

CHAPTER ONE

The context

1.1. Cradle of tenderness: my family

Home and family preserve the wisdom of our ancestors, their memories and their mementos, their stories and their dreams” (Powdyel, 2007, p. 8).

I begin my story from my home, my microsystem as that is my immediate environment and which stands out most vividly in my memory. Powdyel (2007, p. 8), my teacher, a Bhutanese poet and a writer brings out the true meaning of home through the eyes of a child. Thus he writes:

It is where we are born and open our eyes to see the world. We hear the first sounds and get the smells of our life here. We receive the first delicate intimations of people and objects in our family. Our tender hands and feet feel the presences that form part of our baby narrative. With our baby talk, we announce: I am. We proclaim our being and call the world to us.

We meet our first relations here – our mother and our father...in the lap of our mother, our body slowly takes the shape that makes us boys and girls, men and women as we grow. Here we receive our love and our nourishment. It is the place of tender feelings and loving kindness that gives us our capacity to love and care. We receive our name and our address here....(Powdyel, 2007, p. 8).

I am Karma Pedey, an educator and a mother of two boys and I am from Bhutan. I am the youngest with three older siblings. My *aapa* (father) and my *aaie* (mother) are illiterate (if I may use the word in its traditional sense) but my mother can read and write *Dzongkha* (National language of Bhutan) having learnt to read scriptures, taught during free times at home by *mimi* (grandfather). I must say my *appa* and *aaie* were tough and hardy beings as well as intelligent and skilful. They lived in an era when education and schooling was only gaining a faltering popularity and a vague importance amongst very few. I am surprised, even now, that this couple felt the need to educate all four of their children. In my circumstances and generation, as the custom and tradition so required, the eldest child of the family would be designated as

the “home keeper” who will live in the village to take care of the parents, run the home chores, and tend to the cattle and the field. She is the key person who will uphold the family’s heritage and conduct the rites, rituals and the ceremonies that so form the core of Bhutanese lives.

My mircosystem, until I joined boarding school, consisted of my three siblings and another five of my cousins who my parents cared for and hosted in the small house in Motithang, one of the zones of the capital city of Bhutan. Being the youngest I slept with my *aapa* and *aaie* and the rest of them co-slept in one single room. Together we created our own spaces and niche within the boundary of that little crowded house. We had a patch of open land in the backyard which we used to dig and prepare beds for chillies, pumpkins, potatoes and beans to grow - so from digging and planting, to watering and weeding we also learnt to make support stands for the beans, cucumbers and ‘crow-beaks’ to grow and climb on to. It was exciting to wait and watch whose seeds would crack open the earth and be the first to grow, or whose sampling withstood the harsh weather or whose would bear the first fruits. Looking back, I can see that those tasks were value-laden; embedded within them were learnable moments and the experiences were infused with values such as responsibilities, obedience, cooperation, and respect. We also attended to cooking and cleaning, besides feeding the hens and the pigs. My *aaie* regarded *bay zha cha zha* (mannerism) as one of the most important qualities for a girl. She always said the beauty of a girl should radiate through her mannerism and warmth, it has to appeal to the eye of the beholders. She would say things such as:

You girls cannot be as bold as the boys. Somehow girls have to be shy and bit reserved so that their personality doesn't impose on others. Others have to see her as being gentle, kind, loving, warm and organised. For you have the responsibility of bearing children and taking care of your parents later in your life. Possessing these qualities will help you keep your home happy and warm.

Of my primary school days— I have to admit – my memory is very limited. Besides going to school every day, our lives at home had nothing to do with books and pencils. For me as a child, school and home were two different worlds – so distant and so cut off from each other that as a child, I neither could draw connection between home and school, nor relate them, nor understand how these two worlds functioned. The only thing that we took home from school was our homework which

often times got neglected as we found neither time nor interest to complete it. In Bhutan all the subjects are taught in English and as a young child, whose parents were not exposed to Western education, all I did, as did most children, was to learn to read and write English through rote learning. It frustrated my mother that she couldn't help us with the homework. I remember spending tears, struggling to do my homework and fearing my teacher's wrath and flogging, and literally refusing to attend classes the next day feigning to be sick. At the end of the year, we carried home our school results and showed our parents. They would look for red lines or letters which indicated we are "fail" and without it, they would conclude that we have passed the exam.

But what I received from my home environment prepared me for my adult life. For as I grew up, I learnt the art and craft of not only running the house chores (the household chores were gender specific during that time, although that is no longer in practice now) but *aaie* made sure that sewing, knitting, weaving and cooking also made up our lives. We learnt how to weave clothes and make *kira*, (Bhutanese women's wear) and stitch bags, knit mittens and socks and at very early age I was already earning a little through selling my products to our own cousins and neighbours. My *aaie* never failed to amaze me and others with her never-ending ingenuity and cleverness. I would spend many happy hours playing beside her, delighting and feeling pride in the way my *aaie* outwitted others, particularly the men folks with her spontaneity and wit as she joined in the verbal combat with them. The outcome of her witticism and eloquence is my book "*Ta She Ghha Chha*" (The Broken Saddle and other popular Bhutanese Beliefs) "from whom came most of my beliefs" (Pedey, 2005, p. ii) and you would notice her sayings strewn all over the pages of my thesis. To be honest, it was through the *srung* (stories) that *aaie* narrated during those cosy winter nights sprawled on the floor by the *bhukari* (hearth) with my head on her lap which has given me the impetus to write and record these Bhutanese oral genre. She made me see the beauty and the elegance in *Dzongkha* (national language) which otherwise, like many, I found lacking in many ways (as compared to English) - inadequate in expression and difficult to learn and master. On the other hand, I grew appreciative of my rich cultural heritage as I spent many such happy moments listening to the *srung* (stories) she narrated, *lozay* (verses) that she recited and the *zhab thra da lu* (songs and dances) she took part in. Herein I found the funds of knowledge that she seemed to have stowed in her memory. It was as though my

aaie had the key to the door and windows for the light to trickle in and illuminate our little house and edify our little minds.

I remember on many occasions how we cried listening to stories that my *aaie* narrated. Sometimes she told stories about our own family saga – all the hardships and struggles that she and *aapa* endured to bring up the four children. We would listen with awe and wonder and even cry at how they had struggled to raise us and would promise *aaie* that we will repay all their love and kindness when we grow up. To this my *aaie* would always reply, “remember, no matter what, even if the children carry their parents on their shoulder and go round the world, they will never be able to repay the love and kindness that they have been showered with. If you love and take care for your parents and keep them happy, you will be blessed with a very happy and prosperous life, for you will accumulate merit.”

As a child, one Bhutanese value that my *aaie* strongly implanted in us is respecting and observing *ley judray* and *tha damtshig*, whether it be at your work place with your bosses and colleagues, in school with your teachers or classmates, at home with your family, spouse, or children or outside with your friends and neighbours and so forth. If ever the principles of *ley judray* and *tha damtshig* are broken, the consequences would unleash disharmony and rifts in the relationship, so we need to carefully observe *ley judray* and *tha damtshig*. Our whole life – our acts and deeds, our daily activities and thoughts, are all centred on *ley judray* and *tha damtshig*.

My parents constantly reminded us the need to remain true and steadfast to our homeland and own cultural roots. For they said: “*to disconnect yourself from culture is to uproot yourself from it. And like an uprooted plant, you will neither find stability nor strength and will soon wither and perish.*”

Against my own wishes, I was sent into a boarding school at very early age of eleven, thus expanding my miniature world. My parents are of belief that “*bhu ro dha ngyam, nor rang dha ngyam*” which translated freely means “keep the child with others and it will teach him independence, keep the cattle with yourself, and it will give you more milk.” Maybe that philosophy had some meanings – for none of my cousins attended college, except for one. I was somehow fortunate that I did quite well academically and professionally– went to college in Bhutan, took up teaching as a profession, earned a Masters degree from India and worked in various capacities in four different

colleges in Bhutan, enjoyed many rights and privileges and availed myself of opportunities such as travelling outside of Bhutan and living in some of the biggest cities such as Chennai (India), Paris and New York. Wherever I went and whatever I did, I realize now that *ley judray* and *tha damtshig* guided the pathways of my life; these core values deeply rooted in me made up my life.

I don't have to dig too hard into my memory to remember another person who had enriched my microsystem, had a profound influence on my life and who I cherished dearly – my *aangay* (grandmother). She stands out vividly in my memory, for in her company and from the chores I ran for her, from shared moments and my interaction with her, I evolved spiritually and morally and culturally. I remember her early morning chants, her prayer and milk offering to the rising of the sun and to the spirits of the air and the woods, which she believed protected and safeguarded us from all evils and harm. Even as I write these lines, I see myself with my other cousins scampering ahead of *aangay*, carrying her *chini kabchi akha* (balls of sweetened wheat-flour) and looking for anthills. When we found one, we would feed the ant the sugared wheat-flour. This happened on every waxing day of the moon, a time considered to be highly auspicious for Buddhists. She said if we fed the ants in this present live, the ants would feed us in our next life when we are hungry. Even as we spent time in amusement and play, *aangay* was setting into motion the circle of karma. She explained how the law of Karma operated. By planting seeds of kindness, generosity and compassion for these beings, we would enjoy a good life ahead. This karmic theory, as I was to learn later as an adult, is the very heart essence of Bhutanese social and cultural make-up, which I will talk more about it in my later chapters.

And so I grew up believing that culture counts and that I'm but a child of my own culture. Throughout my life, my cultural beliefs and values have played a very big role in influencing and changing my life's trajectory and decisions and in crafting my career pathways and prepared me for who and what I am today.

1.2. The current state of childhood service in Bhutan

Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) programme was introduced in 2004, so is a recent development in Bhutan (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation [UNESCO], 2006). Prior to this the government did not accord

the importance of early childhood care and development programmes. Since 2004, ECCD centres have grown both in number and popularity, particularly in the urban areas. One of the contributing factors to this development is the rapid change in family structure and lifestyles in Bhutan. The Bhutanese family traditions, where the grandparents took care of the grandchildren and the extended family structure that supported a rich environment for the child, are now fast disappearing. Further, as a consequence of more women working outside of home (MoE, 2003), the need for quality services delivered by educators at home as well as in centres has become imperative.

The situational analysis conducted by Save the Children Bhutan (2008) draws attention to many areas in the quality of the few available ECCD services which need to be addressed and improved urgently. The report also identified a lack of organized programmes of stimulation currently available for children. The report informs that very often Bhutanese children grow up in home environments in both rural and urban areas that provide little in the way of stimulation for learning and where they receive very little meaningful adult supervision stemming mainly from the gradual change in the family structure from extended to nuclear and also because of the both parents working, particularly in the urban setting.

Work on a National policy for ECCD in Bhutan is slow. At the end of 2013 the policy was still in its draft form. And, in the absence of any research at the local level, this draft policy according to Ball (2011) has borrowed extensively from Western models. This lack of a comprehensive national policy at an earlier stage has resulted in a poorly coordinated effort to provide adequate early childhood services and has done little to address the low awareness of the value of early childhood care. Existing ECCD centres are widely perceived as “somewhere to leave your child” (Save the Children, 2008, p.10) and their role limited to just “teaching the ABCs” (Save the Children, 2008, p.10). The services that these centres provide need to “consider the unique values that guide the development of Bhutan alongside the rich cultural and diversity within the population and the importance of bringing local knowledge into ECCD” (Ball, 2011, p. 6) so that they can better cater for the holistic development of Bhutanese children.

