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JOURNAL OF BHUTAN STUDIES

POLICIES

Journal of Bhutan Studies is a bi-annual publication of the Centre for Bhutan Studies. It presents scholarly and researched articles on social, cultural, political, and economic aspects of Bhutan. Opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Centre.

We welcome articles and research papers in English. It should be typed in double-space and sent by post or email. Articles sent by post should have both the print and electronic copies. Authors will be provided five copies of *Journal*. We encourage feedbacks on the *Journal*'s articles.

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Introduction

In this special edition of *Journal of Bhutan Studies*, we are publishing some selected papers presented at the first national story telling conference held from 21 to 23 June 2009 at the Centre for Bhutan Studies, Thimphu.

Originally planned to be a small gathering of foreign and Bhutanese folklorists and storytellers, the scope of the conference had to be changed even before it began. The Centre was overwhelmed by interests and responses from a broad section of the Bhutanese society – children, students, teachers, ministers, MPs, parents, farmers, civil servants, expatriates, and monks. The interest was in no small measure generated by a person no other than Her Royal Highness Ashi Sonam Dechan Wangchuck who opened the conference and gave the keynote address.

Her Royal Highness's short but powerful keynote address commended the initiative of "recognizing, reviving, and promoting our rich oral traditions," that has found its place even in the palace as she shared how she would sit with her brothers and sisters in a circle "as our grandmother would tell us exciting stories … undoubtedly intended to mould our moral values." Her Royal Highness continued, "I look forward to passing those stories to my children and grandchildren someday." At a time when the mass media is taking over the traditional storytelling, one of the oldest and most powerful expressions of individual and cultural creativity, Her Royal Highness urged for individual action by making "an effort to re-tell those stories we heard in our childhood as a first step towards helping revive our precious oral traditions." After those words, the Bhutanese folklore landscape changed forever. The Centre for Bhutan Studies and International Center for Ethnographic Studies, US, would like to thank Her Royal Highness for words of wisdom.

Bhutan may have been an oral society in the 1960s, but recycling the same image today is painting a false picture, unaware of the speed at which this rich tradition is disappearing. Bhutanese folklorists would be disappointed by number of narrators and folktales surviving in villages. But not much is done to either to preserve the oral culture, document them before they are forever lost or integrate storytelling in the curriculum. The first National Survey on Gross National Happiness, 2007-2008 revealed that 96.3 percent of respondents considered folktales as important. The first national storytelling conference is one of the initiatives the Centre has organized to recognize, revive, and promote folktales.

Besides presentations of academic papers by participants from US and the Bhutan, the other activities included performance of Bhutanese and American folk music and folksongs; telling of jokes; recitation of lozey; narration of folktales and stories by students and foreign participants; reading of folktales by Bhutanese writers and folklorists; narration of folktales in different Bhutanese languages by storytellers invited from villages of eastern, central and western Bhutan. English translations of the Bhutanese tales narrated in Dzongkha and local dialects were also made available to foreign participants.

The Centre for Bhutan Studies would like thank the International Center for Ethnographic Studies, Atlanta, US for financing the conference. It is hoped that the second national storytelling conference will be as fruitful as the first.

Keynote Address by Her Royal Highness Ashi Sonam Dechan Wangchuck

To be among you this morning for the opening of the National Storytelling Conference makes me very happy. This wonderful initiative is truly commendable, and I would like to thank everyone involved in working towards recognizing, reviving, and promoting our rich oral traditions.

As a child growing up, my brothers, sisters and I would sit in a circle as our grand mother would tell us exciting stories of adventure, travel, bravery, tact, and justice undoubtedly intended to mould our moral values. We would sit quietly in awe as we listened to those stories, and I look forward to passing those stories to my children and grandchildren someday.

Storytelling is a special bond between elders and children and a means of one generation passing on our tradition, culture, and moral values to the next. Community storytelling reinforces social bonds that connect individuals to their community, through shared experiences of traditional knowledge and heritage. In this way, each member of the community possesses a piece of a common knowledge that could enable better understanding of the time and the society that they live in. For instance, satire, and nuances of certain communities can be captured in stories that reflect the times.

Another aspect of storytelling is its purpose of history. The author becomes the storyteller and the facts become their truth. As stories are passed on from one generation to the other they become unique to the storyteller but at the same time, share a common thread of the past. It is continuity at its most alive and its best.

In today's society it is a pity that one of the oldest and most powerful expressions of individual and cultural creativity, traditional storytelling had been taken over by other means of mass media such as television and the internet. Today, young children rarely sit around their grandparents and elders and listen to stories. In fact, in most urban areas, social relationships are often weakened by these new forms of media. With the rise of these new technological storytelling mediums, the cultural prominence of traditional storytelling as an art form is transforming.

The need to make storytelling a widespread practice in our culture has many positive benefits. Oral history and culture found in songs, music, dance, lozey, and folktales are an integral part of a unique Bhutanese culture and identity. Storytelling is an important part of this history and culture. Its dynamics, warmth, and spontaneity are unique to itself. It is a valuable source of shared memory, and for the younger generation a better understanding of the past.

All of us must make an effort to re-tell those stories we heard in our childhood as a first step towards helping revive our precious oral traditions.

Thank you, and Tashi Delek.

The Impact of Cultural Folklore on National Values: A Preliminary Study with a Focus on Bhutan

Steve Evans*

Abstract

Are the personal and national values of people found in their traditional folklore? This paper will look at the correlation between the values expressed by Bhutan's citizens of themselves and their nation and the traditional folklore of Bhutan, seeking to discover the similarities and differences between the values of the people and those found in their folktales. A people's stories help answer questions of identity and values. They touch on the very core of who they are, both personally and corporately. Cultural anthropologists, sociologists, ethnographers, and cultural researchers seem to agree that to investigate the idea of self and all that self means, one does it by way of an individual's stories, along with the stories of his or her historical, societal, and cultural self. It is through these stories that self is revealed – whether the individual self or the "self" of a community, culture or society.

Introduction

There is a story from Central Asia about a man who found a magic cup and learned if he wept into the cup, his tears turned into precious gemstones. Even though he had always been poor, he was a happy man and rarely shed a tear. So he found ways to make himself sad so that his tears could make him rich. As the riches piled up, so did his greed. The story ends with the man sitting on a mountain of gems, a knife in his hand, and weeping helplessly, while his wife's dead body lay at his side (Hosseini, 2003).

What a gruesome and tragic tale this is, one so different from the image of happiness portrayed in Bhutan's story of *Meme Haylay Haylay*.

* International Center for Ethnographic Studies, US.

In brief, the story is of a poor old man who goes to his fields and uncovers a valuable turquoise stone. On the way home, he trades the stone for a horse, the horse for an ox, the ox for a sheep, the sheep for a goat, the goat for a rooster and the rooster for a song. He continued home feeling the happiest, richest and most successful businessman in the world.

> Once there lived a poor old man, Meme Haylay Haylay. One day he went to his fields to prepare them for planting, and as he uprooted a clump of very stubborn weeds, he found a huge, round, bright blue turquoise stone in the dirt. It was so heavy that a man his age could hardly lift it.
>
> Well, because of his good fortune, he decided to stop working and go home. On the way he met a man leading a horse with a rope. "Hey, what are you doing there, Meme Haylay Haylay?" the horseman asked. "Today I am no longer a poor old man," Meme Haylay Haylay replied, "because today I struck it rich! As I was digging in my fields, I found this huge valuable turquoise." But before the horseman could utter a word, Meme Haylay Haylay put forth a proposal, "Will you exchange your horse for this stone?" "Don't joke with me, Meme Haylay Haylay! Your turquoise is priceless, and in comparison my horse is worthless," the horseman replied. "Priceless or worthless, if you are for the trade, take this turquoise and hand over the rope," Meme Haylay Haylay said. The horseman lost no time in throwing over the rope and went his way carrying the stone, feeling happy. Meme Haylay Haylay went his way feeling happier than the horseman.
>
> But that was not the end of Meme Haylay Haylay's business. On the way, he met a man with an ox. "Hey, Meme Haylay Haylay. What are you doing there?" the ox-man asked. "Today I am no longer a poor old man, but a rich man" Meme Haylay Haylay replied. "As I was digging in my fields, I found a huge valuable turquoise stone and I traded it for this horse." He then asked the ox-man, "Would you trade your ox for this horse?" "I certainly would," the man with the ox replied, and the man went away with the horse feeling very happy. Meme Haylay Haylay went his way feeling happier.

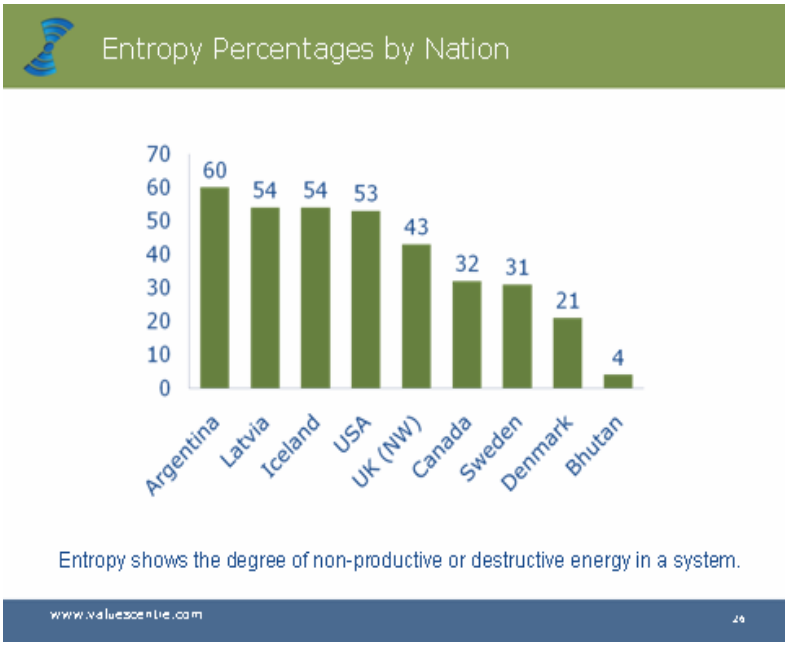
> Then Meme Haylay traded the ox for a sheep, and the sheep for a goat, and the goat for a rooster. And after each transaction, the others walked away feeling happy, but Meme Haylay Haylay walked away feeling happier. Finally Meme Haylay Haylay heard someone singing a beautiful song, and tears of happiness filled his eyes as he listened to it. "I feel so happy just listening to the song," he thought. "How much happier I would be if I could sing it myself." Just then the singer spied Meme Heylay Heylay and asked, "Hey, Meme Haylay Haylay, what are you doing there?" "Today I am no longer a poor old man, but a rich man," Meme Haylay Haylay replied. "As I was digging in my fields, I found a huge valuable turquoise stone and I traded it for a horse, then I traded the horse for an ox, the ox for a sheep, the sheep for a goat, and the goat for this rooster. Here, take this rooster and teach me how to sing your song. I like it so much."
>
> After learning the song, Meme Haylay Haylay gave away his rooster and went home singing the song, feeling the happiest, richest and most successful businessman in the world.

I can hear him singing now: "In my heart there's a song that I sing all day long; I'm happy; I'm happy; I'm happy." In the land of Gross National Happiness, could it be that this folktale of happiness should be the national folktale?

Bhutan National Values Assessment

Research shows that Bhutan is indeed a healthy and happy nation when it comes to personal and national values. To date, nine countries have participated in a national values assessment conducted by various agencies and organizations in cooperation with The Barrett Values Centre. Bhutan's assessment was conducted by the International Center for Ethnographic Studies (ICES) in partnership with the Centre for Bhutan Studies (CBS), East Tennessee State University (ETSU), the Brimstone Grant for Applied Storytelling, and the Barrett Values Centre. Results were released in January 2009.

As already mentioned, the *Bhutan National Values Assessment* confirms that the nation and its people are healthy when it comes to self identity and community. In fact, indications are that when it comes to values, Bhutan could possibly be the healthiest nation in the world. Among other things, the survey measures entropy caused by potentially limiting values. Entropy is a measure of the degree of dysfunction in a system indicated by the proportion of potentially limiting values found in a survey. Bhutan's entropy is at 4% compared with the eight others: Denmark at 21%, Sweden at 31%, Canada at 32%, northwest United Kingdom at 43%, the United States of America at 53%, Iceland at 54%, Latvia at 54%, and Argentina at 60%. This is something Bhutan can truly be proud of! The full report of the Bhutan National Values Assessment can be found in the *Journal for Bhutan Studies, Volume 18, Summer 2008.*



The Bhutan National Values Assessment focused on three key areas – Bhutanese personal values, the values and issues perceived to drive the current national culture, and the values that Bhutanese want their society to embrace. An assessment reveals those values that unite the nation in shared understanding, direction and purpose, while providing clarity to any challenges ahead.

The personal values of the people of Bhutan show that they demonstrate:

- Support for and connections with others
- Focus on enriching their knowledge and understanding
- A positive outlook
- Inner drive and strength

Their top personal value is "friendship," and the Bhutanese have a high number of relationship-type values, indicating that people and their connections to them are notably important, while the people of Bhutan also seek meaning and purpose in their lives. Other personal values in order of predominance are, continuous learning, compassion, caution, sincerity, social justice, self-discipline, optimism, helpfulness, and caring. Current culture values reflect citizens' perceptions of the nation's culture and of day-to-day living. The current culture of Bhutan is driven by values that promote:

- Access to information and knowledge and a commitment to the betterment of society
- Intelligent stewardship of resources
- Being guided and united by a common set of values and a common direction
- Protection for the rights of the people to make political choices

- Moral structure that provides guidance and encourages comfort.

Bhutan's top national value perceived by its people is "continuous improvement," and there is a strong concentration of values showing that the people have a powerful focus on governance that is based on efficient systems and processes, along with a provision of public infrastructure and services that enhance the productivity of the nation and the wellbeing and prosperity of the people. The people of Bhutan see the nation as open to change. Bhutan's other current culture values in order of predominance are: environmental protection, importance of religion, political rights, education, nature conservation, shared vision, information availability, shared values, contentment, and social justice.

What do Bhutanese want? Desired cultural values reflect what participants believe to be important for the wellbeing of their nation. These values provide insights into the direction participants want the nation to take, possible antidotes to current problems, and values that need strengthening. Key themes from top desired cultural values include: 1) providing more opportunity for people to learn, work and strengthen the economy; 2) allowing people to express their views and have access to fair systems; and 3) demonstrating care and empathy for people. The desired cultural values expressed by the people of Bhutan for their nation, in order of predominance, are: education, continuous improvement, freedom of speech, economic growth, social justice, contentment, environmental protection, compassion, full employment, and importance of religion.

Implications for Bhutan's Oral Traditions

It is interesting to note that the number one personal value of the Bhutanese is friendship, while the most well known national folktale is undisputedly *The Four Harmonious*

Friends. As with *Meme Haylay Haylay*, we know this story well.

> Once in the forest, four animals – an elephant, a rabbit, a monkey, and a partridge – argued over the ownership of a tree that all of them had cared for. The elephant claimed, "Well, this is my tree because I saw it first." To this the monkey replied: "Now, elephant, do you see any fruits on this tree?" The elephant agreed that the tree was without any fruit. The monkey continued: "That's because I had been feeding on the fruits of this tree long before you ever saw it." Next the rabbit spoke up: "I fed on the leaves of this tree when it was just a small sapling before the monkey ate its fruit and way before the elephant ever saw it." Finally the partridge, who had been watching the argument, came forward and asserted: "The tree belongs to me because the tree wouldn't have grown if I hadn't dropped a seed. I planted the seed that grew into this huge tree before the rabbit fed on it, or the monkey ate its fruit, or the elephant saw it." The elephant, monkey, and rabbit, agreed that the partridge was the first to know the tree. So all of them bowed to the partridge and regarded it as their elder brother. The four animals became friends and decided to share the tree together in peaceful harmony, enjoying the beauty of the tree's fragrance, its delicious fruits, and the bounty of its shade. They worked together to obtain the fruit: the fruit on the ground and on the lowest branches, the partridge and rabbit got by working together. The monkey climbed the tree and dropped fruit for everyone to share, but only the elephant could reach the highest branches with his trunk. The four animals worked together and with their combined strength, each one benefited and no one went hungry. Other animals in the forest often saw them together, with the partridge on top of the rabbit, who was held up by the monkey, who rode on top of the elephant. Since then, they are called "The Four Harmonious Friends." The four animals are looked upon as an example of peace, harmony, co-operation, interdependence and friendship.

While we can rejoice over the good news of the *Bhutan National Values Assessment* and can recognize the positive influence of the much loved folktale 'The Four Harmonious

Friends', a word of caution must be put forth here. His Majesty King Khesar, the 5th Druk Gyalpo of Bhutan, recognized in his coronation address on November 7, 2008 that core values form a common thread that binds and guides the nation, especially in the wake of current democratic processes. However, his deepest concern, he said, is that as the world changes Bhutan may lose its fundamental values on which rest its character as a nation and people.

He said:

> Our generation of Bhutanese have been gifted a strong, dynamic nation by our forefathers. I am confident that as long as we are willing to work with their commitment and dedication and follow their example we can bring greater peace, happiness and prosperity to our country. I am confident because I know the worth and character of our people. You are the true jewel of this nation. As citizens of a spiritual land you treasure the qualities of a good human being – honesty, kindness, charity, integrity, unity, respect for our culture and traditions, love for our country and for God. Throughout our history our parents have upheld these values and placed the common good above the self. My deepest concern is that as the world changes, we may lose these fundamental values on which rest our character as a nation and people. It is critical that we are able to recognize Bhutanese character irrespective of how far we look back into the past or into the future. The Bhutan we see is vastly different – unrecognizable even – when compared to the Bhutan in the time of our first King. Yet, the character of our people and the nature of our fundamental values have remained unchanged. Henceforth, as even more dramatic changes transform the world and our nation, as long as we continue to pursue the simple and timeless goal of being good human beings, and as long as we strive to build a nation that stands for everything that is good, we can ensure that our future generations for hundreds of years will live in happiness and peace (CBS, 2009).

It is wonderful how His Majesty recognized the true values of his nation and its people (closely matching those of the *Bhutan National Values Assessment*). At the same time, it is significant that he expressed a concern for the preservation of those values in a rapidly changing world.

Dasho Kinley Dorji, former chief editor of Bhutan's Kuensel Corporation, feels the country is going through difficult times, with its values systems dramatically diminishing. One way to combat that, he believes, is to create stories calling attention to the situation and ensure that these stories are shared and heard (Kinley Dorji, 2007).

His creative non-fiction short story *Pretty Woman* portrays how the introduction of television to Bhutan in 1999 thrusts the country into dramatic and painful change. The story tells how, over a period of seven years, a young boy and a young woman collide with forces much greater than themselves, their community and even their country. She was the prettiest girl in the village – strong, sun-darkened, and hard working, with a face as round as the moon and a singing voice that enchanted all the men. He was a young boy, growing up in a volatile climate of change, confused by what he observes.

"The story invites important questions," Dorji said. He then asked, "Are the side effects of development taking a toll that is more powerful than the effects of mainstream development? This is symbolized by the immediate excitement over television that far exceeds the advantages of electricity as a source of power for utilities." (Electricity comes to the story's setting in 2003.) "In a country where there are now an estimated 50,000 television sets compared with 14,000 computers, television becomes a major status symbol and dominates the altar in the altar room" (as it does in the story), he said (Kinley Dorji, 2007: 11).

Over a period of seven short years, the country's hero is no longer the king, but are athletic superstars and Bollywood film actors, and the beautiful image of the hard working village girl is replaced by singing and dancing Bollywood stars and bikini-clad Pepsi models. The end of *Pretty Woman* is poignant and bittersweet:

> Aum Thrimi looks into the distance. "They are so pretty, the girls. They are so thin. They are so fair. They smell so nice." She looks at Kuenley, a gangly five-foot nine-inch boy, standing with his hands in his pockets. She turns and looks out the window again. "Better study hard, Kuenley. Otherwise you'll have to live in the village. You have to work all day in the sun. You have to walk everywhere with no shoes. You have to carry manure on your back and smell of cow dung. In the village you will quickly become ugly. We have no choice because we are already old and ugly." Kuenley says nothing. He does not know what to say. Thrimi is 27 years old. She has not changed. But the world had changed (Kinley Dorji, 2007: 8).

"This story is Bhutan's story," Dorji said. "The metamorphosis of a rural society is documented through the eyes, and the confusion, of a Bhutanese youth who personifies a generation in transition. There are no subtleties because the experience is not subtle."(Kinley Dorji, 2007:10). The message that comes through as the pair's community feels the impact of globalization is that there is an urgent need to put on the brakes before it is too late to do anything about it.

Others agree with Dorji's assessment of the importance of values preservation and transmission. "There is a need to provide a sense of continuity amidst change," said Tashi Wangyal in the article *Ensuring Social Sustainability: Can Bhutan's Education System Ensure Intergenerational Transmission of Values?* "In addition, since culture and traditional values form the bedrock of Bhutanese national identity, it is important for the Bhutanese to ensure that its culture and values are not undermined." (Tashi Wangyal,

2001, 107). Wangyal continued, "It is now more necessary than ever to ensure the intergenerational transmission of values. Otherwise, unbridled modernization may destroy the very spiritual and cultural fabric that has enabled the Bhutanese society to live in harmony with each other and with the natural environment." (Kinley Dorji, 2007:115).

