Jottings from the Field

**Student Journal of the Anthropology Programme,
Royal Thimphu College**

Vol. 2, No. 1 (2022)

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For the cover photo, we would like to thank Jigme Tobdhen, the winner of Journal Photo Competition.

Jottings from the Field is a student lead journal intended to showcase the writings of Anthropology students in RTC. This is the second volume of the journal, which highlights some of the best ethnographic researches and valuable experiences of the students. It has also provided an opportunity for interested students to learn the skills needed to run a publication.

Contents

Introduction to the Journal

From the journal's Faculty Advisors

"Jottings from the Field" is a journal from the anthropology programme of Royal Thimphu College (RTC) for students. The journal captures the programme's knowledge and the students' prowess in the best possible ways. It also serves as an avenue to introduce students to the academic world within and outside the college- Royal Thimphu College. To maintain quality and time management, the anthropology programme has decided to publish it annually from this year onward. This journey to finalize the journal has been fruitful so far. As faculty advisors, paying attention to stories and skills is a learning opportunity and gaining a better understanding of the dynamics of the students' community. We remain committed to ensuring that the journal reflects students' learning graph and their knowledge acquired at RTC and beyond. Throughout the journal work, we also adhere to maintaining a student-centric approach in every process that goes into the finalization of this journal.

The second issue of the Anthropological journal "Jottings from the field" brings you even more exciting articles contributed by Mr. Brent Bianchi (the former head librarian) and our students. It was even more thrilling to be a part of the team consisting of all the hard-working members working toward the second issue. Our editorial team has been working since the last issue to come up with this good mix of articles, and we believe this is one platform to recognize the potential of our students and encourage them to do better. As mentioned in the first issue, another aim of the journal is to create more awareness of our unique discipline, Anthropology.

We want to acknowledge Mr. Brent Bianchi, who served as faculty advisor to this journal's second edition until the spring semester, for his contribution and for ensuring that the journal was on the right track. We would also like to extend our gratitude to Dr. Dolma Choden Roder, Dr. Shawn Christopher Rowlands, Anden Harald Drolet, Nithil Dennis, and Phuntsho Choden for their assistance and support. As we embark on this journey, we hope to continue doing the same and expect our students' thoughts and feelings to reach our readers. We hope the readers will enjoy reading and experiencing this journey with us.

Richard Kamei and Tashi Choden

From the journal's Senior Editors

Between classes, research projects, and extracurricular activities, being a journal editor was tough. The biggest challenge that the editor team faced was getting students to submit their work and work on the feedback that we gave them. However, taking an open-minded diplomatic approach with a little bit of strong-arming, the journal team has selected some of the best works of students of the Anthropology department. Topics range from opinion pieces to the climate crisis and some snippets of the research work done by final-year students. We hope readers enjoy reading these articles just as much as the journal team had fun reviewing them :).

On behalf of the journal's student team, we would like to express our sincere gratitude to the Programme leader, Dolma Choden Roder, for her unwavering support, as well as to our two faculty advisors, Dr. Richard Kamei and Tashi Choden, for assisting us at every step of the way, attending every meeting, and contributing their knowledge and time to make this journal a reality. Without these people, this journal would not have been possible. We are pleased to present you with the second volume of *Jottings from the Field*, the culmination of the efforts of our team, our advisors, and the authors.

Kelzang Tobdhen Yoezer and Tshering Choden

Meaning of Ter Cham to the People of Jambay Lhakhang

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Abstract

This research provides an understanding of one of the mask dances performed in Jambay Lhakhang, Bumthang. Jambay Lhakhang is one of the sacred landscapes in Bhutan and the only temple in Bumthang where *Ter Cham,* sacred naked dance, is performed. Jambay Lhakhang is considered sacred due to the presence of deities and spirits in its surroundings. *Ter Cham* holds a significant meaning in the lives of the people of Jambay Lhakhang. It is more than a religious practice for them. The people of Jambay Lhakhang believe that *Ter Cham* helps them in living a prosperous and healthy life. *Ter Cham* is performed to purify the land, people, and all other sentient beings in the proximity of the performance. Moreover, witnessing and performing *Ter Cham* helps in the accumulation of merits. This research is an outcome of participant observation, semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews with the local people of Jambay Lhakhang during my two months winter break in the year 2021.

Keywords: mask dances, sacred landscape, religion, local beliefs

Meaning of *Ter Cham* to the people of Jambay Lhakhang

My respondents shared that *Ter Cham* has a lot of significance in their lives. The people of Jambay Lhakhang live healthy lives because of the merits they have gained from having performed and witnessed *Ter Cham* for many years. The local people

believe that by performing *Ter Cham*, the dancers can avoid being born into the three lower realms of the world in their next life. For instance, according to respondents, the lower realms include being born as demons, deities and hell dwellers. According to one my respondents (Jambay Tenzin, 31 years old, male),

In Buddhism, Lha Dey Mey Sum falls under the six realms of the world. Lha (Gods) are considered as one of the highest ranked among the realms of the world and it is only the people with high accumulation of merits that are born into the realm of gods. Dey (Demons) fall under one of the lower realms of the world and it is the those who commit sins that are born into this realm.

Ter Cham dancers believe that performing *Ter Cham* will help them even in their afterlife. *Ter Cham* dancers and the local people have slightly different views about the meaning of *Ter Cham*. From my respondents I found out that it is common belief among them that *Ter Cham* dancers gain more merits than the people who do not perform the dance. This is because exposing their genitals to thousands of people is not easy since there is a risk of their identities being revealed. Respondents said that the people of Jambay Lhakhang believe that performing such an embarrassing dance and making the spectators feel embarrassed pleases the deities. As a reward, the deities bless the *Ter Cham* dancers more. To demonstrate this view, one of my informants (Karma Sangay, male, 29) narrated,

> It is embarrassing at times to perform Ter Cham because I sometimes fear that some people might recognize me but I perform Ter Cham enthusiastically because it is a good deed that is helpful to me, my family and the spectators.

Another Cham dancer (Tenzin, male, 29) said,

> Performing Ter Cham protects me and my family from misfortunes and illnesses. I feel I have accumulated merits by performing Ter Cham because till now I have been able to fulfill every wish of mine and all of my family members are in good health. I have witnessed and performed Ter Cham for many years, and I feel that doing this has helped me and my family have a healthy and successful life.

Similarly, a local resident of Jambay Lhakhang (SangayLhaden, female, 68) said,

> I believe that I am healthy even at this old age because of the merits I gained from witnessing Ter Cham. Witnessing Ter Cham cleanses all sins I accumulate in a year, and it protects me from sufferings and illnesses. Most importantly, it has protected me from the harms of evil because there are a lot of evil spirits and ill intents present around us and if one does not accumulate religious merits, one can be easily attacked by them.

The people of Jambay Lhakhang believe that *Ter Cham* is more than a religious practice and they practice this tradition to have prosperous and healthy lives. For the people of Jambay Lhakhang, the significance of *Ter Cham* is deeply embedded in their culture and life. This is because even the youths, as young as fifteen years old, of Jambay Lhakhang know that *Ter Cham* has to be performed by them to keep the practice alive. Respondents pointed out that the elderly always tell the young people of Jampay Lhakhang that it is in the hands of young people to keep this tradition alive and for that the *Ter Cham* has to be practiced for generations to come. The people of Jambay Lhakhang have been performing *Ter Cham* since its beginning- which dates back to the seventh century. One of the respondents, Nim Tenzin said, "*We cannot stop performing Ter Cham because Ter Cham has now become a part of our lives. I feel incomplete when I fail to witness Ter Cham."* From my interviews, I found out that the people of Jambay Lhakhang do not want to risk missing the performance of *Ter Cham* as they fear that there will be negative consequences of not doing so. Even when the pandemic (covid19) hit Bhutan and all the festivals and public gatherings were restricted, *Ter Cham* was performed. The people of Jambay Lhakhang continued performing *Ter Cham* within the closed doors without entertaining spectators. Kinley Tshering, male 38 years old, and all the other respondents pointed out that the Lhakhang and people of Jambay Lhakhang will have to bear the cost if they fail to perform *Ter Cham* even once. If the local people fail to perform *Ter Cham* annually there will be destruction in the Lhakhang. The

deities will not protect the Lhakhang and the people because they would be angered. Additionally, the land would not be purified for the year which means that the evil spirits can and will attack the people and the Lhakhang. Dorji, (male, 76 years old) narrated,

> In the past, once the people of Jambay Lhakhang stopped performing Ter Cham and the consequence of this act was very disastrous for the people and the Lhakhang. There was havoc in the society since there was poor harvest, many people suffered from illness, and the flora and fauna were dying off. There was destruction in the surroundings of the Lhakhang, and people were attacked and affected by the evil spirits. The relics in the Lhakhang showed signs that we have to perform Ter Cham for the well-being of people and the Lhakhang. Since then, Ter Cham has been conducted every year without failure.

Telling Stories in the Land of the Thunder Dragon: The Role of Storytelling in Contemporary Bhutan

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Abstract

Since the olden times, storytelling was an oral tradition that played a pivotal role in the making and shaping of the Bhutanese culture because it tells people how our ancestors lived and their contribution to how we live today. However, recently, with technological advancements and rapid socio-economic transformation in the country, the practice of oral storytelling seems to be diminishing in Bhutan, particularly among the youth. Therefore, this research paper provides an understanding of the practices of storytelling in the past as having an important place in Bhutanese society and the role of storytelling in contemporary Bhutan as vital, as it was in the past. Though the way storytelling is practiced in the present is not as it was in the past, this ethnographic paper documents the existence of storytelling in another form; that is, in the form of digital storytelling such as animations, cartoons, movies, and books. As the preservation and the promotion of storytelling practices remains a main concern among the Bhutanese, individual must make conscious effort to retell the stories we heard as children to help preserve such oral traditions at the grassroots level.

Keywords: Oral storytelling, Folktales, Youth, Education, Digital storytelling

A Glance at Storytelling

In the past, if one were to describe a typical Bhutanese family, one could say that the family would conclude their long and tiring day with the family members sitting around the hearth under the flickering light of a kerosene lamp and listening to stories shared by the grandparents or the parents. Such were the days when the family might have shared stronger bonds because there was no access to modern technologies, such as televisions and smartphones, which kept the family members isolated from one another, though they shared the same physical space. Storytelling practices may have been one way to build a stronger bond within families and communities. As my interlocutor Tshomo (a 70-year-old female), who is a storyteller and an author who collects and writes folktales of Bhutan stated, "The personal interaction among people, the storyteller and the people who are listening to the stories, is so important because it brings the community together, like there is a shared sense of what your legacy is. On the other hand, this mobile phone is very isolating. Is anybody sitting in the corner or if they are sitting in a group not interacting with the people around them? They are not with the group even though they are sitting with one."

