

MASS MEDIA: ITS CONSUMPTION AND IMPACT ON RESIDENTS OF THIMPHU AND RURAL AREAS

*Phuntsho Rapten**

Introduction

Mass Media in Bhutan primarily refers to the radio, Kuensel (the national newspaper), cinema halls, television and Internet. These are the main media disseminating information and serving as sources of entertainment. Although different forms of media were introduced since the launching of socio-economic development in the 1960s, television and Internet services were introduced only in June 1999. While television, newspapers, cinemas and Internet services are largely confined to the urban areas radio is the only effective communication medium in the rural areas.

A 1998 listener survey¹ of five *Dzongkhags* (Thimphu, Paro, Chukha, Punakha and Wangdue) gives an idea of the penetration of the media in Bhutan. Taking an example of all the households in five *Dzongkhags* on average, 63.1% own at least one radio receiver, 22.6% own a tape recorder, 6.9 % own a TV screen, 8.4% own a video player or recorder, and 6.5% own a telephone. Although Kuensel is also widely circulated in the country, its readership in the villages is very limited due to a low literacy level.

The media in Bhutan have progressively enhanced individual awareness by widening the scope of information transmission beyond the traditional face-to-face oral interaction to literacy-oriented communication and now to an electronic media. They have helped to share information about the past and present, depict social, cultural and historical aspects of Bhutan that helped to create a common culture, tradition and system of values.

However, the mass media and information technology are increasingly becoming powerful instruments for the penetration of global culture and the values of a global market into Bhutan. This presents one of the greatest

* Researcher, The Centre for Bhutan Studies, Thimphu

challenges to Bhutan as it transitions from a traditional society into the age of information and technology. While the aim is to reap the benefits of mass media, its excessive influence threatens to undermine indigenous culture and value-system. The immediate consequences of such a penetration are already visible through a creation of new Bhutanese culture in major urban centres like Thimphu and Phuentsholing. This new culture is entirely different from traditions of the past, and the culture of rural Bhutan where 79% of the population lives.

Considering the vastness of the subject, this paper, being the first of its kind, only attempts to elucidate the following:

- Evolution of Mass Media
- Media Flow and Consumption, and
- Impact on some residents of Thimphu and rural areas.

Methodology

A questionnaire was designed to identify the role of mass media in the rural and urban areas, how different people select different content of the media and interpret it in different ways and how they influence their needs, interests, attitudes and common values. In-depth interviewing was the primary method used to gather data for this study. In the rural areas, only two villages were selected based on the following criteria:

- Location of the village at least 4 kilometres from the main highway
- Villages are clustered (to have easy access to different households) but situated in different *Dzongkhags*
- Villagers possess at least one radio, and
- Number of households between 20 to 100.

Based on the above criteria, the following villages were selected for the study:

- Tangsibji which has approximately 75 households and is situated 4 Km from the highway in Trongsa *Dzongkhag*
- Lomnyekha, with about 85 households, and situated 5 Km from the highway in Chukha *Dzongkhag*

The *Gup*² or *Mangi Ap*³ was interviewed first who in turn helped to build a pool of informants in the village. While interviewing, special care was also taken so that the pool of informants was representative of the village in relation to gender, age, occupation and economic status.

Unlike the questionnaire for the rural areas, which focused mostly on radio and very little on Kuensel, the questionnaire for urban residents focused on television, Kuensel, radio and other newspapers. Among urban centres Thimphu was chosen for two reasons: Firstly, Bhutan Broadcasting Service (BBS) television and cable television were first launched in Thimphu. Secondly, a majority of all media consumers are located in Thimphu. The questionnaire was distributed to students, civil servants, businessmen, military personnel, and housewives in different places so as to get a cross sectional view.

Section I: Evolution of Media

Kuensel, the National Newspaper

The first modern medium of communication was introduced into Bhutan in 1967 when Kuensel was started as a bi-monthly, internal government bulletin. It was upgraded into a newspaper format with a weekly circulation in August 1986. Today a 20-page newspaper is the only news print medium in the country. Its predominant readership is the urban elite and educated public. It publishes three simultaneous editions in different languages: the English edition: 12,000 copies; the *Dzongkha* (the national language) edition: 3,000 copies; and the *Lhotshampa* edition: 200-300 copies⁴. There are no other newspapers or magazines published in Bhutan. The few other newspapers and periodicals available in the market are entirely dominated by Indian English-language publications like Times of India, Telegraph, Economic Times, Hindustan Times, India Today, and The Outlook. Other international publications available include Newsweek, The Economist, Far Eastern Economic Review, etc. Government organisations, corporations and the private sector mostly subscribe to these papers and periodicals. However, the readership is confined to a relative few, such as senior members of the government and bureaucracy, or to a few leaders in the private sector.