But what can be done?

"Every people, nation, and community has stories and myths that preserve and prolong the traditions that give them their identity," said William Bausch, author of *Storytelling: Imagination and Faith*. "When a nation is in trouble, it often returns to its traditional stories to look for direction and healing, to regain a sense of what made it great in the past and what will nurture it into the future." He said that "individuals, families, and communities also have their identifying stories that link them to who they are, to their culture." (Bausch, 1999:26)

Bausch said that often a region or a nation has its story concretized in a shrine, statue, museum; that a person without a story is a person with amnesia; and that a country without its story has ceased to exist. "Humanity without its story has lost its soul," he concluded (Bausch, 1999:33).

Edward Chamberlin, Canadian professor of English and Comparative Literature, shared the following story, an incident from which he derived the title of his book on stories and national-cultural identification: *If This Is Your Land, Where Are Your Stories?*

> It happened at a meeting between a [native America] Indian community in northwest British Columbia and some government officials. The officials claimed the land for the government. The natives were astonished by the claim. They couldn't understand what these relative newcomers were talking about. Finally one of the elders put what was

> bothering them in the form of a question. "If this is your land," he asked, "where are your stories?" He spoke in English, but then moved into Gitksan, the Tsimshian language of his people – and told a story. All of a sudden everyone understood...even though the government foresters didn't know a word of Gitksan, and neither did some of his Gitksan companions. But what they understood was more important: how stories give meaning and value to the places we call home; how they bring us close to the world we live in by taking us into a world of words; how they hold us together and at the same time keep us apart (Chamberlin, 2003:1).

"If this is your land, where are your stories?" This question carries with it the importance of a people's story and its contribution to their sense of identity and community. It is interesting here how identity is tied to land – possession of it – and to history and culture. What's even more interesting is that story is the glue that holds it all together. The original inhabitants in this factual tale told by Chamberlin seem to be saying: "Our land, our language, our stories, our history, our heritage, our identity – our very being of who we are – are all tied up together, are all integrated." To challenge any one of these, they imply, is to challenge all the others. This seems to be true for the nation of Bhutan as well.

Kunzang Choden, author of the much loved *Folktales of Bhutan*, pushes for the promotion of storytelling in her country. She said that Bhutan's stories are alive and continuous, not only in the minds of those who unravel and release them, but also in the minds of those who listen to them being unraveled and released. "This oral tradition," she said, "transmitted by one generation to another, is thus the continuing and living thread that links one generation to another." (Kunzang Choden, 1994) In short, stories ensure the continuity of community and identity.

Reflecting back on her early years and the effect Bhutanese stories had on her life, Choden said,

> Some of the stories stayed alive in my mind even during the fourteen years of my cultural exile in India (at boarding school), often providing me with a safe refuge and a solace in times of loneliness and depression, in trying to adjust and later on to understand other cultures. Memories of the stories helped to keep the link to my roots and, therefore, gave me my identity. I knew who I really was even when trying to conform to being somebody else! (Kunzang Choden, 1994:xiii).

"As I realize the importance of the stories as a link to who I am and where I come from, I also realize how important they will be to my children," she said. "They [stories] will be of some value in their lives to link up with their cultural base so in knowing their base they may better understand and appreciate their own lives" (Kunzang Choden, 1994).

Dorji Penjore (2005) of the Centre for Bhutan Studies emphasized the impact folklore can have on the formation and transmission of values. A senior researcher with a focus in the area of oral traditions, he said:

> Distilled folk wisdoms like proverbs for example validate values and beliefs, which are reinforced practically in adult life. Folktales make children imagine and create their own mental pictures, and this mental exercise leaves deepest impression on them, imprinting folktales' rightful place in their imagination. Folk wit and wisdom are not taught through formal arrangement, but through direct observation in earlier stage and direct participation in events themselves. To children, entertainment is the end, and values inculcation comes as a by-product. Scolding parents distill folktales into proverbs and use them to guide children's behaviours, thoughts and actions.
>
> Listening to folktales momentarily transports the audience, mostly children, to a different world; later reflection connects the folktale world to the real world that they would soon face as adults. It is when they first understand and link these two worlds that values so imparted are used in their interactions with man, animals, physical world and spirits. These wisdoms

> are not ordinary one; they have been time-tested through many years of interaction or experience with the real world. The morals of tales are packaged into proverbs. "A confederation of frogs can kill even a tiger" for example is a distillation of the folktale, "Come on Acho Tag! Jump!" Stories express moral or practical wisdom and provide an insight into the adult world. It is common for village elders to quote from some well-known folktales: "like in the tales, you will end up with nothing," or, "don't behave like a tiger in the tale." Child is exposed to knowledge, experiences, morals, customs, rituals and belief that they are supposed to live through as adults through tales (Dorji Penjore, 2005:47-74).

I'm reminded of a story called *Strength* (MacDonald, 2004:17). It is a tale that turns from delight to disaster. It is endearing, sobering and thought-provoking. One day elephant has the idea to have a contest to see who was the strongest. Monkey tied a small tree in a knot. Deer ran three miles into the forest and three miles back. Tiger mightily scraped the ground with his powerful claws. Antelope plowed a road through the fields with his horns. Elephant bought down a huge tree. With each feat, all declared that, indeed, it was a show of strength. Then it was man's turn. He whirled, twirled, did somersault and cartwheels. "That's not strength," the animals said. Man climbed a tree and threw down the palm nuts. "That's great, but not strength," the animals said again. Then man took a gun and shot elephant dead.

> Man was jumping and bragging.
>
> "Strength! Strength!
>
> Wasn't THAT strength?!"
>
> "Strength. . . ."
>
> Man looked around.
>
> The animals were gone.

They had fled into the forest.

"Strength! . . ."

There was no one left to hear him brag.

Man was alone.

In the forest the animals huddled together and talked.

"Did you see that?"

"Was that strength?"

"Would you call that strength?"

"No. That was DEATH."

"That was DEATH."

Since that day the animals will not walk with Man.

When Man enters the forest he has to walk by himself.

The animals still talk of Man . .

That creature *Man*. . . .

He is the one who cannot tell the difference between strength and death.

"The heart does not respond to principles and programs; it seeks not efficiency, but passion," said authors Brent Curtis and John Eldredge in their book *The Sacred Romance*. "Art, poetry, beauty, mystery, ecstasy: These are what rouse the heart. Indeed, they are the language that must be spoken if one wishes to communicate with the heart." They said, "Life is

not a list of propositions, it is a series of dramatic scenes. Story is the language of the heart. Our souls speak not in the naked facts of mathematics or the abstract proportions of systematic theology; they speak the images and emotions of story" (Curtis, 1997:39).

Without intellectual assent or intentional behavioral change, stories enter the heart and affect change. Eugene Peterson, author of *The Message*, said that much later, after one hears a story, he or she proclaims "what are these doing here?" but then finds oneself embracing the truths embedded within the stories. "All of a sudden we see things and people we had never noticed before," he said. "We hear words and sentences that make sense of what we've had intimations of but couldn't quite place." (Peterson, 2003:7). Curtis and Eldredge conclude, "The deepest convictions of our heart are formed by stories and reside there in the images and emotions of story." (Curtis and Eldredge:38).

Conclusion

There is a wonderful traditional Tibetan proverb that says, "What is written in ink can fade away by a single drop of water; what is written on the heart will last an eternity." And folklorist Margaret Read MacDonald said, "Once the story leaves your mouth, it is carried away in the hearts of your listeners" (MacDonald, 2004:22).

It seems that every individual asks the questions, "Who am I? Where do I belong? What are the accepted norms of behavior for me?" A people's stories help answer these questions; while their stories also help shape their answers. These questions touch on the very core of being – identity, community, society, culture. Anthropologists, sociologists, ethnographers, and cultural researchers all agree that to investigate the idea of self and all that self means, one does it by way of an individual's stories, along with the stories of his or her

history, society, and culture. It is through these stories that self is revealed – whether the individual self or the "self" of a community, culture, society, or nation. At the same time, these experts also say that to influence an individual, and ultimately his or her entire culture or society – to preserve its values and morals and pass them on to future generations – it is best and most effectively done through stories.

Stories are an integral part of life, said George Burns, author of *101 Healing Stories for Kids and Teens: Using Metaphors in Therapy*. "Regardless of our language, religion, race, sex, or age, stories have been and will remain, a crucial element in our lives," he said. "It is because of stories that our language, religion, science and culture exist." Quoting author Salman Rushdie, Burns said, "When we die all that remains are the stories" (Burns, 2008).

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Oral Traditions as Alternative Literature: Voices of Dissents in Bhutanese Folktales

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Abstract

This paper is based on a premise that (a) folktales reflect the social and political milieu of particular times and places, and (b) Bhutanese folktales originated from the common people ('small people'). It first explores the social context which led small people to express their dissent through folktales, and then examines an exemplary Bhutanese folktale for elements of dissent, to show how themes, plots and characters satirize the existing social and political order to the extent of overturning the status quo. Folktales are, therefore, a popular medium of the common people to express their discontent with the inequalities of a social order dominated by elites ('big people'); and the composition, narration and even adaptation of such folktales was/is of significance for all social classes.

This paper argues against the theory that folklore originated from an intelligentsia and tickled down to the peasantry (Dorson, 1963). It attributes the authorship of the Bhutanese folktales to the common people (folk). The term 'folklore' here is meant all Bhutanese folktales which began with *dangphu… dingphu* (analogous with 'long, long ago', or 'once upon a time'). If common people, those whom I distinguish here as 'small people' (*mi chungku*) are the principle authors of the folktales, it then follows that the plots, characters, themes, motifs etc., should reflect the social, political, and economic milieus in which they have principally lived. One interesting characteristic of the Bhutanese folktale is the presence of

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thematic elements of dissent, pitting small people against representatives of the ruling classes or elites, whom I distinguish here as 'big people' (*mi bom*).

Not all Bhutanese folktales have folk origin; the classic example being the adaptation of Jataka tales (stories of Lord Buddha's former lives), the collection of parables used by the Buddha and his followers to transmit the laws of causality and other basic Buddhist teachings. The origin of these stories is the Buddhist monastic tradition, which has constituted a literate elite within the larger oral traditional society. The Jataka tales have been narrated to small people to teach the Buddhist principles of interdependence and moral causation.

But the tales whose authorship can be attributed to small people differ from those which originated from elites in their treatment of themes, plots, endings, characters etc. For example, elite characters are often ridiculed in oral folktales by characters coming from lower classes, and the latter always emerge as winners.

It is important to first understand times during which small people resorted to folktale creation. Not much is known about the pre-1616 Bhutan, except that the territory that is Bhutan today was a group of many valley civilizations ruled by petty kings, whose primary engagement with each other involved warfare for more territories and power. Strife, not stability, marked this period. The initial period of peace and stability brought by theocracy after the unification of Bhutan in the late 1650s was followed by two and a half centuries of civil strife and political infighting during which small people were coerced to pay taxes in commodities and corvée labour, to provide military service, to transport loads, and to fulfil a variety of other state obligations. These state burdens were beyond most households' capacity.

Secondly, according to Aris (1987), in the Lamaist Himalayan world, Buddhist monastic culture exercised a virtual monopoly on the arts, education and government. It also played a central role in determining the common people's attitudes and values. Non-Buddhist cultural practices such as oral storytelling, village rituals, and popular beliefs of "… peasants, traders, craftsmen and even lay officials are practically unheard except in the 'weary wisdom' of maxims and proverbs, in love songs which play on double meanings, and in other such predictable forms which do not tell us much about social attitudes and values or the process of change" (Aris, 1987: 115). The tensions between state power informed by Buddhist values, on the one hand, and common people's values based on the individual, the family and the wider lay community on the other can be seen through the study of oral folktales. The study also provides insight into certain common people's attitudes and aspirations which remain hidden beneath the superstructure of Lamaist societies of the past and present.

The argument that the folktales reflect small people's discontent with the exploitative and unjust social order and coercive power of big people should be understood within the above context. The coercive powers that big people exercised was not necessarily bad but a necessary evil contested by small people in small ways. The acceptance, rejection, and contestation of the power-structure are recurrent themes of the folktales, and the endings of the folktales in particular are the common people's ideals of how the world should be, or an attempt to create an imagined alternative social order.

Folktales reveal man's frustrations and his attempts to escape in fantasy from repressions imposed upon him by society as well as from conditions of his geographical environment and his own biological limitations (Bascom, 1954). It provides the individual with a psychological escape from social repression (Heartland, 1990) and there are "concepts of compensation and the escape mechanism" in the "familiar theme of rags to

riches, or to the Cinderella…" (Bascom, 1954:343). While social circumstances conspired to consign them to peripheral status, it was only through their folktales that they took the centre stage and consigned big people to the periphery. The happy endings of most Bhutanese folktales involving village characters were ameliorative, and represent ideals or aspirations. The transmission of folktales provided them a space to ridicule, satirize, lampoon, and take revenge on the big people. They are a medium to express their dissent, contrast their ideal world to their real life situations, and to lampoon the follies and foibles of ruling classes. The oral transmission and listening process provided psychological escapes from the repression and exploitation of social or state power. The process also provided a medium for alterative voices to express dissent by reversing the status quo: a social and political order dominated by monastic and property elites; religious and cultural life dominated and defined by Buddhist lamas and monastic groups; and an economic order dominated by their rich and greedy neighbours; aristocrats and powerful taxpaying free households.

This dissent is not expressed for its own sake, but to improve the structures that generate inequalities. In a society that accepts unconditionally and unreservedly the key Buddhist principle of karma (*las*, the fundamental Buddhist law of moral causation; of action and its result), status or inequality either ascribed or achieved is accepted as a consequence of one's past karma. From the Buddhist point of view, our present mental, moral, intellectual and temperamental differences are due to our own karmic actions and tendencies, both in past and present lives. But the principle of karma is imprisoning as well as liberating, in that one's life is determined by one's karma, a product of one's previous life, but one can also positively change one's present karma through virtuous actions. Forms of rebellion against systems, institutions, and persons, whose benign power and legitimacy may have Buddhist sanction, must be carefully weighed where to do so risks not only the punishment of the system

but accumulating negative karma as well. In criticizing, parodying and lampooning unjust socio-economic and political structure, there is a potential for positive karmic deed and liberating change in life circumstances, whether outwardly or inwardly.

Some folktales satirize people in power and authority, slyly inverting and subverting existing socio-economic and political orders. A least-likely person (an orphan, poor man's son, or lazy boy) becomes the king, while the king loses his throne. The traditional folktale "The Lazy Boy and the King" provides a prototypical version of this reversal of fortune. A king is outwitted by a lazy boy, who becomes the king himself. Society cannot do without a ruler—particularly a compassionate, wise and forgiving one. In this tale the king is a paragon of royal vices, who must receive his comeuppance from below.

The Lazy Boy and the King

Once upon a time there lived a lazy boy who slept both day and night, and his parents named him Olo Nyilo – Sleeping Child. He continued to sleep even in his adulthood, and grew up without doing any work. One day his parents enrolled him as a king's courtier, hoping that a strict palace discipline would change him. Everybody expected a difficult life for him. Who, they joked, would do his share of sleeping?

But he surprised everyone by rising to instant fame. The king appointed him as a *selpon* (the lord who serves meals to the king). But on his first morning of duty as *selpon*, when the king was having his morning meal, he farted several times. The king felt more humiliated than angry, and ordered him to be locked up in jail. The guards took him even as the pungent smell began to fill the room. As in the traditional Bhutanese saying, the monkey had indeed come down to the ground.

In prison, Olo Nyilo complained to the guards that it was wrong for the king to imprison a clever man while

surrounding himself with foolish courtiers. The guards reported to the king what they had heard from the jailed *selpon.* The king summoned him to the palace and asked him to demonstrate his shrewdness.

"I can make thousands of *muti*," Olo Nyilo replied. Muti is a precious blue-green pearl worn as jewellery. "But first I need a friend who never farts." The king sent all courtiers in four directions to look for that special person but they all returned without even one person who did not fart. All admitted they farted every day.

"Then our king is the only person who never farts," Olo Nyilo said.

"Did I tell you so? Of course, I fart like any other person," the king admitted.

"If even the king himself farts, for what crime am I imprisoned?" Olo Nyilo asked the king.

The king thought for a while and ordered for his release. So Olo Nyilo went home happily.

However, after a few days the king summoned Olo Nyilo and handed him two stones that were broken from one big stone. "Stitch these stones into one piece," the king ordered.

Olo Nyilo took the stones and went home, only to return early next morning.

"Did you stitch the stones back together?" the king asked.

"In order to do this correctly I will need a thread spun out of sand," he replied.

"Who has ever been known to spin a thread out of sand?" the king shouted.

"Who has ever been known to stitch two stones back together?" Olo Nyilo replied. The king again accepted the defeat and ordered him not to live near the palace.

As the old sages say: a tiger unable to catch an agile calf will turn on a sluggish old cow. So the king turned his anger on Olo Nyilo's parents. One evening his father came home with a mule. When Olo Nyilo asked how much he had paid for the animal, his father explained that the king wanted him to make the mule give birth to a foal.

"Ah! Ha! Ha! Ha!" Olo Nyilo began to laugh. "Don't worry, I'll take care of the stupid king."

The next morning, he made a huge fire near the palace and waited for the king, who came as expected.

"How dare you make fire near my palace?" the king shouted.

"I'm performing a ritual for my father," he replied.

"What happened? Is he sick?" the king asked him in surprise because his father was in good health only yesterday.

"I'm praying for his fertility. He is sterile and can't give birth to a child," the boy replied.

"You foolish man, where did you hear of a man who gives birth to a child?" the king said, sounding full of wits.

"Where did you hear of a mule giving birth to a foal?" Olo Nyilo replied coolly.

The outwitted king could do nothing but chase him away.

One evening, Olo Nyilo went to see his father at work. There he saw rows of sticks inserted in every furrow left by a ploughshare. The father explained that it was the order of the

king who would arrive soon. Olo Nyilo uprooted all sticks and scattered them everywhere.

The king came soon and scolded him for disobeying his command. "It is my ungovernable son Olo Nyilo who removed them all," the father explained.

The king called Olo Nyilo and said, "I have asked your father to insert rows of sticks in every furrow made by ploughshare to assess the work in the evening, and you have removed them."

Olo Nyilo accepted that he, not his father, was to be punished.

"But first, tell me how many steps you have taken to reach here from your palace?"

"How can I count my steps from the palace to this field?" the king shouted.

"How can my father count the number of furrows from morning to evening?" he replied.

The king became so angry that he banished him from the kingdom, and threatened to kill him if he returned.

So Olo Nyilo had to go into exile to unknown lands, leaving his home and parents. On his way, he came across the dead body of a horse. He cut off its head and carried it along, thinking it would be of some use later. When it was dark, he climbed a tall tree above a huge flat rock. Soon a ghost with a huge goitre came and sat on the rock, followed by an entire gang of ghosts. The goitre-ghost, who was their leader, took a gold cup from his pouch, and uttered, "Gold cup! Bring us some *churma*!" Churma is a home-brewed alcoholic beverage. In a wink of an eye the cup was filled with *churma,* and they all enjoyed it.

"Now bring us food," the goitre-ghost uttered, and the cup was filled with delicious food. The ghosts ate the food too. After

they had finished the food, the goitre-ghost asked where they could find their meat for the night.

"The meat has climbed up a tree," one ghost replied.

Olo Nyilo was terrified that the ghosts were going to eat him. Then he felt something coarse and twisted, curling around his feet. It was the goitre-ghost's long curly hairs. He got hold of a bunch of his curly hairs and tied them around the branch.

"Now what shall we do with the meat above us?" one ghost asked. At this, before any of the other ghosts could reply, Olo Nyilo trembled so badly that he dropped his horse-head. Down it fell with a crash, right in the middle of the gang of ghosts. The ghosts saw the head and ran away in terror, all except for the goitre-ghost, whose hair was tied around the branch at Olo Nyilo's feet. The goitre-ghost pulled at the branch until he pulled his head free, and he ran away too, leaving a big bunch of hair tied to the branch.

In the morning Olo Nyilo climbed down the tree and picked up the gold cup left behind by the ghosts. He wanted to test whether the cup would work magic for him. "Gold cup! Bring me some *churma,*" he cried. The cup was instantly filled with *churma*. Then he said, "Give me some food," and there was food in the cup. He enjoyed the food and drink and continued his journey, taking the magic cup with him.

On the way he met a man who asked him to buy his *kobje*. Kobje is a long bamboo stick used for beating grains during harvest. Olo Nyilo refused, saying he had neither wheat nor buckwheat to harvest.

"This *kobje* is not for beating grains but for fighting any number of foes," the man explained.

