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Bhutan  
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Rig Tshoel - Research Journal of the Royal Thimphu College

Volume 1 Number 1 Autumn 2018

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*Rig Tshoel*



**ROYAL THIMPHU  
COLLEGE**

Research Journal of the Royal Thimphu College

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A Royal Thimphu College Publication.

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Rig Tshoel – Research Journal of the Royal Thimphu College is an open-access peer-reviewed journal intended to align with a key mission of Royal Thimphu College “to be a crucible of new ideas and knowledge that serves to enrich people’s lives and enhance the welfare of society”. The journal aims to issue at least once a year and invites contributions on a wide range of subjects. Authors are encouraged to develop their own scholarship in areas of general relevance to Bhutan, submit work that advances knowledge in their fields, and is written in a broadly accessible manner. High-quality original articles in English and Dzongkha including theoretical and empirical research, commentaries, editorials, and reviews are welcome.

The views expressed herein are those of the authors themselves and not necessarily those of the Royal Thimphu College.

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## Foreword

The Royal Thimphu College has come a long way as an institution of academic excellence and has demonstrated many instances of setting inspiring standards for higher education in Bhutan. This is very often validated by both national and international partners, scholars and visitors. As the first private college in the country, in its short academic life span of about ten years, the College has achieved the most diverse Bachelor level offerings among all the institutions of higher learning in the country, and in parallel has the most diverse international population of faculty and students.

While the College has already made a mark in its primary function of quality teaching-learning goals, the other equally important function of the institution, research and publications, is slowly gaining momentum. In addition to several self-funded or externally funded research activities, it is encouraging to note that there has been considerable interest among the faculty members to engage in research projects, mostly spurred by the establishment of a modest Research Development Grant in the College. A regular fortnightly academic seminar, *Insights*, which is a forum that facilitates the dissemination of research by the faculty, is gaining popularity. This has also resulted into several publishable papers from the researchers over the last few years, which have been published in both national and international journals.

Inspired by these developments, the Royal Thimphu College has decided to publish this first edition of *Rig Tshoel*: Research Journal of the Royal Thimphu College. I would like to thank Dr. Jelle J P Wouters for initiating this important process, just as he did with the *Insights* series. This first volume of *Rig Tshoel* comprises articles on a wide variety of subject matters, as one would expect from a multi-disciplinary and liberal arts type of institution that the Royal Thimphu College is. Representing the diverse expertise of the institution, this series includes papers on widely ranging themes such as Ecotourism, Folktales, Literary Criticism, Democracy, Art, and Urban Planning. I thank all the contributors of this first volume and appeal to them to continue producing credible academic works in future.

RTC will aspire to conduct research and regularly publish quality research articles, consistent with one of its missions “to be a crucible of new ideas and knowledge that serves to enrich people’s lives and enhance the welfare of society”. The publication of the maiden edition of *Rig Tshoel* is also a welcome beginning as we celebrate the first decade of RTC’s service to the nation.

I would like to offer *Rig Tshoel* to the community of intellectuals in Bhutan and abroad and also seek any constructive feedback for our future publications.

Shiva Raj Bhattarai  
Interim President  
Royal Thimphu College

## Editorial

*Rig Tshoel* – Research Journal of the Royal Thimphu College is an open-access peer-reviewed journal that aligns with a key mission of Royal Thimphu College ‘To be a crucible of new ideas and knowledge that serves to enrich people’s lives and enhances the welfare of society.’ This inaugural issue of *Rig Tshoel* disseminates research carried out by RTC faculty on a range of topics, themes, and theories. What binds the nine essays of this publication together is therefore not a shared field of interest, theoretical proclivity, or methodology, but that they have all been written by members of the RTC faculty. The essays published here represent a number of departments and symbolize the wide-ranging interest and expertise available among the faculty. The essays are meant to address a wide audience, including other members of the faculty, students, scholars, and the interested general public. While understanding the essays may require some prior knowledge of the topic, the contributors have attempted to present their data and arguments in a language that is accessible to non-specialists.

Each essay has gone through an internal review process and I would like to thank Shiva Raj Bhattarai, Samir Patel, Nawang Yangden, Janet Schofield, G.P. Sharma, Sanjeev Mehta, Sarbajeet Mukherjee, and Sonam Deki for lending their expertise to this project.

The first four essays broadly concern the interaction between people and the environment in Bhutan, as well as, in the case of one essay, Sikkim. The first essay by Jesse Montes and no fewer than nine of this students is titled ‘Assessing Sustainability of Ecotourism Ventures in Bhutan.’ It applies empirical data derived from three different ecotourism ventures to assess whether conversation goals were being achieved, and in doing so offers a set of crucial insights and recommendations on how sustainability of ecotourism can be guaranteed in the country. The second essay is by Rabilal Dhakal and is titled ‘Changing Patterns of Cattle Herding in the Dorokha Region, Bhutan.’ It focuses on how the tradition of migratory herding has come under considerable strain in the Dorokha Region, particularly after the passing of the Land Act of Bhutan which saw the nationalization of the grasslands that are frequented by herders. This essay is followed by a contribution from Tshering Wangchuk that is titled ‘Cultural Wisdom and Sustainable Development in Satsam Chorteon.’ This essay formulates a critique of approaches to sustainable development that focus on science, technology, and innovation. Instead, the author points to the continuing relevance of Bhutanese traditional, cultural, and spiritual wisdom, which, he argues, provide a home-grown repository of knowledge and techniques that could, and should, be applied to balance development with environmental preservation and protection. The final essay that deals with the environment is by Kausila Timsina. This is a technical paper that is titled: ‘Analysis of Trend of Spatial and Temporal Characteristics of Temperature: A Case Study of Teesta-Dikchu Watershed, Sikkim’, and which

evaluates behavioural changes of the Teesta River in relation to recently constructed hydro-projects.

The fifth and sixth essays of this publication are in the domain of English Studies. Vanlallawmkimi, in her article 'Glimpses into Pre-Christian Mizo Past as seen through Folktales', invites the readers to reflection on two Mizo folktales in order to explore the religious practices, the status of women, and the wider societal values that characterized traditional Mizo society. This is followed by an essay by Priyali Ghosh that is titled: "Exotic Blossom" or Cosmopolitan Victorian? Toru Dutt and and Fin-de-Siècle London and Calcutta.' In this essay Priyali Ghosh presents the life and literary work of the Bengali author Toru Dutt (1856-1877), which, she argues, should be read in a context of 'social cosmopolitanism.'

The seventh essay published here is by Saurav Chaliha and carries the title: 'Central America's "Failing" Democracies: The Case of Honduras. A normative theory of democracy is applied to evaluate the existence of liberal ideals and values in Honduras,' and Central America more widely. Doing so, enables the author to identify a number of challenges and pitfalls countries in this region grapple with as they transitioned, and continue to transition, into modern democracies. The penultimate essay is by Jason Hopper and is titled: 'The Early History of Contemporary Art in Bhutan.' Through a combination of life histories of artists and archival work a connection is drawn between contemporary art, a changing society, and cultural modernity. The final essay is by Leishipem Khamrang and is titled 'Changing Socio-Spatial Structures and Growing Urban Issues in the Quest of Making Thimphu a Dream City.' This essay applies concepts of human geography to critically examine new forms of urban space that are emerging in Thimphu. In so doing, it identifies challenges and formulates a critique to projections of Thimphu as a 'dream city' for all.

Jelle J P Wouters  
Editor

# Assessing Sustainability of Ecotourism Ventures in Bhutan

Jesse Montes, Sonam Tshering, Tenzin Phuntsho, Deborah Kagoda, Bhuwan Kafley, Mindu Wangmo, Maite Maya Subba, Tandin Wangmo, Jangchuk, and Tashi Dendup

## Abstract

Mearns' (2011) methodology for determining the sustainability of ecotourism ventures is applied to Bhutan by adopting a case study methodology. Three cases were assessed, namely Haa Valley Homestay, Phobjikha Homestay Network, and the Phajoding Monastery Eco-Camp. The analysis found, in all three cases, that conservation goals were being achieved, which serves as a main characteristic that differentiates ecotourism from other forms of tourism. However, these conservation benefits were not causally linked to the ventures themselves and may be the result of a combination of other factors such as existing policies and pre-existent community values/practice. Additionally, there were a number of positive economic impacts, though these were often isolated to managers of each of the ventures and their families. In terms of weaknesses, problems with waste management, cultural impacts, and proper capacity building continue to limit development opportunities. A management-regime comparison was also conducted in which the NGO facilitated venture (Phobjikha) proved most 'sustainable' compared to the private (Haa) and government (Phajoding) facilitated ventures. This research provides critical insights and recommendations that will help improve the sustainability of ecotourism in Bhutan.

## Introduction

Bhutan possesses a unique physical and socio-cultural environment, which has motivated its people towards a strong protectionist attitude in their use of natural resources and the preservation of cultural values. With the reality of globalization and a rapidly growing population, Bhutan has developed strategies for meeting the needs of its people, who long predominately engaged in agrarian practices. However, with the rise of a middle-class population and increased opportunities for higher education, more families are abandoning traditional agriculture in the pursuit of other livelihood alternatives. Tourism currently is the second major economic source of the country, behind the export of hydro-energy to India, and has great potential for alleviating poverty in rural areas. However, cultural erosion and environmental degradation are serious threats. With the demand for cultural and eco-style tours on the rise, the government also faces the challenge of ensuring proper distribution of benefits from the tourism industry. While the Bhutan Government has recognized the potential of ecotourism to

meet development goals (RGoB, 1999), rural communities remain concerned that tourism policies are too restrictive to support the industry in remote areas. Gyamtsho (1996) recognized that highland communities experienced few economic benefits from tourism, a mere 4% of their total income. He further postulated that in order to achieve conservation goals, development activities must account for the economic concerns of such rural areas, something tourism has not been able to do. With the looming threat of mass tourism and its impacts on Bhutan's ecological and cultural integrity, the Royal Government has actively explored options to mitigate these impacts. One option has been to diversify tourism products, creating tourism opportunities outside traditional peak seasons, and by diverting industry benefits to rural populations. Ecotourism has been promoted as a key opportunity to meet these goals.

Tourism in Bhutan hinges on a sustainable development model (MAF & TCB, 2012). The government recognizes the integrated nature of people and the environment and has shied away from the 'Yellowstone' protectionist model in terms of conservation (MAF & TCB, 2012). Instead, a zoning strategy has been set up within protected areas in which three zones exist. Core areas are for strict conservation in which activities related to tourism are extremely limited. Adjacent to these core areas are multiple-use zones, which work to account for traditional indigenous practices such as firewood collection, cultivation, fishing, among others. Finally, there are buffer zones, which also limit various activities, but are not as restrictive compared to the multiple-use areas and allow tourism operations. It is within this integrated understanding that Bhutan has strived for a robust ecotourism policy that meets objectives for development in rural communities.

Many developing countries have turned to ecotourism as an opportunity to increase foreign exchange, as opposed to other resource extractive activities (Honey, 2008), and Bhutan is a prime example. Initially the tourism industry was government-run through the Bhutan Tourism Corporation with restrictions placed on the number of arriving 'international' (as opposed to regional) tourists each year, but was then privatized in 1991. Regardless of the 1991 privatization, the Royal Government of Bhutan maintained its influence in heavily regulating the policy of the tourism industry (Honey, 2008). While this constrained the amount of economic leakages due to outside capital investments in the tourism sector, it also limited the distribution to a few tour operators, which subsequently thrived (Nepal and Karst, 2017).

Ecotourism has specifically been highlighted as an opportunity for Bhutan, offering the potential to diversify tourism 'products' rather than expanding the already saturated market (Reinfeld, 2003; RGOB, 1999). Such a strategy would call for strategic/selective marketing and elements of activity control (limited number of individuals for certain activities). While ecotourism is already present in a number of regions in Bhutan, the potential to expand is great. Gurung and Seeland (2008) found that young travellers between the ages of 31-40 were more interested in nature/ecotourism styles of travel, and showed a tendency to stay beyond 14 days

of travel, which was in contrast to older travellers, who focussed more on cultural tourism and rarely stayed beyond two weeks. Park staffs in Bhutan's Protected Areas network also recognized that dealing with livelihood concerns is necessary in order to achieve desired conservation goals (Wang et al, 2006), and ecotourism has been promoted as a key policy initiative to see this happen.

Additionally, with the concern of rapid rural-to-urban migration, ecotourism is recognized as an industry that can motivate individuals to remain in rural areas (Rinzin et al. 2007). In 2002, the government developed a National Ecotourism Strategy that laid the groundwork for how eco-tourism should be promoted in the country. This was followed up in 2012 with a guideline for the planning and management of ecotourism, which specifically focused on the Protected Areas Network of Bhutan (MAF & TCB, 2012). A number of ecotourism ventures in Bhutan have already begun to make a name for themselves as sustainable forms of tourism that meet the goals of both livelihood needs and conservation. Such cases include the Nabji Korphu Trail, Wangchuk Centennial National Park Homestay Program, and the Sakteng Wildlife Sanctuary.

To maintain their goal of 'high value & low impact', the government of Bhutan will need to pay much consideration to the unintended consequences of an increased volume of tourism, not only for traditional tourism products, but especially as they seek to promote ecotourism in rural areas. Monteverde in Costa Rica, for example, was heavily invested in the protection of Golden Toad habitat. However, as ecotourism came to dominate the landscape and outcompete traditional livelihoods, this transition coincided with the disappearance of the Golden Toad (Honey, 2008). Numbers of tourists have also overwhelmed national parks in the United States such as the Grand Canyon and Yellowstone. When parks are overcrowded and no longer offer the 'nature' experience, people look to other locations. With such unique species such as the Black-Necked Crane, Snow leopard and the Red Panda, Bhutan has much potential in becoming a world-renowned ecotourism destination. However, it also has a lot to lose if ecotourism is not planned for appropriately and managed in a sustainable manner.

Environmental degradation and loss of biodiversity are not the only threats posed by the ecotourism industry. Loss of culture and threats to local ethno-ecologies are also serious consequences, and are of particular importance to a government mindful of cultural preservation. Hutchins (2007, p. 76) writes:

the actual practice of ecotourism continuously pries open new space into which physical bodies and cultural meanings flow. The result is mutability rather than sustainability, where local nature is reordered as global commodity, and local meanings are reinterpreted to better align with consumer's desires.

While Bhutan has been unable to shield its citizens from pop-culture, which has ‘leaked in’ through television and Internet media, policies are in place to maintain various codes for architecture, traditional dress, among others. Yet, the effects of globalization on Bhutanese society, and especially Bhutanese youth, are clearly discernible as social identities are negotiated. This negotiation is hidden in the interaction with global market forces that interact through ecotourism as tourists’ expectations shape the way local populations behave and present themselves (Hutchins, 2007).

Bhutan’s ecotourism industry has been promoted as a panacea, an answer to the problems of traditional tourism, and a way to uphold principles of Gross National Happiness (GNH). Yet ecotourism has the ability to modify culture in significant ways (Hutchins, 2007). While culture is never static and is not to be ‘preserved in some idealized form’ (Hutchins, 2007, p. 85), Bhutan needs to be cognisant of what cultural changes are acceptable, and differentiate these from harmful influences that may present themselves as a corollary of ecotourism.

## **Methodology**

Ecotourism Sustainability Indicators developed by Mearns (2011) have been adapted for the local Bhutanese context by adding site-specific indicators. This Indicator framework was used to assess three ecotourism ventures to answer the following questions:

1. Are the select ecotourism ventures operating in a sustainable way?
2. How do specific management regimes impact success and sustainability?
3. What policy shifts have occurred, and which are still needed, to help meet the ideal of ecotourism?

The research is both qualitative and quantitative in nature. An adaptation of Mearns’ questionnaires and survey material was used to collect information from ecotourism operators, community members, and tourists. The research adopted a wide-ranging scope of tools such as direct observations, field notes, focus groups, questionnaires and data collected by GPS units. The data gathered from numerous field visits conducted during 2016-2017 was organized and analysed through the aid of both NVivo and SPSS software. An evaluation framework was adopted which included a total of 24 indicators and 48 sub-indicators.

Three cases were selected based on their alignment with the definition of ‘ecotourism’ provided by Honey (2008) that outlines criteria such as environmental conservation, improving local livelihoods, and education. Additionally, sites were selected based on management variability to assess the impacts of NGO, private, and government facilitated regimes. To meet these criteria the researchers consulted with the Tourism Council of Bhutan (TCB), the Royal Society for Protection of Nature (RSPN), private entrepreneurs, and the Nature Recreation & Ecotourism Division of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forests. Through consultation the

research team established the following three case studies: 1) Haa Valley Homestay in Haa, serving as a private entrepreneurship management regime, 2) the Phobjikha Homestay Network and Black Neck Crane Conservation area serving as an NGO facilitated management regime, and 3) the Phajoding Eco-Camp serving as a government funded and facilitated project in partnership with the Phajoding monastery.

### *Haa Valley Homestay*

Operating since 2012, Haa Valley homestay is approximately 2-3 kilometers from Haa town, and within 5 minutes walking distance to *Lhakhang Karpo* (White Temple). It is a family run venture started by a husband and wife, in collaboration with other family members. While the husband and wife operate the homestay, another family member actively markets the homestay and runs a small tourism business. They also have a nephew who actively serves as a guide to guests at the homestay. A son and daughter also live at the homestay and often use their English language skills to help communicate between the husband & wife team and the guests. Activities provided include archery, hot stone bath, farm activities, and various trekking opportunities. Nearby lies the trailhead for the Nup Tsho Na Pata Trek (4-7 day trek), a recently constructed mountain bike trail, and numerous temple-viewing opportunities.

### *Phobjikha Homestay Network*

Phobjikha Valley is part of Wangduephodrang District, located approximately 4-5 hours drive from Thimphu. The valley is a Conservation Area established by the Royal Government in 2003 due to the region's use as winter habitat for the Black-Necked Crane. This has resulted in immense interest from tourists to visit this unique destination. Due to this, a local NGO, Royal Society for the Protection of Nature (RSPN), has partnered with local communities to establish policies for Community Based Sustainable Tourism, their branded form of ecotourism. Following this, RSPN and local community members established a local network of homestays (approximately 15), which is accompanied by training opportunities, start-up funding, pricing guide, and a community fund which is built-up through a 10% conservation fee applied to all tourist transactions. As part of this research, four of the homestays were adopted as cases to represent the larger Homestay Network.

### *Phajoding Eco-Camp*

Phajoding Monastery is located approximately 3-4 hours hike from Thimphu and serves as the terminal point for the Druk Path Trek, which runs between the Paro and Thimphu valleys (4-6 day trek). As a cultural and monastic hub, it also serves as a base camp for exploring alpine valleys and lakes that has attracted both foreign and domestic visitors. As part of a larger

national strategy to establish and improve ecotourism facilities, the national government, through the appointed Nature Recreation and Ecotourism Division (NRED) of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forests, took on the task of constructing an Eco-Camp near the monastery grounds. While NRED served as a lead in the development, it was a collaborative effort with the Phajoding Monastery and the Tourism Council of Bhutan. Once construction was completed, management of the Eco-Camp was assumed by the monk body of Phajoding, with the intent that the proceeds from the venture would be used to help with eco-camp operation, monastery needs, and conservation efforts.

## Evaluation Framework

It was determined that measuring traditional indicators of tourism, such as arrival numbers and tourist expenditures would not serve the purpose of measuring sustainability (Mearns, 2011; Roberts & Tribe, 2008). Therefore, it was deemed necessary to adopt indicators that measure performance from the viewpoint of a triple bottom line; economics, socio-cultural and environmental. Such an indicator system would allow the monitoring of a venture’s performance in meeting sustainable development goals (UNCSD, 2001).

Mearns (2011; 2012) adopted 12 baseline indicators developed by the World Tourism Organization (2004) for determining sustainability within tourism ventures. In addition, Mearns developed six specific indicators unique to community based ecotourism initiatives. These 18 indicators are highlighted in Table 1, and were further divided into 34 sub-indicators as highlighted in Table 2.

*Table 1. Baseline and Ecotourism Indicators*

WTO Baseline Indicators	Community Based Ecotourism Indicators
Local satisfaction with tourism [Social]	Education [Social]
Effects of tourism on communities [Social]	Community decision making [Social]
Sustaining tourist satisfaction [Economic]	Community benefits [Social]
Tourism seasonality [Economic]	Culture [Social]
Economic benefits of tourism [Economic]	Biodiversity and conservation [Environment]
Energy management [Environment]	Networking and collaboration [Cross-Cutting]
Water availability & conservation [Environment]	
Drinking water quality [Environment]	
Sewage treatment [Environment]	
Solid waste management [Environment]	
Development controls [Cross-Cutting]	
Controlling use intensity [Environment]	

*Table 2. Indicators and Sub-Indicators adopted by current research*

Baseline Indicator	Sub-Indicators
<b>Social Issues</b>	
1. Local Satisfaction with Tourism	1.1 Local satisfaction with tourism
	1.2 Local community complaints
2. Effects of tourism on communities	2.1 Percentage who believe that tourism has helped bring new services of infrastructure
	2.2 Other effects of tourism on the community
3. Education	3.1 Education of tourists
	3.2 Education of community
	3.3 Training and skills development of staff members
4. Community decision making	4.1 Community decision-making structures
5. Community benefits	5.1 Community benefits from tourism
6. Culture	6.1 Cultural appreciation and conservation
<b>Economic Issues</b>	
7. Sustaining tourist satisfaction	7.1 Level of tourist satisfaction
	7.2 Perception of value for money
	7.3 Percentage of return visitors
	7.4 Perception of sustainability
	7.5 Tourist complaints
8. Tourism seasonality	8.1 Tourist arrivals by month
	8.2 Occupancy rates for accommodation by month
	8.3 Percentage of tourist industry jobs which are permanent or full time (compared to temporary/seasonal jobs)
9. Economic benefits of tourism	9.1 Number of local people employed in tourism (and ratio of men to women)
	9.2 Revenue generated
	9.3 Revenue spent in area
<b>Environmental Issues</b>	
10. Energy Management	10.1 Per Capita consumption of energy
	10.2 Energy-saving measures

	10.3 Percentage of energy consumption from renewable resources
11. Water availability and conservation	11.1 Water use (total water volume consumed and liters per tourist per day)
	11.2 Water conservation measures
12. Drinking water quality	12.1 Water supply method
	12.2 Water Bottle disposal method
13. Sewage treatment	13.1 Sewage treatment systems
14. Solid waste management	14.1 Waste volume produced
	14.2 Waste disposal (landfill, recycling, etc.)
15. Controlling use intensity	15.1 Number of tourists per square meter of the site (GPS info required)
16. Biodiversity and conservation	16.1 Local community involvement in conservation projects in area
<b>Crosscutting issues</b>	
17. Development controls	17.1 Existence of a development planning process including tourism
18. Networking and collaboration	18.1 Partnerships and collaborations

Furthermore, these indicators were supplemented by indicators that serve as an adaptation from six impact factors of the Bhutanese ecotourism context identified by Gurung and Scholz (2008). Table 3 below highlights the operationalization of the six impact factors.

*Table 3. Bhutan Ecotourism Impact Factors and Indicators*

Impact Factor	Indicator
Accessibility [Economic]	19.1 Travel time to destination
	19.2 Mode of travel
	19.3 Assessment of road/trail condition
Pricing Policy [Economic]	20.1 Impacts of current policy
	20.2 Suggestions for adaptation
Tourism Products [Economic]	21.1 Nature vs Cultural Based Products
Community Empowerment [Economic and Social]	22.1 Financial Assistance
	22.2 Independent Decision Making
Tourism Facilities [Economic]	23.1 Ownership
Marketing Tourism Products [Economic]	24.1 External vs Self Marketing

These 6 impact factors were modified to provide site-specific indicators (6 indicators and 10 sub-indicators) for ecotourism in Bhutan and were combined with the 18 indicators (35 sub-indicators) provided by Mearns. Furthermore, during the research three emerging indicators were developed, following a grounded approach to data analysis. These emerging indicators are highlighted in Table 4. This resulted in an evaluative framework that included 24 main indicators and 48 sub-indicators.

*Table 4. Emerging Indicators*

25.1	Indirect Impacts (schooling, power outages, migration)
26.1	Stakeholder Concerns (10% fee, food rates, controversies)
27.1	Socio-Cultural Changes (authenticity)

## **Sustainability Assessments**

In this section, a summary of the research findings will be provided along with suggestions for short and long term actions required to increase sustainability. While the research team analyzed each of the established indicators, what follows is a focused analysis that highlights indicators deemed to have substantial impact on the sustainability of each case.

### *Haa Valley Homestay – Private Entrepreneurship Regime*

Haa Valley Homestay has performed well in its years of operation in terms of economic performance and will likely continue to do so in the future. This can be attributed to indicators in which tourist satisfaction is high and the venture is conveniently located within a 3-6 hour drive from other popular destinations. Additionally, there is a high level of independent decision making by the homestay owners, preventing economic leakage. In Haa’s case, being a private entrepreneurship, the venture was started by a single family and was not reliant on outside sources of funding. However, it was noted that the RSPN has been active in the Haa area, looking to reproduce the success of the Phobjikha Homestay Network they helped establish. As such, the Haa Valley Homestay has been approached by RSPN to be part of a coordinated regional effort to improve homestay-style attractions and increase tourist numbers. At the time of this research, the owners of the Homestay had not determined their involvement in these efforts.

Other positive impacts included improved hygiene, sanitation, and diet. However, the venture owners mostly experienced these benefits. Comments from the homestay family included:

People used to live very dirty, but now after tourism started, people have started to keep their surroundings clean, learned to stay clean, wear clean clothes and also have improved table manners (male staff).

Before, we wouldn't be eating varieties of food. Normally it would only just be one dish. When the guests are present we cook four different varieties of food (female staff).

The venture is particularly vulnerable with regards to community benefits, both social and economic. Local employment and profits earned are not extended to the broader community, leading to tensions. While family members expressed that the venture created new employment opportunities in the area, community members were less optimistic. Community members also reported that the nephew of the homestay owner was active in promoting their venture, which diverted customers from other homestays in the area. As such, there seemed to be underlying community dissatisfaction with regards to how the homestay was operating. This was emphasized by the anonymous destruction of signage advertising the venture.

Also, from an environmental perspective, the venture has struggled to find ways to deal with waste. Concurring to indicator 14.2, the manager was asked questions such as: 'where is solid waste disposed?' 'Is waste recycled (e.g. composted)?' The manager responded:

The organic waste is given to cattle. We dump other inorganic wastes in the pit dug on our field. The government had told us to sack the waste and keep it for the garbage truck to come pick it up, but it never came and even if the garbage truck came, it leaves the garbage around. So non-organic garbage is burned as well.

Therefore, the Haa venture does not have an official plan for dealing with the solid waste generated. While organics are easily managed through the feeding of livestock, inorganic waste is merely collected to a central location without further management.

Additionally, while local residents report being active in environmental campaigns (i.e. waste cleanup, tree planting), these activities are not directly prompted by the venture. The indicator system determined that conservation activities are indeed taking place, but were incentivized through other government programs, community efforts, or personal values.

With these issues in mind, the following are short and long-term recommendations to consider in order to improve sustainability. In the short-term, the venture needs to expand its conservation focus by integrating specific actions or programs into routine operations. This may be done by engaging in specific conservation efforts that are conducted by the owners that show a commitment to the local environment (i.e. purchase and planting of saplings), or could be achieved through the incorporation of more ecological related activities for guests. In terms of waste management, a plan should be developed for how to responsibly deal with inorganic

wastes. This may require partnering with local government representatives to prompt a broader discussion on waste management for the region.