Bhutan Broadcasting Service (BBS)

A rudimentary radio network was first begun when members of the National Youth Association of Bhutan (NYAB) started its first radio broadcast in English on an amateur and voluntary basis using the Civil Wireless Department's 400-Watt Short Wave transmitter on 11 November 1973. It was then only a weekly one-hour transmission. As expectations from its listeners grew over the years, the station became a part of the Department of Information and Broadcasting in 1979. Broadcasting hours were then increased to nine hours a week; three hours daily on Sundays, Wednesdays and Fridays. With the installation of a 5 KW short-wave transmitter in 1986, BBS radio officially replaced the Radio NYAB on air. However, with the development of a new 50 KW short-wave transmitter and a new studio complex in 1991, BBS made a major breakthrough in the radio system by enabling its transmissions to cover more distant areas in the

Kingdom. Coinciding with the 45th Birth Anniversary of His Majesty the King, on 11 November 2000, the BBS started its broadcast in the morning by increasing its airtime from over 42 hours to 60 hours a week. It broadcasts daily in four languages, *Dzongkha*, the national language, *Sharchopkha* and *Lhotshampa*, two major regional languages, and in English. Today Bhutanese people can easily catch radio signals through FM in Thimphu, Paro, Wangdue and Punakha and through short-wave and medium-wave throughout the country. Plans are underway to cover whole country with FM transmission.

Cinema Hall and Video Library

Cinema halls are the oldest form of media communication penetrating the entire country. Out of 11 cinema halls in Bhutan, only nine are operating at the moment, after the ones in Lungtenphu and Deothang ceased to operate. The first cinema hall was started in 1960 in Samdrup Jongkhar followed by MIG in Phuentsholing in 1964 and Losel in Gelephu and Luger in Thimphu in 1972⁵. Screening of films varies from hall to hall both during the weekdays and weekends. While the Luger Theatre in Thimphu screens twice daily on working days and thrice on weekends, halls in Phuentsholing screen movies four times a day. In 1999 it is estimated that Bollywood productions were most popular in all the cinema halls except the Norgay Cinema in Phuentsholing that screens mostly English films⁶. Cinemas in Phuentsholing, Thimphu and Gelephu procure their films on contract basis from distributors of EIMPA (East Indian Movie Producers Association) based mostly in Siliguri, West Bengal. These films are not censored in Bhutan because the Censor Board of India has passed them and hence cinema hall managers consider the films permissible to be watched in Bhutan.

Apart from films, videocassettes are also easily available in all most every district and even in some satellite towns like Gedu, Tala, Khaling, etc. Out of the total number of 160 video libraries in the country by June 1999, 76 are located in Thimphu. The first video library was set up in Phuentsholing in 1970 and it was the only one until 1980 when the first video rental, 'Fashion', was set up in Thimphu.

The programmes and documentaries produced by the Development Communication Centre were among the first local audio-visual productions on Bhutan. A private A-V company, Ugetsu Communications established in 1987, made a major breakthrough by producing the first Bhutanese tele film, Gasa Lami Singye in 1988. Today there are many enthusiastic Bhutanese film producers, which to date have produced about 24 Bhutanese films.

Television

Television was officially launched on June 2, 1999. This made a dramatic change in the media, first by legalising TV broadcasting in Bhutan, and second, by making it accessible to a larger section of the population. Television, however, is not new to Bhutan. Before it was confined only to some families in certain social categories, which received signals through illegal dish antenna. Although BBS TV broadcasts for only one hour every day, cable TV service, which was also launched immediately after the introduction of BBS TV, provides a greater diversity of programmes. Some cable operators provide more than 40 channels.

Internet

Internet service in the country was also introduced at the same time as BBS television. However, access to Internet is very limited and concentrated mostly in the urban areas due to an easy access to computer and telecommunication networks and the presence of comparatively more computer-literate people. Druknet, the sole service provider in Bhutan has more than 1820 paying customers, mainly concentrated in Thimphu. Most of them are government users. The public also have access to the Internet through 'Internet cafes'. There are six in Thimphu, at least two in Phuentsholing and one in Bumthang. Internet is now becoming a powerful instrument of communication as it reduces the cost to acquire and disseminate information. Besides, it is very economical to conduct international transactions and coordination activities.

Section II: Media Coverage and Consumption

Kuensel

The primary role of Kuensel is to provide news about Bhutan to the Bhutanese. Its 20-page format includes 6 pages of home news, 1 page of an opinion section, 3 pages of international news (1 page each for world news, sports news and science and health), 6 pages of advertisement, 2 pages of literary section and 2 pages of leisure.

Kuensel provides four other services that are very significant. First, its editorial section discusses issues of public importance and concern that may have an impact on national policy. Second, its opinion column enables people to express their views and opinions. Third, its literary section encourages the youth to write stories and poems, thereby improving their literary habits. Fourth, its advertisement section informs people about the availability of jobs⁷.

It is a fact that as the district headquarters moves further from Thimphu, the distribution of Kuensel becomes sparse. Table 1 in the appendix shows that apart from its direct subscriptions, Thimphu alone received 3457 copies, Chukha 1270 copies, Paro 890, Bumthang 200 copies, Trashigang 310, and

Trashiyangtshi 11 copies. However, its readership is very limited in the villages. Retired civil servants, *gups* and *chimis*⁸, community teachers and extension workers only read it occasionally as and when it is available through post or from friends.