Olo Nyilo took out his gold cup and said, "This cup will give you *churma* and food by simply asking for it." They traded the *kobje* and the cup. But as soon as Olo Nyilo got hold of the *kobje*, he cried, "*Kobje*! Beat that man and bring back my

> cup." The *kobje* flew from his hand in no time at all, beat the man and brought back the cup.
>
> So carrying the *kobje* and the cup, he continued his journey. On the way he met a man carrying a hammer which was capable of building a *dzong* (fortress) by simply beating it on a rock, and every blow of the hammer would add another story to the building. He traded his cup for the hammer; but as soon as he had the hammer he asked his *kobje* to get back his cup. Next he traded his cup for a magic goatskin which, by merely beating the ground created sunshine, rain, or thunder. Then he bade his *kobje* to beat the goat-skin man and get back his cup.
>
> Olo Nyilo decided to return home with the cup, hammer, *kobje* and goat-skin to challenge the king for his unjust exile. First, he beat his hammer thrice on a rock and built a three-storey *dzong*. The king saw the *dzong* and sent his men to see whose it was. Hearing that the owner was no other than Olo Nyilo, the king burned with jealousy and anger, and sent his courtiers to kill him. But Olo Nyilo sent his *kobje* to fight them, and all the courtiers returned beaten and bloody. The king next ordered his men to burn down the *dzong,* but Olo Nyilo used the goatskin to create a thunderstorm and put out the fire. He kept beating on the goatskin till the downpour turned into a flash flood, and washed away the palace, the king, and all his courtiers. In the end Olo Nyilo, the sleeping child, became the king.

The story was narrated by Tshering Wangchuk of Wamling village, Zhemgang, and taken from *Spirits Who Write Human Destiny and other Folktales from Bhutan* (Dorji Penjore, forthcoming 2010).

Any listener's attention is drawn by the boy's laziness because a farming society cannot afford lazy children, especially boys. They have to carry out the twin tasks of farm work and load carrying (*la-khor*). They also need to help parents sustain households by feeding family members, paying taxes to the state, joining militia during endless civil

strife, and fulfilling many other household obligations. Their laziness coupled with the vagaries of nature, wild animals, and unfavourable karma would put their families and communities at risk in perpetuating households and feeding the family members. The boy's laziness is a departure from the conventional qualities of young people. This negative quality and his nickname Olo Nyilo (a sleeping child) is of course significant in assessing his adversary later.

The king, and anything associated with royalty, serves as a common ideal for the small people. The king is the paragon of virtues, the epitome of power and authority, compassion and discipline, knowledge and wisdom. His parents send Olo Nyilo to the palace, where one blunder is enough to risk one's life, so that he could be disciplined and transformed into a hardworking man.

But the sleeping boy surprises everybody and quickly rises to become a *selpon* (a courtier who serves food to the king). The lazy boy's rise throws some questions: is there any significant change to the lazy boy or is something wrong with the standards of the king, the palace and the couriers serving the king? It has to be one or the other – it can't be both. No courtier could be as important as a *selpon*. But on the other hand, does a king (like a child) need to be served his food? Does this infantilisation of the king raise the lazy boy to the king's level, or lower the king to the level of the lazy boy?

The lazy boy, now a *selpon*, makes (by accident or design) a blunder or provocation. In Bhutanese customs nothing could be as disrespectful and embarrassing as farting before the king, and above all in front of the king. Is he simply ignorant of the taboo, or is it his design to reveal the king's stupidity, royal vanity, or the shallowness of palace culture? Objectively, according to the science of gastronomy and digestion, nothing is as natural as farting; subjectively, nothing could be as humiliating and embarrassing. The crime, such as it is, could bring any punishment from mere

reprimand to the death penalty. The king chooses imprisonment. Is the king's judgment based on stupidity or compassion? Imprisonment creates a ground for revenge. Now the battle of wits or foolishness begins.

The lazy boy tells the prison guard that it is wrong for the king to surround himself by fools and imprison a clever person like himself. When he is asked to demonstrate his talents, he boasts that he can make *muti* (blue pearls) if the king can find someone who has never farted. The king, overcome more by his greed for pearls and less by thought of releasing his *selpon*, sends his courtiers to the four directions. But all return without finding a single immaculate subject. That the king wants to find the person who has never farted tells us of his stupidity. When it is pointed out that the king must be the only person who never farts, and therefore, should be capable of making blue pearls, the king admits the truth, more out of fear of being unable to be his *selpon's* equal at making pearls and thus appearing foolish before his subjects, and less out of his love for the truth.

The king releases the lazy boy because the king could not overcome his wit and ingenuity, and keeping him in prison would mean inviting further embarrassment in front of his subjects. The king accepts the lazy boy's wit. But the king needs someone to displace his intellectual superiority, and assigns the lazy boy's father a series of difficult tasks: The lazy boy matches the king gambit for gambit. The king withdraws in defeat and the tension is temporarily resolved. The king now abandons the battle of brain and turns to brawn, forcing the lazy boy to go into exile. The lazy boy's cleverness proves useless before the royal power and institutional apparatus available to the king.

Off into exile he goes, with no worldly resources of any kind. On his way, he begins the ascending arc of a successful trader. Scavenging a horse's head, he essentially trades it to the ghosts for their magic cup of plenty. He breaks through

the ghosts' aura of power and terror, with no power of his own but through sheer accident and circumstances. A frightened man, sheltered atop a tree to protect himself from wild animals, the last thing he expects are these supernatural visitors. He drops his randomly acquired horse's head into their midst, and so inadvertently gains his freedom from hunger and thirst. In short order, then he attains mastery over physical threats (the *kobje* that can defeat any foes), mastery over the problem of shelter (the hammer that could build houses by merely hitting it on a stone), followed by mastery over the heavens (the goatskin that controls the weather).

The people he meets on the way are ordinary people with extraordinary things and power. Ordinary or extraordinary, the lazy boy gets their *kobje*, hammer and the goatskin one after another through his wit. He returns home to challenge the king and the royal power which forced him into exile. He doesn't go straight to the palace to challenge him; instead he lures the king to come towards him by building a palace taller than the king's. He exploits the king's weakness, anger and envy; envy that no one should be richer than the king. The conventional norm also requires the king to be the richest and the most powerful. He fights off the king's men with his *kobje*, and floods the king's palace with the thunderstorm created by his goatskin. The political hierarchy is overturned: the lazy boy becomes the king.

For this story to happen in the real life, it would demand nothing short of a revolution, but it is what the people romanticize or dream, and these are subversive impulses that find expression in their tales. They fulfil in folktale creation what they cannot foresee in social actuality.

For most of its recorded history, socio-political, economic and religious power was an exclusive domain of educated elite within the Buddhist theocracy. Buddhist monastic education was provided by state-controlled institutions. Some private

monasteries headed by local reincarnate lamas, others by religious nobility and a few powerful households formed centres of learning. Government officials and bureaucrats for manning the state institutions and organizations had to be monastically educated, and only rich families could afford monastic education for their children. Traditional scholarship, an exclusive domain of Buddhist lamas and monks, pursued religious subjects, and neglected studies that did not contribute to the knowledge of Buddhism. This became a self-replicating cultural feedback loop that perpetuated inequality. The voices of the common people, in worldly and secular matters, were not written.

Narration of such folktales through descending generations were/are not without significance for both small and big people. When listened to by big people, it helps bring about a change of perspective. In exposing the folly and foibles of big people, children of small people understand the fallibilities of their more powerful neighbours, and the need to cultivate their own positive qualities of shrewdness, courage, and self-reliance. Big people were not necessarily all rulers like lords or kings, but included a whole range of socio-cultural, economic, political, and religious groups who stood above the small people. Folktales were earlier generations' equivalent of universal education, and served in many ways to educate and inform their children about the nature of the world.

Just as in Subaltern Studies in South Asia, the study of selected Bhutanese folktales provides clues to social relations in rural societies – the relations of dominion and control, relations of power and authority between the state (big people) and agrarian peasant groups (small people). The tales allow expression of alternative, imagined, and idealized social orderings. They help us understand the unequal and exploitative relations that exist at all levels: between the state and citizen (*zhung* and *miser*), lords and servants (*gom* and *yog*), ascending and descending generations (*pham* and *busa*), men and women (*pho* and *mo*), teachers and students (*lopen*

and *lopthru*), king and citizens (*pon* and *bangkhor*), older and younger (*gansho* and *chungku*), husband and wife (*map* and *naem*). Some of the silent rebellions and resistances which never made it into official national narratives also find adoption in folktales and continue to be told today.

For example, in Wamling, a remote village in Zhemgang, a story is still told of how the villagers not only refused to fulfil the state obligations but took up arms against the government in the early 19th Century. Tired of paying taxes, contributing labour for load transportation and militia for endless civil strife, the villages of the outer Zhemgang, led by a village leader, took their rebellion to the governors of Jakar (who then ruled over the Outer Zhemgang). The reason was not much the total negation of central power and authority per se as it was against heavy taxation and endless civil strife. Villagers not only rebelled but marched towards Jakar. The governor's forces ambushed the village militia at Jalakhar, and in the ensuing bloody battle, outnumbered village militia were slaughtered. Some escaped, while other defected to the government force. The legendary ferocity of the militia leader was such that even after both of his legs had been cut off, he could still kill anyone who dared to come near him. Unable to kill him with sword, the governor's forces had to stone him from a distance. His corpse was believed to have been buried and a small chorten built to subdue similar 'forces of evil' in future. There are similar historical events which in their counter-hegemonic spirit never made a place in authorized national narratives.

In the absence of records on ancient Bhutan, the study of the Bhutanese folktales and other oral literature can provide insights to past social, political and economic organizations, ideas and behaviours, customs and habits and cultural patterns current in certain places at certain times. It helps write local narrative parallel to the national narrative, no matter its insignificance in the face of the state's (big people's)

superstructure and coercive power, but relevant to the lives and fortunes of small people.

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The Role of Folk Consciousness in the Modern State: Its Efficacy, Use and Abuse

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The overarching story of world history in the last 500 years, as it seems to me, is a simple, two-part one. First, with unprecedented new power, Europe and Europeanized powers first explored and then colonized much of the world. Second, the rest of the world fought back, but in part by mastering some of those same new European powers. Although the technological innovations in industry and the military is most visible factor at first glance, I would argue that it was a new kind of social mobilization that was the deeper, more powerful force, both in the early process of extending European control, and in the later success of the non-European reaction to end that control.

Later in this presentation I will try to connect this directly with storytelling. For now suffice it to say that folktale scholarship in 19th century Europe was, by and large, part of a larger project of nation-state creation through cultural nationalism. It transformed Europe, and proved exportable to much of the rest of the world as well.

From Rousseau's "general will" in the *Social Contract* of 1762 – his description of the emotion it would take to hold a state of free and equal citizens together, without aristocrats or kings – to the draft army brought into being by the Committee of Public Safety in August of 1793, modern political nationalism took clear shape (for good, or ill, or both). This was in the context of the Enlightenment, a most anti-historical movement, in that its primary project was to

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destroy every social and political institution that did not fit the *Philosophes'* (rather optimistic) view of human nature, and replace it with a new institution that did. "The history of all misery," said Diderot in a perfect one-line summation of the Enlightenment in his 1772 "Supplement to the Voyage of Bougainville, "is the conflict of natural man with artificial institutions." Rational individuals, with free access to information, could intelligently rule themselves. And so the key concepts of the age were natural right and law ("natural" meaning in conformity with their positive view of universal human nature), rationalism, and individualism. No matter what one's ethnicity or religious belief is, one could be a full citizen of this brave new state.

But modern cultural nationalism, which has proved to be a much stronger force than simple political nationalism, came from the Romantic Age reaction to the Enlightenment. To the Enlightenment's faith in rationalism and individualism was opposed Romanticism's belief in emotion, intuition, and group belonging. It was strongest in those linguistic units that did not yet have their own independent, united state – groups such as the Germans, Italians, Irish, Finns, Czechs, Hungarians, Polish, and European (especially Russian) Jews. The key basic concepts and vocabulary underlying this new cultural nationalism came from Johann Gottfried von (he was ennobled very late in life) Herder, who lived from 1744 to 1803. In his 1784-1791, *Ideas for the Philosophy of the History of Mankind,* he argued that every group that had been around long enough to have its own language was a *Volk*. No matter whether large or small, literate or illiterate, such a folk group was to be valued if it contributed its own special color to the great stained glass window that was total humanity. Every folk group, in Herder's understanding, came from some seed-time in the past when some group of humans wandered into some land, and magic happened in the fusion of people and land. "Primitive" for him was a positive word, implying something more in line with the original seed time of culture. And "organic" – arguably the single most important word of

the Romantic lexicon – Herder took from biology to describe the way he believed a folk group develops the same way a plant grows, flourishing to the extent that it is true to a pattern in a seed.[1] If you cut off a 3" diameter oak, and try to transplant a 3" diameter maple top – even using all the best horticultural practices – it probably won't live and certainly won't do well. On this analogy, would it make sense to cut off Germanic culture in 1789 and transplant onto it a French top? From the Enlightenment's anti-historical stance, the Romantic Age reacted with a virtual worship of history; it verged on a historicism that tended to argue that any institution of great antiquity was good, just because it was old.

The most famous names in folktales – both for the general public and for scholars – are surely the Brothers Grimm (Jakob 1785-1863, and Wilhelm 1786-1859). They were linked to Herder through their favorite law professor, Karl von Savigny. Herder's influence on von Savigny is manifest, for example, in this paragraph from an 1814 publication:

> But this organic connection of law with the being and character of the people, is also manifested in the progress of the times; and here, again, it may be compared with language. For law, as for language, there is no moment of absolute cessation; it is subject to the same movement and development as every other popular tendency; and this very development remains under the same law of inward necessity, as in its earliest stages. Law grows with the growth, and

[1] Johann Gottfried von Herder, Reflections on the Philosophy of the History of Mankind (title is loosely translated here). Abridged and with Introduction by Frank E. Manuel (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1968. See p. 45 for key passage on "national fictions spring from verbal communications."

> strengthens with the strength of the people, and finally dies away as the nation loses its nationality.[2]

It was in von Savigny's personal library that the Grimms first read the original sources of the German middle ages, in pursuit of their generation's project of understanding present-day law by looking at its Roman foundations of almost two millennia earlier, as modified by Germanic common law of almost one millennium earlier. In 1805, when von Savigny got into the French National Library with its huge German manuscript collection (partly looted from the German states by Napoleon's armies), he asked favorite graduate student Jakob Grimm to come and spend a year working on the project. In 1806 Jakob got an emergency communication from his brother asking him to come home; the French had occupied their home state of Hesse-Kassel, their mother was near death, and the economy was in shambles.

In the next six years, 1806-1812 – in a sense the worst years of German history because all German states seemed to be swallowed up and digested by Napoleonic France and any future existence of a "Germany" was moot – the two brothers really crystallized their life's work. Jakob became the greatest German scholar of medieval German literature, and Wilhelm turned north to the newly discovered ancient Scandinavian Eddas (still the best source of Old Norse mythology) and sagas. The real key to everything that came later was their realization that medieval German literature had emerged from ancient Scandinavian tradition: they had discovered dignified "roots" for German culture. The French had said for centuries, in effect, "We come from the Romans; you come from the barbarians. What can you expect to be?" So

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[2] Karl von Savigny, *The Vocation of Our Age for Legislation and Jurisprudence*, Legal Classics Library, Div. of Gryphon Editions, Ltd., Special Edition, 1986), p. 27.

discovering such roots was a confidence-builder for every native speaker of German.

Their overall project was a piece of that "organic" Romantic mysticism, an attempt to discover everything they could about that supposed "pure" original German culture of northern Germany and Scandinavia of around 500 B.C. or so. If they could discover that original wellspring of culture, they could revive it and use it to reinvigorate "Germany" in their day. They had little in the way of written sources to go on, and so they invented what I would call their "model of cultural breakdown." That original German cultural unit spoke the original German language, had its own religion ("Old Norse Mythology"), its own dress styles, wedding customs, etc. And then over time it disintegrated, either from pressures from the Mediterranean Greco-Roman cultures, or simply the logic of cultural decay. When the religion was no longer fully believed, the religious cement that held all the stories of the religion together was weakened, and the religion broke up in several great epics. A few hundred years later they in turn evolved into legends, which evolved into folktales, which got summed up in riddles and proverbs – and the final level of cultural decay was simple words, popular customs, gestures, and such.

For example, in the Old Norse religion there was a figure called the "valkyrie," a maiden of the slain. Nameless, faceless, spiritual daughters of Odin, they came down to earth to collect the souls of human heroes slain on the battlefield, to take them to Valhalla ("hall of the slain") where they might practice war for the rest of time. Then, when the last trumpet blew and all of the forces of evil came out against the gods at Ragnarok, from hundreds of doors in Valhalla would come thousands of the greatest human warriors ever produced, to help the gods in their ultimate hour of need. Every religion has to explain the meaning of it all, and this was a key part of the Old Norse conception. Then, by medieval times, came the great Siegfried epic. Brynhild, or Brunhilde, was the valkyrie

who was Odin's favorite – note that she now has a name and face. In flying down to earth to collect a hero's soul, her glance fell on Siegfried, most handsome and bravest of mortals, and she fell in love with him. Odin, enraged that his daughter had fallen in love with a mortal, put her in an enchanted sleep on a "Magic Mountain" ringed by fire, but honored her last request that Siegfried might break through the fire and rescue her. Centuries later, the Grimms collected "Sleeping Beauty." Not called Brynhild or even named at all, she is, in her enchanted sleep and magical awakening at the hands of the prince, a warped and woven fairy tale descendant of the medieval epic.

The Grimms were not collecting folktales for children, but because the folktales contained bits and pieces of what Wilhelm, the more poetic of the two, called "the splintered jewel"– the fragmented ancient religion and culture. The first edition of the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (which should translate *Children and Household Folktales*, but which through the British prism came to be known as *Grimms' Fairy Tales*) was published in December of 1812 as Napoleon reeled back towards France after his disaster in Russia. This was the first – and frankly the sloppiest, academically[3] – of all the Grimms' great publications, and were an integral part of their whole life's work – to discover the essence of that original Germanic culture of the seed-time, so that its elements could be revived in the present, and "Germany" once again be free and strong.

About the time the Grimms were born, British scholars in India had "discovered" Sanskrit, the classical language of the Hindus of India. In reading the vast treasure trove of Sanskrit literature from the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* back to the

[3] The best single work on the subject is Christa Kamenetsky's *The Brothers Grimm and Their Critics: Folktales and the Quest for Meaning* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1992).

Rigveda, they were struck with the kinship of Sanskrit with European languages. As young adults the Brothers Grimm were in on the second generation of Sanskrit scholarship, which resulted by 1813 in the coining of the word "Indo-European" for the language family in which English is (meaning most European languages plus Sanskrit-derived languages). In the process this generation of scholars, including the Grimms, invented the new science of philology in their attempt to understand who the *Rigveda* authors were, and the nature of their relationship to Europeans. Translating literally as "love of words," philology, to a historian, seems mainly to be about what comparative languages can tell you about the past. Jakob Grimm especially was a marvel of a philologist, with a working knowledge of seventy languages, living and dead. His "law of consonant shift," of how aspirated consonants in the northwest of the Indo-European world gradually evolved to unaspirated in the southeast (English *two*; Dutch *twee*; German *zwei*; Romance, Slavic, Persian and Sanskrit variations on *do, duo, dva* and *dve*, for example). Philologists realized that every word was a bit of history, although not all were knowable. This brilliant new tool was now brought back to their model of cultural breakdown. Take, for example, as the Grimms did, the English word "berserk." Most of the words beginning with A in English are from Latin, but most of the B words are from German. "Ber" comes from bear, and "serk" is an old word for shirt. Together they meant the hardened bear-hide chest protectors worn by the pre-Viking soldiers in battle. Apparently donning the breastplate, they cultivated the battle rage necessary for combat, and the dress came to stand for the mood. So now, for the Grimms, when written sources failed to inform them, they were now able to turn to a new level of unwritten ones to make up for the deficit.

Among their mature works were the *History of the German Language*; the structuring and partial fleshing out of the world's best dictionary at that time, the Grimms' dictionary of the German language (like the *Oxford English Dictionary*

which came later, based on historical principles); and Jakob Grimm's masterwork, the four-volume *Teutonic Mythology* (the usual English-language translation, or mis-translation, of *Deutsche Mythologie).* It was Jakob Grimm's attempt "to set forth all that may now be known of German heathenism," meaning the whole pre-Christian culture of Germany.[4] There were chapters on the aspects and attributes of all the major deities, as they were believed to be by the ancient German people. There were chapters on beliefs about trees, and charms, and elves and wights. For the reader less well linguistically equipped than Jakob Grimm, every other page is unintelligible, as he amassed commentary in dozens of languages; but the summation in clear German (or English, in translation) has an authority based on all the research. German readers would have been convinced beyond a shadow of a doubt of the great antiquity and vibrancy of the original German culture. And the elements of the German past unearthed by the Grimms (and sometimes frankly imagined by them) would be used by writers, artists, musicians, and politicians as the main emotional force in the new pan-German patriotism and the political unification of Germany to which it led.

With time for just one quick case study in this topic, consider Richard Wagner, brilliant composer and *capellmeister* in Dresden, capital of Saxony, who was a frustrated thirty years old in 1843. He had encountered the idea of a German national theater, and this was fast becoming the goal of his work. In his time of loneliness, he buried himself in the past, in the newly popular antiquities of Germany and Scandinavia. It should come as no surprise that his chief inspiration was the work of Jakob Grimm. In Wagner's autobiography, he says that in that year he was taking the water cure at the

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[4] Jakob Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology*. Translated from the Fourth Edition by James Steven Stallybrass, in four volumes. (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1976); see original introduction.

