



RESEARCH ARTICLE



A THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF THE NOVELETTE DAWA: THE STORY OF A STRAY DOG IN BHUTAN.

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ABSTRACT



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A good piece of literature can be regarded as an authentic mirror image of its society and time. Literature is a slice of life; it holds a mirror to life. 'Dawa' - The story of a stray dog in Bhutan is a novelette written by native Bhutanese author Kunzang Choden in a picaresque fashion. She is the first Bhutanese woman to write a novel in English. The novelette is a prescribed literary text for grade IX students across Bhutanese schools. Besides unfolding numerous values, the novelette has successfully portrayed different shades of Bhutanese society with its virtues and vices. With the background set in present day Bhutan, the novelette traces Dawa's adventures and experiences as he travels from Paro to Bumthang and his rise from discomfiting stray into a leader in the dogs' world. Apart from the referential value, the novelette provides a good understanding about the socio-cultural milieu of Bhutan. Dawa- the protagonist represents anyone of us who have experienced life's rigors - but have never given up hope on the possibilities. This paper has discussed some of the thematic units of the novelette based on the changing scenario of Bhutanese lives, language, culture and religion, western influences and depleting social and moral responsibility in the midst of modern times.

Keywords: Culture, Humanity, Identity, Language, Moral, Nationality, Religion, Western.



INTRODUCTION

The novelette *'Dawa' - The story of a stray dog in Bhutan* is a literary text taught across grade –IX (Nine) in Bhutanese Schools. The novelette depicts the journey of a stray dog in search of self-discovery. The story reveals the hardships that he faces in order to achieve his enlightenment. The story begins with Dawa's decision to travel beyond his immediate community, Paro. The journey and his pursuit of happiness takes him to various destinations experiencing diversified episodes of struggle, and each of these adventures further enhances his personal growth and development. The main characters in this novelette are dogs, and the comparison of the dog society and human society lead to interesting discussions and revelations. The protagonist Dawa, matures through various experiences that he undergoes, and tracing his maturity is an interesting exercise. The audiences in particular are those youths who are studying in grade nine. This makes the novelette incredibly apt as the youths are at the threshold of social and global amalgamation. Bhutan as a part of globalized village cannot effort to avoid the ever-changing scenario of modernization. The fleetness of modernity has crept into the lives of Bhutanese people and the outcomes have been already felt profoundly in social and cultural patterns of life. Though the novelette discusses various aspects of Bhutanese society in brief, yet it presents them in purposeful manner. The local references are woven artistically with the plot. The plot is a microcosm of changing Bhutan. The characters are fictitious, yet they represent different cross-sections of society. The novelette is mirror to various aspects of Bhutanese society.

Everything that happens within a society can be written, recorded in, and learned from a piece of literature. Life is manifested in the form of literature. Thus, the novelette *'Dawa' - The story of a stray dog in Bhutan* critically depicts the changing mindsets of people, perhaps brought about by the materialistic movement of modernized world. It is a recent phenomenon that Bhutan opened her door to the outside world, however the rapidity of developmental pace is too fast that the erosion of old-aged culture and traditions are perceptible in the

minds of the young Bhutanese. Literature explains human values, the works of Plato, Socrates, and Aristotle (the most famous Greek philosophers) contain virtues that promote perfection to a society if only human beings have the willingness to uphold and practice them. Ward & Renee (2002) in Plato's Allegory of the Cave **states the importance of human wisdom and the penalties that one would face to achieve a higher level of understanding.** Through these philosophers' contribution to literature, not only did they craft an artistic convergence of words, but exposed logic and ideas as well. Through the thematic analysis of the novelette the authors highlight some of the most important themes as follows:

a. LANGUAGE: THE CORNERSTONE OF NATIONAL IDENTITY

Language of the fortress popularly known as 'Dzongkha' is the national language of Bhutan. There are also more than 40 different dialects in Bhutan identified by Central for Bhutanese Studies (CBS) in 2000. Official communication, both written and spoken is expected to be in Dzongkha although English is the preferred. Tibetan script is used to write Dzongkha in Bhutanese form. Since the 1960s the Royal Government of Bhutan has made English as medium of instruction in schools along with the Dzongkha as an ancillary subject. However, a CBS (2008) report says that, **"Bhutan could be among the few countries where its literate citizens are finding it difficult to write or read anything written in the national language"**. (Tshewang, 2010). The Dzongkha Development Commission (DDC) has found more than 90 percent of Bhutanese cannot speak dzongkha properly without mixing with either other dialects or foreign languages. (Tshewang , 2010). The trans-cultural and modern educational programs are the main factors for deterioration of dzongkha in Bhutan. English language has dominated the national tongue because being able to speak English would mean one is educated, or well-travelled or with great exposure to external culture. It is also a class distinction indicator and with young people it is fashionable to speak a mixed language. Dzongkha is a complicated and difficult language and students think it is boring and unfashionable. These challenges are



