

## WHAT WE DO, WHY WE DO cont'd

### Name and significance

In the Bhutanese tradition, religious persons give names with blessings and prayers. Thus, the names have spiritual significance and most names are based on righteous Buddhist persons or principles. To give a few examples, the name Sangay denotes the Buddha, Drolma the female Buddha Tara, Ugyen the saint Padmasambhava and Jamyang the Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī. Similarly, Dorji refers to the state of indestructibility, Tshultrim morality, Sonam merit, Tshering long life and Jampa loving kindness. Such spiritually significant names are not only auspicious for the person but also reminds the person of the righteous principle or personage.

### Name and sex

The general convention is to have a combination of two names, which also helps to distinguish the sex. So, a man can be Sangay Dorji (Admantine Buddha) and a woman Tshultrim Lhamo (Goddess of Morality). It is mainly the second name, which marks the sex. Bhutanese first names are mostly neutral and can be used for both male and female. So, names such as Karma, Dorji, Sonam, etc. can be used as first names of both boys and girls. Only a handful of names such as Wangda and Tobgay used as first names for boys and Lhaki and Deki for girls are restrictive in this sense although the rule is not strictly followed. Most names (Phuntsho, Sonam, Dorji, Tobgay) can be used either as a first name or a second name but many are commonly used as first names (Karma, Sangay, Pema, Tashi, etc.) or second names (Choden, Wangmo, Zangmo, Wangyal, Jamtsho, etc.).

Traditionally, the second name or the combination indicates the sex of the person. However, this has become more difficult in recent times as more people adopt fancy and unique combinations for themselves or their children and many women, in imitation of foreign practices, attach their father's and husband's second name to their names. The surname tradition works fine in parts of the world where first names indicate the sex but Bhutanese first names are gender neutral and the second names are mostly gender restrictive. Thus, the new practice of appending a husband's or father's masculine second name to their names by modern Bhutanese women creates some confusion.

Some Bhutanese have only a single name or as the Bhutanese say 'a name without a partner.' This has lately been a problem for many Bhutanese while travelling abroad as all international forms require at least two names. Many Bhutanese add their place of origin. Thus, we have names such as Sha Dorji, Tenzin Drukpa, Boepa Choda, etc. On the other hand, some Bhutanese also have a combination of more than two names. Like in Tibet, this is particularly the case with some religious figures, who use a long string of names to show their importance. Take for example the name given to the 10th Karmapa: Palden Jigten Sumgi Drenpa Kuzhi Lhendup Choying Kuntu Chabpai Thinley Tagpai Dorji Gyurwa Medpa Yizhingyi Nyinpo Gyepa Damedpa Ngonpar Thowai Pal. In recent decades, there has been a slight growth in self-chosen long names even among laities. This perhaps indicates a slight growth in people's self importance.

As names are generally given fortuitously by lamas, members of the family often bear different names with no link. From an anthropological perspective, this is an interesting socio-cultural phenomenon, which concurs with the idea of an individual's independent identity. It works well for a progressive mind that views a person on the basis of his or her worth, without being pegged to a family, class or caste. Besides, it frees societies from the clutches of a patriarchal system in which the principal male member, through the surname, symbolically controls and owns other members.

Bhutan does not have the tradition of attaching clan or household names to people's names, although this practice is widespread in neighbouring Tibet. Bhutan has no known record of any secular lines being passed down for generations with a shared name until the middle of the 20th century. In contrast, religious affiliations are sometimes implicitly marked by a shared name. As was mentioned earlier, lamas often give a part of their names to those they name as a blessing and also an indication of their influence.