In recognition of the importance of ECCD, the Ministry of Education of Bhutan has taken initiatives to make ECCD a nationwide program (UNICEF, 2011a). Today, providing quality early childhood care services is seen as integral to nurturing the future community of Bhutanese as well as a way of realizing the philosophy of Gross National Happiness which underlines the need to “*maximize the happiness of all Bhutanese and to enable them to achieve their full and innate potential as human*” (Bhutan Planning Commission, 1999, p. 12). The Education Sector Review Commission (MoE, 2008) highlights the critical link between early childhood care and development services and primary education and concludes that ECCD programmes and services are necessary for Bhutan to achieve the universalisation of primary education by 2015. The government’s endorsement of Education for All Dakar Framework for Action 2020 also calls for “*expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially, for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children*” (UNESCO, 2000, p. 8). In this context, ECCD is now emerging as a priority and the government today is earnestly looking at ways to support and improve childcare practices.

Today, there are 54 community centres, 6 workplace centres and 8 Non Government Organization run centres spread across the country and 26 private childcare centres located in the urban areas (UNICEF, 2011b). Apart from these centres there are no formal family based ECCD programmes. However, family members, particularly, grandparents and siblings took care of the children when active members of the family went to work (Save the Children, 2012).

Before 2002, the government was of the view that home played the role of a childcare centre where children below the age of six years could learn and receive the best care, education and affection from their grandparents, parents and siblings, all of whom lived together. However, over time, there is a shift from an extended family structure to a nuclear family and an increase in the number of working parents, particularly in the urban areas. Then, there is also an emerging problem of unavailability of babysitters as a consequence of which ECCD has become a popular option for the urban populace.

Thus, from the ninth five year plan (2001-2007), the government recognized the importance of creating centres for children which would enrich their pre-school experiences and help them in the crucial years of their development. After conceiving

the idea of Early Childhood Care and Development in 2002, the Ministry of Education worked on developing frameworks for establishing ECCD centres in the ninth five-year plan period. In 2004, the Ministry also started a pilot phase by separating nursery classes in the private schools and starting childcare centres. The drive to invest in the children's future was also further inspired by Bhutan's ratification of United Nations Convention of the "Rights of Child" and the recommendation of the 10 member Education Sector Review Commission in 2006 to provide universal high quality early childhood education. Thereafter, strategies such as educating the public on ECCD through print and broadcast media, supporting private initiatives to establish childcare centres and nurseries in the urban areas and building capacity of the pre-school and primary school teachers were developed to enhance ECCD programmes (MoE, 2008; Wangchuk, Choden, Choden, Zangpo, & Yangden, 2011).

Further, in 2008, the Ministry of Education created a new unit to work on ECCD policies and programmes. This unit is now a division and the nodal agency to look after ECCD programmes. There is currently a draft national policy for ECCD, regulations for private childcare centres, manuals for ECCD and also Early Learning Development Standards (Wangchuk et al., 2011). Unfortunately, all these initiatives are drawn on Western models with technical support of experts external to Bhutan without actually conducting a study on what is already good in Bhutan and what might be appropriate for Bhutan.

As discussed in the preceding section on the development of community centres in Bhutan, all ECCD programmes and new interventions are initiated by the government through the Ministry of Education. Realizing the role of ECCD programmes in shaping the future of Bhutanese children, the Royal Government of Bhutan's long term vision for ECCD is captured in the Education Sector Strategy 2020 which is "to ensure that all children under age five are supported to enhance their intellectual, emotional and physical development through programmes that enable them to grow in their familiar and natural environment" (MoE, 2003, p. 10). This vision is further supported by the draft national policy on ECCD with the goal of "providing the best start in life for all children from birth to age eight by enhancing access to quality early childhood care and education to ensure that they are healthy, happy and ready to learn" (MoE, 2011b, p. 7).

The draft national policy for ECCD is the overarching document that governs and regulates the establishment and operation of ECCD centres. This document specifies the need, scope, purpose and aims of ECCD centres, its nature and the strategies to enhance and promote ECCD programmes.

Further, the “Operational Manual for Community based ECCD” and the “Operational Guidelines for Day Care Centres” are two guiding documents that are used for ensuring the minimum standards of ECCD centres (community, private and NGOs). Then, there is the “National Early Learning and Development Standards” that provide guidelines for the development of ECCD curriculum and activities (MoE, 2011b).

The planning and regulation for the establishment of centres is administered and monitored by the Ministry of Education, and based on communities’ needs. The special ECCD unit of the Ministry studies the need and the feasibility of establishing ECCD centres as well as plans the programmes to be delivered. Further, it also builds the capacity of ECCD facilitators, monitors the centres to ensure quality of services and facilities with technical assistance from Save the Children, UNICEF and experts from outside Bhutan (MoE, 2011b).

Since private centres are profit oriented, the risk that this might lead to sub-standard services and facilities (Moss, 2009; Rush, 2006; Rush & Downie, 2006) stands very high. Thus, the private childcare centres of Bhutan have an additional document called “Guidelines for Private ECCD Centres”. This document specifies qualification pre-requisites and number of staff, the quality and quantity of physical facilities, safety assurance mechanisms, health and hygiene assurance, quality of programs, procedures for documentation and admission of children and the requirement to have a “Centre Management Board” to ensure good management practices (MoE, 2011a).

Overall, while there is drive to establish as many ECCD centres as possible, the issue of delivering quality programmes remains a question. As indicated in the studies conducted by Save the Children (2008) the poor quality of services stems from three broad causes. These are:

- (i) The ECCD facilitators in the day care centres have only completed Class XII and are not professionally trained in ECCD.

- (ii) The unit that looks after the ECCD programmes itself is dependent on experts external to Bhutan.
- (iii) The ECCD unit is understaffed and does not have time to monitor quality effectively.

This study on childcare and education is therefore, set in the context of the will of the government to invest in ECCD programmes and the challenges arising from the absence of Bhutanese expertise and the consequent dependence on external experts informed by their Western philosophies that may not serve Bhutan well.

1.3. Literature Review

1.3.1. Western ideas on the importance of early childhood

We are informed that early childhood sets the foundation for future growth and lays the basic groundwork for the kind of adult that children grow up to become. Gammage (2006, p. 236) highlights “early childhood” as a critical period revealing to us that childhood is the time when the child begins to respond to the environment “with such malleability that the very architecture of the brain is affected”. During the early childhood period the brain cell connections increase in number, strength and complexity (Kostelnik & Grady, 2009). World Health Organization (WHO) (2009) also reports that the most rapid brain development takes place during this early childhood period, more than any other period in the entire human lifespan. It is during this period that the child’s brain is found to be most sensitive and responsive to his/her external environment. Brain growth of children can be enhanced when they are provided with good nutrition, safe and healthy environments, as well as when they share close relationships with carers and are exposed to stimulating learning opportunities (Kostelnik & Grady, 2009; Sims, 2013; Sims & Hutchins, 2013).

Studies mark the first five years as a critical period as tremendous growth occurs in intellectual, linguistic, social, emotional and physical competence of the child. This is the formative age period during which the child develops capacity for building “intimate relationships” “powerful communicative capacities”, language and “rudimentary moral codes” (Committee on Intergrating the Science of Early Childhood Development, 2000, p. 90). As further supported by Hohmann and Weikart (1995), development of children is the result of accumulated or repeated occurrences

of events that children experience. What kind of knowledge and attitude children acquire depends on the “key experiences” that they encounter as they interact with “materials, people, ideas, and events” (Hohmann & Weikart, 1995, p. 23).

Research (Kelly, 2011; Kostelnik & Grady, 2009; Kostelnik, Soderman, & Whiren, 1993; Shonkoff & Garner, 2011; Sims & Hutchins, 2013) demonstrates that the early childhood period is where the child is most responsive and receptive to both positive and negative environmental influences. The environment that makes up the child’s world includes “all people, objects, settings, and resources that the child has direct contact” (Kostelnik et al., 1993, p. 8). When early years experiences are less stimulating, or when the environment is less emotionally and physically supportive, children’s brain development is shaped in ways that lead to cognitive, social and behavioural delays, effecting the brain growth and long-term health as well (Shonkoff & Garner, 2011; Spratt et al., 2012; WHO, 2009).

The recent emerging neuroscience is now beginning to see how brain development is influenced by socioeconomic conditions and environmental factor (Ferrari, 2011; Howard-Jones, 2011; Kelly, 2011). This cautions us that young children must be provided with adequate and appropriate stimulation for them to learn and develop, lack of which could lead to the inability to handle complex situations and challenging environments in their later life. Research puts emphasis on the need for children’s early nurturance and the significance of the two environments (home and early childhood centres) on children’s holistic growth (Eimann, Mostert, & Hengari, 2005). Children blossom to a greater extent if they are given responsive care with appropriate early childhood experiences and environments (Conti & Heckman, 2012; Eimann et al., 2005; WHO, 2009). Nurturance and stimulation become children’s “brain food” (Kostelnik & Grady, 2009). Building an early emotional connection with children is critical to their overall development and well-being, absence of which could have long-term negative effects on social development and cognitive functioning (Sims, 2013; WHO, 2009). Children learn best when they feel psychologically secure and safe which comes from being in the company of warm and friendly adults who create a stimulating and responsive climate of love and care (Kostelnik et al., 1993; Sims, 2013). The parents and the child’s educators, thus, are the “active ingredients” influencing the environment of the early childhood experiences, either impeding or promoting children’s growth and achievement. This is especially true in the case of

children who suffer from negligence and deprivation, inadequate nutrition and stimulation, lack of supportive and consistent relationships and care or even abuse as evidenced in the studies focussing children raised in institutionalized settings (Chugani et al., 2001; Loman, Wiik, Frenn, Pollak, & Gunnar, 2009; Perry, 2009; Pollak et al., 2010; Spratt et al., 2012). All of these cause damage to neural connectivity and leads to impairment and many developmental difficulties.

Studies have also stressed the significant role that early childhood learning experience plays on children's dispositions and attitudes as they transit from "home child" to "school child" (Kostelnik et al., 1993, p. 3). Children who have received early opportunities for learning and good nutrition are more likely to attend school and, in adulthood, achieve higher incomes, better health, and lower crime rates. Furthermore, countries who have invested more in children and families in the early years have not only the most literate populations but also the best health status and lowest level of health inequality in the world (Conti & Heckman, 2012; Côté, Doyle, Petitclerc, & Timmins, 2013; Sims, 2013; WHO, 2009).

Studies too stress the need to focus on development of the 'whole child' and warn us about the devastating long-term effect on the child when one facet of development is highlighted with the exclusion of all others (Kostelnik et al., 1993). As parents and families are the key to early child development and make up the child's immediate environment, they need to be provided with support to enable them to devote time and attention to their children. Such evidence propels us to spend quality time with young children and create a caring, and responsive environment.

1.3.2. Western ideas – what is considered high quality practice?

The growing body of evidence gathered from research has convinced us that high-quality early childhood education and care programs lead to many positive outcomes of young children such as improvement in their social, emotional, cognitive well being and development (Frances, Hutchins, & Saggars, 2009). Studies show that children who have received high quality childcare and who have shared a close relationship with the carers have higher cognitive development, greater social skills, better behaviour, better peer relations as well as better attention skills (Ceglowski & Bacigalupa, 2002; Côté et al., 2013; High Scope, 2010; Peisner-Feinberg et al., 1999; Sims, 2013).

Yet “quality” in early childhood programs has remained a much debated term, used and perceived in diverse ways by different users (Sims, 2007). Studies demonstrate that the definition of quality childcare and the understanding of the term are hugely contextualized and culture-driven. There is no universal definition of what actually is considered a “quality childcare”(Frances, Saggars, & Targowska, 2010; Sims, 2007). The perception of childcare quality can be subjective, value based and influenced by beliefs about children and their development. Definitions of quality practice vary from culture to culture based on different desired outcomes for children (Sims, 2004). These different desired outcomes can best be incorporated into definitions of quality by taking into account the four perspectives identified by Katz (1993) which are: (a)“top-down perspective” (perspective of researchers, professionals) (b) “bottom-up perspective” (child’s perspective) (c) “outside-inside” perspective (parents perspectives) (d) the inside perspective (working staff’s perspectives).

