

## CHAPTER 1

*At the heart of the Bhutanese education system is the desire to integrate the best in our cherished cultural and national values with the best in modern knowledge and technological developments from abroad, harnessing them to serve the best interests of the country.*

(Education Sector Review Commission of Bhutan, 2008, p.11)

### INTRODUCTION

#### **The beginnings of the study**

My thesis begins with some personal stories that sowed the first seeds of this research, for I believe that personal stories give clarity to the inquiry and also provide readers a fusion of horizons within the context of the inquiry (Ellis, 1998).

My son, Tashi, started school at the age of 5, escorted everyday by his grandfather whom he called *Popo*. Friends and neighbors assumed that unlike their own children, Tashi might adjust much better to school, as his parents were both teachers. That proved wrong. He cried for several days as he prepared to go to school for the first time. In those days, parents were not allowed to stay in the school campus. Even now, they still do not allow parents in many schools. Every day, *Popo* sat on a rock, behind the walls of the Pre-Primary (PP) classroom so that the school authorities did not see him. However, his grandson could see him through a hole in the wall. Whenever he started to cry and call out for his grandpa, *Popo* assured him of his presence through the hole. This arrangement went on for a couple of weeks till Tashi stopped crying and calling out to him. Although he would sit in the class without much fuss, it was quite obvious that he was not happy being there. This made *Popo* very sad and that made me feel both sad and guilty. Every day after school, *Popo* would pour out his rage on me saying that I was robbing the child of his childhood rights to be free and happy, which Tashi definitely was, when he was with *Popo* at home.

A quarter of a century later, I still witness the distressing process of young children beginning school and separating from their families. As a teacher educator, one of my roles in the Paro College of Education (PCE) in Bhutan is to visit schools and observe the teacher trainees in the Bachelor of Education (B.Ed) primary program during their practicum. When a practicum visit is scheduled at the beginning of the school year, a common scenario that greets me at the school gate is the unhappy yet determined faces of parents trying to push and drag their unwilling and crying children towards the PP classroom to begin their first year of school. Their teachers, with flushed cheeks and anxious faces use both their 'carrots and sticks' to try

and make the children sit in the classroom, while their anxious parents watch helplessly from a distance. Some of the children, who initially settle well, begin to cry when they see that their friends are unhappy. Finally, with some children, the teacher just gives up and calls upon the parents to help. After several hours of coaxing, threatening and sometimes spanking by their frustrated parents, the child either goes home or is left sobbing in the classroom. The whole scene unfolds again the next day. These struggles continue for several days for some. The children are clearly not happy and unhappy and stressed children do not learn to their full potentials (Education Sector Review Commission of Bhutan (ESRCoB, 2008; Dockett & Perry, 2001, 2005; Brooker, 2008; Sims & Hutchins, 1999).

During the whole frenzy of running, chasing, scolding, and screaming, one common comment that the embarrassed and at times enraged parents usually make apologetically to the teacher is: “My son was so eager and excited to be in school when he was at home, I do not understand why he is behaving this way”. Unfortunately, the teachers usually will not have an answer to this, much less comfort the unhappy parents. While such experiences do not happen for every child there are still a number of children who go through this traumatic experience as they begin their year one (PP) in school. This happens despite the fact that most Bhutanese children look forward to going to school.

Beginning school is an important phase particularly for the parents, many of whom were not educated in a formal education system. Most parents transfer their aspirations to their children and believe that by going to school their children will have the opportunity for a better life that they believe they could not have. It is essential to make this early experience as smooth and enjoyable as possible for both the children and the parents so that a strong foundation is build for more positive ongoing experiences. Bailey (1999) asserts that:

Kindergarten is a context in which children make important conclusions about school as a place where they want to be and about themselves as learners vis-a-vis schools. If no other objectives are accomplished, it is essential that the transition to school occur in such a way that children and families have a positive view of the school and that children have a feeling of perceived competence as learners. (Bailey, 1999, as cited in Dockett & Perry, 2001, p. 2)

I then wondered - how could we make that happen? “How can becoming a PP student, be a more meaningful and memorable experience; an experience that lives up to the ‘Educating for Gross National Happiness’ philosophy that all schools in the country have adopted? Thus, when I came across Moll and his colleagues’ work on ‘funds of knowledge’ (Moll, Amanti, Neff, and Gonzalez 1992/2005; Moll, 1990; Moll & Greenberg, 1990; Velez-Ibanez &

Greenberg, 1992/2005; Gonzalez et al., 1993) and Vygotsky's (1978, 1987) perspectives of teaching, learning and development, I began to see possibilities that could make a difference to the children and the families' experiences of the first year of school in Bhutan. Although it may not be the complete answer to the problems of beginning school or being in school, it will definitely awaken more awareness and sensitivity to the whole process of initial schooling and to the kinds of knowledge and experiences children bring with them that can be of immense use in their classroom experiences. The initial ideas from the readings formed the foundation for the research proposal for my PhD scholarship application. When I was selected from the many hundreds for an Australian Leadership Awards Scholarship Award, I felt I was summoned to make a difference in the primary education of my country. I am confident that this study will make a timely and important contribution to the primary education system of Bhutan, especially for the many 'Tashis' who are yet to start school.

By examining children's home 'funds of knowledge' and then following them into their first year in school, I envisioned discovering some of the answers to the creation of a productive liaison between school and home which could give children and their families a positive and constructive PP experience. There is a saying in Bhutan 'If the beginning is good, the end follows suit'. Thus, I believe that my inquiry into the home 'funds of knowledge' has the potential to make this beginning a positive and stimulating experience for the children, thus enabling them to experience the essence of the 'Gross National Happiness' (GNH) philosophy at an early age.

The rest of this chapter provides brief overviews of the context and the purpose of the inquiry, the research goals and an outline of the rest of the chapters in the thesis.

### **The context of the study**

#### **Bhutan**

Half a century ago, Bhutan was very different from the country I know today. The majority of Bhutanese lived lives of rugged isolation. Not only were the people isolated from the rest of the world, due to the lack of roads, proper transportations, and no access to telephone, electricity and many such necessities; they were isolated within the country itself by lofty mountains, treacherous terrains and thick forests. Life was hard and conditions harsh. Although secure in community, kinship and family relationships, the world in which most Bhutanese lived was a small one, endowed with spiritual significance. Life spans, too, were short due to the lack of medical facilities and clean water. Communicable diseases were wide

spread and child mortality was very high. For the vast majority of people, education was either unavailable or a luxury that had no place in family survival strategies.

Since then the kingdom of Bhutan made immense progress in all areas. In 1961, the per capita GDP was estimated at US \$ 51, which was then the lowest in the world (Planning Commission of Bhutan (PCoB), 1999). In 1999 the GDP stood at US \$ 551, which made it one of the highest in South Asia and by 2006, it was US \$ 1414 (GNH Commission of Bhutan, 2009). The kingdom's Human Development Index (HDI) of 0.619 in 2007 placed the country in the category of 'medium human development which ranked it 132 out of 182 countries (Ministry of Education, Bhutan, (MoE) 2010a, p. 1). However, the greatest unifying idea that leads the nation's long-term developmental goals is the concept of GNH which aspires to "maximise the happiness of all Bhutanese and to enable them to achieve their full and innate potential as human beings" (PCoB, 1999, p. 17).

Bhutan is a small country of 38,394 square kilometers (National Statistic Bureau of Bhutan (NSBoB), 2005). It is surrounded by India in the South and China in the North and is completely landlocked, with rugged mountainous terrains rising steeply from 200 metres at the southern borders to over 7500 metres in the north (Royal Education Council (REC), Bhutan, 2012a). It has a projected population of 695822 (NSB, 2005) spread widely across the steep mountain slopes and valleys in the southern and temperate belts. 79% of the population engages in subsistence farming (MoE, Bhutan, 2010a, p. 3) although this percentage is dwindling as more and more people from rural areas flood to towns and cities in hope of a better life.

Bhutan maintains a 70% forest coverage (REC, Bhutan, 2012a). The country can be broadly divided into three geographical divisions corresponding to three distinct climatic zones: the sub-tropical southern belt, the central inner Himalayan temperate region, and the higher Himalayan region; among which are spread the 554 schools of which 348 are primary schools and 165 are ECCD centres (Annual Education Statistics, Bhutan (AES), 2013). Despite the government's commitment to provide every corner of the country with roads, electricity, schools, water and health services; access to many areas is still very difficult and therefore, restricts the full provision of social services and education.

The country's state religion is Buddhism and *Dzongkha* is the national language from the more than 20 other languages and dialects spoken in the different regions of the country

(ESRCoB, 2008). English is the medium of instruction in the schools and *Dzongkha* is taught as a school subject.

To the rest of the world, Bhutan is more popularly known as the GNH country or the country that has adopted GNH as its developmental lodestar.

### **Bhutanese education system**

Education has been the central player in the transformation of Bhutan from a traditional society to a dynamic, confident participant in regional and global affairs (ESRCoB, 2008).

The provision and promotion of free education has been part of the success story of Bhutan's effort to make education accessible to all its citizens. Education is recognized both as a basic right and as a pre-requisite for achieving the wider social, cultural and economic goals set for the country (PCoB, 1999). About five decades ago, the only form of formal education available in the country was monastic education, which monks and nuns attended for religious studies. It was not until 1968 that the first 20 Bhutanese students completed high school in modern education within the country.

The current school education structure consists of seven years of primary schooling (Pre-Primary to VI) followed by six years of secondary education comprising two years of lower secondary classes (VII-VIII), two years of middle secondary classes (IX-X), and two year of higher secondary classes (XI-XII). The country has a teaching force of 8542, from which 2495 are primary teachers (AES, Bhutan 2013). One of the targets of the tenth Five Year Plan was to maintain a teacher student ratio of 1:24 (AES, Bhutan, 2013) however, in most schools, the number of students per teacher is much higher due to the lack of adequate infrastructures and teachers. The evolution of the Bhutanese education system over the last six decades has been influenced by several foreign systems such as the Indian, Irish, English and most recently the Canadian. True to the quote at the beginning of this chapter; throughout the changes Bhutan had tried hard to maintain an education system that is suitable for Bhutan and its ideologies.

### **The status of the Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD)**

Given the strength of the traditional practices of child rearing in the contexts of extended family systems, ECCD was not considered a priority for many years. The traditional Bhutanese childcare practices and family values attach importance to a cohesive and nurturing family environment in an atmosphere of happiness, love and respect. Most families are fortunate to have this inheritance where children are secure and have the environment they

need to grow up, interacting with parents, grandparents and relatives. With changing times, there are also children who live in families where there is little interaction, or worse still, in family environments characterized by constant conflict, neglect and abuse. Due to the rapid social transformations and the added pressure on parents working in the formal sectors, ECCD is now considered an important area for future development. The Education Sector Review Commission of Bhutan (2008) document recognizes the significance of early stimulation and education of young children and its critical link with enrolment, retention and learning outcomes in primary education. In a few of the urban areas, the government allowed private sectors to establish fee paying nursery schools, daycare centres and early learning centres. The children whose parents can afford the fees attended these centres (ESRCoB, 2008). Currently, there are 18 daycare centres, ten community based ECCD centres and a few work place early learning centres (Wangchuk et al., 2012). However, issues such as inadequate trained staff, lack of resources, appropriate educational equipment and clarity of curriculum goals were frequently raised concerning these programs in the government documents such as in the Planning Commission of Bhutan (2008), in the Ministry of Education's ECCD documents and in the reports of consultants such as Ball (2012). There is also a mandatory requirement by the government that the private programs shall sign a memorandum of understanding which outlines the broad principles and procedures for their operations. Yet there is still very little in the way of guidance or regulation in terms of instructions or contents to be used in these programs. Likewise, there are very few systematic inspections that would monitor their functioning and aid improvement (REC, Bhutan, 2012a).

Social development is one of the pillars of the GNH concept and it lays great emphasis on education and health. Therefore, the government is committed to ensure the best possible start to life for all children aged 0 to 8. The Constitution of the Kingdom (Royal Government of Bhutan (RGoB), 2008, p.14, Article 9(15) states, "The state shall endeavor to provide education for the purpose of improving and increasing knowledge, values and skills of the entire population with education being directed towards the full development of the human personality". Bhutan aspires to achieve this goal through the practice of "Educating for GNH" (MoE, Bhutan, 2010c) in all the educational institutes in the country.

The Royal Government of Bhutan has ratified the Convention of the Rights of the Child (1991), and has endorsed the achievement of Universal Primary Education by 2015 and the Education for All by 2020 (PCoB, 1999). To accomplish the commitments made, the government of Bhutan recognized ECCD as its priority area for development. There is also a

growing recognition of ECCD as an essential factor in enhancing quality of education in Bhutan.

In 2009 the first National Policy for ECCD was drafted in a forum consisting of members from all different sectors, who by the end of the day officially put together the first thoughts on ECCD in Bhutan. Based on this document, the Ministry of Education in collaboration with UNICEF, drafted the second ECCD document titled “Early Learning and Development Standards: Age 3-6 years” (MoE, Bhutan, 2010b). This document emphasises the importance of the family and the child’s prior experiences by stating:

- Children learn in the context of their families and families are the primary influence on children’s learning and development (p.3).
- Adults need to build on children’s current knowledge and understanding of their world, for making new experience, ideas and concepts meaningful (p.34).
- Cultural background and experiences contribute to a child’s approach to tasks (p.35).

In all the government documents of Bhutan, there is urgency for the recognition of ECCD. The importance of the home, parents, community and children’s prior experiences has been mentioned both in the National Policy on ECCE and the later document on Standards for ECCE in Bhutan. However, as can be seen from Ball’s (2012) report on the status of ECCD in Bhutan, there is little evidence of progress being made in embedding the standards in the child’s education process. Ball (2012, p. 21) recommends that attention must be paid, “to the desire for more child and family friendly approaches to lower primary than is currently the norm in the country”.

The lower primary begins with the Pre-Primary, which is fondly called PP by all. The official age of enrollment into PP is six. The PP class could be seen as synonymous to many other terms such as Kindergarten, Transition, Preparatory and Reception used in other countries. A PP class in Bhutan functions as the entry year to formal schooling, thus, “making their classrooms into scaled-down first grades with worksheets and drills” (Bodrova & Leong, 2007, p.162) which does not provide the underlying skills that make learning effective and efficient in the long run. The ESRCoB (2008) comments that:

The aim of the teachers seem to be to get the children onto readers; formal arithmetic and book work as quickly as possible, so that they will be ready for Class I. The pre-primary grade does not function as preschool (as intended) but seems to be already Class I. The primary education in Bhutan in fact lasts for seven years. (ESRCoB, 2008, p. 17)

This might be seen as contrary to the international expectations of a PP class, which are typically a more preparatory and transition program prior to formal schooling. A future plan of de-linking PP from the formal primary education was recommended in the ESRCoB document (2008), so that better focus could be placed on the 0-6 year olds in order to build a sound foundation for young children. However, at the moment there are no definite plans made by the Ministry of Education to de-link PP from the formal education system.

While it is not an instant fix of all the gaps between the government documents and actual practices in the field, it is hoped that this study can provide a socially and culturally appropriate way to explore better possibilities. This study inquires into the kinds of every day experiences that children, families and teachers dwell in. It considers how these rich experiences might be acknowledged and shared to provide child and family responsive learning experiences for young children in Bhutan. The findings of this study will enable the policy makers, teacher trainers, practitioners, parents and Bhutanese society to better understand and incorporate the cultural and intellectual resources available to students and teachers within the homes and community they come from. This awareness will lead to minimising the gap between school, home and community and maximizing healthy inductions to school.

### **Educating for GNH**

Bhutan opened its doors to the rest of the world in 1950s. Till then it was a landlocked kingdom, referred to as the 'last Shangri-La' by the few foreign visitors to the country. Then on, the country moved in leaps and bounds towards development and modernization and as is usual with development, a lot of changes took place. In the late 1980s, the fourth king of Bhutan, His Majesty, Jigme Singye Wangchuk envisioned a specific "Bhutanese path to development in pursuit of values that were consonant with Bhutan's culture, institution and spiritual values rather than values that were defined by factors external to Bhutanese society and culture" (MoE, Bhutan, 2010c, p.13). His sublime proclamation revolutionized the whole outlook of the country and its people. It emphasized the shift of focus away from a purely materialistic and individualistic development to a more collective development. GNH is not against changes it is more about well-paced and selective changes that maintain a harmonious balance between materialism and spiritualism, modernity and tradition. GNH became the developmental philosophy for the country and its people. In a world obsessed with growth and materialism, Bhutan's choice of GNH over Gross National Product (GNP) made the country the subject of scrutiny and the envy of the rest of the world.

Bhutan took a bold step of including the GNH objective in the Constitution of the Kingdom, as: “the state shall strive to promote those conditions that will enable the pursuit of GNH” (MoE, Bhutan, 2010c, p.11). Thus, for Bhutan this is not just a well-timed buzzword, it is a legal binding objective to which the Bhutanese are committed. GNH has been shaped by the beliefs and values of the faith that the Bhutanese have held for more than a thousand years. Firmly rooted in the rich tradition of Mahayana Buddhism, the approach emphasizes not material rewards, but individual development, sanctity of life, compassion for others, respect for nature, social harmony, and importance of compromise. It has sought to both draw upon and conserve this rich fund of social and cultural philosophy and to achieve a balance between “*peljor gongphel*” (economic development) and “*gakid*” (happiness and peace) (PCoB, 1999, p. 19). When tensions were observed between them, a deliberate choice is made to give preference to the understanding of happiness and peace, even at the expense of economic growth, which is regarded not as an end in itself but as a means to achieve improvements in the well being and welfare of the people (PCoB, 1999). The clear articulation of a cultural imperative has not only been used to guide the distinctive process of development but also to cushion against alien influences and the many disruptive and undesirable impacts of indiscriminate modernization. It has been an anchor in a sea of change.

The GNH framework consists of four foundational pillars: sustainable and equitable socio-economic development, environmental conservation, preservation and promotion of culture and good governance. Further elaboration of nine domains and seventy-two variables provide clarity and depth to the concept of this lofty philosophy (Appendix D, pp. 307-312). The practical issues of this philosophy underwent several levels of discourse and forums both inside and outside the country. Exhaustive attempts have been made at both the policy and implementation levels to put the concept of GNH into practice. In 2010, Bhutan decided that education should be the garden for sowing the seed of GNH, resulting in the movement for ‘Educating for GNH’. The former, Prime Minister of Bhutan, Lyonchen Jigme Y. Thinley (MoE, Bhutan, 2010c) in his opening address to the educators said:

I am absolutely convinced that there is no more effective, comprehensive, and far-reaching way to put GNH fully into practice and to realize our shared vision and goals not in a frustratingly piecemeal way but so that our collective national consciousness naturally translates into enlightened action—than to infuse our education system fully and properly with the humane and ecological principles and values of Gross National Happiness. If we want to be of any service to ourselves, let alone to the larger world, there is no better way than to begin here. (MoE, Bhutan, 2010c, p. 11)

In 2010, many workshops and seminars were held nation-wide with principals, teachers, teacher educators and other appropriate government officials to brainstorm and put together strategies for inculcating GNH philosophies into school practices. Most of the schools across the nation are constantly striving to implement strategies and changes that will meet the GNH goals. However, the actual integration of GNH into the very structured curricula and pedagogical practices of the school system remains a challenge. The MoE (2010c) states:

Infusing Gross National Happiness into the education system is not adding a new subject but enriching learning, and improving the process of education. It has to do with creating a context and an approach that infuses a Gross National Happiness consciousness into everything that is learned and taught. This will make the curriculum and learning more enjoyable, more pleasurable, and more relevant. (MoE, 2010c, p. 53)

There is still a long way to go before we can embed GNH seamlessly throughout the curriculum and practices of the schools in Bhutan. Through this study I look forward to being able to share some much needed insights for the implementation of the concept of 'Educating for GNH'.

### **The purpose of the inquiry**

Many felt a general perception of deterioration in the quality of education in Bhutan. Especially there was concern about the quality of Primary Education. In order to understand the root of the problem we have to trace the development of the Bachelor of Education (B.Ed) Primary Program in Bhutan.

### **The primary teacher training programs in Bhutan**

The first Teacher Training Institute (TTI) in Bhutan was founded in 1968, in Samtse with an initial enrolment of 41 students (Samtse College of Education, 2008). The Teacher Training Institute provided a two-year Diploma course in primary teacher training. The units taught were *Dzongkha*, English, Mathematics, Science, Geography, History and Civics, Principles of Education and School Organization, Child Study, Health Education, Methods of Teaching, Art and Craft, Agriculture, and Physical Education.

In 1975 a Pre-School Care Training Centre (PSCTC) was established in Paro (Paro College of Education, 2010). The two-year certificate program focused more intensely on the education of lower (PP-III) and upper primary (IV-VI) children and had the same units of study as the TTI in Samtse. In 1976, the Rinpung Primary School that was on the same campus as the training centre became a part of the centre and came to be known as the Demonstration School (DS). Thus the nomenclature of the centre became Teachers Training College and

Demonstration School (TTC & DS). The trainees, teachers and the lecturers planned and implemented cooperative activities in the DS and it proved very useful and meaningful for everyone involved.

In 1985 a common curriculum was developed for both the TTI and the PSCTC. The award was titled Primary Teacher Certificate (PTC) and the units of study offered remained the same although some changes were made to the titles. For example, English became Teaching of English, making a conscious blend of content and methodology. Due to the shortage of teachers in the country, the academic qualification required for the entry to the PTC course was the completion of high school.

In 1993, Samtse College of Education launched the three-year Bachelor of Education (B.Ed) primary program with the intention of preparing and creating a group of people with a higher qualification to provide the much-needed academic and professional leadership at the primary level. It was also intended for creating a forum for the students with class XII passed certificates, who were interested in primary education and who had the aptitude for becoming good primary teachers with a degree course (MoE, Bhutan, 2008). With the same goals, Paro College of Education too started the B.Ed primary course in the year 1998 and phased out PTC by December 2003. The B.Ed primary course then became a blend of the B.Ed secondary and Primary Teacher Training Certificate course. The course content was very similar to the B.Ed secondary. In the B.Ed primary course in Paro, a trainee could choose one elective subject from the three provided in the college- History, Mathematics and English. Each elective subject consisted of ten modules spread over three years. The rest of the 40 modules were mandatory for both B.Ed primary and secondary. The common modules consisted of 10 primary curriculum studies, 10 professional development studies and 20 personal development studies.

Thus, in the process of the well intended changes, only about one fifth of the whole program had a specific focus on the actual teaching and learning in the primary education. Within this percentage of the program, the focus was predominantly on upper primary (classes IV-VI). Ball (2012, p. 21) made the same observation. She recommends, “The need to guard against a perception of ECCD as the downward expansion of education as it is currently practiced in Bhutan, or the downward application of post-secondary courses for Primary Education to prepare ECCD practitioners”. Eventually there was a general perception of a poor standard of learning in the early years of primary school and also a general feeling that B.Ed primary

graduates were not able to handle the primary classes well. Therefore, the Royal University of Bhutan (RUB) decided that the B.Ed primary course needed to be reviewed, with special focus on the teachings of lower primary classes (PP-III). The review resulted in a program of 4 years with 40 modules, all focussing on the education of primary children in Bhutan. Some new modules such as Introduction to Early Childhood Education, Creative Arts, Play and Development and Teaching Children with Special Needs were also added to the program. The program was validated in October 2008 and commenced with effect from March 2009.

As of now, a good B Ed primary program is in place. However, the colleges still do not have the required number of lecturers with expertise and training in the areas of early years of school and early childhood education. Ball (2012, p. 30) observes that “understandings of the nature of ECCD in Bhutan are very rudimentary and somewhat ‘mechanical’ (i.e., do not appear to be guided by any depth or breadth of knowledge or skills in ECCD)”. Only a very few of the lecturers realise that early childhood education demands a very different approach to teaching and learning and that they cannot be treated as the downward extension of the primary schooling system. The high schools and the upper primary classes have subject areas that are quite defined, whereas in the lower primary classes the subject areas should be more integrated. The early years of school need the teachers to focus on teaching children rather than the curriculum and the teaching too needs to be more grounded in the circumstances and contexts of the child, family and community.

Further on-going in-servicing and local research is necessary to bring about a major shift in the theory and practice of the teachers and lecturers who work in the areas of early childhood education. Although the kind of professional development of teachers required cannot be accomplished overnight, this research inquiry aims to inform some of the changes for a better early year education in Bhutan.

### **The home and the school**

While revising and improving the B.Ed course might address some of the issues previously described, there are still gaps in our knowledge and understanding of young children, their families and their communities in Bhutan. There continues to be a mismatch between the home and the first year of school that I consider is likely contributing to the unpleasant and traumatic experiences at the start of school. My experience of being a primary educator for more than 25 years and most importantly of being a parent, suggests that we need to examine the first year of schooling (PP) more carefully. A child’s first impressions of school, sets the

tone for the rest of their school experiences (Ames, Rojas & Portugal, 2009; Ashton et al., 2008; Docket & Perry 2004; Fabian & Dunlop, 2007; Jackson & Cartmel, 2010; Brooker, 2008). If the first year of school does not adequately meet the needs of young children then we are not able to easily build upon it in the following years of school.

From my understanding and experiences in educational reforms in Bhutan, I feel that at times we are too close to the problem to be able to see clearly and sometimes we are looking in the wrong places. Occasionally we can amend a problem by looking at something that we did not look at before. In the context of the children's reluctance to attend school, not performing well and dropping out, up till now we have been blaming the school, the teachers, the teacher educators and even the parents. I suggest that we look at the problem in a different way. Perhaps there is a discontinuity between the home and school that is affecting the child's ability to connect with school experiences and to engage meaningfully with learning in a school context. This is an area that we have not yet explored or examined. If we closely examine the relationship between the home and school by looking at children's experiences in the different environments we might discover the root of some of the problems.

### **Preservation of culture**

Education has an important role to play in preserving local knowledge and culture through linking the new generation to the traditions, values and beliefs that are important and distinctive to Bhutan. This is one of the main reasons why education is chosen as the main vein for injecting the GNH philosophies into society, of which Promotion and Preservation of Culture is one of the four GNH pillars.

The Ministry of Education in Bhutan and the Royal University of Bhutan recognize the need for sustainable professional development models and meaningful research in ECCD. I would like to suggest that the discontinuity between school and home experiences devalues and erodes the child's traditional ways of knowing and learning and undermines the child's self esteem and ability to learn. This study examines some of the many traditional ways of knowing and cultural practices that Moll and his colleagues call the local 'funds of knowledge'. This knowledge can be utilised in the school context to mediate young children's engagement with learning (Moll et al., 1992; Gonzalez, et al., 1993; Velez-Ibanez & Greenberg, 1990, 2005). When young children's strengths are recognised we can help them to achieve their potential and stay in school. Acknowledging and valuing children and families'

local knowledge and culture in schools is a foundation upon which the GNH goal of Preservation and Promotion of the Culture of Bhutan can be strengthened.

### **ECCD expertise**

The Ministry of Education is concerned that ECCD teachers do not have the necessary understanding and skills needed to effectively respond to the educational needs of children and families (REC, 2012a; Ball, 2012). From my observations of current programming and practices in ECCD in Bhutan, I am concerned that the teacher/student relationship is very much single-stranded, as the teacher knows the students only from their performances within rather limited classroom contexts (Gonzalez et al., 1993). Until 2009, the two primary teacher-training programs in the country did not offer any modules on ECCD in their colleges. Thus, a lack of expertise in ECCD has resulted in teachers avoiding this area and has led to a shortage of teachers in ECCD. This situation is a common problem in many developing countries, so while this research focuses on Bhutan; it may have applications to the situation in other developing countries.

### **Research goals**

Based on the need for a sound understanding of ECCD for Bhutan, this research endeavours to focus on the intersection of home, community and school. It identifies, preserves and capitalizes on local values, knowledge and culture. It provides a way to access and appreciate the contexts, strengths, values, knowledge and culture of the community of which schools are a part. Currently the relationship between home and school and the practical aspects of sharing 'funds of knowledge' between the two are not well understood and hence not developed in Bhutan. However, when teachers realize the rich resources that lie within their own communities, families and children, they will then be more able to meaningfully integrate them into school activities, learning and ultimately into the curriculum. This would result in the use of a pedagogy that is more culturally responsive and inclusive.

### **Research questions**

Punch (2005), confirms that clarity in the research questions will result in good directives for the study. He adds that good research questions organize the study and give it direction and coherence; delimit the study, showing its boundaries; keep the researcher focused during the study; provide a framework for writing up the project and point to the data that will be needed. Thus, through this study of the local 'funds of knowledge' I sought to answer two overarching questions. Firstly, 'How can a teacher better understand the knowledge, culture,

values and strengths of the homes, community and the school of the PP children and their families?’ Secondly, ‘How can the knowledge of the children, families and the community be of use in building culturally, historically and socially sensitive and meaningful experiences for PP children that are consonant with Bhutan’s efforts in ‘Educating for GNH’?’

In order to achieve the research goals and to design a sound research methodology and relevant procedures and techniques of data collection, analysis and presentation, the following specific research questions were asked:

1. What are some of the household cultures that the children and the parents are embedded in?
2. How do the children and the parents experience the school culture?
3. What norms and practices does the school adhere to?
4. How are these norms and practices in line with the ‘Educating for GNH’ philosophy?
5. How does the school perceive the children and the parents?
6. How is the school culture similar or different from the home culture?

These queries lead me to the collection of a vast amount of fascinating information that provided the basis for my thesis.

### **Structure of the thesis**

The rest of the thesis contains eleven chapters, beginning with Chapter 2, which discusses a diverse range of literature related to the origin of ‘funds of knowledge’ studies. A variety of studies that used the ‘funds of knowledge’ lens and other theories and principles that shared the same perspectives of the ‘funds of knowledge’ concept are further discussed in this chapter. Chapter 3 is an assimilation of everything discussed in Chapter 2. It illustrates a comprehensive theoretical framework in the form of seven themes that are relevant and related to the context of Bhutan and its philosophy of GNH. The themes provided the conceptual framework that guided the inquiry and the analysis processes of this research. Chapter 4 discusses the key conceptual underpinnings of the methodology and the procedures employed for the research. Chapters 5 to 9 illustrate the first level of analysis in the forms of narrative stories of the four families and the school. The stories portray a variety of very interesting physical, social, cultural, economical and ideological practices and perspectives of the children, the families and the teachers.

Chapters 10 and 11 present a deeper level of analysis of the four families and the school. Chapter 10 provides an interpretive account of the families’ experiences of the varied and rich ‘funds of knowledge’ at home and in their community that are in tune with the GNH philosophies. Chapter 11 interprets the families and their children’s experiences of the school culture and analyses the gaps and discontinuities.

Chapter 12 contains the closing reflections, insights and recommendations brought to light by the inquiry, which will hopefully provide ‘food for thought’ towards bringing about some positive changes for the betterment of early childhood education in Bhutan.

