (2002) predict, can have “staggering new opportunities for social and economic integration”. It is therefore of significant importance that the potential impacts of ICT’s in assisting development and the potential benefits of community E-centers in supporting rural development are understood so that the multi-stakeholders in this undertaking (government agencies, rural communities or policy makers) employ ICT’s and community E-centers as agents of change to realize Bhutan’s broader development goals.

Bhutan’s leaders and people are resolved in their decision to enter the information age with leverage while seeking a balance to preserve the country’s culture and conserve its environment. This resolve is reflected in the articulation of a unique development philosophy: Gross National Happiness, as pronounced by His Majesty the King of Bhutan, Jigme Singye Wangchuck. His Majesty asserted that material wealth alone should not be viewed as the end goal of development, but rather a holistic approach to

development should be adopted. This Bhutanese development paradigm includes various facets of development such as cultural preservation, good governance, and environmental conservation while simultaneously progressing economically—all of which will be dependent on the active participation of all its citizens. Therefore, the access to and rights of the Bhutanese people to information must be viewed as vital aspects of Bhutan's development aspirations. Achieving Gross National Happiness in Bhutan demands that information and communications technologies be made central to its development quest. The establishment of the Unlimited Potential E-centers in Bhutan is a step in that direction.

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# **Gross National Happiness through ICTs for Development: A Case Study of the Jakar Community Multimedia Center**

*Dr. Seema Murugan\**

## **Introduction**

Three very pertinent questions form the content of this research paper. The first question is how can Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) meaningfully lead to 'development' in its truest sense? This may be possible through the Community Multimedia Center (CMC) which can turn a marginalized, secluded community suffering from information poverty into a community that may then be termed as 'Information Society'. Secondly, how can a CMC play a pivotal role in harnessing the twin philosophies of Gross National Happiness (GNH) and Development? The present paper then continues to examine the potentialities within the Jakar Community Multimedia Center (as a center for media and public culture) in preserving and promoting the unique cultural heritage of Bhutan. In conclusion, the paper lauds and supports His Royal Majesty's unique concept of GNH as a true indicator of people's development in Bhutan by settling down on its title: Gross National Happiness through ICT for Development.

This paper is focuses into an examination of these three aspects within the focal theme of "Media and Public Culture in Bhutan".

## **ICTs for Development: The Case of the CMC**

The telegraph, telephone, radio, television, telex, facsimile, computer, microprocessor, communication satellite, optical fibre, and networking are all inventions that emerged in the

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last century and a half. Together they constitute what is commonly termed as ICT, i.e. Information and Communication Technologies. ICT are the buzzword of this decade.

Of all the technologies that constitute ICT, it is the computer which is the most predominant today. Consequently, “Have computer, will reach out”, seems to be the motto of the day. The computer has brought a new dimension into our lives: the internet. This great means of reaching out to a global audience, sharing information and messages, is probably the most important development of this century, if not of the computer era. The internet allows people from different parts of the globe to interact with each other effortlessly. The world is increasingly becoming a smaller place and the Internet is the driving force behind this change. The internet allows for an end of dominance of big over small and an end to discrimination based on race, colour, gender, and social class. The ongoing information technology revolution has opened up uncommon opportunities to developing countries in terms of providing low cost access to information. Murali Shanmugavelan and S. Senthil Kumaran have referred to UNDP *Human Development Report, 1999*, which described the internet as “the fastest-growing tool of communication ever, with the number of users expected to grow from 150 million today to more than 700 million in 2001” (Shanmugavelan, p. 28).

This perhaps explains the fact why today there is a preponderance of IT in every sphere of life—be it education, health, the preservation of culture and heritage, or in the various forms of technology itself.

Secondly, the fact remains that there have been and there continue to be rapid changes, or rather developments, in technology. And falling prices are beginning to bring the vast processing power of ICT within the relative grasp of an increasing number of people. The ICT allow for an end to the dominance of big over small and an end to discrimination based on race, colour, gender and social class. So why has it not been able to break the economic barriers which continue to exist? Further questions are: Why can it not be used to

bridge this economic barrier and be a 'true' means to development? And finally, is this economic scale the true measure of development?

To begin answering the questions raised, traditionally, maximizing economic growth had been the foundation of the philosophy of Development. Among its indicators was the Gross National Product (GNP). This is because of the belief that development will trickle down and seep to the social grassroots. How much that development has actually trickled down to the common man is really a question which requires serious consideration. Maybe, at this point, it would be pertinent to quote from the UNDP on 'Human Development':

Human development is first and foremost about allowing people to lead the kind of life they choose—and providing them with the tools and opportunities to make those choices. In recent years *Human Development Report* has argued strongly that this is as much a question of politics as economics—from protecting human rights to deepening democracy. Unless people who are poor and marginalized—who more often than not are members of religious or ethnic minorities or migrants—can influence political action at local and national levels, they are unlikely to get equitable access to jobs, schools, hospitals, justice, security and other basic services.

- Human Development Report, 2004, p. v

Examining the very first sentence implies that to bring about this kind of positive social/economic development in society, people must be enabled to make free and informed choices. Communication plays a pivotal role in making this possible. How well we do it, what modes we use and in whose control they are, determines the effectiveness of many aspects of this struggle for development. ICT are pivotal by being the media of communication between the Government (whose basic role in development is stated in the second sentence) and the common man. It could be a very important means to bridge the gap between the State as having the means of development within it and the citizen as aspiring for a better quality of life through it (as expressed in the third sentence).

Sadly enough, the bare truth today is the fact that there

is unequal access to information and knowledge. This is a serious handicap in a world where information has become so very important for social, economic, cultural, and finally overall development. Most people acknowledge that disparities in access and use of ICT have contributed to the widening digital divide. And that is the reason for the creation of a new kind of exclusion or 'knowledge poverty'. Unless there is a human dimension in the developmental plans for the introduction of ICT, they might not be successful. The human dimension is especially crucial for the success of introducing ICT in the poorest rural and urban areas of developing countries or countries in transition. Equally important is the idea that ICT need not remain the preserve of the educated and the literate.

Coming next to a discussion of the various models available in using ICT for Development, there is no questioning the fact that the cheapest and most revolutionary is the Internet. On the other end of this axis is the humble radio. Probably, the three most important characteristics contributing to the radio's strength as a communication media for development are its pervasiveness, its local nature, and its ability to involve local communities in an interactive communication process.

And it is a Community Multimedia Center (CMC) which successfully combines the power of the Internet with the humility of the radio.

This Mixed Media model is an attractive option. At the same time it is economically viable and community-centric because of its participatory and interactive nature. Maybe, it would be appropriate to elaborate here on what exactly is the Mixed Media model for development. The Mixed Model is a practical approach to development communication in rural as well as urban areas combining radio, video, and the internet so that communities can share and access information. An example of this is the CMC. The CMC itself has the flexibility to exist in two forms: in remote, low population-density rural areas with no local suppliers or maintenance services, where the technology is as simple and robust as possible; and in urban communities, where the use of more sophisticated and

sensitive equipment is always possible.

A CMC combines community radio by local people in local languages with community tele-centre facilities such as computers with email and internet. Since 2001, when the first CMC came up, there are around 40 CMC today in over 15 developing countries in Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean. Community radio is an invaluable tool in the ongoing efforts to familiarize people with ICT use and to ensure that ICT provision is responsive to local needs.

The CMC is a further development from the community radio in the sense that apart from broadcasting capability, it has multimedia facilities for the local community. Therefore, it reaches out to the uneducated and the illiterate, and becomes an inclusive, 'info-rich' force for development in the sense elaborated by the UNDP Report above. It not only meets identified learning and information needs, but also creates a new demand for learning, information, and knowledge.

In this way the CMC becomes a truly people's media for public culture and development. The basic premise on which the CMC is based has withstood the test of time. It combines community radio and ICT access in a unique way to offer an effective gateway to the information society for marginalized communities. In fact, community radio coupled with a small tele-centre exponentially increases the outreach and impact of computer equipment and digital resources available to a given community. The CMC can play a pivotal role by bridging the digital divide and can make ICT truly belong to the grassroots community.

For development, the model of the CMC has one singularly unique and basic feature: ICT are used to meet pre-existing needs of people as citizens rather than new consumer demands which are triggered by the technology itself. Further, their introduction in the most marginalized communities of developing countries serves a more basic function: to bring these communities into the learning—and connected—world from which they were otherwise totally excluded. In this case, the aims of ICT introduction will be directly linked to local development goals such as education and health. This implies that there can be no single formula

for the multimedia centre, which can certainly never be defined by the technology. Rather, the community's own needs and their specific social, economic, and environmental circumstances will determine the profile of the centre.

Before moving onto the next section, let us then sum up the features of a CMC: firstly, local people who form the community and their community-specific developmental needs constitute the starting point for establishing a CMC. Secondly, inclusion of the most marginalized or voiceless within that CMC is a key indicator of the successful use of ICT for development. Thirdly, practical and pragmatic initiatives are needed to make ICT relevant for the most marginalized so that there is actual development taking place through the activities of the CMC. Elaborated below are two such strategies commonly used in CMC:

Radio Browsing of the Internet is a type of programme in which the radio presenters gather information in response to listeners' needs and queries from reliable sites on the internet, on CD-ROM or other digital resources. During the programme, the presenter 'visits' these pages of information on the computer screen together with a local expert (for example, a doctor for a health question) and together, they describe, explain, and discuss the information directly in the languages used by the community. Radio browsing is already used in Sri Lanka, Bhutan, and Nepal. It has demonstrated radio's potential for overcoming language barriers to access, discuss, select and assimilate information available in a limited number of languages on the internet. Moreover, being a participatory radio programme, radio browsing of the internet has taken into account the desires of rural communities to assimilate knowledge collectively as against the prevailing modality of individual access to the internet.

Community databases for development utilize the capacity of the community collectively to produce knowledge and to package and disseminate it in an appropriate manner to meet the immediate needs and priorities of the community. Through the radio browsing programmes, the community becomes aware of the importance of online information and

understands that in the CMC, it remains available for them to consult whenever they feel the need. By developing a computer database, the CMC ensures that the whole community can access a pool of easily-assimilated knowledge in a language which is understandable to the community ([www.communityradionetwork.org](http://www.communityradionetwork.org)).

### **GNH and ICT for Development: Introducing the Jakar CMC**

The catchphrase, 'Gross National Happiness', which was introduced by His Majesty the Fourth Druk Gyalpo, in the late 1980s, has rapidly evolved into the accepted label for the distinct development concept in Bhutan. But in actuality, going back further in time, it was in the late 1960s (a period during which Bhutan's development policy is generally considered to have followed conventional patterns of rapid modernization) that the third king, His Majesty the late Jigme Dorji Wangchuck, expressed his views on the goal of development as making "the people prosperous and happy" (Basu, p.106). Proceeding further, the prominence of "prosperity and happiness" was highlighted in the King's address on one of the most important events in Bhutan's recent history: the occasion of Bhutan's admission to the UN in 1971. This vision, first articulated by the late king was elaborated by His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck, who declared in the first years of his reign that "our country's policy is to consolidate our sovereignty to achieve economic self-reliance, prosperity and happiness for our country and people". While the emphasis is placed on both prosperity as well as happiness, the latter is considered of more significance. For Bhutan, "Gross National Happiness is more important than Gross National Product". For the King, "Gross National Happiness is more important than Gross National Product" because "happiness takes precedence over economic prosperity in our national development process" (Kuensel, p.7).

It would be most appropriate here to also quote from another officially supported notion of GNH—the Keynote address of HE Lyonpo Jigme Y Thinley (then Chairman of the

Council of Ministers, Royal Government of Bhutan) at the Millennium Meeting for Asia and the Pacific on 30<sup>th</sup> Oct. - 1<sup>st</sup> Nov., 1998, at Seoul:

In addition to the conventional notion of development that focuses on quantifiable indicators of economic prosperity, Bhutan's vision of development stresses non-quantifiable goals such as spiritual well being and gross national happiness. We do this through a concerted policy of cultural promotion and the provision of free education, health and other social services. Cultural promotion is one of the four key objectives that we have consistently upheld, over the last four decades. The four major goals are economic self-reliance, environmental preservation, cultural promotion and good governance. Without good governance, none of the goals are achievable. These four goals are superficially antithetical, but they are fundamentally complimentary and consistent. The cost of maintaining culture and environment often makes development projects more expensive in the short run but pays in the long term. It would have been easier for us to become economically self-reliant had we not been so deeply devoted to the promotion of our culture and environment.

- Lyonpo Jigmi Y. Thinley, 1998 (emphasis added)

In the quoted extract, one observes that the Bhutanese concept of development has an explicit concern with preservation and propagation of their unique cultural heritage. This runs almost parallel to the debate on what truly constitutes 'human development' from the *HDR, 2004*. The following quote from Prof. Amartya Sen—the doyen of Indian Economics—almost echoes the sentiments of Lyonpo Jigme Y Thinley:

Human development requires more than health, education, a decent standard of living and political freedom. People's cultural identities must be recognized and accommodated by the state, and people must be free to express these identities without being discriminated against in other aspects of their lives. In short: cultural liberty is a human right and an important aspect of human development—and thus worthy of state action and

attention.

- Sen, p.6 (emphasis added)

This particular extract emphasizes the importance of maintaining and preserving cultural identity. It also implies that what we ideally mean by 'development' in its truest sense is a question of the 'quality of life' of a group of people. It should mean meeting the basic needs of the marginalized. Therefore, if we agree that 'true development' implies empowerment, security, and opportunities for a broader segment of society than just the middle-classes, it should also imply that we should ensure an equal distribution of the fruits of growth or development. In other words, ICT should be freely accessible to the marginalized communities and not be the domain of a few. They should lead to an active participation of the people in their own development rather than overdependence on government or any other machinery meant for that. This idea of people's participation and interactivity in their own development can be actualized by the Community Multimedia Center as discussed further.

Running almost chronologically parallel to the above-mentioned debate (on GNH and development) was the international discussion on the ways and means of blending independent local radio or community radio with the internet. These were presented and discussed at an International Conference, "Converging Responsibility: Broadcasting and the Internet in Developing Countries", held in Kuala Lumpur in September 1999. Next, there was the "ICT for Development Platform" co-organized by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and Global Knowledge Partnership (GKP) as a key element of the World Summit for Information Societies Series of networked events. This was scheduled 9 – 13 December 2003, at Geneva Palexpo, Switzerland ([www.ict-4d.org](http://www.ict-4d.org)). These two gatherings (coming within a span of five years) emphasize once again how important a role ICTs, especially convergence of the old technology with the new (the radio with the internet), can play in development.

Coming now to the crux of this research paper, as already stated, a CMC is the means by which the vast

uninhibited power of the internet could be made available to the largest possible population. The concept of extending 'internet radio' to rural regions in developing countries was devised in 1996 during discussions between UNESCO and community radio broadcasters. The idea was that the two mediums—radio and the internet—could be integrated to lower user connectivity costs and to make the Internet accessible to a wider audience. Perhaps the best and most successful example of this is the Kothmale FM Community Radio Station in Sri Lanka (see [www.worldbank.org/publicsector/egov/Kothmale\\_cs.htm](http://www.worldbank.org/publicsector/egov/Kothmale_cs.htm)). It sought to provide collective access to the knowledge resources available on the internet by using the radio as a sort of people's gateway to the knowledge infrastructure. This it does by trying to address the problem of growing gap between the info-rich and info-poor by using the radio as the entry point to make the internet's resources available to several marginalized communities. This is exactly the basis for the Kothmale CMC. The project was established as a pilot project to assess the prospects for converging community radio and the internet to serve rural information needs and to assess its possible impact in rural communities.

In what ways the Kothmale CRIP has been instrumental in proving that ICT can lead to development is illustrated thus:

Radio-web-browsing programmes helped people to learn about the benefits of ICT, specifically the utility of internet. In these programmes, resource people sit with programme presenters, select appropriate websites and visualize and describe the contents in local languages. Listeners direct their questions to the station and receive answers on the air. The daily programme received an average of five to six requests per day, which provided the basis for discussions on internet content. Some of these requests were hand delivered, the majority were post cards, a few came by telephone. Volunteer resource people such as the local doctor, teachers, lawyers and extension officers present the radio-browsing programmes. In time, visitors had to make advance booking to browse due to the high demand to use the computers - ([www.ictpr.nic.in](http://www.ictpr.nic.in))

It is significant to note here that the Kothmale CMC was the first experiment of its kind which successfully combined traditional and new media to bring the benefits of ICTs to a marginalized community. Following this example, the Jakar CMC can take a leaf out of the Kothmale experience and be the means of harnessing the twin philosophies of GNH and ICTs for development. This will be the focus of attention in the concluding section of this research paper.

**The Jakar CMC: A Possible Synergy between GNH and ICTs for Development**

As already pointed out, the CMC provides a real opportunity for bridging the gap between the information-rich and the information-poor. But in spite of that, a word of caution needs to be mentioned here. The CMC has some limitations when it comes to be in the direct hands of the socially underprivileged or being utilized by the marginalized sections of society. Modern information technologies might end up widening the gap between information-haves and have-nots instead of the other way around. This opinion is voiced by C. Rammanohar Reddy thus:

There are four sets of major challenges—or even hurdles if one prefers to call them that—that need to be addressed before the Internet can become a tool in even the remotest parts of developing countries. These relate to ICT hardware, software, language of communication and basic literacy. Without addressing each of these challenges, the internet, in particular, will remain what it has been the world over—a powerful form of communication that is used by a very large number of people from mainly the advanced economics and which will grow with little discernible effect on the majority of the world's population. (Reddy, p.4)

This is very much possible because Bhutan is a land with diverse cultural aspects and dialects. The communication needs of the Bhutanese—intrapersonal, interpersonal, and communal, particularly at the grassroots level, cannot be met without taking these important facts into account. It is necessary, therefore, to promote technologies which are best

suited to deal with the socio-economic diversity of the Bhutanese rural or urban marginalized society. In this context, given the rich oral tradition that characterizes the Bhutanese cultural society, radio more than the Internet, might prove a better medium of communication. And therefore, the Jakar CMC is a virtual treasury of resources for insuring the preservation and promotion of Bhutan's rich cultural heritage.

But first the facts on the Jakar CMC: located at Bumthang, Jakar District of Bhutan: the number of staff engaged is 3, along with 5 volunteers; the number of computers are 8; and the radio station belongs to Bhutan Broadcasting Service– Regional Bureau. Jakar CMC was formally opened in May 2003 and has a transmitter with an Internet link to BBS National Service in Thimphu. The partners are Bhutan Broadcasting Service and Bhutan Telecom and the funding is from Switzerland. The CMC Website is at: [www.bbs.com.bt](http://www.bbs.com.bt).

Coming now to the title of this ultimate section in the research paper, we build upon what has already been said in the previous Section II: that the Jakar CMC has enough within its limitations for realizing HM's dream of seeing every common Bhutanese blossom and flower in his/her artistic capabilities. This may be done through showcasing rural talents and local capacity building.

The Jakar CMC could well develop as a Community Cultural Centre. The grassroots facilities already exist. Not only during festive times or other cultural occasions, even otherwise the local community could be mobilized into cultural activities with the support and within the framework of the CMC. Then would accrue benefits from the cultural approach to development as mentioned in the previous section. For example, the Jakar CMC could organize development activities around events—shows, gatherings, exhibitions, and competitions. These would draw on the traditional arts, crafts, and creative skills of the local community and would be participation-centered. Such practices transfer very easily to radio. And with sufficient resources and training, it can also be transferred to the

digital media. If actualized, this would be an excellent base for the fusion of GNH and development—especially in the sense of capacity-building of the local community.

Secondly, the Jakar CMC could organize computer training with a strong focus on improving people's employment opportunities. It should make a serious effort to obtain official recognition by delivering certified qualifications. In all regions of the world, there is a current trend of CMC delivering recognized qualifications that improve people's job prospects. Since CMC do offer basic computer training, one possibility for the Jakar CMC would be to deliver recognized courses such as the "computer drivers' license course". In an ideal situation, as soon as the Jakar CMC attains more and better facilities, services, and staff competency, it would be able to deliver recognized educational and training courses.

Thirdly, the Jakar CMC could teach literacy in the local community through CDs. A possibility that may be emulated in the Bhutanese context and in the national language Dzongkha is elaborated here:

In India, the Tata Consultancy Services software group has created a CD to teach adult illiterates how to read and write with basic skills, even in the absence of a skilled teacher. The CD uses animated graphics and a voice-over to explain how individual alphabets combine to give structure and meaning to various words, using puppets as the motif in the teaching process. Lessons are tailored to fit different languages and even dialects. They focus on reading, and are based on the theories of cognition, language and communication. Accompanying voiceover reinforces the learner's ability to grasp the lessons easily, and repetition strengthens what is learned. The multimedia format ensures that the pronunciation of the words/letters is taught accurately through the system, rather than being left to individual teachers. This is particularly useful for languages (like Tamil in South India) where the same letter can be pronounced differently, based on the context.

- [http://www.tataliteracy.com/how\\_it\\_works.htm](http://www.tataliteracy.com/how_it_works.htm)

Lastly, the Jakar CMC has the option to adopt eNRICH—

a software for rural communities. eNRICH is a customizable browser that enables communities to quickly build their own gateway and provides interactivity with and among communities. It enables easy access to authentic information and encourages local content production. This generic ICT web browser, developed by National Informatics Centre in India, can facilitate the following:

- Act as a one stop solution for the information and communication needs of communities;
  - Be easily customized in local languages and content;
  - Encourage community members to produce their own local content;
  - Allow easy access to relevant and authenticated information;
  - Enable efficient communication within and among communities.
- <http://enrich.nic.in/>

### **Conclusion**

On making the oral presentation of the present research paper on the 27<sup>th</sup> of June, 2006, at the Second International Seminar on Bhutan Studies, at Thimphu, the present paper received a wide range of comments. Especially important were the comments received from the representatives of the BBS and Bhutan Telecom, coincidentally the two partners of the Jakar CMC. The author of this research paper is advised of the following facts, rather ground realities, regarding the Jakar CMC:

Basically and initially, the Jakar CMC was set up only to serve as a link between the National center of the BBS at Thimphu and the (listeners of) Bumthang Dzongkhag. In this connection (and especially as elaborated in the previous section) the author of the present paper proposes that the Jakar CMC could be made more beneficial, effective as well as productive by adopting a series of steps within the existing set-up—thus, in effect harnessing the twin philosophies of GNH and ICTs for development.

At times, some of the local (computer literate) people do

visit the CMC for Internet Browsing. But not for the purpose(s) outlined by the author of this paper. It is generally a handful of school teachers or students who come to check their email, etc. So, in essence, radio-internet browsing as an effective measure to spread information and an empowering tool for people who're 'information-poor', still remains new to the Jakar CMC.

The Jakar CMC did conduct some training courses on computer literacy targeted at the local youth. And they were well received too. The author of this paper repeats the point made in the previous section—that if the computer courses were offered in tie-up with certified institutions they would attract more local youth, at least from the employment point of view.

No comments were made regarding the author's suggestions number one, three and four: firstly, that the Jakar CMC could function as a community cultural centre; secondly, that the CMC could teach literacy and; thirdly, that it could adopt the eNRICH—a software for rural communities.

Another pertinent and basic comment came from a fellow participant regarding the very effectiveness of using ICTs for development when people don't have the basic means of survival. Although in agreement with the basic idea that indicators like the GDP and the GNP are basic to the idea of 'development', the author of the present paper supports the unique concept of His Majesty—GNH—as an indicator of people's development in consonance with the title of this paper. Apart from the case presented in this paper, the answer can be strengthened further by citing the many other instances of ICTs being used for development elsewhere.

So much more could be achieved at the Jakar CMC, that the list could be almost inexhaustible. But to conclude this research paper, only a few more points. The CMC is presently a very viable option for using ICTs for development in third world countries. Given Bhutan's overarching philosophy of the GNH, the Jakar CMC is a good enough case where both ICTs and GNH converge to bring happiness as well as development in its best sense and spirit.

Under the vision of Bhutan's unique development

concept of the GNH, special importance and priority can be given to the goals of 'cultural promotion' and 'good governance' by expanding the present activities of the Jakar CMC. The Jakar CMC may thus successfully combine the concept of GNH with ICTs for development in a complementary and mutually reinforcing relationship within the ambit of "Media and Public Culture in Bhutan".

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# Selling Desire and Dissatisfaction: Why Advertising should be banned From Bhutanese Television

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## Abstract

*Managing modern media represents a fundamental challenge for Bhutanese government, society and culture. As a commercialised force, modern media seeks new markets in order to profit from them. The extent to which any local population is genuinely enhanced in the process is a matter of serious debate. This paper considers the downside of commercial media and its intentions in Bhutan by looking at the nature of commercial television and how it might be constructively managed by Buddhist aspirations. Central to the argument that follows is the psychological nature of desire and dissatisfaction and how these states are to be minimised in a Buddhist sensibility but maximised in a commercialised one. Commercial television is driven by a marketing agenda that seeks to embed deep-seated desire and dissatisfaction in order that these be profitably exploited by selling material goods that will nullify these newly cultivated feelings of lack. From a Buddhist perspective this can only be destructive to positive progress when one bears in mind that the Four Noble Truths see desire as constituting the critical entrapment that needs to be overcome if individuals (and society as a whole) are to be capable of meaningful progress towards genuine feelings of fulfilment. Advertising on television aims to undo the pull of Buddhist aspiration and entrap populations within a delusional and harmful materialism. The conclusion reached in this paper is that Bhutan ought to consider an outright ban on television advertising in the same way as it has effectively banned billboard advertising across much of the country.*

## Introduction

The banner under which we gather begs two essential

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questions: what precisely will the impacts of media on Bhutanese culture be and how might these influences be best managed in order that they contribute effectively to the happy society that national policy seeks? This writing will attempt to shed a little light on these complex but essential questions through examining the broad nature of commercial media impact particularly in the domain of television.

Before proceeding though, I should make my working definitions clear. Media in the context of this paper is taken to include all major channels of technology-based communication – television, radio, newspapers, cell-phones, magazines, the internet etc. Taken together these are sources of information, advice, entertainment, persuasion, titillation and profit. (The last factor is, as we shall see, a critical component in understanding the nature of modern media and its intentions). Culture in this paper, is taken to represent the shared worldview a society coheres around and in particular, the sets of moral ideals its teachings, activities and practices aim to facilitate. As with media, the intention of cultural arrangements is what I will focus on as this will allow for a clear point of connection between the indigenous doctrines of Bhutanese Buddhism and those of an incoming commercial medium.

#### **Aspirational Culture and the Example of Buddhism**

If we choose to define culture by the ideals that lie at its heart, then we engage in an essentially aspirational analysis. In this framework, cultures exist to facilitate the achievement of a moral imperative which demands that we become more humane, wise, and inclusive in spirit. The moral codifications of the world's great religions including Buddhism, articulate and justify the most responsible ideals of human development. Participatory events such as *Tshechu*, *Puja* and *Losar* reinforce these ideals through opportunities for community engagement and participation. Acts of fasting, retreat, charitable giving, service and the cultivation of mindfulness shape individual aspiration and pull people towards personally realizing the benefits of connection and

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contribution. In sustainable societies the world over culture can be seen to perform this essential role.

### *The Nature of Buddhist Aspiration*

In Buddhist culture, humanity is seen to exist on a basic existential continuum – one defined by an essentially moral potential. At one extreme, we can remain ‘stuck’ as greedy, hateful and ignorant individuals, bereft of true happiness and harmful to both ourselves and others. Or alternately, we can move progressively towards the opposite pole of happiness, generosity, loving-kindness and wisdom. The measure of a well-led life then is the extent to which narrow selfishness can be effectively transcended.

In Buddhism there are three fundamental entanglements that hamper our progression and render us unhappy and harmful. These are craving, ill-will and delusion. The aim of Buddhist culture is to facilitate emancipation from these hindrances and the suffering they spread. A Buddhist cultural arrangement accordingly exists to reinforce this movement by weaving together a complex fabric of teachings, public happenings and private practices, each playing its part in validating the authority of aspiration. In Bhutanese culture, the teachings of the Buddha permeate public consciousness spread by *kanjur* and *tenjur*, *gomchen* and *gelong*, jakata stories and folk tales. Families and villages come together for ritualised celebrations that simultaneously reinforce community and Buddhist ideals. The annual *tsechu* held in *dzongs* all over Bhutan beautifully brings together many of these strands. *Lhakhangs*, *chortens*, *mani* stones and the sounds of chanting are constant reminders of Buddhist aspiration throughout the country. A parallel role is played by the painted symbolism of ‘the four friends’ which appears almost universally in Bhutan to act as a gentle prompt towards willing cooperation.

In conduct, Buddhism urges respect and care for all sentient beings and so restraint in the name of others’ thriving is a key, if not the key tenet of Buddhist philosophy in all its many forms. To help facilitate this, Buddhist culture

blesses the taking of time for reflection and for the cultivation of mindfulness. To live within such an aspirational culture is to exist consciously within an atmosphere of expectation in which tendencies towards a narrowing exclusionary selfishness are challenged by an authoritative call for personal improvement. In Buddhist culture, the cultivated individual rises above narrowness and superficiality to realize the satisfactions of a deeper connectedness and contribution. This is the ideal towards which all Buddhists are encouraged to aspire.

At the heart of Buddhist philosophy are the Four Noble Truths, a practical code for living wisely and well. In these key teachings, the Buddha identifies liberation from desire in particular as the critical pre-requisite to realizing our potential for simultaneous contribution and happiness. Simply put, the Four Noble Truths state that the suffering we experience in life has its roots in unfulfilled desire and that this suffering can be most effectively undone by following a basic set of practices known as the Eight-Fold Path. These represent eight basic modes of being aimed at overcoming the constraints of craving, ill-will and delusion and cultivating instead an essentially appreciative and generous mode of being that makes possible the simultaneous satisfaction of both self and others. Overcoming desire then is central to Buddhist aspiration as it unlocks our ascendant potential and releases us from the suffering inherent in feelings of deficit.

To indulge desire on the other hand, is to strengthen the pull of a separative self and encourage its futile demands for self-fulfillment. If desires are indulged then the self becomes caught in a perpetuating cycle of non-satisfaction. The basic dynamic that the Four Noble Truths point to is that desire and non-fulfillment are inseparable co-existent states. Desires or wants are experienced as negative states that can only be overcome by obtaining the specific object of desire. Furthermore, craving is fed by its own indulgence and the more one indulges it, the more it comes to dominate our lives. Instead of the satisfaction we think will come from giving in to craving, we end up strengthening it and its power to

overwhelm us with unhappy feelings of deprivation. This is the paradoxical karma of greed and the Buddhist solution involves undoing egotistical demanding by resisting it until finally it begins to release its delusion-forming grip on consciousness.

The mastery of attention through meditative practice in all of its forms is key to realizing our potential in Buddhism as it opens the conscious space within which integration and realization can occur. To be mindful is to be conscious of the karma of desire, wise to the subtle interconnectedness of all things and accepting of the responsibilities that emanate from these complex truths. In combination then, practicing awareness and consciously generous thought, speech and action, sets us on a practical path to realizing our simultaneous potentials for freedom, fulfillment and positive contribution to the world around us. Buddhist culture exists to facilitate these mature states and to challenge the unhappy limitations of self-centered desire.

### **Western Aspiration and the Challenge of Market Culture**

In any analysis that seriously wishes to comprehend the impact of media contact in Bhutan it is important to distinguish between the aspirational aspects of Western culture and the non-aspirational sub-culture of the market. In general, it would be fair to say that the aspirations of 'high' Western culture are largely consonant with those of Buddhism. Both value freedom, equality, justice, peace, compassion and generosity. Although each may connote different content and emphasize contrasting methods to attaining these ends, the fact that the ends are shared allows for a potentially harmonious integration. Furthermore, they share a common emphasis on achieving these ends by cultivating wisdom and moral intention.

Market culture on the other hand is an entirely different beast. In it, the high ideals of Western culture as a whole are deemed irrelevant as effective means to progress. Founding its faith in the de-personalized mechanisms of the marketplace, a different character type is idealized – a morally

unimproved one free to enact an exclusionary self-interest. In the sub-culture of the market, collectively positive outcomes are believed to be most effectively obtained by abandoning the improvement of selfish intentions as a central cultural strategy. In this collapsing of aspiration, moral maturity is undermined and here we find the fundamental challenge that market culture poses for many traditional cultures worldwide.

Throughout Western history, the market has been viewed with clear caution, due in large part to its de-moralizing potential. Inflating, lending and leveraging, conquering exploiting and gouging all constitute legitimate parts of the great battle for material gain. Unrestrained, the drive for profit polarizes as advantage is used to force an indecent distribution of material burdens and benefits. The intention to personally gain while ignoring the interconnected costs to others constitutes the destructive market mindset that any aspirational culture tries to counter. In the West, the Church contained moneyed aggressiveness for centuries under threats of immediate and permanent spiritual exile before passing responsibility into the hands of democratic government and its secular forces of law. Neither aspirational form has however, been able to hold back the market's inexorable rise to dominance.

The critical ideological liberation break for market culture came with the 18<sup>th</sup> century Enlightenment and the rational articulation of a self-correcting market mechanism. The notion of a market mechanism, as most will know, was most completely formulated by Adam Smith (and later narrowed and hardened by purists like Hayek and Friedman). Zealously expanded, its assumptions provide the perfect cover for market culture to break free of cultural/moral oversight as its mechanisms are deemed to be *necessarily* benign. In market culture then, the market assumes its own ultimate authority – one with little need for external control, moral or otherwise.

In the broader atmosphere of the European culture in which the market was conceived, personal improvement through the cultivation of moral character was still seen to be the foundational requirement for any broader social progress. Thus, as in Buddhism, civic virtues like wisdom, compassion

and generosity were to be institutionally encouraged to as great an extent as possible. But in his seminal market text, 'The Wealth of Nations', Smith proposed a contrary economic mechanism that would produce collective benefit without the need for pro-civic intention or the cultivation of moral character. It was the 'free market', a domain of economic activity liberated from traditional cultural constraints. Narrow selfishness, and not generosity drive the market to unintentionally produce the greatest benefit for the greatest number. Thus, for market culture, good intentions are unnecessary and so have imperative status in providing for the common welfare. Progress should be measured not by the improving moral intentions that may underlie it, but rather by the improving outcomes of action alone - quarterly profits, annual sales, market share, economic growth and GNP in particular. In the market fundamentalists' world exclusive intentions become alchemically transformed into inclusive outcomes by the magic of an 'Invisible Hand'. Thus, goes the argument, if market-based selfishness is so necessarily beneficial, it should, by rights, be liberated from the compromising oversight of an unnecessary and indeed obstructive cultural idealism.

As wielded by the ideologues of the free market, this argument has unstitched cultural fabrics on a global scale. This is a critical point to bear in mind when thinking of media and its specific influence on Bhutanese culture. For as we shall see, incoming media has been systematically colonized by a market culture that is singularly opposed not only to Buddhist ideals but to moral ideals in general as 'imposed' guides to market conduct.

The spread of market culture and of its ability to undo traditional societies is an astonishing historical phenomenon. Market forces have liberated themselves from the shackles of cultures, kings and governments. They have broken through layers of social and economic protection to assume the mantle of righteous hegemony in the contemporary global order. Ever since the rationalist formulation of a market with a mind of its own, economic liberalism has forced its advance under the twin principles of historical inevitability and amoral

individualism. At the tip of this advancing force these have become fused into a cynical belief in *an inevitably amoral individualism*. At this point, aspiration is deemed not only difficult but downright dangerous as it literally ceases to exist as a rational option.

In recent decades across both the over-developed and under-developed worlds, market culture has advanced with great pace. Free market capitalism has effectively erased communism from the ideological map as it has spread consumer culture deep into Eastern Europe and Asia. The restraints of Keynesianism have been largely defeated and with them the credibility of major central government control of most national economies. Nationalized industries have been privatized, barriers to ownership, imports, capital markets, land and labour torn down as government has retreated leaving societies to be arranged by market agendas. Although market sovereignty has and is being challenged in many parts of the world - perhaps most notably in Latin America and the Arab world, elsewhere the inevitability of market culture and of competitive individualism seems to be increasingly accepted. The commercialized media has played a critical role in securing these victories - operating as a channel through which non-aspirational identities are advertised and idealized. With media's capture by the intent and ideology of gain, it has been transformed into a critical source of pro-market socialization. It achieves this by incessantly encouraging a delusional solution to the sufferings inherent in the human condition.

#### **Discerning Impact - Commercial Television in Bhutan**

To consider the total impact of commercial media on Bhutanese culture would be to attempt an almost impossible task given the infinite variety of forms and content involved. Media technology has developed at a remarkable speed over the past few decades bringing wholly new potentials for entertainment, intrusion and influence. Cell-phones have metamorphosed from being limited communications devices into multi-media interfaces capable of receiving not only still

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images and text but streamed TV and Movie clips. The internet has opened up endless possibilities for interaction and consumption. Computer games absorb hours of teenage attention combining advertising, action and addictiveness. Modern media is a shifting scene of immense complexity and in order to avoid the generalities that would be inherent in attempting to capture all aspects of media influence, I will from this point on limit my focus to commercial television and its role in market culture. Although more limited in scope, this will allow for a clearer analysis, and one capable of producing specific policy recommendations. In looking at television consumption there are two dimensions of influence that deserve particular attention; the effects of absorption in the medium per se, and the impacts of the commercial content that is actively delivered through the medium. The potential harmfulness of television can then be usefully considered in terms of its intention to capture attention and cultivate desire.

### *The Capture of Attention*

The primary impact of commercial media is the absorption of attention it induces. In the case of television in particular, vast amounts of audience time are devoted to passive consumption wherever it spreads. Active talk and family interaction wither as television absorbs attention. Meal-time conversation vanishes, quiet time is obliterated and community contribution drops off precipitously (see McDonald 2004, for a summary of this literature). Television and other major media aim to absorb attention utterly, drawing it away from other interests and to the extent that it succeeds, it acts as a powerful agent of disconnection.

This disconnection operates in a number of spheres. Media absorption distances the self from social and physical surroundings as attention and awareness are captured by a small screen. It disconnects us from immediate others as we reduce interdependent interaction. It disconnects us from the general cultural atmosphere of aspiration as we remove ourselves into a non-participatory isolation from community.

And most of all, media consumption, particularly in high doses, acts to *disconnect us from ourselves*.

As a person's attention is relentlessly drawn into a commercialized media world, it is for that time at least, effectively lost to any integrative capacity for realization. The competitive drive to capture as much attention as possible pushes mass media, and television in particular, towards split-second sensationalism— more explosive effects, more traumatizing violence (real and unreal), more explicit surgery, more alluring sexuality delivered with ever-more punch and rapidity. Thus absorbed and focussed, awareness cannot connect self with others, nor with surroundings, nor with the deeper levels of one's own being. Television absorption obliterates reflective consciousness and in so-doing eradicates the broad awareness necessary for realizing the truth and value of interdependence.

(If one doubts that the above is true, I would encourage them to conduct some simple experiments. Try having a meaningful conversation with someone while the television is on at normal viewing volume. How often is your attention drawn away and the holistic quality of the flow of conversation fragmented or lost? Or try meditating with the television on. Can you control attention and focus it in ways that are not constantly shattered by television's insistent drawing of attention into itself?).

In absorbing awareness so completely, the popular media and particularly television direct the viewer away from directly experiencing the profound satisfactions inherent in contribution and connection. The resulting 'emptiness' becomes the fertile ground in which material greed thrives. For the Buddhist scholar David Loy, consumerist market culture represents a failed 'lack project', an ultimately futile attempt to find meaning and fulfillment through material accumulation. The stuck individual of the marketer's dream, cannot be fulfilled as they fail to realize the karma of desire. As such, they provide the perfect medium for market manipulation.

In Buddhism, cultivating an integrative awareness is central to all practice. Attuned awareness allows us to

integrate emotions, rationality and insight as we realize their dynamics and co-relations. Awareness of others' troubles and joys allows us to connect generously and compassionately with them and to identify common interests. Awareness of our involvement in the natural fabric brings appreciation and a sense of respect and restraint. As consciousness expands to become more inclusive and integrative, it becomes healthier, happier and more helpful to the general cause of genuine human aspiration. With broadened awareness comes the possibility of realizing the joy of interconnection and with this felt involvement comes the ability to respond in generous, compassionate and wise ways. For Buddhists, the cultivation of these skilful means reflects the growing capacity for profound happiness. However, in market culture, commercial media aims to undermine this foundational process by drawing awareness away from realizing integration, collective involvement and appreciation.

Thus, any for-profit medium like television is inherently problematic for Buddhist aspirations insofar as it aims to export awareness from its immediate context. The total effect of hours of attentional absorption particularly in television and the internet are not fully documented but certainly in the process of consumption vast swathes of attention are turned over to a dulling and disconnecting escapism. In this privatized consciousness the individual becomes increasingly disoriented and prone to feelings of lack. This deliberately cultivated state of unsatisfactory emptiness holds the key to market expansion as it prepares the psychological grounding for a highly profitable delusion, that the problem of existential lack can be solved most efficiently through indulging an ever-expanding materialism.

*The Cultivation of Desire*

As market culture has emerged victorious from the aspirational project that spawned it, it has spread to capture major media as a strategic necessity. Television was formerly controlled by and large by a more edifying and civilizing imperative than mere profit-maximization. State television

along with radio generally originated in a context of an aspirational national project. From Europe to North America, from the Antipodes to Asia, public television was founded to broadcast an edifying mix of entertainment, arts, education, children's programming, politics and news. In the decisive market victories of the 1970's and 80's however, the mass media was largely handed over to profit-seeking business and with it, to the ideology of market culture. In the process advertising hours and content have intensified markedly. Thus, in New Zealand where I live for example, advert-free days and times have disappeared as market owned media have come to devote up to a quarter of all television time to direct marketing manipulation.

Transfixed by the small screen, heavy consumers are prone to delusory deception, particularly given the exact precision of the 'campaigns' and 'weapons' employed by today's marketing corporations. Material goods are inserted in the happiest of scenes, they are constantly associated with success, power, admiration, love, ease and self-esteem. In the process of applying this basically behaviourist law of association, the true routes to these outcomes are obscured and replaced by new associations between material consumption and personal realization. Direct marketing influence represents an intentional blurring of the true connection between the ends of aspiration and the immaterial means by which these can be best achieved. In the delusory world of the market, there is no need for hard aspiration and the inconvenience of challenging one's appetites if true happiness is to be secured.

Instead, the individual is constantly cajoled into believing that essential satisfaction necessarily involves the consumption of mediating material goods and services. However, it has been amply demonstrated that beyond a very basic level of material satisfaction, increased consumption is subject to the law of strictly diminishing returns. Thus, beyond a very limited point, happiness comes not from more material consumption but from the cultivation of relationship, community involvement and a sense of higher purpose and meaning. Endlessly expanding consumption in the

marketplace then is of strictly limited value in forging a happy and sustainable society (see McDonald 2003, for a review of relevant literature).

In Buddhism, to buy into the temptations of materialist desire is to fall into a lack of true perspective and thus to act out of ignorance. As previously discussed, indulging desire does not lead to its cessation but to its inflammation. Desire is akin to a mosquito bite in its response to attention. If one gives into individualized material desire, one falls into a perpetual state of desire, an insatiable feeling of hunger or of lack. This is the basic state of suffering that concerned the Buddha and its cessation was seen to lie in becoming aware of desire's limitations and freeing oneself from its limiting karma. Advertising, the force that runs commercial media, seeks to embed these limitations in order that they be profitably exploited.

Considered in combination with the attentional effects of commercialized media, the fundamental challenge posed by television can be seen in relatively stark outline. Potentially it is a powerful medium for embedding desire and fracturing attentional mastery. But in seeing this, how is Bhutan expected to respond given its interest in cultivating widespread happiness? In particular, what might government do to ensure the corrupting aspects of major media are countered in the name of maintaining the genuine progress that underlies the true attainment of a GNH dream? The fact of the matter is that if media policy is not carefully crafted, the authority of Buddhist aspirations will be rapidly undermined as many individuals (and particularly the younger generation) abandon themselves to finding false purpose in the market's immediate indulgences. Media policy will I believe, be a critical test of the meaning of 'good governance' in Bhutan.

### **Good Governance and Controlling Cultural Corruption in Bhutan**

I have argued before that good governance in the context of Buddhist culture can only be defined by Buddhist ideals (see McDonald, 2005). Thus, if we place the impacts on attention

and desire within the clarifying frame of Buddhist analysis, the nature of good governance becomes clear in outline at least. Good governance exercises in facilitating the attainment of widespread wisdom, generosity and compassion through protecting the authority of these ideals. Inherent in this protection must an aspect of due diligence through which society is protected from the most egregious attempts to undermine the imperative status of these ideals. In the case of incoming market-driven media, such a rear-guard action is necessary given the aggressiveness of the intrusion. The ruthlessness of market expansion is revealed in its symbolic representations of “conquering” or “penetrating” markets, of “target populations”, “victorious campaigns” and other such violent conceptions. In the modern age, protecting a cultural worldview from aggressive corruption has become the necessary counterpart to continuing to teach and practice the more deeply rooted ideals of tradition.

So what specifically might good governance in the realm of the media involve in a Buddhist context? First of all, it should be clear that the justification for controlling commercialized media lies in directly addressing the propriety of its underlying intentions. Marketing media *intends* to cultivate delusion and do this through a fundamental process of disconnecting the individual from interconnected involvement. A market society is exposed to potent psychological manipulation intended to instill feelings of material frustration. Given limited resources, the cultivation of further greed in the contemporary world order is morally problematic to say the least and a fundamental restraint is required if justice and sustainability are to be established in the long term. A restriction on the cultivation of greed is clearly wise and is ultimately an expression of inclusive compassion for those excluded by the current economic order. Indeed, what are the next generation of Bhutanese to be left with if the current generation cannot maintain restraint? In the realm of television at least, Bhutanese officials would be exercising constructive authority if they were to institute a ban on broadcasted advertising through television.

If direct marketing were to be removed from television it would return the medium to a much more justifiable status. There is no need to have broadcasting dominated by profiteering motives and if these were tamed television and indeed all media, could play a more constructive part in shaping the public mind. In fact to purge it of this rude tendency would be to re-approach the ideal market-society balance the original Enlightenment experiment aimed for.

In the original outline of the marketplace, it was conceived as a contributory arena within which people's genuine needs and desires are serviced. Central to its legitimacy is the notion of the sovereign and rational consumer – a type that is clear about what will improve their well-being and one whose desires have been self-generated. In this conception, the free individual freely engages in exchange, wholly uncorrupted by any larger institutional manipulation. And while market culture has become highly sensitized to the 'illegitimate' meddlings of church and state, it has maintained a self-serving blindness to its own profound shaping of the public mind. Marketing delivered through the commercialized media enforces one of the most finely-honed forms of socialization that has been brought to bear on any human collective. It can cultivate feelings of guilt, fear, inclusion and failure as effectively as any organized religion and in seeking to embed manufactured desire in the public mind, marketing culture critically oversteps the boundaries of its own self-defined legitimacy.

Under assumptions of the sovereign rational consumer, the market assumes moral value as the servant of the larger public interest. But when this state is violated, the power relationship is reversed as society at large comes to serve the narrower interests of market players. In free market theology there is no legitimating argument to defend this reversal and hence the common attempt on converts behalf to collapse all moral analysis into the reductionist framework of a necessarily selfish intent. Those at the forefront of advancing market culture – marketers, defend this assault on sovereignty and rationality by hiding behind a shabby defence of merely providing neutral information for use in rational

decision making. But such self-serving duplicity is deceptive as any even brief consideration of the blatant associations forged by media advertising can instantly demonstrate. The attentions of beautiful people, the happy families, the inspiring backdrops, the fawning friends all imply that the deepest satisfactions will emanate from consuming mundane products. Such hopeless delusions systematically subvert consumer rationality and so compromise the market's genuine potential to serve society and its collective happiness. These ideals are silently replaced by corporate priorities of profit gained through shaping the public mind to expect the profound satisfactions that markets promise, but cannot provide. Thus, to ban advertising from television would be to bring the market closer to its proper place in a decent and improving social order and it is, for reasons previously explained, essential as a protective measure for any aspirational culture founding its progress on the constant cultivation of self-restraint.

There are additional benefits to the central ones that have been argued thus far, a key one being a critical slowing in the pace of social and market reformation. In many cases, traditional cultural aspirations are primarily undone by the disorienting pace of change that suddenly-opened markets experience. To allow unrestricted access, especially for media and advertising influence, would be to open Bhutan to a powerfully disorienting whirlwind of change. If this pace were slowed by silencing the frenetic insistence of marketers, there is a very real chance that the market as a whole could be governed in ways that contribute considerably to national happiness. It is important to note here that in banning advertisements cheapening intentions, no restrictions are placed upon the expansion of any goods or services in the economy. These can enter and thrive as the public chooses. It is not the right of the market to function organically that is being challenged but rather the right of the market to force its expansion through false association and collective demoralization. If falsely inflated and poorly considered demand is reduced, sensible and sustainable direction of the 'market as servant of society' is much more likely. With its hyper-

aggressiveness tamed the market can be absorbed within a more responsible cultural framework - one in which happiness ultimately lies in realms beyond the restrictive psychology of purely personal gain.

Television content is as we know, increasingly shaped by commercial incentives to capture and retain attention. The Bhutanese government like those in all nations will need to institute and apply a rigorous code to govern media content and use. In more commercialized societies used to managing media content, violent or sexually explicit programming is limited to the later hours of the evening. Pornography and sociopathy, gambling and racism are monitored by censors and compliance structures are in place to remove the most offensive programming. These, along with a whole raft of measures need to be codified and put in place as soon as possible. In previous writings I have suggested considering an overall limit to hours of broadcast in order that the essentially disconnecting power of television be restricted in a simple but effective way. All day and all night broadcasting is not a right that any media company has as a matter of course. I would again suggest that some such restrictions be actively included in any broad review of the media's place in a changing Bhutanese society.

### **Conclusion**

In 2005, Bhutan received much positive mention in the international press for instituting two restrictions over the market. First, it banned the sale of cigarettes in the kingdom given the health costs associated with the habit. Second, the City authorities in Thimphu instituted a ban on billboard and shop-front advertising. These moves are positive examples of good governance where the larger interests of community health or aesthetics are maintained in the face of a potentially compromising market shift.

I believe that banning television advertising in Bhutan would likewise constitute a positive example of good governance in a Buddhist context. It, in combination with a ban on billboard advertising and other complimentary policies

could constructively contain the most impertinent intrusions of market culture. It is abundantly clear that the market philosophy of gain and disconnection is failing us and that central to its failure is an ignorance of the fundamental importance of recognizing inter-dependence and the responsibilities that attend it. Sooner rather than later, we are as a species going to have to fundamentally challenge the logic of a self-correcting market model given its demonstrable failure to correct its own disastrous trajectory.

Appetites are clearly outstripping the material base of the planetary ecosystem and as such they need to be contained. Bhutan could set the world a positive example by actively banishing advertising from television. It would simultaneously demonstrate the non-inevitability of market hegemony and provide an alternative model of more responsible development for others. As current levels of television saturation in Bhutan are relatively low, few major costs would be involved. The usual arguments that if advertising is limited, jobs will be lost, simply does not apply to Bhutan as a predominantly non-industrialized society. Social change in a positive direction tends to come as a result of inspiration, and if Bhutan were to judiciously tone down the aggressive assault of marketing culture it might inspire similarly sensible and responsible moves elsewhere.

And finally while talking of inspiration it is critical that we remain aware of the essential nature of the Middle Path in Buddhist culture. To balance the old and the new in constructive ways is the challenge set before government in Bhutan. It involves a walk along a razor's edge of fine balance. The market and the media will inevitably continue to enter Bhutan and to fertilize its existing culture. In finding the middle way though, a certain clarity is required within which considerate and balanced decisions can be made. Commercial media pulls consciousness so radically and effectively into itself that it leads us far from a middle way and beyond the balancing pull of Buddhist aspiration. Buddhism rules out extreme methods of involuntary force to gain adherence and if balance is to be obtained, incoming market culture must similarly be restrained from its use of mass marketing

weaponry to secure irrational conversion.

If good governance is defined by the cultural aspirations it seeks to serve, then good Buddhist governance in Bhutan would involve controlling the socially destructive impacts of advertising and excessive desire. In so-doing government would be acting in a way conducive to happiness, by maintaining the cultural pull towards appreciation, satisfaction, generosity, wisdom and care, while removing much of the anti-cultural pull towards non-appreciation, dissatisfaction, selfishness, delusion and carelessness. Such policy formation would rejuvenate a positive cycle wherein traditional wisdom, good governance and private practice reinforce each other to secure a balanced and responsible happiness. If on the other hand, the impacts of market media are not brought under the authority of good governance then a negative and unhappy cycle of deterioration will almost certainly begin in which significant sectors of Bhutanese society abandon responsibility, care and wisdom to the detriment of on-going happiness. (See McDonald, 2005 for more detailed development of this cyclical model).

The world would be a better place if wisdom, generosity and care lay at the heart of the global order. But as market culture continues to expand its dominion it systematically collapses personal aspiration and embeds a radically less progressive sentiment. Media policy in Bhutan represents a critical test of the country's ability to protect its cultural inheritance and advance a wiser model of development. In this paper, I have focussed on television to illustrate the propriety of recommending that media policy be governed by Buddhist ideals and understandings. The argument however, extends in thematic fashion to include all incoming media intent on spreading a new non-aspirational psychology. Bhutan's GNH framework assumes that the satisfactions of Buddhist aspiration are superior to those of the market - hence the elevation of GNH above GNP as a measure of importance. Harmony, happiness and sustainability cannot be built by cultivating isolation, dissatisfaction and careless consumption and thus cannot be secured in any society dominated by systematic marketing suggestion and the

hungry consciousness it intentionally breeds. Keeping this understanding firmly in mind will go a long way towards crafting a sensible and culturally consonant response not only to the specific disruptions of television, but further, to the broader challenge of media management in general.

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## Media and Public Culture: Media Whitewashing

*Kinley Rinchen\**

### Abstract

*Today in Bhutan we can no longer see children and young ones gathered around their family elders listening to stories and fables, or many elders on their favourite pastimes like Khuru, Dego, Sogsum and Jidhum, which were prominent about one and a half decades ago. Rather we see, most of the time, families gathered around a TV show with a conflict over channels, women fighting for Indian serials and children for the cartoon network. The catchy chat topics of those characters in TV serials are ruling their conversations in most of the places...and many Bhutanese folk dress up like some American Yanks...singing like western pop singers. Is it a gift of media? Or is it a threat brought in by it? Whatsoever, this change in the social behaviour of transplanting a new culture is attributed to media. If the country and the people in Bhutan are concerned by this changing scenario and if it is not taken care of at such a pace, Bhutan will not take long to join the rest of the world in a homogenous cultural society.*

*Our forefathers' legacy inherited by our nation from centuries now needs to be underpinned by using the positive aspects of the media. This paper 'Media Whitewashing', at first takes an in depth view of the experiences of media within the country in the context of cultural trends and assesses the development of the Bhutanese media today and its messages. Then analyzing the impacts on our society, it attempts to shed light on these symbols to assess the relationship between the media culture and Bhutanese culture—and tries to elucidate on the suggested remedies so as to turn the strength of media to our benefit.*

### Introduction of Media in Bhutan

The history of media does not lie heavy on our country. It is a

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recent development. For centuries people in Bhutan relied on the tradition of oral transmission of information, which is still strong in rural areas. The written form of correspondence was also said to have been dwelling for long. However, then the literacy rate in the country was insignificant and the impact of written form of media was said to be not so effective. With the socio-economic development and the geo-political changing scenario, the government has given an utmost priority to the media and its development. With the introduction of some legislation in support of the media, the technological advancement and the socio-economic development have altogether pulled in the media with new roles and responsibilities for the society.

Further, the policy emphasis on private sector development paved the way for the development of enterprises and business firms. This caused enormous pressure on the media to perform its function through the activities of advertisement, notification, entertainment, etc. Thus, in recent years, the media has gained impetus in the Kingdom. The giant leap in its revolution commenced with the introduction of the national newspaper *Kuensel* and broadcasting station BBS in the 1980's. This was further revolutionized with the introduction of ICT where the electronic media was introduced, as well as with the introduction of television in the year 1999. Today, we see the following, which are some of the most important and prominent forms of media in the country:

#### *Print Media*

With the literacy rate of about 54 percent, nowadays, Bhutanese could gain access to all forms of print media. The print media has been limited to three newspapers and a few journals, magazines, and publications published by different organizations. However, the people in Bhutan have access to various forms of print media including international magazines and newspapers of all sorts through bookstores and shops. Though Thimphu and some border towns receive the lion's share of information, the rural areas are also given access to newspapers distributed through public agents on

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public transport systems and, in the more remote places, carried by messengers and travellers.

#### *Radio*

Of all the media forms, radio has been considered the most effective in the country. It is also one of the oldest forms of media in the country, one which has been well developed to suffice the nation at large. It has the capacity to reach the remotest part of the country, and most of the people in the remote part of the country, constituting 70 percent of the total population heavily depend on the radio. The radio uses four languages: English; *Dzongkha*, the national language; *Sharchop*, the language prominent in the eastern part of the country; and *Lhotsham*, the language mostly spoken in the southern part of the country. This has paved the way for increased accessibility to radio messages targeting a majority of the population. Started as an amateur weekly broadcasting programme in 1973 by the National Youth Association of Bhutan, it now broadcasts 98 hours a week under the BBSC.

#### *Television*

Television first appeared in Bhutan in June, 1999 and is still in its infancy. Though broadcast in just two languages, i.e. Dzongkha and English, the messages through this media form are still not far flung. TV reaches the urban towns of the Dzongkhags and is alive for just four hours a day. Although the national television broadcast is limited to a short span of time, the viewers of television have wide access to various sources of information. They have an average of about 30 different channels, which can stay alive throughout the day.