It is also estimated that 25.3% of Thimphu population purchase Kuensel weekly and 10.1% occasionally. Similarly, 5.8% of the Paro population purchase Kuensel weekly and 13.1% occasionally, and 2.5% weekly and 5.8% occasionally in Wangduephodrang⁹. The following table shows the readers' choice of language in five *Dzongkhags*.

| Sl.No | <i>Dzongkhag</i> | Kuensel readership by language in percentage | | |
|-------|------------------|--|-----------------|--------|
| | | English | <i>Dzongkha</i> | Nepali |
| 1 | Chukha | 72.9 | 21.8 | 16.6 |
| 2 | Paro | 60.2 | 58.4 | 0 |
| 3 | Thimphu | 84.2 | 35.1 | 4.1 |
| 4 | Punakha | 55.7 | 71.8 | 0 |
| 5 | Wangdue | 55.4 | 71.8 | 0 |

Source: Kuensel Reader Survey, Kuensel/CSO/Danida,
1998.

May

It is evident from the above table that readers in general still prefer the English language edition. This is an indication that *Dzongkha*, the national language, which is the Bhutanese national and cultural identity, still needs to be promoted. The total readership for all editions of Kuensel is estimated at 125,000. However, the readership of Kuensel is very poor in rural areas. The following table shows the significant choice of reading.

Reading Preferences (Percentage of readers)

| Sl.No | Contents of Kuensel | Want More | Don't Read |
|-------|------------------------|-----------|------------|
| 1 | National News | 41.7 | 2.2 |
| 2 | Leisure | 30.2 | 7.6 |
| 3 | International News | 25.9 | 15.2 |
| 4 | Literary | 23.2 | 11.1 |
| 5 | Letters and Viewpoints | 18.6 | 16.7 |
| 6 | Editorials | 13.7 | 23.4 |

Source: Kuensel Reader Survey, Kuensel/CSO/Danida, 1998.

May

Besides Kuensel, people also have access to other newspaper and magazines. The following tables show the distribution of newspaper and periodicals and their potential buyers in the three largest bookstores in Thimphu.

Types of daily newspapers sold for the month of November 2000

| Book stores | Times of India | Tele-graphs | Econ-omic Times | Statesma n | Asian Age | Hindu-stan Time | The Hindu | Indi-an Expr ess |
|-------------|----------------|-------------|-----------------|------------|-----------|-----------------|-----------|------------------|
| Pekhahng | 135 | 84 | 26 | 11 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 1 |
| DSB | 103 | 111 | 23 | 56 | 63 | 16 | 14 | 0 |
| Mega | 4 | 6 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 242 | 201 | 49 | 68 | 67 | 20 | 17 | 1 |

Types of weekly periodicals sold for the month of November 2000

| Bookstores | India Today | The Outlook | The Week | Time Magazine | News Week | Asia Week | The Economist | Front line |
|------------|-------------|-------------|----------|---------------|-----------|-----------|---------------|------------|
| Pekhang | 70 | 2 | 1 | 40 | 15 | 26 | 23 | 32 |
| DSB | 36 | 9 | 7 | 25 | 27 | 20 | 29 | 33 |
| Mega | 5 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 2 |
| Total | 111 | 13 | 9 | 68 | 43 | 49 | 53 | 67 |

Types of newspapers subscribed during the month of November 2000

| Customers | Times of India | Tele-graphs | Econo mic Times | States man | Asian Age | Hindust an Time | The Hindu | India n Expr ess |
|---------------------|----------------|-------------|-----------------|------------|-----------|-----------------|-----------|------------------|
| Govt. Offices | 163 | 124 | 34 | 31 | 25 | 10 | 6 | 1 |
| Corporations | 8 | 25 | 6 | 22 | 14 | 6 | 5 | 0 |
| Private Firms | 26 | 27 | 7 | 4 | 23 | 4 | 6 | 0 |
| Institutes/ Schools | 4 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Individuals | 41 | 21 | 2 | 11 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 242 | 201 | 49 | 68 | 67 | 20 | 17 | 0 |

Types of periodicals subscribed during the month of November 2000

| Customers | India Today | The Outlook | The Week | Time Magazine | News Week | Asia Week | The Economist | Frontline |
|------------------------|-------------|-------------|----------|---------------|-----------|-----------|---------------|-----------|
| Govt. Offices | 79 | 7 | 2 | 65 | 37 | 37 | 40 | 47 |
| Corporations | 11 | 0 | 2 | 3 | 6 | 6 | 7 | 2 |
| Private firms | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Institutes/ Schools | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Individuals | 17 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 6 | 5 | 16 |
| Total | 111 | 13 | 9 | 68 | 43 | 49 | 53 | 67 |

Source: Data collected from three bookstores in Thimphu in the month of November 2000.

The above figures reveal that government offices are the largest buyers. They subscribe for 67.3% of Times of India, 61.6% of Telegraphs, 69% of Economic Times and 45.5% of Statesman. For periodicals, they subscribe for 71% of India Today, 53% of The Outlook, 95% of Time magazine and 75% of The Economist.

BBS Radio

Considering the topography of the country, diverse language groups and low literacy and income level, radio serves as the most cost effective and accessible source of news, information and entertainment among the Bhutanese people. The programmes that are broadcast are diverse in nature, from public service programmes to entertainment.

During the weekdays, BBS radio broadcasts for nine and half hours: three and half hours in *Dzongkha* language and two hours each in English, *Lhotsham* and *Sharchogpa* languages. On average, the broadcasting duration for different contents in a day is roughly 2 hours and 20 minutes for news, 2 hours for music, 55 minutes for advertisement and 30 minutes for *zakar*¹⁰. BBS also broadcasts some special programmes on specific days for about three hours and thirty-five minutes in all the languages. Such programmes include farming, health, environment and youth (Monday & Tuesday), culture, religion, women, *namthar*¹¹ (Wednesday & Thursday), and teaching, feature, story and jokes (Friday). However, during the weekends BBS broadcasts for only 7 hours. During the weekdays music is played for about 15 to 30 minutes in the afternoon in all languages and even longer during the weekends (See table 2 for more detail).