## CHAPTER 2

*He, who considers facts, inevitably considers them in light of one theory or another.*

(Vygotsky, 1987, p. 55)

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction

This literature review has two sections; the first section reviews the literature specific to the studies about ‘funds of knowledge’ and the second section reviews the literature concerning the theories and principles that are consonant with the concept of ‘funds of knowledge’. The first section begins with a brief history of the ‘funds of knowledge’ studies followed by discussion on three important aspects of these studies namely; the multiple tenets of the ‘funds of knowledge’ studies, the use of teachers as researchers and some of the commonalities between those studies. Although the present inquiry does not intend to involve teachers as researchers, the experiences of the teachers in Moll et al. (1992, 2005); Gonzalez et al. (1995, 2005) and Velez-Ibanez and Greenberg (1992, 2005) enriched my perspectives of the ‘funds of knowledge’ concept.

The second section of the literature review discusses four theories and principles that aided in consolidating my comprehension of the concept of ‘funds of knowledge’ as they shared pertinent crosscutting themes relevant to the concept and its approach to education. The theories and principles discussed in this section are the ‘Educating for GNH’ principles that Bhutan has integrated into the education system of the country; the socio-cultural and historical theories; the partnership theories and the household learning theories. All of these share characteristics of the ‘funds of knowledge’ approach.

#### The ‘funds of knowledge’ studies

##### The beginnings

The first ‘funds of knowledge’ studies had their beginnings in the city of South Tucson in Arizona where the majority of the population consisted of US Mexicans. The studies began as a four-year (1988-1992) collaborative project between the University of Arizona’s Bureau of Applied Research in Anthropology and the College of Education. Velez-Ibanez (1992) states:

Since genius is not necessary to conclude that there is a direct relationship for U.S Mexicans especially between income and education, the focus of work undertaken for (the) four years’ is to take, ‘advantage of the strategic ‘funds of knowledge’ of U. S. Mexican households of Tucson, Arizona in order to revitalize the relationships of various sorts between home, school and in fact perhaps, even redefining them to the

extent that they benefitted students, parents, teachers and administrators. (Velez-Ibanez, 1992, p. 132)

The primary objective of the collaboration was “to develop innovations in teaching that drew on the knowledge and skills found in local households” (Moll et al., 1992, p.132).

Some of the earlier studies, such as Greenberg (1989); Velez-Ibanez & Greenberg (1990) and Velez-Ibanez (1988) adopted a more anthropological approach to studying the US Mexican and Yaqui households and their social capital. The primary focus of those studies was more on the nature of the reciprocal social relationships through which knowledge was transmitted, transformed and utilized (Velez-Ibanez, 1995). Velez-Ibanez (1988, p. 142) defines reciprocity as an "attempt to establish a social relationship on an enduring basis, whether symmetrical or asymmetrical, the exchange expresses and symbolizes human social interdependence". Reciprocity and social interdependence are an essential and a much-practised trait in most Bhutanese households and communities. The Planning Commission of Bhutan (1999) reports this as one of the development assets of the country:

Our highly dispersed populations developed over centuries into tightly-knit and self-regulating communities, bound together by unwritten laws, practices and customs that governed kinship and community relations and the use of such shared resources as irrigation water and grazing land. Without this tradition of cooperation and compromise, communities would have been unable to cope with threats and adversity or, indeed, to have survived in the harsh conditions that characterize most parts of our nation. (PCoB, 1999, p. 19)

The Tucson researchers consisted of anthropologists, educational researchers, teachers and at times graduate students. The main researchers were Carlos Velez-Ibanez, Luis Moll, Norma Gonzalez and James Greenberg, the group that Velez-Ibanez (1995, p. 272) describes as the ‘fearsome foursome’ and much later Hogg (2011, p. 668) calls them the “Tucson Academics”. I prefer to use the later term to refer to the group as I continue my discussions of their work. Velez-Ibanez and Greenberg (1990) coined the term ‘funds of knowledge’ which actually originated from Wolf’s 1966 studies that focused on various household economic funds. Velez-Ibanez and Greenberg (1990, p. 314) assert that these funds entailed “wider sets of activities requiring specific strategic bodies of essential information that households need to maintain their well-being”, which they ultimately defined as ‘funds of knowledge’. Although their definition quite clearly separated itself from the earlier term of ‘funds’ as used by Wolf, it still attracted some criticism such as the possibilities of the term ‘funds’ creating a deficit view whereby some households could be considered more deficient in funds than others (Hughes et al., 2005, as cited in Oughton, 2010) and also of the ‘funds of knowledge’ concept

on the whole being perceived as ideological and not being subjected to any questionings or deconstructions (Oughton, 2010).

It is interesting to observe the evolution of the definitions of the 'funds of knowledge' concept within a decade of its use in various studies. Moll et al. (1992, p. 133) define 'funds of knowledge' as "historically developed and culturally accumulated bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and wellbeing". Three years later Velez-Ibanez (1995, p. 253) defines 'funds of knowledge' as "all rural and urban skills, experience, technical knowledge of habitat and survival and the full inventory of social knowledge that households have developed for survival". Seven years later Gonzalez and Moll (2002, p. 625) redefine it as being based on the premise, "that people are competent and have knowledge and their life experiences have given them that knowledge". Although in different terms, this concept of 'funds of knowledge' was also evident in the National Education Framework (NEF) of Bhutan (REC, 2012a). This document uses the term 'life skills' which is defined as the "abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life" (REC, Bhutan, 2012a, p. 115). Velez-Ibanez (1988, as cited in Moll & Greenberg, 1990, p. 323) sums up 'funds of knowledge' with a short metaphorical description as the "nuts and bolts for survival".

In my close observation of all the definitions I noticed a subtle overtone. Generally they all referred only to positive knowledge. This in a way was confirmed by the statement from Moll et al. (1992, p. 134), "our analysis of 'funds of knowledge' represents a positive (and we, argue, realistic) view of households as containing ample cultural and cognitive resources with great potential utility for classroom instruction". I wondered what had happened to those 'funds of knowledge' that are not so positive. I then came across Zipin, (2009, p. 322) who also queries whether "only the positives in the student's life-worlds constitute the positive assets?" and Marshall and Toohey (2010, p. 237) who question: "What happens when the 'funds of knowledge' that the children bring to school challenge the curricular and institutional practices of the classroom?" For instance, Thomson and Hall (2008) quote an elementary teacher-participant in their research in England:

We ended up with what I thought was a good piece of work but it was very controversial and they didn't print it . . . They're like . . . ten or eleven and it is like Blimey . . . I think they wanted a nice project that gave a good portrait of the school and the pupils and it came out as kind of dark. But [it was] really imaginative and I

think really interesting as a piece of work from a primary school. (Thomson & Hall, 2008, p. 93)

The Tucson Academics adopt a more positive stance in their studies and as a result, there is no mention of any of the “dark funds of knowledge” referred to by Zipin (2009, p. 318) or to the “difficult knowledge” (Pitt & Britzman, 2006, p. 379) of the families in their studies.

However, I feel such funds need to be addressed otherwise here is a risk of paying “only lip service to the lives and experiences of children and their families” (Marshall & Toohy, 2010, p. 238). This is exactly what the ‘funds of knowledge’ endeavour hopes to reduce “so that pedagogy and content contextualization which are familiar, relevant, and meaningful to students from ethnic minority groups are not excluded” (Hogg, 2011, p. 671). Spindler and Spindler (1990, p. 108) claim that “learning about human cultures must occur emphatically and emotionally as well as conceptually and cognitively”, therefore, a holistic perspective to the ‘funds of knowledge’ approach is more realistic. Challenging as it may sound, it is crucial to be receptive to all kinds of funds, both the dark and the light so that the former can be overcome and the latter can be built upon (Scrimsher & Tudge, 2003, p. 308). The NEF of Bhutan states that “knowing that children come from different circumstances and have different needs, schools should build on the assets that children bring from their homes and communities and also compensate for the shortcomings in the home and community” (REC, Bhutan, 2012a, p. 139). With this in mind, I decided to remain more open to any kind of ‘funds of knowledge’ in the households, the communities and the school for sometimes such knowledge can be the basis on which productive dialogues among family members, children and the teachers can be constructed (Freire, 1998). At the same time I would like to adopt the same optimistic view about the families as the Tucson Academics, for I too believe that “no matter what background our students have, there is knowledge in their homes that can be tapped into and used (meaningfully) in the classroom” (Amanti, 2005, p. 132).

Although Velez-Ibanez and Greenberg (1990) were the initiators of the ‘funds of knowledge’ studies, it was Moll et al.’s 1992 studies with a more educational focus that caught the attention of many other researchers, especially educators. The Tucson Academics and the schoolteachers added a new dimension to the study of ‘funds of knowledge’ by theorising the practices of the households and later applying those theories in the classrooms. They confirmed that by capitalizing on household and other community resources, teachers could prepare classroom lessons that “far exceeded the rote learning that the children were used to” (Moll et al., 1992, p. 132).

The Tucson studies were generally focused on the ‘at risk’ elementary school children of Mexican-American families described as “students from economically poor backgrounds, who have limited proficiency in English, who have high absentee rates or who frequently move from school to school” (Velez-Ibanez, 1995, p. 265). In a study before the ‘funds of knowledge’ project, Moll and Diaz (1987) state:

It is our contention that existing classroom practices not only underestimate and constrain what children display intellectually, but also help distort explanations of school performance. It is also our contention that the strategic application of cultural resources in instruction is one important way of obtaining change in academic performance and of demonstrating that there is nothing about the children’s language, culture, or intellectual capacities that should handicap their schooling. (Moll & Diaz, 1987, p. 300)

As mentioned earlier, the Tucson research team consisted also of teachers from schools. Although I may not involve teachers in the way they did for their studies, the experiences described by the teachers such as Tenery, Amanti, Hensley, Sandoval-Taylor, Browning-Aiken, and Messing (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005a) were of immense interest and relevance for my study. Their experiences showcased the multiple facets of the ‘funds of knowledge’ concept and approach strengthening the foundation on which my inquiry was constructed. From the rich experiences of the Tucson Academics, I was able to gather a number of tenets of the ‘funds of knowledge’ concept that I perceived relevant for the inquiry. In the following section, I discuss some of the most significant of these.

### **The multiple tenets of the ‘funds of knowledge’ concept**

The Tucson Academics used several catchphrases that illustrated meaningfully the many tenets of the ‘funds of knowledge’ approach. Phrases such as: repositories of knowledge; zone of comfort; a zone of practice; a basis for *confianza*; pedagogical, strategic and cultural resources; critical for understanding teaching and learning; the ‘cultural clue’, dynamic in content; thick social contexts, multi-stranded in relationships; reflexive process and many more (Gonzalez et al., 1995; Velez-Ibanez & Greenberg, 1992; Moll et al., 1992) provided clarity to my comprehension of the approach as well as helping me look at my inquiry with a much clearer perspective. For instance, in the discussion of the theoretical groundwork for their studies, Gonzalez et al. (2005, p. 25) emphasize that culture and ‘funds of knowledge’ are not the same and by moving away from the “stereotypical notions of culture” we “can come to a deeper appreciation of the dynamic and emergent conditions of the lived experiences”. I believe my inquiry should not move too far away from the “stereotypical notions of culture” of the context of the study. Bhutanese cherish and value the unique

Bhutanese culture, which is generally deeply rooted in the daily lives of the Bhutanese. Most important is the, “preservation and promotion of culture” (GNH Commission of Bhutan, 2009), one of the four pillars that the country has adopted as its developmental philosophy for GNH. In the rush to modernise, the Bhutanese traditions and the indigenous ways of doing things that had served us well for centuries and have given us our identity are in danger of being eroded. However, I do agree with Gonzalez (2005) on the “ultimate value of going beyond culture”. She affirms that:

... it opens up spaces for the construction of new fields wherein students are not locked into an assumed unilineal heritage. It allows for variability within populations rather than only between populations. More importantly, the “funds of knowledge” of a community occupy that space between structure and agency, between the received historical circumstances of a group, and the infinite variations that social agents are able to negotiate within a structure. (Gonzalez, 2005, p. 43)

The Planning Commission of Bhutan (1999, p. 25) recommends, “we [Bhutanese] must continue to be social synthesizers and assimilate the positive forces for change making them our own and accommodating them within our own distinctive model of development”. In my study I intend to address both the stereotypical culture of the nation as well as the more specific Bhutanese household cultures, for the former provides a rich basis for understanding the latter as they are embedded in each other. Metaphorically speaking, the national culture is like the warp through which the ‘funds of knowledge’ approach should enable the weaving of the fine weft of household cultures.

Another very pertinent tenet of the ‘funds of knowledge’ concept is the various forms of knowledge transmissions practised in the homes and in the communities. Velez-Ibanez and Greenberg (1992) and Moll and Greenberg (1990) revealed a multiple of positive methods practised by the families as they carried out their daily activities. Some of the methods are listed in Table 2.1. Although Moll and Greenberg (1990) and Velez-Ibanez and Greenberg (1992) discuss these household pedagogies, strategies and contexts, there is no explicit mention of these pedagogies being practised by the Tucson Academics in the classrooms, except for the use of the themes gleaned from the homes such as of horses, candies and constructions. As the present research did not have a plan for incorporating teacher researchers in the inquiry, it was not possible to see the actual household ‘funds of knowledge’ being used in teaching. However, I see the concept of teacher researchers as important for any future research. It would raise the awareness of educators to the array of

unexplored knowledge that households possess. This awareness could provide the much needed departure from the belief that teachers are the sole movers and shakers of knowledge.

**Table 2.1 Forms of transmissions**

<b>Household pedagogies</b>	<b>School pedagogies</b>
Thick, multi-stranded relations. Exposed to an array of different funds. Multiple domains to experiment and more chances of success. Encouragement to experiment further. Children expected to ask questions. Wide latitude of errors allowed. Error not dealt punitively, therefore, self esteem not endangered. A zone of comfort that is familiar yet experimental. ‘Finish it yourself and take your time’. Self-evaluation and self-judgement. Flexible network, adaptive and active. Know the child as a whole. Active participants. Teaching/ learning motivated by children’s interests. The children obtain knowledge.	Thin and single-stranded based on classroom interactions. Encapsulated classrooms. Passive bystanders. Knowledge mostly imposed by adults.

**The teacher-researchers**

Moll and Greenberg’s 1990 study records the beginnings of engaging teachers in the ‘funds of knowledge’ project. They formed an after school laboratory or a study group that Moll (2005, p. 17) calls the “centre of gravity” due to its pertinence to their research project. In this after school laboratory, the researchers and teachers sifted through the home data gleaned by the researchers to explore the most innovative ways of using such data in their classes. They discovered that despite the economic status or educational standard of the households, the Mexican-American households possessed an abundance of wide-ranging ‘funds of knowledge’ (Velez-Ibanez & Greenberg, 1992; Gonzalez et al., 1993; Moll et al., 1992; Moll & Gonzalez, 1997). Unfortunately the schools failed to notice these rich household sources of knowledge and their various forms of transmission, thus losing the opportunities of using them in the classrooms.

During the study group activities the researchers ironically observed that while advocating a participatory learning in the classrooms, their own study group activities were using a ‘transmission’ model, where the teachers sifted through the data gathered by the researchers (Gonzalez, et al., 1993, para. 12). They realized that the “connection of the household and the teacher could not come about through a field researcher as intermediary and that a bond had to be formed interpersonally, evocatively and reciprocally” (Gonzalez, 1993, para. 12). In the

later studies such as Gonzales et al. (1995), they involved the teachers as researchers. After some training in ethnographic field methods such as participant-observation, open-ended interviewing strategies, life histories, and case studies, a selected group of voluntary teachers entered the households of their students with the master researchers on a collaborative endeavour to learn from the families. That is when the Tucson Academics revolutionized the meaning of home visits. Gonzalez et al. (1993, para. 18) declares that, “the conventional model of home visits was turned on its head” when teachers visited the households to learn rather than attempt to “teach the family or to visit for disciplinary reasons”. These experiences provided a license to transcend all boundaries for both teachers and parents, not just for gathering information from each other but more to develop an enduring, reciprocal and genuine partnership between the two (Cairney, 2000). With the families and the communities, they initiated a relationship of “partners for progress” (Langhout, Rappaport, & Simmons, 2002, p. 328) that is not just a one sided practice (Ashton et al., 2008; Eberly, Joshi, & Konzal, 2007; Hughes & Greenhough, 2006; Christenson, 2003; Epstein, 2001; Epstein & Sanders, 2002, 2006) as is the normal custom between schools and homes at the moment in Bhutan.

Their research program mainly revolved around three different forms of activities, which were household visits, after school study groups and the classroom studies. Although several policy documents in Bhutan now seem to emphasize the importance of family, community and school partnerships with more urgency, home visits are still understood more as ways to inform. Ball (2012, p. 50) reports, “Research on the nature of childhood and local ‘funds of knowledge’ about supporting optimal child development is almost non-existent in Bhutan”. The Tucson Academics confirm that they had not tested their data with the children to prove that the ‘funds of knowledge’ approach works. However, their theoretically informed case studies of the classrooms incorporating the knowledge gleaned from the households and the rich narrative accounts of the teachers’ work in the classrooms are very convincing and assuring. I see it as a concept worth exploring in a country like Bhutan where “there is much teachers do not know about their students or families that could be helpful in the classroom” (Moll et al., 2005, p. 79) and where promoting and preserving culture is considered as one of the main goals of GNH (GNH Commission of Bhutan, 2008).

### **Some commonalities amongst the ‘funds of knowledge’ studies**

Beginning with the Tucson Academics much of the ‘funds of knowledge’ related studies focused on ethnic minority groups such as Latinos, Puerto Ricans, Native Americans, Navajos

and African Americans in the US (Tapia, 2004; Basu & Barton, 2007; Tenery, 2005; Moje et.al., 2004; Riojas-Cortez, 2001; Bouillion & Gomez, 2001; Olmedo, 1997; Mercado, 1992; McCarthy, Lynch, Wallace, & Benally, 1991); Bangladeshis, Indians and Pakistanis in the UK (Andrew & Yee, 2006; Crozier, Davies, Booth, & Khatun, 2003); Punjabi Sikhs in Canada (Marshall & Toohey, 2010) and Indigenous Australians (Fleer, 2004). One of the recurring concerns in all these studies was social equity, the intention to give the “less advantaged” (Zipin, 2009, p. 317) or “the marginalized” (Hattam, Brennan, Zipin, & Comber, 2009, p. 312) families an equal platform in the main education system that was dominated by “whites” (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 150). By addressing social equity they intend to challenge the “deficit views” (Zipin, Sellar, & Hattam, 2012; Hogg, 2011; Hall, Murphy, & Soler, 2008; McCarthy, 2000; Olmedo, 1997; Moll et al., 1992; Gonzalez, 1995) held of such households and their families as “places from which children must be saved or rescued rather than places that in addition to problems contain valuable knowledge and experience that can foster educational development” (Moll & Gonzalez, 1997, p. 98). Thus as a means to correct both issues of social equity and the deficit views, the tapping of the repositories of knowledge available in the households and communities is advocated in most of the studies as a way to provide meaningful and equitable education to all children. Sometimes the use of assorted “deficit-laden descriptors” (Sugarman, 2010, p. 96) such as disenfranchised, voiceless, high-poverty, low-income and lower class children and some more in the literature addressing “deficit views” make me wonder; does it really help in defeating the malice of a deficit view or rather announce the dire states of such families as needing special attention.

My experience of being an educator for many years leads me to believe that the deficit view held of households in Bhutan in general is more that illiterate families from rural backgrounds have nothing much to contribute to the education of their children, mainly because they do not read or write English. I agree with Ogbu (1982, p. 293) who believes that all children despite their backgrounds do experience some “discontinuities” as they transition from home to school, in terms of language, context and styles of learning. The present inquiry is not about seeking justice for any particular minorities, or the poor or the ‘at risks’. After all, as every child’s household has a different story to tell, I do not view social equity as a particular group’s problem, in the context of Bhutan. By using a ‘funds of knowledge’ concept as a theoretical framework, I aspire to experience “up-close and personal” (Genzuk, 1999, p. 9) moments with a few pre-primary children and their families and examine whether their

children get a chance to open their “virtual bags” (Thomson & Hall, 2008, p. 88) in their first year of school.

From the Indian education system in the 1960s, followed by a touch of Irish, then of English, then of Canadian, the Bhutanese education system evolved throughout the following five or more decades. Throughout this evolutionary process considerable effort was made to maintain the Bhutanese essence in the education system so that we did not make the mistake of ‘throwing out the baby with the bathwater’. Ball (2012, p. 6) chooses to call this effort “Made in Bhutan” approach to education and in her report states:

The Study Team conceptualized a ‘*Best of Both Worlds*’, bicultural approach that combines the best that global ECCD theory, research and practice models have to offer and the best that repositories of local knowledge, experience, and the policy of GNH can bring to develop courses “made in Bhutan”. (Ball, 2012, p. 6)

Although, my inquiry began in 2011, before Ball’s consultancy in Bhutan, it turns out to be an appropriate follow-up to the recommendations made in her report on the ECCD status in Bhutan. Moreover, the major tenets of the ‘funds of knowledge’ concept such as, the rebuttal of deficit views; households as repositories of knowledge; the particularly of human interdependence, reciprocity and communality; and the various forms of ‘funds of knowledge’ transmission in the households, resonate very closely to the principles of the ‘Educating for GNH’ philosophy that schools have adopted in Bhutan.

Another area of commonality with all the studies that have used a ‘funds of knowledge’ approach was the methodologies that they adopted for their research. As is to be expected of the research concerning household studies, most of them used qualitative ethnographic methods within a socio-cultural (Vygotsky) or an ecological (Bronfenbrenner) framework. Most used a combination of open-ended questionnaires, participant observations, case studies and field notes. A few of them such as Moje et al. (2004); Flerer, (2004); Kennedy, Ridgway, & Surman, (2006); Andrews, Yee, Greenhough, Hughes, & Winter, (2005); Thomson & Hall, (2008); Martin-Jones & Saxena, (2003) used cameras and video recorders to collect data to supplement their notes.

After the Tucson Academics’ studies on ‘funds of knowledge’, there were several others who used the same concept to enrich other disciplines, some of which are listed in Table 2.2. Reviewing the studies of the Tucson Academics and the others who have shared the principles inherent in the ‘funds of knowledge’ concept was an enriching experience for me. The plethora of literature in Figure.2 consolidated my understanding and guided me well in my

inquiry process. The desire to further substantiate my understanding of this concept and its relevance to the philosophy of ‘Educating for GNH’ lead me to other theories and principles that enriched and made the ‘funds of knowledge’ concept much more comprehensible. What follows, are brief discussions of these theories and principles.

**Table 2.2 Discipline based Research**

<b>Disciplines</b>	<b>Researchers</b>
<b>Maths</b>	Bonotto, 2001; Baker et al., 2003; Gonzalez et al., 2005; Andrew et al., 2005
<b>Science</b>	Boullion & Gomez, 2000; Basu & Barton 2006; Cumming, 2003; Upadhyay, 2005
<b>Literacy, Numeracy and Language</b>	Kennedy et al., 2006; Feiler et al., 2006; Street, 2005
<b>Bilingualism</b>	Dworin, 2006; Conteh, 2007; Martin-Jones & Saxena, 2003
<b>Oral History</b>	Olmedo, 1997; Sanchez, 1999
<b>Pedagogy &amp; Curriculum</b>	Zipin, 2012; Gillard & Moore, 2007; Hattam et al., 2009; Ladson-Billing, 1995; Cairney & Ruge, 1998; Cairney, 2002; Comber & Kamler, 2004; Menchaca, 2001; Paris, 2012; Payne et al., 2010; Sirag-Blatchford et al., 2008
<b>Socio-dramatic play</b>	Cortez, 2001; Walsh et al., 2010; Gmitrova, et al., 2009; Samuelson & Carlson, 2008; Sandberg, 2003; Sandberg & Vuorinen, 2008
<b>Teachers and teacher education related to ‘funds of knowledge’ concepts</b>	Gupta, 2006; Mooris & Taylor, 1998; Ryan, 2006; Salsbury, 2008; Schmidt, 1999; Sauto- Manning, 2006; Buck & Sylvestor, 2005; Andrew et al., 2005
<b>Partnerships for sharing ‘funds of knowledge’</b>	Cairney, 2000; Ashton et al., 2008; Christenson, 2003; Crozier et al., 2003; de Acosta, 1996; Eberly et al., 2007; Epstein, 2001; Epstien & Sanders, 2006; Feiler et al., 2006; Galindo & Sheldon, 2012; Hedges & Lee, 2010; McCarthy, 2000; Hughes & Greenhough, 2006; Hughes & Pollard, 2006; Langhout et al., 2002
<b>General ‘funds of knowledge’ of children, households and teachers</b>	Andrew & Yee, 2006; Andrew et al., 2005; Hedges, 2012; Hedges & Cullen, 2005; Mercado, 2005; Rios- Aguiler et al., 2011; Risko & Walker-Dalhouse, 2011; Sugarman, 2010; Thomson, 2002; Zipin, 2012

## **The theories and principles related to the ‘funds of knowledge’ concept**

### **Educating for GNH**

*GNH acts as our national conscience, guiding us towards making wise decisions for a better future...Our foremost priority must always remain the happiness and wellbeing of our people - including the generations to come after us...GNH is development guided by human values... the noble goal of GNH will be the key to Bhutan’s success in maintaining unity and harmony.*

His Majesty Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuk, 24<sup>th</sup> December 2009.

Three years ago hundreds of educators from all over Bhutan gathered in Paro to attend the ‘Educating for GNH’ workshops. After days of listening to presentations on the concept of ‘Educating for GNH’ and carrying out group work to explore ways of incorporating the GNH principles into school curriculum, it was agreed that ‘Educating for GNH’ was the theory that the education system should adopt in providing a ‘wholesome education’ to its young citizens. The “Education without compromise” document (ESRCoB, 2008, p. 12) describes

“wholesome education” as “a goal of cultivating the personal, academic, intellectual, psychological, emotional, spiritual, social and occupational dimensions of all Bhutanese children so that they grow up into well-balanced, properly integrated and sensitive human beings”. The 27<sup>th</sup> Educational policy guideline and instructions (MoE, Bhutan, 2009) recommends that principles of inclusiveness, parent participation in the education of their children and enabling learning environments for effective teaching-learning should be an integral part of educational planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

Many more such statements are reified in many of the recent documents of the Ministry of Education of Bhutan, which sometimes make me wonder like Fleer (2003, p. 64): have “we positioned ourselves so strongly within the rhetoric of the profession that it is difficult to introduce new ideas, or indeed, think of other ways of doing things?” Much remains to be actually practised in the field so that we can achieve what we aspire to in theory. The awareness of the gap between the home and the school and the aspiration to contribute something to fulfilling the vision of the GNH philosophy, led me to the present research. An exploration of the children’s household repositories of knowledge will not only fulfil the vision set out in ‘Educating for GNH’ but will also be able to transform the pedagogy of schooling into a harmonious effort between the home, community and school to educate children. Much of the actual practice of GNH such as conserving and protecting the environment, preserving and promoting culture, social and economic equity and good governance, all have their humble beginnings in the home. Therefore, what can be more meaningful and useful than exploring what Gonzalez et al. (2005, p. 40) theorize as “what it is that people do, and what they say about what they do” which in fact is their household ‘funds of knowledge’, an appropriate starting point for the ‘Educating for GNH’ mission.

### **The socio-cultural and historical theory**

Braun (2009, p. 13) quotes a Buddhist monk; “GNH is about using yourself and your potentials to benefit all sentient beings. Considering the individual as separate from others and his environment, is a delusion and not reality - all is connected”. On a similar note Vygotsky (1978) proclaims that learning does not take place in a vacuum and to understand learning we need to understand its social, cultural and historical context, within which the child learns and develops through interaction with others. To further clarify ‘historical’ dimensions, he adds that this term does not mean the study of the past but a “study in motion” (Vygotsky 1997, p. 43), of constant changes. These perspectives gave rise to socio-cultural and historical theories and the social origins of knowledge and development.

Vygotsky believes that instruction leads and supports development through the interaction of two kinds of concepts, the *everyday* or the spontaneous concept and the *scientific* or the schooled concept. He asserts that “conscious awareness enters through the gate opened up by the scientific concept” (Vygotsky, 1987, p. 191). Vygotsky’s socio-cultural and historical theory asserts that the scientific concepts springboard the everyday concepts to novel heights through the reciprocal relationships with more competent others (Scrimsher & Tudge, 2003), jointly constructing what counts as knowledge in their life world. It is this that Moll and colleagues refer to as ‘funds of knowledge’. Wink and Putney (2002, p. 85) conclude that “Moll’s work is an extension of Lev Vygotsky’s”; their perspectives and theories shared the same essence. They explain that ‘funds of knowledge’ relates well to the Vygotskian notion of the relationship between the individual and the collective, the individual knowledge of the household and the collective community knowledge of which the school is a part. However, Bouillion and Gomez (2000, p. 878) point out that in many cases, “schools are *in* communities, however, not *of* communities”, causing a rift between the two.

Vygotsky (1978, p. 88) asserts, “Development of the individual is a process in which children grow into the intellectual life of those around them”. His paradigm for zone of proximal development (ZPD) concentrates on how a child can become what he not yet is rather than what he is. ZPD is one of Vygotsky’s most widely known concepts that affirm his belief in “performance before competence” (Moll, 1990, p. 3). This separates him from his contemporaries such as Piaget who believed that development should take place before learning. Thus the legacy of Vygotsky’s socio-cultural perspectives of learning and development provide very useful coat hooks upon which to hang most of the tenets of the ‘funds of knowledge’ concept for they are grounded in socio-cultural and historical theories. He believes in the situatedness of what all must do to live and thrive through a constant mediation process between the individual and the collective.

Many others shared the same socio-cultural and historical principle in their own ways. Lave (1991) describes such theories as the situated learning where both knowledge and learning are situated within a community of practice (Wenger, 1998) which Wells (1999) describes as the community of inquirers, whereby the child intensively participates as a legitimate peripheral participant (Rogoff, Paradise, Arauz, Correa-Chavez, & Angelillo, 2003) carrying out “the ordinary practices of the culture” (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989, p. 34). Flear (2003, p. 76) concurs that, “meaning does not reside in an individual or even in printed matter, but rather exists through a dynamic process of living in the world”. Van Manen (1994, p. 141) further

consolidates the social cultural perspective by explaining that children are not like seeds or acorn that grow in isolation or from within. He adds, “It is only in certain relational contexts that the thinking life, the developing identity, the moral personality, the emotional spirit, the educational learning and socio-psychological maturing of the young person occurs” (Van Manen, 1994, p. 140).

The array of terminologies and phrases used by the socio-cultural theorists all lead to one common theme that expresses the importance of context and relationships as the keys to children’s development and enculturation into their communities. Fler (2006, p. 139) confirms that “cultural and institutional inter-subjectivity offers one way forward”. The people and their social world cannot be separated for they are well knitted together in an “overlapping sphere of influence” (Epstein & Sanders, 2002, p. 411) within comprehensive ecological systems that interact with one another (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986). The typical notion of learning as an individual process, that it has a beginning and an end, that it can be segregated from other activities and is a product of teaching, is a huge fallacy (Wenger, 1998, p. 3). For human thinking can never be described as an individual act as it is always mediated and distributed among other people, things and settings (Vygotsky 1987, 1978; Pea, 1993) and that everybody belongs to a community of practice that is existent in every setting in which we work out common sense through mutual engagement (Wenger, 1999, 1998; Lave, 1991; Lave & Wenger 1991). Wenger (1998, p. 47) emphasizes that “a common sense can be commonsensical only because it is a sense in common”. This socio-cultural perspective of people making sense of things together defies the notion that learning is an accretion of information and skills instead it advocates it as an ever-changing process of participation in day-to-day life. Van Manen (1994, p. 139) holds that “a teacher who does not understand the inner life of a child does not know who it is that he or she is teaching”. By this definition, a study of the child’s household ‘funds of knowledge’ informs the teacher as well as his/her teaching.

