

## ***Cultural Maintenance and Promotion: The Print Media's Role in Providing Space for Knowledge and Discourse***

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*A person who gets deculturalised - and I nearly was, so I know the danger - loses his self-confidence. He suffers from a sense of deprivation. For optimum performance, a man must know himself and the world ... I may speak the English language better than the Chinese language because I learnt English early in life. But I will never be an Englishman in a thousand generations and I have not got the Western value system inside; mine is an Eastern value system.*

*- Lee Kuan Yew, Prime Minister of Singapore, 1978, (in Pennycook 1994: 247).*

### ***Abstract***

This paper is a discussion of the role of print media in Bhutan in providing public space for cultural knowledge and discourse. Increased exposure to global cultures and consumption of mass media has spawned the growth of a modern cultural trend that challenges the survival of the material and non-material contents of Bhutanese cultural identity. External threats to indigenous Bhutanese culture must be approached intelligently and wisely. The print media in Bhutan serves as an effective mediator between the persistent winds of an aggressive global culture and the small, vulnerable Bhutanese culture. To the English-using Bhutanese population, and to foreigners keen on Bhutan, Kuensel (Bhutan's print-based national newspaper), and Tashi Delek (Druk Air's in-flight magazine) are a potent source of cultural knowledge and a forum for cultural expression and exchange, both, therefore, supporting the general quest for cultural maintenance.

Article 4 of the draft Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan provides for the state's responsibility to preserve, protect and

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promote the Bhutanese cultural heritage, and through it, to enrich the cultural life of the people. The media's role in this national endeavour is critical. This paper will discuss the need for cultural sustainability in terms of three domains of culture: literary heritage, spirituality, and folklore. The discussion is based on an analysis of cultural contents selected from *Kuensel* and *Tashi Delek* and is grounded in perspectives drawn from contemporary discourse on the role of media in cultural sustainability.

Maintaining and promoting Bhutan's rich literary culture is critical to the experience of Gross National Happiness, because literature is the content of the language a people speak and language facilitates communal bonds. English is being embraced by the Bhutanese as a language of opportunities, of lateral and vertical movements in life. It is already the dominant language of the mass media. The consuming power of the mass media laden with consumerist values will continue to impact the Bhutanese psyche. The print media such as *Kuensel* and *Tashi Delek* (and now *Bhutan Observer* and *Bhutan Times*) can mediate between the influx of values from dominant cultures and values which are native to the Bhutanese. Values carried through the mass media, especially films from India, Mumbai and Hollywood, the television, newspapers, magazines, and now the internet, will continue to provide sensual gratification that modern minds seek. The home-based literary contents of *Kuensel* and *Tashi Delek* at present provide literary materials that not only disseminate knowledge about the Bhutanese literary tradition but also present the social, cultural, and pastoral values that have sustained community life for centuries.

Spirituality is based deep in the Bhutanese concept of development, particularly in the context of gross National Happiness. The deluge of sensual materials, ideas and concepts carried through the mass media will create restlessness, arrogance, and egocentrism in modern minds. The public space that *Kuensel* and *Tashi Delek* provide for spiritual materials through news stories and headlines, articles, reviews, vignettes, views and comments provide not simply knowledge about the Bhutanese spiritual culture, but also a public platform for dialogue, discussion, and reflection. The paper analyses the content of materials in *Kuensel* and *Tashi Delek* that deal with spirituality such as discourses, monuments, profiles, stories,

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and legends.

The word 'folk', hence folk culture, folklore, folk dance, is often used in a deprecating sense. In this paper I refer to it as meaning people, and folk culture as the customs, traditions, and values that belong to a group of people whose communal life derive meaning and sustenance from a common bond of cultural norms, standards, and values practised for generations. Kuensel and Tashi Delek at present provide reasonable public space for knowledge diffusion, articulation, and dialogue on various aspects of folk culture in Bhutan. This paper looks at manifestations of folk culture as they are presented in these two media and what impact they might have on public culture. The manifestations of folk culture include song, dance and music, customs and traditions, art and craft, beliefs and superstitions, and ways of life as they are carried through the print media in Bhutan.

The discussion of the paper will relate the need for cultural sustainability to the development concept of Gross National Happiness. It argues that the maintenance of the Bhutanese literary, spiritual, and folk cultures through dissemination and articulation in the print media will help contain the overriding influence of modernist cultural values based on ruthless egotism and commercialization of human values.

The paper also looks at the role of print media in cultural dissemination and maintenance in a democratic setting. The heavy incursion of non-Bhutanese cultural materials through the mass media inside and from outside Bhutan will influence public knowledge, desire, and lifestyle; hence the need for the print media to recognise its social and cultural responsibilities.

This paper suggests the need to reinforce the present role of the print media in disseminating knowledge on Bhutanese culture through news stories and headlines, research and non research-based articles, viewpoints, vignettes, profiles, and the like. Government policy on the role of the print media must recognise the latter's role in disseminating, if not generating, cultural knowledge and promoting cultural discourse. Without the media's positive role in the cultural domain, chances of its corruption and degeneration may be high, let alone its role in evolving a positive public culture in Bhutan.

### **Introduction**

*The role of the print media in the process of national character building is too significant to be pushed aside as not worthy of academic discussion. It is even more significant now especially as the Bhutanese society transitions from being an oral society to being one that is increasingly dependent on visual media. The significance becomes greater as the Bhutanese begin to see their own roles in a changed political setup which requires individuals to use greater amounts of personal judgement and decision based on knowledge acquired through the print media. The print media's role becomes most significant owing to the singularity of its reach and influence among the reading public. In Bhutan this singularity is caused mainly by the lack of a rich canon of secular literature in the country, in the form of poetry and prose. This literary gap has in some way been filled by the print media, particularly Kuensel, and to some extent Tashi Delek. Two other newspapers, Bhutan Times and Bhutan Observer, launched on 2nd May and 2nd June 2006 respectively, further increase the role of the print media in the evolution of a public culture. The role will be deep especially in "an oral society that has not developed a strong literary tradition" (Kuensel 28 September 2005:2) that moves with uncertainty towards a literate culture where reading, writing, and inquiry become inevitable tools of survival. The significance also increases in a society where, in the absence of a rich literary tradition, the reading public read nearly every single word that is printed in a newspaper and takes in everything with a high degree of gullibility. The up side of this is that the readers' deep engagement with the text of newspapers could be drawn upon as strength, and this must encourage newspapers and magazines to enrich the intellectual content of their publications. This process will, over time, have a deep educational impact on the public mind and attitude.*

*The preservation and promotion of cultural heritage is one of the four pillars that support the development concept of Gross National Happiness. Bhutan may not be a cultural giant among nations in the twenty-first century, as France or Italy was during the Renaissance, but it could present a cultural*

