

CHAPTER 3

The Research Settings: People, Culture and its relations

This chapter illustrates the location of Logodama community in Punakha state and paints the picture of relational values that orchestrate the ultimate purpose in life of the people. The social networks of family and the institutions are elaborated which are influenced by religion and culture of the locality. The politics of GNH will also be discussed in this chapter.

3.1 Location of Logodama in Punakha

Logodama is a small hamlet located on hill overlooking one of the important Dzongs (fortress) in Bhutan, built in 1637 under the command of Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal. The Dzong houses the sacred relics of the Drukpa Kagyu (one of the schools of thought in Mahayana Buddhism) school including the Rangjung Kasarpani, and the sacred remains of Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal and Terton Padma Lingpa. In 1907, Punakha Dzong was the site of the coronation of Ugyen Wangchuck as the first King of Bhutan. Three years later, a treaty was signed at Punakha whereby the British agreed not to interfere in Bhutanese internal affairs and Bhutan allowed Britain to direct its foreign affairs. There are myths around the design of this structure. Older citizens are fond of talking to younger generations about old times, an oral traditions passed down to younger generation. Some say that the chief engineer Tuebi Zaow Balip received his blue prints of the architectural design in his dreams, replicating heavenly abode of the gods. It was built within two years, with the help of the spirits catering resources that as

supposedly aided the worker to finish on time because of the frequent Tibetan invasion from the north.



Figure 3.1 Picture of Punakha Dzong (fortress)

The fortress takes 30-45 minutes of walking time, when average man or women tries to circle in clock-wise direction. This act of circumambulation is believed to gain merit that obscure ignorance to gain Buddhahood. Punakha shares boundary with two other states, Gasa to the North and Wangdue to the South. Dzongs are mostly built on ridges or between rivers to defend Tibetan invasion in 17th century. In 1987, the Dzong was partially destroyed by fire. Due to its location at the confluence of the Pho Chhu (river) and Mo Chhu in the Punakha-Wangdue valley, the Dzong is vulnerable to flash flooding caused by glacier lakes (GLOF). According to a recent report, flash flood damage to Punakha Dzong occurred in 1957, 1960 and 1994 (Chhopel 2006).

Punakha was once the capital of Bhutan until 1955, His Majesty the third king then shifted to Thimphu. Thimphu is about 72 km from Punakha that takes two-and-a-half hours' drive along the mountains. Punakha is still the winter residence of the monastic body headed by the spiritual leader, His holiness Tulku Jigme Choda. The seasonal migration was once practiced by most of the farmers. Till the early 90's people use to come down in the valley to plant rice and go back to Talo, which is 13 km by road up the mountains during winter. Punakha valley is warm in winter with elevation of 1,200 meters above the sea level. With increasing population and land fragmentation, most of the people don't practice seasonal migration. The rate of economic development has

shocked the older citizens who still live with their great, great grandchildren. They remembered about walking bare foot to pay the government tax with labor contribution in snow-clad mountains carrying heavy loads on their back.

Punakha was once a town till the late 90's with small houses as shops. The shops are one-storied traditional makeshifts made out of wood, stone and rammed earth. The new town planning has allotted land for the business owners about 7 kilometers downstream due south. The new town is built on the green fields that were once producing rice. The town is called Khuruthang, meaning a flat plain. Bhutanese were only introduced to trade and commerce during the reign of the third king in the early 60's with money as a medium of exchange. Until late 60's, Bhutan bartered rice, silk, salt, fish and other necessary items with Tibet (now under china) and India. It happened to be the time when Bhutan was self-sufficient and independent.

The Punakha town is dusty and haunted with few people loitering around the shops that are illegally operated since the town shifted to Khuruthang. Punakha is mostly populated during the winter season because students are on vacation and the monks come to reside in their winter residence in the Dzong. Punakha valley is known for its green chilies that are being harvested as the first seasonal crops in the country. Chilies are the most famous spices in Bhutanese dishes and the national cuisine itself is made out of chili and cheese. Whenever the first crop ripens, elder citizens dress in formal attire and visit the Dzong to offer the first season crop as a gesture of thanksgiving. This symbolic gesture is practiced by every Bhutanese in their small altar inside their house, whenever they eat a first meal of the day or when fresh seasonal vegetables are being cooked. I met a chili farmer at his home in one-story log cabin in the middle of the rice fields. When I visited his house, I saw him and his wife busy burning a patch of the field, in order to sow the chili seed.

He was in his early 70's and a hardworking man. He interpreted his happiness as being the first person in Bhutan to offer chilies three times in row in front of the Buddha statue in the Dzong. He earned around 2,000 USD from the sale of his crops. He now

owns a pickup truck to transport his vegetable produce to Thimphu and Khuruthang town. Happiness to him was being healthy and without worries which is related to a famous Bhutanese proverb “lu to ngaste mean sem lu dungnye mye”. Health comes first in his priority list due to his failing body and then comes the healthy mind. Healthy mind in Bhutanese society refers to spiritual mind that are disciplined with routine rituals that help them see the ultimate goal in life. He values relations with his culture, family and religion. This may sketch the outline of common happiness with the older citizens. He lives with his daughter who owns a small business in the town. Both his niece and nephew go to Logodama School.

