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## Role of Teachers in alleviating Cultural Poverty : GNH begins in the Classroom

Singye NAMGYEL and Akinobu KAWAI

### 文化的貧困撲滅における教員の役割 —GNH（国民総幸福）は教室から—

シンゲイ・ナムギャル<sup>1)</sup>, 河合 明宣<sup>2)</sup>

#### ABSTRACT

Preservation and Promotion of Culture is one of the four pillars of Gross National Happiness (GNH), a development philosophy adopted by the Bhutanese Government. The purpose of this paper is to situate cultural values and practices of the psychological wellbeing domain proposed by the Centre for Bhutan Studies (2009) in a Bhutanese primary school classroom. The paper reports research which explored the role of a teacher in alleviating "cultural poverty". The study employed an ethnographic design. It involved observations of classroom interactions in a primary school, specifically the roles of a teacher in promoting some of the fundamentals of culture. In-depth interviews supplemented observations. The findings on cultural values and practices from a small organizational unit such as a classroom inform its scope and challenges at a larger systemic and societal level.

**Key words :** Gross National Happiness (GNH), Cultural Values, Cultural Practices, Youth Violence, Cultural Poverty.

#### 要旨

文化の保護と振興は、ブータン政府が策定した発展の哲学である国民総幸福（GNH：Gross National Happiness）の4つの柱の一つである。本稿の目的は、ブータン研究所（2009）が提唱した心理的幸福達成の領域における文化的価値とその実践（cultural values and practices of the psychological wellbeing domain）がブータン小学校教室の授業では、どのように関連付けられているか明らかにすることである。本稿は「文化的貧困」の撲滅（alleviating cultural poverty）において教師が果たす役割を明らかにした研究を事例として紹介する。

ここでは民族誌学的方法を用いる。小学校教室での指導における教師と生徒とのやりとり、特にいくつかの文化基盤の理解を促進する際に教師が果たす役割についての観察を含んでいる。さらにこれらの観察は綿密なインタビューにより補完された。

小さな組織としての教室における文化的価値とその育成を目指す実践から得られた成果は、より大きな組織や社会における展望と課題を提示するであろう。

**キーワード：**GNH（国民総幸福）、文化的価値、文化の育成、若者の暴力、文化的貧困

<sup>1)</sup> リグスマ連合会教授（元ブータン王立大学シェルブツェ・カレッジ学長）

<sup>2)</sup> 放送大学教授（「社会と産業コース」）

<sup>1)</sup> Singye Namgyel (PhD), Professor, Rigsum Group of Institutions, Thimphu, Bhutan, samgyel1961@gmail.com

<sup>2)</sup> Akinobu Kawai, Professor, The Open University of Japan

## 1. Introduction

The foundation of a child's development must begin in a classroom. Primary education is vital to his/her growth and progress to be a productive youth and a citizen who is sound physically, emotionally, intellectually, morally, socially, aesthetically, and *culturally*. Although all these aspects of development of a child are closely interrelated culture is considered a wholesome developmental tool that must enhance individuals becoming civilized beings (TCBS, 2009).

Recent youth related violence in Bhutan has caught the attention of media and people of all walks of life in Bhutanese society. Law enforcing agencies are engaged in investigating the cases and putting the perpetrators to tasks. Media reports on youth violence ranged from vandalism of properties, and gang fights, to serious stabbing and killing. They maintain that most of the culprits are school dropouts and unemployed youths. Some of them are caught and made to face the law including going behind bars. But the trend continues.

It appears these youth who participate in violent acts missed an important aspect of development at their prime age- the cultural aspect. Studies suggest that the lack of cultured behaviour or "cultural poverty" results in violence. While school children spend their time at home with parents they also spend much of their quality time at school with teachers and peers. Therefore we believe that the study, "Role of Teachers in Alleviating Cultural Poverty : Proposition of a baseline for measuring Cultural Poverty" is timely. The alleviation of cultural poverty has the potential to enhance happiness. The following questions guided our study :

- 1) How does teachers' classroom interaction impact on cultural development of students?
- 2) What are the classroom activities that facilitate cultural development of students?
- 3) What is the relationship between cultural development and youth violence?
- 4) What is the baseline for measuring cultural poverty?