My ethnographic research project mainly addresses the research question: how do people in contemporary Bhutanese society give meaning to practices of storytelling? With modernity, the adaptation and diffusion of cultural activities, especially with the rise of dominant Western culture, seem to be widespread. Therefore, it is essential to examine the role of storytelling in the past as well as in the present to understand more about the socio-cultural dynamics of Bhutanese society.

Storytelling documents how Bhutanese practices of storytelling have been in the past: a medium of disseminating knowledge in the community; a vehicle of Bhutanese culture by passing it down orally from generation to generation; and a form of entertainment strengthening family bonds. It is also evident that practices of storytelling are slowly being replaced by technologies that enable younger people to

have access to different entertainment platforms to choose from. Moreover, there is a rise in a culture of individualism in Bhutan as a result of the influence of Western culture. For that reason, some of my interlocutors prefer reading stories on their own rather than depending on the elderly to share stories, hence the reason why people are expressing concerns about the decline of the practice.

My research also demonstrates the position of storytelling in the present time as not really on the verge of vanishing because it is existing in the form of digital forms such as movies, cartoons, and animations, as modern problems need modern solutions. Though it may lack certain characteristics of oral storytelling, such as allowing children to be creative and a two-way interaction between the storyteller and the listeners, building a sense of community, it can still convey the same message that stories told verbally can. This brings to mind what Balfour (1893), Geertz (1976), and Davidson (2020) stated about the different versions of art created when it is recreated or reproduced again and again, depending on the cultural context one comes from. Similarly, in this digital era, the problem of declining storytelling practices needs to be addressed using technologies. Therefore, given the time and resources, there is an opportunity for anthropologists or anthropologists-in-the-making like us to delve more deeply into storytelling practices in contemporary Bhutanese society through the anthropological method of digital anthropology or ethnography, where we can study the consequences of the rise of technologies for oral storytelling and what it means for the Bhutanese. Most importantly, my interlocutors emphasized the individual's conscious effort to retell the stories we heard as children to help preserve such oral traditions at the grassroots level.

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"MY CLASS TEACHER TOLD ME TO BEHAVE LIKE A BOY." The Bhutanese LGBTQ Experience

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Abstract

The Bhutanese LGBTQ community is relatively new to the Bhutanese general public. It was only after Dechen Selden came out publicly as the first trans woman that the news media began to give attention to the LGBTQ community. Bhutanese LGBTQ representation is absent in the Government policy and legislation. They are invisible in the governance process. Previous anthropological research demonstrates that there is extensive regional and cultural variation amongst LGBTQ that does not necessarily align with those in the West. However, in Bhutan the LGBTQ identity seems to be heavily influenced by the global LGBTQ discourse. There is no cultural or religious reference to LGBTQ identities in the Bhutanese context and we have no positive labels for queer identities. In this regard, the internet plays a powerful tool in connecting the local with the global and allows young LGBTQ Bhutanese to tap into this global discourse and affirm their own identities. Trans people, especially trans women, seem to be disproportionately affected compared to other social and demographic groups. They do not get equal access to education and employment opportunities.

Keywords: Bhutan, LGBTQ, Pride.

Introduction

On December 17th 2020, the fifth Druk Gyalpo, His Majesty Jigme Khesar Namgyal Wangchuck issued a royal *Kasho* (edict) which called for reforms in the education system. Following this *Kasho*, the education ministry has begun implementing policy changes and institutional reforms. However, these reforms mainly seek to implement a national education policy and change learning methods and how assessments are done (Bhutan Broadcasting Service, 2021). According to the *Kasho*, the education system's role is not only to educate but also to socialize and to provide services like counseling to students. Despite these major shifts in the education system, progress is uneven. The needs of students who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) are not addressed since there are no policies that affirm, support or even recognize LGBTQ students. There is a need for such policies that protect and affirm LGBTQ identities because LGBTQ people are some of the most marginalized groups in the world (Monroe,2018). Educational institutes must consider whether the educational context provides equal learning opportunities to all students, including those who are LGBTQ. This is what the *Kasho* is meant for, to not only give 21st century-oriented education but also to give equal access and opportunities for personal and social growth to children. This will not be achieved as long as there is an absence of LGBTQ rights and protection because we are ignoring a whole section of the Bhutanese population.

There is scant academic literature on the LGBTQ experiences in Bhutan, particularly in areas of education. In my literature search on the topic only Chuki (2019) wrote exclusively on the LGBTQ community in Bhutan. This research seeks to bridge this gap about the lived experiences of students who identify as LGBTQ and how they view and experience the Bhutanese education system.

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The Ways of Relating between Black-Necked Cranes and the People of Bumdeling

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Abstract

Bhutan is known for its rich flora and fauna. The Bhutanese share an intricate relationship with their surroundings, including animals. In line with this tradition, Bumdeling in Bhutan is well known for having close connections with animals. Since ancient times, the relationship between cranes and the people of Bumdeling has existed with mutual love and care for each other. The arrival of black-necked cranes (Thurng Thurng) is considered auspicious and serves as an indicator of peace and joy. The arrival of cranes plays a pivotal role in farmers' life in having a bountiful harvest. As a gesture of appreciation, the inhabitants of Bumdeling leave a few grains to let the cranes feed on it later. The black-necked crane is the most sacred among many other bird species. With profound joy and happiness, the people of Bumdeling celebrate their arrival. The sacredness of Chorten Kora and the bountiful valley of Bumdeling provide the ambiance for the perfect union, a good omen for the survival of the species.

Building on ethnographic tradition, this research work presents the kind of relationship that the people of Bumdeling share with the cranes. The concept of multispecies ethnography is used in this research to illustrate the relation between human and non-human species, especially the black-necked crane. The outcome of

this work interpreted the interconnectedness and inseparability between the cranes and the local people. Additionally, it emphasizes a more-than-human method to study as well as demonstrates the relationship and interdependence of cranes and the people of Bumdeling. This research was done by using anthropological research methods such as participant observation; observation of the cranes and the people of Bumdeling, semi-structured interviews, and multispecies ethnography. There are two field sites where observations were made; one in Bumdeling and another in Trashiyangtse town. This research aims to contribute to the emerging scholarship of multispecies ethnography and is an attempt to present the age-old existence of a relationship between human and non-human species in Bhutan.

Keywords: Multispecies ethnography, Bumdeling, Trashiyangtse, Black-necked crane.

The sun was shining mercilessly as I set out on my journey toward Bumdeling. I was covered in sweat by the time I reach my field site. It was partly because of the heat and partly due to the anxiety of starting my data collection. I was confused about where to start so I sat on a rock and took out my notebook. As I flipped the pages of my book, I could hear a river gushing in meanders, the wind blowing prayer flags, and the chills of wind on my face and ears. I was suddenly distracted by the melodious sound of cranes. As I dropped my pen and turned around, I was astonished to see a group of cranes feeding on the grains left by the people of Bumdeling in their paddy fields. They were doing everything in a group from feeding and flying to landing in different places. By evening when the cranes were about to leave the paddy field, I saw them moving in a circle. To me, it felt like they were communicating and dancing. After doing that for a while, the cranes flew away with their melodious voices echoing in my ears. The way they flew was very beautiful and pleasant to watch. I was filled with joy at the end of the day and moved back home with a sparkle in my eyes.

The Love Bond between Cranes and People of Bumdeling

It was a surprising fact that the people of Bumdeling and the cranes shared some sort of bonding. The local people are concerned about the cranes' meals and as stated earlier, they leave some grains on the land, and if that is not sufficient for them, they collect grains from the local people and spread it over the fields so that the cranes can feed on them later. The people's concern about feeding the cranes enough is based on their resolve to maintain a faithful relationship with the cranes. Additionally, they do not want to lose their relationship with the cranes. Instead, the people of Bumdeling wish to develop their bond of love with the cranes. Wealthy inhabitants of Bumdeling contribute more grains and give to those who do not have much. In this way, we can see how people themselves cooperate in encouraging visits from the cranes.

The cranes are seen to remain calm when inhabitants of Bumdeling approach them because of the relational imagination they share with people, which means that the people of Bumdeling exist in relation to the cranes and vice versa. The cranes are aware that the people of Bumdeling will not harm them as they do not fly away when inhabitants of Bumdeling come near them. In contrast, when strangers or outsiders approach the cranes, even from five hundred meters distance, they easily get startled and fly away. This is because the cranes use their senses to recognize the people who are familiar and unfamiliar to them. According to most of my respondents, the cranes recognize the faces and scent of the people of Bumdeling as they have become familiar with them due to their yearly visits.

The cranes are very faithful to the people of Bumdeling and they are also able to tell them apart from other people. A 47-year-old-man Pema Tashi, who is a teacher of one of the schools at Trashiyangtse stated that,

> Black-necked cranes are one of the wisest bird species because we can see that when members of the community get closer to them, even if we approach them within a hundred meters, they do not fly away, but when someone from another

> village or further afield approaches them even at five hundred meters, they would panic and fly away. If people wear pants and shirts or if we go with messy clothes, they fly away even if they approach them from a very far distance.

This is how inhabitants of Bumdeling and cranes are related or interdependent with each other.

Similarly, as stated by van Dooren (2014), in Brisbane, the crows would follow the people living in that region and they would closely watch the people without harming them. This indicates the attachment that crows have with the people of Brisbane. Moreover, the coexistence between the people of Brisbane with crows shows the shared lives between human and non-human species (van Dooren, 2014). It can also be said that cranes also make kinship with the people of Bumdeling through love, labor, and care. According to a farmer Dorji, who is 35 years old and the leader of the Black-Necked Crane Protection Group, and also serves as the head of the community,

The arrivals of cranes are the most awaited day of the year and the happiness of seeing them equal the happiness of seeing our family members. Moreover, the reason for leaving some grains in our fields is feeding the cranes and the satisfaction I get when cranes feed on the grains I leave behind is immeasurable. I also take part in making the cranes' roosting area plain because I get afraid that they will get hurt when they fly since they have big bodies.

