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Political Scenario in Bhutan during 1774-1906: An Impact Analysis on Trade and Commerce

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The East India Company's relationship with Bhutan may be traced back to the conflict between the Princely state of Cooch Behar and Bhutan in 1772 where the Deb Raja of Bhutan defeated King Khagendra Narayan of Cooch Behar. The latter's army commander Nazir Deo re-attacked Bhutan[1] on behalf of the Prince and subsequently won the battle with the help of British soldiers. The relation between Bhutan and British India became imminent when the Deb Raja solicited the mediation of Panchen Lama of Tibet and fell back to the British power. This relationship, however, opened up a new vista to British imperialism from the last quarter of the eighteenth century onwards. While the East India Company's desire to promote its trade in the Himalayan kingdoms, especially Tibet, was one of the reasons to this end, the other reason might be its design to consolidate its empire in this subcontinent against the expansion of the Russian and Chinese imperialism. Various political events like wars and peace-treaties followed as the Company administration in Bengal sought to realise these objectives. In the ultimate analysis, these political events shaped the trade relation of Bhutan with its neighbouring countries. The present article seeks to bring out these causations between various political events and trade relation of Bhutan during the previous centuries.

Section I of this article documents various political events that led to the evolution of Bhutanese trade during the eighteenth-nineteenth centuries. Section II, however, traces

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[1] Deb, *Bhutan and India*, p.74.

out various political events that were intended to obstruct the expansion of Russian and Chinese imperialism. Section III contains a brief conclusion.

Section I: Major political events prior to 1900

The East India Company always operated on the motive of trade and for the promotion of British goods in overseas markets. These basic objectives of the Company explained its growing interest on Bhutan from the second half of the eighteenth century onwards. Moreover, as Bengal's route to Tibet through Nepal had already been closed by that period[2], the Company was eager to find out an alternative trade route to Tibet and China via Bhutan. The relationship with Bhutan could enable the Company to access the markets in the Himalayan kingdoms for their goods. A letter of Warren Hastings, the-then Governor General of East India Company, to the Court of Directors in London, supports this surmise. He wrote on April 4, 1771 "It …[has] been presented to us that the Company may be greatly benefited in the sale of broadcloth, iron and lead and other European commodities by sending proper persons to reside at Rungapore to explore the interest of parts of Bhutan….."[3] Warren Hastings, indeed, took various steps in favour of the Bhutanese traders so that the English trades could get an access to that country. He also sent four political missions to Bhutan and Tibet, headed respectively by Bogle in 1774, Hamilton in 1776 and 1777, and Turner in 1783.

These missions were primarily entrusted with the job to secure permission for European merchants to trade in Bhutan and Tibet. The Bhutanese traders had all along been strongly objecting to any such concession as they apprehended that the European participation in this business would curtail their share in it and dampen the rate of return therefrom. In particular, as a principal trader in that world of

[2] Secret Consultations, 24th February 1775, No. 4, referred in Gupta, *British Relations with Bhutan*, p. 44.
[3] Collister, *Bhutan and the British*. p.8.

business, the Deb Raja was strictly in opposition. Bogle thus revealed, "The Deb Raja made many objections to allowing merchants to pass through Bhutan, insisting that it had never been the custom [for] strangers to come into their kingdom…"[4] The Deb Raja, however, rationalised his judgement in various ways. Once he pointed out, "[T]he inhabitants [of Bhutan] were of a hot and violent temper, and the country woody and mountainous; and in case of merchants being robbed it might occasion disputes and misunderstanding between them and the Company's servants."[5] To Bogle such statements simply intended to camouflage his private interest: "The opposition of the Bhotias really proceeded from motives which they industrially concealed."[6] Similar statement was put on record by the next Deb Raja when Hamilton visited Bhutan. The ambassador of the-then Deb Raja carried a message to Bogle against the entry of the English and other Europeans in Bhutan.[7] Bogle was, however, able to secure the access of non-European traders from Bengal for the purpose of trade in Bhutan.[8] One of the articles of the agreement between the East India Company and the Deb Raja of Bhutan that was concluded at that time proclaimed, "[T]he Deb Raja shall allow all Hindu and Musalman merchants freely to pass and repass through his country between Bengal and Tibet."[9] The argument also provided certain benefits to the Bhutanese traders in Bengal. We may mention in this context that the Bhutanese traders were given to enjoy trade privileges at Rangpur in Bengal as before and they could also proceed, either themselves or by their gumashtas, to all places in Bengal for the sell of horses,

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[4] Public Conr., 19th April 1779, No. 2, containing Bogle's report to Warren Hastings dated 30th September 1775 referred in Gupta, *British Relations with Bhutan*, pp. 42-43.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Sen, *Records in Oriental Languages (Bengali Letters), vol. I, No. 1* referred in Majumdar, *Britain and the Himalayan Kingdom of Bhotan*, p.54.

[8] Majumdar, *Britain and the Himalayan Kingdom of Bhotan*, p.52.

[9] Gupta, *British Relations with Bhutan*, pp. 46-47.

free from duty or any other hindrance; that the contemporary duty levied at Rangpur from the Bhutanese caravan was abolished; that there had earlier been a ban on the purchase of oil and dried fish in Rangpur by Bhutanese merchants. On the complaints received from them, Warren Hastings removed all those bans. He instructed, "[T]he district official should issue Perwannahs to the Zeminders and officers of the districts in which the Bootias have been accustomed to buy these articles, to protect and assist them in carrying on their trade and to allow their oil and dried fish freely to pass the different chokeys and gauts."[10] We may also mention that the exclusive trade privilege was given to the Bhutanese sellers in sandal, indigo, otter skins, tobacco, betel-nut and pan; other merchants were thus prohibited to import these commodities into Bhutan[11] and that the government extended civic facilities to the Bhutanese and Tibetan traders who visited Calcutta every year in winter to sell their wares. A Buddhist temple was also constructed near Calcutta, which they could use as a meeting place, a place of night halt as well as for the purpose of prayer.[12]

In addition to promoting trade to Tibet via Bhutan, the British Government in Bengal sought to enhance the commercial contact between the hill people and the inhabitants of the plain. In this connection, Warren Hastings advised Bogle on May 13, 1774, "The design of your mission is to open a mutual and equal communication of trade between the inhabitants of Bhutan and Bengal…."[13] To this end, the British Government took initiatives to establish a series of trade fairs in the plain where the hill people could conveniently participate. We may cite in this context the trade fair at Rangpur (now in Bangladesh) which Bogle initiated in 1780, and also the Titaliya fair in Jalpaiguri district[14] that Dr.

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[10] Quoted in Firminger (ed.), *Bengal District Records, Rangpur, vol. I.*, p.5.
[11] Ibid. p.47.
[12] Deb, *Bhutan and India*, p.138.
[13] Collister, *Bhutan and the British*, p. 13.
[14] Hunter, *A Statistical Account of Bengal*, p. 270.

Campbell, the first Superintendent of Darjeeling, established. This practice continued in the following century. Among the fairs that the British government set up for the interaction with the hill people, the important ones were the Phalakata trade fair[15], the Alipur fair[16] and the Kalimpong fair. Large number of traders from Sikkim, Nepal, Tibet and Bhutan used to attend these fairs. These annual gatherings not only promoted British goods to a wider market but also strengthened the Anglo-Bhutanese relation, and pacified instability across the border. Collister thus remarked, "…Campbell's administration provided an enlightened period of comparative peace on the frontier during which trade between Bhutan and Company's land was encouraged."[17] Apart from establishing these fairs, the government patronaged these fairs every year, and looked after their securities[18] by stationing policemen at Phalakata and Alipur[19] and entrusting the job for the Alipur fair to the military cantonment at Buxa.[20]

The British move to promote trade with Bhutan through fairs was due to the contemporary trade practices and rules in Bhutan. The Bhutanese rules and regulations on the domestic and foreign trade had been in vogue since the time of Ngawang Namgyal in the seventeenth century. For domestic trade, Namgyal had laid down, "[A]ll barter or trading should be carried on at fair and prevailing rates and not at extortionate and preferential ones. Forced gifts of butter or salt were also strictly forbidden."[21] For export and import trade he had enforced, "The headman should inspect the product of the country industries, and see that they are honest and solid in the make and texture. The merchants who have the responsibility of the import trade at the different

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15 Ibid. p. 297.
16 Ibid. p. 270.
17 Collister, *Bhutan and the British*, p. 78.
18 Deb, *Bhutan and India*, p. 63.
19 Hunter, *A Statistical Account of Bengal*, p. 295.
20 Ibid. p.262.
21 Hasrat, *The History of Bhutan*, pp.57-58.

marts also satisfy that they get good things, and all traders must obey the State merchants in these particulars."[22] These rules were mandatory for all traders in Bhutan.

While the British government in Bengal had thus been striving for better trade with Bhutan since the 1770s, a series of political events in this Himalayan kingdom around the second half of the nineteenth century further added momentum to development. In this connection we stress specifically the annexation of Assam and Bengal duars during 1841-65. It is well established by now that the maintenance of peace at the Assam-Bhutan frontier was the primary objective of the British administration in Bengal behind the annexation of duars.[23] But the trade motive was also there. Around the mid-nineteenth century Assam became economically important due to her land and climatic conditions that suited uniquely for the cultivation of tea. The East India Company turned to Assam for tea plantation in 1833 when the Chinese Government did not renew the Company's monopoly right over its lucrative trade in tea. Speculations on tea made duars lucrative to the British since the clearance of undulating forest in this region was expected to generate revenue from timber, and to make the place at the same time ideal for the cultivation of tea. The duar tract was, indeed, rich in timber, especially for extensive sal forests in Sidli, Ripu and Chirang duar. To clear these tracts, the forest tribes like Meches, Garos, Cacharis and Parbateas[24] were expected to migrate into this region as the labour force. Immigrants were also expected from surrounding districts under British administration and Cooch Behar. In addition to tea and timber, two more considerations were there. First, cotton was cultivated abundantly on the slopes of the hills, and these so-called 'hill-cottons' might be exploited for profitable ends; and second, the region had 'an excellent

[22] Ibid.
[23] Gupta, *British Relations with Bhutan*, p. 193.
[24] Proceedings of the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, Oct, referred in Gupta, *British Relations with Bhutan*, p. 141.

market for English cloth and brass and copper ware.'[25] The British administration was, therefore, confident about the duar tract being eventually able to attract entrepreneurs for tea and cotton plantation as well as for the exploitation of timber. A conjecture of more than three times increment in revenue generation within one and a half decade was the driving force behind the annexation of this region in the British dominion. After a number of battles with Bhutan, the British conquered seven duars in Assam and eleven duars in Bengal.

Although the Bengal Government paid a sum of Rs.50000 to Bhutan as compensation, the annexation of duars had serious adverse impacts on the Bhutanese economy in general and on her trade in particular. Bhutan had earlier kept trade linkage with Assam and Bengal through these duars. Her people including the privileged class used to get all necessary and luxury items from these places.[26] Indeed, Bhutanese traders faced unprecedented hazards in business due to the economic blockade that the British enforced during the duar war. Also, the local people of duars, the Mechis for example, suffered from scarcity and starvation as they primarily survived on trade with Bhutan. They were on record to complain,

> "[W]e regret to say that owing to the scarcity of rice our helpless families are brought to starve. The cause of the grievances arises from the war, being still continued. The merchants, who had hitherto supplied us with rice and cotton seeds, venture not to come to our quarter nowadays."[27]

In view of the resentments of the Bhutanese government and her people, the British administration in Bengal adapted a number of measures. An annual compensation to the Government of Bhutan by Rs.50000 was surely an important

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[25] Ibid. pp. 140-141.
[26] Deb, *Bhutan and India*, p. 118.
[27] Referred in Sen, "The Duar War of 1865", p. 29.

step to this end. Moreover, the British provided a series of facilities to Bhutan's trade and commerce.[28] Among other measures that were targeted to pacify the traders in Bhutan, the Bengal Government established weekly markets, called 'hats', at suitable places where the Bhutanese traders and consumers could procure rice, cotton, dried fish, pigs, lac, tobacco etc. that were produced in plenty in duars. Such hats were also set up in several places in Darrang and Kamrup duars.[29]

The duar war had far-reaching socio-political impacts in this Himalayan kingdom. Since an early time the Penlops (governors) were involved in fighting with each other leading to turmoil in domestic law and order situation. For the first time, the duar war motivated them to form a pressure group to initiate peace dialogue with the British. The Deb Raja was also in favour of such a dialogue. The chief intention of these Governors was obviously the prosperity of the Bhutanese trade which they themselves carried out heavily. This effort culminated to the Sinchula Treaty in 1865. It brought an end to hostilities, and provided a congenial environment for mutual peace and friendship between Bhutan and British India. This Treaty was based on the philosophy of laissez faire which swept the British society around the mid nineteenth century. This free trade philosophy was contained mainly in article IX of the Treaty, which abolished the contemporary duty on the import and export of the Bhutanese goods in India and also on the British goods imported in Bhutan or transported through it.[30]

The Sinchula Treaty was not very successful for two basic reasons. First, the free trade doctrine of the Treaty was not widely acceptable to the Bhutanese society. We have already pointed out that the Bhutanese were suspicious about the European traders; and they did not allow them to trade

[28] Gupta, *British Relations with Bhutan*, p. 115.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Aitchison, *A Collection of Treaties, Engagements and Sanads, Vol. XIV, Part IV*, p. 98.

directly in Bhutan for a long time. Possibly this fear-psychosis developed out of their experience in its neighbour country of Bengal where the European trading community ultimately took over the political power. Secondly, some provisions in the above Treaty were violated by Lord Bentink and this adversely affected the interest of Bhutanese trade. As for example, Bentinck discontinued the allowance that had been provided to the leaders of trade caravans from Bhutan at Dinajpur and Rangpur.[31] Free accommodation of the Bhutanese at the market places was also discontinued. These created serious resentment among the Bhutanese traders.

While the Sinchula Treaty could not much accelerate the Bhutanese trade for the above reasons, the internal political chaos that took place during 1866 to 1898[32] crippled trading activities in the country. Three civil wars were fought here in succession. The first one ran for about two years since 1866 in consequence of the conflict between the Wangdiphodrand Dzongpon (Officer in charge of a district) and the Punakha Dzongpon; the second civil war broke out in 1877 as the Punakha Dzongpon revolted against the Deb Raja; and the third one occurred in 1884 with the Deb Raja, the Thimphu Dzongpon and the Punakha Dzongpon on the one side, and the Trongsa Penlop, Paro Penlop and various other local Dzongpons on the other. Out of these civil wars the Trongsa Penlop emerged as the undisputed ruler of Bhutan.

For these long-drawn internal disturbances a downward trend ushered in Bhutan's trade with British India during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. This is borne in Figure 1 which displays the trends of her imports and exports (along with the total for 1879-1900). It clearly demonstrates a steady decline in all these series. Taking import and export together, the shrinkage is worked out at 7.44 percent annually, from Rs.675 thousand in 1879-80 to Rs.271 thousand in 1899-1900. To grasp these trends more precisely, we present below

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[31] Rennie, *Bhotan and the story of the Dooar War*, pp.159-160.
[32] Singh, *Himalayan Triangle*, p. 330.

the estimated trends of the time-series of total trade (T), exports (X) and imports (M) for the period of 1878-79 to 1899-1900. The estimations are made on the basis of the least-square method.

Y_T = 329097.2 - 3070.217 t.....(1)
(S.E.=46298.469) (S.E.=3525.105) R^2=0.037
(t= 7.108 (t= -0.871 F=0.759 (Sig=0.394)
Sig=0.000) Sig=0.394) DW=1.738

Y_M = 153998.7 - 526.401 t .....(2)
(S.E.=19657.174) (S.E.=1496.672) R^2=0.006
(t= 7.834 (t= -0.352 F=0.124 (Sig=0.729)
Sig=0.000) Sig=0.729) DW=1.778

Y_X = 178137.5 - 2730.207 t .....(3)
(S.E.=28762.356) (S.E.=2189.928) R^2=.072
(t= 6.193 (t= -1.247 F=1.554 (Sig=0.227)
Sig=0.000) Sig=0.227) DW=1.592

where t represents year.

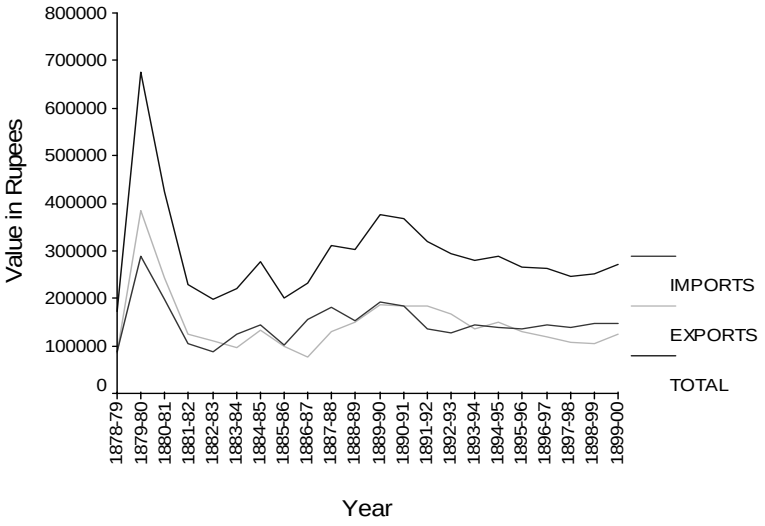

Fig 1: Bhutan's trade during 1879-1900

The above Estimations do not suffer from the problem of autocorrelation as the observed value of Durbin-Watson (DW) statistic is above the tabulated value of du in each case. Against the relevant tabulated value of du at 1.174 at 1% level, its observed value is 1.738 for Estimation (1), 1.778 for Estimation (2) and 1.592 for Estimation (3). However, the most revealing finding of this exercise is that the results corroborate negative impacts of the political events of the late nineteenth century Bhutan on her trade. According to our estimates, the annual rate of decline during 1878-79/ 1899-1900 was about Rs.526 for import and Rs.2730 for export. The latter was thus worse hit. Total trade, however, suffered annually by around Rs.3070. The precisions of these estimates are, however, doubtful because of their high standard errors, viz. 1496, 2190 and 3525 respectively. Moreover, the R^2 and F-statistic are found very low for all the estimated relations indicating thereby that the relations are insignificant. Even if we do not accept a strong negative trend in these series, we may certainly conclude that there was stagnation in Bhutan's import and export trade during 1878-99 with a definite tilt to fall. And these tilts were, indeed, due to her internal political disturbances.

Section II: Political events in the early 1900

The imperial expansion of Russian during the last quarter of the nineteenth century was a major political event in the Asian landscape as it caused a threat to the expansion of the British trade in the Himalayan kingdoms. The British Government in Bengal sought to politically counter this potential threat by involving both Tibet and Bhutan in their favour. Bhutan's trading activities at the debut of the twentieth century were largely affected by the conflict of these imperial forces in the Himalayas.

Recorded history informs that during the second half of the nineteenth century Russia had been extending her empire to Amur and Vladivostok with a view to setting up a naval base at the southern end. The objective was evidently to get rid of the obstacles of ice in her international sea route. By that

time Russia became powerful in Siberia also as China was reduced in strength.[33] Siberia was connected with her sea port, the Port Arthur, by a newly constructed trans-Siberian railway that was extended to China via Manchuria. This great railway was entirely supervised by the Russians so that they could have direct influence over a wider geographical milieu.

By the end of the century Russia had also consolidated her political influence in Asia, particularly in the Mongolian domain. Her expansion became undoubtedly a real threat to the central Asia and the Himalayan countries. The British military officers were worried about the expansion of Russia towards Chinese Turkestan which was situated in between Russia and Tibet. To check Russian expansion towards Turkestan, the Anglo-Russian Pamir Boundary Settlement took place in 1895. The conflict between the expansion of Russian and British imperialism was thus imminent. Indeed, the Anglo-Russian Pamir Boundary Settlement (1895) that declared status quo across a given corridor in the western Himalayas resolved the tension in the west.[34] But in the eastern Himalaya, the threat of Russian expansion remained unresolved as they had already reached at the door of Tibet. The British was seriously concerned about this development because, as we have already pointed out, they targeted the Tibetan market as an outlet of British goods, especially woollen fabrics. As a matter of fact, the steady growth of Indo-Tibet trade inspired J.C. White, the British political officer in Sikkim, to send in 1894-95 the specimen of British woollen fabrics to Tibet to grab that market but 'Lhasa was opposed to the entry of British and even Sikkimese subjects into Tibet.' As the direct route to Tibet through Sikkim was obstructed by the Tibetans, Bhutan gained importance to the British at the end of the nineteenth century. The Russians had also immense trading interests at Tibet. By the end of the nineteenth century she had already had an extensive market in that country for her products like woollen cloths and glass

[33] Parker, *A Historical Geography of Russia*, pp. 366-367.
[34] Lattimore, *Studies in Frontier History*, p. 168.

ware.[35] These markets she had occupied by competing with the Chinese goods.[36]

In 1899 when Curzon came as Viceroy, the British administration was suspicious about the collusion between the authorities of Russia and Tibet.[37] To check Russian expansion towards Tibet, Curzon decided to send in 1903 an armed mission under the leadership of Younghusband to develop relationship with the Dalai Lama, the political authority of Lhasa. In view of the fact that the British had previously failed to establish direct contact with him, Curzon sought for the assistance of Ugyen Wangchuk, the Trongsa Penlop of Bhutan. Ugyen Wangchuk, indeed, assisted the Younghusband Mission in all respects. The relationship between the British administration and Tibet that emerged in this process culminated to the Anglo-Tibetan Convention of 1904. This mission had an explicit objective to promote trade. Out of nine articles that were adapted in the convention, as many as seven were directly or indirectly related to trade between Tibet and Bengal. Those articles[38] were: (1) new trade markets were to be developed at Gartok and Gyantse, (2) the questions of tea and tariff were agreed to be discussed later on, (3) free trade provision for quota-related articles were also to be settled later on mutual agreement, (4) roads to new trade marts were to be constructed, (5) a compensation of Rs.75,00,000 should be given to the Tibetans at the installment of Rs. 100000 per year in seventy five years, (6) the British were to occupy Chumbi valley for the collection of compensation and the operation of trade marts, and (7) the Tibetans should destroy all forts along the Indo-Tibet border.

That the Trongsa Penlop was instrumental in forging relationship between the British and Tibet both the Younghusband mission and the Viceroy of India sincerely acknowledged. Thus, Younghusband put on record,

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[35] Collister, *Bhutan and the British*, p. 135.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Singh, *Himalayan Triangle*, p. 334.
[38] Lamb, *Britain and Chinese Central Asia*, pp. 302-303.

> "The Tongsa Penlop himself, the principal man in Bhutan, accompanied the mission to Lhasa, put me into communication with leading men and was highly instrumental in effecting a settlement. A year ago the Bhutanese were strangers, today they are our enthusiastic allies."[39]

In a similar tone a contemporary document notes, "His Excellency the Viceroy entertains no doubt that the Trongsa Penlop's sound advice and exhortation to the Tibetan Government have been promoted by an earnest desire to establish feelings of friendship and good understanding between the parties to the recent Agreement."[40] In recognition to the service that Bhutan rendered, the British extended many facilities to that country under the recommendations of White who led a mission to Bhutan in 1903-05. Among others White recommended: (1) that the Government of India should enhance the subsidy to Bhutan from Rs.50000 to Rs.100000; (2) that the Sinchula Treaty of 1865 should be revised in respect of Bhutan's foreign relation with China and Tibet; (3) that new roads should be constructed in Bhutan under the financial assistance from British India; and (4) that the Indo-Bhutan trade relation should be improved.[41] Also, the British administration provided compliments to the Trongsa Penlop Ugyen Wangchuk by conferring him the title of Knight Commander of the Indian Empire. He was invited as a State-Guest of the Government of India, and given a reception similar to those provided to the Maharajas of Princely States. In 1907 when the Bhutan Darbar decided Ugyen as the hereditary chief, the Indian Government immediately supported the decision.

China's threat to Bhutan further pushed Bhutan closer to British India during the first quarter of twentieth century. By the early twentieth century it was well understood in the British circle in Great Britain as well as in India that Russia

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[39] Quoted from Kohli, *India and Bhutan*, p.164.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Collister, *Bhutan and the British*, p. 155.

was no longer interested in Tibet as she was grossly involved in war with Japan. But since the days of the Younghusband mission, China had been following a policy to extend the border towards Tibet as well as other kingdoms in the Himalayas. In so far as Tibet was concerned, she was determined to invade the country with the hope to establishing her suzerainty. In a communication to Bhutan, China, indeed, explicitly claimed her political sovereignty over that country. It noted, "The Bhutanese are the subjects of the Emperor of China who is the Lord of Heavens, and are of the same religion as the other parts of the Empire. You, Deb Raja, and the two Penlops think that you are great, but you cannot continue without paying attention to the orders of your rulers."[42] From such a perception China directed the Deb Raja to develop China-Bhutan trade. The document instructed, "The Popon [Paymaster] will inspect your climate, distance of places, crops etc. Transport of fifteen ponies and twenty coolies must be supplied. The Deb Raja must try to improve the trade of the country and the condition of tenantry."[43]

Bhutan did not, however, pay any attention to those Chinese directions and, in fact, restricted the entry of the Popons inside Paro. Though the Maharaja of Bhutan did not even meet the Chinese delegation in person the British administration sought to keep Bhutan under a tighter grip by providing her further supports such as financial and engineering supports to the construction of roads, managerial supports to her tea gardens, etc. These supportive gestures from the British end went a long way to improve the Indo-Bhutan political and trade relations in the early twentieth century. Necessarily, those relations were based on mutual trust and confidence. This policy was, however, altered during the period of Lord Minto (1908) who favoured direct military intervention in the Himalayan kingdoms to check the Chinese aggression. Therefore, the Punakha Treaty (1910) that was

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[42] Kohli, *India and Bhutan*, p.176.
[43] Ibid.

signed between British India and Bhutan promulgated the Bhutan government to seek mandatorily the advice of the British government in her external relation with other countries.[44] This treaty thus enabled the British to trade in Bhutan through controlling her external affairs with other countries. In fact, Bhutan's trade with British India showed a rising trend from the beginning of the twentieth century.