## 2. Literature Review

The section presents a brief literature review on concepts and forms of culture and Gross National Happiness (GNH) ; poverty and cultural poverty ; and types, causes and consequences of youth violence.



Photo. 1 GHH Pillars & Domains

### Culture, Cultural Values and Gross National Happiness (GNH)

In generic terms authors on culture discuss cultural heritage in two categories : Tangible and Intangible. Namgyel (2005 ; 2008) expands the two categories of cultural heritage in the Bhutanese context. They are tangible : Dzongs, scriptures, classical music, stupa, monuments ; and in-tangible : food habits, dances, dress, language, and other cultural expressions. A detailed discussion of these categories and lists is not within the purview of this paper. However, the information is helpful in making reference to the culture, "Preservation and Promotion of Cultural Heritage" presented by the Centre for Bhutan Studies (CBS, 2009), which is one of the four pillars of Gross Happiness (GNH). The Centre for Bhutan Studies (2009) further details this pillar into four domains of (1) Cultural Diversity and Resilience, (2) Community Vitality, (3) Time Use and (4) Psychological Wellbeing. Each of these four domains has a number of values and practices (Photo. 1). The values and practices from the Psychological Wellbeing domain are considered here because of its comprehensiveness and relevancy to primary school classroom. *Cultural Values* include compassion, generosity, forgiveness, calmness, gratitude, truthfulness, reciprocity, fairness, family closeness, hospitality, and cooperation. *Cultural Practices* include volunteering, donation, community participation, strong family ties, saving life, participation in prayers and ritual.

The concept of Gross National Happiness (GNH) as an alternative to a more conventional philosophy to development has brought many brains and minds to the debating table and has critiqued human beings' attitudes and behaviour toward the surroundings that they live in. The Prime Minister of Bhutan, Jigme Y. Thinley maintains that GNH in the end and *Culture* in particular is all about relationship (Thinley, 2009).

Cultural values cement family, and societal relationships and the quality of relationship must begin in a classroom. Namgyel (2010) translates some of these values into daily classroom manner :

Let me select a couple of values and practices that may have a significant bearing on children in a classroom : gratitude and truthfulness. The simple gesture of a teacher and his/her use of language plays a huge role in translating these values into actions that have a lasting impact on the child's psychological well-being. Say 'thank you' to a student for doing any task with a genuine gesture, and teach them to show gratitude to anyone who does something for a common good. Demonstrate a sense of appreciation to someone for trying to do anything ; teach the students to appreciate their friends' success, achievements, their teachers' hard labour, government's support and consideration, and the like (Namgyel, 2010, p.1).

One unique feature of this great philosophy is that it can be brought to a small unit as a classroom.

Dasho Karma Ura's (2009) "A Proposal for GNH Value Education in Schools" is telling in that he suggests four channels, namely rituals (prayers), meditation, classroom teaching and community services learning through SUPW (Socially Useful and Productive Works) to impart value education in schools. Cultural values, ethics, manners and moral complement and supplement each other. In the same vein, Ura (2009) presents six aspects of moral personhood including "reason, values, emotion, character, behavior and identity" (p.58). Descriptors (see Ura, 2009, p.58) for each of these aspects are useful indicators to gauge the possession or absence of cultural values in a child or a person.

There is an assumption that the cultural values proposed by the CBS (2009) and others, if instilled at the prime age in primary schooling, will assist children to grow into contented youths and productive citizens with full of happiness. Akhtar (2010) presents four related and occasionally overlapping varieties of happiness : pleasure-based happiness (elation), assertion-based happiness (joy), merger-based happiness (ecstasy), and fulfillment-based happiness (contentment). Whether happiness and its elements are coined in Bhutanese context, Japanese context or elsewhere the intended purpose is the same, that is, to bring peace and harmony to humankind. In other words in one way or another values listed are to bring elation, joy, ecstasy or contentment. Deprivation of

this state of well-being according to Schimmel (2007) is ill-being.