Despite the claims that quality is contextual, Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2006) identifies seven aspects of quality that they argue are universal – orientation quality (e.g. national legislation, regulation and policy initiatives), structural quality (e.g. physical environment and staff qualifications), educational concepts and practice (e.g. national curriculum framework), interaction and process quality (e.g. quality of interaction between staff and children), operational quality (e.g. management), child outcome quality or performance (e.g. measure children’s outcomes) and standards pertaining to parent/community outreach and involvement (e.g. local community ECEC programs) (Ishimine, Tayler, & Thorpe, 2009). However, what is identified in each of these categories is culturally specific, so although programs in different countries might address all these categories, how they are addressed will be different in each context.

Ceglowski and Bacigalupa (2002) conclude that it is important to design childcare programmes which address the needs of the families and which fit with their definition of quality while also conforming to the already existing definition of quality. It is important that the definitions capture the perspectives of all the stakeholders in the context in which the programme will operate i.e of the children, staff, researchers and families as each one views quality from different angles. Studies that have investigated developmental aspects of children have considered the

structure¹ of the care system and process² of care as criteria to measure quality. These are reflected in the regulations of many countries for the purpose of measuring quality. Findings confirm that the structural dimensions of quality are correlated with the process dimensions, contributing to enhancing interactions and relationships between carers and children which eventually improve children's outcomes (Frances et al., 2010; Rosenthal, 2007).

On the other hand, as highlighted by Sims (2007) high quality early childhood care practices are characterized by an enabling climate of positive relationships and deep bonds shared between the childcare professionals and the children; a highly stimulated interactive environment; and the presence of a highly supportive system where all the staff as well as parents work collaboratively as a team. A high quality service and programme “ensures that the rights of all children and families in the program community are met” (Sims, 2010, p. 2). Cortisol (a measure of stress) is used as another research tool to assess the quality of early childhood environment (Guilfoyle & Sims, 2010). This demonstrates that children who share a deep bond and enjoy responsive care from the carers have low levels of cortisol as compared with those who do not enjoy such privileges. In contrast, in low quality early childhood care, social interactions between adult and the child as well as child-to-child interaction are less frequent and bonding and attachment less intense which results in higher cortisol levels (Guilfoyle & Sims, 2010; Sims, 2007).

Although the bedrock of childcare for all remains the health, nutrition and safety of the children, yet there are other domains of childhood care such as cultural fabric that is regarded as an important element of quality childcare. Central to the realm and process of early childhood development, are also the approaches to childrearing practices, philosophies and beliefs founded on cultural belief systems that shape distinctive parenting practices and characterize the home environment (Sims & Hutchins, 2013; Super & Harkness, 2002).

¹ Structural dimension considers conditions such as group size, adult-child ratio, staff qualification, staff education and training, availability of support systems for staff.

² Process dimension considers children's social interactions (child-to-adult as well as child-to-child interaction); educational experiences; promotion of positive, nurturing and healthy environment; supply of professional development and support to services and monitoring processes, etc.

Care is embedded in the culture therefore, understanding the influence of culture is fundamental to understanding early experiences and how they influence the child over the course of time as they encompass values, aspirations, expectations and practices (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000; Super & Harkness, 2002). In this context, cultural forces play a powerful role in influencing the parenting beliefs, child rearing practices and styles as well as the developmental and educational goals and expectations and aspirations that they have for their children (da Silva & Wise, 2006; Rosenthal, 2007). This is further highlighted by Super and Harkness (2002, p. 271) who argue that “culture organizes the child’s environment”, the dynamics of which manifests in social customs, interaction, beliefs about effective childrearing techniques and care practices which eventually mould and shape the child into the adult that the parents desire. The cultural context of child development is vividly illustrated by Super and Harkness’s description of the “developmental niche” which is constituted by “physical and social settings of everyday life, the customs of childcare, and the psychology of caretakers” (Super & Harkness, 1986, p. 546). These elements interact to provide materials for the child to develop his/her social, affective and cognitive ability and skills building his/her world of experience.

Culture, powerfully and yet subtly directs the way the carers and parents respond to the child’s emotional demands. The parental ethnotheories and their cultural priorities influence the child’s growth and development (Super & Harkness, 2002). Therefore, it is crucial for ECCD professionals to build relationships with the families as that would help them gain knowledge and insights needed to provide “emotional continuity in a culturally responsive and caring manner” (Denham & Weissberg, 2004, p. 14). What seems natural and insignificant can be an immersion experience for the child as together with the caregiver, s/he goes through the day talking, exploring and playing (Larner, Behrman, Young, & Reich, 2001).

However, even this socialization pattern and intensity of involvement and interactions between adult and child vary according to cultures. As argued by Rosenthal (2007), the conceptualization of “quality” is culture specific and is defined by what that particular society actually prioritizes and values as their educational goals and their beliefs about the practices that would enable them to attain these set goals. Accordingly then, the nature and intensity of adult-child interaction, the forms of communication, arrangement of children’s activities and how the overall learning

environment is organized are largely determined by the cultural backgrounds of the participants. This is also emphasized and articulated further by researchers such as Frances et al. (2010) who point out that for quality assurance purposes, and to make childcare quality more robust and dynamic, the services and programmes need to be “contextually sensitive” so as to address the needs of the community they serve.

What we draw from the Western literature on childcare and education is that the early years of childhood are a very important phase in the life of a child. Realizing this, the government of Bhutan is determined to invest in ECCD programmes so that the Bhutanese children can receive quality programmes. The Ministry of Education is also supported by UNICEF and Save the Children in the establishment of ECCD centres. However, the Ministry does not have the required expertise on ECCD and nor does UNICEF and Save the Children. Given this situation, experts from outside are invited to advise and design ECCD programmes for Bhutan. Unfortunately, these experts know very little about Bhutanese culture and they therefore base their work on Western philosophies. While there are many aspects of childcare and education such as physical, emotional and cognitive development which is universally relevant, literature as discussed earlier, lays emphasis on the importance of infusing the culture of the society in the ECCD programmes. It is therefore necessary for these experts to work closely with Bhutanese researchers to examine what is culturally appropriate for ECCD programmes of Bhutan.

Thus, it is against this childcare landscape that the conceptual framework and the methodology of this study have been designed.

CHAPTER TWO

The Methodology

This chapter will present the conceptual framework, paradigm choice, data collection method, recruitment process, ethics approval and limitations of the study.

2.1. Conceptual framework

This study is grounded in Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 2004) which informs that children's development is shaped by influences not only from the environments in which they participate (microsystems - for example; family and childcare centres) but other factors. Such other factors include the exosystem (eg parental workplace), mesosystems (eg the relationships between family and childcare centres), the macrosystem (culture in which individuals live) and the chronosystem (this system of relationships is situated in time and shifts accordingly).

The study focuses on the macrosystem of culture as the key factor since studies (da Silva & Wise, 2006; Denham & Weissberg, 2004; Guilfoyle, Hutchins, Saggars, & Sims, 2010; Lerner et al., 2001; Rosenthal, 2007; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000; Sims, 2004; Sims & Hutchins, 2013; Super & Harkness, 1986, 2002) have established that one of the key determinants of a quality childcare and education is embedding culture in the programme. The macrosystem which is the outer most system in Bronfenbrenner's ecological model refers to the broad societal and cultural contexts that influences the microsystem, mesosystem and the exosystem of the individual who lives in this setting. It is around the macrosystem which is set of cultural beliefs and values that the life of a society is organized. These set of cultural beliefs and values are transmitted through the families, schools and other institutions (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 2004). Thus, this conceptual framework is founded on the premise that culture which influences parental philosophies should be infused in the ECCD policies and programmes of the government and that of the ECCD programmes so that the Bhutanese pre-school children receive quality services.

This framework assumes that the quality of an ECCD centre is influenced by government policies and parental philosophies. While the government policies of

ECCD are inspired by both Gross National Happiness (GNH)³ and ECCD philosophies from the west, parental philosophies are the outcome of culture and the beliefs that each Bhutanese holds. Thus, it is important for the government, parents and ECCD centres to have consultations and exchange ideas on ECCD policies and programs. This would culminate in programmes and policies that not only embrace parental philosophies and government policies on ECCD founded on GNH principles and Western philosophies but that which are also realistic and can be delivered by the centres. This stand is justified further by Bronfenbrenner in his explanation of the mesosystem where he argues that when the values, beliefs and practices are similar in the two settings, which are home and ECCD centre, children are able to learn (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 2004). This is further supported by the concept of developmental niche of (Super & Harkness, 1986) who describe developmental niche as being culturally constructed environment which consist of three subsystems, viz. the physical and the social setting in which the child lives; culturally regulated customs of childcare and childbearing; and the psychology of the caretakers, including parents and others such as teachers or childcare providers.

For centres to maintain the expected quality it is necessary for the government to create an enabling environment and also provide technical support to the ECCD centres to harmonize the Western ECCD theories and the Bhutanese values, beliefs and practices by tapping the local knowledge.

Thus, guided by this conceptual framework, this study will delve into understanding how the ECCD policies and programmes and the ECCD centres are contextualized to suit the Bhutanese needs.

2.2. Research positioning and questions

ECCD is a new development in the Bhutanese education system. Since the establishment of the first private ECCD centre in 2005 the number has gone up to 94 centres as of October 2011 (UNICEF, 2011b).

³ GNH is an alternate development approach coined by the Fourth King of Bhutan when he pronounced that “GNH is more important than GDP”. Since then, all the developmental projects that Bhutan pursues are guided by GNH principles. Today, GNH is gaining attention from international scholars, economists and leaders. The UNO declared March 20 as Happiness day and happiness as one of the Millennium Development Goals (Source: www.grossnationalhappiness.com).

While there are universally applicable domains of childcare and education, culture is one area that is society specific and has to be dominant in the ECCD programme. Studies have shown that culture of a society has to be embedded in the programme if the ECCD centres are to deliver quality childcare and education services (da Silva & Wise, 2006; Denham & Weissberg, 2004; Guilfoyle et al., 2010; Lerner et al., 2001; Rosenthal, 2007; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000; Sims, 2004; Sims & Hutchins, 2013; Super & Harkness, 1986, 2002). However, Bhutan does not have the necessary skills and knowledge to develop culturally appropriate ECCD policies and programmes. To do so requires skills and knowledge in international ECCD principles and practices, and the expertise to use these to shape a uniquely Bhutanese sector. The Ministry of Education, therefore, depends fully on external experts who carry with them the Western philosophies and theories of ECCD but know very little of Bhutanese cultural fabric. Set in this context, the assumption of this study is that the current ECCD sector has developed in a way that reflects Western models more strongly rather than having a balance of Bhutanese parenting philosophies and the cultural elements that shape the identity of a child as a Bhutanese.

Thus, the key question of this study is “How are ECCD programmes contextualized to suit the Bhutanese need?” The two stem questions that guided the study are:

- What do Bhutanese identify as the best possible outcomes for young children (parenting philosophies, child rearing practices)?
- What are the implications of both Western and Bhutanese understandings of quality early childhood services to the ECCD sector in Bhutan?

2.3. Research Design (Methodology)

Quantitative methodology is founded on findings that are measurable and quantifiable (O’Leary, 2004) while qualitative methodology attempts to capture “the direct experience of people in specific contexts, and where social scientists understand, explain and demystify social reality through the eyes of the different participants; the participants themselves define the social reality” (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007, p. 19). As the objective of my research is to closely look at the cultures and beliefs of

the families and if they are a part of the ECCD programmes through direct interaction with the researched, qualitative methodology is appropriate for this study.

