

THE BHUTAN SOCIETY



NEWSLETTER

Number 22

President: Lord Wilson of Tillyorn, KT, GCMG

April 2002

The 10th Anniversary of the Bhutan Society 1992-2002

Lecture – May 14th 2002

“The Languages of Bhutan”

Professor George van Driem, of the Department of Comparative Linguistics, Leiden University, the Netherlands, will present a lecture to the Society on the languages of Bhutan (of which there are said to be nineteen). The lecture will be aimed at the general interest level and is for everyone – not just linguists!

What can Bhutan's linguistic diversity tell us about the population prehistory of the country and of the greater Himalayan region as a whole?

And what of the similarity between South American and Bhutanese weaving? Is there a basis for a connection? And if so, does this connection extend to languages?

Professor van Driem is a world authority on Himalayan languages and also a lively and entertaining lecturer – come and enjoy learning about the many languages and dialects of Bhutan from the pre-eminent authority.

Venue: The National Liberal Club
(The Lady Violet Room)
Whitehall Place, London SW1
Date: Tuesday 14th May 2002
Time: 6:30 pm for 7:00 pm

Drinks available before the lecture

Professor van Driem will also lecture in Oxford in association with the Oriental Institute:

Venue: Room 1, The Oriental Institute
Pusey Lane, Oxford
Date: Monday 13th May, 2002
Time: 3:00pm

Professor van Driem's Internet homepage may be found at:
www.ias.nl/host/himalaya/driem.html

Languages of Bhutan



from: George van Driem, *Languages of the Greater Himalayan Region, Vol. 1: Dzongkha*



NEWS & UPDATES FROM THE BHUTAN SOCIETY



Books for Bhutan

By Genette Dagtoglou

I first went to Bhutan more than seven years ago. We were lucky enough to visit two schools, one a newly opened secondary school in Paro, the other a primary school in Bumthang, in eastern Bhutan. Both schools were desperate for books as reading material for their libraries. We said we would try and help.

A couple of years passed before I got into action. I discovered from P&O that they could ship a ton of books to Calcutta for only £85, and the Bhutan State Trading Company could truck them on to Bhutan at no further cost. So I set about collecting books: I asked friends, members of the Bhutan Society of the UK, circulated local leaflets, contacted over a hundred schools in the area and combed the leftovers of school sales and church bazaars. Soon our garage began to look like a second-hand bookshop.

I cajoled the local wineshops for similar sized cardboard boxes in order to make up a cubic metre of books. Having a weak back, I could not have coped with all the lifting and heaving of boxes without the devoted and enthusiastic help of two long-term guests under our roof, a young Hungarian and an Andorran. A friend owning a large van volunteered to drive with me the sixty odd miles down to London's docks, and, with an amazing minimum of paperwork and formality, we had the satisfying sight of a pallet of thirty boxes on its way to Bhutanese schools.

Word that I was collecting books spread around. It is easier to persuade people to part with excess books than to give money. So by now I am preparing the thirteenth consignment to Bhutan. Several more have gone to Burma, the Republic of Georgia, and possibly shortly to Eritrea. A total of more than 20,000 books has reached areas of great need. A large percentage of the books are children's books, but there have also been many boxes of novels, classics, adventure and detective stories, romances, history, picture books of the world, and also science, because there are many near-adult children and isolated teachers whose needs equally need to be met.

Two years ago I visited Bhutan again, where a consignment of books was awaiting distribution. They were loaded onto our four-wheel drive, and we took them to some dozen schools of all sizes and types. The expressions of delight on the faces of the children as they tore open the boxes and the joyful smiles of their teachers were more than enough reward for the hours spent among often dusty books in a damp garage. At several schools I addressed the assembly, and told them to remember that knowledge of English was their passport to the whole world.

I have always had a passionate enjoyment of books since I was a child. It had seemed to me unfair that so many parts of the world should not have a fraction of the satisfaction and pleasure, as well as the educational benefit, that I have been able to indulge in. Now I feel I am able through this work to pay back in some small degree the good fortune that I have always had - the escape to the world of books.

Queen Elizabeth The Queen Mother 1900-2002

On behalf of our members, the Bhutan Society extends deepest sympathy to HM The Queen, the Royal Family and particularly to our Chairman, Simon Bowes Lyon, and his family, on the sad news of the death of Queen Elizabeth The Queen Mother.

Simon is the nephew of the late Queen Mother (Lady Elizabeth Bowes Lyon) and his home, St. Paul's Walden Bury in Hertfordshire, was her birthplace and childhood home.