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*paradox in the form of an intelligent ability to survive in the global cultural cauldron in which the ancient customs, traditions and values are being rapidly replaced or displaced by the powerful, and often invisible, forces of a global culture characterized by the cult of sensuality and material restlessness, a movement often termed as cultural imperialism. The paradox is already becoming too conspicuous in the case of Bhutan, as is evident from the growing amount of interest the world is showing in how the country is able to keep its heritage alive between two of the world's cultural giants, China and India. The Bhutanese Prime Minister, Lyonpo Sangay Ngedup, in his inaugural address to the meeting of the BIMSTEC member countries (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, and Thailand) meeting on 22 May 2006 said, "It is to culture that we owe our unification and unity as a people and state. It is what keeps us together and it is what gives us the will to guard and preserve our sovereign being" (Dorji 2006:11). The need for cultural maintenance and promotion in the case of Bhutan is not political rhetoric. It is a national agenda, a goal sought at various levels through government and non-government initiatives. The cultural goal finds articulation in the goals of education for schools from primary through higher secondary. At times the articulation may sound obsessive, but it is perhaps this compelling sense of being cultured, the deep recognition of its continuity as a living tradition, and the ability to live it actively, that have helped Bhutan to protect itself from the ravages caused by the advent of a world culture that is fundamentally hostile to identities, values, and spirituality. The Bhutanese government's commitment to the need to save its own heritage against the global cultural blitz is expressed in these words:*

*Today, it is the culture and tradition bequeathed to us by our ancestors that can protect us from some of the negative and indiscriminate forces of modernisation and enable us to retain our identity and dignity in a world in which 'culture' is increasingly defined as a global commodity (RGOB 1999:65).*

*Bhutan is becoming a cultural destination of the world. Already the BIMSTEC has, as part of what it calls the 'Paro*

*Initiative', endorsed the establishment of a cultural centre in Bhutan (Dorji 2006:11). This increases the risk of stagnating and destroying the inherent values of culture as a way of life, a living entity, and making it a tourist product. But as the Bhutanese Home Minister, Lyonpo Jigme Thinley said, while tapping into the possibilities a cultural industry might provide, efforts must be made to avoid the "vulgarisation of culture", a phenomenon that has denigrated cultures in many parts of the world. The print media can play a mediating role by objectively looking at the positive aspects of global culture and by informing and educating the public on its negative aspects, and thereby creating a deeper understanding of and appreciation for indigenous cultures.*

*Braj Kachru, the noted American linguist, locates Bhutan in what he calls the expanding circle of the "concentric circles of Asian Englishes" along with countries like Myanmar, China, Japan, Thailand, Brunei, and South Korea; which means that English in Bhutan is viewed "primarily as a foreign language" (1998:94). On the contrary, English had already taken on the role of a second language much before 1998, as a language of the curriculum from primary up to university, as a medium of official communication along with Dzongkha the national language, as a language of print and electronic media, and as the language of global participation, although the term 'second language' is not used officially even now. Kachru's location of English in the expanding circle contradicts fact, even if we look at the status of English in 1998, the year his paper was published. Yet in effect, the escalating growth of English, as is the case in countries in Kachru's expanding circle, is phenomenal. It will continue to be so. The growing popularity of the print media in Bhutan may be viewed alongside the growth and expansion of English as a powerful language. In 2005 there were 145,817 students (MOE 2005:1) studying in educational institutions in the country from primary to university who use English. Hundreds of students studying in schools and universities in India and elsewhere use English and learn other languages. Most of the country's over 17,000 civil servants are probably active or passive users of English. In the absence of any official figure on the demographics of*

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*English usage, actively or passively, in Bhutan, these numbers help to make an educated guess. Close to 1.6 lakh people in Bhutan, which is about 26 percent of the country's total population of 634,982 (Dorji 2006:1), use English. Including retired civil servants, military men, private sector employees, those in the monastic community who use English, and others, it may again be guessed that close to 26-30 percent of the Bhutanese population use English as a 'second language'. English will continue to grow in its popularity among the Bhutanese because it is a language of convenience, of education and opportunity, of modernisation and business, of the mass media, and of global participation. Unlike in most countries where it has been adopted as a second language, yet is often scorned by its users because of its colonial stink, English in Bhutan is viewed by its users—active, passive, and potential—as a respectable pathway to opportunities. This makes the market potential of the domestic print media in English extremely promising. Along with the promise is also seen the possibility of an influx of media from outside the country that the English-educated populace increasingly consumes.*

*To the large English-speaking Bhutanese population, and to foreigners keen on Bhutan, Kuensel and Tashi Delek serve as a reliable source of cultural knowledge, a popular forum for cultural expression and discourse, and an enduring means of culture maintenance.*

*This paper is based on an analysis of the cultural contents of 5 articles each of Kuensel and Tashi Delek published during 2003-2005 to identify cultural knowledge and values that can impact the public psyche, and hence public culture, in Bhutan. The discussion of the role of the print media in cultural maintenance and dialogue is grounded in perspectives drawn from popular discourse on the role of media in public culture. The analysis of media articles is supported by views of a sample of readers of the English edition of Kuensel on its role in supporting the desire for cultural expression and dialogue. Data for this was gathered through a questionnaire entitled *The Role of the Bhutanese Print Media in Cultural Sustainability* distributed to a random sample of 20 regular*

readers of the English edition of *Kuensel*. The respondents are identified in this paper as R<sub>1</sub>, R<sub>2</sub>, and so on.

***Print Media and Cultural Sustainability: Literary, Spiritual, Folkloric***

*There is general agreement that the media has the capacity to influence audience attitudes, and that it exerts influence on social life (Corner 2000:379 in Igglesden 2002: 21; Kuensel 4 February 2006:2; Rozumilowicz 2002 in McConnell & Becker 2002:11; Kuenselonline 19 February 2005). The need for cultural maintenance in Bhutan at the moment is not political rhetoric but a serious development priority, which is evident when the government says that it is a “living manifestation of civilisation” and that, “as a system of values and norms, it is reflected in our way of thinking, in our attitudes toward the world and to life ... how we make moral and ethical choices and distinguish between what is wrong and right” (RGOB 1999:65). Article 4 of the Bhutanese constitution states that “The state shall endeavour to preserve, protect and promote the cultural heritage of the country, including monuments, places and objects of artistic or historic interest ...to enrich society and the cultural life of the citizens” (Draft of the Tsa Thrim Chhenmo as on 18<sup>th</sup> August 2005:8). The print media can provide a powerful public voice for indigenous culture. As a public service media, *Kuensel* must continue to be a virtual public classroom, a platform for display of indigenous cultures, and it must guard itself against temptations to indulge in mindless commercialism and politicking, a weakness many newspapers in the region have suffered.*