In the long-term, the venture owners need to develop more collaboration with community members. This may involve setting up more opportunities for part-time employment. For example, while children of the owners experience conflict with studies while entertaining tourists, there may be certain seasons where it is beneficial to hire help from outside the family to avoid the negative impacts. Additionally, the owner could engage local committees seeking opportunities for the Homestay to be active in collaborative community efforts. This would ease the local tensions with the community while also creating a positive influential presence that could be used to coordinate conservation efforts.

### *Phobjikha Homestay Network – NGO Facilitated Regime*

The collaboration between RSPN and the Phobjikha Valley community is very positive and has resulted in a successful venture that will likely progress in the future. This relationship is characterized by positive economic impacts to the region through increased employment and income, for which RSPN serves as a strong source of advocacy and capacity building for the community. The multiple homestays that are a part of the established network have the advantage of drawing from the institutional capacity of the RSPN. RSPN has a large presence in the country, is centrally located in the capital of Thimphu, and has the capacity to properly market the venture. A manager interviewee reports, 'in terms of advertisement and marketing, RSPN does all the work'. Therefore, while individual homestay operators lack such capacity, the current collaborative relationship with the NGO is necessary, serving a positive role.

In terms of environmental impact, conservation of Black-necked Cranes has been a priority supported by the homestay network. With the Black-necked Cranes serving as the flagship species, a number of efforts have been made by the community to protect the crane habitat but they have also engaged in reforestation and waste clean-up campaigns. 88% of community members reported their involvement in such conservation projects. An interviewee comments:

The community maintains the community forest...and awareness is created with the community about forest fires. We also plant trees in those areas where there is barren land.

In relation to the creation of social benefits; a number of locals have been trained and are employed as guides. While tourists often come to the valley with their own tour guides, local guides are seen as a unique opportunity to gain specific knowledge of the local customs and ecology. 58% of the community and staff respondents reported that more jobs for local youth have been created due to the homestay network. One interviewee commented thus:

Youths can guide guests, which helps them to gain confidence. And the youth are also given opportunity for cultural exchange programs such as dancing and singing.

In terms of economic benefits, all managers reported revenues that helped supplement their primary incomes. While the number of tourists has been low, resulting in the homestays unable to sustain a full-time income, this is nevertheless in-line with the RSPN objective of creating supplementary income, instead of disrupting traditional livelihood activities.

For future improvements to promote sustainability, the Phobjikha Homestay network needs to specifically address issues of inequality, waste management, and misconceptions related to the 10% fee charged to guests that is retained for community projects.

Community members brought to light the issue of an increasing rich-poor divide. This was specifically related to how operators for the RSPN homestay network were chosen. At its inception, RSPN looked for volunteers from the community to open up their homes as official homestays. Because RSPN had limited start-up funds to disperse, it became apparent that only certain homes that had an already existing standard of construction could volunteer. As such, it enabled already economically well-off families to become integrated into the network leading to a further increase in their income. Therefore, while the ideal of ecotourism looks to improve livelihood conditions and combat poverty, in this case the more impoverished households were at a disadvantage from the beginning. The poor-rich gap that is present will continue to widen and may lead to disruptions in social cohesion, unless poverty issues can be addressed.

Waste management was also a problem in Phobjikha. With more tourists entering the valley, there has been an expected increase in waste generation. While the RSPN had initially helped coordinate efforts for garbage collection through the employment of a tractor, this activity has ceased. One interviewee notes:

RSPN used to send a tractor to collect our waste and they would take it to a dumpsite. But now the amount of waste has increased due to tourism, and the tractor isn't working anymore.

Also related, the number of plastic water bottles provided to guests has been an issue:

I have observed water bottles and other waste being left behind. Not a very long time ago, many tourists....filled the area with waste.

Additionally, one interview reported that waste might be collected in one area, only to be dumped in another part of the valley. As such, waste management will continue to intensify as more tourists are drawn to the area, leading to a larger amount of waste that can no longer be addressed by rural residents alone.

A critical issue that was revealed through interviews was a misconception related to how a 10% fee associated with all tourist purchases within the homestay network was applied and

used. The intent was that 10% of the fees on food and accommodation would be set aside for community projects such as activities related to crane conservation, school upgrades, and road maintenance. These funds would be directed to a Homestay Committee, which would manage the funds accordingly. However, many were not aware of how these funds were being used. There seemed to be a significant amount of distrust between various community members, including allegations of fraudulent behavior. Additionally, homestay owners criticized the 10% fee as a source of economic loss. Managers reported that the fee made their services look more expensive and created a deterrent for travel companies. One manager commented, 'If they really wanted to benefit us they wouldn't be charging us from what we earn.'

To deal with these issues, short and long-term recommendations for this venture are as follows. In the short-term, the RSPN should instigate renewed communication with the Homestay Committee, Homestay Operators and interested community members more broadly. The role of the 10% fee in terms of collection and usage should be clarified. While much of this work may have already been done in the past, reviving this conversation will work to dispel current misunderstandings. In the long-term, RSPN and the Homestay Committee need to determine a workable enduring waste management option. A vision for managing the issue will be in the best interest of the Phobjikha Valley, for both its human and wildlife populations. This could be done through incentivizing waste management at the individual homestay scale or by contacting the local Dzongkhag administration to discuss regional solutions.

### *Phajoding Eco-Camp – Government Facilitated Regime*

While tourists and domestic visitors were already common to the Druk Path trek, the Eco-Camp established at the Phajoding monastery has served as an additional point of attraction. The collaboration between the NRED, TCB and the Phajoding monastery was conceived with a positive development agenda in which government agencies would initiate and fund the project with the long-term goal of handing over operations to the monk body. The monk body was actively involved in the initial planning stages, which reveals a strong community based agenda, which is critical for successful ecotourism ventures. However, the research team deduced that capacity building was not sufficient at the time of handing over the project, which resulted in a number of negative outcomes related to long-term management. Community members seemed to have received very little in terms of skills, such as nature and culture training. Interviewee responses revealed that only 16.6% felt they had received such training. Weakness in waste management, increased visitor volumes, profit generation and acculturation were all viewed as critical areas to be addressed.

Waste management was also a difficulty for the venture. Researchers observed waste problems at the Eco-Camp, but also in the adjoining monastery and throughout the Druk Path Trek. The presence of visitors, both tourists and domestic visitors, to the region has generated

a large waste management problem for the monastery. There is no proper waste disposal site, and while the Thimphu municipality used to collect it in the past this practice has ceased. Interviewees reported that it is not primarily the overseas tourists that are the culprit; rather it is both the Bhutanese guides/trekking staff as well as regional visitors (i.e. India, Bangladesh, etc.). Interviewees commented:

The tourists take good care of their waste but children and domestic visitors are the ones who are careless.

The tourist litter the surroundings as well as the route they take for trekking [Druk Path].

The monk body reported a number of issues such as increased volumes of visitors, conflicts with trekking staff, and a disruption of religious practices. Therefore, local monks were deprived of an enabling spiritual environment and felt compelled to entertain visitors. Two interviewees commented respectively:

Monks cannot talk back and fight with the staff and the horsemen because they are doing religious and spiritual practices.

People who visit Phajoding usually do not have proper beds and camps. The monastery gives them shelter, food and a bed.

With an increased numbers of tourists and horse caravans, there was a reported shortage of firewood and grazing areas. This was not only an issue for the local monk community, but also community members in the area along the Druk Path trekking route, which included a number of yak herding families.

The generation of revenue is a key indicator that determines the venture's ability to retain profits. In the case of the Eco-Camp, the venture is reported to be running at a loss. There has been very little revenue generated, and anything that is generated is used for buying items to maintain operations, such as soap, toilet paper, and disinfectants. It should also be noted that at the time of field research, the Eco-Camp was not in operation for tourists and was serving as accommodation for construction workers labouring on monastery improvements and new constructions.

Socio-cultural change was an emerging impact noticed, both while in the field and during the analysis of our data. Researchers recognized a repeated theme of 'authenticity' in the responses of interviewees. Authenticity is a controversial issue in the social sciences, related to how cultures evolve and change due to outside impacts. In the case of tourism, and by extension ecotourism, authenticity is framed as a particular perception that tourists have of a local culture/people. Ecotourists have a strong desire to visit places and cultures that are deemed

'authentic', which then imposes an expectation upon local peoples to produce this experiential product of 'authenticity'. However, a conundrum exists because it is impossible to determine what 'authentic' is in any given context. Cultures change constantly and are never a static social construct, therefore 'authenticity', in the realm of tourism, has become 'whatever the tourist expects to see'. These expectations, therefore, determine what is 'authentic', and local people work to fulfill these expectations in order to continue benefiting from tourism revenues (see Maccannell, 1973; Urry, 2001).

This scenario has resulted in a process of acculturation in which the local monk culture has changed to meet the needs of tourists. Community interviews revealed that monks were motivated to act in particular ways to ensure that visitors would continue to come to the area. Therefore, tourists' presence, rather than intrinsic cultural motivators, were motivating behavioural changes. Community members commented:

We have to be a good example to all the people and guests, so there have been improvements in living standards, we eat with plates and mugs.

We think it is better to plant more trees and flowers to beautify our surroundings to attract more tourists.

Our monks have been exposed to western clothes and have started to have fancy and fashionable jackets and started to have them on top of the monk robes.

Looking at the tourists, we get inspired to change our mindset (thoughts) and think holistically about the life and situations. They are a good example to see how clean and neat they stay unlike us the monks so we are encouraged to maintain hygiene.

These changes to behaviour motivated by tourists can be understood as staged behaviours out of sync with ordinary customs. Therefore, what has evolved is not necessarily what could be considered 'authentic', but rather a spectacle that meets the economic requirements of the ecotourism sector. While some of the above observations can be considered positive, they seemingly conflict with Bhutan's commitment to cultural preservation that is embedded in GNH philosophy.

To deal with these aforesaid issues, short and long-term recommendations for this venture are as follows. In the short-term, capacity building exercises should be provided by the partnering agencies (NRED and TCB) to ensure management capabilities are instilled in the Phajoding management body. This could be achieved through a series of workshops that would concentrate on specific skill sets. Paired with this recommendation, there should be an institutional champion that is committed to following up with the management committee, ensuring an uptake in best practices including maintaining finance records and cleanliness. Such a champion need not be NRED or TCB, but a suitable partner should be established.

Tour operators and guides should also be committed to discussions with the Phajoding management team to find avenues that successfully meet the economic, social and environmental goals of the venture. A collaborative event could be organized in which tour operators/guides tour the Eco-Camp and converse with the management team, thus creating a relationship to foster future forums on Eco-Camp issues.

In the long-term, Druk Path policies should be developed to ensure use of proper campsites. The current scenario allows tour operators to set up camps randomly, and they often choose to avoid extra fees associated with the Eco-Camp, resulting in economic loss of the venture. Strict policies that ensure campsites are set up at established locations will minimize environmental disturbance while also ensuring revenues are generated for the venture. Additionally, while a monitoring plan has been developed, it has not been implemented. The plan should be revisited, amended as needed and adopted allowing the Phajoding management committee to undergo periodic assessments in order to improve operations.

## **Conclusion**

Ecotourism in Bhutan is an evolving sector that contains much potential for meeting sustainability goals within the country. While the larger tourism sector is showing stress in terms of carrying capacity, ecotourism is an avenue resorted to not only diversify tourism products, but to also meet rural livelihood concerns. In this report, we have presented an analysis of three separate ecotourism ventures that are all characterized by core components of Honey's (2008) definition of ecotourism, but are also differentiated by separate management regimes (private entrepreneurship, NGO facilitation, and government facilitation). The selected management regimes are not exhaustive of all potential forms of collaboration but serve as a subset of existing arrangements.

The Haa Valley Homestay was characterized by a grass-roots implementation with a sole beneficiary, in the form of a single family, and was primarily driven by profits. As such, the venture runs like a business venture, dominated by independent decision-making allowing the owner to successfully supplement income-earning strategies. While it lacks an ideal community focus, the venture is successful from an economic point of view and will continue to prosper. This healthy economic base provides opportunity for improving other social and environmental indicators. Therefore, the private entrepreneurship model, in this case, is not without faults but is likely to continue operating with great potential for improving sustainability.

The Phobjikha Homestay Network was characterized by a strong NGO collaboration. RSPN initiated a robust program that sought economic, social, and environmental goals and has served as a key institutional support for the local community. Marketing, administrative capacities, and capacity building were key areas that RSPN offered to the project. The Homestay Committee

that was established promotes a decentralized form of decision making, thereby allowing the local community a say in how the venture will be developed in the future. Therefore, the NGO facilitated model runs as a 'Partnership' in which power and decision-making are shared and has resulted in a successful model for ecotourism. Despite these benefits, there are a number of issues that demand immediate attention to ensure long term sustainability.

The Phajoding Eco-Camp is characterized by government facilitation in which the key organization, NRED, in partnership with TCB, initiated the joint venture. The project looked to achieve broader national goals of rural development, and therefore received significant startup funding. While capacity building amongst local managers was minimal, this weakness was exacerbated through the handing over of the project without significant on-going support. Therefore, the current capacity for local management at the Phajoding Eco-Camp puts the sustainability of the venture at risk in the long term. While this prediction is not indicative of all government facilitated projects, it does serve as a word of caution for how future programs should be rolled-out.

The final question associated with this research looks to determine which policy shifts can ensure the manifestation of the ideal of ecotourism. Admittedly, this is an issue that has not been fully explored by the research team as it stands. While the data gathering methods of this research proved suitable to individual cases they did not demonstrate the same usefulness when addressing broader policy needs. Therefore, addressing of the third research question was not possible through the current research and will require an alternative framework for assessment. As such, determining the best way forward for ecotourism policy in Bhutan stands as a gap in current research, but which we seek to close in the near future

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# Changing Patterns of Cattle Herding in the Dorokha Region, Bhutan

Rabilal Dhakal

## Abstract

The tradition of herding cattle has been practiced in the grasslands of Dorokha for centuries. However, the number of migratory herders coming down to Dorokha from Haa district has declined significantly in recent years. The passing of the Land Act of Bhutan, and its implementation in January 2017, led to the nationalization of grasslands, thus taking away the private ownership that the herders once enjoyed. This Land Act, coupled with wider social and economic changes, now pose a threat to the age-old tradition of cattle herding in Dorokha. These changes, even as they have some positive impact on environmental conservation, place great strain on the traditional livelihood of the herders and their families. This article explores this current scenario.

## Introduction

Grasslands have long played an important role in the livelihoods of around 120 families in the Dorokha region. Located in south-west Bhutan, Dorokha is a sub-district under Samtse district and lies between an altitudinal range from 600 meters to 3000 meters above the sea level (Dorokha Geog, 2017). The tradition of herders staying in these grasslands with their cattle is an old one. These migratory cattle herders from around the Dorokha region, who derived their livelihoods from the grasslands for hundreds of years, not only have a very close connection and attachment with these grasslands, but also with their livestock and their occupation of herding.

Changing patterns of livelihood in the region and changing government policies have not completely abolished the tradition of herding, but resulted in new challenges, institutions, and policies that the cattle herders and their families now need to mitigate. The grasslands (*Tsamdro* in Dzongkha) owned and used by cattle herders have now been nationalized through the Land Act of Bhutan 2007, which reads: “*tsamdro* land shall be reverted and maintained as the government land” (section 235). With the enactment of this Act, the grasslands thus became the property of the government. While the earlier owners have been compensated, they are yet to enter into other occupational domains. Given that the Land Act was implemented only recently, its consequences on the lifeworlds and the livelihoods of the herders will take some time to become clear. What is evident, however, is that, besides this Land Act, wider processes of globalization and economic development, have in the past ten years or so, brought about significant changes in traditional and customary practices in agriculture, horticulture and

livestock, along with changes in forms of government and governance in Dorokha and in Bhutan at large. It seems increasingly unlikely that cattle herders will continue herding in the long run. They will be forced to embrace new means to carve out their living. This paper discusses the future of this declining tradition, and the impact this decline will have on herder families.

For the purpose of this paper, semi-structured interviews were conducted with herder families in the Dorokha region. Today, there are only 12 families in the region who are actively involved in herding cattle and have remained in the *tsamdro*. Additionally, 11 families have continued to stay in the grasslands, but they do so without rearing animals. I interviewed all active herders in this region, in addition to a few farmers. Table 1 details how and by whom the grasslands are being used today.

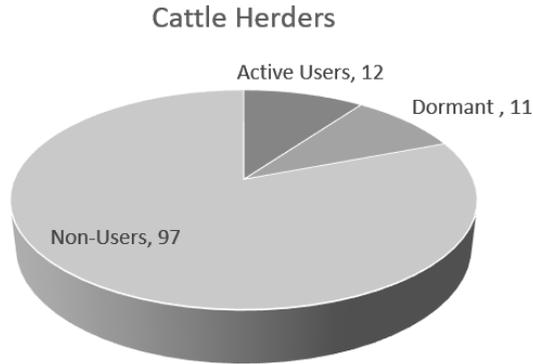
*Table 1: Types and number of herders*

Active users	Dormant users	Legal users(with ownership)	Users without ownership (illegal)	Using others pasture/rangeland
12	11 (staying in the jungle but have no cattle)	89	35 Local Estimate	10 Local Estimate

## Background

While earlier there were around 120 families who depended on grasslands for herding in the Dorokha region, today only 23 families carve out a living from these grasslands. The grasslands are located at a far distance from regular settlements, up to 12 hours walk from the herders' permanent dwellings. These families have not been able to forgo their grasslands and are also not willing to leave the area. As Karma Dorji, the district livestock officer, told me: "*Tsamdros* owners have received compensation but some of them are still reluctant to leave those pastures". Statistical data from the Samtse Dzongkhag (district) livestock office shows that, legally 89 families owned grasslands in the region amounting to 12913 acres, but the actual land in occupation was more than double of the legally owned land. Some of these cattle herders have chosen to stay deep inside the forest, either on their own grasslands or by making use of grasslands that are not formally in their possession, and so distancing themselves from the rest of the world.

*Fig. 1: Number of Cattle herders in Dorokha*



The graph above shows that there are only 12 families who actively use grasslands whereas 97 families, who were earlier herders, have now abandoned this occupation. It is also interesting to note that there are 11 families who actually do not use grasslands for herding but have still been staying there (dormant users). Most of the families who used *Tsamdro* (both legally and ‘illegally’) in the Dorokha region were migratory herders from Haa district. One such herder explained: “We don’t find good grasslands in Haa, which is why my parents brought down cattle to Dorokha”. In fact, Dorokha region has not just been a semi-home for the herders of Haa district, but for long was also a gateway to India and Sikkim for those engaged in barter.

### **Socio-economic aspects of Grasslands**

The Bhutanese economy is not diverse and only few sectors contribute a notable amount to the national exchequer. The majority of the work force (56.2%) in Bhutan (in 2015) is employed in the agriculture sector (MoAF, 2015), which increased by 1.8% to a total of 58% in 2017 (NSB, 2017). However, the contribution of agriculture to the country’s Gross Domestic Product is rather minimal with just 0.6% (Passang, 2017). While the agricultural sector is the main contributor to the primary sector, the overall growth in the primary sector is declining (NSB, 2017).

Within the agricultural sector, livestock husbandry may not have contributed significantly to the GDP, but has nevertheless made a great economic contribution to nomadic families across Bhutan. Although the occupation of herding, according to most of my respondents, did not come as a deliberate choice but rather as a traditional obligation, they for long received adequate economic returns for their labour. For long, therefore, the hardships that come with herding were well compensated by the income these herders reaped. The gross income from the sale of dairy products has been overwhelming, to the extent that herders were not always aware of the amount they had earned. As such, their venture was profitable. One respondent said

thus: “The tradition of us staying in the jungle with cattle would have been long lost had there been no profit”. Economic incentives have not just encouraged herders to continue this old tradition but also, in a way, prevented them from exploring other occupations. While not all traditional occupations provided equally lucrative economic rewards, herding was long seen as profitable. One herder claims, “the amount of money I make from this occupation doesn’t allow me to even think of doing any other work”.

For all this time, families have been able to meet their expenses through the income they made from dairy products and the sale of cattle. The market has been quite lucrative as the demand for their products was often greater than what they could supply. The proximity to Indian markets (West Bengal State) and growing demand from the domestic market continuous, in fact, to provide cattle herders with good business. “I used to go to Charmarchi carrying 20kg of butter. It took the whole day to sell it but now it takes only 2 hours” claims a herder. Another herder also expressed his excitement, “the demand is so high now and people come here to buy products without me even having to go to the market”. The time factor for trading has been shortened for herders due to road connectivity, which benefits the ease of doing business. However, some herders feel that the monsoon hampers their business as one herder expressed: “during the monsoon very few people come to buy my products and it is difficult for me to go to the nearest market”. Herders have catered to the needs of the villagers in supplying not only dairy products but also oxen for agricultural purposes and milking cows, thereby, further increasing their revenues.

Not just as an economic undertaking, the herding of cattle also comes with a strong emotional bonding on the part of the herders. Tradition plays an important role in justifying the occupation as morally right and as an important duty that needs to be preserved. Many believe that the age old tradition cannot be changed and that they have a moral duty to continue it. “We cannot leave what was done by our parents”, as one herder explained this sentiment. The claim and attachment to the profession are strong, to the extent that herders disregard other forms of labour. A herder thus claims: “Other works possess less value and very few people are blessed with the kind of livestock we have”. Some feel that they were chosen to be herders. As one herder states: “my ancestors and few others were chosen to continue this task”. The task is often connected with religion and faith. People see their task of herding cattle in terms of doing justice to their faith. “Hindu and Buddhist cannot do any rituals without milk and butter and we provide this to everyone. We are contributing to religion in this way”, claims one herder.

Herders thus make a connection between their work and traditions and religion. Leaving their profession, therefore, is something they find difficult to do. One herder explains: “we should not disrespect what our parents have done and it is our duty to follow”. This occupation perhaps has the largest emotional attachment, which results from the long and intimate time they spent with their livestock. Some people don’t even see the world outside of their grasslands.

One respondent claims: “when I happen to go to town and see vehicles moving, I feel like my cows are moving and I cannot stay any longer there”. This relationship that herders have with their cattle makes them happy and content with what they do. While many find solace in staying in the forest with their cattle, others have different reasons for keeping themselves away from home, as one herder explains: “There is so much nuisance at home and so, I choose to stay in the jungle free from the troubles of the world”. This is not just an act of escaping, but also manifests itself as a form of meditation. Some herders indeed feel that there is complete peace in the jungle, and see it as a place where they need not worry about all the problems happening around their homes and beyond. “I don’t need to hear about political drama or people killing each other as long as I stay in the forest”, says one herder. In this way, herders seemingly enjoy a high degree of peace and happiness.

## **Tsamdro Uses and Management**

The management practices of grasslands are steeped in traditional practices, rather than vested in formal training and education. Pema Jamtsho (2002, p. 82) states:

The ability of the rangelands to meet the traditional and new demands would much depend on the way it is managed for any one purpose as this will invariably influence the ability to meet other demands.

However the purpose of the use of *tsamdros* has not really been diversified. *Tsamdros* in the Dorokha region were never used for purposes other than mere grasslands until 2006 when few started growing cardamom. Farmers from nearby areas now grow cardamom in the grasslands based on a 1/3<sup>rd</sup> profit sharing with the owner. Although the land could have been used for agricultural cultivation, it was never used for this purpose owing to the fact that the herders moved to different grasslands and nobody stayed back to take care of the crops. Due to the limited size of the available labour force and common traditions, the herders only focused on livestock and therefore the grasslands were left uncultivated.

*Tsamdros*, in this region, are located away from settlements and the permanent dwellings of the herders, making it difficult for these grasslands to be used for multiple purposes. This may be inferred as the reason of the singular use of it. More importantly, natural grass germination was not to be disturbed to ensure that there is enough fodder for the livestock. Although Roder (2002, p. 51) claims that “this system follows the widely used slash-and-burn system found in many subtropical and tropical regions of Asia”, no herders in this region ever practiced slash-and-burn cultivation. This may be related to entrenched beliefs that no big fires should be made near cow sheds (structures built in the grasslands to shelter both calves and herders). One herder said thus: “Making big fire and burning the grassland will disturb our deity as well as the

livestock”. Some also recall that they were told by government officials not to make fires in the grasslands: “One official told my father not to make fires else forest department will impose fine”. Herders thus had the conviction that there existed a policy that restricted them from taking up forms of slash-and-burn cultivation.

The Forest and Nature Conservation Act 1995 doesn't permit the lighting of fires in grasslands or the felling of trees. However infected and unwanted trees were cut down by herders for better growth of fodder trees. As one respondent explains: “earlier, while I was a kid, we used to cut as many trees as we wanted and no one bothered, but now we are no longer allowed to do so”. The management of many *tsamdros* in this region has not been as effective as it could have been due to the inter-district migration of herders. Many herders who migrate to Dorokha from Haa did not legally possess *tsamdros*, but used someone else's land, or the government forest, depending upon their preferences and time. The duration of the stay is flexible. “Some herds pause for varying durations, from ten to 30 days, in different places along the route. Other herders, who do not have their own rangelands along the way, travel without a break to their destination-rangelands” (Ura, 2002, p. 10).

## **The impact of the Land Act, 2007**

The passing of the Land Act 2007 led to the nationalization of all the *tsamdros* owned by individuals, communities and any other institutions (those grasslands owned by religious organizations). The details of the *tsamdros* owned by them have been deleted by the Land Commission of Bhutan, and these lands now belong to the state. A fee of Nu. 105, collected from *tsamdros* owners (fees for the use of grasslands, which is often understood by them as tax), was also discontinued, while compensation has been paid by the government to the *tharm* holders, depending on the size of their registered land. Although the majority of herders have left the practice of herding, some continued to stay and use these *tsamdros*. Many owners who have leased their *tsamdros* still continue to collect the payment (compensation for the use of their grassland), both in cash and kind as was practiced in the past. However many in the region and beyond have stopped leasing and sub-leasing. “Some cattle herders of Haa who do not own *tsamdros* have stopped *tsamdros* sub-lease payment claiming *tsamdros* now belong to the Government” (Tshering Gyeltshen, 2010, p. 11).

The Land Act, in itself, appears controversial due to differences in treatment of *tsamdros* located at different altitudes. The Land Act states that “Highlanders who are directly dependent on *Tsamdros* may retain their *Tsamdros* rights under lease irrespective of possession of livestock and their herd size”. Hence, people of Dorokha region, who belong to the lowlands, will not have this right. The leasing out of the *tsamdros* itself has not been made possible for this could be allowed only after a Royal command. This is agitating owners, who worry if leasing will be a

genuine possibility. The Act benefits livestock owners who did not have any *tsamdros* earlier, as individuals with livestock are now eligible to get the *tsamdros* leased by the government. However, such hopes are grim unless the leasing is done at the earliest, so freeing herders' of a sense of uncertainty.

All in all, the sustainable livelihoods of these herders is now at stake. Leaving this occupation behind and securing alternative ways of livelihood may be a challenging task for most herding families. After receiving compensation for their *tsamdros* from the government, 90% of the herders have now sold their animals. However, after the nationalization of the *tsamdros*, many herders sold their cattle at the same time, and consequently supply was higher than demand, which resulted in herders fetching lower prices for their animals. For instance, herders were able to fetch only an average price of Nu 8000 for a cow and Nu. 5000 for an ox/bull, even though the usual market price was double this amount. Not all herders sold their cattle, however. Religious beliefs and emotional attachments were reasons for them not to do so. They believe that once cattle is sold, they will be butchered, which is the reason for them not wanting to sell their cattle. One herder claims: "how can I let someone kill my animal which is like my child? I will be re-born in hell if my animal is killed by the buyer".

