

Bhutan Press Mirror

===== A JAB Occasional Journal =====

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Contents

Message from the President	1
JAB: who we are	2
 Perspectives	
Bhutan's Press freedom drawback <i>Rinzin Wangchuk</i>	5
Covid-19 and challenges for mainstream media <i>Tashi Dema</i>	12
COVID-19: a threat to fundamental of freedom of media in Bhutan <i>Sonam Tshering</i>	15
Battling crowds, virus and isolation <i>Nima Wangdi</i>	19
Coping with fake news in times of Covid-19 pandemic <i>Passang Lhamo</i>	25
The Return of the Natives <i>Gopilal Acharya</i>	28

Stories From the Field

ཕྱི་རང་རྫོང་ཁག་ནང་གྲུང་སྟོང་གི་ དཀའ་ངལ་ཡོད་རུང་ མར་འབབ་འགྱུ་དོ་ཡོད་པ། མོ་རྒྱན་དོ་རྩེ།	32
Age-Old Melodies from Trongsa <i>Sonam Lhendup</i>	37
གནམ་གཤིས་འགྱུར་བཤོད་ཀྱི་ གདོང་ལེན་ལུ་ ག་སྒྲིག་འབད་བའི་བསྐང་ཡོད་པ། བཀྲིས་ཕུན་ཆོག་ས།	42
Aerial Ropeways: A Vital but Forgotten Rural Lifeline <i>Sonam Yangzom</i>	45
ས་ཁ་མཐོ་སའི་ མི་སེར་ཚུ་གི་དོན་ལུ་ ལ་ནོར་གྱི་ཨ་ཕ་ གསེར་དང་དབྱེ་བ་མེད་པ། ཉི་མ་དབང་འདུས།	48
Rukha community and its famed Nya Dosem <i>Sonam Penjor</i>	52
JAB's Activities: Some Highlights	59

Message from the President

The year 2020 has been a difficult lesson for all of us. Despite the many terrific achievements the world has made in the field of science and technology, we were caught off guard by the outbreak of the novel coronavirus.

The Covid-19 pandemic, therefore, disrupted the Sixth Annual Journalism Award (AJA) the Journalists' Association of Bhutan was supposed to organise on 3rd May 2020 coinciding with the World Press Freedom Day. The event is an annual feature that celebrates excellence in journalism by recognising meaningful contributions made by individual journalists.

Due to the same reason, JAB could not publish the fourth edition of Bhutan Press Mirror. It is an annual journal that mirrors the situation of journalism and highlights issues related to the journalism in Bhutan.

JAB is happy to announce that the Sixth AJA will be organised on June 2 this year to reignite the passion for journalism, encourage journalists to pursue stories, and most importantly, contribute towards uplifting of professional and ethical standards of journalism in Bhutan.

Prior to AJA, JAB is launching its annual journal coinciding with the World Press Freedom Day on 3rd May. The Bhutanese mainstream media during the Covid-19 pandemic faced new low. The pandemic did affect the media not only financially but also in terms of reporting. With a plethora of social media users breaking news every day, the media landscape in the country has changed drastically within the last one year.

Subject knowledge on Covid-19, medicines, microbiology and tests were minimal, almost non-existent, increasing challenges for those doing articles. In addition, journalists were also vulnerable to infection. It is very unfortunate that one of our JAB members and working journalists tested positive for Covid-19 while in the line of duty on April 6.

Access to information has remained still the biggest challenge despite having a Prime Minister open to the press and responds to even late-night calls. The bureaucracy has devised more ways to delay access to information and inconvenience to reporters which discourage many from pursuing impactful stories.

Despite the gloom brought about by the pandemic, the media industry does have a cause for some celebrations. Both Kuensel Corporation Ltd and Bhutan Broadcasting Service Corporation (BBSC) saw the return of veteran journalists as their Chief Executive Officers. With Ugyen Penjor and Kaka Tshering heading Kuensel and BBSC respectively, there are new and renewed hopes for the industry to make fresh leaps in professionalism and survival of the country's struggling media industry.

Happy reading

Rinzin Wangchuk

JAB: who we are

The Journalists' Association of Bhutan (JAB) is a registered mutual benefit civil society organisation with the primary mandate to promote freedom of expression, right to information, and professional development of journalists in the country. In addition, JAB has the mandate to foster a code of ethics and professional conduct among journalists, deal with common and individual challenges the Bhutanese journalists face and explore opportunities to advance journalism profession in Bhutan.

JAB is governed by an elected Board of Directors chaired by the President. The Executive Director heads the secretariat that reports to the Board. The Board guides the planning, implementation, and supervision of all the activities of JAB.

i) Purposes and functions of JAB:

- Protect and promote the constitutional right to information, freedom of expression and media
- Maintain and promote a high standard of ethical behaviour in the practice of journalism
- Foster a growing number of professionally trained journalists in the country
- Protect journalists from hazards such as threats, harassments, and litigation from interest groups
- Support journalists who are seriously injured or permanently disabled or killed in the line of duty through compensatory grants
- Promote interaction and exchange of ideas for the professional development of its members.
- Explore funding sources to collaborate in professional education programmes for journalists
- Institute mechanism to recognise journalists through awards and grants
- Stimulate and sustain professional debate on crucial issues through seminars, workshops, and discussion fora.

Board Members



Rinzin Wangchuk
President



Needrup Zangpo
Board Member, BMF



Sonam Penjor
Board Member, Print



Sonam Wangdi
Board Member, TV



Thinlei Penjor Gyeltshen
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Kinley Tshering
**Board Member,
Freelance**

Secretariat



Namgay Zam
Executive Director



Sangay Choki
Programme Officer



Cheten Norbu
Office Secretary

A large, light gray, stylized letter 'P' serves as the background for the entire page. It is positioned on the left side, with its vertical stem and the upper curve of its bowl extending across the frame.

PERSPECTIVES

Bhutan's Press freedom drawback



Rinzin Wangchuk

JAB President

Dzongkha editor

Kuensel

He is the first recipient

of Jigme Singye

Wangchuck Prestigious

Journalism Award

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Bhutan is probably the safest place in the region to be a journalist. The 2021 World Press Freedom Index ranked Bhutan the 65th out of 180 countries, up two places from the 67th in 2020.

The France-based organisation, Reporters Without Borders (RSF), rank the performance of 180 countries based on a range of criteria that include media pluralism and independence; respect for the safety and freedom of journalists; the legislative framework; transparency, and the institutional and infrastructural environment in which the media operate.

Bhutan could score well on most. Media pluralism has improved over the years and the country has not experienced any threat or violence unlike in other countries in the region. If journalists value their independence, the elected government respects it.

The 2021 World Press Freedom Index compiled by RSF shows that journalism, which is arguably the best vaccine against the virus of disinformation, is totally blocked or seriously impeded in 73 countries and constrained in 59 others, which together represent 73 percent of the countries evaluated. These countries are classified as having “very bad”, “bad” or “problematic” environments for press freedom, and are identified accordingly in black, red or orange on the World Press Freedom map.

Bhutan is identified as orange which means the media operate in a problematic environment. The report stated that self-censorship held back emancipation in Bhutan. It claimed that the level of self-censorship continued to be very high in the land of Gross National Happiness (GNH) because many journalists avoided covering sensitive issues for fear of appearing to challenge the social order.

There are, however, challenges, mostly related to the financial environment. Investment in the media is lacking and without financial independence, press freedom can be compromised. The media is not a lucrative business and media owners or managers do not risk investing in journalism.

Newspapers around the world survive on advertising and the private media appealed for government advertising. This presented a significant conundrum for champions of the independent press.

For the media to grow, it must be free and independent. Free and independent in terms of content, and not ownership. This is the biggest challenge that the media industry in Bhutan is facing today.

Since the government had slashed advertisement budgets as part of austerity measures even before the Covid-19 pandemic, private

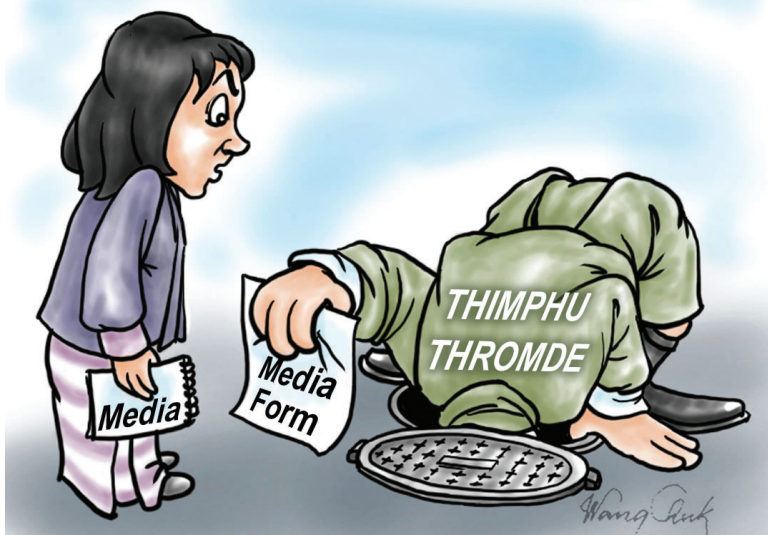
media houses again appealed for government subsidies to survive. Today, the government provides a subsidy of Nu 4.3 million (USD 58,900) annually to the private newspapers through Bhutan Media Foundation (BFM). This situation begs many questions.

The elected government has also been supporting the media development and ensuring that they are effectively involved in governance. The government is committed to ensure access to information to the media. That is why the “meet the press” initiative launched by the first democratically elected government in 2008 is continued by the subsequent governments as a part of a democratic exercise.

It is an unprecedented and unique move, the Cabinet of the ruling government makes itself available to the press every month to answer questions and clarify doubts about actions and omissions of the government. Such are interactions only go to show that greater transparency benefits all players involved.

Druk Nyamrup Tshogpa's (DNT) government held 42 formal meet the press, excluding the Covid-19 press conferences, after forming the government in November 2018.

Seek and Hide ?



To know what I'm doing, fill in the form with your questions. Only then will I decided when I'm going to take my head out of the Rut !

Courtesy: Kuensel

65

in the 2021 World Press
Freedom Index

RANKING

↑ **+2**

67 in 2020

GLOBAL SCORE

↑ **-0.04**

28.90 in 2020

📅 Ranking since 2013

CONTACTS

📧 RSF

🐦 RSF_Asia

🐦 RSF_AsiaPacific

Although the interaction of journalists with government officials was restricted during the pandemic, politicians including the prime minister are accessible to almost every journalist through phone, e-mail or any other communication channels. This is one of the reasons why Bhutan ranks high on international press freedom index.

Patchy access

At the heart of freedom of speech or expression lies access to information, which is still a major issue that Bhutanese journalists face today, compounded by redtapism and bureaucracy.

This arises from a lack of understanding about the media among newsmakers or those who control information. And this is not helped by the layers of bureaucratic procedures and rigid hierarchies involved in getting timely information. Beyond media, researchers and scholars are also dealing with the same obstacles.

In an age when the media is relaying news and information real-time, authorities expect journalists to seek permission even to take a picture or shoot a video.

The Thimphu municipality's recent decision asking media professionals to seek written permission to access information has not gone well with journalists. The municipality claims the protocol was introduced to help both the institution and media organisations to maintain accountability. Journalists argue that the tight deadlines do not give them three to four days that the municipality is expected to take to respond to the media's queries.

However, this is not a new bureaucratic protocol in the country. The Royal Civil Service Commission (RCSC) has been using a similar protocol for journalists seeking information from the commission. One of the reporters with a print media firm said that she has been sending scripted questions in advance to RCSC while following any of the commission's articles. "This only further complicates the already lengthy process while gathering information," she said.

Media coverage is often misunderstood as attacking the organisation or institution if it highlights their inefficiency or incompetency. Indeed, there is a misunderstanding that sharing information with the media is doing media a favour. The information is not for the media, it is for the people. Media is only relaying it.

There were some instances where the authorities threatened journalists and media houses. The Royal Audit Authority officials in 2020 charged a newspaper for publishing its report on dredging of riverbed materials. In another incident, a bureaucrat lodged a complaint against the newspaper for publishing content the individual claimed was not on the record. The complaint was resolved after the Media Council of Bhutan intervened. The usual modus operandi is to intimidate reporters through such complaints and harass them over calls and summons to meeting with authorities.

The media improves transparency in governance. If something is

going wrong, it has to be reported. If big decisions are taken that impact the masses, people have to be informed. And if there are plans and programmes intended for the people, transparency is important to ensure that the benefit reaches the intended target and builds confidence in the system.

In addition, the judiciary has become increasingly impenetrable to journalists seeking information. Current practice sees only reporters with “connections” gaining access to information. A judge or a court official will readily share information only if a reporter has good relations with him or her.

Lack of access to information on the ongoing case of criminal conspiracy, mutiny, abettor of mutiny and other criminal offences involving the senior most justice of Supreme Court, former commandant of Royal Body Guard and a district court judge at the Thimphu district court is a testament to the impenetrability of these institutions.

The media was not allowed to enter the courtroom on grounds of the case being “high profile” and “sensitive”. Court officials, instead, asked reporters to seek information from the defendants.

The media’s duty is to report facts, but with hostile officials and authorities, this is often compromised.

According to Lawyer Sonam Tshering, the freedom of the media is not about the media (JAB’s Press Mirror, Volume III). It is about the basic rights of the citizens to be informed and be able to make the legislature, executive, and judiciary accountability for their actions and strengthen democracy in the country.

The media’s role in scrutinising the judicial actions and impact of its decisions on the public is almost non-existent. The decisions of the courts are all public documents and the media has the right to scrutinise how a court has arrived at a particular decision and whether the decision has caused injustice to any party involved in the case. This will make the judiciary accountable for its decisions.

However, the media mostly remained silent on any decision of the courts, let alone reporting what the courts have said in their decisions and proceedings. The media’s own shortcomings also preclude accurate reporting when it comes to legal matters on which the media lacks specialisation.

Given all these issues concerning access to information, the Right to Information (RTI) Act becomes all the more crucial. The National Assembly of Bhutan had passed the RTI Bill in 2014 to curb corruption and ensure transparency in the government. However, the National Council (Upper House) did not deliberate on the Bill and it has now become a dead bill.

Pandemic year

With the outbreak of Covid-19 in Bhutan, every public office and authority, including the Prime Minister’s Office (PMO) and health

ministry, took to social media to break news and share information. In most cases, journalists were playing catch up and regurgitating what was already out there. The year 2020 saw journalists immersed in increased competition with various platforms and sources to disseminate information.

Bhutan confirmed its first Covid-19 case in a 76-year-old tourist on March 6, 2020. On March 26, the first Bhutanese to test positive for the virus was a student who returned from Europe.

Bhutan experienced two episodes of nationwide lockdown. First, the entire country was locked down on August 11, 2020, for 21 days. It was not the smoothest of lockdowns. Despite having the best of standard operating procedures (SoPs) on paper, many teething issues surfaced during the first lockdown. Communication gaps, poor coordination and shortage of essential goods exposed the lack of preparedness and inadequate response to the pandemic.

People remained stranded as movements were restricted. While information was heavily filtered before it was made public during the initial days, officials themselves struggled with lack of data.

On December 20, Prime Minister Dr Lotay Tshering told the public to stay home, again. It started with locking down the capital city, home to about 150,000 people. Although the government maintained that the lockdown this time was more organised, the outbreak was 10 times bigger than the one in August. The number of Covid-19 cases in Bhutan with a total population of little over 750,000 reached 1,066 in April 2021.

Many believe that Bhutan could not have been more prepared for a public health emergency of this magnitude. This was made possible with guidance from His Majesty The King, who personally oversaw all the containment and response efforts since day one.

The Prime Minister, health minister and foreign minister had decades of experience in healthcare, which reassured the people. Health Minister Dechen Wangmo, a public health expert, said that having medical professionals leading the country's response to a health crisis was an added advantage. "It helped in making rational and well-informed decisions."

The World Health Organisation (WHO) applauded Bhutan's response to the pandemic. WHO representative to Bhutan, Dr Rui Paulo de Jesus said that the uniqueness of Bhutan's fight against the pandemic was the 'whole-of-the-society' and 'whole-of-government' approach guided by His Majesty at the helm (Kuensel, January 2021). "Today, under His Majesty's guidance, Bhutan's response to Covid-19 is second to none and serves as a testimony of how compassionate and visionary leaders can make a difference in the world."