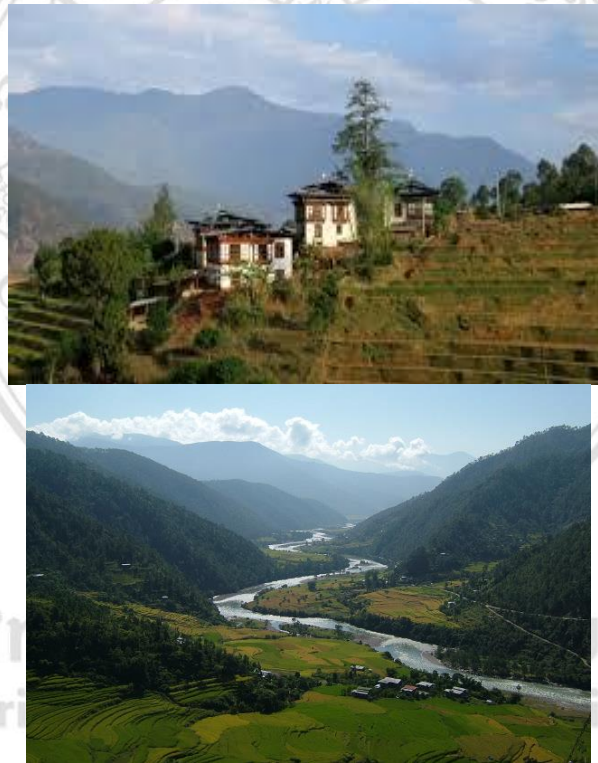


Figure 3.2 Overview of Punakha valley

Early morning in a Bhutanese house, every elderly family member recite their prayer, sometimes in the altar room while prostrating and sometimes while doing their chores. The rosary bead and miniature rotating Buddhist wheels, in the hands of older people are a common sight. There are several schools in Punakha State, but in Punakha valley Logodama primary school and Punakha High School are nearest in the locality. From

Punakha Dzong, it takes 45 minutes' walk uphill by the ridges, through scattered villages to Logodama. Villages around Logodama are scattered with paddy fields between them. A household comprises of a family that includes daughters and their husbands living together in a two-storied mud rammed house with CGI galvanized roofs. CGI roofing was one of the strategies to reduce the usage of timber and save time. In the early 90's, CGI roofing was quite expensive since it involved huge labor cost, because of the poor transportation network with narrow and dangerous roads that only few buses ply as public transportation. During that time most of the villages were not connected with farm roads. Within a decade the structure of landscape has changed, with construction mushrooming on the foot of Logodama. Almost all the villages are connected with modern amenities like clean water, electricity and the latest development was the farm road that was constructed about 3 years ago. The dusty and slippery farm road takes 25 minutes from Punakha to Logodama School.

Zombay, a 45-year-old man from Yungu, a village above Logodama said that during his time in the early 1970s teachers came every day to the village searching for students. Children then had hidden from this search as most mothers wanted their children to help them in the farms. Zombay had studied till grade four in Hindu Medium at Logodama. He still can read little Hindi words and can converse in Indian Language. India was the first country to assist Bhutan in modern development. Until today Bhutan depends on financial and technical assistance from India. The relationship between India and Bhutan has grown since 1950 after their independence from British. A decade ago most of the teachers were south Indians where there were over 17 Indian teachers in Punakha state. Gradually they are being replaced by the local Bhutanese teachers. The laws to become Christian in older days were stringent that there was no Christian among the elders. On the contrary they depicted Buddhist solidarity towards their faith in their religion and culture. Other religious beliefs are taboo in the Bhutanese locality, as most villagers believe that other gods make their mind unstable and often fell sick.

Logodama School has not many neighbors around. The staff room of the School is a common room for the teachers to relax and chat. There are over 22 staffs and 200 plus students. The place is quiet and serene with only distant sound of river Mo Chu flowing in the valley and the whistling of cold breeze between the pine trees. The random rhythm of words and phrases are heard from old class room cottages on the side of the football field. There are three additional two-storied new buildings reinforced by steel and cement, adding to two cottages and two traditional built houses that existed more than two decades ago. My cousin's sister works as a teacher and she has introduced me to the principal and other colleagues. It was a Saturday afternoon when I was first introduced to the team of teachers. I conversed with the vice principal for two hours to construct the overall picture of education practices in the school as the principal was busied with four teachers in his office discussing about the exam papers.