The Land Act has thus impacted the economic system of herding in its entirety. Given that the herders are now left with limited and marginal access to the required land, they are compelled to find jobs in urban areas. Rural to urban migration has already begun with these herders' families moving to urban areas, which could well worsen the scenario of urban migration in the country. However, some farmers, as opposed to herders, feel that the impact of the Land Act has been positive. Previous conflicts with animals in saving and guarding their agricultural field have, as a result, largely been resolved. A farmer stated: "The migratory season of the cattle resulted in losing almost everything from my field earlier but now there is hardly any migration". Problems farmers faced during the migration season now appear to be a worry of the past. The reduction in the number of livestock also resulted in the increase in the greenery and reduction in the land slides. Soil erosions have been further reduced by cardamom plantation in some of the grasslands.

## **The future of cattle herders and the tradition of herding**

Although the numbers of cattle herders have vastly reduced, amongst those who continue herding, the enthusiasm remains high. Herders are looking forward to the lease from the government. The remaining 12 families in the area, who are still using the *tsamdros*, believe that they have no other option but to continue herding. It is their reluctance in finding other occupations, and the attachment they have with herding, that makes them decide to continue this practice.

However, many fear that soon this rich tradition will vanish. The change in likes and preferences of the younger generation also threatens the continuity of pastoralism. Education and globalization certainly seem to have a profound impact on the changing lifeworlds and livelihoods of the people, as is evident from the social change that can be observed in the study area. Younger generations now have different aspirations and are less interested in continuing the herding tradition. A herder claims thus: “My daughter doesn’t want to do what I do as she is educated now”. Today’s youth believe that other professions are better and less arduous. “My youngest son now bought a bolero car and does business. He feels that doing business has lesser difficulties unlike being in the forest with cattle”, one herder explains. With the ageing of current herders and the decline of interest among youth in herding, this tradition might well be on its way out.

*Table 2: No of Herders in different period*

Years	2000	2007	2017	2018
No. of Herders	120	80	30	12

Table 2 shows that from the 120 cattle herders in the Dorokha region in the year 2000, this number has come down to a meager 12 (excluding the dormant herders), a drop by 90% within just 17 years. With youth exploring other professions, the older generations of herders are left on their own devices. The fear of losing this tradition for good worries many herders. One herder stated: “I am afraid this tradition will be lost now”. Some are optimistic still and envisage the procurement of better breeds of cows to continue with their traditional occupation. The fear however is real, especially in view of youths losing interest in carrying on with this tradition. The few remaining herders are of the view that their children will not do the same work after they themselves are no longer able to practice herding. Herders do love what they do, but they also express that it wasn’t the occupation they wanted to pursue while they were young themselves. Applying the same principle now, we might see the demise of this occupation as – contrary to the past – there are now alternative paths available for the youth. Modern developments have brought new opportunities in types of vocation, accelerated by education, but so at the cost of traditional livelihoods. These opportunities along with the implementation of the Land Act would greatly minimize the pastoral livelihood, not just in Dorokha region alone but in Bhutan at large.

## **Conclusion**

The implementation of the Land Act of Bhutan 2007 and changing livelihood patterns caused by modern developments across Bhutan is likely to completely change the traditional practices

of the pastoral occupation in the Dorokha region. Over the past 15 years, there has been a decline of 90% in grassland users bringing down their livestock. These changes have already threatened the livelihood of those families who depend solely on the income from livestock. A profound occupational transformation in this short time would throw a number of challenges to the affected families. The unemployment rate of 2.1% and youth unemployment of 13.2 % (Rinzin, 2017) in the country is consequently likely to worsen further. The once celebrated traditional occupation is now bound to lose not just its significance but weaken the socio-economic foundations of many families.

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# Cultural Wisdom and Sustainable Development in Satsam Chorteon

Tshering Wangchuk

## Abstract

In 1982, the United Nations initiated the World Commission on Environment and Development. This Commission defined sustainable development as “the ability to guarantee meeting the needs of the present without compromising the needs of the coming generations to meet their own needs.” Adopting this definition here, I explore the influence and relevance of this approach to the context of Bhutan. Next, I intend to explore age-old practices of sustainable development that are deeply embedded within Bhutanese social, cultural, political and economic life-worlds. Through a case study of Satsam Chorteon, I will illustrate that sustainable development can be achieved using bottom-up approaches, with the help of local knowledge and old-age practices.

## Introduction

In this paper, I offer an argument on how sustainable development goals can be achieved. In doing so, I formulate a critique and an alternative to modern and universal viewpoints that focus on science, technology, and innovation (STI) as the most crucial ingredients for sustainable development. In the context of Bhutan, I argue that what is needed is the empowering of local knowledge and wisdom, which are embedded in longstanding spiritual and cultural activities. These traditions seem to have an intrinsic connection to the idea of sustainable development. In what follows, I first offer a brief theoretical background to the concept of sustainable development. Next, I explain two images and their associated teachings which are central to Bhutan’s cultural traditions, namely ‘the four friends’ and ‘the 6 symbols of longevity.’ I then illustrate the continued relevance of these images and their lessons in the context of tree worship, in order to show how Bhutan’s spiritual and cultural knowledge and practices can help guarantee sustainable development.

## The Concept of Sustainable Development

This section traces the theoretical foundations and origins of the idea of sustainable development. Rassafi, Poorzhardey & Vaziri (2005, p. 62) argue that sustainable development pertains to the ‘interrelationships of environmental, economic and social variables’, and their intermixing in a way that is deemed sustainable. It may be noted here, that sustainable development has not always been a concern. For example Marx, despite his critique of

capitalism, did not invoke the need for sustainable development. In his time, this was clearly not yet recognised as a concern.

In fact, it took a long time for the concept of 'sustainable development' to gain worldwide currency. When the Soviet Union collapsed, the economic thinker and theorist Fukuyama refused to see sustainable development as an alternative ideology to capitalism. Instead, he framed capitalism as the final ideology of a now post- Cold-war world. In his work *The End of History and the Last Man*, Fukuyama (1992) explained how the western model of capitalism and its values formulated the final, and the most developed, stage of world economy. He predicted that all of humanity would eventually adopt a homogenous model of capitalism. Fukuyama (1992) was not only uncritical of the fallouts of capitalism, he also failed to conceptualize the emergence of new economic models. His work is now criticized by the recognised need to achieve sustainable development, which formulates a critique of the kind of global and unrestrained capitalism Fukuyama envisaged.

While there are several factors that led to the emergence of 'sustainable development', climate change and environmental destruction are prime amongst these. This has prompted an intellectual debate regarding the sustainability of capitalism in the long run. In the Report titled *Happiness: Towards a New Development Paradigm*, authored by New Development Paradigm Steering Committee and Secretariat of the Royal Government of Bhutan (2013), it states that 'the current model, based on the doctrine of limitless growth has resulted in the destructive attempt to use earth's finite resources to satisfy infinite resources.' The same report also points out that:

Now more than ever, the need for a different development approach is highlighted in ecological, social and economic crises: ecosystem degradation, potentially catastrophic climate change, excessive consumption of the affluent and extreme poverty on the other end, and growing inequalities both between and within nations. Underlying all these crises is the lack of the architecture of global governance to address these problems.

It is therefore in view of these manifold crises that sustainable development is increasingly looked upon an alternative paradigm of development and economic growth.

## **Technology and Sustainable development**

The UN System Task Team on the Post-2015 UN Development Agenda identified Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) as major requirements to transform economies that currently rely on the exploitation of natural resources and to, more broadly, achieve paradigms of development that are sustainable. This proposal is derived from the observation that human activities are the prime driver for the exploitation of natural resources and environmental destruction. The UN highlighted the domains of technology, science, and innovation as pivotal

to help reduce our dependence on the natural resources. For this, it was emphasized, significant investment in science and technology is the need of the hour.

However, investing in technology in order to promote sustainable development raises several questions and concerns. If history is anything to go by, we see that it was technology that first gave rise to the industrial revolution, which subsequently vastly increased usage of natural resources and caused widespread pollution and environmental destruction. With technology as a medium, consumerism has taken over lifeworlds, and today it seems increasingly difficult to separate one's 'wants' from one's actual 'needs.' What the case of the industrial revolution shows is that technological advancements inevitably comes with a host of unintended side effects. I would therefore argue that the UN's push for more technology to achieve sustainable development must take careful note of such side effects. This is not to argue that technological renewal and innovation are not important. They are. But what I wish to emphasize here is that technological inventions often come with consequences that were not foreseen, and that such side-effects, and particularly the way they may impact the environment, must be taken into account.

In a TED talk, Leyla Acarolgu (2013) offered a set of insightful perspectives on how technology may result in unintended, sometimes unseen, consequences for the environment. In the 1920s, for instance, poisonous gasses that emitted from refrigerators caused human deaths. Then Thomas Midgley invented an inert gas called Chlorofluorocarbon to solve the problem of refrigerator gas emissions. This solution, however, is now in parts responsible for the hole in the ozone layer. Acarolgu also coins the example of the production of bio-fuels in Europe, which was enforced through legislation. The raw material of bio-fuel included corns and wheat, and resulted in the increased production of these crops. But as many forests were cleared in order to increase the production of these crops. Acarolgu (2013) also argues that technologies that can help address environmental issues are actually very few, amounting to only 2.7% of all technology patents that currently exist. The above further shows that the uncritical usage of technology to promote sustainable development is rather problematic.

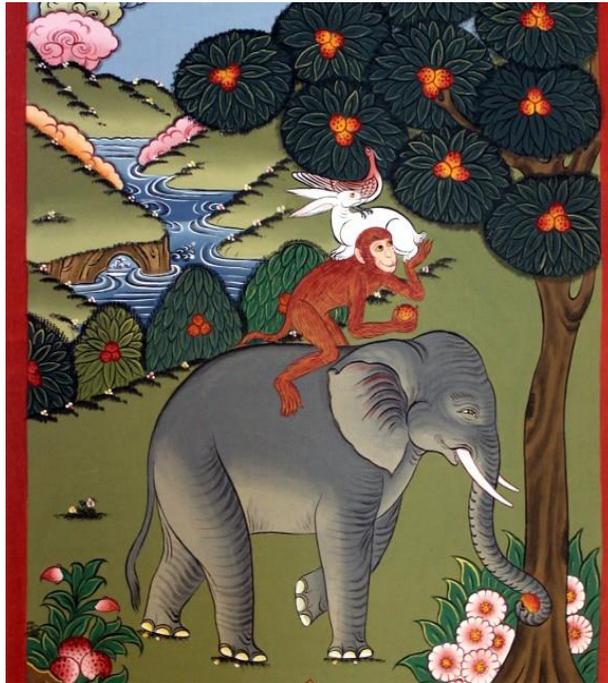
## **Contextualizing Sustainable Development within Bhutan's Wisdom Traditions**

In this section, I will present and explain two traditional and common Bhutanese images, which, I will argue, symbolize the particularistic relationship and understanding that Bhutanese see themselves as having with the environment around them. Their traditional understandings and practices, I pose, offer a localized, indigenous version of sustainable development. I therefore suggest that instead of looking at new technologies, science, and innovation in order to address environmental concerns, academicians and policy-makers should also look to past traditions

and ancient wisdom to find solutions to the problems of environmental destruction and the exploitation of natural resources.

Two popular Bhutanese images are drawn on many *thangkas* and painted on the walls of the Cheosham at Satsam Chorteon (a village I discuss further below), and constantly reinforce our spiritual and cultural relation to the land around us. These two images are; 1. *Thunpa Puen Zhi* (The 4 Friends) and 2. *Tshering Namdru* (The 6 symbols of longevity).

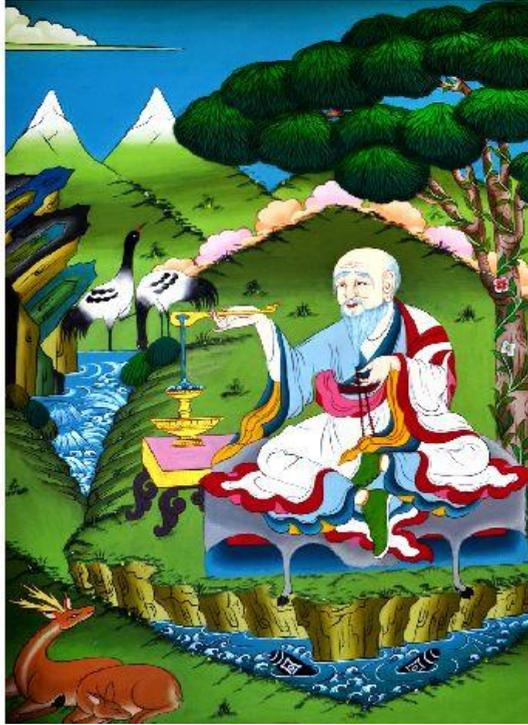
*Image 1: The 4 Friends (Thuempa Puen Zhi) (Sangay Arts and Crafts, 2015)*



The first image I discuss is popularly known as ‘The 4 friends.’ These friends are animals including: a rabbit, a bird, a monkey, and an elephant. The story that goes with the image is as follows. Once, many centuries ago, in a forest an elephant came across a tree and finding it useful, he claimed ownership over it. Then a monkey arrived who disputed the elephant’s private ownership of the tree, claiming that he had been in the habit of consuming its fruits long before the elephant had even saw the tree. They were subsequently joined by a rabbit, who claimed that the tree was solely his because he had long been feeding on its leaves. Finally, a partridge (bird), who witnessed the argument, joined in and told the 3 animals that it was him who was responsible for the existence of the three in the first place as he had brought the seed from which the tree had grown. It now seemed that all the animals had a reason to claim private ownership. However, the private ownership of any one of them would come to the disadvantage of the other animals. The four animals therefore agreed that since they were all interested in different aspects of the tree, it was to their common benefit to share access to the tree, and to

do so harmoniously. This story can be interpreted as a critique of private ownership. For the residents of Satsam Chorleon, this image emphasizes the 'social ownership' of the natural environment and for the need to preserve and protect it.

*Image 2: The 6 symbols of longevity (Tshering Namdru) (ICHAP, 2018)*



Another popular image is that of the "6 symbols of longevity", which shows the relationship between 'man' and the environment. The 6 symbols displayed are: the cliff, man, tree, water, deer, and crane of longevity. The 'man of longevity' is symbolized by an old hermit with a long, white beard, which indicates his advanced age. He is holding an ancient, precious bottle and a holy peach. The hermit, here, symbolizes all human beings. The cliff is shown in the background, and is considered crucial for human shelter in the original eco-system. The tree of longevity is represented by the tree under which the old man is seated. The tree is included as it provides a source of food, shelter, warmth, as well as produces the air which we breathe. Water, furthermore, supports people, animals, trees, and all other living organisms. The deer of longevity is also important as it refers to all animals which walk the earth on four limbs. The crane of longevity here represents all kinds of birds any other animal with two limbs.

Taken together, this painting focuses on the balance between human beings and the ecology, including both living and non-living entities. This image calls attention to the value of interdependence between 'man' and the environment.' It is this inter-dependence that leads to sustainability, which in this image is symbolized by the notion of 'longevity.'

## **The spiritual practice of tree protection through worshipping**

In this section I will dwell on my personal observations concerning a long-standing local tradition of tree worshipping in Satsam Chorteon. I use this case to further argue that environmental conservation need not always be guided by science, technology, and innovation, but must also take heed of traditional and indigenous knowledge and practices. Indeed, almost all households at Satsam Chorteon have long been involved in the conservation of the environment, without the help of advanced science, technology, or innovation.

Once every winter, I, along with my father, visit my grandfather's place, which is a 3 hour journey by foot through the alpine vegetation. We make this visit in order to pay our respects to the tradition my grandfather practiced. We show our respect through offering butter lamps, incense, and by prostrating to a large pine tree. It is said that these trees have been here for many generations. At the foot, these trees meet a small mud spherical stupa of just 50cm in height and 40cm in diameter. It has long been believed that these trees are the home of a deity and this stupa was constructed to house this deity.

Deities are a powerful representation of both incentives and punishment in Bhutanese society. Often, as is the case here, the deity is seen as a subterranean god. These subterranean gods are believed by popular Bhutanese cultural traditions to occupy the underworld and to make their homes in the trees of the middle earth, which is a. Once, my father asked a village monk to perform a small ritual in front of the stupa. We offered locally brewed alcohol, fruits and prostrated before the stupa in hopes of earning better health. Such relations between trees, health and sickness influence people's activities, which, as a side effect, results in the preservation and protection of these trees. It is also being said that if one fails to worship the trees, grave consequences will follow. Such dynamics do not only apply to trees and human, but equally to lakes and mountains. Humans, here, are seen as subservient to nature, not as dominating it in the way that unrestrained forms of capitalism seems to promote. It is this traditional understanding and knowledge of the environment that many Bhutanese possess that now offers new perspectives for conservation and sustainable development, which could be achieved in Bhutan through spiritual means.

I must qualify here, however, that while this knowledge and practice remains a 'living tradition', it is increasingly threatened by the onset of modernity and development. In the immediate vicinity of Satsam Chorteon, farm roads have now been constructed, many trees have been cut, while stones have been excavated for use as construction materials. Additionally, hotels, shops and new residents have rapidly arrived in recent years at Satsam Chorteon, and which, among other issues, led to pressures on drinking water, land availability, and the environment more widely. These changes, rapid as they are, may lead to a scenario in which the

traditional and spiritual protection of the environment becomes challenged, even threatened, by the perceived need for rapid development and modernization. The onset of modernization is definite, but traditional wisdom revolving around the environmental conservation informs the locals of Satsam Chorteon on why they need to conserve the environment. This traditional wisdom may not be scientific or methodical, but has nevertheless long proven to be efficient at protecting the environment and should therefore inform an inclusive environmental activism that pursues sustainable development.

## Conclusion

Achieving sustainable development is crucial in today's context of the widespread exploitation of natural resources and associated environmental issues. Globally, the dominant discourse now hinges on science, technology, and innovation to address environmental concerns. But while this may be useful in parts, in this paper I have argued with the help of two popular Bhutanese paintings that are common all over Bhutan, including in Satsam Chorteon, and by narrating my own personal experiences, that sustainable development can also be achieved through a resurgence of traditional wisdom and practices that are deeply embedded in Bhutanese spiritual and cultural lifeworlds.

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# Analysis of Trend of Spatial and Temporal Characteristics of Temperature: A Case Study of Teesta-Dikchu Watershed, Sikkim

Kausila Timsina

## Abstract

The glacial and monsoon dependent flow of the river Teesta in Sikkim makes the flow very climate sensitive. The trend analysis of the temperature of the watershed becomes essential to keep a record of the any behavioural change in temperature and its impact on the flow of the Teesta river. The study analyses the trend in mean monthly temperature and mean seasonal temperature using Mann-Kendall test, Sen's slope estimation and Pettitt's test for the period 1985-2015 for Gangtok and Tadong and Pettitt's test from 2005 to 2015 for Majitar and Mangan. The trends of temporal and spatial characteristics of temperature along the watershed show much variation. Gangtok and Tadong, the eastern district of Sikkim shows a rise in temperature while the temperature in Sikkim's northern region has fallen.

## Introduction

Weather elements such as rainfall and temperature hold a direct relation to the hydrological regime of any watershed. Understanding the trend of spatial and temporal behaviour of rainfall and temperature therefore becomes essential for purposes of water resource use and management. The burden of the anthropogenic activities on water resources, caused by unplanned urbanization along lakes, rivers and water bodies, now results into the drying up of water bodies and block the recharging of ground water. Further seasonal variation in the volume of spring water available is another crisis frequently reported owing to climate change led weather variability, including erratic, untimely, and unpredictable rainfalls and temperature variations (Rai 2014).

As it is understood, the contribution of the climatic parameters is significant to the health of a watershed and its vulnerabilities to climate change, there is a need to understand the catchment flow regime of the Teesta- Dikchu watershed in relation to the trend of the weather elements in the catchment. The Dikchu River originates from the glaciers, while the volume of the discharge is hugely contributed by rainfall. The study will essentially analyse the climatic pattern of the watershed. Using data for thirty years, the work consists of developing a trend analysis of temperature of the watershed area.

*Weather elements and its relation to Hydrology*

Climatic parameters which regulate the water cycle have a direct relation to the hydrological regime of any watershed. Hydrologic models applied to understand the hydrologic cycle in various watersheds provide an understanding of the influence of the weather elements on the watershed hydrology. In Upper Colorado River Basin, Haw River Watershed in North Carolina, and Boise and Spokane River Basins show that an increase in temperature leads to an increase in the average annual evapotranspiration and an increasing snowmelt corresponding to changes in the magnitude and timing of annual peak flows (Chattopadhyay and Edwards 2015). The Dhuliel catchment in north-east Jordan shows a high unpredictability of temporal and spatial rainfall, flash floods, absence of base flow, and high rates of evapotranspiration (Abushandi 2011). Modelling the Upper Mississippi River Basin, through the SWAT hydrological model, revealed the impact of climate change on temperature, precipitation, and CO<sub>2</sub> levels. Furthermore, the river hydrology is particularly prone to imminent climate change, causing greater episodes of both flooding and drought (Jha 2004). The analysis of mean annual temperature and precipitation 225 meteorological observations over Turkey reveals spatial distribution of mean annual precipitation and temperature and shows a positive correlation of the weather elements to discharge (Bostan and Akyürek 2009).

### *Trends in Air Temperature*

As the Himalayan climate and water atlas key messages indicates, temperatures across the mountainous Hindu Kush Himalayan region are likely to increase by about 1–2°C (in places by up to 4–5°C) by 2050 (ICIMOD 2013). The analysis of the spatial trends and patterns of temperature in sub-regions around the Himalayan region therefore becomes important. Addisu et al, (2015) calculated a time series trend of temperature and precipitation in Lake Tana Sub-basin in Ethiopia, and concluded that the mean, maximum, and minimum temperature showed an increasing trend. This was confirmed by CSAG (2012)'s seasonal Mann-Kendall trend analysis in the Ethiopian region, Dire Dawa, Belg and Kiremit for 1953–1999, which found cooling of Dire Dawa and significant warming at Belg and Kiremit temperatures over the same period. An increase in the temperature in Eastern China by 1.52°C over the last 100 years, Sweden's increasing temperature trend for 1959–2008, and the increasing temperature trend in Florida is affirmed by Chattopadhyay and Edwards' (2015) study. The analysis of historical (1971–2005) and future episodes (2011–2099) of temperature trends in the inner catchment of Sutlej river basin in India shows a fluctuating trend of increase and decrease in temperature (Singh et.al 2015). Jain et.al (2013) studied the rainfall and temperature trends in northeast India by using the Mann-Kendal analysis technique. From this, they understood that the temperature data for all the four temperature variables (maximum, minimum, and mean temperatures and temperature range) showcased a rising trend.

These studies indicate that there is a huge regional variability of temperature in different time and a need for the analysis of the spatial and temporal trends and behavioural pattern of different weather parameters.

## Objective

The study will analyse the climatic pattern of the Teesta-Dikchu watershed In Sikkim, using data for thirty years (1985-2015), this work will consist of developing a trend analysis of temperature of the watershed area. The main objective of this study is therefore, to evaluate trends in air temperature for the state of the Teesta-Dikchu Watershed, Sikkim.

## Study Area

The study area is a sub-catchment of the river Teesta river basin in the Indian state of Sikkim. The Teesta is the main rivers in Sikkim and originates from the glaciers of in North Sikkim at an elevation of about 5,280 m. The present work is in the Teesta-Dikchu watershed (name given for the present study).. The Teesta- Dikchu watershed has an total area of 4657 Sq. km and is located 88°13'E, 28°12N' to 88°51' E to 27°20'N.



*Fig.1: Teesta-Dikchu Watershed*

## Data Base and Methodology

The present study required a set of secondary data on land use and weather. Table 1.1 details the meteorological Database -Daily values for maximum and minimum temperature used in the study. Data of daily temperature of the catchment were collected for 30 years from a number of stations of the India Meteorology Department Sikkim, namely Mazitar, Tadong, Gangtok, and Mangan.

*Table 1.1: Temperature data from different stations*

Station Name	Parameter	Period from	Period to
Gangtok	Daily Maximum & Minimum Temperature	01.01.1985	31.12.2015
Tadong		01.01.1985	31.12.2015
Mangan		01.01.2005	31.12.2015
Magitar		01.01.2005	31.12.2015

## Methodology

### *Statistical test for trend analysis*

A trend analysis of a time series data consists of the magnitude of a trend and its statistical significance. In general, the magnitude of a trend in a time series is determined by either using regression analysis (parametric test) or by using Sen's estimator method (non-parametric test) (Sen, 1968). In addition, a change point in the time series climatic data can be determined with the Pettitt's test. This study uses both trend analysis methods; it uses non-parametric (Mann-Kendall and Sen's Slope) and the change point detection Pettitt's test method on temperature (minimum and maximum) records from weather stations of the Teesta Dikchu watershed for the period ranging from 1985-2015 for the Gangtok and Tadong stations, and a ten year period Pettitt's test for Mangan, Chungthang and Majitar stations due to the unavailability of long term data for these stations. Pettitt's test is used for these stations because Mann-Kendall's test can only be applied to a long-term time series data of about 30 years. The study analyses the temperature trend on a monthly, seasonal and annual timescale.

## Findings

### *Climate and Rainfall*

Sikkim's great elevation range from 260m to 7700m in less than 100 km causes abrupt changes in climatic conditions. Orographic lift, and its interaction with the monsoonal climate, results

in major difference in rainfall and temperature profiles across the Teesta river basin in Sikkim. The month of April marks the onset of summer and the monsoon with a rise in temperature accompanied by hails and thunderstorms. “The rainfall in Sikkim, decreases with elevation after a certain limit. Rainfall at Chungthang (1,600 m) is 2,650 mm and at Lachen situated at a distance of only about 20 km north of Chungthang is 1,680 mm, whereas Thangu (3,800 m), located about 20 km further north receives only 840 mm of rain annually” (CISMHE,DU 2006). Thus, through the different altitudinal gradient of the basin the southern and middle valleys are hot, humid and wet, and the north relatively drier and colder. Four distinct seasons can be observed in Sikkim with winter from mid-November to mid-April, spring from mid-April to mid-June, the monsoon from mid-June to mid-September, and the autumn from mid-September to mid-November (CISMHE, DU 2006). The section that follow provides a trend analysis of the spatial and temporal variation of the temperature maximum and minimum of the Gangtok and Tadong for the past thirty years in the Teesta Dikchu Watershed.

## Trend of Maximum, Minimum Temperature at Gangtok

*Mann–Kendall’s Temperature trend analysis (monthly, seasonal and annual)*

A trend analysis using the Mann–Kendall method and Sen slope estimator was applied for Teesta Dikchu watershed using monthly, average annual, and seasonal (pre-monsoon, monsoon, post-monsoon and winter) temperature data. A positive z-statistic value indicates an increasing trend in temperature, while a negative z-statistic value indicates a decreasing trend in temperature.