On the positive side, the pandemic brought out the good side of the Bhutanese people. The country's success story so far in the fight against the pandemic, according to officials, was because of the cooperation rendered by the people. Public solidarity was at a high,

480,330

Covishield
(AstraZeneca)
vaccinated since
March 27, 2021

and farmers sent vegetables, rice, and dairy products to quarantine centres and landlords waived rents, banks deferred loans instalments and interest was waived. The Druk Gyalpo's Relief Kidu (DGRK) has helped about 52,644 individuals sustain livelihoods and more than 139,096 loan account holders benefited from the interest payment support during the Covid-19 pandemic (April 2020 to March 2021).

Covid-19 vaccination

Bhutan became the second country in the world after Israel to administer the first dose of COVID-19 vaccine to all its eligible population, including the media personnel.

The mass rollout of the Indian made Covishield (AstraZeneca) vaccines began on a high note with Prime Minister Dr Lotay Tshering and other cabinet ministers receiving the jab on the first day.

Despite the global demand for vaccines, Bhutan received its first batch of Covishield vaccine (150,000 doses) on January 20 as a gift from the government of India. Bhutan could have initiated the vaccination, but it opted to wait for more evidence and data on the vaccines.

From March 27 to April 29, 480,330 people have received the Covishield vaccination. The reason why Bhutan opted for a time-based nationwide vaccination campaign was to achieve herd immunity in the community.

The challenges

The 100 journalists registered and accredited with the Media Council of Bhutan and Journalists' Association of Bhutan (JAB) faced a new low during the Covid-19 pandemic. The pandemic affected the media not only financially but also in terms of reporting.

There was immense pressure on the media, from social media as well as from gossip and rumour, which is more powerful than the formal media. Due to lack of cyber laws in the country, people spreading fake news through social media could not be held accountable.

The first journalist in Bhutan tested positive for Covid-19 while in the line of duty on April 6. The reporter was a member of Prime Minister Dr Lotay Tshering's entourage to Dhaka from March 19 to 25 for the celebration of the 50th anniversary of Bangladesh's independence.

With a plethora of social media users breaking news every day, the media landscape in the country has changed drastically within the last one year. The mainstream media today is battling rapid fall in revenue and is challenged with decreasing readership. Their sustenance is at stake more than ever before.

Access to information has remained a challenge despite having a Prime Minister who is open to the press and responds to even late-night calls. The bureaucracy has devised more ways to delay access to information and inconvenience to reporters which discourage many

from pursuing impactful stories.

Given the high attrition rate in the industry, the media houses have constraints in developing capacity to cover critical issues. Most of the newsrooms have young journalists with limited experience and lack the insight and understanding of matters that need time.

The need for professionalism in Bhutanese journalism has consistently been flagged as a gap that must be addressed. The focus of organisations involved in media related activities should be on training, to upskill the entire industry. As the media industry grapples with these developments and irrespective of the changes in the press freedom ranking, self-censorship, access to information and professionalism remains the media's biggest challenges.

Covid-19 and challenges for mainstream media



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The Covid-19 pandemic has changed the face of journalism worldwide. Journalists, who are taught to be at the scene to report, have to stay indoors but continue to inform the people.

With movement restrictions and frequent lockdowns, most Bhutanese were confined to their homes.

Staying away from home and family, some media professionals stayed in their offices, exposing themselves like any other frontline worker to inform the nation during the pandemic. Others did their work from home.

From informing about the emergence of Covid-19 when international media started reporting it to localising the impacts and undertaking full-scale coverage, the Bhutanese media attempted to fulfil its role during the pandemic. Journalists made the coverage on Covid-19 a priority.

But it was not an easy job, especially when it required journalists to get facts and truth without reliable and accurate sources.

Information was limited and the media houses faced a competition from the ministries and the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) to 'break news'. The mainstream media followed the social media pages of the ministries and PMO. There was also the challenge of providing timely news when journalists were not allowed to move freely, could not be at the scene or could not conduct in-person interviews. Dzongkhags that followed their own Covid-19 protocol made their own rules on the movement of reporters.

Since the first Covid-19 positive case was reported in the country on March 6 last year, the media had to rely on press conferences given by the Prime Minister or the Health Minister for information.

Most of the times, information relayed was not complete or accurate, forcing people to speculate that the authorities were hiding information and to blame the media for not doing their job well.

To make matters worse, the public authorities issued several reminders asking people to follow PMO and government agencies for reliable information, justifying that the 'information within the public sphere may create misinformation, confusion and panic'. In the process, the news media was seen as the secondary source of news and information, not to be trusted for accurate and reliable news and information. It undermined the role of the media. It

“
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affected public trust in the media.

A senior journalist wrote on Facebook that coronavirus changed the face of the media in the country. “Ministries and the PMO itself took over the roles of media altogether, leaving the media houses to fight over the clean picked bones.”

Some people were vocal and criticised the media for only sharing PMO’s and health ministry’s information. The mainstream media had to rely on what the government wanted to share, and could not delve further.

A prominent lawyer, who teaches law in the only law college in the country, wrote, “These days MoH and PMO taught good skills to all our mainstream media to copy-paste their reports to make it breaking news.” He also called on the media to do in-depth investigation.

A cross-sectional study conducted among medical students revealed that the main source of information on Covid-19 was social media, of which 85 percent of the respondents said they got information from Facebook pages of the health ministry and 80 percent from PMO’s page. Only 78 percent received information from television and 63 percent from newspapers.

The study shows how the mainstream media, with its limited access to information, could not fulfil its mandate to inform the people despite the effort many journalists made.

The mainstream media’s role, therefore, was relegated to verifying information on social media and combating fake news as misinformation and rumours on the pandemic spread.

Journalists also faced the challenge of talking to relevant officials, who were either barred from talking to the media or were always engaged in committee meetings. Most information was censored during press conferences, where even the questions the media asked were selectively picked for answers.

The media had its own limitations. With limited knowledge of infectious diseases, there was no capacity or expertise to do investigation and detailed analysis of the situation. The knowledge of Covid-19, medicines, microbiology and tests was minimal, if not non-existent, among journalists increasing their challenge of doing in-depth stories.

Many areas, including the Paro airport, were closed to the media.

Too much focus on Covid-19 issues and stories derailed the news coverage as other important issues lost significance and importance. However, some stories on the impact of the pandemic and the lockdowns on human life made a difference. Reporting on the issues helped the central and local governments tackle issues better.

How can media function better in such a crisis?

The main role of the mainstream media is to inform the people and initiate healthy and constructive public discourse.

The Covid-19 pandemic revealed how the mainstream media's role to inform the nation could change during a pandemic. Access to information is crucial for public good and it should be facilitated. But positive stories on how every Bhutanese played their part in combating the pandemic and helping each other raised people's hope. Providing solutions to problems the pandemic created also helped.

In the digital era, online sources and meetings were helpful to media professionals in reporting. Exploring independent and reliable sources have become even more important.

COVID-19: a threat to fundamental of freedom of media in Bhutan



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Introduction

In over a year since the Covid-19 pandemic hit the world, it caused numerous prolonged disruptions to every sphere of human activity around the world. Legally, civil liberties and political rights were either suspended, surrendered, or forced to surrender, contractual obligations became impossible, attracting force majeure clauses, travel restrictions affected the right to movement, public gatherings prohibitions affected the right to peaceful assembly and freedom of expression curtailed.

The freedom of media, including television, radio, and the publishing industry, faced similar challenges. Globally, it was reported that the mainstream media in advertising revenue reduced from \$ 49.245 billion in 2019 to 41.241 billion in 2020. It is expected to further decrease to \$ 35.93 billion in 2024 (-6.11%) in the next five years. Similarly, the circulation revenue dropped from 58.714 billion in 2019 to 52.163 billion in 2020 and is projected to further drop to \$ 50.411 billion in the next five years (Radcliffe, 2020).

On the contrary, the governments enjoyed unprecedented authority and discretion to contain the pandemic. With such power, the governments around the world controlled not just the flow of information but also on how much and with whom information should be shared. This article attempts to provide a brief critical analysis of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the freedom of media in Bhutan.

Foundations of Freedom of Media and Covid-19

Constitutionally, unlike even some of the most liberal democracies like India, Bhutan's Constitution explicitly guarantees the "freedom of the press, radio and television and other forms of dissemination of information, including electronic" under Article 7 Section 5. This is because, the success of democracy relies on the extent of participation of citizens in governance through criticism, discussion or suggestions and oppose the government when the government fails (Clay Calvert, 2018). Recognising the pivotal role of the media in strengthening the democratic culture, His Majesty said "Newspapers, television, radio and the Internet – must play a very important role. The media will be vital in keeping people well informed and in encouraging debate and participation - key to a

vibrant democracy.” (Concluding Ceremony of the Third Session of the First Parliament, 2009).

Article 1 (13) of the Constitution provides clear, “Separation of the Executive, the Legislature and the Judiciary.” However, this pandemic forced the judiciary and the legislature to take a back seat and the executive was vested with the enormous authority to deal with the pandemic. Similarly, while freedom of media is guaranteed by the Constitution, Covid-19 posed a serious threat to the independence and freedom of the media. The government controlled the entire media on how and what it reports to the public. In the name of fighting fake news and misinformation, the government issued a public advisory to only trust the information coming out of the Prime Minister’s Office or Ministry of Health undermining the independence of the mainstream media.

Right after Bhutan was hit by the pandemic, an editorial stated that “Media improves transparency in governance. If something is going wrong in the government, it must be reported. If big decisions that impact the masses are made, people must be informed. If there are plans and programmes intended for the people, transparency is important to ensure that it reaches the intended target and build confidence in the system” (Kuensel, 2020). The same editorial further cast doubts on freedom of the press. It stated that “There is a misunderstanding that sharing information with media is doing media a favour” and often, “authorities threatening the media” (Kuensel, 2020). This is an example of the desperation of the mainstream media in getting access to information.

Threat to the foundations of the media

The Bhutanese media are mostly dependent on government funding which generally comes in the form of advertisements. Due to the serious impact on the economic activity in the country, the government was forced to cut down on its expenditure and public spending. Such measures threatened the very survival of some media houses whose income is heavily dependent on the advertisement revenue. Further, circulation, one of the primary rights of the media, equally suffered due to the requirement of physical distance in the working environment. The ripple effect of such measures is on the freedom of media as the media houses could not afford to employ additional manpower but instead forced to reduce the number of employees.

Impact on the right to information and freedom of speech and expression

Article 7(2) (3) & (5) guarantees every Bhutanese the right to “Freedom of speech, opinion, expression, information and vote.” These rights can be exercised effectively only if there is the freedom of media.

The pandemic led to rapid increase in information consumption as well as timely access to information. However, due to state control on the supply of timely and accurate information and difficulty in accessing information by the mainstream media, social media was often inundated with unverified and fake news and misinformation. With the institution of quarantine across the country, interviewing people in quarantine became almost impossible. For example, there were numerous reports of poor quality of food in the quarantine facilities but the mainstream media could not confirm such reports. Similarly, all the institutions and offices remained closed for most part of the year and the work from home policy was implemented. This further jeopardised the access to information since contacting officials became difficult, if not impossible, in certain circumstances affecting the right to information, right to interview and right to correct information.

Lockdowns - freedom of media paralysed

The “media in times of crisis play an essential role and have a particular responsibility to provide accurate and reliable information to the public – such information are crucial for our health. This is reflected in the increased consumption of news from established media sources, as the public is again placing trust in the explanatory and reporting power of quality journalism” (Radu, 2020).

With the lockdowns, freedom of media is further strangled and the media’s ability to inform the nation and get correct information became impossible at times. While on one hand there was an explosion of misinformation on social media, on the other, the mainstream media was left in information hunger. During the first national lockdown, at least there were regular government press conferences with some opportunities for the media to ask questions and scrutinise the government and relay the public opinion to the government. This changed with the second lockdown. The second lockdown saw a complete shutdown of information. The government decided not to hold even a single press conference and its speeches on the national television was considered press briefings. The media’s right to interview, right to verify information, and the right to question the government came to a halt. As a result, during the second lockdown, the mainstream media were forced to become the mouthpiece and post office of the government. The only update they could give was by copy-pasting the information from the PMO and MOH social media sites (Lhaden, 2020).

Conclusion

This pandemic challenged the fundamentals of media freedom across the world and Bhutan is no exception. While media consumption

increased drastically, the restrictions to contain the pandemic paralysed the independence and freedom of media. Misinformation and fake news further worsened the functioning of the mainstream media. The government alone heavily controlled the media, including what to report and when to report in many instances in the guise of fighting misinformation or fake news. Such state interventions raised doubts on information obtained by the mainstream media. The reduction in the government budget for the media impacted the media's very survival. In short, the right to health and collective right threatened the fundamental freedoms of the media.

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Battling crowds, virus and isolation

A journalist's experience of contracting coronavirus and being trailed by colleagues for news



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Coronavirus is a dangerous and invisible enemy. It is omnipresent. Nobody should underestimate its presence and non-presence. It could be hiding in the place where one thinks is the safest.

About a month ago, I was in Bangladesh on an official trip. I knew it was risky to visit the country where the coronavirus cases were soaring. My office had nominated me, and there was no way I could dismiss it in fear of the virus. I was to cover the birth centenary of the father of Bangladesh, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, and the golden jubilee of Bangladesh's independence.

I was cautioned not to roam places as one would usually do when abroad. I was cautious. I always wore a facemask from the day I left the country and carried a hand sanitiser along.

When I headed for the arrival counter at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport in Dhaka, I started feeling insecure. I doubted if whatever precaution I was taking was good enough to keep me safe from the virus. At the airport, passengers did not seem to care about social distancing despite written notifications. "No mask, no services", read one of the notifications. But the passengers wore a mask only when they needed services at the counter.

The foot markings at the airport counters, where people were supposed to stand and wait, failed to live up to their purpose. Passengers crowded, almost rubbing against one another. The airport authorities could do nothing much about it given the huge number of people. I was out of the airport in about half an hour.

I headed to the Royal Bhutan Embassy at Gulshion 2 in Dhaka with five friends in the car. I came across many people in the towns and along the roads without wearing a facemask. We stayed and ate at the embassy for four days and did not go out. Two local helpers that the embassy employed cooked for us. One of them was said to have tested positive for the virus after we left the embassy for our hotel. I am not tracing my source of infection to the cook since no other team member tested positive. We were then shifted to Hotel Continental.

March 24 was the event day. All the reporters from Bhutan and Bangladesh had to cramp into the tiny media gallery at the airport. We were not allowed to step out of it while the guests arrived. Not being in the gallery would mean missing good photos. It was hot, and everyone in the crowd sweated under the scorching sun.

It was followed by several other events during which I had to mingle



**Nima Wangdi is
the first Bhutanese
journalist to contract
Covid-19**

with many more people. It was inevitable as I was part of the celebration. The hotel was crowded too, with people arriving and departing.

Back home, I tested positive during 10 days in quarantine in Thimphu. I tested negative in the preceding tests. I am still unsure where I could have contracted the virus.

Covid-19 and symptoms

On the 10th night of the 21-day mandatory quarantine in Thimphu, I started getting a mild headache and fever. I felt nauseous. I suspected seasonal flu since I had tested negative so far. But the same symptoms persisted on the following day. I reported it to the health officials who collected samples.

Towards the afternoon, I was informed that I tested positive and must shift to the isolation facility in another hotel in Thimphu. I was scared. I packed up and waited for the call. Just before lunch was served, my phone rang and I was asked to come out to the hotel lobby. I peeped through the window and saw an ambulance waiting with its trunk open. The driver in full PPE stood by the ambulance. As I made my way towards the lift dragging my things, the desuups on duty quickly moved out of my way. They stood a good distance from me and said an ambulance was waiting for me. Stepping into

the ambulance was horrifying. There was a stretcher and an oxygen set. I sat firmly on a bench on the left.

In isolation

Testing positive for covid-19 has more psychological impact than what the virus does to your physical health. Once you know that you have the virus in you, the mind conjures up all the symptoms.

An isolation facility could be any hotel. Isolation for me is a room with windows and doors closed throughout the term, 21 days at least. The seriously ill are taken to the isolation ward in the hospital, where they are constantly monitored. Those less symptomatic are kept in hotels.

I was not that symptomatic.

As I got out of the ambulance, quite an old one, I wondered how many patients it would have carried already. The dents inside the trunk and torn bench covers were the tale-tell sign of its long service. In a way, with a bench running along the sides and a stretcher in the middle, it made me feel like I was sitting in a small restaurant.