Töplitz spa (today's Teplice, just over the mountains from Saxony in today's Czech Republic) in company with his wife, his mother and a sister. Nearly forty years later he still vividly remembered his encounter there with Jakob Grimm's major work:

> . . . it had been noticed that I was always carrying around a rather thick book, with which I sat down to rest together with my mineral water in hidden places. This was Jacob Grimm's *Deutsche Mythologie*. Whoever knows this work will understand how the inordinate wealth of its contents, gathered from all sides and really intended almost solely for scholars, had an immediately stimulating effect on me, who was looking everywhere for expressive and meaningful symbols. Formed from the scanty fragments of a vanished world, of which scarcely any tangible monuments remain to testify, I discovered here a confusing construction which at first sight appeared to me as a huge rocky crevice choked with under-brush. Nothing in it was complete, nor was there anything resembling an architectural line, and I often felt tempted to abandon the seemingly hopeless effort to make something systematic out of it. And yet I was firmly in the power of its strange enchantment: even the most fragmentary legends spoke to me in a profoundly familiar tongue, and soon my entire sensibility was possessed by images suggesting ever more clearly the recapture of a long lost yet eagerly sought consciousness. There rose up in my soul a whole world of figures, which yet proved to be so unexpectedly solid and well-known from earliest days, that when I saw them clearly before me and could hear their speech I could not grasp the source of the virtually tangible familiarity and certitude of their demeanor. The effect they produced upon my innermost being I can only describe as a complete rebirth, and just as we feel a tender joy at a child's first sudden flash of recognition, so my own eyes now flashed with rapture at a world I saw revealed for the first time, as if by miracle, in which I had previously

> moved blindly though presentiment, like a child in its mother's womb.[5]

Soul, rebirth, joy, rapture, revelation, miracle: Wagner had to go to the language of religious conversion to describe his experience. In the very next year, 1844, came the first of his "mature" operas, all based on Germanic sources or themes, and all researched in the scholarly works of the Grimms. As invisible as steam, cultural nationalism was nonetheless the motive power of the political reshaping of all of central Europe, as politicians as adroit as Bismarck diverted it to their own ends.

The first part of this paper, then, has tried to show the emotional power of the Romantic matrix from which modern folktale collecting and general folktale scholarship arose. It was an integral part of modern cultural nationalism, and – for good or ill – was deeply colored by that inspiration. The paper now turns to the general (surprisingly regular) pattern to the development of this cultural nationalism in many modern nations.

Language revival is the first and perhaps key development, logically enough since language tends to be the most important cultural group identifier. In most modern ethnic groups with no independent state, as of 1800 or so there was no single standard spoken or written language – no standard Greek, Yugoslav, Finnish, or Hebrew or Arabic for that matter. Most had a classical language from old manuscripts, or an archaic religious form of the language, plus widely varied regional dialects. Most of these dialects tended to be less than sophisticated, because the sophisticated element of society usually chose to speak the local "world-class" or

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[5] Jakob Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology*. Translated from the Fourth Edition by James Steven Stallybrass, in four volumes. (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1976); see original introduction.

"imperial" language. Aspiring Finnish families taught their children Swedish before 1814 and Russian after that, for example, not any sort of Finnish, so their children could get ahead in empires in which Finns were a small and denigrated ethnic minority.

There were usually four distinct parts of this language revival process. Ideally, a standard grammar had to be "harmonized" from the archaic classical language and the current dialects. Second, a dictionary of the newly harmonized language had to be constructed. Making up this dictionary usually included having to invent many modern words on the basis of ancient linguistic roots (Eliezer Ben-Yehuda, as Eliezer Perlmann re-named himself in Hebrew, did this for Russian-Jewish immigrants to Palestine; he even had to create a modern word for "dictionary" in his new Hebrew). Third, some writer of genius had to commit to this newly-created (or at least newly-refurbished) language. It could be a poet or a novelist or a translator, but the demonstration had to be convincing that here was a live language with no limitations and with unique capabilities of its own (Chaim Bialik, to continue the Hebrew-language example, proved to be this when he wrote his poem "City of Slaughter" about the 1903 Kishinev pogrom). Fourth, an educational movement had to at least try to re-teach the mother language to intellectuals, initially, and then to all young people of the cultural group (Ireland's Gaelic League is a good example).

The second major development, which might be called literary recovery and new literature creation, closely followed the language revival. Collections of folktales and legends were a universal feature of this phase, but it also usually paid particular attention to epic. It was almost as if a people could prove it had an epic, it had the right to an independent state. So if a group had a bonafide epic, they dusted it off (Germany's *Nibelungenlied*, for example – dismissed upon its presentation to Frederick II in the 1700s as "not worth a charge of power," but called by a German historian in 1912

"the pride of the Fatherland"). If an epic outline could be discerned (or imagined) behind assorted folktales in the countryside, it needed to be scissored and pasted together (Finland's *Kalevala*, so scissored-and-pasted and in fact partly written anew by Elias Lonnrot in 1835). If not even that slim basis for an epic existed, it seemed then to be the duty of some literary patriot to forge a plausible one, and hide the evidence of forgery for as long as possible (such was McPherson's *Ossianic Poems* for Scots and by extension their fellow Celts the Irish). And in addition to this work with these three traditional forms of literature (or "orature"), some modern author needed to mine these literary veins, and use the material to create popular modern works (the "Anglo-Norman" W. B. Yeats was apparently convinced to mine Irish cultural themes of a folklore nature by old Fenian John O'Leary, for example).

Music revival and creation was a third major development, and it usually paralleled that of literature. The folksongs and dances had to be researched and popularized. Then sophisticated composers need to do two things to the admiration of their countrymen and foreign experts: a) use folk musical idiom – melodies, rhythms, instrumentation – as a mine for modern sophisticated works; and b) create musical tone poems around images of or feelings for the nation's land or history.

A fourth fairly clear category was history recovery (or at least re-creation). The history of the cultural group needed re-writing by a member of that cultural group, with special emphasis on the "glory days" of that particular culture.

A fifth development began with a cult of physical fitness, usually motivated and justified by a looming war of independence with the occupying or imperial power. It often tried to turn young people of the cultural group away from "foreign" games and back to those traditional in their own culture (Michael Cusack's Gaelic Athletic Association of 1884,

for example, calling for the replacement of English badminton and lawn tennis with the home-grown, more rugged Irish version of stickball, hurling). The usual end of this development was a paramilitary organization that drew on the physical fitness movement (the way the Irish Republic Brotherhood recruited from the G.A.A., to continue the example above).

Here is an illustration of the full pattern, in a group that has virtually ceased to have any self-identity just in the past twenty years – "Czechoslovaks." They occupied Bohemia, Moravia, and Slovakia, and achieved proud independence by 1918, only to lose it to the Germans, and then the Soviets, after 1939; the state was reborn with the disintegration of the Soviet Union ca. 1989, and just three years later split (amicably) into a Czech Republic and a Slovakia. Fifty years ago there were millions of self-professed Czechoslovaks; today it would be hard to find a single one! But here is the important first half of that story.

Joseph Dobrovsky (1753-1829) was a Jesuit-trained Czech, a superb linguist. He wrote a Czech grammar and then a history of the Czech language by 1818. This was all written in German, of course, since he had to invent a harmonized Czech language himself. Joseph Jungmann (1773-1847) was a tireless translator of international great works into Dobrovsky's new Czech, beginning with *Paradise Lost* in 1811. In 1825 he finished a massive *History of Czech Literature* based on extensive manuscript research, and written in Dobrovsky's "new-and-improved" Czech language. In the last forty years of his life he worked on a Czech dictionary that eventually ran to 4500 pages. So together Dobrovsky and Jungmann regenerated the language, and after that came literature. As early as 1821 Jungmann could already see this future in three young friends of his, writers still in their '20s, Kollar, Safarik, and Palacky.

Jan Kollar (1793-1852) was the first good poet of the Czech language revival, even though he was Slovak. He wrote a sort of epic of sonnets, a love story on the surface, but a longing for independence underneath. The hero of the epic wandered along rivers that were sites from Slavic glory, but were now dominated by other peoples. For thirty years Kollar pastored a Slovak Lutheran church in Budapest, and wrote, said one author, as a "Slovak who sees his nationality threatened by Magyarization." Paul Joseph Safarik (1795-1876) was also Slovak. As a young man he taught in Bratislava and became close friends with Palacky. He wrote on Slavic language and literature, and gravitated to Prague by the 1830s. In 1837 he published a book on Slavic antiquities, which meant at that time not just things but cultural patterns. The book triggered intense new interest in the early history of the Slavs.

Frantisek Palacky (1798-1876) was the first really great historian the Czechoslovaks produced, and his work in history led him directly into national politics. He was raised in a Moravian village where Hussite traditions were still secretly alive. He went to school in the great Slovakian city of Bratislava, on the Danube; not many Czechs knew the Slovaks as well as he did, and he liked them and sympathized with the oppression they lived under. When he too moved to Prague, Dobrovsky made sure Palacky had access to key private libraries and was sheltered from government censorship. Palacky researched the glory days of the Czechs and Slovaks before 1620 when their last independence was lost at the Battle of White Mountain. Historian R. W. Seton-Watson wrote that one can only understand the power of what Palacky wrote:

> . . . in the setting of an enslaved nation, a long-neglected language, a hostile Church and a denationalized middle class . . . .
>
> He brought them back to life, gave them courage and belief in a forgotten or despised past, and proved to them

> that they had achievements in the moral and intellectual sphere of which any nation might be proud . . ..[6]

By "denationalized middle class," of course, he meant those educated families who raised their children to speak German, the official language of the Austrian state and the "cultured" language of much of central Europe.

At the time a fourth man shared the general reputation of the three above, although the luster has now gone from his name. Waclav Hanka (1791-1861) was once the most famous collector of West Slavic epics. In 1817 he made a wondrous discovery in an ancient church tower in northern Bohemia of some ancient Czech poems, the oldest epic yet found from northern or middle Europe. Dobrovsky published it. Then, miracle to say, Hanka found another epic in a castle in southern Bohemia. Even Dobrovsky got a little suspicious at that point, and modern historians are virtually unanimous that Hanka forged them both. Excitement over the epics, however, probably brought many people to the Czechoslovakian cultural nationalism movement who stayed with it even after the epics were shown to be fake.

Palacky became a major political voice for independence in the revolutions of 1848. In that same year Karel Havlicek (1820-1856), a popular satirical poet and journalist, founded his own newspaper. He hit on the idea of writing about Ireland's civil rights and home rule struggles to get around the Austrian censorship, and let his readers draw their own obvious lessons about how all this applied to Czech and Slovak lands under Austrian rule (tangential proof that a single underlying pattern informs all modern nationalisms, thinks this author!). It was Havlicek's best friend who became

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[6] Jakob Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology*. Translated from the Fourth Edition by James Steven Stallybrass, in four volumes. (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1976); see original introduction.

the biggest name in Czechoslovak musical cultural nationalism. Bedrich Smetana (1824-1884) was a school friend who later followed Havlicek to Prague. He defended the barricades and wrote revolutionary marches and a "Song of Freedom" for the occasion. Life thereafter in the autocratically governed Austrian Empire was depressing for him, and he took a job in Sweden. When Austria was defeated in a war with France in 1859, he came home to help work for home rule. No longer young, he tried to teach himself to speak and write Czech instead of his native German. By 1866 he produced "The Bartered Bride," the first Czech national opera. For seven years he worked on a set of six symphonic poems called *Ma Vlast* (*My Fatherland*), and most of them including the famous *Vltava*, were finished by 1875. This tone poem for the river running through Prague is better known, ironically, by the river's German name *Die Moldau*.

In 1862 a gymnastics society called "Sokols" ("Falcons") was founded by Fugner and Tyrs. Its distant inspiration was the German Turnverein from Napoleonic days, but it outgrew its model. Eventually its national assemblies would feature as many as 15,000 young athletes performing gymnastics in unison. The organization had strong political overtones. During World War I, the President-to-be of the 1918 Czechoslovak independent state, Tomas Masaryk, had as one of his two key deputies the current president of the Sokols.

So folktales were a celebrated part of virtually every case of modern cultural nationalism. And now, a final question: was such a celebration wholly a good thing, ethically speaking?

In the overall pattern, there are some disturbing elements from the very beginning. Herder, although amazingly receptive of most cultural groups' uniquenesses, was openly anti-Semitic. In fact, he put anti-Semitism on a new philosophical foundation by identifying Jews as a culture that had outlasted its natural life-cycle and lived on only by parasitizing other peoples. "Turnvater" ("Gymnastics Father")

Jahn, in the next generation of German cultural nationalists, famously said: "If you let your daughter learn French you might just as well teach her to become a whore."[7] J. G. Fichte, in his *Addresses to the German Nation* in the winter of 1807-1808, in French-occupied Berlin, called for a new sort of state, one in which "this love of Fatherland must itself govern the state and be the supreme, final, and absolute authority."[8] The Brothers Grimm did not have that level of overt Francophobia or totalitarian view of the new German state, though there is some echo of those emotions in this paragraph from Jakob Grimm's masterwork, *Teutonic Mythology*:

Nearly all my labors have been devoted, either directly or indirectly, to our [German] earlier language, poetry, and laws. These studies may have appeared to many, and may still appear, useless; to me, they have always seemed a noble and earnest task, definitely and inseparably connected with our common fatherland, and calculated to foster love of it.[9]

And yet there had to be an overall positive value in preserving for the whole people what just a few people in the countryside held in their memories. There must have been positive benefits in terms of social integration and respect from so introducing illiterate and semi-literate people to the proudly literate heights of society as bearers of valuable culture in their own right.

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[7] Jakob Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology*. Translated from the Fourth Edition by James Steven Stallybrass, in four volumes. (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1976); see original introduction.
[8] Jakob Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology*. Translated from the Fourth Edition by James Steven Stallybrass, in four volumes. (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1976); see original introduction.
[9] Jakob Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology,* vol. III. Gloucester MS: Peter Smith, 1976. P. lv.

Perhaps it is as simple as this: to the extent that folktale collection (and cultural nationalism generally) has enriched the lives of the whole linguistic group, and inspired them with new meaning in their current lives, it has been good; but whenever it has caused lack of sympathy for ethnic minorities in the state, or jingoistic foreign policies, it has been bad. Whenever cultural uniqueness is identified as superiority, a dangerous ethical boundary has been crossed.

Another paper could be written on the spread of this pattern virtually worldwide.

Russian Jews, for example, persecuted by a Russifying, and failing, imperial Russian government, began in reaction to celebrate their own culture – first making the street slang of Yiddish into a true literary language (in the hands of writers such as Sholom Aleichem) and then reinventing spoken Hebrew and carrying it in pioneer settlements to Eretz Yisrael, their ancient "Land of Israel," or Jakob. As they displaced Palestinian Arabs who had every reason to believe they had traditional rights to farm the land, a Palestinian consciousness developed. The black-and-white checked khaffiyah so famously worn by Yasser Arafat first emerged as a Palestinian nationalist symbol from the peasant Arab protests at a major land transfer in the Jizreel Valley in 1909-1910.

British power conquered South Africa. One of the peoples so conquered were the first white settlers, from Holland, the Boers. From their Great Trek out of British Cape Colony in 1835-1843, including massacre of some by the Zulu in Natal and the Boer revenge at the Battle of Blood River in 1838, grew a folk legend. By century's end cultural nationalism was celebrating Afrikaans as not just a dialect of Dutch but a separate language that demanded a separate state. In 1938 these Afrikaners, as they now called themselves, celebrated the centennial of the Great Trek with pioneer wagon processions about the country, registering voters as they

went. This was the background of the Nationalist Party's surprise election victory in 1948, and the beginning of apartheid, the most rigid racial segregation of modern times. In reaction to that process, of course, for over a century a black African consciousness was slowly forged. One of the young Nelson Mandela's most important mentors was Anton Lembede, who taught pan-black African cultural and political unity. He had grown up in the Orange Free State, perhaps the most racist party of the country, and had seen the power of Boer/Afrikaner nationalism. Mandela, in his autobiography reflecting on this time of his life, quoted one of Lembede's journal articles:

The history of modern times is the history of nationalism. Nationalism has been tested in the people's struggles and the fires of battle and found to be the only antidote against foreign rule and modern imperialism.

I am too new to Bhutan to know much about its history, its struggles, its cultural consciousness, and its patriotism; but this modern cultural nationalism has surely transformed Bhutan's two giant neighbors, India and China, in the past century-and-a-half, as well as every other major Asian nation. Something about the modern world demands that one has some belonging larger than family and clan, and smaller than all humanity – a unit large enough for economic and defense sufficiency. Some places are more easily defended than others – Bhutan and Switzerland have parallels in this regard long noted, and so an advantage for a small state in surviving near stronger neighbors. In some eras greater dangers from stronger powers mean that one needs to be patriotic to a larger and stronger unit just for survival. In less dangerous eras loyalty to smaller units satisfies those economic and defense requirements.

So what has all this to do with preserving Bhutanese storytelling and maximizing Gross National Happiness? If we were just dealing with the first, the solution would be simple:

isolation and poverty have historically been the greatest conservators of folk tales and folkways generally. But these days isolation is not really possible, anywhere in the world, and desperate poverty has a violence stitched into its very fabric.

There was one institution in the development of this new cultural nationalism in 19th and early 20th century Europe that I wonder if Bhutanese educators and decision-makers of the 21st century still might find of interest. It evolved in Denmark, which, unlike Germany (with Hitler's decidedly evil use of folk consciousness) had a positive, healthy experience with cultural nationalism. This was the Danish *Folkehöjskole* – literally the Folk High School, or more prosaically The People's College. The first one was established in 1844, and in the next 75 years or so the institution played a key role in the growth of literacy in the country from around 20% to upwards of 90%, in the transition from a monarchy to a very constitutional monarchy with all of the popular education that required, in the economic revival of the country with its flagship micro-industry (as I guess we'd call it today) of the Danish dairy co-op, and not least, in the growth of self-respect and self-confidence of the Danish people after their disastrous defeats in the Napoleonic wars earlier in the century, and the loss of Schleswig and Holstein in another war in 1864. It all began with one man deeply caught up in his country's traditional stories.

N.S.F. Grundtvig was born in 1783 (making him just two years older than Jakob Grimm, with whom he corresponded and to whom he has many parallels). His early education was at the hands of his mother; he was a precocious student and loved reading. Beginning at age nine, for six years he attended a Latin grammar school with emphasis on memorization and discipline – one he recalled with great distaste later in life, calling it "a school for death." He went on to the national university in Copenhagen, the capital, taught of course in Latin – a university that was narrowly geared towards

producing Denmark's civil servants and army officers. By this time he had come in contact with the German Romantic writings of Herder, Goethe, Schiller and Fichte, and threw himself into study of Old Norse mythology despite the curriculum. He claimed to find there a vigor lacking in his own lack-luster age, and began his life-long work of reviving this in the Danish national consciousness. In line with the whole Romantic movement, he saw the continuation of language to be a key bearer of culture. Here is a translation of a verse of his 1838 poem on the Danish language:

> The mother tongue is a chain of roses
> it entwines people great and small
> only in it does the spirit of the ancestor live
> only in it can the heart move freely[10]

He took the common speech – "servant's hall Danish" – as the vehicle for his great translations of *Beowulf* and the *Eddas*. In 1832, when he would have been almost 60 years of age, his masterwork *The Mythology of the North* was published, fruit of all that study of folk literature.

Along the way, in his chronological study of Danish history – in 1810 in his own life, when he was about 27 – he came to the conversion of the Danish kings to Christianity. It caused him to wrestle with the role of religion in his own life, and brought him after some personal crisis to a new understanding of religion and life. One reader's synopsis of that change is quoted below; perhaps a Bhutanese reader will agree that it has more than a little resemblance to Lam Drukpa Kunley's unusual understanding of Buddhism, albeit without the latter's sharp sense of humor:

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[10] Lorenz Rerup, "N.S.F. Grundtvig's Position in Danish Nationalism" in A. M. Allchin, D. Jasper, J. H. Schjorring, and K. Stevenson (eds.), *Heritage and Prophecy: Grundtvig and the English-Speaking World* (Canterbury Press Norwich, 1994), p. 240.

> Theologians argue as to what one may or may not do, drink, dance, smoke, etc. Grundtvig believed in living life to the full and argued that what was according to nature was right. Of course one could not kill a man – that is not natural. But everyone has within him something which tells him what he may and may not do. What I may do is perhaps not the same as what you may do. But the first thing is to be human. One cannot be a full Christian without first being a full human being. We must realize our human potentialities before we can realize God. Some people will argue that it is necessary to be a Christian before one can be human but this is like being a man before one is a child.[11]

Grundtvig's first public presentation of this in 1815 created a storm within the establishment, and within ten years he was virtually driven out of Denmark's official Lutheran church. But the power of his poetry, rooted in the old folk literature (perhaps half the hymns in the Danish Lutheran hymnbook are by him) and the attractiveness of his argument gradually ate away at the old conservative establishment, and in 1853, when he was 70 years old, he was made honorary bishop by the king. What an interesting fusion of the folk literature (mainly pre-Christian) and a romantically inspired Christianity. And this in turn led to a new idea about education.