We, thus, find that while the period 1878/79-1899/1900 was characterised with political instabilities in Bhutan, both internal and external, the following period of 1900/01-1905/06 was tranquil in both these front. Since the British India government was largely instrumental in her emerging external tranquility and this they did by way of trade-centric policies, we reasonably expect Bhutan's trade to exhibit rising trend in this period. Figure 2 confirms this. It shows that the period witnessed a 60.42 percent annual growth in export. For export and import together, the growth was from Rs. 271 thousand in 1899-1900 to Rs. 1.27 million in 1905-06.

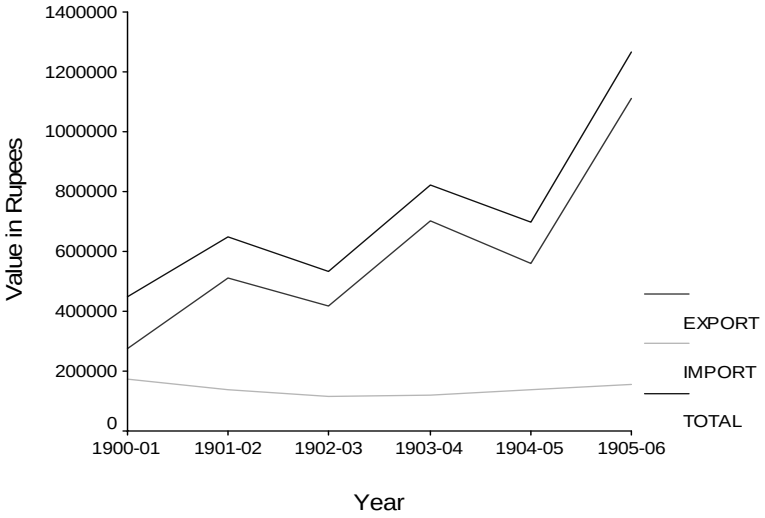

Fig 2: Bhutan's trade during 1900-1906

[44] Aitchison, *A Collection of Treaties*, p. 100.

Rising trends in these series are precisely estimated below on the basis of the least square method. The notations are as before.

Y_T = 284683.8 + 128956.2 t .....(4)
(S.E.=166966.4) (S.E.=42873.004) R^2=0.693
(t= 1.705 (t=3.008 F=9.047 (Sig=0.040)
Sig=0.163) Sig=0.040) DW=2.683

Y_X = 135752.7 + 131559.3 t ..... (5)
(S.E.=158843.4) (S.E.=40787.219) R^2=0.722
(t= 0.855 (t=3.226 F=10.404 (Sig=0.032)
Sig=0.440) Sig=0.032) DW=2.886

Y_M = 148931.1 - 2603.114 t .....(6)
(S.E.=22072.782) (S.E.=5667.767) R^2=0.050
(t= 6.747 (t= - 0.459 F=0.211 (Sig=0.670)
Sig=0.003) Sig=0.670) DW=1.042

For the estimated relations (4) and (5), the value of R^2 is found moderately high, viz. 0.693 and 0.722 respectively. Their observed F-statistics are also found significant at more than 0.5 percent level. We thus infer that these estimated relationships are significant. Moreover, the Durbin-Watson (DW) statistics are found above the tabulated du level for both the cases so that they do not suffer from the problem of autocorrelation. These estimations, however, indicate that Bhutan's export trade and total trade experienced steep upward trends during this period. Annual rates of absolute growth are Rs.132 thousand and Rs.129 thousand respectively. These estimates are significant at 0.04 percent and 0.03 percent respectively from the viewpoint of Student's t-statistic.

Estimation (6) that relates to the trend of import is, however, found insignificant from the viewpoints of R^2 and F statistics. While R^2 is as low as 0.211, the observed F-statistic is insignificant at 0.1 percent level. Moreover, the observed DW

statistic belongs to the inconclusive range of tabulated dL-dU. Hence, the goodness of fit is very poor for Bhutan's import trend in this period of study. In fact, the flat segment of import series in Figure 2 presumes such results. Juxtapose to this absence of any upward trend in import, the upshot of Bhutan's export in the early twentieth century bears a significant indication. It signifies that British India sought to get political relationship with Bhutan by greater in-take of Bhutanese goods although Bhutan did not much enhance the import of goods from British India in this period. This prima facie contradicts the widely accepted doctrine that the economic interest always prevails over the course of political actions by the 'core' capitalist countries. But we should note that British India's trade interest with Bhutan might have been sacrificed for political gains. But those political gains were expected to promote further trade in the long-run with Bhutan and also with Tibet and China.

Section III: Conclusion

Various political events concerning Bhutan in the eighteenth-nineteenth centuries had thus far-reaching bearings on her foreign trade. When the Tibetan trade route via Nepal was closed to the British in the late eighteenth century, the East India Company sought for a route to Tibet and China through Bhutan. But since Bhutan was stubborn not to allow transit trade or trade in Bhutan by the European, the Company's administration in Bengal sent several political missions to Bhutan and Tibet. Many trade concessions were also granted to the Bhutanese. The Company could obtain at the end trade permissions for non-European traders, especially Indians. But the Duar War (1865) that the British indulged in for tea and related industries in and around Assam vitiated the mutual trust between British India and Bhutan. A series of trade-related concessions including an annual compensation was sanctioned to Bhutan on that occasion through the Sinchula Treaty (1865). But the laissez faire philosophy that the Treaty enshrined was not appreciated at large in the Bhutanese society. Moreover, the Bengal administration disobeyed some of its clauses. The Treaty could not, therefore,

bring any break-through in trading activities between these countries. Three successive civil wars in Bhutan during 1866-84 further vitiated the prosperity of trade. Our trend analysis during 1878/79-1899/1900 has, in fact, shown that there was a secular decline in her imports and exports during this period.

The following period of 1900/01-1905/06 brought trade prosperity to Bhutan based on the privileges that British India granted to her. The British sanctioned those concessions with a view to checking the expansion of the Russian imperialism in the Eastern Himalayas, especially the kingdoms of Tibet, Bhutan and Nepal. In fact, with the help of the Trongsa Penlop of Bhutan, the British mission could establish a liaison with Tibet. The Chinese threat to Bhutan also induced the British to keep her under a tight grip. Because of benevolent British policies, however, Bhutan's trade grew rapidly during this period. Our trend analysis suggests that her export trade took a steep upward turn during 1900/01-1905/06 although her import trade remained largely stagnant.

There is no doubt that the British and the Bhutanese worked together for their mutual interests. The Trongsa Penlop assisted the British during the Younghusband mission for several reasons. He knew that Bhutan depended on the annual subsidy given by the British Government, and its withdrawal might be dangerous for the Bhutanese economy.[45] Moreover, he was very much concerned about trade, and strongly believed that the occupation of Chumbi valley by the British might help them move forward in trade-related issues. After becoming the hereditary monarch of Bhutan in 1907, Ugyen Wangchuk focused on improving the country's economic conditions through various schemes. Those initiatives and efforts established a firm relation between Bhutan and British India during his reign.

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[45] Kohli, *India and Bhutan*, p.160.

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Democracy from Above: Regime Transition in the Kingdom of Bhutan

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The tiny Himalayan Kingdom of Bhutan became the world's newest democracy this year when its first-ever multi-party election ended over a century of monarchical rule. On March 24, over 80% of eligible Bhutanese voters heeded the King's order and flooded the polls to cast their votes. The Druk Phuensum Tshogpa (DPT) secured a landslide victory, winning forty-five out of forty-seven seats in the National Assembly. What explained the recent political regime transformation from an absolute monarchy to democracy in the Kingdom of Bhutan?

Questions relating to why certain countries transition to a democracy when some others do not, have been among the most pivotal and heatedly debated issues for the study of democracy. Over the course of forty years, several political theorists, such as Samuel Huntington and Seymour Martin Lipset, have tried to outline a broad conceptual framework for the types of societies that would be "conducive" to the emergence and the sustainability of democracy. Yet, each time an odd case comes along (i.e. Singapore, South Africa) that defies the cookie-cutter theoretical structure. This prompts political scientists to revisit old theories and draw up new ones to explain such outliers. To this end, our understanding of democratisation is not a static set of beliefs, but a rather fluid and ever-changing view. Bhutan's transition to democracy is an exceptionally unique case that will help enrich the overall literature on democracy as well as further enhance our understanding of the most studied political system in the world.

Three questions will be discussed in this paper. First, can the

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recent regime change in Bhutan be contributed to a classical modernisation theory? Although many advocates of modernisation theory have received their fair share of criticism over the years, the theory has stood the test of time relatively well[1] and has remained one of the most cited democratisation schools of thought, especially in Asia where the correlation between the level of economic development and stable democracy is strongest with the advent of democracy in South Korea, Japan, and Taiwan occurring at around the same time as the establishments of their economic institutions. It is no surprise that followers of Bhutanese politics may attribute the recent change in the country's political system to the rise in the population's income. But is this the case of Bhutan?

Second, if the structuralist school of thought, including the modernisation theory, does not explain the introduction of democracy to Bhutan's political system, then what might explain the phenomenon? Can a competing theory of the study of regime change – the voluntarist school of thought – bears the answers to such question?

Third, what are the implications of the answers to the above two questions to the future of the political system in Bhutan? What might be challenges that are laying ahead for the proponents of democracy in Bhutan? Moreover, how can the case of Bhutan's democratisation enrich the overall knowledge of the theories of regime study amongst political scientists?

Few case studies offer a clear-cut voluntarist approach more clearly than Bhutan. Indeed, the transition to democracy is single-handedly introduced and carried out by the monarchy itself. Despite several signs of improved social and economic conditions amongst the populace, the Bhutanese people have

[1] Fukuyama, F (2005). "Confucianism and Democracy," in L. Diamond, M. F. Plattner & P. J. Costopoulos (eds.) *World Religions and Democracy*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.

neither developed a sizable middle class nor a sense of civic and political consciousness to push for political change. Quite the contrary, whenever the monarchy implements modernisation or liberalisation reforms, the Bhutanese public resists any change that would devolve the power away from their beloved monarch. Consequently, the historic transformation of the system of governance to democracy represents, by and large, a directive from the royal family, not the wish of the people. The people have entrusted their benevolent King to know what would be best for the country, and would only be too happy to follow his order.

The first part of the essay will focus on theoretical framework of structuralist and voluntarist approaches on political regime change. The second part will address Bhutan's underlying social and economic conditions prior to the regime transformation. Analyses will be given as to why regime change was not called for by the mass, but rather instigated by the ultimate leader of the nation. The historic election, to most Bhutanese, represents a "change in continuity"[2], rather than a holistic political transformation.

Structuralist v. Voluntarist

The study of regime transformation is dominated by two competing theories: structuralism and voluntarism.[3] Some

[2] This term was coined by Thierry Mathou in Mathou, T (2000). "The politics of Bhutan: Change in continuity," *Journal of Bhutan Studies,* 2(2), 250-262. Retrieved from http://www.digitalhimalaya.com/collections/journals/jbs/pdf/JBS_02_02_09.pdf

[3] Refer to the following literature for analyses of structuralist and voluntarist arguments: O'Donnell, G. & Schmitter, P (1986). *Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies.* Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press; Bermeo, N (1990). "Rethinking Regime Change," *Comparative Politics,* 22, 359-377; Mahoney, J. & Snyder, R (1999). "Rethinking Agency and Structure in the Study of Regime Change," *Studies in Comparative International Development,* 34(2), 3-32.; Adeney, K & Wyatt, A (2004). "Democracy in South Asia: Getting Beyond the Structure-Agency Dichotomy," *Political Studies*, 52 (1): 1-

political scientists have referred to them as the "structure-agency dichotomy" (Adeney & Wyatt, 2004, p.1). According to the structuralists, a regime change relies on factors such as "class, sector and world-systematic political economy."[4] Human actions are either caused or highly influenced by their social and economic positions. Modernisation theory is an integral part of the structuralist argument for it embraces the idea that choices made by human entities are influenced or shaped by their socio-economic positions. In the trailblazing work of Moore, he first pinpointed that bourgeois revolutions culminate the Western form of democracy.[5] The middle class in Britain and France - empowered by their new economic fortunes - began to demand political freedom from the ruling landed upper class.[6] What ensued was a bourgeois revolt against the old establishments. Likewise, Lipset argues that there is a relationship between the degree of economic development and the chance to sustain a democracy.[7] A country with a lower level of wealth distribution, less widespread education and greater degree of class struggle can breed radicalism because these factors precipitate discontent. Several other scholars have also identified linkage between capitalist development and a chance to sustain democracy.

Other factors such as institutional structures, past conflicts or colonialism are considered instrumental in having long-term impacts on subsequent political developments.[8] As

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[4] Mahoney, J & Snyder, R (1999). "Rethinking Agency and Structure in the Study of Regime Change," *Studies in Comparative International Development,* 34(2), p. 3.

[5] Moore, B., Jr. (1966). *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World.* Boston: Beacon Press, p. xxi.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Lipset, S. M. (1998). *Democracy in Asia and Africa*. Washington DC: Congressional Quarterly, p. 31.

[8] Rueschemeyer, D., Stephens, E. H. & Stephens, J. D. (1992). *Capitalist Development and Democracy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p. 23.

Luebbert points out, "…no stable interwar regime was formed that lacked mass support, each regime was based on a distinctive social or class alliance, and each regime had clear material winners and losers" (Luebbert, 1991, p. 306). Furthermore, the dependency theory put forth by O'Donnell has been used to explain why some Latin American countries that had undergone late, but nonetheless, rapid economic growth opted for an authoritarian regime. In the heart of his argument, O'Donnell posits that economic dependence tends to "create pressures towards authoritarian rule" (see Rueschemeyer, Stephens & Stephens, 1992, p. 22). Literature on structuralist approaches has dominated the study of regime change in the past few decades.[9]

Voluntarist approaches have emerged as a competing school of thought that seeks to credit human behavior as key to regime transformation. Varying regime outcomes are a result of agential motivations and interest calculations, rather than their socio-economic roles. The voluntarist arguments place an importance on interests of political actors that are not necessarily rested on social or economic grounds. In *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes* (Stepan & Linz, 1978), Stepan and Linz attribute the overthrow of President Joao Goulart by the military to Goulart's style of leadership, political acts and strategies and personality.[10] While acknowledging structural factors, such as macro-economic environment, in particular the withdrawal looming economic crisis, Stefan concludes that they are not sufficient to cause a regime collapse where a political leader can play a "special

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[9] Refer to works by Moore, B., Jr. (1966). *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World.* Boston: Beacon Press; O'Donnell, G (1973). *Modernisation and Bureaucratic-Authoritarianism: Studies in South American Politics.* Berkeley: Institute of International Studies, Politics of Modernisation Series No. 9; Luebbert, G. (1991). *Liberals, Fascism, or Social Democracy: Social Classes and the Political Origins of Regimes in Interwar Europe.* New York: Oxford University Press.

[10] Stepan, A & Linz, J (eds.). (1978*). The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, p. 133.

role in bringing the regime to a final breakdown point."[11] Likewise, Almond, Flanagan and Mundt discuss in their book *Crisis, Choice and Change: Historical Studies of Political Development* (Almond, Flanagan & Mundt, 1973) that political actors do have room to maneuver, or "a range of freedom of choice"(see Mahoney & Snyder, 1999, p.16), when it comes to the final decision making. In sum, voluntarist theorists believe that structures are "external constraints, which actors may or may not encounter as they pursue their goals."[12]

What really distinguishes the structuralist from the voluntarist arguments is the level of analysis. Structuralism gives way to macro-level analysis, which encompasses factors such as world system, economic development, domestic-structural and institutional.[13] To be sure, structuralists believe that a country's level of economic development, its strategic position in the international arena, "objective social groups defined by their socio-economic positions" (Mahoney & Snyder, 1999, p.9), political parties and military or judicial institutions contribute to a change in regime. On the other hand, voluntarists focus on micro-level elements, such as political leadership and subjective social groups, as sufficient explanations for a regime change. Critics of the structuralist approach argue that the theory underestimates the role of human agency during a change of regime. Although human actions are shaped by their socio-economic positions, the theory "overlooks the possibility that actors may have margins of maneuverability during periods of regime change" (Mahoney & Snyder, p. 5). Moreover, structuralism is seen to be "overly deterministic" (Adeney & Wyatt, 2004, p.5). Democracy has triumphed in some developing countries that did not possess the social and economic prerequisites often referred to when describing Western democracies.

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[11] Ibid., p. 132.
[12] Mahoney, J & Snyder, R (1999). "Rethinking agency and structure in the study of regime change," *Studies in Comparative International Development,* 34(2), p. 5.
[13] Ibid., p. 9.

Bhutan offers another unique perspective on regime transformation. It is argued that, in the case of the recent regime transformation in Bhutan, the structuralist argument cannot offer stand-alone explanations to the political change. The voluntarist school of though indeed provides better explanations to what is taking place in the Bhutanese political system. The liberalisation reforms carried out by absolute monarchs have, on the one hand, created unprecedented growth in Bhutan's economy in recent years, yet on the other, it has neither created critical mass of the middle class nor developed political consciousness among the mass to push for political change. King Wangchuck single-handedly instigated the political regime change in the country as part of continuously unfolding political liberalisation process.

Modernisation, Bhutanese style

The recent transition from absolutism to a multi-party system can only be appreciated within the wider context of changing social and economic landscape within the Bhutanese society. It is argued that the gradual and structural transformations in the Bhutanese societies have brought important changes to the country's socio-economic development, but have not developed key components that would have enticed a change in regime. In other words, peaceful transformation of the Bhutanese society has not given rise to popular support for a regime change. Unlike many other cases in the study of regime collapses throughout Latin America and Asia, the King's decision to transform the country' governance is not reactionary to a political or economic calamity. Rather, it is a carefully planned and calculated decision. Four notable structural factors are worth mentioning in the following paragraphs to demonstrate the relatively unconventional pattern of Bhutanese modernisation: 1) astounding economic advancement with minimal industrialisation, 2) a growing wealth disparities with a low level of class struggle, 3) a relatively high ratio of uneducated citizenry and 4) a still relatively isolated country with minimal outside interference. To be sure, these factors do not always bring about instability

but they have brought some societies to a crisis point where popular discontent threatens an existing regime. The uneven and imbalanced development in Bhutan, ironically, has produced peace and stability in the country.

Economic advancement with minimal industrialisation

Bhutan has entered an extended period of gradual modernisation without actually undergoing a process of industrialisation. This has two major implications: 1) neither a working class nor middle class have developed in mass and 2) the existing class structure in the society remains relatively unchanged. The middle class is seen as a driver of the

Figure 1: Key indicators determining a degree of industrialisation (1980-2007)

	1980	1987	1995	2001	2007
Population employed in agriculture	85%	87.5%	n/a	79%	75%
Agricultural contribution to GDP	56%	45%	38%	27%	22%
Manufacturing contribution to GDP	4%	6%	9%	6%	n/a
Primary energy consumption[14] (quadrillion Btu)	0	0.01	0.02	0.02	0.02

Sources: Planning Commission of Bhutan, World Bank, UNDP, IEA

democratisation process because middle class actors play key roles in revolutionary movements. Moore's analysis of Britain and France's transition to democracy places great emphasis on the role of the educated and well-to-do middle class, who demanded political concessions from the ruling elites. Without a strong or large middle class, there are fewer incentives to create redistributions from the elites to citizens.[15] Likewise, an organised or large working class can

[14] Primary energy includes petroleum, dry natural gas and coal, and net hydroelectric, solar, geothermal, wind, and wood and waste electricity. Also includes net electricity imports.

[15] Acemoglu, D & Robinson, J. A. (2005). *Economic Origins of*

pose a threat to an established order, as evidence in Luebbert's analyses on the origins of liberalism, fascism and social democracy in interwar Europe.

Bhutan was a late developer, but unlike many of its Asian counterparts, it was not trying to catch up with the West. King Jigme Singye Wangchuck was careful to modernise the state without "Westernising" it – ensuring that the preservation of their rich cultural heritage was regarded as utmost important. Bhutan's social and economic transformations have been focused primarily on the basic needs of the citizens, such as access to water, sanitation and electricity, rather than to place high emphasis on developing industries per se. As a result, Bhutan has not experienced modern industrialisation in the sense of creating a strong manufacturing base. From 1980 to 2001, the size of the manufacturing sector remains largely unchanged (see Figure 1). Six out of eight Bhutanese still earn their living in the countryside, despite the declining importance of the primary sector to the nations' overall gross domestic product (GDP). Another major indicator for a degree of a country's industrialisation is the energy consumption level among the populace. Bhutan is one of the lowest energy consumers in the world, ranking 162nd among its peers, with most of its people relying on traditional firewood for cooking and heating.

Figure 2: Key Development Indicators in Bhutan, 1985-2005

	1985	1990	1995	2000	2005 /2007
GDP per capita, PPP ($)	1259	1914	2781	3685	5703
Life expectancy (years)	43	49	57	62	65
Roads paved	n/a	77	64	61	62
Telephone per 100 inhabitants	0	0	1	3	11
Internet users per 100 inhabitants	n/a	n/a	0	1	5
Adults with no	90%	85%	n/a	75%	70%

Dictatorship and Democracy. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 40.

Schooling (over the age of 25)					
Doctors per 10,000 people	0.5	0.8	n/a	1.7	2.3
Urban population % **	4.5	5.5	6.0	7.7	9.1

Sources: World Development Indicators, UNESCO, UNDP, WHO, National Statistical Bureau of Bhutan, Planning Commission of Bhutan

** UNESCO estimates*

** For 1990 and 1995, the figures are averages calculated by the author

Bhutan managed to quadruple its GDP in the past twenty-years by doing practically one thing: building the Chukha Hydroelectricity power plant. In other words, the average annual GDP growth rate of almost 7% since 1985 has been exclusively propelled by the commissioning and the construction of the hydro power plant.[16] The building of the power plant, temporarily, spurred employment in the energy-related industries (i.e. cement and ferro alloys).[17] However, by and large, energy is not a job-creating sector, which is reflected in the still high employment rate in the agricultural sector of the economy. In addition, nearly 90% of firms in Bhutan are micro enterprises or very small family-run businesses, recording revenue of under $22,000 per year.[18]

The relatively underdeveloped industrial sector in Bhutan results in a weak private sector, a small middle class as well as the working class. The entire economy is wholly dependent on directives from the government (and the King) to introduce any social and economic changes. In fact, neither the middle class nor the working has any incentives to challenge the public order because their economic well-being is almost entirely dependent upon the public sector. The government planned and orchestrated the construction of the hydropower

[16] UNDP (2007). *Macroeconomics of Poverty Reduction: The Case Study of Bhutan,* p. 182. Retrieved from http://www.undp.org.bt/poverty/docs/Macroeco_cs_for_Bhutan.pdf

[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid., p. 209.

plant – the single, major source for the development of industries. Incentives and projected benefits are crucial in the process of democratic consolidation because without them, changes to the established order are neither wanted nor attractive.

Growing wealth disparities in relative peace

Policies of gradual modernisation and sustainable development have yielded an interesting contrast within the Bhutanese society: rising inequality with minimal societal tension. How could this happen? There are several explanations to this unusual development. It is because, historically, Bhutan was a nation of subsistence farmers and landowners. Consequently, the Bhutanese do not suffer from starvation; such is the case in other South Asian countries, for everyone is entitled to a minimum amount of agricultural land, given freely by the state, on which to grow food for oneself. The state also gives away enough timber for everyone to build modest houses.[19] As a result, while one-third of the population can be categorised as "poor",[20] the country as a whole does enjoy a high level of human development.[21] This is an important point, because it means that the majority of the population's basic needs are met, although they are poor in terms of their wealth accumulation. Coupled with the fact that the poor do have land and accommodation, it would be much less plausible for them to have a grudge against the state or to feel drawn to any populist ideas of land or wealth redistribution. Indeed, the growing rural-urban inequality is not a result of the state's neglect, but rather the harsh geographical reality that has made efforts to equalise socio-economic development much more challenging.

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[19] Ibid., p. 39.

[20] UNDP (2007). *Poverty Analysis Report 2007*, p. 5. Retrieved from http://www.undp.org.bt/poverty/docs/PAR_2007.pdf.

[21] Based on the UNDP Human Development Indicators (HDI) that measure improvement in life's expectancy, access to basic services, enrollment in primary schools, etc.