I was led to room number 304. A dark tea table stood at the door, almost blocking my way into the room. I knew I would have to pick my food from that table during my time in isolation. As I checked into the hotel room, I was still in some kind of trauma. I thought of my mother, son, my friends and relatives. That made me grow more anxious.

In a short while, a newspaper broke the news online – a journalist has tested positive for coronavirus. That impacted me mentally. I was then worried that people whom I knew might suspect me to be one, as if I was the only journalist in the team. In the team were five journalists.

Soon after, people started calling me and messages flooded into my inbox. My mind was now in bigger trouble. I was unsure if I should answer them. I picked some calls and lied that I was negative. And I responded to the messages in the same way. Not responding to calls and messages would have been harsh. Many thoughts crossed my mind.

The closed windows and door aggravated my agitation. Opening the window curtains completely was a crime in isolation. I always craved for a breath of fresh air, which I was absolutely deprived of. The isolation facility had a WeChat group through which inmates and officials communicated. I was added to the group. There were 29 members in the group comprising nurses, de-suups, hotel owner and cooks. Some more joined in the following days.

The first thing I was informed through the WeChat group was the visitor's timing if any of our friends and relatives wished to drop some stuff for us. Visitors are allowed twice a day, once in the afternoon and once in the evening.

It was still afternoon, around 4 pm. One of the de-suups in the facility



**Food items are
dropped at the door**

messaged detailing the dinner menu. The message read: Dinner Menu, Roti, Cauliflower fry, Dal and Fruit banana. The menu did not seem appetising to me. I had lost my appetite almost completely and my throat would not allow any food in. I was still horrified.

Gradually, my mind grew more agitated. Even a message notification on my cell phone would irritate and cause fear in me. What would happen to me in the coming days was unknown. The fear of falling seriously ill, requiring ventilation, and dying constantly haunted me.

My colleagues and bosses called me and asked if I tested positive. I said no. I knew they would not spare me if I told them the truth. For them, my infection was news. I could not hide this for long when they persisted with their calls. Every time they called, they asked if I had tested positive and who the journalist was if I wasn't the one. Finally, agitated and pressurised, I told them the truth and they wrote about me. The news bore the headline 'First journalist to test positive for Covid-19'. I was annoyed.

But then I asked myself if there was anything wrong at all with the news. My identity was concealed. I later realised that it was harmless. The news brought me more calls and messages. It made me reflect on some disgruntled newsmakers I came across quite often.

As days passed, the number of phone calls and messages has dropped. Now, my only worry is my mother, to whom coronavirus

is always a killer. She is counting the days as I do in isolation. I had to keep lying to her so that she won't worry about me. Having heard the news of people returning from Bangladesh testing positive, she called me. I lied. She called me after 21 days. I still lied. Thankfully, being illiterate, I could convince her with lies. It continued.

My room faces the hotel's entry gate. I could regularly see people dropping parcels for the inmates. Desuups at the counter receive them and deliver them at the doors of the rooms. They ring the doorbell, drop the parcel and leave hurriedly. This is to avoid coming in contact with the positive patients.

On April 21, an inmate declared in the WeChat group that he had completed reading a volume of domang (holy text) during his 14 days in the facility. I had spent 16 days in the hotel by then. In celebration of this, the artistes from the Royal Academy of Performing Arts sang melodious songs in the group. It was a relaxing treat to the rest of the exhausted and bored inmates.

As voice messages popped up in the group, other group members posted stickers in appreciation. Some sent stickers that showed 100 marks for the performance, while some sent applauding stickers.

The next day, all the RAPA team members, 13 of them, left the facility after testing negative. My Covid-19 test was four days away.

As time passed by, the level of stress has reduced and I can eat better. I get the urge for physical exercise. I can do more of it each day. And that is the sign of my recovery as I continue to serve my isolation term.

The love from Their Majesties

It was a fine evening. The sun had set. The darkness gradually engulfed my surrounding. I could only see light bulbs glowing outside my room through the transparent window curtain that I was forbidden to open. I was stressed and worried.

Sitting on the bed, I was wondering about many things. Testing positive to the virus always bugged me. I feared the consequence of the viral infection that triggered relentless stress.

I could only see Desuups walking around outside. Some entered the kitchen while some displayed military march at the courtyard of the hotel. Probably that was what they learned during the desuung training. I usually watched these activities to divert myself from thinking about the illness.

My doorbell rang. It was early for the dinner. I still pulled myself off the chair and staggered towards the door to check. A huge transparent plastic package lay on the table, which stood by my door.

Nobody said what it was and where it came from. Inside it, on a piece of paper, I found a message that read: 'From His Majesty The King and Her Majesty The Gyaltsuen - "Get well soon." I became emotional. I could not believe that Their Majesties cared for us

to such an extent. My spirit soared.

Although the virus was still taking a toll on me, I felt fine and recovered for a moment. I never expected such love for a commoner like me. Their Majesties had sent us everything in the package: a Sunkay (Talisman), toothbrush and toothpaste, soap for laundry and bath, jinlap (holy bids), a T-shirt, blanket, and biscuits. I can't thank Them enough. I remain deeply indebted to the Dharma King and the Queen.

I also thank the Prime minister, Dr Lotay Tshering for sending us a package of food that contained mostly fruits and nuts despite himself being in quarantine at that time. This showed that he has concerns for us.

Coping with fake news in times of Covid-19 pandemic



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Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic has proliferated the spread of fake news. The result of the pandemic was a massive rise in infodemic. The abundance of information available online made it difficult for consumers to distinguish between fact and fiction. The digital platforms which enable sharing information quickly have enormous repercussions, especially on children and youths. Therefore, there is a need for careful consumption of social media contents. Sharing false information can be dangerous for children and young people who can be easily persuaded to believe them and form a distorted view of the world.

In times like the Covid-19 pandemic, when accurate and truthful information is crucial, we are bombarded with fake news, which can have a huge impact on our mental health. Therefore, there is an immediate need for more rigorous media literacy in Bhutan so that people are able to distinguish between real and fake news.

What is fake news?

Fake news is news or information which is not true. Fake news can be categorised into two types: misinformation and disinformation. Misinformation: Information that is false but not created with the intention of causing harm.

Disinformation: Information that is false and deliberately created to harm a person, a social group, an organisation or a country.

How fake news and misinformation impact young people

During the times of the Covid-19 pandemic, we are inundated with numerous information readily available online. Prolonged exposure to misinformation and fake news can reduce trust in the media. Moreover, a lack of good media literacy would make it difficult to know what is fact and fiction. For example, news consumers start to believe that everything can be fake. This can be detrimental to many people, especially younger ones who are most active on social media. This is primarily because most young people consume news directly from social media platforms without verifying it. Furthermore, due to lack of media literacy, younger groups tend to consume less from credible news sources.



FACTCHECK: You may have seen this photo circulating with news of loan waiver being proportionate to rent waiver.

IT'S NOT TRUE!

If you don't see it on the page of a trusted source, don't believe it. This photo has "@drunkalu" on it who is not a trusted/ known authority.



Generally, the trust youth's trust in the news media and social media is weakening. Some fake stories can have a real impact on the lives of our children. For example, the recent false news stories around the Covid-19 pandemic and the conspiracy theory stories about the Covid-19 being circulated on WhatsApp preys on our emotions.

Social media has become an increasingly popular source of news among young adults. However, with the rise of fake news, credibility comes into question, and young adults are left on their own to determine which news is real and which is false. It is perhaps time for serious education on media consumption.

Personally, I find it difficult to be online when I do not know whom

to trust, what is real and what is fake. I presume that many youth are not emotionally equipped to deal with the challenges of fake news circulating online. We cannot stop our children from using the internet. Nor should we. What is important is to teach them how to navigate their way online and make the best use of online resources.

Why is this important?

Social media is largely unregulated, so it can easily become a cesspool of misinformation and disinformation. This poses risks, including health risks, to all sections of the population, especially when they read, listen to or watch news and information at face value without critical analysis.

Recognising the primacy of accurate information during the pandemic, organisations such as the World Health Organisation, have taken necessary steps to provide reliable information online. And in Bhutan, Journalists' Association of Bhutan and Bhutan Media Foundation started a fact-checking initiative as soon as the pandemic hit the country.

For healthy media consumption, it is important to equip people with basic skills such as checking the source of information, where it is first published, who has shared it and why.

Conclusion

Awareness of fake news among school students is essential to protect them from its negative impact. They must know that they should not believe everything they see, read, or hear. They must try to gain an essential set of skills to keep themselves safe online.

As media experts say, the answer to fake news and cybersecurity is education. Rules and regulations can be effective only up to a certain extent. The long-term and more sustained answer is education, media literacy in this case. I think it is the responsibility of institutions and government to ensure that our news consumers in general and children in particular are educated enough to be discerning netizens.



BBS CEO Kaka Tshering



Kuensel CEO Ugyen Penjor

The Return of the Natives

In 2020, Bhutan's oldest broadcast and print media houses welcomed longtime insiders as chief executives. While Kaka Tshering took the helm at the Bhutan Broadcasting Service (BBS), Kuensel saw Ugyen Penjor take over its top leadership. Both Kaka Tshering and Ugyen Penjor started their careers with the BBS and Kuensel and rose through the ranks to become general manager and editor respectively.

Their appointment is seen as the return of the natives of sorts. Both are seasoned insiders who know their companies and colleagues in depth. Both have editorial background, considered as a critical factor to lead a media house professionally. Many in the industry feel their appointment couldn't have come at a better time—where the mainstream media is fighting a losing battle to retain its old reputation of professionalism, trust, and credibility.

I have known the duo for more than two decades now, and I was excited about their appointment. For the first time, in the history of Bhutanese media, we have two major media houses whose heads are working journalists. This is a big win for the local media, for they both bring with them a treasure trove of firsthand journalistic experience. They know the strengths and weaknesses of their companies as well as the challenges and opportunities.



Gopilal Acharya

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Started in 1965 as an official gazette, Kuensel became the government-owned national newspaper in 1986 publishing in three languages: Dzongkha, Nepali, and English. The 1992 Kasho (Royal Decree) guaranteed Kuensel, along with the BBS radio, an autonomous status, although the government continued to subsidize Kuensel till 1999. It was after 1999 that Kuensel's face began to change into an independent newspaper. Although Kuensel remained a weekly newspaper for almost two decades, starting February 2005 it went bi-weekly. Kuensel is today the only daily newspaper in the country and remains the most trusted source of information for the literate public.

BBS's evolution is rather interesting. The first radio service in Bhutan was started in 1973 by a group of young volunteers from the National Youth Association of Bhutan. The group used a 400-watt short wave for a weekly one-hour transmission on Sundays. The service was taken over by the Department of Information and Broadcasting in 1979 to develop it into a professional broadcaster. It was only in 1986 that a 5-Kilowatt SW transmitter replaced the old 400-watt SW transmitter and the Bhutan Broadcasting Service was officially launched with daily broadcasts in Dzongkha, English, Nepali, and Sharchop.

In 1991, with financial assistance from the government of India, a professional radio studio was built and a 50-Kilowatt SW installed. In 1997, the BBS started the FM transmission, and in 1999 upgraded itself into Bhutan's first Radio and TV broadcaster. The BBS radio undoubtedly remains the most effective media in Bhutan. It reaches people in remote and far-flung corners of the country where newspapers often fails to reach. Today, the BBS is an autonomous broadcaster.

So, what makes the appointment of Kaka Tshering and Ugyen Penjor a significant political commitment?

First, it indicates the political will to have the right person in the right place. Worldwide, media outlets are run by people with extensive media experience, and many of them would have spent considerable time in the field, reporting and writing. This brings an informed perspective to journalism, often refining and redefining the very vision of the companies such experienced journalists lead.

Second, there has been a perceptible quietness in the industry in the recent years. People are wondering about media's timidity. They say Bhutan's democratic progress is still fragile, and the gains of electoral democracy could be lost if not substantiated with a broad-based commitment to uphold democratic principles. That's why the country needs a strong public watchdog led by committed individuals.

Thirdly, an independent media is indispensable to democracy. It's only through a strong media culture that the public can

influence national policies and discourses. If we are to become an intelligent, thinking country we must seek to engage all levels of our society, and this can only be achieved through a vibrant national media. Media will continue to shape public opinion, spark public discourses, and deepen people's engagement in the life of their communities.

Ugyen Penjor recently told me about the weight of the CEO's chair in Kuensel. On one hand, the paper has shareholders who measure the company's success by the size of the annual dividends it declares. Commercial and journalistic aspects often collide, and certain decisions call for a sacrifice in either of the areas.

"As much I want Kuensel to be a sustainable commercial venture, I've to keep reminding myself that Kuensel's face has always been the newspaper," he said. "Commercial success brings tangible dividends to our shareholders while a credible newspaper brings intangible dividends, and I feel both are equally important."

Kaka Tshering, on the other hand, feels there is the need to clear the confusion surrounding the status of the BBS.

"Is it a state-owned enterprise (SOE) or a public service broadcaster (PSB)? If it's a SOE, then the company's focus should be on revenue generation, if we are a PSB, then we should focus on informing, educating, and entertaining the Bhutanese public," he said.

The idea of a SOE and a PSB are diametrically opposed. And the BBS is often caught in opposing political currents. For example, in the past, elected executives have insisted that the broadcaster serve the interest of the ruling government. A former information and communications minister had publicly rebuked a former BBS CEO and told her not to forget where BBS's bread and butter came from.

"We need to clear this legal cloud surrounding our status, I am not going to be doing this, the board would have to do this," said Kaka Tshering, "and then we would have to enhance professional growth, mobilize funds, organise trainings, enhance performance, and, more importantly, put in place a stringent performance evaluation system."

Both these young CEOs feel that media's critical role in deepening and sustaining a young democracy must focus on promoting democratic values: strengthening electoral governance and electoral processes, creating a responsible and broad-based civil society, empowering women, strengthening the rule of law and an independent judiciary, and decentralizing political and local governance.

"We cannot let the power of the press weaken, for that would tantamount to desertion of a sacred duty that comes with being the fourth estate," Ugyen Penjor said. "Media must not only seek to inform, but also promote public debate, shape public opinions, challenge dysfunctional status quo, and speak truth to power."