The walls of the classrooms are filled with slogans of Gross National Happiness and inspiring quotes form visionary leaders. I saw many new species of trees that have overgrown around the school locality. Every 2nd June they plant tress to celebrate Social Forestry Day as a memory for the anniversary of the late third king's death. His majesty the third King was known as father of modern Bhutan because he has introduced democratic reforms and the country became a member of United Nations as an independent country. The peoples' relations with monarchs are complex and people revere the Kings as their true leaders and god-like kings. The flower in front of the classroom has withered and it reminds the students about their final exams which constitute 40 percent of the overall credits. The introduction of GNH curriculum in 2009, is educating students about the meaning of Gross National Happiness. Society as a whole gives meanings according to their relationship with things they prioritize in their lives. Over time the meaning of things has changed due to the external events and age difference.

Logodama School is gearing up to deliver GNH-influenced cognitive abilities to their students. Cultures, environment, economy and politic are the main pillars of GNH that

students learn to appreciate its values in the future. As schools being the largest medium, the government has sought to operationalize GNH through the education system. However, as the government tries to inculcate GNH values through different techniques, many stake holders still define their own meaning of happiness, depending on their balance between desire and contentment. Buddhist principles are applied everywhere in the act to redefine its meaning within time and space. The relational meanings to things are often replicated in social hierarchy in Bhutanese community. The meanings are the byproduct of experiences that have generated values within the social network. Cultural influence is vividly portrayed in every aspect of Bhutanese lives which may attribute to the customary practices of tradition and strong sense of Buddhist principles.

3.2 Social Network and Values

In order to apprehend future sustainability of GNH paradigm, it was necessary for me to explore at length about social values and network. The radius of GNH has become very wide in Bhutanese society because of cultural hegemony that has been postulated by the government in the name of unity and sovereignty of the country. To explain the essence of GNH, I have dwelled deep into Bhutanese culture that may not be related to the education curriculum directly, but those values and ethics are what GNH curriculum seeks to teach to the students. Social network and values in Bhutanese societies will enhance the context of Bhutanese and GNH more clearly.

Education has played major roles in transforming Bhutanese society since it was introduced in the early 1960s. Bhutanese society is free of class or a caste system. Slavery was abolished by the Third King in the early 1950s through royal edicts. Female participation in social hierarchy is not limited, depending on their virtue of characters in decision making process. The level of authority in the Bhutanese family is well balanced according to the division of labor. Sociological thinking uses abstract categories

routinely such as “working class, middle class, upper class” which are one such set of categories that describe social positions. What is a “worker”? We could mean a person who does labor (an attribute, actually one shared by all humans). A more sociologically interesting definition of a worker was given by Marx to mean a person who sells control of their labor power to a capitalist. Note that the meaning of “worker” depends upon a capitalist -- and vice versa. It is the relation which Marx would say, a relation of exploitation between occupants of the two roles that defines the meaning of the roles.

The point is: to the structural analyst, the building blocks of social structure are “social roles” or “social positions”. These social roles or positions are defined by regularities in the patterns of relations among actors, not attributes of the actors themselves. Sociologists have measured acquaintance networks by focusing on occupations. People in different occupations differ from each other in many important ways. The work we do reflects much of our pasts, such as schooling and family background, and shapes the ways we live, such as tastes and lifestyles. This indicates that Bhutanese people value their relationship based on the values attached to them. It further can be postulated that meaning to the ideas like GNH can be expressed with their relational values to the standard definition. Most of the stakeholders value or define GNH with their expectation from the government.

Living in the Bhutanese society needs general understanding of norms that are based on Driglam Namzha, a code of conduct which confirms to the function of a respectful society. Common practices of Driglam Namzha include wearing a traditional scarf while visiting the Dzong or an office; letting the elders and monks serve themselves first during the meals; offering felicitation scarves during ceremonies such as marriages and promotions; and politely greeting elders or seniors. Normally, greetings are limited to saying “Kuzuzangpo” (hello) amongst equals. For seniors and elders, the Bhutanese bow their head a bit and say “kuzuzangpo la” (a more respectful greeting). Recently, shaking hands has become an accepted norm.

Bhutanese are fun-loving people fond of songs and dance, friendly contests of archery, stone pitching, traditional darts, and football. Recently women are empowered to play traditional dart usually played by men. Archery becomes a national game, and is usually contested between two teams comprising 13–15 members. Whenever the team member hits the target on the other end of 145 meters then the team members celebrates with song and dances on both sides of the ground, with short rhythmic dance moves in circles. Both teams have to hit one-meter long target to gain points. The target is painted in white with bulls eyes painted in circles in between. Colorful flags that depict the five elements are pitched around the target. Before the match begins both teams offering locally brewed alcohol to the spirits for the safety of the members with short recitation of prayers.