If popular government was to work in Denmark, he reasoned, citizens would have to be educated in it, and educated in a way that didn't separate them from their livelihoods. As Grundtvig said, "It is just this we lack. Professors and learned folk can and obviously must be few, but Danish citizens – educated and useful citizens – we must all be." His solution was the *Folkehöjskole*, first publically proposed in that same 1832 *Mythology of the North*.

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[11] Olive Dame Campbell, *The Danish Folk School* (New York: Thge Macmillan Company, 1928), p. 54. The first and second year curricula of Askov folk school, as of 1922-23, given later in this paper, are also from Campbell, pp. 101-2.

Gear it for young adults, age 18-25, said Grundtvig, those who are making many of life's critical decisions – of mate, of occupation, of mature religious understanding. Use books only sparingly (said this voracious reader and tireless writer); they are after all only valuable once one has the desire and will to use them. It was that desire – "for a truer and deeper understanding of life, a purer and more vital personal expression in the service of a better nation and a better humanity" – that had to be aroused by this People's College. That done, the young adults would themselves embark on "a hungry and endless search" for the exact practical knowledge they needed to carry out their life's purpose. Teach history first and foremost through the *Eddas* and sagas; richness of language and spirit are more important than objective, rational truth at the beginning of such a course. Equip the people with all of their Danish heritage – its language, its geography, its nature life, its social evolution, its economic conditions. World history should not be ignored, but was to be considered mainly as it explained the native.

There was a positive mood to his disciples, "the happy Grundtvigianer" as they were sometimes called. Denmark had suffered horribly in the Napoleonic Wars. It had tried to stay neutral, but first the British destroyed its fleet at anchor at Copenhagen, and when in reaction the Danes joined Napoleon they joined just in time to lose the war. They lost Norway, which they had held for 400 years, to Sweden. Massive economic depression followed after 1815, in peacetime, and by all rights the people should have been depressed as well. But Grundvig said, "Out of loss, gain," with a new focus on the Danish folk heritage and a new kind of spirituality.

Grundtvig originally thought of one single folk school near the geographic center of Denmark. The government refused to build it, so instead it began with private experiments. In 1844, a serious young man named Kristen Kold established the first Grundtvigian-style folk high school – in a parish that

had a Gruntvigian minister who had already prepared the ground for him. Within 20 years another ten were established, and then dozens more in the next few decades. They came just in time to help educate the mass of the people in civic matters (in 1831 the King had ordered the introduction of "consultative assemblies" in the different divisions of the country, and the first of these began work in 1835; eventually the Constitution of 1849 gave all adults the vote and religious freedom).[12] At the same time they played a key role with the transition of rural Denmark into the most famous dairy nation in the world. No more than 25% of young adults in the farming communities attended the folk high schools, but 80% of the heads of the Danish dairy co-ops had attended them, and most of the co-ops were established in the shadow of the folk schools. Free schools for younger children were often taught in the mornings, with adults coming in the evenings. Schools of practical farming classes also budded off of the folk high schools.

The *Folkehöjskole* began with winter courses for men only, later added women's courses in the summer, and finally became coed. Gymnastics were gradually introduced into the curriculum. They kept up their religious association, and had a home-like quality of life, disarming the suspicions of conservative parents who often had to foot the tuition bill. Here is what the curriculum for a first and a second year looked like, in 1922 and 1923, at Askov, one of the more prominent of the schools (founded in 1864 just across the border from the lost province of Schleswig, as if to emphasize that "out of loss, gain" slogan of Grundtvig's). Here is the schedule of the first year:

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[12] Hans Henningsen, "The Danish Folk High School,"in A. M. Allchin, D. Jasper, J. H. Schjorring, and K. Stevenson (eds.), *Heritage and Prophecy: Grundtvig and the English-Speaking World* (Canterbury Press Norwich, 1994), p. 287.

Hour	Students	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
8:00-9:00	All	Geography	Geography	Historical-	Historical-	Sociology	Sociology
				Mathematics	Mathematics		
9:00-10:00	Men	Danish	Danish	Engl/German	Danish	Danish	Engl/German
	Women	Gymnastics	Gymnastics	Gymnastics	Gymnastics	Gymnastics	Gymnastics
10:10-10:20	All	Coffee	Coffee	Coffee	Coffee	Coffee	Coffee
10:30-11:30	All	Historical-	Historical-	History	History	Geology	Geology
		Physics	Physics				
11:30-12:20	Men	Arithmetic	History	Arithmetic	History	Arithmetic	History
	Women	History	Arithmetic	History	Arithmetic	History	Arithmetic
12:30-2:00	Men	Gymnastics	Gymnastics	Gymnastics	Gymnastics	Gymnastics	Gymnastics
	Women	Handwork &	Drawing	Handwork &	Drawing	Handwork &	Drawing
2:00-3:00	All	DINNER	DINNER	DINNER	DINNER	DINNER	DINNER
4:00-5:00	All	Bible	Bible	Song	Drawing/	Drawing/	Song
					Hygiene	Hygiene	
5:00-6:00	Men	Hygiene		Hygiene			
	Women	Danish	Engl/German	Danish	Danish	Engl/German	Danish
6:00-7:00	All	Church	Church	History of	History of	World	World
		History	History	Literature	Literature	history	history

And below is the schedule of the second year. Notice how in both years math, physics and literature are all taught as "historical," or "the history of." This was to make a story out of these discipline (as for example how Descartes, in Netherlands refuge from persecution in France, had the insight that every regular curve graphed on an x-y axis could be expressed as a mathematical formula), to an audience that learned best that way.

Hour	**Students**	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
8:00-9:00	All	Practical	Practical	Geography	Geography	Book-keeping	Book-keeping
		Physics	Physics				
9:00-10:00	Men	History	History	Engl/German	History	History	Engl/German
	Women	Gymnastics	Gymnastics	Gymnastics	Gymnastics	Gymnastics	Gymnastics
10:10-10:20	All	Coffee	Coffee	Coffee	Coffee	Coffee	Coffee
10:30-11:30	All	Historical-	Historical-	History	History	Geology	Geology
		Physics	Physics				
11:30-12:20	Men		Danish	Danish	Psychology	Danish	Danish
	Women	Hygiene	Danish	Danish	Hygiene	Danish	Danish
12:30-2:00	Men	Gymnastics	Gymnastics	Gymnastics	Gymnastics	Gymnastics	Gymnastics
	Women	Handwork	Handwork	Drawing/ Lab	Drawing /Lab	Drawing /Lab	Drawing /Lab
2:00-3:00	All	DINNER	DINNER	DINNER	DINNER	DINNER	DINNER
4:00-5:00	All	Sociology	Sociology	Song	Sociology	Bible	Song
5:00-6:00	Men		Biology			Biology	Biology
	Women	History	Engl/German	History	History of	Engl/German	History
6:00-7:00	All	Church	Church	History of	History of	World	World
		History	history	Literature	Literature	history	history

In conclusion, at this conference there has been much discussion on how to preserve and spread the traditional values-bearing stories of Bhutan. In Bhutan (as in most of the rest of the world) there is also the problem of keeping some of the "best and brightest" in the villages and farmscapes to keep these vital; young people the world over are attracted to the bright lights of the big cities to escape rural boredom and drudgery. In these regards perhaps the Danish folk high school has aspects worthy of emulation. More than any other single institution it brought little Denmark, depressed by great losses to more powerful neighbors, a renewed sense of patriotism and a healthy confidence in its own culture. It played a key role in civic education and rural economic

development, at a stage of political and economic development that at least superficially seems to resemble that of Bhutan in recent times. The government of Bhutan already has over 700 "non-formal education centers" established throughout the countryside. Limited mainly to instruction in literacy and numeracy of adults at present, this institution would seem a natural candidate to expand to a culturally-oriented folk high school. I wonder how such a curriculum as Askov's, above – geared for young adults, to help them to a more fulfilling life in the village rather than remove them from it – might at this particular time in history be adapted to a Bhutanese context by those who know the country and its heritage best? It would surely feature traditional stories.

Ritualizing Story: A Way to Heal Malady

Tandin Dorji*

Introduction

With each passing generation, storytelling is becoming a tradition that is fast fading into the depths of past. As an art and a tradition that is found to be ancient and embedded in the Bhutanese culture, storytelling is a powerful vehicle for instilling values and connecting generations and communities. It is also a source of entertainment and amusement. Today, the older populace of some countries is even trying to find solace by forming storytelling groups as a means to build new family bonds.

But, does the purpose of storytelling go beyond preserving cultural harmony, connecting people, transmitting values and building community?

In response, this paper will study a ritual called Gyalpo[1] choedni (*Rgyal po ched ni*) (Expelling the Gyalpo) as a case to illustrate storytelling as an antidote to propitiate malicious spirits to heal maladies thereby ushering in happiness.

Role of stories

Storytelling and listening to stories is an art and tradition that cuts across all cultural frontiers. There are more

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[1] Gyalpo is a class of malignant spirits. However, in our case the reference is made to Changshing Gyalpo, the central character of the ritual.

similarities than differences in the themes of the stories narrated in different communities. However, each community interprets them differently based on their tradition, culture and beliefs giving a new life to the stories. Each community also has its special style of narrating stories, making storytelling a thrilling experience (Tandin Dorji, 2002).

On the one side, storytelling is dying amongst the youth of many communities, while on the other new approaches of storytelling are designed particularly by elders and scholars. Stories today are told for varieties of reasons ranging from entertainment to building community vitality and even for healing the ailing souls as will be discussed in this paper.

Entertainment and storytelling

One of the primary and original functions of storytelling was entertainment. In the absence of any kind of entertainment such as television, radio, video, cinema, among many others in the traditional societies, storytelling played a major role of keeping the people entertained. For instance, in many pockets of rural Bhutan, even now storytelling is still a source of entertainment. In the pasture lands people exchange interesting stories when their animals graze in the lush meadows. Tucked in the warmth of their blankets, parents recount stories to lull their children to sleep. In other countries, elder people have formed storytelling groups to keep their otherwise inactive life engaged.

Transmitting knowledge and storytelling

People with the art of weaving beautiful stories and narrating it to their audience can transmit valuable knowledge. Even otherwise, storytelling is one of the best ways of passing information and knowledge. In each story lies buried a large expanse of diverse human experience and expression of that experience. Through the stories we learn lessons of hope and

despair, happiness and sadness, success and failure, good and bad, victory and defeat. Storytelling is still integral to the way of life. Stories are used for explaining the history of the land and people, and giving practical knowledge of nature. Without doubt, storytelling is the centre piece of life long learning.

Bridging the generation gap and storytelling

Telling stories about one's family and community is becoming a necessity. In a rapidly changing lifestyle, the younger generation is often disconnected from their parents and community. Thus, sharing stories that are related to the younger generation is a tool that enables them to make sense of things around them and get a fresh perspective on their ways of seeing things. Children learn a lot about the history, culture and beliefs of their community and family through stories and enable them to take a comfortable journey into their future; storytelling "offers guidance and insights into life's lessons."

Storytelling is one way of connecting people of all ages together, consequently increasing understanding, compassion and respect among different generations.

Building community and storytelling

Stories represent the collective memory of a community, for the members interpret it in a similar way. The community members relate the stories to the events and activities of the community. It is through the stories that the community members share the same values and learn similar lessons from the stories. Therefore, sharing stories connects people to one another in meaningful and long-lasting ways. Through discussion of stories we can learn to both express ourselves and listen to one another. Storytelling can lead the people of younger generation towards a more meaningful and

responsible community. One way of sharing our uniqueness while at the same time discovering similarities is storytelling. Storytelling also helps establish bonds with past and eventually build the community.

Storytelling also gives identity to a community. The stories that the members of the community share and the way they interpret stories make each community different from the other. In this uniqueness lies their identity. Thus, the stories that are stored in the collective memory of the community are the live source of the identity and the vitality of the community. That is exactly the reason why many tribal communities have created storytelling groups and websites where they share their stories as an approach to rebuild their community identity.

Healing and storytelling

In many cultures story telling is also associated with healing. Storytelling is generally regarded as an entertainment by many. Some have seen storytelling as a vehicle to transmit values, promote harmony and peace, educate people and build communities. Another interesting role of storytelling is healing. Stories as will be demonstrated later are also a ritual that is conducted to expel the evil spirits and usher in good health and consequently happiness.

Stories are recounted as an antidote to malady. However, the setting is solemn unlike normal storytelling sessions. In this case, an elderly man sits near the sick person and poises himself in a commanding manner and recounts stories where the evil spirits are subdued mercilessly. The voice of the storyteller is also loud and terrifying to scare away the malignant spirits harming the sick person.

The other modality is story as a ritual to heal the ill. This case that will be illustrated a little later is Gyalpo Choedni, expelling the Gyalpo.

Story as ritual: A peek into *Gyalpo Choedni*, a ritual to expel the Gyalpo

Levi Strauss, the Structuralist Anthropologist, analyzes a ritual which is a shamanic healing ceremony among the Cuna in his famous essay, "The Effectiveness of Symbols." He observes that the shaman sings a mythic story and helps a mother through a difficult childbirth. The story is the victory of the Shaman over the malicious spirit.

Similarly, in Bhutan too there are rituals whose content are stories and the finality is to heal the ill. A proper example of such a case is a ritual called Gyalpo Choedni (Driving away the Gyalpo).[3] It is conducted in several villages of Wangdiphodrang Dzongkhag.

The story: Origin of the ritual

A very long time ago, in Lingkatoed, the Kingdom of King Gesar of Ling, a willow tree (changma shing) gave birth to a strange object that appeared like a filled sack. People were shocked and worried that it was ominous and might bring calamity to Lingkatoed.

However, to the surprise of his subjects, King Gesar of Ling opened the sack and found a baby boy inside; he decided to bring him up. He was named Changshing Gyalpo, King of Changma tree as he was born from changma tree. As the

[3] All the information on the ritual had been shared by Paw (Medium) Dorji who is 55 years old. He is from Ngawang village, Bjena gewog, Wangdiphodrang Dzongkhag. He was interviewed on May 24, 2009 in Wangdiphodrang town. He is the key informant for this ritual.

baby turned into a boy, King Gesar of Ling made him the cowboy of his favourite cow called *Ba Tay Ngyen Khoedru Zom*.

Near the cowshed lived a man who cultivated a big wheat field that belonged to another person. As the summer wheat turned lush, the man calculated a bountiful harvest. However, to his utter dismay, despite his efforts to protect his field of thriving wheat from animals, every morning he found that his wheat was eaten by an animal. That summer he lost all his wheat to an animal that he could not identify. He suspected the cow of King Gesar of Ling but there was no evidence and his wit was incomparable to the Changshing Gyalpo to prove his suspicion.

Another season came for cultivating wheat and the man like others in the village did his part. Again, wheat turned green and despite his effort to protect his wheat field, one morning he found that a small portion of the wheat field was eaten by an animal. He tried to trace the footprints but could not find one. He kept close guard of the cow of Changshing Gyalpo but to no avail.

Who could have eaten the lush wheat? It of course was *Ba Tay Ngyen Khoedru Zom*, the cow of Changshing Gyalpo. The cow unlashed itself and went to the wheat field when the man on guard could not help but fall asleep just for a while around the time of the roosters' first signal of arrival of dawn. The cow ate its fill and returned to its shed. It was a clever cow for it left no foot prints. It wiped the prints of its foreleg with its hind leg and that of the hind leg with its tail.

The man could tolerate no more so he kept a trap of poisoned arrow. As usual, the cow came to graze in the wheat field and was hit with the poisoned arrow of the trap. The cow died in the field. The culprit was caught and the neighbour demanded for compensation. However, Changshing Gyalpo

demanded that the skin of the cow be removed and a small chunk of meat be offered to the guardian deities. The man agreed and after removing the hide, Changshing Gyalpo cut a small chunk of meat and threw it as offering. Two crows came but instead of eating the chunk of meat, they fought. Two dogs came and they also fought; two boys came and fought; the mothers of the two boys joined the fight; the fathers and the local leaders too. There was unrest and unhappiness in the region for everyone was entangled in the conflict.

Finally, the news of the unrest and conflict that was happening in his Kingdom reached the ears of King Gesar of Ling. The wise King consulted the best astrologer to diagnose the cause of the conflict and the associated prescription.

The cause of all the conflict was that Changshing Gyalpo intentionally did not look after the cow. The recommendation was to chase away Changshing Gyalpo beyond the frontiers of Lingkatoed, the Kingdom of King Gesar of Ling if peace was to be restored.

Thus, a ritual was performed as advised by the astrologer and Changshing Gyalpo was chased away crossing many rivers and lakes. All the misfortunes and causes of conflict and sickness of Lingkatoed were also sent with him. Peace and happiness was once again restored in the Kingdom of King Gesar of Ling.

Expelling the Gyalpo: Preparatory niceties and the ritual

The preparation of the ritual takes no more than an hour and not many items are also required. About a kilogramme of cereals comprising nine types (Dru na gu), a changma branches that is cut and tied into small bundle that is no bigger than a handful. An effigy of Changshing Gyalpo, about 15 centimetres is made normally of wheat flour. A butter lamp, again of wheat flour is also made.

The items used are all related to the story. Changma branches are used because Changshing Gyalpo was born from this tree. Effigy of Changshing Gyalpo and butter lamp is made of wheat flour as the cow had eaten wheat and was the cause of all the conflict.

Expelling the Gyalpo: the ritual

The ritual is performed by a Pawo, a medium. He wears a head gear, scarf and carries a hand drum and a bell. The ritual begins with the invocation of King Gesar of Ling. Then, the driving away of Changshing Gyalpo begins from the rooftop since it is the abode of the flag deity.[4] Similarly, Changshing Gyalpo is requested to leave each and every corner of the house explaining that each corner had been already designated to someone and that there is no place for him. Thus, Changshing Gyalpo is cajoled to leave every corner of the house and slowly out of the house beyond the rivers and lakes.

Each time Changshing Gyalpo is coaxed to leave a part of the house, the effigy and the offerings are gradually shifted out of the house. Finally, the effigy is taken out of the house and kept facing the direction prescribed by the astrologer.

Significance of the ritual

Gyalpo Choedni (Expelling the Gyalpo) is a ritual to expel a category of spirit known as Gyalpo. It is a very simple ritual that does not incur much expenditure. The purpose of conducting this ritual is to expel the Gyalpo in order usher in happiness, harmony, good health and prosperity. Expelling the Gyalpo also signifies victory over evil and also that of

[4] In the villages where the ritual is conducted, like in many other villages, flags are erected on the rooftop, normally during the annual ritual.

malicious gossip. Since it is an inexpensive affair, even the poorest in the village conducts it. It is in fact a household ritual that takes about only two hours including the preparation and execution of the ritual.

Story and Ritual: A comparative look

Stories and ritual or storytelling and conducting rituals have many overlapping themes. Most stories concern the supernatural. There are talking animals and men who can hold the lion by its feet and whirl it in the stories. The characters and the places in the stories are so different from the natural that the audience can't help but open their mouth in awe. Storytelling takes its audience into the paranormal world and entertains and educates the audience. The audience actually forgets the natural and that is exactly why no one inquires how a lame monkey could teach the poor boy mannerism fitting of a majestic king.

Similarly, the rituals take the audience into the high havens above and the world of the subterranean deities below. The audience is immersed in the supernatural world as the medium cajoles the malignant spirits and negotiates with them in favour of the sick or for the wellbeing of the community. On some occasions the evil forces are threatened and commanded to submit to the demands of the medium.

Among other figures of speech, both storytelling and conducting rituals apply hyperbole and metaphor, at times, lavishly. This could be the reason why people enjoy listening to a medium chant during rituals or a storyteller narrates stories. For instance, instead of saying "the hunter was frightened when he met the bear," narrators add excitement by saying for instance "when the hunter met the bear he was frightened. He was so terrified that he started to tremble hysterically that sweat ran down his body like a brook. His teeth clattered so much that the sound could be heard from

the other side of the valley. His hairs stood on their ends that one might mistake him for an angry porcupine" (Tandin Dorji, 2005:10). In the similar manner, the language used in the ritual is extremely poetic with plentiful use of figures of speech (See Tandin Dorji, 2005:603-604 to have a feel of the poetic use of language in rituals).

Another meeting point of storytelling and conducting ritual is the theme of the stories and the rituals. Both underscore the victory of good over evil. For instance, in the stories it is always the Prince Charming that kills the Belligerent Giant. In the like manner, in the rituals it is always the medium with the help of the deities who subdue the evil spirits.

Both the rituals and storytelling are performances in space and time that evoke other worlds. In both the cases we navigate the world of the supernatural. In rituals as well as storytelling, it is the characters of the astonishing world that act upon the world of humans, the real life. Therefore, what we come to understand is that conducting rituals is an alternative approach of storytelling to heal the ill.

Conclusion

There are many common points that storytelling and rituals share. Both storytelling and rituals concern the world of the supernatural. Thus, rituals can provide another way of storytelling to prevent malicious spirits from causing malady and unhappiness as illustrated by the case of Gyalpo Choedni, expelling the Gyalpo.