*The present role of Tashi Delek, although an in-flight magazine of an airline, in mirroring Bhutan’s cultural tapestry for the Bhutanese themselves and for the outside world seems impressive. Its role may not be recognized by the government or by the society but even a casual reading of its many colourful pages gives one the impression that it is among the mediums of cultural knowledge, expression, and in a minor way, a means of cultural maintenance and promotion. *Kuensel*’s commitment to its cultural responsibility is evidenced by its editorial when it says:*



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*In the end the Bhutanese media must be seen as a credible and responsible entity, not as a power block and certainly not as a tool for politicians and business houses. The section of society called public intellectuals has a critical role to play (Kuenselonline, 19 February 2005).*

*Senior citizens, academics, culture bearers, writers and researchers, the academia—all must work to evolve a discursive community that will create a public space of common concern dedicated to disseminating cultural knowledge, articulating cultural aspirations, and advocating cultural maintenance and promotion. This paper looks at three popular domains of culture, namely literary culture, spiritual culture, and folk culture and discusses how the print media, particularly Kuensel and Tashi Delek, can create, as it does now, adequate public space for disseminating cultural knowledge and facilitating popular discourse.*

### *Literary Culture and the Print Media*

*Oral and written canons of literature constitute an important domain of a country's cultural heritage. Literature in its varied manifestations like poetry, fiction, drama, non-fictional prose forms such as essays, biographies, and memoirs reflect the spirit of a nation, its character, its dreams and aspirations, its problems and predicaments, its values and standards. In simple terms, a country's literary tradition is a reflection of its culture. Referring to the lack of a "strong literary tradition" in Bhutan, a Kuensel editorial (June 4, 2005:2) remarked that "The absence of a good literary tradition would not only mean the lack of academic credibility but a superficial society". This argument becomes convincing when we look at how countries with rich and vast literary traditions are often the ones that set the trend for the development of literary canons. We also see how countries with rich literary outputs are normally respected as cultured and civilised. Russia is known by the fame of Alexander Pushkin and Leo Tolstoy as much as by Sputnik, England by William Shakespeare and John Milton as much as by Isaac Newton and Stephen Hawking, and India by Rabindranath Tagore and Satyajit Ray as much as by C.V.Raman or Bollywood. Great literature from China, Japan,*

Germany, India, Russia, France and many other countries have contributed to world literature through translations.

During 2004-2005, five reviews of literary writing rooted in Bhutanese culture by Bhutanese writers in English were published by *Kuensel*: *Telling tales as they were told* by Dorji Penjore (*Kuenselonline* 12 April 2004); *A dog's tale* by Kinley Y Dorji (*Kuenselonline* 16 November 2004); *The Boneless Tongue* by T.S.Powdyel (*Kuenselonline* 23 February 2005); *Documenting well known myths* by Ugyen Penjore (*Kuenselonline* 5 May 2005); and *Bhutanese Beliefs* by Gopilal Acharya (*Kuenselonline* 27 September 2005). For a small population of 634,982 people, the output is at least good enough to be able to inform and educate readers of *Kuensel* on the content and quality of Bhutanese literature and to create public consciousness about the need to evolve a vibrant literary environment and culture. *Kuensel* will have to continue to provide adequate space for Bhutanese literature in the form of book reviews, academic discourses, and authentic research reports by its journalists and by those outside it. The article called *A yak herder and a yak song* by Kencho Wangdi (*Kuensel* 27 December 2003:5) is a brilliant example of how authentic research by the print media could become material for public consumption, material for classroom teaching and learning, and inspiration for further research. An important aspect of Bhutan's rich oral literature is exposed through this well-researched article. An extract from it illustrates the point.

Composed in the high mountains, "Yak legpai lhadar gawo" tells the story of the tragic parting between a yak herder and his yak, Legpai Lhadar Gawo (the handsome and magnificent yak) who was to be taken on orders from a powerful lord and killed for meat. Lozey is the battle of wits and words through poetry and verse between opponents on subjects of love and challenge, or difference of opinion, where the parties involved use metaphor and symbols to outdo one another, until a winner or draw is declared.

(Kuensel 27 December 2003, p.5)

*This study has not attempted to find out what pedagogical use teachers in Bhutanese schools put such materials to. But such a study would yield interesting facts, especially so because teachers and curriculum writers generally mention the lack of adequate literary materials by Bhutanese writers. Bhutanese oral tradition provides a rich tapestry of creative expressions comprising mainly of genres such as folktales, poetry, epics, biographies, myths, legends, ballads, proverbs, beliefs and superstitions, heroic tales, jokes, popular gossip, riddles, songs, sagas, which provide a rich fund of cultural knowledge. The Bhutanese government, for instance, asserts that "There are differences in folklore, myths, legends...poetry...that together add richness to the nation's cultural tapestry", and that "These must be inventoried and recorded before they are lost forever" (RGOB 1999:66). Much work remains to be done in researching and translating many popular literary genres that may be lost from oral memory, and hence need transmission from mouth to print. The globalization of English and the insinuating spread of the mass media will increasingly challenge the survival of Bhutan's rich oral literature. Davis Crystal (1997: 18) says this of the oral heritage:*

*Oral testimony, in the form of sagas, folktales, songs, rituals, proverbs, and many other practices, provides us with a unique view of our world and a unique canon of literature. It is their legacy to the rest of humanity. Once lost, it can never be recaptured.*

*As a public service media, Kuensel must make sustained efforts in research in Bhutanese oral literature, which would support the people's desire to articulate their cultural values and establish a unique Bhutanese literary identity. It will also help to create an interested international audience for Bhutanese literature, and to preserve and promote the kingdom's vast literary heritage. Kuensel has popularised Bhutanese writing in English, paradoxically, much more than any academic institution at the tertiary level in the country*

seems to have even attempted, something academics in the Royal University of Bhutan could start. Concerns have been expressed about the lack of “quality materials by Bhutanese authors” writing in English, even as the Ministry of Education encourages the inclusion of Bhutanese writing in English in the revised English curriculum for schools in Bhutan (Wangmo 2005:3). Nicole Pluss, visiting Australian author of children’s literature suggested to educators in Bhutan that “oral stories would be preserved if written down and this will provide children with ideas and determination to get their works published” (quoted in Dema 2005:3). All this was not known without the print media’s role.

The mass media, particularly through the powerful medium of English, will bring in tantalising materials that pander to sensuality, consumerist egocentrism, and market libertinism, which will challenge the cultural contents of the public service media in Bhutan. The risk is further enhanced especially when English becomes not just a second language, but a powerful language, a virtual lingua franca among the educated population; and as they show greater interest in more enticing materials that can be accessed via other media like television, internet, and movies from India and Hollywood. The print media in Bhutan can counterbalance it by providing sufficient public space for cultural knowledge, expression and dialogue with the clear purpose of maintaining and promoting indigenous literary traditions.