2.3.1. Paradigm choice

Patton (1990) argues that a paradigm is a worldview and a general perspective which according to (Weaver & Olson, 2006, p. 460) “regulate inquiry within a discipline by providing lenses, frames and processes through which investigation is accomplished”. Further, others (Bunkers, Petardi, Pilkington, & Walls, 1996; Moccia, 1988; Thompson, 1985) see paradigms as frames that hold the vocabulary, theories and principles, as well as the presuppositions and values related to an inquiry. Paradigm then is constructed by humans, influenced by their different belief and value systems (Hamilton, 1994), and can be neither proved nor disproved (Guba, 1990; Moccia, 1988).

Leaning on these theoretical elements of paradigm, this study will adopt an interpretive paradigm because it sets forth beliefs and values and provides road maps (Sarantakos, 2005), which makes an interpretive approach relevant for this study. Further, an interpretive approach begins with a “concern for the individual” (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 21). The approach requires the researcher to be passionate, humble and open during research engagements (Ellis, 2000) and insists on the question which truly is a felt question rather than an abstract debate. Furthermore, rather than reflecting the researcher’s viewpoint, the researcher attempts to present the viewpoint of the researched (Cohen et al., 2007), with acknowledgment of the importance of the researcher’s own position in her ability to listen and interpret. Additionally, interpretative approaches focus on “action” or the “behaviour”, the understanding of which yield meanings and insights to the observer of that behaviour in the study (Cohen et al., 2007). Thus, this interpretive approach broadly guides this research paradigm.

Specifically, the interpretive paradigm will focus on how individuals interpret their social world. Therefore, this interpretive paradigm will anchor primarily on the Bhutanese culture and therefore Bhutanese traditional values and philosophies of life that stems from Buddhism.

The strong positioning of culture as a context in which this research operates thus positions this research as Indigenous Research. While designing an indigenous research paradigm, Martin (2008, p. 81) after providing a glimpse of the Australian indigenous worldview, concludes that “an indigenist research paradigm is served by an ontology that anchors all experiences to relatedness, no matter what the context”. Similarly, the Bhutanese worldview is also shaped by the Buddhist concepts of interdependence and interconnectedness. While it is beyond the scope of this study to discuss the ontological and epistemological grounding of this Bhutanese worldview, this conclusion is founded on the powerful statement of the XIVth Dalai Lama, one of the greatest Buddhist Masters and the Nobel Peace Prize laureate, where he says that interdependence is viewed as “the fundamental law of nature where all forms of life regardless of religion, law, education survive by mutual cooperation based on interconnectedness” (Tenzi G. the IVth Dalai Lama, 1992, p. 5). This worldview is illustrated in the Buddhist iconography of *Thunpa Puenzhi*, the Four Harmonious Friends that are the elephant, monkey, rabbit and the partridge (see Appendix A for the iconography and a brief background story).

Influenced by this Buddhist worldview, the general Bhutanese has espoused two Buddhist key concepts viz. *ley judray* and *tha damtshig* to interpret their values, actions and their world. These two concepts are central to Bhutanese traditional values (Phuntsho, 2004; Ura, 1994, 1997; Wangyal, 2004; Whitecross, 2008).

Ley judray is the law of karmic cause and effect which “people view as an infallible law of virtuous actions leading to happiness and happy rebirths and non-virtuous actions leading to suffering and unhappy rebirths” (Phuntsho, 2004, p. 508). On the other hand, *tha damtshig* can be broadly subsumed as reciprocity and interdependence (Dorji, 2003; Ura, 1994, 1997; Wangyal, 2004; Whitecross, 2008) but “depending on the context, covers a wide range of referents including honesty, fidelity, moral integrity, moral rectitude, moral coherence, reciprocal affection, gratitude, filial piety, etc” (Phuntsho, 2004, p. 570).

The ecological model of Bronfenbrenner (1979, 2005) informs us that the macrosystem is made up values and cultural beliefs of a society which further influences the microsystem, the most intimate and the immediate environment (eg. family) in which a child grows up. The theory also discusses the interconnectedness

between the different systems which are microsystems, mesosystems, exosystems and the macrosystems.

Further, I have sought to understand and study the ecological model in its totality using Sara Harkness's concept of developmental niche (Harkness & Super, 2009; Harkness et al., 2009; Super & Harkness, 1986) in particular, the parents' ethnotheories influenced by culture, which makes up the child's most intimate world. This culturally constructed developmental niche is built by the unique combination of all the systems (micro, meso, exo and macro) in Bronfenbrenner's model and that, which is experienced by each child. Thus, I will describe the developmental niches of my participants in order to understand what they consider is important for their children's growth and development, and how these important factors are (or could be) incorporated into Bhutanese ECCD.

2.3.2. Method

In order to gain an understanding of childcare from a Bhutanese perspective we need to look at the experiences of the families. This will require getting inside the inner world of the families through the parents as they make up the immediate environment of the child and share his/her life-space. Through their "involvement in the life space of the child" (Austin & Halpin, 1988, p. 6) parents have a unique access to the knowledge and understanding about child and its world (Austin & Halpin, 1988; Bornstein & Cheah, 2006; Keller & Otto, 2009; Manen, 1997). As parents carry with them this unique lived experience, the best approach to capture the essence of childcare and parenting philosophies in the context of interconnectedness and particularly the Buddhist concepts of *ley judray* (law of cause and effect) and *tha damtshig* (reciprocity and interdependence) is perhaps to listen to them. Inspired by this belief, I intend to use a Bhutanese approach called *shedtho*.

Dorji (2003) and (Choden, 1994), while talking about the art of folktale narration, explains the verb *tang* in the *Dzongkha* (National language of Bhutan). Choden (1994, p. xi) tells us that the Bhutanese uses the verb *tang* when talking about narration. It means that in Bhutan the folktales are "...not told but released" (Choden, 1994, p.xi). The significance of the verb *tang* is further emphasized when

Dorji (2003, p. 7) says that in the context of folktale narration the verb means “to release, untie, set free.” In the sense it can be understood that Bhutanese folktales are narratives borne and recorded deep in the memories of the narrator, which are not told or narrated but supposedly released or set free. It is interesting to note that *shedtho* (casual talk or relaxed conversation) is also released, set free or untied (*tang*) as in the case of folktales.

For the purpose of clearer understanding I will tease out the implicit meaning of *shedtho*, and take a look at the word composition - it comprises two words which are “*shed*” meaning “to tell or to explain” and “*tho*” which means “record” combination of which is “to tell what is recorded”. “*Shedtho*” is perceived by the common Bhutanese as holding little significance where people indulge in banal talks touching a wide array of common themes such as personal narratives, jokes, past lived experiences, daily affairs and events. However, from a researcher’s standpoint, it can be argued that what may seem banal to the people themselves may not be so for the researcher in that the talk shared amongst the members themselves are indeed “released” (*tang*) from their minds and which arguably carries elements of truth. Take for instance, a conversation on children or of sharing their childhood experiences. This may carry very little significance to the children but to the researcher may be value packed with deep meanings and significance. *Shedtho tang* can therefore be understood as “setting free the thoughts recorded in the wandering mind”.

In the traditional Bhutanese community, when people intend to spend their leisure time together they would say *shedtho tang gay*, which would mean, “let us chat” or “let us have a relaxed conversation.” Set in a relaxed ambiance on the porch, near a stupa (*choeten*), beneath fluttering prayer flags, at home sipping salted butter tea (*suja*) or locally brewed alcohol (*ara*), chewing betel leaf and areca nut (*doma pani*), people engrossed in this process actually set free their lived experiences on a wide array of themes where everyone (two or more people) will contribute. *Shedtho* as a data collection method has similarities with the concept of *yarning* applied in the study of indigenous communities of Australia by Bessarab and Ng'andu (2010), Bessarab (2008), Bowes, Kitson, and Burns (2010), Brown et al. (2001) as well as with the *dadirri* another indigenous Australian method used by West, Stewart, Foster and Usher (2012).

Shedtho, yarning and *dadirri* as research data collection methods have to be set in a relaxed environment. Both researcher and the researched have to participate in talking and listening. Building a trusting relationship with the researched, as reflected in the key Bhutanese value *tha damtshig* (reciprocity and interdependence) whereby they build the reciprocal relationship of a friend (*ta to tsha gi tha damtshig*), is crucial. *Shedtho*, like yarning and *dadirri* is not a “one way process but a dialogical process that is reciprocal and mutual” (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010, p. 38).

Against this backdrop, *shedtho* as the research method for this study will enable me to have in-depth conversations on the childcare and education practices and parenting philosophies with the researched in an environment that is “culturally appropriate” (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010, p. 37) for the Bhutanese. Like yarning, the *shedtho* is also “conducive to an indigenous way of doing things; its strength is in the cultural security that it creates for indigenous people participating in the research” (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010, p. 47).

Applying the culturally appropriate method of *shedtho* for data gathering, this study will explore how the Buddhist views of interconnectedness and the fundamental Bhutanese values of *ley judray* (law of cause and effect) and *tha damtshig* (reciprocity and interdependence) impact the microsystems of different individuals and consequently the other systems described in the ecological model of Bronfenbrenner. Within this Bhutanese framework guided by an interpretive paradigm where culture plays the central role, I will unveil the childhood experiences of my informants and their child rearing practices and parenting philosophies as parents using the *shedtho* method.

2.3.3. Sampling

To study quality of childcare and education, particularly from the perspectives of culture and parenting philosophies, requires a holistic understanding of the society and therefore intense interaction with the right people and the right environment. Thus, this study will adopt “purposive sampling” since it is a sampling strategy that allows the researcher to identify respondents and the people to be interviewed (Cohen et al., 2007; Cooksey & McDonald, 2011; Hart, 2007; Sarantakos, 1993). However,

sample selection criteria have to be defined so that right informants are identified (Cooksey & McDonald, 2011).

According to Cooksey (2011, p. 451), “Sample size is much less an issue in interpretivist/constructivist research; it is not how large your sample is that wins the day but how, who, when, where and what you sample...samples can be very small (even one person or event) in interpretivist/constructivist research and still be sufficient enough to provide a convincing story”. Thus, the sample size of this study has been kept small but the only the relevant respondents were engaged in the *shedtho*.

Based on this theoretical grounding, the study was conducted in two ECCD centres, one in rural and the other in Urban. These centres form the hubs from where parent and educator participants are recruited. Henceforth, I will refer to them as rural ECCD centre and Urban ECCD centre. The selection of the centres and respondents were determined by the following exclusion and inclusion criteria:

ECCD sampling criteria

2.3.3.1. ECCD inclusion criteria are:

- One ECCD centre should be located in a rural setting while other should be from an urban area. This choice allowed me to capture different perspectives on childcare and development in the context of Bhutanese culture.
- Both the ECCD centres should have two or more staff. Most of the ECCD centres, especially those in the rural areas have only one staff.
- The centres should be older than one year since new establishments will not have many experiences to share.

The urban ECCD centre for this study was selected because it is one of the most developed in terms of facilities and also has more staff compared to others. The rural ECCD centre was also selected because it has 2 staff as compared to many others in rural area with just 1 staff.

2.3.3.2. ECCD exclusion criteria are:

- Both the ECCD centres cannot be from a rural or from an urban area.
- ECCD centre with less than two staffs.
- ECCD centres which are less than one year old.

2.3.4. Respondent sampling criteria

The respondents for this study are the following:

- Key ECCD staff, ECCD unit, Ministry of Education, Thimphu, Bhutan
- Key ECCD Staff, Education Unit, UNICEF, Thimphu Bhutan
- Key ECCD staff, Education Unit, Save the Children, Thimphu, Bhutan
- ECCD facilitators, urban ECCD centre, Thimphu, Bhutan
- Parents of children attending the urban ECCD centre, Thimphu.
- ECCD facilitators, rural ECCD Centre, Wangdue Phodrang, Bhutan
- Parents of the children attending rural ECCD centre of Wangdue Phodrang.