This portrays how the people of Bumdeling show their love and care toward the cranes. The paintings and sculptures that are in and around the Chorten Kora show how the people of Trashiyangtse feel connected with cranes and are considered an important species for them. Statues of cranes were kept around *Chorten Kora* and the walls of houses were painted beautifully (see figure 1). Students of the local College

of *Zorig Chhusm* also take part in making such paintings and statues.

Figure 1: wall paintings of Black-necked cranes

https://leythro-darlo.blogspot.com/2011/11/ode-to-black-necked-crane.html

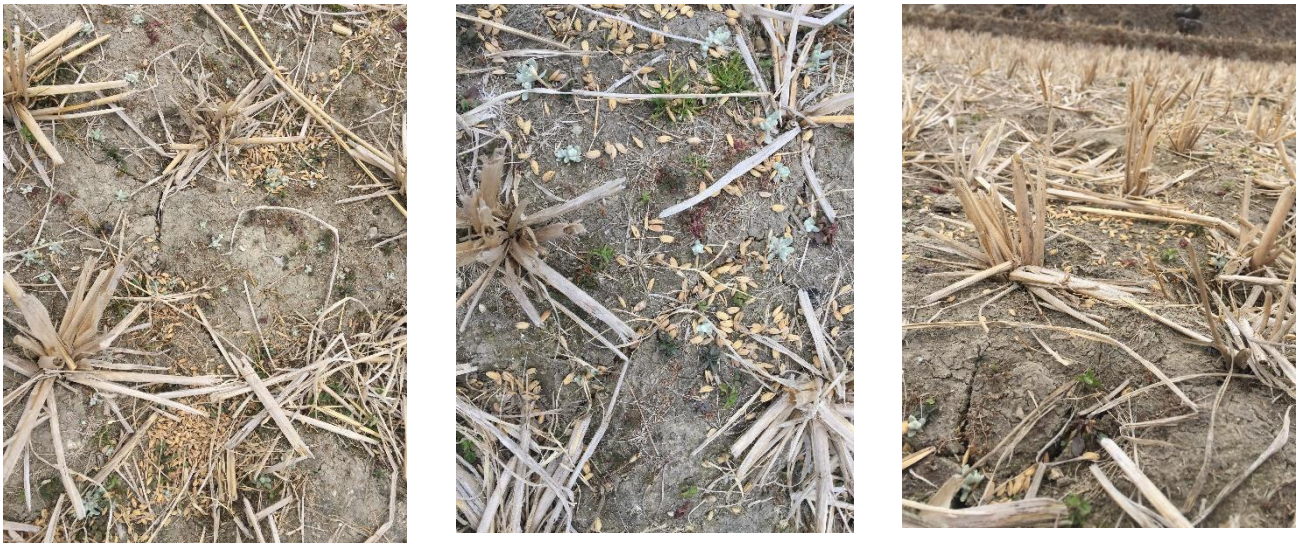

Figure 2: Picture of the grain that is left for the cranes by the people of Bumdeling; photo taken by the author

This research was based on my interest in learning about the relationships between humans and non-human species. Since I was born and brought up at Trashiyangtse, I think it was a blessing to study the relationships between the people of Bumdeling with the cranes. After conducting fieldwork in Bumdeling, I conclude that the people of Bumdeling are interconnected with the cranes, and they are interdependent with each other. The arrival of the cranes has benefited the residents in their harvests and they are also overjoyed to have the cranes visit yearly. However, due to a decreased number of cranes visiting, many people of Bumdeling think that the reason for the decline is that the cranes are being disturbed by researchers. The residents are very concerned and worried about the fluctuations in the number of crane visits. The sounds of the cranes are what people love to hear when they arrive and Black-necked cranes are said to be one of the most faithful and loyal birds to their partners. The people of Bumdeling are very cautious about taking care of their environment and the cranes' arrival. They have even formed a Black-Necked Crane Protection Group for the well-being of the cranes. Furthermore, local people contribute grains to the protection group for cranes. When it comes to future research, I can see a lot of scope for anthropologists to look at the relationships between humans and non-

human species in Bhutan such as the relationships between cranes and the people of Bumdeling. We may think that there can only be a relationship between people but after studying multi-species ethnography, I learned that humans and non-human species are very interconnected and inseparable from each other. If there is plenty of time for fieldwork, I think there would be a chance to gain emic perspectives on the relationships humans and non-humans share. Moreover, we could interview members of the different communities about where cranes visit Bhutan so that we can compare and contrast perceptions about the cranes between different communities. Another example of future research could be to look from the point of view of environmental humanities. Environmental humanities is a transdisciplinary approach that takes into consideration more than human perspectives while addressing certain pressing environmental problems. It also shows how environmental issues have always been entangled in human questions of justice, labor, and politics so that there could be a sense of interdependence between humans and nonhuman species.

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Writing Ethnography (ETY202), Spring 2021: Bhutan Beneath the Surface

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Introduction

In Spring Semester 2021, Writing Ethnography (ETY202), a module for second-year students, was taught for the second time since the Anthropology Programme's founding in 2018. We were extremely fortunate that no lockdowns or similar problems intervened with students' abilities to go out and undertake fieldwork projects. It is true that the threat of such difficulties often seemed to be hanging over our heads, and I am sure there were times when students (and their parents) felt apprehensive. But I hope that with the distance of time, students will look back at the piece presented below, as well as their own memories of the process, with a sense of satisfaction in having persevered and contributed to our understanding of Bhutanese sociocultural dynamics.

Soon after the semester began in February, I proposed a set of loose themes that students could take as a starting point for their projects. These themes were all quite different, yet they all fell under an umbrella that I referred to as 'Bhutan Beneath the

Surface'. The 'surface', in this case, alludes to the many pithy statements that show up frequently in the international media, to represent Bhutan's uniqueness when it is presented to the outside world. For instance, Bhutan is commonly noted as the only country in the world with no traffic lights, the last country in the world to get television (in 1999), and a place where chillies feature so heavily in cuisine that they are full-fledged 'vegetables' rather than a mere 'spice'. Often, these ideas are not merely subjects of fascination to the outside world, but also play a role in how Bhutanese see themselves. For instance, in recent months when lockdowns were declared, we witnessed that Bhutanese media and social media users frequently depicted Thimphu's empty central traffic circle – laden with traditional symbolism, and lacking a traffic light – as the most visible symbol of a once relatively bustling national capital, which was now ground to a halt.

Not every topic that could have been placed under our 'Bhutan Beneath the Surface' umbrella was a reasonable candidate for being addressed in a semester-long project. The world famous concept of Gross National Happiness, for instance, can be certainly studied from anthropological perspectives, but in many cases the participant-observation methods that were a hallmark of ETY202 would seem extremely difficult to apply (for an undergraduate student to integrate themselves among the high- ranking government officers in the GNH Commission would pose challenges, as would tagging along in the national GNH surveys). Similarly, Bhutan's fame as the world's only carbon negative country would be hard to study through participant-observation without an extensive time commitment. However, I believe that our class discussions about the feasibility, or not, of various topics helped students to clarify their thinking about anthropological methods.

Particularly for international readers, I would note that a few of the topics addressed below – even ones that may outwardly seem quite innocent – have some slightly sensitive components to them. I observed a certain degree of self-censorship in some of the student papers, but as editor of this piece, it was not my goal to 'correct' this.

Instead, I present the writings below as a snapshot of student work at a particular moment in time. I hope that these students, and others like them, will continue to enhance our understanding of these topics in the ways that they best see fit.

Bhutan's Central Traffic Roundabout: Pranita Sharma, Tshering Khenden Namda, Sonam Norbu Lhaden

The traffic roundabout at the intersection of Norzin Lam and Hogdzin Lam[1] marks Thimphu's commercial center. A large number of news features seeking to introduce Bhutan to the outside world make mention of this landmark, but the discussion rarely extends beyond a sentence or two, and statements can be contradictory. The BBC, for instance, states that there was once a traffic light there which lasted "just 24 hours", whereas the Telegraph states that it lasted a few days, and Reuters appears to suggest that it never managed to exist at all.[2] I have never seen any of these sources state *when* the purported traffic light appeared and disappeared but, when conducting interviews for her class paper, Tshering Khenden Namda was told that it was in 1995.

Turning now to fieldwork, all three students who wrote about this central roundabout had a common experience: a phenomenon they previously took for granted turned out to be nuanced and changing on closer examination. Pranita Sharma quoted from her field notes in her final paper:

> Whenever I thought about manual traffic signals, I assumed all the police officers had the exact same hand gestures. However I was wrong, as I can see right now that even if the same message is conveyed, like a police officer raising one hand

[1] Since Norzin Lam is Thimphu's main commercial thoroughfare, most people simply refer to it as the 'Norzin Lam roundabout'. For international readers: Lam simply means 'Road' in this context, but Bhutanese speaking in English almost always prefer to say Norzin Lam, at least in my experience.
[2] These are cited in the bibliography as Dwyer (2017), Oldfield & Mitchinson (2012), and McNaughton (2018) respectively. As the Reuters statement is slightly ambiguous, I quote it here: "There are still no traffic lights after residents protested against the installation of one."

> up while the other is in a still position, or lifting both hands in the air and swaying them left to right, the way of doing so is different. (Field notes, 8th April).

These observations received further elaboration, and also led to questions that she asked traffic officers:

> The movement of the hands is artistic and well trained, making it look very professional. Bhutan is a country with strict expected behaviors and etiquette, and respect is usually a required factor, so the hand gestures used by the traffic police give the impression of smoothness and politeness…
>
> The main roundabout's manual traffic signals consist of nine different hand signals in total. However, only three of them are prominently used [because this roundabout has traffic coming from only two directions, due to one-way streets]... As stated by one of the respondents, "there are specific types of hand gestures/signals, and they are taught in the same way for everyone, but we tend to give our own styles depending upon our flexibility and comfort." He further stated that hand gesture's aesthetics are similar to a group of dancers dancing to the same song: there will be one step for all, but how they perform that step differs from one individual to another.