#### *Internet*

Bhutan was virtually linked to the international global village with the introduction of the Internet in 1999. Access to the Internet is limited to only a handful of people in the country. The busiest Bhutanese website, Kuenselonline.com, sees an average of 40,000 to 60,000 hits a day, which is just 10 percent of the total population. However, access is seen to be

picking up with the building of ICT infrastructure and the government giving priority to the ICT development in the country.

*Movies*

Movies emerged in the country much before television and the internet. They have gained popularity where the Bhutanese had fairly good access to Indian and some English movies. The national movie industry has also developed quite recently. This has helped most of the Bhutanese youth to gain employment. This industry did shoot up in a decade. Now the capital's cinema hall has new movies coming up every month. Opportunities for the Bhutanese to gain access to different movies and shows through the sale of VCD, DVD, etc., are increasing tremendously.

*Music*

Traditionally, music has been a key entertainment for Bhutanese people. Music as a part of mass media was developed with the introduction of radio. Today, the Bhutanese have varieties of music ranging from modern Bhutanese songs to a variety of songs in foreign languages through radio, TV, Internet, computers, tape recorder, CDs, DVDs, MP3, etc. This form of media has a wide impact for the society in these days. Therefore, realizing the importance of music as a significant form of mass media, the social sectors have used it for conveying important and educational messages like health care, education, and environmental preservation to the public. Music still remains a basic source of entertainment in our country.

*Others*

Connectivity possibilities like the telephone were a significant happening. This has touched almost all parts of the country, though its numbers are fewer in the remote areas. The recent development in the mobile network has given a giant leap in communication and its usage has surpassed the telephone users. The infrastructure development of B-mobile is

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increasingly extending to many other parts of the country. The facility of the mobile at the moment is limited to only verbal conversation and short messages. However, its advancement in the near future with access to internet will give a more vital role in the use of mobiles as a prominent means of media. Fax is yet another important type of media which is often used for official and important purposes. But the accessibility to this type of media is limited to mostly urban offices. Besides being very expensive and there being a lack of awareness, the fax is not so popular in rural areas.

Generally, much importance was given to the development of media and communications, to respond to the demands of fast changing social, political, and economic development of the country. The Government, realizing the fact that the information and communication in the country will need to be emphasized, established the Ministry of Information and Communications in June, 2003. This Ministry is mandated to steer the development of the information and communication sector including the traditional and new media.

Thus, in just a few decades, with the advent of modern media forms in the country, reflections on the nature of communication and information sharing in our country (going from house to house, and crossing mountains in order to send one single message) have become a myth. In view of that, the country has changed itself into a vastly different reality. Satellites, Internet, television, faxes, and telephones have catapulted the Kingdom into the global village. One lone person from any part of our land can now share and communicate his way of life with thousands of people, anywhere and everywhere in the world. It has also played a role in bringing to Bhutan the knowledge of global community. At the dawn of modernization, media has emerged as the most powerful force driving the entire societal transformation.

#### **Benefits of Media**

Today, as Bhutan enters the age of communications, its priorities are geared to meet the needs and demands of the

times. The kingdom has seen a dramatic increase in the literacy rate of the population as a result of the special attention given by the royal government to the education sector. As technological advancement brings the international community closer together, it has also established the infrastructure to modernize and strengthen communication and information links with the rest of the world. It is the policy of the royal government, therefore, to facilitate and encourage the professional growth of the Bhutanese media which must play an important role in all areas of development. Such a role is especially relevant to the national policy of decentralization which aims to involve all sections of the society in the socio-economic and political development of the kingdom.

- His Majesty King Jigme Singye Wangchuck, October 1992

By and large media in Bhutan is said to have made a remarkable impact in the socio-economic development of the country. Today, as the country transforms itself from an agrarian society to a knowledge-based society, media is said to be a crucial element for development. So, many of the people in the country have developed an unlimited appetite for the media, whose information has changed their life and behaviour. The government and many people have given due importance in the development and usage of media. However, media in the country, being in the nascent stage of development and despite its ability to communicate educative, provocative and instant urgent messages, has yet to develop its effectiveness.

It has been supposed that media is not an active agent of change in isolation but has a complex set of other factors mingled with it. However, from the perspective of its influences, it has been understood that media is a powerful factor for change, be it for better or worse.

Media has become an indispensable source of information and an inescapable part of modern culture. The public at large depends on different forms of media for diverse needs of information for research, education, news, and so on. Apart from that, media today has become an important site for entertainment, too, through music, motion pictures,

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and many sorts of programmes and news. With the revolution in media and tremendous development in the media facilities like television and, we have gained access to a voluminous amount of information. The internet crowded media forms and environment, mostly through entertainment, become the main guide for everyone to learn anything and everything. The internet offers a plethora of opportunities for different groups of people and serves diverse interests and needs of the society, collectively identifying opportunities for fostering stronger knowledge networks.

Media forms, though devoted to entertainment, have fostered the values and ideals of modernized society thereby attracting the attention of masses. The following areas have been identified in which media forms a consistent, potentially crucial and interrelated need in the country.

### *Governance*

Effective governance in the modern era is almost next to impossible without media. Media has become a vital tool of the government and public for economic, political, social, and educational information; it has become a tool to influence people in general, in shaping various governmental policies, and in addressing issues of all kinds. The government can reach out to the public with information on policy changes and reforms through the media. The use of Information and Communication Technology has become a top priority in the field of governance, which helps them attain the mission of efficiency, transparency, and effectiveness. The concept of e-governance is a widely accepted and credited form of governance all across the globe. The use of internet services by the government ministries and agencies to launch websites made a giant leap in information dissemination all across society.

The media offers a platform for the effective governance through:

- Producing responsive communications activism and advocacy programmes of various government policies and strategies;

- Providing better access and sharing of data—especially on social and economic development trends and status with better mechanisms for finding and utilizing relevant research, survey, and studies for the formulation of better government policies and better decisions;
- Stronger and more diverse research in the communications arena, leading to better institutionalization in communications and in academia;
- Greater attention in the international venues of communications policy and reform, including, especially, better integration of networks into comparative and global settings;
- Societies at large rely on various media modalities (TV, Cable networks, radio, newspaper) by every government for official warnings of natural disasters. The media helps in obtaining information/news of the threats of natural disasters. Despite the precipitous nature of disasters (like tornadoes, earthquakes, floods, hurricanes) the media can provide information and forewarn the society well in advance of the mass emergency. Furthermore, in this era its added advantage gives a way for the government, especially the leaders, to convey messages to millions of people within a matter of few seconds;
- It is a fast and cost effective mode of communication.

As a result of this, very soon as Bhutan embarks on the process of democratization, the electoral processes could be transmitted through various media forms, thus maintaining the transparency of the system. In Bhutan's context, media forms have been successfully used to educate the public on the good governance policies and concepts such as decentralization, Gross National Happiness, and Community Development, etc.

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### *Business*

With its ability to create powerful touchstones, the media enables industries to promote and market their goods and services. It helps firms to inform millions in a short span of time and eventually send detailed information to all parts of the world. Travel agencies selling their business through advertisement and various media forms and the business executives and managers using e-conference/ video conferences—are some of the significant examples of the benefit of media in the business world.

Media is the sole stage for the firms and other organizations for advertisement. With the help of media, organizations are able to market their products and improve business. Today some parts of the world experience a marketing revolution where the electronic facilities are optimally utilized. The consumer can look for the goods they need, select and purchase from their own residential area, and in a little while they find their purchased goods arrive home, e.g. e-bay and e-shopping, etc. Vacancies and opportunities in the employment sector are advertised to reach the eyes of most of the job seekers and facilitate their application for jobs in a very effective way.

Private sectors and business firms in the country depend intensively on the media. Without the use of media, most of the private firms, especially the travel agents, amounting to almost 200, will be lamed and numbed. The public at large and the business firms in particular aspire for advanced media utility where even electronic transaction is possible. But due to the level of technological advancement the sector is not able to reach the level of utilizing the strengths to the optimum. Media in our country is yet to arrive at the level of e-bay and e-shopping.

### *Education*

The dramatic development of the overall educational scenario and aspect in the country has seen a provocative priority in the field of information. As a result, the media organization and the information sector have a much bigger role to play in society. The pressure for the development of media in general

is inevitable. The report on a survey conducted by the Ministry of Information and Communications states that 2000 RTM held in Thimphu, had the government declaring its recognition of “media as a tool for Bhutan to leapfrog into the 21<sup>st</sup> century and to help form a society enriched by information, knowledge and skills”.

Decades ago, when newspapers and some newsletters were prominent forms of media, and when the literacy rate at large was poor, the media effect was confined to only a handful of people. Most of the people who were unable to read and write had no access to media forms. But media today, which has both the characteristics of motion pictures and written phrases, has extended its arms to the masses. The films and documentary shows which appear through television and also local cassette stores have introduced most of the classic stories and novels to many people. These movies help develop critical thinking for our people. The cultural and music programming part has its own share of task of opening up our society to the world of music and art.

Media has been a vital tool and source of information for education. Parents can use TV as a catalyst to get kids reading—following up on TV programs by getting books on the same subjects or reading authors whose work was adapted for the programs. Some of the good programmes on television, Internet, and motion pictures can teach people important values and life lessons. Media programmes at times explore pressing and burning issues for people to discuss and educate themselves. Certain educational programming helps people in developing socialization and learning skills. At times, cultural, ethnic, and geographical diversities are also learnt through news, current events, and certain specialized historical programmes. Consequently, many Bhutanese have learnt facts about countries outside from media sources.

These days, due to the convergence of media on a wide array of events, our children are said to have learnt healthy ways of attaining the objectives of education. They have picked up a lot in the field of sports and games by having access to the performance of professionals outside the boundary of our society. The educationists have the facility to

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continuously update and they can help attain better results of their output with the help of media.

Media covers interviewing people from all walks of life, working to create programmes with a powerful social message, which shapes itself as a powerful tool and platform for service to the society. Through programmes covering a wide range of geographical areas, cultures, ethnicities, and races, people all around can elevate their dialogue and create a forum of institutional culture for civic discourse. Media also enables, in different ways, the diverse groups of people in our country and outside to share their culture and traditions. At the same time they will be able to promote their own culture and values with side-by-side learning about other cultures and traditions.

There are broad processes of advancement in the field of media and its benefits in academics, governance, research, education, and personal communications. In this process, the media organizations have won the faith of a number of other institutional actors motivated by similar organizations across the spectrum of producers and users.

Striving for openness and flexibility in education, the government's attention to community outreach, with both traditional methods and ICT-bases courses, was specified as one way of reaching students who are unable to join courses in the regular classes. Continuing education in the Kingdom is envisaged as becoming increasingly popular. Technology is also increasingly being used in traditional classroom teaching, leading to the emergence of combined methods, where traditional lecturing and seminars are combined with web-based study materials, using email for communication, etc., in some of the tertiary education institutions in the country.

### *Economy*

The country's emerging need of media and facilities paved a way for the development of ICT, which will be featured in all aspects of plans in all sectors. The growing demand for the use of ICT was also evident in the other corporate and private sectors. Since the media in general, and ICT in particular, has

been emphasized widely by the Royal Government as a critical tool towards enhancing good governance, the development of IT and its related infrastructure and facilities will likely gear up in the coming years. This will generate employment and boost income in the country. Further, the use of such tools and facilities will have an overall socio-economic impact by improving the way of living and also the equity development in all parts for the betterment of the destitute populace in rural areas.

The increasing number of advertising agents and broadcast and print media agents lead to creating employment opportunities for many in the country. This is particularly important in a situation when the issues of unemployment threaten the country's social and economic scenario. However, since there is potential for the development of advertising agencies and also media organizations' advancement, it is necessary to stimulate development so that it helps the media organizations employ many youth who are otherwise unemployed.

### *Social Life*

Social life for most of the people in Bhutan is typically characterized by involvement in certain gatherings, either out for a picnic or some games, and perhaps occasional get-together like an annual ritual of the family. Due to the lack of family entertainment facilities the media has said to have brought in a positive element that family members who on different occasions go out for entertainments now stay home and have more time to socialize, especially by watching TV. This direct impact of media has improved family relations. Further, this impact on the social life by hooking on to home entertainment was viewed positively by some because of the fact that those family members are most of the time kept occupied at home and so it helps reduce alcoholism and other vices like gambling.

Very importantly, in a society where the culture is dominated by conservatives, the media has broadened the mindset of the people and created a more open society. This phenomenon has been more vivid in the urban areas where

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the media in different forms has broadened the minds and attitudes of the society. Now people do not feel different and awkward to have the company of the opposite sex. Moreover, the people in general and the youth in particular are taught on the values of social ties and behaviours that lead to the healthy social lives and companionship. With advanced ICT facilities Bhutan can also join the rest of the community and communicate with the small but growing e-community. Bhutanese can now socialize through the Internet to promote friendship and networking.

The media also contributes to social cohesion. Especially when it comes to the interaction of people of different sections of society, language as a barrier seems to be diminishing. Furthermore, as the other languages, with strong support of machines, are threatening our own national language, the media can be used to promote our national language, too. The enhancement of our language with electronic facilities will give a strong base for us to withstand the competition and to strengthen our national language within ourselves.

To sum up, the Bhutanese society is by and large developing with the advent of different media forms. It has in many ways helped the nation to develop an ideal culture and lifestyle among Bhutanese society. The development of print media has enhanced reading and writing habits for the people in Bhutan. Furthermore, the development of ICT has helped gain a good culture of our governance towards attaining the values of transparency, accountability, and efficiency.

### **The Negative Effects of Media**

It has been evident that the media effects are considerable with unsurprisingly immediate impacts and influences over the viewers that changes them from their age-old beliefs to a common inducement. The viewers develop and adopt behaviour by mimicking the flickering movements on the screens. These actions are influential in the deterioration of their philosophy to a newly induced behavioural change. Consequently, the effects of globalization has brought the whole society together with their intention of changing the lifestyle as per the needs of their organizational firms and

businesses by creating certain images and behaviours that ultimately subvert the sweet and ideal utopian living style, which most of the people around the world lived in their distinct ways.

The potent effect of media has led people to believe in the media messages, lessening the power of comprehension of the viewers to the real intentions of producers. So far, the media has been embracing commercial advertisements due to high pecuniary benefits as compared to knowledge-sharing and information dissemination programmes. As a result, most of the people have entered a cultural environment that is designed to the specifications of a marketing strategy. This scenario has started taking its toll. The media's race to embrace this newly developing culture has weakened its resolve to pursue truth and relevance.

Media in every form everywhere, share a common feature that is particularly observed regarding the messages conveyed, which is in fact stereotyped. The most common characteristics that the media stereotypes promote through movies, TV, and advertisements, etc., are fairly common and its weakness has come to threaten the public good more than secrecy. It has induced various behavioural traits in different groups. Since popular forms of media in Bhutan are generally dominated by international programmes, ads, and events, the Bhutanese audience is learning more about other countries and foreign cultures than Bhutan. This simple presentation of weakness of the Bhutanese media, gives ample opportunity for the consumers to rely heavily on the other media messages. Thus, as in the following instances, our society gets entrapped and inclined towards a culture which is non-Bhutanese, thereby eroding our own culture and tradition.

### *Lifestyle*

People have changed their basic habits with the media messages in most of the places where media services have advanced. In the past, the social ties were enormous, with the families gathered around and the elderly telling stories and other oral transmissions of traditional values and morals. This does not exist in places where the modern media has

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reached. Basically, the new emerging family relations are that the family members are all gathered around a television set and they experience conflicts and turmoil amongst themselves because of diverse interests and pBibliography for information.

Very commonly, society's emerging concern is that the media, especially TV and internet, are taking away the attention of the people most of the time and that the responsibility for the family at home is most often forgotten. People go to sleep later at night and adjust their housework, even office work, to TV, eating into their leisure time is yet another development. Because of this newly evolving habit, it has been seen that the people usually have less time for work. This trend has given less time for people to participate in outdoor activities such as games and sports. Another habit of most of the younger people in the offices, is the culture of Internet chatting. This activity deprives them of their useful work in the offices and wastes their time and resources.

Most of the parents are concerned by the excessive appetite of their children for media messages. They have found that children are watching television late into the night and that they lose focus on their school objective and activities. They are now getting obsessed with TV characters and picking up language, behaviours, and habits that are undesirable.

The media messages in the country, through our national and local media forms, do not adequately meet the demands of the society, because the society at large depends on the messages and programmes from afar. The basic characteristics of the media messages and information is based on the urbanized lifestyles and culture, like the Indian serials and also all other movies. Since there is very little depiction of the rural and remote areas, there is an implication that the Bhutanese perception of lives could be influenced more with urban lifestyles.

### *Language*

Media consumers have gained access to various languages and dialects, and they get to be multilingual. However, due to

limitations of the media languages especially in the movies and internet, the media is known to have changed the nature of languages. TV and movies have English that has undesirable use of words and language. Email and SMS have abbreviated the spoken language since messages have to be kept short and that distorts language. Further, the Bhutanese language, not being supported by the media as anticipated, was found losing its priority within our society. Since whatever they do, whether it is to search for information, to communicate, or to chat with friends, relatives or loved ones far away, they need to do it in English. Therefore, without the knowledge of English, they feel handicapped. It was found that the English language was to be given priority, and Dzongkha was seen to be just a preferred language. Due to this factor, many of the younger educated people lose their interest in the Dzongkha language.

#### *Physical Image*

Bhutanese traditionally consider someone beautiful based on the nature of the complexion and the shape of the face that is similar to the full moon. However, today emerging from the areas that are prone to media influences, it is usual that the Bhutanese girls and some boys come with all sorts of cosmetic touch-ups on their faces and hair as well. They have thrown away the concept of Bhutanese traditional beauty of a full bloom moon. The natural colour (black) of the hair was not acceptable for some youths so they intend to make it yellow, grey, brown, etc. This was considered to be unethical and not acceptable in our traditional beliefs. The number of powdered faces is increasing tremendously. This colour, as a symbolic stereotype of media, drives girls to use lots of foundation creams and make their lips red and cheeks red. The coloring of their face and hair has become very common, which no longer makes them look like Bhutanese. The make-up and other painting habits have become acceptable by many of our youths to appear colourful.

A stereotypical media image of uniformly beautiful and obsessively thin females with Barbie doll proportions with harmful dieting habits has become common among women

and girls in Bhutan. The world of advertising does not recognize the different beauty ideals that we celebrate within our own culture. The ads normally glamorize skinny models and do not accept the bigger body types. The underlying message for girls in most of these ads is to be unnaturally thin to be accepted and feel normal. Therefore, Bhutanese girls are becoming increasingly preoccupied with their body images and weight. This preoccupation in many cases leads to lowered self-esteem, mental health issues, and eating disorders.

It is even observed that people who regularly read magazines tend to diet and base their body image on photos and messages they find in the ads of these magazines. In fact, many youth revere the images in magazines. Generally the average height and weight for a female model is 5'10" and 50 kgs and the height and weight for the average woman in Bhutan is around 5'2" with 55 kgs. Targeting on the ideal of thinness as beauty, girls diet quite a lot and in case they have binged, they purge in order to meet their perceived ideals.

They believe that the loss of some kilograms in their body will make them have everything—the perfect shape, great sex, and a rewarding career. On the other hand, research indicates that exposure to images of thin, young, air-brushed female bodies is linked to depression, loss of self-esteem, and the development of unhealthy eating habits in women and girls. The false belief that smoking reduces weight and maintains body figure has driven many teenage girls to smoke. However, the culture of Bhutanese society normally does not accept smoking habits in girls. These activities of women and girls in general are to get to the image of Barbie-doll proportions. But the research has found that a body built that way would suffer from chronic diarrhea and eventually die from malnutrition. Still a number of real life women and girls who seek a similarly underweight body is epidemic, and they can suffer equally devastating health consequences. Anorexia and bulimia as a culture is stepping in among the younger female generation as a result of diet consciousness.

The case, as aforesaid, of maintaining the thinness does not dwell in girls only. Similar efforts are also being made by

some men/boys in order to keep themselves slim and colourful. The similar sights of colourful hair fixed with jelly stuffs and powdered faces like girls are becoming common with the male youths, too. Going little beyond, some men are observed undergoing excessive exercises and fitness activities in order to attain thinness for some and masculine structure for others. Salons in the towns enjoy an increase in male customers for make-up and facial purposes; this is real though amazing.

*Leisure and Celebrations*

It is in fact surprising that most of the conversation topics among Bhutanese folks in the towns and other semi-urban areas are all influenced and dominated by Indian serials and episodes. The scenario is very likely to extend further as modern facilities and infrastructure extend their arms to other remote parts of the country. If it continues the cultural erosion seems inevitable.

Typically the Bhutanese way of celebrating is very simple with traditional songs and dances. However, there is a catch when people in the urban areas start their celebration with an opening of 'champagne'. The custom is borrowed from the foreign society through commercial advertisements. The celebrations—like birthday parties, dance parties, and all sorts of entertainment have become embedded into our culture among some of the elites of our society. Since the elites are exemplars, it has become very hard for the common people to abstain from following such a group of the society, and it is even harder for them to realize it as a threat to our own culture.

*Food and Eating Habits*

Whatever form of media (ads, movies, music videos), messages deny certain values of culture and tradition of our people, especially in food habits. This will further deteriorate health due to the influence of the unhealthy food choice advertised. Where will we find today, the beautiful cohesion of the family members sitting on the floor and eating together?

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In fact we see many families owning a dining table, and each one eating at different times. The family feast, which is part of a vibrant culture of Bhutanese society, is vanishing.

Another but very important aspect in society today is the kind of food preferred. Many of the literate families prefer different types of food that were never known to our ancestors. The buttered toast breakfast with jam and cheese, the chicken tandoori, etc., were never part of Bhutanese cuisine. We can see that with the influence of media, people are now buying and experimenting with new food from supermarkets. Many also watch the cooking shows on TV programmed by other countries like India, Korea, China, etc, learning new ideas and new recipes, making our people more familiar with outside culture, creating a new culture in food preparation in Bhutan. It is therefore, not surprising to find some Bhutanese without an idea of how to cook some typical dishes like *Kangchu*, *Jasha maroo* and *Nosha maroo*, etc., but would not lack information for making French fries, noodles, and cakes at home.

### *Costume*

A stereotypical media image of scantily dressed female objects of male desire is now trying to make our culture, to a large extent, experiment with eroticizing behaviour. Since the media places a high value on female sexuality, our young girls are picking up on that message. Teenage girls feel the need to be sexually attractive in order to be loved and accepted. As a result, girls become sexually active at a very young age as they struggle to increase their self-esteem and self-worth. This notion drives girls to desire diminutive attire like short shirts and also transparent clothes to expose their bodies rather than wearing *kira*.

The younger generations mostly now look for branded shoes and track suits and go for walks or jogs. They shy away from helping in domestic chores at home, which is actually a part of the lives of children in the Bhutanese cultural setting. More observations can be made on dress; the youth make lots of exceptions to the national dress to go public places. They opt for attire which is not known in the country, like short

skinny shirts and mini skirts or jean pants. They are so overwhelmed by such dresses that even harsh weather conditions are no barrier for them to wear those clothes.

The costume taste is not different with the boys. They prefer discarding the *gho* and formal shoes. Instead they would prefer to wear jean pants with differently designed shirts and coats. Heavy stuffy rags tied around the wrist and head and long, fancy shirts with jean pants hanging down the buttock and the tips resting on dingo boots were never part of the Bhutanese costume, but are gaining momentum among our youth.

#### *Culture and Social Values*

Today, media culture has lifted many of the veils of secrecy between children and adults, men and women. The result is a series of drastic changes, including the blurring of age, gender, and other social distinctions. It has also been found that people are affected by the pervasiveness of media. Due to the influence of media on children, the ability of parents to develop responsible attitudes and behaviour in their children has dwindled. Fighting and other violence used as a way to 'handle' conflict—the glamorous way of most prime characters depicted in movies, defeating enemies with vigor, violence and pride—has brought many a youth to the stage of gang fights and other unpleasant activities. This, in fact, erodes civility in the society by demeaning and displacing positive social values.

The strong religious influence in our society with beautiful values of having great faith in God, and all the time remembering God is one significant and sacred practice of the Bhutanese. But, intensive media messages, especially the ads, dilute this very belief and people lose faith in religion. Therefore, saying grace before mealtime and prayers before bedtime is diminishing, despite efforts made by the educational institutions. Initially, the culture practiced the tradition of offering to God before eating and drinking. This scenario of saying grace and act of offering has diminished itself quite surprisingly.

Undesirable acts like cigarette smoking and alcohol

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consumption shown in ads as cool and attractive, but not unhealthy and deadly, and promoted by prime casts, has contributed to the smoking habits of many young ones in the society. Since film stars are more popular than national leaders in the society at large, the audiences, especially the youth tend to believe in the behaviour of those stars, which most of the time is vile and undesirable.

The glamorous show and the style of Western merriment of getting into all sorts of nightlife activities on TV and in movies drives many Bhutanese (even married couples who have children) to attend parties and nightlife activities that are part of Western culture and practices.

In most of the media in Western countries' entertainment shows and news media, one will notice that members of ethnic and visible minorities are inadequately represented and that portrayals of minorities are often stereotypical and demeaning. If the media's take on minorities is interpreted at face value, the kids are growing up with a skewed vision of what it means to be part of a first people society. If they get the impression from the news, they will likely take minorities as a negative force, inferior, and so on. As a consequence of this, the public at large, comparing themselves with those figures in the media and with media's advertising intent, does not see people like themselves, in most of the cases—such as with race, ethnicity, or physical ability, for example—diminishing their self worth.

The media shows male characters mainly in the workplace, and only rarely at home. More than a third of the boys had never seen a man on TV doing domestic chores. Most mainstream press coverage continues to rely on men as experts in the fields of business, politics, and economics. Women in the news are more likely to be featured in stories about accidents, natural disasters, or domestic violence than in stories about their professional abilities or expertise. This makes women in general appear morally weak and inefficient or incapable of coming out as somebody in society. This is directly influenced by the underlying media messages for guys to be slobs and all the girls to be sexy. Well, who has ever seen a culture in such bad shape? Bernstein said that

the media's race to embrace this 'idiot culture' has weakened its resolve to pursue truth and relevance. It's a weakness, he said, that has come to threaten the public good more than secrecy.

*Mindset*

Information received by viewers, whether through TV, radio, internet, CDs, or motion pictures, is compared to the invisible shaft of Cupid that inserts fallacy and fancy into the minds of the observers and finally changes one's overall beliefs and perceptions of life. This happens mostly with the youth and adolescents even though the parents prefer to hide them from all sorts of undesired behaviours.

The advent of media, especially television and the internet, has changed the mindset of the people. The media has its own set of cultural values through the advertisements, adopted by the society at large. These strong influences from the media make the viewers accept the culture it sets. Today, many younger Bhutanese have a desire to act Westernized and go out and flirt. The mindset here, to act differently, is being modern and open. Thus, they try to switch to the culture brought in through media, and ignore our Bhutanese culture. Many youths in urban areas feel ashamed if they have not gone to parties and are not speaking English because this act of avoiding such behaviour would make them appear conservative, old fashioned, orthodox-type people. A majority of society, especially young ones, are supposedly of the opinion that television and other forms of media reflect the real world.

Due to the lack of appropriate culture set in with the government's policy, where the ICT facilities were set, but its own objective of using ICT in governance like e-governance, e-services, e-learning, and e-bay systems are still not popular in the society because the people did not care much for the macro level use of the ICT facilities. Ultimately the general notion among the young ones in the offices is that the internet facilities are provided for email, entertainment, and chat. Although the internet is acknowledged as a good tool for research, but possibly due to limitations in access, many do

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not use the internet as an information site. Therefore, internet is used mainly for email, followed by news and chat.

Moreover, promiscuous scenes on different forms of media, like television, magazines, posters, newspapers, and internet have influenced the mindset of the urban population. With repeated views and sights of such scenes, the viewers in general tend to believe that hugging, kissing, and holding hands is a more modern way of social behaviour in the sense of showing interaction. Furthermore, as per the portrayal of the image of women in media ads, the people in the urban areas view women as passive objects without an opinion, or as objects of love. This is against the reality in the Bhutanese cultural setting where the role of a Bhutanese woman is to be a good wife, a capable manager of the household, and a loving mother, sister, or friend.

### **Recommendations**

There is no doubt indeed, that the media has lifted our society by enormous positive steps. However, with every gift, there is a potential downside. The small, fragile and heterogeneous society with a varied culture is not strong enough to sustain itself—especially when the floods of modernization and Westernization seep through, attempting to forge our culture. Elders are worried about the power of mainstream media messages on the young and the different forms of media with reflective impact on social and cultural norms and on beliefs and lifestyles. As we stand at a crossroads between all sorts of media lines and forms, between societal response and political settings, between our own culture and emerging culture brought in through media, it is necessary that we adequately study the newer forms of media to use them productively with minimum negative effects on our society. Airwaves are a public utility, and those who control their access and distribution must do so in ways that represent the best interests of all Bhutanese society.

Media cuts across all sectors as an indispensable factor for development. As the country develops with the objective of creating a knowledge-based society, the accessibility to information becomes critical. This access will not be possible

without the media. Therefore, the development of media needs to be pursued, but these developmental activities should be sensitive to our unique national goals and values.

We need to comprehend the emerging complexity of media and to select intelligent pathways to filter and shape its messages in a holistic perception through a unity of good vision, strategy, and action. Focusing on what media does to people, we should strive to think of what people do with media—only then will we be able to shape media to our benefit. In this context, we must find ways to build a robust knowledge infrastructure for public interest media. We must find ways that enhance researchers and producers in finding and mobilizing relevant research and data that are desired by the society. We must find ways that can facilitate the strategies, and support the articulation of broader conceptual frameworks and linkages between issues to support the need of the public at large. The following are some of the recommended areas to look into for media reform:

*Accessibility and Equity*

As aforementioned, the effect of media on the development of our country is great. Yet looking at the current scenario we find that the media impact was restricted to only a chunk of population living in the urban areas. Though efforts have been made for the development of infrastructure and facilities, it is obvious that the media has not met its equity in terms of accessibility to all portions of society. The radio has touched the lives of nearly every Bhutanese citizen but other forms were restricted to only a few parts of the country. Television and international publications like magazines and newspapers have not penetrated beyond urban society, while the national newspaper and other print media have been restricted to the literate population in the urban and semi-urban areas. The internet facilities have touched only the IT literate people and are very limited for students and others who do not have offices. Further, the media, be it print or television programmes, is basically seen to be a replica of mass media outside the country. This has limited its credibility in the country among the educated and thinkers in

the country.

Besides, the content has been found inadequate with limited coverage especially when it comes to educational programmes. The media representation has been focused more on the urban towns with special attention being placed in the capital where the central office has been located. The rural populace is not equally represented. The evolution of private newspapers, especially Bhutan Observer, seems to have made an attempt to address the coverage of rural places. However, since the accessibility of the newspaper is limited to literate groups which is much less in the rural areas, it is the other forms of media that need to extend to rural areas both in terms of content coverage and accessibility of information.

Therefore, to further nurture our beautiful culture and to develop a culture that best befits our society, we still need to boost our media and reach to all parts of the country. The effect of media in our country can be imagined if the media infrastructure and facilities have extended to all parts of the country.

One of the most important media forms is the movies. However the accessibility to movies is very limited. It was found that Bhutanese movies and films are very expensive, and that an average-sized family would have to pay at least half a thousand ngultrum to watch a Bhutanese movie show. Though it was said that Bhutanese films have high representations of our culture, language, and tradition, the impact is found to be minimal. The government, besides its efforts on enhancement of more Bhutanese films, should also, side by side, enhance accessibility to all the people through reduced entertainment taxes as well.

Media is anticipated to form the vital tool towards promotion of our traditional and modern culture in the country. Therefore, besides entertainment, the media is supposed to cater to the information needs of the country. In this respect, it is critical for the media to maintain a balance between public services and commercial interests. However, maintaining the balance between the two is a challenge for any media organization, in terms of their sustainability. Also, today, in the world of globalization, many media organizations

tend to pursue the current trend of providing their services as per the market forces, which is alarming to our society. Thus, it is of utmost importance to provide financial support in the development of infrastructure. Further, the funding support can be extended to the areas and parts where media information is vital but does not reach. In the decentralized environment, people in the rural areas are in need of information and education that will provide them with a proper guide to government policy etc, assisting in decision-making processes. For this processes funding supports needs to be extended to the remote parts where the areas get access to all information through subsidized rates.

Therefore, in order to meet the government objective for the media to play the role of the 'fourth estate' that is required in a healthy democratic system—regarded as a means of fulfilling the 'entitlements' of all citizens to information, culture and entertainment—the government must ensure the extension of infrastructure and facilities to all parts of the country like power, telecommunications facilities, electronic media, and ICT services, which are very powerful tools of media and yet do not cover many parts of the country.

#### *Research*

Research on media reform needs to be carried out extensively. Part of this process involves inviting researchers and reform actors to reflect on the conservatism of knowledge production and the use in this area—identifying not only specific research needs, but also the patterns that lead to persistent development and study in the field. Thus, there is a concern about the Bhutanese media's content, both in terms of quality and quantity as per the demands of Bhutanese consumers, which needs more research to be of greater variety, higher quality, and, inevitably, more entertaining.

By nearly all accounts, the communications reform field routinely fails in these critical functions. Attention to research is fragmented within the academy and data issues are uneven in all media types. Networks for sharing knowledge, defining research needs, and building linkages between issues are

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mostly *ad hoc*. Academic works on research that is directly relevant to the development of media system that enhances our own culture and preservation of national tradition should be encouraged. Media organizations in Bhutan should have the time, training, or incentives necessary to become rigorous consumers and producers of research. Television watching doesn't necessarily have to be passive; with some research input it can prompt questions, kindle curiosity, or teach activities to pursue when the set is off.

The Royal Government has made a modest beginning by establishing the Information and Media Authority—to take up activities of research, planning, and support for the growth of the media. It initiates research and the drafting of policy, regulation, and legislation for the ministry.

### *Censoring Media*

I would like to remind our youth that the television and the Internet provide a whole range of possibilities which can be both beneficial as well as negative for the individual and the society. I trust that you will exercise your good sense and judgement in using the Internet and television.

- King Jigme Singye Wangchuck, June 2, 1999

The media development in the country was timely, and many new forms of media have been introduced in recent years. Yet, with lack of experience and its impact in the beginning, media growth has been noticeably somewhat discordant. The most effective and accessible form of media, like the television and the internet, were introduced lately with numerous choices of information. The lack of media literacy and education together with the unlimited information of media sites and messages through all print, internet and television, seems to have created some confusion within the mindset of people in the Kingdom. The situation will be further aggravated by the unlimited access to the most vulnerable populace in the urban areas of the country.

The Royal Government, realizing the fact, has established the *National Information Technology Authority* for overall ICT policy and plans in the country and the *Bhutan Communications Authority* as the regulatory authority for all

the ICT and media sectors. Further, for the effective censorship of the media, the government has formed *The Film and TV Review Board*, which will review and censor all Bhutanese films on the impact on national policy, politics, and culture of the country before they are screened for the public. However, due to the emergence of numerous forms of media and unregulated number of cable operators, there is a need to take additional work to enhance the media censor that will prohibit the view of certain harmful programmes from the different groups of the society.

Media has become very effective in communicating to the masses. In a matter of seconds, most children can mimic a movie or TV character, sing an advertising jingle (soap), or give other examples. Many choose to tune out with a hungry appetite for media information and messages. Those who continue to consume media images are strongly influenced by the culture it depicts and its messages. Media in different forms has been very important and has more to teach to the masses than any other medium could. Media messages can so readily harm the culture indeed, for which it needs to be controlled and subject to censoring on issues of media reform.

With the explosion in satellite and digital specialty channels, we now have access to a plethora of both good quality and inappropriate content. In the crowded media environment, the key for the society is to search out high quality messages for their society and culture. A lack of role models should spark discussion about how media portrays different types of people and programmes.

What ever form they take (ads, movies, computer games, music videos), messages can be good or bad for a child. Just as one abstains from certain foods in the diet that may be unhealthy, one should also limit the child's media diet of messages. They should be restricted from the messages like use of cigarettes and alcohol, and fatty foods and thin bodies (where the media heavily promote unhealthy foods while at the same time telling people they need to loose weight and be thin). From media violence children learn to behave aggressively toward others, and incite less caring and

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affectionate attitude toward others.

Since it is evident that the media, especially referring to television, influences viewers' perception of the values and behaviour, the government should liaise with television station operators, cable television system operators, and video programmers to enable and facilitate them taking into consideration that television broadcast and cable programming has established a uniquely pervasive presence in the lives of Bhutanese. There is a compelling governmental interest in empowering media censors and parents to limit the negative influences of video programming that is harmful to viewers.

The government might need to update and provide all concerned authorities and people on the timely information about the nature of upcoming video programming and with the technological tools that allow them easily to block violent, sexual, or other programming that they believe harmful in order to achieve the interest of the society. With respect to the censoring of media messages, the government can seek consultation of the television industry and formulate stringent rules requiring distributors of such technology to permit parents to block the display of video programming that they have determined is inappropriate for their family members.

The government at large and the family at home in particular can initiate media messages censoring with the help of developing program classification system and use it in conjunction with V-chip technology.

#### *V-chip Technology*

'V-chip' is simple equipment used in the TV sets for censoring and blocking certain programmes that are not desired by the viewers. This is usually practiced by the parents to block certain programmes that are harmful to their children. This is also practised through rating the shows, which is established by the broadcasting industry. These ratings are encoded into the programs, and the V-chip technology reads the encoded information and blocks shows accordingly. Using the remote control, parents can program the V-chip to block certain

shows based on their ratings (*Federal Communications Bureau*).

*Media Rating Systems*

It is also critical to set a common rating system of media messages based on the consensus of the media that will allow parents to block a broad range of programs on a multi-channel system effectively and easily. Technology that allows parents to block programming based on common ratings should be introduced. Towards this end, the government must frame rules on the requirement of apparatus, especially television sets equipped with the blocking technology. The alternative blocking technology that enables parents to block programming based on identifying programs without ratings must also be explored in order to enhance effectiveness of the media censoring. However, the establishment of such rules of media rating to screen out sexual, violent, or other indecent material should be informed to the parents before it is displayed to children, and provide voluntarily to broadcast signals that contain ratings of such programming. Towards this end, the broadcasting industry should establish a voluntary ratings system for TV programs and provide a reliable ratings system with the guidelines for the TV viewers. This system can be initiated by the Bhutan Information and Communication Media Authority (BICMA).

It is practically significant that the act and regulation and other guide books of the government and telecommunication authorities should enact regulations on media stressing the procedures for the establishment of a television rating code, as well as procedures for newly manufactured television sets to include a mechanism to block programs.

Ratings could be developed with the help of Motion Picture Association of Bhutan, Association of Cable Operators, and the mass media organizations like BBS, *Kuensel*, BMS, etc., based on research and general feed back from the society on the issue of its impact on society. The ratings can be done either directly with the channel or with the programme with the help of coding. The following box

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provides an ideal example of rating system adopted in America:

### ***The Ratings System in America***

In 1996 Congress asked the broadcasting industry to establish a voluntary ratings system for TV programs. The industry did so by creating the ratings system known as “TV Parental Guidelines.”

This system was established by the National Association of Broadcasters, the National Cable Television Association, and the Motion Picture Association of America.

Ratings appear in the corner of your television screen during the first 15 seconds of each television program. The ratings are also included in many magazines that give TV ratings and in the television listings of many newspapers. Ratings are given to all television programming except news, sports, and unedited movies on premium cable channels. There are six possible ratings that a program can receive:

**TV-Y**, (All Children) found only in children’s shows, means that the show is appropriate for all children;

**TV-7**, (Directed to Older Children) found only in children’s shows, means that the show is most appropriate for children age 7 and up;

**TV-G** (General Audience) means that the show is suitable for all ages but is not necessarily a children’s show;

**TV-PG** (Parental Guidance Suggested) means that parental guidance is suggested and that the show may be unsuitable for younger children (this rating may also include a **V** for violence, **S** for sexual situations, **L** for language, or **D** for suggestive dialog);

**TV-14** (Parents Strongly Cautioned) means that the show may be unsuitable for children under 14 (V, S, L, or D may accompany a rating of TV-14); and

**TV-MA** (Mature Audience Only) means that the show is for mature audiences only and may be unsuitable for children under 17 (V, S, L, or D may accompany a rating of TV-MA).

*Source: Federal Communications Commission, US*

*Policy Support*

Since the most at stake is our own culture, stringent regulations are required to comprehend the dimensions of the use of media and their implications for public policy and culture. The press and broadcasting freedom and opportunity to many offered under the protection of many of the Government legal protections and rights poses a dicey game of creating chaos and lots of institutional malfunctioning in the society.

In order to direct the media to our social development in the aspects of culture and tradition, it is important to further enhance the government's policy, support, and initiation. Towards this end, following measures can be taken in light of the development of media in Bhutan:

The Government must render support and encourage the development and convergence of information and communication technologies on the creation and use of literary and artistic works, as well as enhance individuals to cultivate an informed appreciation of the rich national heritage as well as the civilizations and cultures of the wider world.

The Government must provide incentives and grants to Bhutanese multi-media organizations and local film industries to encourage them to nurture Bhutanese lifestyles, culture, stories, and folktales.

Bhutan, while joining any free trade organizations should be clear on the interpretation of international rules and TOR in order to provide adequate solutions for safeguarding our national culture and associated heritage.

Bhutan should participate in as many international organizations that help and guide the country to protect its culture and restrict other countries to expand their film and literary creators into our society in order to safeguard our culture and traditions.

Enhance and support Bhutanese cultural institutions with good legislation, regulations, program support, etc., towards conservation and promotion of diverse cultural works, stories and symbols in the media world.

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Form a public policy frame work to address media use and other public airwaves in the best interest of our own society and culture.

A special focus on the reorientation of the kind of media used and people to watch will be to forge partnerships with universities, research institutions, and other civil society organizations. This partnership programme will help develop a new approach towards building media organizations to help acquire a stronger base and at the same time encourage greater international cooperation towards fulfilling the objective of guiding proper use of media.

Subsidies on infrastructure—including power, telecommunications facilities, and electronic media and ICT services, which are in fact expensive to the public at the moment—needs to be provided to reach the rural areas and to all income groups.

Legislation and existing regulations, like Bhutan Telecommunications Act, Copyrights Act, ICT Act, etc., will need to be implemented in view of monitoring and guiding the development of media in the country that will protect the media in its professionalism. This is expected to fulfill the national objective of developing of a free and responsible press in a competitive environment in an era of rapid political change, with the introduction of the constitution in the kingdom.

Provide the financial support for the sustenance of media organizations which have been pursuing minimal pBibliography on commercialism and stressing educational and information-based organizations.

### *Media Organization Reforms*

Media organizations in many cases create programs seeing people/society at large as consumers to be sold to. On the contrary their mission should be reformed focusing the people at large as students to be educated, as citizens responsible for the preservation and enhancement of our Bhutanese traditions and culture. The vision of such an organization must be to serve the society through the provision of broadly educating and advocating programmes on our significant

culture and traditions, as well as education as a whole realizing its forte and maximizing the benefits of being part of the consortium of the Bhutanese society. In other words, media organizations must be geared to fulfil their role to inform, educate, and entertain people in Bhutan.

The government should enable media organizations to gain ample experience and confidence to take on the task of enhancing our own culture. Media can augment potentials of the present unique culture of the Bhutanese society to preserve and to flourish. Therefore, the Government must take a deterrent action on the media organizations which are likely to affect the culture. Towards this end, exercises must be carried out to locate, access, analyze, organize, evaluate, and apply information about selected media lines like TV and internet that attract the attention of the majority of people.

It has been customary with many nations that the focus of media has not been properly utilized. The world so far in some cases experienced many of the leaders and political parties utilizing the media for propaganda with many intentions. Such a culture must be changed. In this regard, the government must ensure that all forms of media organizations and other agencies of media (television broadcasters, television programming producers, cable operators, appropriate public interest groups, and other interested individuals from the private sector) are fairly balanced in terms of political affiliation, the points of view represented, and the functions to be performed by those organizations with equal provision of information provided fairly to the people in general. The government also must facilitate and carry out a timely assessment of the media to ensure that people will not use media towards their individual benefit, and provide enough freedom.

Furthermore, diversity guidelines for broadcasters must be set up which ensures balanced coverage on cultural diversity, refraining from stereotypical portrayals. This will ensure that the television and all the media programmes reflect and sustain the country's cultural diversity.

The establishment of such guidelines is expected to:

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- Ensure balanced coverage of issues;
- Refrain from broadcasting programmes that may incite hatred or contempt of others, based on ethnic or national heritage, colour, or religion;
- Be sensitive to the use of stereotypical portrayals;
- Uphold its own tradition in promoting our national interest and cultural values like ensuring the sanctity of the King;
- As far as possible, maintain the balance of social, cultural, political and economic interest of the country.

In the years to come, with the constitution of the Kingdom enacted and implemented, it is significant for the continuous development of the media organizations to develop professionally and in size in order to function independently and responsibly, upholding national interests and to enhance development of the nation and also to keep up with technological trends and developments in the international media.

### *Media Education*

In light of the plethora of potential harmful effects of violent media exposure, the efforts to censor the entertainment industry need the support of media literacy programs to combat the problem. Media literacy is a perspective designed to give audiences greater control over media messages by teaching them to place media messages within an appropriate context (Potter, 1998). Media literacy should reach out to parents, educators, and policymakers to counter the negative influence of advertisements on the lives of the people and children. Media education must be provided to parents to help them filter media messages, set limits, and be actively involved in media consumption time helping the capricious viewers comprehend the media messages.

The following are some of the suggestions in which media education can be enhanced.

Students must be educated both in the schools and at home about the techniques used in advertising, such as air brushing and other touching up, and point them out to the kids. The young girls need to be well aware that the models and TV stars have professionals such as makeup artists, hairstylists, clothing consultants, and lighting experts to help make them look good. And that the much of what is shared on the media is far too exaggerated to be reality.

The education by the family elders is critical for a lead role, and from an early age, help younger ones develop self-esteem and encourage them to have a strong sense of self-worth by accepting and loving them for who and what they are. Help them to draw their self-esteem from internal factors “such as the type of person they are, their strengths, intelligence, and abilities”, rather than from external factors such as physical appearance.

The role of family is very important in fighting the negative influences of the media. Children must have loved ones and good role models around them so they do not feel the need to rely so heavily on the media for ideas about how to be accepted, loved, and respected. The elders in the family should bear the sole responsibility.

Teach the young girls to accept and treasure their body. They have to accept their body type, just as they have accepted their height and eye color. Explain them that the body type seen in ads is common in less than 10 percent of the population.

Finally, but very importantly, it is necessary to minimize the exposure to advertisements and various harmful media messages. The amount of television and the frequency that they watch needs to be reduced, especially in the early years. They need to be encouraged to read various informative and educative books, but not on the magazines and other advertising pamphlets.

### **Conclusion**

Our country Bhutan is unique among nations in the world, aesthetically bountiful, geographically stunning and rich in cultural settings. Albeit it's relatively small size, the country,

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owing to its geographical location and its vast terrain of mountain ranges, is marked with numerous patches of settlements each bearing its own set of dialects, traditions, and culture, magnificently embedded. This unique tradition and the cultural aspects with undisrupted flora and fauna attribute to Bhutan's splendor and fascination to the outside world, making it one of the world's most highly favoured destinations. The rich tradition and culture for untold hundreds of years, has been practised passing through generations via the tradition of oral transmission. However, with the dawn of modernization and advent of a system known as globalization, concerns started brewing with many causes and many reasons. The emergence of different forms of media such as television, radio, video games, and newspapers in the Kingdom changed the behaviour and attitude of many people. The entertainment and the shows on the screen undermine the controls of one and many by the flickering images on the screens and the evocative papers teaching certain information that ruins behaviour and deters the moral values and certain meaningful traditions once long followed by our ancestors.

The seminal policy document of our Kingdom (Bhutan 2020' A Vision for Peace, Prosperity and Happiness) defines culture as "the living manifestation of civilization". There is a need to nurture its values, its survival, and its ability to flourish on a par with the development processes of the nation. Therefore, we must shape our media to make it our own showcase of attractive demonstration of mobile educative and sensitizing shows, with attractive photographs in the newspaper and aired to lure our society in appreciating our own culture and practicing it in every walk of life. This will help retain the values and practices of our heritage and culture in the minds of all Bhutanese, thereby making the nation an oasis of unique cultural setting and traditions amidst countries loomed large by the effects of Westernization through all sorts of media.

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# Media and the Maverick Mind: Need for Media Literacy: A Lay View

*Thakur Singh Powdyel\**

## **Abstract**

*This paper makes an attempt to provide a glimpse of the evolution of media over the years in response to the changing warrant of times; then it discusses the scope of media literacy and the importance and characteristics of media and media bias. An attempt is then made to discuss the advent of mass media in Bhutan and their role in the emerging political scenario; the paper concludes by suggesting the need for a more enlightened responsibility for the Bhutanese media.*

## **Introduction**

The human body is a multi-faceted receiver of myriad impressions and stimuli that permeate our environment. We receive the world and its numerous impressions and presences with our eyes, with our ears, with our hands, with our nose, and with our tongue. We know and interpret our environment by seeing, by hearing, by touching, by smelling, and by tasting. Our senses open our being to the world and bring the world to us. We encounter the physical objects, the sights, the sounds, the smells, the feel, and the taste, and create internal images of the objects and events that surround us.

Samovar et al (1981, 107) argue that:

What we see is light transmitted to us in the form of electromagnetic radiation; what we hear arrives in the form of different air pressures. Our taste and smell are the result of various molecules coming in contact with our mouths and noses, and what we feel or touch is really

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various forms of energy pressing our bodies. These energies carry no inherent experience for us. Experience, as we speak of it here, is each of us making sense out of our environment through the development of structure, stability, and meaning of our perceptions. This development involves internal operations that we perform by converting these impinging energies into electrochemical, neurological impulses that we route through our nervous system to our brains, where we convert them into meaningful experiences.

In as much as all human beings possessed the organs of sense, we were autonomous, self-reliant and self-sufficient. There being no relevance of a divide on either side of which we could fall, we were all equal. There was true democracy, if we will.

This mode of knowing and understanding our surrounding was the result of direct experience. We were decisive actors in as much as we used our own faculties without any suggestion or manipulation from other quarters to perceive reality. It was a world directly lived. Now, the world is *re-presented* to us through the media.

The word media (singular – medium) comes from an old Latin root—*medius*-- meaning ‘middle’. Media, therefore, refer to all the technological processes that operate between the sender of a message and the receiver, thus facilitating communication. The ‘middle’ is the communication link between the encoder of a message and the decoder. Communication happens when the sender, or encoder, and the recipient, or decoder, share the intent of the message transmitted through different forms of media. A & C Black (2006) define “media as the various means of mass communication considered as a whole, including television, radio, magazines and newspapers, together with people involved in their production”.

According to Toffler (1983), historically, the evolution of media can be seen as following at least three modes of communication. In the first wave, communication was direct as it passed from mouth to mouth and face to face within very small groups or communities. In the absence of newspapers,

radio, or television, the only viable means of communicating messages to reach a large audience was by assembling a crowd, which was the first mass medium.

In the course of time, as the system of wealth creation came to be based more and more on mass production in a factory, there was the need for greater communication at a distance and this need led to the rise of the post office, telegraph, and telephone. Necessity was the mother of invention already. The need to have a more homogeneous workforce in the factories led to the invention of more technically-based mass medium. The result was the invention of newspapers, magazines, movies, radio, and television. All these media were capable of carrying the same message to millions of people at the same time.

They became the principal instruments of the industrial societies.

The third wave communication system represents the realities and needs of the post-mass production economy. In this mode, the products are customized and their images, ideas, and symbols are sent to closely targeted groups, population segments, markets, age categories, professions, and ethnic and life-style groupings. This new, high diversity of messages and media is necessary in the light of the changed system of wealth creation which requires a far more heterogeneous workforce and population. The new media are closely inter-linked and fused together, feeding data, images, and symbols back and forth into one another, using fax, computers, word processors, electronic type-setters, digitized imagery, electronic networks, satellites, or other inter-linked technologies.

Elsewhere in the world, conventional methods of communication have ranged from cloud messengers to pigeons to horse-riders to runners to postal carriers to Morse code to telephones to electronic mails, with all the intervening media that have connected peoples and communities and nations through history. The need to communicate has engaged the ingenuity of the human race down the centuries to invent myriad ways to send and receive messages from the most intimate and personal to the most formal and official.

### **Media and their Importance**

Today, media include radio, television, newspapers, books, movies, the Internet, recorded music, magazines and other means of communication. Media occupy a significant amount of our time and become so powerful a social institution that they are supplanting or relegating to the background the influence of the older institutions such as the education system, culture, or religion. Most people in the more advanced societies cannot imagine life without the various manifestations of the media. Life would be totally different if there was no television, movies, radio, recorded music, computers, books, magazines, newspapers, Internet, and the like.

Croteau and Hoyness (2000, 5-6) assert that:

If the media were eliminated, nothing else would be the same. Our entertainment would be different. We would not follow sports teams in newspapers, watch TV, or go to a movie for fun. We would not listen to recorded music at parties or for relaxation. Our understanding of politics and the world around us would be different because we would not have newspapers, television, magazines, and books to explain what is happening in our communities and beyond. Even our perceptions of ourselves would probably be different since we would not have television characters and advertising images to compare ourselves against. For example, we might not concern ourselves so much with the latest fashions, music, or cars if ads did not imply that we should be concerned with such things.

Croteau and Hoyness suggest that if there were no media, we would have plenty of time for ourselves in which to engage in other creative hobbies; our social and community life would be more active; and we would occupy ourselves in educational discussions and debates. They point to the influence of the changes beyond our personal lives: "The behaviour of politicians, business executives, and leaders in other fields would change without media. Government would operate differently. Without advertising, business would be fundamentally different. Education, religion, and every other institution would also be different without media, as would

social movements and citizens' organizations."(ibid, 6-7)

One of the momentous developments in the evolution of mass media was the invention of the printing press. The print medium was the only means of reaching out to a large audience at a distance, thanks to the invention of the printing press by Johannes Guttenberg in 1450 by converting the winepress into the first printing press. According to Anderson (1991, 37), "at least 20, 000,000 books had already been printed by 1500, signalling the onset of Benjamin's 'age of mechanical reproduction'". He goes on to say that "...possibly as many as 200,000,000 volumes had been manufactured by 1600...it is no wonder that Francis Bacon believed that print had changed 'the appearance and state of the world'".

The compulsion of physical distribution of the products of print medium still remained because the speed of distribution depended on the speed of the horse, or train, or ship—the main means of transport then.

The limitations of the print medium were, however, resolved by the sound recording and film medium, the broadcast media, and the 'new' media, developed and perfected over 130 years since Thomas Edison invented the phonograph in 1877. The invention of radio followed by television has transformed broadcast media. In the same way, the development of the magnetic tape, compact disc, the Internet, moving pictures, talking pictures, videocassette recorders, digital video disk, in the print, film media—all the 'new' media that uses cable television, satellites, fiber optic technologies, and computers—have revolutionized mass media.

The Kingdom of Bhutan has had its own many forms and media to communicate between people and people, community and community, from valley to valley, district to district, between ruler and ruler, from government to people, people to government, sovereign to subjects, citizens to sovereign, between government and government, head of state and head of state, nation and nation. The purposes of communication too have varied from the need to arrange the marriage of the daughter or bartering a horse with a bull, to celebration of a local festival, to collection of tax, to labour

contribution, to administration of local affairs, to national referenda, to deputation of state representatives, or to exchange of greetings, among others.

The Royal Government of Bhutan articulated its acknowledgement of the prospect that media has for Bhutan to “leapfrog into the 21<sup>st</sup> century and to help form a society enriched by information, knowledge and skills” during the 2000 Round Table Meeting held in Thimphu with its development partners.

His Majesty King Jigme Singye Wangchuck underscored the importance of the media in the development of the country:

Today, as Bhutan enters the age of communications, its priorities are geared to meet the needs and demands of the times. The kingdom has seen a dramatic increase in the literacy rate of the population as a result of the special attention given by the Royal Government to the education sector. As technological advancement brings the international community closer together, it has also established the infrastructure to modernize and strengthen communication and information links with the rest of the world. It is the policy of the Royal Government, therefore, to facilitate and encourage the professional growth of the Bhutanese media which must play an important role in all areas of development. Such a role is especially relevant to the national policy of decentralization which aims to involve all sections of the society in the socio-economic and political development of the kingdom. (Pek, 2003)

Further, according to the 2003 draft media policy: “the Royal Government of Bhutan recognizes the role that the Bhutanese media will have to play in national development in a changing environment. Following the initiative taken by His Majesty the Druk Gyalpo, the royal government emphasizes that the media must continue to grow in professionalism to fulfill its role to ‘Inform, Educate, and Entertain’.”

The Department of Information Technology’s *Bhutan ICT Policy & Strategies* (July 2004) spells out the Royal Government’s overall objectives to develop ICT in the country:

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- To use ICT for good governance;
- To create a Bhutanese info-culture; and
- To create a high-tech habitat.

These objectives are to be pursued through formulation of sound policy, development of infrastructure, building of human capacity, enhancing content and application, and expanding opportunities for enterprise. In his foreword to the BIPS document, the then Prime Minister of Bhutan, Lyonpo Jigme Thinley said that

The application of ICT to Bhutan's development needs holds great promise for all sectors. Providing relevant market information can increase the income of our farmers. New communications technologies can take phone lines and data into remote valleys. ICT can improve the operations of our government institutions, increasing integrity, accountability and transparency. It can be a means to express our unique national identity and culture through local media and cultural preservation initiatives.