The respondents were selected based on the following inclusion and exclusion criteria:

2.3.4.1. ECCD facilitators' inclusion and exclusion criteria

ECCD facilitators of the two selected centres were interviewed as they carry with them the experiences of caregiver, parent and child. The rural centre had two ECCD facilitators while the urban had ten. I had *shedtho* with all of them. The facilitators were invited based on the following criteria:

- Inclusion: Should have worked for more than a year in any ECCD centre.
- Exclusion: Facilitators with working experience of less than one year.

2.3.4.2. Parent inclusion and exclusion criteria:

Parents of children going to the two ECCD centres were invited to contribute and to share their lived experiences and stories related to childcare and parenting philosophies. I invited 10 parents (see below for explanation of selection) from

each region comprising a mix of male and female participants based on the following criteria:

- Inclusion: Parents with children attending the selected ECCD centre.
- Exclusion: Parents whose children did not attend the selected ECCD centre.

2.3.4.3. Key ECCD staff from Ministry of Education, UNICEF and Save the Children inclusion and exclusion criteria

To understand the ECCD policies, plans and activities, it is essential to meet the ECCD focal persons of Ministry of Education, UNICEF and Save the Children Offices in Bhutan. Since there were only one or two focal persons in each organization, I involved all the four to share their experiences and stories based on the following criteria:

- Inclusion: ECCD focal person who had worked for more than a year.
- Exclusion: ECCD focal person who was engaged in the programme for less than a year.

Thus, this stratified sample of respondents enabled me to gather different views and opinions on quality of ECCD programme, indigenous child rearing practices and parenting philosophies in the context of Bhutanese culture.

2.3.5. Recruitment

As mentioned in the sampling section, I recruited 10 ECCD facilitators from urban location and 2 from the rural setting, 20 parents of ECCD attending children (10 each from the two centres) and 4 key ECCD staff from UNICEF, Save the Children and Ministry of Education. The following process used for recruiting each category of respondents.

2.3.5.1. ECCD centres

- Sought approval of Ministry of Education since it controls all the ECCD centres, both private and government owned.
- Requested for list and details of centres.
- Selected ECCD centres (one urban and one rural) based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria discussed in the sampling section.

- Requested MoE to send my letters of invitation.
- Made a preliminary visit to ECCD centres after they accepted my request. The purpose of the visit was to get an overview of the centres and meet the staff and introduce the purpose of the research and myself.

2.3.5.2. *ECCD facilitators*

- Sought approval of the ECCD in-charge.
- Collected list of ECCD facilitators from the ECCD in-charge (all the staff were women).
- Requested ECCD in-charge to send the letters of invitation and the information sheet.
- Contacted ECCD facilitators introduced the purpose of the research and myself after the staff of two centres agreed to participate in the *shedtho*.

2.3.5.3. *Urban parents*

- Sought approval from the office of the Mayor of Thimphu city.
- Submitted the letter to ECCD in-charge.
- Collected the list of parents and randomly selected ten parents (eight women and three men)
- Requested ECCD in-charge to send letters of invitation and information sheet.
- Contacted parents, introduced the purpose of the research and myself after the parents agreed to participate in the *shedtho*.

2.3.5.4. *Rural parents*

- Sought approval from the Village Headman where the rural ECCD centre is located.
- Submitted the letter to ECCD in-charge.
- Collected list of parents and randomly selected 10 parents (6 women and 4 men).
- Requested ECCD in-charge to send letters of invitation and information sheet.
- Contacted parents, introduced the purpose of the research and myself after the parents agreed to participate in the *shedtho*.

2.3.5.5. Key ECCD persons of UNICEF, Save the Children and Ministry of Education

- Sought approval from the heads of the respective organizations.
- Collected list of key staff. There was no need to select, as there was only one staff each in UNICEF and Save the Children and two in Ministry of Education.
- Requested the head of each organization to distribute my letters of invitation and information sheet.
- Contacted them, introduced myself and study purpose after they agreed to participate in the *shedtho*.

During all the *shedtho* sessions, I explained the purpose of the study and elaborated the details that are already there in the information sheet. This ensured that the participants were convinced that they are interested to participate in the *shedtho*.

I used the format of the consent form available on UNE website and contextualized to suit the Bhutanese need. The consent form and the information sheet were also translated in Dzongkha (National language of Bhutan) for the benefit of the rural parents. Fortunately, all the participants to whom I sent the invitation letter accepted to participate in the *shedtho*, probably because the information sheet had all the necessary details and the content of the consent form also had a clause whereby they could decide to discontinue and leave the *shedtho* session if they felt uneasy and hesitated to participate.

2.4. Pre-testing *Shedtho* method

The fact that I am going to use *shedtho* as a data collection tool both excited and overwhelmed me. It is the first time that *shedtho* is going to be used in a professional setting and to serve a professional need. Using *shedtho* meant giving life and value to *shedtho* as a research tool, which till now remained a means for people to break away from daily drudgery of life and spend leisurely time indulging in banal conversation. I therefore decided to pre-test *shedtho* method with a group of parents from the neighbourhood where I live. I invited ten participants, of which seven were women and three were men belonging to the 35 to 50 age group to help me. All were illiterate except for three of them who had basic education. They knew one another.

All the necessary protocols such as seeking approval, sending invitation letters and information sheet to the list of potential participants, calling them and signing of consent forms were carried out. The *shedtho* session was conducted in an open space in the locality from where all the participants came. I carried some *doma pani* for adults and some snacks for children, in case some parents brought their children along with them.

I welcomed the participants, offered *doma pani* and snacks for those who did not chew *doma pani*. We sat down on the ground in a circle and crossed legs, the Bhutanese style of sitting. I introduced the purpose of inviting them which was to check the effectiveness of the *shedtho* method. The *shedtho* however revolved around parenting philosophies, child rearing practices and ECCD centres in Bhutan. At the end of the pre-testing process and session, these were the lessons that I learnt and used for refining my one paged *shedtho* guide (refer Appendix B) accordingly.

- *Invite people for shedtho and not interview:* After the participants received my invitation, some called me to clarify on the purpose of the invitation. To some I said “for a group interview on your parenting philosophies, your childhood experiences...” while to some I intentionally said “for a *shedtho* session on your parenting philosophies, your childhood experiences”... The response of the parents was interesting. The parents, to whom I said “interview”, were reluctant and I had to spend time trying to convince them to participate. On the other hand those invited for “*shedtho*” agreed easily. Interview or group discussion carried with it the idea of an intellectual asking questions to which one had to respond while *shedtho* was seen more of a informal conversation set in a relaxed environment where there is no intellectual hierarchy. Thus, later, when I invited my participants I invited them for *shedtho* and not group interview or discussion. It proved to be effective; probably this could be the reason why no one refused my invitation.
- *Number should be a maximum of five and a minimum of two:* During the pre-testing, I conducted *shedtho* session with ten participants. This proved to be ineffective as it became difficult to maintain the level of interest and engage all the participants in the conversation. While some were talking, others initially waited anxiously to share their part of the story or their attention got diverted.

However, due to large number of participants, it took quite some time for people to get their turn to talk. Thus, the right number of people for effective *shedtho* with a purpose is five or less but of course not less than two including the researcher. When there are many people, the *shedtho* session becomes quite chaotic resulting into more involvement of the researcher, thereby defeating the objective of *shedtho* method. Thus, in the *shedtho* sessions that I conducted later, I ensured that the group did not exceed five participants so that everyone was able to participate and share the thoughts recorded in their wandering mind.

- *Put people who knew one another in the same group:* In the pre-testing that I conducted, while many participants knew one another, there were few who did not know anyone in the group. These participants remained shy and quiet so I had to use lots of prompting to put them at ease so that they participate in the *shedtho*. I realized that I should discuss with the participants and allow them to choose the group in which they want to be so that they are with familiar people. Thus, before my *shedtho* sessions, I formed the groups in consultation with the participants, in my case that of the parents.
- *Keep audio-recorder in an appropriate distance:* One mistake that I made during the pre-testing was taking the audio-recorder near the person who was talking. While a few did not have any problems some began to laugh and giggle and did not talk. It was only after I placed it in the middle, at a distance that their voice will be captured, that people started to feel comfortable and began to open up.

These were the key lessons that I drew from the pre-testing of *shedtho* method and which helped me to have enriching *shedtho* sessions later.

2.5. Data collection tools

The data collection will be guided by the *shedtho* method which is having a casual and informal talk between two or more people.

As in the case of yarning (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010; Bowes, Kitson, & Burns, 2010; Franks et al., 2002) and dadirri (West et al., 2012) the atmosphere has to be

relaxed in order to build a relationship and trust. *Shedtho* method will not be possible in the absence of a relaxed environment and trust. Without a relationship of trust, informants will not share their personal lived experiences lying deep inside their memories but will share only what is generally known to everyone, the banal information.

How do we create this relaxed ambiance and build trust? The answer can be found in this statement of Pommaret (2004, p. 26) where she says “Consumed by men as well as women, by laymen as well as monks at all the hours of the day, *doma pani* is perceived today by the Bhutanese as signifying a moment of relaxation and conviviality”. It can also signify intimacy and friendship especially if someone asks you to make a quid of *doma and pani*, which comprises betel leaf, areca nut, and a dash of lime. *Doma* (areca nut) and *pani* (betel leaf) occupies an important place in the social life of the Bhutanese. It is omnipresent; it is served during religious ceremonies and festivals, marriage, archery games, after meals, during times of casual talk (*shedtho*), etc. (Pommaret, 2004). Thus, it is important to take some *doma pani* so that I can offer it to my informants. This can be the entry point into building that relationship and trust necessary to have a meaningful session of *shedtho*. Then, with occasional sharing of *doma pani* in between, the conversation can at times be prolonged. It is also normal to take some snacks to give to the children if you are visiting their home.

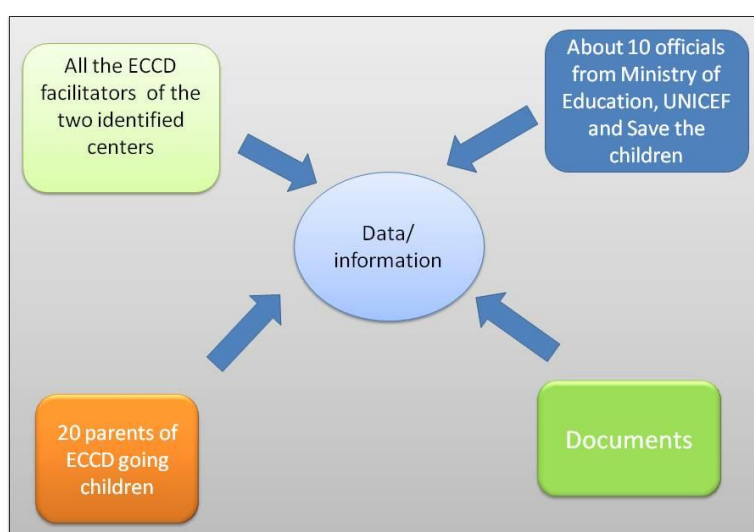
Whether we are meeting individually or as a group, it is essential to have *bay zha* which is “an everyday form of manners that embodied respect and consideration ...without either the formal or hierarchical aspects of *driglam namzha*” (Whitecross, 2008, p. 72) which is “a system of ordered and cultured behaviour, and by extension, the standards and rules to this effect” (Phuntsho, 2004, p. 572). As opposed to *driglam namzha* which is refined form of social etiquette and applied mostly in a formal setting, *bay zha* is mannerism used in everyday interaction. Thus, even during the process of *shedtho* which is set in a relaxed ambience, it is necessary to adhere to some *bay zha*, mannerisms appropriate to the traditional Bhutanese context. The first important thing is to wear the traditional Bhutanese dress which is *gho* for men and *kira* for women, that is if you are a Bhutanese. Simple things like taking off your hat or cap (if you are wearing one) when you meet people, particularly elders, is necessary to make a good first impression. Then, greeting them *kuzu zangpo* (good

health) followed by inquiring how they are and what they are doing are some basic but effective ways of getting connected to the people, the informants. The discussion can be set in a relaxed environment but it is also natural for Bhutanese to use honorific language even between colleagues as a mark of respect. It is therefore essential to talk in the appropriate language.