Despite this prominent role of personal style to break up the monotony of directing traffic all day, the job is certainly not without its stress. Outside observers who find the officers' uniforms and gestures to be a quaint relic in a rapidly changing world will probably not have many occasions to note the difficulties they face. However, Pranita found that,

> The most common problems faced by traffic police are people complaining and not listening to their instructions. One of my traffic officer respondents said "We

> are not here because we like controlling the public to serve our own interest. We are only doing it for their own safety, yet they rebel and disobey us." He added to this by wondering whether drivers might see officers as inferior to themselves, and do not like being ordered around. The officers' work becomes even harder during peak hours, when it becomes extremely difficult to regulate vehicle movements and safety of people, mostly due to disobedient vehicle drivers and rebellious passerby.
>
> From the few respondents I interviewed, they seemed to like their job because it is their main source of bread and butter but also because they feel like they are contributing something to the nation and serving the people. Serving the nation is a way of showing gratitude to His Majesty for all his contributions, and this is exactly what one of my respondents meant when he said, "With this job, which ensures the safety of thousands of people, I am proud that I am able to pay at least something back to our king."

Like Pranita Sharma, Tshering Khenden Namda also looked at personal differences in how the officers conduct traffic.

> The first traffic officer from my second observation was very firm with his arms while directing. He stretched his arm straight, and every movement was very firm when allowing the cars to move... While stopping the movement of cars from a specific direction, he stretched his arm out still at shoulder length, and made a stiff stop gesture with his palms out, and fingers pointing straight up with not a single bend. While stopping them, he made eye contact with the first car; however, after the cars came to a stop, he did not continue holding his arm to order a stop, and rested his arm beside his hip until he had to direct them to move again. He had good *driglam namzha* because he was focused on his work, and showed respect to the job and the drivers waiting, which is in line with the teachings of the Buddha, to respect yourself and others.

> The second traffic police was a little less stiff. He was lanky, so his frequent body turns looked exaggerated. His arms were flimsy when they moved, they did not fully stretch out when directing movement, and his wrists moved more than his arms bent, which made him look uninterested or forced to do his duty. Even while stopping the vehicles his elbow was bent a little, and it looked very informal.

For the last several decades, anthropological methods classes have tended to stress reflexivity, one component of which involves recognizing how one's own background, including biases, influence how one perceives things in a fieldwork setting. Khenden took up this challenge in her paper, and her points concern *driglam namzha*, which she referenced above. She describes *driglam namzha* as "Bhutan's code of etiquette, a system of cultured behaviour" and also quotes Dr. Karma Phuntsho: "good mannerism in Bhutan is to a great extent defined by the Buddhist ethics of wholesome physical, verbal and mental conducts" (2005). At any rate, during the course of her research, she came to realize that internalizing the values of *driglam namzha* had sometimes caused her to judge officers who appeared to be less in conformance with its norms. Referring to an additional pair of officers she witnessed (not the two described in more detail above), she made the following observations:

> [With] the first policeman I observed his body gestures of standing straight up with very minimal but stiff movements demonstrated good *driglam namzha*... However, I thought the second, restless policeman lacked manners. This posed difficulty in trying to maintain a neutral, open mind about the police.

Turning now to Sonam Norbu Lhaden's paper, she focused on the idea that the central roundabout cannot be viewed in isolation: despite its prestige, and despite looking different from other roundabouts in the city, it is clearly related to them. Initially, she starts by contrasting uniforms worn at the central roundabout with the uniforms worn by officers at all the other locations:

> Norzin Lam's traffic police are dressed in vivid colors. Just by looking at them, one can tell they are not like the traffic police in other places. They are dressed in white gloves that are long or short depending on the season, a navy blue shirt with a bright loop around the shoulder, a white belt, and navy blue pants with a white stripe down the side. They also have a round-shaped cap that completes their look. On the other hand, other roundabouts' traffic police wear plain navy blue uniforms. They do not wear any kind of gloves, or pants of varied color.

This discussion of differences leads to an important point about commonalities:

> The two traffic police are similar in that they work they alternate between 12-hour shifts one day and 6 hours shifts the next. In addition, the Norzin Lam traffic police would work as an officer in another part of town for a week before returning to his old job. This is a typical day in the life of a traffic cop.

From the latter point, we can learn that traffic police in the city's most famous traffic circle are not fixed at the top of a hierarchy. Rather, they alternate back and forth between this location and the other less 'prestigious' sites in town. In these other locations, the officers are not shielded by an octagonal pavilion like they are at Norzin Lam, and may stand quite close to moving cars. As such, all traffic officers are immersed in similar experiences as a result of the policy of rotating their workstations.

Television in Bhutan: Sonam Rigdhen Gyeltshen, Yeshey Wangchuk

Before turning to student papers, international and domestic portrayals of television's arrival in Bhutan are best introduced through quotes:

> The kingdom of Bhutan drew the international spotlight in 1999 when it became the last nation on earth to introduce broadcast television. It was a deliberate and strategic move by a country that for centuries had chosen to isolate itself from the rest of the world, turning inward to nurture its own culture. (Avieson 2015)

Clearly, many at the time expected the changes to be dramatic:

> For years, Bhutan had a deliberate policy of isolation, fearing outside influences would undermine its absolute monarchy, freedom and culture. Three similar Buddhist kingdoms Tibet, Sikkim and Ladakh have disappeared as independent states...

The arrival of television will herald tremendous social change, said the country's only newspaper, Kuensel, a weekly.

"If we are to record the language pattern, interests, sense of humor, values, fashion and behavior of our children now and repeat it six months later, we will see a dramatic difference," it said in a recent editorial. (Deepak 1999)

Two years later, an additional foreign news outlet tapped the *Kuensel* (which still remained Bhutan's only newspaper)[3] for perspectives:

"TV is quite a serious concern right now," said Kinley Dorji, editor-in-chief of *Kuensel*, Bhutan's only newspaper. "The basic danger is, it's a very rural and oral society. We have not had time to develop a literary tradition. Now you put a box in front of people and they won't have time to pick up a book. You jump from the oral to the audio-visual."

While not going so far as to say TV should be banned, Dorji is worried Bhutan will fall another victim to television's worldwide bid for cultural dominance.

"Bhutan has always been vulnerable," he said. "This makes it more vulnerable." (Chao 2001)

Returning now to student writing in ETY202, Sonam Rigdhen Gyeltshen conducted research at a monastery towards the upper rim of the Thimphu Valley. He notes the following during his second observation:

[3] This did not change until 2006.

Inside the TV hall, six monks who looked like they were in their early teens were watching television. They seemed not too excited but not too bored also. I could hear giggles, laughter and random conversations. I heard them talking about Bhutanese films, local hip hop artists and most interestingly, how they wished they could go to Thimphu and play video games, go to the movie hall, eat momos, burgers, and pizzas. The monks did not seem like they despised their monkhood or their school. But I could sense that they were keen on urban life and how they would want to take a break sometimes and try things out in the city. I heard one of them say, "Let's go to Thimphu tomorrow - we can do some shopping for the school too. That way, we can give our teacher an excuse." The others were in agreement.

As they browsed through the channels figuring out what to watch, the monk who was in control of the TV stopped at channels that were of Bollywood films and also on channels like National Geographic, the Discovery Channel, and also travel and lifestyle channels. I could see that as a group they paid more attention to the travel, food and lifestyle channels such as TLC [The Learning Channel], Fox Life [an Indian channel] and even Discovery Turbo, with its many features on motor vehicles and engines. While they were watching, they did not talk much, but I could see the interest and wonder in their eyes when they see the globalized modern world on TV. Perhaps the highlight of observing the monks watching TV for the second time was when they saw people partying at the pool. On a lifestyle channel, as the monks watched men and women drinking, dancing and swimming by the pool in their shorts and bikinis, I heard them discuss, "What do the *chilips* [Caucasian Westerners] do for a living?, Do they think they are in heaven, or is their life hell?" They seemed rather perplexed by what they saw on the screen. Some of them eve giggled shyly, some seemed rather disgusted, and some seemed excited and stimulated.

As we can see, Rigdhen resists tropes such as portraying Bhutan as a land whose culture is under intense threat from outside, but rather seeks his best to see these

young monks as an integral part of a rapidly changing and highly interconnected world.

Yeshey Wangchuk also did not view his research participants as under threat, but instead focused on how they use TV for continuing education and group solidarity. He focused on a group of farmers living in the Paro Valley. This particular group, Greener Lyfe Farms, has a strong interest in innovative farming methods, integrating their farms into the broader world of tourism, and in serving as a community resource (they are currently establishing a Treehouse Library, focusing on agricultural books). After becoming a participant-observer in some of their evening gatherings, he noted the following:

> One of the interesting things I found out from my observation was that watching television together leads to creative ideas and discussions on the farm and other life matters. For these farmers, the internet and television are also their primary capital. In an interview, farmer Ugyen shared that we should never stop learning, and that usually after graduation people tend to stop learning and exploring new things. Hence, they came up with the idea of watching television by connecting it to the internet and making it a daily routine. Their theme for watching television on weekdays is based on advancing the farms, and on the weekends they watch miscellaneous shows suggested by the members of the group. Therefore, this culture has become a rite of intensification of these farmers.

He also found parallels with a Brazilian anthropological study (Pace and Hinote 2013), which mentions that farmers had simply tended to go to bed after dinner in the pre-television days. After they acquired televisions for their homes, the period after dinner changed to a time of lively discussion and debate, centered around the TV broadcasts.

Bhutanese Foodways: Chillies and Beyond. Sonam Tshomo, Dechen Wangmo, Pema Lhamo, Anita Gurung

As mentioned in the introduction to this paper, Bhutan is frequently touted as a land where chillies are so ubiquitous that they function as a vegetable rather than a mere spice. As such, their centrality to Bhutanese cooking makes for a strong research topic, but so too do the recent fast food restaurants which both reflect and extend the globalization that is shaping modern Bhutan.

On the point of chillies' centrality, Sonam Tshomo recorded a fairly dramatic statement from one her research participants, who apparently conceives of chillies as the one non-negotiable point in their personal conception of Bhutanese culture. At Nana Restaurant in Kawajangsa neighborhood, she made an observation, which she then ties to a statement made by the above-mentioned interviewee:

> I noticed a teen girl who requested that the restaurant staff change the classic Bhutanese song to Korean pop music, indicating that they are more into modern culture but still enjoy spicy chilli cuisine, and that culture is embedded and remained constant. As one of my informants mentioned, "I honestly do not like some of our traditional culture as they are very orthodox and I think changes are a must. The only culture that should remain constant is chilli consumption, as it is our mandatory diet".