BBS radio is primarily geared towards the rural population and covers about 90% of the Bhutanese population. BBS estimates that there are 200,000 to 250,000 radio receivers in the country with a total listening population of over 400,000 people¹². The expansion of FM networks from FM 92 and 96 Mhz for the listeners in capital to FM 88.1 Mhz and FM 98 Mhz to four neighbouring districts have increased the radio coverage.

Of those who listen to radio daily in five *Dzongkhags*, on average 84.4% listen to the *Dzongkha* language broadcasts, 26% listen to the English service, 21% listen to *Sharchogpa* service and 21.1% listen to the *Lhotshampa* service¹³. In Thimphu alone, 71.3% of the daily listeners listen to *Dzongkha*, 44.3% listen to English, 29.2% listen to *Sharchogpa* and 22.8% listen to *Lhotsham* programmes.

With regard to news preferences, a majority of the people prefers national news followed by local and international news. However, 37.7% of the listeners (from five *Dzongkhags*) want more of music, 11.2% want more of agriculture programmes, followed by announcements and health programmes with 6.7% and 5.6% respectively.¹⁴

Television and Movie Halls

BBS television telecasts a one-hour programme every day; from 8pm-9pm during the weekdays and from 7pm-8pm during the weekends. The first thirty minutes covers news in *Dzongkha* and English. Another thirty minutes covers various programmes either produced by the BBS, acquired locally or from outside Bhutan. At the moment, BBS television is only available to Thimphu valley. However, some cable operators relay each evening's programme to other towns the following day or a few days later. Since the launching of the television till 30th of November 2000, BBS TV has telecast 487 programmes¹⁵ of which 36.5% (177) are in *Dzongkha* language (including some repeated programmes). The programmes include *Dzongkha* drama, visits of the royal family to different districts, festivals, serials (Dorozam, Lam and the turquoise), films (Semkha Thralamlam, Gasa Lamey Singye, Phama) etc. Also during the same period, about 52 % (253) of the total entertainment programmes shown are on Bhutan. Since

February 11 2000, BBS TV also introduced a programme 'Bhutan This Week' (collection of the week's news) that is telecast every Friday in *Dzongkha* and English alternatively.

As of now, there are 27 licensed commercial TV cable operators in the country. It is estimated that there are more than 10,500 subscribers. Today cable TV is available in district centres of Thimphu, Phuentsholing, Paro, Samtse, Samdrup Jongkhar, Gelephu, Trashigang, Bumthang, Chukha, Monggar and Wangduephodrang and in satellite towns like Gomtu and Gedu. Dish antennas are also available in Pemagatshel, Zhemgang, Sarpang, Dagana, Tsirang and Haa. Therefore, a majority of the *dzongkhags* are connected to television.

Apart from television, movie halls still continue to serve as a popular source of entertainment to the public.

Types of movies shown in different halls in 1999

| Sl.No | Cinema Hall | Nos. of movies screened | | |
|-------|-----------------------|-------------------------|---------|--------|
| | | Hindi | English | Nepali |
| 1 | Thimphu (Lugar) | 83 | 15 | 5 |
| 2 | Phuntsholing (Norgay) | 54 | 72 | 3 |
| 3 | Phuntsholing (MIG) | 108 | | |
| 4 | Gelephu (Losel) | 48 | 24 | 2 |

Source: Interim data collected for a study on Mass Media in Bhutan by The Centre for Bhutan Studies, January 2000

This data clearly show that Hindi films make up 80.5 % of a total number of 103 films shown in Lugar Theatre in Thimphu. Similarly, 64.8 % of the 74 films shown in Losel cinema hall in Gelephu are Hindi films during the same year. Conversely, all the films shown in the MIG cinema hall in Phuentsholing are Hindi. Norgay Hall in Phuentsholing during the same period showed 55.8% of English movies. Hindi Movies are extremely popular in Bhutan and 80% of cassettes available for rent in video libraries in the country are also Hindi movies.

Section III: Impact of Media

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. Although its specific impact in villages and Thimphu will be discussed separately, in general, the media has a tremendous impact in sustaining and weakening, if not eroding, the fabric of social life.

It has enabled people to have access to different sources of information and entertainment. It has also facilitated the people to see different peoples of the world (especially prominent personalities), their diverse cultures and customs, religion, and their way of life, thus, creating better ideas and perceptions about the world. The media has also helped to document endangered species, vanishing cultural heritage and life styles and activities of the past.

At the same time it has also influenced people to accept global culture and values. This has led to the undermining of indigenous culture and practices. The excessive advertisement that is now available on television more than on videos leads to changes in dress style and to new consumption demands particularly among youth, which constitutes about 57%¹⁶ of the total population. This is already visible through the display of more modern consumer goods in the market. Besides, violence portrayed on television encourages violence. Scenes of nudity and sexuality, implied or other wise, undermine the sanctity of family values and society at large.