Stories from the Field

A selection of stories supported by JAB's Rural Reporting Grant



དེ་ལོག་ལྷ་དུར་ཏ་མང་
གིས་ ཁོར་བཟའ་སྤྱོད་
འབད་མི་ ས་ཞིང་གསལ་
སྟོན་འབད་བའི་བསྐྱང༌།

ཕྱི་རང་ཚྱང་ཁག་ནང་ གྲུང་སྟོང་གི་ དཀའ་ངལ་ཡོད་རུང་ མར་འབབ་འགྱུ་དོ་ཡོད་པ།

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ཕྱི་རང་ཚྱང་ཁག་བཟུམ་ཅིག་ནང་འབད་བ་ཅིན་ རྟེན་འོག་༡༩ ཡོད་མའི་ནང་ གྲུང་སྟོང་༢༡༥
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ཤོས་ཅིག་ཡིན་པས།



ཨོ་རྒྱན་དོ་རྩེ།
གནས་ཚུལ་བསྟར་བཏོད་པ།
ཀྱན་གསལ་ལས་འཛིན།

ཨིན་རུང་ ད་རེས་ནངས་པར་ གོང་འཕེལ་གྱི་ འགྱུར་བ་དང་ འཁོར་ལམ་ཚུ་ ས་གནས་
ཐདས་ཐད་ཁ་ལས་པར་ རྟོད་ཡོད་པ་མ་ཆད་ གཞི་རྟེན་མཐུན་རྟེན་ གློག་མེ་དང་ འཐུང་ཚུ་
བཀའ་སྲེལ་ལ་སོགས་པ་ རྟོད་མི་ལུ་བརྟེན་ གུང་སྟོང་བཞག་མི་ཚུ་ གཡུས་ཁ་ལུ་ འོག་
འོང་དོ་ཡོད་པ་ཨིན་པས།

དཔེར་ན་ བར་གཤོང་ལས་ རྒྱུས་ལོ་⁶⁰ ལང་མི་ ཁྱིམ་གྲ་རྩར་ཏ་མང་གིས་ ཁོ་རའི་
ཁྱིམ་ གུང་སྟོང་སྟེ་བཞག་སྟེ་ ལོ་³⁰ ལང་པའི་བྱུལ་ལས་ འོག་གཡུས་ཁར་འོང་སྟེ་ ལོ་³
ལང་ཅུག།

ཁྱིམ་གྲ་རྩར་ཏ་མང་དེ་ རྒྱུས་ལོ་²⁴ ལས་ ལམ་སེལ་ལས་ཁུངས་ནང་ ལས་མི་སྟེ་
ཕུག་ཞུ་བའི་སྐབས་ རྒྱལ་ཁབ་ཀྱི་ ས་གནས་ཁག་སོ་སོའི་ ལམ་བདའ་སྟེ་ རྟོད་པའི་བྱུལ་
ལུ་ རྒྱུ་ལོ་²⁰⁷² ལུ་ རྒྱུས་ལོ་⁴⁶ ལང་མ་ད་ ལཱ་གཡོག་ནང་ལས་ དགོངས་ཞུ་འབད་
ཅུག།

ཁོ་ར་ བར་གཤོང་སྐྱང་ཏྲོག་ཁ་གཡུས་ཚན་ནང་ འོག་རྟོད་པའི་སྐབས་ ཁོ་གི་ཁྱིམ་དེ་ རམ་
སོང་སྟེ་ ཡོད་པའི་ཁར་ ས་ཞིང་ཚུ་ཡང་ ཚལ་མ་ལུ་གྱུར་ཏེ་མཐོང་མ་ད་ སེམས་འཁྲུལ་སྐྱང་
ལང་དགོས་ བྱུང་ཡོད་རུང་ ཁོ་རའི་ དགོངས་ཞུའི་གསོལ་རས་ཀྱིས་ ཁྱིམ་ཚུང་ཀྱ་ཅིག་
རྒྱབ་ཚུགས་ཅུག།

ཁོ་གིས་འབད་བ་ཅིན་ ཁོ་རའི་ ས་ཞིང་དང་ ཁྱིམ་སྟོང་མ་བཞག་སྟེ་ ཁས་བླངས་ཐོག་ལས་
ལམ་སེལ་ལས་ཁུངས་ནང་ ལཱ་འབད་བར་ སོང་སོལ་མེན་པར་ གཞུང་གི་བཀའ་རྒྱ་དང་
འཁྲུལ་ ཐབས་ར་མེད་པར་འགྱོད་གོས་ ཐོན་ཡི་ཟེར་ཨིན་པས།

ཁོ་རའི་ཁྱིམ་དེ་ གུང་སྟོང་སྟེ་ ལུས་ཡོད་རུང་ ས་ཞིང་ཚུ་ ཁོ་རའི་སྤྱན་ཆ་ཚུ་གིས་ བཟའ་
སྟོད་འབད་བཅུག་ཡོད་རུང་ ཁོ་གི་མིང་ཐོ་ཁར་ ས་ཆ་ཨེ་ཀར་³ ཡོད་མི་ལས་ ད་ལྟོ་ ཁྱིམ་
⁶⁰ བཟའ་སྟོད་འབད་མ་ཚུགས་པར་ ཚལ་མ་ལུ་ གྱུར་ཏེ་ཡོད་པ་ཨིན་པས།

ཁྱིམ་གྲ་རྩར་ཏ་མང་གིས་ གཡུས་ཁ་ལུ་ འོག་རྟོད་དེ་ ས་ཞིང་ཚུ་ནང་ ཤིང་ཐོག་ཚལ་ལུ་
དང་ ཚོད་བསྟེ་ དེ་ལས་ ལོ་ཐོག་གེ་བ་ཚུ་ འཛུགས་སྦྱོང་འབད་ཐོག་ལས་ གཡུས་ཁའི་མི་
ཚོ་ འོག་སྦྱོང་ནི་གི་ གོ་སྐབས་ཐོབ་མི་ལུ་ སེམས་དགའ་སྟེ་ཡོད་ཟེར་ བཤད་པ་ཨིན་པས།
གུང་སྟོང་མར་བབས།

ད་རེས་ནངས་པར་ ཁྱིམ་གྲ་རྩར་ཏ་མང་བཟུམ་སྟེ་ གུང་སྟོང་བཞག་མི་ ལ་ལོ་ཅིག་
འོག་འོང་ནི་ལུ་ ག་སྤྱིག་འབད་བའི་བསྐྱང་ཡོད་པ་ལས་ གུང་སྟོང་གི་ ཁུངས་ཁ་མར་འབབ་
འགྱོད་ཡོད་པ་ཨིན་པས།

བར་གཤོང་གི་རྒྱལ་ སྤྱན་ཏ་ལཱ་པ་ལུ་ཁུ་ཁུ་ཁུ་སྤྱི་ སྤྱབ་མིའི་ནང་ གུང་སྟོང་ལུ་ དབྱེ་ཁག་³

སྤྱི་ཡོད་མི་དེ་ཡང་ གྲུང་སྟོང་ཟེར་མ་དང་ བྱིས་ནང་སྟོང་མི་ མེད་པའི་ཁར་ ས་ཞིང་ཚུ་ བཟའ་
སྟོང་མ་འབད་བར་ ཞིང་སྟོང་བཞག་མི་ཚུ་ལུ་ སྤྱི་ཡོད་པ་ད་ གྲུང་སྟོང་གཞན་དེ་ བྱིས་
མེད་པའི་གྲུ་ ས་ཞིང་བཟའ་སྟོང་མ་འབད་མི་ དེ་ལས་ དབྱེ་ཁག་³ པའི་ཐད་ལུ་ མི་ཕྱིས་
དང་ གྲུང་ཨང་དེ་ ཆེད་འོང་ནང་ཡོད་རུང་ རྒྱ་དངོས་མེད་མི་ལུ་ཡང་ གྲུང་སྟོང་གི་གངས་སུ་
ཚུད་པ་ཨིན་ཟེར་ བཤད་པ་ཨིན་པས།

ཆཔོ་གིས་འབད་བ་ཅིན་ ཆེད་འོག་གི་ གཞིས་གསར་ནང་འོང་མི་ བྱིས་གྲུང་² དེ་ཅིག་
སྟོང་མ་སྤྱི་ཡོད་ཟེར་ཨིན་མ་དང་ ད་ཚུན་ བྱང་ཡམས་གོ་བེད་-¹ འི་ གནད་དོན་ལུ་བརྟེན་
མི་ཕུད་དོག་གཅིག་ཡང་ གཡུས་ཁར་ལོག་མ་སྟོང་ཟེར་ཨིན་པས།

དམངས་མི་རྩན་ད་ར་རྩ་དུར་མོང་གར་གྱིས་ ཆེད་འོག་ནང་ འཁོར་ལམ་དང་ གློག་མེ་ དེ་
ལས་ མཐུན་ཆུན་གཞན་ཚུ་ སྟོང་པའི་ཁར་ སོ་ནམ་པ་ཚུ་ལུ་ འོང་འབབ་བཟོ་ནིའི་ གོ་
སྐབས་ཚུ་ བྱིན་ཡོད་པ་ལས་ ད་རེས་ གྲུང་སྟོང་སྟེ་ བཞག་མི་ཚུ་ཡང་ ལོག་འོང་ནི་ འགོ་
བཙུགས་ཏེ་ཡོད་ཟེར་ སྤྱི་ཡོད་པས།

དམངས་མི་གིས་ ད་རེས་ནངས་པར་ ཆེད་འོག་ནང་ གྲུང་སྟོང་སྟེ་བཞག་སྟེ་ འགྲོ་མི་མེད་
ཟེར་ བཤད་པའི་ཁར་ འཕྲལ་ཁམས་ཅིག་ཁར་ ཕྱིས་ཐོ་ཅིག་ བཀོད་པའི་སྐབས་ འདས་
པའི་ལོ་⁴-⁵ ནང་ གྲུང་སྟོང་² དེ་ཅིག་ཡོད་མི་ལས་ ད་རེས་² ལུ་ མར་བབས་
སོང་ལྷག་ཟེར་ཨིན་པས།

ཆཔོ་ཚུ་གིས་འབད་བ་ཅིན་ སྤྱིར་བཏང་ལུ་ ཆེད་འོག་ཚུ་ནང་ གྲུང་སྟོང་མར་བབས་སོང་སྟེ་
ཡོད་ཟེར་ཨིན་མ་དང་ སྤྱི་གསར་གླིང་ཆེད་འོག་ནང་ གྲུང་སྟོང་² དེ་ཅིག་ཡོད་མི་ལས་ ད་
རེས་² ལུ་དང་ རང་ཐང་གླིང་ལུ་ གྲུང་སྟོང་⁶ ལས་² ལུ་ མར་བབས་སོང་སྟེ་ཡོད་པ་
ཨིན་པས།

ཕུན་བརྟན་ཚུ་ཆེད་འོག་ནང་ གྲུང་སྟོང་² དང་ དཀྱིལ་འཁོར་ཐང་ཆེད་འོག་ནང་གྲུང་སྟོང་
² མཚོ་གླིང་མཁར་ལུ་² སྤྱི་གསར་གླིང་ལུ་² དུང་ལ་སྐང་ལུ་² སེམས་སྟོངས་ལུ་
གྲུང་སྟོང་² དེ་ལས་ གསལ་གྱི་ཐང་ཆེད་འོག་ནང་ གྲུང་སྟོང་² ཡོད་ཨིན་པས།

གྲུང་སྟོང་གི་རྒྱ་ཆུན།

དམངས་མི་རྩན་ད་ར་རྩ་དུར་མོང་གར་གྱིས་འབད་བ་ཅིན་ ཆེད་འོག་ནང་ གྲུང་སྟོང་གི་
དཀའ་ངལ་གཙོ་བོར་ སྤྱི་ལོ་² ལུ་ འཁོར་ལམ་བདའ་སྟེ་ ལཱ་འབད་མི་ རྒྱ་གར་གྱི་
མི་ཚུ་ རང་སོའི་གཡུས་ཁར་ ལོག་བཏང་པའི་ཤུལ་ལས་ གཞུང་གི་བཀའ་རྒྱ་དང་འབྲེལ་
ཁོང་གི་ཚབ་ལུ་ འབྲུག་མི་ཚུ་ རྒྱལ་ཡོངས་ལས་མི་སྟེ་ བཙུགས་མི་དང་ སྤྱི་ལོ་² ལས་
ལས་ ཐོན་ལྷག་ཟེར་ཨིན་པས།

བར་གཤོང་ལུ་ གྲང་སྟོང་
 ༡༡༩ ཡོད་མི་ལས་༡



ཀྲོ་སྐྱེན་ཏ་ལུ་པུ་རེལ་གྱིས་ སྤྲུལ་མིའི་ནང་ དེ་བསྐྱང་ གཡུས་སྟོ་ཚུ་ནང་ གཞི་རྟེན་
 མཐུན་ཆེན་དང་ ཚོང་ལམ་ དེ་ལས་ ཨ་ལོ་ཚུ་ལུ་ ཤེས་ཡོན་བྱིན་ནིའི་དོན་ལུ་ མཐུན་ཆེན་
 མེད་ནི་དེ་གིས་ མི་ལ་ལོ་ཅིག་ ས་གནས་གཞན་ཁར་ གནས་སྤོ་སྤང་ཡོད་པའི་ཁར་ ལ་ལོ་
 ཅིག་ ལམ་སེལ་ལས་ཁུངས་ནང་ ལཱ་འབད་བར་ སྤང་ལྷག་ཟེར་ཨིན་པས།
 ཀྲོ་གིས་འབད་བ་ཅིན་ གྲང་སྟོང་ལུ་བརྟེན་ རྟེན་འོག་ནང་ འཆར་དདུལ་བགོ་བཟམ་
 འབད་ནི་དང་ ལུ་ལཱ་རྒྱུག་ནི་ དེ་ལས་ རྟེན་འོག་གོང་འཕེལ་གི་ ལས་སྤྲོ་ཚུ་ ལག་ལེན་
 འཐབ་ནི་ལུ་ དཀའ་ངལ་སྟོམ་སྟེར་ ཐུང་མ་མས་ཟེར་ཨིན་པས།
 དེ་བཟུམ་སྟེ་ ས་ཆ་ཚུ་ རྒྱལ་ཚལ་ལུ་གྱུར་ཏེ་ མི་དང་ རི་དགས་སེམས་ཅན་གི་བར་ན་
 ཐེལ་ཟིང་བུང་སྟེ་ཡོད་པ་བཞིན་དུ་ བར་གཤོང་རྟེན་འོག་ནང་ གྲང་སྟོང་གི་ ཁུངས་ཁ་མཐོ་
 ཤོས་ཅིག་ཨིན་མ་ལས་ མི་ཚུ་ རང་སྤོའི་གཡུས་ཁར་ ལོག་འོང་བཅུག་ནིའི་དོན་ལུ་ གོང་
 འཕེལ་གི་ ལཱ་ལེ་ག་འབད་དགོ་པའི་ཁར་ གཞི་རྟེན་མཐུན་ཆེན་ཚུ་ཡང་ ལེགས་ཤོམ་བཟོ་
 དགོ་པ་མ་ཆད་ སྤྱིལ་འབྲེན་དང་ ཚོང་ལམ་གི་ ཞབས་རྟེན་ཚུ་ཡང་ ཡར་འཕེལ་གཏང་དགོ་པ་
 འདུག་ཟེར་ཨིན་པས།
 ཨིན་རུང་ ཉེ་མ་ཕྱད་པ་ད་ རྟེན་འོག་ཚུ་ནང་ གཞི་རྟེན་མཐུན་ཆེན་ཚུ་ ཐོྫོང་ཡོད་པ་ལས་
 གྲང་སྟོང་གི་ གནད་དོན་ཚུ་ཡང་ མར་འབབ་འགྱོད་བཟུམ་ མཐོང་མ་མ་ཆད་ རྟེན་འོག་གི་
 ཁ་ཐུག་ལས་འབད་རུང་ མི་ཚུ་ ལོག་འོང་བཅུག་ནིའི་དོན་ལུ་ ཐབས་ཤེས་སྤྲོ་ཚོགས་བཏོན་