### **The partnership theory**

Gonzalez et al. (2005, p. x) caution readers that the ‘funds of knowledge’ approach should not be mistaken for parent participation programs; neither does it involve any attempts to educate parents on ‘how to do school’ although “both can be a fortuitous result of this approach if desired”. It is this “fortuitous result” that I believe is one of the strong characteristics of the ‘funds of knowledge’ approach. The relationship between the triad of home, community and the school unfortunately has not yet been picked up yet even though it has been expressed as

desirable in many of the official documents of Bhutan. The individual “school policies and practices are not always aligned with such notions” (Christenson, 2003, p. 455). Sugarman (2010) claims that:

Educators who perceive home and communities as their defining pedagogical characteristic in terms of the strengths and resources that they possess, can shift the power dynamics of the educational institutions by supporting an exchange of knowledge and skills between educators, students and families. (Sugarman, 2010, p. 96)

Many researchers have referred to the gap between the triad with the use of such words as discontinuity (McIntyre, Rosebery, & Gonzalez, 2001), chasm and dissonance (Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006), cultural discontinuity (Tyler et al., 2008; Ogbu, 1982) and disconnection (Basu & Barton, 2006; Boullion & Gomes, 2000). As a solution to these many descriptors of deficiency, Epstein (2001, p. 4) advocates the term “partnership” for he argues that this would highlight the joint responsibilities of the triad for the children’s learning and development. Langhout et al. (2002, p. 331) adopted the slogan “Partners for Progress” for their home and school garden project. However, Cairney (2000, p. 164) chooses the term “genuine partnership”, as many such earlier partnerships failed to work as they were mostly geared towards what the home and the community could do for the school or what the schools had to say to them. This he believed was not a genuine relationship, but is, what Galindo and Sheldon (2012, p. 91) describe as, “low intensity generic contacts”. With the absence of a genuine partnership, teachers tended to view the child as a “home-child” and the “school-child” and in the process failed to see the “whole child” (Epstein, 2001, p. 5).

Drawing on the works of Moll and colleagues other researchers such as Hugh and Pollard (2006) and Hugh and Greenhough (2006) carried out some interesting exercises such as the ‘shoe box activity’, the ‘video activity’ and the ‘class recipe book project’ to enhance the relationships between the triad. Feiler, Greenhough, Winter, Salway, and Scanlan, (2006) set up exhibitions at a supermarket so that parents who were hesitant to come to school attended the exhibitions at the supermarket with more ease, a very thoughtful move.

Despite the many barriers to partnership (Feiler et al., 2006; Hill & Taylor, 2004; Morris & Taylor, 1998), it is still worth the effort to try and establish a genuine partnership, as many researchers such as Galindo and Sheldon (2012), Hill and Taylor (2004), Epstein and Sanders (2002) and Epstein (2001) confirm that this relationship could assure children’s school success and parents’ confidence. Ashton and Cairney (2001), Ashton et al. (2008) and Christenson (2003) maintain that children’s cognition develops as a result of congruence

between home and school. If this is true, then one of the promising enabling factors for promoting a genuine partnership is by appraising and mobilising household ‘funds of knowledge’, so that children, families and teachers can be embedded in an education system that is truly local and relevant, or in the case of this study, “Made in Bhutan” (Ball, 2012).

### **The context of learning**

Children are not empty vessels (Van Manen, 1991) and neither are they banks (Freire, 1998) or blank slates (Cummins, 1996). They come to school with a variety of “virtual bags” (Thomson & Hall, 2008) from which the teacher can understand “what it is that they bring into the classroom; what defines their present understanding, mood, emotional state and readiness to deal with the subject matter and the world of the school” (Van Manen, 1991, p. 7). Learning does not just depend on teaching in a classroom (Lave, 1991). The households and communities provide authentic situations for learning; authentic in the sense of being relevant to the daily lives and activities of children (Vygotsky, 1986), which Rogoff et al. (2003) describes as situations in which children are generally eager to participate and Wells (2000, p. 8) describes as “activities that have real meaning and purpose”. Lave and Wenger (1991, p. 68) describe such learning as an outcome of “apprenticeship” where learning just takes place in the course of daily life without any professional teaching effort being required as children become “quintessentially legitimate peripheral participants in the adult social world” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 31). The Tucson Academics described this situation as the ‘zone of comfort’ as they ventured through the households and communities of the Mexican Americans and the Yaqui families. It is in this zone where children with the help of the other members of their family hone their “zone of proximal development” (Vygotsky, 1987, 1978). Vygotsky (1986, p. 188.) believes that “what the child can do in cooperation today, he can do alone tomorrow. Therefore, the only kind of instruction is that which marches ahead of development and leads it”. Adults may manifest certain aspects of ‘funds of knowledge’, however the actual “organization of learning is in the hands of the children themselves” (Velez-Ibanez & Greenberg, 2005, p. 61).

Vygotsky recommends play, especially socio-dramatic play as the most appropriate enhancer of ZPD and as a major source of learning. From the socio-cultural perspectives, imaginative socio-dramatic plays develop abstract thoughts through which children can practise being an adult ahead of time. Riojas-Cortez (2001, p. 35) describes such play as a mediation tool that children use for learning and also as a means through which the teacher can better understand a child. The three most prominent early year curricula namely the *Te Whariki* of New Zealand

(1996), the *Early Years Learning Framework* (EYLF) of Australia (2009) and the *Early Years Foundation Stage* of England (2008) emphasize play as one of the most important contexts for learning. However, the concept of play in the schools of Bhutan is more general and loose; one that refers to all activities that are not literacy and numeracy lessons.

Right from the times of Watson, Thorndike, Skinner and Pavlov, behaviourists believe that observation is essential for effective learning. Decades later, Rogoff and her colleagues ascertain that children can learn through ‘observing and listening-in’ on activities of adults and others as legitimate peripheral participants. They maintain this to be a “powerful form of fostering learning” even if it is in a form of “third party participation” (Rogoff et al., 2003, p. 176 & 178), as it is not mandatory that all learning has to be direct and declarative. As a legitimate peripheral or as a third party participant, a great deal of learning takes place even if there is no direct involvement in any activity (Brown et al., 1989, p. 40). Every interaction between parents and children need not necessarily be geared towards making the latter learn something although in most of these acts there will be some pedagogical intent which is natural of parent-children relationships (Van Manen, 1991). Thus education becomes an ‘all-encompassing’ term at home where experiences are not educationally designed (Hedges & Cullen, 2012) for children are naturally embedded in the, “historically accumulated and culturally developed ‘funds of knowledge’ (Moll et al., 1992).

Correa-Chavez & Rogoff (2009), Correa-Chavez, Rogoff, and Arauz, (2005), and Morelli, Rogoff, and Angelillo, (2003) conducted research on children from traditional American indigenous backgrounds and children from European American backgrounds to test their attention span during some set activities in which some of these children were involved only as third party observers. The findings were consistent on all occasions in that the children from a traditional American indigenous background maintained more sustained attention than those from a European American background. This suggests that children “who grow up in a community in which they are expected to attend to ongoing events attend keenly even in situations when they are not directly addressed” (Correa-Chavez & Rogoff, 2009, p. 630). In Bhutan, particularly, in the rural areas, children are a part of most adult activities and conversations. In most situations children are third party observers or listeners, who do not get involved in the discussions; for it is considered impolite for children to quiz adults and overtly become involved. However, in most cases children listen and observe intently to everything that happens around them, in the process learning many things. In these situations, as Wertsch and Stone (1979) acknowledge that the process is both the learning and the product.

Paradise and Rogoff (2009, p. 107) argue that learning that is contextualized differs from the prototypical learning in the schools, where information and skills are broken down into manageable chunks, “often with little chance of seeing how they all fit together”. Hall (1990, p. 39) imagines this way of learning to be like “building blocks” which he compares to the “sea of information” that can be gleaned from real life experiences. Van Manen (1991, p. 9) states that education should focus on the world of experiences for “experience can open up understanding that restores a sense of embodied knowing” which science and technology blurred due to the very nature of their discipline. Vygotsky recommends that the “everyday concepts (spontaneous) and the schooled concepts (scientific) should work together harmoniously so as to provide organization to children’s thinking (Wink & Putney, 2002, p. 31). On a similar note Freire (1983) recommends the “reading of the world” before the “reading of the words”, how the two should work together to provide better comprehension by creating a “third space” (Moje et al., 2004) of “inter-subjectivity” (Vygotsky 1987) which Hedegaard (1998) describes as the “double move”. She (Hedegaard, 1998, p. 120) explains that “the lower level of the zone of proximal development is delineated by the traditions of practice that have characterized the students’ lives (and) the upper level is delineated by the possibilities of practice”. Thus teaching within the ZPD is a “double move between the students’ experience and their exposure to theoretical concepts” (Hedegaard, 1998, p. 120) in the schools.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter is a synopsis of my journey to find the essence of the concept that I have adopted for the inquiry. In the process, I cherry-picked the many diverse terms and phrases that illustrate the theories and principles to which ‘funds of knowledge’ could be related. I began with a short history of the beginnings of the concept that introduced me to the ‘funds of knowledge’ *gurus* and their practices. Once I acquired a sound knowledge of the original idea, I began to explore other arenas for similar theories and principles that directly or indirectly upheld the ‘funds of knowledge’ concept with their own reified terms. This venture further enriched and consolidated my understanding, which in turn gave me the confidence and the comfort to undertake the inquiry process without hesitation.

With an assured footing, I put together the next chapter, which outlines the theoretical framework for the present study. Chapter 3 brings together important and relevant themes for the inquiry and provides a comprehensive interpretive lens for the whole investigative process.

## CHAPTER 3

*Abstractions build on concrete realities: to understand the concept of “history,” a child has to know “before” and “now.” Simply put, a child “cannot gain conscious awareness of what he does not have”. (Vygotsky, 1987, p. 216)*

### THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

#### Introduction

This chapter builds upon the literature review using some of the key themes of the ‘funds of knowledge’ concept to form a comprehensive theoretical framework for the present study. I begin the theoretical framework with an assimilation of my understanding of the ‘funds of knowledge’ concept and approach. The rest of the chapter discusses five transformative characteristics of the ‘funds of knowledge’ concept that guide the present inquiry. I believe that the knowledge and application of the ‘funds of knowledge’ approach can transform the concept of culture, refute the deficit views held of families and children, empower genuine partnership between the home and the school, redefine the role of teachers and foster inclusive and responsive pedagogy and curricula in the schools.

#### What is ‘funds of knowledge’ and why is it important?

The metaphorical usage of the term ‘funds’ dates back to 1966, to Wolf’s categorization of peasants’ household economy into several funds such as funds of labour, funds of calories and funds of produce. About a quarter of a century later, two anthropologists, Velez-Ibanez and Greenberg, in their 1990 study of households in the US-Mexican borderlands coin the term, ‘funds of knowledge’, connoting the “strategic and cultural resources” that the households contain. They further elaborate on this by suggesting that, “entailed in these are wider sets of activities requiring specific strategic bodies of essential information that households need to maintain their well-being” (Velez-Ibanez & Greenberg, 1992, p. 313). The metaphorical usage of the word “fund” generally refers to how the household and family knowledge are often bartered between the family members and with the outside world, thus becoming an essential component of the family economy (Rios-Aguilar, Kiyama, Gravitt, & Moll, 2011).

Although Moll does not claim credit for the initial terming of the ‘funds of knowledge’ concept, he has generally been associated with it by many of the researchers who adopted this concept for their studies. Moll et al. (1992, p. 134) define ‘funds of knowledge’ as “historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential to household or individual functioning and well-being”. The bodies of knowledge that they refer

to are broadly made up of “social and labour history, household practices, division of labour, ideas about childrearing and values about education” (Rios-Aguilar et al., 2011, p. 164). In the early 1990s Moll and his colleagues adopted it as an approach to study working-class Latino households and documented and highlighted the various bodies of knowledge that underlie families’ productive activities.

Moll et al., (1992), Moll & Greenberg, (1990) and Velez-Ibanez & Greenberg, (1992) focus on how households use their ‘funds of knowledge’ to deal with changing and often difficult economic situations and more importantly how their social networking interconnects them with their communal environments and how their relationships facilitate the development and exchange of resources, that enhances the households’ ability to survive and thrive. Gonzalez et al. (1993) and Velez-Ibanez, (1988) maintain that the cultural glue that holds such relationships together on an enduring basis is the strength of reciprocity. Velez-Ibanez (1988, p. 142) assert that, “whether symmetrical or asymmetrical, the exchange expresses and symbolizes human social- interdependence”. Gonzalez et al. (1993) posit that reciprocal practices within kinsmen, friends, neighbours or teachers establish *confianza* (mutual trust) that constantly provides contexts in which learning can occur. In these contexts, children have ample opportunities to participate in activities with people they trust (Moll & Greenberg, 1990).

The notion of ‘funds of knowledge’ as developed by Moll and colleagues aims at recognizing the knowledge embedded in the labour, domestic, family and community practices of Mexican American families so that they do not get undermined in the schooling process. These studies attempt to stimulate awareness of the resources available to the families; the home based cultural values (Gay, 2010; Rogoff, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978; Riojas-Cortez, 2001); the backpacks filled with hope, expectations, experiences and ideas (Wink & Putney, 2002) and the “virtual school bags” (Thomson, 2002, p. 1) that every child brings to the school. The schools let the children open their ‘virtual bags’ only to take out resources that match the game of schooling therefore the ‘funds of knowledge’ that the children bring in are not treated equally in the school (Rosebery et al., 2001). Those who are familiar with this game are at an advantage from the very start, which means all ‘funds of knowledge’ still do not make a substantive entry into the classrooms (Moll & Greenberg, 1990).

To be able to engage children in the process of learning and development we must know who they are and where they come from so that we can use their ‘funds of knowledge’ for

reorganising instructions in ways that extend the limits of current schooling (Scrimsher & Tudge, 2003). From a Vygotskian perspective, learning does not take place in a vacuum. To understand learning, it is essential to first understand the social, historical, cultural and political context in which learning and development take place (Wink & Putney, 2002).

Researchers in the area of 'funds of knowledge' describe households as "repositories of funds of knowledge" (Gonzalez et al., 2005, p. 99). They believe that every household has knowledge that we can tap into and use in the classrooms "regardless of the family's years of formal schooling or the prominence assigned to literacy" (Genzuk, 1999, p. 10). Households are viewed as important educational settings where the first lessons of life are learnt. By failing to capitalize on household knowledge educators are ignoring "a rich source of children's prior experiences, knowledge and interests" (Hedges, Cullen, & Jordan, 2011, p. 188). Cole (as cited in Wells, 2000, p. 3) affirms that we are not just "limited to biological inheritance", to that is added our cultural inheritance and being able to make the best use of it in our classrooms, we are being able to "assimilate the experiences of humankind" (Leont'ev, 1981, p. 55). Vygotsky (1987) prefers to call this our "distributed cognition" whereas Pea (1993, p. 47) terms it as "distributed intelligence". This notion is further substantiated by Vygotsky, (1981, p. 164) who believes that the "mind rarely works alone" that it is a "copy of the social interaction" and that "all higher mental functions are internalized social relationships" and that children often turn out to be what others take them to be (Wartofsky, 1983). The best way to develop positive support for the child and his/her family is to learn about them through their household practices. Observe, participate and listen to "what (they) do and what they say about what they do" (Gonzalez, 2005, p. 40). Hogg (2011, p. 49) recommends that by adopting a 'funds of knowledge' approach, we are able to harness more of the "what is, rather than what is not". Therefore in the next section of this chapter I discuss five themes in which the 'funds of knowledge' concept and approach can have a positive impact in this study.

### **The transformative nature of the 'funds of knowledge' approach**

#### **The dynamic household culture**

The teacher researchers in the 'funds of knowledge' studies conducted by the Tucson Academics report two underlying transformative potentials of this approach, which are the "shift in the definition of culture of the households and an alternative to the deficit model of households" (Gonzalez et al., 2005, p. 99). Gonzalez et al. (1993, para. 29) describe a

household culture “as a process rather than a normative end state”, it emphasizes the lived contexts and practices of the students and their families. Viewing ‘funds of knowledge’ as a household culture shifts our understanding of culture from an integrated, harmonious, univocal version to a processual view rooted in the lived contexts and practices of our students and families, thus engendering a realization that culture is a dynamic and not a static concept (Gonzalez et al., 2005; Riojas-Cortez, 2001; Hall et al., 2008). From a ‘funds of knowledge’ perspective, the household culture is more significantly a way of using social, physical, spiritual and economic resources to make one’s way in the world (Cairney, 2002; Eberly et al., 2007; Genzuk, 1999, Hall et al., 2008). Cathy Amanti, a teacher researcher in the Tucson Academics project has this to say about culture after several visits to the homes of her U.S Mexican students:

The multicultural curriculum available in schools perpetuates an outdated notion of culture as special and isolated ritual events and artefacts, the kind featured in National Geographic. Its focus on holidays, “typical” foods and “traditional” artefacts covers a very narrow range of my students’ experiences and ignores the reality of life in the borderland, which often falls outside the norms of tradition Anglo or Mexican culture (Gonzalez et al., 2005, p. 99).

Sometimes in an attempt to design culturally responsive pedagogies, we risk portraying groups as homogenous and possessing fixed cultural traits that still follow the notion of one-size fits all (Gonzalez, 2005). Wenger (1999, p. 6) submits that we all belong to communities of practice, in fact to “several communities of practices at any given time” and that they change over the course of our lives. This reflects the “dynamic notion of culture” (Riojas-Cortez, 2001, p. 36), a culture that forms the children’s ‘funds of knowledge’ for “their culture is what they learn at home” (Eberly et al., 2007, p. 7).

To further empower this concept of ‘funds of knowledge’ as a household culture, Vygotsky (1993, p. 164) asserts, “Everything that a child needs to know is already present in the culture” which they appropriate or internalize through signs and symbols. In other words culture is the social milieu in which the life of the people is embedded. Brown and colleagues (1989) provide clarity to this dynamic notion of the household culture, the following lines:

The activities of a domain are framed by its culture. Their meaning and purpose are socially constructed through negotiations among present and past members. Activities thus cohere in a way that is, in theory, if not always in practice, accessible to members who move within the social framework. These coherent, meaningful and purposeful activities are authentic, according to the definition of the term we use here. Authentic activities then are most simply defined as the ordinary practices of the culture. (Brown et al., 1989, p. 34)

Thus if the idea of culture is expanded to accommodate the ways in which the experiences are organized and understood, then there will be a lot more resources that can be drawn upon and “further imaginative re-contextualising work with, upon and beyond existing ‘funds of knowledge’” (Zipin et al., 2012, p. 189) can be advocated. Gonzalez et al. (2005) recommend that not only can the knowledge gleaned be re-contextualized, the perspectives that lead to that can be re-contextualised too. Adopting a ‘funds of knowledge’ approach in a class does not mean replicating the household culture; it is more about “using students’ knowledge and prior learning as a scaffold for new learning” (Amanti, 2005, p. 135). This notion is consistent with Vygotsky’s theories of development and learning, that children learn best when the others around them create instructional activities fuelled by the child’s prior knowledge in the learning of new knowledge and practices.

### **The deficit views**

Hall et al. (2008, p. 129) discuss two transformative effects of a ‘funds of knowledge’ concept. The first is the definition of the culture of the household and the second is the “debunking of the pervasive idea of households as lacking worthwhile knowledge and experiences”. They report that many educators continue to hold this unquestioning and negative perception of households and their communities. Such a view is akin to Olmedo’s (1997) argument that teachers in his study viewed their language minority students from a deficit model. He states that the operative thinking of many teachers is based on the assumption that families in the homes where English is not the primary language and where few books or reading materials are present, have little to offer that is relevant to teaching the curriculum in the schools. Gonzalez et al. (1993, para. 4) consider such a perception as an “inaccurate portrayal of children and their families”. This could result in the discouragement of “the entire family from becoming full partners in the learning and school process” (Souto-Manning & Swick 2006, p. 188).

Gee (1996, as cited in Hogg, 2011, p. 666) reports that a lot of research findings have shown the prevalence of “deficit theorizing” among teachers internationally. Moll et al. (1992) and Gonzalez (1995) explain deficit theorizing as blaming the underachievement of ethnic minority groups in schools on perceived deficiencies relating to the minority students themselves, their families and their cultures. McCarthey (2000, p. 146) defines this as “the model of cultural deficiencies” and Fennimore (2000, as cited in Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006, p. 189) describes it as the “culture deficit” stance. Such deficit views often lead to an

adoption of a transmission model of instruction that focuses on mechanics and rote learning with few opportunities for student choices.

Comber and Kamler, (2004) list a battery of illustrative nouns used by educators to describe the children and their families who are viewed under the deficit lens; nouns such as ‘the poor, the wilful, the disabled, the non-English speaking, the slow and the bottom 10%’. They believe that:

One of the most damning failures of teacher education (both pre-service and in-service), and of educational research more broadly, is that pervasive deficit discourses are still so dominant in classrooms and staffrooms; that they are reproduced in student files, educational journals and conferences, and reported as fact in media coverage of young people and schooling (Comber & Kamler, 2004, p. 293).

Sugarman (2010, p. 96) adds some more adjectives to the language used from a deficit perspective by commenting that the educational climate is suffused with deficit laden descriptors of students their families and the communities. Students are “limited English proficient, underprepared or below grade level; families are overwhelmed, checked out or confrontational; urban neighborhoods are resource deprived, drug infested, or crime ridden”. To which Hogg, (2011, p. 666) adds a plethora of inadequacies described through the deficit theorizing, such as “inadequate home literacy practices, inadequate English language, inadequate motivation, inadequate parental support and inadequate self-concept”. Zipin et al. (2012, p. 181) call such children as the “disadvantaged”. This notion of some children being disadvantaged is a result of the fundamental lack of alignment between their ‘funds of knowledge’ and those of the teacher and at large of the school (Rosebery et al., 2001; Velez-Ibanez & Greenberg, 1992). If a school adopts a view that the parents have nothing much to contribute to their children’s learning then Souto-Manning and Swick (2006, p. 187) hold the view that a “self-fulfilling prophecy of very limited roles for parents can become the primary way of functioning”.

Gonzalez et al. (1993) draw attention to the fact that educational institutions do not view working-class minority students as emerging from households rich in social and intellectual resources. They recommend that:

Rather than focusing on the knowledge these students bring to school and using it as a foundation for learning, schools have emphasized what these students lack in terms of the forms of language and knowledge sanctioned by the schools. This emphasis on so-called disadvantages has provided justification for lowered academic expectations and inaccurate portrayals of these children and their families. (Gonzalez et al., 1993, para. 4)

Moll et al. (2005) Velez-Ibanez and Greenberg (2005) and Gonzalez et al. (2005) confirm that their analysis of 'funds of knowledge' presents a positive and realistic view of households. They describe households as containing ample cultural and cognitive resources with great potential utility for classroom instructions rather than a place from which "students must be rescued" (Genzuk, 1999, p. 10). Generally all places have their own share of problems. Yet, despite their problems, they also "contain valuable knowledge and experiences that can foster educational development" (Moll & Gonzalez, 1997, p. 98). On a similar note Rios-Angular et al. (2011) and Hedges et al. (2010) recommend that one of the greatest strengths of the framework of 'funds of knowledge' is that it highlights and values the resources embedded in the children, families and the communities. Rather than viewing them as "struggling" Sugarman (2010, p. 102) chooses to view them as "strategizing" households. He argues that these families develop alternative skills and techniques for survival, which may prove very useful for facilitating learning. Like all other researchers of 'funds of knowledge' he too recommends the positive stance of recognizing the assets rather than the deficits. Such a stance can break through the "well accepted and rarely challenged" perceptions of some families and communities as "disorganized socially and deficient intellectually" (Moll & Greenberg, 1990; Moll et al., 1992, 2005). Zipin et al. (2012, p. 181) claim that a 'funds of knowledge' approach can work against such "biological deficit views".

Scrimsher and Trudge (2003, p. 308) insist that rather than viewing "deficits to be fixed" the teachers need to reflect upon themselves as having a limited knowledge of their learners which requires fixing so that they can see the "rich resources for learning" (Tenery, 2005, p. 129). Most advocates of the 'funds of knowledge' approach suggest that teachers should learn from their children and allow them to serve as their teachers as most of the "schools and teachers have such minimal knowledge of the out-of-school lives of their students that they are unable to build on their 'funds of knowledge'" (Marshall & Toohey, 2010, p. 221). Thus the 'funds of knowledge' concept initiated by Moll and colleagues not only provides a rebuttal of this deficient theory, but also opens up the richness of children's life-world experiences that tend to far exceed their school experiences (Andrew & Yee, 2006).

### **Partnership within the home, community and the school**

The developmental psychologist Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 1986) ecological theory identifies the 'multiple interlocking and nested variables' that impact the development of a child. Eberly et al. (2007) and Riojas-Cortez & Flores (2009) maintain that rather than a unidirectional relationship, an open communication that encourages a two-way exchange of knowledge

between these overlapping set of systems is imperative for the child to grow and learn. In line with this, Epstein (2001) recommends that ‘partnership’ is a better empirical approach to link the home, community and the school. He explains:

In a partnership, educators, families and community members work together to share information, guide students, solve problems and celebrate successes. Partnerships recognize the shared responsibilities of home, school and the community for children’s learning and development. (Epstein, 2001, p. 4)

Velez-Ibanez and Greenberg (1992, p. 43) report that the school based model of instruction is a “single-stranded teacher-to-student interaction” therefore nothing much “cross-cuts either generational, class, educational, ethnic, or status differences, except the single strand of informational and assessment authority directed by the teacher”. On a similar note, Ladson-Billings (1995, p. 150) points out that much of the existing work on linking students home and school culture has been limited to small scale communities and concentrated on “improving achievement in relation to White middle-class norms”. However, Cairney (2000) reports that the interest in home and school relationship as one of the most positive educational developments of the last decade and he further adds that more initiatives are being taken so as to move this relationship beyond just transmitting knowledge from school to the homes. He adds that there is “a growing desire to move towards a more genuine partnership between home and school” (Cairney, 2000, p. 172) so that a common understanding of each others’ values, beliefs and practices can be developed, a kind of understanding that Vygotsky (1978) terms as “inter-subjectivity”. Wink and Putney (2002, p. 128) define inter-subjectivity as “the collective history and mutual meanings shared by a group of people”. Such sharing can take place only through a genuine reciprocal relationship (Harry, 1992). Moll (2005, p. 280) describes such liaisons as “relationships of *confianza*”, which Christenson and Sheridan (2001) claim will develop only through a collaborative stance that focuses on equality and parity.

Cairney (2002) recommends the Tucson Academics as one of the groups of researchers who had genuinely attempted to empower parents and communities through their exploration of ‘funds of knowledge’ among the Mexican-American working class families. They explored ways of using the concept of ‘funds of knowledge’ to link students’ home and the school’s culture so that students can draw on their own prior-knowledge and become more active in learning. Greenberg (1989) describes a setting that does not tap on the richness of individual’s ‘funds of knowledge’, as a zone of under-development. A regular adoption of a zone of underdevelopment can impact the school’s culture in which “a norm of parent-teacher

isolation” (Sauto-Manning & Swick, 2006, p. 187) could become an accepted way of functioning.

Eberly, et al. (2007, p. 8) highlight that “close relationships between families and educators are built on mutual trust and respect”. They agree that developing such a relationship is difficult particularly when educators take a deficit stance towards parents. This becomes worse still when the parents themselves accept it, because they do not know enough about the school system or speak English (Moll, 2005). Eberly, et al. (2007, p. 8) encourages educators to “reach out to the parents in thoughtful and respectful ways” so that open, honest and reciprocal cultural exchanges can take place. Riojas-Cortez and Bustos Flores, (2009, p. 197) assert that such cultural exchanges will enrich educators’ understandings and equip them with the “tools to become effective teachers”.

De Acosta (1996, p. 12) recommends that family involvement practices should assure that “all families despite their occupations, income, racial or ethnic background and education, can access resources and develop different dispositions toward becoming involved in their children’s education”. This would offer parents the opportunity to observe and understand schooling. Research has demonstrated that young children's cognition develops best and they succeed academically when congruence exists between home and school (Ashton et al., 2008; Cairney, 2002; Christensen, 2003; Epstein, 2001; Epstein & Sanders, 2002, 2006; Galindo & Sheldon, 2012).

Souto-Manning and Swick (2006, p. 191) state that valuing each other’s culture is the first step to challenging the traditional paradigms of parental involvement in schools. Epstein (2001, p. 5) expresses that “without partnerships, educators segment students into the ‘school child’ and the ‘home child’, ignoring the ‘whole child’”. Therefore, I agree with Dodd and Konzal (2002, p. 290) that “since no one knows everything or has all the answers, everyone needs to work together to find better ways to educate children. And everyone has knowledge to contribute to this ongoing process”.

### **Role of the teacher**

The corpus of early literature on education describes the teacher’s role as “having to do with providing the appropriate assistance and the child’s role as using that assistance in appropriate ways” (Scrimsher & Tudge, 2003, p. 301). This unidirectional transmission of skills and concepts fail to use a more collaborative learning process that Vygotsky’s theoretical perspectives recommend.

Comber and Kamler (2006, p. 295) report that a century of investigations into literacy teaching suggests that the most important variable that can make a difference in the school are the teachers - “their expectations, their enacted curriculum, their classroom talk, their relations to young people and their actual ways of inducting students into specific textual practices that most effect outcomes”. Genzuk (1999, p. 11) posits that to be an effective teacher, he/she must have an in depth “knowledge of the culture and history of the students” being taught. Auerbach (1989, as cited in McCarthy, 2000, p. 148) suggests that any kind of literacy programs should always involve activities that are woven into the “fabric of daily life” of the learner. Teachers should “manage their roles and daily routines to enable such uninterrupted learning to occur” (Hedges et al., 2011, p. 200) by connecting the inside of the classroom to the outside world so that literacy becomes a meaningful tool for addressing issues of importance and interest to the learners. The teacher’s role demands a lot of listening carefully to children, supporting, extending and challenging their ideas and thoughts.

Freire’s (1998, p. 21) analogy of the “reading of the word” and the “reading of the world” describe the “inside classroom” and the “outside world” respectively. The reading of the world precedes the reading of the word; therefore when we learn to read the words, it evokes the experiences from the reading of the world, which then brings in new perspectives and understandings. These new perspectives and understandings link our comprehension of the words to the comprehension of the world. If enriching children’s comprehension is an obligation of the teacher, then he/she must lessen the dichotomy between the child’s reading of the word and the reading of the world. Brennan (2007, p. 7) defines the process of connecting the two worlds as “enculturation”. She says it is the “ability to respond emotionally to children and to appropriate cultural tools and practices in a way that connects children to their social and cultural contexts” which she identifies as a challenge for many teachers in a child-centred world. This demands a change of attitude in the teachers so that children and their families from different backgrounds cannot be thought of as having deficits that need to be fixed.