While the term 'constant' does not provide any direct information about how long this interviewee believes chillies have been a part of Bhutanese culture, many outside observers have noted the seeming paradox by which this relatively 'new' vegetable has become so deeply internalized that it is often regarded as ancient. Sonam describes the situation as follows:

> Chillies are thought to have originated in South America and reached in India in the 16th century, before being introduced to Bhutan by pilgrims and traders roughly two centuries later (Parameswaran, 2012). Chillies are now an integral

> component of Bhutanese culture and chillies are synonymous with being Bhutanese.

Recent events such as COVID-19 have disrupted normal chilli supplies. In her research, Dechen Wangmo encountered people who simply made a decision to adapt in the face of growing prices and short supply. In an interview, one shared that,

> "There was a time when we consumed lots of chilli. We use it in our curry which is made of vegetables like potatoes, cabbage, beans. Even still, we need a separate *ezay* (chilli paste) prepared for us as a condiment. It's really difficult to swallow rice without something spicy or 'hotness' in it. But now we are foregoing *ezay* when we have a main chilli dish." Many others started using chilli powder instead of chilli, which is still mild for their taste but still effective to them – they get at least some taste of chilli, and it is cost-effective.

Dechen contributed to our understanding of current literature by finding a highly relevant journal article and then enlarging its observations with her own findings:

> Samdrup & Ueda (2009) had stated that in earlier days Bhutanese, especially in rural areas, operated a barter system to obtain chillies, and how people who have surplus chillies sell or exchange them with other commodities they need. Although they claimed that the tradition is slowly dying out, I could say it is not dying out, but operating in a different form…

Using theories of gift exchange derived from Mauss (1925), and also interpreting the acts described below as a form of barter, she describes interactions that take place when people who have settled in the towns go to meet their relatives back in the villages:

> A person who works in an urban setting must bring gifts to his villagers when he returns to his village during winter for the annual *rimdro* (ritual). The gifts

include soap, packets of sugar, tea leaves, and even some clothes that the person living in town no longer wishes to use. Although manufactured garments are no longer new for the urban dweller, the villagers gladly accept them because they could at least wear them while working. Therefore, the villagers are obligated to receive these items, and to return the gift when it is time for the giver to return to the urban area. The return gifts will be in form of chillies, local Sichuan pepper, local cheese, and butter, as well as red rice. These are placed in handwoven spherical-shaped bamboo container called *bangchung*, or sometimes a sack or bag. After the urban dwellers have received these items, it is their tradition to return the container to a villager with some money, ranging from Nu.100 to a few hundred.

Ueda & Samdup (2009) have emphasized that barter practices involve social networks more than cash transactions at marketplaces and shops. Correspondingly, the system of gift exchange or the barter system practiced by my respondents also shares a similar experience with them. For instance, when he/she returns to their village his relatives and close friends will have more expectation for him to bring them gifts than the other people. So their exchanges also happen within their social network. Moreover, according to their research, barter transaction takes place in places like Paro, Thimphu, Punakha, Wangdue Phodrang, Trongsa, and Lhuntse. Likewise, most of my respondents from these places also agreed that they practice this form of gift exchange.

Turning again to places where chilli dishes are served, Pema Lhamo did research at a restaurant in the center of Thimphu, Ama's, which serves *ema datsi* (literally, chilli [and] cheese), and many other spicy dishes. But before diving into the aesthetics of spiciness, she considers how the restaurant's diverse menu caters to different needs:

[Concerning] food choices made by the people of different ages, I assumed that youths and adults are fond of chillies and indeed they seemed to order more of

> the spicy food. Children are less likely to eat the food with more chillies, rather they prefer less spicy food such as momo dumplings, soup, and others.

In many cultures, knowing how to balance out different flavors when cooking is a highly valued skill. At this restaurant:

> Chillies are bought from the vegetable market, and during the pandemic they have focused more on dishes using dried chilli, as it was very hard for them to get green chillies due to the break in importing chilli from India… One of the finest ways reduce the spicy of the chilli is by including dairy items, namely low-fat cheese and yogurt. Sugars also offer assistance to neutralize the heat of chilli peppers. Adding a small amount of sugar or honey can help to adjust overly hot flavors.

As Pema noted, however, for many customers the high level of heat in dishes may not be enough: the fresh *ezay* paste mentioned in Dechen Wangmo's paper also appears on every table at Ama's, along with chilli sauces. At any rate, Pema's paper used interviews to shed light on what the fondness for chillies entails for some customers:

> "Eating spicy food is what I crave, because it gives me a momentary feeling of delight from head to toe, and I love the spicy nourishment in the same way I pine for something sweet or salty."

Or, as another respondent noted:

> "Spicy food is something that gives me pleasure while eating, and I cannot eat food without some sort of spice in it – usually, chillies."

Incidentally, I would note that Pema Lhamo's paper is a good example of the multilingual world that many Bhutanese students navigate. In the paper's introduction, she had noted that had to translate "research questions into Dzongkha, Sharchop, Kurtoep, and other dialects of Bhutan."

The centrality of spicy dishes to Bhutanese identity seems firmly established in studies like the above, yet we also need to consider that many originally non-Bhutanese foods have made major inroads, and also become localized, in recent decades. Anita Gurung did research at a Thimphu restaurant for which we will use the pseudonym BFC (Bhutan Fried Chicken).[4] The most popular dishes include "pizzas, burgers, hotdogs, and fried chicken with tomato and chilli sauces" and so forth. Often, these originally Western items are served up in a form that would be easily recognizable internationally, but sometimes there are local twists, such as "pizza with *ema datsi* topping."

Similarly to Pema Lhamo, Anita noted how consumers of different ages had different attitudes to the food on offer. One young interviewee was quite enthusiastic:

> "The foods in the BFC are so satisfying that I crave them more and more, and I never get enough of them, no matter how many times I eat here. I come to BFC whenever I get my pocket money, and sometimes order online."

On the other hand, a 37 year old mother of three children was frank about her personal lack of interest in the food:

> "I usually do not prefer to eat the foods in BFC because I do not find the foods compelling. The menus are limited and I find chicken wings, drumsticks, burgers

[4] Although KFC and other American fast food chains have no presence in Bhutan, the acronym is widely known. At least two restaurants in Thimphu use the 'FC' element in their name and, until recently, a college in the Thimphu area simply designated fried chicken as 'KFC' on their whiteboard.

> and such tasteless. But I always bring my children twice a month to BFC because they are fond of it, and this is because no hot spices are added to the chicken products. They love to eat pizzas, burgers, cheese balls and sausages in BFC, and they consider these foods to be tasty."

Anita followed the lead of the anthropologically-driven book *Golden Arches East: McDonald's in East Asia* (Watson 2006) in posing the question of whether consumers believe that such fast foods can actually make up a proper meal. Like most peoples of the East Asian lands that the book covers, Bhutanese also generally consider rice to be central to a nourishing meal. And, as it just so happens, at the time of her research, BFC had "recently added rice to their menu so that they could attract more customers." The general consensus among her interviewees was that the restaurant was often a site for novelty, and a way of breaking out of everyday routines, and that the food was generally regarded as snack food rather than a source for 'meals' per se. The extent to which food eaten at restaurants such as BFC influences the amount of rice-based food eaten on the same day could also be an interesting topic for further research.

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Applied Anthropology: Students' experiences of their project works

Commentary: Dr. Richard Kamei

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Applying anthropology in real-world scenarios is an effort that strives for meaningful contributions through a collaborative approach. Using anthropological knowledge beyond academia constitutes applied anthropology. It moves away from academia and aims to take academia to real-world settings. This setting aims to engage and contribute to addressing issues and complement existing conditions. Applied anthropology, known for the application of anthropological knowledge, allows anthropologists to collaborate and contribute to peoples' interests and issues by breaking down barriers and building a holistic approach to real-life scenarios.

In adherence to the approach of applied anthropology, the final year students of the anthropology programme in 2022, were given an opportunity to take up project work of their choice with organisations chosen for collaboration with Royal Thimphu College (RTC). The module tutor facilitated the students' project work by interfacing with all the organisations selected by students. The four organisations that agreed and took on students for the project work were the Loden Foundation, Nazhoen Lamtoen, Royal Academy of Performing Arts (RAPA) and Tarayana Foundation. The project lasted for one and a half months. After accomplishing the project work, students wrote a detailed report on their project work at an individual level. The

writing here presents students' work in their respective project work with various organisations.

The four organisations chosen for the project work came up with their plan to involve anthropology students. Students who opted to work with the Loden Foundation were focused on publication work about entrepreneurs in the form of an e-book. Students took interviews with entrepreneurs to collect stories for an e-book. The students in a group of five, reached out to eighty-two entrepreneurs through telephone and WhatsApp conversations with the beneficiaries of the Loden Foundation. They completed their project work on time. The second organisation, Nazhoen Lamtoen, worked with students on a mini-research project on the impact of online learning on children during the pandemic. The students, through their research, presented to the organisation with the purpose of using them for intervention work.

The third organisation is RAPA. Students working with them conducted translation work of written materials about folk songs, mask dances, and music. They translated documents written in Dzongkha to English with the aim of making the documents accessible to younger generations who are now equally comfortable in English and Dzongkha. All students accomplished their work on time. They felt a sense of responsibility, having contributed their share of work to the organisation and communities. The fourth organisation, the Tarayana Foundation, worked with students to research Rukha community to assess the impact of development. Tarayana assisted all the students in their project work in providing resources for conducting interviews, including contact details of respondents and materials. Students interviewed respondents through telephone conversations. This was followed by transcription and translation work. They analysed the data further, which were used in their final project report as part of their accomplishment of their project work.

Four to six students worked in a group, wherein 21 students were divided into four groups to work with the organisations. They were given a choice and picked based on their interests. Given the pandemic and lockdown situation, all students carried out their project work virtually. Only towards the end, when the lockdown was lifted, some managed to visit their organisations for project work and give presentations and interactions. Four students' comments and reflections on their experiences from their respective project work with four organisations- Loden Foundation, Nazhoen Lamtoen, RAPA and the Tarayana Foundation are reproduced below. Their responses inform how they applied their anthropological knowledge and skills, and their experiences.