portrayed in novelette through the protagonist-Dawa. Since Dawa has the gift to understand different human languages as he was an excellent translator in his previous life as a human being. He has a beautiful voice, is sensitive in nature and has an amazing perception to understand human languages, especially Dzongkha- the national language of Bhutan. The survival of a nation and the success of its drive towards nation-state status are predicated upon the existence of a language that her people can speak, and more importantly, read and write. First of all there are some fundamentals for Dzongkha which cannot be compromised with. It is the national language and as such must not only be promoted, but it must also be strengthened and celebrated. Dzongkha is also a part of Bhutan's own national cultural identity and it is the indigenous language that helps unite a nation of many regional and sub-regional dialects. While it is important to be able to communicate effectively in national language within the modern nation-state, even more crucial to the manifestation of identity is the demarcation and boundary function which language can play. The language we use forms an important part of our sense of who we are - of our identity. This symbiotic relationship between language and identity is immensely supported in the literature and recent publications also corroborate this close affinity. Language is part of a nation and a person's heritage. To understand and penetrate deep into a community, one must be able to speak and understand the language of the community. Language orchestrates the culturally conditioned patterns of perception, attitude and behavior of its community. Mary (2006, P.14) asserts that **"Language imparts identity, meaning, and perspective to our human condition. Writers are either polluters or part of the cleanup."**

At this critical juncture of our development journey, English language has been recognized for its global reach and hence has become the language for international business. We are faced with a problem that is unique to Bhutan and the Bhutanese. We are grappling with the challenge of popularizing our national language, Dzongkha. The newest and most illuminating trend emanating from the present

generation of youths is a tacit recognition of the dominant positions of English within Bhutan. Therefore, the need to safeguard and promote Dzongkha should not be equated to cosmetic jingoism or ultra-nationalism but as a genuine concern to retain an important element of national unity, identity and stability. For, Dzongkha is more than a language. It is our national language – one of the binding forces that will ultimately define our destiny as a nation. The highlight of the national language (Dzongkha) has been made very prominent through the novelette. Are some of us not speaking more English than Dzongkha nowadays? How is our language a defining feature of Bhutanese national identity? The first step in language endangerment is bilingualism. The second step is the loss of domains of usage to the dominant language. Young polyglot Bhutanese are generally quite competent in English, often more so than in Dzongkha. English has pride of place in many domains of language usage, and Dzongkha already cedes these domains of usage to English in the Bhutanese schools, where English is used as the primary medium of instruction. In most nations, the medium of school instruction is the national language. So, the threat to the national language in Bhutan stems first and foremost from the national school system. This brings us to yet another challenge.

b. DAWA: AN EPITOME OF CULTURE AND RELIGION.

Cultural value and moral implications of individuals and communities are the foundation of socio-economic development of any nation. Landlocked in the Himalayas, the tiny Himalayan Kingdom, Bhutan appear almost untouched by the globalization. The culture and traditional values in Bhutan is deeply rooted to Buddhism. Behavior, perception and daily routines of people are directly guided by the religion, cultural values and the belief system. Thus the preservation and promotion of culture is one of the four pillars in realizing the country's development philosophy of Gross National Happiness (GNH). Bhutanese language and literature, arts and crafts, drama, music, ceremonies and events, architecture, and basic social and cultural values draw their essence from Buddhism. Just as the Kingdom's



history is characterized by religious landmarks, the influence of religion is highly visible in everyday life. Hundreds of sacred monasteries, stupas, religious institutions, prayer flags and prayer wheels mark the countryside, providing a strong infrastructure and atmosphere for the teachings of their living faith. These Buddhist values and Buddhism is another key dimension of the novelette, without the discussion of which any analysis of the novelette is incomplete. The character Dawa has deeper Buddhist values and beliefs. The peaceful atmosphere spread across the plot, the role of old witty guiding characters like Molay and Dampa, and Dawa's beliefs in monks, myth, peace, pilgrimage, rebirth and reverence towards old age signify prevailing Buddhist values. The old characters are symbolic and represent a class of Bhutanese that is often detached from the worldly affairs and devotes their life to spirituality. Molay, the old dog is portrayed as visionary, considerate, wise and witty through her discourse:

Koto, I never minded how you look. I like you because you ask intelligent questions. All my descendents are so content and insular in their outlook. Paro is the world for them...Poor things, so content that they forget that they are descendents of a great ancient lineage which they should uphold and be consciously proud of. They should be curious and ambitious to ask questions like you. (Choden 2004,)