དེ་ཟེར་ ཀྲུ་ལྷ་ལྷ་ལྷ་ བཤད་པ་ཡིན་པས།
བར་གཤོང་ཆེད་འོག་ནང་ སྤྱི་ལོ་༥ ཡོད་ས་ལས་ གྲུང་སྤྱོད་མང་ཤོས་ར་ བར་གཤོང་སྤྱོད་
ཀྱི་ ས་གོ་ནང་ཡོད་པ་ད་ བྱི་ཚུ་ལྷ་མིག་རྒྱུ་སྟེ་ བཞག་ཡོད་པ་མ་ཆད་ བྱི་ལ་ལོ་ཅིག་
རམ་སོ་ལྷག།
བར་གཤོང་གི་འོག་ལས་ར་ སྤྱི་ཚར་གྱིང་ཆེད་འོག་ནང་ གྲུང་སྤྱོད་༦༠ ཡོད་མི་དེ་ ཡང་༥
པ་ཡིན་མ་ད་ ཀྲུ་ལྷ་ལྷ་ གྲུ་མར་རའོ་གིས་ ཁོ་གི་ ཆེད་འོག་ནང་ གྲུང་སྤྱོད་གི་གྲངས་ལ་
དེ་སྟེ་ར་ཡོད་ཟེར་ བཤད་པ་ཡིན་པས།
ཁོ་གིས་འབད་བ་ཅིན་ གྲུང་སྤྱོད་ཡང་ མ་འདྲམ་སྟེ་ཡོད་རུང་ ས་ཆ་ནང་ ལྷ་འབད་མི་མེད་
པར་ བཞག་ཆལ་ལུ་ གྲུང་ཏེ་ཡོད་པ་ལས་ ད་སྟེ་ གྲུང་སྤྱོད་གི་གྲངས་སུ་ ཐོ་བཀོད་འབད་
དེ་ཡོད་ཟེར་ཡིན་པས།
ཀྲུ་ལྷ་ལྷ་ཅིག་གིས་ སྤྱི་ལོ་མི་ནང་ གྲུང་སྤྱོད་ལས་ལྷག་སྟེ་ བཟའ་སྦྱོད་འབད་མ་ཚུ་གས་
པའི་ ས་ཆ་ཚུ་ལུ་ ཆ་གྲང་ལང་དགོ་པ་ བྱུང་མ་མས་ཟེར་ཡིན་རུང་ ས་ཞིང་ལ་ལོ་ཅིག་
ཆལ་མ་ལུ་ འགྱུར་མ་བཅུག་པར་ ལྷན་ཐབས་འབད་མི་ཡང་འདུག།
དེ་ཡང་ ཞིང་སྤྱོད་བཞག་མི་ལུ་བརྟེན་ རི་དྲགས་སེམས་ཅན་ཚུ་གིས་ ཉེ་འདབས་ལུ་སྤྱོད་མི་
སོ་ནམ་པ་ཚུ་གི་ ལོ་ཐོག་ཚུ་ལུ་ གཞོད་པ་བཀལ་མི་ལུ་བརྟེན་ ལ་ལོ་གིས་ གཞན་གྱི་ས་ཆ་
བཟའ་སྦྱོད་འབད་དགོ་པ་བྱུང་སྟེ་ཡོད་པ་ཡིན་པས།
གཞན་གྱི་ས་ཆ་ནང་ ལྷ་འབད་མི་གཅིག་ སྤྱི་ལོ་༤ ལང་མི་ ཡར་གཏོ་མོག་དྲན་ཡིན་མ་
ད་ ཁོ་གིས་ ལོ་ཐོག་ཚུ་ རི་དྲགས་སེམས་ཅན་ལས་ ཉེ་སྤྱོད་འབད་ནི་འདོན་ལུ་ བྱི་
གྲུང་༥ གྱི་ ས་ཞིང་ཚུ་ནང་ ལྷ་འབད་དེ་ དུས་ཅི་འབད་མ་ད་ ལོ་༥ དེ་ཅིག་ ལང་དོ་
ཡོད་པ་ཡིན་པས།
ཡར་གཏོ་མོག་དྲན་གྱིས་ བྱི་ཆང་ཚུ་ ས་ཆ་སྤྱོད་མ་སྟེ་བཞག་སྟེ་ གཞན་ཁར་སོང་ཡོད་པ་
ལས་ ས་ཆ་ཚུ་ བཞག་ཆལ་ལུ་ གྲུང་མི་ལུ་བརྟེན་ རི་དྲགས་སེམས་ཅན་ཚུ་གིས་ འབད་
ར་མ་ཚུ་གས་པར་ སའི་ཚོ་བདག་ཚུ་ལས་ གཞན་བ་ལེན་ཐོག་ལས་ གེ་ཟ་དང་ ལྷ་ཆག་
འཇུགས་སྤྱོད་འབད་དེ་ ལོ་༥ དེ་ཅིག་ ལང་དོ་ཟེར་ བཤད་པ་ཡིན་པས།
ཡིན་རུང་ གཞན་གྱི་ས་ཞིང་ནང་ ལྷ་འབད་མི་ལུ་བརྟེན་ དུས་ལུ་ཚུ་ཡང་ ཆར་གཉིས་ཐོག་
པའི་ དཀའ་ངལ་བྱུང་རུང་ ཐབས་ར་མིན་འདུག་ཟེར་ ཡར་གཏོ་མོག་དྲན་གྱིས་ བཤད་པ་
ཡིན་པས།
ཕྱི་རང་རྫོང་ཁག་ལས་ ལྷོ་ཕྱོགས་ཁ་ཐུག་ལུ་ ཆགས་ཏེ་ཡོད་མི་ བར་གཤོང་ཆེད་འོག་ནང་
མི་སྟོབས་༥,༥༠༠ དེ་ཅིག་ཡོད་པའི་གནས་ཚུ་ལ།



Age-Old Melodies from Trongsa

TRONGSA: The mountains and vales of Trongsa echo one singular age-old melody - the Tangsibje Zhem - which for generations has always been the perfect antidote for those who have taken solace in its magical lyrics and hidden lore.

Tangsibje Zhem in Trongsa is one of the oldest folk songs in the country and native to only this part of the globe and notably performed only by the women of Tangbi village. Today, the zhem has been recognized as one of the most important performing arts in the dzongkhag, a eulogy to the region's rich cultural and linguistic history.

The culture officer Tshewang Rinzin said, "We have given more priority for Tangsibji Zhem to perform in any national events conducted by the dzongkhag administration. However, the people of other gewogs are also given the opportunity to perform their native songs and dances during the annual Trongsa Tshechu."

The Zhem, which loosely translates into a term used for classical songs performed by the women, is a folk song native to the region and sung with the modulated high-pitched and tremendous low husky



Sonam Lhendup
Reporter
Gyalchi Sarshog

“as per the physics of music the zhem can be classified to chungdra but under overtones with mellow voices which falls sub-genre of dangrim.

voice in a pleasantly singsong tone that can captivate any listeners and folk song lovers.

It consists of three sections broken into numerous poetic stanzas with 13 phase style of performance. The first part is called sung choedba or the offering to triple gem and the middle part is zhem chung chang known to be the true essence of the zhem while the last episode ends with the Tashi meonlam or the final prayers.

The lyrics portray melodies offerings of singing and dancing presented for the supreme almighty triple gem that can have contentment for the Goddess of the soul. May you listen well and witness the distinguished performance of women.

The stanza repeats to continue the next lyrics and steps to please their protector, supreme power holders, and deities. In return, they feel blessed with fortunes and good health as well as wealth in their community.

A ballad type of the structure of the lyrics has the rhythmic effect to the tone synchronizes the stressful high and fragile low frequencies of the voices to meet the slow wavy moment and flexible ligament of the right-hand plays the role of activating the most graceful hand gestures ever dashing boneless fingers' stimulating movements.

Music of Bhutan Research Center (MBRC) recognized Tangsibjee Zhem as unique folk songs with multiple tones sung mainly as offerings to local deities. It is learnt that zhem singers have rinsed their body a day before they perform and women with periods can't participate. Moreover, the dancers can't share the bed with their husbands until the performance is ended.

Chief Researcher Kheng Sonam Dorji and also Executive Director in MBRC inferred that the zhem is categorized under the sub-dangrim (Long toner) which is the type of chungdra. He added, “as per the physics of music the zhem can be classified to chungdra but under overtones with mellow voices which falls sub-genre of dangrim.

In addition, the zhem is more griming to pick up even by the expert musicians and singers while it has found defunct in the lyrics and performance as well.

Lam Phuntsho from Tsangkha said the zhem which performed in past decades have been preserved well by the women of Tangbi but some lines of lyrics are now almost lost in translation. He fears that this prestigious classic song will someday become extinct as he observed that youths are not particularly keen on humming the zhem given the mass influx of modern techno-driven songs.

One interesting facet of the folk songs is that elders say the zhem is learnt or memorized but performers believe that it occurs to them as if in a magical trance when they perform the song.

A 54-year-old main vocalist of the zhem Phurba Wangmo asserted that while she feels awkward to sing it alone, as the lyrics don't come to her, she can lead well if she is in a group.

Currently, only a few women in Tangsibjee can perform the zhem

not so as perfect but it does well when they do collectively. It has been sacredly preserved in their communities, yet the song is not as popular as the zhem is never performed beyond the boundaries of the dzongkhag.

Lam Phuntsho expresses the significance of Tangsijee zhem and states that it is the most alive historical piece that is the plight and essence of their community.

Significance of Zhem

The zhem was originally performed to please the local deities and protectors for the wellbeing of the people. It has also a direct link to the forefathers of the Wangchuck dynasty although there is no data or any written records on the evolution of this classical song.

The zhem came to the limelight in 2019 after the dzongkhag administration introduced the song to be performed during the annual Lhamoi and Geonpoi drupchens. The culture officer of Trongsa talked about huge reforms to preserve the zhem in their communities as it is an integral part of the region's rich cultural history and lineage.

In the early 18th century, during the reign of third king Jigme Dorji Wangchuck, the zhem was mainly performed when there were archery matches between Bumthang and Trongsa. Later, the Tangsibji zhem was prioritized to be performed on other occasions, and singers were rewarded handsomely.

It was actually made officially a national performance by the second King Jigme Wangchuck during his stay at the Kuenga Rabten palace, then the winter residence of the monarchs. The culture officers said that from that onwards the zhem was made to be performed during the dzongkhag's annual Lhamai and Goenpoi Drupchen.

The pride of Tangsiji and its growth and evolution however dates back more significantly to the first King Gongsar Ugyen Wangchuck when he was serving as the Trongsa Peonlop in the 1850s.

Ngawang Rigsel, popularly known as Lam Phuntso, narrated a significant visit by Paro Peonlop kusho Tshering Penjor to witness the Trongsa Tshechu. He said one of the major highlights of his visit was the performance of the Nubi Zams, the dance of the damsels of Nubi gewog.

However, Trongsa Peonlop Kusho or Deb Ugyen Wangchuck recommended his Tangbi Zam, personally referring to Tangsibjee Zhem. He wanted to present the performance of Tangsibjee zhem to see off for Kusho Tshering but the Tsepem entitled to the main vocalist couldn't be present due to illness.

The other singers failed several times as it won't go well up to the expectations of Trongsa Peonlop Ugyen Wangchuk. For this reason, Lam Phuntsho claimed that the people threw Zhem over the Thomadra, the cliff located near the Nikachu Hydropower suction tunnel today.

After that, the people of the locality for once thought that they had

forever lost their zhem. However, the pro singer had reinstated the glory of the zhem after she is back to normal health.

Addition lore claims that the zhem also exhibited miraculous powers and was a motivation and a wish-full filling gem to those who believed in its powers.

It was said that during the time of Third Druk Desi Chogyel Minjur Tenpa, to unify the country under the force of Sharchog Khorlo Tsigay in around 1662-1687, he had distributed Jow Skyamuni statues to the communities of Daga, Langthil, Taktse, and Tangsibje.

While the people of Tangsibji were receiving the Jowo Syakamuni the statue of Jow suddenly became heavy and couldn't be lifted even by around 15 men. At that moment, people decide to dismantle parts of the statue and take it to their Lhakhang. However, the statue is said to have miraculously spoken to people not to dismantle him but leave him a night there, and that everyone from the village must come for the reception the next day with well-prepared songs and dances.

The following day, people gathered in front of the statue with all the offerings while the women started performing the zhem. It was said that right after the zhem was sung the men could easily carry the Jow statue as it had turned as light as the dried leaves.

The culture officer Tsewang Rinzin added that the people of Tangbi have plans of keeping the copyright for the zhem as they won't teach or perform in other communities and even the gewogs of Trongsa district. The zhem is significantly preserved with the strong trademark that doesn't allow to perform in other communities out of the Tangbi village and now it has become correspondent performing traditional art dances for the Choetse dzong during the National events and dzongkhag celebrations.

Will the Zhem survive the tides of time?

The trends of the main vocalist define the survival of zhem which congenital pass onto the daughters of the existing lead singer. However, the congenital track of lead zhem singer changes if the daughter is not perfect.

Currently, a 54-year-old Phurba Wangmo leads the zhem performance. She took the role after Tshewang Lhatshok as she is not the direct successor to 84 years old Aum Seldon who is the mother of the existing lead vocalist.

Aum Phurba said, "After my mother, Tshewang Lhaktshok took care of leading zhem as I was not perfect and very young. Now, I am have been 30 years being the main vocalist".

Meanwhile, a 37-year-old Ugyen Zam was nominated as the next main vocalist of the zhem though she doesn't belong to the family member of the current lead singer. The track changes if the daughter of the lead singer fails to lead the member.

Lam phuntsho shares that Tangsibji zhem will not be sent away from the confines of Zalamchu in the west and Kikila in Bumthang towards

the east, and will remain forever in their soils.

Aum Phuba, one of the Zhem singers in her community said the song will never go extinct in the community as there are people like her who will keep the flames of the zhem burning.

However, she feels that it has become less familiar than early days with the invasion of new songs and modern gadgets like mobile phones, TV, and radio that belt out songs after songs.

In addition, she says the zhem is not easily catchable as it is a classic song with tricky lyrics which are hard to understand. Aum Phuba believes that young girls today are keener on learning new zhungdra songs as it is easy to learn and sing. She, however, is confident that there are women who are capable of teaching the zhem to their daughters and keep the tradition alive.

The dzongkhag Culture Officer rigidly said that although it is never guaranteed they still believe that the zhem will survive the ravishes of time.

Promotion and preservation

Home Minister Lyonpo Sherub Gyeltshen said that culture is essentially important and without which peace and sovereignty of the nation cannot be emboldened. He said Bhutanese culture and traditions are closely adapted to spiritual actions to minimize the five poisons and transform into a good human being.

He suggested that the promotion and preservation of culture should start from the basic foundation of education. "It is time to introduce advocacy learning in schools to impart the knowledge about importance culture," he said.

The lyrics and recorded version of the zhem are expected to be archived in Royal Art of Performance Academic (RAPA) as it was studied under the supervision of late principal Kinzang Dorji.

Senior instructor Pema Samdrup in RAPA claimed that there no archived lyrics of Tangsibjee zhem as the late principal couldn't present the research paper before he passed away.

He said, "the RAPA have plans set to delve upon traditional songs and music for preservation and promotion of regional or local songs to promote."

However, Bhutan Songs and Music Research Centre has a fully recorded version with audiovisual presents and the organization is understudy of the songs for more details.

Tangsibji Gup Gembo Dorji said that in order to preserve the zhem the local government will look upon the possibilities to set concrete agenda to ensure more youth participation with regulations to learn zhem for students during winter vacations.

Ugyen Tshomo from Tangbi residing in Thimphu aspires to preserve the zhem as she had been compiling lyrics and coping with tones. She said, "advanced research on zhem needs to be conducted because numerous sources with different tales can confuse the zhem lovers."



གནམ་གཤིས་འགྱུར་བསྐྱོད་ཀྱི་ གནོད་ལེན་ལུ་ གྲ་སྒྲིག་འབད་ བའི་བསྐྱང་ཡོད་པ།

༣ སོ་ནམ་པ་དག་པ་ཅིག་ སྐལ་ཏྲོ་ཁར་ཅེས་འབག་ སྐད་པར་དཔལ་ཏྲགས་བཏགས་
ལག་པ་གུ་ཁམ་བཤེད་ རྩོམ་ཏུ་སག་ར་ རྐྱེད་ལོག་ཡིག་ཚང་ཁ་ཐུག་ལུ་ འཛབ་འཛབ་ཅིལ་
རི་སྒྲེ་འགྲོ་སར་ མཐོང་གསལ་བྱུང་མ་མས།

སོ་ནམ་པ་ཚུ་ བཟོ་སྐྱོན་དང་འབྲེལ་བའི་ བྱུང་ལ་རྒྱུག་ནིའི་དོན་ལུ་མེན་པར་ སྐམ་ཞིང་ནང་
ཚུད་པག་ནིའི་དོན་ལུ་ མཁོ་སྤྱོད་འབད་མི་ ཕྱི་ས་དང་ ལྷགས་ཀྱི་ར་བ་ རོ་རུག་ དེ་ལས་
རྒྱ་ཆས་གཞན་ཚུ་ རང་སོའི་ས་ཁོངས་ནང་ བསྐྱལ་བར་འགྲུལ་ཡིན་པས།

ཁོང་མི་སེར་ཚུ་ཡང་ མོང་སྐར་ཕ་མང་རྐྱེད་ལོག་ བུན་ཇར་སྤྱི་ལོག་ལས་ཡིན་མ་ད་ ཁོང་ཆ་
བྱབ་ རྒྱ་མཚོ་དང་ རྒྱ་མིའི་ནང་ ལཱ་འབད་བའི་བསྐྱང་ཡོད་པ་ད་ རྒྱ་མཚོ་གསུམ་ལས་སྤྱི་
སོ་ནམ་པ་རང་སོའི་ཞིང་ནང་ རྒྱ་བགོ་བཟུམ་འབད་ནི་ཡིན་པས།

ཞིང་ཚུ་དེ་ ཕ་མང་རྐྱེད་ལོག་ལྷེ་བ་ལས་ ཀྱི་ལོ་མི་ཏར་༥ དེ་ཅིག་གི་ རི་གུ་ལས་སྤྱི་ བུམ་
གཡུས་ཚན་ནང་ བཏོན་ཡོད་པ་ད་ བུམ་གཡུས་ཚན་དེ་ རྐྱེད་ལོག་ལྷེ་བའི་ ཡིག་ཚང་ལས་
ཀྱི་ལོ་མི་ཏར་༥ གི་ས་ཁར་འདུག།

སྤྱི་ལོ་༢༠༢༠ ཟླ་༡༡ པའི་ནང་ བུན་ཇར་སྤྱི་ལོག་གི་ གྲུང་པ་༥༥ དེ་ཅིག་གི་ སོ་ནམ་པ་ཚུ་
གིས་ སྐམ་ཞིང་ནང་ རྒྱ་བཏོན་ནིའི་དོན་ལུ་ རྒྱ་བྱུང་བཙུགས་ནིའི་ལཱ་ཚུ་ བདུན་ཕྱག་༢ ཀྱི་