There are other rituals that also contain stories, and probably the rituals originated from the stories for similar purposes as those of the case discussed. The Lhabon of Bjena village, Wangdue Phodrang district of western Bhutan and Kharphu of Tsamang village, Mongar district of eastern Bhutan are just

two examples of rituals as storytelling to bless people with prosperity and prevent malicious spirits from causing malady and unhappiness.[7]

If ritual is an alternative way of expressing traditional stories, it will be useful to explore further and uncover the interrelatedness of story modalities within traditional communities. Studying the content of traditional songs would reveal additional layers and channels of storytelling. If stories are usually told to entertain and instruct, rituals and songs may be other forms of narrating devised by the wise elders to feed different needs of the spirit.

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[7] The content of the Lhabon ritual is about a farmer's life. The ritual specialist chants stories of making ploughshare, yoke, ploughing the field, cultivating barley, harvesting barley, etc. Interesting each story is associated with driving away malicious spirits that causes misfortune and blesses people with good health and prosperity. (For details see Tandin Dorji, 2002: 179-194)

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Preserving Tradition and Enhancing Learning Through Youth Storytelling

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Once upon a time, oral storytelling ruled. It was the medium through which people learned their history, settled their arguments and came to make sense of the phenomena of their world. Then along came the written world with all its mysterious symbols. The ability to read and write now ruled many lands. Oral storytelling, like the simpleminded youngest brother in the olden tales, was foolishly cast aside. Oh, in casual ways people continued to tell each other stories at bedtime, across the dinner tables, and around campfires, but the respect for storytelling as a tool of learning was almost forgotten. (NCTE Guideline, 1992)

Stories are the essence of a culture. Whether they teach how to live in a hostile or fragile environment, represent the collective memory of people, encapsulate the values or promote a hero, storytelling is at the heart of cultural identity and social life (Koki, 1992). It is the recounting of myths, folklore and other forms of oral narrative that maintains group solidarity and identity. Story has the power to transform, reform and re-ignite. Once stories are no longer told and re-told, the culture dies and the people are lost.

By examining what storytelling is, how it controls cultural behavior and promotes identity, this paper will have definitive reasons for preserving storytelling. Next we will observe how storytelling can enhance learning and finally will suggest strategies that have been implemented to change the

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contemporary storytelling landscape. Throughout the presentation, it should be evident that the involvement of young people is imperative.

Storytelling is a traditional art form which has been practiced for thousands of years in every society and culture known to humankind. Traditional stories have been passed from generation to generation through folktales, songs, rituals, chants and even artifacts. These oral narratives are critical historical components that pre-date written words. They explain the culture and how it came to be.

The fact that stories are told or performed orally is a distinctive factor that is embedded in the qualities of the storyteller's persona including voice, gestures, movement, and even clothing. Some storytellers are called elders, legend keepers or tradition bearers and often receive extensive training to ensure the accuracy of the story. Others become story enthusiasts and historians, who choose to teach through storytelling, and still other tellers simply tell for entertainment and performance. Regardless of the reason for telling, it is the task of the teller to explain "how things are, why they are and our role and purpose" (Herrmann, 2007). Storytellers have become a part of society and its development and therefore an integral part of the culture of each community. Throughout the centuries, storytellers have been honored and respected and people sought them for advice and council through story.

So, what is storytelling? The National Storytelling Association has adopted the following statement for its membership:

> At its core, storytelling is the art of using language, vocabulary and /or physical movement and gestures to reveal the elements and images of story to a specific, live audience. A central unique aspect of storytelling is the reliance on the audience to develop specific visual imagery and detail to

> complete and co-create the story. (National Storytelling Association, 1997)

This explanation clearly delineates the role of storytelling and suggests its separation from written literature. Stories illicit a "live" or immediate response from the listener and so, storytelling becomes an interactive activity between the teller and listener in which imagination forms the pictures. Meaning for the stories is established in the minds of the listener based upon his/her prior experience. Likewise the storyteller must understand the story nuances, background and meaning and adapt that information to the response of the audience. The story experience then is a co-creative exchange of thought.

Through this exchange, stories link the past to the present and thus help people understand cultural and social mandates by recognizing the consequence of certain behaviors. In other words, by listening to stories, people learn social expectations. They acquire knowledge and information which explains everything from season changes to animal behavior thus giving them survival information. For this reason, "Every human culture in the world has told stories" (Herrmann). Ong, further suggests, "in an oral culture, knowledge, once acquired, must be repeated or it would be lost" (Ong, 1982). And so, stories must be repeated to anchor ideas in the minds of the listener. Thus the role of the storyteller is further expanded.

In order to know who we are, it is essential to know who and what we have been. Folktales or stories about people and their activities provide with the oldest accounts which have been shared among people. They tell us how life was for the peasant and the king and for the old and young. They often tell us the history of a particular area, the values of the people and how they lived and the customs that dictated behavior. This information gives us "roots" and assists us in building a personal identity.

To illustrate the profound effect of story, researcher and anthropologist, Carolyn Nordstrom, who spent time working with Angolan war orphans, tells this story. Entering a group of children's "home" in the storm drains, she was amazed at the immaculate home and order imposed by a group of children. They had created a "family", a culture where everything was shared equally. This example speaks to the power of story to teach and dictate values (Ledding, 2009).

People and communities need and use stories and ultimately become "story dependent" because story explains their world. Stories preserve and transmit history as they are passed from generation to generation. But it is important to know that stories transmit more than the plot. The way it is told also becomes part of the tradition of the people.

Tribal Elder Cecilia Kunz writing about the Tlingit community's need to preserve its identity to and with the land and animals, tells how the people use a combination of story, totem poles and dance to "pass on" traditions and to express the beliefs of the culture. These story performances are celebrated in festivals and holy days. The belief and understanding about the interconnectedness between humans and the world become the central idea of the story and is sealed in the unique tribal tradition (Kunz, 2008).

The Bhutanese culture, living in contact with the environment, likewise uses storytelling often accompanied by dance, music, masks and clothing to instruct the people about the land and its value (Evans, 2006). Folktales reflect the beliefs, cultural identity, vocabulary and language forms that relate to the community that originated the story. By collecting and preserving these stories, Evans believes that through story the country can identify the values that make its people happy thereby ensuring harmony and pride in the place where the people live. This is the goal of GNH or Gross National Happiness initiated by the King of Bhutan. Identify the culture and tradition and you understand the people.

Levette Davis, in his book, *A Guide to American Folklore*, suggests that folktales provide bridges from one culture to another. In this contemporary society where people are separated by differences in race, cultural bias, economic status, and geography, the historical information dealing with how "folks" live and the folktales which guided them, may be our best tool for dealing with cultural gaps and diversity. In other words, stories have the power to persuade people to understand that we can and must live peaceably with those people who are different than we are.

It would seem that this critical cultural component would be the central focus of a community and that every effort would be made to preserve and promote storytelling. However, in many countries, storytelling has lost, and is losing, its relevancy and so the loss of cultural identity.

As our culture advances, new tools and technologies evolve so that people are comfortable. However, too often these devices destroy older culture by promoting instant gratification, excluding elders or the disadvantaged population, denying the oral heritage, and do, instead, propagate a written or digital culture (StoryBase). Writing literacy replaces the oral component as the primary communication device. People prefer to read and write to acquire knowledge and information.

Annie Auckland, lead teacher of the IB Cambodia program, points out that two problems occur with the emphasis on print. First, there may be a lack of accessible literature in schools and communities and second not every language has a written code or alphabet thereby rendering reading and writing inaccessible to most citizens.

A more relevant example of the accessibility of print material is observed in Bhutan. Until 1960, modern education in Bhutan was negligible with only 11 schools and 400 students.

By 2008, it is reported that 447 primary and junior schools and 455 education centers and 155,234 students are now a part of the education system (Adhikari, 2008). However "overcrowded classrooms, limited and poor library facilities, lack of sufficient and appropriate reading materials…are recognized as major hurdles" (Hariprasad, 2009). In Bhutan, the accessibility to print proves to be a determent to reading and literacy among the people.

The printed word, then, important as it is to learning, may have signaled the decline of oral traditional narration in some areas, and proved not to be the best answer to literacy. A far greater impact on the decline of storytelling may be observed by a simple turn of a knob and the room is saturated with noise, color, and movement through the magic of television. Programs, which have taken millions of dollars and thousands of hours to produce, quickly replace the one person rendition of a folktale, fairy tale or personal experience. Television is simply more entertaining and takes less listener involvement!

Add the other media and electronic invasion, such as IPods, cell phones, e-mails, Facebook, and DVDs, which transmit stories in an abbreviated form, and we find people communicating with "things" instead of humans. The sender of the text message is unseen and may be unknown. The receiver of the message must decipher the message, code it and hope that he/she understands. We have a game of ambiguity which, because of no live transmission, loses information.

These electronic substitutes, while rampant in the United States, are also seen in many countries and nations. Kunzang Choden, collector of Bhutanese folktales, writes, "I came to the conclusion that the art of the oral tradition is definitely on the decline, worse still, the story sessions are rapidly being replaced by video sessions." She went on to note the response

of a Bhutanese storyteller who said, "Why do you want me to tell old stories?"

Choden further recognized the importance of the stories as a link to her personal identity and observed that her cultural base could be lost for her children. "Knowing their base, they may better understand and appreciate their own lives" writes Choden and so, she began his collection of "old stories", – folktales which are lost in the mountains and minds of people of Bhutan (Choden, 1994).

Stories are the models for what has been and the predictors of what can be. They are the key to understanding, tolerance and problem solving. However at this time, it appears that storytelling as a community activity has been declining in many countries and areas. This loss poses a potential danger of misunderstanding and a loss of communal identity. Preservation of stories is not an option, but a necessity for the survival of a global society.

Turning our attention to learning, we find teachers expressing difficulty in motivating students to listen or read. The result is shown in low test scores and difficulty communicating ideas and information. Noting the need for using storytelling in the classroom, Sima and Cordi, veteran storytellers and teachers respond: "Storytelling is the ultimate teaching tool. Unlike television…or computer learning which is passive, storytelling encourages face to face interaction. With storytelling, young people actively participate in learning. A true educational environment is formed." K. W. Zabel agrees and further states: "Storytelling is the cornerstone of the teaching profession" (Zabel, 1991).

Because stories rely on words, they become a source of language for humans. Hearing, which begins in the first weeks of fetal development and ends only with physical or sensory impairment or death, provides people with a constant

means of learning. It requires no auxiliary support such as books or recording instruments and is readily available to everyone within range of the sounds being produced. It is a natural tool for the teacher and is invaluable in managing and teaching. We teach and learn through speech. And speech, when organized into stories, provides information. "Surely stories should be a central part of the world of primary teachers whether they are teaching the mother tongue or foreign language" (Wright, 1995).

Research supports the idea that "even students with low motivation and weak academic skills are more likely to listen, read, write and work hard in the context of storytelling" (U.S. Department of Education, 1982). National storytellers Judy Sima, Sherry Norfolk and Barbara McBride–Smith and Donald Davis, who frequently visit and do storytelling residencies in schools, report rapt attention and participation from classes of students. If for no other reason, this motivation incentive should be the reason for placing storytelling in school curriculum in an effort to improve educational performance.

Second, storytelling is a foundation for literacy. Without the acquisition of knowledge, upward mobility is thwarted. We store information in our brains, but if the database is not filed, the retrieval is not possible. Our educational systems require students to learn data and facts which may have no "real" connection or meaning for the learner. Stories create images and "file" facts in settings and situations connected to people and events. Thus the factual data becomes interrelated and meaningful for the student (Caine and Caine, 1994).

Story is the best vehicle for passing on factual information. It is the ultimate teaching tool. By retelling a story they have heard, the learner transfers images into his own words repeating the information and integrating it into the database. Sima and Cordi suggest that, "Stories are trapped in books: it is the storyteller who sets them free." And when set free,

students begin searching for more information and explanations.

More specifically, in the literacy search, storytelling enhances reading, writing and speaking skills. There is general agreement that oral narrative provides the listener with a model of structure and organization of ideas (Gillard, 1997, NCTE, 1992). Both reading and listening are similar processes in that both involve receptive processing. Reading print material requires much individual practice and skill acquisition, while storytelling involves a physical presence of a teller with a story. The children listen vicariously at first and then become immersed as the story unfolds. "By telling stories, students associate reading with pleasure," state Weiss and Hamilton, "which is an important step towards literacy." If children identify reading with worksheets, they are likely to view reading as tedious and boring and may refuse to study. When we consider that the lowest achievement scores across the nation rest in reading, we note that a New York Times study regarding the reading habits says that ninety percent of fifth grader children are spending less than one percent of their free time reading (McBride Smith, 2005).

However when students have heard and read stories, writing appears to be more spontaneous. Weiss and Hamilton suggest that the reason for this interest is that "stories beget stories". A live interactive storytelling session allows the teller to explore the story without penalty and criticism. The teller simply makes the story "his own" version spontaneously. His audience helps him mold the story and ideas so he is not alone (Hamilton and Weiss, 1990).

Writing is a one-person task that requires both thought processing and the ability to control penmanship or typing while adhering to the rules of composition. It becomes more tedious, requires the knowledge and application of composition rules and thus may discourage the student.

Marni Gillard observed marked improvement in writing skills, after having the children tell the story and then write. She recalls a teaching moment.

> The kids stepped inside those stories and walked around in them. They figured out what made the story work. They got it because they stood inside a piece of literature and lived it. It was better than any lesson I ever did on rising-action and suspense building, turning point and denouement" (Gillard, 1996).

Gillard's experience indicating writing improvement through storytelling is mirrored in other anecdotal records. NCTE also note that storytelling is a precursor for both reading and speaking and recommends that storytelling be incorporated into the curriculum. Lauritzen and Jaeger document the success of this program in an urban school setting, a resource classroom and a Native American reservation in *Integrating Learning Through the Narrative Curriculum*. All three programs were highly successful in terms of reading and writing success. When stories are included in the curriculum, it would appear that learning basic skills does improve.

Speaking is the medium through which ideas and stories are shared and yet in the United States, speaking is rarely taught in K-8. Few speech courses are taught on the 9-12 level and yet all students are required to make oral presentations. The result is that students and adults develop a public speaking fear which is so devastating that public speaking now ranks as the number one fear – ahead of disease, terrorism, and physical harm (Laskowski, 2000).

As a professor of public speaking for over forty years, it is this author's observation that this is a learned phobia which has no merit for such hysteria. As a coach and mentor for youth storytellers, it is rare to hear this complaint. Children who tell stories interact with the audience thereby experiencing

success. Should younger children have storytelling experiences in the classroom and community, it is my belief that such fear would be reduced or eliminated thus providing a secondary benefit for the teaching of storytelling.

Upon review of several storytellings in the classroom books, (Hamilton and Weiss, 2003, Sima and Cordi, 2003, Gillard, 1996, McBride-Smith, 2005), I noted one common and obvious conclusion: students like to tell stories. There is no mention of the fear factor. All books record anecdotes indicate that children's storytelling experiences enhanced self esteem.

In fact, the child in the cover picture of Hamilton and Weiss book, *Children Tell Stories*, was eight years old when the photograph was taken. Now, at age twenty-three, she writes that she has used "storytelling and speaking as tool for success". She indicates that she has chosen a career which involves public speaking and attributes her choice and success to "beginning with story and having a healthy learning experience with people and books" (Hamilton and Weiss, 2003).

Storytelling with children produces increased competency in academics and therefore should find a place in the classroom. Here, the teacher can begin to bridge the cultural gap of understanding between adults and children, while teaching them societal standards, laws and values. Learning is and can be enhanced through storytelling.

Throughout the discussion thus far, it is evident that young people are in need of good storytelling programs. Adults may have been exposed to such programs in the past and thus may be the models and mentors, but the emphasis at this time is to find children learning to listen and tell stories.

Let us now turn our attention to some youth programs strategies currently being used in the United States. Jo Radnor, NSN President in a keynote address states:

> After little more than 30 years ago, the young storytelling movement in the U.S. can claim significant achievement….However much more is required for professional storytelling to attain the same status as performing arts such as theater, music and dance. In our 30s and 40s, we begin to seriously address the direction our lives have taken. And so it is with young storytelling (Radnor, 2008).

One of the major advances in youth storytelling in the United States was the creation of a National Storytelling Network Special Interest Group appropriately named YES (Youth, Educators and Storytellers Alliance). This group of youth, coaches, librarians, teachers, teller and mentors are devoted to inspiring storytelling by and for youth. It focuses on teaching young people to tell stories, to develop and use stories as an educational tool.

In its nine year history, YES has been successful in establishing NYSS (National Youth Storytelling Showcase), a national youth storytelling competition based upon local state support. Each state has an adult coordinator or liaison who conducts the selection of the youth tellers to represent the state. There are five age categories so that children compete only with their peers. After attending the annual three day training, twenty young storytellers become ambassadors of storytelling attending festivals and local events for the next calendar year. DVDs of performance are archived and distributed throughout the country promoting youth storytelling. Financing for the weekend is provided through a contract with the city of Pigeon Forge, Tennessee. The Smoky Mountain Storytelling Festival is held in conjunction with the showcase.

NSN provides grant opportunities to assist in financing, local cities support the children and tellers make donations. YES conducts workshops, conferences and maintains a website to keep members informed about youth storytelling opportunities.

One outgrowth of youth storytelling is the StoryBox created by Kevin Cordi. This local, national and international program has created a storage box which is sent to various localities where it is filled with printed and recorded stories, pictures and books. The StoryBox travels for one year before returning to the home base filled with its collection. This year, Cordi has recruited forty ambassadors to host the exchange. He is currently seeking international host agents (Cordi, 2008).

Other models of youth programs include state agencies such as Florida Storytelling Association's Youthful Voices program. Each year in a state contest, five tellers are selected to attend Florida StoryCamp and represent youth storytelling at concerts, festivals and conferences for the year. To date over 150 children have been selected and served for a year of travel and telling and promoting youth storytelling.

Independent programs such as Children International Story Program and Eth No Tec, meet and train children to present stories and study storytelling. Community libraries host summer programs and workshops to train and encourage young tellers. Professional storytellers travel to schools to present workshops through residency programs. And more recently, state parks have begun summer storytelling programs. Hospitals have established programs for children who are in need of care and counseling support. Clubs and children groups such as Scouts, 4 H, religious groups and nature groups have proposed merit badge recognition for storytelling. Schools have festivals and competitive speech programs have added storytelling as an event. Story Troupes and Clubs have begun to flourish. Homeschoolers are

frequent state and national competitors. And many Tellebrations now include youth tellers.

Not to be excluded from the list are digital storytelling programs such as "Flat Stanley". These opportunities allow children to write and record stories and share them with other children throughout the world. Judging from the growth in interest, these are expected to rise in popularity.

It is evident that number of youth programs has grown as creative adults have organized and sponsored activities connected with storytelling. Without a doubt, the key component in youth storytelling is adult planning in the local community. Adults must assume the responsibility and receive the training to host children who want to tell.

Thirty years ago, storytelling began its resurgence in the United States. Eventually this revival found its way to education and children's classrooms. Professional storytellers understand that preserving culture and enhancing literacy requires developing programs to mentor, motivate and provide venues for children to tell. From this insight, creative tellers began "growing storytelling groups" in classrooms and schools (Sima and Cordi, 2003). They have developed materials, trained teachers and children to such an extent that today's storytelling market is saturated with materials, activities, games, teaching units, lesson plans and stories. Guidelines for clubs and story troupes are suggested. Whatever the classroom needs has been and is being addressed.

However, because storytellers are usually transitory, there is a need to have a story-teacher on location (Gillard, 2003). According to storytellers, Hamilton and Weiss, the key to success is the teacher as a model. And so, teachers must be recruited and given the following advice: "If you wish to convince students to tell stories, you must tell a story

yourself. By telling stories, you provide an effective model for risk taking and good-quality oral language. Perhaps most important of all, you inspire them" (Hamilton and Weiss, 1990).

From this initial telling, teachers begin to experience what has been termed "the power of story". Ruth Sawyer, noted teller, states, "Storytelling is not a means for presenting limited material to the minds of children. It is an art demanding your integrity, trust and vision."

Storytelling will, in time, lead the teacher to create and imagine programs and ideas. It will infiltrate the units of teaching and curriculum and, ultimately, the minds of children. There is no subject that cannot be taught through story.

Using stories results in enhanced cultural awareness and thus knowledge about other people. Because stories have been handed down through time, they are examples of the heart and soul of the people who created them. They are the treasured reminders of how life used to be in both good and bad times and they show some of the strategies and beliefs that make different groups what they are today. Stories do shape our day to day operations and the future that we face. Stories add much to life, and the benefits that they bring to a child's culture and education have been documented.

> Once upon a time, there was a child, a very young child, and she, like all young children, needed to hear stories—lots and lots of stories. She needs a storyteller to help her. (Koki, 1998)

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Preserving our Folktales, Myths and Legends in the Digital Era

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Abstract

Every region of Bhutan abounds with rich oral traditions which include folktales and local myths and legends related to the local history, landforms and place-names. These oral traditions have been a source of value education as well as entertainment in our traditional rural societies, and they hold the essence of our unique culture and traditions. However, unless we act today, our invaluable oral traditions are in danger of extinction soon due to the sweeping forces of globalization and commercial entertainment that have already reached even remote areas of Bhutan. With the help of examples, this paper provides a brief analysis of the traditional values transmitted by our folktales and the functions served by local legends and myths in Bhutanese society. Finally, this paper offers some practical recommendations for collecting our folktales, myths and legends in the form of text, audio and video using the currently available digital technology to create the first comprehensive and dynamic 'Bhutanese Folktales Online Database'.