Being in western part of Bhutan, Punakha society is a matrilineal that involves the inheritance of property by women based on the family's choice. The fluid marriage system is practiced in Bhutanese society, that couples can live together (without performing a ritual) with their consensus, the same for the divorce. According to Pommaret (1998), this fluid marriage system and the freedom for couples to live together might be due to the fact that in Buddhism, marriage is not a sacrament and, the belief that everything transient is deeply rooted. The inherited property usually of women is not surrendered to the man, when they get married and it makes them financially independent. I have noticed that social relations between men and women were harmonious and that gender relations were marked by a remarkable equality. I did not witness any domination by genders, but at some point, the head of the family makes most of the decision regarding fixing date for the annual ritual, crop harvesting and other economic decision. Men and women in the villages work together in the field, and substitute the chores when one is not around, both took care of children and cooking. The only division of labor based on gender was in the practice of ploughing which is exclusively male chore, while women transported the dung (manure) to the field.

In the school, most of the teachers from eastern regions have their parent along with them. If the spouse is not employed, she looks after the kids and parents at home. There are two staff quarters in the school; the principal and vice principal stay in the government quarter. The principal quarter has a kitchen garden in the front of their house with 7 family members including the brother of his wife's cousin. It is a norm in Bhutanese society to send a son or a daughter with elders if they are working. "Cattle should be cared for by the host, children should be sent with other siblings" says Pema, the principal's wife. It meant that children should learn by experience and self-discipline with relative that are supposed to be less flexible than the parents. Her 86 years old mother, sits all day in the altar room prostrating and reciting mantras. She seldom comes out of the house to sun bath. Pema is not her eldest daughter but the second youngest; other daughters are in the villages working with their spouse. If Pema's mother stays in the village, she has to do some household chores to help her daughters while they are away in the farms. So, Pema insisted that her mother come along with her.

Bhutanese name are quite unique in their origin. When a new child is born, their parents will take the child to the monasteries and ask for blessings, prostrating six times. They give fresh fruits, and butter for lighting lamps when they visit monasteries as an offering to the deities. The monk who looks after the altar would bring a stacked of names for parents to choose; these names are similar to the name of the founder of that particular monasteries. These names usually depict flowers, sky, virtues or the names of realized monks. In exchange, the new born takes refuge in the deities as his/her protector, by virtue of the place of birth.

When couples get married, they don't share their last names since they don't have any family names or surnames. The family's honor or wealth has no attachment to the name of a person; this is why caste and creed don't exist in the Bhutanese society. Usually people in the past have only the first name, later it became two names, now three names. This is because Bhutanese are running out of names. The intermarriage between ethnics,

mostly between the southern Nepalese and *Ngalops* (western origin) are not common. However, the ethnic groups live together harmoniously in a society as a whole. When they intermarry between ethnic groups, the families have to choose the name of the newborn based on their consensus on Buddhist or Hindu faith.

Values have been identified with things, sometimes with motives, sometimes with ends. “The notion of values is complex and to speak of values implies recognition of preference qualities of relationships between means and ends in social context. Values involve a grading of objects and actions in terms of their relative desirability. Values also imply systematic behavior, not simply random choice. Values have a cognitive aspect, they may be conceptualized, have a shape in ideas, and an emotional charge. This may be at a minimum for values of technological or economic kinds” (Firth 1964: 220). The traditional Bhutanese values are largely shaped by the Buddhist culture and these values are comprehensive as they include the conduct of individual’s relationships, and address issues of individual self-discipline.

The concepts of *ley jumdrej* and *tha damtshig* are central to Bhutanese values. The concept of *ley jumdrej* essentially states good begets good and vice versa. The idea of *tha damtshi* outlines the sacred commitment to others in the society. This is best illustrated in pairing of duty and obligation between parent and child, teacher and pupil, husband and wife and master and servant. Such pairing of duty and obligations reinforces the need for social responsibility. In terms of individual self-discipline Bhutanese values emphasize the *domba nga* or the five lay Buddhist undertakings. These include: not killing; not taking what is not given to you rightfully; not lying; not consuming intoxicants; and avoiding sexual misconduct. Even with the imprint of other secular religion, the people are aware of values. In Bhutan, there are different interpretations of ‘values’ and thus, no distinction between values, religion, and way of thinking, belief, purpose or custom as in the western languages.

People of Punakha value relationship based on the principles of Buddhism. Happiness is mostly defined from the Buddhist perceptions of desire and suffering. Mostly elder citizens have more things to say than the younger generation when asked about their values. They often narrate their past achievement and failures through stories. Younger generations have more challenges to overcome with less opportunities and intense competition. Financial abilities of the parents are making differences in the society. Those who can't qualify for the government scholarship are sent to private schools and colleges, in and out of the country. The employment crisis has spread bitterness in the education sector. People from the remote village of Logodama don't expect much from their children's education, because of limited job. They are worried about their children's future but on the contrary they feel relieved that, they could at least read and write even if they work in the farms, comparing to their educational status. Parents cast doubt about GNH when the government can't solve the socio-economic problem of unemployment.