Preserving and promoting the literary traditions should be viewed as a cultural imperative because “Written literature and orature are the main means by which a particular language transmits the images of the world contained in the culture it carries”, as the noted African writer N.W. Thiong’o (1986:205) puts it. The mass media’s insidious invasion of local cultures must be understood as too real to be avoided. Kangas’s (2000:x) claim that “Some of the direct main agents of linguistic (and cultural) genocide today are parts of what we call the consciousness industry: formal educational systems and the mass media” perhaps needs not much evidence. In the era of parliamentary democracy the media will be tempted to interpret the statutory rights provided for in the constitution as

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*license to report and publish anything that makes quick money. Of course, the media policy will guard against this. The English language and the culture it imports with its power and appeal will need to be counterbalanced by rich cultural material transmitted through the same popular medium, as Kuensel and Tashi Delek are doing at the moment. Referring to the influence of English in India, British writer Salman Rushdie says, "Assisted by the English language's enormous flexibility and size, they (Indians) are carving out large territories for themselves within its front...They use it as one of the tools they have to hand" (in Crystal 2000: 135-136). The Bhutanese can harness the resources of the English language and make it what the Indian writer Raja Rao calls the "language of our intellectual make-up" (in Crystal 2000: 135-136). Cultural imperialism through the medium of English must be dealt with through the same medium. The print media's role is critical.*

*A nation without a reasonable amount of literary wealth and a visible culture of creativity, imagination, and sensibility, will in the long run be a nation of robots, faces without humanity. For a small country like Bhutan, literature—both religious and secular—must form part of our cultural imperative, for without it culture fails to mirror the nation's inner voice, its spirit, its psyche, its aspirations, its dreams, and its consciousness. There is agreement among literature interpreters that the literary arts in the form of poetry, fiction, dramatic compositions, ballads, songs, memoirs, biographies, essays, and the like in their totality communicate culture. Without culture, a nation becomes emotionally, intellectually and spiritually sterile and impoverished. If the emotional, intellectual, and spiritual health of a people, besides material comfort and convenience, are central to a nation's wellbeing and happiness, then the argument that people must continue to tell stories, sing their songs and ballads, and say their poetry, becomes quite legitimate. Literature, as a carrier of cultural values and popular aspirations, problems and predicaments, impacts the way a people think and behave; it also helps people to develop a sense of who they are, where they belong, and where they are heading; and it also instils in the minds of a people a sense of nationhood and oneness. In fact, literature*

*helps to build national solidarity and an enduring sense of identity. Many African writers writing in English have argued for cultural sensitivity and consciousness through African literature. This may be generally applied to highly vulnerable societies where the risk of facing the heavy onslaught of cultural imperialism is quite high. This makes the task for the print media such as Kuensel and Tashi Delek very challenging.*

#### ***Spiritual Culture and the Print Media***

*One of the ingredients of the cultural aspect of Gross National Happiness will be the search for a balance between selflessness and selfishness, between taking and giving, between grabbing and sharing, between coldness and kindness, between self and other. The invincible forces of the modern globalised culture will tempt the Bhutanese, through subtle means, into uprooting their spiritual convictions in the process of a restless search for instant gratification of the senses; a process that will gradually turn individuals into intellectual machines that know only the self; human beings whose sole occupation is to indulge in what the great American writer Aldous Huxley calls “monomaniacal vices”.*

*The role of traditional institutions in promoting the individual’s inner wellbeing must be recognised: “Throughout our history monastic and religious bodies have tended not only to our spiritual but also to our material well-being” (RGOB 1999:70). The “unambiguous cultural imperative”, the third pillar of Gross National Happiness, underpins the fact that cultural preservation and promotion means not only recognising, inculcating, and appreciating the Bhutanese cultural heritage but also recognising “its role in meeting spiritual and emotional needs of our people and in cushioning ourselves from some of the negative impacts of modernisation” (RGOB 2005:70). Some of the ominous forces of modernisation that will increasingly challenge Bhutanese society, especially through the globalisation of culture, will be the disintegration of the family, erosion of social and communal values, desecration of the institution of marriage, displacement of the finer and more subtle aspects of culture and civilisation by the mindless worship of matter, and the restless search for self-*

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*aggrandizement and ego inflation. Robert Thurman, the American Buddhist teacher says:*

*And what happens in total democracy where there is no spiritual reality available is that the god that dominates is the god of money. And the parliamentarians and the congressmen become bought and sold. Just go to my country, they worship only money (Kuensel, 16 November 2005:5).*

*Spirituality, which simply means dedication to god, religion, enlightened beings such as bodhisattvas, and spiritual things or values, must continue to be one of the defining qualities of the Bhutanese national character. The Bhutanese spiritual heritage comprising such tangible treasures as the sacred texts, religious monuments, holy sites, sacred art and painting, and living manifestations of active spiritual culture such as religious discourses, acts of beneficence and compassion, self-sacrifice, fight against the ego, and renunciation and simplicity, must find adequate space for dissemination so that the deeper aspects of culture nourish the popular psyche. In the narrow sense, this might sound as proselytisation, but centuries of Bhutanese experience demonstrates that the spiritual values of compassion, holiness, beneficence, renunciation, and egolessness do not generate communal hatred, cultism, and narrow sectarianism, but contribute to social amity, harmony, and individual happiness.*

*Sceptics have often commented that Kuensel's only business is advertising. When Bhutan Observer was launched on 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2006, the comments on its maiden issue were generally on its quality of ruralism and breakaway from the traditional media bias towards urbanism. It may not be fair judgement to say that Kuensel has focussed reader attention only on urban issues. The fact is its reporters have traversed the length and breath of Bhutan to write about things that Bhutanese scholars, researchers, and academics have not been quite successful in doing, in many instances. Besides the 'Vacancy Announcements', the 'Advertisement', and the 'Classifieds', Kuensel has demonstrated genuine commitment to being a public service media through its proven efforts to report on various aspects of Bhutanese culture, including the*

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spiritual heritage, be it a story on the installation of a Serto (golden pinnacle) on the Utse of the 500-year old monastery of Khochung in remote Kurtoe, the sacred songs of Talo Tshechu, the preservation of the Drametse Nga Chham, the dissuading of animal slaughter, the legend of Taktshang, the birth of a reincarnate lama, or the passing away of an eminent spiritual master. The passing away of His Holiness the late Nyinzer Tulku was commented upon by the Kuensel editorial in an emotionally poignant manner, paying a befitting tribute to an enlightened Buddhist priest who “did not differentiate the type of vehicle that came to receive him” and “was not particularly impressed by luxury vehicles...was seen happily riding a tractor or a scooter to go to a farmer’s house” (Kuenselonline 15 June 2005). The following extract from Table 1 illustrates the kinds of spiritual materials Kuensel is able to present. Bibliography are made to at least sixteen spiritual concepts. In the absence of scholarly works in English on these aspects of Bhutanese Buddhism, Kuensel stories provide a credible public platform for dissemination of cultural knowledge and education.