Consumption and Impact Among Some Residents of Thimphu

Out of the total respondents, 45% are female and 55% are male. They comprise of students, government employees, housewives, military personnel and businessmen between the ages of 15 to 60 years. Among all the respondents, 4% do not possess television but have access to it through friends and neighbours. 39% bought a television set after the introduction of television. 23% do not listen to radio because they feel that television is more informative. 90% of informants buy Kuensel weekly and the rest only occasionally or on alternative weeks. 57% read other newspapers like Times of India, Telegraphs, Economic Times and The Asian Age.

Although television viewing hours are directly dependent upon the nature and type of programme, about 38% of viewers watch between 3 to 4 hours a day, 18% watch between 5 to 6 hours a day and about 16% watch between 1 to 2 hours a day. In terms of channel preferences, females mostly watch MTV, followed by Zee TV, B4U, Star Movie and Star World. Similarly, male viewers mostly watch the National Geographic followed by BBC, Star Sports, ESPN, CNN and HBO. Children mostly watch Cartoon Network followed by Kermit and Star Sports. However, almost all of them watch BBS television when it is telecast.

Among those who listen to BBS radio, 50% listen in the evening, 13% in the morning and 18% both in the morning and evening. 76% of them listen to the English service, 58% to the *Dzongkha* service, 18% to the *Sharchogpa* service and about 7% to the *Lhotsham* service. A majority of them listen to news followed by music, environment, education, health, *zakar* and religion and *namthar* programmes. Their listening hours vary from 10 minutes to 7 hours. Amongst listeners, 93% listen to BBS radio, 45% BBC, 20% Voice of America, 18% All India Radio and 5% Radio Nepal.

Of those who buy Kuensel (weekly and occasionally), 92% buy the English edition, 16% buy the *Dzongkha* edition and 1% buy the Nepali edition. About 58% read home news, 25% read international news and editorials, and 22% read the viewpoint and advertisement pages. But 23.8% read all the sections.

Since the respondents clearly indicated that radio and newspaper do not impact them negatively in any way, the following section particularly looks at the impact of television among some residents of Thimphu.

Advertisement and Consumerism

Television influences people's life style greatly through its visual impact. The advertisements on television introduce consumer goods and modern ideas about life and work. These invariably tempt the consumers to adopt western lifestyles of conspicuous consumption. For instance, the repeated advertisements on new cars, new clothes, high-tech cell phones, and latest

cosmetic and kitchen appliances generate new desire among the consumers. About 30% of informants reported that they have been influenced by the advertisements. Incidentally most of them are females. Under its influence, they have bought different products like frying pans, shampoo, face cream, clothes, shoes, tooth paste, Bournvita, soap and Coca-Cola to name a few. They have also bought goods, which are usually accompanied by free gifts. They identify more with the modern elements on television than older people do. The most dramatic change is seen in their way of thinking which are reflected in their approach to clothes, to concepts of love and beauty and other lifestyle images, which are continuously impressed upon their minds through television. As the average urban Bhutanese family becomes wealthier, things that were once luxuries are now becoming a necessity. Two-wheelers and television sets are good examples. And the choice of such goods is highly influenced by advertisements.

It is also a fact that advertisements create desires, which cannot be satisfied by people's current economic position. Crimes and corruption are often born out of economic desires. While no research has been carried out to determine this link, incidences of juvenile delinquency reveals some related evidence.

Restructuring of Human Relationship

"Since the June 2 launch of BBS's television service, the daily routines of many people in Thimphu-if not their lives-have changed."¹⁷ It has undoubtedly changed their sitting arrangements, meal timings, pattern of communication and transformed many other similar social activities. Before the arrival of television, household members often sat together after meals to tell stories and share their experiences. Now the television has become their focal point of attention. Some parents have developed a tendency to spend less time with their children and to delay their household chores and ignore some family matters in order to see their favourite programmes on television. Since the introduction of television, meals are also being served at different hours and sometimes in different locations. It has also changed their sleeping habits. 50% of the respondents agreed that it has greatly shifted their sleeping hours to late night (11 to 12 am). Face-to-face interaction with neighbours and family members is also declining although a few of them argued that family interaction has increased.

However, at least 35% of them certainly felt that it has decreased their interaction with their neighbours because they spent their free time watching television.

Development of children

Children are the most vulnerable section of society and most easily influenced - desirably or undesirably- by television images. Although parents in general agreed that it has enabled their children to learn new languages and improve their speaking, it has created a new kind of generation where electronic entertainment is taking away their time for reading and writing. Since they are kept engaged and not bored very frequently, this does not provide enough time for children to think and be creative. Now they watch more and play less. 45% of the respondents reported that their children watch television between 1 to 12 hours a day.