Fleer (2003, p. 77) maintains that we must ensure that we no longer “reproduce ourselves in the next generation of teachers” in order to avoid social reproduction of practices that are reified in out-dated early childhood discourses. Teachers need to be critically reflective (Oughton, 2010, p. 70) so that they get to know a child as a whole not merely as a student by “taking into account the multiple spheres of activity within which the child is enmeshed” (Moll, et al., 1992, p. 133). Sugarman (2010, p. 839) describes two kinds of obligations that a

teacher has to juggle in his profession, an obligation to teach children “what we need to have them do” and an obligation to value what each child brings to school “that they can do”. As the nature of these obligations is ethical, they call on the teacher, as a moral actor, to make choices. The process of redefining the teachers’ roles as thinkers and practitioners begins by the teachers redefining the resources available for thinking and teaching through the analyses of ‘funds of knowledge’ available in the households, community, children and their colleagues (Gonzalez et al., 1993). By bringing the students’ home cultures to the classroom and respecting and learning from the multiple frameworks and from the multiple definitions of parent involvements (teachers) can envision (their) roles as (dynamic) facilitators (Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006, p. 192).

Rogoff, et al., (2003, p. 183) argue that in communities where children participate in the mature activities of their family and the community, “it is superfluous for adults to organize lessons and specialized conversations just to prepare them for the school and the real world”. For all communities have valuable knowledge and experiences that can foster educational development (Moll & Gonzalez, 1997, p. 98). A ‘funds of knowledge’ concept is based on the belief that households and community knowledge can provide “strategic resources for classroom practice” (Civil, 2007, p. 3) and this belief is critical in terms of re-conceptualizing households, not as the source of barriers to educational attainment, but as repositories of resources that can be strategically tapped. Educators who perceive “homes and communities, as their defining pedagogical characteristic, in terms of the strengths and resources that they possess,” can shift the power dynamics of educational institutions by supporting an exchange of knowledge and skills between educators, students, and families (Sugarman, 2010, p. 5) thus enabling an education that far exceeds in quality the rote-like instruction that children encounter in schools (Moll et al., 1992, p. 132).

### **Inclusive and responsive pedagogy and curriculum**

Tharp and Gallimore (1988, cited in Scrimsher & Tudge, 2003, p. 302) argue that teaching is not solely about learning and assessing outcomes and neither is it about simply following children’s lead, it’s more about, “rousing minds to life” both of the teacher and the student. Ayers (1993, p. 25) asserts that teaching is a complicated interactive practice that begins and ends with seeing the student and “seeing through the eyes of the student”. Scrimsher and Tudge (2003, p. 301) explain that as “layers of mystification and obfuscation are peeled away, the student becomes more visible to the teacher, thus, experiences and ways of thinking and

knowing that were initially obscure become the ground on which real teaching can be constructed". Riojas-Cortez (2001, p. 36) notes that for the last decade, educators have been pressurized to include children's culture in their curriculum due to the fact that development and learning occur within that context.

Zipin (2009), Moll and Greenberg (1990) and Velez-Ibanez and Greenberg (1992) draw attention to the kind of pedagogy that is evident in the households and the community through which the children learn the 'funds of knowledge'. They observe that the households and the community provide multiple domains within which a child can experiment, where error is not dealt with punitively and where self-esteem is not endangered. Velez and Greenberg, (1992, p. 17) describe such a domain as the "zone of comfort", a basis of *confianza* that Moll and Greenberg (1990) believe, places children within an appropriate cultural frame for adulthood. Moll et al. (1992, p. 133) adds more aspects of the household pedagogy, the "thick and multi-stranded" relationships and the flexible, adaptive and active networks where adults get to know the child as a whole. Whereas the typical teacher-student relationship is 'thin' and 'single-stranded' based on their very limited classroom context as the teacher hardly ever attempts to draw on the child's 'funds of knowledge'. Ross (2000, cited in Thomson and Hall, 2008, p. 90) asserts that only a "process driven approach that emphasises experiential learning is more likely to mobilise children's funds of knowledge" rather than a traditional pedagogical approach that Butler, Lauscher, Jarvis-Selinger, and Beckingham, (2004, p. 436) describe as "a top-down way of disseminating knowledge".

Central to Vygotsky's cultural-historical theory of development and learning is that a child learns best when teachers create instructions that use the child's prior knowledge, for learning new knowledge and practices and which legitimizes their experiences as valid (Gonzalez, 2005, p. 43). On a similar note Callanan et al. (2001, p. 70), recommends a "contextualization" of classroom instructions which Gonzalez et al. (2005, p. 267) describes as creating a "zone of practice" where the dichotomy of in-school and out-of-school can be drawn into a dialectical practice within which students' engagements with both the contexts and the activity are fore-grounded, therefore guaranteeing them "maximum learning opportunities" (Gilliard & Moore, 2007, p. 252). Subject matter knowledge can only be understood and become functional for children if it builds on children's everyday knowledge. In this way children's cognition will change, and they will be able to use subject-matter concepts as tools for analysis and reflection in their everyday activities (Hedegaard, 1998). This concept is well illustrated in the explanation provided by Vygotsky in the differentiation

of the functions of the scientific and the spontaneous concepts. He states that in the 'scientific', a child learns the concept and its application concurrently, whereas in the 'spontaneous' a child first learns the application and only later master the abstraction for he argues that a child "cannot gain conscious awareness of what he does not have" (Vygotsky, 1987, p. 216).

An essential characteristic of the teaching and learning process is the reciprocal relationship that propagates in a network of interactions and authentic learning situations, in a "community of inquiry" (Wells, 2008) or a "community of practice" (Lave and Wenger, 1991) where teachers can learn from children while teaching and children teach teachers while learning (Scrimsher & Tudge, 2003). Brennan (2007, p. 5) notes that collaborative learning is highlighted in concepts such as 'community of inquiries' and 'community of practices', where "participants contribute to the solution of the emergent problems according to their current ability to do so" (Wells, 2000, p. 5). Such concepts of learning, attempt to shift our focus from how an individual learns to read and write to understanding "why and how, they learn through their social participation" (Cairney, 2002, p. 160) and by being a legitimate peripheral participant' (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Legitimate peripheral participation is when people who are not directly taking part in a particular activity learn a great deal from their legitimate position on the periphery (Lave & Wenger, 1991). In the process they gradually master the purpose of the activities as well as the means by which they are achieved. Azuma (1994) terms this form of learning as "osmosis". He observes that children absorb cultural skills, values and mannerisms through simply being with adults. Rogoff, et al. (2003) describe how children intentionally observe and listen-in on activities of adults and other children, which they call the "intent participation". Learning in such situations is based on the learners' 'intention' therefore the motivation is intrinsic. In intent participation, assessment is not just an outcome; it "occurs integrally throughout shared endeavours to further learning" (Rogoff et al., 2003, p. 196).

Callanan et al. (2001, p. 71) affirm that a 'funds of knowledge' approach to education leads to the construction of "anti-bias curriculum", one that makes every child feel included. Although Moll (2000, p. 264) asserts that "teachers cannot carry out household analysis of every child in the class" the study of a few children can still provide information on, "how a community is imagined and how it will be imagined in the future with new generations of students". A study of a few children can also provide "demonstrable learning outcomes that can be transferred into new curriculum challenges" (Comber & Kamler, 2004, p. 307). On a similar note,

Ladson-Billings (1995, p. 483) draws attention to an effective pedagogical practice that he terms as a “culturally relevant pedagogy” that meets three criteria: An ability to develop students academically, willingness to nurture and support cultural competence, and the development of a socio-political or critical consciousness. A key ingredient to a culturally relevant pedagogy is the awareness of the ‘funds of knowledge’ of the learners. Gonzalez et al. (2005, p. 19) recommend a “re-contextualization” of the household ‘funds of knowledge’ so that it can be utilized in the school curricula and pedagogies. Vygotsky’s social constructivist theory recommends an exploratory and collaborative approach to learning and teaching which recommends a re-conceptualization of curriculum so that the activities of the curriculum will challenge students to go beyond themselves and at the same time be able to draw on multiple sources of assistance in achieving their goals. Aoki (1991) states that:

The quality of curriculum-as-lived experiences is the heart and core as to why we exist as teachers, principals, curriculum developers and teacher educators; the curriculum planning should have as its central interest a way of contributing to the aliveness of school life as lived by teachers and students. (Aoki, 1991, as cited in Pinar and Irwin, 2005, p. 165)

Many more researchers and educationists, such as Gilliard and Moore (2007); Kennedy et al., (2006); Payne, Wilson, Corley and Jordan (2010); Stern and Kysika (2008); Thomson and Hall (2008); Walsh, McGuinness, Sproule and Trew (2010) confirm that no single curriculum is appropriate for deciding what should be taught in school, for questions about which curriculum and which textbooks are relevant are trivial unless posed within the framework of the children’s lives. By realizing the many essences of the ‘funds of knowledge’ approach and seeing how much it is in tune with the philosophy of GNH, I perceive the concept and the approach of the ‘funds of knowledge’ as an apt lens through which to view and review this enquiry process and its findings.

### **Conclusion**

This theoretical framework is rooted in the social constructivist theories of learning that assume learners actively construct their own understandings within a social context (Vygotsky, 1978). Researchers such as: Moll and Greenberg (1990); Moll (2001); Gay (2000); Gonzalez (2005); Gonzalez et.al. (1992, 2005); Hedges (2010); Rogoff (2003); Moll et al. (1992); Riojas-Cortez (2001); Civil (2007); Sugarman (2010); Velez-Ibanez and Greenberg (1992); Vygotsky (1978,1987), and Zipin et al. (2012) believe that individuals, households and communities have crucial knowledge to share; a knowledge that has popularly been named as their ‘funds of knowledge’. Gaining a good understanding of the social context

and their local 'funds of knowledge' is of paramount importance if teachers are to have a holistic view of their learner and their families and also be able to use that knowledge in enriching their classroom teachings and learning. For Noddings (2005, cited in Salsbury, 2008, p. 31) comments that the children we teach "are whole persons, not mere collections of attributes, some to be addressed in one place and the others to be addressed elsewhere". An in-depth understanding of the positive approaches of the 'funds of knowledge' concept led me to a suitable methodology that could help me experience for myself what this concept means in a Bhutanese context. Chapter 4 is the methodology that was carefully put together to achieve the objectives of this enquiry.

## CHAPTER 4

*Visual ethnography, as I interpret it, does not claim to produce an objective or truthful account of reality, but should aim to offer versions of ethnographers' experiences of reality that are as loyal as possible to the context, the embodied, sensory and affective experiences, and the negotiations and inter-subjectivities through which the knowledge was produced.*

(Pink, 2013, p. 35)

## METHODOLOGY

### Introduction

Choosing a suitable methodology for the inquiry began with exploring what other researchers with a similar focus had employed. I needed to select the most feasible and effective methods and principles to meet the objectives of my inquiry. Research concerning human studies often uses qualitative ethnographic methods within a socio-cultural or an ecological framework (Vygotsky, 1978, 1987; Bronfenbrenner 1979, 1986). As mentioned in Chapter 2, most of the 'funds of knowledge' studies used a combination of open-ended questionnaires, participant observations, case studies and field notes. Some other researchers such as, Moje et al., (2004); Fler, (2004); Kennedy et al., (2006); Andrew et al., (2006); Thomson & Hall, (2008); Martin-Jones & Saxena, (2003) used cameras and video recorders to collect data. Some other interesting methods used were the participation of children as researchers by Mercado (1992) and Olmedo (1997), the use of "readers' theatre" by Eberly et al. (2007) and inviting parents to keep observation dairies (Cumming, 2003). A close examination of studies by the Tucson Academics and others provided me with ideas for the design of a suitable methodology for the context of the inquiry. Different research methods suit different research questions, so it is important to employ a methodology that best answers a research query and which is comfortable for both the researcher and the participant (Flick, 2014). After much exploration and considerable thought, an interpretive inquiry approach within a socio-cultural paradigm was deemed apt to study the 'funds of knowledge' of a small population of four children, four to six year olds, and their families in the context of their home, community and the school for a period of four months in a western district in Bhutan.

In the Tucson Academics' studies on the 'funds of knowledge' of the Mexican families, they do not give direct voice to the household participants in their studies, except through the interpretations of the teacher-researchers. However, in my inquiry process I blended the participants' voices with the researcher's voice in order to provide authenticity to the narratives and the analysis. Although it may not be possible to share an equal authorship, it is

important to co-construct data and narratives with participants where possible (Goldman-Segall, 1998).

The Tucson Academics' studies placed emphasis on the labour history of the families because of the context of their studies. Cathy Amanti, one of the teacher-researchers in the Tucson projects, comments that, "if we were simply eliciting labour history associated with categories of work in the formal economic sector, we would risk both devaluing and missing many of the experiences of our students and their families" (Gonzalez et al. 1993, para. 31). Because of this I paid special attention to the factors that were more common in a Bhutanese context such as social network, cultural practices, ideologies and labour histories so that the data from the households were not determined by a "few predetermined variables" (Ellis, 2006, p. 115). Bearing in mind Spindler and Spindler (1990, p. 20) suggestion that "a state of mind is more important than specific techniques"; I endeavoured to keep an open mind throughout the inquiry process.

When choosing the participants, the Tucson Academics allowed themselves wide latitude for the selection of households. Some of them used a lottery system whilst others chose a family they knew or wanted to know more about. I had to give a lot more thought to the selection of my households, as a class of Bhutanese students can consist of children from different regions of the country; say from the east, south, central and western Bhutan and each region has a different dialect and different ways of doing things. For this reason a more careful and 'purposive selection' (Berg & Lune, 2004; Neuman, 2005) of participants gives a better representation of the larger population, even if these participants were not expected to fully represent the Bhutanese population at large. Velez-Ibanez and Greenberg (1992, p. 325) in their study of Mexican families comment that, "the same phenomena may extend to the other middle-class Mexican-American households". However, to see "beyond stereotypes" (Moll et al., 1992) I tried not to generalize, although due to the very small population of Bhutan, I too could share Velez-Ibanez and Greenberg's views.

With each family I spent a day a week as a participant-observer. When the Tsigjab Middle Secondary School (TMSS) reopened on the 10<sup>th</sup> of February for the start of the 2012 academic year, I went along with the children and their families to the school for the first four weeks. My prior familiarity with most members of the families and the school gave me the vantage of a "natural entrée" (Gonzalez et al., 2005; Moll et al., 1992) into their homes, community and the school. Such familiarity made the inquiry process very comfortable and pleasant for both

the participants and the researcher. My role as a participant-observer at the homes, community and the school began in the first week of December 2011 and ended in the last week of March 2012.

The remainder of this chapter outlines the methodological approaches; the conceptual underpinnings for the various methods; followed by the conduct of the study; the limitations and ethical procedures.

### **Methodological location of the research**

Creswell (2013) defines “world view” or “paradigm” as a general orientation about the world and the nature of research that a researcher holds. In other words, it is the way we see the world and, in accordance with that view, the way we organize it into a meaningful whole. I understood that what I learnt from the research depended on the kind of paradigm with which I chose to view it.

### **An interpretive inquiry within a sociocultural paradigm**

Ellis (1998, p. 52) explains that “theoria” in Greek means “behold or contemplate”. Therefore, an interpretive inquiry theory endeavours to behold and contemplate the whole complexity of life. Packer and Addison (1989, p. 277) explain that interpretive inquiry is “the working out of possibilities that have become apparent in a preliminary, dim understanding of events”. Ellis (2006) claims that the interpretive inquiry research method should finally lead to something useful and important, which Angen (2000) describes as being moved to a new level of understanding that enlightens the researcher with a deeper understanding of the human condition under study. It was by the adoption of such lenses that this inquiry intended to uncover a much deeper understanding of the issues that were the focus of the study.

I too believe in the epistemology of human beings not finding or discovering knowledge, but of constructing or making it (Gadamer, 1998). Ellis (1998, p. 16) rightly asserts “one makes the path by walking it”. Interpretive inquiry follows the principles of philosophical hermeneutics (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Ellis, 1998; Gadamer, 1998; Jardine, 1998, 2000; Smith, 1991, 1992, 2002) in the sense that it does not believe in the ontology of the real or the objectivism with respect to meaning and endorses the fact that there is never a final correct interpretation. Meaning is negotiated mutually in the act of interpretation and not simply discovered (Smith, 1992; Bailey, 1997; Angen, 2000). No interpretation is uniquely right or wrong for multiple interpretations can be given to experiences that take place in a particular setting and time; therefore, they are always open to further interpretations (Smith, 1992; Ezzy,

2002). We invent concepts, models and schemes to make sense of experience, and we continually test and modify these constructions in the light of new experiences. Furthermore there is an inevitable historical and socio-cultural dimension to this construction. Schwandt (2000, p. 197) asserts: “We do not construct our interpretations in isolation but against a backdrop of shared understandings, practices, language and so forth”. Realizing that one cannot be separated from one’s interpretations, this research does not aspire to assume an all encompassing truth, instead it offers a “fusion of horizons” (Gadamer, 1994, as cited in Scott and Usher, 1999, p. 33), both the intersecting as well as separate horizons of the researcher and the participant (Geanellos, 2000). Goldman-Segall (1998, p. 4) terms this process of fusing horizons as the expansion of our “points of viewing by including others’ points of viewing”. The researchers’ points of view and their own horizons create a temporal gap, which is the productive ground of all understanding, rather than an impediment to be overcome (Gadamer, 1994). Schwandt (2001) contends that reaching an understanding is not about setting aside one’s own standpoint, prejudgement, biases or prejudices. On the contrary prejudices are the very kinds of prejudgements necessary to pave our way in every day thought, conversation and action, for it is inevitable that the depictions of a situation depend a lot on the depicter’s interests, purposes and values (Smith, 1992). The point is not to block the historically inherited and unreflectively held prejudices, but to examine them and alter those that disable our efforts to understand others and ourselves (Garrison, 1996). The interpretations I make of my data, illustrates the particular perspectives I bring to the data, from the point of view of an early childhood educator, a primary teacher educator and a mother. Others would also bring their own interpretations to it in ways that they perceive as meaningful (Smith, 1992).

For richer data collection and analysis procedures, the inquiry process employed an interpretive inquiry methodology based on the key principles of philosophical hermeneutics. Thompson (1990) explains that the term hermeneutics originated from the name of a Greek god, Hermes, whose job was to interpret and relay clear messages between the gods. In a similar manner, I generated meanings that are varied and multiple through a process of continuous interaction and negotiation between the participants and myself as the participant-observer. We continually made sense of situations and negotiated with each other over the meanings of our own actions and circumstances in a particular social and cultural context.

For the development of a more adequate interpretation, Ellis (1998, 2006) and Smith (1991, 1992, 2002), explain three central themes in hermeneutics. The first theme is the creative

character of interpretation where the interpreter works holistically on the meanings behind every expressions observed so that one can clearly differentiate between a ‘wink and a blink’ in a particular context; the second theme is the constant movement back and forth between the expression and the myriad of meanings.

Smith (1991) states that:

To understand a part, one must understand the whole, and to understand the whole, one must understand the individual parts. One can visualize this back and forth movement between the part and the whole, a movement that has no natural starting or end point, as ‘the hermeneutic circle at work in all human understanding’. (Smith, 1991, p. 190)

It is through such a mincing of meanings that a researcher can produce meaningful, “thick descriptions” (Geertz, 1994) which Goldman-Segall (1998) describes as “multilayered” and Pink (2013) elaborates as descriptions that are as true as possible to the context, negotiations and inter-subjectivities through which the knowledge was produced.

The third theme is the role of language in human understanding; the language available to the interpreter can both enable and limit the understanding. In the case of this research, the interpreter’s ability to speak the different languages spoken by the participants was an advantage in understanding each other better and also in developing a sense of camaraderie between the researcher and the participants.

### **Data Generation Methods**

To collect a substantial and rich amount of relevant data, a combination of a visual method alongside the more conventional methods of interview, observation, and field notes were used in this study. Data gathered informed the subsequent analysis, findings and interpretations of the inquiry. Some methods developed in the field, as is natural of studies intending to understand the lived experiences of people and places (Berg & Lune, 2004; Merriam, 1998, 2009; Walsh, et al., 1993; Smith, 2002). It is not always possible to have a tailor-made method in advance as, “what is being investigated holds at least part of the answer to how it should be investigated” (Smith, 2002, p. 190). For instance I never thought of mobile phones as an option for taking photographs; an option used by one of the families on their village trip when they forgot to take the camera that I had provided them with. In most contexts both the participants and I made the best use of the methods to serve the purpose of the research rather than let the research serve the purpose of the method (McGuigan, 1997).

The following is a discussion on the assorted methods and tools that made it possible to collect rich data for the study.

## Visual Ethnography

As this inquiry endeavors to study human experiences in a particular cultural context, I believe that it could be called an ethnographic study. However, as the term, “ethnography” carries many differing understandings of what the research might consist of, I feel the need to clarify my position on ethnography and in particular the relationship between ethnography and visual ethnography. Punch (2005, p. 154) confirms that “an ethnographic approach can sensitize us to the cultural context and symbolic significance of behaviour we need to understand, in a way that other research approaches cannot”. Merriam (2009, p. 29) states “to be an ethnographic study, the lens of *culture* must be used to understand the phenomenon” and Johnson (2004, p. 369) defines the word ‘culture’ in educational ethnographic studies as “the cultural characteristics of small groups of people or other cultural scenes or events as they relate to educational issues”. In summary, an ethnographic approach provides a holistic account of the people, their beliefs, values and practices in a particular socio-cultural setting or context (Siraj-Blatchford & Siraj-Blatchford, 2001). This holistic understanding of people and place is what the Tucson Academics termed the ‘funds of knowledge’. In this inquiry I aimed to explore the ‘funds of knowledge’ of the children, their families and the teachers in a particular community familiar to me. Evans (2012) states that:

Doing ethnography involves, not only learning over time about the perspective of “the other” but also having to cope with the existential dilemma of learning or challenging everything that was considered to be objectively normal about ones’ own life before undertaking fieldwork research. It is this gaining of a self-conscious reflexive perspective on oneself and one’s own people and not just the other that allows for the possibility that ethnography can be both a life changing method and a critical consciousness-raising project. (Evans, 2012, p. 99)

One area, which needs further explanations regarding the use of the term “ethnographic approach” in this study, is the duration of the field study. The general understanding is that an ethnographic study is usually associated with a field study of a particular cultural context of longer duration. This four-month study might seem comparatively short. In the case of this study the short duration could be compensated for by the researcher’s prior knowledge of the context in general as well as her being a part of that culture all her life. The enquirer’s own background shaped the interpretations of the meanings of the others’ view of their world (Creswell, 2013). Pink (2013, p. 22) adds that “ethnography is a process of creating and representing knowledge (about society, culture, and individuals) that is based on the ethnographer’s own experiences”. In this case, the researcher already has a deep social, cultural and historical understanding of the lives of the participants. In the four months of

study, I selectively focused my ethnographic lens to uncover and more deeply understand the ‘funds of knowledge’ of the four families and the school in a way that I had not been able to before. In other words, this inquiry process was a learning experience in which the partial knowledge that I had of Bhutanese families and of the schooling system became much enriched by engaging in ethnographic practices with the participating families and teachers.

The main data-generation tools used in this study were cameras, video and audio recorders. Advances in electronics have made such equipment affordable and user friendly for most people (Pole & Morrison, 2003). Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead used visual ethnographic methodologies as early as 1942. Since then ethnography has increasingly integrated visual images within its practice (Banks, 2001; Brooks, 2002; Crang & Cook, 2007; Collier, 1967; Goldman-Segall, 1998; Pink, 2001, 2007, 2013; Pink, Kurti & Afonso, 2004; Prosser, 1998; Stanczak, 2007). Researchers have found that videos and photographs have the ability to represent things like gesture, expressions, and sense of emotion, dialogue, and contexts in ways that written notes do not. Pink (2013) states that:

Visual ethnography does not claim to produce an objective or truthful account of reality, but should aim to offer versions of ethnographer’s experiences of reality that are as loyal as possible to the context, the embodied, sensory and affective experiences, and the negotiations and inter-subjectivities through which the knowledge was produced. (Pink, 2013, p. 35)

In visual ethnographic practice, the researcher becomes a “participant-recorder” (Goldman-Segall, 1998, p.35). Moreover, by using audio, video and visual equipment I was able to concentrate on the person and the subtleties of the conversation rather than getting distracted by trying to remember or write down the details. Therefore, for this inquiry process, a visual ethnographic practice was favoured.

Blommaert and Jie (2010, p. 43) term body language or something that comments on the action as “meta-pragmatic”. Meta-pragmatic is difficult to capture when writing on the spot (Flick, 2006). Moreover I am a very visual person, when I have conversations with participants I need to see their faces as I listen to them. Making notes on the spot at times became inconvenient, yet I do recognise the importance of research notes. Ellis (1998, p. 32) recommends “self-conscious reflection” as the signature of an interpretive inquiry based study. So at the end of each day I reflected on the day’s activities, went through the visual and the audios and made notes.

Visual methods open up whole new ways of seeing the worlds we study by enabling a focus on the emotions, the sensual, and the artistic and creative elements. The use of visual methods

provides the opportunity to view “life as it is lived accurately recorded as it happens” (Plummer, 2001, as cited in O’Reilly, 2009, p. 66). Moreover having recordings constantly available for playback and analysis is a good crosscheck for anything missed or misinterpreted. Denscombe (1998, p. 151) rightly comments that memories can be “selective and frail”. The need to make notes as soon as possible after the observation, preferably at the end of each day or half day (Pole & Morrison, 2003) was to some degree, relaxed because the video recordings or still photographs could be revisited as many times as needed.

Images can be used as points of reference in presentation of the data. Sometimes a picture can convey meanings better than words. For instance, a photo of Boju’s shop portrays what a ‘*paan* shop’ looks like more instantly and clearly than I could describe it in words. Ball and Smith (1992) assert that visual information of what the people and their world look like provide an authentication that pure narrative alone might not. An ethnographer need not be an expert in photography or video recording. It is important to remember that the main focus is the “ethnographic concern rather than the cinematic strategies” (Schembri & Boyle, 2013, p. 139). Digital media provide entire new ways to represent and present data (O’Reilly, 2009). At times it is easy to become seduced by the media and overlook the fact that it is just another tool. One might be led to believe that a ‘camera does not lie’. However, one has to be aware that tools are extensions of the people who use them and that images taken can tell us as much about the cameraperson as the content of image they take. The ‘point of view’ of the photographer is as important in visual ethnography as the philosophical position of the narrator (Pink, 2013; Goldman-Segall, 1998). Just as reality is not solely visible, digital media and images too have no fixed or single meanings. The best one can expect is that they allow “one to interpret the visible aspects and the elements of experience that are evoked through (them)” (Pink, 2013, p. 32). Visual images are like field notes that require the collaboration of the participants to interpret the meanings (Harper, 2002; Harrison, 2002).

In this inquiry process, cameras were used both by researcher and participants. The photographs were not just an “illustration of sociological endeavour” (Bolton, Pole, & Mizen, 2001, p. 502) or “a technical means to an end” (Harrison, 2002, p. 864) but more a part of data creation. A substantial amount of information about the home, community and the school was gleaned through the discussions of the photographs that the children and their families had taken of their lives. Harper (2003, p. 244) claims that photographs are “not so much to claim ‘this is what it is’, but to create a dialogue around the competing and complementary meanings of images”. Discussions that surrounded the images were important sources for

informing the researcher of a range of perspectives rather than images illustrating ethnographic evidence (Pink, 2013). Collier (1967, p. 2) describes the camera as “an extension of our senses and perception, but one that is highly unspecialized and can record on the lowest possible scale of abstraction, therefore making it the most valuable tool for the observer”. The photographs established my entry to an interview or conversation and also made wordless probes that lead to the heart of the research. As expected, the families loved looking through the photographs and chatting about them. It always provided a good ‘starter’ for rich conversations and “potentially encouraged member disclosure” (Schembri & Boyle, 2013, p. 1252).

### ***Auto-photography***

Crang and Cook (2007, p. 111) describe auto-photography as an activity where “the researcher encourages or commissions participants to take pictures of their environment or activities, through which the researcher can learn more about how the participants understand and interpret their world and themselves within it”. Some other researchers call this method “participants as image makers” (Bolton et al., 2001; Harper, 1998; Harrison, 2002). In this inquiry process, I was not the only data generator, the participants too took responsibilities for collecting data and the ultimate interpretations were negotiated and collaborative (Pink, 2013). Each of the four families and the pre-primary (PP) teacher of TMSS were given a camera to take photographs of events or activities that they thought were worth capturing in their everyday life at home, in community, in classes and in school. Auto-photography made the inquiry processes a collaborative venture between participants and researcher. Clark (2001, 2010) describes this as researching *with* the participants rather than *on* them, which made building of trust and rapport between the two parties much easier and more enjoyable. Letting the participants make their own images helped the researcher gain meaningful “uncovering” (Ellis, 1998, p. 54) without intrusion. The children shared cameras with their parents; consequently they became “active participant rather than passive subjects” (Bolton et al., 2001, p. 504). Cameras enable young children to express themselves in a medium that is enjoyable for them and has status in an adult world (Clark & Moss, 2001). The children in this inquiry were able to show their parents and grandparents how to use the cameras once the basics were explained to them.

Bloustien and Baker (2003) and Clark-Ibanez (2007) comment that cameras in the hands of participants can give the researcher access to their lives that in ordinary fieldwork would not happen. It was through the many photographs that participants brought back from their distant

village visits and their enthusiastic interpretations of them, that they were able to transport me virtually to those places and events. For instance, their photos and interpretations gave me a realistic feel of the six-hour trudge up the mountain to Nima's ancestral house in the east. I could almost feel the warmth of the ceremonial fire beside which sat the bride and the groom as the *pandit* (Hindu religious man) chanted the ceremonial prayers and see Bishaka running around with her friends with *mehendi* (herbal colour) on her hands. It was amazing how cameras could venture where I could not. Van Manen (1990, p. 98) assures us that when "participants become co-investigators; they often invest more than a passing interest in the research", which I thought was true, for I was touched by the keen initiatives that the four families took to photograph as many activities as possible so that they could share parts of their lives with me, when I was not able to participate personally. For instance, one of the participants who was unable to take the camera to a wedding made an effort to collect some photos from the others who were attending a wedding. She was very keen to show me what weddings looked like in her village. Bloustien and Baker (2003, p. 68) rightly state that "images are records of their personal everyday experiences, their own micro culture and even more importantly from their own perspectives". Although the photos were not very clear, Boju and Bishaka's explanations and interpretations made the whole event very vivid. The participants' photographs and their interesting explanations and interpretations about them formed the main data of this inquiry process.