### Poverty and Cultural Poverty

Poverty is a worldwide issue and much has been discussed and debated about it, but the reports and research on the subject remain largely in terms of economic parameters that encompass adequacy of food, cloths, money, and shelter. Academics in more recent times however have challenged the conventional dimensions and definitions of poverty. For example, Barford (2009) proposes some departures from this conventional economically focused poverty :

I will outline some problems with the current way we think and speak about poverty, consider how some academics think about this, and what we can do to challenge it. The aim is not to deny the existence of unnecessary suffering due to a lack of access to basic resources such as food security, durable shelter, and a safe environment, but to consider the problems arising from how we talk about issues, and to propose some alternatives (p.5).

Although the author does not seem to project in any sense the poverty relating to culture an element of "safe environment" is relevant here. "Culturally safe environment" is as important as "physically safe environment", deficiency of this aspect is a serious deprivation.

Many authors suggest the inclusion of other dimensions of human deprivation while discussing poverty. Baruah (2009) maintains that "what constitutes poverty and well-being has been significantly broadened beyond a narrow income definition to include other dimensions of human deprivation" (p.14). Similar claims have been made by others on the dimensions of poverty, namely social exclusion, vulnerability, lack of satisfaction of basic needs, relative deprivation, marginalization, and low income (Carol, Wendy, Beverly & Sheppard, 2009). Baruah (2009) and Carol et al. (2009) present another dimension of poverty as "deprivation". Therefore, a working definition of cultural poverty, we are tempted to coin, is a deficiency or lack of basic human values and compassion.

One fact that seems to cut across while discussing poverty in economic terms is the daily income on which an individual survives. World Bank and other similar agencies use reference lines set at \$1 and \$2 per day (Barford, 2009 ; Baruah, 2009). In the same vein, howsoever subjective, baseline for cultural poverty can be set at whether or not someone possesses

values and practices, civic sense and basic compassion. Anything less is assumed to be suffering from cultural poverty. More on this is presented elsewhere in this paper.

### Youth Violence : Types, Causes, Consequences

Youth violence has become a global phenomenon of major concern. Several studies (for example, O'Donnell, Roberts & Schwab-Stone, 2011 ; Ryan, Shorey, Cornelius & Idema, 2011) show that students in some countries (Gambia, South Africa for instance) reported witnessing someone threatened with serious physical harm, beaten up or mugged, attacked or stabbed with a knife/piece of glass, or seriously wounded in an incident of violence. Others reported being beaten up or mugged during the past year, and nearly a quarter reported being threatened with serious physical harm. Bhutan has not been spared from youth violence. The news reporter of KUENSEL, Samten Wangchuk (February, 12, 2012), says that "January (of 2012) alone saw six stab cases this year in the country, February began with one at the capital city and so begins this new year" (p.1). Every other day there is coverage in the media on violence involving youths : theft cases, vandalism, assault, or stabbing. This section presents a brief review of literature on violence, youth violence in particular encompassing types, causes, gravity and consequences, the purpose of which is to cross reference with cultural values.

Types of violence typically depend on the context of a society, some of which are crosscutting across the globe. However, a study carried out in South Africa is considered here because of its comprehensive coverage of the issue. Abrahams (2010) presents types of violence in South African context to include Institutional violence, Gang violence, Urban violence, and Xenophobic violence. While the other types of violence listed here are familiar, violence relating to xenophobia warrants some elaboration. Researchers, such as Abrahams (2010) describe xenophobia as, "intense or irrational dislike or fear of people from other countries" (p.512). Xenophobia thus, is a show of hatred of strangers or foreigners, coupled with fear and distrust. The hatred is demonstrated through violence in the form of brutal assaults, with a purpose of ethnic cleansing and mass expulsion. This type of violence is still prevalent in some countries. Causes of youth violence are multi-faceted and their consequences too disturbing. Literature suggests some common causes : (1) exposure to violent environment, (2) low educational qualification, (3) high unemployment, (4) the weakening of social organizations, especially at the family and community level, (5) unjust system,

(6) substance abuse, (7) poverty, and (8) learning environment (Stewart, Harlow & DeBacco, 2011 ; Hungerford, Ogle & Clements, 2010 ; Carol et al., 2009). For example, Hungerford et al. (2010) cite earlier research findings that children exposed to their violent parents and intimate partners have been associated with a wide range of problems, including symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, internalizing problems such as anxiety and depression, externalizing problems such as aggression, low self-esteem, difficulties in peer relationships, and lower verbal and reading ability.