*Table 1.2: Trends of maximum temperature in Gangtok 1985-2015*

Place	Month	SEN Slope	z statistics	Significance	Trend at 95%
Gangtok	Jan	.035	1.25	A	no trend
	Feb	.073	1.62	non-significant	no trend
	Mar	.054	2.30	non-significant	Positive
	Apr	-.014	-.61	non-significant	no trend
	May	.011	.70	non-significant	no trend
	June	0.000	-.16	non-significant	no trend
	July	.019	1.72	non-significant	no trend
	Aug	-.006	-.56	non-significant	Negative
	Sept	.025	1.59	non-significant	no trend
	Oct	.019	1.07	significant	no trend
	Nov	.008	.30	non-significant	no trend

	Dec	.018	.77	non-significant	no trend
	Pre Monsoon	0.044	0.8	non-significant	no trend
	Monsoon	.014	1.23	non-significant	Negative
	Post Monsoon	.013	1.38	non-significant	no trend
	Winter	.067	1.14	significant	no trend
	Annual	.044	1.37	significant	Negative

While the Z-statistics of the maximum temperature of Gangtok from 1985-2015 show an increasing trend with all seasons and nine months of the year showing a positive value, including the winter months of December, January and February. Only the months of April, June and August show a negative value, indicating a drop of temperature in these months. Sen's slope shows the magnitude of change in any given time series data. A decreasing trend with the Sen's slope magnitude of -.014 and -.006 is observed in the months of April and August, while all other months show an increasing trend with highest magnitude of .073 in the month of February and .067 magnitude in winters of 1985-2015.

*Table 1.3: Trends of minimum temperature in Gangtok 1985-2015*

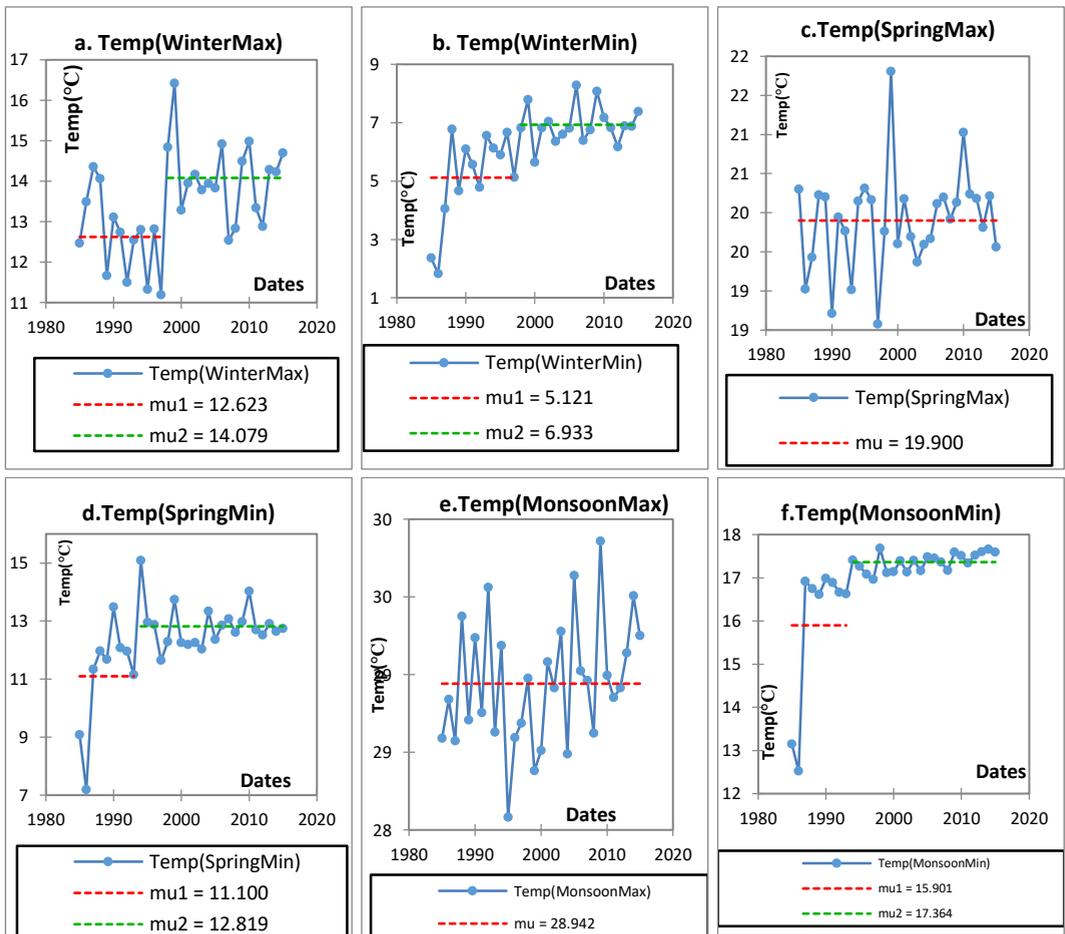
Place	month	SEN Slope	z statistics	Significance	Trend at 95%
Gangtok	Jan	.092	1.28	significant	no trend
	Feb	.133	3.14	non-significant	Positive
	Mar	.078	2.92	non-significant	Positive
	Apr	.075	.99	significant	no trend
	May	.050	2.47	non-significant	Positive
	June	.038	1.86	significant	no trend
	July	.035	1.28	significant	no trend
	Aug	.040	.79	significant	no trend
	Sept	.036	1.03	significant	no trend
	Oct	.054	.77	significant	no trend
	Nov	.067	1.14	significant	no trend
	Dec	.060	1.60	significant	no trend
	Pre Monsoon	.087	.88	significant	no trend
	Monsoon	.050	1.14	significant	no trend
	Post Monsoon	.036	2.08	significant	Positive
	Winter	.059	.90	significant	no trend
	Annual	.217	.32	significant	no trend

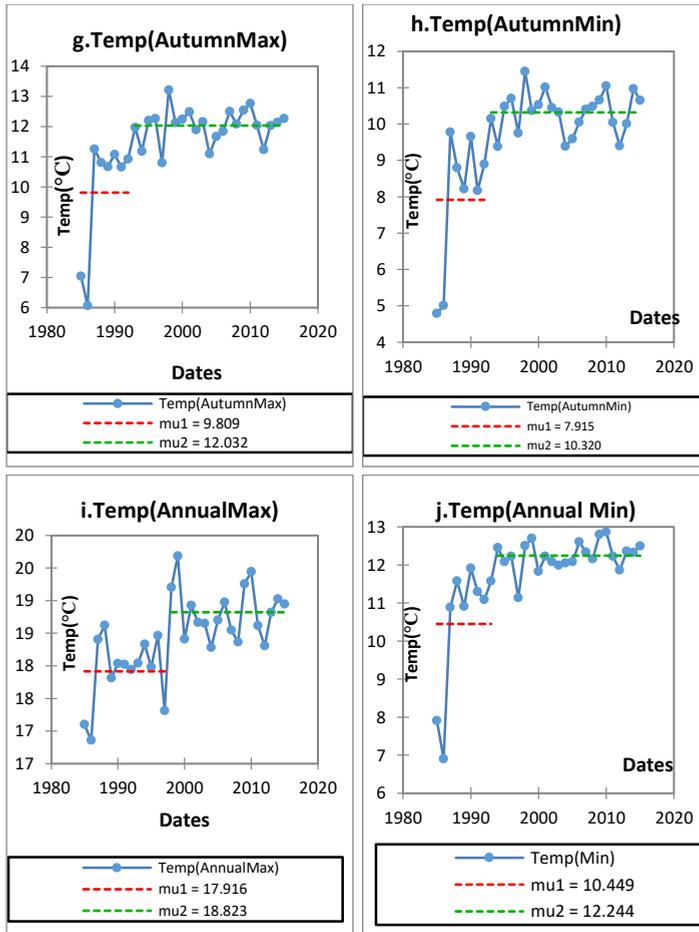
While the Z-statistics of the minimum temperature of Gangtok from 1985-2015 show an increasing trend with all seasons and twelve months of the year showing positive values, including all the winter months of December, January and February. The Sen's slope describes the magnitude of change in minimum time series data of Gangtok and indicates no decreasing trend with all the Sen's slope magnitude of observing positive values in all the months and seasons of the years. All other months show an increasing trend with highest magnitude of .133 in the month of February and .087 magnitude in winters of 1985-2015.

*Pettitt's Temperature trend analysis (seasonal and annual) test Gangtok*

Pettitt's test, as discussed earlier, indicates the change point in any time series data. The following analysis is derived from a test performed in the four different seasons in the Teesta Dikchu watershed.

**Fig 2: Seasonal and annual temperature trend analysis of Gangtok**





The winter maximum 12.623 degrees and minimum 5.121 degrees show a similar trend with a lower average observed till the year 1998 when the change occurs and a rise of an average of 14.079 degrees maximum and 6.933 degrees minimum is observed. The Spring Temperature does not show a very significant change over the years, except for the year 2000 with a high point of 22 degrees, while the average temperature remains 19.9 degrees throughout 1985-2015. The minimum spring temperature shows a rise after 1995 with a rise from 11.1 degrees to 12.819 degrees after 1995.

The Annual average maximum temperature shows a rise in temperature from 17.916 to 18.823 degrees with the change occurring during 1998. The minimum average temperature also rises from 10.449 to 12.244 degrees with the change occurring in 1995. The maximum temperature during the monsoon, though fluctuating, has remained the same with an average of 28.942 degrees, with no change point, while the minimum temperature shows a rise from 1988 from 15.901 degrees to 17.364 degrees. The autumn maximum average temperature rises after 1988 from 9.809 to about 12.032. Similarly, the minimum average temperature rises from

7.915 to 10.320 degrees. The temperature patterns in Gangtok shows a rising trend with an average annual increase of a maximum rise of 1 degree, while the minimum annual temperature has raised by about 2 degrees. The winter maximum and minimum temperature was raised by about 2 degrees. The spring and the monsoon seasons also saw the rise in the minimum temperature of about 1 degree, while in the autumn season the temperature has been high with a rising temperature of about 2 degrees.

## Trend of Maximum, Minimum Temperature at Tadong

### *Mann–Kendall’s Temperature trend analysis (monthly, seasonal and annual)*

While the Z-statistics of the maximum temperature of Tadong from 1985-2015 show a decreasing temperature trends with a negative Z-Statistics observed in the months of January -.95, June -.04, August -.11 -2.31 and -3.70 in November and December respectively, an increasing trend is observed in all seasons and other months. The Sen’s slope shows the magnitude of change in Tadong’s maximum temperature, which is a decreasing trend with the Sen’s slope magnitude of -.030, -.050 and -.067 being observed in the winter months of January, November and December, while all other months show an increasing trend with highest magnitude of .047 in the month of March of 1985-2015.

**Table 1.4: Maximum Temperature Trends at Tadong 1985-2015**

Place	month	SEN Slope	z statistics	Significance	Trend at 95%
Tadong	Jan	-.030	-.95	non-significant	no trend
	Feb	.037	.88	non-significant	no trend
	Mar	.047	2.07	non-significant	Positive
	Apr	.000	.13	non-significant	no trend
	May	.018	.99	non-significant	no trend
	June	.000	-.04	non-significant	no trend
	July	.024	1.77	non-significant	no trend
	Aug	.000	-.11	non-significant	no trend
	Sept	.033	1.64	non-significant	no trend
	Oct	.014	.86	non-significant	no trend
	Nov	-.050	-2.31	non-significant	Negative
	Dec	-.067	-3.70	non-significant	Negative
	Pre Monsoon	.000	.13	non-significant	no trend
	Monsoon	.027	1.93	non-significant	no trend
	Post Monsoon	.012	1.44	non-significant	no trend

	Winter	-.027	-1.66	non-significant	no trend
	Annual	.009	1.04	non-significant	no trend

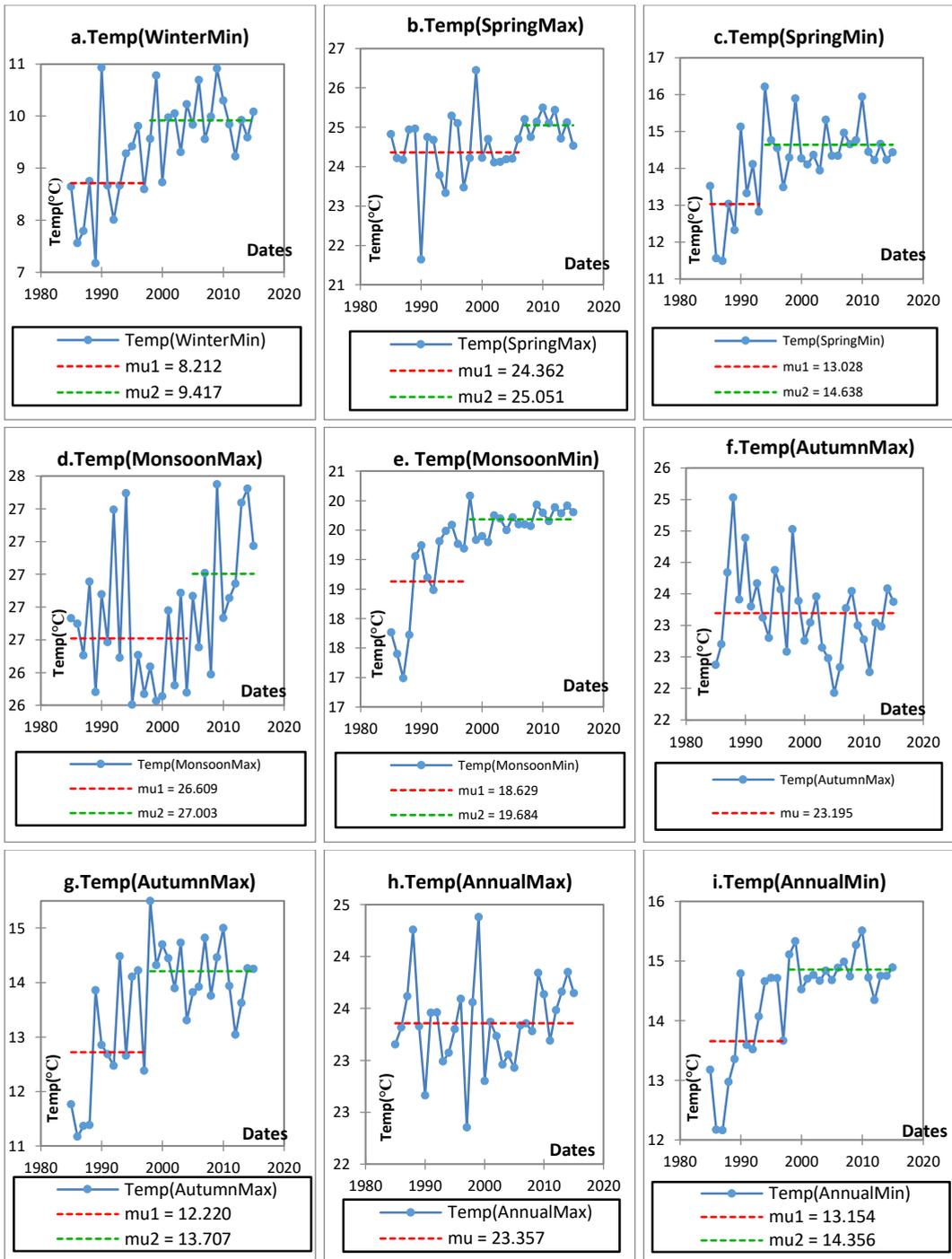
*Table 1.5 Minimum Temperature Trends at Tadong 1985-2015*

Place	month	SEN Slope	z statistics	Significance	Trend at 95%
Tadong	Jan	.058	2.93	non-significant	Positive
	Feb	.081	2.68	non-significant	Positive
	Mar	.057	1.93	non-significant	no trend
	Apr	.080	1.82	Significant	no trend
	May	.075	2.12	Significant	Positive
	June	.071	1.75	Significant	no trend
	July	.057	1.37	Significant	no trend
	Aug	.050	1.39	Significant	no trend
	Sept	.98	1.64	Significant	no trend
	Oct	.068	2.54	non-significant	Positive
	Nov	.082	1.33	Significant	no trend
	Dec	.074	1.63	Significant	no trend
	Pre Monsoon	.069	3.33	non-significant	Positive
	Monsoon	.057	2.04	Significant	Positive
	Post Monsoon	.046	.94	Significant	no trend
	Winter	.070	1.56	Significant	no trend
	Annual	.064	1.01	Significant	no trend

The Z-statistics of the minimum temperature of Tadong from 1985-2015 show an increasing trend with all seasons and twelve months of the year showing positive values, including all the winter months of December, January and February. The Sen's slope shows the magnitude of change in minimum time series data of Tadong, and, similar to the Z-statistics, it shows no decreasing trend with all the Sen's slope magnitude of observing positive values in all the months and seasons of the years. All other months show an increasing trend with highest magnitude of .98 in the month of September and .070 magnitude in winters of 1985-2015.

*Pettitt's Temperature trend analysis (seasonal and annual) test Tadong*

Fig 3: Seasonal and annual temperature trend analysis of Tadong.

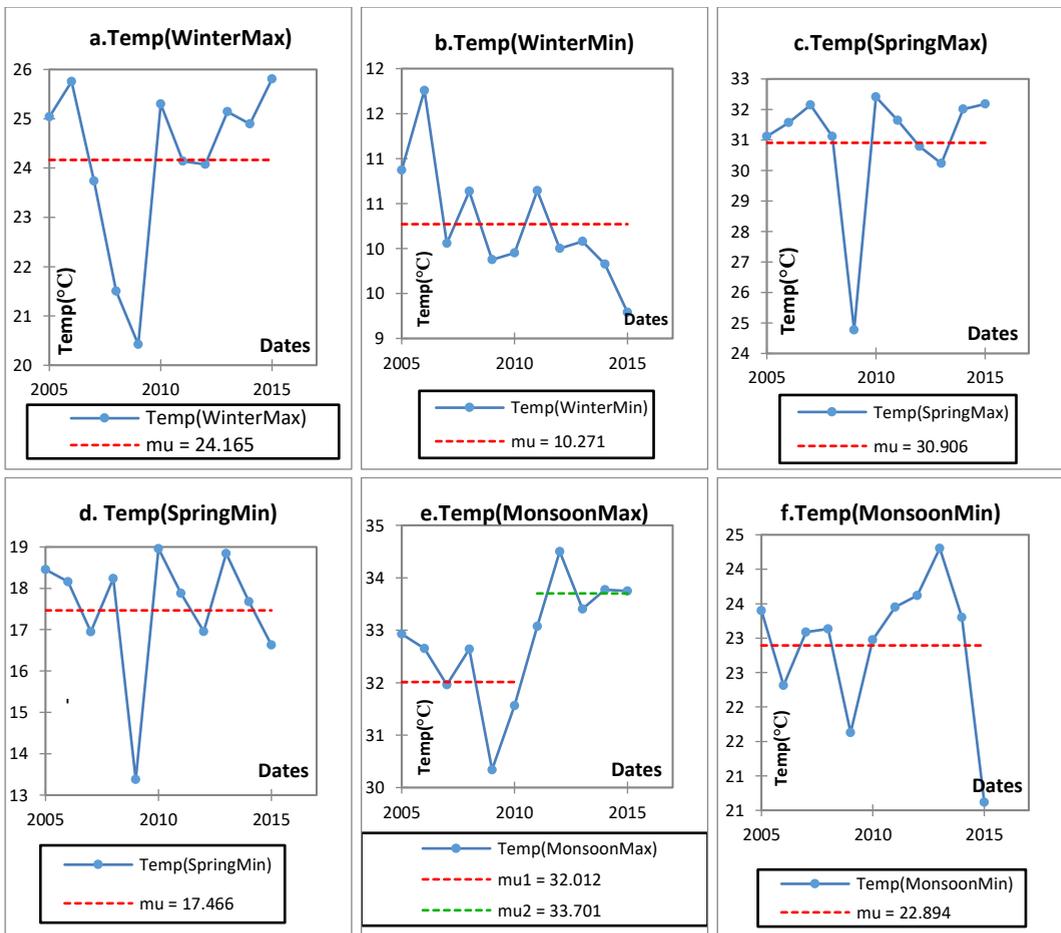


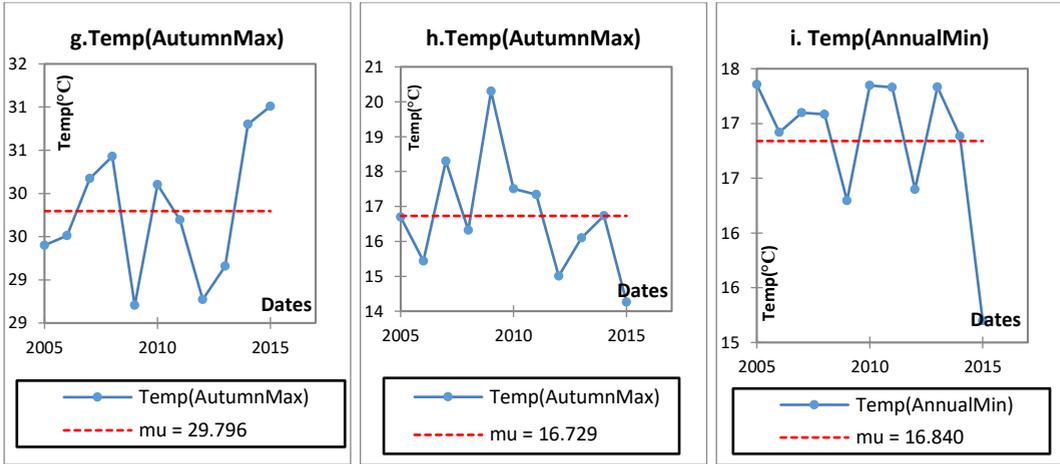
The winter average minimum temperature at Tadong station shows a change point in the year 1998 with a rise from 8.212 to 9.417 degrees, while the change in the average maximum

temperature emerges only in 2005 with a rise from 24.362 to 25.051 degrees. The average spring minimum temperature shows a change point in the year 1995 with a rise from 13.02 degrees to 14.628 degrees. Similarly, the rise in average maximum temperature of 26.609 degrees to 27.003 degrees is witnessed with the change point in 2004. The monsoon minimum average temperature also shows a rise from 18.629 to 19.684 degrees with the change point year being 1998, while the maximum average temperature remains 23.195. The annual average maximum temperature remains 23.357 degrees, while the minimum changes at 1998 from 13.154 degrees to 14.356 degrees. The trend in the maximum and minimum temperature pattern in the Tadong area has been rising with an annual minimum temperature rise of about 1 degree. Rise in minimum temperature of about 1 degree is seen in all seasons, while the maximum temperature also rise by 1 degree in winter and spring season.

*Pettitt's Temperature trend analysis (seasonal and annual) test Magitar*

**Fig 4: Seasonal and annual temperature trend analysis of Magitar.**

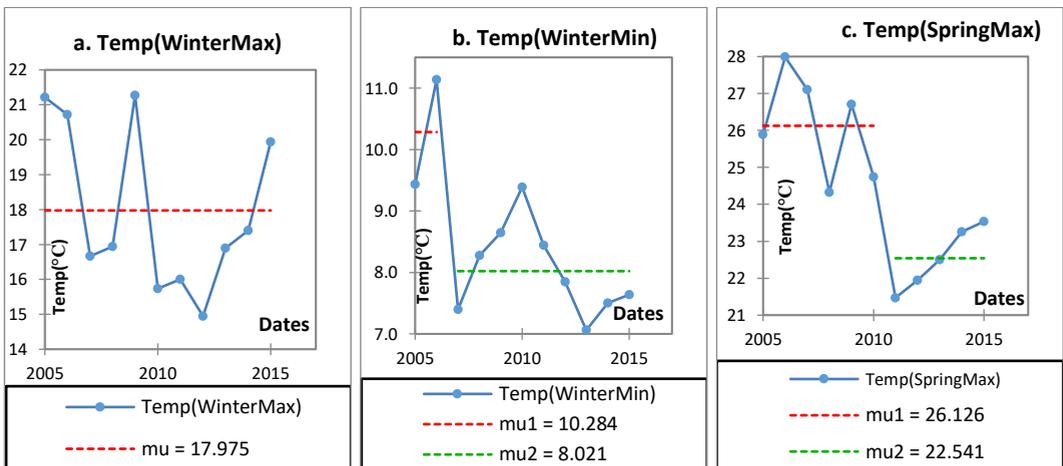


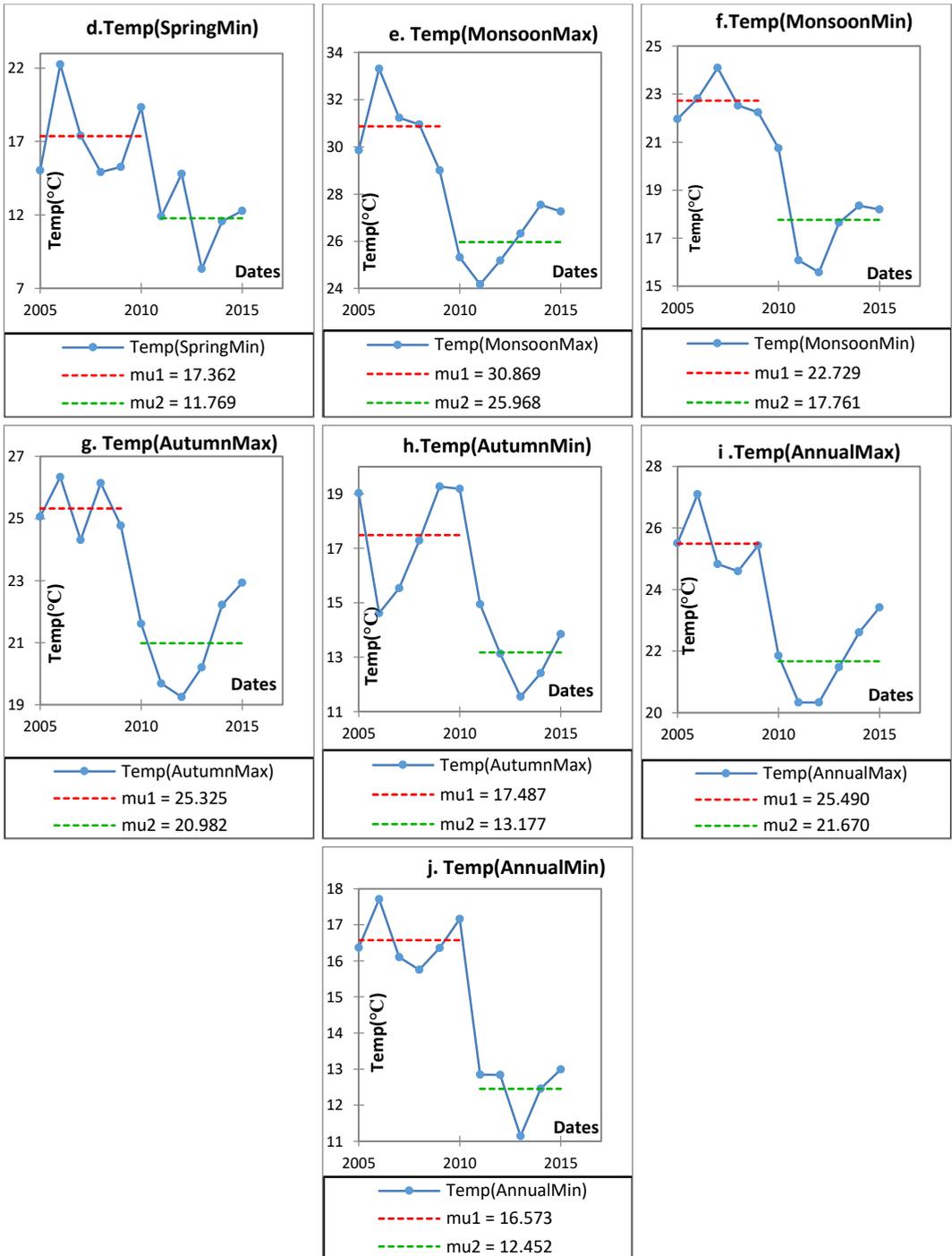


The maximum minimum winter temperature is 24.165 degrees and 10.271 degrees and 30.906 and 17.466 degrees in spring. The monsoon shows a change point in 2010 with the rise from 33.701 to 32.012 degrees. The minimum average remains 22.894 degrees. The autumn and annual maximum and minimum show no change with the annual maximum remaining 29.412 and the minimum 16.40 degrees. The maximum minimum winter temperature is 24.165 degrees and 10.271 degrees and 30.906 and 17.466 degrees in spring. The monsoon shows a change point in 2010 with rise from 33.701 to 32.012 degrees. While the minimum average remains 22.894 degrees.