St. Paul's Walden Bury is well known to a great many Bhutanese who have studied in the UK over the last 20 years and have received hospitality from the Bowes Lyon family at the annual 'Student Lunch' at the house.

Bhutanese students past and present join with us in mourning the loss of The Queen Mother and celebrating the great contribution she made during her long life.

Polytunnel Restoration Appeal Update

Jessica Beaghen, who travelled to Bhutan on a travel scholarship while studying at RBG Kew, has now succeeded in raising the fantastic sum of £1467 in her appeal for funds to restore the polytunnels in the Botanic Garden in Thimphu.

The total amount required is £1,600 so she needs to collect just £133 more to reach the target.

Many thanks to all those who have contributed and Jessica eagerly awaits a few more donations so that work on the polytunnels can commence.

Contributions may be made through the Bhutan Society Trust Fund.

Please send a cheque made payable to the "Bhutan Society Trust Fund" to:

The Hon. Treasurer Nicholas Rhodes

28 Napier Gardens, Hythe, Kent CT21 6DD

making it clear that your contribution is intended for the RBG Polytunnel Fund.

Standing Order Forms

Many members have asked us to provide Standing Order forms to facilitate payment of membership fees. Forms will be sent out to everyone later this year (payment by cheque will of course continue to be fine).

Genette welcomes book donations and can arrange collection in the broader London area and, on occasion, further afield.

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NEWS FROM THE KINGDOM OF BHUTAN



Renewable Natural Resources Exhibition

Kuensel Online (Thimphu, March 2002)

The Renewable Natural Resources exhibition displayed both academic initiatives of young professionals and the practical experiences of our farmers. The mix offered several lessons and left us with many questions.

As farmers snapped up a variety of basic farming tools which were either imported or designed by the Agricultural Machinery Centre, we wondered why there is an acute dearth in the market if there is such a high demand. Standard tools could be made very effective in Bhutan with small modifications, yet we are left mostly with low quality tools which are not designed for the Bhutanese terrain. Farmers from around the country exhibited successful personal innovations and we also wondered why these have not been widely picked up. Some of our farmers are displaying technological intuition which might embarrass qualified engineers. Yet they remain largely unrecognised.

The exhibition included farmers who are already benefiting from the sale of vegetables and other cash crops, plus communities like the Monpas enthusiastically trying to improve their traditional products. Ambitious plans have been drawn up by the research centres and if some of the agriculture and horticulture initiatives bear fruit, there could be a transformation of the Bhutanese diet and even our lifestyle.

Here were farmers presenting their own successes rather than laboratory tests and farming theories being explained by civil servants. The question is, does this spirit stand a chance against the tide of imported electronics, furniture, clothing, and modern luxuries which draw the urban crowd? The challenge is to bridge the gap between theory and the practicalities of daily life. If a research centre produces a new crop, how long is it before it reaches the farmer? And how long does it take to travel from the farmer's field to the market? If a workshop develops a new tool, how long does it take to reach the private markets in a simple affordable form? Why isn't the business sector more active in all this?

Two distinct groups of people visited the exhibition: veteran farmers who could recognise the useful tools but did not understand the literature which represented new initiatives, and students who could understand the concepts but most of whom would not go back to the farm. The former group has a problem with basic literacy, the latter with the practical knowledge which makes literacy meaningful. The two desperately need each other, but we have another potential gap.

One positive impact of such exhibitions is that the old timers and young professionals develop a healthy respect for each other. Urban students see some exciting aspects of rural life. The interaction might help to lead the way to some common ground and the "middle path". Today's new era of decentralisation would greatly benefit if this spirit could be taken beyond the exhibition grounds.

Sacred Texts to be Stored in Computers

by Rinzin Wangchuk, Kuensel Online



Computer classes for monks are the first step towards archiving religious documents electronically

The central monk body has begun teaching computer operations to monks in its bid to electronically archive Bhutan's rich collection of Buddhist manuscripts, biographies and historical documents.

20 monks of the central monk body recently completed a two-week (Level 2) computer operations course conducted by the National Technical Training Authority (NTTA) under its special skills programme. Among the skills taught were using Dzongkha fonts with Microsoft Word, typing, editing and formatting in Dzongkha, typing *pechas* (scripts) and using templates for *pechas*, printing techniques, and an introduction to Internet. With this training the monks will be able to save all scripts on computers, using CDs as back up storage, NTTA officials said. The central monk body has already purchased 12 computers for the project and will soon buy another eight.

This project was personally initiated and funded by His Holiness the Je Khenpo, said project coordinator Karma Lhendup of the central monk body. His Holiness contributed Nu 1.8 million to the project.