One thing that a researcher should avoid is bringing informants of different professional backgrounds together. For instance, if I engage the rural parents, urban parents, government officials and the ECCD educators together in the *shedtho* process, generally it will be the government officials and the urban informants who will talk the most and to which many will subscribe. The scope of listening to the lived experiences and stories of others is not possible.

Thus, while following the *bay zha*, the protocol of fine manners, I ensured that my informants who represent different socio-economic and professional background were not consulted together but rather within more congenial groups. For example, rural parents as a group and rural ECCD facilitators as a group. Against this landscape, my *shedtho* sessions were guided by *bay zha*.

2.5.1. Group Discussions: As explained earlier, *shedtho* method which could be conducted between two people or more, was the key data collection tool for this



study as this method allows the researcher to “take advantage of group dynamics and synergy to enhance and perhaps enrich the conversation” (Cooksey & McDonald, 2011, p. 319). Thus, group discussions were

conducted with the ECCD facilitators of the ECCD centres and the selected parents

of the children attending the two sampled centres. The participants were given liberty to choose their group members. To make best use of the time I guided and facilitated the discussions as this allowed some liberty for the participants to express their experiences and views while at the same time restricting side-tracking. While structured interviews are mainly to get responses for specific questions and therefore “artificial” and rigid to some extent, the semi-structured is more “adaptable” to the situation and allows some degree of natural conversation (Cooksey & McDonald, 2011). On the other hand, an unstructured approach will lead to un-necessary discussions and can be challenging for the researcher to facilitate the discussion. Thus, I adopted semi-structured interviews since this is the middle path and very relevant to *shedtho* method which requires relaxed environment and allows the participants to share their experiences. I had *shedtho* with two groups each of the rural parents and urban parents as well as with three groups of ECCD facilitators (two from urban and one from rural).

2.5.2. Key informant interview (KII): Focused group discussion (FGD) was not possible with the ECCD focal persons of the Ministry of Education, Save the Children and UNICEF as there were only one or two individuals in each organization. Further, it was not convenient to bring the focal persons together to attend the FGD as they represent different organizations and attend to different mandates. Thus, I conducted a KII with each of them but again using *shedtho* method, which is possible even between two individuals, in this case, the researcher and the informant.

2.5.3. Supporting documentation: Documents such as books, research journals, audio-visual materials and websites (Cooksey & McDonald, 2011) were used to complement the information gathered through discussions. Audio-visual materials are particularly useful to capture important phenomena associated with children.

2.5.4. Field journal: I also maintained a field journal to record interesting observations during the visits to the ECCD centres and the *shedtho* session.

2.6. Data analysis approach

Data collected through *shedtho* method captured the lived experiences of my informants. Interpretive inquiry then allowed me to reflect on the lived experiences so that I am able to ‘*reflectively analyse the structural or the thematic aspects of that experience*’ (Manen, 1997, p. 78). Thus, through the cycles of interpretive reflection the data of this study adopted a thematic analysis that is grasping the ‘*structures of experience*’ (Manen, 1997, p. 79) that transcends ‘*conceptual formulations or categorical statements*’ (Manen, 1997, p. 79). This then means identifying themes through ‘careful reading and re-reading of the data’ (Rice & Ezzy, 1999, p. 258).

Specifically, the thematic analysis was conducted using the data-driven inductive approach (Frith & Gleeson, 2004) where data was coded without being influenced by my preconceptions and without attempting to fit it in an already existing coding frame as in the case of deductive analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). This inductive process of coding allowed me to capture the views and opinions of my informants and describe them in detail.

Another consideration that was to be made is the choice of the level of themes to be analysed between semantic or explicit level and latent or interpretive level (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006). The paradigm of this study is set within an interpretive approach informed by the key Bhutanese values of *ley judray* (law of cause and effect) and *tha damtshig* (reciprocity and interdependence) that stems from the fundamental Buddhist worldview of interconnectedness. Thus, the themes will be identified at the latent or interpretive level as semantic themes do not look beyond what the data provides (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006).

According to Braun and Clarke (2006, pp. 87-94), the different phases involved in the thematic analysis are:

- i. Orienting to the data: This is the stage where I first transcribed the data and then read and re-read the data. The ideas that come along when reading the data were to be noted down.
- ii. Producing the initial codes: In this phase I coded the key and interesting elements of the data set and collated the data which are connected to each code.

- iii. Identifying themes: I collated the data into potential themes.
- iv. Reviewing themes: The themes were reviewed in the context of the coded data and the potential themes generated. A thematic map of the analysis was drawn for clarity and easy understanding of the output.
- v. Defining and naming the themes: The themes were defined and named in the context of the overall story.
- vi. Writing the thesis: This was the final opportunity for analysis where I pulled out interesting examples and extracts from the stories so that the analysis was well linked with the research questions and the literature review.

Overall, the analysis adopted a recursive process where there were constant back and forth movement than a *linear* process (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

2.7. Significance

This study will be the first of its kind in the Bhutanese context. Some of the significances of this study are:

- Identify any gaps between the parenting philosophies and expectations and ECCD policy and programming in Bhutan.
- Critique the dependence on Western philosophy and practice in the development of ECCD in Bhutan.
- Examine how Bhutanese cultural elements are, and can be further acknowledged within ECCD development and implementation in Bhutan.
- Advocate the benefits of infusing Bhutanese culture within the ECCD programmes.

2.8. Limitations

The main limitation of this study is the non-generalizability of the findings as is the case with all the qualitative research. Another limitation will be the comprehensiveness of data collection due to time and budget constraint. While the ECCD centres are spread across Bhutan where over a dozen of different ethnic groups live, I covered only two areas. Thus, it is possible that views of some ethnic groups will be left out and the study findings will be relevant only to the areas studied.

2.9. Ethics approval

Before conducting my field study, I sought the ethical approval of UNE HREC. Then, since my field study was in Bhutan, I wrote to the Ministry of Education in Bhutan for its approval to allow me to carry out studies in the ECCD centres and to interview the education officials who are under its jurisdiction. Similarly, written approval was also sought from UNICEF and Save the Children and ECCD educators for collecting data with the ECCD focal persons in the agencies. As for the parents, I received approval from the Mayor, in the case of the urban area and the Village Headman for the rural location. Then, using this letter as official evidence, I attached it along with my letter of invitation to individual participants.

After the conversations were transcribed, I shared this with the respective participants for their comments and feedback and to ensure that there are no misinterpretations and wrong documentation of information.

Both the interview transcripts and the audio records are stored safely on a computer-protected password and will be destroyed after five years in line with the UNE HREC.

CHAPTER THREE

Living so close but in different worlds: Results from the field

This chapter will present the key findings from my fieldwork conducted in two ECCD centres – an urban and a rural centre. The findings are presented in a narrative style. While presenting the field findings I will borrow the idea of developmental niche of (Super & Harkness, 1986) as it supports well the conceptual framework of this study which is grounded in a ecological model by Bronfenbrenner (1979, 2005). The term niche is borrowed “from biological ecology, where it is used to refer to an organism’s place in a biosystem — the etymological origin is the same as “nest”(Super & Harkness, 1986, p. 559). Based on this idea of “niche”, Super and Harkness (1986) discusses the developmental niche of a child as being culturally constructed environment which consist of three subsystems which are “the physical and the social setting in which the child lives; culturally regulated customs of childcare and childbearing; and the psychology of the caretakers, including parents and others such as teachers or childcare providers” (Super & Harkness, 1986, p. 543). Thus, this chapter will present the different developmental niches which are as follows:

- 3.1. Prelude to the two settings
- 3.2. Developmental niche of rural parents: Echoes of their childhood in rural Bhutan.
- 3.3. Developmental niche of urban parents: Echoes their childhood in urban Bhutan.
- 3.4. Developmental niche of rural Bhutanese children of today: Bringing up children in the 21st century crossroad
- 3.5. Developmental niche of urban Bhutanese children of today: Bringing up children in the 21st century crossroad.
- 3.6. Summary: Key themes for each of the four developmental niches.

3.1. Prelude to the two settings

Bhutan followed the policy of self-imposed isolation until the early 1950s. Prior to that, it did not have any diplomatic relations with any other nations. The first road was inaugurated sometime around 1968 connecting the Indian border area of Jalpaiguri to

Thimphu, the capital of Bhutan after the launch of economic development projects in 1961 with external financial and technical support. It was around this time that the first generation Bhutanese took up modern education both outside and inside Bhutan. This is where the roads part for the two groups of respondents and it is the point where the story begins. My urban respondents are the children of those parents who had the good fortune of being the first generation Bhutanese to receive modern education unlike the other rural respondents who did not. “Good fortune” is the term used by the illiterate parents to express their admiration of those who received education. People who went to school are thought to experience opportunities that help create lifestyles which include activities such as driving to the office, sitting in front of television in the evenings, going to movies on weekends, sending their children to private schools within Bhutan and beyond, and talking of their travels to foreign lands where life appears to be easy and people so rich that what my rural respondents earned in one day is not even the price of a modest meal. When I told them what I get as my monthly student stipend my rural respondents were struck with awe and asked me where I kept all this money; they say that my one-month stipend, is what many families earned in a year by selling their cash crops. I understand them when they blamed their *ley judray*, (law of cause and effect) which is the belief that one should accumulate good merit in our past life (Bhutanese believe in life after death) to enjoy the present life; they believe that they had not accumulated enough merit in their past life to reap such fruits in their present life.

This is the setting from where my two different groups of respondents came; as children, they lived just a few hours’ drive away from one another but they belonged to two different worlds. One group of respondents are the first or second-generation literate parents who grew up in towns while the other group are the illiterate parents who grew up in the villages with their illiterate parents.

3.1.1. Setting one: Echoes from rural Bhutan

Tabiting⁴ valley is a u-shaped glacial valley, a marshland known for its scenic beauty and cultural uniqueness. It is located about 4.30 hours drive from Thimphu. The altitude goes up from 2800 to 4000 meters above sea level and is a winter habitat for

⁴ All the names of places and people used in this thesis are pseudonyms.

the graceful Black Necked Crane. They come here to roost and with 13 other endangered species that have made this valley their home. Some 163 KM² of its land is declared as a protected area and managed by a Non-Governmental Organization. All electricity cables are laid underground to protect and preserve these habitats and endangered species and other habitats. The religious and animistic festivals and the presence of endangered species attract many to this highland, which has remained unspoilt and pristine even today.

It is an agrarian economy with its main cash crop being potatoes. It has few modern facilities like electricity, transportation and communication facilities. The hub of the valley is the Rinchenling monastery built on the spur above the valley and surrounded by the villages below. The people in the valley have a very special ethnic identity and speak a very distinct dialect of their own. The area is also inhabited by nomadic shepherds and yak-herders. Prayers flags and stupas are omnipresent. People here get up early at dawn to attend to their daily chores in the farm. During auspicious days, they spend time offering butter lamps and circumambulating Rinchenling monastery.

The ECCD centre located in Tabiting valley is my rural research site where I spent time observing children and having *shedtho* with the ECCD professionals and the parents through *shedtho*. Unlike my urban ECCD centre, this one is a Government owned ECCD centre and like all the rural based centres, the service provided is cost free and made available to the community children.