Pettitt's Temperature trend analysis (seasonal and annual) test at Mangan

Fig 5: Seasonal and annual temperature trend analysis of Mangan.





The maximum and minimum temperatures of the Magitar is fluctuating and does not reveal a rising or a falling trend, except for the monsoon maximum temperature in Magitar in which there was a 1 degree rise in temperature. In Mangan a constant overall fall of about 4 degree is observed in all the months with both maximum and minimum temperature falling from an

average 25.5 to 21.7 degrees maximum temperature to a decrease of 16.6 to 12.5 degrees minimum temperature.

## **Conclusion**

The behavioral pattern of monthly, seasonal and annual series of temperature data of Mazitar, Tadong, Gangtok, and Mangan stations of the Teesta Dikchu Watershed were analyzed using two techniques, which were a non-parametric Mann-Kendall test together with Sen's Slope Estimator and Z statistics and Pettitt's test for the data period 1985-2015 for Gangtok and Tadong. The Pettitt's test was used from 2005 to 2015 for Majitar and Mangan.

The results of the Mann-Kendall test's Z-statistics of the maximum temperature of Gangtok from 1985-2015 show an increasing trend with all seasons including the winter months of December, January and February. An increasing trend with highest magnitude of .073 in the month of February and .067 in winters of 1985-2015 is recorded. Z-statistics of the minimum temperature of Gangtok from 1985-2015 also shows an increasing trend in all the seasons and months of the year while the Sen's slope series data of Gangtok also shows no decreasing trend.

While the Z-statistics of the maximum temperature of Tadong from 1985-2015 shows a decreasing temperature trends with a negative Z-Statistics observed in the months of January -.95, June -.04, August -.11 November and December -2.31 and -3.70 respectively, an increasing trend is observed in all seasons and other months. A decreasing trend of the Sen's slope magnitude of -.030, -.050 and -.067 is observed in the winter months of January, November and December, while all other months show an increasing trend with highest magnitude of .047 in the month of March of 1985-2015. Z-statistics of the minimum temperature of Tadong from 1985-2015 show an increasing trend in all seasons and twelve months with a highest magnitude of .98 in the month of September and .070 magnitude is observed in winters of 1985-2015.

The analysis of the trends of Temporal and Spatial Characteristics of temperature along the watershed by the Pettitt's test show much variation along the watershed. In the eastern district, the temperature has risen, while the temperature (maximum) in the northern part, especially the Mangan region, shows a falling trend.

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# Glimpses into Pre-Christian Mizo Pasts as seen through Folktales

Vanlallawmkimi

## Abstract

Mizoram has come a long way; from a society that, in the 19th century, was by and large illiterate, and often portrayed as "head-hunters", it today ranks as the second state in India in terms of literacy. Until the arrival of Christianity, whose missionaries first Romanized the Mizo language, knowledge and wisdom were preserved and communicated through oral traditions. Since, for most of Mizo history, oral tradition was indispensable to Mizo society, it is imperative to return to these oral traditions to understand both the past and the present, and the changes that occurred in between. In this paper, two Mizo folktales have been translated from Mizo to English in order to offer insights into religious practices, the status of women, and societal values that prevailed preceding the arrival of Christianity to Mizoram.

## Introduction: The Mizo Tribe

The Mizo tribe is the main tribe that resides in the state of Mizoram. Mizoram is located in the north-eastern part of India, bordering Myanmar to the east and Bangladesh to the south. The term Mizo translates as "highlander", as Mizos are known to have always settled in the mountains. There are many sub-tribes within what is the Mizo fold today. Although most of the tribes reside in Mizoram, there are also Mizos living across North-East Indian states and in Myanmar. The language that is widely accepted as the Mizo language is the *Duhlian* (sub-tribe) language, although there are several other dialects within the Mizo tribe.<sup>1</sup> It is hard to trace the origin of the Mizos, but there are many theories and fascinating oral tales about Mizo origins. Of all these legends and origin myths, the most widely-told is the legend of *Chhinlung*. It goes as follows:

According to the popular legend, the Mizos claimed that their forefathers came out of the earth through a big hole on the side of the mountain in the east at a place called Chhinlung, the big stone shutter. However the exact location of this big stone called Chhinlung was never known right from the days of our forefathers.

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<sup>1</sup> One of the Mizo clans, whose dialect is today used by most Mizos.

Most probably, it lies in central China from where the Mizos migrated to the south until they reached the present Myanmar (Burma) and finally went towards the west through the Chin Hills and halted at the present state of Mizoram (Khangte, 2006, p.119).

The Mizo society was always a close-knit society under the leadership of tribal chiefs. Since there were frequent battles between different tribes, bravery in a man was important and revered. Every village had a hall called *Zawlbuk*, a place where all the bachelors of the village came together at night, ready to protect their village against possible intrusions.<sup>2</sup> This is the place where young Mizo men were trained by the elders to serve society.

The arrival of the Christian Missionaries in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century brought about tremendous changes within the Mizo community. The first missionary to visit and survey Mizoram in 1891 was a Welsh missionary, then stationed in the Khasi hills named William Williams. He did not stay in Mizoram for long, but soon two missionaries arrived in Mizoram to spread Christianity. Pachuau & Van Schendel (2015, p. 92) write:

The first settled missionaries were J. H. Lorrain and F. W. Savidge who were sent to Mizoram by Robert Arthington, a missionary philanthropist in Britain and the founder of the “Aborigines Mission”. Lorrain and Savidge put up a church right away.

Lorrain and Savidge arrived in Mizoram in 1894 and developed the Mizo alphabet. Thus the Mizos saw the beginning of their journey into literacy. Today the literacy rate of Mizoram is 91.33% according to the Mizoram population Census data 2011. The conversion of Mizos into Christianity did not happen overnight. It was a slow process met with hostility in the beginning, but the missionaries became more successful when they introduced education and health facilities. ‘By the 1940s, resistance against Christianity had been overcome and most Mizos thought of themselves as Christians’ (Pachuau & Van Schendel, 2015, p. 103). The conversion of Mizos into Christianity and their introduction to education have caused some changes in the status of women and led to the disappearance of traditional religious practices. There are certain societal values and practices such as *tlawmngaihna* (selflessness) and the sense of communal solidarity that are still preserved and practiced by the Mizos. Under British India, the present state of Mizoram was known as the Lushai Hill District within Assam. In 1954 it became the Mizo Hills District and later in 1972 it became a Union territory under the name Mizoram and achieved statehood in 1987.

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<sup>2</sup> A village hall, where all the young men of the village comes to sleep when they reached a certain age.

## Mizo Folktales and Religion

Folktales are an important aspect of any culture that has rich oral traditions. Folktales are not merely stories passed down from generation to generation to teach moral lessons, as it is commonly perceived, but they also provide excellent reflections on the tradition and culture of a society. Folktales cannot be dismissed as stories just for children or entertainment. They are an essential tool for helping us appraise the ways of our ancestors: their code of conducts, etiquettes, rituals, religious beliefs, and moral values. They are an indispensable medium for learning and preserving a past that is now fast disappearing. Mizos have a rich oral tradition with a host of folktales, songs, legends and myths. These tales and songs were their medium of communication, their custodian of culture and tradition and, in a word, their teachers. As Khiangte (2006, p. 121) writes: ‘The folktales of the Mizos were as old as the history of the people itself.’

Before the introduction of Christianity, the Mizos believed in a god called *Pathian* and other spirits, both good and bad, that were believed to reside in the natural world.<sup>3</sup> *Pathian* was considered to be an all-knowing and loving god. The Mizos did very little to worship *Pathian* because he was deemed to be a loving god who needed no constant pleasing. Instead, they spent their time and money on offering animal sacrifices to evil spirits that they called *Huai*, because these evil spirits were believed to bring calamities. The Mizos lived in constant fear of these evil spirits and did everything to appease them: ‘The Mizos believed in the existence of various demons which caused illness and other bodily sufferings to man. When they fell ill they called the *Puithiam* (priest) who prescribed necessary sacrifice to be offered demons for recovery’ (Lalzama, 2017, p. 29). The Mizos also believed in life after death and a world beyond this world. Lawmsanga (2010, p. 37) writes thus: ‘The early Mizo society believed in the existence of two different abodes for the dead people. One was called “mitthi khua” (village of the dead) and the other place was called “pialral” (paradise).’ These places are supposed to be beyond the Rih Lake in Myanmar, which is situated just a few kilometres away from the present-day Mizoram border. It is said that: ‘On the outskirts of the Mitthi khua there was a man called Pu Pawla who had a big pellet bow with which he shot the spirits of the dead coming to the “mitthi khua” the abode of the dead’ (Lalzama, 2017, p. 32). It was believed that a spirit that gets shot cannot enter *pialral*, the ultimate paradise where there is no suffering or work. However, brave warriors who killed certain wild animals, rich men who gave *thangchhuah*, or men who slept with three or

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<sup>3</sup> A word used to describe God even today.

more virgins would never be shot by Pu Pawla.<sup>4</sup> Further, it was believed that spirits who cannot cross the 'pial' river and enter pialral would need to go to *mitthi khua* where they would have to continue to work and live like when they were in the world. (Shakespeare, 1912).

In what follows I will present and discuss two folktales and use these to reflect on various aspects of Mizo society before the advent of Christianity. I start with the story of Ngaitei, who is an orphan girl.

### **Folktale 1: Ngaitei, an orphan girl**

Once upon a time there lived a young orphan girl named Ngaitei. She lived with her grandmother in a small village. She and her grandmother would often go to their *jhum* fields to harvest yams and other vegetables.<sup>5</sup> At the bottom of their farm there was a river. Her father had drowned in this river and it was believed that her father's spirit still lived in the river.

One day Ngaitei and her grandmother went to their farm to dig out some yams and as they were working, Ngaitei felt very thirsty. Her grandmother went down to the river to fetch some water for her. After a while, she felt thirsty again and asked her grandmother for some more water. "I am too tired to go down again. Why don't you go down to the river and get some water? But when you reach the river, do not say *ekhai*," said her grandmother.<sup>6</sup> Ngaitei went down to the river and when she reached it, she saw that the river was dark and deep and she said *ekhai*, forgetting her grandmother's warning. As soon as she said *ekhai* she fell into the water. When Ngaitei did not return, her grandmother got worried and thought that she must have drowned. So she decided to go and look for her. On her way, she met a pair of deer and she asked them if they had seen Ngaitei. They replied saying, "Yes, we saw her go on the other side of river Tuipui and Tiau." Her grandmother realized that Ngaitei must have been taken by her father's spirit. As she continued to walk, she met a pair of partridges and asked them again if they had seen Ngaitei. They also gave her the same reply. When she reached the river, she saw Ngaitei in the river. "Ngaitei, I am going to jump into the water," she called out and jumped into the river. Ngaitei was overjoyed to see her grandmother. Her grandmother asked, "Where is your father's spirit?" "He has gone to work in the form of a snake and will come back soon," she replied.

In the evening her father's spirit came home in the form of a snake, but after a while he turned into a human. The grandmother said, "I am going to take Ngaitei back." Ngaitei's father

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<sup>4</sup> A ceremonial feast to attain higher social status in the society.

<sup>5</sup> Process of clearing land and burning them for cultivation practiced in Mizoram. Also known as slash and burn.

<sup>6</sup> An exclamation to express amazement.

missed his daughter and wanted her to stay with him but said, “You can take her back now, but she must come back to me again.” Ngaitei and her grandmother went back home happily. Ngaitei was very happy with her grandmother and did not want to go back to her father.

Since Ngaitei did not return, her father’s spirit decided to flood the village where Ngaitei and her grandmother lived. This was his way of demanding the return of his daughter. The water began to flow into the village and the flowing water appeared to say, *Ngai, Ngai, Ngai*.<sup>7</sup> The water was about to submerge the village and since the villagers knew why this was happening, they talked amongst themselves: “Because of Ngaitei our village is going to be submerged, what are we going to do?” Some suggested: “Throw a piece of cloth that belongs to Ngaitei into the river.” When they did that, the flood subsided for a while. But soon the water started rising again. Someone said: “Throw her comb into the river,” and they did that, and again, for a while, the water subsided. The villagers continued to throw each and every possession of Ngaitei into the water to appease her father’s spirit. Each time, the water would momentarily subside, but soon Ngaitei ran out of belongings. The river started swelling and the people of the village realized that if they do not throw Ngaitei into the water their village will be completely destroyed. The spirit of Ngaitei’s father would not rest until his daughter was returned to him. So, the distressed villagers had to make a decision and it was decided that they will have to sacrifice Ngaitei for the larger benefit of the village though she was loved by everyone.

As soon as the water swallowed Ngaitei the flood water subsided and it never came back. The people of the village were very sad and kept crying for Ngaitei. They grieved for her in mournful songs, even long after the day of the flood.

## **Folktale 1: Ngaitei**

*Ngaitei* is a popular Mizo folktale about a young orphan girl who had to sacrifice her life to save her village. The story of Ngaitei depicts the pre-Christian Mizo belief in the existence of demons in their surroundings that harm people and therefore need to be appeased. In this story, the spirit of Ngaitei’s father is believed to reside in the river and causes floods in the village in order to demand the return of Ngaitei, who continued to live with her grandmother despite her father’s request for her return. His spirit in the story can be considered an example of *Huai*, an evil spirit that is said to inhabit rivers, big trees, caves, big rocks, and precipice. These spirits cause illnesses and other harm and therefore sacrifices are made to them. Ngaitei’s father’s spirit

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<sup>7</sup> Part of Ngaitei’s name. It could also mean the feeling of longing or needing something.

causes floods and threatens to destroy the village. The people of the village try to appease him in the beginning by throwing in all the belongings of Ngaitei, but the flood would recede only for a while and eventually the villagers had to make the hard decision of sacrificing Ngaitei in order to save themselves. As soon as Ngaitei is thrown into the river, the water subsides and the village is saved. Ngaitei here is a symbol of the sacrifices that Mizos used to make to drive away evil spirits. Mizos did perform animal sacrifice but whether Mizos practised human sacrifice or not is debatable. While there are some who claim that Mizos could have practised human sacrifice, J. Shakespeare, the first Superintendent of the Lushai Hills District expressed his doubts about such practises and expressed how such stories could be just an invention. He claims that Mizos were merely raiders and not even headhunters and bringing home heads was just a result of raids they made for loot and slaves. However it cannot be denied that bringing home a human head from a war was considered an act of bravery among the Mizo tribes (Zou, 2005, p. 6-9). The belief that the spirit of the dead crosses some kind of water-body such as Tiau Lake to go to *mitthi khua* or *pial* river to go to *pialral* is seen in the story of Ngaitei when the grandmother is told by a deer that they saw Ngaitei with her father beyond the river *Tuipui* and *Tiau*.<sup>8</sup>

Although Mizos still hold on to many of the indigenous beliefs of their forefathers, they no longer have fear of demons or evil spirits in nature nor do they perform any kind of animal sacrifice.

## **Mizo Folktales and Women in Mizo Society**

Mizo society is a patriarchal and patrilineal society and men are seen as dominant both at home and in the community. When a woman marries a man, she is expected to go to her husband's home and her children will take their father's name, even though the wife continues to keep her surname. The status of women in the pre-Christian Mizo society was far from ideal. When a girl got married a bride price was paid by the groom's family to the bride's family. In traditional Mizo society a man could easily divorce his wife, and in such an event the only thing the wife was permitted to take home were the things she brought from home on her wedding day (Lalhmingpuii & Namchoom, 2014, p. 33). Although the tradition of paying a bride price is still practiced in the Mizo society, this is not looked upon as bane to the society but rather as a way of maintaining traditional practice. Bride price today can also be considered as a way for a bride to seek help and protection from her relatives as the bride price which she gets from the

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<sup>8</sup> Names of rivers in Mizoram.

groom's family, in small amounts, is distributed to various relations who in turn give her gifts and blessings to take with her when she is married.

In the past, a woman did not inherit anything from her father or her husband. She belonged to the men in her family from birth to death. A Mizo woman's position in the society in the past is reflected in some of the old Mizo sayings, such as "A woman's wit does not cross a village spring" and "A woman and an old fence can be easily replaced." However, it does not mean that women did not play an important role in traditional Mizo society. They were in many ways the backbone of their family and thus of society. Women did not only do all the household chores, but also toiled hard in the fields. They worked from dawn to dusk taking care of their family. They would get up early in the morning to fetch water, prepare meals for the family, and go to their *jhum* fields to work all day. Their work continued once they got back home: cleaning, cooking, weaving, and feeding children and domestic animals. Young unmarried women were also expected to entertain *inleng*, who may visit them every night.<sup>9</sup> In the story of *Mauruangi*, *Mauruangi* and her step-sister *Bingtaii* are made to cultivate plots of land once they reached a certain age because a woman's responsibilities did not end within the four walls of her home. The story of *Ngaitei* depicts *Ngaitei* and her grandmother working in their *jhum* field. Mizo women were meant to be strong physically and emotionally. J. Shakespeare observes, 'The women are prolific, five to seven children being about the average, but mortality among the children is so great that few parents can boast of more than two or three grown up children' (Shakespeare, 1912, p.2). The following folktale, titled 'the story of *Mauruangi*', will be narrated in order to look at the status and standing of women in traditional Mizo society.

## Folktale 2: The Story of *Mauruangi*

Once upon a time, in a faraway village in Mizoram, there lived a young girl. Her name was *Mauruangi*, and she lived with her mother and father.

One day her parents went to the forest to collect firewood and on their way, they had to cross a very old and weak bridge. The wife asked: "How can we cross this bridge on our way home when we are heavy with our load?" Her husband made a plan and told her: "Whoever is scared to cross the bridge on our way home should be pushed into the water," and the wife agreed. When they started collecting firewood, the husband made sure that his wife's load was heavier than his. On their way back to the village, when they reached the bridge the wife was

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<sup>9</sup> Male suitors.

afraid to cross it. Her husband reminded her of the agreement earlier and pushed her off the bridge.

At home, Mauruangi was eagerly waiting for her parents. When her father arrived home alone she asked: "Father, where is mother?" He replied: "She is washing my turban in the river." When her mother did not return that night, Mauruangi kept asking her father about the whereabouts of her mother. He kept giving excuses as to why her mother had not arrived home. At last, her father told her the truth and Mauruangi wept bitterly for her mother.

The next day when Mauruangi tried to light the fire, she could not, as the ambers had died in their hearth. Her father told her to go to their neighbour to ask for fire. Their neighbour was a widow who lived with her daughter, Bingtaii. When Mauruangi went to her neighbour's house to ask for fire, the widow said to her: "I will give you fire only if your father agrees to marry me." Mauruangi was surprised and told her father what the widow had said and her father told her to tell the widow: "Maybe someday I will marry her."

Very soon Mauruangi's father married the widow. In the beginning she was very good to Mauruangi, but soon she started mistreating her. The step-mother loved her own daughter and gave her all the good things, but she did not even give proper food to Mauruangi. Mauruangi was fed rice husk and made to do all kinds of work. She became very thin and weak. She missed her mother and would often cry.

One day Mauruangi went to the river feeling sad. Suddenly a big fish began talking to her: "I am your mother. Your father pushed me into the river and I have turned into a fish." Mauruangi was very delighted to meet her mother and she told her all about how her step-mother was mistreating her. Her mother gave her delicious food to eat and told her to come to the river every time she got hungry. So Mauruangi would go to the river to meet her mother every time she was hungry and started gaining her weight back.

When the step-mother noticed that Mauruangi was gaining weight and was looking healthy despite the food she offered her, she started suspecting her of stealing. So she told her daughter Bingtaii to watch the whereabouts of Mauruangi every day. Bingtaii secretly followed Mauruangi around and found out who had been feeding Mauruangi and reported this to her mother. The step-mother was very pleased with Bingtaii's discovery and soon made a plan to kill the fish. She told her husband that it was time for the whole village to go fishing in the river. When Mauruangi heard of the plan she was very sad and went to her mother and told her of the plan. She told her mother: "When I tell you, 'swim upstream', swim downstream and when I tell you, 'swim to the side', swim to the middle of the river."

When the village men started casting their nets Mauruangi shouted: "Mother, swim up," and when the men went upstream Mauruangi's mother would go downstream. When she shouted: "Mother go to the side," her mother swam to the middle so the men could not catch the fish. When they realized that it was because of Mauruangi, someone shouted: "Gag that girl

and take her away.” So Mauruangi was gagged and taken away and they were able to catch the fish.

The whole village gathered and had a feast but Mauruangi was heartbroken and refused to eat the fish. She collected the bones of the fish and buried it in their garden. A *Phunchawg* plant sprouted out of the bones and grew into a big tree which blossomed beautifully.<sup>10</sup> Every time Mauruangi got hungry she would stand beneath the tree and sing:

‘O bend down Mother  
Mother Phungchawg *Darhniangi*  
Bend down, O Mother’<sup>11</sup>

The branches of the Punchawng tree would bend and Mauruangi would pluck the flowers and drink the nectar from the flowers. This way, Mauruangi was getting healthy again and it was soon noticed by her step-mother. So, she again persuaded her husband to get the villagers and cut down the tree. So the men of the village came to cut down the tree. As they began cutting down the tree Mauruangi kept singing:

‘Hold on, my Mother  
Mother Phunchawng *Darhniangi*  
Hold on, O my Mother.’

As she sang, the tree held on and resisted being cut, so Mauruangi was gagged and taken away again. Finally the tree was cut down and Mauruangi no longer had her mother to take care of her.

Once again Mauruangi was starved and mistreated, but she grew up to be a hardworking woman. Her step-mother decided that it was time for her and Bingtaii to work in the farm. The step-mother gave Mauruangi bad seeds to sow while giving the best seeds to Bingtaii. Bingtaii was very idle and slept all day in her farm whereas Mauruangi worked all day and her crops thrived.

One day when Mauruangi was tending her crops some men passed by her field and asked: “Can you give us some of your cucumber and corn? We are really hungry.” Mauruangi replied: “You may eat as much as you want.” These men were the servants of a foreign king and were looking for a wife for their king. The king’s servants were very pleased with Mauruangi’s nature

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<sup>10</sup> A tree, whose scientific name is *bombax ceiba*.

<sup>11</sup> Name of Mauruangi’s mother. It is also a nick-name for a phunchawng tree.

and beauty so they asked her: “Will you be our king’s wife?” Mauruangi told them: “My step mother will not allow me to wed as she has her own daughter to marry off. The only way I can marry your king is if you come to my house and ask for my step-sister’s hand. My step-mother will be delighted and she will ask me to see my sister off at the outskirts of the village. When we reach the outskirts, you can drop her and take me instead.”

The men agreed to the plan and went to Mauruangi’s step-mother and asked for Bingtaii’s hand. She was delighted and soon prepared for Bingtaii’s departure. She told Mauruangi: “Your sister is going to marry a king and look at you; you will never find a husband. Get ready to drop her until the outskirts of the village.” So the men carried Bingtaii and Mauruangi went along. When they reached the village outskirts, they dropped Bingtaii and took Mauruangi instead. Bingtaii ran home crying and told everything to her mother who was furious.

The king was very happy to see Mauruangi who was beautiful and skilled in so many things, especially weaving. They got married and lived happily. Meanwhile, Mauruangi’s step mother was plotting revenge. She sent a message inviting Mauruangi to come home, saying: “Let Mauruangi come home so we can give a feast in her honour.”

Mauruangi went home and one day when her step-mother was looking for lice, she pretended to drop her comb under the house and asked Mauruangi: “Can you please go and fetch my comb?” When Mauruangi went under the house looking for the comb, her step-mother poured hot water on her. She was presumed to be dead and thrown into the woods.

Meanwhile the king was starting to miss his wife, so he sent a message telling them to send his wife back. Mauruangi’s step-mother took this chance to send Bingtaii to the king but the King was quite sure that she was not his wife. He tested Bingtaii by asking her to weave, but she could not.

One day while the king’s men were traveling through the forest they heard a woman singing and when they approached her they realized that she was their king’s wife. Mauruangi told them everything, including how she was recused and healed by *Sazaltepa* who made her take care of his baby.<sup>12</sup> When they asked her to go home with them she said: “I cannot go without the permission of my master who saved me.” So they waited for *Sazaltepa* to come home and when he did, they gave him a bunch of bananas in exchange for Mauruangi.

The king was very happy to have his real wife back. He made a plan to get rid of Bingtaii. He decided that Bingtaii and Mauruangi should fight a duel and that whoever survives will be his wife. The king secretly gave Mauruangi a sharp sword and a thick blanket to cover herself

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<sup>12</sup> A Serow. By saying *Sazaltepa* and not *Sazaltep* the Serow is personified. All Mizo male names end with an ‘a’ and female names end with an ‘i’.

while he gave Bingtai a blunt sword and a thin blanket to cover herself. Mauruangi was able to defeat and kill Bingtai.

Maurungii and the king lived happily ever after.

## **Folktale 2: Mauruangi**

*Mauruangi* is a story of a girl who, despite being mistreated by her step-mother, is virtuous, hardworking and generous and is therefore ultimately rewarded with a king as her husband. All the women character in the story of *Mauruangi* are either weak or evil. Mauruangi is an epitome of an ideal Mizo woman, who is beautiful, virtuous, subservient, hardworking and skilled. It is easy to point out that like all women in a strong patriarchal society, she is voiceless and is eventually rescued by a man. Mauruangi cannot speak or save herself from the clutches of her wicked step-mother. When she tried to speak and save herself and her mother, she was gagged and silenced by the society. The callous murder of her mother by her father also shows the place of women in the society. The step-mother who was a widow before marrying Mauruangi's father is depicted as a desperate woman trying to woo Mauruangi's father into marriage. Perhaps this is because of the way widows were treated and perceived in the Mizo society before Christianity. Widows were looked down by people. Even their children were often mistreated by others only because they were *hmeithai fa*, children of a widow. But, it is important to note that widows were allowed to remarry if they wished to, even in the past, although they were expected to remain in their in-law's house for three months after the demise of the husband. In traditional Mizo society, women had very little say in who they married. If a man was interested in them, or if their parents wanted them to marry a certain man, they had to agree. The joy in Bingtai's mother when the king's servants offered to take her daughter as their king's wife shows how important it was for girls to find a good husband. 'The girl's greatest attributes were physical beauty, skill in the spinning wheels and looms and the ability to exert hard labour in agricultural work' (Lalhmingpuii & Namchoom, 2014, p. 33). Therefore, in the story, Mauruangi who has all these qualities is the one who finds a good husband. The story ends with a duel between Mauruangi and Bingtai, which is a sad depiction of women fighting for a man in patriarchal society and it eventually leads to the death of one of them.