The following excerpts clearly show the impact of television on children. "My son has several stories to narrate ... 'Appa, *goonda* (villain) was beaten up by *keta* (hero) and then the policemen appeared and took all of them to jail....' In a minute's time, he runs into the kitchen and comes running back ...He holds a spoon, which he pretends is a microphone, in one hand, and solicits my attention. With his eyes closed and his chest pushed forward, he starts reproducing some part of the sentences from the World Wrestling Federation fights. He has different stories to tell everyday. He has different actions to demonstrate almost everyday.. They (some high school girls) also watch MTV and other music channels like MCM and B4U Music. Whenever they are free, they are most certainly discussing Sharukh Khan, Madhuri Dixit and a host of other Bollywood stars. I interrupt and ask them how old Madhuri Dixit is and one of them proudly answers, 'she is thirty-four'. "¹⁸

Cultural Influence

Among other forms of media, television plays a vital role in moulding people's opinion. The more a society is exposed to external forces and ideas, the more transformation it undergoes. Once an individual or an institution in the society accepts something new, it profoundly impacts other cultural values. Since cable television provides programmes for 24

hours, audiences gradually become powerless and accept the importation of external cultural productions. This changes people's perception, ideas and behaviour. Foreign cultural products often influence youth and its consequence is seen in the way they dress, speak and think. "Indeed, it may be no exaggeration to say that we are now facing the emergence of two relatively distinct Bhutan. The difference between them is being defined along the traditional differential faults of language, religion, environment, customs, and even dress. But the situation is more complex. First, the new culture is being created in specific localities, but the fault line between the two cultures runs through Thimphu and Phuentsholing and into the heartland of the other Bhutan. Thimphu and Phuentsholing are urban centres whose population is drawn from all over Bhutan, and the new culture impacts the members of Bhutan's various sub-cultural groups throughout country through their members who reside in Thimphu and Phuentsholing. The ties between the urban and the rural population are still such that people visit their villages and inevitably, consciously or unconsciously, take home elements of the new culture created by the media."¹⁹

Although television provides entertainment, it also creates conflict among its viewers when they only own one television set. Children like to watch cartoon, housewives like to watch Hindi serials and films, and husbands like to watch Star sports. The conflict culminates when all favourite programmes are shown at the same time. Some times, it even provokes misunderstanding and creates unpleasant atmosphere.

Impact in the Rural Areas

Bhutan is predominantly a rural society where access to modern telecommunication and media is very limited. The villagers of Tangsibji and Lobneykha do not have access to any modern mass medium except radio, which is the most popular among them. However, due to the language barrier, most of them only listen to BBS radio in the *Dzongkha* language let alone listening to other stations.

Since the impact of radio is not as immediate as the audio-visual impact of television BBS radio repeats the same programmes in different languages in a day to catch the attention of its audiences. The following section explains

the impact of radio among students, farmers and lay priest according to their choice of programmes.

Students

School children constitute about 28% of the respondents from two villages. Students between grades three and seven listen to BBS radio only in the *Dzongkha* language more in the evening than morning because they need to wakeup early in the morning and start early to reach school on time. Among the students interviewed between 9 to 17 years 100% listen to news and songs, 85% listen to education programme and 71% listen to health programme. The news keeps them informed about the current activities of the nation and world at large. Being young, they all listen to modern Bhutanese songs rather than traditional songs for two reasons. First, the lyrics and tunes are very appealing and captivating because they are mostly composed around the theme of love. Their tunes, usually borrowed from Hindi or Tibetan songs are easier to get familiarised with. Second, they prefer modern electronic musical instruments, which are more diverse and powerful than traditional instruments such as *lingm*, *dramnyen*, *chiwang* and *yangchen*. The songs that they learn from radio are usually sung and danced in school during its annual concert and inter-house song and dance competitions. They also sing and dance during the annual rituals conducted at home or at their neighbour place. Through such singing and dancing they are able to socialise in the community. Traditional songs are not so appreciated by the young because it takes time to understand and appreciate the values of traditional songs, unlike modern Bhutanese songs, which are mostly love songs that appeal them. Apart from music, they also listen to educational programmes because they discuss the education system and its values, which are very relevant to them. They like to listen to a replication of class room teaching programme because a comprehension followed by its question-answer session usually enable them to learn new lesson and morals and helps to improve their analytical and listening skills. They also listen to health programmes because they keep them aware of health and sanitation and other health issues such as family planning, HIV and AIDS.

Farmers

70% of the respondents are farmers between 20-65 years of age. 100% listen to news, 85% listen to music, 80% to *zakar* and farming, 74% to health and 62% to environment. However, they cannot listen to BBS radio daily because they are more in the field than at home even during the weekends.

Moreover, as the BBS transmission closes at 6.30 pm during working days, people can hardly catch the programme after the work. Therefore, the frequency of consumption of news and other programmes is also limited. But whenever they are at home they listen to radio preferably in the morning between 7-8am and after 5pm. in the evening. The news, amongst others, keeps them informed about royal visits, development activities and the current security problems (ULFA & Bodo) in the country. Unlike students, most of the farmers prefer to listen to traditional songs like *boedra* and *zhungdra*. They transmit religious, social and environmental values, of which the elder people are very fond. They also listen to *zakar* because it enables them to schedule their activities appropriately. It foretells the appropriateness of an intended journey, business and construction undertakings, consecration and conduct of religious rites etc. Farmers also listen to farming programmes, as they inform them about the scientific and modern method of farming, traditional cropping practice, seasonal crop diseases and measures to be adopted among others. Besides, they also provide information about the market price of various crops in different seasons. This greatly helps the farmers to estimate how much profit they would earn if they sell their crops outside the village. The radio also makes farmers aware about the need to preserve and promote the environment.

