

FOLKTALE NARRATION: A RETREATING TRADITION

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Introduction

To talk of folktales in the Bhutanese context is to discuss on a literary genre popularly known as *khaju*¹ or 'oral transmission'. It serves as an important tool of communication between one generation and another. Among others, the folktales comprise an indispensable portion of oral literature. In it is seen the manifestation of the popular imagination and creativity representing the Bhutanese patrimony which has been passed down from mouth to ear since time immemorial. The role that it plays in the transmission of moral values, philosophy, beliefs, humour, etiquette, and many other traits specific to the Bhutanese society holds an inescapably eminent place. Despite this importance, the documentation of folktales in Bhutan is still in its infancy. Till the mid-twentieth century, education was imparted through the monasteries and all the people did not have access to it. Furthermore, the scarcity of writing and printing facilities compounded the difficulty and consequently the larger section of the population remained illiterate. Even after schools were opened and facilities provided free of cost, the documentation of folktales took quite sometime to jump from the springboard. It was only in 1984 that Dasho Sherab Thaye published his first volume of the collection of folktales followed suite by another two in 1986. This was the debut and now we have authors like Kunzang Choden, Kinley

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Wangmo, Françoise Pommaret and a few others who had followed the footsteps of Dasho Sherab Thaye. However, the collections made until today is just a drop considering the vast reservoir of folktales that lies recorded in the memories of the Bhutanese. It requires the efforts of many Bhutanese even to document a part of this inexhaustible patrimony. This, however, is not to indicate that the Bhutanese folktales are different from the rest. In fact, '...folktales are the same all over, for they tell of people. Not ordinary people like those we meet on our journey through life, but the whole secret and exciting society of one eyed sorcerers, evil giants, handsome princes and dancing fairies....' ² All the same, what is special about the Bhutanese folktales is that, it still is a living tradition in many pockets of rural Bhutan. In the villages which are far flung from motor roads, the narration of folktales in the pastures, and in the evenings are even today very much alive. However, the question is, how long will it continue to survive? Will the development process engulf this beautiful tradition? And, what could be done to keep this heritage alive?

It is also immensely important to record other aspects related to folktales besides its documentation. For this very reason, this paper is a simple attempt made to record a small portion of the art of folktale narration as well as the role that it plays, directly or indirectly, in the everyday life of the Bhutanese. It is based on interviews of local old-timers as well as some scholars. Here, a mention should be made that the field of study is Bjena Gewog in Wangdue Phodrang district but scholars from other parts of Bhutan had also been interviewed. Folktales are narrated in as many as twenty-four dialects, but an assumption has been made that the narration technique will be almost similar throughout Bhutan. This, however, is not intended to make any abusive generalization. Some storytelling sessions had also been conducted with a selected group of villagers³ during the fieldwork. The situation created was for research purpose and lacked the sensation of a real storytelling session but enough information could be extracted. A literature survey had also

been conducted to find out if such attempt had been made in the Bhutanese context, to avoid duplication of work and above all for information supply. The presentation does not pretend to be exhaustive but would definitely serve as a starting point for further research in this area.

Overview of Folktales

The art in which the folktales are narrated could be same all over the world but what is interesting in the Bhutanese context is that the stories, strictly speaking, are not narrated. In Bhutan, the folktales are ‘...not told but released (*tangshi* in dzongkha)’.⁴ Here, it is very significant to note that the verb *tang*⁵ can mean to ‘release’, ‘untie’, or ‘set free’. In effect, if the folktales in Bhutan are not told or narrated but ‘released, set free or untied’ it is tempting to assert that it is tied or attached in the collective memory of the Bhutanese. This could then imply that the Bhutanese and the folktales are inextricably interwoven that it wouldn’t be wrong to comment that they are found one inside the other. The folktales contain the traits and aspects of the Bhutanese. In the memory of the people dwell the folktales ready to be ‘untied’ at an appropriate time.