The status of women in the Mizo society changed for the better with the advent of Christianity and education. Education came hand in hand with Christianity in Mizoram and exposed the discrimination and exploitation faced by women. Though women are still marginalized, their place in the society has improved significantly. Girls are nowadays given equal opportunity to education, thus enabling them to be independent and self-reliant. The formation in 1974 of Mizo Hmeichhe Insuihkhawm Pawl, an organization that aims to protect women and children has brought about tremendous improvement in the status of women. This

organization works tirelessly for the empowerment of women in the Mizo society by trying to bring changes in traditional customary laws, which provide very little or no rights to women. Though the status of women in Mizo society has improved, their presence and influence in politics, economy, religion and government administration often remains very insignificant and they are still considered inferior in the society that continues to be dominated by men (Lalhmingpuii & Namchoom, 2014).

## Mizo Folktales and Societal Values

Mizo folktales are a mirror to societal values that are deeply imbedded in the Mizo society. Mizo society is a close-knit society, a society that celebrates, mourns and works together. The most treasured value in the Mizo society is the value of *tlawmngaihna*, which can be roughly translated as a selfless act, or the willingness to help others. The value of *tlawmngaihna* compels Mizos to always come together in times of need. In the story of *Ngaitai* the village community came together when the river flooded their village and collectively tried to solve the issue. They deliberated and discussed the problem and came up with a solution, even though the solution may not have been what they had desired.

The story of *Mauruangi* showed how the people of the village came together to catch the fish on the behest of Mauruangi's father, who was persuaded by his wife. The villagers also rendered their help when the step-mother decided that the *Phunchawng* tree that was providing food to Mauruangi should be cut down. Even today Mizos as a community will come together in times of sorrow and happiness. Organisations such as Young Mizo Association can be referred to as custodians of these values as they are ever present when someone in the community is in need. The proverb, *sem sem dam dam, ei bil thi thi*, which means, 'those who share will live and those who eat alone will die', is the guiding philosophy of the Mizo community. In the past rich families would give feast to the whole village community and even share their valuables with the public (Khiangte, 2001, p. 12).

## Conclusion

Mizo society witnessed tremendous changes and development within a very short span of time. Christianity and education has ushered in tremendous transformations in all walks of life. While these changes may be seen as signs of progress, it has also distanced us from our history and our roots. A society can thrive and continue to live on if we are respectful of our past and our roots. Therefore, preserving these folktales, song, myths and legends are of paramount importance as it is through them that we can see glimpses of our past.

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# “Exotic Blossom” or Cosmopolitan Victorian?: Toru Dutt and Fin-de-Siècle London and Calcutta

Priyali Ghosh

## Abstract

What did it mean to be a young, female Bengali writer living in late nineteenth-century Calcutta but also in London and Cambridge? What did it mean to be raised within a family protected by its wealth and status but also ostracised in India for its religious and cultural iconoclasm – more specifically for its collective conversion from Hinduism to Christianity and consequent loss of caste? This paper presents the literary work of Toru Dutt (1856-1877) and the reception in both Britain and India of her posthumous collections *A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields* (1880) and *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* (1882)

## Introduction

This paper introduces the life and legacy of Toru Dutt (1856-1877), the Indian-born poet, who in her brief span of twenty one years, lived an extensively-travelled and cross-cultural life in India, France and Britain. Unusually, for her time, she was proficient and creatively active in Bengali, English, French and Sanskrit. It is the critical success and posthumous reception in London and in Calcutta of her translations from French poetry into English, *A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields* (1876) and reinterpretations in English of Sanskrit epic and religious poetry *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* (1882), that I consider here.<sup>1</sup>

As such, Toru Dutt wrote and should, I suggest, be read, in the continuing context of “social cosmopolitanism”, by which this paper refers to traditions of personal, cultural and creative travel that have led to the intersection and corresponding expansion of different worlds, locales and times in the person and work of the traveller. Her poetry is multivocal in act and ambition. In other words, it contains within it the ‘many voices’ of the places she lived in and visited. This paper extends an understanding of that multivocality by presenting her work to a twenty first century readership, with whom, it is hoped, her multilingualism and ability to cross cultural boundaries with knowledge and understanding, will resonate. It is also hoped that the readership of this paper will seek to apply the internationalism and capacity to hear and respond

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<sup>1</sup> A few poems in the collection appear to have been translated by her sister Aru Dutt, and their father, Govin Chunder Dutt, probably influenced the collection as well.

to the ‘many voices’ of the several cultures at play in contemporary global society, that are exemplified in the life of Toru Dutt. The further reach of this paper, by which is meant its “afterlife” in the thoughts and actions of its readership, is a matter of collective choice and action.

## **Early Life, the Mutiny of 1857 and Travel to France and England**

Who *was* Toru Dutt? Born in 1856, a year before the largescale violence of 1857, alternately termed the Sepoy Mutiny or the Great Rebellion depending on the perspective adopted by historians. She grew up in a Calcutta which had remained largely untouched by the conflict. Rosinka Chaudhuri, in her study of the traditions of English language poetry that developed in Calcutta over the course of the nineteenth century, has termed this time in Bengal “the loyal hours,” (2002 pp.127-58). The phrase is borrowed from a collection published in 1876 by Toru’s uncle Greece Chunder Dutt on the occasion of the Prince of Wales’ visit to India. It underwrites the lack of support seen in Bengal for the mutinying regiments and their leaders, who were largely established in northern and western India.

Toru, whom I will refer to by her first name, in keeping with Bengali critical tradition, was born into a wealthy, educated and literary family. Their pro-British affiliations could be said to have been vindicated by the defeat of the mutineers and the sentiments of the population of Calcutta and the Bengal province at large. Yet, she could hardly have failed to have known the long shadow cast by the events of 1857. This paper argues that a hardening and simplification of the perceived categories of “race” and “nation” is symptomatic of societies in a state of post-traumatic stress<sup>2</sup>. Hence, the country saw a widening of the gap in sympathies between those who perceived themselves as “British” and those who perceived themselves as “Indian.” After 1858, the East India Company gave way to Queen Victoria’s government in India. The more conservative forces within this newly established government, as well as the orthodox elements within Bengali society, gained ascendance. Both looked with deep suspicion at any attempt to complicate a ‘monological’ view of identity. By ‘monological,’ this paper refers to a view of identity founded in only one cultural source of meaning, i.e. either Britain or India, but not both.

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<sup>2</sup> The term “post traumatic stress disorder” was only formally recognized by the American Psychiatric Association in 1980. The recognition that traumas following from war and conflict can affect a civilian population is only now taking shape, as the report “Afghanistan: PTSDLand” published by the Pulitzer Centre on Crisis Reporting, suggests. This paper puts forward the view that stress and trauma following the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 are likely to have affected not only combatants, but also the larger society of which they were a part. The violence unleashed did not, of course, take place in zones removed from cities and villages, but in their midst.

Thus, the poet and educator David Lester Richardson (1801-1865), who had been one of a circle of bicultural poets and writers who published their poetry and prose for a readership in Calcutta as well as London up until the mid-1850s, was disallowed from taking up the prestigious appointment of Professor of English Literature at Presidency College, Calcutta. In 1861, after the Secretary of State for India had intervened to prevent his acceptance, Richardson left India. At the same time, other “Anglo-Indian” writers and poets, or those of British birth or ancestry who had *lived* most or all of their lives in India, such as Toru’s senior contemporary, the poet Mary Eliza Leslie (1834 - ?), found themselves in a state of conflict and confusion as to their rightful affiliations.

In Toru’s case, the “complication of a monological identity” was a very condition of her existence. Not only was she a young girl educated to an extent that was highly uncommon amongst her contemporaries, be they denizens of India or of Britain, but she was also a practising Christian. Her father, Govin Chunder Dutt, and her two uncles Greece and Hur Chunder as well as their families, were all baptised after the death of a fourth uncle, Kissen. Kissen’s final request was for his brothers to embrace Christianity (Gibson, 2011 a, p. 287). They did so with a commitment and dedication that appear not to have wavered in the face of the criticism and rejection of their immediate family, as well as of Hindu Brahmanical society at large.

Contemporary Bengali society would have viewed the Dutts as, at best, wealthy eccentrics, at worst as uncategorisable apostates. The more orthodox members of the social circles that surrounded the civil and military infrastructure of the British Indian state, headed by a succession of Viceroys appointed from London, were not likely to have found it easy to worship alongside or socialise with the Dutts. The easygoing inter-cultural relations of the early nineteenth-century were, perhaps, under siege in Calcutta in Toru’s time. It is probable that distrust and memories of loss and violence generated by the events of 1857, pushed communities, friends and neighbours apart.

In the case of Toru and her sister Aru, dislocation from contemporary Calcutta following from the family decision to convert to Christianity was further complicated by the level of education they pursued. The sisters studied Bengali, English and French, while, later on, Toru also took up the study of Sanskrit. Family life appears to have been continually marked by the search for a welcoming environment, which was perhaps further motivated by the constant experience of loss. Shortly after their conversion they moved to Bombay for a year, then returned to Calcutta. Abju, Toru’s elder brother, then died in 1866 at the age of fourteen. Eventually, perhaps hoping for a complete change from the divided and unforgiving environment they encountered in Calcutta, the Dutts left the country altogether in 1869 for a three year visit to France and England. For a few months the two sisters attended a *pensionnat* in Nice, after which

the family moved again to Cambridge, where the girls attended the Higher Lectures for Women at the University of Cambridge (Gibson, 2011a, p. 295).

Despite the constant search for a place in which to settle, or, perhaps, because of it, a sense of ongoing isolation, counteracted by a vital desire for community, recognition and acceptance, is clear in almost every word written by Toru Dutt.

## Social Cosmopolitanism in England, Isolation in Calcutta

Her lyric poem “Near Hastings,” which appears in the “Miscellaneous Poems” section of *Ancient Ballads and Legends*, seems to tell the story of a chance encounter. Toru and the much loved and slightly older Aru, who died of tuberculosis in 1874 (a mere three years before Toru also succumbed to it), wander along a beach in south-east England and meet a local woman. Autobiographical elements within the poem suggest that it is based on an actual incident that may have taken place when the Dutt family were living in St. Leonards-on-Sea in East Sussex, in 1873 (“Toru Dutt” n.d.):

Near Hastings, on the shingle-beach,  
We loitered at the time  
When ripens on the wall the peach,  
The autumn’s lovely prime.  
Far off,~the sea and sky seemed blent,  
The day was wholly done, The distant town its murmurs sent,  
Strangers,~we were alone. (ls. 1-8, 127)

This appears a probable image of the two sisters at a distance from the town and uncomfortably aware of their own status as “strangers,” uncertain of their position and place. It also contains references to the sickness that, by this time, it was probably clear, Aru was not to escape:

We wandered slow; sick, weary, faint,  
Then one of us sat down,  
[...]  
A lady past, she was not young,  
But oh! her gentle face  
No painter-poet ever sung,  
Or saw such saint-like grace. (9-10, 13-16, p. 127)

The apotheosis of female virtue is a common theme in Toru Dutt's poetry. This may also be seen in the characterisation of Savitri, the angelic Princess-wife, in the long narrative poem of the same name which opens the collection. Savitri, however, is able to rescue her husband from certain death, as she persuades Yama, the God of death, to spare him and grant additional boons to her family. Female protagonists who offer rescue and salvation rather than conforming to a passive ideal of femininity, speak, perhaps, to Toru's attempt to excavate or create a platform for a female perspective in her readings of the *Mahabharat* and other Sanskrit source texts.

In her personal lyric poetry, there appears to be more of a sense of a female-to-female engagement. Perhaps this reflects Toru's real life experiences of finding comfort and acceptance in strong female friendships. First, in her relationship with her sister, and, thereafter in her literary correspondence with the French writer and historian, Clarisse Bader. Mary Martin, daughter of Reverend John Martin of Sidney Sussex College, whom she met when the family made Cambridge their home between 1871 and 1872 ("Toru Dutt"n.d.), was another longstanding female friend.

In this case, there is no apparent history or longevity to the encounter. It is, instead, a moment of kindly intervention from a female stranger, which appears to bring relief from alienation. A shared experience of spontaneous community is sparked, as the poem continues:

She past us, ~then she came again,  
    Observing at a glance  
That we were strangers; one, in pain, ~  
    She asked, ~Were we from France?  
We talked awhile, ~some roses red  
    That seemed as wet with tears,  
She gave my sister, and she said.  
    "God bless you both, My dears!" (17-24, pp. 127-128)

One might read this as a "socially cosmopolitan" moment, whether real or imagined, during which a native of the English East Coast connects with the two sisters in an imaginative gesture which goes beyond any immediate markers of "race," to include France as a possible point of origin.

Access to such an immediate cosmopolitanism seems to have eluded Toru in India itself, except in regard to her historical vision of the country and the readership she was able to sustain for her work in the *Calcutta Review* and the *Bengal Magazine* from 1874 onwards (Gibson, 2011 a, p. 295). Thus, the second half of *Ancient Ballads and Legends*, containing lyrics and sonnets of a more personal nature than the first half, references a close-knit family circle that seems set

apart from the world beyond it. This closeness is reflected in “The Tree of Life,” “Sonnet-Baugmaree” and “The Casuarina Tree.” “The Tree of Life” recounts moments with her father in what appear to be the final stages of her illness, while the two sonnets record an Edenic visualisation of the garden in Baugmaree where the Dutts had a second home. The poems in this section which contain public references focus on revolutionary France and the Franco-Prussian war, as in “On the Fly-Leaf of Erckmann-Chatrion’s novel entitled ‘Madame Thérèse,’” and ‘France: 1870.’

Nowhere in Toru’s poetry or letters can one find references to the kind of social connection and acceptance within India itself, that she appears to have found in England and France. On the contrary, she writes to Mary Martin on the subject of the Dutts’ much discussed return to England after Aru passed away, “you are quite mistaken to think that we should be greatly missed [by friends and relatives] if we leave Calcutta” (as cited in Foss 2008, p. 164).

An isolation in Calcutta that only just fell a little short of ostracism can be imagined for the Dutt family. Writing again to Mary Martin, Toru says “there are some orthodox families who will not mix with friends and relations who have been to England, unless these make the necessary purifications ordained in the Hindu shastras and by pundits” (as cited in Foss 2008, p.164). This was most probably a reference to the idea held by orthodox Hindus that those who crossed the sea had lost their caste, and so could not mix with other Hindus for fear of contamination.

The Dutts, of course, can be thought to have lost their original caste several times over – not only had they crossed the sea at least twice by this time, but they had also voluntarily converted to Christianity. This was an act that would have put them beyond the pale of the caste system in any case, and that also cut them off from that extended family to which they would have looked for support and acceptance. She writes of her maternal grandmother, “she is, I am sad to say, still a Hindu” and “I wish she would become a Christian” (as cited in Foss, 2008, p. 165). On another occasion, explaining to Martin why she could not attend a cousin’s marriage, Toru explains in a matter-of-fact tone that does not quite serve to hide the hurt behind it, “she is a Hindu and so is her family, so of course we were not invited” (as cited in Foss 2008, p. 164).

When Toru Dutt eventually lost her battle with tuberculosis and passed away on 30<sup>th</sup> August 1877, she was buried in the Church Missionary Society Cemetery in Calcutta (Gibson, 2011 a, p. 297) and it is doubtful whether any of her extended family came to pay their respects.

## **Posthumous Fame in London, Edmund Gosse and the Present-day Implications of Social Cosmopolitanism**

However, very shortly afterwards, her work started to gather a growing readership in both Calcutta and London. Edmund Gosse, (1859-1928), the poet, biographer, translator and critic

favourably reviewed the first edition of *A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields* (1876) for the *Examiner* in 1877. This first Indian edition was followed by a second in 1878 and a third was published in London in 1880 by Kegan Paul. Toru's father saw to the publication of two complete novels discovered amongst her papers after her death. *Bianca, or the Young Spanish Maiden*, which is possibly the first novel in English by an Indian woman writer appeared in Calcutta's *Bengal Magazine* (1878) and *Le Journal de Mademoiselle d'Arvers*, which may be the first novel in French by an Indian writer, appeared in Paris in 1879 (Foss, 2008, p.161 -162).

Finally, *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan*, which Toru's father compiled posthumously from her manuscripts and work, which had appeared in periodicals in India, then appeared in London in 1882, with a glowing introductory memoir by Gosse. He writes:

It is difficult to exaggerate when we try to estimate what we have lost in the premature death of Toru Dutt. Literature has no honours which need have been beyond the grasp of a girl who at the age of twenty-one, and in languages separated from her own by so deep a chasm, had produced so much of lasting worth (*Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan*, "Introductory Memoir," xxvii).

Reading Gosse's words, one might think that Toru had found a reader able to enter into the "social cosmopolitanism" that appears to have been a real or, at least, a much desired feature of her literary and lived relationship with English culture in England itself.

However, Gosse's language is riven by an uncertainty, and even a resistance, that seems to stem from what can only be described as an essentialist view of "race" and "culture." He appears to be unable to separate what he perceives as the unalterable fact of Toru's "Hindu" ethnicity from his readings of her work, which causes one rather to wonder what his judgement might have been if he had read her poetry without any knowledge of her name or identity.

Her Christianity seems almost a superficial gloss in his eyes. Thus, he writes:

She was pure Hindu, full of the typical qualities of her race and blood [...] Her mother fed her imagination with the old songs and legends of their people, stories which it was the last labour of her life to weave into English verse (xi- xii).

Toru's mother may have inspired her daughter with stories told during childhood, as suggested by internal evidence in the poem "Sita", which appears in *Ancient Ballads and Legends*. However, it is also true that Toru's reinterpretations of Sanskrit texts were made after a careful acquisition of the language and study of its texts with the aid of a pundit. While this is mentioned later on in the memoir, Gosse's idea that there is an almost physical tangibility to Toru Dutt's 'otherness,' or alterity, which must set her apart from the London she sought so hard to embrace, persists.

Ending with a reference to the premature death which did not allow her to mature fully, he writes in a doubled edged tone:

That mellow sweetness was all that Toru lacked to perfect her as an English poet, and of no other Oriental who has ever lived can the same be said. When the history of the literature of our country comes to be written, there is sure to be a page dedicated in it to this fragile exotic blossom of song (xxvii).

It might be possible to argue that Gosse's discomfort with Toru's ease and facility in English and French and his attempt to exoticise her while, at the same time, receiving her into the canon of English literature, stemmed from historical fractures in the cosmopolitanism that linked Victorian London and Victorian Calcutta. That is, his reliance on the idea of an unnegotiable "otherness" that resulted from her "race and blood," determines his readings of her work. His mind appears closed to the idea that she might have developed as profound an understanding of "English verse" as any poet of English descent. The local woman of "Near Hastings," on the other hand, receives Toru and her sister with little acknowledgement of racial or cultural difference. While she may or may not be a creation of Toru's imagination, she does embody a social cosmopolitanism that moves beyond the idea of Hindu/Christian, Indian/English, East/West as binary oppositions.

If this is the case, one might also argue that both that social cosmopolitanism and the fractures along the lines of the binary oppositions to which it offers an alternative, are still available to us. They may, indeed, shape our interpretation of the world in the twenty first century. The idea - or, indeed, the need to believe in - a demarcation of the world into East and West is not a harmless one, as now appears particularly clear in a post-Brexit context. Nor is it harmless in a global context in which significant numbers of people feel it is incumbent on them to choose between the perceived "East" and the perceived "West," and are then drawn into a polarisation and, in extremity, a militarisation of their positions.

In presenting the life and work of Toru Dutt, I hope to have made the case for her wider recognition - not simply as an Indian poet writing in English - but as a cosmopolitan Victorian. I hope to have also made the case for her increasing relevance in our own time, as we seek to find idioms and traditions to address our current needs. Her legacy can, perhaps, help us to confront and renegotiate the invidious dualisms which threaten to destabilise and remake for the worse, our global society.

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# Central America's "Failing" Democracies: The Case of Honduras

Saurav Chaliha

## Abstract

This paper analyses the various factors which have contributed to the political instability in Central America, especially Honduras. This region consists of several democracies, at least so formally, but in reality most of these grapple with weak and failing institutions that result in the faltering of liberal democratic ideals and values. Amongst the various nations in the region, this paper focuses on Honduras in order to showcase some of the core challenges faced by Central American nations in their bid to preserve democracy. The paper will also outline possible solutions which could be adopted by various agencies in order to maintain and promote democracy in the region.

## Introduction

Although formally part of North America, Central America is often considered to be a unique region that connects North and South America through a narrow strip of land. This region encompasses the nations of Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama. Apart from geographical similarities, these seven nation-states also share similar political issues that have led to increasing violence and instability across the region. All of the seven nation-states are democracies, although varying between parliamentary and presidential styles.

Since the late 1970's, Central American nations formally transitioned from authoritarian forms of leadership to liberal governments. This transition took place in various stages within the region, including, for instance, the overthrow of General Somoza in Nicaragua in 1979. In Nicaragua, this culminated into a socialist styled government which later transitioned into a democracy through elections held in 1990. Dominguez & Lindenberg (1997) noted a common trend related to the establishment of democracy in most Central American nations, which, they argue, was through the use of force. El Salvador (1979), Guatemala (1982) and Panama (1989) serve as examples of nations in which authoritarian rulers were deposed by the military and where attempts were subsequently made to establish a plural political sphere (Dominguez & Lindenberg, 1997, pp. 1-2).

Dominguez & Lindenberg (1997) believe that democracy served as a means to end the state of war in the region. It was amidst increased international focus and intervention in the affairs of Central America, that political opposition leaders in several Central American nations came

to view democracy as a means of gaining political backing from the international community. In the military coups of Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua and Panama, the ultimate goal was to enlist support from the international community since authoritarian leadership had failed to provide for their citizens. Authoritarian leaders usually commanded obedience from the masses based on the ability to provide economic growth and stability. The failure of various economies across Central America in the 1980s, however, led to a sense of disillusionment and despair amongst their citizens, which helped in the establishment of democracies (Dominguez & Lindenberg, 1997, pp. 3- 13).<sup>1</sup>

Regrettably though, Central American democracies have still not managed to mature and face a constant risk of reversal into authoritarian regimes. The biggest challenge to democracies in this region comes from the lack of strong institutions, which would help to consolidate a democracy. Weak institutions give rise to strong elites in the executive branch, who gather power at the expense of the other branches of the government (Converse & Kapstein, 2008). Bull (2014, pp.120) defines elites as:

groups of individuals that, due to their control over natural, economic, political, social, organizational, symbolic (expertise/knowledge) or coercive resources, stand in a privileged position to formally or informally influence decisions and practices that have broad societal impact.

By this definition, elites do not simply refer to institutionally privileged sections, such as parliamentarians, bureaucrats or the military but also to other actors such as drug cartel leaders and other 'strongmen' in the region. According to Puig & Sanchez- Ancochea (2014), the socio-political system of this region continues to be dominated by a small group of elites who undermine the rule of law and state, and are able to succeed in doing so due to the existence of weak institutions. This paper will aim to highlight the factors that generally hinder the functioning of democracies in the Central American region. I will show the manner in which particular forms of political leadership impede the growth and progress of democracy, thereby turning this institution in to a mere tool that is utilized for the personal benefit of a selected group of individuals.

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<sup>1</sup> Economic failure in the region was a part of the chain of events related to the global economy starting with the oil price shocks of the 1970's and the implementation of anti-inflation measures by Paul Volcker, then chairman of the US Federal Reserve Board, in 1979, which restricted US money supplies and led to an increase of the dollar interest rate. This made it difficult for developing nations, including those in Central America, to repay their debts. Mexico was the first nation to acknowledge its inability to repay debts.

## Features of democracy in the region

Bull (2014) believes that the lack of institutional strengthening in Central America can be attributed to the fact that democratization has occurred due to external pressures, particularly by US involvement, instead of emerging organically from 'within'. According to Robinson (2016), the US indulged in imposing democracy in the region during the 1980's in a bid to maintain its own position as a global hegemon. It is therefore evident that democracy was introduced in the region not due to its feasibility or local desirability, but rather to fulfil the self-seeking motives of the US government. Robinson (2016) points towards a paradox in this, which are historical instances in which the US government oppressed democracy by rendering support to dictators such as Rafael Trujillo, Anastasio Somoza, and Augusto Pinochet.

Bull (2014) emphasizes the need to uphold democratic institutions in Central America through regular and strong practices by the key actors, which include the legislature, executive and the judiciary. The actors that make up these institutions need to set a strong example to the public by exercising strict adherence to democratic norms. Unfortunately, elites have continuously undermined these institutions and used them as tools to take on their political rivals. Elites tend to form networks which reconfigure the nature of a state into that of an authoritarian regime that now operates within democratic institutions (Bull, 2014). Dominguez & Lindenberg (1997) believe that political elites use democratic institutions solely for the purpose of maintaining the support of the international community, which lends legitimacy to their rule and results in foreign aid and support. In reality, however, these political elites manipulate and oppress these institutions in order to further their own interests and gain control over the resources of the nation-state.

Bull (2014) discusses the dominant role played by the executive branches in Central America regardless of whether the country has a parliamentary or presidential system. In each of these states, the executive branch exercises disproportionate powers vis-à-vis the legislature and judicial systems. They capitalise on elite networks across various sections of society such as businessmen, academicians, journalists, military leaders, public officials, and even criminal leaders to maintain their iron-grip over state institutions. These networks are built and sustained through either kinship, ethnic or ideological affinities. Bull further argues that the reach of these networks permeates national boundaries and operate at a transnational level too. Elite networks function through the use of money, force, and control over information and ideological institutions.

Converse & Kapstein (2008) attempted to establish a link between the levels of success of democracies and the constraints imposed on executive powers. They comment that countries that impose high constraints on the executive branch are more likely to succeed as democracies. This hypothesis has been tested in the context of democratic reversals in nations such as

Venezuela, Russia, and Bolivia, in which the chief executives have repeatedly tampered with the constitution or democratic institutions.

Converse & Kapstein (2008) highlight the importance of ‘initial conditions’ as crucial to the overall success of any democracy, especially because new democracies tend to be characterized by economic and political volatilities. They point towards the unflattering statistic that Latin America witnessed the reversal of nine democracies into authoritarian regimes since the wave of democratization started in the 1970s. These initial conditions refer to the socioeconomic factors that exist at the time of establishment of a democratic government. Issues such as low per capita income, high economic inequality, ethnic fragmentation, and high poverty rates add to the challenge of sustaining a new democracy. However, democracies do not crumble solely due to poor economic performance. Central and Eastern European democracies continue to exist despite facing severe economic problems. They survived due to the strengthening of institutions in those nations, barring a few exceptions such as Ukraine and Georgia which continued to remain under the influence of non-democratic leaders. The distribution of economic resources plays a pivotal role in determining the survival of democracies. Weak economic performance such as low per capita income can be tolerated by the public if income inequality is lowered (Converse & Kapstein, 2008). The problem with Central American states is that income inequality soars due to the control of resources by a handful of elites, and this has proven to be a major hurdle in maintaining democracy in the region (Bull, 2014).