The paradox is that there appears to be intra-cause-and-effect within the causes, meaning one cause of violence is also the cause of another cause, suggesting a vicious cycle. A case in point is low educational qualification leads to unemployment, which leads to poverty. Carol et al. (2009) report that mental health and mood states of adolescents are associated with the financial difficulties of their parents. Furthermore, negative changes in the parent-adolescent relationship are observed, "resulting to depressions, sense of helplessness, feelings of shame and inferiority, greater risk for teen suicide, symptoms of violence" (p.25). Further there are : depressive symptoms, anxiety, problematic behaviours, mental disorders, substance abuse, poor academic achievement, with one or more of these leading to violent acts. A vicious cycle in play is the relationship between substance abuse and poverty, and between substance abuse and criminal offending, contributing to problematic social behaviours.

A similar study reports that psychosocial risk behaviours follow this order : depression, self-harm, violence, suicide. Some early behaviors appear to be minor such as colouring hair and dressing (Rutledge, Don & Micah, 2008). The symptoms the study cautions include desires to harm others, plan to access weapons, self-harm behaviours such as cutting, scoring, scratching, history of past violence or aggression, threats, angry outbursts, cruelty to animals, or being a disciplinary problem. The study suggests a number of useful preventive measures wherein the roles of a counselor in association with teachers, administrators, parents, and students are of utmost importance and can make a difference. School personnel can follow three steps to deal with the issue : (a) Content Expertise (provide educational programs, open-door policy to facilitate access to students), (b) Identifying At-Risk Teens/youths, and (c) Intervention.



**Photo. 2** A GNH School

### 3 . Method

The study employed an ethnographic design (Creswell, 2007) within the qualitative research approach. The study site was confined to a small primary school (Photo. 2). The researchers conducted unstructured interviews (Namgyel, 2011) with the principal and one of the teachers from the school. Observations of teaching were done to determine the first hand interaction of teacher and students in the classroom.

Review of related literature on culture, GNH, poverty and youth violence is the hallmark of the method in this study. Findings from the literature and data from observation and interviews are discussed, themes proposed and conclusions drawn.

### Discussion, Findings and Conclusion

One of the purposes of this study was to situate cultural values and practices in a Bhutanese primary school classroom and explore how a teacher plays instrumental roles in alleviating a “cultural poverty”. First it is imperative to revisit the *Cultural Values*, i.e., compassion, generosity, forgiveness, calmness, gratitude, truthfulness, reciprocity, fairness, family closeness, hospitality, and cooperation and the *Cultural Practices*, i.e., volunteering, donation, community participation, strong family ties, saving life, and participation in prayers and ritual (CBS, 2009). This section on discussion is presented under the themes, causes of cultural poverty and ways to alleviate cultural poverty. The study proposed a baseline model for recording and measuring cultural poverty.

### Causes of Cultural Poverty

The study found that poverty to a great extent is discussed in terms of economic parameters. Although some researchers (Baruah, 2009 ; Carol et al., 2009)

suggest departures from conventional descriptions of poverty by presenting other dimensions namely social exclusion, deprivations, so forth but none of them mention deprivation of culture. Observations of classroom interactions show that a teacher's classroom management has the potential to significantly impact on the cultural growth and development of a child. The teacher taught “Reading Thermometer” to Class IV of 18 students (11 girls and 7 boys). He gave a class assignment to label diagrams of a thermometer following the questions. The students checked or crossed the answers of their friends. This excited them and there was an air of interest. There was some degree of truthfulness and reciprocity in that teacher corrected right/wrong answer then and thereby supporting or rejecting the evaluation done by students. The use of positive reinforcement such as “all correct” and “good” motivated students.