Lay Priest

12% of the respondents are lay priests who serve religious functions in the village. All the respondents reported that they listen to news, music, and *zakar*. However, 90% listen to religion and *namthar*, 83% to health and 66% to environment programmes. The impacts of news, music, *zakar* and health are the same. But the religious and *namthar* programmes have special value to them. For instance, they reinforce the values of compassion and altruism, the benefit of prayers and rituals and the meaning of impermanence that are important in making them more human, generous and humble. Besides, this type of programme also disseminates the merits and virtues gained by some of the religious practitioners and dos' and don'ts for human beings. It also addresses the advantage of being born a human being and the possibility to attain enlightenment in one's lifetime.

Like the urban experience, rural areas have their own incidences of conflict arising mainly from choice of programmes. Conflict often arises among household members when they own a single two-in-one tape recorder. Often housewives and children love to play modern Bhutanese and Hindi cassettes while older people love to listen to radio for news and music. They complain that songs played on the tape recorder often irritate them and try to turn them off if possible. They succumb most of the time, except when their favourite *boedra* and *zhungdra* are aired. These they listen to with full satisfaction.

Another incident occurred in Lomnyekha village about a year ago during their annual *Bumdey* ²⁰recitation. People gathered in an open ground to see a video brought by one of the businessmen for public entertainment during the ceremony. Older people wanted to see a Bhutanese film while younger ones wanted to see a Bollywood or American production. Eventually they could not resolve their conflict and older people cut off the electric line.

Conclusion

Due to the difference in distribution and consumption, the impact of media differs between rural and urban areas. Since villagers are mostly illiterate, radio is the only medium through which they are being informed, both about the nation and the world at large. In particular, through radio they learn about government policies and development activities taking place around the country. However, despite the availability of many stations via radio, most Bhutanese only listen to BBS radio due to the language barrier. Therefore, the variety of news, programmes and entertainment are limited and hence the impact of media is also limited in the rural areas. Had there been television instead of radio in the rural area, the impact would have been very different, because of its visual powers.

However, its impact in urban centres is both positive and negative. It has enabled urban residents to have access to different sources of news and entertainment. It has also enabled people to express opinions and participate in public discourse. The television has further enabled people to see beyond their traditional borders, peoples and culture of the world and, therefore, broaden their perceptions and ideas. On the other hand, it has encouraged adoption of western lifestyles of conspicuous consumption,

erosion of native values and languages and changed their interactions with family and neighbours. It has also allowed foreign culture to penetrate and influence traditional cultural practices. Although its impact at the moment is very marginal, it may increase over the years.

The greatest challenge that Bhutan is facing at the moment is to make a conscious and informed choice in order to benefit from mass media and information technology, and at the same time keep its negative forces at bay. Bhutan also needs to take precautions against the possible emergence of an information gap and place emphasis on providing relevant media content. In order for the media to play an effective role in the development of the nation, it must promote education and awareness, and enhance public discourse and participation.

Notes

¹ BBS Listener Survey: BBS/CSO/DANIDA, May 1998.

² Village elected headman.

³ Community Leader.

⁴ RGOB (2000). Development Towards Gross National Happiness, Seventh Round Table Meeting, 7-9 November, Thimphu: DADM, MOF, p.67.

⁵ CBS(2000). Mass Media: Legislation and Policy Issues (Unpublished).

⁶ See interim data collected for a study on Mass Media in Bhutan by The Centre for Bhutan Studies, January 2000.

⁷ RGOB (2000). Development Towards Gross National Happiness. Ibid., p.68.

⁸ People's representatives to the National Assembly.

⁹ See Kuensel Reader Survey, Kuensel/CSO/Danida, May 1998.

¹⁰ Astrologer reports on the day. It is a custom in Bhutan to consult an appropriate day with an astrologer before performing any social or religious activity.

¹¹ Hagiography.

¹² RGOB (2000). Development Towards Gross National Happiness. Ibid., p.69.

¹³ BBS Listener Survey. Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Data received from BBS library.

¹⁶ RGOB (2000). Development Towards Gross National Happiness. Ibid., p. 57.

¹⁷ See Kuensel editorial titled "Media momentum" dt. August 14, 1999.

¹⁸ See Karma Galay's viewpoint on 'Impact of cable TV-a parent's perspective', Kuensel dt.23/9/00.

¹⁹ Kinga, S, Raptan, P and Galay, K (2000). Non-Traditional Security in South Asia: Information Flow, Society and Culture-Globalisation and Information Technology in South Asia with Special Reference to Their Impacts on Bhutan. p.,12.

²⁰ Recitation of 100,000 stanzas of Buddha's teachings consisting of 12 volumes.

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Table 1: Weekly Kuensel Supply as of 25.11.00

| Sl. No | Dzongkhag/ Place | Distribution of Kuensel by language | | | Total |
|--------|-----------------------|-------------------------------------|----------|-----------------|-------|
| | | English | Dzongkha | Lhotsh- ampa | |
| 1 | Thimphu | | | | 3,457 |
| 2 | Chukha | 1270 | 263 | 45 | 1578 |
| 3 | Paro | 890 | 175 | 17 | 1082 |
| 4 | Haa | 100 | 60 | 5 | 165 |
| 5 | Wangdue | 230 | 130 | 10 | 370 |
| 6 | Punakha | 208 | 135 | 0 | 343 |
| 7 | Bumthang | 200 | 160 | 0 | 360 |
| 8 | Mongar | 190 | 65 | 4 | 259 |
| 9 | Tashi Yangtshi | 11 | 7 | 0 | 18 |
| 10 | Trashigang | 310 | 150 | 5 | 465 |
| 11 | Samdrup Jongkhar | 280 | 135 | 3 | 418 |
| 12 | Sarpang | 300 | 100 | 17 | 417 |
| 13 | Tsirang | 110 | 40 | 20 | 170 |
| 14 | Samtshi | 250 | 75 | 4 | 329 |
| 15 | Zhemgang | 70 | 20 | 0 | 90 |
| 16 | Lhunsi | 70 | 40 | 2 | 112 |
| 17 | Pema Gatsel | 40 | 15 | 0 | 55 |
| | India (North East) | 110 | 1 | 30 | 141 |