### ***Photo-elicitation***

Harper (1998, p. 35) describes photo-elicitation as a "model of collaboration in research". He adds that photographs can be used in conjunction with interviews and ethnographic fieldwork as eliciting techniques (Harper, 2002). Cappello and Hollingsworth (2008, p. 444) further emphasizes that "the power of photography lies in its ability to be a source of data as well as a tool for eliciting data when employed as a stimulus". The photo-elicitation method had its beginnings in the 1967 when the visual anthropologist, John Collier first used it as a model for collaborative research where the researcher became a listener who encouraged the dialogues to continue.

When participants viewed the photographs I took, they interpreted my visualization of reality and when I viewed the participants' photographs, I interpreted their visualization of reality (Pink, 2013). The interpretation of images depended on the varied understandings of reality by the respective viewers (Pink, 2013; Harper, 1998; Goldman-Segall, 1998) which when discussed, resulted in a much richer understanding of experiences of realities such as beliefs,

feelings, priorities and values. This method allowed a more transparent and mutual discovery and creativity for both researcher and participants. Clark-Ibanez (2007, p. 194) adds, “No other type of fieldwork yields richer data than photo-elicitation does”. The photos that the participants took often evoked significant personal meanings, which stirred “deep emotional significance, sometimes associated with joyful or painful memories” (Pink, 2004, p. 68). For instance, a participant was looking at a photograph of a birthday celebration, which brought a touch of melancholy on her face. The mother remembered that the photo was taken when she just had two children, but she now had five children and could no longer financially afford to celebrate such occasions. Another time my curiosity about a grandma’s nose ring in the photograph lead to a long explanation from Bishaka on the correct term for the ring in her language and all the details of when a person is allowed to wear it. Harrison (2002, p. 864) aptly comments that, “it is the reflexivity between image and verbalization which produces the data for the investigator”. Photos therefore were a powerful, comfortable and enjoyable means for the participants to share their stories with me.

### **Participant-observation (PO)**

Angen (2000, p. 385) holds that “interpretive research depends on the inter-subjective creation of meaning and understanding”. Vygotsky (1978, 1987) explains the term ‘inter-subjectivity’ as a creation of common understanding of each other’s values, beliefs and practices. As a methodological requirement and to better understand the inter-subjective meanings of human experiences, I had to participate in the life worlds of my participants (Schwandt, 2000; Van Manen, 1990). Dewalt, Dewalt (2011, p. 4) describe this participation as “hanging out” and Clifford (1997, p. 188) describes as a “deep hanging out”. Epistemologically, this paradigm required the inquirer to take the role of both participant and observer in the whole process of the inquiry; a role that Merriam (1998) describes as a participant-observer (PO). Dewalt et al. (1998, p. 261) caution that the PO approach “disallows selective learning about people”. This aspect of the PO role suited my inquiry, as I did not intend to concentrate too assiduously on any particular household culture, as the concept of ‘funds of knowledge’ required a more holistic experience of the participants’ lives.

Atkinson and Hammersley (1994) describe PO as:

The epistemology of participant observation rests on the principle of interaction and the reciprocity of perspectives between the social actors. The rhetoric is thus egalitarian: observer and observed as inhabitants of a shared social and cultural field, their respective cultures different but equal and capable of mutual recognition by virtue of a shared humanity. (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994, p. 256)

As a participant-observer I could learn about the participants in their natural setting by taking part in and observing their activities (Dewalt et al., 1998; Dewalt & Dewalt, 2011). These prolonged engagements could not only assure trustworthiness and rapport between my participants and myself (Guba & Lincoln, 1994), but also gave access to the “backstage culture” (De Munck, 1998, p. 43) and to the many unscheduled events in the lives of the participants. For example, two of the mothers arranged days for me to attend their special religious ceremonies. On another occasion, one of the children decided to take me to meet her physically disabled aunt. Gaining the participants’ trust was very important as this made a difference to how much of their lives they were willing to disclose to me. The participants in the study often discussed with me their personal matters, both comfortably and confidingly, which sometimes tested my emotional and ethical responsibility.

For four months I was a participant-observer on a ‘partial immersion’ basis in the homes, community and school of my participants. Delamont (2007, p. 206) describes “partial immersion” as when the researcher visited the field on a daily basis and returned home for the night. Whether it was a total or partial immersion, a full engagement in the culture was a *sine-qua-none* so that the result is a “theorized account of the culture studied with ethnographic methods” (Delamont, 2007, p. 207). Through my role as a participant-observer, I closely observed all that I could with regards to the local ‘funds of knowledge’, the children’s adjustment and adaptations to the new school environment and the different roles the family, the children and the teacher played in their daily activities.

### **Semi-structured interviews and conversations**

Ellis (2006) claims that interviews are the most frequently used tools in qualitative research to learn about people’s thoughts and experiences. During the informal interviews or the conversations that I had with my participants we were always engaged in making meaning of the research topic. In order to understand the other person’s constructions of reality, I found it very useful to question them in a way that allowed them to respond in their own terms and in a depth, which addressed the rich context that was the substance of their meanings, rather than by imposing my priorities. Often the object was not simply to get answers to questions, but to learn what the topic of the research meant for the participants (Ellis, 2006).

O’Reilly (2009, p. 126) describes an unstructured interview as “much more free flowing and formless” just like normal conversations. He adds that the interviewer is likely to have no more than a list of topics to cover or a guide to themes. In my inquiry the form of the

interview was more like a conversation than an interview. I was able to insert questions as and when I felt right and the respondent was able to answer at leisure and in ways that suited her or him. Blommaert and Jie (2010, p. 46) define conversation as “not an interrogation, it is talk between people on a variety of topics, which emphasises topics, not questions because not all there is to be found out can be found out by asking”. Pole and Morrison (2003, p. 30) contend that “unstructured interviews are powerful tools in the ethnographers’ kit because they explore the worlds of the participants from their own perspectives”. It was both culturally and methodologically more appropriate that I used a relaxed, open-ended and conversational approach to the home observations. I needed to work in a manner that was responsive to the particular situation as well as to the child and the family.

Crang and Cook (2007) observe that a one-off interview can only scratch the surface of an interviewee’s life, which then fails the purpose of an ethnographic study. During the several visits to the households and the schools, I carried out a series of conversations with different members of the households as and when convenient and appropriate for both parties. With the focus group (FG) members I had to adopt a few “grand-tour questions” (Seidman, 1991) or “trigger questions” (Ashton et al., 2008) in order to open up free flow of conversations on the issues of interest for the study as there was only one FG interview for each of the five schools. With the families, no ‘trigger questions’ were required as the purpose of the inquiry was to study how the families lived their day-to-day existence and how they interpreted them. Conversations flowed naturally as I mingled with them in their home and community contexts.

### **Focus group interview/conversations**

The focus group was originally a particular type of group interview used in marketing and political research and also for psychotherapy. Now the term is used interchangeably with group interview (Punch, 2005; Crang & Cook, 2007). Crang and Cook (2007, p. 91) affirm that “a focus group interview is valuable to ethnographic and related qualitative research because it illustrates and explores the inter-subjective dynamics of thought, speech and understanding” of the participants. I used FG interviews with the PP teachers in the four primary schools. In each school there were five PP teachers participating in the FG conversations. As there were no specific structured questions used in these group discussions, the discussions flowed more easily and naturally like conversations. Some of the areas of focus that guided the conversations were; challenges and gratifications of being a PP teacher; their perception of the PP child; and their perception of teaching and learning theories and

practices within the philosophy of 'Educating for GNH'. Discussions in these areas provided insights into the beliefs and the practices of the teacher participants as well as the normal culture of the schools.

In the group interviews my role was more of a moderator or facilitator rather than an interviewer. I facilitated the group interaction with occasional prompts and probes towards the topics or the questions relevant to the research. I agree with Punch (2005) that well facilitated group interactions bring to the surface views and perceptions of the participants without their feeling targeted, which at times can occur in a one-on-one interview. A usual system in Bhutan is the serving of tea and snacks in between the meetings, which relaxes the whole atmosphere. Over cups of hot tea on the cold winter days, the FG meetings in the five schools went very cordially and fruitfully.

### **Field notes**

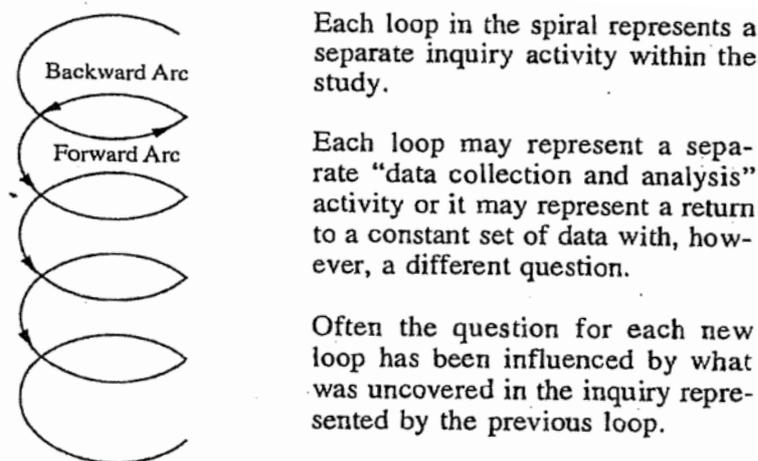
Although the video recordings provided both fine grained descriptions that concentrated on minute details and lessened ambiguity by providing both visual and audio modes for analysis (Goldman-Segall, 1998), I did not want to rule out the use of notes wherever possible. Notes were a good supplement on top of the other data gathering tools. As Hammersley and Atkinson (1995, p. 175) state: "A research project can be as well organized and as theoretically sophisticated as you like, but with inadequate note-taking the exercise will be like using an expensive camera with poor-quality film, which results in blurred pictures". Clear and well-recorded field notes have the power to evoke images of the time and place even if read much later. Sometimes I felt the need to note down the kinds of feeling, thinking, experiences and perceptions of both the participants and myself; some of the things that were difficult to capture with visual aids. Field notes enabled me to retrace and explicate pertinent information relating to the core themes of the research. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995, p. 192) maintain that the provision of such "natural history" of the research is a crucial component of the complete ethnography. They further posit that ethnography is produced as much by how we write as by the processes of data collection and analysis. How we write is directly linked to how we read; the use of various figures of speech in writing constructs recognizable and plausible reconstructions of social actors, actions, settings and analytic themes.

Richardson (1994) identified writing as a legitimate method of inquiry that produces data in a way that is attended to. She adds, "Settling words together in new configurations let us see

and feel the world in new dimensions” (Richardson, 1994, p. 522). Based on her writing experiences, she introduced four categories of note making; observation notes, methodological notes, theoretical notes and personal notes. In particular visual and audio methods required supplementation with personal notes. As and when required, I used Richardson’s note making framework to write down things after a home or school visit. While in the field playing the role of a participant-observer, it was not very feasible to take notes. It was much easier talking with others with the small camcorder or the audio recorder placed in a strategic place. My note making often took place at the end of the day, when I went through the visuals and recalled the events of the day.

### Data Analysis

Data collection and data analysis in ethnography are said to be “congruent” or “alternating” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995; Johnson, 2004; Pole & Morrison, 2003; Wolcott, 2008). At the end of each day, the data collected had to be roughly analysed so as to guide the next day’s activities. Thus it was a cyclic process for the whole duration of the fieldwork. As recommended by Ellis (1998), to track the progress and development of a research based on an interpretive inquiry it was useful to visualize the process of data collection and analysis as a series of loops in a spiral as shown in Figure 4.1.



**Figure 4.1. Interpretive Inquiry as an unfolding spiral (Ellis, 1998, p. 20)**

Merriam (2009) points out that at the heart of ethnography is the ‘thick description’, a description of the meanings that the participants make of their lives, supplemented by the researcher’s interpretation (Wolcott, 2008). However, I was aware that great care had to be taken to avoid the charges of relativism so that the research product could be presented as being based on the reality of the situation that it sought to understand and not merely the opinion of

the ethnographer (Pole & Morrison, 2003). Although Smith (1992) adds that no knowledge or observation is theory-free and that they are always influenced by the interests, purposes and the value of the observer, in my inquiry process it was preferable to generally adopt a holistic approach to data collection rather than using a ‘categories-first approach’ (Ellis, 2006, p. 112). At times it could not be denied that the theoretical and methodological information gleaned before the field work in some ways directed my gaze to particular aspects of social reality and sharpened my ears and eyes for particular phenomena and events which lead to the identification of themes and patterns (Blommaert & Jie, 2010).

The data collection and analysis was guided by the conceptual framework of ‘funds of knowledge’ and by two overarching questions:

*How can a teacher better understand the knowledge, culture, values and strengths of the homes, community and the school of the PP children and their families?*

*How can the knowledge of the children, families and the community be of use in building culturally, historically and socially sensitive and meaningful experiences for PP children that are consonant with Bhutan’s effort in ‘Educating for GNH’?*

To answer these questions, the analysis of the data gleaned is organized into two interpretive levels. The first comprises Chapters 5 to 9, which are the narrative stories of the families and the school and the second more intensive interpretative analysis comprises two chapters; Chapter 10 - The family ‘funds of knowledge’ and Chapter 11-The school ‘funds of knowledge’. In the next two sections I provide brief introductions to the kind of analysis carried out in these chapters.

### **The family and school stories (Chapters 5 to 9)**

Moll and Greenberg (1990), Velez-Ibanez and Greenberg (1992) and Sanchez (1999) believe that stories share culturally internalized and historically transformed sets of knowledge and problem-solving skills needed to survive within a particular social environment. Sanchez (1999, p. 352) adds that within the stories are embedded the various cultural themes, values, norms and also the skills, ideas, rituals and practices, which are essential to the later generations’ wellbeing. Sarbin (1986, cited in Ellis, 2006) describes narratives as the ‘root metaphor of experience’. The narrative stories of the four families and the school in Chapters 5 to 9 are the initial analysis. Their purpose is to provide the readers with a “sense of being there” (Stake, 1995, p. 63), particularly for those who are not familiar with Bhutan. They set the scene for the later chapters that analysis the home and the school ‘funds of knowledge’. These stories are lived experience descriptions of the participants, which give clarity to the

inquiry, and they are a “powerful way to support a reader’s fusion of horizons with the text” (Ellis, 1998, p. 61). In brief, Goldman- Segall (1998, p. 22) asserts that “telling a good story touches on issues concerning point of views”. These narratives are the researcher’s ‘point of view’ of the four families and the TMSS. I agree with Greg et al. (2010) and Pink (2013) that what I understood as true or real was always the product of my experiences and social interactions guided by the theoretical lens used to understand that version.

### **Further interpretive analysis of the home and the school (Chapters 10 and 11)**

Chapters 10 and 11 present further interpretive accounts of the home and school that attempt to answer the research questions. By going through the audio and visual texts, transcriptions and the notes several times and by writing and rewriting the stories, common themes and patterns emerged out of the families and the school stories (Mead, 2003). Van Manen (1990, p. 90) gives a very picturesque description of themes as “ knots in the webs of our experience around which certain lived experiences are spun and thus lived through as meaningful wholes”. The themes gave names to the kind of ‘funds of knowledge’ that were evident and were being experienced by the participants in the social contexts in which they lived and worked. Each theme started with a relevant anecdote to portray the ‘point or cogency’ of the theme (Van Manen, 1990). Chapter 10 analyses the families’ home ‘funds of knowledge’ under seven themes that are very close to the variables described for GNH and some of the more specific household cultures. Chapter 11 analyses the school ‘funds of knowledge’ through the families and the children’s experiences of the school. Their experiences of the first year in school illustrate the gaps between the home and the school ‘funds of knowledge’. This chapter also discusses the possible connections and positive changes that could be a result of a deeper understanding of the ‘funds of knowledge’ concept and approach.

### **The inquiry process**

#### **Site**

The first site of the inquiry was at the homes and the communities of the four children who all lived in different parts of a community in the western part of Bhutan, the details of which are illustrated in Chapters 5 to 9. Bearing in mind the limited time available for data collection, I chose families whose houses were quite close to the school as well as to my own house so that frequent and longer duration visits could be made to the houses and the school. When the schools re-opened after the winter vacation, the second site of the inquiry was conducted in the TMSS where all the four children enrolled into the PP class of 2012. More

details on the school are provided in Chapter 9. This school was chosen because of the Principal's interest in the research project and also because of the inquirer's familiarity with the teachers and students in the school. In addition, four other primary schools in the same area were visited for the FG conversations with the PP teachers in these schools. The schools for the FG conversations were chosen according to the availability of primary teacher volunteers for the FG.

### **Participants**

The participants for this study consisted of four families and twenty-five primary teachers. Qualitative ethnographic research with an interpretive focus recommends a small and informative group of participants through which the researcher can experience what "it means for participants to be in that setting, what their lives are like, what's going on for them, what their meanings are, what the world looks like in that particular setting" (Merriam, 1988, p. 6). The essence of such an inquiry is the richness of the information that can be gleaned and not the number of participants (Crabtree & Miller, 1992). Clifford (1986, p. 7) argues that no ethnographic research or any number of participants can reveal a complete reality; they can only illustrate a part of the story, which he describes as a story that is "committed and incomplete".

### ***The families***

I chose four volunteer families who had children beginning PP in the following year. I observed the family and their children's experiences at home and from home to the school and then in school. Goethe (1963, cited in Van Manen, 1990, p. 6) remarks that, "One learns to know only what one loves, and the deeper and the fuller the knowledge is to be, the more powerful and vivid must be the love, indeed the passion". The preference of PP children was also based on my many years of working with the primary trainee teachers in the Paro College of Education in Bhutan and my knowledge of the PP curriculum, its evolution over the years and my own passion for early years education.

One family was native to the area while the three other families had migrated from the east and south of the country. Each area of Bhutan has distinct cultural beliefs and practices as well as different languages. An overview of the families is provided in Figure 4.2.

**Table 4. 2 An overview of the families**

<b>Family</b>	<b>Members</b>	<b>Relation</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Home district</b>	<b>Language</b>
Bislama's family	Boju Bajay	Grandmother Grandfather	64 70	Shopkeeper -----	Sipsoo (Southern)	Lhotshampakha (Nepali)

	Cheyma	Aunt (grade 7)	14	Student	Bhutan)	
Nima's family	Abi Sonam Yangzom Tandin Kezang Yenda Ugyen	Grandmother Father Mother Sister (grade 9) Brother (grade 9) Brother (grade 7) Brother (grade 2)	80 45 37 17 15 12 7	---- Taxi driver House wife Student Student Student Student	Samdrupjon gkhar (Eastern Bhutan)	Sherchogpakha (one of the dialects of the Eastern Bhutanese)
Sonam's family	Jojo Angay Ugyen Kesang Jigme	Grandfather Grandmother Father Mother Uncle (university)	79 65 40 35 21	Farmer Farmer Bank Cashier House wife Student	Paro (Western Bhutan)	Dzongkha (The national language)
Pema's family	Tenzin Ngwang Tashi Dema Ugyen	Father Mother Brother (grade 8) Sister (grade 7) Brother (grade 2)	49 38 15 12 10	Storeman Housewife Student Student Student	Pemagatshel Eastern Bhutan	Sherchogpakha

I chose the four families for several reasons; what Scott and Usher (1999) would call their explanatory power in terms of their origins, economic status, occupations, language, culture and educational backgrounds. I chose them because most members in the family knew me and that made a lot of difference to the authenticity of the data as well as the naturalness of the inquiry process. For example, many times I had been a passenger in Sonam's taxi, I was a customer who bought red rice from *Angay* frequently and occasionally visited *Boju's* shop for *shalroties* and knew Pema's father from several social gatherings that we happened to attend together. Moreover, some of the older children in the families have been my husband's students so they know me as 'NT sir's wife'.

Paro is a small place where everybody knows everyone. This familiarity with the family eased my entry into their homes and set a natural and comfortable participation for me as well as for the family in their daily activities. There were no awkward moments when each waited for the other to say something, conversations of all sort just flowed naturally. Many times during my home visits I felt that the women looked forward to my coming, as they always seemed to have many things to talk about, particularly as the men were mostly out at work. Dewalt et al. (1998, p. 266) claim that "people love to tell their story and to share their experiences with those who take an interest in them". Many a time I sat with them and their guests chatting, laughing, drinking tea and listening for several hours. Once, during such a chat, Pema's mother in the midst of laughter, looked at me and asked apologetically, "When do I actually

tell you things that are useful for your research?” Her guests laughed. I assured her that everything that we talked about was very useful and interesting for my study and she smiled happily.

### ***The teachers***

Following my request and a letter from the Ministry of Education, the principals of five schools in the valley arranged for five teacher volunteers from each school to be part of the FGs. The majority had several years of experience in teaching lower primary classes. The purpose of the FG was to gain a general understanding of the teachers’ perceptions of the PP children in their class, their perceptions of themselves as PP professionals and of their philosophies of teaching and learning in the context of ‘Educating for GNH’. The FG’s meetings were not more than an hour for each school. The intention of the FG was not for them to be representatives of the primary teacher population of Bhutan but to offer further insights and provide personal perspectives of their general practices and beliefs.

### **Schedule of Data Collection**

On the 1<sup>st</sup> December 2011, I met the Director of Education, Tshewang Tandin to confirm his consent for the school visits, which had been discussed before I started my journey home for data collection. Multiple copies of the Consent Letter addressed to the District Education Officer (DEO) of Paro and the Principals of the primary schools in Paro were collected from the Director’s Office. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2011, I visited the DEO’s office in Paro and explained the purpose and the nature of the research and then handed him the Consent Letter from the Director so that he could officially inform the principals in the valley about my research. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> December, I met the principal of TMSS and formally introduced myself and informed him of my inquiry, even though he had already been advised by the DEO. I was given permission to go through the list of families whose children were going to attend the PP interview on the 10<sup>th</sup> of December. A PP interview is held by all schools in Bhutan at the end of the year to formally select PP children for the next academic year. The selection panel members mainly check the child’s birth certificate, parents’ citizenship identities and ask a few questions about their families. It is mandatory for a PP child to be six years old or older. A more detailed scenario of the PP interview is provided in Chapter 9.

The vice principal offered to call the families to ask for some volunteers to participate in my study. After a couple of days, I was informed that there were at least fifteen families who

volunteered and as I went through the list I noticed that most of them were people whom I knew. I selected four families according to the reasons explained earlier.

On the 10<sup>th</sup> December, I met the four families and their children during their interview. I sat through the interview and video recorded it with prior permission from panel members and parents. After the interview the principal invited the four families and their children to the staffroom, introduced me and explained how important my research was in educating their children. I added that I was not there to judge them or their home conditions but to learn from them, as they were their children's first educators. On the 11<sup>th</sup> December, I had an annual prayer ceremony in my house where I had about nine monks performing a ritual. Surprisingly I found myself seeking the advice of the head monk for an auspicious day to start the home visits. The elderly monk opened a small book and with his glasses resting on the tip of his bulbous nose, said in a serious tone that 12<sup>th</sup> December was a good day to start any venture. With a smile he said, "Madam, even if you plant a tree upside down, it will grow that day". I immediately contacted the four families and asked if I could visit them briefly on the 12<sup>th</sup> and they consented.

On the 12<sup>th</sup> December 2011, I began my visits at Nima's house and ended the day with Pema. I asked them to sign the consent forms and demonstrated how to use the cameras and left them to try them out. As predicted by the monk I got a very positive feeling on that first day that the inquiry journey with the four families was going to be fine, as Ellis (1998) comments that for some, "getting started was daunting" as one does not know what to expect. The initial plan was to spend one day a week with each family, but it did not always work that way. Sometimes I would spend more time with one family and at other times I would spend half a day with one family and the rest with another. Sometimes they would call me to attend certain events at their house or in their community. The home visits continued until the 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2012.

The FG conversations with the PP teachers in the five schools took place from the 10<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> February 2012, at a time that was convenient to the teachers and the schools. The children started school from the 15<sup>th</sup> February 2012 and on the same day my role as a participant-observer at the school began. From that day onwards I was present everywhere in TMSS and at the homes until the 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2012. After one week in the PP class in TMSS, I became curious to find out what was happening in the other PP classes in the valley, although it was not a part of my initial plans for data collection. In the second week, I spent an hour each in

the four other PP classes in the valley and as expected all the activities in the PP classes in the valley were synchronized by the national curriculum. I observed children singing ‘Roly, Poly’ from the top of the valley to the bottom, all on the same day.

I flew back to UNE on the 26<sup>th</sup> March 2012 with my head filled with the ‘more than expected’ data from the families’ rich ‘funds of knowledge’.

### **Assumptions and Limitations**

An interpretive inquiry approach does not result in a comprehensive final answer for a single researcher cannot encompass all there is to know about ethnography or the topic under study (Pole & Morrison, 2003). The families, teachers and I interpreted things according to what we perceived at that particular space and time and this information is always open to further and varied interpretations by others. The most one can expect is rich, thick and detailed descriptions (Geertz, 1973) of the moment that will provide comprehensive information for anyone interested (Creswell, 2009).

Quantitatively, the small size of participants used for the study could be viewed as a limitation in some ways as they may not represent the larger population. Nevertheless, for this inquiry, they are sufficient to portray the richness of the family’s ‘funds of knowledge’ and their usefulness to the process of educating the children. The issues addressed in the inquiry are of immense relevance to Bhutan’s early year education and also for the training of primary and early childhood education teachers. The outcome of this study will provide avenues for the realization of the philosophy of “Educating for GNH” in the schools in Bhutan.

### **Ethical principles and procedures**

I was excited about the idea of using a visual ethnographic method in Bhutan because, I know that we Bhutanese love taking photographs and being photographed. As a child, my friends and I used to run after tourists asking them to take photographs of us - “sir, photographs; madam, photographs”. Some would send us copies and sometimes we would have the excitement of seeing ourselves in a *National Geographic Magazine*. Particularly, if the photographs or the video is meant for the betterment of their children and of the education system, most families will participate willingly. Visual ethnographers such as Pink, (2013); Schembri and Boyle (2013); Collier (1967); Goldman-Seagall (1998) and Harper (2003) believe that ethnographers with some experiences of a particular culture and society will already have a sense of the visual and the technological cultures of the people with whom they plan to work and I believe that this, being true for me, gave me confidence. Similarly

Gonzalez et al. (1993, para. 14) observed that a teacher was always given entrée into the Mexican households that they studied with respect and honour, as they “evinced neither suspicion of motives nor mistrust of how the information gathered was to be used”. Sikes (2006) emphasizes that ethical matters are of utmost concern in the process of qualitative research and require very careful decisions throughout the study - before, during and after fieldwork. As a researcher who is conscious of the relationship between the concept of sensitivity and covenantal ethics I made sure that I did not take advantage of my participants or take anything for granted during the whole inquiry process.

I was clearly aware that of all kinds of educational research approaches, ethnography is the most notable in sharing the lives and feelings of other people. The issue of vulnerability and insecurity for both parties has to be carefully considered (Dewalt et al., 1998; Pole & Morrison, 2003). I was also conscious that using visual media and methods in intimate contexts like the home might cause ethical and practical dilemmas (Pink, 2013; Schembri & Boyle, 2013). Through the use of auto-photography and photo-elicitation methods, the participants had the choice of deciding what they wanted to show and discuss with me. They had control over what information could be accessed and what was to be withheld (Flick, 2006) and I always respected their decisions. I never exerted pressure for any information that they did not want to share with me. For instance among one family’s collection of photos that they wanted to show me, we came across a young man who happened to be an immediate family member to one of the families. I never saw or heard him being mentioned before in our conversations. I was briefly told that he was in jail and then the photo was put away and we never mentioned him again. The collaborative method that I employed for my study ameliorated the feeling of being researched, which had the potential to stress participants.

I followed the ethical principles and procedures of utilising consent forms for every participant in my study. I clearly explained to them the purpose of the study in their own language. At the beginning, most of the participants were not very convinced that I wanted to learn from them. Nima’s mother smiled and said, “What can people like us teach you?” But, very soon they noticed that I was not there to judge or instruct them, but that I was genuinely interested in everything they said or did which made them more chatty and forthcoming. I avoided any form of data collection until the completion of every proper procedure. The study conformed to the University of New England’s code of ethical conduct and was approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) with the approval number HE11/167 on the 25<sup>th</sup> November 2011. Formal consent was sought from the Director of Education, the District

Education Officer, and the Principals of the primary schools in the valley. Consent forms were understood and signed by the parents and the teachers who were willing to participate in the research. They were informed that all forms of information collected for the research will be securely kept as per UNE's HREC policies and that no harm of any kind will be inflicted on the participants through this study. The parents were a bit nervous when it came to signing the consent forms which was understandable as in their culture this sort of procedure would only be required for legal matters such as in a police station or in the court of justice. In the past, those who were not literate in English or *Dzongkha* were robbed of their land and property because of them having put their thumb impressions on a paper that some someone explained as 'harmless'. Being aware of such occurrences made me more concerned to convince the participants that this paper really was 'harmless'. I interpreted each word in the consent form in the participants' own home language and left nothing to chance. With the participants from the east, I sought the help of a woman in the community who all of them knew and who could speak *Sherchogpakha* very fluently to explain the consent form, word by word.

I took Pink (2013) and Smith's (1992) words of caution about how I represented myself to my participants and how I situated myself in the research context would have implications for the knowledge that could be produced from the encounter between the researcher and the participants. Johnson (2004, p. 375) asserts that "one of the cardinal rules for an ethnographer is to avoid being ethnocentric", which meant judging a group or a culture according to the standards of the researcher's own culture or group, from a "moral high ground" (Gadow, 1999, p. 66). Taking a non-judgemental stance in order to gather appropriate information was not difficult for me as I grew in a similar family and went to similar schools. I faced the same ups and down they faced, which made it possible for me to relate and share my experiences with them. Ellis (1998) recommends that a researcher should begin fieldwork with humility, openness and genuine engagement. One of the tips that Taylor and Bogdan (1984) suggest for collecting useful data was to be unobtrusive in dress and action. Just as Schembri (2009) wore the standard jeans and black leather so as to blend and be accepted into the HOG (Harley Owners Group) subculture that they were researching, I too always wore my wrappers and pullovers during my home visits, like the mothers in the families. I wore formal dresses only to the school where it was mandatory. Simple things like this proved useful in building rapport with the participants. More than the technicalities of ethical procedures, it was important to conduct the research culturally appropriately, something that Wolcott (2001, p. 55) describes as "moving around gracefully within the culture". Simple mindful gestures such

as taking some gifts for the families the first time I visited them is part of our Bhutanese culture. The words of my late father still rings in my ears, “never walk into someone’s house for the first time empty handed”. The gift can be just a few sweets for the children in the house or it can be much more. In line with what Pink (2013) term as ‘giving something back’, I compiled some of their best photos into albums and presented it to each family and the teacher. In this inquiry, I left no stones unturned where ethical procedure were concerned.

### **Conclusion**

The careful compilation of a suitable and feasible methodological package for the study resulted in a visual ethnographic approach, supplemented by the more conventional methods of field notes and semi-structured interviews, that I prefer to call ‘conversations’, based on the principles of an interpretive inquiry approach within a sociocultural paradigm. Although I tried to believe that I had a comprehensive and workable package to collect data for the study, I was still worried as I was not very sure how the participants would receive the methodology, particularly the use of cameras. However, just after a week with the participants I wondered why I ever worried for they naturally became my partners in the venture of collecting data and making sense of each other.