*During Tshechus, the atsaras wear a cloth phallus as part of their head gear; the dagger in five different colours - white, yellow, red, green, and blue, represent the different manifestations of Jampalyang, the goddess of wisdom.*

*Bardo - the intermediate state of consciousness after death; the soul wanders in the bardo and must face judgement before Shinje Chhogyel (Lord of Death).*

*The collective sound from the recitation of prayers and bazagurus from inside the ponds ...*

*Talo tshechu; the inspiration to build the Talo monastery was drawn from the Samyi monastrey in Tibet; the Manisum songs are blessed by the Zhabdrung, and only Talops are allowed to learn the songs and perform them; if the songs are not performed properly it can bring misfortune such as natural calamities and diseases.*



*(Kuensel 1 February 2003; 6 December 2003; 10 January 2004; 22 January 2005; 2 April 2005)*

*In-flight magazines generally look like pamphlets and brochures departmental stores publish to promote sales. Tashi Delek reads like a rich travel guide to Bhutan, with pictures of the landscape, of art and architecture, of dzongs and monasteries, chortens and prayer flags, monks and farmers, dances and legends, mountains and valleys, streams and birds. Margaret Gee concludes her essay *Amazing Land of the thunder dragon in Tashi Delek* (April-May-June 2006: 10) with these words:*

*Everywhere you go in Bhutan you experience and witness Buddhism at close quarters...Such intense is their faith in religion... As tourists we may be unwittingly changing Bhutan but believe me for outsiders even a flying visit to Bhutan is a transforming experience.*

*The following extract from Table 2 illustrates the richness of spiritual information, concepts and themes Tashi Delek presented through five articles and stories in three issues between 2003 and 2005.*

*... a Bhutanese does not view a painting or a sculpture as a work of art - for him it is a religious work; many artistic styles of thangka painting - karma gardri style which has a Chinese touch, Tshangdri style which originated in the Tibetan region of Tshang, khamdri style of the Kham region, the mendre style, and chendre style (the art style of Gangkhar Chentse); the mortal remains of Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal; eternal meditation; nirvana; Palden Lhamo - Bhutan's guardian deity; Lam Ngagi Wangchuk; the omnipresent smell of incense in the Dzong; Master of discipline; Dorji Lingpa, the famous terton (revealer of treasures); the region in which the Zhabdrung arrived was Laya; the chorten with the footprints of Zhabdrung; Layaps and the old faithful hairy yaks.*

(Tashi Delek Oct-Dec 2003; January-March 2004; January-March 2005)

The extract presents numerous aspects of Bhutanese Buddhism such as history, legend, tradition, art, philosophy, mysticism, and belief. Tshering Penjore, Druk Air's marketing manager says that 90 percent of Tashi Delek readers are foreigners. Given the high level of curiosity and eagerness with which visitors experience Bhutan, it may be assumed that the rich culture-laden articles and stories that are published in Tashi Delek educate culture enthusiasts a lot more, in some cases, than can Bhutan's tourist guides who have in the past established notoriety for saying anything that reciprocated learned queries from eager tourists. Tashi Delek represents numerous aspects of Bhutanese culture and landscape in splendid colours and authentic stories through its two content sections called *News from Bhutan*, and *Glimpses of Bhutan*, all of which provide the Bhutan enthusiast a good primer on important aspects of the country and its people.

*News from Bhutan* (Tashi Delek July-September 2004, p. 20-21)

*Drametse monastery renovated*  
*Golden bowls for Punakha Dzong*  
*Historic Rigsum Gompa restored*  
*Bhutan Pavilion in France*

*Glimpses of Bhutan* (Tashi Delek January-February-March 2004, p.38-41)

i. *The impregnable Dzongs* (Gasa Dzong, Wangdue Dzong, Punakha Dzong, Trongsa Dzong, Jakar Dzong, Thimphu Dzong, Drugyel Dzong).

Spiritual culture is a delicate and sensitive heritage, so efforts in dissemination and popularisation, especially through the mass media, may need learned discretion and wise handling. This may especially be so in the case of the philosophical and mystical teachings and practices of Buddhism. Mindlessness may lead to the vulgarisation of

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*culture. Visual representations of the tangible aspects of spiritual culture such as dzongs, monasteries, caves and mountainsides, art and painting, flags and stupas, should be given adequate space for public consumption, as Kuensel and Tashi Delek are doing at the moment. On the role of the print media, most of the eighteen participants who responded to the questionnaire used in this study said that the print media must promote the Bhutanese spiritual heritage. These statements provide some insight into popular aspiration as expressed by the respondents.*

*... Celebration of local and national cultural activities such as Tshechus ... description of the values and history of certain artefacts, religious sites, buildings and historical figures and their life histories. [R1]*

*... The print media must make more and more coverage on our Lhakhangs, Goendeys, Dzongs, visual/oral traditions in the countryside (villages, etc.) It should also invite/publish articles on the theme by both national and international authors. The media should also promote discourses on these values. [R14]*

*Many countries have, in their quest for development and modernisation, wittingly or unwittingly compromised their spiritual moorings thus resulting in the loss of their convictions and identities. Spirituality is perhaps the most fundamental strength on which the Bhutanese identity has depended for so long. The ancient spiritual values of compassion, of self abnegation, of the primacy of the Bodhisattva mind, of the humility of the self and importance of the other, of recognition and respect for the transmitters and custodians of spirituality, and the texts and physical entities of spirituality have all been elemental to the mental and physical wellbeing of the Bhutanese people. Social and political institutions have been motivated and guided by the fundamental knowledge that every human effort is spurred by the desire for happiness and that human institutions exist for advancing it. The sombre aspects of modernisation such as the disintegration of the*

family; denigration of marital obligation and fidelity; and mindless disregard for religious monuments, artefacts, classical texts, and other manifestations of spiritual culture, will continue to tease Bhutanese cultural values and challenge their strengths and convictions. The desirable future may be one where students, farmers, office-goers, technocrats, bureaucrats, politicians, monks, and nuns, in their search for happiness for themselves and for others, continue to seek refuge in the deep waters of Bhutan's ancient spiritual wisdom. The mass media, which has already made deep inroads into the Bhutanese cultural psyche, lifestyle, and habits, particularly among the younger generation in the urban centres, generates a psychological culture of restlessness, sensuality, arrogance, ruthless egocentrism, and literate ignorance, which should be resisted through careful and even passionate assertion of the Bhutanese cultural arsenal. The print media and school and university curricula have significant roles to play in this counter-balancing process.