Ngawang Dema, who worked with RAPA shared that "applied anthropology is vital to resolving different issues in today's world ranging from developments, education, health, economic policies, and environments." She added that irrespective of the area of work, the applied aspect ensures that it delves deep into how to amplify the interests of people and work towards prioritising the beneficial aspect for society. She also believes that the module, applied anthropology "can be used to further our career goals and our developments in both our personal and professional life." Given the limited time frame of one and a half months of project work, she commented that "even though our project with RAPA provided less scope to use the anthropological knowledge, we were still able to advocate some important aspects of intangible culture in the form of translation." Ngawang Yangchen Jamtsho, who worked with the Loden Foundation, shared that working with them allowed her "to use my anthropological knowledge to complete the project given to me." During her project work, she also used anthropological knowledge, qualitative research, and using ethical considerations. She felt a sense of accomplishment by contributing information from interviews about entrepreneurs for the Loden Foundation and took it as a learning experience.

On the Tarayana Foundation's project work with students, Sonam Norbu Lhaden shared her experience of using applied anthropology in her project work. She stated that the project work enabled her to enhance her research skills and collaborative work as part of applied anthropology. As part of the project work, she conducted interviews with selected respondents from the Rukha village. She added that her project work with Tarayana Foundation was beneficial, "I gained a lot of experience engaging with a community that was far away from us owing to the research I conducted in Rukha village. I was also able to obtain experience conducting online interviews using semi-structured questions through phone calls... I was able to learn about the village through the reports we received, even without personally visiting the village." Yeshey Wangchuk was one of the four students who worked with Nazhoen Lamtoen. He saw that the project work allowed him to look at an issue from a practical perspective by using his anthropological knowledge and skill. He found the collaborative work to be really helpful in making him contribute a mini research writing on the impact of online learning on children during the time of the pandemic.

Application of anthropological knowledge and skills help students of the anthropology programme at RTC to take stock of their learning in the past three years. The project work they conducted gave them an opportunity to take their classroom to real-world settings. They see it as a preparation for facing the world outside the classroom and diversifying their interests in community, environment and personal pursuits academically or professionally. The applied anthropology module will continue to harness anthropology students' potential to engage in meaningful contributions to society and real-life issues.

Weaving History: A report on a three-day textile conservation workshop

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This semester, Anthropology students of Royal Thimphu College (RTC) were given an opportunity to participate in a workshop on textile conservation led by the Royal Textile Academy (RTA) team. The workshop would cover practical and theoretical aspects of textile conservation over the course of three days. Alumni were also extended invitations, and as this was something I was excited about, I accepted the invitation.

On the 20th May of 2022, we had our first workshop session in the afternoon. The chief curator of the RTA, Tshering Uden Penjor, met us in RTC and after a brief introduction of all present, the presentation began. Although the main goal of the workshop was to explain textile conservation efforts and methods of the RTA, to help us fully understand the context, Penjor started at the very beginning – the loom.

It is not known exactly and without a doubt when and from where the loom was first brought to Bhutan. Being as steeped in religion as written Bhutanese history is, so-called "domestic" matters need to be parsed from the texts and are usually symbolic in nature. Thus, one of the first mentions of a loom in Bhutan is in a *namthar* (biography of a religious figure) of Phajo Drugom Zhigpo, circa 1580. Another mention of the loom can be found in Ashi Nangsa's *namthar*, where she sings a song

using the loom as a symbol. Many people believe an oral tradition that says the tool was actually brought to Bhutan by Ashi Gyaza, a Chinese princess more commonly known as princess Wencheng, circa 623 AD. However, documented history disputes this by stating that the princess was never in the country to be able to do so.

Penjor then moved on to talk about the history of Bhutanese attire, the first representation of secular attire being a wall painting at the Changangkha Lhakhang, dated to around the 13th century. Jesuit priests that visited Bhutan during Zhabdrung's time (1627) also contributed to the knowledge in this area by writing in-depth reports of the country that included detailed descriptions of the attire at the time. From these information, scholars speculate that the kira was adapted from the *pakhi* of the Lhop, thought to be the first settlers of Bhutan; the gho from the Tibetan *chuba,* hitched up on the knees to adapt for mobility. Other Bhutanese attire can also be connected to neighbouring areas, with the Merak Sakten attire being identical to the Tawang attire and the *mentha* kira sharing similarities to the clothing of the Sikkimese Lepchas. The *mentha* weave pattern is the only pattern worn solely by women, whereas every other pattern can be worn by both men and women. Another interesting weaving pattern mentioned by the chief curator, is the *tingma,* a supplementary discontinuous weft pattern that is completely unique to Bhutanese weaving.

Traditionally, women would study weaving while men studied embroidery. Embroidery was mainly for sacred purposes, and men were responsible for the creation of *thangkas,* appliqué of Buddhist Gods, or Deities. *Thagzo* or the art of weaving was handled by the women because weaves are intricate and required nimble fingers. For many women, *thagzo* served as an avenue to express their individuality and creativity. Combinations of different patterns and weaving techniques are all up to the weaver, so each piece is truly unique work and reflects the maker's mood, individuality, and creativity. Although weaving materials are imported nowadays, in the past, fibers and dyes were made from local natural

resources. Buddhism is embedded in these weaving practices too, and the silk fiber for *bura* is acquired from discarded silk cocoons, rather than the usual method of boiling the cocoons in their raw state, with the silkworms inside.

In her presentation, the chief curator also mentioned projects the RTA undertook, or are still in the process of, such as their ongoing project with Gasa for the preventive conservation efforts of Zhabdrung's saddle. The session ended with a mention of conflicts faced by conservators when interacting with the owners of artefacts. Their differing motives: conservation, preservation, and art appreciation for the conservators, and religious beliefs and sentimental attachments of the people, meant that their ideas of how these artefacts should be handled were at odds. This left me wondering whether the two could have a middle ground. Conservators put their efforts into preserving precious objects to protect history, making sure they were handled delicately to last as long as possible. Whereas owners of these historically significant artefacts found religious or sentimental meaning in these artefacts, and to them that meant using them well until they fell apart. Yet in the end, both groups did what they did for the love of the object.

On the second day, the workshop began earlier, starting at 9 am. This time, the chief curator covered the technicalities of conservation – how the collections were cared for, different methods of conservation, how different materials were treated differently, the different ways the textiles were stored and organized, and so forth. According to Penjor, preventive conservation was always the first choice with each textile, only then was treatment conservation considered. Penjor explained in detail a simple yet high-tech system of storing textiles that was specifically developed for storing Bhutanese textiles called anoxic storage. This storage system works by packaging the textile in a plastic covering that is drained of oxygen and free of insects and dust, prolonging the life of the textiles. Penjor ensured that this method of storage would be demonstrated to us the next day, when we would visit the RTA.

After the presentation, we were divided into small groups. The team then demonstrated to us the different ways of sewing, the ways in which shoes were labeled, the way the labels were organized, and how textiles were mounted for display. Each group was given the opportunity to practice sewing identification tags on textiles we were instructed to bring from home. The team was friendly and forgiving of our mistakes when teaching us, and their demonstrations and instructions showed us just how meticulous and experienced they were.

On the third and final day of the workshop, we were given a tour of the RTA museum. When we entered the front door, we were greeted at the entrance by an enormous *thongdrel* (large appliqué depicting religious images, which translates to 'liberation at sight') of the Lord Buddha. Our tour started with the screening of a mini-documentary on the textiles of Bhutan. We were then led to the exhibits, where several textiles, ornaments, and other such materials were displayed, all with their own detailed descriptions. We were also treated to a special showing of the battle helmet, sometimes called the 'crown', of Desi Jigme Namgyel, an item that was in the process of treatment. The workshop ended with the team demonstrating the anoxic storage method, though it was almost skipped due to technological issues. The process required quick hands and focus, and although they gave us an opportunity to try it out ourselves, it was too much of a pressure for any of us to take up on.

Despite the workshop being short, we all came out of it having learned more about the history of Bhutanese textiles and the art of conservation. Workshops like these give us a practical glimpse into the things we only ever read about, and the RTA team did not disappoint.

Artefact Conservation Report

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Day 1

(Photos taken during the workshop, July 2022)

National Museum of Bhutan

A brief history of Ta-Dzong is available to the public. It is said that there used to be a watch tower and was converted to a museum once its function as a watch tower was no longer required. While on the topic of renovation of this museum, I was curious as to how the renovation was done. Whether the renovators took into

consideration the authenticity of the structure or if they renovated it to suit a museum aesthetically. The presenter then reassured the question by stating that the original look was maintained. The museum has seven floors, each being a separate gallery of different themes. I learned that the importance of the artefacts plays no role in where they are kept. As long as they belong to one of the themes of the seven floors, they are put there.

Royal Heritage Museum

The museum had quite a large number of items and artefacts related to the royals. This museum faced challenges in conserving and preserving its artefacts, as is expected from the work. It was surprising to me that the curator of the museum and a set of people from the museum advocated the value of the museum to schools and communities. Following this pattern, they initiated a virtual intern program for students and had successful accomplishments from the students, which also provided me with the information that such a program existed.

Division for Cultural Properties

This division dealt with movable cultural properties as well as the conservation of wall paintings around Bhutan. Since the art of conservation is fairly new, they face challenges in conserving the said artefacts.

Collection Care of Museum Objects

Collection care means avoiding needless damage and loss to a collection. The idea is to prevent damages so that they do not have to be repaired. The presenter also mentioned that the value of an object is lost once it is placed in a museum, but I had a doubt about religious objects. The statue of a deity before being brought into the museum has value and its function is to bless people who pray before the statue. Just by seeing the statue, one is said to be blessed. In that case, how would that function change once its location is changed? How much does religion play a part in the museum?

The answer to this question was that the function remains but changes how it is treated. When the statue is in a temple, fresh water, incense, and butter lamps are offered regularly. Prayers are chanted, but once the statue is in a museum, these activities are no longer continued; instead, the power of belief among certain Buddhists will show respect as they would in a temple but without the commonly practised behaviour of prostration followed by offering offerings. The museums follow preventive conservation, which is, as the name suggests, conserving the artefacts through the prevention of damages. To safeguard the artifact from agents of damage and deterioration, the conservators minimise physical interaction and regulate the museum's temperature, humidity, and lighting. The environment and location of the museum also play an important part in avoiding the damage caused by temperature, humidity, and lighting as well.