བཀྲིས་ཕུན་ཚོགས།
གནམ་ཚུལ་བསྐྱེད་པ་
ཀྱན་གསལ་ལས་འཛིན།

འབད་ཡོད་པ་ཡིན་པས།

དེ་བཟུམ་སྟེ་ རང་སེའི་ཞིང་ནང་ རྒྱུད་པག་ནིའི་དོན་ལུ་ རྒྱུ་ལི་རྒྱ་ཡང་ དེ་སྤུ་ནངས་
པར་ བཅོ་སྐྱོན་འབད་བའི་བསྐྱང་ཡིན་པས།

གནམ་དགུན་ལུ་ ཚོད་བསྟེ་འཇུགས་སྐྱོང་འབད་བའི་སྐབས་དང་ གནམ་བྱར་ཆར་མེད་པ་
དུ་ རྒྱུ་ལི་ལས་སྟེ་ འཇུགས་སྐྱོང་འབད་མི་ཚོད་བསྟེ་དང་ ལོ་ཐོག་ལུ་ རྒྱུ་
རྒྱུགས་ནི་ཡིན་པས།

ས་གནས་ཀྱི་ མི་སེར་རྒྱུ་ འབྲུང་རྒྱུ་མ་ལང་བའི་ དྲུག་འཇུག་དང་ རྒྱུ་སྤྱི་ཚད་མེད་
པའི་ཁར་ འབྲུང་བ་བཞིའི་རྒྱུ་དན་ དཔེར་ན་ རྒྱུ་རྒྱུད་དང་ ས་རྒྱུ་ཀྱིས་ ས་ཞིང་རྒྱ་
ཕྱགས་བདེ་འཇི་དང་ སོ་ནམ་ཐོན་སྐྱོད་མར་ཉམས་འགྱུ་བའི་ གདོང་ལེན་བྱུང་སྟེ་ཡོད་ཅེར་
ཡིན་པས།

ཆོད་འོག་བདག་སྐྱོང་འགོ་དཔོན་ བསོད་ནམས་རྒྱ་མཚོ་གིས་ སྤྱབ་མིའི་ནང་ དེ་བཟུམ་མའི་
དྲུག་འཇུག་བྱུང་མི་དེ་ གནམ་གཤིས་འབྱུར་བཟོད་ལུ་བརྟེན་ འོང་ནི་མས་ཅེར་ཡིན་པ་ད་ མི་
སེར་གྱི་ འཚོ་བའི་གནས་སྤངས་ ཡར་འགྲུག་གཏང་ནི་དང་ རང་ལྷན་བཅོམ་ནི་ གནམ་གཤིས་
འབྱུར་བཟོད་ལུ་ གདོང་ལེན་འབད་ནིའི་དོན་ལུ་ སྐམ་ཞིང་རྒྱུ་ནང་ རྒྱུ་དཔག་ནིའི་ ལས་
རིམ་ཅིག་ འགོ་བཙུགས་ཏེ་ཡོད་ཅེར་ བཤད་པ་ཡིན་པས།

གོ་རིམ་དང་པའི་ནང་ བུན་ཇར་སྤྱི་འོག་གི་ རྒྱུ་ཀྱང་༤༥ འི་ ས་ཆ་ཨེ་ཀར་༥༠ ནང་
ཞིང་རྒྱུ་བཏོན་ནིའི་ལཱ་རྒྱ་ མཁུག་བསྐྱེ་ཞིན་པ་ལས་ འཐིང་ལུང་སྤྱི་འོག་ནང་ རྒྱུ་ཀྱང་༣༥
ལུ་ ས་ཆ་ཨེ་ཀར་༧༥ དེ་ཅིག་ནང་ ཞིང་རྒྱུ་ཐོབ་སྤྱོད་ཡོད་པ་ བཅོམ་ནི་ཡིན་པས།

ཡུམ་གཤུགས་ཚན་ལས་ སྤྱི་ལོ་༢༡ ལང་མི་ རྒྱ་མགོན་གྱིས་ སྤྱི་ལོ་༢༠༡༠ ལུ་ མོང་སྐར་
གྱི་ འཐིང་རིམ་སྤྱོད་གྲ་བར་མ་ཅིག་ལས་ སྤྱོད་རིམ་༡༠ པ་ མཁུག་བསྐྱེ་བའི་ཤུལ་ལུ་
འཕྲོ་མཐུད་ཤེས་ཡོན་སྐྱུང་མ་རྒྱུགས་པར་ བཅ་༢ ལུ་ ཆ་ལོགས་འབད་དེ་ སོ་ནམ་པ་སྟེ་
སྤྱོད་ཡོད་པ་ཡིན་པས།

རྒྱ་མགོན་གྱིས་ སྤྱབ་མིའི་ནང་ གནམ་དགུན་ལུ་ ཆར་པ་དང་ཞིང་ནང་ རྒྱུ་མེད་མི་ལུ་བརྟེན་
ལུངས་༥༠༠ ཡོད་མི་ ཆལ་ལུ་ཤིང་སྐམ་ཏེ་ ཤི་དོ་ཡོད་པ་ལས་ ཐོན་སྐྱོད་མར་བབས་དང་
ཞིང་སྤྱོད་སྟེ་ བཞག་དགོ་པའི་ གདོང་ལེན་རྒྱུ་ཡོད་ཅེར་ཡིན་པས།

དུས་ཚོད་དང་འབྲེལ་མ་དགོ་པར་ ལོ་ཐོག་དང་ ཚོད་བསྟེ་འཇུགས་སྐྱོང་འབད་མི་རྒྱ་ རྒྱུ་ནི་
ཡོད་རུང་ རྒྱུ་མེད་པ་ལས་ ཐོན་སྐྱོད་བསྐྱེ་མི་རྒྱུགས་པས་ཅེར་ཡིན་པས།

ཡུམ་གཤུགས་ལྷག་ལུ་ རྒྱུ་མཛོད་སྤྱོད་༡ དང་ བར་མ་༢ རྒྱུ་དགོ་མི་ལས་ ད་ལྟོ་ རྒྱ་
མཛོད་སྤྱོད་རྒྱུ་བའི་བསྐྱང་ཡོད་རུང་ འཕྲལ་འཕྲལ་ར་ དོ་བཅོམ་འོང་ནི་མེད་པར་ ཞག་

དང་ བདུན་ཕྱག་སྟེ་ འགོ་རྟེ་ཡོད་པ་ལས་ ཚ་གྲང་ལང་མས་ཟེར་ ས་གནས་ཀྱི་ མི་ཅིག་
གིས་ བཤད་པ་ཡིན་པས།

ཡིན་རུང་ རྒྱལ་ཇོན་རྒྱུ་ཚར་བའི་ཤུལ་ལས་ ཏ་མ་གྲིན་གྱིས་ སྐམ་ཞིང་ཨེ་ཀར་༥ ནང་
ཚོད་བསྟེ་དང་ གེ་བ་ དེ་ལས་ ཤིང་འབྲས་ལྷུ་མ་ར་ཚུ་ནང་ རྒྱུ་དཔག་ནི་ཡིན་པས།
སྐམ་ཞིང་ནང་ དཔག་ནི་ཡིན་མི་ཚུ་དེ་ཡང་ རྒྱལ་ཇོན་ཁང་རྒྱུ་མི་ལས་ རང་སོའི་རྒྱ་ཀ་ལི་
བཟོ་མིའི་ནང་ འབག་ནི་ཡིན་པས།

བདག་སྐྱོང་འགོ་དཔོན་ བསོད་ནམས་རྒྱ་མཚོ་གིས་ སྐམ་ཞིང་ལུ་ ཚོད་བསྟེ་འཇུགས་སྐྱོང་
འབད་ནིའི་དོན་ལུ་ དགོ་པ་རྒྱུ་དེ་ཡིན་མ་ལས་ གནས་གཤིས་འབྱུར་བསྟོད་ལས་སྟེ་ལས་འགོ་
དཔོན་རྒྱ་གིས་ མ་དདུལ་རྒྱུ་སྐྱོར་ཐོག་ ཆེད་འོག་བདག་སྐྱོང་གིས་ མི་སེའི་རྒྱ་ལུ་ རྒྱུ་
སྐྱོར་འབད་དོ་ཟེར་ཡིན་པས།

རྩ་མང་ཀླུ་ བསོད་ནམས་དར་རྒྱས་ཀྱིས་ ཆེད་འོག་ནང་ འབྲུང་རྒྱུ་འབད་ག་འཛིན་
འབད་ནི་དང་ འཛིན་སྐྱོང་འབད་ཐངས་ཀྱི་སྐྱོར་ གསོ་བའི་ལས་རོགས་པ་རྒྱ་གིས་ སྐྱོང་
བནར་དང་ གོ་བན་རྒྱ་ སྟེ་ལ་བཞིན་དུ་ཡོད་པ་ལས་ ད་ལྟོ་རྒྱ་ན་ དཀའ་ངལ་སྟོམ་མ་ཐོན་
ཟེར་ བཤད་པ་ཡིན་པས།

རྒྱལ་ཇོན་གསུམ་ཆར་ རྒྱུ་ཚར་བའི་ཤུལ་ལུ་ ལོ་ཐོག་རྒྱུ་མ་གཅིག་མེན་པར་ ཤིང་ཐོག་
འཇུགས་སྐྱོང་འབད་མི་རྒྱ་ལུ་ཡང་ བན་ཁྱད་འབྱུང་ནི་ཡིན་པས།

རྩ་མང་ཆེད་འོག་ནང་ རྒྱུ་དཀའ་ངལ་བྱུང་མི་ གཙོ་བོར་ མི་སྟོབས་ཡར་སེང་འགྱུ་བའི་
ཁར་ སྐམ་ཞིང་བཟུང་སྐྱོད་འབད་མི་ མང་སུ་ཐོན་མ་ལས་ ཞིང་རྒྱུ་ ལུ་རྒྱ་གསུམ་བྱུང་
ཡོད་པ་སྟེ་ ཆེད་འོག་ནགས་ཚལ་རྒྱ་སྐྱོད་ལས་རོགས་པ་གིས་ བཤད་པ་ཡིན་པས།

ད་རུང་ ཆེད་འོག་ནང་ ནགས་ཚལ་གྱི་ རྒྱུ་ཚར་བརྒྱ་ཆ་༥༠ དེ་ཅིག་ཡོད་རུང་ ནགས་
ཚལ་དང་ འབྲུང་རྒྱུ་ གཞོང་ལེན་སྟོམ་ཤོས་ར་ ཆེད་འོག་གི་ འཁོར་ལམ་དང་ ཞིང་
ལམ་བསལ་མི་རྒྱ་གིས་ རྒྱ་སྐྱོར་འགྱུ་དོ་ཡོད་པ་ཡིན་པས།

རྒྱ་ལུ་ན་སྟེ་ འཛིན་སྐྱོང་འབྲུང་མིའི་དོན་ལུ་ ནགས་ཚལ་འཛིན་སྐྱོང་གི་སྤྱི་གཞི་དང་
རྒྱུ་བཅའ་ཁྲིམས་དང་འབྲེལ་ ར་བ་བསྐྱོར་ནི་དང་ ཤིང་འཇུགས་སྐྱོང་འབད་ནི་ དེ་ལས་
མོར་བདའ་མ་ཚོག་པའི་ སྤྱི་གཞི་རྒྱ་ རང་སོའི་ཚོགས་པ་ལུ་ འགན་འཁུ་སྐྱོད་དེ་ཡོད་པའི་
གནས་རྒྱུ།



Aerial Ropeways: A Vital but Forgotten Rural Lifeline

WANGDUEPHODRANG: Given Bhutan's undulating mountain topography and unforgiving terrain which makes up the entire country's total geographical area, aerial ropeways are seen as the most viable alternative to building transport and communication networks for far flung settlements where building road networks are riddled with massive hurdles.

Apart from economic feasibilities and advantages like being environment-friendly, one of the striking features of a ropeway is that it treats commuters' with breathtaking aerial views of the landscape below. Be it for a simple leisure ride or reaching the next destination at the fastest possible time, ropeways, though negligible in number, have always played a crucial role in connecting some of our most remote communities where road networks are virtually absent.

Today, there are a handful of communities in the country who solely depend on this mode of transport. Though the government has made concerted efforts towards building motorable roads, aerial ropeways still remain the cheapest and most effective means of transport.

The country has about five ropeways connecting different rural communities across the country. Of the five ropeways, Phajoding



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“The ropeway can be very useful to transport sick people and in emergencies as it is very efficient and safe...”

ropeway in Thimphu and Chuzomsa ropeways, Wangdue Phodrang are used to ferry construction materials and for logging purposes.

However, except for the one in the capital which is used to transport construction materials and equipment to the ongoing Phajoding monastery reconstruction site, the other two ropeways in Wangdue Phodrang and Samtse are now out of service, partially because of its prolonged use or because the once remote villages are now connected with motorable roads.

However, despite the pressing need for aerial ropeways given its feasibility, the Ministry of Information and Communication (MoIC) at the moment do not have an inventory on the existing ropeways in the country leaving us with limited room for future prospects and its viability in the country.

“The ropeway was our economic bloodline and had helped us a lot when it was functional,” said Khandu the gup of Bjena, Wangdue Phodrang. The ancient mule track which took commuters about seven hours on foot was shortened to a half-an-hour joy ride with the institution of the ropeway. The bumpy dirt road, which is today laid with asphalt, also took almost two hours to reach their village.

One of the country's oldest ropeway systems, Tashila ropeway in Wangdue Phodrang was installed in 1997 and it was used to ferry both goods and people in its wooden cabin which could accommodate about six persons in a single one-way trip.

The community of Shar Khotokha then used it as the most efficient means to reach the nearest road point at Chudzomsa. However, despite ferrying people, the ropeway was chiefly used to transport timber for various construction sites across the country.

However, it has now been seven years since the ropeway was last used to ferry villagers from these communities. After more than two decades of service the ropeway now lies deserted as it is considered unsafe to commute through the ropeway.

The community of Khotokha and the nearby villages, however, are still upbeat that this ropeway will be restored to its former glory as it was one of the most efficient ways to commute.

“The ropeway can be very useful to transport sick people and in emergencies as it is very efficient and safe. It can also be used to promote tourism in the region which will translate into direct economic benefits for the entire communities who are dependent on it,” said Khandu, a villager.

He added that the ropeway is one of the longest and provides the most scenic adventure with breathtaking views of the valley floor below. He said it was popular even with tourists when it was up and running.

Meanwhile, the ropeway in Samtse connecting Thrikha and Changju villages has been rendered defunct for three years now. It was installed in 2014 as a gift from Tarayana Foundation and directly benefited the lives of about four hundred people of the gewog. Christened the ‘Thikha-Changju Gravity Goods Ropeway,’ the ropeway was funded

by the Global Environment Facility Small Grants Programme and executed by Tarayana Foundation.

Rinchen Dorji, gup of Norgaygang gewog, said that if the ropeway is shifted to Phendaygang village it will be of immense help to the communities living there. The Jaldaka River which runs between the two villages becomes impregnable during the monsoon seasons and poses great risk to commuter's lives. Without an option commuters are unable to cross the river and villagers are forced to take a longer detour. The only ropeway that ferry people and still in use is the homemade ropeway of the tiny village of Yangkana in Goenshari, Punakha. Strikingly, Yangkana village has only two house-holds and exactly a dozen inhabitants. The village is located at the banks of Mochhu and is connected to the highway with a crude and rickety ropeway stretched precariously right across the raging river torrents.

The ropeway was built by Pema, a 57-year-old blacksmith of the village when he first settled in the village with his family. The ropeway is twenty years old and, despite being the creator of the magnificent invention, Pema can only afford to keep the cogs oiled and the ropeway running with financial assistance from his landlord.

Despite the uncertainties and difficulties posed by the rickety ropeway, Pema and his family use it for at least four times a day as it is their main outlet to the outside world.

However, taking a ride in the crude ropeway with an equally rusty wooden tub-like cabin has been a huge gamble for the micro community. Pema's family members have mostly injured their fingers because of the ropeway and the most serious one was Pema's mother-in-law.

A few years ago her fingers once got struck along the cable lines and the pulley resulting in her index finger getting severed.

Many of the 12 odd residents of this micro village have deformed nails and fingers. A whopping seven of them, which is more than half the entire population, have injured their fingers and have uneven fingers. Pema said the first thing any children in his family learn while commuting via the ropeway is to keep their hands safe in the cart. Even Pema's two-year-old grand- daughter knows that toying with the ropeway can result in devastating results, the most extreme being losing ones lives if the cable were to snap midway.