Lyonpo added that "ICT can also play an important role in furthering Bhutan's political evolution. The policy of decentralization can be enhanced through improved access to information and services in remote regions. Democratization will be aided by increasing citizen access to information and participation in the political process."

The government's ICT White Paper (October 2003) states that "with people at the centre of development, Bhutan will harness the benefits of ICT, both as an enabler and as an industry, to realize the Millenium Development Goals and towards enhancing Gross National Happiness."

When media is mentioned in Bhutan, what comes to mind immediately is the broadcast media particularly represented by radio that includes BBS, regional and international programmes; print media that include *Kuensel*, and of late *Bhutan Times* and *Bhutan Observer*, and regional and international programmes. Recent arrivals include television--BBS, regional and international; film and music—local, regional and international—and most recently the Internet. Books, magazines, journals, art, architecture,

festivals, dances, songs, rituals, sports, traditional ballads, and other forms of cultural practices allow the Bhutanese to communicate among themselves and with the outside world.

*Media and Media Characteristics*

Media are among the most aggressive and pervasive of forces that characterize modern life. They inform and influence our life and culture in obvious and subtle ways, shaping the way we think and act. It is, therefore, necessary to learn how to view the products of media through a critical lens and deconstruct the media text to understand the message beneath the surface. Dawe et al (1999) advance the theory that all media texts:

- Are a function of constructions;
- Have their own codes through which they communicate;
- Have a commercial value;
- Have a target audience;
- Express values;
- Contain representations.

Every product of media is a function of numerous decisions involving several players bent on creating the desired effect on the customers. All the materials and resources are consciously marshaled to create the impression of the real and the natural.

Every medium has its own distinct language, code, and features that it uses to communicate its message. It employs the technical resources that include the different kinds of camera shots, brush techniques, perspectives, and composition to achieve the effect. The symbolical codes the medium uses include the images that convey the message through connotation rather than by denotation.

All media texts have a hidden agenda. They have a commercial motive and want to sell a product.

As an audience, a viewer brings his or her own experience, meaning, or outlook to bear on what he or she is

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viewing. The way one views a media text depends upon one's upbringing, family values, cultural sensitivities, age, gender, needs and anxieties, education, attitude, and experiences in life.

Many media texts have a target audience such as children of a certain age-group, youth, women, and other critical target groups which determine the volume of investment that the media industry is going to make.

Media texts are value-laden. They carry strong messages and encourage a certain way of life or standard of living. A critical viewer must crack the media code and look beneath the surface to find out what the media text is up to and draw one's own considered conclusions.

Media texts wield immense power of portrayal. Often, the representation of people and objects could be true to life; but at other times, what is portrayed is out of proportion to reality. Media are often accused of presenting an unrealistic or a stereotypical view of certain classes or groups causing untold harm to the parties in the process.

Toutant et al (1998) discuss the way media texts exploit the power of images, words, and sounds to achieve their effect. Decoding advertisements, for instance, involves looking at how they work and what they hope to achieve. Knowing this requires critical thinking about images, words, and sounds.

### *Images*

Photographs are the most common type of images in advertising because they give the impression of being the most realistic. It is important to know though that an image in an ad is not trying to show reality, but to create the right mood to persuade the viewer to buy the product. A critical viewer needs to ask:

- How are content, composition, camera techniques, colour, and light used to create the mood?
- What do the images have to do with the product? Do they give us factual information?

- How would we describe the people in the ad? Are they average in looks? Are they stereotypes? What does their body language communicate?

### *Words*

Media texts communicate the message by implication rather than by statement. They suggest rather than say. Advertisers exploit the creative and persuasive potential of words to hook the customers. They use metaphors, metonymy, hyperbole, euphemism or fuzzy words, and facts and figures as a means of communicating their message.

Critical viewers ask:

- What mood is created by the choice of words?
- Are the claims for the product based on facts?

### *Sound*

Sound is the only means of communication in a radio advertisement. A television commercial has the luxury of image to work with sounds to create the desired effect. The choice of music, the tone of voice, the pace of speaking—all contribute to communicate the message. What mood is created by the choice of music?

Toutant et al present three powerful instruments that the advertising industry uses to catch our attention. They call these emotional hooks! They are: 1] Testimonial, 2] Lifestyle, and 3] Common fears. As far as testimonial goes, a well-known person declares the product to be terrific. This strategy appeals to our need to find acceptance and security by modeling ourselves after hero figures. Lifestyle—here the product is associated with a desirable life. This hook appeals to our desire to fit into the society and achieve success, an exciting life, good health, and happiness. Common fears are a dimension of our life which the advertising industry capitalizes on by focusing on our common insecurity. Am I pretty enough? What do my friends think of me? The product is shown to be the solution to the imagined problem.

*Literacy and Media Literacy*

The changing wisdom of successive generations question facts, discards ideas, and demolishes theories. The robust certainties of yesterday become the shaky uncertainties of today, and tomorrow will see the inadequacy of today's sound affirmations. In traditional societies, the ability to read and write conferred on the individual special privileges and standing vis-à-vis those who were not as fortunate. Even to this day, significant numbers of children and adults around the world still do not enjoy this basic human right and are denied the light of learning. The opportunity of just being able to read and write will take a long time for many millions. However, there is the emergence of a new reality to confront—that of the digital divide that separates the haves and have-nots of a different order. The old notion of the economic haves and have-nots is not a unique phenomenon anymore. In the more fortunate parts of the world, the mere ability to read and write is not good enough. One must be media-literate.

According to Considine (1995, online) Media literacy generally refers to “the ability to access, analyze, evaluate and communicate information in a variety of formats including print and non-print”. To Considine, media literacy is an expanded information and communication skill that is responsive to the changing nature of information in the society. Media literacy addresses skills the students need to be taught in school, the competencies citizens need to have as they consume information in their homes and living rooms, and the abilities workers need to have as they try to meet the challenges of the economy. With the emergence of infotainment and the decline of objective, neutral, and reliable news, responsible citizens need to possess the ability to question the accuracy and authenticity of information in all its forms, not just print. They need the ability to make reflective critical responses to this information.

Considine states that media literacy is about more than just consuming information. A media literate person is able to produce, create, and successfully communicate information in all its forms, not just print. When it comes to media

literacy at the institutional level, particularly the education system, it is a function of understanding the culture and lifestyle of the youth, finding out the influences that they encounter, how they respond to those influences and preparing them to be critical receivers and users of these influences. The major sources of the influence that young people encounter are the mass media. It is important for the students to learn how to analyze and evaluate what they see and read and form their own considered opinion, without being carried away by the spectacle. As far as teachers are concerned, media literacy provides them with an opportunity to examine the reliability, authenticity, and motive of the media texts.

It is important to make use of the tremendous opportunities opened up by the proliferation of the media industry. The media channels bring the world of science, technology, sports, music, art, literature, mathematics, philosophy, jurisprudence, economics, politics, fashion, holidays, hobbies, governance, environment, people, and cultures from around the world to our living room. Media also bring to us a whole body of information, sights and sounds and power which are not always wholesome. Inability to distinguish what nourishes our positive values and higher tastes could have costly consequences on young minds. The spectacle of Helen of Troy on the stage could lead to a Faustian end. Media can suck the soul and lead an individual to premature damnation of sorts.

It is, therefore, crucial that media opportunities are marshaled to be a pathway to knowledge and individual growth rather than an instrument of bondage and depravity. Students need to be given opportunities to develop their own voice and personality and discover their place in the larger scheme of the world. At times, students could be involved in comparing the effect of a written text with a film version, in examining the images in music videos and newspapers, in writing an article or a letter to the editor on a certain media issue, in producing a pamphlet or a little programme for the radio, or even in creating a video of their own.

Even as students encounter a media text, they need to

constantly ask themselves:

What is the message being conveyed?

What is the source of the message?

How is the message being sent and who is it intended for?

What could be the purpose of this message?

What is the relevance of this message to me? Do I need it?

Responding to a visual text involves our aesthetic, emotive as well as affective dimensions. It is important here for the teachers to encourage the students to interact with a visual text in their own individual way and express their opinions in an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect.

As suggested in Atlantic Canada (2000) students can:

— Engage in a discussion about the elements of design and colour and explore the ways in which the artist communicates his or her message by using these elements;

— Discuss the emotions and feelings the visual image creates in them, and create their own visual representation of a written text that they are doing;

— Deliberate on the special effects a visual image creates that other media do not.

Our schools of the future could be vastly different places of learning compared to today. In many countries, students and teachers have access to a huge body of information available through the Internet, on-line databases, multimedia sources, and CD-ROMS, among a host of others. Books and teachers will still be there, but the way information is found, manipulated, and used could be very different. This changed scenario would call for the achievement of information literacy that involves “the ability to access, interpret, evaluate, organize, select, produce and communicate information through a variety of media technologies and contexts to meet diverse learning needs and purposes” (English Language Arts, 2000).

Some futurists are already visualizing tomorrow’s

classrooms. For Rickelman and Kaplan, for instance:

This classroom will be made up of several learning centers, with no identifiable focus for information delivery. Tables will be placed around the room. The teacher will still provide guidance and facilitate student learning, but the methods will be vastly different. Some students may be in a corner of the room, learning about whales from a multimedia, interactive CD-ROM program. Other students will be linked to the Internet, where in small groups they will search web sites for information and use e-mail to link to people in other countries. Some students may leave the classroom to attend a teleconference with students from other continents and compare and contrast where they live as they learn about diverse world customs. Homework assignments are downloaded into students' portable computers for them to take home, or homework can be accessed from home via the Internet. Students who are absent or who are on vacation can have easy access to work completed throughout the day as well as homework assignments that they missed. They can submit assignments via e-mail or the Internet. The world, via computer links, will be the standard reference. More traditional students might use key word searches to gather relevant information, and issues such as web site censorship and the veracity of Internet information will be discussed in school and home.

- Rickelman and Kaplan 2000, 307

This is the vision of an ideal technology-rich scenario, but most schools especially in the poorer countries of the world are still struggling with the barest minimum of resources. Yet, the opportunities provided by the Internet to access information are huge and exciting. As things stand, more and more schools are going to become wired. The Internet could soon become the most preferred mode of sharing information amongst the different stakeholders including the school, teachers, parents, and students. Information explosion and its abundance can often be maddening and the searcher could be lost in the digital wilderness. It is, therefore, important that teachers and students know how to locate the relevant information in a sea

of possibilities. Key word search is a helpful guide to narrow down the field to a manageable level and relevance.

With all the excitement and opportunities that the Internet provides, it has its own share of problems. Well used, the Internet is an inexhaustible mine of information and education; abused, it can be the source of all dangers. The violence and the horror, pornography and scandals that the Internet and the entertainment industry breeds are a major cause for concern among parents and teachers. As early as 1993, the American Psychological Association estimated that an average American child saw 8,000 murders on television before finishing elementary school.

Several studies have been done to assess the effects of media violence. Some results point to the fact that exposure to violent programming could lead to more violence. Children exposed to violence on the screen could exhibit violent behaviour, otherwise termed 'aggressor effect', or increased fearfulness about violence, otherwise termed 'victim effect', or increased callousness about violence directed at others, otherwise termed 'bystander effect'. Paik and Comstock (1994) analyzed over 200 studies on television violence and concluded that there was 'a positive and significant correlation between television violence and aggressive behaviour' (cited in Croteau and Hoynes, 2000, 109)

Speaking on the downsides of popular culture, the 1995 presidential candidate, Bob Dole remarked: "One of the greatest threats to American family values is the way our popular culture ridicules them. Our music, movies, television and advertising regularly push the limits of decency, bombarding our children with destructive messages of casual violence and even more casual sex." He expressed his concern over the work of "corporate executives who hide behind the lofty language of free speech to profit from the debasing of America", and added, "We must hold Hollywood and the entire entertainment industry accountable for putting profit ahead of common decency."

Children with access to the Internet can easily obtain pornographic or sexually explicit, morally repugnant, and indecent or obscene materials online—materials that may not

otherwise be easily available in text or video version. Exposure to such materials would have a bearing relative to the power of their content and presentation. In many cases, parents and elders may have no clue to what their children are viewing.

Cyber-crime is a new phenomenon that the world is faced with. With the advent and rapid expansion of ICT, the world is fast becoming borderless. It used to be said in the eighteenth century that when France caught cold, the whole of Europe used to sneeze. Now, when a hacker or cyber-criminal hatches an idea, the whole world is infected. Geographical boundaries do not limit the passage of a computer virus that can derail crucial military, defence, and medical security systems within seconds and still the cyber-criminal could escape capture and penalty. As nations become more and more technology-dependent, cyber-terrorists become ever smarter in wrecking havoc by sabotaging online services like banking, stock exchanges, financial transactions, aviation control systems, water purification systems, and oil and gas production and storage facilities, bringing all functions to a standstill.

The concerns of the country over the use and abuse of the media were expressed by His Majesty the Druk Gyalpo Jigme Singye Wangchuck on June 2, 1999 when television and the Internet officially came to Bhutan:

I would like to remind our youth that television and the Internet provide a whole range of possibilities which can be both beneficial as well as negative for the individual and the society. I trust that you will exercise your good sense and judgment in using the Internet and television.

- Pek, 2003

Talking about the media, Marshall McLuhan, Canadian commentator, theorist and professor, said:

Once we surrender our senses and nervous system to the private manipulation of those who would try to benefit from taking a lease on our eyes and ears and our nerves, we don't have any rights left. Leasing our eyes and nerves to commercial interests is like handing over the common

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speech to a private corporation, or like giving the earth's atmosphere to a company as a monopoly.

- Anderson & Barry, 2002, 335

Media literacy is also about the need not to surrender our soul to the machinery of advertising and popular culture.

As far as the lives and experiences of the young go, the school curricula have a significant influence in shaping both. It will be the primary responsibility of the Bhutanese education system to inform and empower the younger generation to examine the worth of what they see and hear and read. Accepted that it is not possible to barricade the youth or even adults against the unhealthy influence that they might encounter, it is still desirable and necessary to mount programmes that include media literacy as an important part of being educated. Curriculum planning, materials selection, pedagogical choices, and assessment practices will be powerful instruments in engaging and promoting the more positive energies and imaginations of the Bhutanese youth.

It is heartening that the Ministry of Education has made a positive beginning by incorporating aspects of print and visual media into the new English curriculum. The materials selected provide useful opportunities to students to examine the representation of the world by popular media and allows them to critically evaluate the construction and presentation of media messages. More needs to be done.

### *Media Bias*

However objective and unprejudiced the media industry may claim to be, it is not totally free from taint. Part of learning about the media is to be aware of the biases that plague even the media. Media bias is a term used to describe a real or perceived bias of journalists and news producers within the mass media, in the selection of which events will be reported and how they are covered. The term 'media bias' usually refers to a pervasive or widespread bias contravening the standards of journalism, rather than the perspective of an individual journalist or article (Wikipedia).

Wikipedia identifies the following kinds of bias:

- Ethnic or racial bias, including racism, nationalism and regionalism;
- Corporate bias, including advertising, coverage of political campaigns in such a way as to favour corporate interests and the reporting of issues to favour the interests of the owners of the news media;
- Class bias, including bias favouring one social class or bias ignoring social or class divisions;
- Political bias, including bias in favour of or against a particular political party or candidate. Political bias has been a feature of mass media since its birth with the invention of the printing press in the 15th century;
- Religious bias, including bias in which one religious viewpoint is given preference over others. Media bias towards religion is most obvious in countries where media is controlled by the state, which is in turn dominated by a particular religion;
- Sensationalism, which is bias in favour of the exceptional over the ordinary. This includes the practice whereby exceptional news may be overemphasized, distorted or fabricated to boost commercial ratings;
- Language may also be a more subtle form of bias. Use of a word with positive or negative connotations rather than a more neutral synonym can form a biased picture in the audience's mind. Eg terrorist, bombers, hijackers, militants, assailants, gunmen, extremists, attackers, freedom fighters, for insurgents...
- National and ethnic viewpoint — many news organizations reflect or are perceived to reflect in some way the viewpoint of the geographic, ethnic, and national population that they primarily serve. Media within countries is sometimes seen as being sycophantic or unquestioning about the country's

government.

Print media has its own share of biases. Galtung and Rage (Goatley, 2000) have identified a number of factors that determine the selection of material for news which include the following:

- Bibliography to elite persons—only prominent individuals or popular heroes are newsworthy;
- Bibliography to elite nations—only powerful and wealthy nations make news and are worth highlighting;
- Media are often aligned with certain cultures rather than others and report more favourably on them;
- The degree of intensity of the news and its impact value are significant factors;
- Unexpectedness provides novelty to the news report and gives media an element of surprise;
- Happenings that focus on the negative sells. Media find the positive monotonous and unappealing. Negativity is, therefore, the favoured fare.

The Bhutanese media have come a long way; they have a longer way to go. The print and broadcast media in particular have proved to be tremendously effective tools in articulating the various dimensions of our country and our culture. They have followed the diverse events and developments that have marked and shaped the march of our country in the course of the last several years particularly in the aftermath of the advent of Bhutan's modern socio-economic development. The media have recorded and highlighted the upbeat moments as well as moments of despair, times of great national jubilation as well as times of great anxiety, periods of abundance as well as phases of scarcity, experiences of all-galvanizing patriotic upsurge as well as moments of doubt and insecurity. The Bhutanese media have sung hymns of glory about the wonder that is Druk Yul; they have described the sights and the sounds and the smells that characterize the unparalleled

floral and faunal wealth of our country. The media have sat in the hall of the National Assembly conference venues, workshop sites, openings and inaugurations; witnessed births and deaths; and partaken in anniversaries and observances, meetings and weddings.

The Bhutanese media have introduced and taken our country to different parts of the globe and helped raise the profile of the land and its people. The books that the Bhutanese and non-Bhutanese writers have authored and the documents, films, documentaries, journals, newsletters and magazines that the government and non-government, as well as international agencies, have produced, present their own images of Bhutan and the Bhutanese to people beyond our borders even as they have informed us about ourselves. Through the local and international media, Bhutan has been able to tap into the intellectual resources of humanity in diverse fields of science and technology, inventions and discoveries, art and literature, mathematics and philosophy, culture and beliefs, sports and fashion, and values and practices as the country continues its active engagement with the wider world further afield.

Thanks to the proliferation of telecommunications facilities, even the remotest gewogs in the country can link themselves to the rest of the world through VHF telephone lines. Over 33,000 fixed lines and 51,000 mobile phones connect the Bhutanese to themselves and to the rest of the world. The advent of satellite television has opened up new possibilities and vistas for the Bhutanese people.

The arrival and evolution of mass media have been a great boon for the Bhutanese people as they try to understand their culture, their hopes and aspirations and as they attempt to sharpen their view of the world. Media can and do reflect the obvious and the physical to a degree of precision and accuracy that is often a wonder to the lay. However, there is a deeper, profounder and less dramatic dimension to phenomena. And these often lie outside the scope of mass media.

The strength of the Eastern civilizations in general and that of Bhutanese civilization in particular is believed to

derive from the cultivation of the inner resources of the human being. We often call our religion *nang pai choed*—the religion of the inner—and we term our culture *nang pai loogsoel*—the culture of the inner. Our grandest programme yet—the cultivation of Gross National Happiness—will succeed only with the cultivation of the finer resources of the Bhutanese mind.

Having decided to lift the veil of isolation and having joined the family of nations, Bhutan needs to endeavour constantly to achieve the difficult balance between the best that it has inherited from the past and at the same time selecting and assimilating the best that modern science and technology have made available to mankind. This will include the benefits accruing from the proliferation of diverse means of communication and mass media. Will the media be able to discover and advance the best that Bhutan has or is capable of, or will it only whet the appetite for more of the flesh and matter? Will the media truly educate the Bhutanese people to select the best from among the available fare or will they merely tickle their more vulnerable and maverick selves?

All nations, communities and cultures possess the vital life-force that is more complex and subtle, unlike the active objective expression that seems more real and immediate to most. Underneath the often arrogant and pervasive external life of nations and peoples, there is the subjective self of balance, equanimity, and harmony. How do the media perceive unity and relationships that lie beyond the range of the obvious? How will the media discover the qualities that provide standards and points of reference beyond the ephemeral and the superficial? If the media feed on and pander to the more appetitive spirit of the human beings and touch them where they are most vulnerable, what will they offer to those dimensions of individuals who might rather cultivate the principle of contentment?

The power of the Bhutanese mind is already getting sorely tested against the power of the emerging power of media. Whether or not the Bhutanese mind will be able to withstand the tide of mass media and sift and sort the essential and the authentic from the flashy and the

fashionable to keep the nation's soul intact will actually determine whether the country will be able to continue being faithful to its true self.

As momentous political changes sweep across the country in the run up to 2008 and beyond, the Bhutanese media will have to decide whether it will swim with the tide and respond to events as they unfold. Or, will they lead the way and educate our masses to empower them to participate in the political process? As powerful as the media are, they have a responsibility not only to react to happenings around, but also to anticipate events and prepare the people to face up to the challenges. Of what use will this mighty force be if it does not look for and advance what is true and good and beautiful?

The Bhutanese media is also faced with the challenge of being able to present a truly inclusive and comprehensive picture of the diversity and the variety that truly constitute the uniqueness of our country. This ability will correct the often distorted view that readers on and viewers of Bhutan get from a distance. It has to have the vision and the courage to discover and highlight the uniqueness as well as the commonality that our different communities share which build the solidarity and unity of our nation. The media can and should be a most significant instrument to bring our scattered communities and people to know and appreciate that there are other people like themselves who are their compatriots.

Today, media have a unique opportunity to honour and celebrate those common bonds and similarities that unite us as a nation rather than belabouring the differences that divide us. The BBS cameras should be able to turn a full 360 degrees and shine their light in all the directions of the country. The print and non-print media, books, films, magazines, pamphlets, music, and other cultural expressions should be truly representative of the genius and contributions of the diverse peoples of our country. Media should do all they can to refrain from engaging in the ignoble job of stereotyping and taking divisive acts that weaken our society and our system.

### **Conclusion**

The sensational and the spectacular are newsworthy, but the gentle and the sublime hold the people together. The Bhutanese media will have to discover and pursue a role for themselves beyond the dramatic and the fashionable and be truly a conscience-keeper of the nation. This too is media literacy.

In the ultimate analysis, media literacy is:

- The power of knowing only a means to an end and not an end in itself, where human beings can use the means to achieve an end of their own deciding;
- Understanding that human beings may consume information but should not be consumed by it;
- The affirmation of the integrity of the human person and valuing the sacredness of the human being as an active agent capable of making judgments about the integrity of what they encounter.

Media will serve our country well if it can help in raising “the intellectual tone of the society, cultivating the public mind, purifying national taste, supplying true principles of enthusiasm and sobriety to the ideas of the age, and facilitating the exercise of political power...” in much the same breath as Newman wished the universities to do.

If the opening of a brave new world only panders to cultivation of the flesh and leads to the debasement of the finer impulses of our people and society, the great opening will actually be a great closing of the Bhutanese mind.

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**Appendix: A glimpse of the evolution of mass media through the ages**

Timeline/Year	Event related to media
100 AD	Papermaking develops in China and spreads through Asia and Arab world by the year 600
700 AD	Arabs carry Chinese techniques for papermaking to the West
1000 AD	Moveable type made of clay in China
1400 AD	Moveable metal type developed in Asia
1450 AD	1456 Gutenberg perfects moveable metal type and hand press in Germany; the Bible is printed
1600 AD	First “newspapers” appear in Germany, France and Belgium
1700 AD	1702 <i>London’s Daily Courant is first daily newspaper</i>
1800 AD	1833 Mass-circulation media begin with the first “ <i>penny press</i> ” newspaper, the New York Sun
	1837 Telegraph is first demonstrated
	1839 A practical method of photography is developed by Daguerre

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	1844 Samuel Morse sets up telegraph link Washington and Baltimore
1850 AD	1876 First telephone message sent by Alexander Graham Bell
	1879 Edison patents the electric bell
	1884 Eastman perfects roll film
	1894 Motion pictures are invented and the first films are shown to the public
	1895 Radio messages transmitted by Marconi
1900 AD	1903 "Great Train Robbery" becomes model for storytelling with film
	1920 First regularly scheduled radio broadcasting, by KDKA in Pittsburg
	1927 "The Jazz Singer" is first feature-length film with synchronized speech
	1933 TV is demonstrated by RCA
	1937 First digital computer created telephone parts
	1941 First commercial TV is broadcast
	1946 The first mainframe computer is invented at the University of Pennsylvania

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	1947 First transistor is developed by Bell Labs as alternative to vacuum tubes
	1949 Network TV begins in the US
1950 AD	1956 Videotape recording (VTR) is invented
	1957 Sputnik, world's first communication satellite, is launched by USSR
	1961 San Diego cable operator is the first to import television signals from another city (Los Angeles) for distribution to subscribers
	1969 First nodes of the computer internet are created in Pentagon plan to establish a decentralized communications system that can withstand nuclear attack
	1970 Early (and expensive) video cassette recorders (VCR) introduced
	1971 Invention of the microprocessor
	1975 The first microprocessor is marketed
	Fiber optics transmission begins
	HBO begins transmitting programming to cable TV system by satellite
	1977 Qube, the first interactive cable system, begins in Columbus, Ohio

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	200,000 VCRs sold, more affordable machines enter the market and sales boom
	1990 World Wide Web (WWW) started as simple user interface for wide variety of data types
	1997 Digital video disc (DVD) first introduced
	1998 Digital television broadcasting begins.

*Source: Media Society: Industries, Images and Audiences, Second Edition (2000, p 9-10) Pine Forge Press*



## Media in the New Political Order

*Dorji Wangchuk\**

### Premise

Bhutan is undergoing fundamental changes in politics, economy, social fabric and every other aspect as a nation. This is a defining moment for a country that has seen a peaceful idyllic existence for over a century. Whatever decisions are made, changes proposed, and conclusions drawn will have long-term implications on the country both as a 'State' and as a 'Nation'.

In the new political environment mass media will play a vital role in sustaining the democracy. In fact the success of the new path, so laboriously and single-handedly forged by His Majesty, will in large part depend on how the media is managed and practiced in the country. The *draft* Constitution guarantees the freedom of speech, press and expression in 'letters'.<sup>1</sup> Will these be translated into 'spirit' by the government that would have to regulate these rights and by citizens that would have to exercise these rights?

This paper looks at the development of the modern mass media in Bhutan and the role that it has played in the overall modernisation process. It attempts to answer the questions pertaining to issues such as press freedom in Bhutanese context, the need for a Bhutanese media model, and the role of the public service and the independent press in the changing political scenario. To simplify the argument presented in this paper, mass media shall mean print, radio, and television.

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<sup>1</sup> Article 7.2 of the Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan

## **Background**

To understand the growth of media and its role within the Bhutanese context, one has to appreciate the overall overarching development philosophy. This understanding is vital and it averts any prejudiced assessment or simplistic conclusion often drawn by Bhutan-watch groups and so-called upholders of press freedom in the world.

Bhutan is a tiny kingdom in the Eastern Himalayas still not widely known to the rest of the world. This is because the country remained in a self-imposed isolation until the first half of the twentieth century. The total superficial area of 38,394<sup>2</sup> square kilometres is sandwiched between India - to the south and China - to the north. Within these borders, the country rises into the higher Himalayas like a giant stairway, dramatically climbing up from the lush green tropical forests to some of the highest mountains in the world. The virtually untouched forest that covers 64.5 percent of the country is home to a large number of flora and fauna making Bhutan one of the world's hotspots in biodiversity.<sup>2</sup>

Although Bhutan is a comparatively small country in size, it has many diverse language groups among its small population. A total of 18 languages and numerous dialects are spoken among a population of 634,972.<sup>3</sup> Having never been colonised, the country developed a distinct culture and tradition over the millennia. Three main ethnic groups – Ngalong, Sharchop, and Nepali, and several other minorities are dispersed across a mountainous and difficult territory. Communication is still undeveloped, and except for a small group of population comprising of government officials and business community, much of the Bhutanese people confine themselves within their farms in rural areas.

Until the sixties, Bhutan remained an isolated country, a forbidden kingdom. Only 13 Western expeditions had entered the country beginning with two Portuguese Jesuit missionaries – Cacella and Cabral in 1642.<sup>4</sup> This isolationist

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<sup>2</sup> Ninth Plan document, Planning Commission, Royal Government of Bhutan, 2002

<sup>3</sup> *National Housing & Population Census, 2005*

<sup>4</sup> Françoise Pompalet, *Introduction to Bhutan*, Odyssey publications

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policy was to change forever with the enthronement of the third king of the Wangchuck dynasty – King Jigme Dorji Wangchuck, in 1952. The King recognised that if Bhutan were to survive as a nation, it had to modernise its economy and open its door to the outside world. Hence he initiated an intense political, social and economic reform starting with the institution of the National Assembly in 1953 as the parliament.<sup>5</sup>

In 1961, the first five-year development plan was launched with the focus on roads and social infrastructure, such as hospitals and schools.<sup>6</sup> In 1965, the Royal Advisory Council was instituted as a consultative body to advise the king and government and to supervise the implementation of programs and policies laid down by the national assembly.<sup>7</sup> Three years later in 1968, the Bank of Bhutan was created to regulate the economy and monetary policies.<sup>8</sup> In the same year, the Royal Court of Justice was established separating the judiciary from the executive arm of the government. In 1971, Bhutan was admitted to the United Nations as an independent and sovereign nation. The present King, His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck, who succeeded to the throne in 1972 continued this process of modernisation and gave continuity to the progressive policy of the third King. Forty years of planned development have remarkably improved the living standard. The GDP per-capita now stands at US \$ 1,321 - one of the highest in the South Asia.<sup>9</sup>

While the story of a nation's modernisation process is nothing extraordinary, what singles out Bhutan is the balance that this country has achieved between modernisation and cultural preservation, and between economic development and environmental conservation. In short, Bhutan has drawn on the global development

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5 The National Assembly is composed of 150 members. 100 representative of the people elected to the post for three years tenure, 10 members of the clergy and thirty representatives of the government

6 Karma Ura, "The Bhutanese development story", *Kuensel*, 23 January 2004

7 Statistical Yearbook of Bhutan 2003, National Statistical Bureau, Royal Government of Bhutan, March 2004

8 The function of the central bank would later be transferred to the Royal Monetary Authority created in 1982

9 *Bhutan Poverty Analysis Report*, National Statistical Bureau, Royal Government of Bhutan, August 2004

experience and followed a unique development path carefully adopting what is good and not necessarily accepting everything coming from the West.

*Development of Bhutanese Media*

The development of media has followed the same overall development policy of slow, balanced, and calculated growth. Mass media in Bhutan until recently was comprised of *Kuensel*,<sup>10</sup> the national newspaper; BBS (Bhutan Broadcasting Service), the public service radio; TV; Internet; and cinema. This is not surprising as the country itself embarked on the modernization process only four decades ago.

When the modern economic development started in 1961, priority for development was on creation of basic physical infrastructure, such as roads and power stations, and social infrastructure, such as schools and hospitals. In such a situation, with decision-making concentrated in the capital, it was appropriate and adequate to have only the *Kuensel*, an official bulletin catering mainly to the officialdom. In fact, *Kuensel* did not start as a newspaper. It was more a development newsletter carrying short write-ups on important decisions and events revolving around the capital.

Similarly, radio was first broadcast in 1973 as a weekly service for the Thimphu area. It was initiated by an amateur radio operator and a group of volunteers of the erstwhile National Youth Association of Bhutan (NYAB). In fact the station was known as Radio NYAB. With the bureaucracy getting bigger and development activities increasing year-by-year, there was a need for wider coverage.

Radio NYAB became a full-fledged public service in 1979 after the station was brought under the erstwhile Department of Information & Broadcasting. The Royal Government, realising the potential of radio to disseminate information, brought Radio NYAB under the wings of the Ministry of Communications. Further support from the government and

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<sup>10</sup> *Kuensel* newspaper was started in 1967 as an official bulletin of the Royal Government. It later became a full fledged newspaper in June 1986. In 1992, it became independent of the government by the Royal Decree of 1992. It is published bi-weekly, on Wednesdays and Saturdays.

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external aid agencies led to the establishment of the Bhutan Broadcasting Service in June 1986.

As the curtain of the twentieth century drew to a close, Bhutan launched the broadcast television on June 2, 1999 and liberalised the media with foreign television stations beaming into the country from space. The day before, Bhutan was connected to the worldwide web (WWW) and cyberspace.

Finally in January 2005, the first two independent newspapers were licensed under private ownership, marking a new era in the Bhutanese media. While this was a surprise for many who never believed that Bhutan would accept the Western notion of a free press, for Bhutan connoisseurs and operators in the Bhutanese media, this development was seen as a natural progression of the media in the country. The seed for an independent press, in fact, was sown in 1992 when, by a Royal Decree, the two media organisations, BBS and Kuensel, were delinked from the government apparatus. The following is an excerpt of the Royal Decree:

...Today, as the kingdom enters the age of communications, its priorities are geared to meet the needs and demands of the times. The kingdom has seen a dramatic increase in the literacy rate of the population as a result of the special attention given by the Royal Government to the education sector. As technological advancement brings the international community closer together, it has also established the infrastructure to modernize and strengthen communications and information links with the rest of the world.

It is the policy of the Royal Government, therefore, to facilitate and encourage the professional growth of the Bhutanese media, which must play an important and responsible role in all areas of development. Such role is especially relevant to the national policy of decentralization, which aims to involve all sections of the Bhutanese society in the socio-economic and political development of the Kingdom.

The national newspaper, Kuensel, and the Bhutan Broadcasting Service will therefore be delinked from the Ministry of Communications to give them the flexibility to grow in professionalism and to enable them to be more

effective in fulfilling their important responsibility to society. From the fifth day of the eighth Bhutanese month (October 1, 1992) the national newspaper, Kuensel, and the Bhutan Broadcasting Service will be established as two autonomous corporations. The Kuensel and BBS Corporations will be governed by an editorial board comprising of representatives of the government, media professionals, scholars, and eminent citizens.

His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck, King of Bhutan

The decree clearly specified the mandate and professional role of the Bhutanese media, aside from implying fresh directions and responsibility.<sup>11</sup> It is often referred to as the turning point in the history of media development in Bhutan.

It can, therefore, be concluded that the growth of media has been in consonance with the socio-economic development of the country. It reflected the changes taking place in the social, political, and economic evolution of the country.

#### *Freedom of Press - Absolute or Relative*

One of the most recurrent questions a Bhutanese pressman hears is *how free is the Bhutanese media?* There is no straightforward answer to this simple enquiry, for freedom of press is not an absolute concept but a relative term. Nowhere in the world, not even in the greatest democracies such as the US, is there anything called 'absolute' press freedom. The pro-American views adopted by American media on during the last war in Afghanistan and the ongoing occupation of Iraq are latest examples of how nations, who preach the idea of free press, actually carry out such practices in reality. On the other hand, the American Constitution does not mention press freedom as fundamental rights *per se*. Rather, it is only mentioned as an off-shoot of freedom of speech guaranteed by the First Amendment passed by Congress in 1791. Across the Atlantic, Article 10 of the European Convention even suggests 'permissible' modification of the press freedom to protect the security of a nation, public health and moral, and to oppose

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<sup>11</sup> *Kuensel* editorial, 19 February 2005

racism and violence.<sup>12</sup> Hence, press freedom in an absolute sense is an ideal and like any ideal it remains enshrined somewhere distant from reality.

Having accepted that freedom is actually *relative*, one can affirm that Bhutanese pressmen have always enjoyed *relative* press freedom. It has never been a state policy to stop the growth of the media. If situations, circumstances and conditions have proved otherwise, it is because certain bureaucrats and individuals equated themselves to the 'State' or to the 'Government'. And even when personal or institutional weaknesses were revealed or shortcomings exposed, senior government officials often linked the action of the press as an attack to the "Tsa wa sum" (King, country, and the people). Other times, bureaucrats maintained a defensive stand against the media. The most common occurrences were over-zealous subordinates who would make the press a scapegoat to win favours from the rich or the powerful.

The draft Constitution of Bhutan explicitly guarantees the freedom of speech, press, and expression. This is a big commitment rarely seen in other countries of the world. But as the country gets closer to adopting this Constitution, there is a growing misconception that some sort of *grand* free-for-all situation is on the horizon. But freedom entails sense of responsibility. In fact a *great* sense of responsibility, both for operators as well as for ordinary citizens. Freedom of press does not mean freedom to write anything one likes. Freedom of speech does not mean freedom to insult or defame somebody. There are individual rights and privacy to be respected and social well being of the community to be taken care of. Unless the media gives more weight to such social norms, it will become far from a credible source of information working for the social good.

Nor can an individual media-person use the press and people around him or her to gather solidarity around his or her beliefs. Freedom of speech is an *individual* freedom while freedom of press is that of an *institution*. While journalists

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<sup>12</sup> Chua Lee Hoong, *Press Freedom and Professional Standards in Asia*, AMIC, Singapore

and producers may exercise their freedom of speech as individuals, they may not use the press as platforms to reach thousands of Bhutanese. This is as unethical as barring the freedom itself.

### **Factors Limiting the Press Freedom and Responsibility of Free Press**

Having practiced and having to practice the press freedom what are then the variables or factors that determine, or limit, the press freedom? What does it really mean by the term a *responsible* press?

Media in different countries plays different roles. These roles are based on historical experiences, racial mixtures, cultural settings, political systems and levels of human development. The combination of these factors in varying degrees is what defines the media in a country. Every country therefore works out a media model that suits itself the best. There is no universal standard or yardstick, although quite often, Western nations have tried, and continue to insist on the Western model as the universal media model.

### ***Historical Background***

All over the globe, there has been a basic consideration in the way the concepts of press freedom historically shaped themselves. In the UK, the distinguishing stamp on the press freedom is undoubtedly the Official Secret Act. In India, the growth of a vibrant anti-colonial nationalist press before the independence was the watermark of the press that subsequently developed as a powerful element of freedom and democracy. Singapore always played by the motto of less-freedom-and-more-prosperity and went on to achieve the material wealth comparable with any Western nation. The Philippines is perhaps a good model of how a press should *not* be, with a grand free-for-all situation where the infamous *envelope journalism* has its roots and is still a widespread practice today.

In all above cases it is evident that every country has developed the media in relation to the historical experiences

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that the country has gone through. Modern Bhutanese media is an off-shoot of the modern development process initiated in 1961. Both the press and the broadcast media focused on development communications. In fact, the mission statement of BBS is “to act as a bridge between the people and the government and contribute to the socio-economic development of the country”.<sup>13</sup> Much of the programming on BBS radio reflects this statement in that a large chunk is dedicated to development programmes such as improved farming methods, better livestock management, non-formal education, etc. The historical role of the BBS was therefore purely developmental, whereby the media would assist the government in the overall effort of nation building.

### *Ethnic Consideration*

Although a small kingdom, Bhutan is a very diverse country in terms of racial mixtures and ethnic composition. The long isolation with the outside world and within the districts and regions has sown the seeds for intense regionalist feelings. And though planned economic development has connected every district in the country, encouraging massive movement of people and goods from one region to another, it will still take some more generations for Bhutanese to think as a nation. Hence the notion that “the rules of news judgment call for ignoring story implication”<sup>14</sup> would be disastrous. In simple terms, if a man rapes a woman, the press cannot report that the perpetrator is a *ngalop* (western Bhutanese) and the victim is a *sharchop* (eastern Bhutanese) or vice versa. Little does it matter that these *are* the facts. Such disregard for ethnic sensitivity could inflame the delicate balance between different ethnic groups in the country. The overall effect on journalism, one could argue, is that there is a loss of news objectivity. However, in exchange for social harmony, reporters should often compromise their professionalism and ethics. In neighbouring India, in 1992, it is believed that the demolition of the Babri Mosque shown *live*

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<sup>13</sup> BBS Mission Statement, Ninth Plan Document, 2002

<sup>14</sup> Sunanda Dutta Ray, *Press Freedom and Professional Standards in Asia* AMIC, Singapore

on BBC TV via satellite had spurred communal violence all over India. The TV channel should have considered the social implication of showing jubilant religious fanatics at work. Similarly, multi-ethnic countries such as Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia and even UK have adopted this editorial policy.

#### *Cultural Competence*

Cultural competence is defined as a set of behaviours, attributes and policies enabling an agency or an individual to work in cross-cultural settings and situations. The rugged mountainous terrain of Bhutan has for thousands of years impeded the intra-regional communications and cultural exchange. This has led to the evolution of distinct culture and tradition between regions. Cultural conservation is considered one of the four pillars of the GNH (gross national happiness). Hence, media persons should exercise cultural competence in their line of duty. If local traditions call for certain behaviours and ethics, which reporters may find unusual or comical, they should not criticize or mock at the ways things happen.

In Bhutan, culture is almost synonymous with religion and hence any disdain on the culture could be viewed as direct blasphemy or act of profanity. In a country where religious sentiments still run high, such acts would entail problems within communities and groups.

A story goes that in a village in Africa, a documentary screening session ended up in a brawl because the documentary contained a scene of a chicken crossing the screen. Apparently this act was inauspicious and the owner of the chicken (on screen) had to be identified and reprimanded for not taking a good care of the chicken. Only after that could the evening resume.

#### *Political System*

A political system and its evolution play an important role in shaping the media in a country. The political history of America has enabled the development of a press which unfortunately cannot be transplanted in Bhutan which has

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been a medieval-state until the nineteen sixties. Democratic societies have been in the forefront in promoting press freedom. This is not to say that other forms of governance have not encouraged a free press. Monarchies such as Japan, Thailand, and even Italy (before World War II) have a vibrant press and journalism.

In Bhutan, the political system has definitely shaped the modern media. A significant deviation from the Western norm is a strong sense of national loyalty. The traditional *zhung-dang-mitse-damtsi* (government – people relation) extended to media-persons. This is mainly because Bhutan has been blessed with a leadership whose concern for the welfare of the people has never been in doubt. Hence, the media, with rare exception, ended up adopting the government's position on almost everything. Patriotism or national loyalty may be a *passé* in the west. In Bhutan, it is still very strong. This practice gave the view that the media was under the strict control of the government. In reality, the common editorial policy practiced by Bhutanese media has been that of forging a sense of national identity and sense of nation-hood under the figure head of the monarchy. This is for obvious reasons. A country sandwiched between two giants can only survive through a strong sense of national unity.

### *Freedom of Expression and Censorship*

Freedom of expression is termed as a means of seeking, receiving, and imparting information or ideas regardless of the medium used. It goes beyond the freedom of speech into non-verbal form of communication such as art, films, pictures, songs, dances, way of dressing, looks, etc.

If freedom of expression is explicitly guaranteed by the constitution, then the existing government mechanisms to control or censor, such as the national film & TV review board, become unconstitutional. This board has been set up to censor and certify Bhutanese films for public consumption, which is sensible in light of social, political and cultural implications that a film might possibly have, not to mention the breach in state security and safety. But as people become self-centred and greedy, some unpleasant events might

overrun the otherwise good work of the board. It may be necessary therefore to review the mandate, functions, and responsibility of such boards and committees taking into consideration the freedom of expression on one side and responsibility on the other.

Then there is the restriction on civil servants to sing, act in films, write articles and columns, and talk to the press. On one hand freedom of speech and expression are granted and on the other, age-old methods still seem to prevail in Bhutan. Democracy and free press are concepts that unfortunately come as a package. One cannot welcome Democracy and shut the door to free press. There cannot be a vibrant democracy without a dynamic press.

### **Threats to Freedom**

When one refers to threat to press freedom, one is immediately inclined to think of regulators, legislators, dictators, and autocrats who *either* don't believe in free press or fear them. The fact is that there can be two kinds of threats – threats from *external restrictions* and threats from *within*.

#### *External Restrictions*

Threats from external restrictions include censorship, legislation, government regulations, and other measures and practices that restrict the job of pressmen. In an editorial for Bhutan Times, Editor Tashi Phuntsho writes: "Media may be granted freedom but when there is censorship at the source of events, it defeats the purpose. The door is increasingly shut to us." Despite the rapid pace of progress and the overall achievement in socio-economic spheres, the sad reality is that restrictions exist. Not so much as state policies, but rather as personal considerations or individual decisions. Perhaps it is owing to the feudal past, or may be it is because of the Bhutanese modesty and humility at work. Whatever the reason, people still prefer to operate in secrecy, within their little 'pond', totally apprehensive of any external presence. Any intrusion or attempt to intrude is met with disapproving

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faces and defensive actions. Defensiveness reflects fear, the fear of discovered dishonesty, revealed complicity or, at best, lack of self-confidence. Such an attitude neither augurs well for the establishment nor for the press itself. For it undermines the national policy of efficiency, accountability, and transparency. Not to mention the breach in Article 7.5 of the Constitution that guarantees the citizens right to information. How much these rights are respected by those in power will remain to be seen.

### *Internal Threats*

Threats from within are internal (individual or institutional) threats. These are as dangerous as external threats. In case of Bhutan, they are even more. They stem from self-censorship, irresponsibility, inaccuracy, and lack of professionalism by media personnel, as well as outright corruption by reporters and editors for personal gain. Again the fault does not lie entirely with the journalist. Sometimes the reason could be simple: low salary and poor working conditions. Unless a journalist enjoys a good pay and a decent living standard, he or she would fall prey to corruption and envelope-journalism.

Institutional threats are caused by childish delight of owners and chief executives masquerading as editors and journalists. Managers, who have no background in media, do not recognise media-persons as professionals and moreover tend to 'advise' the subordinates. Internal threats degrade the credibility, responsibility, and journalistic ethics of the press.

### *Consequences of Threats*

Threats, whether internal or external, do achieve one common goal – they weaken the press. Such a scenario will be disastrous in the wake of the political reforms in the country. The necessary condition for a vibrant democracy is a dynamic and responsible press. A feeble or a muzzled press would therefore undermine the whole democratic experiment. For, it is only through the media that people can express their wishes freely thereby holding the authorities accountable to

the populace and redirecting their plans and priorities. However, it is a well-known fact, though generally not accepted, that Bhutanese at all levels are allergic to criticisms no matter how well-intended or how best they are worded. Even in the lower level of bureaucracy, to submit even a constructive criticism to an individual would be to invite a fierce defensive, and sometimes offensive, stance by the entire institution. Worse still, the issue is given higher importance attracting counter-suits and allegations of being judgmental, biased, and detrimental to the image of the State.

One of the flaws of democracy is that there could be a leader who is incapable, inept, and inefficient, or a combination of all three. Such a leader could nevertheless equate himself to the State, and any attempt to uncover his wrongdoings or shortcomings could be likened to an attack against the State. Any criticism to his plans and policies could be taken as an assault to the social harmony of the nation.

In India, the government-press relation is still governed by Mahatma Gandhi's enlightened statement that "the national cause will never suffer by honest criticism of national institution and national policies". This far-reaching and visionary dictum explains perhaps the very high quality of journalism standards in India – some comparable to the best in the world.

As new leadership take the helm of governance in Bhutan, would they accept positive comments and constructive criticisms? Or will they also retaliate with vague reasons and restrictive regulations in the name of national security, identity and harmony and good relations with friendly countries?

### **Role of Media in a Changing Political Scenario**

Bhutan is going through fundamental changes. Unlike other countries that greet the changes with political turmoil and civil unrest, Bhutan is blessed with a leadership that is managing the changes as a peaceful evolution rather than as a violent transition. However, for such peaceful means to fully succeed, media - both public service and independent - must

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play a crucial role. They must inform and shape public opinion. They must educate the masses on the changes, challenges, choices, and eventual benefits. Only then can people make informed choices and play a significant role by actively participating in political changes.

### *Role of Public Service Media*

One of the sacred roles of the public service media is to offer citizens universal, equal, and unimpeded access to information. Public service media also has the societal and cultural obligation to help bind the nation together by promoting social equity (that rich and poor alike should have the same opportunities to receive programs).

The public service media has in large part operated as an extension of the government within the overall context of nation-building. However, employees of the two public service media have been given the step-motherly treatment. Neither do the employees get the benefits rendered to the civil servant nor the financial incentives enjoyed by other corporate workers. In this period when the wisdom of having public enterprises is being questioned, publicly owned media cannot be taken for granted, and their objectives and obligations are no longer self-evident. Therefore, there is a need to redefine the roles, mandate, and funding mechanisms for the public service media.

There is no question of whether Bhutan needs the public service media or not. It is clear that as independent media gets their financing from corporate entities (which will have political inclinations), the role of the public service as a credible source of balanced reports, unbiased analysis, and impartial programming is vital for the success of a democratic society. This is again not to question the professionalism of the independent press. The Media Act in fact bars the editorial interventions of owners and CEOs. But how much this is applied and monitored is another issue.

If an appropriate funding mechanism is not worked out for the public service media, what could also happen is that instead of reaching out to the districts, the public service media could be bogged down competing for a share of

audience, improving the ratings, and capturing the urban market where money flows. This will leave the un-economical areas like rural Bhutan unreported in the mainstream media.

*Public Service Radio*

Few years back, a government minister was visiting the remote valley of Merak Sakten in the higher Himalayas, inhabited by a semi-nomadic group, known among others for the foul smell that radiates from their body and dress. Every morning from the window of the guesthouse where our minister was hosted, he would see an old man defying the early morning chill to go and wash in the cold icy waters of the Himalayas. On enquiring the man, our minister was told, "I am having my regular bath". Amused, the minister carried on, "But don't you feel the cold?" "Well I was told I should take regular bath if I am to stay healthy," the man replied. More amused, our minister asked, "And who told you that?" "I heard it on the radio," came the reply. This short story portrays the power of the radio and the presence of this medium in the daily lives of rural Bhutan, comprising about 70 percent of the country's total population.

Radio is by far the most important media for the Bhutanese people. The very mountainous terrain, deep gorges, fast flowing rivers, and dense jungles make radio the effective tool for disseminating information. In some remote isolated communities, especially among semi-nomadic pastoral groups of Laya, Lingshi, Lunana, and Merak Sakten, radio is the only source of entertainment, information, and education.

Bhutan is still very much an agrarian society with 70 percent of Bhutanese still living in the rural area<sup>15</sup> on subsistence farming. It is here among the simple and often illiterate farmers that radio has the widest audience. Media Impact Study 2006 commissioned by the Ministry of Information shows that there are around 83,000 radio receivers in the country with a total listening population of

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<sup>15</sup> *Bhutan Poverty Analysis Report*, National Statistical Bureau, Royal Government of Bhutan, August 2004

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400,000,<sup>16</sup> which is equivalent to 88.6 percent<sup>17</sup> of the total population. The study also shows that in terms of people's specific preferences, it is radio, closely followed by television. About 45.93 percent of the respondents preferred the radio while 45.72 percent prefer TV.

### *Public Service TV*

I would like to remind our youth that the television and the Internet provide a whole range of possibilities which can be both beneficial as well as negative for the individual and the society. I trust that you will exercise your good sense and judgment in using the Internet and television.

- King Jigme Singye Wangchuck, 2 June 1999

Broadcast television came to Bhutan in 1999. From one-hour transmissions confined to the capital city of Thimphu the service has been extended nation-wide with a daily programming of five hours. While the public service radio models itself as a developmental radio, television has successfully established itself as a public forum for discussions on issues facing the society. Hence, in light of the fundamental political changes, TV more than radio, has the potential for providing public space for discussion on issues facing the society. Such debates are vital in shaping public opinion, which is but a crystallization of the freely expressed wishes of the people. Public opinion will have bearing on the governance of the country, thereby fulfilling the ideals of democracy.

What is not very clear is the capacity of the present public service TV to organize evocative public debates on meaningful issues confronting the society. The broadcast media has been managed by civil servants, of different managerial capacities, some good and some who left much to be desired. The one common result was the limitation of the journalistic and professional growth. Although by a Royal Decree of 1992, BBS was to function as an autonomous corporation, for all practical matters, it had to "abide" by

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<sup>16</sup> BBS Audience Survey 2000, Danida/Roots Consultancy

<sup>17</sup> Media Impact Study 2003, Siok Sian Pek

some unwritten code of management. This was often some casual remarks here, some indiscriminate views there, passed by some prominent people. The management would often put producers, reporters and editors at the receiving end of unpleasant “briefings”. The net result has been a flourishing practice of self-censorship where reporters and editors would censor out facts even before any reaction has been received.

Then there is the unique Bhutanese journalism which one could term as ‘speech’ journalism where the prime time news is dominated by speeches, workshops, and inaugurations by senior government officials. Editors often wait for press handouts and reporters are often “invited” to, and attend, the numerous workshops and conferences. This has left the major chunk of the population either un-reported or under-reported.

Although the newest of the three traditional media, TV, has caught on to the audience who prefer watching TV more than reading paper or listening to radio. Besides, television, being the most powerful medium, has the social responsibility to conduct and encourage TV debates on various issues affecting the nation. It can bring the nation together through socially and culturally diverse programming and content.

#### *Public Service Print*

*Kuensel* (meaning clarity) was started in 1967 as an official bulletin. It was brought to the present tabloid format in 1986. From 500 copies, *Kuensel* now sells over 15,000 (Saturday issue) and 12,000 (Wednesday issue) copies with an estimated readership of 200,000 (*Source: Kuensel*). *Kuensel* is increasingly opening up and becoming a credible source of news. However, many still believe that *Kuensel* is government-controlled. While the broadcast media caters to the rural population, *Kuensel* has the potential to stir public debate, shape the opinion, and contribute to the overall political discourse—mainly for the educated elite. In fact it has grown to be a powerful force of democracy having initiated online debates and editorials that touch on issues of social and national importance.

***Endowment Fund***

As Bhutan moves unenthusiastically towards 2008 when democracy and party politics will take hold, the role of the media remains crucial to the success of the political reforms. Once the transition to 2008 has been made, the position of the public service media, especially BBS, will remain a dilemma. BBS receives much of its funding as a subsidy from the government. This funding mechanism could prove to be “tricky” as the government in power could use the annual subsidy to impose their terms and conditions. What could happen is that the public service media, that is suppose to stay out of partisan politics, will have to foster closer ties with political decision-makers to keep the show going. One cannot argue that *sin qua*; both BBS and Kuensel were often considered as an extension of the “civil service”, which was synonymous for government, state or the nation. In the new political order, the single sacrosanct *Zhung* (government) will be replaced by many state entities—the political debates dominated by two opposing factions, the ruling and the opposition parties. Hence, the public service media cannot, and should not, represent the ruling government if they are to maintain public credibility and faith.

Hence, the operation of the public service media should be met through an “endowment fund” to be granted to the public service print, radio, and TV. This fund should not be at the discretion of any government. Rather it should come with an Act passed by the National Assembly that would require the government to release the money with no conditions attached.

**Challenges - Globalisation**

One of the challenges for the Bhutanese media is to contain the impact of global media. Globalisation has not spared even this Lost Horizon. *Coca Cola* is already operational with its first plant in the kingdom. *Pepsi* has been around for quite sometime now. *Nokia* has started connecting the Bhutanese people while the Airbus ferries fresh *sushis* and *Hagen Daz* ice cream under the Druk Air banner. Fortunately, with the

recent nation-wide ban on the sale of tobacco products, Bhutan is not a *Marlboro country*.

Yet, more than these commodities, it is the direct-to-home satellites that may have an irreversible impact on the age-old culture and tradition that have survived till the dawn of this millennium. Today, nothing less than 45 foreign channels are available in every urban home in Bhutan—with CNN International being the first to tell us what we should know and *Fashion TV* showing us how our girls should look.

The effects of global television are very visible. Cricket, which was virtually unknown before the advent of cable television, is today the fastest growing sport among our youngsters. Cricket may perhaps be the brighter side of the story depending on whether or not one loves this sport. What is more alarming for any sensitive observer is the fact that global television is connected with the ideology of global capitalism, a force intent on distraction, cultural assimilation, and consumer creation. Traditionally, the Bhutanese, as pious Buddhists, cultivate from an early age a slow and subtle appreciation for values of life and simplicity. Commercial television promotes just the opposite—individualism and unscrupulous consumerism and puts life on the fast lane. It is not surprising therefore, that in the few years since the arrival of TV in Bhutan, private ownership of cars have grown from 7,438 in 1999 to 11, 428 in 2003.<sup>18</sup>

The explosion of capitalism and the growth of the urban centres are fuelling another problem—the rural-urban migration. Studies have shown that this migration is taking place at an alarming rate of 10 percent per annum<sup>19</sup>. On the other hand, the average age of the general population is going down and youngsters are more inclined towards foreign media and commodities. In either of the above cases, radio will not have any listeners a few years down the line.

Finally, the presence of international media in even the remotest villages is now inevitable. New technologies continue to bring civilisations closer and yet at the same time threaten

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<sup>18</sup> *Statistical Yearbook of Bhutan 2003*, National Statistical Bureau, Royal Government of Bhutan, March 2004

<sup>19</sup> Pem Gyeltshen, *Rural Urban Migration*, Asian Institute of Technology, Bangkok

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to tear the world apart. Under such a scenario, decision makers, media executives, and professionals should have a better understanding of national policies and local priorities. Eventually there is the need to develop a strong sense of local identity of the media to suit local needs. This localisation of programme content is what will give the ownership and sense of identity to the listeners. Oddly, in the age of globalisation, the secret of survival is staying local. To paraphrase, more or less, one Indian media executive, it does not matter, to an ordinary Indian farmer, whether it rains or shines in New York or London. What he needs to know is whether there would be enough rain before the rice plantation season. And this information is something only a local media can give.

#### **Quo vadis - From there to here to where?**

From development journalism that the Bhutanese media has always been, where does it go from here? What direction does it take in light of the fundamental changes in the country? There are three areas of recommendations:

##### *Need to develop a 'Bhutanese' Media Model*

Media, as we have seen, does not have a universal standard that can be applied in every country. It varies from country to country and from region to region. On one hand there is the need for the media to reflect the Bhutanese culture and society. On the other, the influence of the media in a "new" Bhutan is so great that one cannot overlook the need to understand the media itself.