“The hard truth about Buddhism is we have to look for ourselves” said one of my participants. He added that the true value of life is enlightenment but it is mainly for the monks. This needs life-time dedication but some simple folk like us; we just need to make peace with ourselves, not complaining too much about simple things. In Buddhism mental attitude is altered to suit the environment. It is not a happy society if people fight over values, talk about others, rob monasteries, and so on. The value of money has become a priority in Bhutanese society. People are becoming choiceless because everywhere money is preferred over custom and traditions. Sonam says, “Happiness is about efficiency of using resources once you have it but, the point is to have it.” She laughs away with the smile. The contradiction of giving away when you don't have anything, still riddles peoples mind of being compassionate or cultivating altruistic values. They find it hard to negotiate between the concepts, and reality of Buddhism and happiness. Being content with what one has is a common concept of being happy. This is the influence by the biography of the great yogis in the 13th and 14th centuries.

3.3 Religion and Culture

People in Punakha, even among the educated elites living in the valley have a common view on gods and deities. Many rituals had to be performed to keep those spirits at peace. Chakravarti (1979) explains in a clear way the indigenous religion of Bhutan. He argues that Bön was the only pre-Buddhist religion of Bhutan. Bhutan had its own indigenous religion Bön, but later Buddhism assimilated it. Many elements of that indigenous religion are still alive today. Evidence for this is the belief in many gods and deities who are worshipped like sky gods (lha), water gods (lu) and earth gods (sa bdag). Everywhere in the village one could find, as Chakravarti calls them, Lapchas – stone cairns. Such cairns are the altars of the indigenous warrior gods. Whenever new things are built they usually perform a day ceremony, inviting monk from the local monasteries.

I have witnessed consecration of small prayer house near the school. At 6 am, the principal of the school came with two monks in his car, while other teachers and staff waited anxiously for them. The monks and his assistance sat on the elevated floor, tea and snacks has been served by the office assistance and some female teachers. The school has hired a local chef for that special day and District Education Officer was invited to witness the ceremonial gesture in the school. Few student representatives have also been called, since it was Sunday, the school remained closed. Pine and cypress leaves were burnt to sanctify the place while the monk and his assistance were reciting prayers with drums and cymbals. The vice principal told me that, this ceremonial gesture will further enhance the sanctity of the prayer hall that will remove negative impurities from the minds of the students while learning. “It signifies that with prayer being recited, we are asking for their blessing and protection, seeking refuge in Buddha, Dharma and the Sangha” said the head monk.

When I was collecting data in Logodama School, since I became friends with sister's friend I was invited to one of the annual ritual called “cho-ku” which lasted from one to

two days and everybody was literally invited for lunch, snacks and dinner. Rice porridge is usually prepared to mark the special occasion; it was served in the morning before breakfast. Conducting annual ritual has become an expensive practice in the village. It employs around seven monks including the head monk who is senior and be able to meditate profoundly on specific deities. All the neighbors, friends and family are invited especially during the second day. Family members, who are serving in a government job or living in and around Bhutan, gather together for that special moment, offering money and prostrating in the altar room. There is a special sequence during the ritual procession to offer prayers by family members and it is believed to appease the gods and goddesses during that time. The deities are being appeased but the ritual recognizing their presences and strengthening the relationship between sprits and human.

The act of gift exchange took place during the second day of the ritual. All the neighbors showed solidarity in taking part in the ritual. They brought puffed rice (*Zaw*) and bottle of rice wine, and contributed to the head of the host family. In return they were fed with tea, wine, lunch and dinner with pork, beef, eggs and vegetables. The neighbors send a representative if the head of the family can't attend the ritual. The guest like me, coming for the first time representing the school community had to take other forms of gifts which are easier to get from the market. We have contributed around 10 USD among seven of us and took industrial beers and cookies as a token of exchange. The head of the family was an elderly lady of late 60's and said 'I work hard to earn enough so that I can organize the spiritual and social gathering'. The ritual has some kind of pride attached to its social significance. Some family members with large numbers of sibling takes turn on organizing it on an annual basis. Usually those who are not employed but work in the farm, contribute rice, wine and labor. People always make remarks that one of the family members should be a monk so that they could take care of the rituals, even during the funerals.