## **Challenges to democracy in Honduras**

Honduras serves as a prime example highlighting the various challenges faced by democracies across Central America. In Meyer’s (2009) view, the coup d’état of 2009 highlighted the inadequacy of its political institutions and the overpowering role of Honduras’ elites. The serving president, Manuel Zelaya, was removed by the military on 28 June 2009 and sent into exile to Costa Rica. An interim government was formed by the President of the Congress, Roberto Micheletti, with the approval of the Congress. To be noted here is that the dismissal and exile of the President was an illegal act as the Constitution of Honduras does not allow the banishment of its citizens (Meyer, 2009).

Prior to the events of 28<sup>th</sup> June, Manuel Zelaya had already requested for the intervention of the Organization of American States (OAS) in anticipation of a possible coup.<sup>2</sup> He had

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<sup>2</sup> The Organization of American States is a regional organization which came into existence in 1948 with the goal of preserving peace and security in the Americas region. It currently consists of 35 nations, including the United States of America.

requested for an emergency meeting of the OAS permanent Council by invoking Article 17 of the organization's charter, which relates to the protection of democracy when a member state is under an immediate threat. Following the removal of Zelaya, the OAS adopted isolation methods along with economic sanctions through agencies such as the World Bank and the European Union. However, the newly formed government of Micheletti refused to concede to these pressure (Legler, 2010).

The entire disturbance was started by Manuel Zelaya's decision to hold a non-binding nationwide referendum to solicit peoples' views on the establishment of a new constituent assembly by voting for it in the upcoming general elections of November 2009. Zelaya stated that if people were in favour of establishing a constituent assembly, then a fourth ballot would be introduced in the general elections of November 2009, alongside the three traditional ballots used to vote for the post of the president, national congress members, and mayoral positions. The fourth ballot would then be installed to vote for the establishment of a constituent assembly based on the outcome of the referendum. Both opposition leaders and members within Zelaya's party were opposed to this plan as they viewed it as a deliberate move to consolidate further power in the hands of the chief executive (Meyer, 2010). According to the Constitution of Honduras, the National Congress can initiate amendments to the constitution by a two thirds majority of the Congress (Article 373). However, Article 374 of the Constitution states that articles related to the terms of the presidency, period of presidency, changing the form of government or national territory cannot be initiated by any group or individual.

According to Article 239 of the Constitution, a candidate can be elected to the position of president for four years and cannot seek re-election for a second term at any point of their political career. Detractors of Zelaya believed that he wanted to create a constituent assembly in order to contest elections for a second time. Zelaya defended his actions by justifying the need for a constituent assembly to rewrite the constitution in order to help the country adapt to changing situations and challenges (Meyer, 2010). Zelaya's opponents, however, felt insecure about the president's support towards socialist leaders such as Hugo Chavez and feared that Honduras could also come under the influence of socialism (Legler, 2010).

Legler (2010) opines that in spite of best efforts of the international community and the strong stance adopted by the OAS, the case of Honduras shows how democracy continues to be challenged in the Central American region, despite the existence of several safeguards and institutions in place for its protection. There are numerous factors responsible for the failure of democracy in the region, one of which is the problem of conflicting messages given by the upholders of democracy such as the US. As noted, democracy was established in this region due to self-seeking motives of the US. Paradoxically, however, the US frequently engaged in non-democratic activities in order to uphold the ideals of democracy. The invasion of Panama can be seen from that angle (Legler, 2010). The 2009 coup and the US's support of the

Micheletti government can also be analysed in a similar manner as supporters of Micheletti believed that the ousting of Manuel Zelaya was a move meant to protect democracy in Honduras. The nature of their action may have broken democratic ideals but the end goal was achieved. In nations with weak institutions, it is important for globally established nations to set the tone through consistent actions.

The Micheletti government managed to maintain its control over the country by further polarizing the issue and through gathering the support of members of the US Senate. Legler (2010) sheds light on the role of Republican senate members such as Jim DeMint and Mitch McConnell in urging the then Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, to change the government's stance towards Honduras. There are also documented cases of Republican senators travelling to Honduras to meet Micheletti. Furthermore, many Republican members of the US Senate refused to approve diplomatic appointments of Undersecretary of State Arturo Valenzuela and Ambassador to Brazil, designate Thomas Shannon, until the Obama government changed its rhetoric toward Honduras. Despite imposing several sanctions and cutting off financial aid to the country, the Obama administration buckled under the pressure of Republican senators and supported the Honduran election results of November 2009 (Legler, 2010). The Republican Party became involved in this issue as they suspected Manuel Zelaya of being a socialist. They believed that his re-election would lead to political transformation in Honduras, which would then enable the establishment of socialism. The US government defended its stance by explaining their move as being a necessary step towards ensuring stability and order in Honduras (Meyer, 2010). However, this episode highlighted the strength of the elite network. The elites led by Micheletti used their transnational network to garner support for their cause. The Republican senators who were a part of this network turned the Honduras issue into a domestic US issue by withholding appointments of the government to pressure the US administration into adopting a favourable political position versus Micheletti.

The Honduran coup showed the power of, what we may call, 'domestic coup coalitions' in jeopardizing the functioning of a democratically elected government. The coup of 2009 was backed by the attorney general, the ombudsman, members of the Supreme Court, members of the armed forces, leaders of the Catholic Church, and media outlets. The legitimacy of the actions of the Supreme Court and the Congress, in ousting Zelaya, has been questioned by political analysts and the international community, but the otherwise widespread support of the coup lent an aura of legitimacy to the actions of Micheletti government (Legler, 2010).

The coup also highlighted the impunity with which the Micheletti government adopted authoritarian practices by justifying them as necessary measures for the protection of democratic ideals. Activities such as intimidation and the shutting down of radio and news channels became

common practices. Rival political leaders went into hiding and a 45 days long ‘state of siege’ was declared, which curtailed individual freedoms of the citizens and the press (Meyer, 2010)<sup>3</sup>.

Whilst international analysts view Central American democracies to be in a fragile state, it is important to also look at the view of people living in the region. According to a poll conducted by the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) in March 2010, the 2009 coup was not predominantly viewed as a setback to democracy by the people of Honduras since 27.4% of the respondents felt that the country had become more democratic after the coup while 37.9% felt that there was no change to the status of their democracy (Argueta, et. Al. 2011).

However, such public views may not correctly signify the impact of the coup on democracy in Honduras. The Micheletti government appointed Captain Billy Hoya Amendola as its chief security advisor. Amendola was responsible for leading a Honduran army unit in the 1980s, which was responsible for political assassinations and the torture of political opponents (Canadian Council for International Co-operation, 2010). Haugaard and Kinoshian (2015) refer to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights’ report titled *Honduras: Human Rights and the Coup D’état* (2010) to draw attention to the increased violence that followed the coup. Political detentions, arbitrary arrests, violations of women’s rights, persecution of minority groups, and abuse of children’s rights were on the rise and posed a serious threat to the country.

The Honduran coup is one out of several examples available in Central America. The case of Honduras shows how democracies are unravelling in the region. At the time of writing this paper, Honduras had recently finished its presidential elections in which the incumbent, Juan Orlando Hernandez, was able to contest for re-election due to a Supreme Court verdict which imposed a stay order on the constitutional article that limited the term of presidency. On this occasion, there was no coup since the elites backed the decision, but it does bring back memories of the Coup d’état of 2009 when Manuel Zelaya was ousted on suspicion of planning to run for re-election (The Economist, 2017). The ever changing nature of political institutions shows that it is individual actors who are managing institutions, more so than the rule of law.

The case of Honduras raises a very pertinent question about Central America, which is: does democracy exist? According to Colburn & Cruz (2007), democracy does exist in the region if we view it as a system that ensures free and competitive elections. Central American citizens, after all, exercise their right to vote in high numbers as election turnouts in the region are on par with developed nations such as the United States of America, France, and Japan. The elite

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<sup>3</sup> State of siege refers to a situation in which constitutional guarantees are suspended due to a situation of emergency arising from an external threat or internal disturbance. State of siege is a translation of the provision *estado de sitio*, which is commonly used in Latin American constitutions to signify the granting of all executive and legislative authority to the president. The president can also suspend judicial independence in this situation.

actors also respect the sanctity of elections, as they view it as the only route to power. However, Central America's problem lies in its interpretation of the terms democracy and liberalism. Most political theorists combine these two terminologies together with liberalism, which is seen as ensuring the rule of law, delineating and limiting the power of the government, and protecting individual rights. Unfortunately, in Central America, the existence of weak political institutions hinders the functioning of liberalism. This has allowed elites to come to power legally but subsequently manipulate institutions to their personal benefits and uses (Colburn & Cruz, 2007, pp. 32- 35). The existence of presidential system of governance also poses a challenge to democracies in this region since the chief executive is not directly connected with the legislative body due to the independent voting procedures for both institutions, which often leads to political conflicts (Lehoucq, 2012 cited in Biekart, 2014).

Puig & Sanchez-Ancochea (2014) postulate that most political institutions lack credibility in the eyes of the public. Many Central Americans view the church and armed forces as superior and more legitimate institutions due to the weak state of the legislatures and judiciaries, which are, moreover, often prone to corruption. The support for a powerful armed force and the lack of separation of powers can be attributed to the existence of illiberal democrats in the Latin American region as a whole. Carrion (2008) defines illiberal democrats as national actors that prefer democracy but also endorse unconstitutional usages of power. Such groups might be understood as still grappling with the transition from dictatorship to democracy.

The case of Manuel Zelaya can be explained through Carrion's (2008) analysis since the Honduran Supreme Court supported the, safer though illegal, option of allowing the military to depose the president from power, instead of establishing a judicial enquiry to initiate the impeachment procedures as prescribed by the constitution (Puig & Sanchez- Ancochea, 2014 cited in Biekart, 2014).

The Central American tryst with democracy has been a classic case of one step forward, two steps backwards. In order to ensure the success of democracies, regional and international agencies have to combine their resources and assume a more proactive role. The OAS charter requires immediate revision so that it can integrate solutions for new challenges and situations in which illegitimate coups are organized by legitimate institutions and orchestrated by corrupt elites for their personal gains. Legler (2010) asserts that the OAS must improve its ability to engage effectively in preventive diplomacy, rather than serving as an organization aligned towards 'fire-fighting.' Beyond that, the economies of these nations need restructuring in such a manner that poverty rates and income equality decrease, which is then expected to bring down the currently excessively high crime rates. This can be done through more stringent checks by donor nations by monitoring the utilization of the aid provided by them. Transnational companies can also play a big role in the resuscitation of the economy. However, foreign investments can only be attracted by countries first ensuring political stability and a safe social

environment. The practice of strengthening democratic institutions has to be expedited with an emphasis on building durable institutions such as free press and an educational system that promotes diverse ideas. These institutions play a big role in shaping attitudes and perceptions towards liberal democracy. This seems necessary because Colburn & Cruz (2007) point towards the skewed perception of democracy, which exists in the minds of many across Central America. Democracy, after all, is more than just a system that promotes free elections. Free elections merely serve as the stepping stone to many other important aspects enshrined within the charters of democratic institutions, such as ensuring welfare, following the rule of law and promoting equal opportunities in all fields.

The re-election of Juan Orlando Hernandez as the Honduran President in December 2017 has served as another reminder of the control exercised by elites over weak political institutions of the region (Malkin, 2017). The opposition candidate, Salvador Nasralla, has continued his protests over the flawed electoral system in the country. Malkin (2017), in turn, highlighted the challenge of ensuring 'fair' elections in the nation as the 2017 elections laid bare the incompetence of the Honduran Election Commission, which was mired in controversy over the counting of votes.

The future of Central American 'democracies' will continue to remain bleak unless the international community is able to exert unrelenting pressure on the elites of this region to respect the rule of law and assist in building strong political institutions. The masses will also have to play a critical role in determining the final outcome of this situation. Growing political consciousness on their part can help in reforming the political institutions. The failure to achieve this will only perpetuate the growth of incomplete democracies that oscillate between weak and failed states.

## **Concluding Remarks**

Critics may argue that democracy may not be an ideal fit for this region. The reality, however, is that democracy has become globally normative. There has definitely been an attempt by the US to impose normative democratic ideals in the region (Robinson, 2016). While that may be viewed as an incorrect method, it is also important to understand why other methods may not be suitable.

The idea of seeing democracy as a 'polythetic' category, one that assumes different shapes in different places, could be used as an example to explain the 'uniqueness' of democracies in Central America. Wouters (2015) discusses democracy through a culturalist outlook, as opposed to exercising strict adherence to normative democratic values. The historical background and unique cultural characteristics of a group should be taken into consideration while developing and practicing democracy, which may conflict with universalistic and normative projections of

'liberal democracy.' While this could be a beneficial idea to understand how democracies work locally, it must be emphasized that this approach may not prove to be effective in Central America. This region experiences a lack of proper political consciousness due to the existing political and economic inequalities, as a result of which people tend to accept inequality as a norm and adopt an incomplete idea of democracy. Carrion (2008) sheds light on the constant struggle between instrumental and normative ideas of democracy amongst the people of this region. Instrumental ideas of democracy invoke the conviction that support for democratic ideals hinges on the material and economic achievements of the democratic government. A government's failure to do so can make instrumental supporters abandon the idea of democracy. The existence of this thought process allows elites to manipulate and undermine political institutions. Thus, it becomes imperative to solidify normative values in order to maintain democracy in the first place. A polythetic approach can therefore only be adopted at the grassroots level once the core institutions begin to function in an efficient manner.

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# The Early History of Contemporary Art in Bhutan

Jason Hopper

## Abstract

Bhutan today hosts a small but vibrant contemporary art scene centred in Thimphu and Paro. During my fieldwork in 2017, I counted no fewer than six galleries in Thimphu and another two in Paro showing contemporary art, not to mention the hotels and cafes that frequently display art by contemporary artists. All of this art presents a mystery: in the absence of the institutions commonly associated with contemporary art such as art schools, national galleries, and museums, how did contemporary art arise in Bhutan? Based on the life histories of artists and archival work at *Kuensel*, I argue that contemporary art grew out of increased exposure to modern artistic practice, increased demand for new forms of visual culture, and a shift in the social organization of traditional artistic practice. Contemporary art, in this way, sheds light on how cultural modernity works in a country focused on cultural preservation.

## Introduction

In many ways, art history in Bhutan is unlike its regional neighbours. Whereas modern art was often a key component in the creation of national modernity in countries like India, Thailand, and Japan, Bhutan has never pursued a project of cultural modernity through art. Instead, the Bhutanese state has largely sought to keep culture largely separate from the larger projects of modernization. For example, although Bhutan has pursued bureaucratic and technological modernity in the forms of a modern public education system, modern military structures, new forms of mass communication, and a modern transportation system, cultural policy has focused on preservation and limiting change or outside influence. Consequently, contemporary art in Bhutan has been ad hoc, improvised, something that has grown in the interstices of broader, primarily state-led projects of modernization.

Yet, modern cultural forms have taken root in Bhutan nonetheless. In the following essay, I trace some of the early developments that contributed to the rise of art and, in the process, hope to show how contemporary art can shed light on the dynamics of cultural modernity in Bhutan more generally. Working backwards from my interviews with contemporary artists in Bhutan, I describe some of the key players and show the ways in which their highly personal choices to pursue art were also shaped by broader changes that took place in Bhutan. While by no means the complete story, this paper shows some of the ways cultural modernity in the form of contemporary art developed in Bhutan. Specifically, I argue that a combination of exposure to

new forms of cultural production, demand for new forms of cultural production, and training of artisans for employment by the market and state led to the introduction of contemporary art.

## **Definition of terms**

Allow me to clarify the meaning of a few key terms I use in this essay. Throughout this essay “traditional art” and “contemporary art” refer primarily to modes of making art. Painting is by far the most commonly found contemporary art form, but artists do not confine themselves to one form alone. Contemporary artists like Pema Tshering who primarily paint also engage in other media, such as sculpture, but see all of it as part of their art practice. The fluidity I saw in practice has led me to a relatively loose use of the term “contemporary art” here as I found that the specific medium was often less important than the intention behind the work and the cultural frame people used to approach visual and material culture.

Specifically, I distinguish “contemporary art” as set of ideas and practices that prioritize originality and distinct individual style, and which frame the objects that result from this process as made for aesthetic and conceptual appreciation in their own right. I use the term contemporary art very broadly here, roughly synonymously with the quintessentially modern practices and products other scholars have described as “fine art” (Shiner, 2001). Though this may be confusing for readers familiar with contemporary art as a specific period of global high art, contemporary art is a clearer term for understanding Bhutan. Not only is contemporary the term preferred by artists in Bhutan, but also Bhutan at one point had a National Fine Art Centre which taught traditional, primarily Buddhist, art.

I also specifically wish to distinguish contemporary art from “traditional art” which I use to largely refer to the culture surrounding Buddhist arts, such as painting and statue making, which have been codified as “traditional” in Bhutan. As such, I use the terms traditional and contemporary art to mark, broadly, a distinction between contemporary art as a relatively autonomous realm of experience distinct from the religious experience associated with traditional Buddhist arts. As a result of my focus, the specifics of my argument may or may not apply to other arts in Bhutan. For example, even as some of the dynamics related to modernization described in this essay may apply to fashion and film, these creative practices have their own histories.

## **Exposure**

Although never truly isolated (Pommaret, 2000), Bhutan’s relationship to the world beyond its borders intensified and broadened after the 1950s, introducing Bhutanese to new forms of artistic production. Modernization brought more outsiders into the country to aid in

development. Likewise, as Bhutan joined regional and international organizations like the UN (in 1971) and Non-aligned movement (in 1968), more of the elite class had reason and opportunity to travel. This movement of people has played an important role in the arts. Visiting foreigners opened galleries, provided training for aspiring Bhutanese artists, and shared their own ideas about art. Likewise, the introduction of tourism in 1974 created a market and further led to the rise of tourist hotels that have been central to creating display spaces for contemporary art. Although there is increasingly a Bhutanese market for art, many of the gallery owners continue to insist that without tourism, their sales would collapse.

Some of Bhutan's earliest contemporary artists were members of the elite who had the opportunity to travel abroad. One of the earliest examples come from a man known by his title Dasho Drupon<sup>1</sup>, half-brother of the Second Queens of Bhutan. By the early 1970s, Dasho Drupon began producing realistic paintings of people, landscapes, and buildings. In interviews with his family as well as those who knew of him, I heard Dasho Drupon described as ceaselessly creative and also a bit mischievous. Not only did he paint, but he was also an excellent *dranyen* player and led musicians from the court of the Third King of Bhutan to record their music in Kolkata in 1968. Dasho Drupon also traveled to Hong Kong, a popular destination for Bhutanese at the time, and drew inspiration from Chinese paintings of nature. The paintings of his that were kindly shown to me by his surviving family, were done in oil paint and incorporated the distinctive gnarled pine and black-necked cranes against a plain background seen in Chinese art. Another key early painter who had opportunity to travel abroad was Aum Tshokye, the wife of former Foreign Minister Lyonpo Dago Tshering who I was told displayed oil paintings of both landscapes and Buddhist icons. Notably both Dasho Drupon's and Aum Tshokye's work focused on themes that would have been immediately legible as important subject to a Bhutanese audience: the King, religious monuments, and Buddhist icons and symbols. Much contemporary art today continues to play with these themes pioneered by early artists.

Visitors to Bhutan also played an important role. Opened in 1968, India's embassy in Thimphu proved to be an important avenue for the introduction of contemporary art in Bhutan. In particular, the wives of several ambassadors played important roles in the arts in Thimphu. Notably two were ceramic artists. Gouri Khosla, wife of Shri I.P. Khosla (ambassador 1974-77), brought an electric wheel, kiln, and a passion for glazes when she was transferred from England to Bhutan with her husband. Linked to the Tagore family on her mother's side, Gouri

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<sup>1</sup> I am using the spelling I have found in *Kuensel* (Zangmo, 2016) and Music of Bhutan Research Centre (2015) publications which is roughly phonetic.

Khosla studied glazes at Taggs Yard School of Ceramics in London (Khosla, 1980). The Third Queen, Ashi Kesang, and the Fourth King's sister Ashi Pem Pem, provided the impetus to start the ceramic gallery in 1975 after they saw Gouri Khosla's works at the embassy (Kuensel, 1976). They brought artists from the National Fine Art center, actually a center for traditional art training under the direction of the Kikhor Lopen, to learn from Mrs. Khosla. As part of the studio, both an electric and wood fired kiln were built and a gallery called Joongshee, set up. Using electric wheels, the traditional sculptors learned to make cups and bowls, as well as porcelain Buddhist deities (Khosla, 1980). They also learned modern glazing and firing techniques that were not part of Bhutanese traditional ceramics. Traditional Bhutanese pottery for utilitarian items is fired on an open flame whereas clay statues are normally just left for sun drying. Notably, Mrs. Khosla also taught the traditional artists about Western Renaissance painters and the "old masters" (Khosla, 1980). In the 1980s, Kusum Haider, the wife of then ambassador Salman Haider, would use the kiln at India house to make beautiful earthenware that played with Bhutanese designs and were sold. A trained actress, Kusum Haider also put on plays in Thimphu, including a rendition of "Black Comedy" and a theatrical version of Rashomon, both with Bhutanese actors.

Education also played an important role in introducing Bhutanese to modern ideas of art. In particular, contemporary art in Bhutan can be traced to Yangchenphug Central School in the mid-1970s. Two key educators at Yangchenphug Central School, Principal J.B. Tyson and art teacher Naresh Sengupta, profoundly influenced the development of new art forms in Bhutan. Opened in 1965 as Thimphu Public School and today known as Yangchenphug Higher Secondary School, Yangchenphug was one of the preeminent educational institutions in Bhutan at the time and a place where many ministers and important people in Bhutan today received primary and secondary education. Both the founder of VAST, "Asha" Kama Wangdi and contributor to Bhutan's first feature film and Paro-based artist Chimi Dorji were students at Yangchenphug. Kama Wangdi and Chimi Dorji formed close bonds with J.B. Tyson and Naresh Sengupta and both credit the two with encouraging their interest in the arts and eventual career as artists. Beyond professional artists, many other Bhutanese of the same generation that I spoke to fondly remembered both J.B. Tyson and Naresh Sengupta and it is likely that their efforts more generally helped foster an audience for new art forms and art education.

Mass media has also played an important role in the introduction of contemporary art to Bhutan. Although today artists largely use the internet to find and learn about art, books were an early form of exposure to artistic practices outside of Bhutan. Dasho Drupon, according to my interviews, relied on books about European painters for inspiration. Well into the 2000s books remained important as the internet was too slow for much more than emails or the simple browsing of websites. Even artists in the late 20s and early 30s described how winning a book about art in a competition was formative for them. VAST, for example, has an extensive library,

and the older members have described how in the past these books were an enthralling and important source of knowledge about art.

Even outside of Thimphu, books were an important introduction to art. One artist who grew up in the south of Bhutan recalled being enamored with a book of Thomas Gainsborough's work—the English portrait and landscape painter. My art classes at VAST were filled with reading recommendations from our teacher as well. Our teacher recommended a huge range of books—fiction about artists like *The Agony and the Ecstasy* and philosophy like *The Seven Rings*—which he said were important for getting us to think and, therefore, were important for making art. Books have never completely disappeared; however, the internet, television, and film have become incredibly important vehicles for new ideas and learning artistic practices. Artists today rely especially on the internet to learn new styles and techniques. During my fieldwork in 2017, for example, many contemporary artists used Youtube to learn how to make Zen Tangles, a trademarked technique for producing graphic patterns, and incorporated these patterns into their work.

## Demand

As hinted at above, modernization brought not only contact with new visual culture, but also demand for it. Social change in Bhutan created demand for new forms of visual communication alongside older forms like *mani* walls (Ardussi, 2006). The new visual reforms desired by a changing state and society created conditions where contemporary art and modern artistic skill were valued. Perhaps most directly, the state needed to communicate its development plans, and to gather and produce information such as maps. This led to the need for print-makers, photographers, filmmakers, among others, many of whom were or went on to become artists. Modern schools, likewise, provided spaces where various forms of visual art were considered useful, laudable, and valuable. Likewise, the growth of *Kuensel* from a bi-weekly government newsletter to a daily newspaper of record required not just reporters, but visual media like photographs and comics to fill its pages. So too, hotels also created an important space for the early display of artwork.

Development also created requirements for new media. During the 1980s the state began what is described as a “decentralization” of power that delegated power to regional offices (Ura, 2004). The shift was significant and raised the issue of both communicating the aims of development more broadly and recruiting the populace to the ends of development. Out of these drives, and with the help of the UN, Bhutan created the Development Support Communication Division (DSCD), in 1981 under the Ministry of Communication. The DSCD employed many early artists and gave them a chance to use their skills (if not always as they had hoped to). Kama Wangdi worked for this department and helped make charts, banners and

other materials for many departments. The DSCD also employed filmmakers to document Bhutanese life, including Ugyen Wangdi who would go on to make Bhutan's first feature film. Notably, it was from the DSCD that Kama Wangdi left to study Communication Media at the Kent Institute of Art and Design and it was to the DSCD that Kama Wangdi returned to work before he went on to set up his own art gallery.

Modern schooling, in addition to introducing many Bhutanese to art, also created demand for new forms of artistic production and showed that art in a modern sense was something valuable. While only a few schools have offered art classes, like YHS did in the 1970s, many have art clubs. Sherubtse College art club, in particular, was important to the practice of Sukbir Biswas, who owns Art Yantra Gallery in Thimphu where he sells his own and the artwork of many other people. The art club produced works to sell at the colleges "Fete Day" which in turn raised money for buying art supplies. The teachers often bought the artwork, providing both a source of approval to the students and funds for their painting. The Paro College of Education (PCE) art club has also fostered artists. The Tashigyangtse extension of VAST was started by Jigme Tenzin, who not only learned art at VAST but also was an active member of the PCE art club. Tshewang Darjey, a dzongkhag teacher north of Thimphu, also was an active participant in the teacher college's art club. Another artist displaying his work in the galleries in Thimphu was an active member in the art club at Samtse College of Education and contributed to an annual exhibition they had there in addition to selling his artwork in Thimphu. Teachers, it should be noted, learn "visual communication", but schools do not currently offer art classes.

Furthermore, schools continue to be the key way youths find out about and participate in art competitions run through everything from UNICEF to VAST, sometimes in coordination. The earliest records of art competitions I could find in Bhutan were sponsored by India. In 1972, Chimi Dorji<sup>2</sup> won a competition through India house and the following year *Kuensel* announced he won an award from Shankar's International Children's Competition (SICC). Started with support from cartoonist K. Shankar Pillai's publication Shankar's Weekly, SICC began in 1949 and accepted international submissions the following year. The competition carried some prestige with it, *Kuensel* records that Indira Gandhi herself handed out Chimi Dorji's award and the award was accepted by Lyonpo Pema Wangchuck, Bhutan's representative to India. Notably Chimi Dorji did go on to become an artist, working on Bhutan's first feature film released in 1988 and opening his own gallery in Paro that sold modern art from 2005 until 2013 or 2014. Competitions supported by NGOs like UNICEF or WWF and run through schools continue to provide encouragement for Bhutanese artists. When I asked about how they

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<sup>2</sup> The romanization of Bhutanese names is often inconsistent, so although the newspaper lists "Chimmi" Dorji and also "Chime" Dorji as winning, these are the same artist.

got interested in art, many young artists brought up winning an art competition or having their work printed in the calendars that often result from such competitions.