The government's set of policies are heavily geared towards benefiting the poor. First of all, the state relies heavily on non-tax revenue, primarily from the sales of hydroelectricity. Direct taxes, at the beginning of the fiscal reforms in the 1980s, were virtually non-existent and have been kept minimal to this day.[22] This implies that as the country grows economically, the elites will not be burdened with increased taxes – a situation that makes consolidating democracy more attractive and cost-efficient.[23] The share of non-tax revenue also stands to increase in the coming years, allowing the government more independence in its expenditure. Normally in the cases of many authoritarian regimes, when the government's revenue comes from sales of natural resources, such as oil and gas, it severely decreases the level of government's accountability to its own people. However, in the case of Bhutan, the situation is quite the contrary: over one-quarter of the total government's budget is earmarked for heath and educational programs. More importantly, due to the policy of fiscal decentralisation, government officials at the local level are permitted to spend twenty-five percent of their budgets on local needs, bypassing approval from the national level.[24] The high level of government's support for rural development is not only unwavering, but increasing on a yearly basis. In sum, the self-sufficient and land-owning nature of most Bhutanese, along with the government's heavy focus on helping the poor, have smoothened out the otherwise potentially divisive impacts of growing inequality among the various classes in society.

A high level of adult illiteracy

Five in eight adults in Bhutan have had no schooling (see

[22] Budget Summary 2007-2008.

[23] Acemoglu, D & Robinson, J. A. (2005). *Economic Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 36.

[24] UNDP (2007). *Macroeconomics of Poverty Reduction: The Case Study of Bhutan,* p. 4. Retrieved from http://www.undp.org.bt/poverty/docs/Macroeco_cs_for_Bhutan.pdf

Figure 2) – an illiteracy rate so high it bogs down many other developmental efforts.[25] Many scholars have suggested that the higher the level of education, the greater the chances for democracy. Researchers have found that the more educated the citizens, the more likely they are "to believe in democratic values and supported democratic practices."[26] During the run-up to the parliamentary elections, government officials and volunteers were sent out into the countryside to educate the public about the meaning of democracy and civic governance. Two mock elections and countless training sessions were completed to ensure that the election would go smoothly for a country whose majority of the adult population cannot read or write. Right after the election, a group of 400 people from three towns voiced their concerns during the royal audience that democratic transition may have been introduced too early as "illiterate villagers moved from one party to the other and were swayed by whatever said to them" (Kuensel Online, 2008) and that too few people really understood the meaning of democracy.[27]

In sum, while Bhutan has undergone through drastic, albeit gradual, structural transformation in its economy through decades of modernisation, the country lacks key components that would have led to a popular demand for a regime change. The imbalances in the country's socio-economic development only substantially increased the level of income per capita,

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[25] In comparison to other developing nations in Asia, such development represents an uncommon occurrence. In comparison to other Asian countries with a similar level of income, Bhutan has a much lower rate of literacy and level of urbanisation. See figures for Sri Lanka, Thailand, Philippines, and Maldives on the World Development Indicators (WDI). For lower income countries in the same region, see Nepal and Bangladesh.

[26] Smith, G. H. (1948). "Liberalism and Level of Information," *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 39: 65-82.

[27] People appeal to His Majesty. (2008, April 2). *Kuensel Online.* Retrieved from http://www.kuenselonline.com/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=10124.

yet, other development figures, be it literacy rate, level of urbanisation, and infrastructure, have not made the same speed of progress.[28] International development agencies have also acknowledged this rather unusual development that, due to the slow rate of health and educational attainment that is progressing over the years, it is very likely that the increase in the level of human development was a result of an income rise only.[29] As a result of these uneven developments, the Bhutanese society lacks a sizable middle class (and working class), educated citizenry, intra-group tension that would have precipitated regime discontent among the public. Modernisation theory, consequently, cannot explain the regime change to democracy in Bhutan.

An isolated state, with minimal external interference

The long, extended period of isolation imposed by the early Kings may have served Bhutan well, but it has also kept its neighbors at bay. Having escaped Britain's colonial aggression in South Asia and subsequently secured India's recognition of its independence, Bhutan went into isolation and maintained its traditional monarchical rule. Bhutan had reasons to feel vulnerable as it was the only surviving Mahayana Buddhist kingdom, after Sikkim was absorbed by India to the south and Tibet was annexed by China to the north. The monarchy played an immensely important role in consolidating fragmented Himalayan groups and exemplifying a unifying force for the development of the Bhutanese state. The country's historians point out that Bhutan would have fallen prey to the Indian dominance had it not been because of the monarchical institution.[30] Indeed, the only way for

[28] Over 20 years, GNI increased by six fold, while literacy rate increased two and a half times, and percentage of urban population increased two times.

[29] UNDP (2007). *Macroeconomics of Poverty Reduction: The Case Study of Bhutan,* p. 38. Retrieved from http://www.undp.org.bt/poverty/docs/Macroeco_cs_for_Bhutan.pdf

[30] Rose, L. E. (1977). *The Politics of Bhutan*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, p. 107.

Bhutan to maintain its sovereignty was for the country to enter an extended period of isolation to allow time for the monarchy to establish itself as the only legitimate institution. The backwardness of the nation made it much easier for the monarchs to consolidate their power and become the absolute ruler of the people, whose political consciousness was not yet developed.

Although Bhutan slowly came out of self-imposed isolation in the 1980s, no outside powers were exerting pressure for democracy in Bhutan in the lead-up to last week's election. Bhutan has long remained closed to outsiders, maintaining diplomatic relations with very few countries (mostly in Asia). Huntington argues that democratisation in a country may be influenced by "the actions of governments and institutions external to that country."[31] Successful demonstrations in one country can encourage demonstrations elsewhere since they create a contagion effect.[32] India is Bhutan's closest and longest ally, whose relationships extends from economic to military. Through decades of India's assistance to Bhutan, political differences between the two nations were never given significance.[33] India is also the only stable democracy in Bhutan's immediate vicinity. Yet, due to the Indo-Bhutan Treaty of 1949, India pledged non-interference in Bhutan's domestic affairs.[34] Bhutan had sought no relationship with its northern neighbor, China, for security concern after Tibet was annexed in 1951. Memberships at international organisations were

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[31] Huntington, S. P. (1991). *The Third wave: Democratisation in the Late Twentieth Century.* Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, p. 85.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Galay, K (2004). "International Politics of Bhutan," *Journal of Bhutan Studies,* 10: 90-108. Retrieved from http://www.bhutanstudies.org.bt/main/pub_detail.php?pubid=89.

[34] Choden, T (2003). "Indo-Bhutan International Relations: Recent Trends." Paper presented at the *Regional Conference on Comprehensive Security in South Asia*. Kathmandu: Institute for Foreign Affairs, p. 114.

gradually sought after in the early 1970s, with most organisations present in Bhutan are on humanitarian grounds and focus mostly on development work. Being seen as a peaceful, traditional society by most outsiders has helped the monarch escape scrutiny for its authoritarian nature.

Some observers of Bhutanese politics have tried to develop a connection between the social, anti-monarchist unrest in Nepal to the stepping down of the Bhutanese monarchy. The domestic politics in Nepal may have raised concerns about the "future" status of the monarchy amongst the ruling monarchs, but it, in no way, directly puts pressure on the King to abolish absolute monarchy. Unlike King Gyanendra of Nepal, who faced over a decade of demonstrations and popular uprisings before he finally announced the demise of the country's monarchy, King Wangchuck of Bhutan is widely popular and highly revered among the public. The extremely high level of power and legitimacy that the Bhutanese monarch upholds is unmatched by most leaders in the world, democratically and undemocratically elected. Many Bhutanese widely believe that their Kings would take better care of them than any other politicians.[35] The general public took the news of his abdication with grief, sadness, and fear to what the future might hold for them without the King.[36] Better yet, the elites were completely caught off guard and repeatedly pleaded to the King to reconsider his decision. Then they were "asked" by the King to reorganise themselves as parties in preparation for the upcoming parliamentary election.[37]

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[35] Gier, N (2008). "Two Himalayan Kingdoms Give up their Kings," *New West Wire*, Retrieved from http://www.newwest.net/main/article/two_himalayan_kingdoms_give_up_their_kings/

[36] Chiramal, J. M. (2008). "Dragon Kingdom's Date with Democracy," *Kuensel Online.* Retrieved from http://www.kuenselonline.com/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=10230.

[37] Sinpeng, A. (2008). "Bhutan: The world's Youngest Democracy,"

Democracy: A long envisioned goal

The political transformation in Bhutan was a clear case of voluntarism – a situation whereby the leader, in this case the King, decided to give up his power irrespective of his social, economic or political position. In fact the country was stable and prospering, facing no immediate political threat both from the domestic and the international realm. While many dictators and military juntas around the world – not to mention the royal family of neighbouring Nepal – are using both coercions and military might to hang on to power, His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck concluded that his throne had come to an end and Bhutan must transition to democracy. When he announced his abdication in 2006, he clarified that democracy was not necessarily Bhutan's goal, but a part of good governance and a key pillar of the King's ultimate objective: to achieve Gross National Happiness (GNH). Innovated by the King himself, the GNH became the country's benchmark to development - promoting a more balanced and equitable development that preserves Bhutan's rich, cultural heritage. In order for the country to achieve "collective happiness", its citizen must become empowered, in the King's view.

The change of regime was therefore not reactionary to any social, economic or political calamities, but a rather long-intended, carefully carved out plan. As Chiramal suggests, "the transition to democracy was no overnight phenomenon, but an ongoing process."[38] King Wangchuck had envisioned, in the early 1980s, that eventually Bhutan would need to move away from an absolute monarchy.[39] His Majesty says

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The Globalist. Retrieved from http://www.theglobalist.com/DBWeb/storyid.aspx?StoryId=6899.

[38] Chiramal, J. M. (2008). "Dragon Kingdom's Date with Democracy," *Kuensel Online*. Retrieved from http://www.kuenselonline.com/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=10230

[39] Part of King Wangchuck's address to the people of Haa illuminates his thinking: "On the introduction of a parliamentary democracy His Majesty explained that the Constitution was being established for

that,

> "I do not believe that the system of absolute monarchy, wholly dependent on one individual, is a good system for the people in the long-run. Eventually, no matter how carefully royal children are prepared for their role, the country is bound to face misfortune of inheriting a King of dubious character."[40]

These words were not a break from the past for the monarchy – as such conviction was passed on since the foremost King. The first steps towards democratic transition had, as a result, been initiated long before the recent election in 2008. For example, in 1953, the National Assembly (Tshogdu) was established by the third King despite the public's reluctance. "Although the people said they were not ready for such a forum, the King insisted on the establishment of the National Assembly to discuss issues of national interest, promote public welfare and develop political consciousness among the people so that they could play a greater role in the decision making process and running of the country."[41]

Successive Kings follow in the path to gradually liberalise the country's system of governance through a series of

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the future well being of the country and the people. His Majesty said that Monarchy is not the best form of government for Bhutan as it has many flaws. His Majesty pointed out that, in times to come, if the people were fortunate the heir to the Throne would be a dedicated and capable person. On the other hand the heir could be a person of mediocre ability or even an incapable person. That would create problems for a small country like Bhutan." See "The Constitution: Are We Ready?" (2005, November 5). *Kuensel Online*. Retrieved from http://www.kuenselonline.com/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=6217

[40] UNDP (2007). *Macroeconomics of Poverty Reduction: The Case Study of Bhutan,* p. 42. Retrieved from http://www.undp.org.bt/poverty/docs/Macroeco_cs_for_Bhutan.pdf

[41] *About the National Assembly of Bhutan*. (n.d.). Retrieved May 30, 2008 from http://www.nab.gov.bt/aboutus.php.

decentralisation measures. In 1981, King Wangchuck further decentralised the country's administration by dividing the country into twenty districts (dzongkhags) and set up the District Development Committees to involve local citizens in consultations on the development of their own districts.[42] The decentralised system of governance is most pronounced at the local level where a group of villagers form a constituency called "gewog" and is administered by "gup" who is elected by the people.[43] At the village level gups can settle petty disputes. The most ambitious change towards the development of decentralisation came in 1998 when the King devolved his executive powers to the Council of Ministers who is elected by Member of the Parliament (Chimis). This means that, for the first time, the government would be elected directly by the Parliament. The king even instigated more power to the Parliament by reinstating the vote of confidence in the monarchy. With the decentralised system of governance in place, local people would be able to decide the faith of the monarchy.[44]

The monarchy understands the peril of a tyranny and does not want to maintain the single-ruler system, despite its astounding success in consolidating a once fragmented nation and restoring peace and prosperity to the people. That is why King Wangchuck gave up his throne at the height of his power, while there is peace and prosperity within the country. In essence, King Wangchuck's decision to transition to democracy is a "pre-emptive" one, under the assumption that such regime change is inevitable in the future and it is better to make a peaceful and orderly transformation rather than a violent one. Once the decision has been made to

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[42] Bhutan adopted the First Five-Year Plan from India, which provided the bulk of the assistance (both advisory and financial) and continues to be the major donor of the Kingdom.

[43] *Political System.* (n.d.) Retrieved May 3, 2008 from http://www.bhutan.gov.bt/government/abt_politicalsystem.php

[44] UNDP (2002). *Decentralisation: Bringing People Closer to the People.* UNDP Program in Bhutan, Discussion Paper. Retrieved from http://www.undp.org.bt/Governance/Decentralisation.pdf.

transition to parliamentary democracy, the monarchy traveled extensively for two years throughout the country to discuss the drafting of the constitution with various professionals, local leaders and villagers.[45] It was the King's vision to ensure that the country's first modern constitution would be representative of the people.[46]

What is most interesting about the political transformation of Bhutan is that it represents a true "royal directive" by the monarchy, rather than a proposed change by the elites or the public. For a country with a large share of uneducated and politically docile population, one would suspect the elites to play a greater role in propelling political change. In reality, however, the elites have simply objected to the monarch's wish to devolve his power to them.[47] The Bhutanese people, in general, are conservative in nature and have deep reverence

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[45] Australia -Bhutan Friendship Association. (n.d.). *Bhutan Becomes the World's Youngest Democracy*. Retrieved April 2, 2008 from http://www.australiabhutan.org.bt/abfanews.htm#TravellersandMagicians.

[46] A speech from the 2005 Nation Address: "During 2006-2007, the Election Commission will educate our people in the process of parliamentary democracy and electoral practice sessions will be conducted in all the 20 dzongkhags. After 26 years of the process of decentralisation and devolution of powers to the people, I have every confidence that our people will be able to choose the best political party that can provide good governance and serve the interest of the nation. I would like our people to know that the first national election to elect a government under a system of parliamentary democracy will take place in 2008."

[47] A man who observed the king's audience spoke: "On the eve of the centenary of our Monarchy, it is too painful to even conceive of the idea of the Druk Gyalpo (the King) relinquishing the Throne." Another woman also said, "I never expected to see the day when our own children would discuss such outrageous issues in His Majesty's presence. How can Bhutanese people talk about a King stepping down? Or impeaching the Druk Gyalpo? Or the other personal matters of the royal family?" Refer to the full text: "The Constitution: Are We Ready?" (2005, November 5). *Kuensel Online*. Retrieved from http://www.kuenselonline.com/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=6217.

towards the King and would prefer the paternalistic style of governance under the directions of the monarchy. It is a common occurrence throughout Bhutanese political history that the people would make pleas and requests for reconsideration to the monarchy every time the King ordered any devolution of power from himself to either organs of governments or to the local level of administration.[48]

Future implications

The impact of the recent multi-party election may not be dramatic at first, but it will have far reaching consequences to the democratic development of the entire nation. One thing for certain is that the monarchy is here to stay. The monarchy may have given up rule on paper, but its power remains in force. The time for Bhutan's political transition was deliberately chosen; there is stability and peace in the country, and the royal family has the people's trust. It came as no surprise that both the DPT and the People's Democratic Party (PDP) shared a strikingly similar political platform – a continuation of the monarch's policies – though the latter proposed for a faster change of pace. The first democratic election of Bhutan was not contested, for it lacked real alternatives to the existing discourse. As the new leadership takes its place, King Wangchuck's system of governance, public policy, and official discourse will carry on. The people of Bhutan will continue to regard their King as the Guardian of the nation, who "will ensure stability and protect the long-term interests of the people."[49]

Nevertheless, there remain significant challenges for the

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[48] "The constitution: Are We Ready?" (2005, November 5). *Kuensel Online*. Retrieved from http://www.kuenselonline.com/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=6217.

[49] Looking for a team. (2008, February 14). *Kuensel Online*. Retrieved from http://www.kuenselonline.com/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=9853.

future of democracy in Bhutan. Despite over two decades of gradual political liberalisation in preparation for the introduction of the new system, there is no telling that democracy would be sustainable. First of all, there seems to be no real opposition force in the political scene. At least for now, the monarchists will be the only political group running the show. Royalist bureaucrats and civil servants will continue to occupy important positions in the government. The heavy reliance on the King's policy preference may impede the development of political parties in Bhutan. In essence, if all parties wish to follow the King's path, then there will be little differentiation in policies or platforms of each party. In such case, party politics may be of marginal utility or significance to Bhutan's political system. Moreover, the transition to democracy in Bhutan after centuries of monarchical rule will certainly give rise to "royalists" or "monarchists" who will continue to be prominent on the political scene for years to come. Only time can tell whether this is a curse or a blessing. To put it in comparative perspective, that is what occurred in Thailand, where royalists prompted a coup in 2006, more than 70 years after the end of monarchy's rule, to topple a democratically elected government.

Secondly, civil liberties in Bhutan remain limited despite recent signs of improvement. The Freedom House has given the country 3.72 scores for civil liberty (0=weakest; 7=highest), with very low points on freedom of association and protection of ethnic minorities.[50] The main reason why Bhutan scores low in this category is due to the relatively new concept of civic freedom. After more than a century of monarchic rule, such ideas have only been introduced recently in the form of political decentralisation and social liberalisation. The King himself began to educate the Bhutanese people of their rights and duties as citizens[51] and

[50] Freedom House. (2007*). Freedom Around the World: Bhutan*. Retrieved from http://www.freedomhouse.org.

[51] Freedom House. (2007). *Countries in Crossroads: Bhutan. Civil Liberties*. Retrieved from

civic consciousness is just beginning to be formed. The 34-Article Constitution also lays grounds for the development of civil society, to ensure that citizens have the right to freedom of expression. However, foreign observers, such as Freedom House, argue that the Bhutan Information, Communications and Media Act and National Security Act have limited the free flow of information, the protection of journalists and the freedom of expression.[52] The Editor-in-Chief of Kuensel, the largest state-run newspaper in Bhutan, acknowledged in 2006 that the role of government in media is "all-pervasive" and calls for government subsidies would mean trading off the media's independence.[53] Independent media has only been given permission to be established in 2006, by the King himself, and already some occasional criticisms towards the government have begun to emerge through its website. On recent occasion, Bhutan Observer, an independent newspaper, criticised the government officials for being denied accessed to the meeting between prime ministers of India and Bhutan, citing "…only the state-run media are allowed. This is not democracy" (Bhutan Observer, 2008).[54]

Lastly, forces of globalisation will pose both an immediate and

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http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=140&edition=8&ccrcountry=150&section=86&ccrpage=37.

[52] Freedom House. (2007.) *Freedom Around the World: Bhutan.* Retrieved from http://www.freedomhouse.org. For full disclosure of Bhutan's Information, Communications and Media Act, see http://www.bicma.gov.bt/final%20ICM%20as%20of%2025th%20OCT06.pdf. The 1992 National Security Act stipulates that any criticism of the king or Bhutan's political system is prohibited. Such stipulation, however, is not uncommon among constitutional monarchies in today's world. For full disclosure of the document, follow the link below.
http://www.oag.gov.bt/images/acts/National%20Security%20Act.pdf.

[53] Dorji, K (2006). "Media in Bhutan: Now and Then," *Journal of Bhutan Studies*, 14, p. 8.

[54] Media rights. (2008, May 23). *The Bhutan Observer.* Retrieved from http://www.bhutanobserver.bt/2008/editorial/05/media-rights.html.

long-term threat to the identity and the cultural heritage of Bhutan. Past success of the absolute monarchy and the recent first-ever election rests upon the fact that Bhutan is an insular, conservative kingdom with strong roots to its traditions and little access to the outside world. To preserve its culture, the King was careful to modernise Bhutan without westernising it. Recognising that Bhutan cannot remain isolated forever, the King began to open the country up slowly to the outside world. In 1999, television was introduced for the first time in the country. The public reaction was mixed: some say that violence seen on television and movies has led to increased violence and fighting among youths – a phenomenon which contradicts the deeply cherished values of peace and non-violence among the Bhutanese.[55] In response to public concerns the potential danger of uncensored television, the Association of Private Cable Operators imposed restrictions to allow only thirty channels with "a complete ban of twelve music and other channels that provided 'controversial' content."[56] Moreover, a 1989 and its subsequent royal decrees require that all wear the national dress while in public during daylight hours. In 2004, Bhutan became the first country in the world to ban the sale and use of tobacco. Only the test of time can tell whether or not Bhutan can withstand the test of globalisation and its impact on its culture.

Conclusion

The transition to democracy in Bhutan will serve as a unique example to the study of regime change for years to come. Since the 1970s, few cases in the sphere of regime study offer a clear-cut voluntarist approach, whereby agential actions are evidently responsible for the transformation of a country's political system. Most of the literature on regime change has

[55] Lubow, A (2008). *The Changing Face of Bhutan. The Smithsonian Institute*. Retrieved from http://www.smithsonianmag.com/travel/da-bhutan.html

[56] Freedom House (2007). *Freedom Around the World: Bhutan.* http://www.freedomhouse.org.

focused heavily towards the structuralist argument – leaving much room for the voluntarist counterpart to make its case.

When observing the country's social and economic development in the past two decades, it is clear that although Bhutan has gone through the modernisation process in the past two decades, the society is not "ripe" for a regime change. Indeed, the country lacks several major components that would have made a democratic consolidation attractive to the public at large. First, the country has not undergone the conventional industrialisation process based on the emergence and the acceleration of the industrial or manufacturing sector. Bhutan has been able to increase its gross output by relying solely on the commissioning and construction of its most important natural resources: water. Secondly, the wealth that is being created through the sales of hydroelectricity has over the years increased the income gap among the populace, but has not, surprisingly, resulted in any social unrest or tension. That is because the government has focused its efforts almost exclusively on providing for the poor – guaranteeing a sufficient piece of land, accommodation, free healthcare and subsidies for farming activities. Better yet, the government is not forced to raise taxes to finance their expenditure on rural development because its major source of earning comes directly from the sales of hydroelectricity. The intra-group inequality has neither bred class struggle nor provided the public an impetus to dissent the monarchical regime. Thirdly, the overwhelmingly high share of uneducated adults in Bhutan does not give strong basis for the development of political consciousness, civic responsibilities or an appreciation for democracy. Lastly, Bhutan experiences minimal interference from its more powerful neighbors, such as India or China. The lack of external influence means that the existing regime could operate without pressure to change from abroad.

It was the monarchy who has brought about democracy in Bhutan voluntarily, unpressured by any social or economic tensions. In fact, it was at the height of the King's power, with

peace, stability and prosperity within the country that he decided to abdicate from power to give way to democracy. The very nature of his voluntary act was best exemplified by a series of petitions, gatherings, and demonstrations from both the public and the elites who pleaded repeatedly for the monarch to reconsider his decision. Some of the concerned citizens voiced their suspicions over the question of whether or not Bhutan was indeed "ready" for democracy. However, King Wangchuck reassured his people that democracy would bring more good than harm to the entire nation. The high level of trust that the King received from his people was sufficient to mobilise the country towards democracy. The exceptionally high voter turnout of the country's first-ever election is a testament to the power and legitimacy that the King has to his subjects.

The case study of Bhutan can, in addition, enrich the theoretical framework of the study of regime transformation. Several political scientists have pointed out that the voluntarist school of thought is a more pertinent explanation for the regime change by way of revolution.[57] In no case where there is a transition to democracy caused mainly by agential action represents "an evolution" of regime transformation. That is mostly because a gradual political liberalisation from an authoritarian system to a democratic one takes not only time, but an isolated state where no outside influence can have a profound effect on the country's political future. Bhutan offers this unique situation because it lacks in what Fish terms "external patronage" (Fish, 2001, p. 325) - a situation when a great power has asserted dominance in another country's affairs – that could greatly impact

[57] See Stepan, A. & Linz, J. (Eds.). (1978*). The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press; Di Palma, G (1990). *To Craft Democracies: An Essay on Democratic Transitions*. Berkeley: University of California Press; Fish, S. M. (2001). "The Inner Asian Anomaly: Mongolia's Democratisation in Comparative Perspective," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, 34: 323-338.

democratisation in the country.[58] The relative level of isolation, strong culture of political compromise and a high level of consensus among the people have made it possible for Bhutan to gradually transition to a democracy.

[58] Fish, S. M. (2001). "The Inner Asian Anomaly: Mongolia's Democratisation in Comparative Perspective," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, 34: 323-338.

A Unique Parallel

Dr. Sonam B. Wangyal[*]

Introduction

One would be surprised and even shocked to hear that a parallel can be drawn between Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal of Bhutan and Ögödei Khan (The Great Khan) of Mongolia: the former was a man of religion and lived and ruled by the law of compassion while the latter was a conqueror who lived and ruled by the blade of his sword. The Shabdrung forged a country the size of which was no bigger than an average Indian district while Ögödei forayed into Russia, China and Eastern Europe vastly expanding the empire left to him by his father Ghengis Khan. Nonetheless, one can draw a unique parallel between the two, separated by great distance and time, in two historic events that had impacts in the corresponding nations' history. To unravel one of these two events, a prelude to an episode in Sikkim-Bhutan history is necessary.