Writing the story of the families and analysing the data gleaned, not only answered the key questions of the study, but also made me aware of the richness of each family in terms of what they did with their children in their day to day life, something that I had never before observed closely. This methodological package enabled the successful ‘uncovering’ of the phenomenon being studied and gave me a sense of urgency to show others, the ‘funds of knowledge’ the families possessed that could be of immense use in the education of their children.

Chapters 5 to 9 will showcase the four families’ daily lives within their communities and the school where they send their children. These five chapters of illustrative narrations will set the scenes for the later analytical chapters in the thesis.

## CHAPTER 5

*What the child can do in cooperation today he can do alone tomorrow. Therefore the only good kind of instruction is that which marches ahead of development and leads it.*  
(Vygotsky, 1986, p.188)

### BISHAKA'S FAMILY

#### Home

Paro is one of the most beautiful wide river valleys in Bhutan. It is home to the only International Airport in the country. In the centre of the valley is Paro Town, surrounded by snowcapped mountains in the north, the green glacial river, locally known as Pachu on the east, and long stretches of paddy fields on the west. Sadly, more and more buildings are rapidly replacing the beautiful paddy fields, as people see this as a better income than growing rice.

Paro Town, which has been growing fast for the last couple of decades, has at present about one hundred buildings arranged along the two main streets. Paro Town does not have street names. The street closest to the river is locally known as the *Old Street* because it was the first street in the town. The houses along this street are mostly double storied and are more traditional, in that most of them are made from locally made bricks and have traditionally designed timber windows. The *New Street*, closer to the paddy fields, is lined with four to five storied concrete buildings, with pre-fabricated traditional metal windows and Bhutanese paintings. Most of the banks and offices are on this street. All these buildings have pseudo flats concealed under the roofs. A building that looks like it has four-storeys actually has five-storey. The fifth, pseudo storey is commonly known as 'the attic' a terminology used by the *Municipal Authority*. In one of these attic-flats lives six-year old Bishaka with her aunt and grandparents. Bishaka calls her grandparents *Bajay* and *Boju*, which in their *Lhotshampa*<sup>1</sup> language meant grandfather and grandmother. Bishaka explained that the rent for the attic was cheaper than the other regular flats in the same building, because of the low ceilings and small rooms. Their attic-flat is made up of two small bedrooms, a very small kitchen and bathroom cum toilet for which they pay a monthly rent of Nu.3000 (A\$55). One day *Boju* and Bishaka took me to see their home (Figure 5.1 & 5.2). An ascent of 85 steps up a winding staircase

---

<sup>1</sup> Southern Bhutanese

got us to the door of their flat. Seeing me huff and puff, Bishaka grinned and said, “My aunt does the same because she drinks a lot of beer”.



Figure 5.1 The steps to the attic



Figure 5.2 Bishaka's home

I quickly responded, “I do not drink beer”. She looked at me amused and said, “I see”, *Boju* laughed. Bishaka took out a bunch of keys from a small plastic bag that she was carrying, opened the door, took off her shoes and stepped into the room. As I stepped into the house after her, I was in a small bedroom-cum-lounge-cum-dining room. In the corner of the room was the single bar heater that I often saw in photographs, around which the foursome sat with their knees touching each other during the cold winter evenings and mornings. The next room was almost completely filled with two beds. It was Bishaka and her grandparents’ bedroom.



Figure 5.3 The altar



Figure 5.4 Family photographs

As can be seen in Figure 5.3, in a corner of the room, next to the door was a small altar, and on the top of a glass-fronted cabinet was a clutter of framed photographs of their family members and the kings of Bhutan. There was a framed photograph that had a flower garland around it (Figure 5.4). Seeing me look at it, Bishaka explained, “This is my uncle who died of a day’s sickness” and she looked at *Boju* for further information. *Boju* just smiled and I changed the topic of conversation.

### The *Paan*- shop

Bishaka locked the door of the attic and put the key back into her plastic bag and we walked out of the building. We passed four buildings and an open space, finally reaching the ground floor of the fifth building, which was *Boju's paan* shop. The one-room-shop was partitioned into two, the front side was the *paan*-shop (Figure 5.5); a nomenclature given to such shops where the main items for sale are a mixture of betel leaf, areca nuts and slaked lime with other ingredients, such as small pieces of coconut, cardamoms and cloves as chosen by the customer.

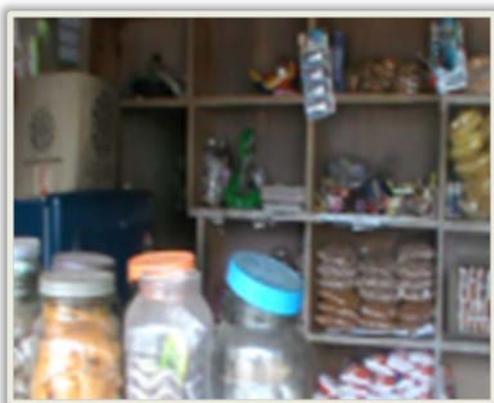


Figure 5.5 The *paan* shop



Figure 5.6 A customer serving herself

Paro town has more than a dozen *paan*-shops catering to the many *paan*-eaters in the valley. At the back of the shop, was a makeshift kitchen where *Boju* and the girls prepared snacks for sale. *Boju* and Bishaka prepared homemade snacks such as *shalrotis*, *neemkies*, *pushka* and finger chips (Figure 5.7). These preparations were always in need of more hands and time. As can be seen in Figure 5.8, Radha and any other relatives who paid visits to *Boju's* shop helped her in the preparation of the snacks. For both *neemkies* and *pushkas*, they used wheat flour. They flattened the dough and then cut it into small diamond shaped pieces and fried them in oil. They called this snack - *neemkies*.



Figure 5.7 Bishaka frying finger chips



Figure 5.8 Relatives helping *Boju*

Bishaka explained that for the *pushkas*, the flattened dough has to be cut into small circles which, when put in hot oil, popped up like small balloons. She explained that a plate of *pushka* was served with a kind of cold sour soup which she did not know how to make. *Boju* explained that they made the soup with tamarind, green chilies, salt, masala and water. The family packed the *neemkies* and the finger chips in small plastic bags and arranged them on the shelves. Most days, *Boju* sat on the long box that served as the only sitting place in her *paan* shop. Many a time, four to five of us squeezed ourselves on the box to look through photographs and sometimes I had total strangers breathing down my neck to get a peek at the photographs and comfortably joining in the discussions. In the morning, the shop smelt of incense sticks, which were lit on a small altar inside one of the many square shelves on the wall of the shop. The rest of the shelves were filled with small amounts of snacks and other miscellaneous items for sale.



Figure 5.9 The children on the poles



Figure 5.10 *Boju* on the poles

Just next to her shop there was an open space normally referred to as a vacant ‘plot’ (Figure 5.9), a town-planning term used by Municipal personnel. Each building in town is on a ‘plot’ but the owner of this particular ‘plot’ has not yet been able to construct a building. This open space has multiple uses for all the people living around it. Adults, children, dogs and cats sitting on and around the metal electric poles on the ground, left there by the Bhutan Power Division, was a common sight that I saw each time I visited the family or passed that way (Figure 5.9 & 5.10). Several times, I too joined the group on the poles, feeling the coldness of the metal through my fairly thick wrappers and the more comforting warmth of the sun on my back. As we chatted on the poles, we watched people and cars moving up and down the street and I listened to their interesting talk on all sorts of topics. It was a great place for socializing. The tenants who lived above *Boju*’s shop came out with their children and sat with them. Sometimes their relatives came and joined them on the poles for a chat. More frequently it

was the elders who sat on the poles while the children played around them in the dirt. The single clothesline seen in Figure 5.11 was always covered with clothes as everyone in the building used it. Children and adults ate their meals balancing themselves on the poles (Figure 5.12). Whenever a customer entered *Boju's* shop, *Boju*, Bishaka or her aunt, whoever got up first, ran to the shop to attend to the customer. They closed the shop around 9 p.m. and sometimes continued preparing snacks if the snack shelves were empty.



Figure 5.11 The clothesline



Figure 5.12 Lunch time for the children

### The Parents

Bishaka's mother, Radha is *Boju's* youngest child from her late husband. Radha completed her year 10, Bhutan Certificate of Secondary Education with a fairly good aggregate of 65 %, which those days would have given her a sure entry into year 11 in one of the government high schools. Unfortunately she could not meet the official document requirement for the school, which sadly led to her discontinuance of schooling even though she had the interest to continue further. *Boju* often reminisced about her daughter holding first and second positions in all her classes, starting from PP to year 10 in Jagar High School in Bumthang, in central Bhutan. *Boju* sadly commented, "I think that is a part of her destiny".

Some months after dropping school, Radha met Sanjay; they fell in love and got married. Radha commented that she had no regrets having married. She did have lots of regret about not being able to continue studying. She wanted to become a teacher. The first time I met Radha in *Boju's* attic flat, she took out some of her high school certificates from a wooden box kept under *Boju's* bed and showed them to me. She expressed great interest in pursuing Continued Education (CE) and complete at least year 12. Hearing us talk about CE, Bishaka responded, "I would also like to do CE". Radha looked at her daughter seriously as if the word CE was a taboo and said, "You will not. I want you to finish your graduation and become someone in society". I looked at Bishaka's face and wondered whether she

understood her mother's aspirations for her as she nodded her head. I once mentioned Radha's interest in pursuing CE to *Boju* and she was very supportive of her daughter's wishes. She said "You know madam, this girl is very interested and good in studying and I tell her if need be I can take a loan for her education".

Bishaka's father and mother lived in Haa, another district about two hours drive from Paro that is, if we take the shorter route over Chelela. The young couple have a small meat shop in Haa. Initially, Bishaka's father worked in a meat shop in Paro; however, as the proliferation of meat shops continued in the past few years, the owner closed the shop so her parents moved to Haa to open their own meat business. Out of curiosity, I asked Bishaka's father, in which meat shop he worked in Paro and he responded, "Remember the TD meat shop, ma'am?" I instantly answered, "Yes, yes, I used to buy chicken and pork ribs from there". He smiled and said, "Yes, you did ma'am". He then added that he and his wife wished to come back to Paro, which has put *Boju* on a constant watch for vacant shops in a strategic spot for her daughter and son-in-law.

Bishaka refused to live with her parents in Haa. Many times, Radha and her husband had attempted taking their daughter to Haa. It always turned out stressful both for them and the child. No amount of coaxing and bribing would entice Bishaka to live with them. Radha said, "She would cry the whole night worrying about her grandmother, it made me so stressed". Radha and her husband wanted Bishaka to live with them for many reasons. As *Boju* had looked after their daughter from the time she was born they felt guilty having *Boju* continue to care for her. Moreover, they believed that getting a school for Bishaka in Paro would be very difficult. Radha managed to get Bishaka admission to a primary school in Haa and she added that she could teach Bishaka some basic numeracy and literacy at home, which would give her a good start in the PP class. I assured her that their daughter was definitely learning a lot from her grandmother, things that may not be taught in a class. She smiled and replied, "Yes, that's true, but when she is with *Boju*, she stays like a child and does whatever she feels like doing". I then jokingly asked, "Isn't she a child?" We both laughed, and on a more serious note Radha said, "Ma'am, I really want to make everything right for her, so that she would not have to leave her education half-way". She added, "She does have a very good memory because she can remember things said to her a long time back, because of this I feel she may do well in school".

### The grandparents

Bishaka's sixty-four year old *Boju* and seventy year old *Bajay* were originally from Kalikhola, in the Southern part of Bhutan. They had moved to many different places during the past years, determined by *Bajay's* transfer orders from the Royal Bhutan Army. *Bajay's* last placement was in Paro. When he retired, rather than going back to their village they decided to settle in Paro town and have a go with a small *paan* shop like their other relatives, who were all doing well. Whilst *Boju* managed the *paan* shop on her own, *Bajay* ran a snooker game room in a place called Bondey, a small town about 2 kilometres south of Paro town.

*Boju's* first husband died at the very young age of 32, leaving her with two sons and five daughters. Some years later she married *Bajay* and they had a daughter, who is a student in Tsigjab Middle Secondary School (TMSS). *Boju's* eldest son was a manager in the *Bhutan Oil Distribution* Paro. Unfortunately, he too died at the very young age of 31. With difficulty I controlled my tears, as *Boju*, with great composure, narrated the sad details of her son's sudden death. I was filled with a strong sense of empathy and admiration for her. In many ways her calmness and poise reminded me of my late father. What they had in common was their strong religious faith, the foundation of their philosophies of life.



Figure 5.13 Bishak prays with *Bajay*



Figure 5.14 *Bajay* blesses Bishaka

*Boju* and her family were Hindus. Every morning they worshipped the sun god and they were vegetarian. In their small bedroom in the attic, every morning, Bishaka's grandparents sat in between the altar and the beds and meditated for half an hour and sometimes Bishaka joined them (Figure 5.13). After the meditation and prayers, the grandparents put sandal wood *tikas* on Bishaka's forehead (Figure 5.14) and blessed her for the day. Observing them pray a lot, I was curious to know what *Boju* prayed for. *Boju* explained: "I am not praying for this life, madam, not for buildings, cars and money for this life. I am trying to clear my ways and

cleanse myself to go to heaven after this life”. Knowing my own father so well and seeing the similarities in them, I knew how *Boju* would respond to what I was going to say next. I asked, “When you lost your son at such a prime age, did you for a moment not feel that all your prayers and good will were in vain?” She paused for a moment, nodded her head and said, “Yes, madam I definitely felt that once, because I lost my son, however, the reality is we all have to die someday”. She looked at me, smiled and added, “Madam, we do feel let down sometimes, however, when we think clearly, all of us do bring our own *karma*<sup>2</sup> from the time we were born, so we should not blame God for that - if God is not there we would not be here, isn't it madam? God is always there”. Listening to her made me very emotional; in a choked voice I told her that my late father would tell me the same, every time I was on the verge of blaming God for something.

*Boju*'s eldest daughter also has a *paan* shop in Paro Town on the *Old Street*. Bishaka introduced me to her aunt's family members through the photographs. She has four children and her eldest daughter, Dimple, worked in a handcraft shop in Paro town. Bishaka proudly told me that her cousin Dimple designed necklaces, key chains and the earrings in the handicraft shop. My interest in jewelry got the better of me, so one day Bishaka and I walked hand-in-hand into Dimple's handcraft shop, which normally catered to tourists.



Figure 5.15 Making bracelets

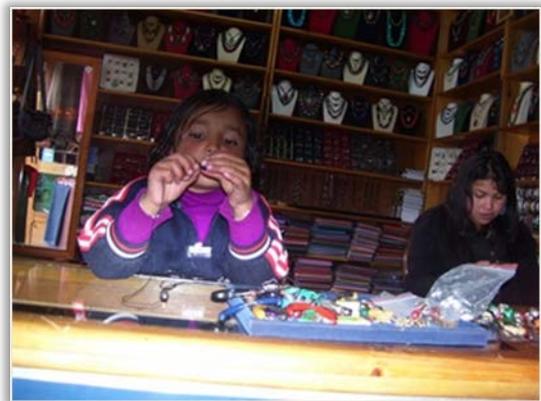


Figure 5.16 Stringing beads

Bishaka was right; there was a good collection in her neatly arranged shop. My eyes caught sight of a beautiful pair of turquoise earrings. I picked them up from the case and asked, “How much is this?” Bishaka quickly added, “The Bhutanese price, didi”<sup>3</sup> We laughed and Dimple said, “Nu.550”. I asked Bishaka, “How much would it cost for a tourist?” She replied, “More”, and then looked towards her cousin for details, who added, “For a tourist it would be

---

<sup>2</sup> Fate

<sup>3</sup> An older sister

almost three-fold”. Bishaka put my earrings in a small brocade pouch that she took out from a drawer and handed them to me. I commented, “Looks like Bishaka knows your shop well”, and Dimple answered, “Yes, ma’am she does, sometimes she shop-sits for me when I have to go somewhere. I teach her how to bead the necklaces and bracelets and design simple key chains and mobile chains” (Figure 5.15 & 5.16).

*Boju*’s brother-in-law and his wife lived in their house in Kalikhola, in the south. The family members rarely visited their hometown. They travelled down south only when there was a government census or a wedding taking place during the wedding season in the winter months. *Boju* has a lot of relatives in Paro town. Every time I visited her shop, one or other of the relatives was around. For instance, one day, sitting on the poles outside *Boju*’s shop, I found myself busy convincing her nephew that there were no ghosts in the Punakha High School dormitories, where his parents wanted him to study. I enjoyed sharing with him some of my ten golden years of schooling in Punakha Central School, as it was known then. Another time I politely listened and consoled a weeping niece of hers who was on the verge of getting a divorce. Sometimes, the intertwined relations between her children the grandchildren and her own relatives and the in-laws and their relatives, confused *Boju*. Not so Bishaka who knows exactly who they are and how they relate to her. Once, while going through some photographs, I asked Bishaka who the people in the photograph were and she said, “My sister and aunt”. *Boju* looked at the photo and said, “She is not your aunt”. Bishaka looked at her grandmother with big eyes and asserted, “Reema is my aunt”. *Boju* then muttered something to herself, which sounded something like, “Dinesh is my elder brother’s son, so Reema is....” She smiled and said, “You are right, she is your aunt”.

One day, I sat with seven people on the poles, relishing the warmth of the sun on our backs on a cold winter day. While talking to Radha and Bishaka about her PP admission, I wondered whether *Boju* had ever gone to a school. *Boju* smiled and said, “To tell madam the details of my school days, I will have to narrate it like a story”. I asked her to go ahead and added, “I am all ears for such stories”. She began:

*Well, a long time ago when I was about eight years old, my cousin and I were washing our feet in the river while grazing the cattle; along came one of the Indian teachers, named Sir Lalu from the local school in Sibsoo. He knew our parents, so he asked us “Aren’t you so and so’s children? We answered – “yes, we are”. He said, “Your families are not that poor and you do have other people in the house to tend to the cattle, so why are you two not in school?” We told him that all our friends were looking after cows and goats therefore we too would like to do the same, we do not want to part from our friends.*

*The teacher told us to come to the school the next day, so that he can register our names in the school register. He added that he would be very annoyed if they did not turn up in school. Those days we used to get so scared of teachers, so we agreed to whatever the Sir told us to do. So we informed our parents about our decisions and told them that they need not accompany us to school, as the Sir would help us. So the next day we wore our cleanest clothes and plaited our hair and walked to school. The Sir was very happy to see us. He wrote our fathers' names in the register and we were formally enrolment in school.*

*We passed through Infant A, Infant B and then into class one. However, one day, my cousin's family decided to move from our village to a more remote village, where there was no school. Therefore, my cousin advised me to stop going to school too, so I stopped. The Sir came four times to my house to urge me to come to school however, I decided to drop school. My parents insisted that I go back to school but I refused because without my cousin, I did not want to study. So I continued looking after the cattle and goats. (Boju, personal communication, January 31, 2012)*

That was an amazing story of *Boju's* schooling sojourn. Her only regret for not having completed her studies was not being able to read the prayer books that are now printed both in English and *Lhotsampa* language. For her granddaughter she has different aspirations. She said, "Bishaka should study because in the present day if you cannot read and write, you are like a disabled person". *Boju* expected her granddaughter to gain knowledge, skills, good behaviour and discipline in the school so that she can live a better life. I commented that Bishaka was learning a lot of things from her too and she replied, "Yes, I make her clean the house in the morning, I make her clean her hands after going to the toilet and I teach her some of the prayers". After a brief pause she smiled and added, "She listens and does whatever I tell her to do, she is a good girl".

### **Bishaka**

Bishaka gets up around 7 o'clock, washes her face, brushes her teeth and joins her grandparents for the morning prayers. They then move into her aunt's bedroom to sit around the single rod heater and eat their breakfast. Bishaka helps her aunt carry the breakfast plates from the kitchen to her grandparents. After breakfast her aunt does the dishes while Bishaka sweeps the floor in the breakfast room. They then leave for the shop. While *Boju* gets her kitchen ready for preparing the snacks for sale, Bishaka helps her aunt to clean the shop and empty the dustbins into a bigger bin outside the shop, which is collected by the municipal truck. She then climbs on the box to reach the altar and picks up the bronze container full of water and walks out of the shop. She holds the pot with both hands against her forehead and then pours out the water facing the sun (Figure 5.17).



Figure 5.17 Offering water to *Surjay*



Figure 5.18 Offering incense

She then fills the pot with fresh water and puts it back on the altar for the next morning. Then she lights some incense sticks and swirls the smoke thrice around the altar (Figure 5.18) and then sticks them on a stand to burn. These are some of Bishaka’s daily routines in the shop. To quiz her a bit I asked her, “In case the sun does not shine do you still have to do this?” She smiled and said, “Yes, I do because *Surjay*, the sun god, will be behind the clouds” saying this she looked at her grandmother and added, “Isn’t it *Boju*?” *Boju* smiled and nodded her head. Most *paan* shops in the town cannot afford to get their miscellaneous merchandise directly from India, as do the bigger shops, so they buy them from wholesale dealers in town such as the Food Corporation of Bhutan (FCB). *Boju* did the same, and most of the time Bishaka did the shopping from the FCB for their small shop.

As we looked through some photographs of Bishaka assisting her grandmother with the shopping, *Boju* lovingly stroked her granddaughter’s head and added, “She is very helpful”. Bishaka pointed at one of the photographs and said, “I went to Pema aunty’s shop to buy *koka*”. I asked her, “How much did you pay?” She looked at *Boju* and said, “250”, I, too, looked towards *Boju* for affirmation, and with a smile, she nodded her head. Suddenly Bishaka remembered something, so she added, “We do not pay, they write it down”. *Boju* explained that this shop maintained a credit account for her, so she paid them when she had enough money. As for the FCB, most of the time she sent Bishaka with cash.

As we were talking and looking through the photographs, a customer walked into the shop and asked for something in *Dzongkha* with a strong *Parop*<sup>4</sup> accent. *Boju* looked at me for help. I had to ask the man again what he wanted and he said, “Do you have *dzathi*?” I asked

---

<sup>4</sup> A Native of Paro

*Boju* in her language, whether they had any nutmegs to sell. She nodded and asked Bishaka to get the blue plastic container from one of the shelves in her shop. Bishaka opened the container and asked *Boju*, how many she should give. I asked the man how many nutmegs he wanted and he asked the price. This time no translation was required Bishaka instantly showed five fingers to the man. Bishaka took out three nutmegs and wrapped them in a piece of paper that she tore from a pile of old newspapers under a table and then handed them to the old man with both hands, something that she was taught to do at home with elders as a gesture of respect. *Boju* allowed Bishaka to help her with so many things in the shop.



Figure 5.19 Cutting betel leaves



Figure 5.20 Stirring curry

However, there was one thing that she did not allow her to do and that was cutting areca nuts. She said that the nut cutter was very sharp and she might cut her fingers. She did allow her to cut betel leaves (Figure 5.19) and sometimes made her watch over the cooking as *Boju* attended to customers (Figure 5.20).

Bishaka had a lot of playmates, mostly her own cousins and neighbours, whom she introduced to me through the photographs that she took of them. In a particular photograph, I asked her that they were doing and she said, “I was making cake and she was making *laddus*<sup>5</sup>” (Figure 5.21). I commented, “Oh, how exciting, was it a *puja*?” She shook her head and said, “No, we were expecting some guests”.

She picked up another photograph and once more introduced her friends and added that this time they were playing students and teacher (Figure 5.22). She took a closer look at the photo and then said, “Vishal is not writing anything, I think he does not have a pencil”. I asked her why the girl in the green sweatshirt was not writing anything and she said, “She does not know the ABCs”.

---

<sup>5</sup> A sweet ball normally prepared for Hindu prayer ceremonies



Figure 5.21 Playing "cooking"



Figure 5.22 Playing "school"

One day I invited Bishaka and her friend to a *momo* restaurant. While we three talked over cups of tea the waiter stood outside the hotel in the sun. I asked the children whether they would like some *momos* and they eagerly nodded their heads. I asked Bishaka's friend to call the waiter in and to my surprise Bishaka advised her friend to address the girl as *didi*, meaning elder sister. I asked Bishaka why should he address her as *didi* and she said, "He does not know how to talk to elders".

A week later I got a call from Bishaka, asking me if I wanted to meet her mother, who had arrived from Haa. As I entered the attic, I found mother and daughter sitting on the floor counting money. As soon as Radha saw me she got up and said apologetically, "I told this girl not to call ma'am because she will be busy". I assured her that I was not busy and that I was looking forward to seeing more of them. Radha walked into the kitchen to prepare tea for us. With their permission I walked into their toilet-cum-bathroom and saw a big red bucket full of water with a homemade electric immersion rod fizzing in the water. As I came out of the toilet I narrated to them how my husband's grandfather from the village once dipped his finger in the water to check whether it was hot enough and got the shock of his life. Bishaka laughed and said that she never went near it. As the three of us sat on the mat to drink our tea, I saw a plastic bag full of old photographs in the bottom of the dressing mirror stand I asked Radha if I could have a look at them. Radha took the photographs out and handed them to me as she excused herself to take a bath. Bishaka and I went through their old photographs and as usual she introduced me to all the people in them. She picked up a photo of a young man and hesitated for some time, I asked her who he was and she said, "My uncle, *Boju*'s youngest son". In a low voice she added, "He is in jail. He was very naughty". Next she picked up a photograph of her father with a glass full of beer on the railing of a verandah. She said, "He does not drink now because he was very sick. He has high blood pressure". As we delved

deeper into the pile of old photographs, I became more and more informed about Bishaka's family.

### The Puja



Figure 5.23 Tea



Figure 5.24 Snacks

Every Saturday *Boju* and the others in the community performed *pujas*<sup>6</sup> in different houses. In whichever house the *puja* was to be conducted, they gathered there and prepared vegetarian dishes for the offerings as well as for the participants (Figure 5.23 & 5.24). On the 20<sup>th</sup> of February 2012, *Boju* invited me to attend a *puja* ceremony at one of her relative's flat in the evening. My friend and I drove up to *Boju*'s shop where Bishaka was waiting to take us to the correct house. We followed her up the staircase to the third floor of a building in the northern part of the town. The corridor to the flat was filled with adults and children, an overflow from the two big rooms in the flat. I looked in one room and saw a kind of an arch made of banana leaves, paper and flowers under which was a square fireplace where a *pundit*<sup>7</sup> had performed the fire ceremony before they sang the *bajans*<sup>8</sup> in the next room. *Boju* ushered us to the only sofa in the room, the rest of the floor was filled with men, women and children all sitting facing a corner of the room where there was a small altar. Some of the men were busy tuning their musical instruments, the likes of small drums known as *tabla* and *madal*, harmonium, guitar and tambourines (Figure 5.25). Some of the women started handing out prayer books to each other. *Boju* came back to the crowded room with some tea and snacks that were served for anyone who came to the house for the evening. The two of us awkwardly sipped the tea and nibbled at the snacks while they started to sing their *bajans*. The children were asked to dance. Bishaka and a couple of her friends gleefully waved their hands in the air and shook their hips un-rhythmically to the beat of the *tabla* and *madal* (Figure 5.26).

---

<sup>6</sup> A religious ceremony

<sup>7</sup> A Hindu priest

<sup>8</sup> Hindu hymn



Figure 5.25 Music for the prayer



Figure 5. 26 Dancing to the prayer music

There were many children running in and out of the crowded room. I was not very sure whether the children understood the significance of the evening. However, they were definitely enjoying the food, music, songs and the crowd and none of the adults restricted them in any way. I noticed *Boju* and the other women in the room covering their heads with a shawl, scarf or a piece of cloth as they started the prayers. I was later told that it was a sign of paying homage to their *guru*. I found that interesting because in my culture, we took off any head coverings as a sign of respect.

Next was *Boju's* turn to perform the *puja*. Remembering the number of people at the last *puja* that I attended, I wondered how many of them might actually fit in *Boju's* small attic. *Boju* smiled and assured me by saying, "Yes, they will fit; we will remove all the furniture outside the house." Her very accommodating and relaxed nature made me reflect on how my brother and I always panicked and fussed about the seating arrangements for the eight to ten monks who came annually to perform rituals at my house, even though our altar room was much bigger than *Boju's*.

### The Wedding

On the 25<sup>th</sup> of January, *Boju* and Bishaka travelled down south to Kalikola to attend a relative's wedding while Bishaka's mother travelled to another place in the south to attend another cousin's wedding. Bishaka and her grandmother left Paro a couple of days earlier than the actual wedding day so that they could help with the arrangements and the cooking.

I got a call on the 29<sup>th</sup> of January from Bishaka informing me that they had returned so I went to visit them. We sat on the poles and *Boju* and Bishaka shared some of the details of their trip. *Boju* told me that there were more than 200 guests and they had to offer meals starting from breakfast, as many came from villages far away. *Boju* added that, "The Indians across the border arranged all the decorations for the wedding for which the family paid a lot". Quite

impressed with all the preparations, *Boju* commented that in the earlier days, during such occasions, the meals used to be served on huge banana leaves, now they could buy readymade leaf plates from the Indian towns at the border.



Figure 5.27 The fire ceremony



Figure 5.28 The bride and the groom

*Boju* continued to elaborate on the wedding procedure. She said that once the groom arrived at the bride's house, they would then hold the “*swamvara*”<sup>9</sup>(Figures 5.27 & 5.28). I suddenly remembered “*Sita's swamvara*” that I read and rote learnt from the Indian History textbooks during my high school days. *Boju* explained that the bride would receive the groom with a flower garland and he would put a ring on her ring finger. Some unmarried girls carrying lamps and clean water would accompany the bride. Hearing this Bishaka said, “I was one of them” and added with excitement that she got money for doing that. While looking through some of the wedding photographs Bishaka shared with me some interesting information on Southern Bhutanese weddings. We came across *Boju's* photo and I asked, “What is that on *Boju's* nose?” She responded, “It's a *fuli*”<sup>10</sup>. I then commented, “You do not have a *fuli* on your nose”. She answered that she she was too young to wear *fulies*. She added that only after marriage women wore *fulies* and *potays*<sup>11</sup>. When I get married I will wear saris and all these things” added Bishaka excitedly. To provoke further discussion, I pointed at *Boju's* forehead and said, “See she has two *tikas*”. Bishaka instantly corrected me by saying, “No, one is a *tika* and the other is a *sindoor*. The red one is a *sindoor*. It is put on the forehead, when you have a husband. The yellow one is a *tika*, which we put on after a *puja*”.

Both *Boju* and Radha agreed that attending a wedding was expensive because of the travelling involved as well as the expense of the gifts. However, *Boju* added that attending these

---

<sup>9</sup> The flower garland exchange during a Hindu wedding

<sup>10</sup> A nose stud

<sup>11</sup> A Hindu woman, once married wears a bunch of small green beads with a golden piece in the centre.

weddings provided them with a good opportunity to meet the relatives in the village and she said “The first night we stayed with my sister and the next day we stayed with my sister-in-law and the last day we stayed in the bride’s house. Every day was a feast”. With a tinge of sadness in her voice, she adds, “the kind of weddings we have in our own village cannot possibly be had in any other places”.