The ECCD centre is laid out inside the premises of Tabiting Medium Secondary School. The centre is a temporary wooden shed. It was initially built for the site engineers to live in during the construction of the school. The playground has two swings, two slides and two seesaws, a few vehicle tyres fixed in the ground, a scantily filled small sand pit, and a small patch of veggie garden where the children had planted their seedlings. The campus is fenced by pine wooden planks and secured further by a gate made from pine crudely designed by the local people. On the initiative of the ECCD staff, the parents contributed labour, planks and poles towards building the fence, the play equipment and the gate.

Inside, there are two rooms used as classrooms, a kitchen and a toilet. The rooms are filled with stones, leaves, sticks and plants and other materials gathered from outside

and obviously used by teachers as teaching and learning materials. Children's drawings, handprints, and scribbles on pieces of paper attached to a string, are hung down from the low ceiling and from one end of the room to the other end. There are some other learning materials such as blocks, posters, pictures and reading charts (mostly in English), books and a box full of play items and some soft toys stuffed in a wooden cabinet, most of which are donated by UNESCO and Save the Children. Charts and newspapers are put on the wooden wall to close the gaps between the wooden planks to keep the cold draft from entering the room. The centre has a single toilet built in Indian style. Water for the toilet is stored in jerry cans and buckets.

This small shed accommodates 30 young children. The two ECCD facilitators who have completed Class XII and had received a few weeks of training in ECCD manage the center. The centre follows the ECCD Toolkit developed by the Ministry of Education in the delivery of their programmes. Except for a few school teachers, almost all the parents of the children attending the ECCD centre are illiterate.

Rural ECCD Centre at Tabiting

April 2, 2013: notes from my personal journal...

I have chosen Saturday to interview the parents of the ECCD going children as I was informed that most parents are free that Saturday morning. I decided to have the introductory session with all the ten parents had consented to have shedtho. After the introductory session, I put the parents in two groups of five parents each so that I have a manageable group where everyone can be involved.

Chuki and Pema (pseudonyms), the two ECCD facilitators had come some thirty minutes early to help me coordinate the shethod and introduce me to all the parents. Chuni, a teacher in the high school and a former student of mine, had come with a big flask of tea, a bangchug (bamboo container) of zaw (roasted rice) and biscuits for snacks as a gesture of 'welcome' and an acknowledgement of her teacher. This gesture is also a demonstration of tha damtshig (reciprocity of gratitude) between a teacher and a student.

My sister who accompanied me is busy in the small kitchen preparing tea for the ten parents and my aaie (mother) is arranging pani (betel leaf) and cutting doma (areca nut) in the bangchung (bamboo container, traditionally used as plate) for the parents

to chew during the shedtho. The three girls and I laid the plastic mats on the playground for the parents to sit down during the shetho. Bhutanese normally would sit cross-legged on the floor and laying the mat on the playground created an ambience of warmth and friendliness, which would foster a smoother shedtho.

Even before the hands of the clock turned 9 am, parents strolled in, in pairs and trios, looking rather shy and uncertain yet curious and excited. A few mothers have their young children strapped onto their backs tightly secured by kabni (scarf). I stood holding the wooden gate open to welcome them, greeting 'kuzuzangpo' (means good health but used as a greeting) cheerfully and politely. A few replied 'kuzungpola', while others just smiled back in return and yet a few others took off their caps and scratched their heads with a smile and a nod. It is customary to take off ones cap as a mark of respect and acknowledgement of the other person. Bhutanese would normally take off their caps in the presence of a high ranking person, a monk, and an educated person, upon sighting a temple or entering into it or even to objects considered sacred and holy. The group even has a grandfather who was taking care of his only grandson studying at the centre. I can see, as custom so demands, Pema literally forcing Aap Chungla, the grandfather to sit on the softer cushion instead of the plastic mat. The cushion is placed on the higher slope of the play ground so that it appears to be at a more elevated position to which Aap Chungla declines saying, "Tubay, tubay (it's ok, it's ok). Madam should sit there not me." So I go to him and after much insistence, he accepts the cushion but not the elevated spot. Customarily, Bhutanese reserve such seats for person of high position, important guest, monks and nuns, or elderly persons.

So eventually I am the one who sat on the elevated spot and to create the atmosphere and mood for shedtho, I joke lightly saying I am now lam (high priest) and about to deliver a wang (blessing). It seems to ease the mood slightly as we smile at each other. Chuki starts with the zhudrey of doma pani (serving areca nut and betel leaves with a dash of lime as a starter of an event, done in a traditional way), offering the first doma to Aap Chungla as a mark of respect which then was circulated amongst the rest. I am observing that while some chewed on doma, others take one and tuck into their belt so that they can chew later or give it away.

While we adults are organizing ourselves, Chuki is busy taking care of the children who had tagged along with their parents, getting them to form a queue to receive the

gums that I have brought for them. They form into a line in sheer excitement and obedience ready to receive the gums. As their names are called out they step forward and as loudly as their small lungs could allow shout 'kadrinche la' (thank you). I can see they have learnt some school rules and discipline.

After Pema, one of the ECCD facilitators introduced me, I made the parents introduce themselves. Then, I assured the participants that all that we are going to do is have a *shedtho* with them about their childhood days, how they were brought up by their parents; as parents themselves how they bring up their children; what their expectations are from them; what they do to realize their hopes and aspirations etc. I also had to explain to them that I could have *shedtho* with a group of five at a time and this meant that there will be two groups and some will have to wait. I coordinated with them and formed two groups. The parents who lived near the ECCD center agreed to have *shedtho* in the second group

3.1. 2. Setting two: respondents from the maddening crowd

Thimphu is the capital city of Bhutan. It must also be the only capital city in the world where there are no traffic lights but for the Bhutanese it still stands as a cosmopolitan city as compared to the other parts of Bhutan. Most of the architectural features of the buildings laid out on the landscape of the capital city stand uniquely in the traditional style with Buddhist paintings and motifs. To a foreign eye, nested within the surrounding mountains, Thimphu valley may appear exotic and spectacular, with its hills spotted with fluttering prayer flags, the eternal flow of the Wang Chu river with Tashichhodzong “the fortress of the glorious religion” standing on the right, and Simtokha Dzong perched on the hill.

The Memorial *choeten*, a large stupa built in memory of the Third King of Bhutan which stands in the heart of the city and the gigantic Buddha statue, the size of which may be equal to twelve storied building, towers from above the hillock overlooking Thimphu city to capture the spiritual facet of the city. While the Buddha statue, which is just a few minute drive from the city, is frequented by the health conscious city dwellers who go for their daily runs or in search of quietude and breath of fresh mountain air, the Memorial *choeten* has remained a hub, particularly for the old people to gather and spend time circumambulating it. They do so in a clockwise direction chanting prayers to earn merit for a better rebirth (Bhutanese believe in life after death)

and also for the wellbeing of all sentient beings. While the old people may spend their entire day here, the office goers stop to circumambulate on the way to their office or on their way to dropping or picking up their children from school. One may find the *choeten* crowded during certain days considered as auspicious days during which time religious ceremonies and special prayers are offered for the well being of the entire nation and the whole earth.

A few minute walk away from these religious sites and one enters into the core business zone of the city crowded with shopping malls, bars, restaurants, hotels, resorts and discotheques. At the periphery, we also have schools, both private as well as government- run. There is over a dozen childcare centres, most of which are privately owned. Challenged and confronted by the job demands with both parents working outside of home and the difficulty in getting babysitters, the private ECCD centres have attracted many parents of children below the age of 6 years, the age when you can admit the children to a pre-primary class. Located here is Foundation First, one of the private ECCD centres that I have selected as my research site. Using *shedtho* as the research tool, I conversed, interacted closely with them listening to their stories with the staff and parents of the children attending the centres and also carried out observations during my visits.

Inside Foundation First: my urban research site

I had two *shedtho* sessions each with the ECCD facilitators and the parents of children attending Foundation First which is located in the Northern fringe of the capital. The centre is secured with a heavy iron gate painted in white and blue and a colourful sign board 'Foundation First.' The centre looks secluded, surrounded by trees, and has a modern look about it, its space filled with colourful imported equipment like seesaws, swings and a dollhouse. Everything appears bright and cheerful. It hosts six female staff and 40 young children ranging from 2-5 years old. While one staff (temporarily employed) holds a Bachelors degree in Arts, two have studied up to Class X and the other seven up to Class XII. Only one has childcare experience having worked for five years in another private ECCD centre and she is also a mother. The rest are unmarried and had no particular experience in childcare prior to their joining the centre. The writing below which describes the scenario has been drawn from my research journal that I maintained during the *shedtho* session:

It was on a bright Tuesday afternoon that I visited Foundation First. I brought few packets of candies as well as few packets of betel leaves and areca nuts, which is customary for a Bhutanese to offer during a *shedtho*. Keeping in mind that my approach has to be culturally appropriate and acceptable for my respondents to hold a *shedtho* with me, I dressed in *kira* normally I would in a public place, especially in a formal setting. It is important that I maintain a cultural appearance in order that I create the right mood and environment for *shedtho*. I have to ensure that my respondents make an immediate connection with me through the rapport that I build with them, the cultural affinity that we together hold and the easy and relaxed atmosphere that we together create for ourselves so that it facilitates a smooth flow of *shedtho*.

It is 4:30 pm when I opened the gate and walked into my research site – Foundation First. Just as I am about to give a call to the proprietor who has fixed my appointment with some of the parents of the children attending Foundation First, two little boys aged between 4 to 5 cycle towards me. They appear to be well dressed in jeans and shirts, one even is wearing long hair tied into a pony tail, which is unusual for little boys in Bhutan. As soon as they see me they come towards me and before I could say anything, the pigtail boy asked, “Are you looking for anybody?” (the question was in English) another thing that surprised me. I replied in English and explained that I need to see the proprietor. “Wait here” they shouted and ran inside. Minutes later, the door opened and a young woman greeted me with, “*Kuzuzangpo, Aue*” (*Aue* means sister or brother used for making reference to people who are older than yourself but of the same generation). We introduced each other and she took me upstairs. Like the outdoor play equipment, here too, the rooms are well furnished (at least for a Bhutanese standard), the walls painted with colourful pictures of Mickey Mouse and English alphabets and other pictures splashed in variety of colours. The rooms are stuffed with soft toys and other play and educational materials imported from outside of Bhutan. Everything appeared modern, colourful, rich and entertaining, geared to attract children’s attention and curiosity and stimulate their learning. I am impressed for I haven’t seen any ECCD centres in Bhutan look as rich! While the allocated room for toddlers and kindergarten had no chairs or tables as the children in these age groups spent time sitting on the floor while playing, the pre-schoolers room appeared no different from classrooms in the schools. Here the room is furnished with low chairs and tables, has educational materials (charts, calendars, alphabets, students’

work) displayed on the wall, a chalk board, a table and a chair for the teacher to sit on. The room appeared too small to accommodate space for free play. I am told that, “parents here want us to teach their children ABCs.... They expect us to teach the children reading, writing and speaking and prepare them for school next year...they specially want us to teach their children to learn English.” In the course of *shedtho*, I also learnt that play time for pre schoolers or even outdoor activities are limited as they are required to spend time sitting and writing as so wished by their parents. I am also told that the centre’s sand pit has been removed as the parents complained that the children get dirty and that it’s risky for their children to be outside playing in the mud and sand. It appeared that the parents have a strong voice here in the running of the centre. Meetings are held on monthly basis with the parents during which time the parents put up their demands and expectations. The proprietor, a young mother, and not trained in childcare herself, expressed her own frustrations and inability to do what the centre would like to, given that the parents understand and support the centre. She shared:

We are obliged to fulfil their expectations, sometimes even when we know it isn't right because we are dependent on them ...they are our customers and we have to keep them happy and satisfied... my teachers are so young and inexperienced...although they are good with children but they are shy with parents and they cannot speak their thoughts.... the parents think that they are just babysitting, on the other hand we also have pressure from the Ministry of Education ...with their rules and regulations that we need to follow... they have given us some trainings and small workshops but they are very short...they help us but wish they had more such workshops for longer durations...it would really help us and the children....