It is necessary to mention that there are no professional storytellers and no particular way or place of narrating stories. However, there seems to be two ways of telling stories⁶ though the nuance actually is invisible until observed critically. The first way of narration appears very solemn and is done when someone is sick at home. Here, normally an elderly man narrates the story sitting near the sick person. A small table⁷ is placed in front of him. A bowl containing a burning incense stick is kept on it. The sitting position is also special. He holds his head and torso straight; his left leg is kept on top of the right. His left hand presses the left knee and his right hand the left foot. While narrating the story his voice is loud and powerful. The purpose is to project an image of a proud, bold and a daring person. The theme of the stories, as far as possible, focuses on the victory of good over evil, the torture of evil spirits by human beings and others of

the kind. The main goal of this setting is to frighten away the evil spirits supposedly inflicting sickness on the ill person.⁸ The objective of the narration in this particular case is then far from entertainment. However, this is one special way of narrating stories, which is differentiated from the other type by its ceremonious setting and ritual aspects. The other type is a free style narration as the narrator can be from any age group, and men or women. It also demands no preparation and is solely for entertainment. The latter, which we will treat hereafter, is the popular and the most common type of narration.

Starting Formulas of Folktales

A glimpse of how the folktales are released or set free from the memories of the Bhutanese clearly unfolds the thrill and fun it can provide. In the variety of the 'starting formula' can also be witnessed the entertaining and educating power latent in the folktales. Out of the several ways of debuting a story the most common and the popular way is by saying *dangbo dingbo*.⁹ 'These two terms are used ...as an indicator of time, as...*dangbo dingbo* ... would equate to long, long ago'.¹⁰ These would mean that the precession of time is given according to the intonation of these two words. For instance, on the one hand, if the narrator pronounces *dangbo dingbo* quite rapidly, it is implied that the story to be narrated is of the recent past. On the other hand, if the narrator stretches these two words and says *dangbio.o.o...dingbo .o.o...*, the audience understands that the story which would be narrated had taken place a long time ago. Other than the indication of time, it is plausible to say that '...by beginning the folktales in such a formal ritualistic way, the narrator establishes a kind of break-off from the mundane world. We enter into the world of imagination.....'¹¹ This then implies that the audience detaches themselves from the world and enters into the fascinating land of folktales where they identify themselves with the heroes and the good. People rejoice when the hero very cleverly steals the cubs of a tigress and laugh when he is able to make fools of the villains. They are worried when the monsters kidnap the beautiful maiden. And, they are sad

when the marriage of the charming Prince and the beautiful Princess fails. Thus by beginning a story in a ritualistic way the audience is navigated into the marvellous unspecified past. The audience is temporarily disconnected from the mundane world. This formula also ‘...opens the door of the magic world where the mood is completely engrossed in the imaginary and the supernatural’.¹²

The other ritualistic formula is beginning a narration with *henma henma*.¹³ It can be interpreted as ‘once upon a time’ or ‘in the past’. However, some old timers are of the view that it is used for beginning a story which took place in the recent past. In the situations that happened very long ago, the previous formula is preferred.¹⁴

The preceding formulas are, as mentioned earlier, very common and used by all the storytellers. However, some very talented narrators make it a point to add a few more ingredients after saying *dangbo dingbo*. It would begin in the following manner:

‘*Dangbo dingbo*

When few stones and pebbles could be seen

When the saplings and grasses began to sprout out in greenness

When few drops of water began to drip

In the upper, upper direction

In the lower, lower direction

In that, that direction

In this, this direction’.¹⁵

Following this formula the narrator will start releasing the folktales recorded in his memory.

The above description indicates that the story to be narrated relates to the time when the world itself was in the process of formation. The mention of four directions and its repetition is to express the vastness of the land to which the characters in the story belongs. This formula, as mentioned earlier, takes the people to the world of fantasy, leaving behind the banality of everyday life.