Hence, there is the need to develop a Bhutanese media model--considering the nation's history, culture, ethnic composition, level of human development, and the role the Bhutanese media has played thus far.

##### *Re-define the Role of Public Service Media*

There is also the need to redefine the role of the public service media. From development journalism there is the need to go further into shaping the public opinion on national issues, providing equitable coverage, enhancing the cause of

nationhood, and watering the seeds of a democratic society. There is the need to go from just plain reporting to involve and encourage discussions and debates and carry the country forward.

*Carryout Massive Media Literacy Programme*

The absence of an independent media has created a *quasi-divine* status for the mass media which is synonymous with BBS and Kuensel. As commercial media comes into the market there is the need to educate the people on how to view media more critically, in essence to become media-literate. People need to understand that whatever comes from the media is not the absolute truth. Media literacy programmes should be carried out among all sections of the society--especially students.

*Legislation – the New Dilemma*

The job of the media has never been an easy one. Until now it had to understand the target audience and tailor-make any information that was disseminated. On different occasions, media is often accused of being on opposite sides by warring parties. In worst of cases it becomes the sacrificial lamb. The general expectation, again, was that with the adoption of the Constitution and media legislation, things would improve. In fact the opposite was expected and that exactly what has happened. The job of the pressmen has become even harder because the line that marks the borders between do's and don'ts will become hazy. And with no clear directives or professional maturity to decide what can be reported and what should be left out, journalists and editors are in a total dilemma.

**Closing words**

Bhutan has always had the wisdom and political commitment to balance growth and happiness. As the doors were flung open to modernisation and winds of change blew across the Eastern Himalayas, Bhutan has not adopted everything coming from the West but has had the ingenuity to choose

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skilfully things that can best serve its interests. At times, Bhutan seems to have perfected the art of modifying Western concepts and culture to suit her own needs.

With the entry of global concepts like free press and democracy into the homes of every Bhutanese where evening dinner talks around the kitchen fireplace could be centred on multi-party politics, it may not be a surprise if Bhutan again skilfully responds by reconciling politics and press freedom with traditional “Bhutanese” values and ways of doing things. If the new mantra of the Bhutanese continues, it will be similar to a Bollywood classic *Shri 420* where Raj Kapoor sings: “my shoes are Japanese/these pants are British/the cap on my head is Russian/but my heart is Indian.”

# Role of Kuensel in Fostering Democracy in Bhutan

Sanjeev Mehta\*

## Abstract

*In this study, the role of Kuensel in fostering the democratic process is estimated on the basis of four important functions: provider of information, interpreter of the events, initiator of public debate, and as a watchdog. Since its inception Kuensel has greatly contributed to disseminate the information and later in promoting public discussion, albeit on a smaller scale. Findings of this study suggest that Kuensel's regular readership is not very high and also that its news reporting despite its above average quality cannot make an impact on people's opinion.*

*The finding of this sample study suggests that Kuensel is rated as average by the people for its role in fostering democracy. Its aggregate point score is 22.66 out of 40. Its failure to explore and focus the crucial community issues, and consequently its inability to provide alternative solutions to the community problem has resulted in the poor rating. Its role as a watchdog over the public institutions is also rated below average, which is not surprising considering that about 82% respondents believed that reporting in Kuensel is subject to censorship.*

*The regression estimates suggest that issues relating to participatory journalism are vital in strengthening the democratic process. It is relevant for not only Kuensel but also for other media in general.*

## Introduction

The mass media constitute the backbone of democracy. Role of print media and especially that of newspaper in strengthening democracy is extremely vital. Democracy is generally defined as the rule of the people by the people and for the people. This type of meaningful democracy requires

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that informed citizens take the most appropriate decisions regarding various aspects of governance. People make social choice through the voting process. Citizenship is a crucial issue for the success of the modern democratic state. Citizenship refers to the rights and duties of the members of a state. It is argued by historians that citizenship has thus expanded with democratization to include a wider definition of the citizen regardless of sex, age, or ethnicity. The concept was revived in the context of the modern state, notably during the French and American Revolutions, and gradually became identified more with rights than obligations. In modern times citizenship refers conventionally to the various organizations which institutionalize these rights in the welfare state.

The role of modern media is extremely crucial for the strengthening of the democratic process by educating the citizens on the various relevant issues. The media is expected to perform three basic functions: provider of information, watchdog for the people, and interpreter of the events.

Newspapers act as transmitters of information on a variety of public issues and as interpreters of different events. People, the main players in democratic systems, decide the policy issues either directly or indirectly. In this decision making process, access to information about the working of the socio-political system is essential.

We need suitable benchmarks for political knowledge to analyze what the public learns from the news media. The literature provides two broad approaches on the role of media, the civic approach and the relativist approach.

### *The Civic Approach*

Traditionally speaking, it meant providing a narrow type of 'ideal' information about the government and public policy that all citizens need to know.

### *The Relativist Approach*

It is based on the assumption that people have a limited stock of political information which is insufficient to make any social choice. The role of the media is to provide all the

necessary information that is crucial in making informed opinions and judgment on the relevant public and social issues.

But the concept of civic approach to journalism has undergone an evolution and now it is interpreted in various manners. Most would probably agree, however, that civic journalism is both a philosophy and a set of practices that require a newspaper to go beyond the mere telling of the news. Rather, it strives to invigorate the democratic process, usually by seeking out the concerns of average citizens and motivating them to become involved in solving civic problems. It requires a more active role than that of the traditionally uninvolved observer; civic-journalism coverage usually involves the promotion of public discussion of key issues and the reporting of positive, solution-oriented stories (rather than "conflict" stories). Civic journalism also usually goes beyond modes of coverage: papers sometimes organize communities (or their leaders) with activities intended to spark movement toward solutions, or at least toward greater civic unity.

It is thus quite evident that the media plays an important role in providing vital information to the people (stakeholders in the democracy). Its role in strengthening democracy lies in performing this vital task. The modern media look at this responsibility in different ways. Some act like the provider of information, others take the responsibility of providing analytical interpretation of the information and a small section, whose number is on the rise, act as public watchdogs.

How do newspaper journalists envision their social role in the broadest sense? Media researchers for several years have found that journalists seem to identify with one, two or even all three of these functions: as disseminators of information; as "watchdogs" (in some research called "adversaries") of powerful institutions (especially government); and as interpreters of events. Most studies have found that the interpretive role is embraced most widely among newspaper journalists, with the least-agreed-upon being the watchdog role.

It would be not impertinent to quote The American

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Society of Newspaper Editors (1997) which highlighted the present trend:

There seems to be a declining (but still solid) commitment to all three of these traditional understandings of the purpose newspapers serve. It could be that journalists are less sure generally about the role newspapers play, or should play, in the broadest sense.

The media has a crucial role in governance, human rights and the elimination of poverty. The media can become a major force in improving the quality of governance. Tight government controls and censorship makes media ineffective. According to DFID (2001) the article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights provides that:

Everyone has right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without any interference and to seek, receive and impart information through any media regardless of frontiers.

On the other hand too little control may lead to domination of commercial media ruled by advertising which is detrimental to the interest of those without purchasing power. Good management, professional and technical skills are equally vital to make media an effective tool in fostering democracy.

Public debate and discussions on relevant and significant issues is very crucial for the success of democracy. Nelson Mandela (1994) wrote in his autobiography about the importance of public debate in democracy:

Everyone [that] wanted to speak did so. It was democracy in its purest form. ...The foundation of self governance was that all men were free to voice their opinions and equal in their value as citizens.

In the absence of the tradition of public discussion, the newspapers and other media have to play a crucial role in stimulating such discussion amongst the wider segment of the population.

In short, the media enables strengthening of democratic process by:

- Making people more aware of their rights;
- Making people more aware of political and social issues, available options;
- Initiating wider and pluralist debate on the relevant public issues;
- Drawing attention towards institutional failure such as- corruption, nepotism, callous attitudes and general inefficiency of the government machinery;
- Creating pressure for improved government performance and efficient delivery of public services; and
- Extending public accountability.

### **Media Research**

Many researchers have attempted to identify the role of the media in performing these functions. The study of evaluations of the news media—particularly in terms of one dimension, credibility—has a long tradition. Whitney (1985) has traced systematic public opinion research on media credibility back to the 1930s, when Gallup and Roper surveys included questions asking respondents if the press was credible and believable. McLeod, Kosicki and Pan (1991), summarized early research on the impact of media images and reported that audience members who believe the media is of high quality are—surprisingly—less likely to learn from news in the media than are those with a negative evaluation of the media in this dimension. Spitzer (1993) emphasized that the media possesses a distinctive capacity to shape public policy. Kingdon (1995) suggested that news media shapes public policy by linking people inside and outside the government.

Linsky (1986) found that the media plays a significant and commanding role in democracy and public affairs. He also maintained that the media substantially impacts the formation of political agendas and the performance of political institutions. Graber (1984) commented that “Although the verdict is mixed about the extent of media influence on various political arenas, evidence strongly suggest it is a

sizable factor.”

Gunther and Mughan (2000) found that cross-cultural comparisons convey the strong effect of the media on political development. McCombs and Reynolds (2002) stated that there is plenty of evidence that the media has a strong influence on people’s perception about the issues which are important and for which they seek solution from the government.

The evidence in this research provides a good insight into the mechanism through which the media affects the democratic process.

### **Objective of this study**

In this paper we plan to evaluate the impact of *Kuensel* on the public life. It is important to understand how *Kuensel* has been able to affect the informed opinion of the public and thereby how it has been able to tackle crucial public issues. For a society which has remained shut from the rest of the world till the middle of the last century; public awareness about relevant issues and the ability of the general public to debate over the issues was greatly compromised. Has the arrival of *Kuensel* changed the situation? Is it an important area of research?

In the last two and half decades, the RGOB, under the leadership of the present King, has been making a series of attempts to democratize political institutions. It is therefore not surprising that the Times Magazine has named His Majesty the King as one of the 21 most influential leaders in the world. Now the question is to what extent the fourth estate is able to play the required role in fostering democracy. *Kuensel’s* responsibility to strengthen democracy is even more important. Since there is no proof of how it has played the required role, it is important to gauge how the readers rate *Kuensel* in this respect.

The central objective of this study is to find this out and to statistically test the significant parameters.

### **Methodology**

This study is based on primary as well as secondary data. For this study we collected primary information by conducting a sample survey in Kanglung. We used stratified random sample selection for the members of Sherubtse College: students and others, which included teaching and non-teaching staff. The list of names was used as a sample frame. For non-Sherubtse samples, we used a convenient sample selection process in the absence of any reliable sample frame. Sample units are the individuals who read *Kuensel*. The random sample selection was difficult in the absence of a reliable sampling frame. We carried out questionnaire-based data collection. A total of 176 persons were interviewed, but 35 questionnaires were omitted either because of non-response or due to incomplete or inconsistent responses. The samples were asked to give their response to different questions and the answers are analyzed on a point scale to find out the average score for each response and overall conclusion.

Secondary data were used to trace the growth of *Kuensel* and its contribution to fostering the forces of democracy. For assessing the role of *Kuensel* in fostering democracy, I explored different issues of *Kuensel* which were randomly picked up. For selecting samples of *Kuensel*, I used the stratified sampling method so as to provide proportional representation to different decades. Samples selected belonged to the years: 1969, 1972, 1978, 1980, 1986, 1995, 1998 and 2002.

### **Findings of the study**

#### *Tracing the Growth of Kuensel*

In a social setting with a strong centralist tendency, without any constitutional provision that protects the right to expression and the right to information, the rise of *Kuensel* as a national newspaper was no mean achievement in and of itself. *Kuensel* came into existence in the late 1960's as an official fortnightly news bulletin of the Royal Government of

Bhutan. Its primary role was aimed at providing information to the general public about government policies, which can be termed a civic approach. Organizationally, it was under the Ministry of Development. In 1980's, its status changed from the official news bulletin to the news bulletin and in the same decade it turned from a fortnight to a weekly news bulletin. In the 1990's it became a national newspaper. In 2005, *Kuensel* started appearing twice a week.

As an official mouthpiece, it was not supposed to generate debate on the issues of public interest. Under the Department of Publicity it was obviously an official mouthpiece of the government. In the earlier phase, *Kuensel* did not have an editorial as a regular feature and whenever they appeared, they were limited to some significant events which were absolutely non-controversial. By the late 1980's, editorials were a regular feature of *Kuensel*. Initially, it did not provide any scope for reader's responses. In 1990's, when its status was changed to a national newspaper, editorials and reader's opinion started featuring as regular content.

The analysis made about the role of *Kuensel* is based on the reporting in the sample issues of *Kuensel*.

*Kuensel* did not carry editorials in 1969. The *Kuensel* issue of September 10, 1972 featured an editorial titled "Jigme Dorji Wangchuck, Kingly Reformer". On September 24, 1972, the editorial of *Kuensel* covered the three resolutions in the 37<sup>th</sup> session of the national assembly. In 1980 and 1986, *Kuensel* issues did not contain any editorials. The 1990's witnessed reader's opinions, which implied an improved role of *Kuensel* in generating public debate. In an issue of *Kuensel*, dated February 18, 1995, a letter by Chhoeki Wangchuk of Galing Lhundrupjhung is a testimonial of the changing role of *Kuensel* in generating public debate on relevant public issues. In this letter Chhoeki responded to the article "Galing: A village neglected" (*Kuensel* January 28, 1995) by Tenzin Rigden about the decline in the education in Galing due to faulty government policy. Not only did *Kuensel* point out the flaws in the government policy but also aroused a public debate.

On another occasion Tashi Wangchuk wrote on June 24,

1995: “*Kuensel* should be pleased with the way a section of the society is influenced by its editorials”. This comment showed that *Kuensel*’s reporting was able to influence popular opinion. But again he pointed out that most of the letters were written by expatriates. *Kuensel*’s reported inability to initiate public discussion among Bhutanese nationals reflects the lack of a culture of public discussion.

In 1995, the range of the coverage of the editorials was very vast. It included non-controversial topics such as “No spares” (Jan 21) about the unavailability of spare parts for imported vehicles. What is more significant is that this editorial was written in response to the letter by a reader on this issue. It is an example of responding to the needs of the public in a participatory approach to journalism. Other editorials included relevant public issues about: crime and unreliable police statistics (Jan 28), professionalism and quality of the work of the private contractors (April 15), and tackling fronting (June 10), which highlighted the fronting practices of Bhutanese businessmen. In this editorial the ability of the ministry to tackle this problem is questioned very subtly as “whether ministry barks far fiercer than its bite”. It also raised scepticism whether the key ones would be caught. This editorial is an indicator of the evolution of *Kuensel* into a more independent newspaper which acts as a watchdog over public institutions.

From the samples of editorials and reader’s responses it is quite evident that *Kuensel* evolved from a mouthpiece of the government to a more independent newspaper which highlights the relevant public issues, fosters public discussions on these issues, and also keeps an eye on government performance. *Kuensel* has performed all of the three roles that a modern media is supposed to perform. Its ability to transmit that information conveys its strong role in promoting democratic values.

How *Kuensel* is rated by independent organizations is also important to know. I have an excerpt from the Freedom House’s Bhutan country report (2004):

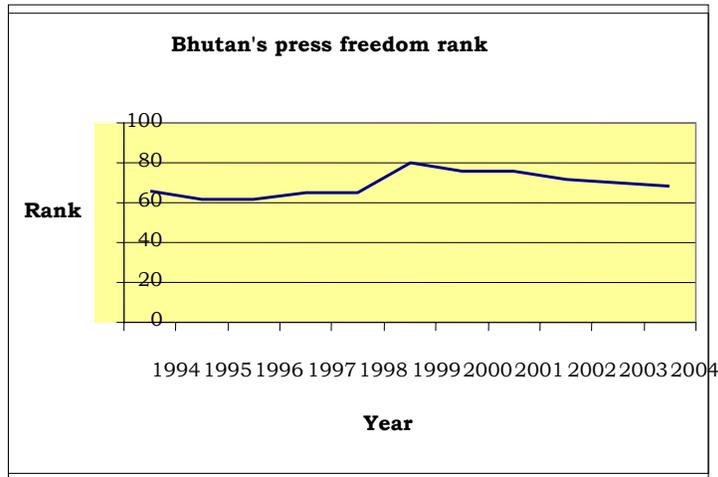
Freedom of expression and of the press is restricted. In the

## *Media and Public Culture*

absence of a constitution or clearly defined legislation concerning the operation of the media, the legal environment for the press remains opaque. Criticism of Bhutan's political system has by tradition been prohibited. Bhutan's only regular publication, the weekly *Kuensel*, generally reports news that puts the kingdom in a favourable light, although it does provide occasional coverage of criticism of government policies during assembly meetings. *Kuensel's* online edition, which is updated daily and contains reader feedback, provides a somewhat livelier forum for discussion and debate. In past years, journalists working for *Kuensel* have reportedly been subjected to threats from the government, but no cases of official harassment were made public during 2004. The broadcast media, which consist of the state-run Bhutan Broadcasting Service radio station and television station, do not carry anti-government positions and statements. Cable television services are privately run and carry uncensored foreign programming. However, while they are thriving in urban areas, their growth has been somewhat hampered by a high sales tax and the absence of a broadcasting law. Internet access is growing and is unrestricted, and a second Internet service provider started operations in 2004.

Any judgment on this cannot be made as there is no strong evidence to either accept or reject the report.

**Graph 1: Changes in press freedom rank of Bhutan**



Source: Freedom House, "Freedom of the press" Freedom House Surveys, 2004

Freedom House conducts annual surveys and ranks different countries on the basis of their level of press freedom. Bhutan's press freedom rank deteriorated in the 1990's but improved during the present decade. Graph no.1 shows the press freedom rank of Bhutan since 1994.

#### **Readers' Response**

Any unbiased judgment on the role of *Kuensel* in fostering democracy would call for getting the feedback from the readers. How they rate *Kuensel* will reflect the ability of this medium to penetrate the minds of the end beneficiaries.

Of the 141 samples, 98 (69.5%) were male and 43 (30.5%) were female. Gender-wise distribution of samples is not based of their respective weight in the population.

#### **Disseminating Information**

One of the important tasks of the media is to disseminate

information to the public. It depends upon its ability to get the attention of the readers/viewers and the quality of news coverage.

The respondents were asked the questions: Do you read *Kuensel*? And do you read editorials in *Kuensel*? Those who responded negatively to the first question were removed from the study.

As the table no. 1 suggests, a small segment of the respondents i.e. only 29% read *Kuensel* regularly, while 44.7% respondents said that they read it more or less regularly. About 26% of the respondents accepted that they read *Kuensel* only occasionally. Only 16.3% of the female respondents reported reading *Kuensel* regularly, which is less than half of the male respondents i.e. - 34.7%. On the same line, more of the female respondents (30.2%) as compared to the male respondents (24.5%) conveyed that they read *Kuensel* only occasionally.

When asked about their habit of reading editorials (table no. 2) 23.4% of respondents conveyed that they read editorials regularly. A predominant majority, i.e. 68%, revealed that they read editorials only sometimes, while 8.5% of the respondents never read editorials. As far as the habit of reading editorials is concerned there is less of a sharp difference between male and female respondents as compared to reading the *Kuensel* itself. These gender based differences in the reading habits are largely due to the fact that females are less interested in political affairs. This analysis becomes more significant considering the fact that all the samples belong to the more educated category of the society. Logically this would imply that as we move down the ladder the penetration of media becomes less strong.

*Role of Kuensel in Fostering Democracy in Bhutan*

**Table 1: Reading Kuensel**

	Male	Female	Total
Regularly	34 (34.7%)	7 (16.3%)	41(29.1%)
More or less regularly	40 (40.8%)	23 (53.5%)	63 (44.7%)
Occasionally	24 (24.5%)	13(30.2%)	37 (26.2%)
Total	98	43	141

**Table 2: Reading editorials**

	Male	Female	Total
Regularly	25 (25.5%)	8 (18.6%)	33 (23.4%)
Only Sometimes	65 (66.3%)	31 (72.1%)	96 (68.1%)
Never	8 (8.2%)	4 (9.3%)	12 (8.5%)
Total	98	43	141

When asked for their opinion about the whether the news coverage of the *Kuensel* is wide, 56.7% respondents believed that news coverage is wide. About 85% of the respondents believed that news reporting by *Kuensel* is informative. Many respondents believe that news reporting is informative but a relatively lesser number of thinks that its coverage is wide. It is equally significant to note that about 72% of the respondents were of the opinion that *Kuensel* reporting is able

to bring out different viewpoints on critical and relevant issues.

***Inducing Discussions***

It is quite surprising in the light of the high readership and better opinion about the quality of the reporting in *Kuensel* that it failed to provoke discussion over the critical public issues amongst the readers. Only 18.5% of the respondents conveyed that they participate in the discussions and 81.5% respondents never participated in any of the discussions. This is a pointer towards a lack of culture of public discussions which is against the spirit of democracy. This can be seen as a failure on the part of *Kuensel* to promote greater spread of public debate on the relevant issues. The other side of it is brighter in the sense that 19 of the 26 (73%) respondents who participated in any discussion on the issues raised by *Kuensel* believed that these discussions were based on better informed opinions. Table no. 3 provides the analysis of the extent to which reporting in *Kuensel* affected reader's judgment on any issue. More than half of the respondents (52.5%) expressed that their judgment on any issue after reading news reporting in *Kuensel* did not change or they do not remember it. Only 14% respondents agreed that their judgment on any issue changed very often after reading reporting in *Kuensel*, while 33% respondents expressed that it happened only sometimes. It is interesting to note that 62.8% of the female respondents expressed that their judgment on any issue never changed from the reporting in *Kuensel* as compared to only 48% of the male respondents. Similarly, only 7% female respondents told that their judgment has changed very often after reading reporting in the *Kuensel*, as compared to 17.3% of the male respondents. Identification of the reasons of these gender based variations in the answers is not the scope of present study and future researchers may look into this aspect.

**Table 3: Does *Kuensel* reporting affect readers' judgment?**

	Male	Female	Total
Yes, very often	17 (17.3%)	3 (7%)	20 (14.2)
Only sometimes	34 (34.7%)	13 (30.2%)	47 (33.3)
Never/do not remember	47 (48%)	27 (62.8%)	74 (52.5%)
Total	98	43	141

For any effective democratic process it is essential that the media not only generate awareness amongst the public on critical and relevant public issues but also create pressure on the government to enact desirable changes. This helps to bridge the communication gap between the rulers and the ruled especially when the majority of population does not take up the issue directly. There is no objective evidence to evaluate the role of *Kuensel* in inducing discussions amongst political leaders in the national assembly and influencing their decisions. We have attempted to gauge this from what the *Kuensel* readers think about it.

The findings are listed in table no.4, according to which 56% respondents felt that news reporting or editorials in *Kuensel* create pressure on the political leaders for discussion and decision on those issues. We made curve estimates to find out the association between education level and belief of the respondents about inducing discussions among the political leaders and affecting their decisions. The curve estimate (as shown in graph no.2) reflects a negative association. With a higher education level, people think negatively about the role of *Kuensel* in this sense. This is probably because with higher education, analytical faculties of the people improve. Variable 1 (education level) is independent and variable 2 (dummy variable for the reply by

the respondents in yes and no) is a dependent variable. Table no.5 shows there is a small negative correlation (-0.167) between the two variables and the value of  $r^2$  is 0.027, which explains that about 3% of the variation in the answers can be explained by changes in the education level. The coefficient of determination is very small and therefore insignificant.

**Table 4 (a): Does Kuensel influence political decisions and debate?**

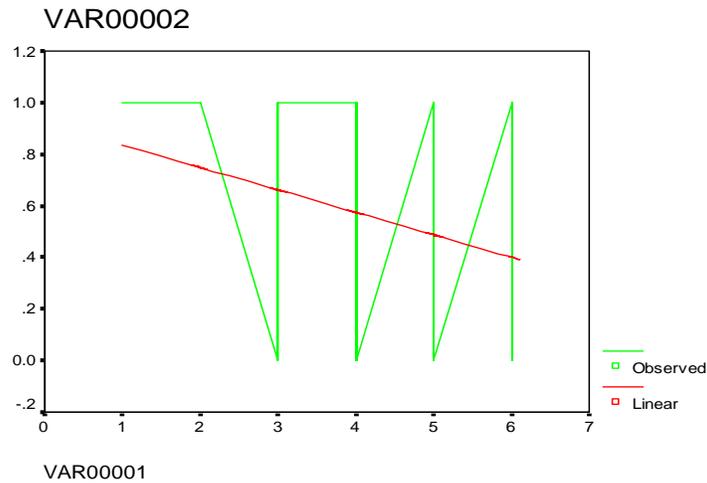
	No. of respondents	%
Yes	79	56
No	62	44
Total	141	100

**Table 4 (b): Education level and Kuensel's influence in inducing debates and discussion**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.165	.027	.020	.4931

a Predictors: (Constant), VAR00001

**Graph 2: Curve estimate of the impact of education level on belief in influencing political discussions and decisions**



### Acting as Watchdogs

Another important role of the media is to act as a watchdog for the public over the public institutions. If the media is subjected to censorship or stricter regulations it cannot perform this duty. When asked about their opinion whether the reporting by *Kuensel* is subjected to censorship, a predominant majority i.e. - 82.3% of respondents thought it is subjected to censorship. This is also because of the strong belief among the respondents that *Kuensel* is not acting as a watchdog. All the respondents except one conveyed that *Kuensel* should initiate investigative journalism.

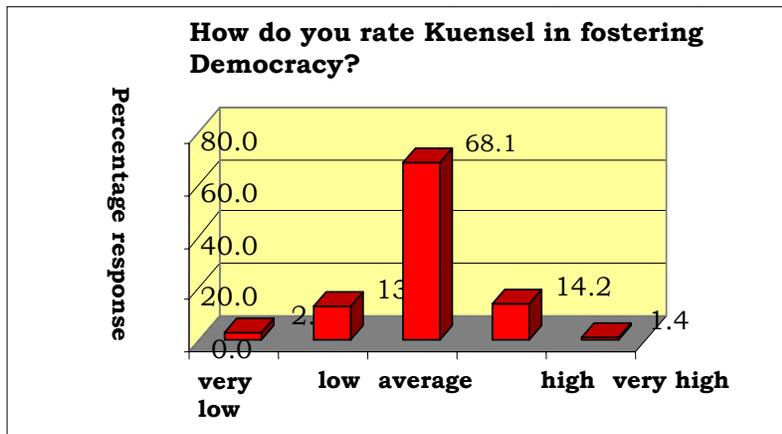
**Table 5: Whether Kuensel is subjected to censorship?**

	No. of respondents	%
Yes	116	82.3
No	25	17.7
Total	141	100

**Role of Kuensel in Fostering Democracy in Bhutan**

When asked about the role of *Kuensel* in fostering democracy in Bhutan a vast majority (68%) of the respondents rated it as average. 2.8% and 13.5% of the respondents rated it very low and low respectively. Only 1.4% of the respondents rated it very high. (See graph 3)

**Graph 3: Kuensel’s role in fostering democracy**



62.4 % of the respondents rated the quality of reporting in *Kuensel* as average and 14.2% of the respondents rated it as high. 2.8% and 13.5% of the respondents rated it as very

low and low respectively. None rated it as very high. To the question whether *Kuensel's* editorials provide critical understanding of the significant issues 57.4% of the respondents rated it as average and 17.7% respondents rated is high. 19.9% and 5% respectively rated as low and very low.

**Analysis of the respondents' opinion on the role of *Kuensel* in fostering democracy**

To quantitatively assess the overall role of the *Kuensel* in fostering the process of democracy in Bhutan we asked different relevant questions (as shown in the table no. 6) to the respondents. The respondents were asked to put their answers in numeric scale of 1 to 5 in an ascending order of opinion, i.e. from “strongly disagree” as 1 to “strongly agree” as 5. The numeric scale was combined with a verbal scale to facilitate the exact meaning of the numeric scale. For each of the questions we have calculated the average score, which represents the extent of the contribution of the *Kuensel* in that particular aspect. The aggregate score is a sum of the average score for each of the questions which reflect overall rating of the *Kuensel* in fostering the democratic process in Bhutan.

Table 6 suggests that the average score of *Kuensel* in fostering democracy is 2.99, that is 3. It means that the respondents rated it as average when the question was asked directly. The average score of *Kuensel* for the quality of its reports is 3.13, which is above average. For developing enterprising stories for focusing attention towards community problems it rated 2.92 on the numeric scale. As far as the ability of *Kuensel* to generate public discussion is concerned, it scored the lowest average point of 2.6. This is a main area where *Kuensel* seems to have performed the worst. *Kuensel* scored 2.89 points for the ability of its editorials to provide critical understanding of crucial issues. *Kuensel's* average score for taking up issues relating to corruption is 2.65. Its low rating for this issue is largely due to the fact that 82% of the respondents believed that it is subjected to censorship by the government. For the rest of the issues its rating is also

below average. The aggregate score of *Kuensel* in fostering democracy is the sum of the average score for all the questions taken together. The aggregate score of *Kuensel* is 22.66 out of 40, which is equivalent of 2.83 on a scale of 5. This implies that *Kuensel's* role in fostering the democratic process can be rated as average. The points given by male and female respondents to the *Kuensel* on the performance of its various roles are quite consistent and reflect a very low degree of difference. There are some interesting internal inconsistencies in the points given by respondents: when asked directly about how they rate the role of *Kuensel* in fostering democracy, female respondents gave them lower points (2.91) as compared to the male counterpart who gave 3.01 points to *Kuensel*. But the aggregate score given by females (22.77) is higher than that of their male counterparts (22.56).

It is quite clear from this evidence that *Kuensel* needs to put more emphasis on issues like promoting public debate and acting as a watchdog of the government to consolidate its role as an institution that strengthens the roots of democracy. This can be done by improving the editorials in order to provide critical understanding of the issues to its readers. In the absence of better knowledge about the relevant issues, people are not able to debate on the relevant public issues on a larger scale. Persistent arguments are an important part of public life in democracy. Public debate provides the citizens constant opportunity to participate in the public decision-making process. To make such public discussion more effective, the media will have to play a very powerful role as a disseminator of the relevant information on public policies. Besides this, *Kuensel* will have to give more importance to raising the issues of corruption in public life, without which not only would its public rating be low, but its position as a democratic institution would weaken, especially in the face of emerging competition. This would depend upon how the media is free to operate.

In the quantitative analysis different variables are categorized as:

### *Role of Kuensel in Fostering Democracy in Bhutan*

- Average score of *Kuensel* (var1) is also taken as a dependent variable;
- Editorials providing critical understanding of significant issues (var2);
- *Kuensel* generating public discussions (var3);
- *Kuensel* providing alternative solutions to community problems (var4);
- *Kuensel* developing enterprising stories to focus attention towards community problems (var5);
- *Kuensel* conducting town meetings to discover issues (var6);
- *Kuensel's* ability to focus on issues of corruption (var7);
- Age of the respondents (var8);
- Education level of the respondents (var9).

Var1 is defined as a dependant variable, and it is a proxy variable representing the role of *Kuensel* in fostering democracy. Var2 to var9 are defined as explanatory variables. Var8 and var9 are exogenous variables, which cannot be affected by the media. The exogenous nature of var8 and var9 raises the importance of policy-induced variables in fostering democracy. The remaining explanatory variables (var2, var3, var4, var5, var6 and var7) are policy controlled variables, i.e. changes in the policy of reporting the news can determine the aggregate score.

A linear regression test is conducted to identify the extent to which each variable affects the dependent variable.

**Table 6: Points scored by Kuensel on different issues pertaining to its role in fostering democracy**

Issues	Average score (given by males)	Average score (given by females)	Average score
Rate the role of <i>Kuensel</i> in fostering democracy	3.01	2.91	2.99
Rate the quality of reports in <i>Kuensel</i>	3.11	3.16	3.13
Rate the ability of editorials to provide critical understanding of the significant issues	2.85	2.95	2.89
Rate the extent to which <i>Kuensel</i> is able to generate discussions	2.63	2.56	2.60
Reporting in <i>Kuensel</i> provides alternative solutions and	2.84	2.86	2.84

*Perspectives on Bhutanese Media*

points out trade-offs involved in community problems			
<i>Kuensel</i> develops enterprising stories to focus attention towards community problems	2.92	2.93	2.92
<i>Kuensel</i> conducts town meetings to discover issues in the community and follows up	2.57	2.74	2.64
Ability of <i>Kuensel</i> to raise issues relating to corruption in the government	2.65	2.64	2.65
Aggregate score	22.57	22.77	22.66

**Curve estimate for association between var8 and var1**

It is natural and logical to assume that people gain experience with age and develop a greater ability to analyze things. In this case, how they rate the role of *Kuensel* in fostering

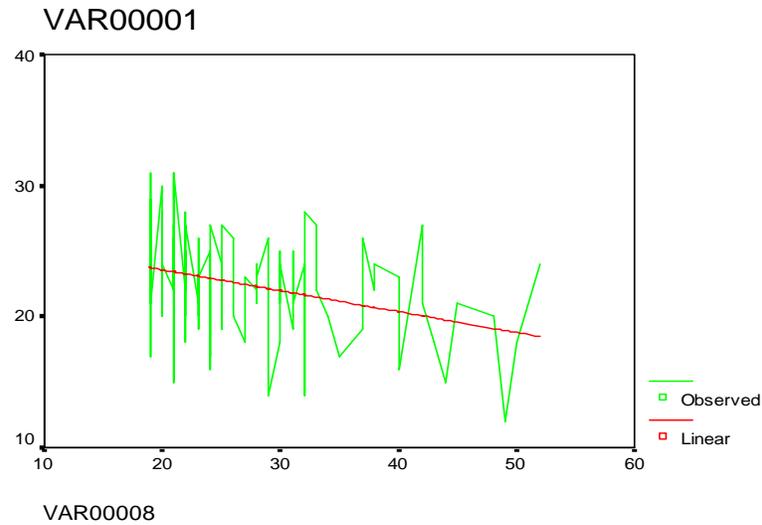
### *Media and Public Culture*

democracy would be affected by their age. We have run a regression test on var1 for var8. The intercept of the regression function is at the aggregate score of 26.76, which can be termed as the mean score. Slope of the regression function is (-) 0.1596, which implies negative association between age and the aggregate score. Value of  $r^2$  is 0.11; hence only 11% of the variation in aggregate score can be explained with the variation in age. The regression estimates suggest that with the increase in age people's rating of *Kuensel* declines. It is an area in which *Kuensel* will have to look into to improve its reporting quality to make it appealing to the more experienced segment of the population.

#### *Test Results*

Independent: VAR 8

Dependent Mth Rsq d.f. F Sig b0 b1  
VAR1 LIN .111 139 17.34 .000 26.7616 -.1596



### Curve estimate for association between var9 and var1

Education level of the people is another important factor determining how they rate democratic institutions. With a higher level of education, people's understanding of different issues improves and they are able to make an appropriate decision. We have run a regression test on var1 for var9. The mean value of the aggregate score is 23.01 with a slope of -0.092. There is a small negative association between var1 and var9. The value of  $r^2$  is also very small (0.001), which means association is extremely insignificant. From these two tests it is ascertained that age has played a stronger role than education level in affecting the aggregate score. It is a surprising result that level of education does not influence people's rating of the media. I can not offer any explanation of this phenomenon.

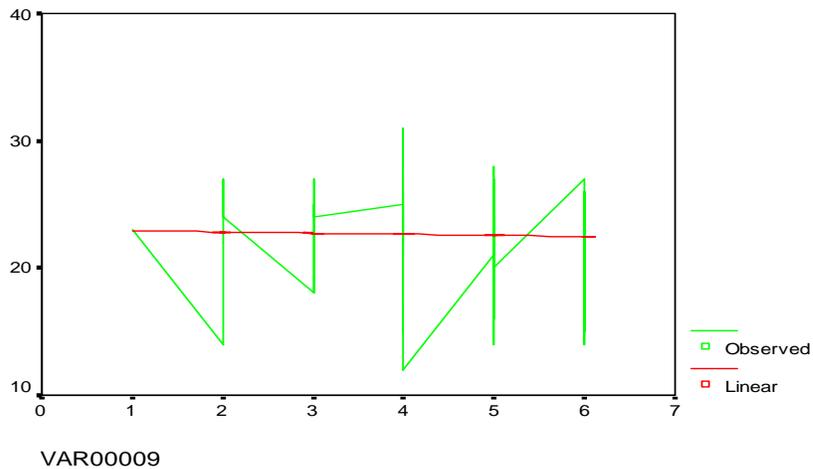
#### Test results

Independent: VAR9

*Media and Public Culture*

Dependent Mth Rsq d.f. F Sig b0 b1  
VAR1 LIN .001 139 .09 .770 23.0140 -.0920

VAR00001



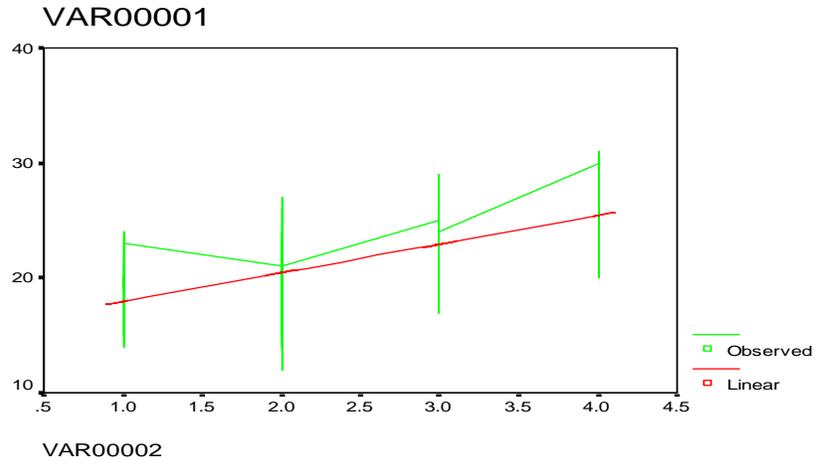
**Curve estimate for the association between var2 and var1**

Good quality editorials help the readers in developing critical understanding of the issues and consequently strengthen their ability as enlightened citizens. A regression test reflects that var1 is positively associated with the changes in var2. The mean value of var1 is 15.45 and the slope of the regression line is 2.49. The value of  $r^2$  is 0.285. The better the people rate the editorials of *Kuensel* the higher is their rating of *Kuensel* in promoting democracy as their understanding of critical issues increases and they make better informed social decisions.

**Test Results**

Independent: VAR2

Dependent Mth Rsq d.f. F Sig b0 b1  
VAR1 LIN .285 139 55.28 .000 15.4562 2.4918



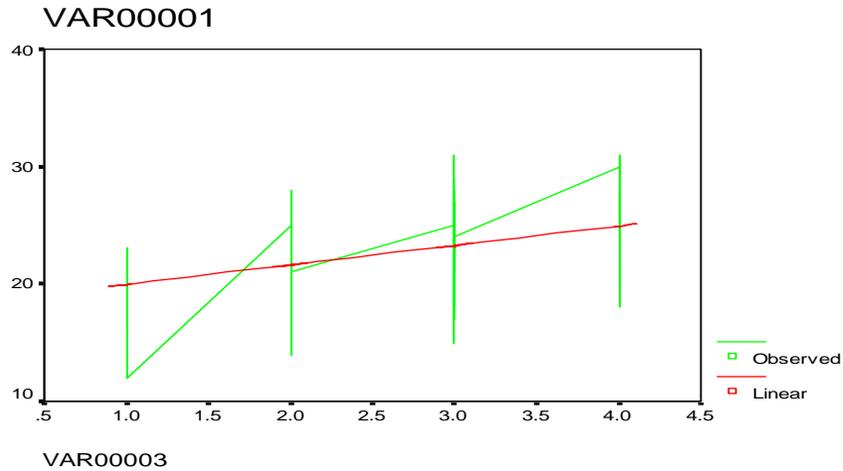
**Curve estimate for the association between var1 and var3**

The ability of the media to promote public discussion on critical public issues is an important variable that affects its ability as a democratic force. Regression estimates suggest that the mean value of var1 is 18.31 and slope of the function is 1.65. There exists a high positive association between var1 and var3, given that the change var3 brings about is more than the proportionate change in var1. The value of  $r^2$  is 0.129.

**Test Results**

Independent: VAR3

Dependent Mth Rsq d.f. F Sig b0 b1  
 VAR1 LIN .129 139 20.62 .000 18.3195 1.6520



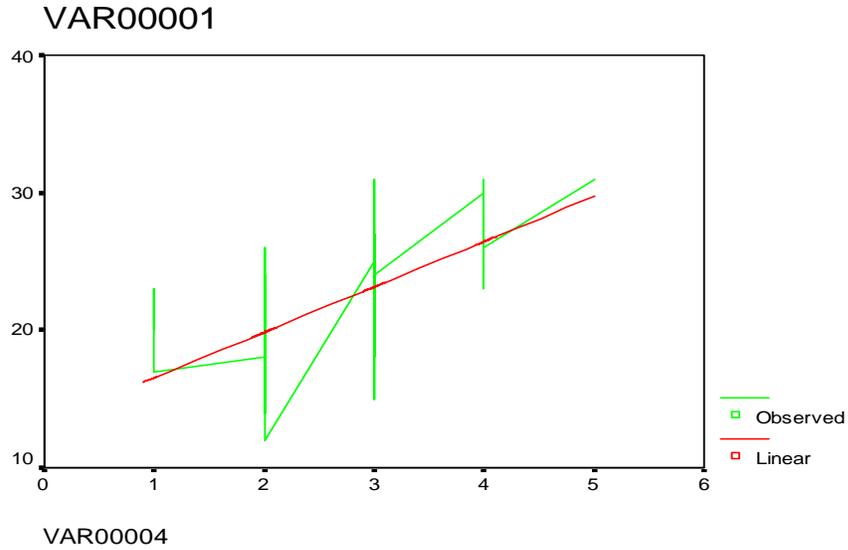
**Curve estimate for the association between var1 and var4**

The ability of the media to provide alternative solutions to community problems provides a larger range of social choice to the public and thereby positively influences the democratic decision making process. Regression estimates suggest that the mean value of var1 is 13.24 and the slope of the regression line is 3.30. The value of  $r^2$  is 0.446, which means about 45% variation in var1 can be explained in terms of variation in var4. There is a strong positive effect on var1 from var4.

**Test results**

Independent: VAR4

Dependent Mth Rsq d.f. F Sig b0 b1  
 VAR1 LIN .446 139 111.95 .000 13.2455 3.3002



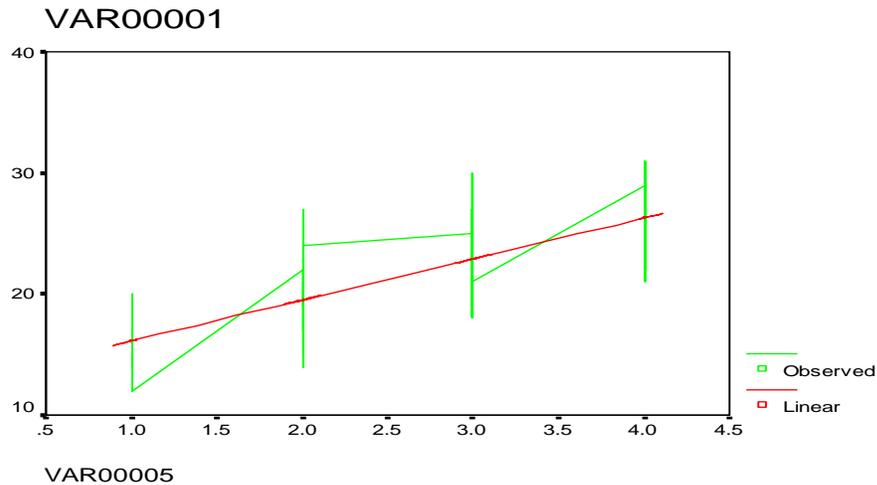
#### Curve estimate for the association between var1 and var5

An increasing portion of media literature highlights that the media should try to focus attention on community problems by developing enterprising stories. Such stories draw the attention of public as well as the government and thus facilitate more prompt attention to tackle the issues. It helps to reduce delays in taking action. We have run regression test for var5 on var1 to check the association. The mean value of var1 is 12.77 and the slope of regression line is 3.37, which reflects that changes in var4 have more than a proportionate effect on var1. Value of  $r^2$  is 0.5 which implies about 50% of the variation in var1 can be explained through the variation in var5.

#### Test results

Independent: VAR5

Dependent Mth Rsq d.f. F Sig b0 b1  
VAR1 LIN .503 139 140.84 .000 12.7709 3.3745



#### Curve estimate for the association between var1 and var6

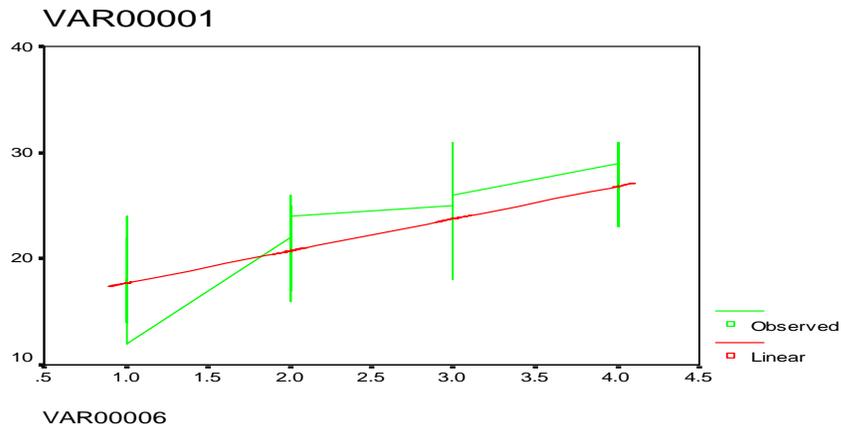
The ability of the media to promote a democratic approach to governance also depends upon how it interacts with the community to discover the relevant and critical issues and bring them into public discussion. The media should interact actively with the community to address their problems. This is increasingly being recognized as an important ingredient of participatory journalism. Such action forces public institutions to notice the issues and address them. How this variable (var6) affects democratic process, measured as var1, is an important question to be answered. Regression estimates reflect that the mean value of var1 is 14.67 and the slope of the function is 3.03. Var6 has high positive effect on var1. Value of  $r^2$  is 0.518, which is significant.

**Test results**

Independent: VAR6

Dependent Mth Rsq d.f. F Sigf b0 b1

VAR1 LIN .518 139 149.63 .000 14.6718 3.0332



**Curve estimate for the association between var1 and var7**

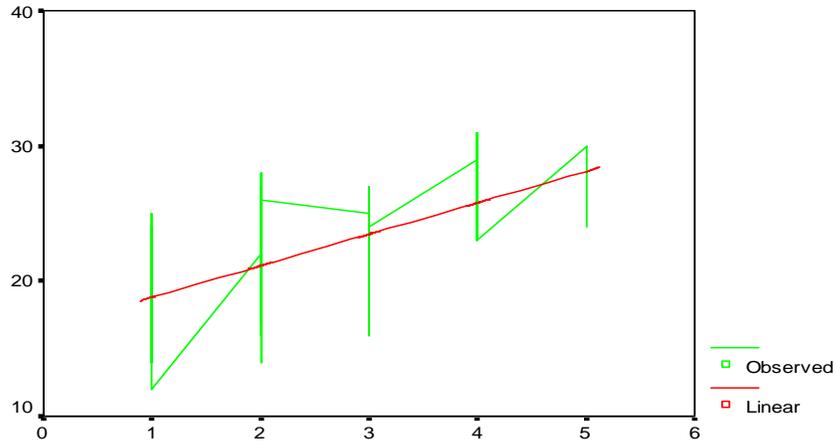
Media is one of the most effective institutions of democracy as it acts as a watchdog of the people on public institutions. It is supposed to focus on the issues relating to corrupt practices of public institutions. By bringing out these issues it can create social and political pressure for good and clean governance. If the media performs this function effectively it can contribute to making the benefits of public policy reach the weaker segments of society. Regression estimates for var7 on var1 suggest that it is positively associated. The mean value of var1 is 16.45 and the slope of the regression function is 2.33. The value of  $r^2$  is 0.387.

**Test results**

Independent: VAR7

Dependent Mth Rsq d.f. F Sigf b0 b1  
 VAR1 LIN .387 139 87.80 .000 16.4529 2.3355

VAR00001



VAR00007

To find out which policy-induced explanatory variables have the highest effect on the independent variable, a comparison is made between the values of  $r^2$ . The value of  $r^2$  is a measure of overall goodness of fit, called a coefficient of determination. Though the straight comparison of the  $r^2$  values of different models is not appropriate, it can be done if the sample size in the different models is same. In the table no.7 such comparisons are made.

**Table 7: Comparing the  $r^2$  values for different regression**

**models**

Regression model	r <sup>2</sup>
var2 on var1	0.285
var3 on var1	0.129
var4 on var1	0.446
var5 on var1	0.503
var6 on var1	0.518
var7 on var1	0.387

Of the explanatory variables, var6 has the highest r<sup>2</sup> value; hence it has relatively the largest impact on var1. The var5 has the next most significant explanatory variable, as its r<sup>2</sup> value is marginally less than var6. Var3 has the least affect on var1. The ranks of the policy-induced explanatory variables on the basis of the r<sup>2</sup> values are given in table no.8. The aggregate score of *Kuensel* is mainly influenced by its ability to identify crucial issues, by its ability to interact with the community, and by its ability to raise community issues and find out alternative solutions to them. These are the three areas the media will have to focus on. The importance of var6, var5, and var4 indicates that Bhutanese people rate the ability of the newspaper to foster democracy most significantly on the basis of their participatory activities.

When Bhutan moves towards constitutional democracy the focus of *Kuensel*, as well as that of other media, should be directed towards a participatory approach to journalism. The result of this study shows that only by doing so can they effectively turn into a strong institution that fosters democracy.

**Table 8: Rank of the policy induced explanatory variables**

Rank	Variable
1	var6
2	var5
3	var4
4	var7
5	var2
6	var3

### Conclusion

*Kuensel* has been rated as almost average by the respondents in its role in fostering democracy. It earned an aggregate score of 22.66 out of a maximum of 40 (equivalent of 2.83 on a scale of 5) on its role as an institution to foster the democratic process. The gender-based difference in the rating of *Kuensel* is very marginal, or rather non-existent.

*Kuensel's* score for its contribution to generate public discussions, for focusing on corruption issues, identifying community problems, drawing public attention towards them and providing alternative solutions, has been below 3 on the numeric scale which is defined as average on the corresponding verbal scale. Why its rating is almost average is largely due to failure of *Kuensel* to highlight these issues.

The findings from linear regression for the dependent variable (role of *Kuensel* in fostering democracy) on policy-induced explanatory variables suggest that the rating of

*Kuensel* in fostering the democratic process is greatly determined by its participatory approach to journalism as reflected by var4, var5 and var6. The  $r^2$  value for these regressions is greater than it is for other variables. The more these issues are taken care of, the greater would be its contribution in strengthening democracy. As Bhutan moves towards constitutional democracy the media will have to focus on a participatory approach to make it more relevant in strengthening the democratic process.

The exogenous explanatory variables—age of the respondents (var8) and education level of the respondents (var9)—are found to have negative effect on the rating of *Kuensel* in fostering democracy. As people grow older and as they receive higher education, they rate *Kuensel* low for its ability to foster democratic processes.

Only 29% of the respondents read *Kuensel* regularly and 26% read it occasionally. Only 23% of the respondents read editorials regularly and 8.5% of the respondents never read it. The readership data convey that these percentages are very high as compared to countries at a similar level of development. From its inception, *Kuensel* has greatly contributed as the disseminator of the information and later in the 1990's it began to induce public discussion on the relevant public issues. This is quite an extraordinary achievement for a newspaper which grew as an official bulletin of the government.

The survey findings suggest that 81.5% of the respondents never participated in any discussions on the issues raised by *Kuensel*. This could be either due to lack of a tradition that discusses public issues or due to the inability of *Kuensel* to prompt discussions as it may not be raising those issues which concern the majority. But 73% of those who conveyed having participated in the discussions on the issues raised by *Kuensel* agreed that these discussions were based on better informed opinions due to reporting by *Kuensel*. Another significant finding of the study is the fact that 56% of respondents believed that reporting in *Kuensel*, and public debate initiated by it, create pressure on political leaders to discuss those issues in the national assembly. However, this

opinion becomes less strong as the people become more educated. With the increase in education level, *Kuensel* in particular and other media in general will have to be more focused on creating pressure on political decision-making processes.

The inability of *Kuensel* to highlight the issues relating to corruption in public institutions is one of the important reasons why *Kuensel's* rating is low. A predominant majority (82.3%) of the respondents were of the opinion that it is subjected to censorship by the government. The freedom of speech and expression provided by the draft Constitution would probably take care of this in the future and would make news reporting more free. Increasing competition from emerging newspapers would require that *Kuensel* become more focused.

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## Role of Media in the Changing Socio-Political Situations in Bhutan

*N. Balasubramanian and Jigme Nidup\**

All sentient beings, including the small insects, cherish themselves. All have the right to overcome suffering and achieve happiness. I therefore pray that we show love and compassion to all.

- H.H. Dalai Lama

### **Abstract**

*We live in changing times. Significant political, economic, and social developments are taking place in Bhutan. With the coming of democracy and elections in 2008, the impact of media on Bhutanese society is going to be far more increased. Newer challenges are ahead and how to cope up with these challenges is going to be a Herculean task. In most countries, the mass media has moved away from the positive expectations of civil society. Global competition and the profit motive have made the media forget its social responsibility. Instead, it is busy transforming citizens into spectators by offering them entertainment in the name of knowledge and communication. A major challenge for media in Bhutan will be “how to get the people out this whirlpool of consumerism?”. What role will the media have in making the people at large rise from their individual selves to the spiritual level of responsible citizenship? To what extent will the media in Bhutan be circumscribed by neutrality, impartiality, security, anonymity, and meritocracy? These are some major issues requiring attention in our discussion.*

*With the passage of time, the fourth estate, the press and and*

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*the media, has not only become an important factor in Bhutan but is playing a major role in educating the public. Irrespective of age or qualification, the language of a large number of people is being significantly influenced by it. The general use of phrases, syntax, and idiom is often being determined by the way media use them. The electronic media has really made the world a global village. Just by pressing a button one gets to know the happenings in virtually any part of the globe. In the days to come the extent to which the media is going to control people's aspirations in Bhutan cannot be undermined. The political changes that are to take shape in 2008, the general election and democracy, are going to bring a lot more uncertainties about the role of the media. The world over what one sees today is the media is trying to set out a pattern which is held to be sacrosanct. It projects its views in such ways that there is a general feeling among the public that those who do not conform to this pattern are to be considered backward. The pattern is essentially a copy of the West and the English-educated urban population is just trying to imitate it and become 'street smart'.*

*Our effort in this article would be to explore the ways and means of monitoring the media's impact on the society and also to examine how the media should play a positive role in building up the society towards more knowledgeable, rational, and analytical citizens. How will the media address issues like enlightening the citizens and overhauling the education system to make it value-based so as to obtain the best results? The media will have to play a very major role in shaping the opinions and attitudes of the people of Bhutan. It should become the watchdog of the society and at the same time its role needs to be monitored by an established autonomous institution.*

### **Positive aspect of the Media and its Influence**

Media, like a coin, has two sides, one positive and the other negative. The positive side of the media has not been given much attention. The media, in general, has been playing a significant role in shaping society today. Media is the term closely associated with the fourth estate (which includes both print and visual media), and it has not only become an

important factor in democracy but is playing a major role in educating the public. Irrespective of age or qualification, the language of a large number of people is being significantly influenced by it. The general use of phrases, syntax, and idiom is often being determined by the way journalists use them. The electronic media has really made the world a global village. Just by pressing a button one gets to know the happenings in virtually any part of the world. The satellite television has brought into our lives the kind of things that we could not even imagine a few decades ago. Even the hair-style or the one-ear ring style of Beckham or Ronaldinho has become popular in some rural areas of the country, thanks to the media coverage of club and country football in Europe and South America.

It is an undeniable fact that the electronic media has increased our knowledge base and we have quite a few mobile encyclopedias amidst us, at least among the educated public. The media keeps providing information to young students and educated youth to build up their careers. It has opened up a new horizon for these youngsters to unravel their own hidden talents and the media is providing some ventilation to their feelings, creativities, and aspirations. In Kuensel, for example, there are pages where school-going and college students can write poems, essays, articles, or even short stories. There are also programmes on television where experts from different fields are invited to give talks or to participate in discussions so that it helps them in choosing their careers, or finding solutions to their problems. There are also career-counseling sessions on television, and students are immensely benefited by such programmes. Our pBibliography for various items, including daily needs, are being highly influenced by the advertisements in both print and visual presentations. We should admit that today, knowingly or unknowingly, we are being controlled by the media.

The media has become the most important purveyor of information and its importance is fast-growing with the spread of education. This looks to be a healthy sign so far as the progresses of nations like Bhutan or other Asian nations. In an unstable national and international environment where

hostile external stimuli often seek to initiate internal instability, as at present, nation-building and preservation of national culture have become the primary responsibilities of the media which brings it into close contact with the rest of the society.

In this era of globalization, the media seems to be playing a crucial role in inculcating many Western /alien cultural values into the life-style of people in various parts of oriental cultures; countries like Bhutan which are able to maintain and follow an unique pattern of value system strengthened by age-old tradition and customs, will have to work out a master-plan to counter the ill-effects of the media, which is fast-pervading the life-style of people in many parts of Bhutan. It is most unfortunate that most of us do not want to discuss the negative side of media influence because it will pull us further down. But, unless we discuss its negative side, how can we make media more beneficial to society?