To start with, the Drukpa Kagyued text will be compiled. "Some portions of the text have been lost", said Karma Lhendup, "but we have borrowed the text from Buddhist monasteries in India and Nepal to fill in the missing bits and make corrections where necessary." He added that other rare Buddhist texts which once existed in Bhutan but are now lost will also be borrowed and archived. Important religious texts of other major Buddhist lineages like the Nyingma tradition will be compiled at a later date.

"When we complete compiling, our archive will be accessible to the public and those interested in research", said Karma Lhendup. The National Library also has a similar project to document religious texts in the country.

Keep up-to-date with news from Bhutan

Visit the website of Bhutan's national newspaper, Kuensel, at www.kuenselonline.com for regular news updates, editorials, readers' comments and more...

BHUTAN CONNECTIONS

Multiple discourses on modernisation, culture and tradition in Bhutan

State development policies and development discourses
among young people in education

A summary by Akiko Ueda of her PhD thesis (Development Studies) 2001, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London

This is a study of what the people and government of Bhutan think about 'modernisation' and 'culture and tradition'. It is an attempt to understand 'development' from the perspectives of people and government in a developing country where, after all, development activities are actually taking place.

Bhutan first came to my attention in 1993 when I saw a small article in a Japanese newspaper. The article was about Bhutan's 'unique' development path, which was trying to balance modernisation on the one hand, and the conservation of the natural environment and the traditional Bhutanese way of life on the other. To a student of Development Studies, it seemed an intriguing case.

An approval for my research proposal from the Bhutanese government was issued as a result of warm assistance from many people, both in Bhutan and in the UK. Also during my one year of fieldwork in Bhutan a number of people kindly shared their time and knowledge with me.

My thesis is about the meaning of 'culture' and 'tradition' and how they are used by the state and local people. It is also about 'modernisation' and 'development', since talking about culture in the context of development is also to talk about modernity. The thesis at the same time deals with the background and motivations which lie behind the usages and meanings of words such as 'modernisation' and 'culture'. It also investigates the interactions of ideas between government level and grassroots level – focusing on the younger generation.

A fundamental aim of Bhutanese development policy is to maintain a balance between modernisation on one side and culture and tradition on the other. Young people in society are generally accused of being alienated from Bhutanese culture and tradition and of being influenced by Western media and culture. My thesis argues, firstly, that the Bhutanese development policy of preservation of culture and tradition, and the prevalent social norm that one must be culturally aware, is derived from Bhutan's position as a small country sandwiched between two giants, China and India. The state defines Bhutanese culture and tradition as guardians of the nation's independence. Secondly, and following the same logic, the Bhutanese government constantly presents its development policy as being original and unique, and insists on its distinctiveness from the Western idea of 'development' in which material progress predominates. Thirdly, the state's development policy influences young people's ideas about 'modernisation' and 'culture and tradition' but is by no means 'hegemonic' among young people.

Using educational differences as a way of investigating different ideas circulating among young people, the thesis establishes the existence of important differences pertaining to ideas of modernisation, culture and tradition between three groups of young people; those in English medium education, Dzongkha (the national language) medium education, and monastic education. Furthermore, it examines the social background of these differences. The thesis argues that young people's identification of their position is not only in terms of their career but also in terms of how they present themselves as being culturally aware.

Nepal delegate visits Bhutan

A member of the Nepalese Congress Party and head of the Department of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Chakra Prasad Bastola, visited Bhutan in March on a four-day visit, during which he was granted an audience by His Majesty the King. Mr. Bastola, who has served as Minister of Tourism and Agriculture and is the former ambassador of Nepal to India, called on the Prime Minister, Lyonpo Khandu Wangchuk, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lyonpo Jigmi Y. Thinley. During his stay Mr. Bastola also attended the Paro Tsechu and visited places of cultural and religious significance.

The Tenth Annual Dinner

The Society's tenth Annual Dinner will take place on **Friday October 18th, 2002** in the Great Hall of the Royal Hospital Chelsea. The Guest of Honour will be HRH The Crown Prince of Bhutan. Joanna Lumley, a Life Member of the Society, will also attend.

We hope that as many Members as possible will be able to join us. Please bring your friends for what promises to be a most special occasion.

Cost and ticket application details to follow shortly – apologies for the delay.

The **Hon. Secretary Michael Rutland** will be in Bhutan until 1st August 2002.

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Michael Rutland will be delighted to meet members of the Bhutan Society visiting Bhutan during this period. Telephone him when you are in Thimphu.

Anyone wishing to join the Society should send a cheque for £10, made payable to *The Bhutan Society of the UK*, to: Lucy Hornberger
Unit 23, 78 Marylebone High St., London, W1U 5AP