Figure 3.3 Monks performing annual ritual (Choku) in Punakha)

“The central monastic body has circulated an office order not to serve meat during the annual ritual”. Around a decade ago, almost all the household raise pigs for pork which will be butchered during the annual ritual. This custom has changed due to easy access to the meat market from India. People still find reasons to take life of other sentient beings that is contradictory to the principles of Buddhism. Buddhist epistemology emphasizes the need to learn to be part of whatever one seeks to understand, to generate a process of dialogue within oneself and with others, eliminating the barriers separating human lives. Buddhism seeks to remove the causes of anxiety in order to free human beings from suffering: for this reason it is referred to as a science of man rather than the revelation of God. None of the religions or philosophies particular to Asia (Confucianism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Jainism, and Animism) draws a distinction between religious and secular values. The religious scriptures contain guidelines not only for worship, but also for correct conduct in everyday life, even including politics, economy and the arts (Cauquelin et al 1998: 3). Values have relational meanings and over time it has considered other factors in a Bhutanese society such as, historical experiences, development within society, the rise of a market economy with the phenomena of urbanization, geographical and climatic conditions, and experiences of wars and ecological disaster.

A festival known as Tsechu (literally “tenth day”) is a large gathering which performs the function of social bonding among people of remote and spread-out villages. The focal point of the tsechu is costumed masked dances, based on incidents from the life of the 9th century Nyingma teacher Padmasambhava and other saints. Usually the festival last around a week in Punakha and on the last day, it features the unfurling of a *Thongdroel*. A thongdroel is a large *Thanka* (piece of cloths depicting gods) typically depicting a seated Padmasambhava surrounded by holy beings, the mere viewing of which is said to cleanse the viewer of sin. It is raised before dawn and roll down by the morning. Students from Logodama recall those days with fervent temptation with vivid memories of the past. Karma, 16, said “I enjoy all the days during tsechu, I go with my mother and she is so kind on those days because it is believed to be auspicious. I eat my favorite food and wear favorite dress and I am enthusiast to wear the scarf. I feel like I am already a government employee with the scarf.”

Punakha Tsechu falls in March every year, and government declares a holiday in that state. People across the 10 Blocks in Punakha come together during that time, with the sole purpose of watching the masked dances in the court yard of Punakha Dzong. Bhutanese should wear long scarf when visiting Dzongs and other administrative centers. The scarf worn varies in color, signifying the wearer’s status or rank. The scarf worn by men is known as *Kabney* while those worn by women are known as *Rachu*. The *Rachu* is hung over a woman’s shoulder and unlike the scarves worn by men, does not have any specific rank associated with its color. *Rachus* are usually woven out of raw silk and embroidered with beautiful rich patterns



Figure 3.4 Tsechu and its significance of dress code

Photo courtesy: Bhutanpic.com

Men are dressed in silk and traditional woven dress, with neat haircuts. Women are dressed in silk *Kira* (Dress) and *Tego* (Blouse). Everyone from 7 years of age is mandatory to wear Bhutanese attire including the scarf. On the first and the second day of the tshechu the masked dances include the performances which cover: dance of the four stags, dance of the three kinds, dances of the heroes, dance of the stags and hounds, and dance with guitar. The significance of Punakha tshechu is on the third day that stage historical drama in which men from the four blocks represent a small army of the 17th century during the time of Zhabdrung. They come from the first door of the Dzong waving their swords and making blast with the fire cracker. About ten minutes they dance in circle singing lyrical tune of sacrificing and upholding the dharma. They enter the Dzong again from the second door. This signifies the strategy of Zhabdrung to fool Tibetans invader watching from the hills in order to play the number games in warfare.

Old mothers were accompanied by their daughters and son in laws. Most of the people had come in groups with packed food and refreshment. Little boys and girls were neatly dressed in their little *gho* and *kira* (national dress) and are mesmerized by the masked dances. An old grandfather near my seat was busy explaining to his nephew that this mask will hunt him when he dies if he did not do a good job. A subject about death is not a taboo in Bhutanese society. It is widely discussed in the text books as well as in the story of saints and gods. Children from a very young age are made aware of the spirits. Students before exams usually visit local temples to offer butter lamps and get blessings. This has become a trend even among the high official to visit monasteries and roll dices that predict their results.

In front of the Dzong, the old archery ground was converted into restaurants and shops, they were around 50 stalls. People came to drink beers and try their luck in cards and dart games. The ground was frequently sprinkled with water because of the dust and sand. Most people save money for the festival and enjoy that day with their best foods and dress. In the evening towards the end, they prayed that they will be able to witness next year and till then, let the words of the Buddha save all sentient being from suffering. People believe that unless they first pray for the sentient beings, their meaning of prayer is baseless. Only through compassion for others, they get merits and when accumulated enough then they might be able to be reborn as a human being, an old lady told me. She is the head of the family, and lives on the other side of the Dzong. Her daughter and son in-law works in the farm, so she has plenty of time. However when the sun inclined across the mountain, she fidgeted and said that she has to help her daughter with the livestock and sell cheese in the market tomorrow.