Source: Kuensel Corporation, Thimphu, November, 2000

Table 2: Radio Schedule

Weekdays: Morning

| Language | BST | Content |
|-------------------|------|---|
| <i>Dzongkha</i> | 0700 | Anthem/Prayers |
| | 0710 | Advertisement |
| | 0720 | Zakar |
| | 0730 | News Brief |
| | 0740 | Farming (Mon, Tues), Cultural (Wed, Thurs), Teaching (Fri) |
| | 0750 | Health (Mon, Tues), Religion (Wed, Thurs), |
| | 0800 | News |
| | 0810 | Advertisement |
| | 0820 | Environment (Mon, Tues), Women's (Wed, Thurs), Feature (Fri) |
| | 0830 | News Brief |
| | 0840 | Zakar |
| | 0850 | Youth (Mon, Tues), Namthar (Wed, Thurs), Story & Jokes (Fri) |
| | 0857 | Services |
| English | 0900 | News |
| | 0910 | Advertisement |
| | 0915 | Services |
| | 0920 | Buddhism Series (Mon, Wed, Fri) - Youth Forum (Tues, Thurs) |
| | 0930 | News Brief |
| | 0940 | Farming the Bhutanese Way (Mon, Wed, Fri) - Zakar (Tues, Thurs) |
| | 0950 | Toh Baygye Oye (Mon, Wed, Fri) - Region in the News (Tues, Thurs) |
| <i>Lhotsham</i> | 1000 | News |
| | 1010 | Advertisement |
| | 1015 | Services |
| | 1020 | Environment |
| | 1030 | News Brief |
| | 1040 | Health |
| | 1050 | Agriculture |
| <i>Sharchogpa</i> | 1100 | News |
| | 1110 | Advertisement |
| | 1115 | Services/Zakar |
| | 1120 | Religion (Mon, Tues) - Culture (Wed, Thurs) - Namthar (Fri) |
| | 1130 | News Brief |
| | 1140 | Zakar |
| | 1150 | Agriculture (Mon, Tues) - Health (Wed, Thurs) - Legshey (Fri) |
| | 1200 | Transmission Break |

Weekdays: Afternoon

| Language | BST | Content |
|----------------|------|---------------|
| English | 1400 | News |
| | 1410 | Advertisement |

| | | |
|-------------------|------|--|
| | 1415 | Education Calling Teachers (Mon), Topical (Tues), Buddhism Series (Wed), UN Calling Asia (Thurs), Bhutan This Week (Fri) |
| | 1430 | Music |
| Lhotsham | 1500 | News |
| | 1510 | Advertisement |
| | 1515 | Health (Mon), Topical (Tues), Request (Wed), Local Talents (Thurs), DJ's Choice (Fri) |
| | 1530 | Music |
| Sharchogpa | 1600 | News |
| | 1610 | Advertisement |
| | 1615 | Farming (Mon), Health (Tues), Request (Wed), Cultural (Thurs), Request (Fri) |
| | 1635 | Listener's Choice (Mon, Tues, Thurs) |
| Dzongkha | 1700 | News Brief |
| | 1710 | Environment (Mon), Youth (Tues), Culture (Wed), Cultural (Thurs), Namthar (Fri) |
| | 1735 | Health (Mon), Request (Tues), Farming (Wed), Religion (Thurs), Bhutan This Week (Fri) |
| | 1800 | News |
| | 1810 | Advertisement |
| | 1815 | Music (Mon, Wed, Fri), Request (Tues, Thurs) |
| | 1830 | Close Transmission |

Weekends

| Language | BST | Content |
|--------------------------|------------|---|
| <i>Dzongkha</i> | 1000 | Anthem/Prayers |
| | 1015 | Zakar/Advertisement |
| | 1020 | Stories & Jokes (Sat), Teaching (Sun) |
| | 1035 | Request (Sat), Guest of the Week (Sun) |
| | 1100 | Music |
| | 1200 | Feature (Sat), Education Calling Teachers (Sun) |
| | 1220 | Request |
| | 1300 | News |
| | 1310 | Advertisement |
| | 1315 | Request/UN Programme |
| <i>Sharchogpa</i> | 1400 | News |
| | 1410 | Advertisement |
| | 1415 | Short Stories & Jokes (Sat), Request (Sun) |
| | 1435 | Listener's Choice (Sat) |
| <i>Lhotsham</i> | 1500 | News |
| | 1510 | Advertisement |
| | 1515 | Request (Sat, Sun) |
| English | 1600 | News |
| | 1610 | Advertisement |
| | 1615 | Thimphu Top Ten (Sat), Request (Sun) |
| | 1700 | Close Transmission |

Source: Bhutan Broadcasting Service, Thimphu, December 2000