#### **Folk Culture and the Print Media**

Literature interpreters and folklore scholars have presented various definitions of the word 'folk'. Many folklore scholars emphasize the quality of ancientness in their definitions; hence the word has often come to mean the "carriers and transmitters of folklore" who were "illiterate peasants or, to some extent, tribal peoples" (*International Encyclopaedia of the Social and Behavioural Sciences* 2001:5712). However, more recent definitions use the term as referring to a tribe or nation, or the common people of a nation. Some folklore scholars agree that "all human beings in some way or another are involved in the folklore process, as performers, watchers or audiences" (*ibid.*). So in fact there is nothing derogatory in the meaning of the term as it is understood today. This definition clarifies the concept of folklore better, and shows that "in its broadest sense" it is the "part of the culture, customs, and beliefs of a society that is based on popular tradition", and that it is "produced by the community and is usually transmitted orally or by demonstration" (*Encyclopaedia Americana International Edition* 2004:498r).

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*What is the status of folk culture in Bhutan? The Bhutanese government seems clear about this aspect of the Bhutanese cultural heritage: "Our heritage covers not only historical sites, architecture and physical artefacts but also our rich tradition of folklore, traditional crafts, arts and sports" (RGOB:66). The government's reference to folklore as an important area of the country's heritage is encouraging, particularly at a time when the softer aspects of human culture and civilisation are either neglected, vulgarised for tourist consumption, not understood or recognised, or discarded as economically useless in many parts of the world. Bhutanese folk culture, which will include the arts and crafts, dances, sports, beliefs and superstitions, holiday and religious celebrations, and various forms of other customs and traditions, the totality of which lend meaning to social life, must be preserved and promoted. Kuensel and Tashi Delek's role in this regard is noteworthy. They have represented some of the Bhutanese folk culture that face the risk of being pushed into oblivion, especially from the memory of the younger generation who are increasingly exposed to the superficial trappings of global culture transmitted through the mass media. The folk traditions of pottery making, the festival of the Gomphu Kora Tshechu, the Drametse Ngachham—a masterpiece of humanity, the art of Desho (paper made from the daphne bark), Yaklha (the tradition of appeasing the yak deity) in the Ura village of Bumthang, the symbolism of the phallus, water therapy, the hot springs of Gasa, Bhutanese beliefs and superstitions, the Tshechu, Ara (spirit brewed in Bhutanese homes), Khuru (Bhutanese traditional darts), have all been written about by Kuensel and are aspects of Bhutanese culture that seem vulnerable in terms of the risk of their being affected by the dreadful tide of globalisation.*

*With the launching of Bhutan Observer, the second private newspaper in the country, whose focus from the first issues seems to be on rural life, it is hoped that the representation of folk culture will expand in the print media and become more vibrant than it is now. The print media's research departments must identify those aspects of the country's folk culture which remain untouched, hence more vulnerable to the phenomenon*

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of loss and displacement. Folk culture, as one participant in this study said, should be presented by the print media in order to:

Sustain and promote the originality of our cultural heritage;  
Create awareness among the younger generation;  
Expose for appreciation by foreigners;  
Enhance the Bhutanese identity. [R8]

Another participant said this of the role of print media in preserving and promoting folk culture.

Endangered 'heritage' like cultural values, objects, etc., can be documented, photographed, and preserved for future reference... With the publication of folk cultures, readers will get to know the cultures of particular localities...our country's cultures will be known by outsiders... Expose our unique cultures to the outside world. [R9]

The five articles in the three issues of *Tashi Delek* (see Table 2) present a rich tapestry of Bhutanese folk culture, which include a wide range of concepts and themes such as the ethnic characteristics of the people of Laya, the customs and traditions of the Lhops or Doyas of the south, *thangka* painting, the life, art, and culture of the palace of Ugyen Choeling, the *Tsha chhu* (hot springs) that cure and heal, and many more. Many participants in this study said that the print media, by presenting Bhutanese culture through its articles and stories not only creates awareness among the Bhutanese themselves, but can also help to create a unique identity for the country and "protect them from being drowned in the current of neo-colonialism, and from losing their cultural roots" [R1], thus "reinforcing the concept of Bhutanese identity in the global community" [R17].

The hot Bhutanese chilli is already being contested by sausages from Bangkok, *suja* by coffee, the *Adha Marthra* by jeans and T-shirts, evening prayers by WWF, visits to monasteries and spiritual guides by bars and discos, and visits to ailing mothers and fathers in the village by frantic search for a trip to Geneva or Canberra. These are inevitable symptoms of modernisation and economic prosperity. In the absence of proper education in our own folk heritage and its

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*deeper cultural meanings and symbolism, children would like to spend time on sensual materials and hanker after visual stimuli that sedate the senses. A society where people are restless and continually seeking excitement and sensual gratification, the state of happiness is bound to be low. Social customs and traditions, beliefs and values, arts and crafts, sport and leisure should be popularised through careful adaptation and modernisation. The recognition and appreciation of folk culture through education and media presentations will enable the Bhutanese to continually look within themselves, trace their roots and build convictions in their own identity as a people. This way, the darker forces of globalisation will find it hard to tempt the small and the vulnerable. One way of avoiding becoming ‘cultured apes’ is perhaps by being wisely aggressive about one’s own culture.*

**Table 1: Content analysis of articles published in Kuensel (2003-2005)**

Issue details	Title of article & author	Thematic categorisation		
		Literary (oral & written traditions)	Spiritual/ Religious	Folk (customs/ traditions, lifestyle)
Kuensel Volume XVIII, No.5 (p.5) February 1 2003	Of Phallus: an arcane symbol - by Gopilal Acharya	The worship of the phallus was believed to be in practice even before the arrival of Guru Rinpoche and Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal ... What we	During Tshechus , the atsaras wear a cloth phallus as part of their head gear; phalluses hung	Hanging phalluses on the wooden eaves of a house; the phallus comes in various shapes and sizes, carved in wood, metal, stone and cloth;

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		<p>know about it is what we heard from our forefathers. The phallus was in the centre of and played a primary role in all Bon rituals...</p>	<p>form the eaves of a house also have a dagger (reldri) tied to them; the dagger in five different colours - white, yellow, red...</p>	<p>commonly used to ward off evil spirits; phallic ritual...</p>
<p>Kuensel Volume XVIII, No. 48 (p.5) December 6 2003</p>	<p>The influence of Buddhism on the Bhutanese trial system – by Kinley Y Dorji</p>	<p>Even a thousand Buddhas cannot wash away your sin, even the fastest hare cannot overtake your sins; Bardo thodrol (Book of the Dead).</p>	<p>Bardo - the intermediate state of consciousness after death; the soul wanders in the bardo and must face judgement before Shinje Chhogyel (Lord of Death).</p>	<p>Tshechu; raksha mangcham which portrays an elaborate trial; Nyalbum—the accused; Lha karmo—defence counsel; Daynagchung—the prosecutor; the silken knot ...</p>
<p>Kuensel Volume IX, No.2 (p.5)</p>	<p>The healing waters of Gasa - by Kencho</p>	<p>Tshachus were held sacred by the Bhutanese, many</p>	<p>The collective sound from the recitation</p>	<p>Tshachu; Gasa tshachu is believed to cure rheumatism,</p>