Gestures, Expressions and Figures of Speech

The commencement of folktale narration places the audience outside the mundane world. Little by little and bit by bit, the narrator releases the folktale, punctuating his narration with *dele*¹⁶ which would equate to 'and then'. It is important to remark that the narration of folktales does not possess any rigid vocabulary and expressions but depends more on the knowledge and talent of the narrator. An inexperienced storyteller will narrate nothing more than the raw facts. For instance, the narrator in question might say: 'When the hunter met the bear, he was frightened that he started to shiver'. But on the other hand, a gifted and a talented storyteller will share the same information in a very hyperbolic and exciting manner to make the audience share the fears of the hunter: 'When the hunter met the bear he was frightened. He was so terrified that he started to tremble hysterically that sweat ran down his body like brook. His teeth clattered so much so that the sound could be heard from the other side of the valley. His hairs stood on their ends that one might mistake him for an angry porcupine'. Unknowingly, the figures of speech are lavishly used by the gifted storytellers to add life and charm to the narration. Thus, to describe a beautiful damsel, a talented narrator will say: 'She was beautiful, so beautiful that people thought that goddess herself has descended on earth. She was so beautiful that people admired her beauty for days without blinking their eyes'. From these few examples we understand that the narration of folktales are beautified and ornamented with striking expressions and attractive figures of speech. But, there is no similar vocabulary and expressions for the same story; it basically depends on the narrator. Thus, in the Bhutanese society, there are no trained or professional storytellers but all 'release' stories from their memories in their own unique ways adding personal flavours. And yes, even children storytellers narrate their stories in their own little ways to their playmates and to their proud parents.

The art of narration is not limited to the use of beautiful expressions, figures of speech and ritualistic formulas but it

is also equally animated and made lively through gestures and varying intonation of the voice of the narrator. The rise and fall in the tone of the voice of the narrator indicates multiple sentiments. The anger, sadness, happiness and many other sentiments are evoked through the tone of narration. Further more, 'the eloquent expression on the face, the sudden brightness on the eyes, the knowing blink on the eyelids, the changing movements on the lips, the intense bitter grin, the inescapable contagious laughter...'17 of the narrator adds charm to narration. This is how a talented narrator takes his audience to the peak of interest making them forget the flow of time of their real world and seducing them to enter into the land of fascination which he has created.¹⁸

Curiosity and Anxiousness: Response of the Audience

The narrators tell stories in their own entertaining ways but what is the attitude of the audience? How do they react? First of all it is important to know that the storytelling sessions are not a one-way communication where the storyteller simply talks and the others passively listen'.¹⁹ In fact, it constitutes a continuous interaction where the audience also reacts according to the sentiments evoked by the storyteller. The audience expresses their sympathy by saying *aye*²⁰ the surprise and shock by *yaah lama*,²¹ humour by laughing and other sentiments through a myriad of facial expressions and gestures. Furthermore the audience keeps on saying *dele* or *wum*²² each time the narrator makes a small pause. Here, it is necessary to briefly explain the difference between *dele* and *wum*. The response *dele* which means 'and then' is used for expressing the desire of the audience to know more. This is done mainly to indicate the curiosity of the audience and their eagerness to know, for instance, 'what would happen to the trapped Prince who is on the way to his wedding? As far as *wum* which would mean 'okay' is concerned, it is used as a signal that the story is listened to by the audience. More importantly, the audience responds saying *dele* or *wum* from time to time because 'this custom is to prevent the spirits from listening to the stories

and stealing them. As long as a human being responds and indicates that the story is listened to, the spirits cannot steal them.”²³ Alternatively and practically analyzing, could the function of this response be to make the storyteller aware that the audience is also actively involved and enjoying the narration? This response of the audience could also be a kind of encouragement or ‘cheer’ as a silent audience might demotivate the spirit of the narrator. At times the narrator can become nasty enough to stop the narration if the audience is silent.