The development of *Kuensel* from a biweekly into a daily newspaper created a demand not only for written but also visual material that provided a space for artists to display their work and income. In fact, the same Chimi Dorji who won a Shankar's Weekly competition and was a student of Naresh Sengupta also wrote and drew a comic which ran in *Kuensel* weekly from 1987 until 1988—possibly Bhutan's first. The story followed the adventures of Tenzin Drugay “first druk descid [sic]” who became the first head of the civil administration under the Zhabdrung known as “desi” (Chimi, 1987). The story told in the comics emphasized the values of loyalty, bravery, and religious devotion, and drew parallels between the past and the present. Readers must have enjoyed not only the history lesson, but the scenes of intrigue, swordsmanship, and dangerous travel across mountain passes. The comics also linked the past and present in a way that fit with broader projects of nation building at the time, adapting an incredibly modern narrative from to the goal of cultural preservation. Other early artists, such as the architect Namgay Retty who would go on to display art at a gallery set up by volunteers with the British Voluntary Service Overseas in the 1980s, sent in sketches to be displayed in the pages of *Kuensel*.

As mentioned earlier, hotels have also provided one of the earliest and most important markets for contemporary art in Bhutan and spaces for the display of that art. One of the earliest was likely the Druk Hotel. Very few accommodations existed early on in Bhutan, and visitors had to stay in government “guest houses” (Imaeda, 2013). But by the 1980s, hotels were beginning to open. Part of the Bhutanese Tashi Group of Companies, the Druk Hotel opened in 1985. Boutique hotels in Bhutan cater to both foreigners and to Bhutanese elite. They provide not only a place to stay, but also a place to meet and to host events. Early on, the Druk Hotel served as a space for displaying entrants of an RSPN art competition (Kuensel, 1987). Catering to foreigners and to the Bhutanese elite, hotels pursued an aesthetic that looked “modern” and also “Bhutanese”. Artists played an active role in helping create the demand for their work in hotel spaces. In particular, Sukbir Biswas helped pioneer the display of contemporary art in these places. He recounts traveling with his paintings, made in his spare time while working at the Ministry of Revenue, to try and convince the owners of the hotel to buy and display his work. Today, works by many contemporary artists can be found in the high-end hotels in Thimphu. Le Meridien, which has a reputation for supporting the arts and creating “art experiences” for its guests, has even donated gallery space to VAST in 2017. Kama Wangdi worked on several large pieces for upcoming hotels during my stay in Thimphu.

## **Modernization of traditional art training**

One of the main contributors to the rise of contemporary art was, paradoxically, the formalization of training in traditional art. Starting with the Institute for Zorig Chusum (IZC) and National Fine Art Centre in the 1970s, the creation of institutes to train Bhutanese in traditional art represented a significant shift in the social position of traditional artists if not in the training itself. To begin, the institutes placed art within the comparatively secular purview of the state. Current scholarship suggests that prior to modernization, traditional art was deeply Buddhist. Monasteries and *dzongs* served as key sites for learning the arts and religious figures played a central role in teaching traditional art (Ardussi, 2008; Maki, 2016).<sup>3</sup> Though Buddhism continues to remain important to the training of traditional artists, Buddhist prayers form an important part of the daily routine of students, the institutes moved from being primarily part of Bhutan's religious institutions to primarily part of the state, managed under the Ministry of Labour. The new institutes also mirrored a broader shift in power towards secular side of the "dual system" of government described by Michael Aris (1979, 1994).

Furthermore, the institutes were part of a broader shift towards modern forms of labor to meet the demands of a state that no longer relied on corvée labor and a burgeoning market. Early in the modernization process Bhutan faced a general shortage of labor for new development projects (Pain, 2004). This also applied to artisans. One of the key figures in the creation of the National Painting School that would eventually turn into the IZC, Dasho Choki Dorji explained in our interview that the need for a training center became evident from the difficulty faced recruiting skilled artisans for work on renovations of Tashichodzong undertaken in the 1960s. The state in Bhutan needed not only civil servants, many of whom were trained at Sherubtse a modern secondary school founded in 1962, but also artisans. Similarly, the National Fine Art Centre, founded by the Ministry of Trade, Industry, and Forests in 1971, was explicitly created to create employment opportunities for the growing tourist market in Bhutan. The Fine Art Centre (which initially taught mask making, the sculpture of religious figures, and thangka painting) was part of a larger Handicraft Emporium that gathered and sold Bhutanese handicrafts. In his address at the opening, L.M. Menezes, hired in the capacity of "Industrial Expert," described the goals of the emporium and the other centers set up by the Ministry of Trade and Industry, as to preserve cultural and artistic heritage while meeting market demand for handicrafts (Kuensel, 1971). In effect, traditional arts organizations created a new class of artisans that operated like free labor or civil servants.

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<sup>3</sup> Further research on the social organization of art prior to 1960 could help clarify or complicate the transition I describe. Most extant research focuses on religious figures, mostly likely due to the sources available.

The shift in how traditional art was organized seems to have accompanied traditional artists experimenting with new art forms. A number of important contemporary artists received their training at organizations run and founded by the Bhutanese government. The Fine Arts Centre was where Kama Wangdi—one of the founders of VAST, prolific artist, and hugely influential mentor for many current Bhutanese artists—trained starting in 1976. Kama Wangdi learned not only painting, but a host of other crafts and stayed at the Fine Art Centre for 10 years, helping them develop new products (Samal, 2010). Tshewang Tenzin, Gyembo Wangchuk, and Phurba Namgay either studied and/or taught at the Zorig Chusum. Some of these artists have explicitly told me that in addition to providing greater freedom, their interest in contemporary art reflected a growing market for non-traditional work. Notably, these artists are all men. Buddhist painting and traditional arts institutions were initially only open to men, which likely contributed to the fact that most practicing contemporary artists in Bhutan are men. However, this dynamic may be changing. Recent exhibitions by Zimbiri, who trained in fine art in the United States, and the “Her Expression” exhibitions that have been running at VAST since 2014 are two examples of the increased participation of women in contemporary art.

## **Conclusion**

While by no means complete, the overview provided herein I hope offers a comprehensive view of the early contributing factors to the growth of contemporary art in Bhutan. In particular, I hope this essay points the direction towards future research. Oral history of traditional art before the 1960s, for example, could reveal much about the social organization of art. Likewise, studying contemporary art offers a sense of the dynamics of cultural modernity in a country where cultural policy not only lacks a broad program of cultural modernization but actively seeks to resist cultural modernization. The rise of contemporary art shows the way ordinary Bhutanese finds spaces between official state projects to make room for ad hoc, context specific, what might be considered what Ritu Khanduri calls a “tactical” form of modernity (Khanduri, 2014).

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# Changing Socio-Spatial Structures and Growing Urban Issues in the Quest of Making Thimphu a Dream City

Leishipem Khamrang

## Abstract

Building on the notion of socio-spatial dialectic, this paper examines new forms of urban space emerging in Thimphu city and formulates a critique to the idealisation of Thimphu as a dream city for all. This paper further asserts that new trends of social ordering can potentially pose a threat to Bhutan's unique development philosophy of Gross National Happiness, which elevates and popularizes the country in global development debates.

## Introduction

By 2027, as the ambitious Thimphu Structure Plan 2004-2027 envisions, Thimphu city will have witnessed an urban facelift that turns Thimphu city into a dream city for all Bhutanese. Buttressed by the Gross National Happiness (GHN) philosophy, the Thimphu Structure Plan 2004-2027 (TSP) underscores the reinforcement and reestablishment of public domains directed towards providing better choices, spaces, and places for a sense of community to develop, thereby making interactions and activities of the people in different spaces unique (MoWHS 2004). Since the introduction of the Thimphu Structure Plan, progress in various determinants of urban development is engineered by the country's meticulous and systematically designed development policies that underline the chief goals – balancing spiritual well-being and material well-being - of Gross National Happiness. In contemporary development debates, the notion of progress, however, is contested and articulated from different philosophical perspectives, the most dominant being the neoliberal ideology.<sup>1</sup>

Given the existing development philosophy of the country, which does not privilege excessive materialism, the concept of neoliberal ideology may be deemed irrelevant in the Bhutanese context. And yet, simmering just below the surface are novel forms of social and economic relations that betray the gradual penetration of a 'neoliberal ideology', certainly so in

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<sup>1</sup> Harvey (2005) defines neoliberalism as a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can be best advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterised by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade. Furthering, the role of a state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices.

Thimphu. New lifestyles with new social structures are currently emerging in Thimphu, leading to a gradual change in the traditional socio-economic landscape, even as contemporary development policies remain concurrent to the philosophy of Gross National Happiness. Until not so very long ago, Thimphu city was a mere swatch of paddy fields dotted with a few villages. These villages then amalgamated into the present urban Thimphu, now the largest urban centre of the country.

It is against this background that this article argues that rapid changes in urban socio-spatial structures are currently unfolding and resulting in new forms of urban space. These changes, I pose, are the manifestation of the infusion of neoliberal ideology in the socio-economic practices in Thimphu.<sup>2</sup>

## **The Birth of Modern Thimphu city**

The 1950s is an epochal decade in the history of Bhutan, a period popularly associated with the dissolution of the country's self-imposed isolation policy. What compelled Bhutan to dissolve its self-imposed isolation policy is subject to interpretation, yet the long standing claim of China over parts of Bhutan, which it sees as part of Southern Tibet, socio-economic insecurity, and widespread political pandemonium witnessed in South-Asia midway the 20<sup>th</sup> century are regularly invoked as contributing factors. Bhutan judiciously fixed its political proclivity towards India with the aim of strengthening its own territorial, social and economic security. It was during these decades of political pandemonium in the Himalayan region, and South Asia more

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<sup>2</sup> The concept 'socio-spatial structure' requires an understanding of the meaning of 'space' employed in the present paper. Space is a social construct that emerges out of various human interactions and activities. It is not only a container of social activities, as assumed in the past, but constitutes a part of social relations and is intimately involved in everyday life. It affects the way we feel about what we do and explains why people alter space and construct new environments to fit their needs (Gottdiener, & Hutchison 2011). Such a (re)construction process of space is triggered at large by the motive of competitive control over resources, which in turn produces a new pattern of social structure. Socio-spatial structure thus here refers to the social structure that emerged recently as a response to the modernization process. In common parlance, urban socio-spatial structure is formed as a result of differentiation in social status, income, lifestyle consumption pattern and living conditions, and embodied in it are the differentiation and combination of social groups in geographical space (Wang & Liu, 2017)

widely, that Bhutan steered towards modernisation through transitioning its political system, thus becoming one of the last nations in the world to embrace modernity (Phuntsho 2013). The choice of Bhutan to turn towards India, as Pradhan (2012:73) asserts, has “proved to be beneficial for the nation’s wellbeing and Gross National Happiness’, especially when China was considered hostile to Bhutan’s political survival, at least until then last decades of the 20th century”.

With the termination of the isolation policy, the search for an ideal administrative centre resulted in the shift of Bhutan’s capital from Punakha to Thimphu in the 1950s. His Majesty, King Jigme Dorji Wangchuk, consciously worked to create state institutions with their powers centered in this now new capital (Walcot 2009). To this end, a massive revamping of Tashichho Dzong was carried out with financial assistance given by the Government of India. Until that time, Thimphu was a ‘cauldron’ of scattered settlements whose activities revolved around the Lakhangs and Goenpas (religious structures) and Tashichho Dzong (administrative centre) (Norbu 2008). After the termination of the isolation policy, there were frequent visits by diplomats from India who announced financial aids and development funds on behalf of the Government of India.

In post-independence India, the first treaty - the treaty of friendship and cooperation - was signed between India and Bhutan in 1949. However, it was only after the visit of Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru in 1958 to Bhutan, on the invitation of His Majesty the third Druk Gyalpo, that the diplomatic relation between the two countries was actualised and came to fruition with prime emphasis given to economic development and bilateral cooperation. Nehru’s visit was followed by significant developments in Bhutan, such as the introduction of the Integrated Development Plan in the year 1960 with the help of Planning Commission of India. Subsequently, The First Five-Year Plan (1961-66) was adopted and entirely financed by the government of India with an approved outlay of Rs.1747 lakh.

With the introduction of First Five Year Plan in 1961, Thimphu experienced massive transformations and began to take on an urban form with its hitherto organic and traditional settlements gradually giving way to modernisation (Norbu 2008). When the town began to emerge, there was no proper planning; people constructed their houses wherever they found it convenient and as directed by stars and astrologers (Norbu 2008). In the words of Sinha (2001:10): “Thimphu town was like a labour camp in the late 1960s with some casual

construction just started and the town was huddled within a few lived-in buildings in one street”. Later, the core area, comprised of upper and lower Motithang, Changzamtog and Hejo-Langjopakha, was divided into areas for residences, a retail service strip, schools, a modern hospital and a traditional medicine centre, and in doing so followed British planning practices (Walcot 2009). The total population of the town was said to be around 3500 persons back then, including labourers and seasonal migrants such as monks, workers, members of the assembly and district and national administrators. The township was designed by the town planners from Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) in Kharagpur (Sinha 2014).

After the declaration of Thimphu as the new capital, the construction of the first administrative building (Tashichho Dzong) was started in 1961 and completed in 1969 with financial aid from India. After its completion, the attention of the government went to the development of Thimphu town. A number of bureaucrats and staffs were recruited for various departments of the new government, which, in turn, resulted in a sudden surge of population and resultant housing shortage. Therefore, in the 1970s, major efforts were initiated to cope with the increasing housing shortage. Large colonies of different types of dwellings (from large bungalows, semi-detached houses and barracks to multistoreyed apartment estates), reflecting the social status of their users, were constructed, so gradually creating an urban landscape. Thimphu city, thus, developed as a colony for bureaucrats recruited from all over the country and from abroad, particularly from India (Dujardin 1999; Norbu 2008).

The first Master Plan for the capital was actually introduced in 1964 (MoWHS 2008a) but unfortunately it could not be implemented. In 1985, the first development plan for Thimphu city was initiated when the National Urban Development Commission (now known as Department of Urban and Engineering Service) was established to consolidate development areas and streamline the so far relatively unplanned and haphazard urban developments (Dujardin 1999). Back then, the valley was still sparsely populated and the royal Government of Bhutan used incentives to attract investors into land development and into construction. Though land was practically given away, there were few takers for plots on which taxes would be levied (Benninger 2002; MoWHS 2004). This scenario has changed dramatically since, as can be seen through the mushrooming of commercial activities, services, modern buildings and expansion of urban area.

Initially, Thimphu city was a small hamlet, called Chang Jangsa, consisting of only six households and two ruins at the present site of Thimphu's city centre (Kuensel, 3 October 1992 as cited in Kunzang Choden 1999). The population was said to be about 3500 in the late 1960s (Sinha 2001) which increased to 10,000 in the 1970s and to 79,185 in 2005. The estimated figure shows that by 2027 the population of the city will reach 162,327, assuming 5% rate of growth of population (MoWHS 2004), while its carrying capacity (desirable population) is estimated to be 120,000 (MoWHS 2008<sub>p</sub>). Further, the proportion of Thimphu city population to the total urban population of the country is estimated to increase from 40 percent in 2005 to 88 percent by 2020, given the current population growth rate (MoWHS 2008b). With this rapid increase in the city population, the municipal boundaries of the city have expanded from 8 sq. km in the 1970s to 25 sq. km today. The urban spread, urban growth, and urban sprawl associated with the process of urbanisation continue unabated with a constant inflow of migrants, particularly, from the rural areas. New forms and functions of urban space emerge as people enter into a new social relations and organise themselves and their activities, both influencing and influenced by their urban surroundings.

### **New social ordering and spatial consciousness**

The making of a city is a continuous process influenced by socio-economic and political dynamics. The constituent processes that make a city are not confined to iconic architecture, flagship projects, or ambitious master plans, but also include formal and informal practices that shape urban environments and the ordering of urban spaces in particular ways (Tonkiss 2013). The particular forms cities take are deeply rooted in human practices, interactions and responses to the material functions, economic arrangements, social relations and the political system. Cities are, therefore, not just physical spaces but socially constructed spaces – they are products of human imagination and human agency, and ever, of course, tied up to questions of politics and power (Harvey 1973). The nature of social relations, in such a 'socially constructed space', evolves over time and become deeply intertwined with relation of power. Eventually, privileged sections of the population assume more powers, which results in the fragmentation of urban space along the lines of: 'who can influence and who can be influenced'. It is, therefore, important to see the direction of change and the conditions under which the change in the urban social landscape is taking place while analysing urban socio-spatial phenomena. Given the contemporary urban socio-spatial change in Bhutan, Thimphu in particular, the dynamics of spatial (social) processes appear somewhat similar to the experiences observed in many urban centres in developing countries. More precisely, new urban spaces with varying social structures have emerged in Thimphu in what was earlier, rather unproblematically, described as a 'humble city' (Benninger 2002). These urban forms are stirred by neoliberalism and globalisation, both

of which increasingly permeate social and economic practices and give rise to the logic of accumulation and consumerism. In Bhutan, too, people are increasingly oriented towards consumerism and accumulation, which is resulting in an increasing competition over resources while the society itself shows signs of division along clearly discernable material lines.

The idea of accumulation, inherent to the capitalist mode of production, is becoming increasingly perceptible amongst Thimphu's urban elite and landowners (Bajaj 2014; Bothe 2017). The dominant group, mostly consisting of landowners, businessmen, and senior government officials (Thapa 2005: 24) exercise their status and power in the accumulation of urban property (Norbu 2008; Lorway, Dorji, Bradley, Ramesh, Isaac & Blanchard 2011) and preside over the rental system of apartments.<sup>3</sup> There is no rental rate fixed by the state as the Bhutan Tenancy Act 2015 (Chapter IV, clause 19) gives freedom to the parties (landlords and tenant) to determine monthly rent. Given the situation of housing shortage in the city, only 11.1 percent of the households in Thimphu *Thromde* own their dwellings (NSB 2017) implying that the vast majority are renting their apartments, and the absence of standardised rent rate according to the unit, size and quality of the apartment, landlords play a monopoly in determining the rent by charging more than the actual price it would cost. This makes the tenants one of the most disadvantaged groups among the urban dwellers and victims of private house owners (Penjor 1999). With no alternative left, many tenants are compelled to stay and keep paying more than 30 percent of their income on rent (Dendup 2016)

The identification and demarcation of area development also worked to escalate land value, giving rise to opportunities for wealth creation, and real estate speculation by landowners further makes land unaffordable to those who are less affluent (MoWHS 2008a). It therefore appears that the absence of systematic and effective state policies or legislation against the renting or sales of buildings and land in the urban area works to further augment the power and wealth of urban landowners, while the absence of taxes levied by the state on associated income (unearned income) disadvantages the public sector (Norbu 2008).

These contemporary trends are giving rise to 'urban privilege' in a modern, capitalist sense. Unequal access begets unequal exchange and eventually this augmenting inequality is expected to increase over time. In India, inequalities in the urban sector are usually associated with a hierarchical social structure. Interestingly, such concerns are now also recognised in the

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<sup>3</sup> The term 'dominant group' referred here is not an expression of the class structure emerging from the social (spatial) relations of production, but a dialectically defined component of the general relations of production, relations which are simultaneously social and spatial Soja (1980:208).

Thimphu Structure Plan, which says: “In every Local Area Plan (LAP) of the city, a small high-density village of low income units should be constructed for domestic servants who will work in the area” (MoWHS 2004:38). Thimphu Thromde development control regulation 2016 also provides special regulation for the development of residential schemes for the low-income group within the urban village (Thimphu Thromde 2016).

In the quest for providing affordable housing, the National Housing Development Corporation (NHDCL) has taken up numerous housing projects based on various income brackets. Perhaps the earliest such initiative was the construction of the Changjiji housing colony in Thimphu, which is occupied by the civil servants from lower income groups since December 2005 (“Thirty five families”, 2013). I argue that the creation of such spaces, and associated practices, indicate a new form of hierarchy, one that feeds into a neoliberal ideology. Of course, a hierarchical social structure has long been intrinsic to Bhutanese society, as can be read into the existence of social classes such as: *threlpa*, *drapa*, *nangzen* and *suma* (Lhendup & Zangpo 2014). While these forms of social stratification no longer exist in explicit terms, in its place have emerged new forms of social hierarchies that result from current development initiatives. This suggests that urban challenges can no longer be confined to issues such as, social infrastructure, planning and management but must also take account of new forms of social stratification generated through the neoliberal logic of accumulation. Emerging new trends of social ordering observed in Thimphu city appear identical, in many respects, to contemporary social hierarchies that characterise urban centres of many developing countries. A relevant question that can therefore be posed is to what extent the popular assertion of ‘Thimphu as a reflection of hope, aspirations and dreams of the people, image of who we are, image of Bhutan, the mirror of Bhutan’ (MoWHS 2004) can be justified in the light of such developments.

Relatedly, spatial consciousness has now entered the public discourse. This spatial consciousness, or what may be called ‘the geographical imagination’, as Harvey (1973:24) writes,

enables the individual to recognise the role of space and place in his own biography, to relate to the spaces he sees around him, and to recognise how transactions between individuals and between organisations are affected by the space that separates them.

Such spatial consciousness regarding contemporary urban space of Thimphu is mirrored in various lived experiences of individuals, neighbourhoods, or the community as a whole. A recent film by Chand Rai titled: ‘Thimphu city’, projects the livelihoods of seven individuals and attempts to identify the patterns of their everyday lives. These seven characters represent the composite life of people’s perception, imagination, negotiation and experiences of everyday life in Thimphu city - rich and powerful people, successful yet fighting their own inner demons,

struggling and finding it hard to make ends meet, strong and independent yet facing illusions, people who want it all but loses all at the end, a transgender seeking love and identity, people with hope and dreams and competition over space (“Seven lives one city”, 2017; Rai, 2017). All these experiences reveal how Thimphu’s urban space has changed significantly in the process of the country’s modernisation.

While there are contradicting views by scholars and researchers on these changing urban social forms, one can certainly identify in these changes elements of the new global order. For instance, Bhutanese society was long characterized by close-knit relationships that could contain social and civic problems. However, such intangible relationships are largely lacking in urban settlements such as Thimphu, where life is increasingly becoming individualistic and nucleated, leading to a reduced sphere of social life (Ura 1999). In the given asymmetric social matrix, an attempt to find space for an ordinary person could be a Herculean task. It is therefore imperative that the development and growth of Thimphu city needs to be examined alongside existing and emerging socio-spatial structures and processes. The implementation of urban planning must hence take account of the vertical and horizontal cross-section of people who together constitute the social morphology of the city. Thimphu city can thrive only when planned development strategies recognise the defining characteristic of the city, and which are multidimensional in nature – high density, mixed usage, stimulus, transactions and above all diversity (Montgomery 1995; Amin & Graham 1997).

The slow entry of consumerism and the ideology of accumulation in social and economic practices has increased competition over the control of urban resources – the land and real estate market in particular – and this intensified the degree of disparity in the urban socio-spatial structure. Sections of the city, like Motithang, continue to retain its tag of ‘locality of the elite and affluent suburb’ while Changzamtog predominantly houses the lower income group (Norbu 2008; Misra, Thakur & Singh 2013). One can thus visualise intra-city spatial relations as locality indicates place identity and social position in the urban setting, which is a common urban feature noticed in many large cities in places across the world where pockets of the city are known for their high concentration of either elites or marginalized sections of the population.

The spatial dimensions of urban space is one of the concerns accorded in urban development policies, yet the existing development plans and policies have apparently failed to address the issues. Housing for the poor, for instance, has not been adequately addressed in the Local Area Plans (LAPs) and the local communities, particularly the poor, are not engaged in the development dialogue (MoWHS 2008). Inability of the current development policies to address the issues (Bajaj 2014), coupled with a lack of coordination and compliance of the people further intensifies urban problems. Though there is no concrete information about the numbers of urban poor, estimated figures shows that 800 to 2900 households are poor and vulnerable (MoWHS 2008a:19). Particular areas, such as opposite to the vegetable market, around the three

water tanks in Motithang, behind RMA in Kawajangsa, near the Youth Hostel, behind the Ministry of Labour and Human Resources in Motithang, Kala Bazaar, and Changzamtong are identified as poor areas (MoWHS 2008a:6). Most of these informal settlements are inhabited by municipal workers and labourers, and by those engaged in the informal sector. Even though their extents and numbers are small, it has become a challenging task for the state to address the issue (MoWHS 2016).

## **Concluding remarks**

Cities have become focal points in contemporary development studies. They play a crucial role in social, economic, and political transformations; serve as centres of economic innovation, political engagement, and cultural exchange, and constitute arenas in which human activities thrive and develop in response to economic and social needs (Harris & Ullman 1945). Development dynamics of cities are influenced by the ways in which human activities are arranged, organised and by the ways means are deployed to fulfill social needs. While human activities of different kinds continue to interact, meet and negotiate, urban spaces gradually get exposed to a process of 'spatial segregation' with the tendency of the dominant group gaining greater control and influence over spatial activities. One consequence of this is the production of conflicting spaces associated with intra-city spatial relations, resulting in different kinds of localities. Therefore, the agendas of inclusive urban development policy needs to be actualised by taking people as the focal of development and by allotting priority to the upliftment of the poor. Only in this way can Thimphu city become a 'dream city' for all.

Thimphu city has already become a centre of attraction in the country. There is a constant flow of migrants to the city, exerting huge pressure on urban infrastructure. Consequently, existing infrastructure has not been able to keep at pace with rapid population growth. This has resulted in unplanned development in peripheral areas, chronic shortage of housing, lack of clean and reliable drinking water, issues of solid waste management, traffic congestion and pollution, and increasing issues of crime and safety (GNHC 2013). People from rural areas come to Thimphu city with the hope of assimilating themselves into its urban culture and to secure modern forms of employment. Oftentimes, however, their aspirations descend into frustration and a sense of hopelessness, among others due to mismatch of skills, which, in turn, has contributed to a range of social issues. Associated problems include increasing crime rate, unemployment, rising numbers of commercial sex workers, amongst others (Lorway, Dorji, Bradley; Ramesh, Isaac & Blanchard, 2011, RENEW 2015; GNHC 2016).

Given such emerging issues, alternative measures to ease urban tensions, as the Bhutan National Urban Policy 2008 envisaged, could be the creation of growth centres in the country and the subsequent redistribution of the urban population (MoWHS, 2008b). This would also

contribute to improving regional equality. The roles and contributions of small towns in regional development deserve special attention, not only to reduce regional inequality but also to accelerate the economic growth of the country. There is a clear need to stress the development of local towns to serve as economic, social and cultural centres of their respective areas; small towns, after all, are an integral part of the local economic landscape. The nature and extent of economic linkages between rural towns and their hinterland constitute a key factor of local development (Wandschneider 2004, Register 2013).

While the urban development strategy of the country emphatically focuses on Thimphu city with the intention of making a dream city for all the Bhutanese, development strategies that focus on regional growth centres need equal attention. Thimphu, being an administrative seat of the country with the services sector as the dominant activity, cannot accommodate all aspiring urban migrants. The latest report of Bhutan Living Standard Survey report (2017) shows that Thimphu thromde now has the highest unemployed rate in the country with 6.8 percent (NSB 2017). The relocation and redistribution of population to reduce urban tensions would be feasible only through the creation of centers of opportunities in the peripheral regions. The plan of the state to turn Thimphu city into 'a dream city for all' would therefore seem overtly ambitious.

Apart from efforts by the state, there is also need for further academic engagement on urban planning and space. The importance of small towns and urban centres in regional development need to be brought in to the mainstream of academic research. This can help develop policy measures relevant to the actual realities and requirements of peoples, and at the same time justify the development programmes and policies embarked on to enhance the quality of life, and, finally, to fully achieve the goals of Gross National Happiness.

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