Cataloguing of museum artefacts

This is acquiring and attaching information with the museum artefacts and items. These items are coded with organised numbers and letters according to the artefact's material to ease the burden of knowing where each artefact is within the museum. In addition to the numbering of the artefacts, a detailed description is also provided along with its measurements, the source of where the item came from, and the provider's history is researched before the items are accepted into the museum. Although the cataloguing is manually written and collected, the digitised version is yet to exist but is underway. According to the presenter, plenty of research is available on these artifacts and is highly recommended conduct.

Museum Lightings

Although the person who was supposed to present on this topic was absent, one of their colleagues decided to present it. As mentioned earlier, lighting is an important factor to maintain to avoid damaging the artefacts and objects subject to it. Therefore, accent lighting is used because it radiates less heat which is required for

the safety of the museum items. "Focused lighting" as the presenter put it, also helps bring the visitors' attention to the displays available during the gallery presentation.

Day 2

Thangka Conservation

This talk first started with a brief description of what a Thangka is. It is a depiction of a Buddhist deity, mythological scenes, and Buddha and his teachings. It originated from India and served as a replacement for thick books of teachings. Thangka is loosely translated to scroll painting and is used on special occasions. Chemical and physical methods are used to arrest deterioration, prevent further degradation, and restore original appearance or conditions. Methods of conserving *Thangka* are preventive methods, remedial, and restoration. Preventive methods are measures to prevent the *Thangka* from deteriorating. Remedial is a curative method, treated using chemicals, and are experts. Restoration is an action to bring back its original appearance.

When in conservation, the first step is documentation. It is important because the record kept by a conservator can be used again by another. Photography is important to see the changes before and after restoration. Studying the object is the second step. The history, materials used, and findings are important as well. The third step is conservation and choosing which type of conservation to use. There are many deteriorations: physical, mechanical, environmental (smoke from butter lamps), light, and pests. Treatment methods include separation, which is to separate the thangka materials and treat them accordingly.

Cleaning is the first step in any conservation, removing the dust and any dirt on the object of conservation. A different type of vacuum cleaner is also used. Humidification introduces water into/onto the *Thangka.* Pest eradication is more of a prevention rather than a cure. Food or drinks are kept outside to not let any pests

enter wherever the thangkas are kept. Relining is strengthening the painting part of the *Thangka* to stitch properly.

Compensation for loss is tied with the belief that not fixing the missing body parts of the deity in the *Thangka* will lead to the one who does not fix being reborn with the same missing body parts.Mounting is the outer frame of the main painting, which holds the painting firmly. It can be repaired or changed completely. Mending is stitching back all the parts of the *Thangka* together after each and separate parts of the thangka are restored.

Hands-on Experience

This session was all about practical hands-on training on handling a *Thangka*. The steps above were taken whenever possible, and some of the more professional steps were skipped but were discussed. With a total of 3 different thangkas, the students were grouped into members, 3 per group. Surgical gloves were used to maintain cleanliness and the whole procedure was a learning process of how to handle the thangkas, its documentation process, and a superficial brushing off dust from the *Thangka* ended the practical class.

Day 3

Conservation

Conservation of Metal Artefacts: What is conservation?

Conservation and restoration of metals is the activity devoted to protecting and preserving objects. The reason artefacts are conserved are to allow the objects to speak for themselves with their existence and information researched by the conservators and researchers. It includes all activities aimed at preventing or slowing the deterioration of items. Even though metals are generally considered relatively

permanent and stable materials, they deteriorate gradually in contact with the environment.

In some cases, the change is fast and visible, and in most cases, it is slow and continuous. The speed of deterioration depends on factors such as temperature, humidity, physical shocks, etc. This change happens irrelevant of the object. The biggest challenge to conservators is deterioration. There are two steps in conservation. The first is to implement Preventive conservation, and if it fails, interventive conservation is used.

History of metal conservation

Ancient civilisations used metals as materials for objects, adornment, religious artefacts, and weaponry. Polishing these items shows an early sign of conservation. During WW1, artefacts in the British Museum were put underground and were damaged due to humidity with corrosion, mold, and salt efflorescence. During WW2, they learned from the WW1 incident and used crates to let air circulation and artificial climatic control.

Agents of Deterioration

Preventive Conservation

All measures and actions aim to avoid and minimise future deterioration or loss. There is no interference with the materials and structures of the items or any modification to the appearance. The agents of deterioration include environmental, biological, chemical, human, and disaster (both man-made and natural) factors. The agents of deterioration and their preventive methods for maintaining the optimum range of temperature, humidity, and light were the repetition of the contents of Day 1. Pollution and mishandling/vandalism were also briefly talked about by the presenters on Day 1. Documentation is done but would not be considered preventive

conservation but would be used as a reference source. A separate file is maintained for individual artefacts.

Interventive Conservation (Recover/Treat)

When Preventive conservation fails, interventive conservation is used. If all attempts at controlling damage from an agent of deterioration fail, then steps must be taken to recover from this damage by treating the affected artefacts. It usually involves cleaning, consolidation, and repair. However, much damage is impossible to undo. It is better to establish control strategies so that this stage is never reached. One good rule in museums is to treat all artefacts with both hands irrelevant of their size. Conservation treatments are done as a last resort, kept to a minimum, and should be reversible. Interventive treatments are needed when an object is disintegrating or fragile and the treatment will protect the object and/or stop the decay. Planning will assist in making the best decision in restorative conservation.

Principles of Conservation

Do's and Don'ts of Conservation

Use proper equipment and pay respect to the artefacts at all times. There should be no food/drinks inside the lab. Conservators should never touch the artefacts with their bare hands. They should also maintain good hygiene at all times. They should avoid the use of cell phones and other devices. Patience, diligence, mind concentration, and awareness are mandatory for conservators.

Transportation and Handling

There were strict rules while transporting and handling each artefact. From the place of procurement until the artefact reaches the museum, various and studious rules were required of all personnel involved while engaging with the artefacts. Once the artifact reaches the museum, the documentation process is started.

Museum Documentation

The importance of documentation and cataloguing has been covered on Day 1 and Day 2. However, a new point was added to the reason for documentation, i.e. to prove that the work of conservation has been done to concerned people when asked.

Hands-on Practice

Similar to the hands-on experience of the *Thangka,* the experts did the process of conservation of the different statues with a thorough explanation. The first step started with dry-cleaning the statues with brushes. This was followed by the students present, and with not enough time left, it was decided to be continued on Day 4.

Day 4

Hands-on Experience

This was a continuation of the hands-on experience of day 3. With the dry-cleaning or the dusting of the statues completed, the next step was wet-cleaning, where multiple liquids were used. The first liquid was distilled water. Once the statue was cleaned using distilled water, the dirt that was not cleaned with distilled water was done using a ⅓ mix of 99.9% alcohol and water, respectively.

Then, the last liquid used was a type of acid that had a strong solvent property. With the cleaning of the statue, the practical class ended with a spoken presentation of what was to be done after the wet cleaning was completed.

Conservation of Wall Paintings

Wall paintings are mostly and commonly seen in *lhakhangs* in Bhutan. Wall paintings are done on plaster or canvas. The significance of wall paintings is important as all the other rituals and cultural heritage. The process of the conservation of wall paintings has certain testing preparations, much like the

processes of the thangka conservation. The structure of the wall is considered as well before the painting is done as well as the type of wall painting to be done.

The damages and deterioration which harm the wall paintings are similar to the ones that damage thangka and statues. The maintenance of temperature, humidity, and light plays an important role in keeping wall paintings safe. Although some technical terms unknown to me were used, the general idea was the consequences of what would happen if the optimum range of temperature and humidity were not maintained. When it comes into contact with the wall, humidity will activate certain chemical compounds and damage the painting.

Day 5

Field trip to the Department of Culture

The field trip began with a tour of the wall paintings that had been removed from the walls of various locations around Bhutan. Some paintings underwent conservation, while others were already done with conservation work. After a tea break, we saw sculptures of varying sizes of deities. One was in the process of making while smaller ones had already been completed. The sculptor described the process and provided a summary of the equipment used while making the statues. This was followed by a tour of the museum with a presentation and a documentary on how *deshog* paper(a type of paper) is made and how religious scriptures are written. There were many tools used in writing religious scriptures and at the end, we went around the museum, which mostly contained items shown in the documentary. Some writings were on politics.

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ཁོ་གིས་བཤད་རི་བཟུམ་འབདཝ་བ་ཅིན། དཔེར་མཛོད་ཁང་དང་། འབྲེལ་བྱེད་ཁང་ཚུ་ མ་ཀངོས་ ཡུན་བརྟན་ བཞག་ཚུགས་མི་ཚུགས་འདི། དཔེའི་ནང་མས་ཀ་གཞི་ ན་གཞོན་ཚུ་ལུ་ རཀ་ལས། ན་གཞོན་ཚུ་ དེ་འབཟུམ་གྱི་ལམ་སྲོལ་ བཏགས་འཛིན་འབད་ནི་ལུ་ ལྷོ་བ་མེད་པ་ཅིན། མ་ཀངོས་པ་ན་ རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་མར་ཅམས་འགྱོ་ནིའི་ ཉེས་ཁག་སྤོམ་ ཡོད་པ་ཡིན།ཟེར་གསུངས་ ཡི།

དེ་ལས་ ང་བཅས་གཅིས་ དཔེར་ནང་པ་བཟོ་ཡོད་པའི་ འབྲེལ་ཡོད་ཁང་ནང་ལུ་ བཤལ་ཏེ་ཀ་བར་སོང་ཡི། དེ་ནང་ལུ་ ཅ་ཆས་ཀྱི་རིགས་མ་འདྲ་ལེ་ཤ་མཐོང་ཅི། དེ་ཚུ་གི་གཏི་རིགས་མ་འདྲ་གསུམ་དང་། རང་བཞིན་གནས་ཡུངས་ཀས་ བཟོ་ཡོད་པའི་ ལྷག་ཚིའི་ རིགས་མ་འདྲ་ཁག་ ५ དང་། གཞན་ཡང་ ཅ་ཆས་མ་འདྲ་ ལེ་ཤ་མཐོང་ཅི།