Prelude

Tensung Namgyal, the second Chogyal (Sk. Dharmarajah, Eng. king) of Sikkim, took three consorts[1] with the possible rationale of obtaining peace and thereby consolidating the foundations of the newly formed kingdom. His first wife came from southern Tibet[2] and with the marriage he sort of

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[1] Maharaja Thutob Namgyal and Maharani Yeshay Doma (translated by Kazi Daosamdup. *History of Sikkim* (in Manuscript).
Risley, H.H. (1989). *The Gazetteer of Sikkim*. Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press, pp. 11-12.

[2] *History of Sikkim* (Several sources she was a Sikkimese but I have chosen to agree with the *History of Sikkim* firstly because it was written at a period closer to the event and secondly the authors would have a better knowledge of the issue basically because it is *their* family history).

purchased peace from his powerful northern neighbour. The second wife came from Bhutan[3] and this marriage bought him peace from his eastern neighbours. The third wife was the daughter of a Limbuwan chief and with that peace was obtained on the western front. The south was basically a thick pristine forestland with small insignificant settlements in the plains. All sides being adequately tied up, the fledgling kingdom enjoyed absolute peace during his reign. Historians too enamoured with wars, conquests, revolts, intrigues and upheavals uniformly describe his reign as "uneventful" and leave it at that with one writer in a brief note on the history of Sikkim not even giving him a mention[4]. They ignore the fact that Tensung brought peace and stability, and thereby possibly prosperity too. Upon his death, his minor son Chagdor Namgyal, was put on the throne much to the displeasure and disapproval of his elder half-sister, Pende Wangmu, the daughter of the first queen who was of Bhutanese birth. After all, her mother was the senior-most queen and she was years older than the child put on the throne. When nothing worked in her favour she sought assistance from Bhutan which came in the form of an army descending on Sikkim and an eventual conquest of that country[5]. The Bhutanese ruled for about seven years and very mysteriously withdrew to the east bank of the Tista river retaining what is today the Kalimpong sub-division of Darjeeling district. Why this unprovoked withdrawal took place has perplexed many and this paper will try to arrive at an answer.

Possible explanations

There are various versions given by different writers but none worth the ink spilled on the paper. A.R. Foning, a local

[3] Although Bhutan as a unified nation did not exist the term is used purposely for convenience sake.
[4] White J.C. (1971 (1909)). *Sikkim and Bhutan: Twenty-one Years on the North-East Frontier 1887 – 1908*. Delhi: Vivek Publishing House.
[5] Hasrat, Bikrama Jit (1980). *History of Bhutan*. Thimphu: Education Department, p. 64.

amateur historian, indirectly implies that the VIth Dalai Lama wrote to the Deb Raja asking him to restore Chagdor's kingdom[6] but there are no records of the Bhutanese acknowledging the letter or of their acquiescence to the same, if the letter was written at all. The matter looks most unlikely because the Dalai Lama had died (murdered?) a year earlier, 1706[7]. Another historian, Dr. P.N. Chopra, comments that on "On Chakdor's pleas, the Bhutanese King relented and withdrew his forces from Sikkim which was again taken over by Chakdor with the exception of Kalimpong and adjoining areas."[8] By citing "King" if Chopra meant it to mean the Deb Raja then it must be mentioned that the Bhutanese are mum on that matter and alternatively if it meant the Shabdrung then the hypothesis falls flat because he had already died (gone to "retreat") was the term used then, way back in 1651, fifty-six years earlier. The senior diplomat turned writer, Vincent H. Coelho, is a bit closer, but still distant to the truth with his claim that "Chakdor Namgyal was prompted to return to Sikkim" on the demise of the Dalai Lama, but he goes off the mark with the statement that the Bhutanese withdrew upon Chagdor Namgyal's arrival.[9] The argument does not hold water because when Chagdor returned his friend and patron, the VIth Dalai Lama had already passed away, and so had any hopes of active or passive support, and the returning Chogyal was no victorious king or general coming home heaped with honour and glory. Bhutanese were the conquerors and it just does not stand to reason why the victorious army should withdraw from its conquest simply because a defeated and vanquished king decides to return. The most unlikely conclusion comes from a man who should have known better. J. Claude White, the Political Officer to Sikkim and Bhutan, twenty-one years in the region, displays his gross negligence and ignorance of local history by writing

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[6] Foning, A.R (1987). *Lepcha: My Vanishing Tribe*. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Private Ltd, p. 269.

[7] *History of Tibet, Conversations with the Dalai Lama*, p. 185.

[8] Chopra, P.N (1979). *Sikkim*. New Delhi: S Chand and Co., p. 27.

[9] Coelho, V.H (1970). *Sikkim and Bhutan*. Delhi: Vikas Publications, p. 13. See also *The Gazetteer of Sikkim*, p. 12.

that "The Tibetans drove them [the Bhutanese] out and Chador in gratitude founded the great monastery of Pemiongtchi, the largest and entirely Tibetan in character."[10] This claim cannot be substantiated since all historical records are absolutely quiet as far as Tibetan military intervention is concerned simply because such an event never took place. Dr. Aparna Bhattacharya is another historian who also goes off track with the contention that "on the intervention of Tibet, Deb Raja, or the Gyalpo of Bhutan, withdrew his forces from Sikkim…"[11] Firstly, the Deb Raja was never addresses as Gyalpo (Monarch) and then she fails to qualify the type of intervention resorted to by Tibet. The only Tibetan intervention that can be verified is found in the faithfully recorded compilation on the history of Sikkim by Maharaja Thutob Namgyal and Maharani Yeshay Doma where they let us know, "It is said that the Tibetan General sent a letter to the Bhutan Government, to the effect that the Tibetan Government, should be the father, the Bhutanese the mother and Sikkim State the child. They should bear friendship and love to each other so that they should try to increase the prosperity of each other, as they are one nation."[12] When it comes to the Tibetan involvement even the Royal family is careful with their words and they commence the sentence with a hesitant "It is said that…" leaving a hint that it could be just a rumour, a bluff or simply a good piece of propaganda. It therefore is absolutely patent that the various reasons given for the Bhutanese departure cannot be trusted upon but what is also equally manifest is that the Bhutanese troops *did* withdraw to the east bank of Tista river. As to the reason for the withdrawal they will be dealt with shortly.

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[10] White, J.C., pp. 16-17. Rao, P. Raghunanda (1978). *Sikkim: The Story of its Integration with India*. New Delhi: Cosmo Publications, p. 3.

[11] Bhattacharya, Aparna. *The Prayer Wheel and the Sceptre, Sikkim.* Bombay: Nachiketa Pblications Ltd, (no year of publication), p. 61.

[12] *History of Sikkim*

A Parallel in history

When Ghengis (Chenggis) Khan died in 1227, the Mongol empire stretched from the Pacific Ocean to the Adriatic Sea.[13] The main expansionist phase had just come to an end as the armies returned home to elect a new Khan.[14] The Mongol army withdrew from wherever they were to elect the new leader. Ögödei (pronounced Oh-go-day) Khan was selected as the leader and he took upon the title of "Great Khan" and the empire was divided amongst Ghengis Khan's sons. Ögödei received the *khante*[15] of most of Eastern Asia including much of China. He followed his father's footsteps and under him the speed of expansion reached its peak. By April 1241 the Mongols had overcome the joint army of German and Polish troops[16] and in the span of just a few weeks the victorious Mongols decimated several large armies and killed over 200,000 of Europe's finest warriors, including the famed Teutonic knights.[17] In early December the Mongolian army crossed the Danube River and was all set to conquer Vienna.[18] As news spread of the ferocity of the Mongols, Europe trembled in anticipation of an attack[19] and all Europe could hope for was a miracle. To the sheer disbelief of the

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[13] Dr. Timothy May, Assistant Professor of History, Young Hal, North Georgia College and State University. http://www.accd.edu/sac/history/keller/Mongols/empsub1.html

[14] www.greenkiwi.co.nz/footprints/mongolia/ghengis-history.htm

[15] Khanate (or Chanat) is an old Turkish word describing a political entity ruled by a "Khan". In Modern Turkish the word used is hanlık. This political entity is typical for people from the Eurasian Steppe and it can be equivalent to tribal chiefdom, principality, kingdom, and even empire.

[16] *The New Encyclopædia Britannica*, 15th Edition, 1997, Vol. 8, p. 886 b & c.

[17] "Korea under the eye of the Tiger", Chapter 6, *Koryo Under the Mongols - Expanding the Realm* http://www.koreanhistoryproject.org/Ket/C06/E0602.htm

[18] http://www.fsmitha.com/h3/h11mon.htm

[19] May, Dr. Timothy, Assistant Professor of History, Young Hal, North Georgia College and State University. http://www.accd.edu/sac/history/keller/Mongols/empsub1.html

petrified Europeans, a miracle did happen: the Mongolian troops simply withdrew and headed home. The Europeans did not know then, and for quite sometime later, why they were spared the wreck of a war and the humiliation of a definite defeat. In Mongolia the Great Khan, Ögödei, had died (11 December) and the generals along with their troops simply went back to select and assert allegiance to the new ruler.[20]

Conclusion

No matter how insignificant the Bhutanese expansion may appear in comparison to the empire built by Ögödei Khan, both the Mongols and the Bhutanese were the conquerors. Their enemies did not fancy any chances of successful resistance or victory, and both the armies withdrew from their vantage without any provocation or threat of confrontation. To this parallel one can add another and that is to be noted in the reasons for the withdrawal of the troops. As in the death of the Great Khan the troops were required to return to confirm allegiance and protection to the new ruler[21] and thereby prevent unnecessary power struggle. So it was also with Bhutan for in 1706 the death of the founder of Bhutan, Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, so long kept secret, was made public. The late Michael Aris evaluates the possible problems faced by the top ranking officers at the death of a leader like Shabdrung: "No matter how masterful and energetic a character he might be, a ruler is always dependent on his officers. Much of the daily business of the government lies in their hands, but the legitimacy and strength of their authority depend entirely upon that of the ruler. In the event of his death, unless the succession is secure and favours the continued authority of his officers, their position is in real danger."[22] So possibly the leaders in Bhutan needed a secure

[20] www.encarta.msn..com/encyclopedia_761571469_3/mongol_empire.html
www.fsmitha.com/h3/h11mon.htm
http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C3%96gedei_Khan
[21] http://www.fsmitha.com/h3/h11mon.htm
[22] Aris, Michael (1979). *Bhutan*. Warminster: Aris and Phillips Ltd.,

succession that favoured "the continued authority" of the senior leaders and this would not have been possible without the strength of the army. In a system where the successor is a mere child who was deemed the reincarnation while the effective governance went to the regent or the Deb Raja endorsed by a "representative" of the deceased Shabdrung the chance of political disruption was more than real. The army withdrew home either to support the chosen ruler or they came to show allegiance to a candidate of their preference: but their presence was vital all the same. One must also bear in mind that the declaration of the death of Shabdrung had the potentiality of, besides internal power struggle and national chaos, the more dangerous, possibly anticipated, likelihood of external interference. After all Tibet had invaded Bhutan four times in twenty short years[23] and with the Shabdrung gone, the power centre becoming vacant, what less could the Bhutanese expect, especially if a large bulk of its force was doing service on foreign soil.

pp. 234-235.
[23] Aris, pp. 212, 219, 224, and 227.

Khar: The Oral Tradition of Game of Riddles in Tshanglakha Speaking Community of Eastern Bhutan

Tshering Dorji[*]

Abstract

Khar, which literally means 'house', is an age old oral tradition of riddle games in Tshanglakha (Sharchopkha) speaking communities of eastern Bhutan. This paper attempts to explain the terminology khar for the game of riddles. The preliminary survey of its presence in other dialectic groups of eastern Bhutan, explanation of the terminology for the game, comparison amongst the riddles in different dialectic communities and the way of playing the riddles as well the occasions during which it is played will be discussed. An attempt has been made to find similar oral traditions within other linguistic and dialectic communities in other parts of the country. A modest attempt of finding its prevalence in neighboring and other states of India is made, and comparison is drawn between that of Bhutan and those of other states so as to prove its importance as an age old tradition spread all over the region. This paper also attempts to put forward the importance of khar, as an oral tradition, to lives of rural communities and the causes of its diminishing popularity in present times.

Introduction

This is not a scholarly paper but a layman's attempt to record the prevalence of riddles, their significance in the lives of the communities, the possible causes of their vanishing trends amongst the younger generations, and their prevalence in other parts of the world. An attempt to explain the possible origins of different terminologies for the riddles in different dialectic and linguistic groups is also being made as an appetizer for further studies by researchers in this field. The way of riddling or playing the game of riddles in different

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communities has been given to show its richness and widespread prevalence. A comparative study with a few examples of riddles from different dialects has been given so as to help in grouping the riddles into different groups with respect to the subject matter. It is to be noted here that there is no such classification but it is a simple attempt by the author to show the range of subjects the people touched on while riddling, and also to bring out the similarity amongst riddles in different places and communities.

The methodology of study was personal communication by the author and also by friends from different parts of eastern Bhutan. The author also based most of the findings on personal communications with students and friends of Nangkor higher secondary school in Pemagatshel.

Oral tradition

Oral tradition is one of the oldest forms of art in any society on the earth. A. Steven Evans writes, "Large numbers of the world's population are oral communicators. They learn best through communication that is not tied to or dependent on print."[1] He mentions that, "it is estimated that more than two-thirds of the world's population, or over four billion people, are oral communicators by necessity or preference."[2] Evans further writes that, "Primarily through story, proverb, poetry, drama and song, oral communicators house their knowledge, information, teachings, concepts, lists, and ideas in narrative presentations that can be easily understood, remembered, and reproduced."[3]

In Bhutan oral communication includes "*srung* (folktales), *dpe gtam* or *dpye gtam* (proverb), *gtam rgyud* (legend), *blo ze* (ballad), *tsang mo* (equivalent of quatrain?), *gab tshig* (riddle),

[1] Evans, A. Steven (2006), "Promoting Happiness through Oral Traditions," *Journal of Bhutan Studies,* 15:115-132, p.117.
[2] Ibid. p.117.
[3] Ibid.

and *dgod bra* (joke)", as per Dorji Penjore.[4] And he further writes, "Bhutan is still an oral society… Modern education was introduced only in late 1950s, and before that, the monastic system that provided Buddhist education was accessible only to a few privileged families. Modern education may succeed in turning man into an efficient machine for the market, but in creating value-based, socially responsible individuals, oral tradition plays an important role."[5]

Different languages and dialects in Bhutan

Bhutan, though a small landlocked nation, has about twenty dialects as per DDA.[6] Bhutan has one native language that is being spoken by the common people, viz., Dzongkha, the national language and mother tongue of the majority of people in Paro, Haa, Thimphu, Punakha and Wangdiphodrang dzongkhags, while Lhotshampakha (Nepali) is the language spoken by Lhotshampas, people of southern Bhutan (Sarpang, Samtse and Tsirang dzongkhags and some parts of Samdrup Jongkhar, Dagana, Chukha dzongkhags) who have immigrated from Nepal and neighbouring states of India. They also speak other dialects of different castes like Tamang, Gurung, Sherpa, etc. English is a foreign language that has made its way into Bhutanese daily life some time back as a medium of modern education and the language of communication with other countries.

Tshanglalo (as called by the native speakers) or Tshanglakha or Sharchopkha (in Dzongkha) is the most popular dialect spoken by majority of the people of eastern Bhutan (comprised of Lhuntse, Mongar, Trashigang, Trashiyangtsi,

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[4] Penjore, Dorji (2007), "Role of Bhutanese Folktales in Value Transmission," in *Rethinking Development: Proceedings of Second International Conference on Gross National Happiness,* Thimphu: Centre for Bhutan Studies, 258-277, p.262.

[5] Ibid. p. 261.

[6] DDA (Dzongkha Development Authority) as quoted in Gyeltshen, Tshering (2006), "Migration of Kurmedkha Speaking People," *Journal of Bhutan Studies*, 15:1-39, p. 9.

Pemagatshel and Samdrup Jongkhar districts), while other major dialects in Bhutan would be Bumthangkha, Khengkha and Kurmedkha (Chocha Ngacha) considering the number of speakers and the size of the area the communities speaking the dialects occupy.

In eastern Bhutan besides Tshanglakha, there are other dialects like Kurmedkha, Zhakat, Zalakha, Khengkha, Chalipikha, Bumthangkha, Gondupikha, Brahmi, Brokat, and Dakpakha.[7]

Overview of origin of riddles in Bhutan and the terminology *khar*

sNyen ngag, which literally may mean 'words that please ears' (*snyen*: 'nice/sweet to hear' and *ngag* 'words'), is one of the *rig ney chung wa nga* (five smaller or lower *rig ney*).[8] *sNyen ngag* has three parts, of which *gab tshig* is the second chapter in the third part. The literal translation of its definition is, "In the midst of gathering of people, when played or begun to plan the game to play so to make (others) laugh. And the meanings of the words that are not to be made known by all that have gathered and have to be hidden are done so by other words and uttered making the other people puzzled, thus making it difficult to understand instantly the intended meaning of the message. Such appropriate words that are the ornaments of *snyen ngag* are called ornaments of *gab tshig*."[9] Further it is said that 'though it is called *gab tshig*, in olden language (*bda nying*) of the three *bon* (bonism), *drung* (legends) and *deau*, it is the *deau*. But then, it is (i.e., *gab tshig*) the sentences with appropriate wording (*nyam tshar dang den pey*) that belong to *snyen ngag* which is similar to popularly known (i.e., in Tibet) *kha tshar* or *khed.*[10]

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[7] Ibid.p. 2.

[8] 'Rig ney chung wa nga: snyen ngag, ngen jade, deb jur, dhoe gar and kart shi' as in 2007 reprint of Dzongkha Dictionary edited by Lam Chechong, Thimphu: DDA, p. 909.

[9] Pelden, Setshang Lobzang (2004), *Tshangsey bzhed pey drayang*, Delhi: Tibetan Cultural & Religious Publication Centre, pp. 866-867.

[10] Ibid. p. 866.

Dorji Penjor mentions *gab tshig* as one of the oral traditions of Bhutan and translates it as riddle. In dzongkha *gab tshig* is explained as '*gu thom drewa'*,[11] which would literally mean 'a puzzling question'. The terminology *gab tshig* could not have been the original dzongkha term for riddles which was an oral tradition in almost all parts of Bhutan. Even in Tibet it originated, later than the popular terminology *kha tshar*[12] or *khed*[13], as mentioned above, once Buddhism had spread through various Indian and Tibetan masters, and translators.[14] *Kha tshar* or *khed* had in turn originated later than the *deau.*[15]

In Bhutan riddle could have originated from Tibet as part of Bon culture or later from *kha tshar* or *khed* or it could have originated in Bhutan independent of these two traditions of Tibet. It looks likely the second assumption is nearer to the mark since the Dongkha has the word *kha tshar,* but this terminology could have easily got into Dongkha by contact with Tibetan. While in the east, riddle could have originated independently or by any of the assumptions put above and the words *kha tshar* might have got abbreviated as *khar* or the word *khed* could have got modified into *khar* over a period of time.

The abbreviation of the words and change in meaning is evident from the way of asking the riddle by Tshangla communities in Narphung[16] and Kurmedpa communities of Kurtoe and Trashiyangtse.[17] People in Narphung ask the

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11 *English Dzongkha Dictionary*, Thimphu: DDA, p. 868.
12 *Dzongkha Dictionary* (2007), Thimphu: DDA, p. 96.
13 Khed is synonym for gab tshig as in *Advanced Dzongkha Dictionary* (2004), Thimphu: KMT Publisher, p.132.
14 Refer *Tshangsey bzhed pey drayang* (2004) by Setshang Lobzang Pelden, p. 1-20.
15 Deau is explained as one of the caste in Tibet in *Advanced Dzongkha Dictionary* (2004), Thimphu: KMT Publisher, p. 869.
16 Author's personal recollection.
17 As collected by Bodpa Ngedup, teacher, Tangmachu Middle Secondary School, Lhuntshe.

riddle as, "*Wang bu la phur lus pa, hang kharbey? Khar phay, khar phay*" and it would translate as, "When hole is taken the pole is left, what is it/what it means?" *Hang* means 'what' and *kharbey* has come to mean 'it means or is it', when it is used during the game, but will make no sense if used casually in normal communication. The word is clearly formed from *khar phay* as evident from way of asking it in other places and even in Narphung by some other people. For instance, in Nangkor it is asked as, "*Wang bu la phur lus pa, hang?*" While in Khandudung, it is asked as, "*Wang bu la phur lus pa, hang? Khar phay, khar phay*." In Kurmedkha the word *sholong* has come to mean 'what is it / what it means' though it is the terminology used for the riddle. For instance, they would ask the riddle as, "*Ama bong ring ku chig ka rey log chig pa ghenma, sholong*?"[18] When asked, common Kurmedkha speakers do not know the meaning or origin of the terminology.

The third assumption that it might have originated independently in Bhutan could also be argued from the view point of change in terminology for the riddles in Tibet. With the change in time and influence of Sanskrit literature, the original terminologies have become overshadowed by the new terminology *gab tshig*, which is a written form of literature mainly used or written by elite groups of Indians and Tibetans, particularly masters and royals,[19] while the oral traditions have become a thing of the past as one could decipher by reading in between the lines that define *gab tshig* as cited above. The point is the riddles might have been there in Bhutan but the terminology might have been imported from Tibet, most probably looking at the similarities in essence of the riddles played orally and that of the written form as noted above for the origin of *gab tshig*. Thus, *khed* or *kha tshar* could have come to eastern Bhutan either from western Bhutan or directly from Tibet and became *khar*.

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[18] Ibid.

[19] Refer *sNyen ngag gi tenchey chenpo melong la jhug pey shaed jar danyidhiye gong jan zhe jawa zhug so* (1999) by Mepham Geyleg Namgyal.

There is a second very strong argument with regard to independent origin of riddles in eastern Bhutan looking at the terminology *khar*. *Khar* literally means 'house' to common people of a Tshangla community, while the dictionary meaning of it in Dzongkha is a 'fortress'. The terminology Khar could have come from the bet the respondent has to give if he or she fails to give the correct answer. In different parts of eastern Bhutan, the bet is either a dzong, monastery or house. For instance, in Shongphu[20] under Trashigang district it is monasteries, in Gomdar under Samdrup Jongkhar it is predominantly houses, in Bikhar[21] under Samkhar gewog of Trashigang it is house and in Trashiyangtse it is dzong.[22] The initial meaning of the word *khar* could have been 'dzong' which later began to be used for comparatively bigger state or government houses (also called *nagtshang*) that served as residence cum office for the local chieftain, or *drungpa*, in the locality and then began to be used equivalently for the ordinary houses. The argument is further supported by the terminology used by Lhotshampa people of Bhutan who call the riddle *gaun khani katha*[23] which literally means 'story for eating village' and the bet given is a village.

Different ways of riddling

With regard to storytelling, Tandin Dorji writes, "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."[24] In playing riddles Bhutanese are inventive, and different villages have developed their own way of riddling. The following are a few ways of

[20] As recollected by Tshering Wangdi, Office assistant, NHSS.
[21] As recollected by Choki Wangmo, author's wife.
[22] As recollected by Lopen Ngawang Phuntsho, NHSS, and I owe him for telling me, for the first time, the term 'sholong' for riddle game in Kurmedkha.
[23] As recollected by D.C. Khatiwara, teacher, NHSS, and I thank him for this and the examples of gaun khani katha.
[24] Dorji, Tandin (2002), "Folktale Narration: A Retreating Tradition," *Journal of Bhutan Studies,* 6:5-23, p. 10.

playing *khar* that I have come across during my work and these are certainly not the conclusive representatives of playing it in other Tshangla communities of eastern Bhutan.

People in Narphung play it by asking the riddle followed by the word *kharbey*. *"Sa phrakha dengtsi/tsigpa gapha hang kharbey? Khar phay, khar phay* or *phey phay phey phay."*[25] 'What is the wall beneath the soil? Give house, give house,' the questioner would demand.

And the respondent would try very hard to answer and he or she gets enough time and chance to answer, but with incessant, "*khar phay, khar phay*" by the questioner. It goes on until the respondent gives up and asks, "*Ei bi gha phey chas pey?*" 'Whose house do you want?'

The respondent would suggest an array of houses belonging to their village and the questioner would not agree unless he or she gets the best house of the village. Then it is the turn for the respondent to question and pester for the house. He or she will not accept the house already given to the first person.

In Nangkor, once the respondent fails to answer the riddle, he or she asks whether the questioner wants *ser* or *sa dzong* or *ngey* or *nam dzong*. The giving of the bet itself is a riddle where *ser/sa dzong* means a latrine, while *ngey/nam dzong* means proper house or dzong. Here the colour of the stool or soil is compared with the gold and since the latrines hold stool it is therefore called *ser/sa dzong*.[26]

Ultimately the players would be counting the houses, monasteries or dzongs they got in the course of the game and would be the champion for the moment.

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[25] Author's personal recollection.

[26] As recollected by Lopen Kelzang Lhendup, NHSS and I sincerely thank him for his contribution on sending away the *khar* by people in Nangkor.