Dampa represents a class of the old Bhutanese who probably laments over the glorious past and disintegrating values in the newer generation, which is a characteristic trait of senior citizens of modern Bhutanese society. Whether it is criticizing Dawa for the way he speaks Dzongkha, or sending him to monks, or helping him to go on pilgrimage, Dampa's intention is to drive Dawa who represents younger generation, to move towards perfection in terms of cultural, ethical and older values so that they can be preserved. Compassion and belief in karma are two

basic characteristics of Buddhist monks. We find these two pronounced in a very practical way here in the novelette. The older monks have been portrayed in a very reverential manner and as true carriers of these characteristics and Buddhist values. The younger monks have been held up to ridicule for their moral and ethical deviations:

"...the monks used to speak Dzongkha, but not anymore. These days they are too exposed to and influenced by other cultures and languages. It's impact of TV, they say, and monks do enjoy watching a good deal of TV." (Choden, 2004)

Two old monks represent the traditional, compassionate, learned and devout monks. The monk's instruction to the younger monk who was going to beat Dawa at the peak of his strength at Thowadrak is a sign of compassion:

"...the lama suddenly stopped in his tracks and looked at him, then clapped his hands in childlike delight and let out a single loud laugh. 'Ha stop, Phuentsho,' he shouted and held Phuentsho's hand just as the young monk had raised his stick high above Dawa's head...Look. Look. I say, I say look at the dog, it has such a comical face. It is almost like he is saying something to me. It is so pathetic with its mange. May be it came to us for protection. May be it has a karmic connection to this sacred site. Poor thing. Let it be." (Choden, 2004)

The novelette informs the readers how Buddhist values and culture plays an important role in self-realization and national identity. Preservation and promotion of culture is said to be vital for the functioning of a harmonious and progressive society.



One of the greatest strengths of Bhutan is its unique identity that comes from culture. For a country like Bhutan, which is small both in size and population, it is important to be different from others. It is culture that makes the Bhutanese distinct from the rest of the world. Thus, it is necessary for Bhutan to promote and preserve its spiritual and cultural values as it is the symbol of Bhutan and being Bhutanese.

c. CALL FOR HUMANITY

The talk on being human and humanity has been a priority in today's world. The present generation has felt that the feeling of love and compassion of the people for other sentient beings has significantly reduced. The dynamicity of human thoughts and the evolutionary human emotion has been a subject of every thinker and philosopher and the very issue of the newness in human thoughts and its consequential actions is a commonly treated theme of many classic and contemporary literatures. This part of the paper makes a sincere effort to analyze a few incidents of human error which triggers at, 'calls for the humanity', beside it also analyzes and exposes the new trends brought in by the new life style amongst the Bhutanese folk. Negativity has grounded deep into human heart and the cruelty is abundantly visible in their actions today. The then merciful heart is now a source of devilish acts and human beings are seen as selfish and the most fearful creature in the world. Dawa snaps, **"Some wretched person had laced the meat with deadly poison, proof of the killer instinct in the human beings. Humans were not to be trusted."** (Choden, 2004). Bhutan and the Bhutanese are believed to be the strong believer of Buddhist doctrines; nevertheless the incident in the novelette comes as a big shock as the line in isolation means the same as in the context. Human today have lost their battle of trustworthiness to a greater extend. With the heaps of greed and hidden selfish motives, human beings are ready for all atrocities in the society. Politeness is supposed to be the sign of humanity but the reality is something different. Instead of being polite and loving, the human seems to be growing more aggressive and hostile. The traditional values; love and compassion remains in text and the society may soon face the dearth of it as

transition to wickedness is apparent within the human folk. Dawa cries out,

"Because I am miserable and everybody is so abusive with me. Without my fur I am cold, and nobody cares. People call me all sorts of ugly names and chase me away. One or two even went to the extent of pouring hot water on my already painful body." (Choden, 2004).

The heartless behaviors of the human beings indicate transformation of human to a stronger living evil force. Joseph Conrad's expression of evilness in human is evident as Kurtz shouts, "The horror! The horror!" (2006), the actions of human are getting immoral. Pouring hot water on the body of a manged dog can be a symbol of humans' crumbling sanity. It can be noticed here that the greatest threat of the evil deed, and fear of evil actions, and an alarming situation have evolved from within the human heart. Massive shift in human tendency towards negativity is felt as the pages of the novelette unfold gradually. The author artistically crafts the plot of the story and attempts to warn the human folk to check their ways before it is too late.

d. THE CHANGING TRENDS

Bhutan stood unique and isolated nation for quite a long period of time, but over the last four decades many news changes are visible as it embraces the economic development. The concept of GNH, which is developmental philosophy of the country, has been safeguarding the country's unique identity. Some of the thinkers shares that the principles of GNH has not only allowed the development process to derive from the cultural roots besides, it has also provided a cautious and rational defense against the improvising and detrimental changes of global changes (Centre for Bhutan Studies and Institute of Developing Nations, 2004). Nevertheless, the present world is swept by the current of globalization and the wave doesn't confine to one corner of the world, like the



ripples it touches every corner of the globe. Bhutan had to break through its policy of isolation since economic development was necessary. The globalization and Bhutan's adoption of the same has indeed posed a major threat to the Bhutan's cultural heritage. As asserted by He Fangchua , **"Globalization is not only, even mostly not, about the economic reliance on one another, but about the world shaking change of space and time in our life"** To be a part of the changes that has been brought in by the gust of globalization is felt uniquely by Bhutan and the Bhutanese.