Many say such crude and rudimentary ropeways which are built without taking any safety measures into account should be periodically examined for its strength and worthiness as lives are at stake. Apart from getting injured the fear of the cable snapping and plunging into a watery end looms large and haunts the users often.

With growing concerns, the residents of Yangkana village now longs for a bridge to connect to the other side of the world as it is their only means of transport. However, until the bridge comes to fruition, the 12 residents of this micro village called Yangkana will have to make do with the rickety old ropeway which is on the verge of collapse any moment.



གདང་མགོ་སྐྱོང་ལས་ སྐྱེས་ལོ་
 ༤༡ ལང་མི་ འོད་ཟེར་སྐྱོལ་
 མ་གིས་ སྐབ་མི་འི་ནང་ ས་
 ཁོངས་གཏེ་འབད་རུང་
 གཡལ་ག་གི་ཨ་ཕ་སྟོག་བཞག་
 ཡོད་པ་ མཐོང་པ་ཅིན་ གཞན་
 གི་བདག་བབྱང་འབད་བའི་
 རྟགས་མཚན་ཡིན་མ་ལས་
 འབྲུ་འབག་མི་ཆོག་ཟེར་ཡིན་
 པས།

ས་ཁ་མཐོ་སའི་ མི་སེར་ཚུ་གི་དོན་ལུ་ ལ་ཞོར་གི་ཨ་ཕ་ གསེར་དང་དབྱེ་བ་མེད་པ།

༡ གནམ་དགུན་གི་ ཏུས་ཚོད་ལུ་ ཐིམ་ཕུག་རྫོང་ཁག་གི་ མཐའ་བྱར་ཆེད་འོག་སྔོས་ལུ་
 མི་སེར་ཚུ་གིས་ ཅེ་ཏུ་ཚུ་ནང་ གཡལ་ག་གི་ཨ་ཕ་སྐྱེས་ཚུ་བཅུགས་ཏེ་ སྐལ་པར་འབག་འགྱོ་
 སར་ མཐོང་མ་མཚན་ ལ་ལོ་གིས་ ཏུ་ཚུ་གུ་བཀལ་ཏེ་ འབག་པ་ཡིན་པས།
 དེ་ཡང་ ས་ཁ་མཐོ་སའི་ ཤིང་དོག་ཅན་དྲགས་ནི་དེ་གིས་ ཐབ་ཤིང་གི་ཆ་བ་ལུ་ ལ་ཞོར་གི་
 ཨ་ཕ་ཚུ་ ལག་ལེན་འཐབ་དགོ་ནི་དེ་གིས་ཡིན་པས།
 གཡལ་མི་ཚུ་གིས་ རང་སོའི་གཡལ་ག་གི་ཨ་ཕ་ཚུ་ མ་བསྐྱ་བའི་ཉེ་མ་ཚར་ེ་ ཐོག་སྟེ་སྐྱེས་
 བཞག་དོ་ཡོད་པ་ད་ ལེགས་ཤོམ་སྟེ་ སྐྱེས་པའི་བྱལ་ལུ་རྒྱུང་མ་གཅིག་ རང་སོའི་ཁྱིམ་ནང་
 བསྐྱ་འབག་པ་ཡིན་པས།
 རྒྱལ་ཁབ་ཀྱི་ ས་ཁ་མཐོ་སའི་ས་གནས་ གཞན་ཚུ་ནང་བབྱམས་སྟེ་ སྔོས་ལུ་ཡང་ གཡལ་
 གི་ཨ་ཕ་ཚུ་ ཁྱིམ་ནང་མེ་འཕུ་སྟེ་ རྫོང་ཏྲག་ཏྲི་སྟེ་ བཞག་ནི་དང་ བཞེས་སྟོན་འབད་ནི་འི་
 དོན་ལུ་ ལག་ལེན་འཐབ་དོ་ཡོད་པ་ཡིན་པས།
 རང་སོའི་ཁྱིམ་གི་ཕ་བར་ ཞོར་གི་ཨ་ཕ་ཚུ་བཞག་སའི་ བཅོ་བཀོད་རྒྱུ་སྟེ་ཡོད་མི་ཚུ་ཡང་
 ནང་ན་ ཆར་པ་མ་ཐལ་སྟེ་བཅོ་སྟེ་འདུག།
 འབྲུལ་ཁམས་ཅིག་ཁར་ སྔོས་ཏི་ཀི་ཐང་ལས་ སྐྱེས་ལོ་ ༢༩ འབད་མི་ ལྷ་བ་ཆེ་མིང་གི་



ཉིམ་དབང་འདུས།
 འགན་སྲོད་ཅོམ་སྟིགས།
 ཀུན་གསལ་ལས་འཛིན།

ཨ་ལི་གིས་ སྤང་བྱང་ནང་ལས་ གཡག་གི་ཨ་ཕ་ཚུ་ བསྐྱ་བསྐྱུམ་འབད་དེ་ ཡང་ཅེ་ནང་
འདེགས་པ་ད་ ཁོ་ར་ ཏྲ་བདའ་ལྟེ་ གཡག་གི་ཨ་ཕ་ཚུ་ བྱིམ་ནང་བསྐྱུམ་ཨིན་པས།
ཁོ་གིས་འབད་བ་ཅིན་ ལོ་བསྐྱར་བཞིན་དུ་ གཡག་གི་ཨ་ཕ་ ཡང་ཅེ་༡༠༠ ལས་ལྷག་སྟེ་
བསྐྱ་བསྐྱུམ་འབད་དེ་ཡོད་པ་ད་ དེ་ཚུ་ གནམ་བྱར་ལུ་ ཆར་པ་རྒྱབ་པའི་སྐབས་ ཐབ་ཤིང་
སྟེ་ ལག་ལེན་འཐབ་ཨིན་ཟེར་ སྐབ་ཨིན་པས།

ཁོ་གིས་ སྐབ་མིའི་ནང་ གཡུས་ཁར་འཛོ་སྤྱོད་འཐབ་སྟེ་ སྤོང་དགོ་པ་ཅིན་ གཡག་ཚུ་
ཨོམ་དང་ མར་གྱི་དོན་ལུ་ རྒྱང་མ་གཅིག་ཨིན་པར་ ཨ་ཕ་གི་དོན་ལུ་ཡང་ དེས་པར་དུ་
དགོ་ཟེར་ཨིན་པས།

གདང་མགོ་སྤྱོད་ལས་ སྐྱེས་ལོ་༩༡ འབད་མི་ འོད་ཟེར་སྤྱོད་མ་གིས་ སྐབ་མིའི་ནང་
གཡག་གི་ཨ་ཕ་ཚུ་ འབྲུག་ཁྱེ་༡༠ པའི་ནང་ལས་འབྲུག་ཅི་ འགོ་བཙུགས་པ་བཞིན་དུ་ དེ་ཚུ་
རང་སོའི་འོར་འབྲུམས་སའི་ ས་ཁོངས་ཚུ་ནང་ལས་རྒྱང་མ་གཅིག་ འབྲུ་འབག་ཆོག་ཟེར་
ཨིན་པས།

མོ་གིས་ བཤད་མིའི་ནང་ སྤྱི་ཁྱེ་༩ པ་ལས་༩ པ་ཚུན་ ཆར་ཚུའི་དུས་ཚོད་འབད་ཕྱ་ལས་
ལོ་དེ་གི་ ཉེ་མ་ལས་ གསོག་འཛོག་འབད་མི་ ཨ་ཕ་ཚུ་ ལག་ལེན་འཐབ་དགོ་ཟེར་ཨིན་པས།
ད་ སྤྱི་ཁྱེ་༡ ལས་༩ པ་ཚུན་ ཨ་ཕ་ཚུ་ སྐམ་བཅུག་པ་ཨིན་ཟེར་ཨིན་པས།

དེ་ལས་ སྤྱི་ཁྱེ་༩ པ་མཚུག་བསྐྱུ་ཁམས་ལུ་ ཨ་ཕ་ཚུ་སྟོག་སྟེ་ ད་རུང་ སྐམ་བཅུག་དོ་
ཡོད་པ་ད་ སྤྱི་ཁྱེ་༡༠ ལས་ བསྐྱ་བསྐྱུམ་འབད་ནི་ འགོ་བཙུགས་པ་ཨིན་ཟེར་ འོད་ཟེར་
སྤྱོད་མ་གིས་ སྐབ་ཨིན་པས།

མོ་གིས་ བཤད་མིའི་ནང་ ག་དེམ་ཅིག་སྟེ་ གཡག་ཚུ་ ཕྱི་ཁ་ལས་པར་ འགྱོ་བའི་སྐབས་
ཨ་ཕ་བཏང་མི་ཚུ་ འགོ་དང་པ་ མཐོང་མི་དེ་གིས་ འབྲུ་ཆོག་ནི་ཨིན་རུང་ གཞན་གྱི་ས་
ཁོངས་ནང་ལས་ རྩ་ལས་ར་ འབྲུ་མི་ཆོག་ཟེར་ཨིན་པས།

གཡུས་ཚན་ཚུ་ནང་ ཁོར་གྱི་ཨ་ཕ་ལག་ལེན་འཐབ་ནིའི་དོན་ལུ་ བཟོ་བཀོད་འབད་མི་
ལྷགས་ཐབ་བུ་ཁ་རི་ཚུ་ཡང་ ནང་འདྲེན་འབད་དེ་ཡོད་པ་ད་ འོད་ཟེར་སྤྱོད་མ་གིས་ སྐབ་
མིའི་ནང་ ས་ཁོངས་ག་ཉེ་འབད་རུང་ གཡག་གི་ཨ་ཕ་ ལྷག་བཞག་ཡོད་པ་ མཐོང་པ་ཅིན་
གཞན་གྱིས་བདག་བབྱང་འབད་བའི་ རྟགས་མཚན་ཨིན་མ་ལས་ འབྲུ་འབག་མི་ཆོག་ཟེར་
ཨིན་པས།

འབྲུ་འབག་སར་ མཐོང་པ་ཅིན་ ཨ་ཕ་སྟོག་བཞག་མི་དེ་གིས་ མི་དེ་ལུ་ ཨར་རྒྱན་གྱི་
ཉེས་འཛུགས་འབད་རུང་ འབད་ཆོག་ཟེར་ཨིན་པས།

འོད་ཟེར་གྱིས་འབད་བ་ཅིན་ གནམ་བྱར་ལུ་ གཡག་ཚུ་གནམ་སྤོ་སྟེ་ ཐག་རིང་སར་



སྤྱི་ལོ་ ༢༠༡༩ ལང་མི་ གླ་བ་
 ཚེ་རིང་གིས་ རྟ་བདེ་ལ་སྤྱོད་
 ལ་ལོར་གྱི་ ཨ་ཕ་ཚུ་ བྱིས་
 རང་བསྐྱུལ་བའི་བསྐྱེད་

བདེ་ལ་འགྱོ་བའི་སྐྱབས་ འབད་བ་ཅིན་ ཆར་པ་ནང་ གཡལ་གི་ཨ་ཕ་ བདེ་ལ་འཛིན་འཐབ་
 མ་ཚུ་གས་ནི་དེ་གིས་ ཤིང་ཚུ་ལག་ལེན་འཐབ་ཨིན་ཟེར་ཨིན་པས།

གཡལ་གི་ཨ་ཕ་ཚུ་ཡང་ རྩོམ་ཏ་སྐྱེ་ བྱིས་ཆགས་ཏེ་ ས་ཀྱག་ཀྱ་སྤྱོད་ སྤྱོད་པའི་སྐྱབས་
 ལུ་ རྩོག་དགོཔ་དང་ དེ་གི་སྐྱབས་ མི་ཚུ་གིས་ དང་པ་ར་ རྒྱུ་མ་གིས་བརྩུང་སྤྱོད་ རྩོག་
 རྩོག་ཡོད་པ་ཨིན་པས།

གཡལ་མི་ཚུ་གིས་ སྤྱོད་མི་འཛིན་ གཡལ་གི་ཨ་ཕ་ཚུ་གིས་ མེ་ལེགས་ཤོམ་སྤྱོད་ འབར་
 བདེ་ལ་མ་ཆད་ མེ་མ་གི་བར་ ཡུན་རིང་མོ་སྤྱོད་ སྤྱོད་པ་ཨིན་ཟེར་ཨིན་པས།

རྩོག་སྤྱོད་མེ་མ་ལས་ སྤྱི་ལོ་ ༢༠༡༩ འབད་མི་ པདྨ་དབང་མོ་གིས་ བཤད་མི་འཛིན་ མོ་
 གིས་ གཡལ་གི་ཨ་ཕ་ཚུ་ གནམ་བྱར་གྱི་ སྤྱོད་སྤྱོད་ཚུ་རང་ཡང་ གསལ་ལོག་འབད་དེ་
 བཞག་དོ་ཟེར་ཨིན་པས།

ཨ་ཕ་ཚུ་ འཕྲལ་ར་ལག་ལེན་འཐབ་ནི་ཨིན་པ་ཅིན་ ལེགས་ཤོམ་སྤྱོད་ སྤྱོད་མི་ཚུ་དགོཔ་
 དང་ གཡལ་སྤྱོད་ གསལ་ལོག་འབད་དེ་ བཞག་ནི་ཨིན་པ་ཅིན་ དུམ་གྱ་རེ་ མ་སྤྱོད་མི་ཚུ་
 འབད་རུང་བདེ་ལ་ཟེར་ཨིན་པས།

རྩོག་སྤྱོད་མེ་མ་ལས་ པདྨ་མཁའ་འགྲོ་གིས་ སྤྱོད་མི་འཛིན་ ཤིང་དགོན་པའི་ཁར་

གྲང་ཤུགས་ཆེ་བའི་ ས་ཁ་མཐོ་ས་ཚུ་ནང་ གཞན་གྱི་ཁྱིམ་ནང་ལས་ གསེར་ཡར་ཕ་བརྒྱུ་མི་
དང་ གཞན་གྱི་ས་ཁོངས་ནང་ལས་ ཡ་ཕ་འབྲུ་འབག་མི་གཉིས་ ཉེས་ཤིང་ཅིག་ར་འཐད་
ཟེར་ཡིན་པས།

གལ་སྲིད་ གཡལ་གུང་སྤྱི་ཅིག་ལས་ མེད་མི་ཚུ་ལུ་ ཡ་ཕ་གིས་ མ་ལང་པ་ཅིན་ གཡལ་
ལེ་ཤ་ཡོད་མི་ཚུ་ལས་ ལྷང་དགོ་པ་ཡིན་པས།

ཁོ་གིས་འབད་བ་ཅིན་ ཏུས་ཅི་ བསྐྱ་བསྐྱུམ་འབད་མི་ གཡལ་གི་ཡ་ཕ་ཚུ་ ཤུལ་མའི་
གནས་དགུན་གྱི་སྐབས་ མི་གཏང་དགོ་ཟེར་ཡིན་མ་ད་ སྲོས་མི་སེར་ཚུ་གིས་ ཡ་ཕ་སྐམ་ཚུ་
ལུ་ ཅུག་ཟེར་ སྐབ་དོ་ཡོད་པ་ཡིན་པས།

སྲོས་ཀྱི་དམངས་མི་ ཆོ་རིང་རྩོུ་གིས་ སྐབ་མའི་ནང་ སྲོས་ལུ་ གཡལ་གི་ཡ་ཕ་ཚུ་
ལག་ཆེ་མི་དང་འཁྲུལ་ ཡ་ཕ་འབྲུ་ནིའི་ ཏུས་ཆོད་ཁར་ མི་ཚུ་གི་བར་ན་ འཁོན་ལུགས་ཏེ་
མ་འགྲིག་པ་དུམ་གྱ་རེ་ འཐོན་ནི་ཡོད་པ་ད་ འདས་པའི་ལྷན་ནང་ གཡལ་མི་ཅིག་གིས་
ཉོགས་བཤད་ཀྱི་ བརྒྱད་འཕྲིན་ལྟོད་ཡོད་པ་ཡིན་རུང་ ཅོད་དོན་དེ་ ཆེད་འོག་ནང་ མ་ལྟོད་
ཟེར་ཡིན་པས།

འཛིགས་མེད་རྩོུ་རྩོུ་དབང་ཕྱུག་རྒྱལ་ཡོངས་གླིང་གའི་ སྲོས་ནགས་ཆལ་གླིང་ག་ཡིག་ཆང་ལས་
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Rukha community and its famed Nya Dosem



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The community in Wangduephodrang makes a living from the smoked freshwater trout

WANGDUEPHODRANG: The Harachhu stream meanders through the communities of Rukha community in Athang Gewog, and apart from feeding their parch rice fields also brings promises of better lives as it provides the primary source of cash income from the renowned smoked delicacy – Nya Dosem - or smoked Himalayan freshwater trout.