ང་བཅས་ མི་ཁམས་རིགས་པའི་ ན་གཞོན་ཚུ་གིས་ དཔེར་མཛོད་ཁང་དང་། འབྲེལ་བྱེད་ཁང་ཚུ་ ནང་ལུ་ འཚོ་ཞིན་མ་ཁཏ་ཅ་ཆས་ཚུ་གི་ཐོག་ལས་ ཅ་ཆས་ཚུ་གི་སྐོར་ལས་ ཆ་ཤས་ཀྱི་ ཤེས་ཡོན་ཡོད་ཚུགས་ ཡོད་ཟེར་ ང་ཚོས་ རེ་བ་བཏགས་ཡོད། ང་བཅས་ཀྱི་ཆ་ཤས་ མི་ ཚོས་ཚན་དང་འབྲེལ་བ་སྤྱིམ་ འདུག། དེ་འབཟུམ་མའི་ལས་རིམ་ཚུ་ལས་བརྟེན་ ང་བཅས་རའི་རྒྱལ་ཁབ་ནང་ལུ་ ཅ་ཆས་མ་འདྲ་ གཅིག་ཡོད་པཡིན་ན་ ཤེས་ཚུགས་པའི་ཁར་ བདག་འཛིན་ཡང་འཐབ་ཚུགས་ ཡྱི་ མི་ཚུ་ལུ་ཡང་

གོ་བརྡ་ལྷོད་ཚུགས་པས། དེ་གིས་མ་ཚད་པར་ རང་གི་ཤེས་ཡོན་གོང་འཕེལ་ གཅང་ཤི་ལུ་ཡང་ ཨཀ་ཐོགས་སྤྲོམ་ འཛུག་ཅེར་ཞུ་ནི་ཡིན།

ལང་ལས་རྒྱས་བཏབ་འདོན།

ཀུན་ལེགས་མཚོ་སྐྱེས།

གཙུག་ཨག་གཞི་རིམ་ནང་རིག་དང་མི་ཤམས་རིག་པ།

ཚོང་གཉིས་པ།

The Concept of Multispecies in Bhutan

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Until now, Eurocentric notions and systems have been prevalent and considered as a norm worldwide. For the westerner, the economy and people with authority should be given the top priority and everything else should not matter as much. However, such a misleading concept has led to disregarding what actually matters the most in our lives and failed to address the other aspects that actually makes this world function in the way it should. In that manner, we are also encouraged to disconnect from our roots and be less mindful about who we are and who we should share the earth with. Therefore, we should realize that there are flaws in such values and notions and we should work towards reshaping them and realizing that every one of us can have a voice to create justice in this world, not just for humans but also for other living species and this earth we call home.

Bhutan is known to be rich and diverse in biodiversity and culture. We find a variety of flora and fauna present. Additionally, our culture includes unique practices that symbolizes the independence and uniqueness of our nation. Religious values are also attached in those aspects of our society including politics which makes the values and traditions Bhutanese follow even more authentic. So, we should work towards preserving and promoting our own values and way of living rather than feeling obliged to do everything the majority does. Being a religious country, our worldview is different compared to the rest of the world and we should be proud of it. For instance, Buddhism has taught us compassion and kindness towards not just humans but also various non-human aspects like animals and the environment. In Buddhism,

we believe in karma and rebirth and we learn since being a kid that we should be empathetic towards not just humans but also animals, since our loved ones from our past lives could have been reborn as an animal and that way, we might be dealing with the people we used to love anywhere and anytime. We also give personhood to animals and in the Bhutanese context, the best example of animals being given personhood could be the yaks residing in the highlands of our country. The people there have so much love for their yaks, not only because they can provide for them and help them with subsistence but also because of the bond they share with them. They name the yaks just like human beings and the yak herders see them as their children or parents, hence, as a part of their family who deserve an immense amount of care and empathy.

Even when it comes to the environment, non-living aspects are given so much importance and the idea of personhood even extends beyond living beings in our country. The fact that we believe our landscapes are sacred and protected by revered deities makes us automatically be aware of conserving our nature. Because of such beliefs, we feel the presence of our deities and divine forces in different forms of nature such as rocks, lakes, and even trees. We know the importance of forests and try to preserve them as best we know how, also knowing depend on these for survival and to be spiritually awake. We perform rituals and make sure that the surrounding area is clean where there is presence of deities in order to receive blessing and for this nation to remain peaceful.

Also, people fear and are against causing any harm or destruction to the places that are considered sacred, that way, the people and the country have been saved from becoming too materialistic and being involved in economic greed. So, if we were to copy and do exactly what the economically driven countries in the West did, we would have never been able to follow such mindful and useful practices and values. We would have forgotten our roots and even the concept of Gross National Happiness (GNH) which contributes a lot to our happiness would not have been introduced. The political system would have been completely different and our small

nation would have suffered from poverty, wars and corruption. Therefore, accepting diversity in culture, tradition, people, and ideas could lead to a better world where everyone could define happiness in their own way. Simultaneously, the Earth will function in a much better way as the living beings inside it and the environment would be treated in the way they should with care and kindness. We will also be able to realize that no one ever owned this earth in the first place and no being is ever above the other, but these are all imaginations that started to turn into reality because we decided to believe in them.

In conclusion, we should learn to not be carried away by the notions and views that first started from the West and we should be able to point out where they went wrong and be brave enough to tell our own stories and voice our own opinions. We should accept the existence of diversity in this world and be kind towards our environment and fellow living beings. Priority should be set for the benefits of all and we shall work together towards making this world a better place. All living beings equally share everything that is on Earth and we should recognize Earth as our home and never intend to cause harm to it in any way. We are all responsible for taking care of what we have before we lose it all.

An Eight Year Old and Her Sheep

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Earth has been sustaining human lives since the beginning of our existence; it has provided for and protected us for the longest period. Therefore, it is very important for humans as individuals to imagine our existence in relation to the existence of the environment. To live in harmony with the environment, it is important for humans to coexist with other non-human beings who are an equal part of the earth as we. Learning how to create a bond with species other than ourselves is the first step towards living in harmony with nature. Animals are a part of nature too and our nurtured relationship with them is the first step towards respecting nature, its beings, and its individual existence. Existing in peace with nature is not a new concept but it is something that needs to be remembered because people are getting too involved in themselves that they are forgetting its nature's significance.

This line of thought follows my story of turning vegetarian some 15 years ago because of a nurturing relationship I developed with a sheep reared at our home. My experience covers progressive relationship development with a species other than humans, eventually altering my perspective of almost everything, changing my belief system, and my life. This story has a lot to uncover starting from why a single sheep changed me from a hard core meat lover into a complete vegetarian at the age of only eight to how this small change of lifestyle has helped me bond with species other than ours. I believe my experience has the potential to help other people at least give a second thought to the significance of co-existence and other lives on Earth.

Some sixteen years ago, I lived in my village with our grandparents who are farmers, and at that time, reared a great deal of livestock such as chickens, cattle, goats, and sheep. I had great love for sheep so when three new lambs were born; my grandfather gave the ownership of one of the lambs to me. He said the white lamb was my responsibility and I took it quite seriously. I fed him every day, cleaned his shed, hung out with him all the time. I would run to check on him right after my school and became very attached to the lamb. Fast forward to one year and six months, it was the festival season, Dassain, which is a significant festival in the Nepali calendar. One of the many specialties of Dassain is dining together as a family with different varieties of meat such as mutton, chicken, pork, and beef. It is also a season of profit for livestock rearers. So here is the crux, my grandparents decided to sell those little lambs which were not so little to be called lambs anymore without my knowledge. One day I came back from school and their shed was empty, I instantly assumed what might have happened. I ran back to home and asked my little brother and he said two uncles came and took both the lambs, one of which was his.

I cried so much that day that my heart still aches when I think about it. However, my story does not end here, as it was a festival and I was just a kid. My grandparents bribed me with money and new clothes and other things and I started enjoying the festival. I am grateful for what follows now but back then I hated the neighbor aunt who came to our home the next day and told me "enjoyed the meat you ate yesterday, it was your *pangrey* (name of my lamb!"). I was devastated and felt like I cannibalized one of my own siblings because I developed a kinship with that lamb. Since that day, I promised I would never eat meat again because they have equal rights to live as much as we do in this world and here I am fifteen years later, still a strong vegetarian. That one incident made me realize the importance of considering the existence and rights of other living beings on Earth as much as we are concerned about humans. I argued with everyone at home because we were a joint family, did not talk to them for days and started thinking about how other animals might have

felt when killed for meat. I was just a kid, but these emotions were strong. So, if an eight year old could develop such a strong kin relationship with an animal in just a year, I believe we as adults can surely give some thoughts about other living beings on Earth and treat them as a part of this world too.

The world is unjust and unequal in its nature. There is eurocentrism, racism, gender inequality, and other forms of inequalities, and people have been actively working for centuries towards combating these factors. However, the same problems are happening with the environment and its species but very little or no attention has been given to them. For instance, in Asia, tigers are killed in great numbers to use their skin and bones as well as when they are a threat to people. Similarly, in my village, my grandparents say that they do not recall elephants being a threat to their crops and lives when they were kids but human settlement exceeded far and beyond destroying their habitats and now elephants are the main concern to the livelihood of people in Sipsoo village. Furthermore, according to (Bennett 2020), Mountain Gorillas in Central Africa and Whales in the North Atlantic are enlisted as endangered species since only a countable number of them exist today due to habitat destruction from pollution and deforestation. So, the question here is, what is the justice given to them for taking over their homes and removing them from Earth? When human settlement is overthrown by natural hazards, people are given compensation or new lands but animals are increasingly losing their homes and they are in no way compensated. Is it ethical for humans who are considered to be the most civilized and culturally molded beings on Earth to disregard other species rights this way?

In this 21st century, we can no longer afford to think of humans in isolation to other non human beings. Historically, we have been inculcated to think of our species as superior to any other living beings on earth but it is high time for each and every one of us to change our narratives, think radically about mountains, rivers, water, air, atmosphere, plants and animals. We have to channel our concept of justice by

considering that justice can only be just if it is just to non human beings too. There is a fairly new concept of "relational imagination" which explains that human life can only exist in relation to something else and this is a radical thinking formed against another concept of "human exceptionalism", which literally means the view that humans are different from all other organisms and our behavior is controlled by culture and free will. Idea of human exceptionalism is ingrained in our brains because we are culturally brought up that way but now it is our responsibility as a part of society to deconstruct that thought and make the Earth a safer place not only for ourselves but also for non human beings, such as plants and animals.

Reference

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2020 Anthropology cohort