Ending the game of riddle and beliefs associated with it

As there are so many ways of ending storytelling sessions by Bhutanese storytellers[27], there are also numerous ways of ending the riddles in eastern Bhutan. The common ground of concluding the riddles is sending off the *khar*, which in Tshanglakha is called *khar abi nung mey*. The riddle is personified as *khar abi (abi* means *'grandma'* or '*old lady*', *khar abi* could mean '*grandma of the house*') in the end of the game. The personification could have come from the general belief that ladies are more intelligent than man and riddles definitely require intelligence.

In Gomdar people send off the *khar abi* by providing her with all the necessary items for food and drink, and then hurling her over a cliff with thunderous *growa* 'crash' as in the following:

"*Bogpi cho thur, kharang lamshu thur, khu khau thur, ara palang thur, khomin tshik thur, phagpa sha gudey thur, solo nam gnang thur, eincha par thur, melong brag key dong growu!*"[28]

In Bikhar people send off the *khar abi* along with three essential equipments required for weaving which are all hurled over the bridges of the major rivers in their locality as given in the following:

"*Thagchung toam thur, brung toam thur, sepir toam thur Thungthiri zam pye dong growa ken, Samkhar ri zampye dong growa ken, Gamri zampye dong growa ken.*"[29]

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[27] Dorji, Tandin (2002), "Folktale Narration: A Retreating Tradition," *Journal of Bhutan Studies,* 6:5-23, p.12-17.

[28] Translation for the sending off of *khar* in Gomdar as recollected by author, *'*Two fistful of flour, a container full of kharang, a container full of rice, a bottle of wine, an internode of sugarcane, a pair of sliced pork, a pod of chilly, a fistful of salt, crash over the cliff of melong.' (Containers mentioned are standard measuring containers used in rural Bhutan).

[29] As recollected by Abi Daza, grandmothera of author's wife and

In Samdrupcholing[30], under Samdrup Jongkhar, *khar* is sent off along with the household items as done by people in Narphung but they are hurled over the bridges as done by people in Bikhar.

In Khanduphung[31], Serthi Gewog under Samdrup Jongkhar, the sending off of *khar* is unique from other places and it is as below.

One of the participants will say, "*Yap ley doan*" and the rest will say in respond "doo!" and will continue with "*ray ngan ley doan, doo!, phynang ley doon, doo!, medharang ley doan*", and conclude with, "*kho petang ley doan, doo!*"

In Nangkor and other villages of Pemagatshel it is done quite elaborately and dramatically and a transliteration of it is given below.

Abi khar tam gyelmo nung ma khab. Lap ka za ley yaenang tshas pey dang. Lap ka ja may lam chang tshas pey dang. Khamong na may thagcha tshas pey dang.
Dang dang dangshing. Ba ba badhey. Thag thag thagchung, ne ne neyshing. Why why whyshing. Li li lizu. Sho sho shogodong. Phu phu phunpalang. Phun phun phundum. Kho kho khom thur. Si si sipchurung. Bu bu bumphegtsham. Bi bi bitan.
Abi labka ku wo gyeba kab. Brung ga warong nang ka ara

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translation is, 'A bundle of sword, a bundle of bamboo rods and a bundle of pattern pick crash over the bridges of thungthi, Samkhar and Gamri rivers.' (Translation for the items used in traditional handloom in Bhutan is from "*From the Land of the Thunder Dragon: Textile Arts of Bhutan*" (1994) (eds) by Myers, D.K & Bean, S.S, pp.44-45).

30 As recollected by Aum Sangay Wangmo, wife of a BPC employee at Nangkor.

31 As recollected by Pema Rinzin, lab assistant, NHSS. An English translation of sending off *Khar* in Khandudung is: Evil in the loft. Doo! Evil on the ladder. Doo! Evil in the house. Doo! Evil in the hearth. Doo! Evil on the doorstep. Doo!.

zhey. Abi labka threul nang langpa kab. Mencha warong nang ka ara zhey.
Nadang chilo baka sheg pa kab. Ye nang to rey chi lo phag ney zhey.
Nadang zemo baka sheg pa kab. Ye nang to rey ze mo phag ney zhey.
Ley shing tshong gu sheg pa la la li li ma ghig cho.
Buy nang shing ga ra gu sheg pa ba ba bi bi ma ghig cho.
Zor khon zor khon shegpa za ra zo ro ma ghig pen daey na. Abi auo auo![32]

The people of Narphung, Bikhar and Nangkor believe that the contestants will have bad dreams if the *khar* is not send off, while people in Samdrupcholing believe that the contestants will suffer from stomach ache. Though there are no concrete reasons for sending off the *khar abi*, one can say that people are trying to send away the evil forces from their houses and lives. It is evident from the way they throw away the *khar abi* down the cliff or bridges so as to make her unable to return. It is more evident from the way people of Khandudung send off the *khar* where the very powerful word *doo*[33] is used to

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32 As recollected by Lopen Kelzang Lhendup. An English translation of it is: When grandma khar tam Gyelmo is send off demands pack lunch and drinks for the journey, and demands for the equipments for handloom. Thag thag the sword. Ne ne the heddle rod (ground warp). Why why the closing rod. Li li the temple. Sho sho the shed rod. Phu phu the shuttle case. Phun phun the yarn winding rod. Kho kho the breast beam. Si si the supplementary –warp-pattern heddle rod(?) Bu bu the leash (coil) rod. Bi bi the foot brace (source same as that of 28.) Grandma, when tired on the way drink the ara from the horn of buffalo (containers made of horn of buffalo and mithun). Grandma, when sad on the way drink the ara (locally brewed alcohol) from the horn of mithun. When reached at bigger resting places eat the bigger pack lunches. When reached at smaller resting places take the smaller pack lunches. When reached near the clusters of banana plants utter not la la li li. When reached near the oak trees utter not ba ba bi bi. When reached at hilly areas go without uttering za ra zo ro. Grandma, auo auo!

33 *Doo* is a tantric incantation used by religious persons to drive away evil forces.

drive away all possible evil spirits (*doan*) residing at different parts of the house after being named one after another by one of the contestants. Sending off and beliefs associated with it warrant further study.

Presence of the riddles in other dialectic groups in eastern Bhutan

People in Trashiyangtse and Lhuntshe have various dialectic groups of which the majority speaks Kurmedkha (Chocha ngacha). The Kurmedkha speaking people in different parts of Lhuntshe and Trashiyangtse call the game of riddle by various names like *sholong, ngachi si si long long, ngae mi chi long long* or *mi si long long*.[34] The original meaning of the word *sholong* is not known by the people, as mentioned earlier, but it is author's assumption that it could have meant 'raising the game of dice' or 'wake up to play the dice' (*sho* 'dice' or 'game of dice', *long* –'wake up' or 'raise') or 'look for dice' (*long* also means 'look amongst things' in Dzongkha and Chocha ngacha). This assumption is drawn from the usage of the words "sholong sholong do sholong" by the people of Trashiyangtse before the riddle. Another possibility could be that the word could have simply meant 'come on wake up' in the beginning, since these two words' plain literary meanings are the following: *sho* is 'come' or 'come on' in Chocha ngacha and *long* is 'wake up' in both Dzongkha and Chocha ngacha. This conclusion is drawn from one of the reasons cited by a person from Trashiyangtse for playing the riddle.[35] The reason was to keep awake while working overnight or guarding fields against wild animals during the night.

There is another strong but simple possibility for origin of the word *sholong* as it is supported by the name and meaning of the terminology for the riddle in Dungkar village in Lhuntse. In Dungkar it is called *sholo* and Tashi Dungkar[36] of Dungkar village it translates as 'coming', but the probable reason for

[34] Collected by Bodpa Ngedup.
[35] Ibid.
[36] As told to Rinchen Khandu, teacher, NHSS by Tashi Dungkar, a 38 year old man of Dungkar village, Lhuntse on 16/10/2007.

the usage of the terminology for the riddle game could not be provided. The word *sholong* could have probably come from the word *sholo* and over time changed to *sholong* and the people might have lost the trace of the word's original meaning.

The bet they keep is *dzong*. The way of playing it in Kurtoe (Lhuntse) is similar to that in other parts of eastern Bhutan but the respondent will give the choice between "Ser Dzong and Nge Dzong", which literally means 'Golden fortress and Silver Fortress'. The questioner would ask for "silver fortress" for the simple reason that the golden dzong is the Lhuntse Dzong, and the word 'golden' is accorded to the dzong to mean worthlessness. While, on the other hand, 'silver dzong' would mean any other dzongs which are supposed to be of greater value than the Lhuntse Dzong. It is similar to asking *ser* or *sa dzong* or *nge* or *ngaam dzong* by people in Nangkor and equating the gold to stool because of the similar colour.

In Khoma, another village in Lhuntshe district, where the dialect is Zalakha, the riddle is called *meg pa chop chop*.[37] The way they play it is similar to that of other places in Lhuntse. In Dungkar, another village in Lhuntse, the riddle is called *sholo* and the questioner gives *dzong* to the respondent if given the right answer. There, the loser in the end of the riddle game has to sing *tshangmo*, a genre of traditional songs, while in schools the students make the losers do frog jump and other activities.[38]

The way of playing *sholong* and *meg pa chop chop* is different from that of *khar* in the way ghe questioner begins the riddle. *Sholong* is begun with "*sholong sholong do sholong*" in Trashiyangtse and in Dungkar only "*sholong sholong*". The riddle is asked after this as, "*Sholong sholong do sholong. Tho ra ngan ma che ring ri nga ring ri ja khan sholong?*" While, *meg*

[37] Collected by Bodpa Ngedup.

[38] As recollected by Sonam Deki, Student, Class VI, Dungkar Primary School and collected by Rinchen Khandu.

pa chop chop is begun "*nga ku meg pa chop chop*" where again "*chop chop*" is further repeated for some time as, "*Nga ku meg pa chop chop chop ... Yig peye ri sum tsi kha phab peye jamtsho ting nga zi lo ya?"*[39]

Subjects for the riddles: A comparative study

A comparative study of riddles asked in different places of eastern Bhutan reveals that the riddles were mainly based on common household items, crops grown in their fields, wild and domestic animals around them, their daily activities, commonly seen heavenly objects, Buddhist cultural artifacts, parts of the body, etc.

Following are a few examples of the riddles, in native dialect along with their English translation, played by Kurmed people living in Lhuntse district, where they call it *ngae michi long long*.[40] Of the five examples, the first two are the vegetables grown by them, next two are the parts of a tree they come across daily and the last is the heavenly body they happen to see almost daily in the blue nights of Bhutan.

1. Sa yi nang gi relmo dung do : Yu mang.
Beating of cymbols beneath the soil: Turnip.

2. Sa yi nang gi dhung phu do: Cha ru.
Blowing of blow horn beneath the soil: Raddish.

3. Nam tho khi ma mu tum ten ma: Dhong phu kung.
Showing of feast from the sky above: Cone of pine.

4. Nam tho khi ma khab ten ma: Dhong phu tra.
Showing needle from the sky above: Pine needle.

5. Chu phi ru ghang kei yang chab do: Karma.
Cup of water spread everywhere: Stars

[39] Collected by Bodpa Ngedup. Translation is given along with the transliteration in the appendix.
[40] Ibid.

The answer to the riddle number 3 will be given as inflorescence of banana by the people living in lower altitudes where bananas grow, as no or a few pine trees grow in those areas.

A few examples of riddles narrated by a Kurmedkha-speaking person from Trashiyangtse are also given and divided into the above mentioned groups for comparision.

1. Ama bong ring ku chig ka rey log chig pa ghenma sholong?: Dhar shing.
A tall lady wearing belt (*kera* in Dzongkha) on one side. What is it?: Prayer flag.

2. Ama bong ring ku la chig nam pa tag gu yed pa sholong?: Trayka
A tall lady having nine pouches. What is it?: Ladder.[41]

3. Mi bong thung ku la chi mig kha drang med pa sholong?: Phrugpa.
A short man with uncountable eyes. What is it?: Bamboo basket.

4. Nam mey tshig pa tang ma sholong?: Chala.
A wall built in the sky. What is it? : Banana.

5. Za tshey kha gi za, ju thsey lok kie ghung ma sholong?: Rung thag.
Eaten through mouth but comes out through waist. What is it?: Grinding stone.

6. Dar phu chig gi nang dren po per gang yed pa sholong?: So.
A handful of guests present in a cave. What is it? : Teeth.

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[41] A pouch called *khanang* in Sharchop that is formed when gho (traditional dress of Bhutanese man) is put on. It is used in reference to rungs of a ladder which is suppose to have nine rungs ,and ladder is used to climb up to the loft of a house by all Bhutanese households.

These examples also reveal that the subject matters are related mainly to the above mentioned broad topics like the religious artifacts, household items, body parts, agricultural produces, etc.

A few examples of riddles played by Tshangla communities are also given below to reveal the similar trend with regard to subject matter.

1. Phur bula wang lus pa hang kharbey?: Muley.
When pole is taken the hole is left. What is it?: Radish.

2. Wang bu la phur lus pa hang kahrbey?: Phur gey lan phag pa.
When hole is taken the pole is left. What is it?: Untying rope from peg.[42]

3. Sa phra kha langder shug pa hang kharbey?: Langley
The snake gliding underneath the earth. What is it?: Plough.

4. Tsho nyig tshing rum la rum la dag pa phu thur gi tok pa hang kharbey?: Ming nyig tshing cham ka nawong.
Two seas are about to merge but blocked by a mountain. What is it?: Two eyes with nose in between.

5. Ama dagsey la za bi sam hang kahrbey?: Ara zang dang nang kho.
A short mother with three-legged son. What is it?: Cauldron and pot.[43]

Examples of riddles from other parts of Bhutan as well from Kerala in India have striking resemblances and the examples with the English translations are given in the appendix for

[42] A knot is made at the end of a tether and instead of untying it the knot is slipped off from the peg.
[43] A tall cauldron in which the fermented rice or maize is kept and boiled with a condenser pot on its top. Inside the cauldron is kept usually an earthen pot in olden days but an aluminium or copper pot now a days on a wooden tripod to collect alcohol.

further emphasis and reference.

Prevalence of riddles in other language speaking communities in Bhutan

When enquired informally, many people from western Bhutan whose mother tongue is Dzongkha affirmed that there is a tradition of playing riddles mainly by older people in the communities but they were not in a position to tell the exact terminology for the game. Luckily a person[44] from Doteng village under Paro Dzongkhag recalled it being played by older generations when he was young and the people over there call it *shetho kheb*, which literally means 'expert in gossip' (*shetho* 'gossip', *kheb* 'learned' or 'expert'). In order to know and trace the original terminology or terminologies for the riddle in Dzongkha-speaking communities one may have to do thorough research amongst the village elders before it is too late. The *gab tshig* cited as one of the oral tradition in Bhutan is quite doubtful whether it was the original or right terminology for the oral form of riddles in Dzongkha. Some of the examples of the riddles in Dzongkha are given in the appendix to illustrate its similarity with riddles in other parts of Bhutan.

In the southern dzongkhags, where majority of the people are Lotshampas and speak Lhotshampakha, the riddle is called *gaun khani katha* as mentioned earlier and the bet they give for the riddle is a village. A person[45] from Pemathang village in Samdrupcholing, Samdrup Jongkhar district recounts the acceptance of the bet as follows: "Whatever good, expensive things like houses, fertile lands, productive and useful domestic animals, and beautiful or handsome girls or boys are there in the village belongs to me. All useless things such as unfertile land, lame and unproductive domestic animals, latrines, ugly boys or girls of the village belong to you." Then only the questioner gives the answer for the riddle. It is somewhat similar to the way the house is accepted by people

[44] Rinchen Khandu.
[45] D. C. Khatiwara. (Examples are given in the appendix).

in Nangkor where the good things in the house are taken by the questioner and unwanted and filthy things forced upon the respondent. The subject matters of the riddles both in Dzongkha and Lhotshampakha are similar to that of other dialectic groups in Bhutan. But the study on the prevalence of riddles, ultimately aimed at preserving and promoting it, in the other major dialectic groups is wanting at present.

Prevalence of oral form of riddles in other parts of the world

Riddles have been a rich oral tradition, without doubt, throughout the world. Every society plays it in present time, though riddles have become more complicated with the advent of writing. Examples of English riddles seen in books reveal how written forms of communication has given rise to new riddles. For instance, the riddle "What is common in front of a woman and behind a cow?" for which the answer is 'w' clearly shows that it is word play.

As mentioned above, riddles had been prevalent in Tibet a long time before Buddhism reached and the literary form of riddle, *gab tshig* came from India and overshadowed the oral tradition. In India, the presence of literary form of riddles which were used for philosophical discourse, and also as a part of literary prowess among the elite, is evident from the references made by Tibetan literary works and writers and also by studying Sanskrit literature. Upon informal enquiry people from different parts of India also agree that the oral form of riddles are there in their communities. In Kerala it is called *kadamkhatha*[46], which means 'story of debt' (*kadam* 'debt', *katha* 'story') and a few examples of it are given below.

1. Kala kidakkum. Kay arodum: Mathanga.
Cow will sleep. Rope will roam: Pumkin.

2. Muttathe cheppin adappilla: Kinar.
A small lidless container in front of the house: Well.

[46] As recollected by Somarajan K.S, teacher, NHSS.

3. Adum kuthira. Chadum kuthira. Vellam kandal. Nilkum kuthira: Cherippu.
Running horse, jumping horse. On seeing water the horse stops: Shoe.

Khar and its significance in the lives of the people

According to Tandin Dorji (2002), "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."[47] *Khar* is another important source of this secret enchantment and the smiles the question brought upon my students and colleagues, and their eagerness to share their experiences when asked about *khar* truly revealed the role *khar* had played in their youthful ages.

Khar is usually played by people to entertain themselves during long winter nights (even summer nights are quite long for villagers who go to sleep at about 6-7 pm) as they remain awake in their beds. Of course it also helps gauge the intelligence of the people gathered in different places on different occasions. It can as well sharpen the intelligence of a person. Common occasions are losars (Bhutanese New Year), annual puja (*lhasey*), monthly tshechus and marriage ceremonies. When boys are gathered in the cattle ranches away from villages or sleeping in makeshift huts (*khaye* in Sharchopkha) during winter, they enjoy the dirtier riddles. Same is the case with girls when they are gathered in

[47] Dorji, Tandin (2002), "Folktale Narration: A Retreating Tradition," *Journal of Bhutan Studies,* 6:5-23, p.17.

someone's house to weave together or just to enjoy the youthful glee of sleeping together at friends' places.

It also has a very practical use when it is played by people who keep guard of the fields from wild boars and other animals: it helps them to remain awake. Playing *khar* also helps the young to remember the village households as well the people living in them and their relation to those living in the houses, since they have to either name the chief of the house or someone of the house to give it away as bet. At times the contestants would have to wrack their brains to recollect whose house still remained. This would also make the children know the social standings of different households as they would try to get the house of the richest household for themselves.[48] It also would help younger generations learn about their surroundings like plants and crops grown in the fields, common plants and animals available in their locality. Also, they would learn about the daily household items, agricultural tools and their body parts. The giving of dzongs and monasteries would also make the contestants aware about the historic buildings and their significance.

Anthropologists could use *khar* to trace the origin of the communities, migration patterns and as well as to study social settings. For instance, sending off of *khar* reveals the importance one placed on weaving or agricultural activities, and also the subject matter of the riddles easily reveals the household items, crops, animals, religious practices, etc. that the people are familiar with. The study of *khar* can also reveal the extent of social interactions amongst communities living nearby.

Causes for its diminishing popularity

Modern education has become a necessity for survival in the present day world and its penetration into the lives of the rural population is a boon. But it has also proved to be a cause for the diminishing trend of oral traditions not only in

[48] From author's personal experience as a youth.

rural communities but more so in recently evolved urban communities of Bhutan. Students in rural areas still play *khar* but not so much as it was played few years back. Even then they are aware of it and know few of them, while a Sharchopkha-speaking student from urban Bhutan is asked about it he or she will be at a complete loss. Even storytelling and other beautiful customs of the past are looked upon by our younger generations as outdated because of their distorted and ill-informed idea of modernisation. These are of course the ultimate result of wrong usage of modern amenities like television, video, etc. since these modern amenities along with modern education can do wonders in reviving, preserving and promoting oral traditions, including *khar*, if used in a proper manner. A friend[49] of mine recalled hearing BBS airing *khar* once and it would do much good in promoting and preserving *khar*.

Another main cause of diminishing *khar* and other oral traditions amongst the urban population is the foolish pride our younger generations and their modern parents harbour when they say that they have never been to their native villages. This attitude is making our urban populace lose their ancestral root and ultimately the fading of oral traditions. If a child or a student is asked to share a riddle he or she will definitely wrack his or her brain to come up with a riddle of an English origin. It illustrates the loss of their original root and the finding of a new root. Further, some educated lots discourage children from playing riddles in their native villages and look upon it as wastage of time on foolish adventure of village simpletons.[50] This results from the lack of understanding by our people of the importance of the oral traditions to the intricacies of social webs of our country, especially the rural communities.

The other cause is the lack of proper documentation of *khar*

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[49] Pema Rinzin.

[50] Lopen Passang, NHSS shared his experiences at his native village Kokokhar, block Bjena in Wangdiphodrang district.

as it is an oral tradition, and besides it is overshadowed by written forms of riddles at the present time. The lack of any organised competition of riddling in the villages could have been a reason for its diminishing trend and also its lesser popularity compared to storytelling. This has lead to documentation of storytelling as a rich oral tradition of Bhutan by many Bhutanese as well by foreigners, but not riddles, though they are prevalent through out the country.

Conclusion

This paper, as mentioned, is a sincere attempt to record the prevalence of *khar* amongst the Tshangla communities and the prevalence of oral form of riddles in other dialectic and linguistic groups of Bhutan, as well as its prevalence in some of the states of India. The wide spread prevalence of the oral form of riddles became evident from this study. Striking similarities in the subject matter of riddles between that in Bhutan and Kerala shows it's the simplicity and down to earth nature of the oral form of riddles, unlike that of English literary riddles and *gab tshig*.

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Appendix: Some common examples of riddle in different parts of Bhutan.

I. Examples of ngae michi long long:

1. sa yi nang gi relmo dung do- yu mang
Beating of cymbal beneath the soil- turnip

2. sa yi nang gi dhung phu do-cha ru
Blowing of trumpet beneath the soil- radish

3. chu phi ru ghang kei yang chab do- kar ma
Cup of water spread everywhere-stars

4. nam tho khi ma mu tum ten ma-dhong phu kung
Showing of feast from the sky above-cone of pine (People living in lower altitude give the bud of banana as the answer to the question)

5. nam tho khi ma khab ten ma-pine needle
Showing needle from the sky above- pine needle

(Recollected by: Amgay Yeshi Peldon of Tangmachu, Lhuntse and collected by Bodpa Ngedup.)

II. Examples of sholong sholong do sholong:

1. a ma bong ring ku chig ka rey log chig pa ghenma sholong-dhar shing
A lady of tall height wearing kera (belt) on one side-prayer flag

2. a ma bong ring ku la chig nam pa tag guy ed pa sholong-tray ka
A lady of tall height having nine pockets (khanang - pouch resulting when gho is put on)-ladder (suppose to have nine rungs)

3. mi bong thung ku la chi mig kha drang med pa sholong-phrugpa
A man of short height having uncountable eyes- bamboo basket

4. nam mey tshig pa tang ma sholong- cha la
A wall built in the sky -Banana

5. za tshey kha gi za ju thsey lok kie ghung ma sholong- rung dhag
Eaten through mouth coming (passing) through waist-grinding stone

6. bar phu chig gi nang dren po per gang yed pa sholong- so
Handful of guests present in a cave-teeth

7. na pa nga songma nga songma zey tshe phin sa dhen da phen ma sholong-kam
Says 'I will go fast, go fast' but reaches destiny at the same time- legs

8. tho ra ngan ma che ring ri nga ring ri ja khan sholong-leyu dur
Early in the morning that says 'you are taller. I am taller'.-pounding stick

9. lang gud po la chig thag zhi gi tag tey yed pa sholong-tshan ta
An old ox tied by four ropes- shelf (traditional shelf made of poles and tied at four corners and hung from ceiling just above the oven)

10. Lung nhi phrat to phrat to zer tshe gang chig gi dhog pa sholong- mig to
As two oxen are about to fight, it is blocked by a hill-eye.

(Recollected by Ugyen Wangchuk, cook, Tangmachu MSS, and he is from Trashiyangtse, and collected by Bodpa Ngedup on 30th September, 2007).

III. Examples of meg pa chop chop:

1. Nga ku meg pa chop chop….Mi ringku la thag gey pey log thag la thag gyen ney zi lo ya?: Dar cho shing.
Nga ku meg pa chop chop….. A tall man wearing gho only on one side of the body. What is it?: Prayer flag.

2. Nga ku meg pa chop chop….Yig peye ri sum tsi kha phab peye jamtsho ting nga zi lo ya?: Sho sho ma.
When lifted is at the tip of the ri sum (three mountains) but when lowered is at bottom of the ocean. What is it?: Churning stick (Churning stick used traditionally in Bhutan and other places in Himalayan region)

3. Nga ku meg pa chop chop…..Pang thang zed rang chig puye shig phab tang thag lu ney zi lu ya?: Lem.
When whole meadow is burnt a strip is left. What is it?: Path.