#### **Negative Impact of the Media**

A major harm that the media has caused in the minds of urban youth in Bhutan is that it has set out a pattern which is held to be sacrosanct. It projects its views in such ways that there is a general feeling among the public that those who do not conform to this pattern are to be treated as 'country' and 'not-modern'. In fact, this is a typical Western influence on our young Bhutanese youth and they imitate the West much better than the Western youth themselves. In all our higher learning institutions, in the evenings and on holidays (unless they have some office functions/classes, etc) our girls are seen in public places only in jeans and T shirts, many of them seem to have forgotten the national dress! Due to peer-group pressure students are taking to the latest fashion in trousers and tops, and those who cannot wear such dresses, either because of financial constraints or due to family pressure, often suffer from an inferiority complex. It is most surprising to see how the media is brain-washing people

of all ages into believing that the so-called 'beauty products' really enhance personal appearance; so much so that it is common nowadays to see advertisements of beauty parlours in our national newspapers.

The biggest harm that the media has been doing to the youth of the world is eroding their self-confidence. Most of the media programmes highlight the corruption, insincerity, poor work culture, and lack of discipline in the society. Not much effort is made to correct the situation through positive write-ups and programmes. While the positive side of the West is highlighted, its darker aspects are hidden very cleverly. It is never revealed how selfish and lonely the Westerner often is, how depression has forced a large number of Western youths to take to drugs, or how mental unrest has shattered the concept of a happy family in the West. All this would have adverse effects of the psyche of the media-fans. A person lacking self-confidence cannot lead a happy life because it produces a feeling of insecurity. The feeling of insecurity is transmitted to other members of the family, thus making the home a living hell, but never the happy home where others' opinions are respected and where all members live harmoniously. At the workplace, people who inwardly feel inferior to their colleagues make the environment a veritable hell. The boss may be highly qualified, but because of that lack of self-confidence he always tries to find a scapegoat for his own faults. Loss of self-confidence is often a result of lack of self-respect. A man who does not respect himself, does not respect anything. This is the real reason why we backstab our friends, flout rules, yield to temptations, and indulge in all sorts of pettiness. It is impossible for such people to love their motherland.

It is here, the role of media becomes important—either it can play a positive role by minimizing such tendencies, or, a negative role by escalating it further, ultimately to the loss of societal welfare. The media has a special role for small and compact societies like Bhutan, because it plays a crucial role in sovereign governance. It provides an option for the state in protecting its citizens and way of life against external and internal cultural threats. A great deal of effort has to be put in

to develop and motivate the media personnel so that they play a positive role in strengthening the national ethos and culture, and in incorporating unquantifiables like discipline, morale, pride, and self-esteem within its scope. There has to be a great emphasis on the development of a high degree of integrity and mental resilience through a positive democratic culture based on moral and spiritual value systems. In the years to come, if one were to go by the assertion of the Chairperson of the Anti-Corruption Commission, the media will have to play an active role in enlightening the masses of the need for corruption-free governance. Because corruption is the worst enemy of the country, it being anti-national and anti-development, hence, the role of media becomes even more important in a free atmosphere.

#### **Media's Role in Directing Diplomacy**

In an atmosphere of freedom, democracy, party-based politics, and governance, the media in Bhutan is going to be far more important than what it is now. In fact, the media may even promote and popularize a certain ideology or a group of party-based individuals as the ideal choice for peoples' representatives. In that situation, unless some rational choices and logical analysis is done, then, perhaps, the system as a whole may go under wrong policies and wrong governances, as is the case in many parts of the world. For example, presently, under the illustrious leadership of His Majesty the King of Bhutan, it is possible for the state to ensure safety and security from external and internal threats and the people of Bhutan have been enjoying peace and stability.

The genuine rapport in Bhutan's relations with its close friend and neighbour, India, has reached a new height and the country also enjoys growing relations with its development partners, as well as other countries that appreciated the kingdom's wholesome policies for development and change. But, supposedly, in the changed

circumstances of the post-2008 era, a change of government or ideology can significantly shift bi-lateral or multi-lateral relationships of Bhutan, be it in economic, social, cultural, or political spheres. So, here comes the importance of a responsible media and media culture; unless we start working towards some fair and highly conscientious media, it may not be possible to set things right overnight.

It would not be out of place to mention here the impact of media in shaping the diplomatic relations of India with that of the U.S.A. or with the erstwhile Soviet Russia in the cold-war era. In fact, it was the dominant print media which played a significant role in projecting India as a close ally of the erstwhile U.S.S.R. during the 1970s and early 1980s and that made all the difference in the U.S.A.'s approach towards the sub-continent's geo-politics and its biased outlook towards the 'Kashmir issue'; even today its stand in support of Pakistan's position. However, Indo-U.S. relations have come of age and presently, it has been so good as never before, but the strains it created in the 1970s and early 1980s (which was mostly the print media projecting India as anti-American) and even today such wrong projection has its ill-effects on the bilateral relations between India and the U.S.A. So, similar such happenings cannot be overruled in the changed political scenario in Bhutan after 2008; after all, party politics is nothing but the politics of individual parties and for their survival one cannot rule out the possibility of selling out the national interests, sometimes for winning the polls. Perhaps, such a scenario may not emerge in Bhutan, but still cautions can very well be raised. Because diplomacy is one area where not many would show attention or give special focus and this lack of adequate scrutiny from the reading public the media, sometimes take it for granted and play their own tune depending on prevailing circumstances. One more example is being explained below which would throw more light on the role of media in times of political and diplomatic crises.

Imagine a situation like that of Nepal, where there is complete breakdown of law and order or any proper functioning of the public institutions like that the judiciary, etc. In fact, the media projects to the outside world "as if

everything has got collapsed in Nepal; and the life of the common man in great jeopardy". To a large extent, the people, whether within the country or outside, go by what the media project. In reality, the ground situation can be completely different from what the media keeps projecting to the outside world. But, unfortunately, people believe what these media, both the Eastern and Western press, had to offer to the people. Before the King of Nepal took over the complete control of the government, the situation in Nepal was far more worse, the Marxist-Leninist party members created all sorts of trouble for the government lead by the Nepali-congress and these "so called" revolutionaries did everything to disrupt the public life by both damaging the property and lives of common people; but later when the King took over power, both these parties, viz. the Nepali congress and the M.L activists, joined hands and again created a joint strike by damaging the public life and property! If they can join under one banner against the relatively peaceful rule of the King, why did not they join hands and create a peaceful atmosphere when an elected government was in power? This question was neither asked nor debated in the Nepal media or other such media which supported these "*bandh* culture" in the sub-continent. Here, lies the important role of media to be fair, honest, and unbiased in their functioning style.

If the political parties fulfilled their responsibilities, the Monarch would not have any role in the governance of the country, but if there were serious problems, he would still have an important and constructive role to play in ensuring that the Constitution is adhered to and upheld by all political parties.

This was the comment of our beloved H.M. to one of the questions raised during the public meetings recently held in Wangdi Phodrang; if one were to study the observation made by His Majesty the King, it throws much light to our discussion in the earlier paragraph in connection with the 'mass unrest' in Nepal. Perhaps, here the media as a whole need to play a positive and constructive role in educating the masses, particularly, the younger generation for they are the

source of all kinds of mass movements against either pro or anti-people protests. How far the media in Bhutan is going to play a responsible role in the changed circumstance with freedom and democracy and party-based politics, is going to be the order of the day in Bhutan in 2008.

Will the new system and the political parties fulfill the responsibilities mandated in the Constitution? Looking at the democracies and democratic forms of government in different parts of the world, with more and more income disparities, social inequalities, nepotism, favouritism, and corruption at the higher bureaucratic levels, can Bhutan escape from this syndrome? How far is the media going to play a crucial role in keeping Bhutan above all these problems? These are some million dollar questions and time alone can answer these critical issues. Presently, we can only hope that the media will be responsible and accountable to both the people and its institutions.

The media has a greater role in taking the messages of change to the larger section of the society and in making the people as a whole understand the importance of Articles like the Political Party and Elections:

The success of democracy will be determined by the ability of the people to elect the best political party that would provide good governance and fulfill the aspirations of the people. The important responsibility to elect the right people, therefore, lay in the hands of the people.

His Majesty the King makes this observation time and again in all public meetings, of late. Governance is the art of administering the affairs of the state through the legislative, executive, and judicial wings, and other institutions within the overall ideological framework of the accepted political system, as is envisaged in the draft Constitution of Bhutan. The entire philosophy underlying the above principles can be summarized in the twin concepts of a democracy and welfare state. The new constitution requires the administration of the country to be committed to these concepts in order to cater to the needs of the people of the country whom the administration is meant primarily to serve.

The role and impact of media should be seen from the above context, and that too with more changes likely to come in the private television channels going to follow the suit of the private press in the form of Bhutan Times and Bhutan Observer. How these private channels and the press will perform the functions of a responsible public media—is a big question! In the atmosphere of competition and market survival, whether these private media would play the role of the responsible agencies of mobilizing the public opinion about various national, regional, and local issues in Bhutan—only time will have to test it. At the moment we can only hope for the best, because the press and the visual media elsewhere focus mostly on their profits and market share rather than the quality or reliability of their news coverage or way of coverage, etc. How are we to bring in a check and balance system of media in Bhutan?

The eminent statesman and economic-historian, Gunnar Myrdal, observes that in many third world countries, particularly under democratic systems, there is a lack of social discipline, and the systems suffer from deficiency in respect for law, law enforcement, and observance, and from collusion between officials who are responsible for implementing policies and programmes, leading to rampant corruption. One of the main causes of this deterioration is the inability or failure of the media, in general, to arouse public consciousness and providing an alternative for better governance and able leaders and their ideology.

Abhijit Bhattacharji, a noted columnist, after experiencing first-hand polling in several Indian states during general election, wrote a series of articles in *The Pioneer* ending with the one titled “Dark Alleys of Democracy”. He lamented: “one wonders as to when we will have candidates—scholarly, politically alive, but at the same time balanced people—at the helm to navigate Indian political, economic, and radical destiny? Should we not confront and combat the uneducated criminals and gangsters?” In spite of innumerable recommendations of different committees and

the Election Commission of Bhutan (ECB), no major electoral reform has so far been undertaken to stem the downward slide of the entire electoral process. But, in Bhutan one has to take into account of all these ill effects of democracy and work towards a proper and just system for the peace-loving and non-violent people of this Himalayan Kingdom.

Now that the Office of the ECB has been formed in Bhutan, its role does not end in conducting fair and free poll in 2008, but lies in establishing high standards and streamlining the entire body-politic for years to come. The media has the biggest responsibility of taking the role and objectives of the ECB to the people. Each and every eligible voter in Bhutan should know the fundamental principles and the functioning nature of the election commission in ensuring a free and fair poll. The Commission is an autonomous agency and its primary role is to conduct the general election and hold the ECB above corruption, nepotism, favouritism, etc. It has the responsibility to maintain the freedom and proper behaviour of all the political parties and the contesting candidates in the election. With the help of the police (which is under the rule of the Home Ministry), the Commission has to maintain the law and order in the country during the times of public election. In fact, the police and *dzongkhag* administration have to play a subordinate role during the times of elections, and it is the election commission takes the full responsibility of conducting the free and fair election. This is a new set-up for many Bhutanese; hence, the media has to take an important role in taking this message across the different sections of the population. Perhaps, only then, larger participation of people in the election process becomes possible. Besides, the very objective of bringing all these grass-roots level changes envisaged by His Majesty the King of Bhutan will be fulfilled only when the media and these newly formed institutions do their duty with complete commitment for the nation's welfare.

There are, however, strong countervailing factors like an independent judiciary, free press and emerging grass-roots level democratic bodies at the *Gewog* level should ensure the survival of the democratic spirit in Bhutan. Besides, as

Winston Churchill said, “democracy, as of now, is not the most ideal form of government but...no better system has yet been evolved.” The media could play a major role in ensuring a constant and vibrant people’s culture in a country like Bhutan with its commitment and unbiased outlook. The true character of good media services in a country should be circumscribed by neutrality, impartiality, security, anonymity, and meritocracy. It has to play a positive role in strengthening the concept of responsive administration which means a proper understanding of the people’s problems and a speedy and fair disposal of their grievances.

In His Majesty’s definition, an administrator “is not the commandant ordering people about. He has to understand the people in human way and stoop to conquer.” The spirit of service should be reinforced by a commitment to the constitution and not any particular party in power, or to a person who forms a part of the political executive. The basic value of the spirit of service has to be guided by the highest ideals and principle. The new forces that are at work have to be reckoned with and while on the one hand you have to ensure advance in the material and economic field, you also have to give equal if not greater importance to spiritual and cultural aspects. Here lies the greatest challenge for the media as a whole in Bhutan.

Today, in Bhutan, in spite of the repeated efforts of His Majesty the King, the initiatives of various government departments, and the participatory democratic system envisaged by His Majesty, the people in general do not see themselves as having the wherewithal to influence a political process that is firstly incomprehensible in its complexity and secondly happens at a time when the country is going through a crucial phase in its modernization. It is an unprecedented experiment in the modern history of the world as a whole. The future direction remains uncertain, given the experience of various countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America; but the extra-ordinary faith and trust the King has in his people can be reciprocated only, and, if only, the media

in Bhutan play a completely different role than its counterparts have played in these areas mentioned above. The big question that we now face is: What should be done to make journalism and media-based jobs an enlightened profession? However, it is not only a question of journalism. In order to raise a new generation of enlightened citizens, it becomes necessary to overhaul our education system as it exists now and make it value-based so as to obtain the best results. It may sound utopian, but this is the only remedy. Unless we inject good values into the body politic through the education system we will be unable to conquer the oppression of false values that are destroying the cultures of different societies in the world.

Unless we make attempts to develop the right attitude, positive changes will not come. Journalists and media correspondents with large hearts, open minds, and clear reasoning, should take up their pens (and cameras) which are mightier than swords, and fight against all odds to protect and preserve the uniqueness of Bhutan in its entirety. They must highlight reports that help foster positive attitudes in the people. Great things can be done only when people think more positively and optimistically. There has to be a complete unanimity in the approach of educationists, administrators, future political aspirants, and social thinkers so that there are serious discussions and measures taken to strengthen Bhutan's future. Its future is bright; Bhutan is projected to play a much more constructive role in the SAARC region in the years to come. If that be so, the media will have to play a very major role in shaping the opinions and attitudes of the people.

#### **Social Responsibilities of the Media in Bhutan**

The social responsibility of media, be it the print, radio, or the television, cannot be undermined in any society. In fact, in countries like Bhutan, it becomes even more relevant and important that the media take enough interest in this social responsibility. Because the Bhutanese society is more cohesive and there are central organs like culture, language,

religion, and the non-violent nature of the Bhutanese people. With the changes going to come in the areas of polity, judiciary, administration and the over-all constitution, this role is going to be a big challenge. Many Bhutanese are not much aware of the changes that are going to occur in the near future; and given the remote location of their settlements, they got to be educated of the changes as well as they got to be continuously made aware of the requirements in various fields of life. Besides, the proper understanding of the concept of GNH also is a major agenda for the media. Only when people, at large, understand the concept of GNH properly, will it lead to long term social stability and prosperity of the country as a whole.

Today, the living style of people in urban areas of Bhutan, particularly in Thimphu, is in no way different from that of any of the cities in the West. The people have become highly individualistic, self-interested, and not bothered to know or have time to know about their own neighbours. They consider material success as the biggest thing in life. The bank savings against their name would procure them much happiness, and they have become 'spiritually empty'. There is a 'rat race' in out-doing others, in the name of competition and survival; many seem to be losing their traditional values which are very essential for the sustainability of the individual identity of Bhutan. Even among the educated (getting education from different institutions in Bhutan) people, there is an undue expectation that the Government should provide them everything—job, promotions, comforts, etc. It is a wrong notion that the younger generation of this country thinks and expects too much from the government; the government can provide them the opportunities, avenues for growth, but it is they who have to find the ways and means of attaining them. Our young graduates should look out on their own to various non-government sectors for their growth and career ambitions; this kind of awareness is presently lacking amongst our youth. Here, media of all types have a great role in making them understand the reality and

prepare them for future assignments; this will go a long way in the overall development of the country.

### **Suggestions and Recommendations**

According to the latest Census in May 2005, still there are about 30 per cent of Bhutanese population living below poverty line and more than two-thirds of our population living in rural areas, and unless the difficulties of these people are alleviated, the GNH cannot be attained. Here, the role media will be playing is going to have an important contribution in either making GNH a complete success or a failure. Alcoholism is becoming a big threat in various parts of Bhutan, given its natural entry into our homes in the name of traditions and treating others with love and affection. But, the impact of alcohol use in our youth and young population needs to be analysed and the ill-effects of alcohol use cannot be underestimated in any society. Moreover, the other vices like 'drug abuse' and 'substance abuse' are also becoming a menace in some parts of Bhutan, including some educational institutions. Here, also the media can play a positive role in educating our youth and young student population about the various ill-effects of these habits and they can contribute towards social welfare and happiness of the population as a whole. In a completely non-violent society, like that of the Bhutanese, of late, one comes across instances of 'suicide', 'rape', 'murder', etc. The crime rates in different parts of Bhutan (though very insignificant compared to other countries in the sub-continent) are becoming the concern of all peace-loving people of Bhutan. What role is the media going to play here? How are they going to educate our youth/people? Will the media have time and interest in doing so (given their commercial and marketing objectives)? Do we have enough legislation to enforce upon the media all these concerns? These are some questions need to be answered well before the process starts happening.

The most important thing in one's life is to be 'happy'. But, can this happiness be given to people like the way they are given various facilities such as a good road network,

water, electricity, telephone network, education, health facilities, and remunerative jobs? It is a big question, because, happiness is not a commodity and hence it cannot be distributed to the people. It can only be realized by the people, the government can only provide the avenues to the people so that they can live in happiness. And, it is the responsibility of the people to realize what happiness is all about and to strive to attain it. Happiness lies in being together, being with one's own family members, with one's friends and relatives. A well connected family network of relationships is an indication of happiness. How is the media going to inculcate these values into our younger generation?

The media has a combination of two conflicting, sometimes, contradicting objectives viz. survival goals and social goals. To what extent the media can balance between these two goals is not an easy question to answer. It depends on the nature of the media personnel themselves, their ethics, morale, social consciousness, etc. To become commercially viable is a major objective of not only the media but also any business or industrial adventure. Because financial viability (making a reasonable rate of return from their financial investment) is a basic objective of all business activities, media cannot be exempted from that goal. On the other hand, to meet the social objectives is completely different from financial goals; in a highly competitive environment (more so when private media come to play a role in Bhutan) survival in the competition and in the market becomes, sometimes, the sole objective of many media enterprises in the world today.

This can be explained with the recent introduction of two more newspapers in Bhutan. Till recently there was only Kuensel in the print media and it had its own freedom and way of functioning. But now that there are two competitors, Kuensel had to change its style, coverage and presentation of items, etc. In the days to come, the competition will become more prominent and we will be in a better position to understand and analyse the impact of private newspapers in Bhutan. Similarly, there is soon likely to be private television

channels and also private radio broad casting services along with BBS. To predict the course of action these media will take for their survival cannot be possible at the moment. But what is sure is there is going to be a tough competition and in order to survive in the competition, and to have a reasonable market share, the media may follow any kind of path which suits its objectives; but when that happens, there arises the questions of how the government and society will have their views expressed, of how the media is going to be controlled, to what extent the media becomes accountable to the people, and how we are going to establish the mechanisms to bring the media under public. However, it will not be an altogether impossible task to streamline the role of media in a free and democratic Bhutan. We have enlisted a number of concerns in this paper, and, we have also made explicitly clear of the issues to be tackled and the concerns to be kept while dealing with this important issue.

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## Media, Markets and Meaning: Placing Sustainable Development and Environmental Conservation and Enrichment at Risk

*Dr. Peter D. Hershock\**

### **Abstract**

*This paper critically assesses the globally dominant pattern of complex relationship that obtains among mass media, market economics, and both cultural and environmental change. Making use of Buddhist conceptual resources that link the meaning of development, environmental conservation and attentional enrichment, the effects of consuming mass media commodities are evaluated in ways that are compatible with Bhutan's overarching commitments to enhancing Gross National Happiness (GNH).*

*Contemporary media are a complex result of historical processes shaped by the interplay of wide-ranging social, economic, political, cultural and technological forces and systems. Understanding how media affect public culture and environmental quality requires gaining critical perspective on these processes and the multi-dimensional context of their consolidation. Here, I want to focus on a particular pattern of connections obtaining among mass media, communications technology and market economics—a pattern of interdependence that has crossed key thresholds of intensity and scale to begin globally transforming the quality and directional character of attention itself, thereby affecting the very roots of public culture and effecting a systematic erosion of environmental diversity.*

*In spite of its complex texture, the broad outlines of this pattern of connections can be relatively simply formulated. As a result of compounding efficiencies correlated with specific advances in transportation, manufacturing and communication technology, by the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century there had emerged global markets of sufficient reach and density to bring about a commodification of the entire range of goods and services needed for basic human subsistence, including food, clothing, shelter,*

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*healthcare, education, sensory stimulation and a sense of belonging*<sup>1</sup>. In the early phases of this process, mass media played a key role in coupling markets and consumers by transmitting advertising content specifically designed to manufacture consumer need. In later phases, positive feedback circuits emerged between market growth and media consumption that did not depend upon media content performing a coupling function.

As a result of advances in communication technologies, the scale of media consumption crossed a decisive threshold beyond which the explicit content of the media has come to be less crucial to furthering market growth and the proliferation of consumer needs than the summative effects of media consumption as such. The most salient among these effects is the mass export of attention from local environments, resulting in a depletion of the basic resource needed to appreciate or directly add-value to those environments, as well as a concomitant impoverishing of relational capacities and commitments.

Beyond certain thresholds of reach and density, markets attain sufficient complexity to begin producing not only goods and services, but also populations in need of them—populations that experience themselves as living in increasingly elective environments open to and yet also in deepening need of management or control. For individuals in such populations, opportunities for differing multiply geometrically, but those for truly making-a-difference to and for one another contract. Expanding powers for exercising (consumption mediated) freedoms-of-choice come at the cost of diminishing strengths for relating-freely.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This list of subsistence needs combines the customary triad of food, clothing and shelter with four other basic needs that are derived from a range of Buddhist teachings, including those referring to the “four nutriments” and the minimal level of material support needed to sustain a spiritual practice. Failure to meet of any one of these seven needs for very long seriously compromises quality of life.

<sup>2</sup> Here, “power” indexes ability to determine situational outcomes; “strength” indexes capacity for opportune situational engagement. Power enables winning whatever “game” is being played, be it social, economic, political or cultural. Winners are accorded further power. Strength enables playing whatever “game” is being played in such a way as to keep all players interested and involved. Where power implies having relatively greater freedom-of-choice than others, strength implies having the resources needed for relating-freely with others.

*These are very strong claims. They suggest that contemporary mass media are implicated in a complex pattern of interdependencies that compromise appreciative and contributory virtuosity, degrade immediately experienced environments and ecologies, and foster the systematic translation of locally vibrant patterns of cultural and environmental diversity into mere variety. If valid, contemporary media must be seen as having come to exert a potent and yet practically invisible, corrosive effect on public culture.*

*This will come as unwelcome news for those inclined to see the media as a potentially powerful forum for developing national-scale Bhutanese public culture and as an efficient means of widely promoting environmental conservation. For those who have seen the media—and especially the new media emerging at the developmental edge of communication technology—as vehicles for expressing differences and resisting hegemonic social, economic, political and cultural forces, they are likely to be seen as claims hardly worth countenancing. At the root of such hopeful visions of the interplay of media and public culture is the presupposition that the media and their underlying technologies are essentially value-neutral—the conviction that neither the media nor their technological infrastructure in any way determine or prescribe their uses or their social, economic, political and cultural effects.*

*In what follows, I hope to show that matters are not so simple. Media, global markets and the technologies that make them possible jointly express a sustained commitment to values, intentions and practices—in Buddhist terms, a karma—that occasions a complex of outcomes and opportunities which poses particular challenges to realizing the deepening capacities-for and commitments-to equity and diversity that are at the heart of Bhutan's GNH-oriented public policy.*

### **Technology and Media**

The crucial role of technological change in the emergence of contemporary mass media is incontestable, and many media historians and critics have rightly granted a central role in their emergence to advances in communication technology. Most obviously, technological change made available vastly greater powers both for the mass duplication of communications content and for its geographically expanded

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mass distribution. The leap of printed daily and weekly newspapers from local to regional and national scales of distribution, for example, required both greatly increased unit production and greatly expanded means of reliable and rapid automotive and rail transportation. Radio broadcast, likewise, made possible vastly amplified audiences for live public commentary, music performances, and both scripted and improvised dramatic entertainment.

Less obviously, perhaps, but no less importantly, advances in communications technology also enabled an expansion of the sensory reach of the media and a radical extension of their potential content. Abstract, nominally visual media like print were first augmented by lithographic illustrations and still photography that allowed the presentation of relevant visual information/images and not just linguistic representations of them. The advent of audio recording and broadcast radio opened the sense of hearing to mass mediation. The invention of motion picture film enabled mass kinesthesia and the inclusion of gesture-based, non-verbal communication as media content. Film, television, and more recently computer-based gaming enable the merging of visual, audio and kinesthetic content to bring about potentials for mass-mediated emotional stimulation and interactive imagination. Although we are perhaps decades away from full-sensorium mass media, that is certainly the dream of those pushing the communication technology envelope: the creation of convincingly “real” mass-mediated virtual environments.

The contemporary *scale* and *scope* of mass media can, with considerable plausibility, be seen as a direct result of technological development. But technology itself is not an autonomous domain. Its development is closely allied, if not essentially alloyed, with changes taking place in the social, economic, political and cultural dimensions of contemporary life and, even more importantly, within emergent interdependencies among them. Thus, while it is entirely natural to begin a discussion of the impact of media on public culture by reflecting on technological conditions that have enabled them to take on the shape and scale that they have,

the discussion needs also to take into account the larger, truly global patterns of historical development in which the rise of mass media has played a particularly complex and crucial role.

*Evaluating Technologies on the Basis of Tool Use: A Category Mistake*

As a crucial preliminary to this broader discussion, a key critical distinction must be made between technologies and tools. Tools are products of technological processes that can be adequately evaluated individually, on the basis of their intended, task-specific utility. If tools do not work or work well, they are discarded, recycled or redesigned. Although tools are designed with specific uses in mind, flexibility obtains in how they are actually used; adapting existing tools to new uses commonly precedes the design and manufacture of new tools. Televisions, DVD players, radios and internet-connected home computers are among the more common consumer tools associated with contemporary media; producer tools include audiovisual recording equipment, disc manufacturing machinery, radio and TV broadcast transmitters, and network routers and servers.

In contrast, technologies are complex alloys of material and conceptual practices that embody and propagate distinct systems of strategic values. While tools occupy relatively limited and precisely located amounts of space, technologies consist of emergent, value-laden *flows* of historically-informed relationship saturating wide swaths of the entire spectrum of human endeavour. Technologies are not *things* that can, strictly speaking, be said to exist—literally ‘standing apart’ or ‘taking place’ at some particular point in space—in service of some task-specific utility. Instead, technologies are indefinitely occurring *events* resulting in the generation of new kinds of tasks and embodying broad propensities for realizing certain kinds of world or lived experience.

Unlike tools, technologies cannot be evaluated on the basis of task-specific utility. Indeed, technologies cannot in any strict sense be used at all; instead, technologies are engaged in the shared conception and promotion of particular interests or ends. Technological engagement means

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consolidating specific patterns of strategic valence. Thus, technologies—and the values they propagate—can only be effectively evaluated in terms of how they affect relational quality and the meaning of the interdependencies they establish among the personal, social, political, economic, cultural and environmental dimensions of our situations as complex wholes. Somewhat surprisingly, technologies must be critically appraised in explicitly aesthetic, moral and ethical terms.

Important implications attend the ontological difference between tools as individually existing things and technologies as indefinitely occurring event flows. First, although one can refuse to use particular tools and whatever advantages they might bestow in carrying out particular tasks, there are no clear ‘exit rights’ from the effects of heavily deployed technologies. Thus, even those people who elect not to own televisions cannot entirely escape the effects of televised entertainment and news consumption on public and popular culture; people who elect not to own and drive automobiles are nevertheless subjected to the polluted air, traffic gridlock and transformations of urban space that attend heavily deployed automotive transportation technologies. The impacts of a given technology on relational quality may be initially greatest for intensive users of tools associated with that technology, but eventually these impacts become effectively ubiquitous.

A second key implication is that while tools can persuasively be depicted as simple problem-solvers, regardless of how many of them are in use at any given time, this is not true of technologies. Histories of technology suggest that scale thresholds obtain beyond which further deployment of a given technology begins generating ironic consequences or problems of the type that only this technology or its close relatives can apparently address. These ironic (or ‘revenge’) effects demonstrate the fallacy in assuming that what is good for each of us will be good for all.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> For a thorough discussion of ironic consequences, see Peter D. Hershock, *Reinventing the Wheel: A Buddhist Response to the Information Age*, Albany, NY:

They also demonstrate that technologies emerge as higher order complex systems<sup>4</sup> on the basis of novel compositions of lower level systems of knowledge and material practice in novel ways, while at the same time exerting 'downward causation' on such component systems to bring them into better functional conformity with their own higher order needs and values.<sup>5</sup>

Confusing tools and technologies, collapsing the important ontological differences between them, is to commit a particularly ominous category mistake, especially if one errs on the side of considering critical assessments of tools to be the equivalent of critically assessing the technologies from which they are derived. In effect, that is to exempt

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State University of New York Press, 1999.

<sup>4</sup> To clarify the force of this claim, let me distinguish among simple, complicated and complex systems or phenomena. Simple systems—for example, an automobile engine or a notebook computer—comprise relatively few inert parts or variables. Their behaviour can be understood in linear causal terms and can be accurately predicted and controlled as a sum of the capacities of their component parts. Complicated systems—for example, ocean currents or traffic flows in a large city—are composed of large numbers of simple, interacting, and yet non-adaptive, parts or variables. Although the behaviour of individual parts cannot be accurately determined or controlled, the overall behaviour of complicated systems remains limited to a sum of the capacities of their simple, component parts and can be predicted and controlled in probabilistic or statistical terms. By contrast, complex systems—for example, living organisms and societies—comprise significant numbers of interacting and dynamically adaptive parts or variables. Complex systems do not simply aggregate the characteristics of their component sub-systems. Instead, they express qualitatively distinct, recursively-structured orders that are capable of generating novel behaviours, actively incorporating histories of the situational outcomes of their own behaviours to shape present and future behaviour. In sum, complex systems are both *auto-poetic* (self-making) and *novogenous* (novelty-generating).

<sup>5</sup> The notion of 'downward causation' is explored at length in Peter Bogh Andersen with Claus Emmeche, Niels Ole Finnemann and Peder Voetmann Christiansen edited, *Downward Causation: Minds, Bodies, and Matter*, Aarhus University Press, Århus: 2000

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technologies from any appropriate critical regard at all.

### *Mass Media as Complex Technological Phenomena, not Complicated Tools*

The term 'mass media' was first used in the 1920s with the advent of national radio broadcasts in the U.S., marking a close association of media with technology that continues to the present day. 'Mass media' is now generally used to refer a range of technology-enabled communication systems including: print publishing (newspapers, magazines and books); electronic broadcast (radio and television, but now also computer-based podcasts); the internet; and computer games. These media categories are associated with a range of purposes including: journalism (the provision of news and information); advocacy (the provision of social, political and business/economic perspectives and propaganda); entertainment (the provision of sensory and aesthetic stimulation); public service (e.g., organizing disaster relief); and education.

The alignment of mass media with technology that is evidenced by standard categorizations of the media reflects how the media are appraised, especially in terms of their impact on the dynamics of the public sphere. Unfortunately, however, the media have not been understood and appraised as truly complex technological phenomena. Rather, they have been treated as merely complicated tools that can be evaluated in terms of how well they serve the distinct purposes for which they are used. In essence, the effects of mass mediation have most often been assumed to be a simple, combined function of the intentions of those using the media—either as profit seeking producers or enjoyment or information seeking consumers—and the content that mass media deliver. Consequently, the public impacts of the media typically have not been assessed comprehensively—as I have argued should be the case for any technological phenomena—in terms of how they affect relational quality and the meaning or directedness of the interdependencies they foster.

Seeing the media as tools has deflected critical attention away from the media themselves to the commodified goods

and services passing through them and the reasons that they do so. Paralleling the popular argument wielded by the proponents of the right to bear arms—"guns don't kill, people do"—the media are generally held to lack any intrinsically determined effects on public culture. Whether the media have good or ill effects on society depends strictly on who is using them and why.

In sum, mass media for the most part have been critically regarded as an essentially neutral interface between media users—a means of transmitting messages and not communicative systems expressing and/or propagating meanings of their own. Media ethics has thus tended to concentrate on establishing codes of professional conduct for those generating media content (most prominently investigative reporters, newscasters, journalists and book authors); on building systems for regulating media production and marketing (often reflecting stances on censorship and worries about market monopolies); and on discerning if, how, and in what way specific program contents affect individual media consumers (e.g., the effects of violent cartoon programs on young viewers)

To be sure, the intentions of media users (both producers and consumers) and the communicative content linking them do make a difference in how the media affect popular culture, as well as other dimensions of the public sphere. The importance of program content is evidenced, for example, in strong correlations between the consumption of violent media and social violence.<sup>6</sup> The proven success of mass mediated advertising and the successful use of television as a

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<sup>6</sup> A summary of scientific findings on media and violence, as well as media misinformation about these findings, can be found in Brad J. Bushman and Craig A. Anderson, "Media Violence and the American Public: Scientific Facts Versus Media Misinformation," in the *American Psychologist*, June/July 2001. An interesting work focused on the role of unconscious imitation in media consumption is Susan Hurley's "Bypassing Conscious Control: Media Violence, Unconscious Imitation, and Freedom of Speech," in *Does Consciousness Cause Behaviour? An Investigation of the Nature of Volition*, edited by S. Pockett, W. Banks, and S. Gallagher, Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005.

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propaganda tool in—to illustrate both ends of the ‘propaganda’ spectrum—both Hitler’s Germany and contemporary American presidential election campaigns leaves little doubt as to the relevance of intention in the public impact of the media. Nevertheless, the effects of program content and producer/consumer intent do not exhaust the full range of media effects on the dynamics of the public sphere. Indeed, granted that technologies arise as complex and value-laden relational flows that pervade both the personal and the public spheres, and that their effects are not restricted to those making direct use of tools associated with them, it may well be critically counterproductive to focus exclusively on media users—those whose communication and information needs are being adequately met, and perhaps shaped, by the increasingly refined tools of mass mediation.

In the following section, I want to sketch out the relational terrain linking mass media and market economics. The point of this is to open for consideration the possibility that, as important as the mediating effects of content and intent are, they ultimately may be dwarfed by the systemic effects of the media as complex, value-laden technological phenomena that have emerged through, and helped to both sustain and direct, a particular pattern of interdependencies among modern (and now postmodern) social, economic, political, and cultural practices and forces.

#### *The Bigger Picture: Market Realities and the Emergence and Flourishing of the Media*

It has been said that the only thing more certain to hamper the advance of critical understanding than generalizations is the failure to make them. The aerial views afforded by generalizations are notoriously short on detail, passively obliterating differences that at ground level may be profoundly important. At the same time, however, their broader horizons make possible both a significant expansion of what might be considered relevant and an almost paradoxical sharpening of detail with respect to large-scale patterns. Comprehensively and critically understanding mass media and their current and potential shaping of public

culture requires systematically reckoning with how the media's historical evolution has affected and been affected by large-scale patterns of development outside of the communication sector. Adopting such an aerial perspective on the media will mean glossing over important differences in how mass media have emerged and become woven into the fabric of day-to-day life in various parts of the world.<sup>7</sup> But at the same time, it will enable shedding critical light on whether those differences might—or might not—be able truly to make a difference in how 21st century media affect public culture.

Within the overall patterns of events constituting the historical 'terrain' out of which contemporary media have emerged, I want to concentrate on four main features. These are: 1] the growth of national and global institutions aligned with such modern values as universality, equality, autonomy, plurality, tolerance, precision and control, which fostered; 2] the concurrent evolution of a globally integrated economic system that has successfully commodified virtually every aspect of human subsistence, thereby; 3] challenging and dissolving traditional socio-cultural roles, practices and identities, especially those related to direct, mutual contribution to shared welfare, to; 4] greatly expand experiential freedoms-of-choice and systematically support the fashioning of globally profitable elective identities and communities, ironically compromising both capacities-for and commitments-to relating freely in the realization of a truly diverse and environmentally enriching public sphere.

### **Modernity and the Advent of a Global Market Economy**

Among the most prominent and significant features of global history over the past half millennium have been the ideological and institutional triumph of modernity and the consolidation of globally integrated market activities. Understanding how contemporary media affect public culture

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<sup>7</sup> For a collection of essays exploring such differences, see James Curran and Myung-Jin Park, edited, *De-Westernizing Media Studies*, New York: Routledge, 2000.

involves coming to see how the media have been implicated in expanding the scope of market activity, but also in qualitatively altering the critical purchase and practical traction of modern values, inculcating postmodern sensitivities-to and celebrations-of difference in a technologically enabled reconciliation of tensions between the values of autonomy and equality.

In his book, *Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity*, Stephen Toulmin has argued masterfully against the long received view that the birth of modernity and its displacement of Renaissance humanism and skepticism resulted from a kind of immaculate conception—an intrinsically generated shift of basic values and conceptual frameworks. To the contrary, Toulmin makes the case that transitioning from the values and concept clusters of Renaissance humanism and skepticism to those characteristic of modern thought and institutions was of a piece with equivalently radical shifts taking place in the social, political, economic, cultural and technological domains. These shifts, he maintains, occurred as systemic responses to a confluence of stresses, within the public sphere, that were unique to 17th century Europe and that continued significantly to affect the trajectory of global history through most of the 20th century.

No less practically than theoretically motivated, modernity involved the interpretation of difference as an expression of contingency and the canonization of dichotomies asserting the primacy of reason over emotion; of mind over body; of the written over the oral; of the universal over the particular; the general over the local; the timeless over the timely; and the logical over the rhetorical. Modernization meant—and continues to mean—change based upon the preeminence of a constellation of values including: universality, autonomy, equality, sovereignty, precision and control. These values ramified with particularly apparent force in the realm of politics, setting in motion nation-building processes that profoundly revised the shape and quality of political space. But, just as powerfully, they transformed the dynamics of trade and development.

Global trade is not a strictly modern phenomenon. A quilted pattern of exchange relations linked, for example, imperial China and imperial Rome from as early as the 1st century CE. But global trade began undergoing a series of technologically and ideologically driven shifts in the 16th century that, over the succeeding three hundred years would bring about the realization of a truly global market economy through which almost all natural and industrial resources were commodified and put into worldwide circulation. Among the key values inscribed in and prescribed by these shifts have been: control, competition, convenience and choice.

It is useful to identify four major periods in the realization of contemporary global markets: the period of colonial economics that prevailed from the 16 to the 19th centuries; the period of development economics that developed from the 19th century through roughly three quarters of the 20th century; the information economy that assumed global primacy over the last decades of the 20th century; and, most recently, the subtle emergence of a media-sustained attention economy.<sup>8</sup> These four periods can associated with technologically triggered efficiencies that dissolved geographic and temporal constraints on the expansion of market scale and content, making possible: 1] the successive commodification natural resources, labor, information and attention; and, 2] the successive extension of power over the production and flow of goods, consumption, knowledge/human capital, and a sense of belonging or meaning.

An important turning point in this process occurred in the late 19th century. By this time, markets of truly global reach were fast maturing, resulting in shortfalls in the velocity of consumption required to sustain economic growth. Theorists like Thorstein Veblen were, by the end of the century, noting that expanding markets mandate expanding consumer bases and that limits exist as to how far this

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<sup>8</sup> I have described these transitions and their wider contexts in: *Reinventing the Wheel* (op. cit.) and in *Buddhism in the Public Sphere: Reorienting Global Interdependence*, London: Routledge/Curzon, 2006, especially, Chapter 3.

expansion can be driven by falling prices associated with efficiencies in production and transportation. Sustaining growth meant continuously increasing the absolute range of goods and services placed into global circulation. Beyond a certain scale threshold, the growth of overall market activity can only be stably realized through accelerating rates of consumption. In short, maximally extended market reach produces powerful imperatives to maximize market density, incorporating entirely new populations (e.g., children) and new commodities (e.g., entertainment) within the scope of market exchanges.

In effect, increasing the density of market activities involved the generation of needs and problems that might be addressed by new, market-designed and market-delivered goods and services. Under the aegis of added convenience and expanded freedoms-of-choice, market growth came to be sustained by systematically finding fault with the familiar and traditional. Homemade soap, for example, was faulted for being 'un-hygienic'—produced by rendering animal fat wastes—and far inferior to the scientifically engineered and 'pure' cleaning agents produced by the chemical industry. By the mid-20th century, novelty itself had been elevated to the status of a selling point. Particularly in the U.S., accelerated consumption was successfully sold to the public as a means of bringing 'the future' into every home and neighborhood.

Two major consequences of increasingly dense market activity can be noted here. First, economic growth becomes coupled to deepening dissatisfaction with things as they have come to be. In Buddhist terms, this can be seen as the systematic creation of an economy of dissatisfaction rooted in the production of *papanca* or the proliferation of situational blockages—the steadily expanding experience of disappointment, trouble and suffering (*dukkha*). Secondly, economic growth becomes proportionate to a tightening of the consumption-to-waste cycle, which translates into decreasing opportunities for directly appreciating or adding value either to the goods and services one purchases or to one's situation as a whole. Beyond certain thresholds of market reach and density, growth has a corrosive effect on relational quality.

This effect is most severe for the poor, who are deprived in relative, if not absolute, terms of the resources and imagination needed for investment. Economic growth, in these terms, becomes systematically impoverishing.<sup>9</sup>

Mass media have played a crucial role in making this kind of economic growth possible. Technological advances in industrial production and transportation had, by the beginning of the 20th century, enabled the commodification of basic, material subsistence needs: food, clothing and shelter. Over the course of the century, the needs for medical care, education, sensory stimulation and a sense of belonging or meaning were successfully subjected to marketization. Mass media were important throughout this process. They served first as a means of advertising goods and services and creating new kinds of needs. Later, they served as forums for broadly shaping and setting popular agendas for public policy. Finally, they began functioning as almost universally available conduits for marketing/distributing sensory, imaginary and intellectual stimulation in the form of news and entertainment products and programming.<sup>10</sup>

The development of commercially viable, electronic mass communication, from mid-20th century onwards, was especially important in bringing about both quantitative and qualitative shifts in the relationship among media, expanding market reach and density, and the erosion of personal and communal resources and opportunities for contributing directly and significantly to sustainably shared welfare. Here,

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<sup>9</sup> I have presented this argument in greater detail in: "Poverty Alleviation: A Buddhist Perspective," *Journal of Bhutan Studies*, Volume 11, Winter 2004, pp. 33-67.

<sup>10</sup> It should be noted, here, that I am working with a Buddhist-inspired understanding of subsistence needs as those 'nutriments' required for sustaining human beings as persons-in-community. It is part of the basic, Buddhist worldview that human beings have six sense organs and associated ranges and qualities of consciousness: the visual, auditory, gustatory, olfactory, tactile and mental. Thus, intellectual stimulation is, in Buddhist terms, a form of sensory stimulation. Concepts and ideas are, for us, a kind of 'food' – a nutriment without which it is impossible to lead fully human lives.

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let me draw attention to four phases or aspects of this complex process.

First, because electronic communications technologies were instrumental in opening up possibilities for mass producing and mass marketing auditory and visual experiences, they effectively enabled mass media to circumvent the literacy hurdle presented by print media and, in some degree, to perforate the language barriers that had hitherto segregated national media markets. Among the most readily apparent outcomes of this capacity of mass media to penetrate markets worldwide was the emergence of global pop music.

Secondly, these new technologies also made possible the penetration of mass media into the lives of barely literate and pre-literate populations, especially children. The affects of television program content and advertising on children's desires and expectations—and subsequently, family consumption patterns—has been nothing short of profound.

Thirdly, these new technologies made possible the marketing of ephemeral goods—experiences or sensory stimulation as such—that radically collapsed the consumption-to-waste cycle and habituated media consumers to a diet of virtually unbroken product streams. An important aspect of this was the market-driven development of user-friendly, inexpensive and highly portable media tools (e.g., the original Sony Walkman and the new I-Pod) that allowed the consumption of mass media to be effectively freed from spatial/geographic constraints. It became practically possible to consume media products virtually anytime, anywhere.

Finally, the flood of cheap, new media tools combined with niche marketed media content to fabulously expand consumers' freedoms-of-choice in managing the content of their (mass-mediated) experience. In effect, this dissolved tensions between the values of autonomy (acting in one's own individual interest) and equality (the combination of difference with an absence of explicit hierarchy). Internet technologies, in particular, made possible the realization of a virtual public sphere in which—at least as claimed by some cyberspace

visionaries—every individual can exercise the right to pursue whatever he or she means by liberty and happiness, making a difference for himself or herself without necessarily making a difference to anyone else. The widely recognized ‘digital divide’ of inequitable access to computer-mediated information and opportunity is one shadow of free market media; the digital divide or gap that allows individual user choices to occur in almost complete isolation is, in terms of public culture, an even deeper and more dangerous shadow—a direct threat to diversity understood as a function of mutual contributions to sustainably shared welfare.

**Mass Media and the Global Market Sustaining Export of Attention**

If the media are viewed as (or, at least, in terms of) tools that are used and evaluated by individuals, these ‘effects’ of commercially viable mass media can easily be regarded in a quite positive light. For any individual, having more choices, for example, regarding the content of their day-to-day experiences is certainly better than have fewer choices or none at all. Whether mass mediated experience is of higher, lower or equivalent quality to unmediated experience is, arguably, simply a matter of personal opinion or debate. And, as proved by the use of the internet to organize social and political activism (e.g., the movement advocating alternatives to free market globalization), or by the proliferation of non-mainstream sources of information and analysis (like Z-Net or the blogging phenomenon), the tools that have been used to build global markets can also be used to take them to task.

However, if mass media are understood as technological phenomena or strategically structured flows of events, then it is entirely possible that the sum of all individual stories about media use will still not tell us much—at least, not much that is critically relevant—about media effects on public culture. Critically engaging mass media requires keeping the bigger relational pattern in mind. To this end, I want to look at attention itself as a form of capital—indeed, the single most important form of capital for realizing diverse and caring communities, but also one that is circulated by and essential

to the 'health' of the global market economy.

It is often assumed that the overall viability of (especially) electronically delivered, commercial mass media is a function of how well the costs of producing and marketing media commodities are offset by income from their purchase and consumption. With media like recorded music or cable television, unit charges for individual products or time-based charges for access to product streams are a major source of income; for media like broadcast radio and television—which supply media goods (program content) without any direct charges to consumers—costs are largely recouped, and profit generated, through advertising sales and related product spin-offs. The dynamics of the information economy are, in fact, very much dependent upon such processes in which flows of information and opinion intermingle to form immaterial attractors for both production and consumption.

Yet, mass media play a much more important role in global economics than that of generating product- or program-mediated monetary transfers. At present scales of media penetration, made possible in large part by technological efficiencies that have allowed media consumption to become highly individualized, as well as nearly ubiquitous, mass media are habituating entire populations to diets of virtually unbroken streams of ephemeral entertainment, information and news. This signals a systematic and significant export of attention out of the environments within which mass media are consumed—homes, schools, workplaces, neighborhoods, communities, and so on. Because this export is occurring in the context of rapidly evolving, postindustrial institutions, it does not result in obvious, large and lasting accumulations of attention capital. The export of attention from here does not result in its apparent import elsewhere; it is the entire system of the global free market economy that benefits from the flight and circulation of attention capital.

Critics of mass media have almost exclusively linked the ill-effects of mass media on family life, personal development and public culture to specific—most notably, violent or sexually charged—program content, and these links are quite

real.<sup>11</sup> But the most widely spread and relationally powerful effects of mass mediation center on their role in distracting attention from local environments and placing it into contingently structured global circulation. Simply stated, time spent consuming mass market media is time not spent attending to the needs of one's family, home, neighborhood or local community. In countries with mature media markets—the U.S. is, perhaps, the best, though not necessarily most extreme, example—time spent in media consumption now exceeds a per capita average of 6 hours per day.<sup>12</sup> This is time not spent developing new relational capabilities, not acquiring new skills or refining existing ones, not passing on personal or cultural traditions, and not making use of locally available resources to meet other basic human needs by, for example: cooking, designing and making clothes, building or repairing one's home, caring for the ill, inspiring and refining learning activities, creating new works of art, music, dance and drama, or participating in public debate, policy formation, or democratic governance. In Buddhist terms, mass media consumption functions as an *asrava* or effluence of attention-energy into activities that—whatever personal enjoyment or sense of freedom they afford—are relationally polluting or wasteful.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> It should be noted that the causality linking media program content and society is not linear, but complex and network-like. The linkages are, in other words, correlative—a function of interdependencies and not one of independent 'causes' producing dependent 'effects.' The policy failure (or irrelevance) of research that is critical of the interplay of mass media and society is itself very much a function of the rarity with which one can find a "smoking gun" in media content.

<sup>12</sup> Americans spend, on average, 4.5 hours per day watching television. Internet use stands at about 12-15 hours per week. Statistics for radio, video-game, magazine, newspaper and recorded music consumption are not readily available, but surely add significantly to the total. Even allowing that some media—like radio, MP3 products and podcasts—can be consumed while engaged (at least superficially) in other activities, it is quite conservative to estimate the Americans devote roughly one-third to one-half of their waking hours to media consumption.

<sup>13</sup> It is worth noting that, particularly in early Buddhism, the elimination of

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It must be stressed, again, that the ill effects of mass media on public culture and the appreciation (or sympathetic resonance with and adding of value to) local environments are not a direct function of media content. Attention is exported just as powerfully by so-called public broadcasting, documentaries, and locally produced news or entertainment as it is by commercial, global media. It must also be stressed that a significant, cumulative effect of massively exported attention will be an increasing reliance and, eventually, dependence on market designed and market delivered, non-media commodities. That is, time spent in media consumption effectively mandates the consumption of goods and services that otherwise might have been personally produced (and, perhaps, traded). Mounting reliance/dependence on market produced goods and services leads, first, to a professionalizing of the means of production for meeting these needs, then to the erosion of local production ecologies, and, finally, to a consolidation of highly mobile, profitably rationalized global production monocultures.<sup>14</sup>

From one perspective, this can be seen as a means of opening up economic opportunity—fostering a transition from a world of locally made and used crafts to one of globally circulating commodities. Recommending such a transition is a marked increase in the number of choices available with respect to meeting basic needs, but also—at least at certain points in the process of transition—a general increase of quality with respect to specific goods and services. But, this same process can be seen as trading-off or forfeiting high productive diversity for heightened consumption variety—acquiescence to the seductive mandates of consumerism. As the attention economy matures—albeit with considerable unevenness at all geographic scales—there occurs a proliferation of differences associated, for example, with the development of niche markets and new domains for the

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*asrava* was identified with the attainment of ultimate freedom—the realization of liberation from trouble and suffering.

<sup>14</sup> See, for example, *Buddhism in the Public Sphere*, Chapter 3.

exercise of choice. There is not, however, a comparable enhancement of capacities-for and commitments-to making a difference. Indeed, an important outcome of the individuation of media tool use that fuels the attention economy is a shrinking of active opportunities either to differ-with or differ-for others.

Beyond a certain threshold of complexity, global market growth has the downward causal effect of producing populations in need. Consumer needs now span the full spectrum of subsistence, including: food, clothing and shelter, medical care, education, sensory stimulation, meaning-making and a sense of belonging. Mass media consumption, by exporting attention capital from homes, neighborhoods and local communities, plays an indispensable role in the deepening of consumer neediness.<sup>15</sup> The complex pattern of values-intentions-actions (karma) informing global market economics and the emergence of the attention economy yields conditions in which increasing opportunities for exercising freedoms-of-choice are coupled with lowering opportunities for relating freely in the satisfaction of our own needs and in contributing aptly to others.

Ivan Illich's insight that the commodification of subsistence needs invariably leads to the institutionalization of a new classes of the poor is, here, of signal relevance. By effectively making sensory stimulation, meaning-making and sense of belonging commodified services to which public has ready access, the complex dynamics of the attention economy engender a public in need of such services. Simply stated, the growth dynamics of the attention economy are relationally impoverishing.

### **Mass Mediation and the Conversion of Environmental Places to**

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<sup>15</sup> Among the most striking demonstrations of this neediness is the epidemic of boredom afflicting much of global youth—a generation that can only with great difficulty bear being 'alone' or present in a way that is not technologically or commodity mediated. The need they experience is not just to be entertained or to be present virtually with others, but to be entertained or networked with increasing variety and speed.

### **Locations**

It is not possible to accelerate rates of consumption, especially of goods and services aimed at meeting, as well as stimulating, needs for sensory stimulation, meaning and a sense of belonging, without intensifying dissatisfaction with present circumstances. Empirical studies on happiness or perceived well-being suggest that a threshold exists, beyond which further consumption and accumulation of material 'wealth' do not enhance perceived well-being. On the contrary, evidence suggests that accelerating consumption—or tightening the consumption-to-waste cycle—at some point begins negatively affecting perceived well-being.

Buddhist teachings on karma and consciousness are particularly useful in understanding this inverse correlation of increasing 'wealth accumulation' with a decreasing sense of well-being. The Buddhist teaching of karma can, for present purposes, be summarized as enjoining insight into the meticulous consonance that obtains between values-intentions-actions and the play of experienced outcomes and opportunities. Put somewhat differently, the teaching of karma encourages realizing that we have intimate relationships with the environments in which we find ourselves and with all that takes place therein.<sup>16</sup> The consumption of mass-produced, globally marketed

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<sup>16</sup> The karma of global markets and the various economies—colonial, development, information and attention—that historically have been associated with them is, undoubtedly, a complex function of many generations of intentional activity, informed by historically and culturally distinct constellations of values, flowing together in the gradual articulation of globally shared practices and institutions. Just as doubtlessly, however, close ties obtain between the patterns of inequity and impoverishment associated with contemporary scales and depths of globalization and the distinctive modern and market values that have largely shaped its dynamics—in particular: control, competition, choice, autonomy, equality and universality. Human history is always a function of both intention-rich personal karma and collective/cultural/communal karma in which intentional is of largely generic importance and in which the force of values is, accordingly, much more prominent.

commodities to meet all of our basic needs, rather than personally or locally crafting them, alters these relationships. This is especially the case with mass media, which serve the dual purpose of providing desirable experiences while extracting attention from consumers' immediate environments.

As noted earlier, shifting from a world dominated by craft to one of commodities is not necessarily a bad thing. The availability of fruit and vegetables throughout the year can (but, as is well known, need not) enhance physical well-being. What is crucial, from a karmic perspective, are the values-intentions-actions in accordance with which our relationships with our environments are altered. As a crucial part of the global market economy, in addition to their explicit content, mass media also promulgate a particular complex of values and, in order to be profitable, must also systematically affect patterns of intention and action. The pivotal values embodied within global market operations are competition, control, convenience and choice. Mass media are competitive to the degree that they are able to attract and, finally, extract attention—that is, the degree to which the consumption of media commodities supplants other practices for meeting the basic human needs of sensory stimulation and a sense of belonging and meaning. What the media offer is convenience, a nearly infinite array of choices, and almost complete, individual control over the contents of experience.

All of these values have liabilities in terms of the cyclic pattern of outcomes/opportunities that they generate. Consider choice. Choices, in contrast with commitments, do not imply sustained involvement. One chooses between two or more things, courses of action or experiences. Although it is possible only to choose one out of any given range of things, actions or experiences, all of them are equivalent as intentional objects that are subject to being chosen. We do not have an intimate relationship with what we can choose, but rather an entirely contingent one. A world in which we have an almost infinite array of choices—like that offered by contemporary global media—is a world of things that we can instantly possess; it is not a world to which we belong, a

world to which we give our hearts. The karma of continuously expanding our freedoms-of-choice is then a karma for being free to not belong, to not commit, to not contribute as needed; it is not a karma for enhancing our capacities-for and commitments to relating freely.

A distinctive feature of Buddhist thought is that consciousness is understood as a quality of relationship constituted by and encompassing the interplay of sentient beings and their environments. That is, consciousness arises between and qualitatively integrates sentient organisms and their supporting, sensible environments. From this, it follows that degraded environments are necessarily correlated with degraded patterns of consciousness. It follows, as well, that degradations of consciousness—defined generically, here, as an attenuation of attentive virtuosity (*samādhi*) or the capacity for sustained, concentrated and yet flexibly responsive awareness—will also necessarily result in environmental degradations. Degradations of consciousness will eventually result in being less and less well or valuably situated.

This, in fact, is the particular pattern of outcome/opportunity that is associated with the controlled satisfaction of wants or needs: the better we get at getting what we want, the better we will get at wanting; but the better we get at wanting, the better we will get at getting what we want, only we won't want what we get. To get good at getting what we want, we must be left continuously wanting. Likewise, the karmic cycle of control implicates us in finding ourselves in situations that are not only increasingly open to control, but also in apparent need of it. The ability readily to determine experiential outcomes leads to a systematic depreciation of being where and as we have come to be. This, in a nutshell, is what results, karmically, from the convenient, choice-rich and control-bestowing consumption of globally circulating mass media commodities. There is a point beyond which the export of attention from our immediate situation brings a mounting degradation of our

environment.<sup>17</sup>

The Buddhist teaching of karma enjoins seeing that environments are always ‘mine’ or ‘yours’ or ‘ours’. As the relational understanding of consciousness stresses, we ultimately are continuous with—indeed, infused by—our environments. Environments are places in which we have a place—they are an expression of what we mean by being sentient. Consuming mass media is an act of displacement. Mass mediation displaces our attention, removes it from where we have come to be. Mass media allow locating ourselves elsewhere. In doing so, they render contingent—a matter of choice—both where we have come to be and who we have come to be along the way. The media allow us to choose, experientially, where we are and who we are, at the cost of reducing our current place to but one among an infinite array of locations or spaces that we might occupy if we wish. The natural world, once home, becomes a generically shared context for choice. It ceases being the place where, together, we all belong.