Compassion, generosity, forgiveness, calmness must come with an enabling environment and adequate resources. Teachers in a primary school teach at least 35 of 38 periods in a week. Overburdening with teaching workload and scarce resources have the potential of posing the threat to sidelining some of the values. However, what is heartening is that one can notice icons and symbols of cultural heritage in the school, namely temple, and structured cultural activities organized through culture clubs.

One other cause concerns the growing youth related crimes and violence especially in urban towns. The cause of youth violence as discussed elsewhere in the paper is multi-faceted. Stewart et al. (2011), Hungerford et al. (2010) and Carol et al. (2009) list some of the causes of youth violence : exposure to violent environment, low educational qualification, high unemployment, substance abuse, poverty, learning environment. Two observations are considered pertinent here. One, when the *learning environment is not ambient* in their prime age it is possible to impact them with some negativity and over time at later age they become violent. Two, young primary school students (for that matter any student) live in a society where they are too *exposed to violence* in and around them. The rippling effect of prevalent youth violence has potential to become a cause for upcoming youth to become violent.

### Alleviation of Cultural Poverty begins in the classroom

Alleviation of cultural poverty will go a long way towards preventing youth violence and related issues that the society is grappling with. Although this is a societal responsibility, this study puts a classroom

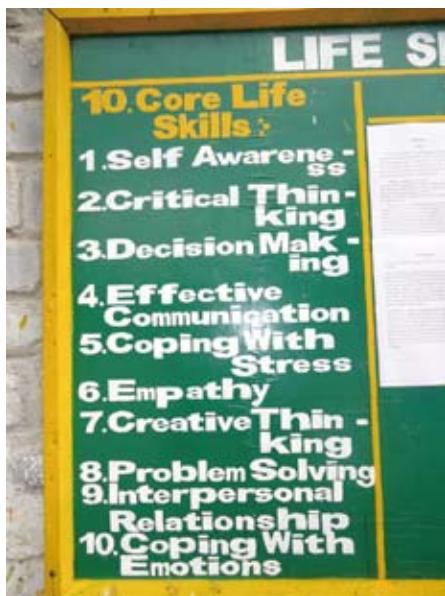


Photo. 3 Ten Core Life Skills



Photo. 4 GNH Practices

teacher at the centre of the stage and challenges him/her with the role of alleviating cultural poverty. Let us revisit Namgyel (2010) and Ura (2009) who offer suggestions and strategies to alleviate cultural poverty.

Namgyel (2010) is down to earth and specific about classroom interactions between a teacher and students. Among others, being truthful, showing gratitude, saying thank you, demonstration of genuine goodwill gesture, exhibiting compassion, are testimony of a teacher being role model. Similarly, Ura's (2009) six aspects of moral personhood : reason, values, emotion, character, behavior and identity, and their descriptors supplement classroom values and practices suggested by Namgyel (2010) (Photo. 3, 4).

Classroom observation reveals that the teacher's use of language and the tone of interaction either comforts or threatens students in the classroom. This, either positive or negative, is going to have a lasting impact on the child's psychological well-being. It is imperative that a teacher is mindful of his/her classroom manner, in all aspects : body, speech and mind. Absence of vices and negativities and ensuring an ambient atmosphere in the classroom is one of the many steps to alleviating cultural poverty.

#### Proposition of a baseline model for assessing Cultural Poverty

The study proposed a baseline for recording and measuring cultural poverty. Descriptions of Table A and Table B, and directions on how to use them are presented.

#### Directions to use the baseline table

Table A has a set of Cultural Values (1-11) whereas Table B has Cultural Practices (1-6). Within these tables, Column B, indicates that the teacher is to design 10 activities related to each of the values and practices that are doable, practical and understandable to the level of students. During the month each student is to mark whether or not he/she carried out or practiced or demonstrated the possession of those values and practices. If the teacher is confident that students have attained a high level of integrity monitoring and assessing of their performance, then it may be left to the individual students themselves or peer assessment.