However, one thing that is certain is storytellers will never explain why the ugly frog transformed itself into a charming Prince? And, the audience also, on their part, is never curious to know why such unbelievably fascinating event took place. This is because everything is possible in the fabulous world of imagination. The lack of curiosity to explore and question the land of magic is another factor, which adds to the charm of the stories. If otherwise the beauty of the world of folklore would lose its power to captivate and arrest the interest of the Bhutanese. One might then say that it is undesirable to carry out scientific study on the nature and content of the folktales; the fascinating mysteries and magical dimensions of the folktales should never be questioned. The lame monkey²⁴ should continue to train the poor boy on the art of *dza cha dro sum*²⁵ and the *thuen pa pun zhi*²⁶ should forever live in harmony. In case, scientific study unnecessarily attempts to decipher the mysterious events and the magical characters, the folktales would exist no more and with its disappearance many values proper to the Bhutanese will also die.

Close up Formulas

The folktales, as we have seen, have some ritualistic ways of beginning and in the similar manner there are also formulas to close it appropriately. Traditionally, as far as our knowledge is concerned, there are a few formulas to close the narration of the stories. A mention, nevertheless, should be made that these formulas are used especially by the experienced storytellers and not everyone else. The narration

in most cases concludes with the end of the story without making use of the formulas.

One of the popular manners to close a story is the narration of the episode of *dangbo*, *dingbo* that forms a story by itself. *Dingbo* should never catch up with *Dangbo* because if it happens there will be no more stories to be released. As long as *Dangbo* is said before *Dingbo* the folktales will continue to exist. But why should *Dangbo* precede *Dingbo*? Here is the reason. 'Once *Dangbo* escaped from *Dingbo* but a thorn got in the sole of his foot. He could run no longer and on seeing a Brokpa²⁷ *Dangbo* asked for a needle to remove the thorn. On being refused he requested a mouse to eat the bag of the Brokpa. The mouse refused and *Dangbo* asked a cat to eat the mouse but it did not listen. *Dangbo* then sought the help of a dog and asked it to chase the cat. The dog too refused to help and *Dangbo* asked a stick to hit the dog. On receiving a negative response, *Dangbo* asked a fire to burn the stick but it refused. *Dangbo*, at this moment saw *Dingbo* approaching from a distance. Getting nervous, *Dangbo* pleads the water to kill the fire but on being refused, he requested a ram to drink the water. The ram somehow obeyed and as soon as he started to drink, the water was frightened and splashed on the fire to put it off. The fire then sissed and rose to burn the stick. The stick reacted and hit the dog. The dog whimpered and ran. This frightened the cat, which hissed, and finally the mouse began to gnaw at the bag. This made the Brokpa offer the needle to *Dangbo* who used it to take out the thorn and run away as soon as *Dingbo* reached on the spot. *Dingbo* missed *Dangbo* by a hair's breath and the great chase began all over again.²⁸ So, as long as folktales are narrated, *Dingbo* will continue to chase *Dangbo*, and so long as *Dingbo* chases *Dangbo*, folktales will continue to be narrated.

Another way of concluding a folktale is as follows: Once upon a time there lived a hunter without soul. He went to hunt and climbed on a peak without mountain. On seeing a deer without soul he pulled the trigger of his bullet less gun. The deer without soul was hit and ultimately killed.²⁹ What we

observe here is the absence of reality: the man without soul, peak without mountain, deer without soul and a gun without bullet that can kill. This concluding story is an indication provided by the narrator that whatever had been narrated belongs to the fabulous world of magic where anything that is beyond the explanation of rationality and logic can happen.

These close-up formulas are then the tools used by the storytellers to bring back the audience to the real world from that of the land of exciting society of one-eyed sorcerers, evil giants, handsome princes, talking animals and a galaxy of many other fascinating characters. It seems like a hypnotising session where the hypnotiser brings his client to reality by using some formula in order to avoid the problem of displacement of time and space. However, these days, storytelling sessions have become comparatively few and in most cases deprived of all the concluding formulas. Now, the audience is left on their own to return to reality, as most narrators do not recount the close up formulas.