Introduction

Just until two or three decades ago, Bhutan had been mainly an oral society with written communication confined to the religious circles, schools and government administration. Therefore, Bhutan's rich oral traditions are still almost intact. However, these oral traditions are in danger of being wiped out as Tandin Dorji (2002) opines unless we are careful because many villages in Bhutan are today making a direct transition from an oral society to the age of digital communication and entertainment.

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Our oral traditions include folktales, local myths and legends, songs, *tsangmo and Lozey*,[1] riddles etc. These oral traditions have been a source of value education as well as entertainment in our traditional rural societies, and they hold the essence of our unique culture and traditions. For Bhutan, a country which accords top priority to the preservation and promotion of culture as one of the pillars of Gross National Happiness, the importance of preserving and promoting our oral traditions is no trivial matter.

Yet, Bhutan's efforts so far at preserving and promoting these oral traditions have been less than laudable. As Dorji Penjore (2005) points out, our school curriculum includes too little material from our folktales even though the use of our own folktales is expected to be far more effective in inculcating our traditional values compared to the folktales of foreign origin which are being used. Moreover, as the stories of *Meme Haylay Haylay, Bumo Sing Sing Yangdonma* and *Masang Yakhilai Rowa* narrated as examples in this paper show, Bhutanese folktales are no less entertaining, interesting or rich in morals as their foreign counterparts.

In addition to folktales, local myths and legends are another form of oral traditions that show insights into the local history, beliefs and the relationship between man and his natural environment. These kinds of myths and legends also deserve to be documented for posterity; as otherwise, they too might disappear completely in some years' time.

We cannot escape from the forces of globalization and consumerism that have become so essential to the so-called modern economy and modern way of life. However, these very

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[1] *Tsangmo* is a short verse or poem, usually sung to convey a message to someone, who would then reply with a suitable verse. *Lozey* is a verse of any length usually recited to convey a message to someone or to a general audience.

same forces which are threatening our traditional culture and values have brought us tools like the digital technology which we can use for their preservation and promotion. Therefore, this paper offers some practical recommendations for collecting our folktales, myths and legends in the form of text, audio and video using the currently available digital technology to create the first comprehensive and dynamic 'Bhutanese Folktales Online Database'.

This paper concludes by arguing that our oral traditions are at the risk of extinction and that the best way to preserve and promote our oral traditions would be to archive them using digital technology and include them in the school curriculum on a broader scale than is done now.

Examples of Bhutanese Folktales

Recent years have seen the publication of a few books on Bhutanese folktales, but these collections have mainly covered the folktales from the western, central and southern regions of Bhutan. As it may be expected, folktales vary from region to region although the overall theme and sometimes even the main plot of the story remains the same. As I was born in eastern Bhutan and grew up there, my perspectives on Bhutanese folktales are based on those of eastern Bhutan.

Bhutanese folktales include the following kinds: fairytale-like stories, stories of *Masang* (men of super-human physical strength), stories of *Sinpo* (demons) and *Sinmo* (demoness), stories of stupidity and wit, sexually-oriented stories, funny stories, stories of poor man's son and rich man's son, stories involving talking animals, ghost stories, *rolang* (vampire) stories, story of jealousy where the jealous one gets punished, story involving the deities and spirits etc. These stories give us a glimpse into the morals, values and lifestyle of the Bhutanese.

In Annexes 1 to 3, I present three stories that were told to me by my late grandmother when I was small. These are examples of the kind of folktales that the children of my generation in the east grew up listening to. The stories are presented in full so that the readers can understand not only the plot, but also the flow of the story. It is hoped that this would help the readers make their own analysis and judgments on the stories.

Annex 1 presents the story of *Meme*[2] Haylay Halay. As Dorji Penjore (2005) points out in his paper many versions of the story of *Meme* Haylay Haylay exist in different parts of Bhutan. This is the version that my grandmother used to tell me when I was a little child. Annex 2 presents the story of *Bumo Sing Sing Yangdonma*. This fairy-tale-like story is very popular among children. Different versions of this story might exist in different parts of Bhutan. Annex 3 presents the story of *Masang*[3] Yakhilai Rowa. This story is also very appealing to children of all ages.

Folktales and Traditional Values

One of the pillars of our unique development philosophy of Gross National Happiness has been identified as the preservation and promotion of our culture. What constitutes our culture? Probably, the first thing that comes to our mind is either *gho* or *kira*. Although the tangible aspects of our culture like the *gho*, *kira*, *kabney*, *patang* etc. are important, the intangible aspects of our culture that reside inside the mind of each individual Bhutanese are equally important, if not more.

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[2] *Meme* means grandpa in Sharchop.
[3] *Masang* in Sharchop means a man with extraordinary physical strength.

Traditional values form an important part of the intangible aspects of our culture. But these traditional values are under threat of erosion especially among the youth due to the forces of globalization and consumerism. Our folktales could be used as a tool to challenge that because they hold much potential for inculcating traditional values in our children.

Some fundamental Bhutanese traditional values reflected in almost all our folktales are highlighted below.

1. Sampa Zangpo (Good thoughts or intentions)

Whether one is a layman or a religious practitioner, having good thoughts or intentions is considered as one of the most important qualities in our traditional belief. Therefore, almost all the stories echo with this theme.

The virtue of having good thoughts or intentions is summed up by the following saying which almost every Bhutanese knows by heart: "*Sampa zang na sa dang lam yang zang. Sampa ngen na sa dang lam yang ngen*" (If [your] thoughts and intentions are good, [all] places and paths will be favourable [to you]. If [your] thoughts and intentions are bad, [all] places and paths will be unfavourable [to you]). Bhutanese consider having good thoughts or intentions the guiding principle for any laymen who have no understanding of the complexities of religious and moral doctrines.

In all Bhutanese folktales, the character with *Sampa Zangpo* is rewarded in the end. For instance, in the story of *Bumo Sing Sing Yangdonma* given in Annex 2, the youngest prince who is kind to a helpless old lady wins the hand of the beautiful maiden in the end and leads a happy life ever after compared to the two rude elder brothers.

2. Drinlen Jelni (Repaying kindness)

Kadrin Gatshor or the feeling of gratitude is considered very important in Bhutanese society. To think of *Drinlen jelni* or repaying kindness is a kind of social obligation once a debt of gratitude has been incurred. To be ungrateful is considered a very shameful act as a Bhutanese saying compares such an act to "shitting in the plate from which you eat".

Our parents and teachers reign supreme among those to whom we owe immeasurable gratitude. But any act of kindness by anybody has to be returned with gratitude as the words *Kadrin sam shep* (knowing how to feel grateful) and *Drinlen jelni* (to repay kindness) show.

In Bhutanese folktales, characters that show gratitude and make efforts to repay kindness are always depicted in the positive light while the opposite is true of those characters devoid of such feelings. In the story of *Meme Haylay Haylay* in Annex 1, the frog promises the old lady that a time may come when he could repay her kindness and he lives up to his word.

3. Obedience to parents/filial piety

Obedience to parents and filial piety are also very important in traditional Bhutanese society although this seems to be slowly changing in the recent times. Many of our folktales echo with such themes. For instance, in the story of *Meme Haylay Haylay* in Annex 1 the youngest princess is so obedient to her father that she decides to marry a frog. In the story of *Bumo Sing Sing Yangdonma* in Annex 2, *Bumo Sing Sing Yangdonma* takes utmost care of the three grains of wheat she receives from her mother and follows her mother's advice. Because of this, she is able to escape from the clutches of *Meme Sinpo*.

4. *Tha damtshig le ju dre* ('boundary of sacred oath' and 'law of karmic cause and effect')

The concept of *tha damtshig le ju dre* is one of the most fundamental Bhutanese social values and is reflected in most of the Bhutanese folktales. Lopen Karma Phuntsho (2004) explores the origins of the concept and its current socio-political implications in depth in his paper. *Tha damtshig le ju dre* is a combination of two separate terms *Tha damtshig* and *Le ju dre*. According to Sonam Kinga (2001), *Tha damtshig* means "'boundary of sacred oath' and refers to commitment and obligation of love, honour and loyalty in one's relationship with other people." The relationship could be between religious masters and their disciples, King and his subjects, parents and children, husband and wife, among siblings, among friends etc.

Lopen Karma Phuntsho translates *Le judre* (*las rgyu 'bras*) as the law of karmic cause and effect. He further explains that "To be a moral man is to abide by *le judre* through engaging in virtuous actions and eschewing non-virtuous actions. 'To have no [regard for] *le judre*' (*las rgyu 'bras med pa*) is to be morally unconscientious, irresponsible and reckless."

In the story of *Meme Haylay Haylay* for instance, because of *Tha damtshig le judre* between the youngest princess and her husband, they are able to meet again and lead a happy life ever after. The same goes for the *Bumo Sing Sing Yangdonma* and her husband in the story of *Bumo Sing Sing Yangdonma*.

***5. Jampa dang Ningje* (Loving kindness and Compassion)**

Jampa (byams pa) is translated as 'Loving kindness'. It is the attitude of wishing that other beings may be happy. *Nyingje* (Snying rje) is translated as 'compassion'. It is the attitude of wishing that other beings may be free from suffering. *Jampa* and *Nyingje* are two of *Tshed med zhi* (the Four Limitless

Qualities in Buddhism) which include Loving-Kindness, Compassion, Joy, and Equanimity.

The virtues of *Jampa* and *Ningje* not only towards fellow human beings, but also towards all sentient beings is reflected in many Bhutanese folktales. As such, Bhutanese folktales could be used to inculcate these values in our children.

For instance, it has been observed that Bhutanese who have grown up with these values find it hard to eat in a restaurant where live fish or animals are displayed for customer's selection and meat is cooked and served immediately after killing the animal. In addition, foreigners often become surprised when a Bhutanese picks up a wriggling worm from a scorching footpath and throws it safely into the bushes to save its life.

In the story of *Bumo Sing Sing Yangdonma*, the youngest prince is imbued with the virtues of *Jampa* and *Nyingje* which he shows at the sight of the helpless old lady.

Folktales and Cultural Preservation

Our present efforts in cultural preservation are geared mainly towards programmes that show tangible or visible results such as the renovation and construction of monasteries, Dzongs and temples, preservation of dress-codes and the traditional etiquette of *Driglam Namzha*. These efforts are indeed laudable and have produced very good results but a more concerted effort may be needed to inculcate an understanding of and an appreciation for our traditional values in our youth who are increasingly exposed to various sources of information and entertainment.

Folktales can be used to inculcate traditional values in our children. Today, most of the story books and picture books

that children read are those from India or abroad. Children enjoy these books. But if there are story books and picture books of Bhutanese folktales, our children would understand the characters more clearly and enjoy them even more. In the process, our traditional values would gradually seep into their brain. This will have more effect than any amount of lectures and sermons which our youths generally find very boring.

Local Myths and Legends

Many places in Bhutan have legends and myths behind the origin of their names or those surrounding the shapes of landforms. These legends and myths provide vital insights into local history and beliefs.

I grew up in a place called Menchari located in lower Bartsham[4]. The story of how the place came to be called Menchari goes like this. Long time ago, a mithun belonging to a rich household in Yangkhar, a village located in central Bartsham, went missing. After a long and futile search, the owner traced the mithun's footprints down the Yangkhar Zor (Yangkhar hillock) towards Zongthung Shong (Zongthung stream). The footprints led him further across the Zongthung stream through the lush green forests of rhododendrons and oak and then to the drier areas of towering chir pines.

The owner had almost given up hope of finding the mithun in an area with no source of water, when he just found him sitting calmly in a little clearing on a hillock. The owner wondered how the mithun quenched his thirst in such a dry area. When the owner looked around a bit, he was surprised to find a spring at the side of the hillock. Since then, the name of this place came to be known as Menchari. *Mencha* means mithun and *ri* means water in Sharchop.

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[4] A place under Trashigang Dzongkhag in eastern Bhutan.

On a rock in Yangkhar Zor, there are footprints and marks of the scrotal sacs, said to be left by the mithun on his way to Menchari. And in Menchari, there is a clearing where the mithun was said to have been found resting. It is said that shrubs or grasses never grow on this clearing.

At the lower end of Menchari, there is a place called Masang Degor where there is a pair of round flat rocks[5] piled one upon the other. These rocks are said to be *Degors*[6] belonging to the *Masang*. There are also another two huge rocks[7] said to be *Masang's Pungdo* (shotput). Just below one of the Masang's shotputs, there is big hole called Dudphung (Cave of the demon) which is about two to three metres in diameter with an entrance and an exit.

On the right and left side of Masang Degor, there are two sources of spring water with thick evergreen forests. The one on the right side is called Dudlu (demon spirit of water) and the one on the left is called Nagki Song Song (the echoing forest).

According to legend, a much-feared demoness lived there attacking human beings passing by that area. One day, a *Masang* was playing Degor between the hill above menchari called Gumagang and the hill of Bidung Wung Chilu on the other side. As the *Masang*'s degor flew right above the demonness' abode, she was irritated and called out the *Masang* thus, "You, come here. I will swallow you at once."

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[5] Probably around 2-3 metres in diameter.
[6] Flat stones used in the traditional Bhutanese game of throwing a pair of flat stones.
[7] These two rocks are few metres in length and breadth and at least 3-5 metres in height. We used to play on its flat top when we were children.

Masang immediately chased the demoness by throwing his *degors* and *pungdos*.

Realizing that the *Masang* was a manifestation of the Buddha himself, the demoness ran for her life. She tried to escape by digging into the ground, but was pulled out. The hole which is rightly named Dudphung (Cave of the demon) is said to be the hole made by the demonness when she tried to escape by digging into the ground.

The *Masang* then subdued the demoness. The demoness took a vow never to hurt any human being in return for sparing her life. It is said that the *Masang* then blessed the place for future peace and prosperity.

Lying on the outskirts of the main village, Menchari was uninhabited at that time. But owing to its wide open space, moderate climate and fertile soil, Menchari attracted a horde of inhabitants later. And indeed its inhabitants prospered. A variety of temperate as well as tropical fruits and vegetables ranging from peaches and pears to mangoes, banana, oranges, pineapples, peanuts and sugar cane etc. grow in this place. But today, due to the forces of change and unstoppable migration of people from areas without roads and schools to semi-urban areas with amenities like roads, schools etc., Menchari and its surrounding areas are once again empty of its inhabitants leaving its golden soil untilled once again.

Functions Served by Local Myths and Legends

1. Defining relationship with nature

Local legends and myths help our people define their relationship with their natural environment on which they depend for their livelihood. The belief in the stories of demons and spirits help them maintain a sense of awe and respect for the natural environment, restraining them from destroying

nature which in the end would only be detrimental to their own livelihood.

2. Protection of water sources

Water is an indispensable resource for any rural community. All trees that grow at the source of water are believed to be protected by *Nepo* (spirits) and are treated with awe and respect. Sometimes, there are many myths and legends connected with these *Nepos*. People believe with absolute certainty that if someone cuts down such trees, sickness or even death would befall him or her. This belief has helped protect the source of water for many rural communities in Bhutan.

3. Making sense of the world around them

Living in immediate proximity to the natural environment, our people wondered about the various shapes of the landforms that they saw. The legends and myths helped them explain why a certain mountain was shaped like a cone, the existence of a certain rock, waterfall or a lake in a certain area, etc.

4. Reservoir of local history and beliefs

Local myths and legends give us insights into local history and beliefs. People get a sense of where they come from and where they belong from the local legends. The legends behind place names help people understand the history of their place even though the legends may not be totally true.

Using Digital Technology to Preserve our Oral Traditions

The advent of digital technology is a boon to the efforts towards preserving our oral traditions. Digital technology has made collecting, compiling, archiving and making the various

forms of our oral traditions available to the global audience very easy, provided we have the willingness to commit a certain amount of our time, energy and resources to it.

The following are some practical recommendations for preserving our oral traditions using the currently available digital technologies. In short, these are the recommendations for the creation of the first comprehensive and dynamic 'Bhutanese Folktales Online Database'.

1. Creation of a web server and a database

A web server and a database should be created to host the collection of folktales and other oral traditions of Bhutan. The server could be managed by the Centre for Bhutan Studies or outsourced to an Internet Service Provider.

A suitable website with proper interface should be created for accessing the collections in the database. Accessibility could be divided into three or more levels based on whether the user is an administrator, a contributor, a registered user or a non-registered user.

2. Formats for archiving

An item in the collection could be archived in the form of text, video or audio in suitable formats. If possible, efforts should be made to have any single item represented at least in the form of both text and audio. The text could be in either Dzongkha or English, or both. The text could also be in any other Bhutanese language in which the story was originally narrated. This can help preserve the original impact and flavour of the story, which is often lost in translation. Any language of Bhutan could be written using the Dzongkha script.

3. Accessibility and terms of use

The collection should be freely accessible to everyone. On top of that, the collection should be made freely available for use in non-commercial undertakings, especially for education and research in any country in the world.

Users should also be able to post comments and feedbacks to the stories. Decision could be made about whether to allow all users or just registered users to post comments.

4. Recruitment of contributors

Building a large collection would be no easy feat without contributions from a large number of people. So, one of the most important tasks in this endeavour will be the recruitment of a large number of motivated contributors, rather than relying solely on a few dedicated researchers to go around the country collecting folktales and local legends. For instance, a contributor could be someone who has an interest in folktales and volunteers to collect folktales or other oral traditions in the form of audio and text (and video of the narration taking place, if possible) and upload into the Bhutanese Folktales Database.

If there are not enough volunteers willing to be contributors, contributors should be recruited with the offer of incentives from among the civil servants and corporate employees working in different parts of Bhutan. However, collecting and uploading folktales should be done during their spare time, and it should not interfere with their main responsibilities.

First of all each selected contributor could be provided with a digital audio recorder and a digital camera with video capability. Additional incentives must be based on the number of valid stories they upload into the database for proper accountability and transparency.

5. Making the website dynamic, not just an archive

The website should be made dynamic, and not simply an archive of folktales. There should be areas where interested individuals can discuss various topics related to the folktales. There should also be provisions for the readers to upload a different version of the story in response to a story in the database

6. Search and retrieval

As the database grows in size, it would become difficult to find the items one is looking for. Therefore an effective strategy for search and retrieval should also be planned from the beginning with proper provisions for metadata.

7. Collaboration with colleges in Bhutan

Once the database becomes operational and reaches certain size, collaboration could be set up with colleges within the country for further research and development of the database and increasing the size of collection.

Conclusion

This paper has outlined the importance of our oral traditions that include folktales and legends and myths for transmitting our traditional values and preserving our unique culture and traditions. It has highlighted the danger of extinction facing our oral traditions due to the forces of globalization and commercial entertainments. The threat is real if we do not take a timely action. The timely action that we need to take is to preserve and promote our oral traditions by the use of digital technology creating a comprehensive and dynamic database of our oral traditions. Efforts should include more Bhutanese folktales in our school curriculum and publish

story books and picture books based on our folktales for our children.

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Oracy in the New Millennium: Storytelling Revival in America and Bhutan

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Abstract

Starting in the 1970s there has been a significant wave of storytelling revivalism in the United States, Canada, and across much of Western Europe. Drawing on earlier revivals of oral traditional or "folk" music, dance, and crafts, this revival has spawned a new class of free-lance professional storytellers along with a broader network of enthusiasts who make use of oral stories as tools in a variety of amateur and applied professional settings (especially education, business, ministry, and health care). Because this revival has taken root in an advanced technological society with a longstanding commitment to (if not actual realization of) universal literacy, it occupies a cultural position that blends conservative and radical elements. Storytellers affirm their commitment to traditional values of community memory, interconnectedness, localism, and ethnic heritage, while at the same time placing these attitudes in the service of potentially hegemonic, homogenizing forces. This paper will explore these paradoxical forces at work in the American storytelling movement, and reflect on their implications for emergent storytelling work in the context of the Kingdom of Bhutan.

These reflections are being composed on the occasion of this first Bhutan Storytelling Conference/Festival, held in the Bhutanese capital, Thimphu, at the end of June 2009. Bhutan's road to constitutional monarchy, democratic self-government, and modernization is already well-paved, and initial journeys are underway in the direction of universal suffrage and universal literacy – which some would say amounts to the same phenomenon, since it is difficult to make use of a ballot without being able to read one. This conference signals the existence of a unprecedented interest

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in cultural conservation and self-reliance, in line with the core principles of the Kingdom's Gross National Happiness model. The spark for it comes from the idea, as Evans clearly presents it, that a people's traditional folktales contain the seeds of appropriate judgments, relationships, attitudes, and instincts; they help relieve psychological stresses, ease social tensions, and resolve cultural contradictions, and promote personal and community happiness.