In the novelette, *Dawa: The Story of a Stray Dog in Bhutan* it has many such significant issues of western influences depicted by the author. Many incidents in this novelette talks about the plight of Bhutanese at the face of globalization. Dampa, the old friend of Dawa says, **"Oh yes, I forgot to tell you, the monks used to speak the best Dzongkha, but not anymore. These days they are too exposed to and influenced by other cultures and languages."** (Choden, 2004). The most significant identity is at stake today. The natives and more, the most trusted guiding custodian of the nation identities are influenced by the culture of the other nations. Monks and Nuns in comparison to the layman are expected to uphold purity and preserve national etiquettes including the national language Dzongkha, but the scenario seem different and alarming today. Though finally, Dawa learns the pure Dzongkha language from one of the monks, the most painful part lies at the hints that majority of them are carried by the waves of globalization. Preservation of national language is the sacred responsibility of all the citizen of the country as it is the significant part of the national identity. The very reason to be mindful here is that when the religious personals are distracted and diverted, what would be the condition of the layman? The author throws another arrow to alert the people at this juncture to be aware of the changing trends. Series of incident which hints at similar behavioral changes are witnessed in the novelette. Dawa was shocked as well disheartened when he says, **"Sonam Pem was sitting on the doorstep with the chain of the white dog resting on her lap and she was stroking him just like the**

foreign women had done." (Choden, 2004). The ancestral lineage of Bhutan doesn't have evidences of such sights and it is definitely a foreign influence. Weather to call it as called cultural invasion or the call of the modernity, the hiccup here is the unbelievable moral violence which has marred sublime Bhutanese ethics and related moral values of love and compassion. The very love and affection a dog enjoyed in its society falls apart as the people adopted the Western trend of nurturing one animal as a baby and ignoring the rest as alien and ugly. The author brings yet another incident towards the end which can be offshoot of modern development at large. The author uses the voice of Dawa to pass a crucial message of rapid urbanization to the readers when she says, **"...and watches Thimphu spreading and sprawling up and down the valley, converting the green paddy fields into concrete blocks and climbing up the forested hill"** (Choden, 2014). The pace of development in Bhutan is very fast, which is a matter of pride indeed, nevertheless in the process of developing some of the crucial issues of environmental protection has been overlook for which the country may regret in the years to come. The author gently reminds the Bhutanese folks to check their ways and pave it right before it is too late.

CONCLUSION

Bhutan now stands no bar in global literary network. The advent of modern education and English sufficing to be the official language has become a stepping stone in the race. This has made world literature available to anyone who can read and thus have conquered opportunity in proving themselves in the arena. *'Dawa' - The story of a stray dog in Bhutan* portrays multiple dimensions of Bhutanese ways of life in the progress of modernity. Indeed, modernity refers to a condition of social existence that is radically different to all past forms of human experience. It is the transitional process of moving from "traditional" or "primitive" communities to modern societies. In the name of modernity the essence of old-aged culture and traditions has lost its value over the decades. Bhutan as a nation that has rapidly developed over few decades is certainly struggling to find her way to balance the growth and development through the very essence of



developmental philosophy of Gross National Happiness (GNH).

Literature is really not a reflection of the social process, but the essence, the abridgement and summary of all history. De Bonald in Wellek and Warren (1956) states that “**literature is an expression of society**”. It may represent what actually happened in the society. Thus, as an expression of society, literature cannot be separated from all the problems occurred and happened at the time it was written. Therefore, Bhutan is not exceptional in the cosmos of changes, through the artistic work (novelette) the author tries to educate and empower the general Bhutanese to critically reflect on one’s own behavior, in terms of body, speech and mind and rethink on their pattern of thoughts and actions both in young and old people. Although profoundly influential in Bhutanese way of life, there is still way forward to reconciling the spiritual quest with greater essence of realistic modernism.

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GLOSSARY

1. Dawa – name of the dog (protagonist)
2. Paro- One of the districts in Western Bhutan
3. Dzongkha – The national language of Bhutan
4. Molay- name of the dog (minor character)
5. Koto – Bhutanese term for crooked/ curved
6. Dampa – name of the dog(minor character)
7. Lama – monk/priest
8. Phuntsho- name of one of the monk/priest
9. Sonam Pem- name of the female dog (minor character)
10. Thimphu – capital of Bhutan.