In the close up formula can also be seen the liberty for the narrator to put an end in creative and at times humorous ways. A very good example is the conclusion of the story in the following manner:

'From the wilderness of the east
Came a bull without tail
And put an end to my story.'³⁰

The real beauty of this formula is fully eroded when it is translated, but with a little explanation a part of the charm can be retrieved. In this particular situation the narrator is making use of pun and playing with the word *judu* which can mean tail less as well as 'put an end'. So, the mention of the word *judu* announces the close of the narration. Another way to conclude a narration is fully free style and completely depends on the narrator. For instance, the story itself ends with the marriage of the charming prince and the princess. To this the narrator would add information like, 'I also attended the party. It really was a show of extravaganza...'. When the

narrator says that he was also there during the marriage ceremony the audience would instinctively understand that the story has come to an end. Thus, information related to the stories are fabricated and added as a close up formula by some narrators.

The narrator has another interesting way of putting an end to the narration of stories. Normally, the storyteller says:

'The God has won and the devil has lost.

Hurray!

Hit the devil a hundred times with a stick'.³¹

The audience on their part repeats the whole concluding words.³² This close up formula is a very simple one but one is tempted to say that the story telling sessions seems to be considered as a kind of ritual that is geared towards warding off evil spirits and the bad. Otherwise, why to mention the victory of good and the defeat of the evil? Then, can we say that the stories are also meant to be antidotes for evil and the bad? If so, we have all the more reason to keep the narration of folktales actively alive and hold this tradition from fading away steadily.

There is also a very professional close-up formula. A full free translation of this formula is provided so as to appreciate the imaginative way of concluding a story. Besides its creative quality this formula is also very significant as it puts an end to the narration in an appropriate manner.

'One, two, three passes

Beyond and after traversing the third pass.

One, two, three plains

In the centre of the meeting point of these three plains.

(Lies) a lake no bigger than a mirror

And no smaller than a mirror.

In the middle of the mirror-sized lake

(Lies) a tree no bigger than half the arm's length

No smaller than half the arm's length.

On the tip of this tree

(Sits) a bird no bigger than a thumb

No smaller than a thumb.
On the head of the thumb-sized bird
There is space enough to build a hundred fortresses.
Come and build if you wish
Or just leave it alone.
Underneath the right wing of this bird
There is archery range large enough for a hundred men to
play.
Come and play if you wish
Or just leave it alone.
Underneath the left wing of this bird
There is weaving place large enough for a hundred women to
weave.
Come and weave
Or just leave it alone.
Below the beak and on the throat of this bird
There are eighteen silken knots.
On the neck there are twenty similar knots.
These knots can only be untied with intelligence and
imagination.
Definitely not with teeth and nail'.³³

This concluding formula like the folktale itself is very unrealistic. For, how can there be space enough on a thumb-sized bird to build a hundred fortresses, archery range for a hundred men and weaving place for a hundred women? However, the last two lines convey the message. The narrator concludes the close up formula by saying that the knot on the neck and throat of the bird cannot be untied with teeth or nail but needs to be so done with intelligence and imagination. This is then to be considered as an indication given by the narrator to his audience that what ever has been recounted comes from the fabulous and mysterious land of imagination. This is also to inform the audience, in simple terms, that the story that had been narrated is not real but created. The other reasons are not different from the ones mentioned earlier.

Thus, if the stories belong to the popular imagination that is still alive, it is equally released from the memories of the talented narrators in a very seductive way. The audience, on their part, they also journey into the world of fantasy identifying themselves with the heroes and sharing sincerely all the sentiments and the adventures, but obviously, always in favour of the good.