Under the regime of consumption that is mandated by the market-driven attention economy, there is little time left for immediate and sustained appreciation of family and friends, of the day’s weather and the advance of the seasons, or of the subtle presences that distinguish houses from homes. If there is no time for appreciating what is most nearby—the lived environments of the home, the community, the village and the urban center, but also in the environments within which economic and political activity is directly undertaken—there is even less time for attending to the natural processes without which nothing human ever could have come to be. And, while the effects of degraded consciousness will be most apparent in the disintegration of homes and neighborhoods and senses of felt community, they are ultimately horizonless and affect every scale of environment from the most intimate to the most global. The

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<sup>17</sup> I have discussed at length, elsewhere, how the consumption of contemporary mass media qualitatively affects consciousness (see, in particular, *Reinventing the Wheel*, Part III).

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looming prospect of human-triggered climate change is a singularly troubling case in which qualitatively deficient patterns of human consciousness have had a corrosive effect on planetary health.

#### **Bhutanese Public Culture, Environmental Conservation and the Media**

It has been argued thus far that errant or troubling patterns of relationship have come to obtain among mass media and global market economies, resulting in systematic compromises of attentive virtuosity and diversity, at every scale, and in every domain, of the public sphere. This pattern of compromised diversity extends beyond the public sphere to affect even the ecological systems comprised in the biosphere as a whole.

Nevertheless, the critical perspective from which this argument has been forwarded also allows asking whether there might be a scale or depth of media penetration that is compatible with, for example, Bhutan's policy of development committed to the promotion of Gross National Happiness (GNH). Is it possible to make use of media tools to further the evolution of Bhutanese public culture and environmental conservation, without opening the Bhutanese population to the neo-colonialism of the attention economy? Or, put in more operational terms, how does one determine the utility threshold beyond which mass media—as complex technological phenomena—begin producing the conditions of their own necessity?

The second of these questions is more easily answered. One cannot determine, in advance, the precise level of deployment at which a technology crosses the threshold of its own utility. It is not possible to predict when a technology will begin spawning problems of the sort that only it (or related technologies) can solve. Technologies are complex phenomena, and while they may exhibit quite typical histories or patterns of development, they are also capable of behaving in ways that could not have been anticipated. There is no amount of empirical data that will make it possible to know in advance when mass media will cross the line, in any given

society, from just providing entertainment, news, and a sense of meaning or belonging, to generating intensifying needs for (or perceived lack of) them.

It might be objected that media history, of sufficient scope, can surely afford useful insights, if not accurate predictions, in regard to the conditions for such a crossover. Unfortunately, history never repeats itself precisely. In a world of increasingly complex social, economic, political, cultural and technological interdependence, it is not just that no particular 'history' is ever repeated, the very rules of history are being constantly rewritten.

The first decades of television consumption that were experienced in the U.S. or Europe will never be repeated because more recently developed media complexes in other societies have simply leapt over them. In many Asian countries, for example, cellphones with extended functions like image transfer and email capabilities have allowed leapfrogging over the era of building extensive land line infrastructure; access to television programming by satellite dishes preceded (or made irrelevant) antenna-based, national broadcasting; direct downloading of music and films from the world-wide-web and a vibrant trade in (often bootlegged or illegally reproduced) DVDs and VCDs has enabled the mushrooming, virtually overnight, of consumer markets across the region that are accustomed to viewing the latest Hollywood, Bollywood or Hong Kong films within days of their official, theatrical releases.

The postmodern realities of 'time-space compression'—most incisively analyzed by David Harvey in his book, *The Condition of Postmodernity*—do not, however, only affect macro-level phenomena like technology transfer and global flows of production/consumption. Compare the sensory diets of the present generation of world leaders, born in the 1950s or earlier, with that of children today, especially during the first six to eight years of life, when basic enculturation and personality formation take place.

Consider the effects, first, of a shift from engaging in mass media consumption for, at most, a few hours a week to doing so a few hours per day, and the associated lack of time

spent in shared play and other social activities that encourage, not only skill in improvised communication, rule-making and joint imagination, but also critically appraised reasoning and emotional maturation.

Consider, next, the pervasive violence, physical, verbal and emotional, that characterizes so much of, for example, so-called children's television.<sup>18</sup> Consider the product placement and consumption cues ingrained in television shows, films, books and educational media targeted at young children, as well as the quick-cut editing and narrative discontinuities that condition the nervous systems of young viewers to anticipate and eventually 'need' environments in which change is constant, rapid and extreme. Finally, consider the computer and on-line games that constitute a major global media for children and young people—media that share all the traits just enumerated and which inculcate, in addition, a keen sense of competition and yearning for control.

The effects of adding limited mass mediated experiences to the sensory diet in the first generations exposed to global mass media do not provide a basis for envisioning the effects of contemporary media diets on today's children and youth. The only certainty, at present, is that their sensory appetites and understandings of meaning and belonging are being systematically adapted to meet market imperatives for accelerating media consumption and for proportionately depreciating engagement with their immediate, natural and social environments.

This suggests, at the very least, that Bhutanese public culture and environmental policies will be served better by limited the overall time spent in media consumption, especially by children and youth. The realities of Bhutan's steady integration into the global economy, and its commitment to increasingly democratic governance, prohibit accomplishing this by restrictive legislation or by

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<sup>18</sup> The average American child, turning eighteen this year, will have watched 11,000 murders, killings or rapes in the course of his/her life in media consumption.

technologically constraining choices related to media consumption. In fact, any attempt to exert control over the public's consumption of media or other globally circulating commodities is likely to have the same ironic consequences that are associated with control karma in general—a pattern of outcome/opportunity in which mounting capacities for control are inseparable from ever more intensely experienced needs for control.

What is needed, instead, are policies and practices that will enhance the sensitivities and sensibilities needed for the Bhutanese people to realize the difference between taking advantage of what global media offer and being taken advantage of by them. They must, in other words, be well enough attuned to their own qualities of consciousness to perceive the onset of a relationally degrading hemorrhage (*asrava*) of attention from their own lives and life circumstances, and to have the wisdom and moral clarity to respond accordingly. This will mean taking the time to make a difference in how the relationships constitutive of their immediate situation are unfolding, sustainably appreciating or adding-value to them, becoming, thereby, ever more valuably situated.

There are no set recipes for how to ready the Bhutanese (or any other) people to avert the relational and environmental ravages of steadily accelerating rates of consumption and the erosion of attentive resources needed to service a growing attention economy. Public policy responses must themselves be improvised in attunement with local conditions, as they have come to be. Still, it is possible to specify the overall direction in which public policy must move in order to foster the sensibilities and sensitivities needed to realize GNH enhancing development.

Simply stated, conditions must be created and maintained within which each and every member of society is poised to offer something distinctively to others. This means sufficiently sustaining local ecologies of production to insure that each and every person is not becoming increasingly needy—the result of capitulation to the demands of market growth that radically compress the production-to-waste cycle

and that engender populations that are in almost continuous states of perceived lack or want—but rather increasingly needed. To be a needed person is enjoy *kusala* or virtuosity-developing capacities-for and commitments-to contributing to others. It is to enjoy the *bodhisattva* karma of having ever more to offer to others, which is also the karma of being ever more richly endowed and valuably situated. Public policy must be oriented to the accumulation, not of material wealth, but of the noble wealth that results from skillfully demonstrating compassion, loving-kindness, equanimity and joy in the good fortune of others.

Development along these lines involves conserving differences, for the purpose of insuring the continued viability of each member of a community to truly make a difference. It means carefully recognizing the limited value of equality and the supervening value of equity or fairness in the context of resolute difference, thereby conserving the conditions needed for realizing truly robust diversity or innovation-rich mutual relevance throughout the public sphere.

One concrete measure that can be taken to create opportunities for realizing aesthetically rich and enriching public spaces for meeting the basic human needs for education, sensory stimulation and a sense of meaning or belonging. Environments like this are natural in the sense that they cannot be constructed according to preordained plans; instead, they can only emerge through the free interplay of those to whom spaces are entrusted, within which they can assume an abiding place. The privatization of experience and the creation of hybrid private/public spaces that are critical elements in the realization of a functioning attention economy must be resisted, but, in order to be effective, the resistance must take the form of a positive expression of common purpose and shared meaning-making. Some forms of knowledge can be acquired in private. Wisdom cannot. And yet, it is wisdom that is needed to promote truly sustainable development and the realization of truly liberating human and natural environments.

# Attitude towards Mass Media and its role in promoting Environmental Consciousness: An Empirical Investigation<sup>1</sup>

*Tshering Dorji\**

## Introduction

Communication remains the most fundamental element of society and its progress. Therefore, the modern epoch of information technology - also known as the era of 'satellite communication' - necessitates mass media as part and parcel of human existence, experience, and endeavor. Through communication, members of a society share their experiences and knowledge, understand each other, and generate collective wisdom. The ever-expanding network of communication has overcome great distances and formidable boundaries. It has enabled the most essential and basic trait of human communication to thrive and flourish more splendidly. Today, various types of mass media enable people all over the world to interact and learn from each other at a tremendous pace. Communication, with the help of mass media, not only brings people but also communities together, thus contracting the globe into a village (McLuhan, 1964).

The frontier between mass media, individual and cultural transition has been the subject of investigation for many social scholars since the dawn of the 'information and communication age' (Lerner, 1958; Hagen, 1962; Schramm, 1964, Rogers & Shoemaker, 1971; Rogers, 1986; Alahari, 1997; McDonald, 2000). As mass media becomes an integral part of human societies, it, undoubtedly, brings varying

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degrees and natures of unprecedented changes to different societies and individuals in different ways. It is reported that initially, early studies on mass media communication were based upon the assumption that the effects of mass media communication were powerful, direct, and uniform. The insight into the importance of diverse societal needs and priorities, and individual differences in people's attitudes, values and other personality variables, prompted later scholars to cast doubt on its very theoretical foundation. This gave birth to a new theoretical framework considering societal and individual differences pertaining to their perceptions and responses. The new theory assumes that the effects of the media are selective and dependent on the characteristics of a society and individual differences, and is supported by many empirical findings (Peterson & Thurstone, 1933; Cantril, 1940; Schramm, 1979; Kazee, 1981; Lowery & DeFleur, 1988).

Thus, the impact of mass media communication could be perceived at two ends of a spectrum. At one end, the impact would be readily absorbed as a progressive socio-economic feature and the way of life that is characteristic of an individual and a society, without causing perceptible change in the way an individual functions or the way a society is structured. While at the other end, the introduction of an ostensibly innocuous technology would gradually result in cumulative imperceptible change to the unique way of life perfectly adapted and flourishing prior to the advent of mass media. The outcome of such a change would cause a major shift in the individual's attitude and outlook towards the social fabric and cultural setting that might underpin the essential values and convictions deeply held by the individuals and society at large. Bhutan, in particular, has a popularly idiosyncratic developmental approach with the ultimate aim to realize and maximize happiness for every citizen. The realization of such a big aim in a small country hinges comprehensively on four potential nuts and bolts of Gross National Happiness (GNH). Two of these are the preservation of Bhutanese culture and a sustainable environment. The importance of a sustainable environment

for attaining happiness is specifically reflected in government policy. It is implicit in this widely-endorsed approach that in the fruitful harmony that exists between nature and culture is rooted the eco-friendly approach to conservation of Bhutan's largely un-spoiled environment.

On the other hand, already the country's initiative to allow more pervasive force of media like cable television and the Internet, has been viewed skeptically by many from both inside and outside alike. The country, being a late starter in development, is fully aware of the undesirable impacts that the media have had on much larger societies. Furthermore, Bhutan, as a society with a strong oral tradition, instead of literary, is far more vulnerable to the negative impacts of media (Kuensel, June 1999).

Till now, no direct studies have attempted to assess the relationship between mass media and environmental awareness and certainly no such attempt has been made in the context of Bhutan. Perhaps, there is an embedded understanding of the possible role of mass media in general to function as a medium of national development. Nevertheless, commercialization of various forms of mass media might conflict with the priority of interest and may fail to fulfill the original noble goal of the mass media. It assumes even greater interest, given the circumstances, where cable television and the Internet were ushered into the country in 1999, when its national medium and institutional capability concerning the legal and social acceptance of mass media were still in their embryonic stages.

A decade later, as fluid as the culture is, the pervasive force of mass media is likely to expedite its evolution. Has the era of modern mass media introduced significant changes? What is the impact of mass media on people's attitudes? What is its role in affecting attitudinal transition towards environmentalism? How could media play a fruitful role in promoting environmental awareness? Such questions become pertinent since, not only does mass media serve as a medium for socio-economic and psychological development, but it can also play a vital role in promoting cultural and environmental integrity.

*Environmental Education, Mass Media and Development: Concepts, Concerns and Opportunity*

Critical to the realization of any novel idea of relevance and practical translation is the matter of creating and raising its awareness. In the domain of environmental issues, environmental education plays a key role in sensitizing people of the need and significance of any such programs, which are carried out to address environmental problems confronting them.

Environmental education increases public consciousness and knowledge of environmental issues and challenges. People profit, through environmental education, by gaining an understanding of how their individual actions affect the environment, acquiring skills that they can use to evaluate various sides of issues, and becoming better equipped to make informed decisions. Environmental education also gives people a deeper understanding of the environment, inspiring them to take personal responsibility for its conservation and restoration (Mukharji, 2004).

Environmental education also helps bring forth the traditional solution to address the modern environmental crisis by discovering the time-honored connection between nature and culture. This is particularly true in a traditional society where environmental consciousness is the upshot of a culture of associating various aspects of environment to a sacred space. The profundity of such a link, on which people's environmental consciousness is established, stirs tremendous awe and reverence for the environment and hence its preservation.

Mass media is an unfamiliar expression of a familiar medium of communication that was dominant in Bhutan, particularly in the form of radio and print media prior to the advent of more invasive forms of media such as TV and the internet. Even though, mass media has been present in the country for nearly five decades, it is not until the turn of new millennium, with increased accessibility to other pervasive forms of media, that it is able to gain fresh momentum and significance. So, the concept of mass media in the country is

old as it is new. Janowitz (1969) describes mass communications as comprising specialized institutions employing technological devices such as press, radio, film, etc., to circulate important subjects to large, diverse, and widely distributed audiences.

According to V. K. Narayana Menon (1981) (cited by S.P. Alahari, 1997), the notion of individuality is lost in the word 'mass' and various forms of media such as radio, television, newspaper, etc., report events intended for such an enormous number of listeners, viewers, and readers. The advances in telecommunication networks have revolutionized the function of mass media to serve wider coverage at a faster pace worldwide. This has provided an enabling environment for media in the new era to achieve its ultimate aim of reaching to a very large audience in Bhutan.

Mass communication, therefore, plays a crucial role in connecting the world to an individual, and provides opportunity for the individual to communicate with a wider audience. However, the downside of mass media communication, as national and international media ownership is more likely to be influenced by a few, is in its difficulty to maintain neutrality to what is being shared through different modes of public communications (McDonald, 2004; Ura, 2006). A classic example of the case in point can be illustrated by referring to often one-sided picture presented by mainstream western media of events unfolding in Balkan in 1999 and of the American war on Iraq (Kuensel, May, 1999a; BBC news, 2005).

It is reported by S.P. Alahari (1997), however, that one of the greatest concerns of many communication scholars is not so much the effect of mass media on people in general, but the potential function of mass media for bringing desirable social change and for achieving the developmental goals of nations. Several scholars set the stage on the dynamics of development and the role of mass media in achieving developmental goals.

Daniel Lerner (1958) emphasized the relationship between communication, urbanization, and modernization by considering that urbanization is an important step towards

enhancing media exposure, which in turn, increases political and economic participation. Everett F. Hagen (1962) also emphasizes the need for modernization as a prerequisite for development by expanding the mass media because he believed that the traditional values, as opposed to innovative personalities of more industrialized nations, are a setback to progress in the third world. This has, perhaps, inspired UNESCO in the sixties to set apart the underdeveloped countries on the basis of not fulfilling certain minimum standards for media structure and thereby emphasizing the need for expansion of media facilities (cited by J.S.Yadava, 1994).

S.S. Lowery and M.L. De Fleur (1988) argue that development, the process of modernization, and the growth of mass communication are closely linked. According to them, modernization is needed to trigger the culture of consumerism, which can be effectively achieved by the expansion of mass media communication. This is accompanied by a bandwagon of cultural change, creating a major shift from traditional values to modern ways of life.

Others, like Everett M. Rogers (1976), have, from very early on, understood the essence of wholesome development, taking into consideration both material and social advancement. He also highlights, the fact that the goal of development can be county-specific, depending on the priority of needs. However, it is clear that the Rostowin economic theories and the *laissez-faire* concept of market economy have tremendously influenced development and communication thinking in most developing countries (Yadava, 1994).

The problem of mass media in facilitating unrestricted growth in developing countries has been, therefore, due to direct export of western models and theoretical formulations in the developing countries (Ball-Rokeach and Canter, 1986). However, there is no question that growth is not necessarily a bad thing. It is a reality and an important feature on which human existence depends. The issue is not a discrete argument of growth or no growth, but rather the redefinition of the term growth in more sustainable terms. Such a

concept of growth demands a far-sighted vision beyond the typical planning period. In fact, sustainability calls for a comprehension of tomorrow that spans several generations into the future (Lein, 2003). This new paradigm of development, as opposed to the conventional model of growth, is now being increasingly appreciated at all levels in both developed and underdeveloped countries. The role of mass media has been redefined to place a new emphasis on development communication where media can be used to provide social and educational opportunities, such as family planning or environmental campaigns (Prasad, 1999). For making best use of communication for development, it is necessary to first clearly define the development objectives, and then accordingly set explicit communication objectives, and specific communication tasks and inputs to achieve the development objectives in a most cost-effective manner (Yadava, 1994).

In the light of the new paradigm of development, the integrated environmental planning concept is a compatible approach towards conservation which views the environment as spiritually renewing- a notion that characterizes the environment as an entity possessing ethereal qualities that are worthy of preserving simply because they exist (Lein, 2003). The essence of such an approach is ingrained in Bhutanese cultural integrity that permeates its consciousness and reflected in the country's sound environmental policy (BAP, 2002; Dey, 2002). Considered the 'the champion of the earth' for its sustainable environmental approach, guided by the profound wisdom of the 4<sup>th</sup> Druk Gyalpo, Bhutan has tremendous scope to maintain its environmental integrity. The preservation of the country's natural environment is not only because of its connectedness with social and cultural values but is also due to strong economic and ecological reasons that call for the environmental intactness (BAP, 2002).

The mass media may promise to enhance opportunities to keep abreast of modern events and experiences happening globally. On the contrary, the importance of preserving traditional values in the developing world is as crucial for

existence as modernizing ways of life in the developed world. Bhutan is probably the last nation to allow the introduction of mass media, particularly television and the internet. With more than thirty foreign television channels and with little restriction in viewing, the unquenchable grip of the media has almost completely seized the nation overnight. Cable television, with unrestricted exposure to sensational entertainment and biased information could orient people's intent and action (Ura, 2006). Numerous studies conducted suggest a significant effect of television on an individuals' attitude and behavioural traits (Williams, 1986; Doordarsha Study, 1994; Gupta & Nagar, 1994). McDonald highlighted the danger of television in Bhutan and the damage it could do to the nation's values and ideals. He emphasized that the introduction of captivating media like cable television is equivalent to upholding the culture of consumerism, which is counter-productive in a nation striving towards maximizing GNH and not GNP.

It is clear that media has had a dramatic effect on society at large by modernizing peoples' traditional values and attitudes. One of the challenges in the realm of environmental sustainability is to keep traditional attitudes and values alive by strengthening the link between environmental conservation and the conservation of cultural heritage (Bhutan: 2020). The media, on the contrary, could prove to be fatal to environmental consciousness by successfully obliterating the harmonious link that exists between nature and culture.

It is plain to see that mass media in any society cannot be prohibited, as the access to information has become an inalienable right of the individual. However, it can be noted that media is not necessarily an evil. As media brings many positive results in the industrialized world, so it could be tailor-made to serve Bhutan's need. Many advocate that, while media can be adapted to play a positive role, it has not been exploited to the fullest extent in developing countries. It is crucial to exercise appropriate discretion in the use of mass media, so that mass media resurrects and supports, and does not destroy culture and values undergoing rapid

modernization.

The paradoxical impacts of mass media on society and its people is a deep concern of His Majesty the King himself, who formally introduced television and the Internet in the nation, which is reflected in his public address during the 'country's silver jubilee celebration:

The introduction of TV and Internet in Bhutan today is a reflection of the level of progress that we have achieved. I would like to remind our youth that television and Internet provide a whole range of possibilities, which can be both beneficial as well as negative for the individual and the society. I trust that you will exercise your good sense and judgment in using the Internet and television.

- *Kuensel*, June, 1999 (b)

Environmental education is one of the tools to help meet the aims of conservation. The media could take up a crucial role by providing technical information about relevant environmental problems and possibilities, and about appropriate innovations (Singhal & Rogers, 1989). In an approach to create conservation education strategy in Nepal, the use of various forms of mass media, such as radio, television, newsletters, etc., has been highly recommended to reach out to the masses effectively in terms of cost, time and efficacy (Bhujju, 1987).

Reaching out to the public is essential to ensure sustainable development and environmental management, since the livelihood of people and the environment are symbiotically linked. To this end, the need for public awareness and participation has been regarded as imperative (Dey, 2002). Thus, it may be possible to inculcate a predisposition towards environmentalism through mass media by cautiously paving a middle path between preservation of traditional values and resistance to wanton modernization as a result of exposure to pervasive forms of media such as TV.

### **Problem**

While the preceding section discussed the impact of

unrestricted mass media on society, it also highlighted the potential of mass media communication to function in a way that can strengthen the link between traditional values and environmental preservation in the age of modernization. In Bhutan, before the advent of modern mass media, the promotion of environmental awareness was mainly through religious discourse centering on the Buddhist concept of *karma* (cause and effect) or through spiritual belief that the natural environment is a home to sacred deities, and, therefore, the destruction of such sites will disrupt the harmony that exists between the people and the deities. Perhaps, such consciousness and conviction enabled Bhutan to emerge in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as one of the biological hotspots on the globe for its abundant flora and fauna with comparatively few environmental problems.

In the age of 'info-communication' such an outlook, however, would not last as modernization accelerated by mass media gradually sweeps away spiritual reverence for the natural environment, and favors a consumerist attitude towards natural resources. The recent entry of cable TV and the internet in almost every Bhutanese house would further expedite the process of modernization with greater efficiency. Media imperialism, undoubtedly, is deleterious to the rich social and cultural foundation of Bhutanese society.

Today, as environmental concerns escalate with the ever-increasing rise in population, the need for turning the force (foes) of media to positive forum (friends) for environmental education is imperative. There is a proportional need to explore ways to heighten and deepen environmental awareness to be able to tackle the problem successfully. Particularly for Bhutan at the juncture of historic socio-political change, the rise of media could be employed as a development communication to play a crucial role to this end.

This calls for micro-level evidence on the role of media in environmental education in Bhutan, since various changes at the macro level could be a reflection of the changes at the individual level. It is possible that some of the changes, as a result of exposure to environmental education, might pervade

the larger structure of society and bring about desirable change. The research questions to be addressed here are: Has varying levels of exposure to media had an impact on individuals' environmental awareness? Would media be able to play a crucial role in environmental education?

However, the above questions need to be considered with the following preliminary information such as: What is the attitude of people towards media? To what extent has media influenced individuals' decisions? What is the role of various media in environmental education?

Against the above backdrop, the present study seeks to answer the above, and several other related, issues through empirical investigation. Sai Prasa Alahari (1996) has taken a similar approach through studying the relationship between modernism, alienation, and the behaviour of people towards media. The current study looks at the attitude of people towards media and its role, potential, and perception in environmental education.

### **Methods**

The present study was based on a primary survey of the respondents in terms of appraising their attitude towards mass media and its relation to the level of environmental awareness. A field survey was conducted with pre-designed questionnaires. The survey was undertaken on individuals living in and around Kanglung. Out of 251 respondents drawn on the basis of convenient random sampling, only 184 samples were used. The remaining was left out simply due to ambiguity in the information provided.

The study considered only the role of print media, that is, *Kuensel* and electronic media such as the Bhutan Broadcasting Service (BBS) - radio and television, which were assumed to have greater impact than other media forms, such as films, magazines, newsletter, etc. The programs broadcasted by electronic media and the contents of print media were reviewed randomly to assess the coverage on environmental themes. Based on the programs and the contents, relevant questions were designed to test the

awareness of respondents on environmental issues at national and international levels.

The main aims of the study were as follows:

- To assess the respondents' attitude towards mass media;
- To assess the influence of media on the respondent's decision-making;
- To assess the most important functions of the media;
- To investigate the perceptual and potential roles of existing media in promoting environmental education;
- To examine the relation between the perceptual role of media in environmental education and the respondents' level of environmental awareness;
- To discern the extent to which exposure to various media contributed to the respondents' environmental awareness;
- To investigate whether all the above issues differed between males and females.

In the present study, *the Attitude towards media* refers to the respondent's accessibility to any one form of media in question, such as *Kuensel*, radio, or television. It also included exposure to various kinds of media in terms of average time spent, the most important reason for using each form of media in question, and association between the times spent for various kinds and their educational level.

*The Influence of media* refers to the effect of various kinds of media on the individual's decision-making process and the association between the time spent for various media and its effect on the individual's decision-making.

*The Role of media* pertains to the respondent's perception of the media in creating and promoting environmental awareness. It also included the respondent's expectation of the potential role of media in environmental education.

*Index of Environmental consciousness* is defined as the level of environmental awareness of an individual.

Different aspects of mass media attitude pertaining to each of the three forms of media were investigated further. This has been done to investigate the patterns of mass media consumption among the male and the female sections of the population, and among the different educational groups as well. Firstly, the accessibility to various mass media was measured differently for each media. For example, the way in which the respondents obtain print media such as *Kunensel*, could be as follows: the reader might have a subscription or buy the paper on a daily basis or obtain it from the reading room/library/office. For radio and television, the accessibility was assessed in the form of ownership of one or more than one set, or on sharing with friends or families. The respondent's accessibility was separately assessed for the male and the female population.

Secondly, the respondent's exposure to each media was assessed among males and females. This was done using the data collected for the average number of hours per week that the respondent engages in reading *Kuensel*, or listening to BBS-radio, or viewing TV. An attempt was also made to find out their engagement in viewing the national channel, BBS-TV.

Thirdly, the respondents could be using various media for different reasons. Media could be used as a source of information, education, and entertainment, or any other reason. Various reasons for using each medium by each group of the male and the female respondents were assessed to find out the most important function served by the media.

Fourthly, the effect of various media used by the respondents on their decision-making was examined for the whole sample. Which gender group is most likely to be affected by the media in their decision-making process was also examined. This was measured on a five-point scale: one, being not affected at all; and five, being affected all the time. The association between the influence of various media on the respondent's decision-making process and their level of exposure to each medium was also investigated.

Then, various issues pertaining to the role of each type of mass media for environmental education were examined for

the whole sample. The role of various media for the sample of males and females was observed. The role of media includes two aspects: the perceptual role and the potential role that the media plays in enhancing environmental awareness. First of all, the respondent's rating of the role of various media in promoting environment awareness constituted the perceptual role played by each media. This was measured on a five-point scale: the lowest being negligible and the highest being excellent in terms of role in promoting environmental education. The actual user of that particular medium can rate this only after taking into account the content and the coverage of each media with regard to the issue.

Second of all, the potential role of the media was defined as the people's expectation of the possible role that the media could play in promoting environmental consciousness by extending coverage on environmental issues. This attempted to gauge the respondents' expectation of the potential role that the media could play in environmental education. The information is crucial, given the growing accessibility and the increased exposure to various forms of media in the country. Respondents' expectation of each media was assessed on a three-point scale: the highest being a definite expectation of the role of the medium and the lowest being ignorant of the potential role of the media in creating and promoting environmental awareness. Since this pertained to the respondents' opinion on the role that the media could play in environmental awareness, all the respondents, irrespective of actually having used the media or not, can mark the scale for the particular media. The results were analyzed separately according to gender.

An index of environmental awareness had been created to test the respondents' awareness on the environmental issues. It was evaluated on the basis of an environmental awareness scale. The scale consisted of a set of questions based on the environmental theme both at the national and international level. Some of the issues discussed in the questions would have appeared at one time or the other in the entire medium of the mass media considered for the present study (such as *Kuensel*, BBS-radio and BBS-TV

coverage). There was a set of ten questions which were designed to test the individual's level of knowledge on environmental issues. The scale was formulated on the principles of Bloom's Taxonomy for categorizing level of abstraction of questions that commonly occur in educational settings (Bloom, 1956). The scale, therefore, attempt to include questions to test individuals' environmental awareness at various levels such as recall, application, comprehension, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation.

The average score of the respondents was determined to discover the level of their environmental consciousness. An attempt was made to discover if there is an association between the role of media in promoting environmental education as perceived by the respondents and their level of environmental consciousness. This was done by correlating the individuals' scores on the index of environmental awareness with their rating of the perceptual role of the media in environmental education.

An attempt was also made to examine if the respondents' environmental awareness vary with their exposure to various media by comparing their environmental awareness scores with their average hours per week spent on each media.

The data was analyzed and the results determined, using appropriate statistical techniques to meet the aims of the study. The data on attitude towards mass media and the index of environmental awareness were scrutinized with the help of both descriptive and inferential statistics, such as correlation, to assess the relationship between the two (if any). The results are presented in tables and graphs to better demonstrate the findings.

### **Results and Discussions**

The total sample size of the current study consisted of 184 individuals ranging from 16 to 67 years of age. Around 70 percent were males and the rest were females. About 30 percent of the sample was from 16 to 20 years of age and 45 percent were from 21 to 25, while 15 percent fall under the age range of 28 to 30 years. The respondents were from

different educational backgrounds ranging from illiterate to primary school and from high school to degree and professional. Around 70 percent of the total respondents have either completed their degree or were undergoing one, and as few as 17 percent had either dropped out or were still doing their high school. Very few had either studied up to primary school (3%) or had no schooling at all (4%). Therefore, the majorities of the sample were made up of young people between the ages of 16 to 25 and were mostly undergraduates.

It was reported that the assumption of the impact of media to be direct, powerful, and uniform as postulated by the 'Magic Bullet Theory' is one of the conceptual setbacks to which earlier scholars in the field of media subscribed (Alahari, 1997). Such an assumption did not take into consideration the variations in terms of individual's need, personality, and other variables, as well as in terms of social groups. The apparent drawback with such a theoretical framework led to formulation of 'Selective Influencing Theory', which opines that the impact of media is neither direct, nor uniform, nor powerful but is selective and dependent on the nature and behaviour of people as an individual and as a group (Lowery and DeFleur, 1988). Therefore, to comprehend the effect of media and to explore its engagement in a positive manner requires categorical understanding of the way in which media functions and is consumed in each societal group. The groups may be formed on the basis of demographic characteristics such as age, sex, social status, educational background, etc. The present study sought to focus on the attitude towards media and its role in environmental awareness by a group that constitutes a largely similar age and educational background.

#### **Attitude towards Mass Media**

The present study focused only on the role of *Kuensel*, radio, and television on the respondents' attitude, and its relationship with environmental education. The attitude of the respondents towards media pertaining to different

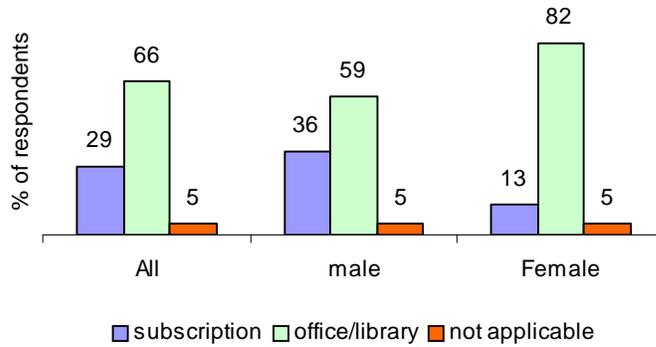
*Media and Public Culture*

mediums was described in the following sections:

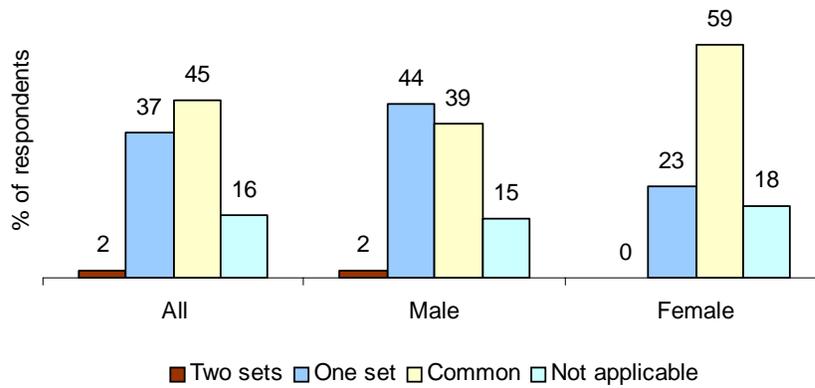
*Access to Media*

The accessibility to various media considered all the means that the user employed. These were different for different media. Graphs 1, 2 and 3 described various means of accessing *Kuensel*, radio and television respectively.

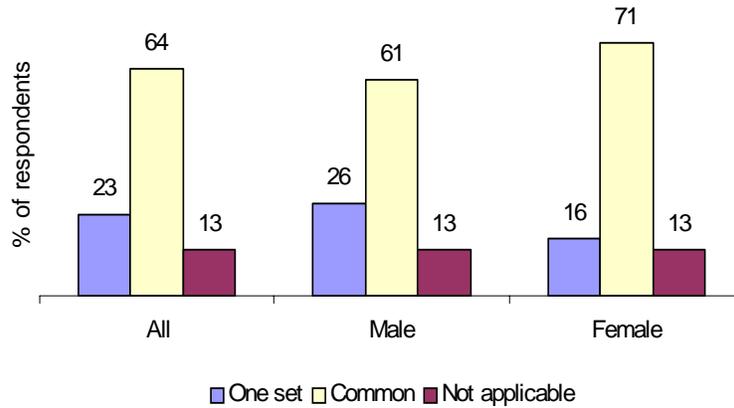
Graph 1: Accessibility to Kuensel



Graph 2: Accessibility to radio



Graph 3: Accessibility to television



It was found that the majority of the respondents (66%) read *Kuensel* either from the library, reading room or at the office. Around twenty nine percent of the respondents were regular subscribers of *Kuensel*. It was claimed that more than 5% of the total population did not read or buy *Kuensel* at all.

A majority of females (82% female: 59% male) were found to read *Kuensel* but did not have a regular subscription. A majority of males (36% male; 12% female), on the other hand, were regular subscribers of *Kuensel*. Equal proportion of the male and female population did not read *Kuensel* at all (5%).

With regard to the access to radio, the majority of respondents shared with their friends or family (45%). About two percent of the total respondents owned more than two sets of transistors; more than thirty seven percent owned only one set; around 16 percent did not own any.

The majority of females (59%) shared a radio set with their families and friends, while, the majority of males (44%) had their own radios. About twenty three percent of females had their own set and thirty nine percent of males shared with their friends and family. While about two percent of males owned two sets of radios, no females owned more than

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one set. More than fifteen percent of males and eighteen percent of females neither owned any radio nor shared with the friends or family. It can be inferred that more of the male respondents have access to radio.

It is reported that the majority (64 %) of the respondents shared a television with their friends and families. More than twenty three percent had their own television set and around thirteen percent did not own one at all.

Similarly, the majority of males (60%) and females (71%) claimed to share a television, while twenty six percent of males and sixteen percent of females had their own set. An equal proportion of males and females (13%) did not own any set at all.

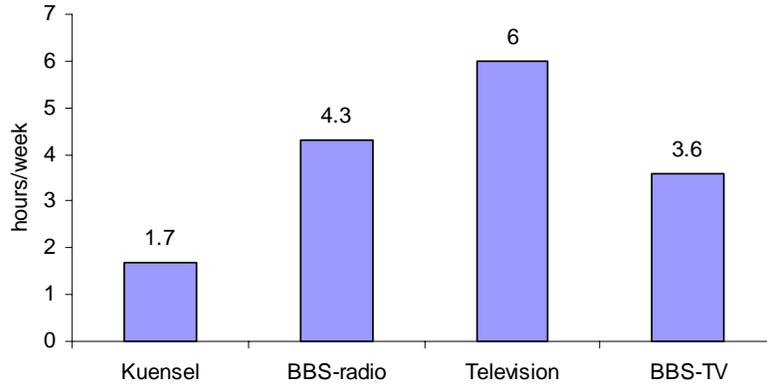
### *Exposure to Media*

An attempt was made to assess the exposure to various media in terms of the average time spent by the respondents per week on each of the media. The time durations were divided into different duration categories for the print media and same time duration categories for the audio and the visual media.

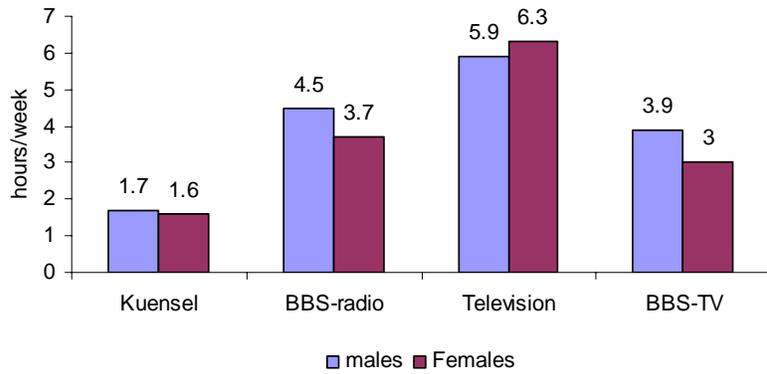
The average number of hours spent by an individual per week on each of the media is calculated and presented in Graphs 4 and 5.

Attitude Towards Mass Media

Graph 4: Average hours per week spent on various media



Graph 5: Average hours per week spent on various media according to gender



It can be seen that respondents on an average per week, spend almost two hours reading *Kuensel*, four hours listening to BBS-radio, three and half hours watching BBS-television and about six hours watching television. So it can be inferred that a comparatively greater number of hours per week were

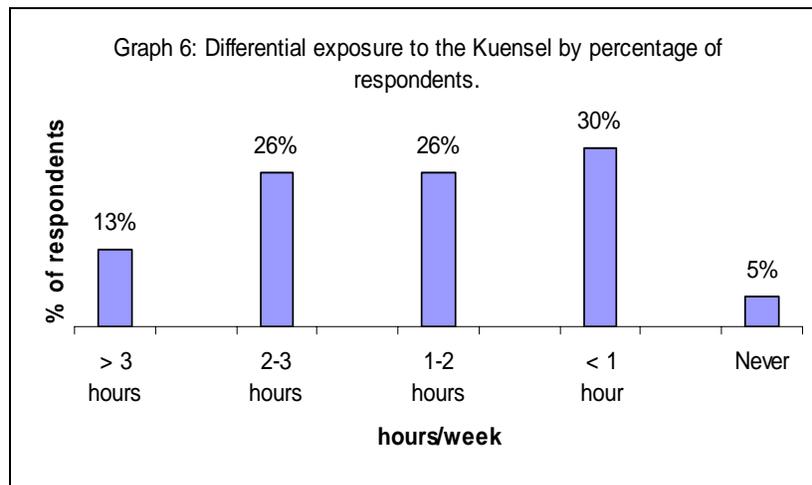
spent watching television, and since the time spent on television also includes the amount of time spent on BBS-television, it means more hours per week are spent specifically watching BBS-television. Given the fact that there is a circulation of two editions of the *Kuensel* a week, an average person spends less than an hour per week per issue.

The average number of hours spent in a week on various media was further examined according to gender and presented in graph 5. It can be seen that even though an almost equal number of hours per week are spent by both genders reading *Kuensel* and watching television, the males spent more hours in a week listening to BBS-radio and viewing BBS-television. This may be because a greater number of the male respondents have independent access to radio and television than their female counterparts.

The percentage of respondents falling in each time duration category is tabulated to find the differential time exposure across various forms of media. The results are summarized in the following Table 1 and 2, and Graph 6 and 7.

**Table 1: Differential exposure to Kuensel by percentage of respondents (number of respondents 184)**

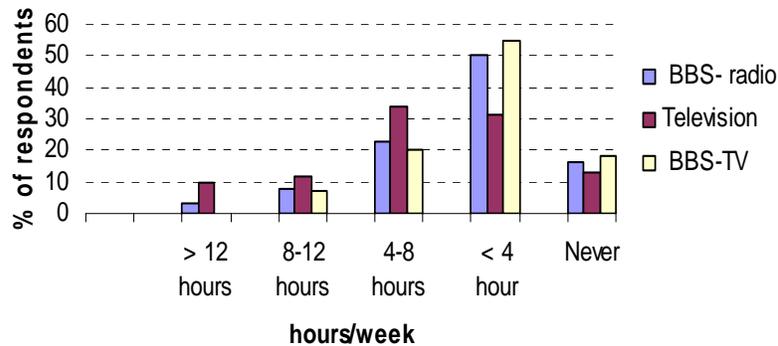
Number of hours per week	% of respondents
More than 3 hours	13
2-3 hours	26
1-2 hours	26
Less than 1 hour	30
Never	5
Total	100



**Table 2: Differential exposure to BBS-radio, and watching TV and BBS-TV by percentage of respondents (number of respondents: 184)**

Number of hours per week	BBS- radio	Television	BBS-TV
	%	%	%
More than 12 hours	3	10	0
8-12 hours	8	12	7
4-8 hours	23	34	20
Less than 4 hours	50	31	55
Never	16	13	18
Total	100	100	100

Graph 7: Differential exposure to radio and television according to percentage of respondents.



Although more than ninety percent of the respondents get access to *Kuensel* either through regular subscription, or through other sources, some variation existed in the time devoted per week to reading *Kuensel*. The respondents seemed to be equally distributed over different duration categories but relatively fewer respondents (13%) spent more than three hours a week reading *Kuensel*. Around eighty two percent of the respondents, irrespective of gender, spent less than three hours per week reading *Kuensel*. The remainder of the respondents read *Kuensel* for less than an hour per week, and about five percent do not read it at all. This is not surprising given the fact that the majority of the respondents are literate.

Time spent listening to BBS-radio, watching television, and watching BBS-TV was examined using the same point scale. It was reported that the majority of the respondents claimed to watch television at least an hour per week. There was a greater number of respondents who claimed to spend less than eight hours a week listening to BBS-radio and watching BBS-television, while slightly fewer claimed to view other channels for the same duration of time. Comparatively, more respondents claimed to watch television (22%) for more

than eight hours compared with the respondents who either listened to BBS-radio or watched BBS-television for the same duration of time. The number of respondents who tended to spend less than four hours per week watching BBS-television is greater than those who viewed television for the same period of time.

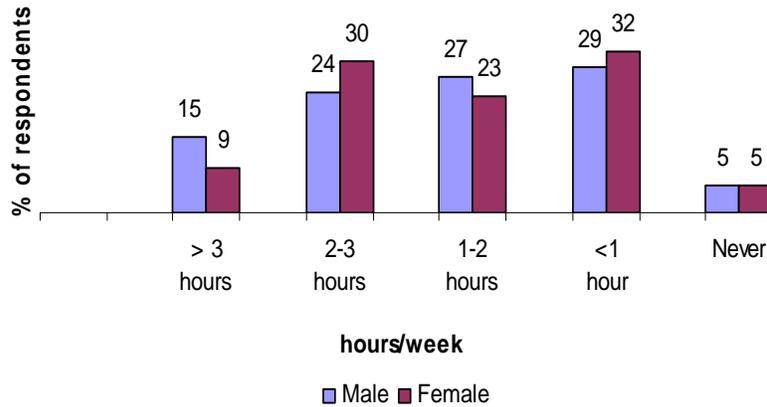
Basically, it can be interpreted that when the respondents have more time (> 4 hours/week), they seemed to watch television, but when they have less time (< 4 hours/week) the respondents either watched BBS-television or listened to BBS-radio. On the whole, the majority of respondents spent more time watching other channels of television while fewer listen to the radio or watch BBS-television. In fact, no respondents claimed to watch BBS-television more than twelve hours a week. This may be attributed to the fact that the broadcasting time for BBS-TV is not more than eight hours. The viewers would be kept well-informed even if they watch BBS-TV for at least four hours. Therefore, comparatively more respondents watching BBS-television less than four hours confirm the statement.

The exposure to each media was further dissected to examine the difference concerning the average time spent by males and females. The results are described in the following section and presented in Tables 3 and 4 and; Graph 8.

**Table 3: Differential exposure to the Kuensel according to percentage of gender (number of male: 128; female: 56)**

Number of hours per week	Male (%)	Female (%)
More than 3 hours	15	9
2-3 hours	24	31
1-2 hours	27	23
Less than 1 hour	29	32
Never	5	5
Total	100	100

Graph 8: Differential exposure to the Kuensel by percentage of gender.



**Table 4: Differential exposure to BBS-radio, and watching TV and BBS-TV according to percentage of gender (number of male: 128; female: 56)**

Number of hours per week	BBS-radio (%)		Television (%)		BBS-TV (%)	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
More than 12 hours	5	0	11	9	2	0
8-12 hours	8	9	12	12	6	4
4-8 hours	25	18	30	43	22	14
Less than 4 hours	47	55	34	23	51	66
Never	15	18	13	13	19	16
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

It can be seen from the table that an equal majority (95%) of both male and female respondents read *Kuensel* for at least an hour per week. Not much variation exists in the number of hours engaged per week in reading *Kuensel* between males and females, but relatively more males read *Kuensel* for more than three hours a week compared to females reading it for the same period. The proportion of males and females who read less than three hours a week is more or less equal.

With regard to radio, television, and BBS-television, the

majority of males were reported to use these forms of media for more than eight hours a week, compared to female listeners. In fact, no females listened to radio or view the BBS-television for more than twelve hours a week. Almost an equal proportion of males and females claimed to spend less than eight hours a week listening to radio or viewing television. However, the number of females watching BBS-television for less than eight hours per week is comparatively more than the males viewing it for the same duration of time.

There was not much of a difference in the number of the male and female respondents who never used any forms of the media.

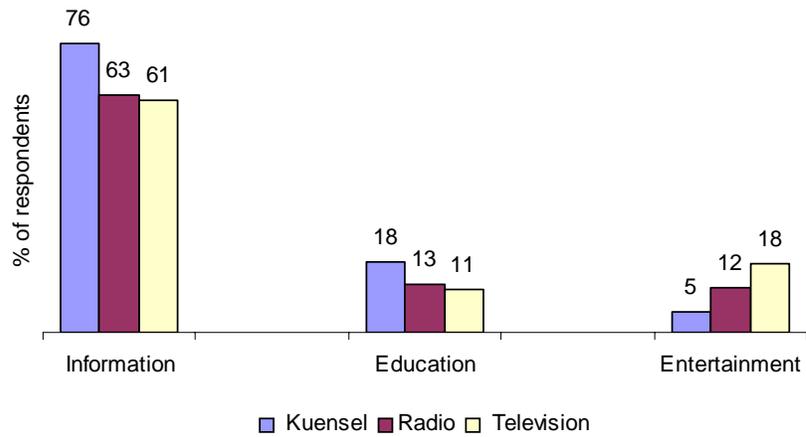
*Reasons for Using Various Media*

Respondents were asked to state their reasons for using each media. The reasons could fall into the following categories: information, education, and entertainment. Most of the time, any reasons would be relevant to the media in question. So the respondents were asked to indicate the sequence of relevance, if they found more than one of the above reasons to be true for a particular media. This was done to discover the most important reason for using each of the media. Table 5 and 6; and Graph 9 describes the result.

**Table 5: Most important reason for using various media (number of respondents: 184)**

Reasons	Reading Kuensel	Listening to radio	Viewing Television
	%	%	%
Information	77	63	61
Education	18	13	11
Entertainment	5	12	18

Graph 12: The most important reason for using various media



**Table 6: Most important reason for using various media according to gender (number of male: 128; female: 56)**

Reasons	Kuensel (%)		Radio (%)		Television (%)	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Information	77	75	65	57	59	64
Education	21	12	14	9	15	3
Entertainment	5	7	9	18	16	23

From the table above, it is clear that the majority of respondents considered information the most important reason for using each forms of the media. In particular, a greater number of respondents tended to read the Kuensel mainly for information. An equally high number of respondents claimed that radio and television were also important sources of information after the Kuensel. Only about eighteen percent of the respondents seemed to agree that the Kuensel is read mainly for educational reasons. However, this is higher when compared to the number of respondents suggesting that radio and television were used mainly for educational purposes. On the other hand, an equal number of readers (18%) believed that television was mainly viewed for entertainment, and less for educational purposes. About twelve percent of the respondents believed that the most important reason for listening to the radio is for entertainment. Education seemed to be regarded as the most important reason by a moderate number of respondents.

Information is clearly indicated to be the most important reason for using the various media in question, but males and females seemed to derive information differently from

different media. Undoubtedly, an equal number of males and females claimed that the most important reason for reading the Kuensel was for information. On the other hand, most of the male respondents reported listening to radio as the primary reason for information, while almost an equal number of female respondents claimed that information was the most important reason for watching television.

Almost twice as many males as females remarked that education, after information, is the most important reason for using the Kuensel, radio and television after information. Conversely, the majority of females seemed to claim that entertainment is the primary reason for using various media. It can be observed that the most important function performed by the media and the primary reason that the media is used is for information, followed by education and entertainment. However, using the different media in question as the most important source of information differed between the male and the female respondents. In general, the male respondents claimed it to be radio and the female respondents claimed it to be television, but when it came to the Kuensel, both genders agreed the newspaper was the most important source of information.

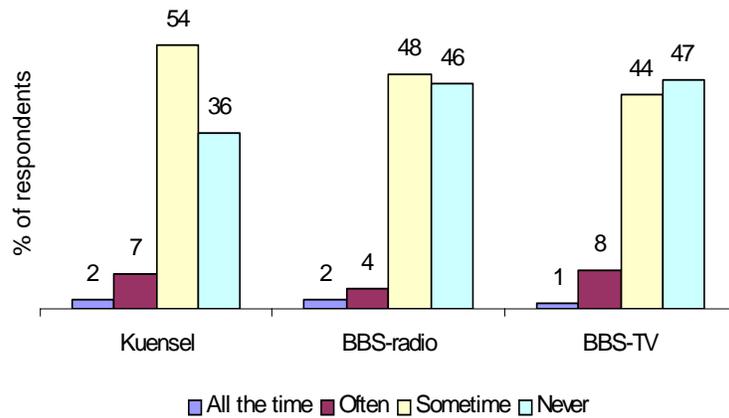
*Influence of Media on Decision-making*

The influence of the Kuensel, BBS-radio, and BBS-television on the respondents' decision-making process was examined by finding the number of times the respondents take a decision by what they read, see, or hear from various media. The results are summarized in the Table 7 & 8; and in Graph 10.

**Table 7: Influence of media on decision-making process  
(Number of respondents: 184)**

	Kuensel	BBS-radio	BBS- Television
Frequency	%	%	%
All the time	2	2	1
Often	7	4	8
Sometimes	55	48	44
Never	36	46	47
Total	100	100	100

Graph 10: Influence of media on decision-making



**Table 8: Influence of media on decision-making according to gender (number of males: 128; number of females: 56)**

Frequency	Kuensel (%)		BBS-Radio (%)		BBS-Television (%)	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
All the time	3	0	2	2	1	0
Often	6	9	6	0	7	11
Sometimes	57	48	50	43	43	46
Never	34	43	52	55	49	43
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Tables 7 and 8 revealed that the impact of *Kuensel* on the respondents' decision-making appears to be greater compared to BBS-radio and BBS-television, because only a few respondents were not affected by it in their decision making. The majority of the respondents were affected only sometimes by each of the media. Comparatively, the number of respondents affected only sometimes by *Kuensel* was more than the number of respondents being affected by BBS-radio and BBS-television. The number of respondents not affected at all by BBS-radio and BBS-television is more or less equal to the number affected sometimes by the same. Even though the number of respondents often affected by various media is relatively less, the number of respondents often affected by *Kuensel* and by BBS-television is almost double the number often affected by BBS-radio. This suggests that most of the time, *Kuensel* and BBS-television had influenced a greater number of people.

When the results were examined according to gender, the trend did not differ much, but the number of male and female respondents affected on different occasions appeared to show some variation. The influence of *Kuensel* on the males appeared to be greater as more males (66%) than females (57%) were affected by the same. The same was true for the number of males (58%) and females (45%) listening to BBS-radio. Conversely, the influence of BBS-television on females appeared to be more, as greater number of females (57%) than males (51%) seemed to be affected by BBS-television.

While there were few males who claim to be affected all the time by *Kuensel* and BBS- television, no females claim to be affected all the time by the same. *Kuensel* and BBS-television often appear to affect more females than males, but no females claimed to be affected often by BBS-radio. Although the majority of respondents were reported to be affected only sometimes, the influence of *Kuensel* and BBS-radio at times is more on the males than on the females. More or less equal number of males and females were only sometimes affected by BBS-television in their decision-making process.

The relationship between the average time per week exposed to each media and its influence on the respondents' decision making was examined. The results suggested a positive correlation between the influence of *Kuensel* ( $r = 0.35$ ), BBS-radio ( $r = 0.42$ ), television ( $r = 0.30$ ), and BBS-television ( $r = 0.28$ ) with the average time per week the respondents spent on each. This tended to suggest that the influence of media on individuals' decision-making is more with more exposure to each forms of media. However, the correlation value is not very significant.

This finding supports the characteristics of print and audio media described by Menon V.K. Narayana, who discerns the effect of print media and audio-visual media by stating that when an event is reported, people who listen to radio and others who view it on television learn of the event at almost the same time, while those who read of the event learn of it the following day. So the impact of radio or

### *Media and Public Culture*

television reporting is almost instantaneous on a large group of audiences. This cannot be more accurate in Bhutan's situation, where it used to take almost three days to get the only print media, *Kuensel*, and more than a week to get BBS-telecast for the reader and viewers in the eastern part of Bhutan. He further argues that television and radio reporting creates a feeling of a shared experience and a sense of participation in the event being reported. A newspaper, on the other hand, is limited to one reader at a time who is segregated for the few moments from the rest, and every reader reacts singularly to the reported item causing time delay in their reaction.

#### *Role of Media on Environmental Education*

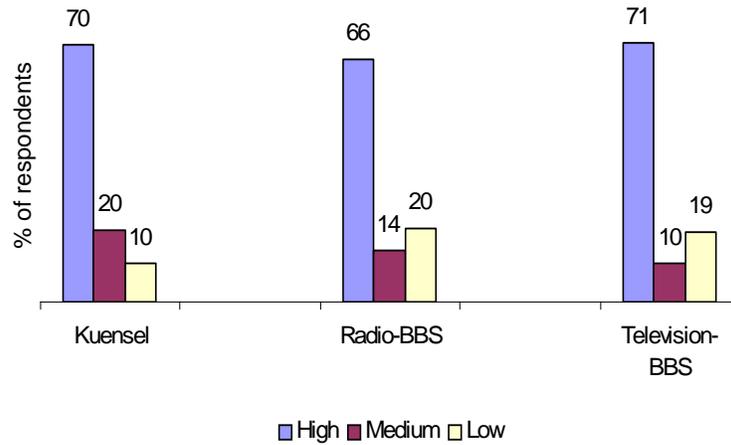
This section was an attempt to reveal the perception of the respondents and their expectations of each media to play a role in generating environmental awareness. The results were presented in two sections: 1) the perceptual role, and 2) the potential role of media in enhancing environmental awareness. Firstly, the individual respondents were asked to give the rating of the role of each media in promoting environmental awareness. This constituted the perceptual role of the media in environmental education. Initially, it was evaluated on a five-point scale but the responses were later divided into three categories for convenient comparison.

Secondly, an attempt was made to find the respondents' expectation of each form of the media in creating and promoting environmental awareness. This was done to find out the extent to which media could play a role in enhancing environmental education. Tables 9 and 10, and Graph 11 summarize the observations.

**Table 9: Perceptual role of media in environmental awareness (number of respondent: 184)**

	High	Medium	Low	Total
	%	%	%	%
Kuensel	70	20	10	100
Radio-BBS	66	14	20	100
Television-BBS	71	10	19	100

Graph 11: Perceptual role of media in environmental awareness



**Table 10: Perceptual role of media on environmental awareness according to gender (number of males: 128; females: 56)**

Media	High (%)		Medium (%)		Low (%)	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Kuensel	67	77	21	16	12	7
BBS-radio	64	70	16	11	20	20
BBS-television	67	79	12	7	21	14

*Perceptual Role of Media*

It is clear from the Table 9 that the majority of readers claimed that the role of *Kuensel*, BBS-radio, and BBS-television in promoting environmental awareness is very good. A moderate number of readers (20%) claimed that *Kuensel* played an average role in promoting environmental awareness, while as many as half the readers (10%) rated *Kuensel* very low for this. Conversely, most the remaining respondents believed that the role of BBS-radio and BBS-television for raising environmental awareness is below average, compared to the respondents who claimed that it is not.