4. Nga ku meg pa chop chop… nob tey achu chu nab tey achu chu zi lo ya?: Jo.
In the evening it says achu chu and in the morning also it says achu chu. What is it?
Ladle made of a gourd. *(Achu chu are words uttered when some feels cold).*

5. Nga ku meg pa chop chop ….. gay long ku kha nang nga kang go la dray tsheud ney zi lo ya?: Yaar.
Inside monk's pocket there is a pebble. What is it?: Black pepper.

(As recollected by Gembo Dorji, student of class X, Tangmachu MSS and collected by Bodpa Ngedup.)

IV. Examples of Sholo in Dungkar:

1. Sa la dar dir nam la phur phur: Toham.
On the land it makes dar dir sound while in the sky (air) it makes phur phur sound: Pounding stick. *(Traditional instrument to pound rice and other grains in Bhutan).*

2. Bari zon chepta chepta re thag gi gugpaey na: Me ni ri.
When two bulls are about to fight it is blocked by a hill: Eyes and nose.

(Collected by Rinchen Khandu and recollected by Sonam Deki)

V. Examples of khar:

1. Pako tsa lo nang ka bitang temken cho wa hang?: Solo.
A red pocket filled with coins. What is it?: Chilli. *(Bitang is old Bhutanese coins)*

2. Ser khag tang thur gadang gi tshung mey mar ba hang?: Khe.
A lump of gold that cannot be touched by hand. What is it?: Stool.

3. To nowang guy za la khi tharkhang guy woo wa hang?: Rang thang.
Food is eaten by mouth and stool is passed through waist. What is it?: Grinding stone.

4. Lung thunka shing lik pa shing thungka lung ligpa lung thungka shing shing thung ka soo lik pa hang?: Rnag thang.
On stone a tree is grown, on the tree a stone, on the stone a tree and on the tree a bamboo. What is it?: Grinding stone.*(Traditional grinding stone in Bhutan has a circular lower stone joined with a wooden pivot to the upper circular stone which has a wooden handle covered with a hollow bamboo pipe.)*

5. Phashi phag pa thur gi ja dang bay ta ka hang?: Lam.
A strip of cane that reaches all over India and Tibet. What is it?: Path.

(Recollection of author.)

VI. Examples of shetho kheb:

1. Mi chi lu migto lesha yed mi ga chi mo?: Tsheu.
A person with numerous eyes. What is it?: Bamboo basket.

2. Lha khang karp chi nang gomchen serp chi yed mi ga chi mo?: Gong do.
Inside a white monastery there is a yellow monk. What is it?: Egg.

3. Ma rey ma rey zer the rey mi rey rey zer the mi rey ga chi mo?: Kha.
When said don't touch don't touch it touches and when said touch touch it does not touch. What is it?: Mouth *(Lips of mouth does not touch each other while uttering rey rey but touches when said ma rey ma rey).*

VII. Examples of gaun khani katha:

1. Ghar tira zhada ban tira muk. Ban tira zhanda ghar tira muk. Kay ho?: Bancharo.
While going towards home the face is towards forest, while going towards forest the face is towards home. What is it?: Axe. *(It is being carried on the shoulder with the handle towards front of the person.)*

2. Tsha pani, tshaina pani, bhaya pani chaidaina. Kay ho?: Bhuychalo.
It is there, it is not there. Even if it is there, it is not needed. What is it?: Earthquake. *(If you say earthquake is there then you cannot see it. But if you say it is not there yet it happens.)*

3. Thallo ghar ko kuwa ko pani suktha, mathlo ghar ko rithay lato marcha. Kay ho?: Dhipri.
If the pool of water in the ground floor dries up the silly chap in the first floor will die. What is it?: Kerosine lamp.

4. Auta goru ko sayawora jura. Kay ho?: Karala.
One ox having hundred humps. What is it?: Bitter gourd.

5. Tin mukoy janatu achamby hunago, chaway jura chan tara. Bokcha duy janalai saaj biyana kat khancha hai kar kara. Kay ho?: Chula.
Creature with three mouths and six humps carries two persons every dawn and dusk, and eats firewood. What is it?: Oven.

(Collected by author and recollected by D. C. Khatiwara. He recounts narrating the fifth riddle in the example in a rhythmic manner in his youthful age).

Bhutanese Folktales: Common Man's Media with Missions for Society

Chandra Shekhar Sharma[*]

Abstract

Apart from being a mode of entertainment, folktales have been a medium of communicating social ideals, values, morals and philosophy. Bhutanese folktales involve a mission of cultivating Buddhist values and virtues in common man's life. And for this very sake they involve common man and his life. Entertainment is their aim but in a way that contributes to the well-being and happiness of the society in the long run. In Bhutanese society they have served as a vehicle of ideals. Folksongs too have served as media with mission but they differ from folktales not only in terms of content and form but also in terms of life and pattern, treatment of subjects and flexibility. Unlike folk songs they do not have social or religious regulations. Folktales have been a tool for Bhutanese society to transfer ideals and values from one generation to another via entertainment. The paper attempts to analyse the folktales of Bhutan as common man's media with some missions. In due course of research it proposes to trace the positioning of common man and his life in the folktales. The sources for this analysis are the available Bhutanese folktales translated into English.

Introduction

Unlike folksongs that had been composed by prolific personalities and learned lamas to propagate highly spiritualistic ideas in an elevated manner, folktales have enjoyed the lap and company of common Bhutanese both in composition and transmission. Bhutanese folksongs have been confined to mood, occasion, ceremony and in some cases to places, but folktales have denied any bondage. And perhaps for this very reason folktales in Bhutan are said not

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to be just 'narrated' but to be 'released' or 'unraveled' in leisure hours of life – an act of not 'just killing time' but of enjoying leisure in a creative manner. This very inevitable and peculiar fact about the process of story telling in Bhutan has been attested by Kunzang Choden and Tandin Dorji. Choden says

> "In Bhutanese tradition stories, fables and legends are not told but are unraveled (shigai in Bumthangkha) and released (tangshi in Dzongkha)…these concept of releasing and unraveling are invested with much significance."[1]

These terms, *shigai* or *tangshi*, are related to information, which implies that our folktales are media with a mission of dissemination of information and transfer of knowledge along with entertainment.

It has been quoted by different scholars that before the introduction of a Western system of education in the sixties of the past century, there was only monastic education in the kingdom. However I feel that this is not true for such statements overlook the educational aspects of folklore and its significant contribution in the shaping of the society. If education is a philosophical concept imbibing ideals of equality, freedom, justice and harmony, then the process of folktale narration is also a type of education. Keeping in view the pedagogical aspects of our folktales it will be right to say that before the introduction of Western education, Bhutan had two education systems: monastic education and the non-formal social education system of folklore.

The monastic education system was not accessible to everyone. Besides this, the strict administration in monastic education disinterested adolescents. Some would run away or others would give up for the sake of establishing family. On top of all these facts, social structure also demanded some people to work in fields and at home. If everybody became a geylong (monk) or lama and devoted themselves to scriptures

[1] Choden, Kunzang (2002), p. xi.

and spiritualism, who would be left to do regular social chores? Sex was another discrimination in monastic education. Females were not privileged to pursue monastic education. Dorji Penjore writes,

> "…the monastic education system that provided Buddhist education was accessible only to a few privileged families. Women were excluded with exception of a few nuns."[2]

In her novel *The Circle of Karma*, Kunzang Choden also mentions such discrimination. Her protagonist Tshomo is not allowed to read and write and attend traditional educational classes conducted by her father at home just for the reason that,

> "You are a girl. You are different. You learn other things that will make you good woman and a good wife. Learn to cook, weave and all those things. A woman does not need how to read and write, Father says quietly but sternly when she asks him to teach."[3]

In such a social scenario it became very necessary to impart basic education about social values, prevailing beliefs, common sense, general knowledge and religious values to those underprivileged ones. Folktales shared this responsibility as a media not only for entertainment but also for education. But the role of folktales as a media has been improperly acknowledged. Dasho Kinley Dorji too skips folk tales in his list of traditional media while saying,

> "Our scholars now remind us of the centuries-old media that we had in Bhutan- the mani walls, prayer flags, the festivals and dances."[4]

Before delving into the topic it isn't amiss to have a cursory glance over the concept of media. Normally when we think of media we are conscious of only the modern means of

[2] Penjore, Dorji (2005), p. 51.
[3] Choden, Kunzang (2005), p. 21.
[4] Dorji, Kinley (2006), p. 4.

information dissemination. We skip over the traditional oral culture and its role as media. Folklores are seldom recognised for their role as media. Françoise Pommaret rightly says,

> "When speaking today of media, we immediately think of the press, TV, internet, films, etc., therefore implying that the traditional society has no media, no form of public communication."[5]

Thus the role of folklore and traditional means as an information and entertainment media rarely come to our mind. Various definitions can be given to elaborate the term 'media'. In a broader sense, anything that serves or propagates information is media. In this very sense media is devoted to "…cultivating the public mind…performing a public function."[6]

Media has its role. It caters to the demands of society, time, situation and context. Based upon these factors, different types of media emerge from time to time. Various literatures and theories may be cited to demarcate the role of media in any society. Pommaret points out:

> "…media transmit values that are often cultural or religious oriented, and that the subliminal messages that any media conveys, are therefore reflection of the culture in which the media themselves are produced."[7]

This statement has been used in the context of dances but it also proves that folktales are media with a mission in our society. Another appropriate observation from the Bhutanese point of view about media's role appears in Dasho Dorji's following lines:

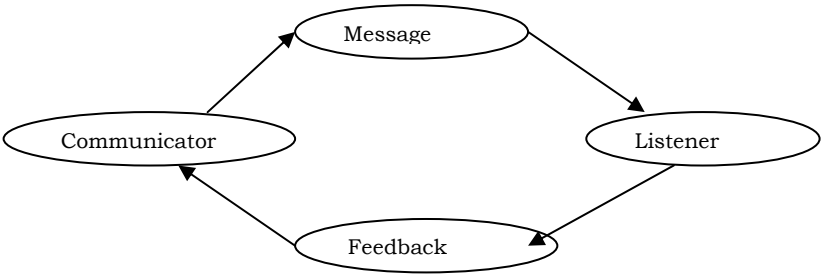
> "Media must help society to understand change and, in the process, define and promote right values, including public values…responsible for culture, happiness, liberty,

[5] Pommaret, Françoise (2006), p. 26.
[6] Dorji, Kinley (2006), p. 4.
[7] Pommaret, Françoise (2006), p. 26.

spirituality, even survival of society."[8]

The role of Bhutanese folktales must be evaluated in the shadow of the above sentences.

Each folktale is a medium of communication, and also a process of communication in itself. Communication is defined as a process of transfer of ideas or information from one person to other for a definite purpose. Communicator, listener, ideas or information, medium, feedback or response are the basic requisites for a talk to be communication. It is a two way process, i.e. both the communicator (speaker) and listeners actively participate in it. Our folktales not only involve these requisites but also ensure the other important feature 'feedback' which is essential in the communication cycle (illustrated below).



In the process of storytelling in Bhutan the person who narrates the tale is a communicator. The communicator has a purpose behind telling the story, and this purpose may be entertaining the listener or providing them moral lessons. The message in the story is not only verbal (in the form of words) but also lies in the sentiments and expressions that are employed by the narrator. The sender employs a variety of measures like variance in pitch, intonation, gestures, pauses in between his/her narration to portray different human sentiments like- melancholy, anger, sadness, jest, happiness, and joy.

[8] Dorji, Kinley (2006), p. 4-5.

> "The art of narration is not limited to the use of beautiful expressions, figures of speech and ritualistic formulas but is also equally animated and made lively through gestures and varying intonation of the voice of the narrator"[9]

Mention must be made here to the commencing and closure of the process of storytelling. The process starts with 'Dangbo…Dingbo' (Long long ago) and 'Henma henma' (Once upon a time) to take the listeners far away from the fatigue and penury of their real life to a wonderland of fantasy/imagination. This increases the anxiousness of the listeners. Similarly the methodology of ending the story is also worth noting. The session (not the tale) ends with a note to bring back the listeners to the real world by using various closure formulae.

Such an artful narration contributes to effective discharge of concepts and in enhancing proper encoding and decoding of the message behind a tale. The receiver, the listener, listens to the story and deciphers or interprets the message and gives a proper feedback. Basically media has two basic roles to play in the society. Firstly, it aims to entertain. Secondly, it aims to bring behavioural change in the audience. The effectiveness of the message conveyed or the understanding is judged by the feedbacks. We have two types of feedbacks in context storytelling sessions:

1. Immediate/ instantaneous feedback (verbal or nonverbal)
2. Long term feedback (behavioural)

Immediate or instantaneous feedbacks are the immediate responses of listeners to the narrator. These can be either verbal, (i.e. in the form of a hum or word) or nonverbal (i.e. can be expressed with expressions). They help the sender in knowing the attentiveness of the listener in addition to keeping them involved by maintaining interest, curiosity and

[9] Dorji, Tandin (2002), p. 10.

anxiousness among the listeners. Such feedbacks ensure active participation, continuous interaction and active listening.

While the narrator narrates the tale, the audience produces a humming sound "Umm..mm" which implies 'that the story is listened by the audience'. This is a common response but there are some other responses too. To express their sympathy or signify their listening the listener may say "Aye", which roughly means 'yes' and when the story takes turn to some astonishment or reveals suspense the audience express their surprise or shock by "Yaahlamah" or "ayi wha". Another usual response that follows the sequence one "Aei" or "tse ni" (in Bumthangkha) or "delay" that means 'then'. This instantaneous feedback ensures that the message encoded has been decoded properly. Being a two way process, communication requires active participation of listeners. While the speaker's participation remains active by speaking, there is a risk that listener's participation may become passive. To avoid such risk and to ensure his/her participation a feedback technique has been intelligently incorporated. There are three purposes behind caring for instantaneous feedback. Firstly, to ensure that audience listens to and not just hears the tales, because one can provide empathetic response when one listens properly. Secondly, it is also to ensure correct decoding, and thirdly to keep the audience active by making them feel that presence is valued.

This instantaneous feedback is not very natural but has been imbibed in the listener society as a required custom of storytelling or listening activity. Kunzang Choden reasons:

> "This customs is to prevent the spirits from listening to the stories and stealing them. As long as human beings responds and indicates that the story is being listened to, the spirits cannot steal them."[10]

[10] Choden, Kunzang (2002), p. xiv.

Another reason that I came across while undergoing this work is the following. The silence or lull during the storytelling session may point to the absence of the listener and will invite a demon whose one tooth touches the sky and the other to the earth, to take away (steal) the story. These demons or spirits are none but the inattentiveness of the listeners, which will surely kill the stories or vanish the stories from memory of common man. Through such imbibed trait the listeners are kept abound with the discourse so that they can in future narrate the same to others.

Coming back to the long-term feedback, we must look at behavioural changes. Folktales as a media try to imbibe some cultural traits in the listeners, and thus act as media, a vehicle. Various tales are narrated to fill the education gap in the younger generation. Certain social values are much related to Bhutanese society. As recognised by Curriculum and Professional Support Division (CAPSD) these are:

> "Love for Family, Cleanliness, Obedience to Parents and Teachers, Love for Animals, Honesty, Friendliness, Thankfulness to Parents, Teachers and Friends, Love for Plants, Respect for Teachers and Friends, Punctuality, Love for Friends, Care for Properties, Responsibility, Generosity, Obedience, Love for Friends and Family, Cleanliness, Helpfulness, Thankfulness, Punctuality, Respect, Helpfulness, Responsibility, Friendliness, Loyalty, Unity, Honesty and Gratitude."[11]

These values are not new to Bhutanese oral society. It has long back recognised these values and their importance, and has disseminated them through folktales targeted to entertain the young and to bring in them some behavioural changes so that the society can be happier and more prosperous. These behavioural changes were long-term feedback for the entire senior generation and society. The imbibing of such values could have been done by monastic education too but it wasn't available to everyone. So what the mask dances and folksongs

[11] *Teaching Learning to Be,* (2001).

would do occasionally with some limitations, was done with a great ease by tales. This procedure of entertaining and educating was not just limited to academic clergy or theocratic scholars but to the common man whose tool was imagination and simplicity, and whose aim was a peaceful and harmonised society. Originating from the common man as a common man's media, these stories involve common man's life outlook and perception on different themes. Highly spiritual lessons of sin, salvation, suffering, offerings, metaphysics, complexities of transcendentalism and philosophy doesn't lie in the scope of folktales for they are far behind the understanding of a layman. But within the scope lies the social life of human beings and the common man's perception and attitude.

Apart from communicating values, Bhutanese folktales have different roles to play in society. Dorji Penjore identifies four roles of folktales in Bhutan.

1. Educating the children
2. Entertainment and communication
3. Repositories of culture and value
4. Folktales and spiritual needs[12]

The first and the second role are umbrella roles that cover the third and the fourth one. In addition to this, as Tandin Dorji mentions, tales have also been used to ward off evil spirits who have haunted a person.[13] The functions of Bhutanese folktales can be summed up into following categories.

1. Communication
2. Entertainment
3. Education
4. Enhancing Social Structure
5. Imbibing socio-cultural virtues, promoting right

[12] Penjore, Dorji (2005), pp. 53-56.
[13] Dorji, Tandin (2002), p. 7. Dorji mentions the way in which tales are told for this purpose.

virtues, and cultivating minds
6. Treatment

Anytime, anyone, anywhere

Folktales are 'released' and 'unraveled'. But when? Who? Where? Anyone can release it any time. Like songs and mask dances they aren't bound to any customary chains. Whenever wherever there is audience and someone willing to take charge of being narrator, the session can take the shape. Tales are told in leisure hours of life, where the storyteller and listener have ample of time to stroll in the mystic world and enjoy its realms. We can bifurcate natural story telling session into two: social storytelling sessions and family storytelling sessions.

In families, the elders start the session after dinner, after arranging bed. All the children and the younger ones sit or lay around the 'thap' or 'bukhari' and the tale is released to enjoy and decipher the hidden meanings. The listeners will from time to time, give their verbal feedback to let the storyteller know that they are listening. This is a typical example of family storytelling sessions. During the day the old and young are busy at work, so night is the only time where both can find time to enjoy and interact. Thus storytelling sessions appears to be held normally at night.

A social storytelling session involves different members of society. Such sessions appear to be less frequent than the family ones because the population and settlements are scattered. Yet some authors say that it has been a common phenomenon. Kunzang Choden says that it was not only night when tales were 'released' but they were also narrated during day and that too in social gatherings.

> "As I reminisce now of the story telling sessions, I see a circle of adults and children relaxing in the late afternoon sun, in the West Gate field of Ugyen Choling Naktsang, listening in rapt attention to every word of the story teller. At other times it was the evening sitting around a charcoal

> brazier in the flickering light of lawang. As the flickering light cast remarkable arrays of shadows, the images from the stories came to life and became real."[14]

But these social gatherings appear to be occasional and not as frequent and as usual as storytelling sessions within the family.

Anyone who remembers tales, can keep the audience glued and has confidence in the art of narrating can perform the task. Male or female, rich or poor, young or old, anyone can tell a tale. Choden in the preface to her collection talks about Bhutanese men and women who had told her tales. Wangmo asserts of an old man narrating her stories. Tandin Dorji's organised storytelling sessions too had narrators from a wide spectrum of society. There is no discrimination. Similarly, place doesn't matter; whether it is an open yard or room or field, everything holds good for this media. There is restriction to time; it can be day or night.

Scholarship in Bhutanese folktales

Print media in Bhutan gained momentum from the last decade of the twentieth century. Getting something published was a tougher job before. Printing and publishing jobs were mainly outsourced and if they were done within the kingdom the publishers were the authors themselves. Sometimes the publication was self-sponsored; sometimes international agencies sponsored the job of printing and publishing. Amidst these situations, translation of folktales into English and getting them printed and published was a challenge. Tandin Dorji notes

> "… the scarcity of writing and printing facilities compounded the difficulty and consequently the larger section remained illiterate even after schools were opened and facilities provided free of cost, the documentation took quite sometime to jump from spring board"[15]

[14] Choden, Kunzang (2002), p. xii.
[15] Dorji, Tandin (2002), p. 5.

In addition to these facts, poor readership and illiteracy should also be taken into consideration. Buying and reading books happened to be a less preferred recreational activity than other hobbies. And those who had it were very few. School-going children, who comprise a major reading group, still depend on school libraries. But now the challenges are being challenged. The kingdom has three newspapers, and some publishers with investment attitude and modern printing facilities.

The first attempt to collect folktales and publish them in the form of a book was from Dasho Sherab Thaye. It was in 1984 when Dasho Thaye published his debut collection of folktales from Bhutan titled *Dzongkha Short Stories (Book One).* This pioneering work was published in New Delhi, India. His love for this venture did not end up with the first volume seeing the light of the day. Two years later in 1986, two volumes of folktales with same titles came into existence. But these two volumes did not hunt any foreign publisher; these volumes were published in Thimphu. These stories were in Dzongkha and hence foreigners or those who lacked competency in Dzongkha were unaware of the world of Bhutanese folktales.

What unveiled the treasures hidden in the oral prose of Bhutan to the non-Dzongkha speaking community were the compilations of translations of folktales. Before any Bhutanese could venture into translating the folktales into English and publishing them in a collection, Kusum Kapur, an Indian brought a collection to the stands. Kumar undertook the first sincere attempt of translating Bhutanese stories and getting them published. During her two-year stay in the kingdom she not only collected the stories but also laboured on their translation. Her collection of folktales *Tales from the Dragon Country* was published in 1991 in New Delhi.

Kunzang Choden is a much-praised Bhutanese female writer. Her literary life began with a popular collection of folktales translated into English. This collection of folktales and legends which is titled as *Folktales from Bhutan* saw light in

1993. It was published from Bangkok, Thailand. A full time writer by profession and passion, Choden is a reputed author in the kingdom. Her long stay in India for education made her feel the importance of her ethnic identity. This self-realisation inched her towards collecting, compiling and translating folktales, which came in the form of a book.

Yeti, like UFOs, have been haunting learned and common people as well till date. Choden's passion for tales took her to find yeti but not in snow capped mountains, rather in Bhutanese oral tradition. Her *Bhutanese Tales of Yeti* which came out in 1997 contains popular folktales that involve Yeti as a character. These tales tells us that Bhutanese society too had some perceptions about yeti. This collection was also published from Thailand. In the same year came another collection of folktales, *Tales from Rural Bhutan*, was published from Thimphu. Her collections have made a significant contribution in popularising the tales in and outside Bhutan.

Another female writer who gained repute in collecting folklore and getting them published is Kinley Wangmo. Her collection of folktales in Dzongkha *Druk gi Lozey dang Tangyu Natsho ge* came out in 1995; two years after Choden's collection in English. Francoise Pommaret mentions this as "a longer Dzongkha Version in which three short versified ballads (lozey) appears"[16]

In 1997 Wangmo published *Tales from Rural Bhutan*. This collection was edited by Karma Singye and was published with help of financial assistance of Helvetas.

While Choden's inclination towards folktales and their effortful compilation symbolises a yearning for yore and ethnic identity, Wangmo's collection symbolises external influences. She asserts,

> "I met Ap Chethey in the spring of 1993, while traveling

[16] Pommaret, Françoise (2000), p. 146.

> the country with Ms. Claudia Meier, a Swiss writer of folktales who, incidentally gave me the idea and the encouragement for this and earlier book I have published in Dzongkha."[17]

The year 1998 found yet another collection *Folktales of Bhutan* by Rita Thomas published from New Delhi. Pommaret introduces one more writer, Tshering Gyeltshen, in her paper. She writes, "Tshering Gyeltshen has put in writing a collection of popular stories which have ribald and humourous tone "[18]

But she doesn't clearly mention whether the "popular stories" are folktales or fictional creations of his own? In 2002 came another collection by Rinzin Rinzin titled *Talisman of Good Fortune and Other Stories from Rural Bhutan*. In 2004 Gopilal Acharya, former journalist with Kuensel and currently editor with Bhutan Times, also came up with a slim collection of folktales titled, *Bhutanese Folktales- from East and the South*; this collection was published in Thimphu.

In his paper, Dorji Penjore cites his paper "Was it Yeti or Deity" as 'forthcoming' and "Shenje's Horn" as 'draft'. If these are collections of folktales they will certainly enrich the scholarship in folktales.

Analytical works on folktales took some time to come up. This may be because of two reasons. Firstly such works couldn't find a proper platform and were less encouraged for their utility in the society. Secondly, late compilation of folktales delayed the focus of the people who could undergo such studies.

The first analytical paper on folktales, "Folktale Narration: A Retreating Tradition" was produced by Tandin Dorji, a history Lecturer at Sherubtse College, published in JBS (Journal of Bhutan Studies) in 2002. His paper was an outcome of

[17] Wangmo, Kinley (1997), p. 7.
[18] Pommaret, Françoise (2000), p. 145.

detailed research work that included organising storytelling sessions and surveys. Later Dorji Penjore, researcher at CBS, came up with a paper "Folktales and Education: Role of Bhutanese folktales in value Transmission" in 2005. This was published in the 12th volume of JBS. Steve Evans, a Communications Specialist at International Center for Ethnographic Studies, Atlanta, has added three papers that address the context of Bhutanese folktales. "Tears and Laughter: Promoting Gross National Happiness through the Rich Oral Tradition and Heritage of Bhutan" appears in *Gross National Happiness and Development* published by CBS. His other two papers, "An Analysis of Meme Haylay Haylay and His Turquoise" and "Preserving Consciousness of a Nation: GNH in Bhutan Through her Rich Oral Traditions", both secured room in volume 15 of the JBS.