Role of Folktales in Bhutanese Society

The stories are not simply narrated for the pleasure of exhibiting the knowledge of the storyteller. Putting it the other way, the stories are not deprived and barren of functions. On the contrary, the folktales and its narration hold a very important place and play an indispensable role in the life of the Bhutanese society in general. For, 'Oral literature is a better projection of the innermost recesses of the socio-cultural life of a society and its traditions, customs, social values, rites and rituals.'³⁴

On closer observation, we realize that the folktales are pregnant with a variety of roles that influences the very core of activity of the Bhutanese. According to H. Villa Susie: '...in the everyday life of the Armenians, the stories originated with its real function as entertainment...'³⁵ The Bhutanese situation will not be different, as the absence of any kind of entertainment in the rural pockets of Bhutan obliged the residents to resort to this intellectual feast of story telling sessions. It is important to know that approximately 79% of the Bhutanese population dwell in the villages and some of which are as far as three days walk from the motor road point. The modern amenities like electricity and entertainment gadgets such as video, television, cinema and many others are not available. Tucked away thus, one may think that they lack even the basic entertainment amenities but a closer understanding of the rural community would reveal that they dwell in the state of secret enchantment. One of the sources of enchantment is the storytelling sessions that replace the modern entertainment gadgets of the urban population. Like in the times of their grandparents, in some

villages, the story telling sessions at the close of a hard day's toil, still comprise an entertainment. And yes, if the urban population entertains themselves by reading and watching television, video, cinema and others, the rural residents do the same entering into the fabulous world of magic where animals talk and even marry human and where the arrow of the hero can pierce as many as seven targets at a time. If not more, the narration of folktales can provide as much pleasure, fun and stimulation as the modern entertainment gadgets. Indeed and certainly, storytelling sessions are wonderful alternative sources of entertainment and relaxation that merits to be preserved and promoted.

This genre of oral literature also represents the collective memory of a whole society. The animals who cheats and plays tricks and the animals who transforms into Charming Prince are nothing other than examples through which the beliefs as well as traits linked to a particular culture and tradition are evoked. This is so done by realising the folktales, which are hidden extensions of our mind that lies dormant in the depths of our sub-conscious. Despite the nuances in the art of narration and the use of varying vocabulary, the central theme and the principal facts remain unaltered no matter who narrates the stories. This eventually permits us to say that the folktales do not concern an individual but a particular society in its totality. If the folktales talk of the society, it is in the minds of the people that the stories lie ready to be released at an appropriate moment. The folktales could thus represent the collective memory of a society that is transmitted orally from grandfather to grandson since time immemorial. It is through this collective memory that one society differentiates itself from the other, sometimes through the theme of the folktales and at other times through the interpretation of the theme and the chain of events of the stories. Thus, the folktales, without much hesitation, can be said to be an element that represents the identity of a society. Yes, many beliefs, sentiments as well as values concerning a society is evoked in the day to day life of the Bhutanese directly or indirectly through the vehicle of folktales.

The folktales are normally not very long and the plot is quite simple. This could be one of the reasons why it is easy to store many folktales in the memory, never losing the real essence and the principle theme. Besides, the liberty of using the vocabulary and the skill one possesses encourages all the Bhutanese to narrate folktales. The old and the young alike listen and narrate the same story repeatedly in their own way and always with the same enthusiasm and zeal. The simplicity of the theme and plot of the folktales offers itself as a literary genre that is comprehensible to all; folktales never were esoteric. Thus, the mythical characters which marches across the memories of the narrator allows the audience to explore the land of dreams and return to the mundane world equipped with the philosophy of life, beliefs, code of traditional etiquette, values and many other traits proper to the Bhutanese society. The folktales, if viewed from this angle, assume didactic function. Take for instance, in the story titled, 'The Lame Monkey'³⁶ the poor boy is taught the manners of eating, self-presentation and walking by the monkey. Through this story, the Bhutanese are reminded of one of their indispensable beautiful etiquettes popularly known as *dza cha dro sum* which can be freely translated as 'the three manners of eating, self presentation and walking'. In the like manner, there are stories which stresses on the values of the Buddhist principles of *tha damtshig lejud*³⁷ which means the boundary (*tha*) of honour (*damtshig*) and causes and effects of actions (*lay jude*)...³⁸ These two principles are very important and act as a cementing force of a society and its absence would result in the encountering of unprecedented calamities and sufferings, as it means contradicting what 'accords with morality'.³⁹ Many other values which are the basis of peaceful and harmonious co-existence between man and environment and among human beings themselves are exhibited through the folktales. In addition, obviously, values, which teach how one can become a real member of his or her society, are also revealed through the folktales.