Examination of the perceptual role of media in environmental awareness according to gender revealed that the majority of female respondents, in comparison to the male respondents, regarded *Kuensel*, BBS-radio and BBS-television as playing very good roles in environmental awareness. Interestingly, the majority of males, when compared to females, rated the role of each media to be moderate in contributing to environmental awareness. A similar trend existed when considering the role of each media

*Attitude Towards Mass Media*

as low concerning environmental awareness with the exception of BBS-radio, where the proportion of male and female respondents is exactly equal.

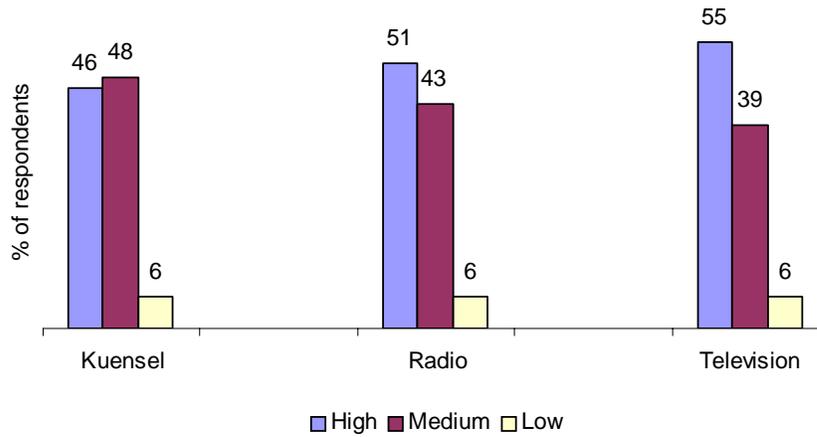
*Potential Role of Media*

The results of the respondents' expectation of the media in raising environmental awareness were categorized into three groups. The results are presented in the following tables and graphs.

**Table 11: Potential role of media in environmental education (number of respondents: 184)**

Reasons	High	Medium	Low	Total
	%	%	%	%
Kuensel	46	48	6	100
Radio	51	43	6	100
Television	55	39	6	100

Graph 12: Potential role of media in environmental education



**Table 12: Potential role of media in environmental education (number of males: 128; females: 56)**

	High (%)		Medium (%)		Low (%)	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Kuensel	53	30	42	62	5	7
Radio-BBS	55	43	40	50	7	7
Television-BBS	59	46	35	48	6	5

The majority of respondents answered that BBS-radio and BBS-television could play a very significant role in environmental education, while an almost equal number of respondents claimed that *Kuensel* could play a moderate to

high role for the same. It was also reported that fewer respondents did not have high expectations from each media to play a significant role in environmental education.

Although the majority of females perceived the role of various media in environmental awareness as high and the majority of males perceived the role of various media in environmental awareness to be moderate (Table 11), their expectation of the potential role of each of these media is just the reverse. Interestingly, the majority of the male respondents, in comparison to the females, were reported to regard the potential role of each media in environmental education as very high. While the majority of females, compared to males, claimed to believe that each of the media could play only an average or moderate role in environmental education, only a small proportion of the male and female respondents claimed that the media could not play a significant role in promoting environmental awareness.

*Index of Environmental Consciousness*

The level of environmental consciousness or awareness was assessed using a series of questions on environmental themes, evaluated out of ten. The respondents were divided into three categories:

- High environmental consciousness, including respondents scoring eight and above;
- Medium environmental consciousness, including respondents scoring between five to eight; and
- Low environmental consciousness, including those who scored below five.

The results are presented in the following tables and graphs.

**Total 13: Percentage of respondents with varying levels of environmental awareness (number of respondents: 184; number of males: 126; and number of females: 56)**

	High	Medium	Low	Total
	%	%	%	%
All	9	59	32	100
Male	12	58	30	100
Female	2	64	34	100

Table 13 and Graph 13 indicate that the majority of the respondents had average environmental awareness, and as few as nine percent of the total respondents were highly environmentally conscious. A greater number of the males (12%) are more environmentally conscious than females (2%), but the majority of the females (98%) showed a low to moderate level of environmental awareness, compared to the males (88%) with the same level of environmental awareness. Almost an equal proportion of males and females scored low on the environmental awareness index. This means that more males were highly conscious of the environment, but a majority of the females are moderately conscious. It can also be noted that one-third of male and female respondents are equally ignorant about the environment.

The average score of the respondents on environmental awareness was 5.3 and; those of males and females were 5.5 and 4.8, respectively. The score of the male respondents was slightly above average. The males on average are more environmentally conscious than their female counterparts.

The association between the respondents' perception of

the role of each media and their environmental awareness index was examined by correlation. It was observed that there is a positive correlation, but to a very low degree. This means that more environmentally conscious respondents seemed to perceive that the role of media in environmental awareness is positive. However, the correlation is not very significant. The correlation values for *Kuensel*, BBS-radio, and BBS-television are 0.3, 0.09, and 0.28 respectively. The picture is not very different when examined according to gender (with little variation). Both males and females showed weak positive correlation between their rating on the role of media in environmental awareness and their index of environmental awareness. The females ( $r = 0.41$ ) seemed to show slightly higher degree of correlation as compared to the males ( $r = 0.27$ ) in terms of their rating of the role of *Kuensel* and their environmental awareness. Even in the case of BBS-radio, females appeared to show a higher degree of correlation ( $r = 0.22$ ), compared to males ( $r = 0.04$ ). With regard to BBS-television, males seemed to show a slightly higher correlation with their environmental awareness ( $r = 0.31$ ) than females ( $r = 0.24$ ). This seems to suggest that a larger number of environmentally conscious female respondents believed that *Kuensel* and BBS-radio had, to some extent, enhanced their environmental consciousness. While a larger number of environmentally conscious males claimed that BBS-television has some role in the promotion of their environmental consciousness.

An attempt was made to discern the extent to which media exposure could play a role in influencing the respondent's environmental awareness. The respondents were divided into three categories depending on the number of hours they spent on each media:

High Exposure: including those respondents who spent more than two hours a week reading *Kuensel* and those who spend more than eight hours a week listening to BBS-radio and viewing television and BBS-television.

Medium Exposure: including those respondents who spend one to two hours per week reading *Kuensel* and those

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who spent four to eight hours per week listening to BBS-radio and viewing television and BBS-television.

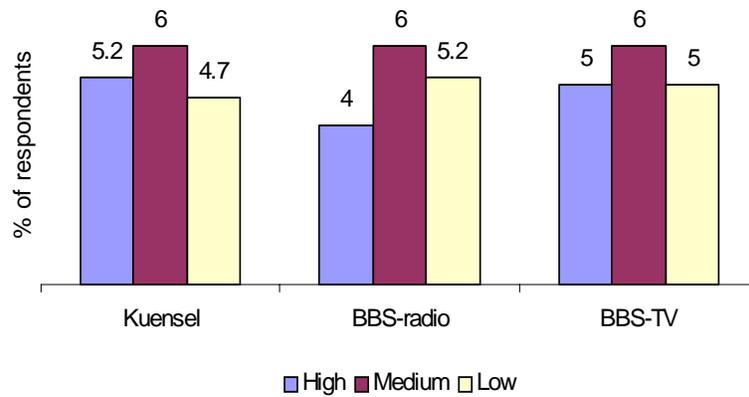
Low Exposure: those who spend less than one hour per week reading *Kuensel*, and those who spend less than four hours listening to BBS-radio and viewing television and BBS-television.

The average scores of the respondents' environmental awareness index and the differential exposure across each media were examined. The results are presented in the following section:

**Table 14: Association between the average score on environmental awareness and the differential exposure to each media**

	High	Medium	Low
Kuensel	5.2	6	4.7
BBS-radio	4	6	5.2
BBS-TV	5	6	5

Graph 15: Association between the average score on environmental awareness and the differential exposure to media



It can be seen from the table that the respondents with moderate exposure to *Kuensel*, BBS-radio, and BBS-television appeared to have high scores on the environmental awareness index. Those who are moderately exposed to various media are, perhaps, able to select and choose only some programs that were relevant to their interest. It can also be seen from the table that the respondents who spend more time reading *Kuensel* had scored high and those who spent less time on reading had scored low on the environmental awareness index. This shows that, in general, moderate exposure to each of the media (i.e. 1-2 hours per week for *Kuensel* and 4-8 hours per week for radio and television) had positive effect on raising environmental awareness. It can be inferred that the respondents who spend more than two hours per week reading *Kuensel* are certainly more environmental aware than those who spend less than one hour per week on *Kuensel*. However, those who have high exposure (more than 8 hours per week) to BBS-radio have scored less (4) than those who spend less than four hours per week listening to BBS-radio (5.2) on the

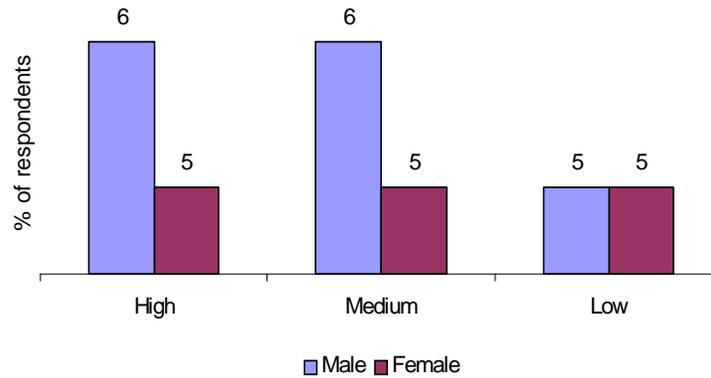
average environmental index. This seems to suggest that the time spent on media and the respondents' environmental awareness index was indirectly related, because the more time a listener spent listening to radio, the less effective the radio becomes in promoting environmental awareness. This could be either because the environmental coverage on the radio program is overwhelmed by coverage of other issues, or, as the respondents spend more time on radio, they are not likely to show any discrimination with regard to the programs they view. Certainly, some degree of exposure to a particular content may lead to the difference in the respondents' environmental awareness. Moreover, exposure beyond a limit may become ineffective. These findings need to be explored further

The environmental awareness index score across the differential exposure to BBS-television did not show any variation except for the moderately exposed group. The group of respondents who watched BBS-television for more or less hours per week scored identically on the environmental awareness index. It can be inferred that the role of BBS-television on environmental awareness does not seem to vary with differential exposure to BBS-television at the two extremes.

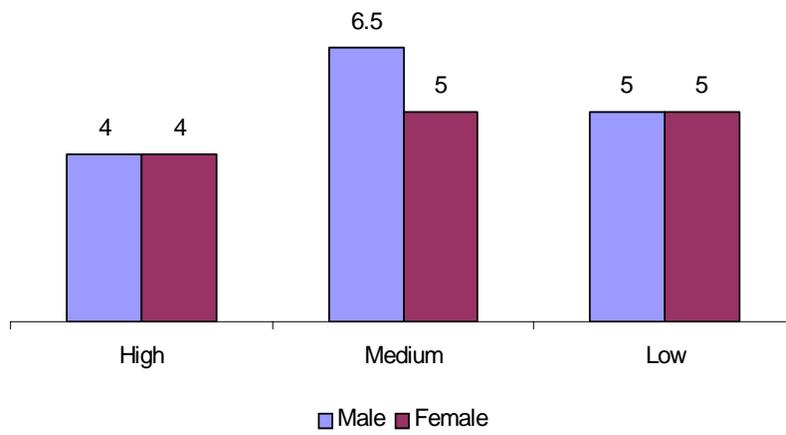
**Table 15: Average score on environmental awareness index for differential exposure to each media according to gender**

	High		Medium		Low	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Kuensel	6	5	6.0	5.0	5	5.0
BBS-radio	4	4	6.5	5.0	5	5.0
BBS-TV	5	5	6.0	5.2	5	5.5

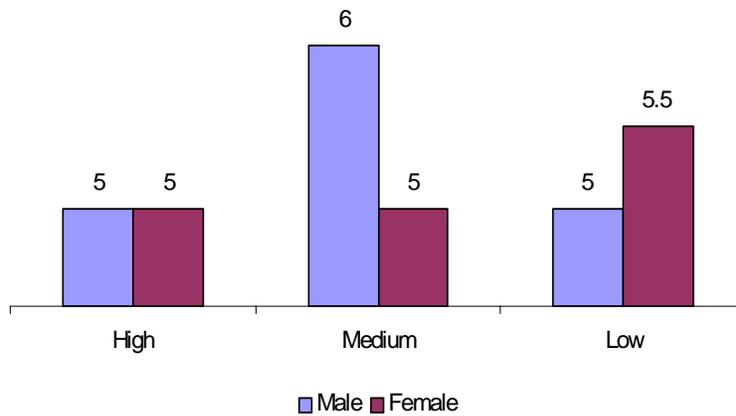
Graph 16: Average score on environmental index for differential exposure to the Kuensel



Graph 17: Average score on environment awareness index for differential exposure to BBS-radio



Graph 18: Average score on environmental awareness for differential exposure to BBS-TV



The average score on environmental awareness was further explored according to gender to investigate whether the environmental awareness score varies across differential

exposure to various media between the male and the female respondents.

It can be seen from the table above that the average score on the environmental awareness index for males with high exposure to *Kuensel* was higher than the average score for females at the same level of exposure. This was also true for those males who were moderately exposed to *Kuensel*. It might be that male respondents read articles concerning environment (if any) in *Kuensel* more often and remember them much more readily than females. It might be that the female respondents who read such articles consider them not so important to remember for later reference. The issue needs to be further explored.

It can be inferred that reading *Kuensel* for more than an hour a week appears to enhance the environmental awareness score of males more than females, while spending less than an hour per week on *Kuensel* does not bring any appreciable difference in the average score between the male and female respondents.

The average scores on environmental awareness of males and females belonging to marginally exposed groups to various media did not differ much. In fact, this is higher when compared to the average score of the respondents highly exposed to BBS-radio. This suggests that spending more than eight hours per week on listening to BBS-radio neither brings an appreciable increase in the average score of environmental awareness, nor any difference in the score among males and females. This does not seem to suggest that spending more time on BBS-radio proves to be counterproductive in terms of raising environmental awareness. It could be that respondents tend to listen to other programs when they have more time to spare to listen to BBS-radio. In terms of the groups that are moderately exposed to each of the media, the average score of males on environmental awareness is higher than that of females. This means that, generally, males who read *Kuensel* for one to two hours per week or listen to BBS-radio or view BBS-television for four to eight hours a week, have scored more on environmental awareness than females. This suggests that

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perhaps males who are moderately exposed to various media are able to focus on particular programs of relevance and enhance their understanding of the issue.

However, the average scores of both males and females who have low exposure to various media are not very low. This might indicate that the various media considered are not the only source that contributes to the respondents' environmental awareness. These media would have contributed to some extent, but it would be worthwhile to quantify how much each media contributes to enhancing individual awareness on environmental issues. This may be an area of further study by exploring the time and the content of the programs offered by various media on environmental themes, and the behavioural or attitudinal impact it has made on the respondents. This would not only indicate but also quantify the importance of media in environmental education.

### *Conclusion*

The present study was primarily aimed to determine the influence of public communication in Bhutan such as *Kuensel*, radio, and television, on individuals' environmental awareness by taking into consideration the varying degrees of exposure to each of the above-mentioned forms of media. It was also expected to assess the potential role of each media in creating environmental awareness by making an attempt to delineate the most important functions served by each media and the influence of each media on individuals' way of making decisions. The study was also aimed to investigate the above issues according to gender.

As background information to the above investigations, the information on the respondents' attitude toward media was collected and analyzed for the whole sample and among the male and female respondents.

The following is a presentation of what the study says:

**Attitude towards Mass Media**

*Attitude towards Kuensel*

A majority of the respondents are expected to have access to *Kuensel*, radio, and television but a greater proportion of them read *Kuensel* rather than listen to radio or watch television.

A typical respondent is likely to read *Kuensel* either from the office or the reading room in the library. He/she is most likely to spend on average, a couple of hours per week reading *Kuensel*. He/she mostly reads *Kuensel* for information. In fact, a greater number of respondents look at *Kuensel*, and not other forms of media, as the primary source for information. Although, *Kuensel* has an influence on the majority of respondents, the typical respondent is usually affected only sometimes in his/her decision-making by the events reported in *Kuensel*.

An equal number of male and female reads *Kuensel* mostly from the office or the reading room. Information remains the primary reason for reading *Kuensel* by both genders. While a female is as equally likely to be influenced only sometimes as she is never by the events reported in *Kuensel*, the male is likely to be influenced only sometimes.

*Attitude towards BBS-radio*

Sharing a radio set either with his/her family or a friend, a typical respondent is likely to spend four hours per week listening to BBS-radio, mainly for information. He/she is as equally likely to be affected sometimes in decision-making as never by the events broadcasted on BBS-radio.

While the typical female is likely to share a radio set with her family or friends, the typical male is as likely to own a radio set as share one with his kin. The typical male is likely to spend more number of hours per week listening to BBS-radio than his female counterpart. They are likely to listen to radio for information and both are seldom affected by the events reported.

*Attitude towards Television*

A typical respondent probably shares a television set with his/her friends or family, and devotes six hours per week watching television. In fact, the typical respondent spends a much greater number of hours per week watching television than using other forms of media. Given the fact that the time spent on watching BBS-television is also included on the time spent on watching television in general, the typical respondent is more likely to spend more time watching national television than other channels available. Generally, television is regarded more for its entertainment value than the others; notwithstanding, typical respondents regard information as the most important reason for watching television. A typical person is as likely to be influenced sometimes in his decision as never by the events presented on television.

A typical male and a female are likely to share a television set with their friends or families and likely to spend almost equal number of hours per week watching television, which is comparatively higher given the average time spent per week on the other forms of media. A typical male is likely to spend more hours per week watching BBS-television than the female counterpart. Both use television mainly for information and are as likely to be influenced sometimes as never by the events reported on BBS-television.

**The Influence of Media**

The impact of media on respondents' decision-making following an event reported was investigated. Although the majority of respondents were influenced at different occasions, the influence of *Kuensel*, in particular, was found to be more than the impact of television and radio on the respondents' decision-making.

Furthermore, the influence of *Kuensel* seems to be more on males than females but this did not differ much by gender with BBS-radio and BBS-television.

The influence of various media on decision-making seems to vary positively with the time exposed to each media.

This suggests that the more time one spends reading *Kuensel*, listening to radio, and viewing television, the more one is likely to be influenced by the events reported on the decision one makes.

The data on differential exposure to television and the impact of each media on the individuals' decision-making was examined to find whether there is any association. The results suggest a positive correlation but to a low degree. Although the amount of time exposed to various media was not a good predictor of the impact of each media on individuals' decision-making, it nevertheless showed some association. In fact, the correlation of the amount of time spent on listening to radio and the influence of events reported on radio was relatively stronger followed by *Kuensel*.

It has been reported that radio allows individuals to collectively react almost simultaneously to an event being reported, while print media confers the power of non-involvement where the individual reader is detached for that moment from the rest and reacts slowly (Menon, 1981). However, there is a rapid advance in information technology and the creation of on-line forums for almost every print media to facilitate an interactive forum and provide even better opportunity for people with access to these facilities to involve and participate in discussion. The *Kuensel*-online is one such example where the readers interact and participate with much-needed passion and honesty. Such form of on-line discussion is revolutionizing the typical non-involvement and time-delayed role of print media into an active and fully participatory form of media.

#### **Role of Media in Environmental Education**

This is attempted to investigate the relation between the perception and expectation of individual on the role of media in environmental education. It is indicated that the majority of respondents believed that various forms of media have played a positive role on environmental awareness. In particular, *Kuensel* and BBS-television was regarded to be playing contributory role in enhancing environmental

awareness. More women seem to be supporting the above statement than men. Slightly higher degree of correlation obtained for females suggest that their level of environmental consciousness is due to *Kuensel* and BBS-radio.

However, the potential role that media could play in raising environmental awareness was not quite as high. But it was not too low as well since equal number of respondents expected that media would be able to play moderate to highly level of role in environment awareness. This means that media could play a promising role in enhancing environmental awareness if media content is extended to include environmental coverage. This is a very good indicator of the prospective role of media in conservation effort, which relies closely on public awareness and participation. Conversely, females do not sound to be as promising as before in regarding the prospective role of media in environmental education as positive. This decrease in expectation of the media's potential role in environmental efforts is difficult to explain and needs further exploration.

#### **Level of Environmental Awareness**

Most of the respondents are only moderately environmentally conscious. Although there are more women who are moderately environmentally conscious compared to men, there are far more men who are highly environmentally conscious than women. Generally, it can be inferred that men are more environmentally conscious than women.

One major finding is that the groups with varying degrees of exposure to *Kuensel*, BBS-radio and BBS-television differed with regard to their environmental awareness score, which indicate that the differential exposure to each media is likely to raise environmental awareness in different ways. The groups that are moderately exposed to each media are likely to have higher score on environmental awareness index. Thus, it can be inferred that moderate exposure to *Kuensel*, BBS-radio and BBS-television is likely to improve the environmental consciousness among the user of these media. Even low exposure group did not

score very low on environmental score indicating that various media considered for the current study are not the only source that contributes to the respondents' environmental awareness

Examination of this fact between genders reveals that, generally, males with moderate exposure to media scored higher on environmental awareness index than females.

### **Concluding Remarks**

With most of the respondents aged between 16 to 25 and coming from diverse experiences and places all over Bhutan, the current sample is more representative of the younger generations: a very significant player in the future of the country. It is clear from the study that information is the major gratification for using various media considered in the study. This shows that most of the youth are information-oriented in using various media.

The study has provided evidence that the influence of media on decision-making is quite significant with most of the respondents affected at least sometimes by the events reported. There is also an indication that this influence is likely to increase with the time exposed to media.

A perceptible effect of differential exposure to media on individuals' environmental awareness is also visible. The study has provided evidence that moderate exposure to television is likely to enhance people's environmental attitude and outlook.

The study also indicated an optimistic expectation of the role that media could play in environmental education by extending coverage on environmental themes. Therefore, suggesting a tremendous potential for media to foster an affinity for environmentalism.

These findings from the study further suggest that the risks which the country took in opening itself to the influx of mass media could be turned into the opportunities for reinforcing the link between the environmental preservation and the cultural heritage, which underpins the guiding principles of environmental conservation in Bhutan.

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## **Geographical Information System –As a Media Tool for Promoting Sustainable Development vis-à-vis Environmental Conservation**

*Dr. Pankaj Thapa\**

Sustainable development vis-à-vis environmental conservation is today recognized as the key to the present and future welfare and survival of the global community. The present day media-dominated world plays a key role in informing the public, influencing public opinion and in setting public agendas. Media is no doubt a powerful tool and multiplier for disseminating knowledge and information, and achieving the goals of sustainable development and environmental conservation. The launching of “Google earth” ([www.earth.google.com](http://www.earth.google.com)) – a web based Geographical Information System (GIS) service provider, and the distribution of Free and Open Source Software (FOSS) have fairly democratized the accessibility to the GIS and enhanced its applicability as a powerful media tool. GIS may now not necessarily be considered as a highly sophisticated and specialized system, needing large capital investment for the procurement of hardware and software components, and requiring a great deal of technical and operational skills. The dissemination and usage of resource data from satellites, sharing of maps and other information through the internet and the recent development in the GIS embedded technology, have further revolutionized the way in which information is stored, analyzed, accessed, and disseminated.

There is no doubt that one of the most important prerequisites for sustainable development is the availability of accurate, reliable, up-to-date and standard data on natural and cultural resources of the country. Such data/information

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is required at various levels for different purposes, for example, a tourist who needs to know the location and direction of a tourist spot; demographers need information on the total number, distribution and composition of the population; industrialists need to know the best location to establish an industry; agriculturalists, foresters, soil scientists, environmentalists, policy makers and planners all need data and other vital information to chalk out the development activities and conservation strategies to achieve sustainable development.

Therefore, building a strong, reliable, accurate, and easily accessible micro-level database system should form a major component of decentralization. Such database infrastructure will facilitate participatory planning and decision making at the grass root level. GIS, aided with remote sensing data, Global Positioning System, and other media for information collection and diffusion, can play an effective role in the storage, retrieval, analysis and sharing of data. Its usage can be as simple as providing readers and viewers with maps that give context to the news of a journalist or as complex as creating an earthquake risk zonation model.

The author of this article is highly confident that GIS can play a major role as a media tool for gathering, storing, disseminating, reporting, analysing and sharing of quantitative and qualitative data, and other vital information about the country's natural and cultural resources. This would not only facilitate the process of decentralized planning as an approach to sustainable development vis-à-vis environmental conservation, but would also be an important aid during natural disasters and other emergencies.

### **Introduction**

Conservation of biodiversity and the sustenance of the globe's growing human population is one of the great challenges faced by the present generation. The two are inevitably linked as economic development impinges upon the biota, while at the same time the biosphere provides essential resources for human well being. In this context "Development that meets

the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”,<sup>1</sup> or what is commonly known as ‘sustainable development’, is seen as the best way to tackle these challenges. The report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development<sup>2</sup> suggests the creation of a global mountain database, is vital for launching programmes that contribute to the sustainable development of mountain ecosystems. Some of the major objectives of the programme are to: create and strengthen the communications network and information system; evaluate environmental risks and natural disasters; build an inventory of different forms of soils, forests, water use, and crop, plant and animal genetic resources; identify hazardous areas that are most vulnerable to erosion, floods, landslides, earthquakes, snow avalanches and other natural hazards.

It is a well-accepted principle that appropriate data and information are required to underpin the complex decision-making needed to conserve biodiversity and attain sustainable development. Planning and management to conserve biodiversity must deal with the distribution of these ecological resources through space and time, at a scale commensurate with that imposed on the landscape by human land use and resource extraction.<sup>3</sup> The loss of biodiversity can be considered as a symptom of failure to implement the process of sustainable development and vice-versa. The progress and development of societies are evaluated by

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<sup>1</sup> Brundtland, G. (ed.) 1987: *Our common future*: The World Commission on Environment and Development, Oxford University Press

<sup>2</sup> Agenda 21: Chapter 13, Managing Fragile Ecosystem: Sustainable Mountain Development, Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, 3-14 June 1992. For full details see:  
<http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/documents/agenda21/english/agenda21chapter13.htm>

<sup>3</sup> Brendan G. Mackey: The Role of GIS and Environmental Modeling in the Conservation of Biodiversity. Available from:  
[http://www.sbg.ac.at/geo/idrisi/gis\\_environmental\\_modeling/sf\\_papers/brendan\\_mackey/mackey\\_paper.html](http://www.sbg.ac.at/geo/idrisi/gis_environmental_modeling/sf_papers/brendan_mackey/mackey_paper.html) (Accessed 21 April 2006)

comparing the past with the present condition of the overall social, cultural, economic and environmental standards. Accurate, up-to-date, and reliable data/information about the country's natural and human resources is therefore the prerequisite for analyzing and monitoring the achievements, and for developmental planning. This is where GIS can play an important role as a tool for promoting sustainable development vis-à-vis environmental conservation.

Environmental conservation and sustainable development has been a major aspect of the Five Year Plans in Bhutan, and are also important components of Gross National Happiness (GNH). The Kingdom of Bhutan has received international acclaim for its commitment to the maintenance of her biodiversity and places environmental conservation at the core of development strategy. The vision of happiness, peace and prosperity clearly states that the long commitment to the maintenance of biological diversity and productivity is rooted in the understanding of the importance of forest systems to the survival strategies of remote and isolated communities, beliefs and customs, and understanding of sustainable development.<sup>4</sup> The dynamic leadership of His Majesty and the prevalence of strong traditional values have so far played a crucial role in the preservation of country's rich biodiversity. However, with the ongoing process of decentralization, the responsibilities and powers to maintaining the ecological resources and the overall environment will be vested in local communities, and will also lead to grassroots level planning and management of the resources. A sound database and overall information about the location, quality, and quantity of the country's natural and human resources is therefore the prerequisite for the conservation of biodiversity and for planning for a sustainable future.

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<sup>4</sup> Ministry of Planning 1998, RGB, Bhutan 2017: *A Vision for Happiness, Peace and Prosperity*, p. 35

*GIS and the Information & Communication Technology (ICT)*

The dramatic acceleration in the development and use of information and communication technologies during the last few years has set in motion a worldwide process of transition from the 'industrial' to the 'information society'. Moreover, individuals, groups and communities will need to develop not only new tools of analysis but also very different mentalities and attitudes in order to adapt to the emerging 'new' civilization based on information and knowledge.<sup>5</sup> ICT is a very broad term that includes radio, television, telephone networks, satellite communication and the latest internet system, which can be used as information-handling tools. It is true that these technologies play an important role in gathering, storing, and disseminating information about our environment and resources. However, its use is more for social services, entertainment, and exchange of information, which may not necessarily be related to the environmental conservation or sustainable development. But, the role of GIS as an important component of ICT is already established, and there are ample research and practical applications in various disciplines across different countries to confirm GIS as an analytical device that is especially configured to handle spatial information and/or as an information technology, as a (mass-) media.<sup>6</sup>

The importance of information system has been clearly highlighted in the vision statement, which states that "greater priority must also be accorded to the development of the information system required for decision making and development planning".<sup>7</sup> Christopher B. Faris in his article "Information and Communications Technology and Gross National happiness – Who Serves Whom?" describes the ICT

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<sup>5</sup> UNESCO and an Information Society for All.

Available from: <http://www.unesco.org/webworld/telematics/gis.htm> (Accessed 3 April 2006).

<sup>6</sup> Hans Skov, Petersen, *Defining GIS – Assessment of ScanGIS*. Available from: <http://www.scangis.org/scangis2003/papers/31.pdf> (Accessed 8 May 2006).

<sup>7</sup> *Op cit*, Ministry of Planning 1998, p.37.

as a powerful engine for accelerating and promoting economic and societal development, preservation of cultural heritage, managing the environment, understanding issues like biodiversity and climatic change, monitoring ecological conditions, and mitigating the effects of natural disasters. His study reveals that the ICT has significant potential to advance Bhutan's progress towards the goal of GNH.<sup>8</sup>

In the past few years, Bhutan has witnessed a rapid growth in the application of ICT. Almost every sector, i.e. government, academia, corporate, non-profit, and non-governmental, are involved in building their respective ICT infrastructure. Many of the technical requirements for the establishment of GIS database already exist in the country, and some of the departments have already procured and started utilizing GIS in their respective fields. However, very little scientifically sound research has been carried out concerning the actual impact of ICT, novel technology required to meeting the developmental needs and methodologies that lead to success or failure of ICT projects. Moreover, the approach in the application of GIS has been somewhat isolated and centralized. An integrated and decentralized information system and a firm policy framework to strengthen the collection, authentication, and sharing of this information, and scientific research will definitely assist in proper planning and conservation of the country's natural resources.

#### *What is GIS?*

In its most basic form, GIS refers to computer-based systems for automation, storage, retrieval, analysis, and presentation of geographically related information. It is the ideal tool for extracting the patterns and trends inherent in location-based information. GIS is a technology that manages, analyzes, and

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<sup>8</sup> Christopher B. Faris: *Information and Communications Technology and Gross National happiness - Who Serves Whom?* Gross National Happiness and Development, edited by Karma Ura & Karma Galay. CBS, 2004. pp. 140 - 173.

disseminates geographic knowledge.<sup>9</sup>

Peter Burrough defined GIS, as “a powerful set of tools for collection, storing, retrieval at will, transforming, and displaying spatial data from the real world”.<sup>10</sup> “A main objective of GIS is to allow the user of the system to interact vicariously with actual or possible phenomena of the real world.”<sup>11</sup>

The definition and approach to GIS at the initial stages of its development was initially seen purely as quantitative and data driven technology. It was only during the nineties that the awareness of the social aspects of GIS became more and more articulated. As of today, GIS serves as a main vehicle for communication, and plays a significant role in influencing people’s perception of the world. Hrishikesh Samant, the Sr. Associate Editor of *GIS Development*, in his article “The world in a window...Google Earth”, describes how web based GIS service has popularized the use of geospatial data, which can be used for a plethora of activities.<sup>12</sup> Its application involves site selection, investment for commercial real estate, architecture/engineering, urban planning, infrastructure maintenance, defense/intelligence, emergency planning, and location context for world events.<sup>13</sup> Google Earth gives the media critical tools for understanding and relating the story in real time. Its services include visual displays of fly-throughs and perspectives for both on-air use and print applications; in-depth earth data including over 100 global

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<sup>9</sup> Bonnie Bracey Sutton: *Geography Matters: GIS*, Available from: <http://www.digitaldivide.net/articles/view.php?ArticleID=493> (Accessed 19 Nov 2005)

<sup>10</sup> Burrough, P. 1986: *Principles of Geographical Information Systems for Land Resource Assessment*. Clarendon Press, Oxford, p. 6

<sup>11</sup> Mark, D.M. 1989. Cognitive Image-Schemata and Geographic Information: relation to the user View and GIS Interface. *Proceedings, GIS/LIS '89*, Orlando, p. 1.

<sup>12</sup> Hrishikesh Samant, Saurabh Mishra: *The World in a Window...Google Earth*, *GIS Development*, The Asian GIS monthly, November 2005, vol.9, issue 11, pp. 16-22.

<sup>13</sup> For details see <http://earth.google.com/industries.html>

cities in high resolution; and valuable data overlays such as the locations of airports and political boundaries.<sup>14</sup> With the launching of 'google earth'<sup>15</sup> and the availability of other internet-based software, GIS as a technology has come to a point in its development where its role as a media tool is a profound feature. GIS can now be considered a media tool that can effectively handle and communicate geographic information to the masses and assist in attaining sustainable development vis-à-vis environmental conservation.

Thus, with the ever expanding use of GIS and mapping-related applications, it becomes increasingly clear that this technology is well established as a strategic element of our information technology infrastructure and subsequently, the decision making process. GIS provides a particularly valuable framework for managing both human and natural activities because it facilitates the integration and analysis of complex data, making it readily accessible to scientists, planners, and the general public. The GIS framework allows the assimilation of physical measurements, analytical methods, and computer models into a uniform system that allows analysis and maintenance of workflows and perpetuates sustainable development. Taken as a whole, GIS is improving our understanding of the natural processes of our planet, at both the micro and macro levels. GIS helps to increase efficiency, reduce costs, and promote better decision-making.<sup>16</sup> Sui and Goodchild in their guest editorial column "GIS as media" provide a very explicit example. They state that the "...latest development in GIS have convinced us of the need for new conceptualizations", and further that "...the complex relationship between GIS and society can be better

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<sup>14</sup> For details see <http://earth.google.com/media.html>

<sup>15</sup> Available from: [www.earth.google.com](http://www.earth.google.com)

<sup>16</sup> Jack Dangermond (President, ESRI): *GIS: Helping manage our world*. Available from: [http://www.gisdevelopment.net/magazine/years/2005/dec/26\\_1.htm](http://www.gisdevelopment.net/magazine/years/2005/dec/26_1.htm) (Accessed 26 November 2005)

understood if one conceives of GIS as new media".<sup>17</sup>

### ***Components of a GIS***

There are four basic components of a GIS. They are:

*Hardware:* The hardware components of GIS include input, storage, and output devices, such as computer, disk/tape drives, scanner/digitizer, printer/plotter, and Geographical Positioning System (GPS).

*Software:* Software refers to programmes that manage the functioning of the computer and determine the task it can perform. There are wide ranges of software, which can perform simple cartographic tasks to multiple raster/vector analysis. The choice of the software depends on the type of data to be handled, the purpose to be accomplished, and also the budget allocation.

*Database:* Database can be generated from existing paper maps, field surveys, satellites images and aerial photographs, sensors, GPS, etc. Advanced GIS software can handle text, tables, graphics, video and most other data formats. The quality of the result that the software and hardware produces depends on the accuracy, relevance, and the overall quality of data that is fed to the computer.

*Organizational Setup:* The above three components of GIS govern the way in which geographical information can be handled but they do not of themselves guarantee its success. In order to be used effectively, the GIS needs to be placed in an appropriate organizational context. Therefore it is equally important to have a multidisciplinary team of experts, managers, planners, and a strong institutional framework and sound policies to make best use of this technology.

### **Latest Developments in GIS Technology**

GIS offers immense opportunities to all societies and

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<sup>17</sup> Sui, D.Z. and Goodchild, M. 2001. GIS as media? Guest editorial. International Journal of Geographical Information Science. Vol. 15, No. 5, 387-390.

individuals as a universal way of accessing and disseminating information. The technology can be easily acquired and adapted with appropriate resource mobilization, and provides immense scope in its utilization and expansion in almost all disciplines. The GIS industry has perhaps experienced three big changes in the recent years, namely: i) GIS awareness ii) new computing technologies for internet, and iii) internet GI Services users and providers. Along with these three big changes, in both academic research and commercial markets, the new pretty face of internet GIS will attract more people to use it and it will transform the way people live, work, and behave.<sup>18</sup>

### *Embedded GIS*

Embedded GIS refers to the geographic data and functionalities embedded into other systems and applications. This could be an application within a web browser, functions embedded within word processing documents and spreadsheets, or mapping provided within applications.<sup>19</sup> A.R. Dasgupta, the distinguished professor in the Bhaskaracharya Institute for Space Applications and Geoinformatics, (Ahmedabad, India) identifies three approaches to embedding technology.

### *Embedded Applications in GIS*

All GIS software provides customization tools to automate GIS functions through scripts. These could also include screen design tools to construct menus to enable a visual interface. The GIS and query functionalities are hidden behind the visual menu system which enables the user to interact with the system and invoke the query functions without knowing the GIS commands.

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<sup>18</sup> Ming-Hsiang Tsou: *Recent developments in Internet GIS*. Available from: [http://www.gisdevelopment.net/technology/gis/techgis\\_002.htm](http://www.gisdevelopment.net/technology/gis/techgis_002.htm) (Accessed 5 May 2006)

<sup>19</sup> Jian Kang Wu: *Embedded GIS - An Overview* in GIS Development, February 2006 Vol.10, Issue 2, p.28

*GIS Embedded in Applications*

The most common example of this kind of embedding is Web GIS. The web browser is used as the interface and HTML and XML extensions are used to serve up GIS content. By adding elements of GPS and communications a very powerful embedded application can be developed. These applications fall under the category of tele-geoprocessing. Vehicle tracking systems have been developed using these technologies.

*Device Embedded Geographical Applications*

This is the emerging area of development and involves a level of ubiquity already achieved in other IT applications. It calls for a high degree of integration of devices, software and geographical information in to what is termed as 'Portable Spatial Information technologies'.

GIS have become ubiquitous and embedded GIS is the next evolutionary spatially enabled technology for the common people. Embedded GIS have further enhanced the usefulness of the mainstream application and facilitates the integration of spatial information with the IT infrastructure, and makes intelligence about location accessible to more business applications, resulting in better information, and agile decision making.

Another important development in the field of GIS is the Free and Open Source Software (FOSS), i.e. software whose source code is openly accessible, whose ownership may be copyright but which includes collaborative development and/or adoption. FOSS and initiatives have become increasingly popular and dynamic over the past decade. They protect intellectual property through copyright, yet foster sharing, distributed development, bug-fixing, training, support customization, etc. Thus, the freely available internet based GIS software has gained much attention from the geoinformatics community and has created new opportunities

and benefits to a wider audience.<sup>20</sup>

### **Role of GIS in sustainable development and environmental conservation**

GIS plays several different yet complementary roles in relation to sustainable development and environmental conservation. GIS provides a means of converting spatial data into digital form that can then be stored, retrieved, displayed, manipulated, modified, analysed, and reproduced quickly in a new format, available for either visual display or hard copy reproduction.

GIS can be used for constructing models for analyzing trends and identifying factors that affect them and to simulate the effect of a specific process over time for a given scenario. Such models can also be used for environmental impact assessment or for displaying the possible consequences of planning decisions or projects that affect resource use and management.

It can assist policy makers and planners to make appropriate plans for sustainable development, for example, to decide on the best potential sites for growing a certain cash crop, the agricultural planner might use geographic databases combining soils, topography, and rainfall to make an agro-ecological zonation map. Forestry planners can use GIS to monitor the impacts of deforestation and the wildlife manager can use GIS to determine the size and location of animal populations or to determine areas having high food and habitat potential for specific species.

GIS can also be used as a potential media tool for creating awareness related to the country's natural and human resources and biodiversity conservation through

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<sup>20</sup> Venkatesh Raghavan: *Free and Open Source Software solutions in GIS* in GIS Development, January 2006, Vol. 10, Issue 1. pp. 22-24. More information about FOSS can be accessed at:

<http://www.fsf.org>

<http://www.opensource.org>

[www.freegis.org](http://www.freegis.org)

[www.mapserverfoundation.org](http://www.mapserverfoundation.org)

environmental education.

GIS provides a platform for individuals and organisations to share and upgrade data and information and facilitate real-time and instant communication network.

### **Opportunities and Challenges**

Over the last decade or so, GIS and related technologies have made remarkable advancements, providing a new dimension for integration and analysis of divergent sources of information. The cost of hardware and software has become less expensive, and since the process of computerization of various institutions in the country is already underway. The emphasis can now be given to software procurement, manpower training and generating geo-spatial database. It is therefore imperative to take necessary steps to building a reliable Geographic Information Infrastructure (GII)<sup>21</sup>, which is as important as the building of other infrastructure such as roads or telecommunications.

GIS technologies and applications are evolving in ways to ascertain their prominence in decision-making processes by integrating many disciplines and adding value to them. The information thus processed through GIS-based decision support systems can render useful information and knowledge for sustainable decision-making.<sup>22</sup>

A dearth of credible data and information; poor co-ordination in data and information sharing and exchanging; and the lack of scientific research often hamper decisions on sustainable and equitable development. Studies carried out by the International Centre for Integrated Mountain

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<sup>21</sup> GII has been conceived as an environment where - the basic geographic datasets are readily available; existing geographic information are well documented; available geographic information conform to accepted standards; policies encourage sharing and exchange of geographic information; and adequate human and technical resources to maintain and manage geographic information.

<sup>22</sup> GIS for Sustainable Mountain Development op cit.

Development (ICIMOD)<sup>23</sup> in the Hindukush region reveals that the lack of credible data and information and poor regional cooperation in sharing and exchanging data and information as some of the major challenges in sustainable mountain development. Fortunately, Bhutan has so far been able to preserve their natural resources and maintain a healthy environment. This can be largely attributed to the strong traditional values of the Bhutanese society and the dynamic leadership of His Majesty. However, the undergoing process of decentralization will transfer the functions, responsibilities, and powers to maintaining the ecological resources and the overall environment to the local communities. This necessitates proper evaluation and time-to-time monitoring of the resources and creation of a sound information system. "GIS can bolster a community development organization's efforts by enhancing decision-making, resource allocation, and strategic planning functions. In an age when knowledge is power, GIS can offer distinctive tools that enable an organization to gain an edge, provided the organization is willing to make the necessary investment of time and resources to develop a foundation in the GIS basics."<sup>24</sup>

#### *Application of GIS*

Mountains have very distinct spatial and temporal expressions and many of our planning and decision-making processes in these areas are often influenced by geographic information. Given the dynamic character of the natural resources that undergo quick changes in the mountain region, there is constant need to update the information and review the dynamic linkages. Geographic information infrastructure provides a unifying framework for integrating

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<sup>23</sup> *GIS for Sustainable Mountain Development*. Available from: <http://www.icimod-gis.net/sustain/hkh.php> (Accessed 25 Nov. 2005)

<sup>24</sup> Amira Sobehi : *Geographic Information Systems (GIS) in Egypt*, Available from: [http://www.iisd.org/pdf/2005/networks\\_dev\\_connection\\_egypt.pdf](http://www.iisd.org/pdf/2005/networks_dev_connection_egypt.pdf) (Accessed 8 May 2006).

many different kinds of information for better understanding of mountain ecosystem and supports its functioning and management.<sup>25</sup> Early adopters of GIS included disciplines in the natural sciences, natural resource management, applied technologies, landscape architecture, biology, geography, and geology. Today, its techniques and applications can be widely used in fields such as business, economics, engineering, history, journalism, and public health, among others.

As a digital media tool, GIS integrates disciplines, organizations, work flows, decision-making bodies, plans, and processes. By integrating data, the user has the ability to more clearly understand, conceptualize, model, and visualize what is going on in the world around us or that s/he is analyzing. These tools are especially valuable for persons who deal with budgeting, facilities management, emergency planning, crime analysis, resource allocation, grounds maintenance, and other similar issues where GIS software can offer solutions because of its database interconnectivity, visualization representation, and analysis capabilities that streamline administrative problems.<sup>26</sup>

GIS has attained a multi-disciplinary status and its application leaves virtually no aspect of life untouched. The thrust area basically meant for geographers has been taken over by resource scientists, physicists, computer scientists, electronic engineers, surveyors, and statisticians, apart from the remote sensing application scientists.<sup>27</sup> Saurabh Mishra et al<sup>28</sup> probe into the critical issues and successful applications of GIS and related technologies in the management of three

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid

<sup>26</sup> Geographic Information Systems Software: Digital Media Tool with Uses Across the Curriculum. Available from <http://www.bsu.edu/library/article/0,1894,-5572-33424,00.html> (Accessed 19 Feb. 2006)

<sup>27</sup> Prithvish Nag and M, Kudrat, 1998: *Digital Remote Sensing*, Concept Publishing Company, New Delhi, p. 200

<sup>28</sup> Saurabh Mishra, Rituparna Sengupta, Tuhina Sinha: *Natural Resource Management: A critical agenda in GIS Development*, Asia Pacific April 2006, vol. 10, issue 4, pp. 16 - 22

important natural resources – water, flora, and fauna, citing case studies carried out in various regions of South Asia. They further conclude that GIS and related technologies have the potential to provide the perfect backdrop for all management decisions by adding greater transparency and accuracy to information. Philip J Burden describes how GIS with its capability for displaying, managing, and modeling spatial data can be utilized throughout the various phases of the disaster cycle, i.e. identification & planning; mitigation; preparedness; response; and recovery.<sup>29</sup> Several instances are observed where GIS is being applied to enhance and facilitate wildlife conservation programmes all over the world.<sup>30</sup> Many countries are already using GIS to plan and implement programs to promote sustainable socio-economic and environmental development. GIS is an important tool that can assist natural resource management initiatives and enable increased public participation in decision-making. The technology, often called mapping software, can be used for a variety of purposes, including resource management, development planning, cartography, and route planning.<sup>31</sup> GIS have advanced into an increasingly important information tool, especially on-line Public Participatory Geographic Information Systems (PPGIS), with the aim to enlarge the level of citizen's involvement and participation in decision-making processes.<sup>32</sup>

GIS aided environmental modeling provides new capabilities for analysing the space/time distribution of

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<sup>29</sup> Philip J Burden: *GIS and Natural Hazard Management*. Available from: <http://www.gisdevelopment.net/application/environment/pp/envpp001.htm> (Accessed 21 March 2006)

<sup>30</sup> Can GIS save the endangered wildlife? Available from : [http://www.gisdevelopment.net/have\\_a\\_look/2sept\\_9sept05.htm](http://www.gisdevelopment.net/have_a_look/2sept_9sept05.htm) (Accessed 8 May 2006)

<sup>31</sup> Amira Sobeih : op cit

<sup>32</sup> Darinka Golubovic Matic, *Geographic Information Systems on the Internet: Sustainable Solution for the Information Society*. Available from: [http://www.corp.at/Download/CORP2006\\_CDRom/archiv/papers2006/CORP2006\\_GOLUBOVIC.pdf](http://www.corp.at/Download/CORP2006_CDRom/archiv/papers2006/CORP2006_GOLUBOVIC.pdf) (Accessed 8 May 2006)

ecological phenomena. Habitat modeling, soil erosion modeling, vulnerability modeling, land cover change prediction modeling and so on - all have the common element of deriving new maps of the likely occurrence or magnitude of some phenomenon based on an established relation between existing map layers. Given the importance of this activity, it is not surprising to see that GIS continues to evolve its modeling tools. The latest developments, however, promise to take GIS to dramatic new levels of functionality.

The ICIMOD with its headquarters at Kathmandu is perhaps the most important proponent of GIS in the entire Hindu Kush-Himalayas (HKH), and fosters the establishment of a strong GIS network in the entire region. The article on the ICIMOD website<sup>33</sup> reveals that GIS technology has made significant inroads into the HKH region and clearly demonstrates as to how these technologies have been effectively used to support policy formulation, planning, and management of the natural and human resources for sustainable mountain development. It has also developed diverse ranges of applications and decision support systems suitable for mountain areas at the local, national and regional levels. Some of the important applications and decision support system that ICIMOD has put to use are:

- Landuse/Landcover mapping at the regional level;
- Vegetation monitoring using remote sensing data;
- Sustainable development indicators;
- Inventory of glaciers, glacial lakes and potential impact of glacier lake outburst floods due to global warming;
- Urban and municipal planning;
- Biodiversity mapping and assessment using remote sensing data;
- Water resources management applications;
- Decision support system for national park management;

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<sup>33</sup> GIS for Sustainable Mountain Development, Op cit.

- Eco-regional agricultural and landuse planning for mountain ecosystems.

The above applications are mostly related to physical resources, and hold great importance in Bhutan too. Another important area that can help in planning for a sustainable development is the creation of GIS based population census report. The first ever population census survey of Bhutan carried out in 2005, apart from containing the demographic characteristics, also consists of the locational aspects, which was recorded using the Geographical Positioning System (GPS). The compilation of population census data (with its geographical location) in the GIS environment, along with the data on the distribution and utilization of natural resources, and other economic activities can become the base for planning and policy making for a sustainable future of the country.

#### *Decentralization of Information*

Bhutan's economy is dominated by agriculture, which accounts for approximately 42 percent of the GDP, and employs 78 percent of the economically active adult population. Forestry shares about 11.2 percent and livestock 9.7 percent of the GDP.<sup>34</sup> This indicates that much of the natural resources are directly or indirectly controlled by the rural masses. The development of the information systems required for more informed decision-making cannot be confined to the national level but should also extend to the *Dzongkhag* (district) level, and eventually even to the *geog* (block) level.<sup>35</sup> While the initiation of *Dzongkhag Yargye Tshogchung* (DYT) in 1981 and the *Geog Yargye Tshogchung* (GYT)<sup>36</sup> in 1991, extends the process of decentralization to the *Geog* level and promotes a participatory approach in the

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<sup>34</sup> UNDP, Development Co-operation, Bhutan, 1993 Report. p. 22.

<sup>35</sup> Ministry of Planning RGB, *Op cit*, p. 37.

<sup>36</sup> *ibid.* (Note: DYT refers to District Development Committees, and GYT refers to Block Development Committees).

decision making process, the control over information systems and accessibility to information is highly centralized and institutionalized. Decentralization must not only be seen as having an administrative and planning purpose, but needs to give equal emphasis on the 'decentralization of information'. Therefore, the first level of operation for data entry and collection of information should be based on rural information centers. Respective departments at the *Dzongkhag* level can establish their own GIS divisions to process the data, which can then be used by decision and policy makers to help in planning, implementing, managing, and monitoring public sector developmental activities at various levels. However, there are important issues relating to organizational setup, data classification, policies, and legal framework for data collection, authentication and sharing, privacy and security, right to information etc, which need proper scrutiny and assessment before decentralizing information. Therefore, further research and viability studies needs to be carried out before its actual implementation.

*Preliminary Preparation for Setting up GIS*

A great deal of careful preparation needs to go into the setting up of a geographical information system. A part of this preparation is finding out what others have done, and becoming acquainted with the enormous literature available. It would be worthwhile to employ a consultant who has recognized experience in the field. A detailed inventory of the existing work situation is essential to create a baseline from which one can anticipate how future data handling needs are likely to develop in order to assess not only current requirements for computerization, but also how the system is likely to grow. The distinction between components that are absolutely essential from the beginning and those that would be helpful but not essential will need to be made in relation to the degree of funding that is available. The type and source of hardware and software and the services they can provide also needs special consideration before deciding to setup a GIS infrastructure so as to ensure its smooth functioning. Most

important of all is a political will to support and encourage the processes of decentralization of information and to formulate policies and standards to promote the development and interconnection of national information infrastructures.

### **Conclusion**

GIS can be effectively used as an important tool for storing, analysing, updating and retrieving data. The increasing use of GIS-based decision support and information systems has rendered useful information and knowledge for sustainable decision-making, resource allocations, and planning functions. Like all other infrastructures, it is also necessary to give due importance to building the nation's information infrastructure, which can best be achieved by decentralizing information systems and formulating firm policies through a dynamic organizational setup. Remote Sensing, GPS, and other associated techniques can serve as important tools for data acquisition, which when fed into the GIS environment can enhance capacities to understand and manage physical and ecological processes. The use of GIS can further reaffirm the role of media to meet the very basic educational, scientific, and cultural needs of people. The strategic importance of the fragile Himalayan eco-system of Bhutan needs to develop locally suited spatial methodologies for environmental conservation and sustainable development. Though the various problems can be generalized at the 'national' level, its solution needs to be realistically 'local' in nature.

The establishment of a GIS-Database and the decentralization of information in the country will definitely assist in planning, managing, monitoring, and disseminating information about natural and human resources, which is a prerequisite for attaining sustainable development vis-à-vis environmental conservation.

“The application of GIS is limited only by the imagination of those who use it”

-Jack Dangermond, President, ESRI.



## Role of the Media in Achieving a Sustainable Society

Tim Bodt\*

### Abstract

*This paper explores the role that the media can play in contributing to a sustainable society. First the terms sustainable development and its ultimate aim, a sustainable society, are defined in particular in the context of Bhutan's pursuit of Gross National Happiness. Despite the Royal Government's future vision for Bhutan and the resulting deliberate and well-planned policies, a growing population will inevitably mean an increased pressure on the environment, culture, and society. Therefore, it is argued that if Bhutan is serious in pursuing a path of sustainable development, the Bhutanese population needs a change in behaviour away from current or possible future unsustainable behaviour towards sustainable actions. These should contribute to sustainable development and thus to Gross National Happiness. This change in behaviour will not be achieved by itself but needs conscious efforts on the part of the government and society as a whole. It is suggested that Education for Sustainable Development of all sections of society can contribute to this behavioural change. Considering that a considerable part of the Bhutanese population is not enrolled in the formal education system, the case is made for an increased role of the media in disseminating Education for Sustainable Development. Various recommendations are then made as to how the current developments in the information, communication, and media sector, as well as the increased democratisation and decentralisation of the Bhutanese system of governance, can be utilised to make continued progress towards a sustainable Bhutanese society.*

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## **Introduction**

### *Poverty, Economic Development and Environment*

The raise in living standards of the mass of the population occurred in developed countries in the past 100 years. This has been happening in most developing countries in the last half century, or, in the context of Bhutan, mainly in the past three decades. This raise in living standards has many positive effects, such as: better access to health care resulting in increase in life expectancy and reduction in child and infant mortality; better access to educational facilities rising literacy and improving economic opportunities; improved infrastructure; increased availability of consumer goods; and increased access to modern media. As expressed in Bhutan's Vision 2020 (Planning Commission Secretariat 1999: 11-17):

30 Years ago Bhutan had little of the infrastructure associated with a modern nation state and the life for the vast majority of the people was both harsh and short. In the past three decades Bhutan has undergone a major transformation (and seen) progress unmatched by other developing countries. More social and economic development has happened in the past 30 years than compared to the previous 300 years.

But, at the same time, increased development, rising living standards, and increased consumption and production result in increased pressure on the environment, threatening the long-term sustainability of the earth's life-support systems. Vision 2020 phrases it as follows (Planning Commission Secretariat 1999: 36): "Although the natural heritage is still largely intact, we cannot take it for granted (as) it is subject to increasing pressures. Ecological systems are particularly vulnerable, and pressures will certainly mount in the years ahead." In the presentation on the State of Bhutan's Environment by the Deputy Minister of the National Environment Commission to the National Assembly in 2005, it was stated that although Bhutan's natural environment is still largely intact, growing population and development activities, especially in urban areas, reduce the air quality in

urban areas and lead to localised water pollution and land pollution in the form of deforestation and waste (N.n. 2005).

So despite recognition of the problem and a well-planned vision for the year 2020, including government policies directed at environmental preservation besides economic and social development, there is a danger that when the behaviour of people does not change towards a more sustainable way of living, Bhutan might face future environmental problems not much different from those faced by other (developing) countries.

Thus, even in Bhutan, there are obvious links between poverty, environmental degradation, and economic development. The precursor for all later developments was the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment (UNCHE, United Nations 1972) in Stockholm in 1972, where the then Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi already said that “the environment cannot be improved in conditions of poverty”. It is often thought that economic development alone will alleviate poverty through increasing income levels of the population. This unfortunately passes by the fact that the resulting environmental degradation can also lead to increased poverty. For example, large-scale commercial harvest of valuable tree species will contribute to the economy and can thus contribute to poverty alleviation. If not properly managed however the resulting deforestation can lead to soil erosion, nutrient loss, loss of biodiversity, and loss of ecological services such as maintenance of the water balance. This in return will affect rural populations depending on the forests directly through decreased availability of forest products—but also indirectly, for example through decreased agricultural production as a result of decreased soil fertility.

*Achieving a Sustainable Society through the process of Sustainable Development*

It was this realisation of the links between environment, economic development, and poverty which resulted in the coining of the term ‘sustainable development’ by the United Nation’s Brundtland Commission in 1987. It is generally

defined as development “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Brundtland 1987), with as basic pillars economic development, social development, and environmental protection at the local, national, regional, and global levels (United Nations 2002). In other words, sustainable development strives to achieve economic development that can be maintained well into the future and for all human beings. The Brundtland Report describes the common challenges facing the earth, namely: growing populations; securing food security; threats to and conservation of species and ecosystems; energy use and depletion of energy sources; industrial development; increasing urbanization; and the relationship between poverty and environmental degradation and inequality between the developed and developing world.