3.4 The Politics of Gross National Happiness

Bhutan is experiencing post democratic changes and it is still in a state of transition. “The historical evolution of Bhutan provides a manifestation of considerable and

complex transition through which contemporary Bhutanese policy has come into being. Its religious, political, and ethnic institutions had been uniquely secured through the historical process, which has shaped the typical Bhutanese personality in which a clear separation between spiritual and temporal realms is not recognized” (Ramakant 1996: 12). This applies to the government policies and principles. The notion of “Happiness” in Bhutanese societies has evolved from a feel good term or pleasurable sensation to more intricate mixture of values. The values that are deep rooted in Buddhist principles but with the modern twist in the end. Gross National Happiness (GNH) is all about happiness that includes citizenship role in enhancing the policy. I can sense the obligation in the eyes of the civil servants, when they wear their traditional dress to schools; other official who works in the Dzong has to wear a scarf (kabney) any hour of the day. Dago (not his real name), a 37-year-old man said “when I was studying in India, going to university was much easier since I don’t have to follow strict dress code, now I have to change my dress every time I go to public institutions with the scarf. Some older people even criticize me when I go to the village in shorts saying that we are anti-Bhutanese.”

On my way to Logodama, I met Ap Zombay, a 54 years old villager who farms in a village called Yungu, just 20 minutes’ walk from Logodama. He is an active member in the community meeting, asking question on the policies and pledges due made during the frequent visits of the politicians, such as village representative, village head man (*Gup*), National council and representative from the constituency (Member of Parliament) contesting for votes. During the political campaign, he received calls from his nephew on his candidate and reasons for choosing him. Three years ago, during a local government election his nephew was elected as a village head man. He has a mixed feeling about him because of accountability on decision making and financial attributes. He has been working hard to maintain the farm road with few of his village counterparts. He asked his nephew for few trucks of rocks for fillings, finally they have finished maintaining the road mostly on the slopes. Elder Dema, 65, who worked on the road said “every pebbles and sands are owned by the state and I feel we are grinded

between the power struggles. The local leaders we have elected said, they don't have enough budgets for the road maintenances but the farm road is our main backbone to economic self-reliance." The contrast of economic self-reliance and conservational policies can be seen in her desire to connect her village with all-weather road.

The concept of Gross National Happiness (GNH) was introduced in the political discourse in the 1960s by the late king of Bhutan, Jigme Dorji Wangchuck. In 1971 the idea was articulated by the present King Jigme Singye Wangchuck in his famous statement that "Gross National Happiness is more important than Gross National Product" (Priesner 1999: 28). In 1991 the idea was mentioned in the Five Year Plan (7th 5-year plan pp. 22) and in 1998 the Prime Minister elaborated the idea in an international address (Thinley 1998). According to GNH, happiness is defined as the degree to which citizens in a country enjoy the life they live. Individual's happiness can be measured by self-reported on a single standard question. Pemala, 47, a retired civil servant said "I am very skeptical about the questionnaires they ask while monitoring GNH because people may say what they think at the moment based on their momentary feelings." The measurement of happiness may prove different and that it should consider those momentary emotions.

People still revere the monarchs, especially the 4th king. Students draw his pictures on the class room walls; offices and homes are decorated with their portrait showing solidarity to the country. The right to vote has been bestowed upon to the people by 4th King Druk Gyalpo (Dragon King) and people feel that they are empowered to choose their own leader. There is sadness in the political atmosphere because people are new to democracy and they are used to the dynamic leadership of the Kings, which have protecting their subjects. The relationship between kings and the people has cultural and religious attributes in Bhutanese society. People always approach their kings when they are in trouble. They prostrate to the king directly when His Majesty is on tour. People take chances on sudden opportunity when His Majesty leaves the place or while

travelling in the vehicles. This way they avoid paper works that route through His Majesty's Office which take days.

GNH became the common concept in Bhutan, only after the parliamentary democracy. For the common people it is simply, modern development. I have interviewed one 80 years old villager of Yungu village, who said "I have seen three generations and can feel tremendous change in the environment and people. Cooperation amongst the people is depreciating because they have freedom to get employment outside the village depending on their skills. They don't depend on my rice stock anymore as they have easy access to the rice from India." The government has worked towards developing the infrastructure in the village, most of them are completed. The latest development was the farm road that has created chaos among the villagers. When the public road was constructed on the private land, farmer becomes furious of losing their land. To protest they simply rolled over their land and stop the work; the stakeholders decided to change the course of the road. Some farm roads are still steep and without filling on the curves and these roads have become very difficult for travelling during the rainy season. Gewog (block) governments consistently had significant influence on the nature of farm road construction. Yet this influence was driven by community pressure, sometimes at the expense of the gewog's own interests.