Common man's life and perception in folktales

The majority of folktales are centered on the life of common man for they have been their media. These folktales provide an interesting insight into the life and perception of common Bhutanese. Folktales of Bhutan can be broadly classified into following categories:

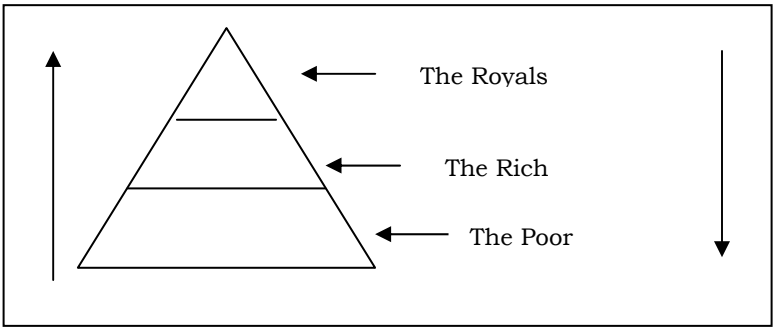
1. Fables or animal tales where the characters are only animals and they speak, interact and practice social values.
2. Animal-human interaction tales in which human beings interact with animals and birds.
3. Rich versus poor tales. These tales project virtues in their proclamation.
4. Demon/ghost tales (*Sinpo*, 'ghost'). These often project victory of poor fellows over demons and ghosts.
5. Idiot tales depicting idiots and narrating their follies.
6. Tales of disguise.

The common themes on which these tales run are very much related to the harmonised and peaceful society. Some of the themes can be summed up as:

1. Upholding and teaching about the common social virtues
2. Instilling the philosophy of karma
3. Imbibing socio-cultural and religious beliefs

As the folktales are released by the common man it is quite inevitable that they involve the social life and pattern and the values he perceives for the betterment of society. The tales have a lively pattern of social life that comprise poor, rich, as well as spiritual and mystic beings.

Our folktales provide hints about our social structure. Most of our characters are poor (economically backward) who would either attend to the duties or orders conveyed by the rich or would just survive with their small harvest. Other than rich there are royals. This simply points that the Bhutanese society, even in those times was divided into three classes depending on privileges and economy. These were royals, rich and poor with their population in increasing order and economic condition and privileges in decreasing order in the series. This gives a pyramidical structure of the society.



Dorji Penjore has a similar view.

> "At the apex of social and political hierarchy are the kings, who are supported by wise ministers and retinue of loyal courtiers. Persons working as court servants are held in highest esteem. The protagonist - usually a poor boy - soon to become king himself is seen serving the king. Lamas,

> monks, gomchens, astrologers, rich men, cattle traders, businessmen fill the second stratum. They are mostly assigned secondary roles to move the plot. In the last group are the poor people and their children, hunters, fishermen, farmers, tseri-cultivators, beggars, shepherds, orphans, etc."[19]

It is the last group that finds a prominent place in our folktales and whose presence and actions are justified and celebrated over the first two groups.

Another part of the social structure is the means of survival. Our folktales attest that farming and cattle-rearing happened to be the two activities on which the survival of the society was largely dependent. Apart from serving the upper strata it was the main activity of the poor in their life. Whereas the royals happened to be largely devoted and dependent on the administrative system, and the rich were related to trading in addition to farming and cattle rearing, the poor mainly depended on farming; their other means of earning was serving the upper strata.

In the stories like "The Boy Who Went to Buy Cows", "Meme Haylay Haylay", "The Mother and the Ghost", "Bum Dolay Serba and Bo Serba Tung Tung", "The Adventures of Poor Boy", "Acho Tsagye", "Gyalpo Migkarla", "Bum Sing Sing Yang Donma", "Ap Brapchu", "Lame Monkey", "P'Chekay- the Man…", "The Story of the Lazy Boy", "The Borrowed Gho", etc, the primary activity of the poor was farming. In some stories they barter the things they produce like in Meme Haylay Haylay, The Shepherd, and The Lazy Boy. But they never barter their fields, which shows the highest value they had for their fields. These fields and environment are symbols of productivity and life and hence are highly valued in folktales. In fact, folktales teach that fields and cattle are loveable possessions and should not be bartered with anything else because the survival of the society basically depends on them.

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[19] Penjore, Dorji (2005), p. 57.

Some characters rely on cattle-rearing. The number of cattle, especially number of cows, one owns implies one's wealth. But there is an interesting factor that is revealed in our stories regarding society and its structure. The job of looking after cattle is not confined to any class or sex; anyone whether rich or poor, male or female, young or old, can go behind the herd. In the tales "The Boys Who Went to Buy Cows", "Bum Dolay Penzom and Bo Serba Tung Tung", "Gyalpo Migkarla", "The Borrowed Gho", etc, the poor as well as the rich come to the pastures with their herds. In noting this, the folktales preach that no work is mean and every work is for everyone unless incapable of doing so.

In Bhutanese folktales pasture acts as a ground for interaction and adventure between rich and poor, supernatural and natural, mystic and real. It also symbolises its openness for everyone. Not only males but females too are actively involved in this activity. Bum Dolay Penzom ("Bum Dolay Penzom and Bo Serba Tung Tung"), Goke Zangmoi Buthi ("The Borrowed Gho"), Ashi Yulidolma, Ashi Sarlidolma and Ashi Dunglidolma ("Ashi Dunglidolma") are rich girls who go to pastures to take care of the finest possession and it is here that they meet smart guys from poor background who prove themselves to be their worthiest and most suitable life partners. It is also apt to cite some other characters like The Girl ("Aming Niwa"), The Poor Boy ("The Boys Who Went to Buy Cows"), The Boy ("The Shepherd"), The Dumb Boy ("How a Bull becomes a Tiger"), P'Chekay ("P'Chekay"), and Meme Haylay Haylay who didn't find their life partners but indeed meet some adventures that portray their inner strength and metamorphism in life. While the girl in Aming Niwa encounters a mouse by chance who turns her life happier, the poor boy encountered a she-demon. Thus pasture proves to be an adventurous land, a juncture that not only twists the tale but also metamorphoses the lives of the characters. The tales caution that pastures are not only where cattle graze but are lands full of promises, no less than fertile fields, that can provide happiness for Bhutanese folks. These stories cultivate an understanding that going to pastures is not a

boring activity nor a risk and in case anything unpredictable comes, it should be faced bravely and honestly.

With pastures and fields is connected the philosophy behind the dignity of labour. Our folktales preach this philosophy with different characters and plots. The methodology of our folktales as media to preach dignity of labour is not spiritual but far more practical and full of illustrations. Labour is not criticised but is hailed high and is portrayed as an activity full of enjoyment. The philosophy of 'Work is Worship' lies at the soul of the stories. We do find here the 'division of labour' but we don't find here traces of taking a task mean. Nor we find people classified into castes and creeds according to the work they do in the society. Every character apart from being rich or poor, male or female, able or disabled, young or old, are found engaged in some productive activity. Even in fables we find animals engaged, and those sitting idle are criticised or are made to suffer. The chickens ("Why Fox Chases…") grow crops; the lion and the buffalo are busy in hunting and grazing. Similarly the deer ("Fate and the Deer"), all the birds ("Why Bat is not a Bird"), the three birds ("Oldest of the All"), the cuckoo ("The Cuckoo and the Frog"), the female hoopoe ("The Hoopoe"), the hen and the monkey ("The Hen and the Monkey"), the frog ("The Tiger and the Frog") all have something to do. These hardworking creatures proclaim their victory and are rewarded with joys in their life.

More interesting tales in this context are "The Hoopoe", "The Hen and the Monkey" and "The Tiger and the Frog". The female hoopoe is responsible for the nesthold chores while "the male hoopoe flew around and collected whatever he could". This points out to us the way the tales teach the division of labour, the dignity with which the characters take their responsibilities, and the honour they have for another's task.

Demeaning others' tasks is a social evil. It is a vice and a folly too, for each laborer in the society contributes to the social development through labour. Bhutanese folktales even

portray this by showing that no work is bad in itself. The folktale titled "The Hen and the Monkey" takes it as its mission to teach this to the society. The monkey who demeans the work of the hen suffers at every point he demeans it whereas the hen takes every work assigned to her by the monkey as her duty and performs it with smiles and enjoyment. She gets success in doing every task with her skill whereas the monkey who demeans and imitates the hen's way fails and suffers. The hen is a symbol and preaches that one's own skills tinted with enjoyment in doing it bring success.

This task of preaching dignity of labour is not only done by hailing it but also by vibrantly criticising idleness and laziness. The lazy characters in animal tales are thrown towards utter criticism, mockery and sufferings. The monkey in the above story is a lazy fellow and imitator. He couldn't involve his own skills in doing anything hence is made to suffer and run away out of the house to live without a good-wife, the hen. This mission of warning people against laziness is reported not only through fables but also through other tales. The lazy human beings like the rich boy ("The Boy Who Went to Buy Cows"), the rich girl ("Aming Nima"), and the lazy sinpo ("Acholala") symbolise their sufferings. However Acholala's laziness is not criticised but is taken as a lucky matter for the girl in the story. There are some stories in which lazy characters are made to give up their idleness and tempted to work. Stories like "Lame Monkey", "The Phob that Provided Food", "The Story of a Lazy Boy", "The Silly Man and His Wife" are exemplary in this context. They tell us how the common man perceives laziness and his reaction, and the ways the society would take to treat idle fellows. It is another mission that lies at the core of our folktales.

One of the virtues that a society nestled in mountains and dense forests requires is bravery. Our tales have been a media to teach people lessons of bravery and to instill in them courage, confidence, and competence which are the only tools for any common man in his daily life. We see that the

characters depicted are humble, feeble prima facie but when it come to face the test of the time they prove to be strong, intelligent and brave enough. Their bravery is much related to their virtues. The girl escapes the sinpos or boldly faces the astounding palace of mouse or deceives the wild animals. The boys fighting the ghosts and sinpos, and other challenges are the portrayals meant to imbibe the traits of bravery in the society. One more fact to notice the folk doing brave jobs are young boys and girls. It obvious that the folktales (as media) targeted young boys and girls to instill courage and other tenets of bravery. To start with, the tales having sinpos all demonstrate courage. For a layman sinpos are demonic creatures with furious faces, enormous energy and a cannibalic nature. Anyone would surely fear them for these characteristics. The youths win them over and proclaim:

> "… for even ghosts have little power if they cannot evoke any fear in their victims. Fear in victims empower spirits and ghosts, who then are capable of harm and destruction."[20]

If the above sentences are taken as hidden adages in Bhutanese folktales it becomes clear what mission some of the stories with ghosts, rolongs and sinpos have behind them. Secondly such dangerous looking characters in our tales are not just meant to create horror and scare the audience but I feel that they have been incorporated to say that men and women of ordinary calibre can win over them by bravery and virtues. The boy in "The Mother and the Ghost", "Acho Tsagye", "Bum Sing Sing Yangdoma", the girl in "Acholala", the geylong in "Ap Rolong", "Ganze Joy Guma" are the characters that have been projected for instilling bravery and confidence in youth so as to perform duties fearlessly. The same lessons of bravery go with the tales related to yeti in Choden's collection.

Humility, kindness, respect, generosity, courtesy, are some other virtues that are required to be practiced in society for

[20] Choden, Kunzang (2002), p. 51.

the greater common cause of happiness. Folktales have also served to teach these virtues through various characters and situations. Mutual respect to elders and trust has been portrayed at length. Also, the cost of not valuing these virtues has been illustrated. Fables like "Fate and the Deer", "For Not Paying Heed", "Cuckoo and the Frog", "The Hoopoe", "The Hen and the Frog"' tell the listener about the mutual respect among the family members and the cost of losing it. On the other hand, we have characters like the three obedient sons ("Tsongpon Dawa Zangpo"), the widow's son ("Mother and the Ghost"), the princess with three breasts, Mekhay Doma, who are examples of obedience and respectful character.

Trust is another important factor not only in the familial sphere but also in the social sphere. Trust is the social value that binds the society, and in family it contributes to peace and happiness. Our tales lay much thrust upon trust or faithfulness among couples through a variety of characters. Among the finest examples in this context are the fables: "The Cuckoo and the Frog", "The Hoopoe", "The Monkey and the Hen", "For not Paying Heed", "Fate and the Deer". The current of distrust runs under these tales taking its toll by breaking the happy relationship between the couples. In these fables the element of distrust arises from males. The female counterparts perform their duties honestly but the males either suspect or deny their suggestions that lead them to heavy difficulties, sometimes even at the cost of their lives. The frog ridicules the devotion of his wife, cuckoo. The husband Hoopoe's unreasonable anger, the monkey's derogatory and charging attitude towards her wife hen, the Dengo's (dough's) unpaying and unheeding attitude towards its wife – a slab of butter, and the same attitude of husband deer towards his wife all signify the frivolities and vices on the part of males who are responsible for spoiling the entire family.

Distrust, unfaithful behaviour and betrayal have been taken as the root cause of sufferings and also loss of life in extreme cases. Other tales that signify the need for trust and the cost

of its absence are: "To Pay for Water", "Dasu and Basu", "Why the Bat is not a Bird?", "Who Frightened Whom?", "Abar Sigay", "The Boys Who Went to Buy Cows", etc.

The wife is an honourable entity of her husband. Marriage, though not a custom or tradition-bound activity, is an important landmark. Traditionally marriage is not celebrated in the form of ceremony nor it has much to do with religion or society. It is very personal. Bhutanese choose their partner very informally and become husband and wife.[21] They live together and contribute to the making of a home. Our folktales teach that another's wife should be respected and it is not a 'thing' to be snatched or seized, an act that is a sin that leads to suffering. It seems that the wealthy might be doing so, for we see rich people and kings try to forcefully seize the wives of poor people. This pain of the poor comes out in acute degree in two stories: "The Shepherd and the Orphan" and "The Serpent Princess". The virtues of poor husbands and the brilliance of their wives works, and the kings in the tales are defeated to gain nothing other than mockery, humiliation and pain. This cruelty is criticised and the victory is projected in such a way that we feel happy for the punishment the culprit gets.

Harmony between man and nature is also important for the welfare of sentient beings. The characters in our tales eat meat and kill demons and wild animals, yet the folktales propagate the philosophy of harmony. Human beings not only live in harmony with animals and birds but also marry them in their form and accept them as life partners. Both human beings and other beings are obliged to each other. Even trees are depicted as obliged to render a helping hand towards human beings. It is in these stories we find rats, dogs, cats, and monkeys are saved by human beings and in turn are obliged to them. These tales depict the theme where virtue

[21] In saying this I am not talking of the southern Bhutanese who are mostly Hindus and marriage is a customary activity with social importance. In Hindu culture marriage is a sanskaar.

brings virtue, sowing the seeds of good deeds in society.

The poor versus ghosts, sinpos and the wealthy

Considerable attention is given to the presence and attributes of ghosts, sinpos and the wealthy in the tales. They stand as symbols to various follies and vices. Ghosts, according to Bhutanese beliefs, are those bad spirits, which are invisible to human beings and keep on moving in this world because of bad karma during their life as a human being. They harm the human being by various physical means. Sinpos, on the other hand, are demons having a horrible look that comprises two extra-large curved teeth, a tail and a giant body. Choden's interpretation of sinpos goes like this,

> "Flesh-eating spirits that roamed the earth freely until Guru Padmassambhava subdued them and exiled them to another world sinpoiyul "[22]

By listening to the tales it becomes clear that sinpos are visibly demonic creatures. They differ from the ghosts in a sense that ghosts are not visible. Ghosts have deadly habits. The wealthy in our tales are rich human beings having luxuries and comfort yet harmful to other human beings for their vices.

There is a message behind the inclusion of these characters. Sinpos are full vices like lethargy, anger, cannibalism and uncivilised behaviours harmful for the society. In tales they pick up humble human beings either making them slaves or eating them up. Such creatures are harmful for a peaceful and terror-free social existence. The poor, who are laced with ethical qualities, intellectual abilities and bravery as their strength, fight with them and prevail. In no story do we find a poor person being defeated by sinpos. Rather we find the poor, and not even the rich, fighting and winning over the sinpos (and also the ghosts).

[22] Choden, Kunzang (2002), p. 195.

The wealthy in our tales are full of jealousy, greed, pride, gluttony and other vices. It clearly suggests that rich people in Bhutan in the past were not having humanly attitude towards the underprivileged people or subjects. Never do we find them portrayed as humble and good people caring for laymen. And thus they too are defeated by the good qualities of laymen and forced to learn lessons. The rich boy in "The Boy Who Went to Buy Cows", the girl in "Aming Niwa", the rich parents in "The Borrowed Gho", and the brother of Bum Dolay Penzom are some of the rich characters that show traces of vices, and low level idiosyncrasies in their attitude towards the poor. The poor, the framers of our tales observed this and thus criticised them politely and celebrate their defeat. Not only this, the tales also tell the reader how the poor were exploited and what methods of coercion were used. Though these symbolic characters are made to suffer, their punishment is justified. The ghosts are subdued or killed for they can never learn lesson and become good for society. The boy in "The Ghost and the Mother" kills the ghost brutally for it is the way for the whole society to get rid of it. On the other hand, sinpos are tormented and tortured and even burnt to make them run far away from the places where human beings live.

But the wealthy? They aren't killed! They are neither burnt nor looted! Why? It is so because though they bear vices, they are needed in society for they help in earning bread and butter. On top of this they are human beings who can learn lessons by their mistakes; therefore they are not made to suffer by the hands of the poor but by the great leveller of nature. The rich boy in "The Boy Who Went to Buy Cows" loses his handsome face as the cost of his cheat, the rich girl in "Aming Niwa" looses her beautiful hair and gets dreadful rewards for her gluttony, the rich parents in "The Borrowed Gho" have to surrender before the love of the poor guy Gele Gyalwa Dupchu. Many examples can be set herein to aver the victory of excellent qualities of the poor over the exploitation of the rich.

The poor versus ghosts, sinpos and the rich signify the triumph of divine over the demon. The contrast between the poor and the rich is the contrast of vices and virtues in the society which clearly delineates before the audience that vices are punished and virtues are rewarded. Though there may be little in the record of the rift between rich and poor in Bhutanese society, the folktales point to the consciousness of common man towards the attitudinal differences of the rich towards the poor. Keeping in account its role as media, these tales have not only criticised the frivolities, and not only preached lessons, but also celebrated the qualities of the poor people.

Against non-violence and spiritualism?

Bhutan is one of the few Buddhist countries. Buddhism is not only preached but also practiced. A degree of belief in Buddhist philosophy runs in the veins of society. The general expectation in such a condition is that the tales may contain non-violence, lack of cheating, and will be very spiritualistic in nature. A general reader may think before hand that our tales may just be related to the Buddha, the Dharma, the monk-body and spiritualism. A cursory glance over the tales and characters may confuse a reader with such expectations, whether they follow Buddhism or something else. This is so because the tales have cunningness, killing, cheating, inclination towards material possessions, idiocy, etc, that appears to be on the other pole than that of spiritualism. The characters in folktales do kill animals, sinpos, and ghosts, but their purpose is not to uphold violence as a motive behind living life. They kill those who are harmful to them and all. Violence to our characters is just as robbery is to Robin Hood. The killing of ghosts by boys becomes essential for his survival and to uphold the peace in family and society. Characters burn, harass or kill sinpos because their existence may cost the survival of peace in society. Such violence is not just violence but a justified action. Thus we can say that violence in our tales is supported by justice in action.

To denounce worldly affairs and move towards spiritualism

and religion is another Buddhist trait. Some spiritual scholars praise this act of denouncement and some oppose it on various grounds. In literary terminology, such an act of moving away from realities is called escapism. Bhutanese folktales don't preach escapism. None of the tales ask the people to denounce worldly affairs and take the refuge in a monastery. Rather they teach us to live in this world with virtues, and to contribute to the fullest of their abilities in social development. It is so because for a common man the three basic needs – food, shelter and clothing – are much more important. To fulfill these basic needs workmanship is more important than surrendering to religion or embracing monkhood. But this doesn't mean that they oppose religion or consider it as 'opium.' Rather they beautifully divide the spiritualistic tasks too. Through folktales – i.e. their media – they teach that youngsters must work and live with virtues, and that devotion is for old age. The story of Mekhay Doma has the traces of such a message. Her parents in their old age devote themselves to the hermitage and the little girl looks after the regular chores and supplies the essentials to their hermitage.

Our characters become happy by possessing worldly things. They fight for worldly pleasures and their life is portrayed as happy when they achieve them. Those who lose are portrayed as *tsagye* (fool). Meme Haylay Haylay, P'chekhay, the Lazy Boy ("The Story of Lazy Boy") are depicted as fools who go on bartering their priced possessions with less important objects. Steve Evans and Dorji Penjore have taken unnecessary pains in portraying Meme Haylay Haylay as a happy man, and his foolishness born as happiness as happiness-in-fact. There are no traces in the tale nor in social consideration that aver that Meme Haylay Haylay (and other such characters viz. P'chekhay and the Lazy Boy) are symbols of happier people; rather they are portrayed as symbols of foolishness, their idiocy. These characters are criticised at the end for losing their initially prized possession for Meme falls in cowdung, P'chekhay forgets the songs and the lazy boy is turned out of his home. These tales are idiot-tales meant to make people

laugh and to teach them a fool remains a fool. Through such tales it is also taught that one should not be such an idiot fellow. Scholars have tried to view these tales from their prejudiced binoculars. Folktales must be analysed in social context. Their meaning should be drawn in collocation with local beliefs. The concept of happiness in Bhutanese folk tales is virtue-oriented, achievement-oriented and not surrender-oriented. That is why in our tales protagonists strive to achieve, and after achieving live happily. Each tale ends with a note on the happiness that comes with worldly achievement (not surrender or denouncement).

Cheating, cunningness, playing tricks, befooling others, lying and other such behaviours are vices, often considered sins. Bhutanese folktales are full of these traits. Does it mean that they propagate these vices? Of course not. An act can be termed as sin if it is to harm anybody for the sake of ones own benefit. An act can be termed as a sin or crime on the basis of the motive behind it. Some innocent characters like Mekhay Doma, the boys in the stories "The Boy Who Went to Buy Cows", "The Mother and the Ghost", etc, cheat their superior's against the latter's oppression. In "A Few Magical Things" the protagonist goes on cheating people by his cunning tricks but he is praised in the story. Similarly the sparrow in "The Most Important Things in Life" cheats cruel vulture to save her life. On the other hand the monk in "Tsongpon Dawa Zangpo", "Dasu and Basu", the painter in "The Painter and the Carpenter", the rich aunt in "The Phob that Provided Food" are portrayed as bad characters made to suffer badly in their remaining life. What is shown here is not bias but justifications. Achievement by cheating or cunningness is not a sin if it is not targeted to harm other or encroach upon another's entity.

Conclusion

Folktales have contributed much to the shaping of society. The social values and virtues we wish to imbibe in the generation today were largely discovered by the oral society long time ago and the task of imbibing in the society was

largely done through folktales. Thus they happened to be an influential media in the past. This role of folktale must be recognised and utilised. Steps should be taken to revitalise this tradition. Let us say the stories and respond with an immediate feedback so that they can survive longer in our society.

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A Pre-budget Exercise as a Pro-poor Development Tool[*]

Phub W. Dorji[**]

Abstract

In the Tenth Plan (2008 – 2013), the Royal Government of Bhutan introduces a new results-based planning framework to help achieve its strategic commitment to poverty reduction. The three-year rolling Medium Term Fiscal Framework seeks to integrate development priorities, budgeting procedures, and implementation outcomes into a "dynamic, efficient, responsive, and results oriented" process (Draft Tenth Five Year Plan: [2008 – 2013]). This paper attempts to underline some of the issues relevant to, specifically, the expenditure budgeting facet or, explicitly, the Medium Term Expenditure Framework process of the proposed framework. It presents some qualitative (and quantitative) evidence for the incorporation of such a pre-budget exercise in the national budgeting process. And it seeks to reason that the benefits of such a practice inevitably accrue to the poor in developing countries. To do so, I draw heavily from the works of two World Bank authors- Philippe Le Houerou and Robert Taliercio- whose research in the Africa region demonstrates many similarities and sheds much light on the experiences with the MTEF in Bhutan.

Introduction

A general consensus in development studies is that there is a significantly positive relationship between economic growth, income distribution, and poverty. The rise in mean incomes, contingent on neutrality with respect to income distribution,

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[*] The term "pro-poor development tool" has been previously used in an MTEF document prepared for the erstwhile Department of Budget and Accounts, Ministry of Finance, Royal Government of Bhutan. The views presented in this paper are solely those of the author's and do not necessarily reflect those of the Ministry of Finance, Royal Government of Bhutan. My sincerest gratitude to Mr. Karma Tshiteem.

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is shown to be favourable for the poor.[1] National governments of developing countries all over the world use a mix of both fiscal and monetary policies[2] to try and achieve these goals. But the disproportionately large role and importance of government in poorer countries have increasingly led to a focus on its fiscal powers such as tax and expenditure policies[3] to redistribute income, and thus, to alleviate poverty. Even here, the primary emphasis is often on government expenditure policies given the limits of taxation, especially in poor countries, as evidenced from a number of empirical studies.[4] This is why sectoral allocations, subsidies, public investments, and, for some, entitlements, rank high as redistributive budgetary practices.