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January 10 2004	Wangdi	believing them to have been touched by divine hands.	of prayers and bazagurus from inside the ponds ...	arthritis, ulcers, indigestion, skin diseases; it is nature's way of healing people.
Kuensel Volume XX, No. 4 (p.5) January 22 2005	Kushuthara weaving: a vibrant tradition - by Samten Wangchuk	According to the book <i>Textile Arts of Bhutan</i> by Susan S. Beans and Diana K. Myers, the kushuthara has its origins in the Kushung tunics used in some parts of east and west Bhutan; there are three types of kushuthara - the ngasham ...	-	... women folk weave the kushuthara in small groups; backstrap looms; all the women in Khoma can weave the kushuthara.
Kuensel Volume XX, No. 19 (p.5) April 2 2005	Manisum: the sacred songs of Talo Tshechu - by Ugyen Penjore	Zhungdra - classical song sung in a meditative style without music; the Manisum was composed by Zhabdrung Jigme Chogyal	Talo tshechu; the inspiration to build the Talo monastery was drawn from the Samyi	The Zhungdra performance—particularly the three songs (Manisum) is very close to the heart of the Talops; women of the dance troupe

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		(1862-1904); the three songs of the Manisum trilogy - handwritten on ancient scrolls, are Samyi Sala, Drukpai Dungye, and Thowachi Gangi Tseley ...	monastrey in Tibet; the Manisum songs are blessed by the Zhabdrun g, and only Talops are allowed to learn the songs and perform them...	must refrain from sexual intercourse three days before the Tsechu to maintain the sanctity of the Tshechu...
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**Note:** Words and phrases in the table that describe cultural themes, ideas and concepts have for the most part been reproduced verbatim from the five articles mentioned in the table. For convenience of reading, quotations marks and Bibliography to source have been avoided. Also, minor adaptations have been done for convenience of grammar, without altering the sense.

***Bkra shis bde legs (Tashi Delek): Cultural role of an In-flight Magazine***

It may seem rather bizarre to attribute a cultural role to a passenger airline's in-flight. If it does play a role, then it is legitimate to know what that role might be. Not knowing incurs the risk of letting the media, no matter how small or insignificant, to do what the mass media in general have done to traditional cultures. Tashi Delek, the in-flight magazine of Druk Air (Royal Bhutan Airlines), is a quarterly publication with about 8000 copies circulated each quarter for use by air passengers. Tshering Penjore, Drukair's marketing manager says it is a "well read magazine", and 8000 copies of it "do not last one quarter". In 2005 Druk Air carried about 96,285

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*passengers (information from Tshering Penjore 1 January 2006). Assuming that all the 96,285 passengers who travelled Drukair during the period had at least looked at a few pages of the magazine, if not read it closely, it may be inferred that some content of 32,000 copies of the magazine were at least seen by that many passengers, who would have therefore gathered some impression on Bhutanese culture. Tshering Penjore says that 90 percent of the readers of Tashi Delek are foreigners. In the absence of any credible magazine published within Bhutan, it is not surprising that the content of an in-flight magazine is so rich, so academic, that for first-time visitors it can serve as a reliable guide and a kind of first-impression book. In a way Tashi Delek has provided space for foreigners visiting Bhutan to write about their impressions of the culture, landscape, and people of Bhutan and their intellectual friendship with the country.*

*As powerful media, Kuensel and Tashi Delek will continue to inform and educate not only the Bhutanese but also the outside world. The versatility and flexibility of the English language makes it easy to harness it and use it to the advantage of the Bhutanese idiom and cultural psyche and their peculiar experience. Thus the sombre imports of globalisation transmitted through the mass media is counterbalanced by a rich exposition of the Bhutanese culture and its peculiar experience through the same medium. It has been rightly said that “The media in Bhutan must be conscious that it serves a small vulnerable society that survives on the strength of a distinct cultural identity” and that it must be sensitive to the “cultural and social complexity in the environment of rapid political transformation” (RGOB 2005:52).*

**Table 2: Content analysis of articles published in Tashi Delek (2003-05)**

Issue details	Title of article & author	Thematic categorisation		
		Literary (oral & written traditions)	Spiritual/ Religious	Folk (customs/traditions/lifestyle)
Tashi Delek Volume VIII, No. 4 October-December 2003	i) <i>Thangka Painting: Art Interlaced With Buddhist Values</i> (p.10-14) - by Tashi Dorji	There is a belief among the Tibetans that every hundred years, a Jangchubse mba is born in Bhutan. A thangka painted by a Jangchubse mpa needs no consecration and is a precious possession for any Buddhist.	Thangka painting; thangkas are an integral part of Mahayan Buddhism; a Bhutanese does not view a painting or a sculpture as a work of art—for him it is a religious work; many artistic styles of thangka painting—karma gardri style which has a Chinese	Thankgkas (religious scroll paintings) are one of the thirteen Zorig Chusum or the traditional arts and crafts of Bhutan. Bhutanese art has three characteristics i.e. it is anonymous, it is religious, and it has no aesthetic function. A Bhutanese does not view a painting or a sculpture as a work of art—for him it is a religious work ...

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			touch, Tshangdri style which originated in the Tibetan region of Tshang...	
Tashi Delek  Volume IX, No. 1 January-March 2004	i) <i>The Legends of Punakha</i> (p.32-36) - by Gustasp Irani	<i>Punakha Dzong and its place in Bhutanese legend and folklore.</i>	<i>The mortal remains of Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal; holy relic; eternal meditation ; nirvana.</i>	<i>No one is allowed to enter the sanctum except a handful of senior monks who treat the mortal remains (of Zhabdrung) as though he were still alive bringing him meals and all other means of sustenance; why the Bhutanese wear white sleeved robes...</i>
	ii) <i>In the Labyrinths of Trongsa Dzong</i> (p. 16-20) - by Danuta Zasada	<i>The legend of "Trongsa"; the name sounds curious: something exotic; may</i>	<i>Palden Lhamo— Bhutan's guardian deity; Lam Ngagi Wangchuk ; the</i>	<i>Traditionally dressed: gho; kera; kira.</i>