## CHAPTER 6

*Children do not grow in isolation or simply from within, such as seeds or acorns. It is only in certain relational contexts that the thinking life, the developing identity, the moral personality, the emotional spirit, the educational learning, and socio-psychological maturing of the young person occur. (Van Manen, 1994, p.140)*

### SONAM’S FAMILY

#### Home



Figure 6.1 Wochukha



Figure 6.2 Chimina

Paro is made up of several small villages each with their own names. Sometimes it is difficult to tell where one village begins and the other ends. They are mostly identified by the cluster of houses in the villages. Wochukha (Figure 6.1), situated just below the highway, is one of the smallest villages in Paro consisting of just two households. About a hundred yards from

Woochukha is another village called Chimina (Figure 6.2), which has about eight households. Most of these villages are made up of paddy fields, fruit orchards, kitchen gardens and traditional mud-rammed houses.

Sonam, a five-year-old boy lives with his parents and grandparents in Woochukha. His grandparents' three-storey house is a typical Bhutanese farmhouse, with mud-rammed walls, numerous timbered window frames and traditional paintings both outside and inside the house. The only modern parts of the house are the bathrooms on the first floor and the galvanized, corrugated iron sheets on the roof, which replaced the traditional wooden shingle roofing that they had a few years ago. The grandparents live on the second floor of the house, where they have three bedrooms, a kitchen, a lounge, or sitting room as they usually call it, and the altar room. The most used room in the house is the spacious kitchen, which has the *bukari*<sup>12</sup> in it (Figure 6.4).



Figure 6.3 The sitting room



Figure 6.4 The *bukari* room

I spent most of my time in this warm room during my visits to their house. Visitors with whom the family is familiar and with whom they are at ease, mostly spend their time in this part of the house sitting around the *bukari* while *Angay*<sup>13</sup> constantly moves around the room cooking, cleaning, chopping and talking at the same time, and Sonam engages with his brother in various activities. The sitting room is normally used for more formal guests. It has a teak sofa, a couple of glassed cabinets with some expensive traditional wooden containers exhibited in them and, on top of one of the cabinets, a Sony 24 inch television set (Figure 6.3). I remember being ushered into this room the first time I visited them. However, I managed to make quick progress to the *bukari* room.

---

<sup>12</sup> A wood heater

<sup>13</sup> Grandmother



**Figure 6.5** The granaries

The one half of the ground floor is used as a granary (Figure 6.5), the other half is a cowshed. The first floor is partially rented to some trainee teachers from the Paro College of Education. This is quite a recent development in the villages. Many villagers have converted their cowsheds into rooms for renting to supplement their income from the sale of grains, vegetables and fruits. There are more shelters and stores outside the big house, where they cook the cattle feed on a fire. They used this same cooking place for preparing food and drinks when they have to cater to many people during special occasions such as ‘*Lomba*’ (New Year) and ‘*Choku*’ (the annual ritual). There are more granaries in front of the ground floor, an essential feature for villagers with a substantial number of paddy fields.

Sonam’s parents and his three-year-old brother live in a smaller two-storey brick unit annexed to the bigger house. All meals are prepared and eaten in the big house with the grandparents. *Angay* built this annex when Sonam’s father got transferred to work in the Bank of Bhutan in Paro. Sonam’s family lives on the first floor, which has two rooms and a bathroom, with the ground floor again being used as a granary. Each time I climbed up the narrow ladder to their house, I could hear the giggles and laughter of the two boys running around in the room, mixed with the rhythmic thud of his mother weaving on the loom. This is the room where we sit on the mat, look through photographs and chat over cups of tea brought in by *Angay* from the main house. In one corner of the room is a television on a table and under the table are heaps of toys. Sonam lifts up the curtain on the door of the second room and says, “I sleep with dad on this bed and Yoeser sleeps with mom on that bed”. The two beds almost fill up the whole room. Right next to Sonam’s house is the family rice mill made of rocks and mud (Figure 6.6) and on the left side of the mill is their only neighbour, in another traditional two-storey Bhutanese house.



Figure 6.6 The rice mill



Figure 6.7 The only water source

Both households in Wochukha share one water source in front of their houses (Figure 6.7). The water comes from the bottom of the hill about fifty yards away from the houses. The folks in the village have interesting tales to share about the source of the water, as no one knows exactly where it comes from. Many say that in winter the water stays warm and in summer it becomes cool. Every time I visit the village I see adults and children either carrying water to their houses or washing clothes and dishes under the ever-running pipe, as it does not have a tap.

On the right side of the house they have an apple orchard, where they also grow vegetables under the apple trees. The space also serves as a car park for their family (Figure 6.8). As can be seen in Figure 6.9, the apple orchard is a favourite place for the family members to sit in the sun in the winter months. Right in front of the house and the mill is a small space, where most of the time during my visits I see *Angay*, Sonam and some others spreading out grain on big tarpaulins to dry in the sun before they thrash it in the mill.



Figure 6.8 Car park



Figure 6.9 Sitting in the sun

### *Jojo and Angay*

*Jojo*<sup>14</sup> and *Angay* are *Parops*<sup>15</sup>, 67 year old *Angay*'s ancestors were originally from a place called Jimna about a couple of hours walk up the mountain above their present house. Her forefathers had lived there for many years. They had a smaller house in Wochukha where *Angay* was born. She remembers how they came down to the valley early in the mornings to work in the paddy fields and then return to their house on the mountain (Figure 6.10) late in the evenings. After some years they renovated the house in Wochukha (Figure 6.11) and decided to live there permanently, as it was more convenient to look after their fields. They visited Jimna only to perform rituals and make offerings to the deities. As of now the house still stands very strong, but without any permanent inhabitants. *Jojo* was from the next village called Wangthanka. During a conversation with *Angay*, she looked at me and said, "I think you know Dasho Ugyen: *Jojo* was from Dasho's family". I nodded, as I knew that family very well. I asked her how old *Jojo* was and she said, "He is a monkey" and I laughed. On a more serious note, I asked her what age that would be. She asked me what year it was, and I replied, "dragon", she then counted on her fingers and said, "I think, he is three scores and sixteen". Counting in scores was quite common in the villages, particularly by the older generations. Next I asked how many people actually lived in the present house.



Figure 6.10 The former house



Figure 6.11 The present house

Very interestingly, she replied, "We are 15 of us in the census" meaning in the official census record of the district. However, most of the time there were only three people living in the main house, the grandparents and one of the nephews. *Jojo* and *Angay* have eight children and eleven grandchildren. Except for the eldest son who is a farmer, the rest are all in government

---

<sup>14</sup> Grandfather

<sup>15</sup> Natives of Paro

services and three of them are primary school teachers. Talking about her children made *Angay* a bit emotional. She remembers the times when all her children lived in the house and they helped her with the chores and other household work, but now she sees them only once or twice a year. This is the lament of most parents and grandparents residing in the villages because children move out to look for jobs, which are mostly in towns. Sometimes when work in the field becomes too tedious *Angay* ruminates on the option of distributing all her land amongst her children so that it will be easier for the old couple. On second thought, she thinks it is better for them to keep the land together so that the children have a reason to come and help them. She makes sure that at least once a year the family members get together in the main house for *Choku* which is an annual ritual for the well being of the family and for *Lomba*, the *Parop* New Year that is celebrated during the eleventh month of the year.

*Angay* rarely travels anywhere because of the amount work she has to do in and around the house at all times of the year, due mainly to the many paddy fields that they own and also because of their cows and hens. She works every day from dawn to dusk. Discussing this Sonam's mother commented, "If I work like *Angay*, I think I will die. Last time we had five workers plus the two of us, we carried wet manure to the fields, and some of the fields were far. At the end of the day I could hardly walk". *Angay's* youngest son, Penjor added, "Even if there is nothing much to do, she will still look for something to do. I think she is



**Figure 6.12 Manure for the fields**



**Figure 6.13 Hay for the cows**

used to slogging too much from her young days." *Angay* listened to us talking about her and then commented, "If I stay idle my body stops functioning. When my calves ache, the best thing to do is to pick up the bamboo container and start carrying manure to the fields or hay to the cowshed (Figures 6.12 & 6.13). The minute I sit down the aches begin".

Every time she is not well, she takes a pain killer, that she calls the 'pink tablets'. She jovially tells me, "I eat the pink tablet, one every morning and I am fine the whole day". Once she had

to undergo an endoscopic check up by one of her nephews who is a doctor. He had advised her earlier not to eat the tablets constantly. Noticing some sores on the linings of her stomach, he reprimanded her for not listening to him and she replied, “I cannot work without taking these tablets and moreover I am quite close to death, so it does not really matter”.

*Angay* has fourteen cows and she faces great difficulties taking care of them. That was why she was very keen to give some of them away. But she was in a kind of dilemma, finding a safe home for the cows so that they do not get turned into beef. Hearing us talking about the cows, Sonam, with a concerned look, asked, “*Angay*, are you giving away *Dhongkam*<sup>16</sup>, too?” She smiled at him and patted his head before replying, “No, no, I am going to give away only the ox. *Dhongkam* will soon have a calf”. With excitement sparkling in his eyes he reminded *Angay* that she had agreed to give him the calf. *Angay* nodded her head, looked at me and smiled.

One day I walked with Sonam and his *Angay* between the mill and the house towards the cowshed at the back of the house. On the way, Sonam popped his head inside the chicken coop and took out an egg and showed it to me. I asked him how many hens he had and he said, “ten”. I then commented, “Why only one egg?” He explained that winters were too cold for them all to lay eggs, having said that he looked at *Angay* for confirmation. *Angay* added that they get ten eggs everyday in summer and that was enough for the two boys.

Most of the time in winter, *Jojo* took trips to the hot springs or went on pilgrimages. This time he went down south to Phuntsholing to attend a prayer ceremony that lasted two months. Two of their children worked in Phuntsholing, so accommodation was not a concern. However *Jojo* could not spend the whole two months as planned. I was surprised to see him back in the house one day. We sat in the sun and talked about the prayer ceremony and he added with some unhappiness that he had to return before the completion of the ceremony because it was time for getting the fields watered and ready for sowing rice. He waved his hands to the many fields in front of his house and said, “These fields take about three days to fill up when the water source is quite small”.

---

<sup>16</sup> White face



**Figure 6.14 the dey**



**Figure 6.15 My brother buying rice from Angay**

The family had seventy to eighty *dey*<sup>17</sup> (Figure 6.14) of paddy fields. The grandparents provided rice to all their children throughout the year and still have plenty to sell. I bought my rice from them too (Figure 6.15). Each time the children returned from their home to their work places a major load in their cars were sacks full of red and white rice. They would carry enough rice to last them until their next home visit. The corridors in between the big house and the sheds outside the house were filled with huge sacks full of rice.

Having to thrash so much rice throughout the year as and when required for the children and the customers, proved an expensive activity, especially when they had to thrash it at someone else's mill. Therefore, they bought a mill machine from India and then set up their own rice mill (Figure 6.16). As I looked around the mill, Angay got busy cleaning some rice in a tin (Figure 6.17). Sonam pointed at the long tough band that went around the wheels of the mill and said, "This comes off sometimes, last time I helped Angay put it back". Without looking up from the tin, Angay said, "Yes, we two fixed it last time, didn't we".



**Figure 6.16 The mill machine**



**Figure 6.17 Angay cleans the rice**

One day, Sonam and I were sitting outside the mill, looking through some photographs while Angay was cleaning the mill. We came across a photograph of Angay with a young girl, who I had never seen before, so I asked him who she was. He said, "My aunty came to give some

---

<sup>17</sup> A container to measure rice (approximately 1 ½ kilograms)

things to *Angay*". From the mill, *Angay* shouted, "Who?" Sonam ran inside the mill with the photograph. However, when *Angay* stretched out her dusty hands to take the photograph he swiftly moved it away from her reach and said, "Your hands are dirty" and then he pointed at the girl. *Angay* wiped her hands on the colourful wrapper that she wore outside the *kira*<sup>18</sup> and as we walked out of the mill to where we sat earlier, she said, "That's my niece, her mother had sent me some cheese and riverweed from Punakha". She laughed and added, "My niece wanted to give me her mother's mobile number, however I did not know how to record it on my mobile". Sonam looked at me and said, "My *Angay* does not know how to receive a call. I receive and make calls for her". *Angay* laughed and added, "Yes, he is a very smart boy, he even plays Bhutanese songs for me on my mobile". Sonam looked very pleased with *Angay*'s comments.

One day I sat with *Angay* and Sonam in the apple orchard, helping them clean the dried red chillies that *Angay* wanted to grind and take to one of her daughters working elsewhere (Figure 6.18). I said, " So finally you have decided to make a trip, too", she responded, "Yes, madam, actually I do not like to travel, however my daughter needs a friend for a couple of days as *Aku Jojo*<sup>19</sup> has to attend a ritual at a monastery for some days". *Aku Jojo* is *Jojo*'s younger brother who is a monk and lives with the girl.



Figure 6.18 Cleaning red chillies



Figure 6.19 the *Joeps*

While we chatted, Sonam and his brother were busy riding their cycles in between the apple trees. Suddenly I heard Sonam shout, "*Angay*, the *Joeps*<sup>20</sup> (nomads) with their *sung*<sup>21</sup> are in the field". At first, I did not know what he was saying. *Angay* looked across the fields and I

<sup>18</sup> Woman's national dress in Bhutan

<sup>19</sup> Grandfather's brother

<sup>20</sup> Nomads

<sup>21</sup> Incense

too looked in the same direction and saw a man and a woman at a distance (Figure 6.19). She said, “The *Joebs* have again come to sell *sung*. Last year, I exchanged some of their *sung* for my rice and dry chillies”. Just then the couple shouted across the fields, inquiring whether she would like some more incense and *Angay* shouted back, “No, remember I kept enough last time”.

She then turned to me and asked me from where I bought my *sung* and I told her that I got them from the Sunday Market in town. She recommended that the *Joebs’ sung* from the high mountains were the best. I instantly got up and told her that “I will be back soon” and ran across the barren paddy fields to buy some *sung* from the *Joebs*.

### Sonam’s parents

Sonam’s parents are a fusion of the east and west. His father Ugyen is a *Parop* and his mother Rinchen is a *Sherchop*<sup>22</sup> from a small village called Pangthang in Zhemgang district, in the east. Rinchen came from a family of eight siblings and she was the eldest. Rinchen’s parents still lived in Panthang with one of her brothers, and most of her father’s relatives lived there, too. Most of her mother’s siblings had moved to the capital, Thimphu.

Rinchen wove cloth when she had time and helped *Angay* with the household chores. Whilst she did not mind getting up early to light the *bukari* in the main house and then prepare meals for the whole family there was one thing that she dreaded and that was carrying manure to the many fields around the village. She said, “Especially when the manure is wet, it is back breaking. The next day I just cannot get up from my bed”.



Figure 6.20 Uncle Jigme and Sonam do the laundry

Rinchen spends a lot of time washing heaps of clothes under the water pipe outside the house. Sometimes Sonam and his uncle helped (Figure 6.20). One day I watched Sonam washing

---

<sup>22</sup> A person from the eastern Bhutan

clothes, he was so engrossed in his washing that he was unaware of the long leech like secretion from his nose, which was about to drop on the clothes that he was washing. His mother took one look at him and screamed, “Are you trying to add more detergent to your wash?” He looked at her and continued to brush. She told him to wipe his nose, which he did by blowing his nose into his small hand and then flung it across the field. Once more his mother screamed between laughter, “Be careful, you might fling it on madam!” I told her, “Don’t worry I can dodge it” and all of us had a good laugh. She looked at her son lovingly and added, “When I am busy he takes good care of his smaller brother, he never beats or snatches things from him, compared to some other children, he is not naughty”. Still continuing to brush Sonam said, “Yoeser, always wants to wrestle with me”. I asked, “Who wins?” He looked up at me with one eye closed because of the bright sunshine and said, “I let him win”.

When asked about her expectations for her children, Rinchen told me that she had not thought much about it. She said, “After all, everything depends on their fate, there is no use hoping and wishing, I think”. She poured me a cup of tea and continued, “Look at my husband’s niece; she has not yet got a job although she has finished her graduation a long time back”. I asked Rinchen whether Sonam was keen about going to school and she said that he did not talk much about it. However, the younger son was very keen about going to school. She then gave me a concerned look and said, “Madam, I am worried that Yoeser might insist on sitting with his brother inside the classroom”. I comforted her by saying that we can allow him to sit with Sonam for some time. She could not believe this could happen and she said, “I am told that parents are not even allowed to stay in the school campus”. I then told her that we would wait and see what happens.

Sonam’s father, Ugyen is a cashier in the Bank of Bhutan. He had worked in three different places in Bhutan before he got posted home to Paro. During his placement in Thimphu he met Rinchen, who then was running a small bar after dropping out of school in grade eight. Ugyen is not very fluent in his wife’s language, which is *Sherchogpakha*<sup>23</sup> so all four of them always speak *Dzongkha*. Although Rinchen uses her mother tongue when she is with her own relatives, she has no problems communicating in *Dzongkha* when she is in Paro.

Ugyen is a very useful and helpful person for the people in his village when it comes to helping them invest and save money in the bank. Most villagers do not understand the

---

<sup>23</sup> A dialect in eastern Bhutan

banking procedures, so they keep their money that they make from the sale of apples or rice at home. A woman joined Sonam's family for lunch. She had come to see Ugyen.



Figure 6.21 *Angay* serves lunch



Figure 6.22 Banking at home

When Ugyen arrived for lunch, *Angay* picked a basket full of plates and bowls from the kitchen shelf and placed it on the floor, the guest helped her to place the rice cooker and the curry pan on the floor. We all sat around the *bukari* on the wooden floor and *Angay* started to serve food and pass it around (Figure 6.21). As usual I tried to refuse, but to no avail, so I joined them for lunch. After lunch the guest handed some money to Ugyen (Figure 6.22) and he jokingly said, "That's a lot, a few notes will do". We all laughed and then Ugyen reminded her to take the receipt for the previous month's deposit. I looked at Ugyen and said, "So you are the village banker" and he laughed. Sonam looked up from his food and said, "Yoeser and I have money in the bank too, haven't we, *Apa*?"<sup>24</sup> His father looked at him and nodded his head.

Sonam's mother and his brother had gone to Thimphu to their relatives' house. Sonam and his father were going to join them on the weekend. Sonam was excited about the trip and he said, "We have to take *Santabarbara* for *Ama*<sup>25</sup>, isn't it *Apa*?" I looked quizzically at him and asked what *Santabarbara* was and he replied seriously, "I think it is wine, however, *Apa* and *Ama* call it juice". Ugyen and I burst out laughing, though Sonam did not catch the joke.

Ugyen went back to his office and the guest and I helped *Angay* clear up the dishes, pots and pans from the floor and put them in a bucket, so they could be taken to the water pipe outside the house to be washed. From behind the kitchen door, the guest took out a broom to sweep the floor, but *Angay* refused her help and asked Sonam to do the sweeping. She said, "He does it every time we two are on our own".

---

<sup>24</sup> Father

<sup>25</sup> Mother

### Sonam and Yoeser

Sonam is two years older than his little brother Yoeser; therefore he is the *Acho*<sup>26</sup>, who is expected to take care of his little brother. Most of the time when Rinchen is weaving, she keeps the boys indoors. Besides playing with the heaps of toys they have, Sonam enjoys watching a couple of Indian cartoon programs namely, “*Chota Bhim*” and “*Jagu and Raju*”. As I hadn’t seen these programs on my television at home, I asked him which channel they are on and he said, “They come right after the other cartoon programs in Pogo”.



Figure 6.23 Sonam makes a kite



Figure 6.24 Sonam cleans up the room

When they are not watching cartoons, Sonam likes to make paper kites, planes and darts for himself and Yoeser (Figure 6.23). I often saw the boys on the floor surrounded by papers, scissors, glue, sellotape, sticks, strings and pencils. Rinchen sometimes fussed about the mess that they made in the house so Sonam always sweeps the floor after every paper-cutting activity (Figure 6.24). As we were talking and looking through the photographs, his brother opened the door to walk out onto the very small porch at the top of the ladder. Sonam got up instantly and shouted, “Yoeser, come in and close the door” and his mother shouted at the same time, “Quick, quick, Sonam get him inside”. Sonam locked the door as his little brother came into the room. Every time I was at their house, I have always observed Sonam doing things for his brother as per his mother’s instructions. Sometimes he would be under the beds looking for his brother’s wellington boots, sometimes he would be carrying his brother’s tricycle to a spot where Yoeser can ride it safely and at times he would be running around looking for a piece of cloth to wipe his brother’s nose as well as his own and most days he is babysitting, a responsibility that he shoulders very efficiently.

---

<sup>26</sup> Elder brother



Figure 6.25 Thrashing rice



Figure 6.26 Angay and Sonam dry rice

I picked up a photograph of Sonam behind a machine in the fields near a haystack (Figure 6.25). He looked at it and said that it was a grain thrasher and I asked him how it was used and he explained, “You must hold the bundle firmly and move your feet on the paddle and we thrash it like this”. As he spoke he demonstrated with actions. Just then his mother came in the room with some tea and upon seeing the photograph she said, “I told him not to go in the dust, you know ma’am, when they beat the rice like this there is so much dust. The next day his eyes were all red”. She looked at her son with more softness and said, “He likes participating in the farm work. We call him *Angay*’s right hand”. Sonam added proudly, “*Angay* says I am better than some of the workers”.

Although the two boys had heaps of manufactured toys in their house, Sonam never gets tired of making his own toys. Most of the time, his little brother watches and waits patiently for his *Acho* to make a toy for him. One very interesting improvised toy was the maize cob darts that he called *kuru*<sup>27</sup> with feathers stuck at one end and sharp sticks stuck at the other end (Figure 6.27). I asked Sonam how he learnt to make them and he said, “My uncle made one and I made the rest”.

---

<sup>27</sup> Darts



Figure 6.27 The *kurus*



Figure 6.28 Making a paper propeller

He and his brother had *kuru* matches with their cousins. He smiled and said, “Yoeser and I use the ones with the best feathers so we win”. He also made paper airplanes. He said, “I did not know how to make one and dad did not know either, then uncle Jigme taught me and I made one”.



Figure 6.29 The "cycle"



Figure 6.30 Fixing the "cycle"

Another of his favorite activities was playing with a circular pipe that he rolled on the ground with a looped aluminum wire. He calls it the ‘cycle’ (Figure 6.29). His uncle Jigme made it for him. I reminisced as to how I played with the same improvised toy made by my father during my childhood days.

I shared my experiences with Sonam and told him how difficult it was for me to make it roll on the ground and he said, “Your hand should be on the pipe and as you roll it with the wire you must run. If you go slowly, the ring will not roll”. Once while rolling the ‘cycle’ the pipe came apart and Sonam tried to put the two ends together.

However, he could not. Seeing this, his cousin’s grandfather picked it up and fixed it for him while he kept talking to *Angay* about cows (Figure 6.30). A couple of boys from the neighbouring village wanted to try rolling it too. Seeing the demand for this single pipe circle,

the old man drew out his short dagger from inside his *gho*<sup>28</sup> and cut some more pieces from the scrap pipes behind the house and joined them into circles. Meanwhile, Sonam's uncle and I collected some aluminum wire to make the rollers, so that by the end of the day, all the children had a pipe to roll.



Figure 6.31 Sonam and cousins

A very popular outside activity for Sonam and his cousins was riding their bicycles and tricycles. There were quite a lot of photographs of the boys and their cousins riding bikes or climbing trees in their orchard. I had a very interesting time listening to Sonam's explanation about one of the photographs. He said, "We are putting oil in our bikes". He pointed to a red string hanging from the nearby willow tree and said; "You see this we are putting oil from this" (Figure 6.31). I asked him what kind of oil he was using for his bike. He paused and said, "Petrol" and then added, "Apa uses petrol in his car". I asked him who the girl in the photograph was and he said, "My cousin, she is the oil manager". "Who is the boy beside her?" I asked. He said, "Her brother, he is a mechanic".

Besides his cousins, a friend from the adjacent village quite frequently joined Sonam to play. Sonam introduced him to me through the photographs. He said, "This is Wangchuk, from there", he pointed towards Chimina. He then added, "Like you, he does not know how to roll the cycle. I showed him how to do it". He pointed at the small bow and arrows and said, "It's Wangchuk's" and then added that he could make bows and arrows too.

---

<sup>28</sup> Bhutanese national dress for man



**Figure 6.32 Sonam practices his ABCs**

Like most Bhutanese children Sonam practices writing the English alphabet at home (Figure 6.32). On the first day of my visit to their house, I saw him writing ABCs with a red marker pen, on one of the wooden grain containers in the corridor. I asked him who taught him to write and he replied, “*Apa*”. I asked whether he could read them and he said, “No. I can only write them, reading I will learn in PP”. The drawing book that I gave him was also filled with letters from the English alphabet. He had even written letters from the alphabet on his bike, which he tells me, was his name and bike number.



**Figure 6. 33 Drawing the house**



**Figure 6.34 Sharing the drawing book**

Besides writing the letter of the English alphabet everywhere, Sonam loves to draw. He frequently draws his grandmother’s big house (Figure 6.33). His drawings of the main house were always detailed. He would often explain his drawing to me, by saying, “This is where we sleep, this is upstairs, this is grain, this is Jigme, this is my cow, this is *Jojo* and this is where we get water”. As seen in Figure 6.34, sometimes his brother joins him in using the drawing book, trying to copy what his *Acho* draws.

### **The *Lomba***

*Parops* celebrate *Lomba* as a New Year starting from the 29<sup>th</sup> day of the 10<sup>th</sup> month until the 1<sup>st</sup> of the 11<sup>th</sup> month on a lunar calendar. Every member of the house, irrespective of where

they are will try and make it home before the *Lomba* eve, which is the 29<sup>th</sup>. On the *Lomba* eve, when the household performs a ritual cleansing of the house to remove all bad vibes, it is essential for all family members to be present. *Jojo* believes that not only is *Lomba* a very festive occasion when families meet and spend the whole day eating; it is also a kind of an auspicious omen that symbolizes the healthy and harmonious presence of every family member for every *Lomba* for many more years to come.

On the morning of the 29<sup>th</sup> day, as I walked towards their house through the fields, I met *Angay* with a huge basket of manure on her back just outside their house. She explained that she had to finish taking the manure out of the cowshed because it was believed that no old manure should be left in the shed when *Lomba* begins. Three days after *Lomba*, we sat in the *bukari* room and, as usual, *Sonam* took me on a virtual tour of *Lomba* on his uncle's laptop. By now he knew how to take the memory card out of the camera and insert it into the memory slot of the laptop and I helped him to open the photograph files and then asked him to share his *Lomba* celebrations with me.



Figure 6.35 29<sup>th</sup> Eve dinner



Figure 6.36 Family members in the orchard

On the *Lomba* eve, before the family sat for their dinner (Figure 6.35), they had the *lue* ritual. The *lue*, which normally comes in a form of an effigy made with flour, representing the family was not seen in the *bungchung* that held the other ingredients for the *lue* (Figure 6.37). Out of curiosity, I asked *Sonam* where the *lue* was and he looked at me quizzically. His uncle laughed and said, “We put a printed version of the *lue*” and *Angay* supplemented by saying, “We have the *lue* printed with the twelve animals of the year from the Buddhist horoscope, so everybody’s age will be represented”. *Acu Jojo* carried the *lue bungchung* around to every family member so that they could say their prayers for a good year ahead and put some money in it (Figure 6.38). *Sonam*’s mother laughed and said, “*Yoeser* refused to

part with his money”. Sonam added, “I gave him my GI Joe, only then did he put the money in the *lue*, isn’t it, *Ama*?”



Figure 6.37 the *Lue* in the *bungchung*



Figure 6.38 *Acu Jojo*

Rinchen nodded. *Angay*’s eldest daughter, made a trail from the *lue* to the door with white flour and as they carried the *lue* out of the house, she swept the flour after them so that the *lue* does not see the route back home (Figure 6.39 & 6.40).



Figure 6.39 A trail for the *Lue*



Figure 6.40 Cleaning up the trail

Once outside the house they lit some fire crackers which made Sonam and his cousins very excited. Slightly disappointed he said, “We still have many big bombs and pencil bombs left. *Angay* did not let us light them all; she feared that the fire might fall into the haystacks in the field”.

Next we saw some photographs of the family’s hot stone bath (Figure 6.41 & 6.42). Most families arrange a hot stone bath for the night, symbolizing the washing off all sins and misfortune before the *Lomba*. Some humorously call it the *Parops*’ annual bath’, which must have been true half a century ago. Sonam looked at one of the photographs of him naked and

stuck out his tongue in embarrassment. I asked him whether he enjoyed the stone bath and he nodded his head and quickly clicked the key for the next photograph.



Figure 6.41 The stone bath



Figure 6.42 The hot stones for the bath

During *Lomba*, most of the men played archery and *kurus* while some women danced and some brought food for the players and the children ran everywhere and ate for the whole day.

### The *Choku*

Another very important occasion, for which all family members' presence is required, is the *Choku* (Figure 43 & 44). Most perform it for a day and some do it for two days, depending on how many local deities they have to appease. Sonam's family does it for two days.

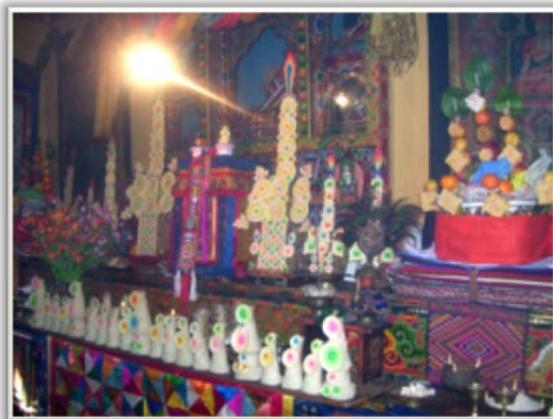


Figure 6.43 The *tormas* for the *Choku*



Figure 6.44 The *Choku* performers

A lot of preparation has to be done before the actual *Choku*. A couple of days before the *Choku* I met *Angay* in one of her sheds where she cooked the cow feed. That day she was going to use the right date for the *Choku* was a very difficult task when you have a huge family. The problem was getting a date on which all family members, plus the number of

monks required for fireplace to prepare *ara*<sup>29</sup> (Figure 6.45) for the *Choku*. As she got the pots ready for making *ara*, I commented, “So for the *Choku* you need quite a lot of *ara*, don’t you?” She said, “Not so much, now-a-days people prefer beer. I have to prepare *ara* for the offerings.”



Figure 6.45 *Angay* making *ara*

Besides the preparation of food and wine for the *Choku*, *Aku Jojo* confided that fixing the performing the *Choku*, can be present. *Acu Jojo* shook his head and said, “It’s not like before when the children were all in the house. Now we have to wait for each one of them to arrive home from different places”. *Angay* added, “Phurba (one of her teacher sons) has to attend a workshop first, and only then can he join us. He agreed to bring fruits for the offerings from Punakha”. When I heard Punakha, I asked whether Phurba would be bringing any *Tan Tshering* rice, special rice grown in some parts of Punakha. *Acu Jojo* smiled and responded, “Yes, it is the best rice in Bhutan. It tastes so good”. There was another woman in the house during our discussions and she inquired, “Is it like our Japanese rice?” To which *Acu Jojo* responded, “I don’t think so. I believe the first person that planted it was called *Tan Tshering*, therefore, the rice was named after him.