Clearly the normative goal of equity is inherent and widely addressed in most public expenditure programs. What receive less attention are the inefficiencies in the budget management systems and processes of developing country governments in ensuring that their modest resources meet the needs of the largest number of constituents. This paper emphasises then that it is not just the "end" allocation which is important, but the "overall" expenditure process which needs to be pragmatic for reasons of scarcity of resources, weak capacities and other such shortcomings endemic to developing countries as discussed further on.

A step in achieving this is to reform conventional budget practices by incorporating a "pre-budget exercise" which takes stock of the resources available (or not available), and

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[1] See Khan (2001) for public policy implications of rural poverty in developing countries.

[2] Perkins et al. (2006) use the term "financial policy" synonymously with "monetary policy."

[3] See Perkins et al. (2006), especially chapter twelve, for more on fiscal policy strategies adopted by governments in developing countries for redistribution purposes. .

[4] See Perkins et al. (2006) footnotes 21, 22, 23, and 25 on p. 466 and p. 469, which refers to various studies on the implications of tax reforms in Latin America, Malaysia and Indonesia.

links this assessment to expenditure planning in a dynamic medium-term agenda of three or five years. The medium-term expenditure framework (MTEF)[5] provides this linking structure by matching the "bottom-up" costs of programs and policies with a "top-down" resource-ceiling[6] (Houerou & Taliercio, 2002). Such exercises that provide a basis to (re)structure the expenditure process so that it "is driven by policy priorities but disciplined by budget realities" (World Bank, 1998) are particularly productive in developing countries characterised by less-than-effective decision-making processes and a lack of fiscal discipline, which is why many experience wide disparities in what has been promised and what is realistically affordable because their policies, plans, and budgets are often largely disconnected.[7]

There are three main parts to this essay. The first lays out a framework for understanding the notion of the "MTEF pre-budget exercise" – that is, the functions, capabilities, and grounds for such a fiscal mechanism. This framework will explain why, in most developing countries, there is a need to restructure expenditure planning in this way as opposed to the traditional yearly budget cycles. The second part looks at

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[5] The World Bank (WB) is the foremost researcher and advocate of the MTEF. They are particularly focused on developing countries in Africa. However, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has also advocated this exercise, albeit with lesser intensity.

[6] Also referred to as a top-down "resource envelope."

[7] It is important to note here that the medium-term expenditure framework is but one step in the overall process of public expenditure management. The medium-term fiscal framework (MTFF) is the first, but typically consists of only a statement of objectives, and a set of integrated fiscal targets and projections. The second, medium-term budget framework (MTBF), seeks to develop medium-term budget estimates for every spending agency. Its objective is to allocate resources to the country's strategic priorities and ensure that these allocations are consistent with the overall fiscal objectives. This is not addressed here since our concern is of distributional efficiency (processes) and not of resource allocation (ends).

the issues in implementation, particularly how such an expenditure policy can be translated into an effective instrument for poverty alleviation. These issues sharply limit the successful adoption and implementation of this pre-budget exercise. The final part draws upon the experiences of countries that have instituted such processes, and presents some qualitative (and quantitative) evidence that, in developing nations, the patterns of benefit from pre-budget planning progressively favour the poor.

The Pre-budget exercise

When the expenditure policies of governments fail to deliver services or redistribute income to the poor, a good place to start looking for the underlying problem is almost always how the government spends its money.[8] The budget is a critical link to understanding if the shortcomings arise from (among many other factors that are not discussed here) the unsustainability of programs because policy-makers and politicians promised more than is affordable, i.e. there is a mismatch between bottom-up "needs" and top-down resource "availability." Or, because funds are misallocated between varying phases and needs of a program resulting from a lack of coherent multi-year agenda of policies, plans, and budgets.

The medium-term expenditure framework approach, therefore, complements the standard budget process because it integrates the policy and planning stages with the budgeting and allocation stages. But most importantly, it provides a platform for harmonising priority-driven expenditure programs with scarce resources over a medium-term of three or five years.[9] How the MTEF achieves this, is outlined in the following paragraphs.

A typical budgeting practice in most developing countries is performed on an annual basis. The restrictive time-frames of

[8] See, World Bank. (2003). *World Development Report 2004: Making Services Work for Poor People*. Washington, D.C. IBRD, p.181.
[9] See Figure 1. The MTEF Process in the Appendices Section.

these yearly budgets mean that events out of a plan period, e.g. macro-economic realities, expected future revenues (or deficits), and the long-term requirements of programs and government spending policies, are not thoroughly accounted for across or even within fiscal years. This is aggravated by weak monitoring and evaluation capacities. The MTEF, as a corrective measure, is a rolling pre-budget exercise in that, the first year's estimates becomes the basis for the subsequent year's budget and so on, after accounting for economic changes and policies. This aspect allows for a degree of monitoring and relatively smoother integration of policies, plans and budgets across financial years.

However, the real value that the MTEF adds to a traditional budget process in poorer countries arise from its capacity to vertically integrate and match the top-down resource envelope with bottom-up costs of programs and policies in a multiyear framework.[10] Specifically, after a government has developed its medium-term growth strategy, the respective finance ministries[11] determine and forecast its revenue inflows over the next three or five years (whichever is relevant). At the same time, preliminary budget calls are also issued to the various spending agencies. The review of the country's financial position is then relayed as a resource ceiling to the government and its agencies as a basis for estimating and adjusting their sectoral spending.

The balancing of agencies' spending within a manageable resource ceiling so that revenues and costs remain sustainable and consistent with medium-term projections is, therefore, a key strength of this fiscal exercise. It facilitates greater macro-economic balance, improved sectoral allocations, greater budget predictability for agencies, and, generally, a more efficient use of public money. In addition, it

[10] See Figure 2. The MTEF "Top-down" – "Bottom-up" Link in the Appendices Section

[11] And, consequently, the respective budget departments or accounts departments.

also alleviates some of the shortcomings endemic to developing countries that were highlighted above.

For example, it is often the case that poor countries are characterised by weak institutional capacities and a lack of political plurality. As such, pro-poor priorities such as health, education, and welfare are often subject to not only inefficient, but also insufficient resources. The national budget, however, experiences ballooning increases in other expenditure such as payroll and contracts. This is indicative of structural decay and corruption. In the traditional budget system, there are relatively fewer controls for such increases in spending. And the prioritisation and allocation of resources, for good or bad, remains largely, a political affair. The MTEF is a practical mechanism for not only fiscally disciplining the unrealistic promises of elected officials in such disabling conditions, but also to some extent, sheltering pro-poor budgetary commitments from the vagaries of changing governments and politicians.

The consequences of institutional weaknesses are also manifest in the international commitments of developing countries. The need for investment in capital projects (and current expenditures) to drive long-term growth, generally leads most to seek additional resources from external multilateral and bilateral sources.[12] But, the limitations of their fiscal plans and processes (let alone other prevalent shortcomings), call to question the efficiency with which these monies are directed to development efforts and, also, the borrowers' credibility in servicing these debts. It is not by chance that forty-one of the poorest countries in the world are also the most highly indebted.[13] The MTEF is, therefore, not

[12] These are funds to fill in a country's "financing gaps", which is the difference between government expenditure (capital and current) funded from its own coffers and total expenditure funded by domestic plus international commitments. It is often made up of aid, grants, and other borrowings.

[13] See International Development Association (IDA) and International Monetary Fund (2007). "Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC)

only a pre-budget fiscal tool to demarcate and allocate scarce resources to strategic priorities without infringing on the government and its agencies' spending priorities, but also a safeguard against compromising the country's international credit-worthiness. These are some of the primary reasons why a pre-budget MTEF exercise is valuable as a complementary segment to the traditional budget process in developing countries. It separates strategic commitments to poverty alleviation from the electoral concerns of weak political and bureaucratic institutions by managing resources and expenditures; controlling unsustainable and erratic borrowing; and fixing targets on broad indicators of fiscal performance such as primary deficit, resource mobilisation, and total investment expenditure. In procedural terms, it also puts national budget processes on a planned and sustainable path towards utilising public monies effectively in delivering services to the poor year after year.

Issues in implementation

The conceptual strength of the medium-term expenditure framework is broadly acknowledged. There are concerns, however, about the issues involved in moving this exercise from the theoretical to the operational arena. Weak institutional capacities and a lack of efficient policies and plans hinder the operation of programs which aid the flow of benefits to the most disadvantaged sections of societies in developing countries. In addition, experiences in Africa[14] have shown that the implementation of MTEF reforms are impeded by the fact that: 1) basic foundations of budget and public expenditure management in developing countries are very weak; 2) donor demands for complex and comprehensive

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Initiative and Multilateral Debt Relief Initiative (MDRI) – Status of Implementation", p. 3. This figure includes: 22 countries that qualify for irrevocable debt relief; 9 countries that qualify for debt assistance; and 10 countries that are potentially eligible and may wish to avail themselves under the enhanced HIPC Initiative.

[14] See, World Bank. (1998). *Public Expenditure Management Handbook*. Washington D.C. IBRD, p.39.

reforms far outpace host-country's implementation capacities; 3) other institutional support-apparatus to complement budget reforms are also weak; 4) line ministries often have little time, information, and incentive to submit to reforms dictated by the finance ministry; and 5) fiscal reforms are often focused only on technical issues and exclude political and institutional considerations. In line with the objectives of this paper, these issues will be addressed as part of a broader inquiry about possible roadmaps for such reforms; and why political and bureaucratic interests are important for a successful implementation of the MTEF as a development tool.

First, the implementation process can emulate the ideals of the MTEF itself. Where the pre-budget exercise seeks to match needs and availability, its implementation can benefit from matching the aspirations of donors (and governments) with the capacities of the budget and other institutional support-apparatus of the host country. This practical grounding keeps expectations in check while identifying areas that need reinforcement. It also strengthens the idea that the MTEF alone cannot deliver efficient and effective public expenditure management, but that "it is only a complement to (and not a substitute for) basic budget management" (Houerou & Taliercio, 2002). It needs the support of other institutional mechanisms.

These are important considerations in "sequencing" budgetary reforms, so that implementation is introduced either horizontally by "piloting", i.e. gradually widening its scope across sectors from high-priorities such as health, education, and welfare[15] to low-priorities such as subsidies, tax-breaks, and luxury goods imports; or, vertically by "phasing" [16] across MTEF levels – aggregate, sectoral, service

[15] See Houerou, P. L. & Taliercio, R. (2002). "Medium-Term Expenditure Frameworks: From Concept to Practice. Preliminary Lessons from Africa," *Africa Region Working Paper Series*, 28, p. 26.
[16] For more on the concepts of MTEF "phasing" and "piloting" see, Houerou, P. L. & Taliercio, R. (2002). "Medium-Term Expenditure

delivery (as shown in Figure 2) – on a government-wide basis. Houerou and Taliercio (2002) add that implementation can also be carried out using both pilots and phase-ins by "operating in a limited number of sectors (horizontally) and levels (vertically)." There is no exact specification as to which sequence is better. But the decision to implement MTEF reform as a pilot, phase-in, or a mixed approach based on a match of donor demands and host country's capacities and basic public expenditure management conditions, is an important basis for an effective and efficient budget process that yields tangible gains. The recognition of such gains is then crucial to the successful adoption of fiscal reforms in developing countries.

Secondly, even a well-specified and productive fiscal process is not always successfully adopted. It is often observed that while a reform process demonstrates the capacity to trickle resources to appropriate redistributive priorities and debt-servicing plans, there is little political and bureaucratic "will" to support these reforms. These conditions render MTEF reforms "toothless" at best. Two sets of incentives need to be addressed here: 1) the incentives for politicians and 2) bureaucratic incentives of central and sectoral ministries to participate in budget reform and implementation. In developing countries where constituency expectations are high, elected officials are likely to promise more than can be feasibly delivered. A budget envelope restricts such discretion, making it undesirable to many politicians. A failure to appreciate the nature of MTEF, which seeks to fiscally discipline and prioritise the country's long-term development goals within its limited means, also lead most politicians with short-term objectives in mind, to veto it.

Similarly, the bureaucratic incentives for central and sectoral ministries need to be specifically addressed if they are to contribute unequivocally to the process. Like many other

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Frameworks: From Concept to Practice: Preliminary Lessons from Africa," *Africa Region Working Paper Series*, 28, p. 28.

reforms, the MTEF creates winners and losers. Therefore, if the costs and benefits of reforms are not at least accurately estimated, it is not only non-priority sectors (losers) who stand to give up the most that will reject them, but also priority sectors (winners) who will disregard the credibility of the reform's promised benefits.

There are preventive measures to political influences and bureaucratic non-compliance however. One noteworthy proposal is that the preparation of the MTEF should involve broad consultative processes. If results are viewed to be productive and legitimate, legislative and public pressure may dissuade political executives from straying too far[17] from the development strategy and pro-poor commitments of the MTEF. For bureaucratic agencies, positive incentives such as flexibility and autonomy in determining their own spending priorities within their resource envelope will enhance their participation.

Therefore, the recognition and attention to issues of sequencing and incentives in the implementation of budget reforms, is a key step towards creating a broad consensus that fiscal tools such as the MTEF enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of budget systems in sustaining the delivery of public goods and services to the poor.

Experience and evidence

But do MTEFs really deliver on its promises? And what are its implications for the poor in developing nations? To answer these questions, I draw from a preliminary comparison of fiscal reforms in the Africa region by Philippe Houerou and Robert Taliercio (2002) for the World Bank. Their study includes nine countries, among which two (South Africa and Uganda) have instituted comprehensive MTEF reforms; three (Kenya, Tanzania, and Ghana) are in the intermediate stages;

[17] See Houerou, P. L. & Taliercio, R. (2002). "Medium-Term Expenditure Frameworks: From Concept to Practice: Preliminary Lessons from Africa", *Africa Region Working Paper Series*, 28, p. 34.

and four (Mozambique, Malawi, Rwanda, and Guinea) are in the basic stages of implementation.

There are some limitations to the study. First, the assessment is limited by the lack of data produced in these countries.[18] Second, quantitative analysis of MTEF reforms is restricted to just three cases – South Africa, Uganda and Tanzania, who were included only because of the availability of data. A question of selection bias arises here. Third, the qualitative analyses of the first five countries[19] in the group are based strictly on donor documents such as internal World Bank memos and perspectives of country-economists. The picture of the progress of reforms in these countries is incomplete. And fourth, the lack of data has also meant that only a subset of outcome indicators is analysed. These are macro-economic/fiscal balance, resource allocation, and budgetary predictability.[20] The evidence of efficiency in the use of public funds after MTEF reforms, which is of interest to this paper, is not presented.

Despite these limitations, important inferences can be drawn from the conclusions of Houerou and Taliercio to support our theory that MTEF reforms are catalysts for enhancing commitments and spending on pro-poor priorities in developing countries. The analysis of trends in resource allocation in Africa, specifically government expenditure on priorities such as health, education, and welfare in the pre-MTEF versus post-MTEF period, provides some proof of this. Some of the systematic benefits that accrue from implementing MTEF pre-budget reforms are discussed below.

One of the objectives of MTEF reforms is fiscal discipline. I

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[18] The authors acknowledge the lack of data as a primary limitation to their study as well. See p.16.

[19] Houerou & Taliercio (2002) include only the first five countries in their qualitative analysis because of a lack of regular expenditure reports in the latter four countries. They are only in the basic stages of implementing the medium-term expenditure framework.

[20] See Houerou & Taliercio (2002), p.17.

have emphasised that the mechanism would regulate not only the activities of domestic spending agencies and actors, but also country activities in the international arena. In Houerou and Taliercio's study, a country's fiscal deficit (revenues minus expenditures) is used as the proxy indicator for fiscal discipline. The authors find no evidence to support the hypothesis that fiscal reforms are correlated with improved national fiscal discipline. Uganda, South Africa, Ghana and Tanzania all record minimal to no reduction in fiscal deficits (as a percentage of Gross Domestic Product) over the period 1985 to 2000 during which the MTEF was implemented.[21] The authors, however, state that their analysis is simplistic and does not take into account various causal factors (e.g. macro-economic shocks, adjustment, and fluctuations in debt payment), which weaken the explanatory power of their results. In terms of the fiscal behavior of elected officials, the study does find some subjective evidence that MTEFs lead to more accountability. In Kenya, South Africa and Tanzania, where MTEF formulation is based on public hearings, civil society representation, and other consultative meeting processes, it has, by some accounts, led to budget appropriations based more on "professional criteria than on political calculations" (Houerou & Taliercio, 2002). This positive result for accountability is a valuable reinforcement to fiscal reforms.

Furthermore, there is little evidence to support the proposition that MTEF reforms lead to budget predictability. Houerou and Taliercio use the absolute difference between the approved budget and executed budget expressed as a

[21] There are studies, however, with results that are contrary to Houerou and Taliercio's conclusions. In fact, they (Houerou & Taliercio) note that authors like Allister Moon, whose study (1997) of "Uganda's Budget Framework" and David Bevan and Geremia Palomba's (2002) "The Ugandan Budget and Medium Term Expenditure Framework Set in a Wider Context", argue that MTEFs have been successful in achieving macro-economic stability and that expenditures were matched to revenues in order to manage fiscal deficits.

percentage of the approved budget[22] in any given year to analyse this outcome. In the two cases of Uganda and Tanzania used in their analysis, there is no significant relationship between fiscal reforms and budget predictability even for priority sectors. In fact, as the authors emphasise, there is considerable difference between budget formulation and execution in these countries. As I have noted, this is detrimental to the credibility of the reform because it may lead winners or the priority sectors (let alone the losers or non-priority sectors), to disregard and ultimately reject the benefits espoused by the MTEF. However, it is important to note here that these results only hold for a limited number of years given that MTEF implementation in most African countries is still in the preliminary stages. At this point, it is simply difficult to clearly associate the results of MTEF reforms with its objectives of macro-economic stability, political accountability, budget predictability, and the overall effectiveness of the MTEF process.

On a more positive note, there are encouraging findings in terms of resource allocation. Houerou and Taliercio find that budgetary reforms are associated with the (re)allocation of resources to government priorities. I use this as a justification for the hypothesis that, in the countries who have instituted MTEF reforms, there is a positive tendency towards pro-poor commitments and spending as indicated by a comparison of the overall health, education, social services, and welfare expenditures in Uganda and South Africa[23] before and after reforms.

The real annual change in sectoral spending in Uganda in Table 1 shows that MTEF reform outcomes are most prominent for pro-poor priorities such as education and health. In education, we see an increasing real annual change from -0.06 percent in 1994/95 to 0.36 percent in 1995/96,

[22] This method is known as the "Budget Deviation Index" (BDI).
[23] See Table 3. Sectoral Expenditures of Uganda; and Table 4. Sectoral Expenditures of South Africa in the Appendices Section.

0.15 percent in 1996/97, and 0.23 percent in 1997/98. Houerou and Taliercio note that education sector spending grew from 19.8% of total expenditures in 1994/95 to 26.9% in 1997/98.[24] In terms of health, the allocations increase, but remain inconsistent from year to year. This is true for expenditure in other pro-poor programs such as social services and agriculture.

The South African story is significantly better in associating MTEF reforms with not only increased sectoral spending for pro-poor priorities, but also in showing that government spending is gradually reallocated from non-priority sectors to priority sectors (Table 3). Table 2 shows that – as a share of total actual expenditure – education receives the largest and most persistent government commitment and spending. This is also true of spending on education as a percentage of total MTEF expenditures. Other priorities such as health, welfare, and justice increase their share of total expenditures marginally from 1997 to 1998 as well. In terms of reallocation of resources, we see marginal decreases in South Africa's defense spending as a percentage of total expenditures (Table 2) as well as a percentage of total MTEF expenditures (Table 3). This would – to some degree – explain the affordability of increases in spending for the priority sectors.

Conclusion

Therefore the limited quantitative evidence from Houerou and Taliercio's preliminary analysis of MTEF reforms in Africa suggests that budgetary reforms are correlated with some levels of sectoral (re)allocation to top priority sectors such as education, health, welfare, and social services. This does not mean that all government expenditure is allocated or re-allocated to priorities, or even that, the prescriptions of the

[24] These figures are not presented in Table 1 in the Appendices Section. Houerou and Taliercio present these numbers based on the findings of other studies cited in their paper. They also note that "total expenditure" refers to only recurrent expenditure and capital expenditure financed by the African country government itself.

MTEF are used in practice. There are trade-offs which are unique to individual cases. For example, in the three countries that have implemented the MTEF comprehensively, Uganda prioritises and allocates to the education sector; South Africa to health and justice; and Tanzania to social services. Further research using a wider sample of countries over a number of years will help shed more light on the significance of relationships (if any) between budget reforms and priority sector spending.

For now, it can be inferred from the preliminary evidence presented by the World Bank authors that the encouraging spending trends in the areas of health, education, welfare, and social services, which have generally been positively correlated with economic growth and poverty alleviation in most developing countries confirms – in some measure – the proposal of this paper, which is that, pre-budget exercises such as the MTEF progressively favour expenditures on pro-poor programs, and, therefore, the poor.

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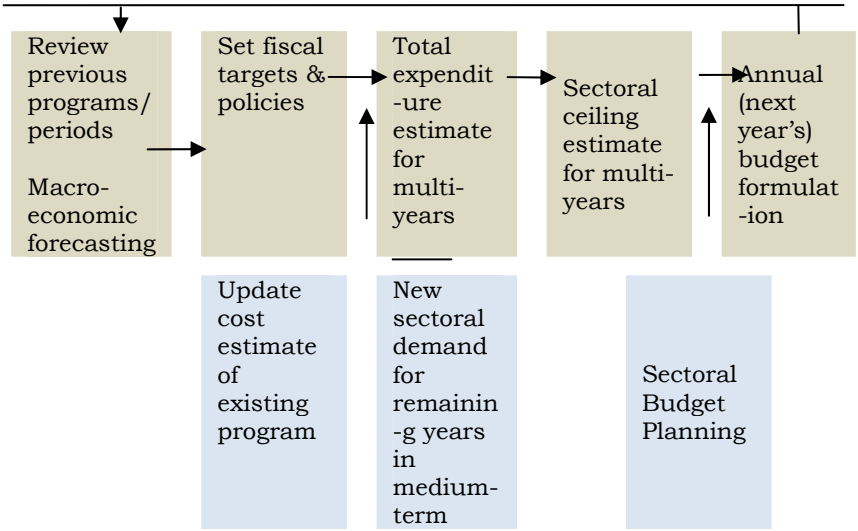
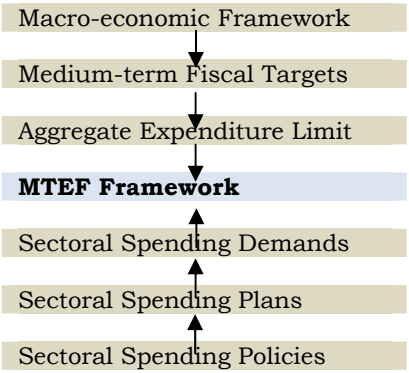
Appendix

Figure 1. The MTEF Process



Adapted from: *PEM Handbook* (World Bank, 1998: 32) & "MTEF/Top-Down Budgeting" (Kim: 2004)

Figure 2. The MTEF "top-down" – "bottom-up" link



Source: *Medium-Term Expenditure Framework as a Pro-poor Development Tool – Implications and Basic Guidelines for the DBA.* (Royal Government of Bhutan & the UNDP, 2004: p.12)

Table 1. Sectoral Expenditures: Uganda (Real Annual Change in %)

	Sector	FY94/95	FY95/96	FY96/97	FY97/98
1	Health	0.22	-0.15	-0.11	0.20
2	Education	-0.06	0.36	0.15	0.23
3	Economic Functions & Social Services.	-0.31	0.22	-0.30	0.03
4	Agriculture	-0.42	0.07	-0.19	0.01
5	Roads & Works	-0.01	0.82	-0.30	0.50
6	Security	-0.05	0.14	-0.22	0.60
7	Law & Order	0.09	0.04	0.00	-0.04

Source: Houerou & Taliercio (2002: p.19)

Table 2. Sectoral Expenditures: South Africa
(As a Percentage of Total Actual Expenditures)

	Sector	1997/1998	1998/1999	1999/2000
1	Health	14.4%	14.5%	14.8%
2	Education	28.2%	27.9%	28.0%
3	Welfare	11.3%	11.4%	11.7%
4	Economic	6.6%	7.0%	5.9%
5	Infrastructure	14.6%	14.8%	12.8%
6	Justice	11.7%	13.0%	13.5%
7	Defense	7.5%	7.1%	6.4%

Source: Houerou & Taliercio (2002: p.20)

Table 3. Sectoral Expenditures: South Africa
(As a Percentage of Total MTEF Expenditures, 1999/2000)

	Sector	MTEF (1998)	Budget	Actual Outcome
1	Health	14.5%	14.8%	14.8%
2	Education	28.6%	27.5%	28.0%
3	Welfare	11.7%	11.5%	11.7%
4	Economic	5.5%	6.6%	5.9%
5	Infrastructure	13.8%	12.3%	12.8%
6	Justice	13.1%	13.0%	13.5%
7	Defense	6.7%	6.6%	6.4%

Source: Houerou & Taliercio (2002: p.20)

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