The construction of other government institutions like schools is decided by the government with little public consent. In the 1980s when Logodama School was established nobody knew about the plans as most of them were unfamiliar with modern education. "Thousands have been graduated from Logodama and when they contested for parliamentary election, they forgot to upgrade their old school. It shows the different side of modern education being inclined rules and regulation" said one of the parents, who had participated in the meeting. However, the government could not upgrade the school because of the less student enrollment ratio. Most of the young people have left the village in search of jobs and few have returned. There is a feeling in the minds of

educated populace that education was meant to find a job and leave the village life. These attitudes among the youth are changing due to the policy gap between enrollment and unemployment situation.

Among the teachers in Logodama, most of them have come from other regions and only four of them have come again to teach in their old school. All four of them knew each other and their families well. The principal doesn't have much authority over budget and new construction. It has to be routed via Ministry and the state authority. Generally, local people are excluded from school administration. They are called once in a year to discuss about the policies, labor contribution if needed and collaborating with the disciplinary code of conduct. Most of the villagers are unaware of school curriculum; they rely mostly on teachers and government institution. Teachers are respected in the local community, and their professions were the first seen by villagers as government employees. Most of the students dream to become a teacher before; now with democracy and exposure, teachers are the least opted career.

Dorji, a 41 years old grade four teacher teaches language, history and geography. His village Yungu, is above Logodama. He is the youngest of his eight siblings. One day he had a terrifying encounter with the bear while herding cattle when he was just 10 years old. The following year he was a student of Logodama, and later graduated with the diploma from Paro Teachers Training Center. He is married to another teacher teaching in the same school. The couple lives about 20 minutes' walk from the school downhill. Dorji's mother has already given the land and house to her eldest daughter. Dorji used to live in his village to take care of his mother after his father passed away. He was given a plot of land as his inheritance called "*fha zhi*" so he only visits home during the annual ritual.

Dorji was not aware of the GNH policy and curriculum before its introduction in the school. During His Majesty the Fourth King's reign, he never had a doubt about the policies and had hundred percent trust. This factor attribute to His Majesty the Fourth's

personality and leadership. In 2003, the Indian militants that fought against India and resided in Bhutanese boundaries had created turbulence in the friendship of two countries. After several failed negotiations, His Majesty the Fourth King led his army and handed over the militants to the Indian government. This brave act has gained popularity and became the legend among Bhutanese people. In 2005 His Majesty abdicated his throne to his son and became the King of the past. There was strong emotions in Dorji's tone when he talked about the King giving up his power, which reminded me of the biographies of the enlighten beings and the Buddha himself.

The concept of GNH has values attached to the King. People always attribute GNH to the fourth King and his visionary leadership. They have too much confidence in GNH that they don't have any doubt in the policy. This confidence didn't last long when in 2008 the democracy and politics have divided the society. In 2013, the People's Democratic Party secured 32 seats out of 47. People knew the functions of the government and its political parties. In 2011, all the vehicle imports and construction loans were stopped due to financial imbalances in the reserves. The first political party had a landslide victory leaving only two of their opposition; it became a concern for the people about the check and balance issues while executing the plans. There was a common consensus that the party should have balance seats in the parliament. During the political campaign people became literate on the GNH policy, since then the essence of GNH has been redefined by the public.

Government policy in a GNH country was contemplated over the trust worthiness due to political favoritism in the society. Ap Dophu from Yungu Village laments "The ministerial candidate coming in the villages and asking for a vote made people confused about the cultural power or obligation to respect them". Ministers were once appointed by the government and had tremendous social power in the locality. After democracy, frequent change of Minister became a common sight. One of my participants said that he did not fear the power of the Minister because he was once a commoner working like

him. People have realized the freedom of rights; yet they have never seen a general strike in their life that may tell another story of rights.

3.5 Summary

This section has introduced the location of Logodama, the ridge where the school is located above Punakha town. The people of Punakha have an identity of *Ngalong*, the dominant ethnic minority in Bhutan. The social behavior is shaped by the principle of Mahayana Buddhism as a state religion. The festivals are widely celebrated and agriculture is mainly their income source. The annual festivals remind people about the cyclic existence of human lives, through masked dances and songs. The Buddhist faith is reinforced through different cultural practices. A family name or a husband's names don't play any role after the marriage, nor there any symbolic features to indicate their status of the relationship. This practice embodies the Buddhist principles of impermanence and interdependence on the social network. There is a very thin line between social practices and Buddhist philosophy.

These values in the society hold the communities, institutions and modernization with different objectives. The policies are framed on the values of Buddhism and modernity, which go in parallel to deliver happiness as the end result. Bhutanese societies are never exposed rapidly to the modern 21st century. The government policies had a major contribution in making the actors realize their stand against the mighty global cultural influx. The overall framework of the political agenda in Bhutan is happiness. Gross National Happiness is a national policy acting as a filter based on their domains and pillars. Bhutanese think that they can use this screening tool to develop modern Bhutan but with the strong connection of values and customs. In the following chapter I will discuss in details about the policy of Gross National Happiness and its mechanisms, being operationalized in the educational institutions as a part of state pedagogy.