During a certain part of the *Choku ritual* all the family members enter the altar room (Figure 6.46), say their prayers for the coming year and then place money on the altar. I asked *Sonam* what he had prayed for and he coyly said, “To pass in PP”. I asked him what dishes he liked the best during his *Choku* and he answered, “Yak sausages”. I added, “I like them too”. For

<sup>29</sup> Local white wine

the whole two days of *Choku*, the monks performed the rituals in the altar room (Figures 6.44 & 6.47) while the family and the guests chatted, ate and drank for the whole day. As a child I always looked forward to *Choku* and *Lomba*.



**Figure 6.46** Sonam prostrates in the altar room



**Figure 6.47** Offerings to the deities

## CHAPTER 7

*Societies in which children are integrated in adult activities, the children are ensured a role in the action, at least as close observers. (Rogoff, 1990, p. 124)*

### PEMA'S FAMILY

#### Home



Figure 7.1 The Airport



Figure 7.2 The Paro valley

Khangkhu is a small and quiet village on a hillside facing Paro International Airport (Figure 7.1) across the *Pachu*, the river that flows through the Paro Valley (Figure 7.2). This village enjoys a few extra facilities that other villages do not. It has the Khangkhu Middle Secondary School and the Indian Military Health Unit at the base of the hill below the main highway. I live in the same vicinity, just above the school. After a busy day at the Paro College of Education, I look forward to the cup of *lopchu*<sup>30</sup> tea that I drink outside my house and then look up at the top of the hill to see the green stretch of pine trees touching the blue borders of the clear sky.



Figure 7.3 Pema's house



Figure 7.4 The neighbours

---

<sup>30</sup> An aromatic tea

As my gaze descends, I see a beautiful two storey traditional Bhutanese house (Figure 7.3) overlooking the whole of Khangkhu village and with a good view of the valley. This is where Pema, a six year old boy lives with his parents and three older siblings. The traditional paintings, typical Bhutanese designs of the windows and the mud bricks used in constructing the house make it different from the other huge plain concrete buildings that have been sprouting like mushrooms for the last ten years in this small village. Pema's father, Tenzin built the house some seven years ago with the help of a dozen relatives from his village, Radhi, in Eastern Bhutan. He lent them money when he visited his village in the winter. In return they came to his aid when he needed them. This solved the problem of getting labourers from India, a procedure requiring extensive paperwork for the Immigration and Customs Department of both India and Bhutan.



Figure 7.5 The altar



Figure 7.6 The bukari

A single attic room on the top of the first floor is the altar room (Figure 7.5), where they perform the frequent prayers, rituals and offerings to the many gods, goddesses, deities and lamas. The family lives on the first floor, which has three bedrooms, a sitting room, two bathrooms and a kitchen. As usual with most Bhutanese houses, the most used room in the house is the '*bukari*<sup>31</sup> room' (Figure 7.6) which in summer is known as the 'sitting room' when they remove the *bukari* for about seven months till the cold months arrive again, sometime around November. Walking into their *bukari* room was like walking on a chessboard because of the black and white design on the linoleum that covered the floor. The family receives all their guests in this room, always with tea and snacks. In all their children's bedrooms there were study chairs and tables in the corners cluttered with books and files (Figure 7.7). On the walls of the rooms were colourful educational charts, such as multiplication charts, vegetable and fruit charts with labels in English (Figure 7.8). Pema's

---

<sup>31</sup> A wood heater

mother Ngawang hopes that her children will learn some things from the charts as they sit, sleep and study in their rooms.



Figure 7.7 The study corner



Figure 7.8 The fruit charts

The walk up the hill, following the winding red dirt road towards Pema's house, is a pleasure. As I take a breather on a rock, my eyes feast on the beautiful Paro valley and my nose catches a whiff of fresh pine trees from the coniferous forest that forms the backdrop to the house. I would have thoroughly enjoyed my trudge up the hill had it not been for the many stray dogs that were fed by the tenants living in the buildings on the way up. These dogs in return dutifully barked at anyone walking on the road. So, every time I visited Pema's house, he and his sister had to meet me halfway up the hill so that I reached their house in one piece.

### The Parents

Tenzin and Ngawang are initially from Radhi, in Eastern Bhutan, a place popular for its raw silk, hand woven materials known as '*bura*'; a material much recommended for *ghos*<sup>32</sup> and *kiras*<sup>33</sup> worn during occasions such as festivals, ceremonies and rituals. Tenzin and Ngawang are a handsome couple in their mid-thirties. I assumed that they must have had a romantic marriage in a remote village in the east. However, Ngawang popped this particular figment of my imagination when she announced in her shy demeanour that they had an arranged marriage. She said, "Our parents discussed it and advised us to get married, so I agreed, thinking I will not have to study any more". She dropped out of school from year eight, when she was 19 years old to get married to Tenzin her distant cousin. It is generally believed in Bhutan that arranged marriages are quite common in the east, especially between distant cousins and that marriages arranged by parents work well for children.

---

<sup>32</sup> Bhutanese national costume for man

<sup>33</sup> Bhutanese national costume for woman

## Ngawang

Pema's mother, Ngawang comes from a family of five siblings. Except for her eldest sister who still lives in the village, the rest have all moved to the western part of Bhutan. She says, "Opportunities are better this side". Her statement reminded me of a talk that I had with a stranger. I once walked with an old *Parop*<sup>34</sup> towards the Paro Hospital up the hill. As we looked down the valley, he heaved a long sigh and said, "I won't be surprised if one day, I find half of the *Parop* living as tenants in *Sherchop*<sup>35</sup> houses". Paro has an ever-growing population of *Sherchops* and others, so I understood the old man's concern.

On the first day, as I entered their *bukari* room, I had the impression that there was someone in the house who was passionate about plants; some very lush green indoor plants and flowers adorned the room. I asked Ngawang about her favourite pastime and she excitedly responded in English, "Flowers, madam, first thing that comes to my mind are flowers". Every time we talk about flowers and plants her face lights up and she would join in the conversation with much gusto. One day, she and her children took me to the back of their house to show me the small self-made greenhouse, which contained quite a variety of plants and flowers. As we chatted, Pema and his sister ran in and around the greenhouse taking photographs. I looked at one of the flowerpots and commented that the primula was very beautiful. Ngawang looked at my face and then looked at all her flowerpots in the greenhouse and asked me doubtfully, "Is it the white one?" A bit surprised, I told her that it was the purple one and she laughed and told me that she did not know the names of most of her plants, but was very good at growing and taking care of them. I told her that I could name many plants but did not know how to grow them and we had a good laugh. Her children loved assisting her in taking care of the plants. They helped her in making the soil, collecting cow dung for manure and watering the plants. Pema's sister told me that each child has to take a potted plant to the school as a part of the school greening program. Ngawang added that, "Very soon, Pema will be asked to bring one, too". Ngawang loves to exchange and give flower seeds and plant cuttings to her friends and relatives, whoever is interested in growing flowers. During my second visit to her house, I gave her some packets of flower seeds and bulbs that I had bought from Australia, and told her that I would like some of them, if they were still thriving in 2014, when I returned home. She responded with confidence and happiness that she would have them ready for me.

---

<sup>34</sup> A native of Paro

<sup>35</sup> A native of Eastern Bhutan



Figure 7.9 The pole gate

It was the 15<sup>th</sup> of December and I was at Pema’s wooden pole gate in front of the house. Just as I bent down to crawl in between the poles, I heard a clatter of hooves. I stopped and looked up to see Pema chasing a couple of cows round his house towards the gate. I quickly got out of the way as the cows pushed themselves through the poles and vanished into the jungle (Figure 7.9). Pema pushed some pieces of cloth that he had in his hands into his pants pocket and then pulled out a pole to let me in. I thanked him for the help and asked him what the cloth pieces were and as usual he gave me his monosyllabic response, “*sung*” which is a smoke offering that a Buddhist makes. As we chatted, Ngawang emerged with a bucket full of similar pieces of cloth. Pema picked up the cloth pieces, one by one and handed them to his mother, who hung them on the clothesline with a peg on each one of them (Figure 7.10). I commented, “I think you need a few dozen more pegs” and she laughed. I asked Pema how they used these cloth pieces in the *sung* and he looked at his mother, who responded, “We cut them up into small pieces and mix them up with incense sticks, scented woods, raisins, milk, sugar biscuits, fruits, sweets; as many items as possible and then burn some every morning”. I too, make *sung* offerings at my house but in a different way, therefore I could not help asking her, why offer *sung* in this way. She smiled and said, “The smoke of the *sung* reaches all the dead, the living and the celestials. The different ingredients are the representations of the worldly things that all of us need, such as food, clothing and money. Thus using the smoke I offer to all sentient beings what we all need”.

Ngawang collects the cloth pieces from the tailors in Paro town, who willingly accumulate them for her, as they do not have the time to make these offerings themselves. Ngawang tells me that Pema enjoys washing, drying and cutting the cloth pieces although sometimes he forgets what the stuff is for and he would accidently step on them, which should not happen.

Mother and son then showed me the temporary *sung* place at the back of the house (Figure 7.11).



Figure 7.10 The cloth pieces for 'sung'



Figure 7.11 The 'sung' offering place

Tenzin had promised his wife a proper *sung* dome, soon. Pema's family are Buddhist and his mother is most vigilant when it comes to participating in religious rites and ceremonies. I once complimented her on her piousness and she said, "I am just trying to do what I can within this short human life, because after I die I am not very sure whether I will be fortunate enough to be born as a human again".

When Ngawang is not attending to the chores in the house or working in her green house, or attending a '*trema*<sup>36</sup>' ritual, most of the time she is harnessed to her loom trying to make some progress on a half finished *gho* piece (Figure 7.12).



Figure 7.12 The loom

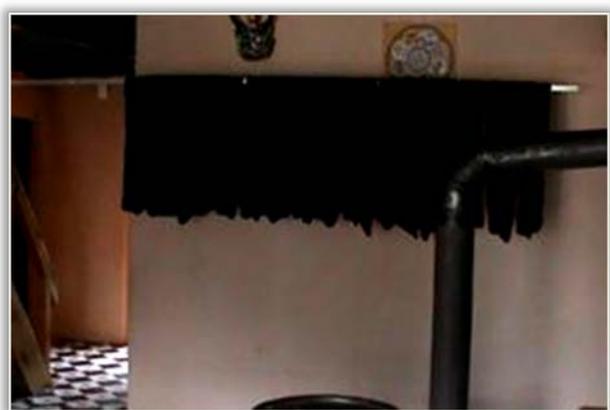


Figure 7.13 The dyed wool

It is a known fact in Bhutan that women from the east are mostly good weavers. They learn this skill from their parents at a very young age. Many of them use this skill to make a living for themselves and their families. However, Ngawang and her mother mostly wove clothes for

---

<sup>36</sup> A ritual

their own use. Once while going through some photographs, I asked Pema and his sister why they have wool hanging on the walls (Figure 7.13). His sister explained that her mother and grandmother sometimes dyed wool with natural plant dyes that they prepared in their villages in the east. They boil the dye in a big pot on the *bukari* and then soak the wool in it for some hours, after which they hang it out to dry. Ngawang is trying to finish her weaving before the school starts. She said, “Once the school starts I will have to accompany Pema to school. His brother cried a lot, I had to go with him to the school continuously for four months and stay the whole time in school, till the PP classes were over”. With a worried face she added that she was not very sure how Pema would react to school.

### **Tenzin**

Pema’s father, Tenzin studied till year 10 in the east. He says, “I started from the Radhi primary, then to Tashigang Junior then in Kaling Middle”. After which he moved to the capital, Thimphu where he joined the Royal Institute of Management (RIM) for two-years’ training in finance and accounting. While on the training, he took a part-time work with *Tashi Nyencha*, which at the time was the only private entertainment group in Bhutan. He learnt how to dance, sing and play musical instruments and even performed mask dances. Tenzin shares with me an exciting trip that he made to Japan. He says, “In 1998 we went to Japan to play music, dance, sing and also perform mask dances. We went again in 2000, there were about 76 countries participating. It was like a competition and we came first and got an award”.

After the completion of the training at RIM, he got his first job placement in Paro High Court in 1994. His wife joined him in Paro in 2000. For six years he continued working part-time with *Tashi Nyencha*. The arrival of their first child and the demands of the office work kept him away from the part-time work that he loved doing. He proudly tells me that most of the performers and the proprietors of all the present private entertainment groups in the country had once been part of the *Tashi Nyencha* group.

Tenzin still has a *drumney* (a Bhutanese guitar) in his house which he sometimes plays after he comes back from the office in the evenings. He says, “I can still play but with less dexterity” and adds, “Now, maybe because of my age, I am not that interested in music and dances. You know, I guess for everything there is a particular time in life”. Sometimes he teaches his children how to play *drumney* if they show interest. He says, “You know ma’am, for everything we need to have interest, otherwise it does not work”.

One day I asked Tenzin about his current job at the Civil Aviation and as usual he explained the length and breadth of how he became a storeman-in-charge after working for thirteen years at the Paro Court. He said, “I was transferred from the Paro *Dzongkhag* to Dagana in the south. I did not want to go down there, so I changed my department”. With a contented smile on his face he said, “If I had gone to the south I would never have had the opportunity to build a house in Paro”. Although the Civil Aviation Department in the Paro Airport looks very close from Tenzin’s window, he has to drive about three kilometres to reach his office each day. Every morning he would leave home with his packed lunch that Ngawang prepares for him, as well as for the children.

I asked Tenzin what were his hopes and aspirations for his children. He thought for some time and said that he actually did not have many expectations for his children. He said, “I want them to study, although I do not have much hope of them getting government jobs because for that they have to have very high marks. Getting a job has now become so competitive”. He continued, “It’s not like during my time - even with a grade 8 we could get a job. For these children (he points at Pema who was playing with his Lego blocks on the floor) there is so much competition. I wonder what it will be like when they finish their graduation in about 16 to 17 years time”. On a lighter tone he added, “My responsibility is to make them complete their education and what they will become, whether a minister or a *Dasho*<sup>37</sup> or a sweeper will depend on their *karma*<sup>38</sup>. The ones who can learn fast and the ones who cannot learn much, both are a result of their *karmas*”. At the end of the conversation, he solemnly says that he and Ngawang will do the best they can and the rest they leave to their *karmas*.

### **Pema’s grandparents and great grandparents**

Ngawang’s parents live at a place called Wochu about a kilometre away from Khangkhu, where they have rented a small house. I wondered why they did not live together with their children at Khangkhu. It is normally the practice for parents to live with their children even if the dwelling is a tent. However, I later heard from Ngawang’s father that he and his wife wanted a quieter place to live. Tenzin looked at them lovingly and said, “I always asked them to live with us, however, they refused”. Ngawang’s father shares the same passion for plants as his daughter, which helped him to get a job as a gardener at the Paro International Airport.

---

<sup>37</sup> A man of high status

<sup>38</sup> The result of a person’s actions in one of his or her lives which influences what happens to them in their future lives.

Every time there was a gathering at their daughter's house, her parents came to assist her, especially with the cooking. Occasionally they would housesit when Tenzin and his family have to make trips out of Paro. Sometimes Ngawang leaves her children at their place in Woochu, when she has to attend to other things. The grandmother frequents Pema's house more than her grandfather, for she helps Ngawang with her weaving.

I once asked Ngawang how old Tenzin's mother was. She thought for some time and then she made Pema run to the next room to ask her mother, who was helping her to add some more inches on the *gho* piece, which had been on the loom for quite some time. Pema came back with a smile. When Ngawang asked him in *Sherchopakha*<sup>39</sup> what *Abhi* told him, he looked at me mischievously and said, "Rat". All three of us burst out laughing. We quickly got down to using all our fingers to count the twelve animals for the years. She was sixty-four years old. Tenzin's parents and grandparents live with his brother in the village. I have never previously seen them in Paro; however, I was introduced to them through the amazing photos that Pema and his family brought back from their visit to the village. The great grandfather, who is 97 years old, looks after his brother's four children. The grandfather, who is in his seventies, travels with his ponies and yaks every week to Sakten (Figure 7.14 & 7.15) one of the highest villages in the northeastern part of Bhutan, about 3000m above sea level.



Figure 7.14 Sakten



Figure 7. 15 Getting ready for a trip to Sakten

The inhabitants of Sakten are mostly semi-nomadic yak herders. I assumed that he went there escorting tourists, but I was mistaken. He and his ponies and yaks carried merchandise for the few shops in Sakten, and brought back things that they needed in their village such as butter, cheese, yak meat, yak skin, wool and *filu*, a thick rich cream formed with *Zoe's* (female yak) milk and normally considered a delicacy in curries or as curries.

---

<sup>39</sup> A dialect spoken in Eastern Bhutan



Figure 7.16 The oldest *Meymey*



Figure 7.17 *Abhi* making roasted rice

Ngawang's daughter, Sonam loves to talk about her grandparents and although Pema does not talk much he always hangs around eagerly to look through the photographs and listen to his sister. Sonam tells me that '*Meymey*'<sup>40</sup> gets up at about 6 o'clock in the morning and reaches his destination in Sakten at night and then returns the next day in the morning". She then suppressed a giggle and said, "The people in the village call him *Bolero*"<sup>41</sup>. I asked Pema what *Bolero* was and he said, "Jeep". I asked Sonam, why he was called by that name and her mother replied, "Maybe it is because of his frequent travels and also because he is very strong. The other younger ones in the village cannot walk like he does."

For villages like Radhi, Merak and Sakten, maintaining a symbiotic social relationship amongst themselves is crucial to their existence in these far-flung places with very limited modern facilities such as cars, buses, roads, electricity and shops. When *Bolero* ventures with his ponies and yaks to Merak and Sakten, he stays the night there with his *Saktenpa*<sup>42</sup> friends as there are no inns or hotels in Sakten. When the *Saktenpas* descended to his village, they stayed in *Bolero*'s house.

The business transactions between *Bolero* and the *Saktenpas* are not always handled in cash. They exchange foodstuff, which is more important than money in their villages. The last time I heard from Pema's family, they informed me that *Meymey* is now seventy-eight years old and still making trips to Sakten.

---

<sup>40</sup> Grandfather

<sup>41</sup> A sturdy Indian jeep

<sup>42</sup> A native of Sakten

### Pema and his siblings

Pema is six years old and the youngest son in the family of three children. He has a seven-year-old brother called Ugyen and a ten-year-old sister called Sonam. Pema also has a 13-year-old half-brother by the name Nyenda, who lives with them during school days, other times he lives with his birth mother who is from Sha, in Western Bhutan.

Pema is a very quiet and shy boy. Most of the time, he does not speak except in single words and nods. He hardly spoke in *Dzongkha*<sup>43</sup>, but I noticed that he did understand most of what I asked him. Once I saw him eating his lunch on the bed in one of the bedrooms and I asked him what he was eating and he replied “*gotham*” meaning “egg” in his mother tongue. To all my questions he will always respond with single words mostly in his own language. In their house they speak both in *Sherchopakha* and *Dzongkha*, in fact, Ngawang says, “We speak more *Dzongkha* than *Sherchopakha* because Nyenda, our eldest son, does not speak *Sherchopakha*”. Nyenda’s mother is from a *Dzongkha* speaking region of Bhutan.

Most days Ngawang does not let the children play outside the house. They are always inside the house, neat and tidy and engaged in their own activities and television programs. Every time I visited their house I saw Pema with his Lego block set on the floor of his parents’ bedroom. He also likes to watch *Tom and Jerry*, *Chhota Bhim*, and *Mighty Raju*; the latter two are Indian cartoon programs, popular among Bhutanese children. Sonam prefers to work or play indoors. Her father teaches her how to use the laptop and her mother teaches her how to weave and stitch. However, the boys are much happier when they are allowed to play outside the house. Sometimes they run for hours in and around the house with their dog, “*Mindu*” after them.

As seen in Figure 7.18 and 7.19, Pema and Ugyen spend a lot of time playing with the leftover planks and logs from the construction of their house. The boys like constructing things with the planks and wood at the back of their house. Pema showed me a photograph of a seesaw that he and Ugyen made and calls it “*langka pangka*”<sup>44</sup> (Figure 7.18). One day we looked through some photographs and came across Figure 7.19, I said, “Oh, this must be a plane”. His brother nodded, but Pema, looked at me quizzically and said, “Dragonfly” in English. His brother laughed and said that Pema loved dragonflies.

---

<sup>43</sup> The national language of Bhutan

<sup>44</sup> A balance



Figure 7.18 The *Langka- Pangka*



Figure 7.19 Constructing a dragonfly

### A *trema* ritual

Ngawang is very religious; she is an active member of the “*trema tshogpa*” which is a Buddhist religious group formed by members who perform the *trema* rituals. In the Bhutanese lunar calendar there are auspicious days that are traditionally observed when merit is increased by making offerings. For example, in a month, the 10th Day or the *Guru Rinpoche* Day, the 25th Day or the Dakini Day and the 10 Million Days (there are four during the year) mark different events in the life of Shakyamuni Buddha. Members of the *tshogpa*<sup>45</sup> take turns to host prayer ceremonies in their homes. Unlike her floral friends these spiritual friends take their relationships to a different level of commitment. They try to be present at all good and bad times for each member of the *tshogpa*; that makes Ngawang a very active woman. Her family become very busy each time it is their turn to host the prayers. Most of the members are employed therefore they host the prayers during the night so that the majority of them can attend. The prayers became much more frequent during the 2011 winter months as His Holiness Dugse Thinley Norbu Rinpoche passed away on the night of the 27th December. He was the initiator of the practice of “*trema*” and his last wish was for his disciples to practise “*trema*” for three continuous weeks after his death. Therefore, the members of the *trema tshogpa* took turns in performing the rituals until the cremation, which was finally held in Paro.

I have observed the *trema* being mostly practised by women and Ngawang explains that is because this particular ritual is an offering to the goddess “*Dorji Pham*”. Pema’s parents invited me one evening to attend the *trema* at their house. I asked my neighbour’s wife to accompany me. We walked up the hill with torches in hand, both for illumination and as

---

<sup>45</sup> A group

weapons against the dogs. Surprisingly, except for the soothing sounds of the drums, cymbals, bells and chants coming from the top of the hill, there was no other disturbance around. I whispered to my companion, “Maybe they are so tired of barking at all the people who went up today”. She broke into a peal of giggles I quickly put my finger on my lips and she got the message.



Figure 7.20 Pema's aunties making tormas



Figure 7.21 The tormas for tremas

Huffing and puffing I squeezed myself through the traditional pole gate in front of the house to be received by Pema and his sister who ushered us into their warm *bukari* room. I asked Pema what was happening and he ran into his parents' room, got the camera and sat near me on the sofa. He showed me a few photos that he took of the preparations before the *trema* started. I pointed my finger at the *tormas*<sup>46</sup> and asked him what they were and as usual he gave me his single word response, “*tormas*”. I asked him whether he enjoyed watching the *aunties*<sup>47</sup> prepare the *tormas* (Figure 7.20 & 7.21) and he nodded his head. He suddenly handed me the camera, got up, looked outside through the window, jumped off the sofa and ran out of the house. Meanwhile Tenzin brought us some hot cups of tea and a *bungchung*<sup>48</sup> full of *tegma*<sup>49</sup> topped with some Bangkok cream crackers and then he disappeared into the kitchen.

As I sipped my tea and gnawed at the crackers, I listened to the sounds of the drums, cymbals, bells and conches from upstairs, mixed with the thumping, chopping, clanging and occasional whistles of the pressure cooker from the kitchen. Just then Pema opened the door of the house to some more guests for the evening. I then realized that Pema had been assigned the job of an

---

<sup>46</sup> Religious effigies prepared during rituals and prayers

<sup>47</sup> Children call elder women aunties

<sup>48</sup> A bamboo basket

<sup>49</sup> Beaten maize seeds

usher. Every time, *Mindu*, their small Tibetan terrier barked, he ran excitedly out of the door to see who was coming. At the door his father took over the job of ushering the visitors into the *bukari* room and then served them tea. It was teamwork between father and son while the mother was busy with the rituals upstairs. Noticing how busy each member of the family was, I wanted to be of some help too, so I picked up the empty teacups to take them to the kitchen. However, Pema insisted that he should take them.



Figure 7.22 *Paro Abhi*



Figure 7.23 *Paro Meymey*

Out of curiosity I followed him to see the cause of the percussion noises coming from the kitchen. Pema's sister was at the tap washing the dishes and cups and her father was stirring a curry on the gas stove. There were two more people sitting on the kitchen floor who were responsible for the thumping and the chopping. Tenzin introduced them to me as Ngawang's parents. They were a couple in their mid-fifties. I asked Pema who they were and he said, "*Meymey and Abhi*"<sup>50</sup>. *Abhi* was in charge of making the chilli paste (Figure 7.22) using a locally made wooden mortar and pestle and *Meymey* was chopping the vegetables for the various curries (Figure 7.23). I asked Tenzin what he was stirring and he replied, "Butter and cheese curry" and added that tonight they would not be eating any meat.

Tenzin asked Pema to take me upstairs to attend the *Trema* (Figure 7.24). Pema ran to the sofa to get his camera and we walked softly up the well-polished wooden staircase. At the door we took off our shoes and Pema opened the door quietly. We were greeted with a concoction of the familiar smells of incense sticks, butter lamps and *tormas*. To avoid being a distraction, I swiftly sat down on one of the mats in the corner of the room, but Pema folded his hands and started to prostrate towards the altar. Seeing this I was so embarrassed, I looked at the *trema* performers and to my relief, saw most of them were engrossed in their prayers. Hopefully they missed my act of ignorance. I quickly got up and joined Pema to carry out the three

---

<sup>50</sup> Grandmother

prostrations. Panting from the exercise, I sat down to see six men and nine women chanting the prayers with small drums and prayer bells in their hands and with some more instruments on their laps. With their red shawls cast over their shoulders, they sat in line on the long mats on the wooden floor.



**Figure 7.24** The *trema*

Pema took some photographs of the ritual, while I did not, fearing that it might disturb their concentration on the prayers. I would have sat there longer if the thought of my friend waiting downstairs did not urge me to leave. We apologized to Tenzin for not being able to stay for dinner and he in turn apologized for not being able to chat with us as his wife had put him in charge of dinner for twenty people. With the assorted sounds and smells still entertaining my senses, we quietly walked down the hill looking at the multiple spots of lights spread in the darkness, except for the faint illumination of a beautiful crescent moon.

### **A family trip to Radhi**

December and January are winter vacation months for all schools in the country. This period is a favourite time for families to travel around, although parents have to make arrangements to take leave, if they are not teachers. Pema's family planned a ten-day trip to their village in Radhi, so that the children can meet their grandparents and the parents can perform certain rituals and offerings to the gods and local deities. The family would have loved a longer visit; however, ten days paid leave was what Tenzin was entitled to each year. Tenzin's friends helped him arrange the family's accommodation, as they have to pass through two main towns in the south of Bhutan. His employer let him use a bigger car so that all five of them and their gifts, ration, clothes and bedding could fit comfortably. On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of December 2011, the family left for Radhi, leaving Ngawang's parents to housesit.

I have never been to Radhi, but the family's photographs and explanations of them transported me virtually to their village, as I sat with the children in their *bukari* room and rummaged through all the photographs.



Figure 7.25 Dough for tormas



Figure 7.26 The guests in the village

There were several photographs of the rituals that took place in their house in Radhi. Sonam told me that there were two whole days of prayers and offerings. Many villagers also participated in the prayers (Figure 7.25). Ugyen and Pema helped their cousin to knead the maize dough for the *tormas* (Figure 7.26). Pema did not make any attempt to explain the photographs although he did wait eagerly for his sister's explanations. We let him pick the photographs for the discussion. He mostly picked the photographs of the *tormas*. Maybe he too found them amazing like I did. In Paro, most of us make *tormas* out of wheat flour. However, in the east, as they grow a lot of maize, they make them out of maize flour. They made amazing *tormas*, a kind I had never seen before. Ngawang too commented that she hadn't previously seen such *tormas*. Tenzin explained that they were pretty much the same *tormas* that we make in Paro except these were more detailed. He added, "My folks at home



Figure 7.27 To ward off evil



Figure 7.28 For prosperity

wanted to make sure that they make very elaborate *tormas* so that we get a sense of appreciation and satisfaction after having come from such a distance to perform the ritual”. I was peering at the two photos in Pema’s hands, I pointed at Figure 7.27 and said, “This is a very scary looking *torma*, what is it?” Pema chuckled and did not say anything, instead he looked at his father who explained that it was the *torma* for warding off evil and the other one was for prosperity (Figure 7.28). I exclaimed, “Oh, really! I would like to order a huge one of that second type for my house” and we all laughed.

Pema listened with amusement to our talks on *tormas*. I was not very sure whether his amusement was stimulated by his father’s information about them or by my limited knowledge. He picked up a couple more *torma* photos. However by then Tenzin had vanished into the kitchen. He shouted, “*Apa*, this one?” Tenzin came back with a cup of tea for me and then said, “These are the offerings for the local deities” (Figure 7.29).



Figure 7.29 The offerings



Figure 7.30 The family effigy

Pema looked at the next photo which was an effigy of a person in the centre with smaller ones around it (Figure 7.30). He pointed to the smaller ones and started naming them as Pema, Sonam, Ugyen, *Ama*<sup>51</sup>, *Meymey* and *Abhi*. I pointed at the bigger structure and asked who he was and Pema answered, “*Apa*”<sup>52</sup>. Tenzin smiled and humorously remarked, “Yes, I am the boss there”, and on a more serious note, he added that they were *lue* and he looked at me to confirm my prior knowledge on *lue*. This time I assured him of my understanding about *lue* and what they were for so we did not discuss it any further.

I picked up a photograph (Figure 7.31) and asked Sonam what she was doing and she replied,

<sup>51</sup> Mother

<sup>52</sup> Father



Figure 7.31. Sonam dries the wheat



Figure 7.32 Karmo

“ I and my cousin were helping *Abhi* to spread wheat on the tarpaulin”. She added that Pema ran around the whole day taking photographs of everything. I looked at Pema and commented, “These are very beautiful photographs, you will become a great photographer some day”. He smiled happily. I asked him to tell me something about Figure 7.32 and he said, “*karmo*”, his sister smiled and added, “that is the name of the cow”.



Figure 7.33 *Chorten kora*



Figure 7.34 The pilgrimage

During their ten-day visit to the village, they made a pilgrimage to one of the holy places in the east, called the *Chorten Kora* (Figure 7.33) in Tashiyangtse, in northeast Bhutan. From their village it is about four hours drive up into the mountains. Pema and his sister took me through some of the photographs of the pilgrimage and their family picnic outside the *chorten*<sup>53</sup>. Sonam narrated briefly the amazing legend of *Chorten Kora* that she heard from her grandparents, while Pema and I listened with awe. I picked up the next photograph (Figure 7.34) and asked Pema, “Did you fart? See your sister is covering her nose”. The children laughed and Sonam said, “No, ma’am, I covered my mouth so that my breath will not

---

<sup>53</sup> A stupa

contaminate the butter lamp offerings”. I knew that, however to sustain the humour I commented, “Oh, I see” and both Sonam and Pema continued laughing.