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		<i>be it refers to a musical instrument.</i>	<i>omnipresent smell of incense in the Dzong; Master of discipline.</i>	
<p><i>Tashi Delek</i></p> <p><i>Volume X, No. 1 January-March 2005</i></p>	<p><i>i) Ugyen Choeling Palace (p.7-10) - by the president of www.rainbowphototours.com</i></p>	<p><i>I found Ugyen to be a walking historical library of the Tang valley; the third floor houses a library comprising rare documents —of over 500 manuscripts and xylographs collected over generations .</i></p>	<p><i>Dorji Lingpa, the famous terton (revealer of treasures)</i></p>	<p><i>The rooms in Ugyen Choeling palace capture lifestyle in the palace household; artistic expression like weaving and wood-carving; specimen of rock salt, borax, dye and brick tea; saddle packs and horse bells; yarn and comb used in weaving, carpentry, wood-carving, leather processing, grain silos...</i></p>
	<p><i>ii) Laya - the Land of yak breeders (p. 28-31) - by T.S.Powdyel</i></p>	<p><i>Laya and in particular Bhutan has a reason to be grateful</i></p>	<p><i>The region in which the Zhabdrung arrived was Laya;</i></p>	<p><i>Worshippers of the dra-lha; the practice of polyandry; the women keep their</i></p>

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		to the fox for it helped Shabdrung Nawang Namgyel to arrive in Bhutan; as a tribute to the fox ...	the chorten with the footprints of Zhabdrung; Layaps and the old faithful hairy yaks.	hair long and wear peculiar conical hats, with a bamboo spite at the top, held on a beaded band.
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**Note:** Words and phrases in the table that describe cultural themes, ideas and concepts have for the most part been reproduced verbatim from the five articles mentioned in the table. For convenience of reading, quotations marks and Bibliography to source have been avoided. Also, minor adaptations have been done for convenience of grammar, without altering the sense.

**Guarding against Political Pressure**

The media’s role in public education, particularly in the political consciousness and decision-making domain is widely recognised. There seems to be very little discourse on its role in cultural education and consciousness, which is important for Bhutan. In the era of parliamentary democracy, it will be imperative for Bhutan to have an increasingly “active, engaged citizenry” who can “participate actively in public debates on policies and programmes” of the government (Dessallien 2005:73-74). The print media can provide active space for collective engagement in cultural discourse. The demand for representation of cultural aspirations will increase in the future, particularly in a democratic environment, as representation of interests and aspirations through the media is the “basis for any democratic culture and political system” (Splichel et al. 1993:3).

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A media impact study commissioned by the Ministry of Information and Communication in 2003 revealed that the impact of media was “visible in the social, cultural, and political aspects of Bhutanese life...” (Wangdi 2004:1). Minister of Information and Communication, Lyonpo Leki Dorji said that: “Coverage must be more comprehensive. There is a need for specialised media coverage for certain sections of the society” (in Wangdi 2004:20). Freedom of the press, as enshrined in article 7 of the Bhutanese constitution, says that “There shall be freedom of the press, radio and television and other forms of dissemination of information, including electronic” (Draft of the Tsa Thrim Chhenmo as on 18<sup>th</sup> August 2005:8) would tempt the print media to behave licentiously and forget their social and cultural responsibility and indulge in commercial and political sensationalism. This will be particularly true when political parties pressure the media to advocate and popularise their own agendas—social, economic, political, or cultural. This is where a strong media legislation and policy, understood and appreciated by the democratic polity, and independence of media in performing their roles in the full spirit of law, will be most critical. Culture, if the role of the media in this domain is not legislated, could become a victim of exaggerated portrayal of political stardom and muscle power, as seems to be the character of media in many democratic societies. A socially and culturally irresponsible media can contaminate the deeper aspects of culture through trivialisation and vulgarisation. The road ahead for print media in Bhutan, in this arena, looks good.

### **Concluding Remarks**

Literary heritage—in written and oral forms—spirituality and folklore form significant constituents of the Bhutanese cultural landscape whose values must continue to be recognised, understood and appreciated. For this to happen, space must be provided for the dissemination of cultural knowledge and information, for discourses on cultural concepts and themes, and for expression and articulation of cultural aspirations and desires. The print media, like Kuensel and Tashi Delek can be active agents that can facilitate this process, as it has a virtual



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*ability to enrich public culture and collective consciousness. The globalisation of English, and the powerful influence of the culture it imports with it, will challenge the values and attitudes that define Bhutanese society and culture. The influence of sensual materials imported through the mass media and through the powerful medium of English will indeed be deep and pervasive. And more so over time, if these external influences are not counterbalanced or mediated by an assertive projection of the Bhutanese culture. In a democratic setup the media will come under increasing pressure from political organisations and interest groups to advance the latter's interests and priorities. The temptations for the media to succumb to political muscle power for short-term gains will be high. The temptations will be more in the absence of media legislation and lack of support from the people. The prevention of vulgarisation and trivialisation of culture will be a big challenge for the government and the people. So the media cannot afford to work in isolation and in total independence of regulations and public opinion and support.*

*Kuensel and Tashi Delek are good examples of how the print media can help to educate the Bhutanese and outsiders on various aspects of the kingdom's cultural heritage through research publications, occasional papers, reflective articles, academic discourses, visual representations (e.g. Tashi Delek's "Glimpses of Bhutan"), and the like. This paper suggests that the government must institute a national award for excellence in cultural promotion (e.g. Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuk Award for the Advancement of Culture), contestants for which will include the mass media, writers, researchers, educational institutions from primary to university, NGOs, the entertainment industry, and others. Spiritual culture is a delicate and sensitive heritage, so efforts in dissemination and popularisation, especially through the mass media, may need learned discretion and wise handling. This may especially be so in case of the philosophical and mystical teachings and practices of Buddhism. Mindlessness may lead to vulgarisation of culture. Visual representations of the tangible aspects of spiritual culture done with care and discretion will help to express and articulate the heritage and make it more*

accessible to people. Kuensel and Tashi Delek can provide excellent archives for writers and researchers engaged in work on Bhutanese culture.

The younger generation needs intellectual feed that has cultural values and deep perspectives. The print media's role in educating young minds on the distinct manifestations of Bhutanese culture—be it the literary canons, spirituality, or folklore, will be immense.

Readers of the English edition of Kuensel, who responded to the questionnaire used to assist the writing of this paper, agree that the print media through their documentation and presentation of culture will help to expose and promote the Bhutanese cultural identity and uniqueness to the outside world. The influence on public culture of publications with small or specialised readership coverage, such as Tashi Delek, should not be underestimated, especially if the materials published are grounded in research and scholarship and their authors are of some repute. The tantalising title of R.A. Kocour's article "In a World Gone Mad, There's Still Bhutan" published in Tashi Delek (2003, July-September:10-21) caught the imagination of high school students, and many adults, who flaunted the phrase in their speeches and writings. Such is the influence of the print media.

The media must play a proactive role in the cultural sphere, as it will in the political sphere. This desire is in fact expressed unambiguously by the government when it links the media's role to the country's social, cultural and political imperatives: that the media in Bhutan must be conscious that "it serves a small vulnerable society that survives on the strength of a distinct cultural identity" and that it must be sensitive to the "cultural and social complexity in the environment of rapid political transformation" (RGOB 2005:52). Good actions can emerge from good intentions.

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