Besides what had been discussed till this point, the folktales play another important role in providing the rudimentary vision of the world. For example, without ever having seen the sea, ⁴⁰ a Bhutanese would describe it as *thamed jamtsho*⁴¹ which means 'a large body of water which stretches without limit'. Further, never ever having gone beyond the mountains that surround their village, an illiterate Bhutanese knows that on the north his neighbour is Tibet and in the south lies India. All these and more such facts are made known to people through the narration of folktales.

The folktales then occupy an extremely important place in the life of the Bhutanese. It is a tool of entertainment, didactic source, medium of communication and a transmitter of values and code of conduct from one generation to another.

Concluding Remarks

The knots on the neck of the 'thumb-sized bird' have to be untied with intelligence, imagination and in human mind; the bullet less gun has killed the deer without soul. If these are some of the formulas of closing a story, we have to agree that the immense reservoir of stories are all created by man for the benefit of the upcoming generations, not only as entertainment but also as a vehicle of transmission of religious, social, and moral values, philosophies and many unique traits of a society. Then, it is not only important to document and create a treasury of folktales but also keep them alive. For this end, folk tale narration competitions could be held at school, institute, *dzongkhag* as well as national levels through the initiative of the Dzongkha Development Commission (DDC). The Bhutan broadcasting service (BBS) could also introduce folktale narration sessions in their broadcasting programmes and produce recorded cassettes. The old timers from the villages could be invited for this purpose. This would make the younger generation who are lured by video, television and other entertainment gadgets to appreciate the charm that is inherent in the folktale narration. Eventually, folktales would regain its momentum and become a source of entertainment as it did in the recent

past. Imagine the renaissance of this beautiful tradition among the Bhutanese youths.

A sincere attempt has been made to document the art of narration of folktales and the role that it plays in the life of the Bhutanese. As mentioned earlier, the area of fieldwork has been kept small for practical reasons. In the near future, similar studies could be conducted in different regions of Bhutan to find out the nuances and similarities in the art of narration, the reaction of the audience and of course its role.

Notes

¹ //bkha' brgyud//

² Thurlow, C., 1981: Preface ix.

³ I would like to extend my sincere thanks to the following individuals of Trashi Tokha village, Bjena Gewog who kindly agreed to participate in the storytelling sessions as narrator as well as audience.

Around 20 stories were narrated within five sittings in the evenings in January, 2001:

Chimmi Zam, 84 years old. (narrator and audience).

Dendup, 75 years old (narrator and audience).

Dorji, 25 years old (narrator and audience).

Kinley Bidha, 64 years old (narrator and audience).

Pema Tenzin, 62 years old (narrator and audience).

Tshering, 35 years-old (audience)

Dema, 27, years old (audience).

⁴ Kunzang Choden, 1993: Preface xi.

⁵ //btang//

⁶ It is important to note that the reference is made just to folktales and not to the narration of epics and biographies of saints.

⁷ In dzongkha it is called *chodrom* (*Ichog sgron*).

⁸ This information was provided by Lopen Jamphel Chhogyal who is the senior most lecturer teaching Dzongkha in Sherubtse College. I had interviewed him in his office on several occasions in August, 2001. Chimmi Zam, 84 years old resident of Trashi Tokha village, also gave the same information.

⁹ //dang phu dung phu//

¹⁰ Kunzang Choden, 1993 : Preface xiv.

¹¹ Jean Louis M.P., 1986/87:48.

¹² Ibid: 49.

¹³ //hen ma hen ma//

¹⁴ Personal communication of Lopen Jamphel Choggyal.