In this paper I will explore the cycle of cultural revitalization, first as a general theoretical model of cultural stress and renewal, then in particular as it pertains to storytelling as a self-consciously organized cultural practice in the United States. I will examine the influences of dominant technologies of culture in stimulating or repressing the cycle of storytelling revitalization during two notable such revival periods, from 1890-1925 and from the early 1970s till the present. Finally I will draw certain broad parallels and distinctions between the American experience and that of the Kingdom of Bhutan, whose nascent organization of storytelling practices for purposes of national cultural well-being is what brings us together here.

Starting in the 1970s there has been a significant wave of storytelling revivalism in the United States, Canada, and across much of Western Europe. Drawing on earlier revivals of oral traditional or "folk" music, dance, and crafts, this revival has spawned a new class of free-lance professional storytellers along with a broader network of enthusiasts who make use of oral stories as tools in a variety of amateur and applied professional settings (especially education, business, ministry, and health care). Because this revival has taken root in an advanced technological society with a longstanding commitment to (if not actual realization of) universal literacy, it occupies a cultural position that blends conservative and radical elements. Storytellers affirm their commitment to traditional values of community memory, interconnectedness, localism, and ethnic heritage, while at the same time placing

these attitudes in the service of potentially hegemonic, homogenizing forces. This paper will explore these paradoxical forces at work in the American storytelling movement, and reflect on their implications for emergent storytelling work in the context of the Kingdom of Bhutan.

It would be worthwhile here to say a bit about how technologies of cultural transmission operate to form a perceptual matrix for societies that employ them. For societies do not simply employ their fundamental technologies, they are in a definitive sense employed by them, or more precisely they are constituted and constructed on essential cognitive levels by the technologies in which their cultural activities are conducted.

To illustrate: oral traditions must be carried on in small group, face-to-face interactive contexts. In the absence of mediums of storage such as print or electronic recording there would be no other ways to transmit the materials of oral culture than by the interaction of tradition-bearers with those who share their language and customs. These interactions are generally purposeful, ritually organized, and even when apparently casual or informal they are guided and circumscribed by a host of customary norms, protocols, rules of respect and appropriate behavior. These are not arbitrary, but are naturally evolved and enduring precisely on the basis of creating conditions of interdependence within which traditions may be sustained. These kinds of face-to-face community gatherings thus constitute the perceptual framework of the culture—they generate the tone and the web of relationships that are the very fabric of which the community is made.

Manuscript culture generates a whole different fabric of relationships and activities, one far more dependent on the solitary communion of individuals with the medium of writing, copying, and reading. The individual begins to take a new focus in cultural life, a focus that is heightened by the

mechanical precision and proliferation of print. Monastic and scholastic frameworks take shape as means of ensuring the training and maintenance of individuals and communities suited to receive and transmit cultures of the Book. Since book learning is highly intensive in its solitary cultivation, it is necessarily at odds with the long seasonal labors of agricultural work. Cultures of high literacy thus tend to breed scholarly and religious elites, usually separated from lower caste majorities who receive the sacred wisdoms of the culture through oral and iconographic mediations. Here again, the actions of writing and reading become a primary framework within which those initiated into the culture conceive and experience the fabric of self and society. There is an introjective element to reading/writing that opens up new dimensions of inner life. There is also a projective element, in that it opens up dimensions of the outer world that are neither available to the immediate senses nor framed by the immediate social environment; thus it broadens the perceiver's relationship with objective dimensions of time and space.

The television, and in accelerated senses the online environment, constitute society in vastly different, transformative ways. MacLuhan called them "haptic," meaning kinetic, palpable, hyper-stimulating as if transpiring on the perceiver's very skin. These are iconographic, non-analytic, even anti-analytic media, in the sense that the moving images succeed and replace one another in such tumbling, headlong rhythm as to leave little or no time for sustained analytic metabolism – one simply learns to surf the images and respond emotionally, viscerally, as one plays a video game and sends text messages with one's guts and one's thumbs. Because they are primarily iconographic, meaning is embodied and condensed primarily into images – which make them instantaneous and anti-elite; and in fact in thoroughly media-saturated cultures we can see the age-old structures of elite religious/educational institutions breaking down and becoming merely vestigial, nostalgic shadows of

their previous definitive significance. New elites have formed based on iconographic presences within the media complexes themselves (celebrity culture); and as this process advances we see the former literate signifiers of age, authority, gravitas, wisdom, literacy itself ebbing to be replaced by youth, physical vitality, rhythm, sex appeal, the tactile visual surfaces of the human form as compositional center of the moving image.

There seems to be cyclic pattern to technological innovation and the concomitant cultural transformation that such innovations bring. I will offer here a necessarily foreshortened outline of that cycle for the purpose of introducing a central theme. At the beginning of a cycle there is accelerating excitement and restlessness that ripples through the cultural fabric, a wave of disaffection from old ways and alienation from longstanding traditions, as younger generations absorb themselves in new technologies that will come to constitute their medium of expression and community. As these generations grow into stations of power and influence, the new technology assumes a naturalized place as a medium of ideas and expression. Gradually there is ushered in a mature phase in which a technology has established itself as a dominant strand of cultural life. Its masterful exponents are celebrated and rewarded with authoritative roles in the public discourse; their works become canonic, and are studied in institutions of "higher learning." In this mature phase of a cultural technology the culture itself becomes identified with these key canonic figures, works, and forms, and it is generally forgotten that they were once proponents and products of an exotic, insurgent technological framework.

But as a technology begins to age, as its forms and rituals rigidify and lose their creative elasticity, a new kind of disaffection begins to emerge in the cultural pattern. I will suggest that it is at this ebb tide of a cycle of technological change, when weariness of saturation by a mature dominant technology overtakes the children of an elite, that oral

traditional revivalism blossoms forth, and that this blossoming, while summoning back to an earlier cultural configuration, also presages and prepares the ground for new developments that are still embryonic within the unconscious of the revivalists and the culture at large.

The recourse to traditional folklore and storytelling is common in times of social change and resultant stress. Sociologist Anthony F.C. Wallace's model of revitalization sets this idea in a clear matrix of cultural evolution and revolution, or, one might say decay and regeneration. "Revitalization," he wrote, is defined as a deliberate, conscious, organized effort by members of a society to construct a more satisfying culture." He uses the analogy of societies as corporate organisms, and regards revitalization movements as homeostatic responses on the organisms' part to correct for conditions of social stress. "A society will work by means of coordinated actions (including 'cultural' actions) by all or some of its parts, to preserve its own integrity by maintaining minimally fluctuating life-supporting matrix for its individual members, and will, under stress, take emergency measures to preserve the constancy of its matrix. Stress is defined as a condition in which some part or the whole of the social organism is threatened with more or less serious damage." Wallace identifies a distinct sequence of phases that precipitate and articulate a cultural revitalization movement, including a preceding "steady state" or equilibrium, period of increasing stress on individuals and groups, period of distortion operating on the culture as a whole, period of revitalization through a new vision of society based on revived, imported, or innovated models, resulting in reorganization along divergent lines, leading ultimately to a new steady state.

I entered the storytelling field during one such period of revitalization in the United States, which began over thirty-five years ago and continues to unfold its karmic consequences into the present day. It was a revitalization that

began at a very different stage of modernization from the one that has embarked upon in Bhutan, and it is one with a significantly different overall trajectory; yet because of the convergence of forces of technology and globalization around the world, some of the results and coordinates of our distinct storytelling revitalizations may end up converging as well. So it may be useful to compare and to contrast the storytelling movements in America and Bhutan, to examine their potential growth and developments, and to make some predictions and suggestions concerning the patterns and the choices involved.

The phase of the contemporary American storytelling movement that began in the 1970s emerged from the shadows of a time of great social change and unrest. The 1960s had been a decade of wars abroad and near-warfare at home over a spectrum of cultural divisions. As I wrote in my history of the storytelling movement, *The Storytellers' Journey*, "The [background] of the storytelling revival was the cultural turbulence of the sixties. Accelerating changes in the technological, social, and economic organization of mainstream America all seemed to be enforcing a rapid decline in conditions supportive of traditional storytelling. Chief among those changes were the shift from rural to urban and suburban communities; the shift from extended to nuclear families; increased social mobility leading to a decline in local, regional, and ethnic particularity; and the growing dominance of electronic media and the consequent decline in the cultural value of the spoken and written word." This may not sound unfamiliar in the context of present-day Bhutan. But in addition to these social trends there were also the background factors of the Vietnam War abroad and antiwar movement at home, the movement for civil rights for African-Americans and Native Americans, the rise of feminism, gay rights, ecological activism, drug subcultures, eastern and western religious revivals, and a host of similar counter-cultural movements danced to a soundtrack of folk or rock music festivals, alternative lifestyles, and guerrilla arts.

The technological background of the 1970s storytelling revival is worth commenting upon in particular. Television had emerged as the dominant technological medium of American culture in the 1950s. By the end of that decade the medium had been interiorized by a significant portion of the sentient population, meaning that it occupied a controlling position in both our outward cultural and inner imaginative landscapes. By the sixties the medium had matured, with its theorization by Marshall MacLuhan and others. One of MacLuhan's axioms was that technological environments are invisible to those who inhabit them, becoming part of the unexamined habitual fabric of perception; but we might extend that by noting that once they do become visible to the inhabitants, by way of self-conscious theoretical and critical reflections such as those by MacLuhan himself, the dominant medium will likely have passed its point of saturation of the cultural matrix, and may well be on its way to replacement by new technological configurations.

By the 70s there was a sense of weariness and disenchantment with television and its effects. The phrase "a vast wasteland" (Minow) was popular among critics of the media terrain. A movement of resistance spread through many strata of the culture, exemplified by various counter-cultural movements of which storytelling constituted itself as one of the gentler. "Kill your Television" bumper stickers appeared in great number, affixed to the fenders of back-to-the-landers' camper vans. Storytelling answered directly to this widespread counter-cultural weariness with the technological status quo of medium and message. The intensity of effect that storytelling had on its adherents during that initial revival period, often described in terms of numinous spirituality, may be related to the sensory reorganization experienced in the initial encounter with the live interactive oral medium, a reorganization which carries a distinct "psychedelic" charge, without the harmful side-effects of psychedelic drugs – more akin to group meditation and

guided visualization, which also made major inroads into American culture during the same period.

To further illuminate this cycle of technology and culture we may need to go back a full cycle to a previous period of storytelling revival in America. At the end of the 19th century and for the first two decades of the 20th century there was a period of storytelling popularization in many ways strikingly similar to the movement of recent decades. Between 1890 and 1925, storytelling was established in the United States as an essential component of public library work with children. But it was also being practiced extensively in schools, through the urging of influential educators such as Friedrich Froebel (founder of the kindergarten movement), Felix Adler (founder of the Ethical Culture Society), John Dewey at Columbia University and G. Stanley Hall of Clarke University. Storyteller-educator Richard Thomas Wyche founded the National Storytelling League, an association of amateur storytellers, at a gathering of primary school teacher at the University of Tennessee in 1903. Artist-storytellers such as Marie Shedlock, Seumas MacManus, and Ruth Sawyer toured the country performing for children and for adults. Numerous books on the theory and practice of storytelling were published to great acclaim, including works by Shedlock, Wyche, and Bryant. Re-reading these works today, we do not simply see a pragmatic assessment of the uses of storytelling in fostering literacy and good citizenship – we also see glimmerings of the kind of oral revivalist fervor that has animated our recent storytelling movements. A few of these works were still in print when the latter day revival began in the 1970s, providing inspiration and encouragement as well as instruction and repertoire. But the breadth of popular acceptance and enthusiasm that once surrounded the art and led to the generation of that body of literature had by the time of the new awakening been mostly forgotten.

That earlier movement occurred at an earlier stage of technological saturation. At that time print was the dominant

medium of American and European culture. It was a mature technology, in that it had been greatly interiorized by a preponderance of the urban and rural populations. Literacy was widespread, even universal in certain social spheres; but there were non-literate immigrant populations pouring into American cities; and among the social elites there was a widely distributed fear of resulting social disintegration. One homeostatic response on the part of the conservators of culture was the public library movement. It was founded and supported by certain dominant social interests, such as steel magnate Andrew Carnegie, patron of the Carnegie Library system. This effort supported urban populations, both middle class and the working poor in their assimilation to the dominant cultural forms, through providing subsidized public spaces in which to internalize the culture of books. These early libraries were constructed along the lines of Roman temples. Like railway terminals, which memorialized the transport technologies fundamental to the construction of empires, the library buildings memorialized the reproductive technologies of writing and reading which enabled and constituted what Barthes called "the Empire of Signs," that is, the common perceptual and interpretive frameworks that made imperial power conceivable and sustainable.

It was discovered in the course of the building of the library systems that the most powerful method for initiating children of the non-literate working classes to books was through the gateway of oral performance. So, in addition to the more missionary story work taking place in schools, on playgrounds, and in settlement houses in the immigrant slums of Boston, New York, and Chicago, elaborate rituals of oral representation were created in the public libraries, enacting a ritualized submission of oral traditions to the sacramental ascendancy of the book. Here is how that ritual was conducted, according to the model set by the Storytelling Section of the New York Public Library, which early on assumed the role of monastic seat of the old order of library storytelling. The teller would set up a chair for herself, beside

a table with a white tablecloth and a crystal bowl filled with water and cut flowers. Upon the table she (nearly always a she) would neatly stack the books from which each of the stories selected for the afternoon's program were to be taken. Children would be gathered, often to the sound of a little hand-held bell. The storyteller would raise the first book. She would show the book to the children, clearly recite the title and the author and say a few carefully chosen words about their background. Then she would place the book upright on its spine upon the table, where its status as the free-standing source of the story in progress would be clearly marked. The storyteller would not read directly from the book, but would recite the author's words from memory exactly as they appeared in the text, the book standing upright beside her as if looking on with an author's right of approval or disapproval. When that story was done she would gently close the standing book and lay it back down. She would raise the next book and repeat the ritual cycle until the story hour program was complete. Then she would ring the bell, dismissing the children. She would remove the books and the cut flowers from the table until the next story hour program was set to begin (Alvey).

This was the library story hour as codified by the heads of Children's Services at the New York Public Library, a lineage so mandarin and venerated within the fold that, as in a Nyingma school, many librarian-storytellers can recite it by heart: Anne Carroll Moore founded the service and handed the mantle to Francis Clarke Sayers, who passed it to Mary Gould Davis, who anointed Augusta Baker, etc. It remained a dominant model within American storytelling until the 1970s, when alternate models emerged through the entrance into the field of young performers with backgrounds in mime, folk music, theatre, clown arts, and a variety of ethnic oral traditions.

The hierarchy of media embodied in the library ritual is clear. The covered table functions as altar; at its ceremonial center

stands the book. The performer sits off to the side, deferential to the sacred arrangement of books and cut flowers in a crystal dish, an iconographic echo of the theme of nature (orality) sacrificed and sublimated to culture (literature). Ong writes in *Orality and Literacy* of how the custom of pressing flowers between the pages of books reinforces the connection of printing with death – the living word is likewise pressed between the pages of books to be sacrificed into the memorial realm of print. The storytelling revival of the 1970s once again brought storytelling out of the memorial vaults of libraries into the messy streets and byways of the living cultural moment. And thirty-five years on it is likewise engaged in a process of ceremonializing and memorializing what was then revived. Ceremony, ritual, and memorial are part of the infrastructure of cultural equilibrium – ritual enforces repetition which ensures continuity. When ritual repetition becomes mechanical or breaks down, stresses accumulate in the system, which leads to the process of revival or revitalization, and to new equilibrium—the cycle of cultural change and renewal.[*]

So, the earlier (1890-1920) American storytelling revival occurred at a complex moment of middle-class and elite saturation with the values of print and a simultaneous perception of those values under threat: an influx of oral/non-literate immigrants into the major urban centers, peoples whose presence evoked cultural anxiety and an outcry for remedial cultural activism. Yet even as that movement unfolded in its self-conscious restorative programs,

[*] This cultural subtext of technological initiation through the printed word was also enacted in Christian churches throughout the period of print, extending from Gutenberg's invention of movable type, which led inexorably to the Reformation, the creation of the "Authorized text" of the King James Bible at the beginning of England's imperial period, and the pervasive ongoing fundamentalist sacralization of the printed text. It is still a battle being fought and refought, even as the sacred text has been widely displaced or reframed by gigantic television monitors and miniature digital screens.

the technological ground under-girding the movement shifted out from under its original impulses. That thirty year period saw the rise of motion pictures as an insurgent cultural influence – driven by energetic entrepreneurs from among the outsider immigrant groups. It also saw the spread of radio, phonograph recordings, telephone communication, and the entire primary infrastructure of electronic media – what MacLuhan and Ong at a much further advanced stage of media self-consciousness would call the world of secondary orality.

Thus by the time that early storytelling revival reached its own institutional maturity, the wider cultural matrix had entered into a period of fervent and voracious internalization of the new media complex. American culture underwent a reverse oscillation from absorption in an idealized oral past to fascination with an unfolding technological future. This, I would suggest, in concert with specific political, social, and economic developments (the legal restriction of immigration in the 1920s, the economic boom of the 1920s followed by the Great Depression of the 1930s, the rise of labor, socialist and New Deal politics, the coming of a second world war, etc.) was responsible for putting that particular American storytelling revival back to sleep for fifty years.

Similarly, in the 1970s when American youth had reached a point of weariness and disenchantment with the technological configurations that dominated their cultural landscapes, a critical subculture emerged that transfused itself with the alternative values and visions of oral traditional revivalism. Even as that movement matured, as it has at the present time with its fragile yet plainly visible structures of organizational forms and networks of practitioners and supporters, the technological ground has once again shifted beneath us. Our thirty-five years of storytelling revivalism has seen the rise of the personal computer, that summary aggregation of all previous electronic mediating functions into one exponentially powerful and pervasive cultural presence.

The computer gathers into its compact frame each phase of electronic communication that has reshaped the cultural landscape before it, from the telegraph (texting) and telephone to newspapers, movies, radio, and television. It has even swallowed up the post office, leaving only perhaps the parcel service to non-digital adjuncts (though you must track the status of your parcel online). From its unassuming beginnings as a "word processor," an electronic typewriter with memory features, the device has engorged itself like the very hungry cat of folkloric fame to incorporate print, graphics, music, audio and video. All social domains and processes have migrated to the world-wide web, including but not limited to corporate and small business advertising and branding, selling, shipping, tracking, and receiving, personal and sexual relations, political communication and organization, news gathering and dissemination, game playing and spectatorship, and artistic creation, exhibition, and marketing. It is precisely the digital universe's omnivorous fluidity in mixing all these social processes and sensory channels that has made it so swiftly and utterly culturally dominant and socially transformational.

Digital media provide a democratic cultural matrix in ways that its predecessor media could not and never attempted to match. Armed only with cheap digital audio and video recording devices attached to their PCs, an international brotherhood and sisterhood of isolated geek youth can chat, hook up, clown around, and broadcast their self-instructed self-expressions to potential audiences of millions around the globe, completely bypassing arbiters and gatekeepers that have traditionally rationed out the products of previous cultural systems. The digital environment is politically volatile, having already fostered peaceful and not-so-peaceful multi-colored (iconographically-driven) revolutions across the globe. This process of rapid techno-cultural evolution is a massively compelling story, meta-story, and mega-story that fixes the attention of a generation marked from birth by its epic progress, and which divides the attention of earlier

generations of storytelling activists who may still be struggling to retell the old revival narrative amid the overwhelming hubbub of a new digital echo-system.

Bhutan comes to this global festival of transformation and re-storying both late and early. The Kingdom has long been protected by its splendid Himalayan isolation. It retains not just the outlines but much of the substance of an ordered medieval society, with the same disciplined ranks of manuscript-based sacred and political castes and oral traditional agrarian peasantry that would have existed in Europe in the late middle ages. The relations between these social levels is mediated here as it was in medieval Europe by an iconographic tradition of retelling the sacred tales in pictorial array on the walls and ceilings of temples, in devotional pieces on home altars, and in traveling memory containers such as the story-boxes of mendicant religious epic singers. Most parts of the country are still deeply oral traditional. Yet the few urban centers that serve as portals for global cultural forms, goods, and media to enter in, such as this rapidly expanding capitol, inevitably exert a powerful gravitational pull on the national consciousness.

Bhutan is a unique sort of laboratory of cultural /technological change, in that while a thin sliver of the cultural elite has been educated in Western traditions and technologies for a century or so, it is only in the past few decades that this educational exposure has gradually spread to include a broadly influential segment of the Bhutanese citizenry. In the past decade alone, Western mass cultural media have been introduced to the country in accelerating tides of potentially disorienting innovation. And these new forms are being introduced, not in distinct phases of innovation, adjustment, stabilization, and organized mourning for what has been sacrificed (as in revival movements), but, as it were, all at once, led by the ultimate aggregative and revolutionary technological platform, the web.

It is hardly time yet to talk of a "storytelling revival" here in Bhutan. It is time to talk of the organized effort of cultural conservation, now underway, and to seek out and closely examine the tools of preserving and perpetuating the best features of oral traditional cultures – not only as artifacts pressed like dead flowers between the pages of books, but as living and vital processes and practices which allow the riches of traditional wisdom to be breathed out and breathed in, here in the Kingdom, of course, for the upliftment of its people and the sustenance of its land – and also perhaps to be broadcast to the world, so that the deeper web – the web of all sentient beings – may be strengthened and served.

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