The suggested frequency of assessment of cultural poverty (or cultural richness) is once a month. However, it is left to the judgment of a teacher and the student concerned on the necessity of assessment and its frequency : monthly, fortnightly or weekly. The judgment could also include whether or not to assess all values and practices or to observe a selection of items.

#### Interpretation of scores

Now refer to Columns A to G. Column A is the list of values and practices suggested by CBS (2009). B is the list of activities that a teacher is to design, if relevant, in consultation with students. It is important that every student performs different activities to cater to all or most of the values and practices, not simply repeating one or two of them. If, in case an activity is to be performed regularly (for example, prayers) it should be counted as one activity.

The main point here is the Cultural Poverty Base-

**Table A** Baseline for monthly performance in Cultural Values

A. Cultural Values	B. Activities	C. Cultural Poverty (1-3)	D. Poverty Baseline (4)	E. Culturally Consistent (5-7)	F. Culturally Rich (8-10)	G. Remarks
(1) Compassion	Design 10 activities					
(2) Generosity	Design 10 activities					
(3) Forgiveness	Design 10 activities					
(4) Calmness	Design 10 activities					
(5) Gratitude	Design 10 activities					
(6) Truthfulness	Design 10 activities					
(7) Reciprocity	Design 10 activities					
(8) Fairness	Design 10 activities					
(9) Family closeness	Design 10 activities					
(10) Hospitality	Design 10 activities					
(11) Cooperation	Design 10 activities					
Total						

**Table B** Baseline for monthly performance in Cultural Practices

A. Cultural Practices	B. Activities	C. Cultural Poverty (1-3)	D. Poverty Baseline (4)	E. Culturally Consistent (5-7)	F. Culturally Rich (8-10)	G. Remarks
(1) Volunteering	Design 10 activities					
(2) Donation	Design 10 activities					
(3) Community participation	Design 10 activities					
(4) Strong family ties	Design 10 activities					
(5) Saving life	Design 10 activities					
(6) Participation in prayers and ritual.	Design 10 activities					
Total						



Photo. 5 Girls Study in Hostel



Photo. 6 Primary Students Pray in a Morning Assembly

line is set at 4 points out of 10. If a student scores just 4 it is considered to be a bare minimum pass mark and he/she is living on baseline of poverty. But any score below it, i. e., 1-3, is below baseline and therefore a student is destined to be living in the world of Cultural Poverty. It is the responsibility of teachers, students

themselves, parents, and stakeholders concerned to help save students from this cauldron. In severe cases, if a student's acts are detrimental to cultural values and practices, meaning if his/her average scores happen to be zero or minus points the student is la-

beled to be living in Severe Cultural Poverty. Column E (5-7) is Culturally Consistent and Column F (8-10) is the domain of Culturally Rich. Column G is for recording remarks, if any. Therefore depending upon the performance a student may live in "Severe Cultural Poverty" or "Culturally Rich" or just at the "Baseline".

An important message however is that the exercise should not be carried out for the sake of filling in boxes and record keeping. This should have a lasting impact on students both in values and practices, so that they do not grow into youths who self-harm by abusing substances, who vandalize properties for fun, who rob shops and individuals, or who stab with an intent to kill another human being (Photo. 5, 6).

#### 4. Conclusion

Due to the small scale nature of this qualitative research it is not possible to generalize its findings. However, owing to its in-depth and uniquely emergent themes its findings may find merit in some ways. The researchers may be permitted to express their final word thus : humankind is likely to suffer famine and poverty of a different kind, that of culture. Cultural Poverty has the potential to be a terror of the next century. This study, despite its limitations, discussed literature on related topics, to bring home the importance of culture and suggested ways to alleviate the poverty in question. Here the physician, the economist who should begin the task of alleviation is the teacher. Youth violence and related issues are presented to make the point that deficiency of culture can be a cause. Alternatively youth violence is the consequence of that poverty. A point of delight of this study is the proposition of "Cultural Poverty Baseline". Although the authors intended the utility of the template in Bhutanese schools it however can be tried in any other context and society, if it deems merits.

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