¹⁵ Source: Ibid. The transliteration is provided here-below for the freely translated verse to maintain the beauty of the original formula:

//dang phu ding phu rdo rda ra rdo rog chags pa'i bsgang shing
chang chang hung skye b'i bsgang

chug knar rim kayo rim babs pa'i bsgang

yar yar blta sti

mar mar blta sti

phar phar blta sti

tshr tsur blta sti//

¹⁶// de las//

¹⁷ W.Dessaint and Avòunda N., 1994:120.

¹⁸ Ibid:121.

¹⁹ Kunzang Choden, 1993:Preface xiii.

²⁰ //a'e.//

²¹ //ya bla ma.//

²² //'um.//

²³ Kunzang Choden, 1993 : Preface xiv

²⁴ Ibid: See the story on page 125.

²⁵ //bza' bca' 'gro gsum//

²⁶ //mthun pa spun bzhi// Kunzang Choden, 1993 : See the story on page 54.

²⁷ The nomenclature "Brokpa' is generally applied to the highland people whose main source of livelihood is livestock.

²⁸ This story was told by Chimmi Zam and Pema Tenzin. For more information see Kunzang Choden, 1993:189-191.

²⁹ This concluding story was used by Kinley Bidha and Dendup during the story narration which I organised for the purpose of research.

³⁰ Transliteration of the freely translated verse: //Shar phar gi ri las
blang 'jug du gcig 'ong ti

nga'i gsungs yang 'jug du da'i//

This information was provided by Karma Tshering, Project Manager, Ministry of Trade and Industry in December 16, 2001.

³¹ //Lha rgyal dre pham rgyel lo dre gu te tha khal lnga sdung//

³² Lopen Wangchuck Rinzin, Lecturer, Department of Dzongkha, Sherubtse College provided this information. He is also from Wangdue Phodrang and remembers as a young boy intensively participating in storytelling sessions both as narrator and audience.

³³This concluding formula was provided by Lopen Jamphel Choggyal from his personal collection of unpublished "Lozey" (*blo ze*). The

transliteration is provided below to save the originality and the beauty of this formula.

//gangs gchig gangs gnyis gangs dang gsum
gangs ni gsum brgal b'i phar rgyab nang
spang gchig spang gnyis spang dang gsum
spang ni gsum 'dzoms pa'i sbug lu
mtsho sbom yang mi sbom me long tsam
chung yang mi chung me long tsam
mtsho me long tsam gyi nang shed na
shing sbom yang mi sbom khyu gang tsam
chung yang mi chung khyu gang tsam
shing khyu gang tsam gyi rtse mo lu
bya sbom yang mi sbom 'theb cung tsam
chung yang mi chung 'theb cung tsam
sbya nga r'i mgu to 'gu lu
rdzong rdzong khal lnga yang bzhengs sa yod
bzhengs mi yodn bzhengs shog rmed
bzhengs mi medn tsang rang bzhag
bya nga r'i gshog sgro gyas p'i 'og
skyesp khal lnga dga' b'i mda' cha yod
rkyab mi yodn rkyab shog rmed
rkyab mi medn tsang rang bzhag
bya nga r'i gshog sgro gyon p'i 'og
zam khal nga dga' b'i bal 'thag yod
thag mi yodn 'thag shog rmed
'thag mi medn tsang rang bzhag
bya nga r'i skod m'i gi b'i 'og
dar gyi mdun phud bco brgyad yod
rgyab mdun gtogs par khal gchig yod
de sems dang rig pas 'kholn 'khol
so dang sem mus 'khol mi 'tsugs//

³⁴ Punia, Deep, 1993:11-12.

³⁵ 1966:29.

³⁶ Kunzang Choden, 1993 : 160.

³⁷ //tha dam tshig las rgyu 'bras//

³⁸ Ura, Karma, 1997: 247-248.

³⁹ ibid.

⁴⁰ Bhutan is a land locked country.

⁴¹ //mtha' med rgya mtsho//