The goal of sustainable development has been generally described as to achieve a sustainable society. This means a society in which economy and population size are managed in such a way that they do not do irreparable harm to the environment by overloading the planet’s ability to absorb waste and pollution, replenish its resources, and sustain human and other forms of life over a specified period of time. In a sustainable society the needs of people are satisfied without depleting natural resources and thereby reducing the prospects of current and future generations of humans and other species. The objectives of sustainable development often are mentioned as: reviving growth; changing the quality of growth; meeting essential needs for jobs, food, energy, water, and sanitation; ensuring a sustainable level of population; conserving and enhancing the resource base; reorienting technology and managing risk; and merging environment and economics in decision-making.

Since 1987, the term has seen a mass distribution and popularisation to the extent that now practically every nation has adopted sustainable development as one of the official policy objectives. In 1992, the United Nations Conference on the Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil resulted in the adoption or signing by more

than 178 nations of Agenda 21 (a 300-page plan for achieving sustainable development in the 21st century) and the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development (UNCED 1992). Principle 8 and 10 of this declaration state that “to achieve sustainable development and a higher quality of life for all people, States should reduce and eliminate unsustainable patterns of production and consumption and promote appropriate demographic policies” (Principle 8); and there has to be “participation of all concerned citizens...each individual shall have appropriate access to information concerning the environment...and the opportunity to participate in decision-making processes. States shall facilitate and encourage public awareness and participation by making information widely available...” (Principle 10).

As will be shown later, these two principles are important since they provide a direct link between sustainable development, media, and democracy.

In 2002 the Rio Conference was followed up by the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, South Africa, where states recommitted themselves to the Rio Declaration Principles; more concrete measures and targets for better implementation of the Agenda 21 and the Millennium Development Goals were discussed (United Nations 2002). Article 11 of the Report states: “We recognise that poverty eradication, changing consumption and production patterns and protecting and managing the natural resource base for economic and social development are overarching objectives of and essential requirements for sustainable development.” Thus from economic development alone as the solution to problems of poverty and environmental degradation, we have now reached a general consensus that arriving at a sustainable society includes achieving both economical, social, as well as environmental sustainability.

#### *Sustainable Development and Gross National Happiness*

As mentioned, Bhutan is currently undergoing a fast transformation from one of the least developed countries in

the world to a country where many of the usual features of a developing country belong to the past. In this development process, with its ultimate goal to maintain Bhutan's independence, sovereignty, and security, Bhutan is guided by six main principles, namely: identity; unity and harmony; stability; self-reliance; sustainability; and flexibility (Planning Commission Secretariat 1999). However these six main principles are not sufficient and a single unifying concept of development has been chosen to complement these principles and identify future directions that are preferred above all others. This concept has been propounded in the 1980s by His Majesty King Jigme Singye Wangchuck. It is the uniquely Bhutanese concept of 'Gross National Happiness.'

Although the concept has been made popular by His Majesty, many of the underlying ideas and principles have guided Bhutan's development for a much longer time. The starting point for the concept is that happiness is the ultimate desire of all human beings and that all else is a means for achieving happiness. The traditional development concept of Gross National Product, stressing a maximisation of economic growth, does not take this happiness into account. Neither does it take environmental degradation nor increase in social problems into account, which might be the results of a narrow striving for economic growth and prosperity (Planning Commission Secretariat 1992). In that way, the concept of GNH is directly linked to pursuing sustainable development, in which economic, social, and environmental sustainability are equal components of development. GNH places the individual at the centre of all development efforts and recognises that an individual, besides material needs, also has spiritual and emotional needs. Finding a careful balance between material and non-material components of development is the main aim of GNH as a development concept.

The concept of GNH has been translated into more easily quantifiable objectives for the long-term development of Bhutan. The five most important priorities, or pillars, of GNH have been selected as: human development; culture and heritage; balanced and equitable development; governance;

and environmental conservation (Planning Commission Secretariat 1999). These five pillars not only serve as objectives to be achieved when GNH is to be maximised, but they also are of decisive importance to maintain Bhutan's future sovereignty, independence, and security. The global significance of Bhutan's environment warrants a development process that conserves this rich environment for all times to come, whilst at the same time using this environment in a sustainable way to maximise GNH. This means a careful balance has to be found between use and conservation of environmental resources, and between economic growth and social stability. Thus, if GNH is taken as the ultimate policy objective, sustainable development is required.

This is reiterated in the Draft Constitution of Bhutan (Royal Government of Bhutan, 2005), in which Article 5(1) defines the role of every Bhutanese towards the environment: "every Bhutanese is a trustee of the Kingdom's natural resources and environment for the benefit of the present and future generations...through the adoption of environmentally friendly practices and ethos." The role of the government is defined in Article 5(2): "The Royal Government shall secure ecologically balanced sustainable development while promoting justifiable economic and social development." Regarding the roles of the State, Article 9(20) furthermore states that the State shall "strive to create conditions that will enable the true and sustainable development of a good and compassionate society rooted in Buddhist ethos and universal human values".

Thus, the entire Bhutanese development policy has been, is, and will be directly based upon the concept of sustainable development. But how sustainable development can be achieved in practice is a more difficult question to answer. Government policies alone will not be sufficient to achieve a sustainable society. It is the people who matter and make the change.

*Sustainable Development requires Behavioural Change*

According to Agenda 21, achieving sustainable development

requires “recognition of the challenge, collective responsibility and constructive partnership, acting with determination and indivisibility of human dignity” (UNCED 1992). However, trying to achieve GNH and a sustainable society implicitly implies a change of behaviour and action from environmentally, socially, and culturally unsustainable to sustainable behaviour.

Although some research is available on behavioural change for sustainable development, this research is mainly on the theoretical and academic level (social and psychological theories on human behaviour) and there are very few practical examples (Warburton 2005). There are several theories explaining how behavioural change in humans takes place. Examples are *learning theories* that emphasize that learning a new, complex pattern of behaviour, like changing from unsustainable to sustainable behaviour, normally requires modifying many of the small behaviours that compose an overall complex behaviour. The *theory of reasoned action* states that individual performance of a given behaviour is primarily determined by a person's intention to perform that behaviour. The *social learning theory*, later renamed *social cognitive theory*, proposes that behaviour change is affected by environmental influences, personal factors, and attributes of the behaviour itself. Examples on behavioural change towards conservation are more widely available, such as the Conservation, Education and Communication Programme of WWF-Nepal, where positive changes in attitude and behaviour in support of sustainable development have been observed (Shrestha 2005).

One model which seems very applicable to the behavioural changes necessary to move from unsustainable to sustainable behaviour is the *Trans-theoretical Model*, or *Stages of Change* (Prochaska et al. 1997). This model, which is widely applied in health education and promotion, is based on several key insights that radically shifted the way that psychologists and others understand and support the process of behavioural change. Although the model in essence focuses on individual behavioural changes, it is all these behavioural changes together that finally contribute to societal change,

and as will be discussed, individual change cannot occur seen separate from the wider societal developments.

The main insight of the model is that behaviour change is a process rather than an event. Before the advent of *Stages of Change*, it was common to assume that a certain period of education and support might lead someone to change an entrenched behaviour. This older approach has several implications. One is the assumption that every person will react similarly to new information and guidance. It was assumed that once people realise there is a problem, they will change their ways, and if they don't then it's because of a lack of motivation and willpower. Warburton (2005) however also indicated that the assumption that people don't change because they have a lack of information is not sufficient, because: people don't always trust the message (scientific data) or the messenger (government institutions); there is a value/action gap (people know there is a problem and they have to do something about it, but they don't); people don't have sufficient time and resources; and because people don't think that what they'll do will make a difference.

The *Trans-theoretical Model*, however, is based on the insight that the behaviour change process unfolds over months and years and is characterized by six distinct stages of change. Each change corresponds to an individual's readiness to change, which will vary over time. By matching an intervention to the appropriate stage (or readiness) the chances of success increase. Success, moreover, is defined not just by changing the behaviour but by any movement toward change, such as a shift from one stage of readiness to another. Barrow and Condon (2002) also recognised that change from an economically driven to a sustainability driven society will be made in small steps. Another important and innovative contribution of *Stages of Change* is its emphasis on *maintaining* change. The model recognizes that relapse is common. But instead of viewing relapse as a failure (i.e., the behaviour change didn't last), the Stages of Change model sees relapse as an opportunity to learn how to sustain change more effectively in the future.

The six stages in the *Trans-theoretical Model* are pre-

contemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, maintenance, and termination (adapted from Prochaska et al., 1997).

In the pre-contemplation stage, people have not yet thought about changing their behaviour. Some may be truly unaware of the consequences of their behaviour (e.g. "Plastics are not bad for the environment so throwing them away is no problem"). Others may be aware of the consequences but don't see any relevance to themselves personally (e.g. "I know waste is polluting our environment, but as a single person I don't produce much waste anyway"). A shorter term for this situation is 'denial'.

In the contemplation stage, the first steps are taken towards behavioural change. There is a greater and more accurate understanding of the advantages and disadvantages of changing the behaviour but since the advantages are still considered to outweigh the disadvantages, there is no readiness to change yet (e.g. "I know I should reduce my waste, but I wouldn't know how").

In the preparation stage, a person gets ready to take action relatively soon (e.g. "I have learnt a bit about composting, recycling and waste management so I know what I should do").

Now the advantages of changing behaviour are outweighing the disadvantages, and the next stage implies taking actual action to change the behaviour (e.g. "I have dug a waste pit and a compost pit and contacted a recycling agent").

The following stage, the maintenance stage, might last forever and is related to possible relapses into the old behaviour. In this stage the behaviour should be more firmly and thoroughly adopted (e.g. "I used the waste and compost pits but it is difficult and time-consuming to separate the waste").

In the last stage, the termination stage, there is complete confidence that the behavioural change can be maintained forever in any situation (e.g. "I always separate and recycle all the waste I produce"). Sometimes, this phase is never achieved and the maintenance stage might last forever.

So in this model, any person changing his or her behaviour from unsustainable to sustainable has to move through at least five different stages in order to achieve a behavioural pattern which is compatible to the behavioural pattern required in a sustainable society. The moving from one stage of the model to the next is being encouraged by several processes (adapted from (Prochaska et al, 1997) :

Consciousness-raising—finding and learning new facts and suggestions supporting the change (e.g. through education, by accessing different kinds of media, or communication with other people). This process is most effective in the pre-contemplation stage, when awareness has to be created regarding the lack of sustainability in current behaviour. After initial awareness and consciousness is raised, as Warburton (2005) mentions, further awareness raising and telling people what to do becomes less effective and can better be replaced by other processes such as the following processes.

Environmental re-evaluation—assessing how one's problem affects the environment (e.g. realizing that producing and indiscriminately dumping waste is harmful to the environment as well as human health). This process also applies mostly to the pre-contemplation stage, as it raises consciousness of the effects of behaviour.

Self re-evaluation—realizing that the behavioural change is part of one's identity (e.g. seeing oneself as an environmentally and socially conscious person). This process is most effective in urging the move from the pre-contemplation to the contemplation stage as it projects a more positive image of oneself as the goal of the change process.

Self liberation—choosing and committing to act on the belief that change is possible (e.g. making a New Year's resolution). This is most efficient in the preparation stage as it makes a person mentally ready for taking actual action

Counter-conditioning—substituting more sustainable alternatives for unsustainable behaviours (e.g. recycling instead of dumping of tin cans). This process is most effective

in the step from maintenance to termination behaviour. It makes relapse into more unsustainable behaviour less attractive and less possible and is closely related to implementing more sustainable actions.

Stimulus control—avoiding triggers and cues (e.g. buying less single packed chewing gum and other sweets which are easily thrown into the environment). This process also works best in the step from maintenance to termination.

Contingency management—increasing the rewards of positive behavioural change and decreasing the rewards of the unsustainable behaviour (e.g. providing a deposit for returning bottles and cans to the producer for recycling or a tax on each kilo of waste produced). This process also works best in the step from maintenance to termination as it reinforces the positive behaviour thus preventing relapse into unsustainable behaviour.

Social liberation—this is receiving societal support for more sustainable behaviours (e.g. discussions about waste management, community action in constructing compost pits). This process is applicable throughout all stages of the model. It can assist in raising awareness and consciousness, but also in making the taking of decisions and of actions easier. According to Warburton (2005), this focus on practical support for sustainable behaviour, and linking this up with wider societal changes and building up a critical mass to make changes mainstream, are most important since individual behaviour is based on individual values and attitudes shaped by collective and social norms, expectations habits, and situations. One of the most important factors is a democratic and decentralised society with freedom of expression.

As the model shows, for people to make the change from unsustainable to sustainable behaviour it is first of all necessary to have sufficient and well-balanced information regarding current issues and policies. They should also have the capacity to evaluate this information within their personal context in order to make the right decisions, especially since many of these issues involve their every day life as well as the lives of future generations. Later on in the model, societal

support and a conducive social environment become more and more important. One of the important implications of this model is that a society moving towards sustainability should have a sufficient level of participation of people in decision-making, as well as sufficient access to information.

*Behavioural Change, Democratisation, and the Media in Bhutan*

This becomes quintessential when, like in the case of Bhutan, a society moves towards more advanced forms of democracy. When people are given more choice; decision-making power; and chance to participate in formulation, adoption and execution of plans and policies, they require sufficient background for delivering inputs and making decisions. As said, this is also mentioned in the Rio Declaration, Article 8 and 10.

This need for access to information is also stressed in the Policy and Institutional Plan (Department of Information and Media 2005), The Draft Constitution (Article 7(5), Royal Government of Bhutan 2005), and the Application Guidelines for the Introduction of Private Newspapers in Bhutan (Ministry of Information and Communications 2005a). In all of these, a growth towards an information or knowledge-based society is envisaged in which there is ready access to information, and freedom of speech, opinion, and expression (Draft Constitution, Article 7(2)), as well as freedom of press, radio, television, and other forms of electronic dissemination of information (Draft Constitution, Article 7(4)), leading to sustainable and equitable opportunities for growth and progress. The media in an information society has the dual role of informing the general public of policies, developments, and current affairs especially those affecting them directly. It also has to give the public the ability to make their voice heard. The media is seen as a vital two-way tool, providing information from the top to the masses at the grass-roots and allowing their views, ideas, and opinions to filter back up to the policy makers. As it is said, "Whoever controls the media controls the mind" (N.n. 2006b).

Thus in order to achieve a sustainable society,

### *Media and Public Culture*

behavioural change is necessary, and for this change in behaviour the public should have sufficient access to information, as well as an opportunity to freely express views and opinions. Increased democratisation and decentralisation are supportive factors which enable people to effectuate behavioural change through provision of information needed for consciousness-raising and awareness-raising and through better communication with (and choice of) policy-makers and decision-makers at all levels of government.

### *Education as a Vehicle for Behavioural Change*

But how this change of behaviour can be achieved in practice is a big challenge. Chapter 36 of Agenda 21 advocates the promotion of education, public awareness, and training in order to come to a behavioural change leading to a more sustainable society. The decade 2005-2014 has been selected as the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development. The aim is “to promote education as basis for a more sustainable human society and integrate sustainable development into education systems at all levels”. Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), sometimes called Education for Sustainable Living (ESL) or Education for Sustainability (EfS), evolved partially out of Environmental Education (EE) and is one of the ways in which information on how to achieve a more sustainable way of living has been disseminated among wide portions of society in many countries.

Environmental education was first propounded in the Belgrade Chapter (UNESCO-UNEP 1976) with the goal of “a world population aware and concerned about the environment and associated problems and which has the knowledge, skills, attitudes, motivations, and commitment to work individually and collectively toward solutions for current problems and prevention of new ones”. The Tbilisi Declaration that followed in 1978 (UNESCO 1978) continued by stating that environmental education should:

- Foster clear awareness and concern about

*Role of the Media in Achieving a Sustainable Society*

- economic, social, political and ecological interdependences in urban and rural areas;
- Provide every person with opportunities to acquire the knowledge, values, attitudes, commitment and skills needed to protect and improve the environment; and
  - Create new patterns of behaviour of individuals, groups and society towards the environment.

According to the Tbilisi Declaration, environmental education should focus on five criteria, namely:

- Awareness: to help social groups and individuals acquire an awareness and sensitivity to the total environment and its allied problems;
- Knowledge: to help social groups and individuals gain a variety of experience in, and acquire a basic understanding of, the environment and its associated problems;
- Attitude: to help social groups and individuals acquire a set of values and feelings of concern for the environment, and the motivation for actively participating in environmental improvement and protection;
- Skills: to help social groups and individuals acquire the skills for identifying and solving environmental problems;
- Participation: to provide social groups and individuals with an opportunity to be actively involved at all levels in working towards resolution of environmental problems.

Thus, the Tbilisi Declaration clearly doesn't just focus on awareness creation, but also on the change of behaviour necessary for improvement necessary for improvement of the environment.

In 1998, the International Conference on Environment and Society (ICES) in Thessaloniki, Greece, in its proceedings,

moved away from 'environmental education' focusing primarily on education for understanding and conservation of our environment to a more all-inclusive education focusing on all issues of sustainable development, including economic, environmental, social, and cultural aspects (UNESCO 1998).

This ESD is "a dynamic concept using all aspects of public awareness, education and training to create or enhance an understanding of linkages among issues of sustainable development, thus balancing human and economic well-being with cultural traditions and respect for the earth's natural resources" (UNESCO 1998; Centre for Environmental Education 2005). Like environmental education, ESD involves a multidisciplinary process that focuses on critical analysis of environmental issues by gathering information, organizing information, and interpreting information to draw conclusions and make inferences. It has to foster respect for human needs compatible with sustainable use of resources and the needs of the planet combined with a sense of global solidarity (Centre for Environmental Education, 2005). The general population needs to understand that any policy decisions, especially decisions on environment related issues, have profound influence on their lives and the lives of future generations.

ESD has a number of characteristics shared with EE, whereas others are more unique to ESD alone. The main characteristics are (North American Association for Environmental Education 1996; Centre for Environmental Education 2005; UNESCO 1998):

A learner-centred approach: ESD has a focus on learning rather than teaching, and learning of institutions and societies rather than individuals. Learners, through active involvement and participation, will learn much more effectively that way than by being simply taught and told what to know and what to do. Moreover, it is considered that although the first step always starts with behavioural change of individuals, it is ultimately the society that has to change.

Life-long and continuous learning rather than confined to

a specific period, which coincides with the *Stages of Change* model. It is recognised that behavioural change is a process therefore taking an entire lifetime, with most people remaining in the maintenance stage wherein sustainable behaviour has to be continuously reinforced.

Formation of an active learning community through action-oriented education, including examining one's own lifestyle, exhibiting a willingness to change it, envisioning the necessary changes, and implementing these changes. It also needs to promote civic responsibility and encourage learners to use knowledge, skills, and assessments of issues related to sustainable development as the basis for problem-solving and action. This relates to the process of societal liberation which will enforce each and every step towards change and ultimately result in behavioural patterns that are more sustainable.

Equip societies with the kinds of expertise, skills, knowledge, and technologies to make these changes. If these supporting factors are absent, the implementation of actions that lead to change often turns out impossible and a relapse into unsustainable behaviour occurs.

Be multi-sourced and accessed rather than top-down, controlled, and orchestrated, empowering rather than indoctrinating. Instead of relying on a limited number of teachers, information should be accessible from various sources including the media, that way providing different views, ideas, and opinions from which the individual or community can select the one that is most applicable to their own situation. It also refers to an increased degree of participation and democracy in which people have more access to information as well as a better forum for making their voices heard. This is why democracy, decentralisation, and freedom of media and speech are necessary preconditions for ESD and sustainable development.

Sensitive to gender, poverty, diversity, etc. ESD should include all factors of sustainable development including environment, economy, and society, but explicit attention should be given to those groups in society that are marginalised or otherwise disadvantaged, such as the poor,

women, children, indigenous people, and the handicapped. ESD should also focus on creating awareness of the wide variety of views, opinions, feelings, attitudes, values, and perceptions surrounding issues of sustainable development, often depending on the position in society.

Foster awareness of the natural and built environment, and an understanding of environmental as well as social and economic concepts, conditions, and issues. Without this initial awareness the step from pre-contemplation to contemplation will not be made since there is no understanding of the advantages and disadvantages of certain behaviours.

Fairness and accuracy in describing sustainability problems, issues, and conditions, reflecting the diversity of perspectives on them. It is important to offer different perspectives and, depending on the audience, present a necessary level of facts and data underpinning the information provided.

Real-world contexts and issues, global yet locale specific. People are often encouraged to change when they are presented with examples from reality and from examples to which they can relate and which they know do really exist. Issues of sustainable development have local, national, regional, as well as global implications. Although change, first and foremost, takes place in the local environment of the individual, it is important to recognise the ways that it affects, as well as is affected by, global issues.

A multidisciplinary approach: This flows from the understanding that sustainable development has elements of social, economic, as well as environmental nature. Thus, input, knowledge, and ideas from all the sciences is required, and issues of sustainable development cannot be understood and solved by simply focusing on a particular science.

Not only focusing on formal education, since empowerment of all people is needed. Especially in developing countries with relatively low enrolment in the formal education system, a considerable proportion of the society will not be reached. Therefore, specific attention and focus have to be placed on non-formal education, as well as on

people who are illiterate. As will be discussed later on, this leads to an important role for the mass media.

Strive towards the development and building up of the critical-thinking and problem-solving skills. Issues of sustainable development cannot be solved by simply understanding them, and instead ESD requires people to think critically about the information they are provided with, filter out the information important to them, and apply problem-solving skills to deal with issues that are most critical to their own lives, as well as those of future generations.

#### *Education for Sustainable Living in Bhutan*

Education for sustainable development has until now not been consciously implemented in Bhutan. Instead, the focus has been on merely education to raise awareness about the environment and environmental problems. Moreover, environmental education in Bhutan has been rather limited to environmental studies (EVS), taught in Dzongkha in schools, NFE centres, training institutes, and in Sherubtse College. Furthermore, there have been one-time or regular periodical awareness campaigns such as the Land Management Campaign (focusing on land degradation), the Walk for Life (focusing on human health), water preservation campaigns, STD and HIV/AIDS campaigns, and the yearly celebration of Social Forestry Day (focusing on reforestation).

The Royal Society for the Protection of Nature (RSPN) is one of the main supporters of environmental education in the country. The goal of the RSPN's environmental education program is "to impart environmental education and raise awareness among citizens for promoting positive attitudes and self sustaining citizens' action to conserve Bhutan rich environmental heritage". As such, the RSPN has established environmental education programs at 78 schools and four training institutions, providing them with financial and technical support and distribution of resources; a model self-sustaining citizen involvement program for urban solid waste management; an environment education program with

scouts, National Parks, and the Integrated Conservation and Development Project in Phobjikha; an action and research component in the Wang Watershed Management Project; and an Environment Education program with the Education Department, mainly focused on developing teaching materials for the formal and non-formal education sectors (Royal Society for the Protection of Nature 2005). The RSPN has recently initiated another programme, 'Environment and Religion', focused on disseminating environmental education among the religious institutions and the general populace based on religious texts and precepts.

Although environmental and value education within the formal and non-formal education system, and occasional public awareness campaigns, reach a considerable part of the society, in predominantly agricultural societies such as the Bhutanese, a significant part of the population is not, or only marginally, reached. Moreover, the limited focus on environmental issues neglects other important elements of sustainable development. It is particularly in such situations that the media play a major role in spreading information, providing a medium for discussion, and as a vehicle for change that would lead to a more sustainable society.

### **The Media as vehicle of Education for Sustainable Development**

#### *The Role of the Media in Education for Sustainable Development and Behavioural Change*

The media plays a crucial role in educating and making individuals, communities, and society conscious about sustainable development, the need for more sustainable patterns of production and consumption, and encouraging them to take action directed towards change and a more sustainable future. It is generally acknowledged that not scientists nor politicians, but rather the common man is the most effective agent of change. Once the civil society is familiar with the complex environment and development related issues, it will gain the confidence to act appropriately, leading towards sustainability. A major point for

understanding the role of the media in achieving a sustainable society is that ESD does not only target those in the regular educational system (i.e. school going children and adults attending non-formal education), but the majority of the public. These people can most efficiently be reached through all available mass media including newspapers and other printed media, radio, television, and the internet.

This is reaffirmed in the Programme for Further Implementation of Agenda 21, Article 137, which states that "...education for all needs to be assured as another crucial factor associated with policy development. The concerns of sustainable development, global interdependence and peace must be fully integrated in formal and non-formal education as well as in public awareness-raising" (Commission on Sustainable Development, 1997). The International Council for Science (2002:9) also states that "encouragement should be given to the publication of popular books and magazines, as well as theatrical presentations, radio and television programmes and other forms of mass communication, intended to help the public become sufficiently informed about the nature and impact of key scientific and technical developments to participate effectively in debates about them."

The mass media, especially the radio, are seen as the most cost-effective way of providing information and a voice to all members of society including the marginalised sections (Department of Information and Media 2005). According to the findings of the International Conference on Education for a Sustainable Future (Centre for Environmental Education 2005), the media has an important role in fostering debate, influencing public opinion, and encouraging people to make behaviour changes towards sustainability. Thus even in Bhutan the mass media are widely seen to play a pivotal role in educating and shaping public opinion as well as influencing policy decisions.

#### *History of the Media in Bhutan*

The Bhutanese society mainly depended on oral transmission

of information until the recent past. In absence of newspapers, radio and TV, and telecommunication facilities, word travelled mainly through word of mouth. *Kuensel*, the government gazette, was published from 1965 onwards with as main purpose to inform civil servants on government policies. The majority of the population, being illiterate, was not reached through this medium. In 1973 the Bhutan Broadcasting Service (BBS) started short-wave radio broadcasts, increasing the number of people reached. But still the programmes mainly consisted of limited news bulletins and information on government policies, achievements, and decisions.

The main developments started in the mid-1980s when *Kuensel* became the weekly published national newspaper and the Bhutan Broadcasting Service got the mandate for daily radio broadcasts. In 1989, under pressure from conservative sections of the society, the government ordered all television antennas and satellite receiving dishes to be dismantled. In 1992 the government-run *Kuensel* and BBS were made into independent corporations. In 1999, coinciding with the 25 year reign of His Majesty the King, this was followed by a remarkable liberalisation of the media. Television broadcasting was legalised, allowing around 25 foreign channels as well as the BBS TV to broadcast programmes. A digital telephone network was also installed, internet was introduced through the ISP provider DrukNet, and the Division of Information Technology was established. In 2000, FM instead of SW radio broadcasts of the BBS reached all parts of the Kingdom, greatly improving reception. Between 1997 and 2000, the number of radio sets in the country increased from an estimated 37,000 to 250,000, and in 2000 the number of television sets was estimated at 35,000 or reaching 4 percent of the population, with 0.73 percent of the population having access to the internet and a *Kuensel* circulation of 20,000 (Pek, 2003). Finally, in 2004, public television and internet cafes sprang up in various parts of the country and the first steps were made towards an Information and Communication Technology Act and Media Law (Penjore, 2003).

*Recent Developments in the Media in Bhutan*

The International Press Institute (2006) has reported positive developments in democracy as well as the media taking place in Bhutan. According to Pek (2003) it has been conscious government policy to first establish and privatise the media in order to develop the infrastructure and train the professionals, followed by securing sustainability of the independent organisations, and finally come up with the necessary legislation. The developments in the media in Bhutan are, however, accelerating. BBS can now be received on FM band all over the country and even in the most remote parts of the Kingdom a transistor radio can be found in practically each and every home. The BBS radio broadcasts are estimated to be listened to by around 400,000 people or over 63 percent of the population (Pek, 2003). BBS radio broadcasts in Dzongkha (six hours per day), Tshangla (two hours per day), English (three hours per day), and Lhotshamkha (two hours per day).

From 2005 onwards, the broadcast of BBS TV was nationalised with two hours of programming each in Dzongkha and English. With the increased coverage of BBS television through satellite broadcast since February 20, 2006, antenna and cable are rapidly being introduced in every place that has electricity bringing the news and entertainment right from Thimphu into the rural household and acting as a bridge connecting people with the government and people among themselves (Rai 2006; Acharya 2006). With increased literacy in Dzongkha and English, the number of people that have access to the news through *Kuensel*, now published twice weekly, has also increased, and with the new *Kuensel* office in Kanglung since December 2005 news reaches every major town in the country within a day.

The latest developments include the introduction of two private newspapers, the *Bhutan Times* (first issue appeared on April 30th 2006) and the *Bhutan Observer* (planned for May 2006: Penjore 2006). These newspapers are expected to play an important role in the new political environment but need strong support from society to act as a watchdog for the

## *Media and Public Culture*

democratic system in informing and educating the whole society (N.n. 2006a). In the near future, The National Assembly will discuss the approval of the Bhutan Information, Communications and Media Act 2005 (Ministry of Information and Communications 2005b). This Act, in its Preamble, states that the government will strive to “promote universal service to all Bhutanese especially in the remote and rural areas of the country”. This developing media environment poses both possibilities as well as challenges. According to Pek (2003), the growth of the media has to be directed towards professional growth and development but at the same time be sensitive to Bhutan’s unique goals, hence the need for clear media policies and regulations and for a constitutional assurance of freedom of speech and the media.

All these developments in the media, including increased coverage and access and increased programme time, in combination with a constitutionally secured freedom of press and expression of opinions and a legal framework, mean that there is a huge scope for stepping up ESD in order to reach a larger proportion of the population.

### *Current role of the Media in disseminating education for Sustainable Development in Bhutan*

Just like ESD is currently not yet well-entrenched in the Bhutanese formal and non-formal education system, at the same time the role of the media in disseminating ESD is rather limited. *Kuensel* regularly publishes news articles regarding issues and problems of sustainable development, for example on waste management, the situation of forests in Bhutan, industrial and chemical waste, and road and hydropower construction. These articles, however, merely present the news as it is without going very much in-depth and are not based upon additional research. Moreover, and more importantly, by merely presenting the news they don’t actually encourage action, although these articles have led to improved conditions and action, mostly on the part of the government. Government agencies, such as the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Agriculture, regularly publish

health and environment related messages that explain existing or new rules and regulations and encourage or discourage certain behaviours. The first issue of the *Bhutan Times* issued on April 30<sup>th</sup> 2006, had a similar message on forest protection and forest fire prevention.

Regarding BBS radio broadcasting, the following are the programmes which bring information and create awareness to the public regarding issues related to sustainable development:

- Dzongkha service: 25 minutes per week on current affairs, education, and regional issues; 50 minutes per week on women's affairs, health, culture, youth, and social affairs; 75 minutes per week on agriculture, politics, and good governance;
- Tshangla service: 40 minutes per week on culture; 10 minutes per week on education, politics and good governance, and women's affairs; and 30 minutes per week each on health, social affairs, youth, and agriculture;
- Lhotshamkha service: 90 minutes per week on health and agriculture; 40 minutes per week on environment; and 30 minutes per week on current affairs;
- English service: 30 minutes per week on women's affairs; 15 minutes per week on cultural affairs; 60 minutes per week on youth; and 30 minutes per week UN radio.

These programmes are still rather limited in number and, moreover, in many cases, they present current news issues and latest government news; encourage certain agricultural practices (mostly focused on increased income generation and marketing and not necessarily on encouraging sustainable practices; application of chemical fertilisers and pesticides is for example encouraged whereas focus on biological pest control is absent); and often stop at creating awareness, without providing incentives for people and communities to

actually take action. A major advantage of these programmes is that in many cases they take a distinctly rural outlook.

As for BBS TV, right now BBS TV broadcasts from 6 p.m. to 11 p.m. with a repetition the next morning. The programmes are in English and Dzongkha. Per week, 80 minutes of the Dzongkha programme are devoted to regional news from Phuentsholing, Jakar, Samdrup Jongkhar and Gelephu, and Kanglung; 20 minutes to youth, social issues, agriculture and environment, education and health, and current affairs; and 40 minutes to good governance. Of the English programme, 20 minutes per week each are dedicated to youth, good governance, ICT, education and health, current affairs, agriculture and environment, and women. Compared to the BBS radio service, the number of programmes on sustainability issues is much more limited and often the programmes take a more urban view on the issues. Considering the increased broadcasts, and therefore public of BBS TV, this should ideally change.

The audiovisual entertainment industry in Bhutan is still in its infancy although a lot of progress has been made in the recent past. As several audio cassettes produced by the former Ministry of Health and Education as well as the success of the recent street theatre tour have shown, these alternative media have a very high potential in spreading messages of sustainability. However, the right support should be given to them in order to increase efficiency.

The electronic media, mainly the internet, in Bhutan is still in the infant stage when considering access, coverage, infrastructure, and usage. With a large proportion of the population not having access to the electronic media, their development should be a gradual process.

*Increasing the Role of the Media in Disseminating Education for Sustainable Development in Bhutan*

The media are usually divided in printed media (such as books, magazines, and newspapers), the audiovisual media (including TV and radio, and the entertainment media including cinema, drama, and audiocassettes and CDs) and

the electronic media (first and foremost the internet). Here, the recommendations on how the role of the media in disseminating ESD can be improved will be divided in general recommendations (mostly on how to bring a message across and inspire people to take action); recommendations regarding (BBS) radio; recommendations regarding (BBS) TV; recommendations regarding *Kuensel* and the private print media; recommendations regarding entertainment forms of audiovisual media; and recommendations regarding electronic media.

### **General Recommendations**

Although there are several programmes broadcast and published in the media that bring messages of sustainability to the general population, the design of these programmes could be improved to make an impact on a larger proportion of the population. Among the recommendations made are:

Since mainstream media, i.e. those channels broadcasted from India, focuses heavily on news and entertainment programmes popular with the audience (such as serials, fashion, urban concerns and issues), it is the role of the national media to focus on issues of sustainable development (Centre for Environmental Education, 2005). This was also expressed at a meeting of journalists in 2006 where it was argued that the media could help to achieve the eight Millennium Development Goals (Wangchuk 2006).

Knowing the target: It is very important to define and understand the audience and to come up with appropriate strategies to reach the targets. Each and every audience has a different set of values, biases, and conceptions as well as hopes and aspirations for the future and as such, the products should be aligned with those in order to fulfil the desired goals and objectives.

With a largely rural population, the media should pay more attention to rural problems, views and challenges and increase access to the media for rural leaders and populations, for example through the establishment of small

cinemas or professional screening centres in rural areas (Pek 2003). These outreach activities were also advocated during the International Conference on Education for a Sustainable Future (Centre for Environmental Education 2005). This is of special importance in view of the continued decentralisation policies and increased participation of people in decision-making.

Building and supporting a community (Patten 2005) as seen in the Trans-theoretical Model, social liberation is an important process influencing individuals and communities in their transition from one stage of the model to the next. Especially the step from preparation to actual action is heavily influenced by social pressures. Therefore, working within a supportive community will result in more effective and lasting change. The internet is a very effective means for realising this, as the example of the *Kuensel* online forum shows.

Currently, Bhutan has no specialised environmental reporters and the current reporters often lack background to effectively investigate and convey messages on sustainability issues. More professionalism is therefore required. In order to achieve this, environmental reporters, journalists, and programme makers should receive training. Possible assistance to this end could be provided by the Society of Environmental Journalists (Society of Environmental Journalists 2006) whose goal it is to advance public understanding of environmental issues by improving the quality, accuracy, and visibility of environmental reporting.

Alternative sources of funding have to be sought. Procuring as well as producing programs for broadcasting which encourage people towards more sustainable behaviour costs money. Since due to the small population and limited government budget, neither advertisement nor government subsidies will be sufficient for this, funds could be secured for procuring and dubbing these products from the international community and environmental organisations abroad.

Producing programmes designed and directed by local people (either individuals or communities), and publishing articles written by local authors (Pek 2003). Local people have

a much better idea of the issues pertaining to sustainable development that directly affect them and that are of importance to them. Therefore, programmes and articles by local people with a more specific Bhutanese content will generate more interest, hold the attention, encourage people to take action, and will be expressed in an understandable language.

Focusing on good practices and examples from both within and outside Bhutan (Centre for Environmental Education 2005; Patten 2005; Wildlife Film Festival 2005). Individuals and communities will be encouraged to take action when they are confronted with successful and positive changes made by other people, as long as they feel that those changes can be effectuated by themselves as well. It is important to note here that although positive/successful examples will encourage positive behaviour, it is also important to show unsuccessful examples (including relapse into old behaviour) in order to show what could possibly go wrong, as long as it is also shown how this could be prevented or solved.

Making products which inspire people to take actual individual or community action on an issue. As indicated before, ESD does not stop with providing information and raising awareness, but should lead to actions that represent a change from unsustainable to more sustainable behaviour. If an article or a radio or TV programme hits the right snare with the audience, it can be a very efficient trigger for actual action and behaviour change.

Coming to a synergy between audio-visual, audio, and written media (Centre for Environmental Education 2005). Too often these three forms of media are treated in isolation whereas they can actually complement each other and strengthen each other. Messages conveyed in one form of media can be repeated in other forms, thus reaffirming, reinforcing and strengthening the effect of the message among the audience.

Providing accurate and up-to-date information that can be verified (International Council for Science 2002; Patten 2005). As seen in the *Trans-theoretical Model*, consciousness-

raising is especially important when an individual or community is moving from the pre-contemplation to the contemplation stage. It is the accuracy of the information which will often decide the balance between advantages and disadvantages of changing certain behaviour. On the other hand, the accuracy of information provided also influences whether a person might relapse into old behaviour or not. For example, if information becomes available stating that recycling glass bottles uses a lot of water and energy for transportation and cleaning and is therefore not as environmentally friendly as previously thought, this might lead people to give up on bottle recycling. Moreover, current issues in sustainable development are constantly changing and developing and with a lot of research being done, new information is becoming available every moment. And with increased access to electronic media such as the internet, and thus opportunities people have to cross-check information provided, it is important to present information that is accurate and recent. This will avoid people losing trust and confidence in the media when they are confronted with obviously incorrect information. One source of information could be the Environmental News Network (Environmental News Network 2006), the largest and most recognised environmental news source providing daily news updates on environmental and sustainability issues accessed for information by many journalists and other people across the world.

Using simple terminology that can be understood by the audience. It has to be realised that for most people scientific jargon is incomprehensible. Therefore, this jargon has to be translated into simple language that can be understood easily. This is especially important for languages such as Dzongkha, in which most of the scientific terms are not yet or only recently translated and thus unknown to the public. Instead, terms have to be explained and elaborated upon to make them known.

Making products short and to the point, thus holding the attention of the audience and generating interest within the audience (International Council for Science 2002; Centre for

Environmental Education 2005). People have only a limited concentration span especially when more serious issues and concerns are raised. Therefore, it is important to make articles and programmes which convey the message in a compact but efficient way. Other useful tips on how to create a message that grabs the attention of the audience are: using word pictures describing a situation with measures that are familiar and easily visualised (such as for example the number of football fields of tropical rainforest cut down every year instead of the number of hectares); emphasizing additional features, effects, benefits or advantages; working at the appropriate (local, national, regional, global) scale; stressing the human angle by presenting humans as the culprits, victims, as well as solvers of environmental problems; relying on outside expertise if needed, admit what you are not doing; and being persistent (Global Development Research Centre 2006).

Making more products in the local languages (also stressed as outcome during the International Conference on Education for Sustainable Living, Centre for Environmental Education 2005). In a country such as Bhutan with a diversity of around 20 languages, there will always be people who do not understand the national language or the language spoken by other majority groups. These people are in some cases disadvantaged in other ways as well, such as women, the aged, and the poor. In order to reach these groups, products on sustainability issues should be made in local languages.

Evaluate the product and see whether it has reached the goals of education and awareness and participation and behaviour change (Patten 2005). Each product, being a newspaper article, radio broadcast or TV telecast, is made with certain goals in mind. Evaluation of the product will result in valuable lessons as to how the product could be improved in the future to achieve a better result.

### **Recommendations regarding (BBS) Radio Broadcasts**

It is widely accepted that in developing countries with a

considerable illiterate population, as well as scattered and remote settlements and a difficult terrain making communications difficult, radio broadcasts are the most cost-effective means of communication for sustainable development (International Council for Science 2002). According to Pek (2003), despite the increased access to media there is an increasing gap between the haves and the have-nots, to which the BBS radio broadcasts can provide a solution. Although there is an estimated rural population of 70 percent, the importance of the radio has recently become rather neglected.

Radio is considered the main media for mass communication but despite that, the excitement over the introduction of TV has led to the neglect of the radio. Since the Bhutan Information, Communications and Media Act 2005 (Ministry of Information and Communications, 2005), in its Preamble, states that the government will strive to “promote universal service to all Bhutanese especially in the remote and rural areas of the country”, there should be an increasing role for the radio. Shrestha (2005) also mentions that in the case of Nepal, radio programmes are the most effective medium of communication due to the wide coverage, affordability, and the fact that it reaches illiterate people as well.

Making more programmes in the local languages (Pek 2003). Currently, BBS radio broadcasts in Dzongkha, English, Tshangla and Lhotshamkha. English service only reaches those who have sufficient educational background, in particular civil servants and students. Dzongkha medium reaches the majority of the population of western Bhutan as well as those educated in Dzongkha and those whose language is closely related to Dzongkha (i.e. Kurtoepkha/Kurmekha). Tshangla medium reaches a major part of the population of eastern Bhutan who speak or at least understand Tshangla. Lhotshamkha service is mainly directed towards the people of Nepali origin. Thus, the radio services cover a considerable part of the population; however, disadvantaged (uneducated, poor and remote communities) are not reached. This mainly refers to the population of

central Bhutan (i.e. speakers of Khengkha, Bumthangkha and Dungkar Kurtoepkha) and far eastern Bhutan (i.e. Dzalakha and Dakpake, to a large extent also understood by speakers of Brokpake and the Monpa of Tawang in Arunachal Pradesh). If BBS radio could include for example weekly or twice weekly one to two-hour services in Khengkha and Dakpake, this would reach another major part of society. The content should not be limited to news and information but also programmes specifically focusing on local sustainability issues.

Increasing the number and quality of programmes related to sustainability. At the moment BBS radio broadcasts programmes from 7 a.m. till 12 p.m. As mentioned before, during this broadcasting time, there are only limited programmes which bring information and create awareness to the public regarding issues related to sustainable development. Except for the Lhotshamkha service, the other language services do not have programmes specifically about the environment. However, environmental topics are usually presented in other programmes. It can be noticed that health and agriculture are relatively well represented, that the programmes are adapted to the audience (for example the English service has no programmes on agriculture since few farmers will know English), and that regional programmes are underrepresented. Moreover, since most programmes lack in promotion of taking action and actually changing behaviour, they are not very effective in fostering change for sustainable development. The ways in which programme quality can be improved have already been mentioned in the general recommendations section.

Introducing competing FM radio broadcasting stations which could focus on local languages and more local and regional issues, giving BBS the national mandate. With the small population, competing radio broadcasters, even though sanctioned under the Bhutan Information, Communications and Media Act 2005, would rely on government support and subsidies since proceeds from advertisements would be minimal. Moreover, for the moment it might be too expensive to produce quality content. Therefore, it is considered that

BBS radio will remain the main radio broadcaster for the near future.

**Recommendations regarding (BBS) TV telecasts**

Broadcasting time and quality of content should improve: The current broadcast time as well as the number of programmes on sustainability issues is rather limited. Broadcasts should ideally be increased to day-long original programmes. However, as said before, an increase in the BBS TV broadcasts should not be at the cost or neglect of the BBS radio service. Recommendations on how to improve the programme content can be found under the general recommendations.

Regional media houses could be contacted to co-produce programmes to reduce production cost, for example within context of the SAARC. The production costs of programmes solely for the limited Bhutanese market would in many cases be too high. But programmes on sustainability issues produced in Bhutan might find a ready market in other South Asian countries as well as beyond, and programmes produced abroad could be broadcasted in Bhutan. Thus, cooperation between BBS TV and other media companies and media houses could increase the number of programmes that become available.

Regionally and internationally produced programmes could be dubbed in Dzongkha and broadcasted on TV. In contrast to the German and Japanese programmes currently aired on BBS TV, which are purely entertaining, there are unlimited choices in media and educational products available supporting and promoting the transition to sustainability. One example is EcoIQ (EcoIQ 2006), which offers spoken and written products, video and still images, and online resources regarding the environment. Another example is the Environmental Media Corporation (Environmental Media Corporation 2006), designing, producing, and distributing curriculum-based media to support science and environmental education and conservation for classrooms and communities and having a

collection of 450 programs and series for public television broadcast and public use. Alternative funding for the procurement of these programmes should be sought, for example, from international donors, organisations, and agencies supporting sustainable development.

**Recommendations regarding Kuensel and the other printed media**

The increased competition after introduction of the two private newspapers should be a stimulus for more competitive, truthful, accurate, and challenging reporting which makes articles more appealing to the audience. Recommendations on how to improve the content have been mentioned under the general recommendations.

More printed media space could be used for conveying messages and spreading awareness on sustainability issues by showing examples of successful actions and behaviour changes rather than just focusing on news, advertisement, and entertainment.

Frequency of newspapers could increase if more attention would be paid to the above mentioned rather than just relying on news.

**Recommendations regarding entertainment forms of audiovisual media**

The entertainment forms of the audiovisual media include for example audio cassettes and CDs, drama, theatre, street-theatre, and movies. It is recommended that:

The government and other organisations subsidise the production of audio cassettes and CDs with songs containing messages of sustainability that not only raise awareness but also promote action and behaviour change.

The government and other organisations stimulate the development of (street) theatre plays which focus on sustainability issues, for example by sending interested people for training, providing a place for practice, and providing financial support.

Movie-makers are encouraged to insert issues of sustainability into their movies since these movies reach a larger audience and the combination with entertainment might create a synergy promoting change.

Media outreach posts should be set up in every Dzongkhag and major human settlement for the benefit of people (filmmakers, theatre groups) to show their product to the rural population.

The cost of audiovisual entertainment media should be reduced. Right now the price, for example, of audio cassettes not produced or subsidised by the government as well as for example screening of movies is too high for rural populations to access. By reducing cost, the rural coverage will increase.

### **Recommendations regarding the electronic media**

Until the time that internet coverage in Bhutan is increased to include rural areas as well, the roles of the electronic media in achieving more sustainable behaviour will remain limited to:

Being a source of information for journalists and producers of programmes. Those who write and produce the media could use the internet as a readily accessible and inexhaustible source of information on sustainable development. However, caution has to be made that the internet is not an unbiased and objective source of information. In fact, anyone and everyone can publish and present information on the internet and this means that many websites present individual, organisational, or governmental opinions and ideas. These websites should always be used with great care and can never replace first-hand information obtained from, for example, research and scientific journals, which are peer-reviewed and therefore much more likely to present an approximation of the truth. As was mentioned before, there are some websites which try to present more or less objective information on sustainable development.

Being a source of information and inspiration for people on the policy-making and policy-implementing levels. The

internet publishes a staggering amount of messages on sustainability issues accessible to the majority of policy-making and implementing public officials. These messages do not only provide information and create awareness, but can also sensitise policy makers and implementers. They could also encourage them to take action and come up with new policies or increase the sustainability of current ones.

Providing a forum for discussions among the scientific community, policy-makers and implementers, and the general public regarding issues of sustainable development. The internet is a powerful tool for people to express their ideas, opinions, and views mainly because it guarantees anonymity to a large extent. With increasing freedom of press and speech guaranteed in the Draft Constitution people will make increased use of this option, as the Kuenselonline Forum has already shown.

The main recommendation would be that the coverage of and access to internet facilities should be increased to all parts of the Kingdom, especially towards the rural areas. For example, in each Dzongkhag and geog, government-initiated and sponsored internet facilities could be set up. This would encourage literate people to use the internet and provide an additional source of information. At the same time, the cost should be reduced and, with high set-up and maintenance costs, the government should consider subsidising it.

### **Conclusion**

Bhutan, in its Draft Constitution as well as in its *Vision for 2020*, has made a conscious choice that for achieving Gross National Happiness, a path of sustainable development is necessary. This path of sustainable development would lead to a sustainable society, thus maximising economic and social development while at the same time conserving the environment. To move from unsustainable to sustainable practices, a change in behaviour of individuals, communities, and the society as a whole is necessary. This change in behaviour can be supported and influenced through Education for Sustainable Development as well as increased

democratisation, decentralisation, and participation. Although Education for Sustainable Development has not been implemented as such in Bhutan, it is argued that the recent developments in the media as well as the new political dimensions of Bhutan offer an increased scope for effective behavioural change through awareness-raising, education, and encouragement to action-taking. The media is a very effective means of reaching those people not within the regular educational system, often also otherwise marginalised or disadvantaged groups. However to fully exploit this, a number of recommendations is made. These include:

- Focus on issues of sustainable development for the national media;
- Know the audience and the goals and objectives to be achieved; including to pay more attention to rural populations and their issues of sustainable development;
- Build and support a learning community;
- Training of reporters, journalists and programme makers;
- Look for alternative sources of funding, for example through co-production of TV programmes;
- Produce products written, designed and directed by local people;
- Focus on good practices and examples;
- Programmes and articles should inspire to taking individual or community action;
- There should be more synergy between audio-visual, audio and written material;
- Media should provide accurate, recent and verifiable information;
- There should be more programmes in local languages especially in the radio broadcasting;
- The language used should be simple and understandable to all;
- Programmes and articles should remain short and to the point;

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- The role of the radio should increase and not suffer from increased attention to the TV;
- Competing FM radio stations could be introduced;
- Number and quality of radio, TV and newspaper editions as well as the time and space used for sustainability issues should increase;
- Internationally and regionally produced TV programmes could be dubbed;
- The entertainment forms of audiovisual media should be subsidised and cost reduced if they include issues of sustainability and awareness-generating messages;
- The coverage of and access to entertainment forms of audiovisual media should increase especially in rural areas, for example through media outreach posts;
- The cost of the electronic media mainly the Internet should decrease and the access should increase especially in rural areas.

It is hoped that with the implementation of at least some of these recommendations the media in Bhutan will be able to provide the much needed vehicle for Education for Sustainable Development and thus to future achievement of the noble goal of Gross National Happiness in a sustainable society.

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## Concluding Remarks: Perspectives on Bhutanese Media

*Kinley Dorji\**

This group is largely Bhutanese media personnel. But we understand, in the context of this media and culture seminar, that we are also the custodians of Bhutanese culture. We have a tendency to place ourselves into categories, giving ourselves narrower roles in life. But it is time to climb out of this box and take on the broader responsibilities that our changing society demands of us.

Such a seminar gives us a new perspective of the Bhutanese media. The media was previously understood as newspapers, radio, and television. Then came the broader purview of film, music, and the new electronic media like internet. Our scholars now remind us of the centuries-old media that we had in Bhutan- the *mani* walls, prayer flags, the festivals and dances. This concept gives us a new depth of values to draw on as we develop the Bhutanese media today.

Media is not a distant, neutral phenomenon. It is not just technology. When we talk about Bhutanese media, we talk about ourselves. And we are expressing values all the time. We are cultivating the public mind. We are performing a public function.

When we talk about the role of the media, particularly in our vulnerable society, we have to be conscious of our blatant and inherent biases, be it religious, political, elitist, gender, age, and numerous other faults.

### **Role**

Media must help society to understand change and, in the process, define and promote the right values, including public values. As this seminar reminds us we are responsible for culture, happiness, liberty, spirituality, even survival of society.

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Thus, the concept of public service media. In the past they talked about public service broadcasting, then of the public service media. Public service means balancing state control and the lowest common denominator that we see in the commercial media. In Bhutan public service must be a goal of all media, not just state-owned media. And this means reaching the people on their terms.

We talk of the role of media after 2008. In essence this role is not new. The role of media in democratic governance has always been to provide the public space for the people's views and to initiate public discussion. As a developing country, of course, we keep in mind our own priorities like our relations with other countries.

We look at trends in the media. Media is very much a part of the evolution of public culture. It is a force that helps shape public culture. The small explosion of the Bhutanese media that we see is good but that reminds us immediately of the need for professionalism. Someone asked what freedom of expression meant. In one word, freedom means responsibility.

We have to understand media in the context of GNH. GNH requires that the people make important decisions. The role of the media is to give them the information, to empower them, to make those decisions.

## **Culture**

This seminar also focused on culture. Today we are trying to understand culture, the living traditions that are evolving in Bhutan.

As we recognize the value of variety, our multiple community identities, we see the pluralism that we sometimes deny ourselves. The ways in which diversity is recognized and valued in civic and political domains raise important questions for contemporary pluralist societies. National culture in Bhutan, as someone said, can be seen as an amalgam of its different community cultures.

When we talk of culture, uncomfortable issues come up. We saw this during the public consultations on the draft Constitution. The most vibrant debate has surrounded the issues of religion, language, dress. One of the scholars was

quoted saying, “defining culture is an act of politics”.

Through all this we hear the question, is Bhutanese culture strong enough to withstand the forces of change?

We talk of public culture which has always revolved around community life and religion. It has been pointed out that technology changes the contours of existing public spheres. We see a new significance and visibility in economic, political and civic domains.

In Bhutan public culture is often understood as national culture and has, for more than three centuries, been synonymous with national identity. Public culture is changing every day and change is giving birth to a new cultural identity. Our culture, our identity now includes discotheques, nightclubs, pool rooms, the process of urbanization. But, through all this, we must watch the change in values more than the external changes.

The general consensus is also that public culture is perceived to be under threat from globalization. And the mass media is a culprit.

### **Trends**

On trends in media and culture I’ll mention just the issues that are addressed by the seminar. Today there is a strong move to promote Dzongkha, more than ever before. The strength of Dzongkha is the realization that it is important for survival. Significantly the new Bhutanese politics will be played out largely in Dzongkha.

Some academics are also concerned that Dzongkha is borrowing too much... a suicidal trend because excessive borrowing could mean death. Others worry that Dzongkha is not borrowing enough, that some universal words are acceptable.

There is also the proliferation of the music and film culture. But these are catering to the masses and, therefore, reflecting the lowest common denominator. And we have plagiarism on a massive scale in our media industries.

Today we are mistaking sensationalism for freedom of speech. That is why I stress the responsibility of the media.

### **Advertising**

We talk about advertising. Our friend from Holland tells us that his company functions from an old Church. It strikes me that our monasteries need to start doing some effective advertising before they lose touch with the people, particularly the youth. I mean, of course, healthy advertising.

It would be a wonderful counter to trained commercial advertisers whose sole aim is to inflame our desires. In the Buddhist context this desire is the cause of suffering. We all agree that it is wrong but we do it anyway.

Advertising in Bhutan faces new challenges every day. We do not advertise alcohol but what do we do when our elite and international representatives take part in the Tiger Beer golf tournament? We criticize the petty gambling during the fetes, but what do we say about the large-scale online gambling approved by the government?

### **Response**

What should our response be to all this? Let us first get a perspective. I believe that we do have a powerful counter if we learn from our own intuitive capabilities. I use the example, somewhat intrepidly, of Gross National Happiness. We have sold it quite well, even before we have refined the product at home. We have given Bhutan a brand name that is even better than Shangrila and, of course, I am all for it.

One of our scholars gave us the provocative advice to ban advertising on television. It's a great idea but advertising is here. And the only answer is to produce our own advertising, target our own audiences and, most important, do it with professionalism.

The bottom-line is education, not just by the education ministry but by the media. We learnt that the advertising budget worldwide far supersedes the education budget. When we talk about media literacy we must begin with media professionals, in raising standards and professionalism.

And we start with our youth. But, as we have been reminded, someone has to do some real hard work. Who will do this hard work? We, the media.

## **Government**

At the helm of all this is the government. What is the role of the government... especially an all pervasive government like ours? I am a little concerned about the calls for government help and subsidy. Seeking subsidy means trading independence. State support is necessary but in the form of legislation, infrastructure, newsprint, licensing fees, events and functions, advertising, and other accepted forms.

But the government has a critical role. Our government today requires a more comprehensive media vision. We saw, for example, the sudden start of television that caught society by surprise and are understanding the impact only now.

The studies presented here, on the impact of media and impact of television, are not new. They have been done over and over again in other countries. We claim to learn from the mistakes of others but we do not do the home work and sometimes do not learn from our own mistakes.

The ICT centers around the country sound pragmatic and ideal, particularly in an era of decentralization. They could foster new community culture and enrich our public culture. But, even as the Bumthang centre changed from NCPC to NTC to CMC, it has not been able develop local content, to provide practical information like the price of potatoes in Phuentsholing. Someone suggested that the centre could deal with basic problems like low computer literacy.

## **Law**

The media law is to be approved by the National Assembly. There is a misconception that the media law will guarantee a free media. It is the Constitution that guarantees freedom of expression, freedom of media, and also gives government the mandate to provide access to information.

The media law will touch on important issues like licensing to ensure that there is no media monopoly, it sets rules for foreign ownership and investment because the media is considered a sensitive industry in every country.

With the media law will come regulations and the

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regulatory body, BICMA, which actually needs more independence. BICMA will have important functions including the monitoring of print runs, distribution figures, and viewership statistics. It will need to monitor the powerful medium of advertising.

Corruption in media is a major issue everywhere and so is the relationship between media owners, advertisers, editorial teams, and management.

But the media law will not solve our problems. It is important for the media to set our own standards and codes. Among advisory bodies a media council could play an important role and help diffuse many problems before they go too far. Codes of ethics and practices must be established by media themselves.

A relevant question is, who is the government? A seminar like this must acknowledge that it is us who must take the initiative. We are a highly inter-connected society. Many of us have multiple identities as decisions makers, media professionals, government officials as well as critics both inside and outside the system. It is the media that should take healthy initiatives to the government.

I emphasize the interdependence, in fact the synonymity, between media and culture. Our scholars have described this as the means and end, the medium and the message. Together they represent public culture. And we might ask what kind of a cultural identity – and inevitably – national identity do we present today?

In conclusion, I submit that the media story is Bhutan's story. And, for us, this is just the beginning.