Launched in 2010, Harachu Capture Fishery Management Group (HCFMG) in Rukha under Athang Gewog in Wangduephodrang Dzongkhag is the first and only formalized fishery community in Bhutan, and which has brought smiles to the lives of the community. The fishery group was formed after the government realized that community-based fisheries management can bring about significant socio-economic benefits and livelihood changes for farmers at the grassroots whose means of income are limited and hard to come by. It was formalized with 17 households as core members with the aim to put in place sensible and responsible fisheries management practices and also provides a framework within which people could harvest fishery resources from Harachu without compromising the ecological integrity of the fish stock and the marine ecology. It was formalized with the support of Renewable Natural Resources Research and Development Centre, Bajo, Dzongkhag Livestock Sector, in technical collaboration with National Research and Development Centre Cold Water Fishery (NRDCCWF) in Haa. Rukha community comprises eight villages and they are actively engaged in fishing and the gewog is best known for its unique product of Nya Dosem for several decades, which is a specially prepared smoke fish using the traditional method and fetches up to Nu 800 a kilogram in today's market. Locals claim they had a difficult time even meet their daily needs because of the remoteness of their village before fishing was legalized in their community. The gewog is one of the most remote gewogs in the Dzongkhag with a poor communication network and limited accessibility making. The villages are about nine hours walk from the nearest road point.

Making Nya Dosem & Marketing Their Produce

After harvesting, fresh fishes are collected and bent into a curve shape with the help of canes and bamboo. These are then placed over bamboo mats or wooden logs and smoke-dried.

The Chairperson of HCFMG, Tashi Dorji, said that until 1984, the community was in possession of a Royal Kasho issued by His Majesty The Fourth Druk Gyalpo which gave them permission to harvest fishes with traditional harvesting techniques. But overtime, they misplaced the Royal Kasho following which the community faced difficulty in obtaining fishing permits from the Department of Forest and Park Services.

The communities of the two chiwogs in Athang Gewog, Rukha-Samthang, and Lawa-Lamga are legalized to harvest fish from the Harachu stream. Elsewhere in Zhemgang, the communities of Bertey are also legalized to harvest fish, similar to Rukha, but their final product is different.

“For Rukha, the fishing permit from the government is renewed every 10 years based on the sustainability and impact on the income

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of the community,” Tashi Dorji said.

The fishing period is spread over through the 7th to 9th months and the 12th to 3rd months of the Bhutanese calendar as higher landings are recorded during these periods. Fishing effort is also the highest during these seasons.

After the community was connected with a 25-kilometer farm road in 2017, they are also exploring other cash-generating activities like mass paddy cultivation of paddy and rearing hybrid livestock, among others.

To supplement their sustainability issues, the locality also rears common carp and grass carp under pond fisheries which are also harvested and made into Nya Dosem, and this initiative is supported by the livestock sector.

There are also those who condemn the initiative because of spiritual reasons. The Secretary of Jangsa Animal Saving Trust, Phuntshok Rabten, said that the action of killing would only lead to eternal suffering. “Actions, especially, which leads to killing of innocent animals will never bring peace to the nation or the individual mind?” Locals don’t disregard the spiritual beliefs but confess that there are hardly any other means of earning hard income.

The Gup of Athang Gewog, Khandu Dorji, said, “Apart from harvesting fish, there is hardly anything else to earn cash income. People in our community do make a little from cane and bamboo products but it is hardly enough.”

Tashi Dorji said that harvesting fish is more than just an opportunity that improves the livelihood of their community but also a means of preserving the age-old tradition of processing of Nya Dosem.

To address the sustainability of aquatic resources and also to enhance the social and economic life of rural people, it was important to explore it in a sustainable manner which ultimately led to the birth of the fishery group.

Since the communities have strong by-laws, they don’t have any conflict with other groups. Today, the community boasts of seven fishery groups consisting of about nine members each.

“We conduct awareness on sustainable fish harvesting to the community at various intervals and the forest officials from the Jigme Singye Wangchuck National Park do frequent monitoring and patrolling,” said Ugyen, the Dzongkhag Livestock Officer.

The pilot fishery was initiated for a term of five years and it completed its first five years term in 2015. During this period, the HCFMG legally harvested over 22-metric tons (MT) of fish.

According to the Harachu Capture Fishery Management Plan developed by the Department of Livestock (DoL), during the pilot project, the annual fish volume harvested averaged about 4 to 5-MT. The average volume decreased slightly in 2013 and 2014 as the community was engaged in other works.

Member of Parliament (MP) from Athang-Thedtsho Constituency,



Kinley Wangchuk, said that selling dried fish delicacy did supplement the livelihood of the community there. However, the sustainability of fish resources and other factors like the impacts of climate change meant that the community and the government should explore alternatives.

“The government, under the water flagship program, has been addressing several new irrigation schemes to encourage people to take up more and more agriculture-related activities.

Owing to their heritage of being Oleps and having unique culture, the government through their tourism flagship program has also

identified a trek route to Rukha,” Kinley Wangchuk added.

The locals use locally made Do and Dang which are traditional traps and these are used for catching fish mainly during the downstream run after spawning.

“These traps are made from cane, bamboo, and woods. And as they keep the gap between bamboo stalks large which allows smaller fishes to escape through which would ensure the future sustainability of fishes,” added Tashi Dorji, adding the eyehole of the Do and Dang need to be maintained about three inches in order to not trap or kill small and immature fishes.

While the community harvests about 20 kg in a single night, Tashi Dorji said that they are faced with multiple challenges like guarding their trap especially during the monsoon seasons as rivers swell. Besides, it is a labor-intensive project where only men can do the work.

The Member Secretary of HCFMG, Penjor, said that they used to earn an annual income of about Nu 50,000 in any normal year. But the Covid-19 pandemic has robbed them off the annual income.

The dried delicacies are normally sold in the nearby villages or the available market mostly in Wangduephodrang and Thimphu. However, Tashi Dorji confessed that the demand for the delicacies are so high that the community cannot meet the demand from the market.

After the initiation of HCFMG, members of the group observed a three-fold increase in the net household income which the Group has noted to be an increase from Nu 14,833 in 2010 to Nu 47,250 in 2015. Of the reported household income, 28.9 percent of the income in the community came through the sale of smoked fish.

In 2018, the HCFMG harvested 0.75-MT followed by 0.67-MT of fish in 2019 from the Harachu and the volume decreased to 0.45-MT in 2020. Ugyen said the decline in harvest was due to a flash flood which killed most of the fishes in the stream in 2019.

To resolve the issues arising from the inequality in fishing among fishers, members agreed to introduce a rotation system for river segment usage. This allows the community to use different segments of the fishing ground on a rotation basis. The site allocation is also done through a lucky draw.

The fishing ground spans over a 16.5-Km long stretch along the Harachu stream and also constitutes the main fishing ground for HCFMG.

The NRDCCWF has provided a drying machine through a pilot project which can be used to dry the fish. The machine ensures that villagers are not physically exposed to smoke. The finance coordinator of HCFMG, Khandu Wangmo, said that locals prefer the traditional method of firewood-fueled drying which takes about two to three days to dry fish properly.

Tashi Dorji said the fish drying machine saves time. “Before, I spent

about five days of drying and smoking the fish, and now, almost three days is enough to finish one smoking. It gives me plenty of time to do other works.”

Athang is home to 1,980 residents spread over 167 households, 26 villages, and five chiwogs. Athang experiences a dry sub-tropical climate and lies between altitudes ranging from 1,000 to 3,500 meters above sea level.

For these communities, the production of Nya Dosem has come as a huge respite given their vulnerabilities to climate change which has affected their agriculture growth and livelihoods.

A large, light gray, stylized letter 'J' serves as the background for the entire page. It is positioned vertically, with the top of the letter near the top of the page and the bottom of the letter near the bottom. The letter is slightly offset to the left, leaving more space on the right side.

JAB's Activities

Some Highlights

Community Media Literacy

Much of the rural populace is semi-literate and is unreached by mainstream media and government agencies. Rural communities constitute close to 70% of Bhutan's population, but are unable to take advantage of the power and influence of media although they increasingly use different forms of media for news, education, entertainment, and interaction.

To educate and create awareness among rural communities on the importance of using mainstream media not just for news, but also to engage with the media, JAB conducted four community media workshops in four rural communities of Bhutan: Dungkhar in Lhuentse (east), Soe in Thimphu (west), Gesarling in Dagana (south) and Dhur in Bumthang (central) in 2019. The workshop introduced community members to different forms of media, the role and importance of the media, the government's social media policy, and how to engage with media. They were also briefed on fake news. A total of 233 community members participated. JAB will conduct another four workshops in four districts, this year.

Owing to Bhutanese media houses' urban-centric location and coverage, reporters often miss pertinent rural issues and challenges faced by rural communities. Following the community media workshops, JAB formed a community media forum consisting of five to seven members. The members were then trained to conduct subsequent meetings with the journalist facilitator for timely reporting on any issue affecting the communities.

The purpose of the media forum is to identify issues and challenges faced by the communities concerned to enhance the mainstream media's coverage of rural issues and to disseminate their stories via social media. JAB has already sent four journalists to four respective communities to meet with the forums. More journalists will be sent to meet with forums until the project ends in October 2021. This project is supported by the United Nations Democracy Fund (UNDEF).

Community/ Campus Radio

JAB organized a three-day training for Community/Campus Radio in October 2019. Fifteen participants attended the workshop. The radio stations included two village-based community radio stations in Pemagatshel (KYD Community Radio), radio stations from Sarpang (Edi Community Radio), Samtse (Lhop Community Radio), and campus radio stations from Sherubtse College (Sherubtse FM), College of Science and Technology (CST Campus Radio), and College of Language and Culture Studies (Taktse Campus Radio).

During the training, radio stations without facebook pages were made to create one so that they could share community issues and have media pick up stories to write about/broadcast. The training was aimed to professionalise community radio stations through



Community media literacy workshop in Dungkar, Kurtoe



The participants of the community media literacy workshop in Dungkar, Kurtoe



Community media literacy workshop in Gesarling, Dagana



The participants of the community media literacy workshop in Gesarling, Dagana

organisational, managerial, and technical skills development. We are still in touch with the trainers and trainees. We have also encouraged the participants to apply for our rural reporting journalism awards and grants.

Long-form Narrative Story Writing

32 reporters from different media houses were trained in long-form narrative story writing in Thimphu over the last two years. The training pedagogy included both theoretical and practical sessions. All trainees were encouraged to write stories during the training and several of the stories were published/aired in mainstream media. Some trainees were selected by JAB to cover stories identified by the Community Media Forums.

Rural Reporting Grant

Following the Long-form Narrative Story writing workshop, JAB invited proposals for the Rural Reporting Grant from print, television and radio journalists. The Rural Reporting Grant is primarily aimed at enhancing coverage of news and issues from rural pockets of Bhutan, mostly those unreached by mainstream media.

Eighteen journalists from print, broadcast media, and freelancers were awarded JAB's 2019 and 2020 Rural Reporting Grants. The journalists traveled to rural Bhutan and pursued untold stories.

These activities were organized as a part of JAB's two- year project Empowering Rural Communities in Bhutan through Mass Media, supported by the United Nations Democracy Fund (UNDEF).

Women Leadership

As a part of JAB's Helvetas EU -funded project, we organized a three-day training on Women Leadership in Haa. The training was aimed at building the confidence of female journalists and other women to help them aspire to positions of leadership. 35 participants attended the training. The participants included women from various media organisations, Haa dzongkhag administration, and Civil Society organisations.

Annual Journalism Awards

JAB's Annual Journalism Awards (AJA) is usually held on 3 May coinciding with World Press Freedom day. The fifth AJA in 2019 was graced by the Minister of Information and Communications, Karma Donnen Wangdi. More than 130 journalists, government officials, and CSO members gathered for the event. JAB broadcast the event LIVE for the first time, in partnership with the national broadcaster, Bhutan Broadcasting Service (BBS).

34 journalists were recognized for their exceptional contributions. Of the 34 awards, 10 awards were supported by the United Nations Democracy Fund. JAB sought donations and financial assistance



Community media literacy workshop in Soe, Thimphu



Copies of Bhutan Press Mirror were distributed to the students of schools in Soe, Thimphu



Information and Communications Minister, Karma Donnén Wangdi and the JAB President, Rinzin Wangchuk launch the third edition of Bhutan Press Mirror on May 3, 2019



Exchange of MoU between the two presidents of JAB and IJU in Kathmandu, Nepal

from government agencies, private companies, and financial institutions for the remaining awards. The number of awards was increased upon feedback from members.

We had to postpone our sixth AJA due to the pandemic and related difficulties. We are pleased to share that JAB will be organizing our Sixth Annual Journalism Awards on 2 June, this year.

Bhutan Press Mirror

The third edition of the Bhutan Press Mirror: JAB An Occasional Journal, was launched by the Minister of Information and Communications, Karma Donnen Wangdi, on May 3, 2019 coinciding with the celebration of World Press Freedom Day and AJA.

The journal is divided into three parts, namely Perspectives (opinion pieces by journalists and non-journalists, Stories from the field (best rural stories supported by JAB's Rural Reporting Grant), and JAB's Activities: Some Highlights.

The issue of the journal carried a total of six opinion pieces, six rural stories, and all the activity highlights of JAB, including UNDEF-funded activities. The opinion pieces and stories were published in English and Dzongkha.

The opinion pieces highlighted issues in Bhutanese media, public funding of private media, social media and politics, media and the judiciary, and Civil Society organisations. The rural stories published in the journal highlighted poverty, welfare, challenges of rural women leaders, and rain water harvesting on rural livelihood among others.

Copies of the journal were distributed to various government offices, the parliament, CSOs, media houses, colleges, schools, monastic schools, and rural communities. The e-copy of the journal was distributed to all journalists via email and uploaded to JAB's website and Facebook page. The journal renewed interest in the situation of the press in Bhutan among locals as well as international journalists. JAB is launching the fourth Edition of the Bhutan Press Mirror on 3 May this year too.

Other Activities

a. JAB in collaboration with the Bhutan Media and Communications Institute (BMCI) instituted a year-long Multimedia Journalism course for Bhutanese journalists. This was the first of its kind in the country.

BMCI also supported JAB to buy masks, sanitizers, and face shields for our members. JAB was able to provide free care packages all journalists in the beginning of 2020 when Covid-19 had just hit the country.



Fifteen participants attended the community/campus radio training in October 2019



At the Women leadership training in Haa

b. JAB in collaboration with Bhutan Media Foundation (BMF) also took on fact-checking to fight fake news on the coronavirus. JAB and BMF fact-checked all misinformation and made correct information available on social media and chat apps.

c. JAB also collaborated with BMF and conducted a two-day Media Engagement Workshop for the Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in Thimphu from 26 to 27 November 2020. A total of twenty representatives from CSOs attended the workshop. The main objective behind the training workshop was to help the CSOs in Bhutan to understand the importance of media and how to effectively engage with the media.

d. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between JAB and the Indian Journalists Union (IJU) on 8th November 2019 in Kathmandu, Nepal, to further cooperation and mutual understanding, and to improve sharing of information between the parties. The MoU was signed in the presence of the International Federation of Journalists' deputy general secretary Jeremy Dear, and director Jane Worthington. JAB was represented by President Rinzin Wangchuk

e. JAB collaborated with Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS) and organized a Mobile Video Journalism Course from 25 to 27 November 2019.

f. JAB with support from KAS also had their Investigative Journalism Manual translated into Dzongkha, printed, and distributed to all media organisations in 2020.

g. JAB partnered with the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP) in 2020 to make various scholarships/workshops available to Bhutanese journalists. This partnership is continuing in 2021.

h. JAB also became a part of the South Asian Women in Media network in 2020 to help Bhutanese female journalists improve their network and share targeted opportunities.



KAS funded a mobile video journalism in Paro from November 25-27, 2019



The recipients of rural reporting grants



At the community media literacy workshop in Dhur, Bumthang



Bhutan Media and Communications Institute (BMCI) supported JAB to buy masks, sanitizers, and face shields for our members