The children here observe every Wednesday as cultural day where boys and girls come attired in their national dress, gho and kira. They begin their day singing their national anthem and they also sing and dance to Bhutanese tunes and Bhutanese nursery rhymes.

3.2. Developmental niche of rural parents: Echoes of childhood in rural Bhutan

Life in a traditional Bhutanese village was controlled by the natural light. Village folks woke up with the break of dawn and got back home from their fields at dusk. The reminiscences of the parents from rural settings during their childhood take us to the time when village elders counted the crowing of the rooster to rise in the morning and attend to their day's work. Even before the sun rose the house was filled with the bustle of activities, children were up and about - folding their own bedding with their parents' in order to stack them in the corner of the room. Even today people in the villages fold their bedding every morning and unfold it at bedtime. They were already running errands for the elders and carrying out small household chores such as feeding the domestic animals, helping their mother or grandparents build a fire in the fireplace, fetching water from the spring, making offerings of water at the altar or starting to fumigate outside of home to start their day appeasing the deities.

As breakfast commenced, the day's affairs were discussed by the head of the family. Family members sat on the wooden floor and in a circle, cross-legged with the food in the middle. Meals were eaten with bare hands and parents made rice balls for the little ones to dip in the curry and eat. It was also considered ill-mannered to talk or laugh during meal times and although children are reprimanded if they breach the rule, adults chatted and laughed whenever they had occasions to do it.

It was the house lady (*nang-gi aum*), normally the mother who served the food. It was the eldest in the family who was served first and the children (unless hungry or crying) served the last. Every member of the house had their assigned tasks and roles to fulfil within the family unit including the children. Then as dusk arrived, almost everyone returned home but not empty handed. Those who went to graze cows in the forest or went to collect fodder for the cattle or firewood, brought home mushrooms, fiddle heads and other wild edibles. These are childhood experiences shared by all of my rural parent respondents during the *shedtho* session.

Aum Nam adds that nothing was easy during their times but life was good. They had very little of everything but were happy just the same. Being the eldest of her two other siblings she had a big responsibility of running the house from a very young age

of twelve. All her younger siblings attended schooling except her. She says she took care of them, carried all of them on her back and watched them grow. Even as she cooked or swept or fed the animals, she had them on her back for her parents were always busy with fieldwork. She says that as she had been like a mother to them and she was certain that based on *tha damtshig* (reciprocity), they will take care of her during difficult times. Her siblings are now getting into government jobs and have settled in urban towns and take care of the two younger siblings. She plans to send her younger daughter who is attending ECCD to one of the urban schools where her sons work for good education.

*I think children do better in urban schools...they learn so much...I have seen how children in town can talk more they have more wang (confidence)....
...they can speak English. My daughter cannot speak English...she is too shy... I am not educated I just watch her write and scribble on blank pages...she may write anything I do not know but I have to believe that she is writing something that her teacher taught her... (Aum Nam)*

Some of my rural respondents' memories of their childhood days are of those moments spent in the company of their grandparents. My rural respondents carried fond memories of their grandparents telling them stories in the night, sitting and sleeping in their beds by the hearth. As there was no electricity, pine chips were used to light up the house at night. Generally, grandparents slept near the hearth so children often slept with them listening to bedtime stories. With their back turned towards the warmth of the blazing fire, grandparents narrated folk tales, their own stories of suffering, of courage and valour or local ghost stories as grandchildren on their knees would rub in butter and rub their backs and waist to ease them of body ache.

This is vividly described in the words of Aap Daw who recollects his childhood in two different settings: as a young boy living in his village herding cows and as a school boy living in the city with his maternal uncle but he could not complete even primary education and returned to help his parents in the village. While in the village, he had spent most of his time in the company of his grandfather looking after the herd of cattle as they moved from one pastureland to another. He reflected rather nostalgically....

My aangay (grandmother) taught me many things... to hunt for wild food, climb trees, look for mushrooms.... how to trick bears if you encounter one....(laughs)... pausesif bears attack you, you have to pretend to be dead and lie down still that's if you cannot run....if you want to fight...you need to hit the bear on the nose....(laughs again)....during summer when we took the cattle up the mountains, my aangay and I used to collect nice smelling mountain herbs....like etho meto, salu balu....(rhododendrons and azaleas) ...chop them into fine pieces and dry them. These became our gifts to our folks in town for them to use it for burning incense when conducting rimdro (rituals). They gave us money in return. I remember him most for the stories that he used to narrate during the nights...sometimes when we did not have much work he used to tell me even day time stories...

As shared by Aum Bida, children often gathered in a circle for a story telling competition as they narrated stories that their parents and grandparents had told them. Stories that were told were almost always known to all and so as one narrated, another commented on the sequence of the story and charged the story teller as telling lies.

We would often argue about the plot, the character or the sequencing of the story and an adult would be approached to validate the truth. (Aum Bida)

Stories varied and were laden with morals and values and drawn mostly from animal characters, birds, fairies and supernatural beings, subterranean, kings and queens, god and goddesses, demons and demonesses. They talked about loyalty, fidelity, strength, courage and valour, *ley judrey tha damtshig*, goodness, compassion and kindness.

Typical of *shedtho*, Aap Daw's story evokes memories similar to his of that of Aum Bida's...

During winter time...when there was little field work...we would bask in the sun on the front porch... I would spend many happy hours besides my aangay (granny) and pulling out her grey strands as she narrated stories...and lozay (poetic verses through which people expressed their wit, humour and richness of language)...

...and that of Aum Nam as well...

My aangay would tell me stories when in bed...either the story would soothe me to sleep or the ghost story would be so frightening that I would shut my eyes tightly to force myself to sleep...

Another event happily recounted as a collective story was the way most of them spent their playtime. Oftentimes, the rural children amused themselves by turning work into play; so as they worked, they played. Aap Tsheri voices out the childhood days shared by the rural parents:

... we had no dedicated playtime. We had to be creative and smart with our time and work... We were like little adults...we were always working... but at the same time playing...

To which Aap Daw added:

... responsibilities like collecting firewood and fodder for the cattle became a sport event. We would contest to see who completed the work first, who climbed the highest tree, carried the biggest load of fodder or firewood, and brought home mushrooms and other wild edibles.

And Aap Dendup concluded:

While grazing our cattle, we would also make flutes out of the bamboo tubes with big knives, played games such as dart, suksom⁵, degor⁶ or made arrows and darts and played archery, wrestled, had bullfights and were never bored...it was such fun...those days are over now and our children do not play such games and sports anymore... We even used to become so adventurous that we used to pull the big creepers from the trees on a cliff top and swig above the cliff... It was very frightening when I reflect on it... Parents did not stop us from it....

⁵ Suksom is a game played between two teams or two individuals. There are two targets which are about 15 to 20 meters apart for adults. Each player holds a pair of slender bamboo sticks of about 1.5 to 2 meters long with sharp point on one end. The objective is to hit the targets and who ever reaches the agreed points first wins the game.

⁶ Degor is a game played between two teams or two individuals. Each player has two flat stones of palm size or bigger based on the choice. The objective of the game is to get as close or even on top of a peg put in the ground. The pegs are placed at each end of the field, about 25 meters apart for adults. The stones closest to the peg will get a point. Similar to suksom, the teams would set a point which they have to reach first to win.

However, my rural mothers' reminiscences of their childhood give a glimpse of the play world for the girls that were different. The girls spent most of their time in the company of their mother, grandmothers, aunties and girls in the village and very rarely with the father or male members.

Aum Zam narrated...

We always followed our mother or older siblings... and I remember my mother narrated stories and folk tales... she taught me songs and lozay (poetic verses where people displayed their wit, humour and richness of language) and sangmo (four verses poetry which is sung)... so whenever occasions arose we sang and had verbal combats and exchanged repartees and enjoyed asking brain-teasing questions something like riddles.

Further, Aum Bida recounted...

Popular amongst them which children asked was, "Name the monk dressed in red robes and offering tea to 32 others dressed in white and seated in two rows?"

Aum Bida challenged me to give the answer. I replied "*the tongue and 32 teeth.*" I knew the answer as I had heard it from my grandparents too. By the look in their eyes I knew that my response surprised everyone; they must have thought someone who has received Western education would not know the answer. Probably if she had asked the same riddle to her children they wouldn't know as they are very little connected to the wealth of local knowledge. Aum Bida continued:

"Name the guest who came to eat without being invited?" The answer is the "crow" as they hovered around houses and rooftops waiting for people to place the rice cakes on the rooftops while performing rituals to appease deities. One game popular amongst the rural children was Ta dang Nor⁷ (Two Tigers and a herd of cattle).

⁷ *Ta dang Nor* is a game played by two persons. One played as a herd of cows and the other a pair of tigers. The concept is similar to the game of chess. The tigers and the herd of cattle are pitted against each other. The aim of the cattle is to block all the places for the tigers to move around by spreading

Whenever they had free time, my respondents shared that they engaged themselves in pretence play where they played out roles of adults and animals. The girls enacted the role of mothers, daughters, grandmothers and aunties. They swept the house and cooked, fed babies and animals, milked cows. While the boys (often younger boys joined the play with the girls) took up roles of grandfather, father, uncles and sons, chopping firewood, ploughing the field and constructing houses or fighting the bears. Then, they also played as wild animals such as deer, monkeys and wild boar prowling in the field and men laying down traps to catch the animals.

Listening to their collective stories and from the knowledge gathered from my own experiences and awareness as a Bhutanese, every member, old or young engaged herself/himself in a task and contributed to the running of the house no matter how trivial. For instance, grandparents would, while chanting prayers and turning their hand prayer wheel and pulling on the prayer beads sat, watched over a sleeping infant, fanning to drive away flies. They would sit by the window or in the open porch to guard the grains laid out on the bamboo mat for drying while a young child sat beside them, playing and at the same time ran small errands for the elders.

As shared by few of my rural mothers, in a traditional familial setting the daughters helped their mother to milk the cows, fetched water, carried firewood to the kitchen, swept the house, cleaned the pots and pans, and prepared food for the family and those who worked in the field.

Another main task for which the girls were responsible was looking after our younger siblings. I had to carry my baby sister strapped on my back and oftentimes, carried the child the whole day when my parents were busy with farm work... (Aum Bida)

Aum Zam intervened:

... you were fortunate you had only one sister...I carried and took care of three younger siblings...I started carrying my younger ones when I was eight years old...people say if you carry heavy load as a child, it will hamper your growth... I think it has effected mine... that's why I am the shortest...

around while that of the tiger is to kill as many cattle as possible so that they will not be able to block it from moving around.

All of my rural respondents talked about the early responsibilities that they shouldered, the errands that they ran for the adults and elders and the scolding, criticism and beatings that they got from failing to attend to the given tasks.

My father was so strict, I used to get beatings quite often and I used to hide from him whenever I couldn't do the task...after sometime he will forget and I would come out then.... (Aum Zam).

They mentioned that if found disobedient and shying away from their given tasks, they were spanked, yelled at and even condemned and criticized as being 'useless' and 'good for nothing' and so forth. Obedience and respect for elders was a theme that all my rural respondents shared with me. In regard to discipline beliefs, Aum Bida shared a popular proverb that she had heard from her parents repeatedly and which still echoed in her mind: "*only those who have faced hardship will bear good fruits*". To this Aap Chungla added the two that he heard the most from his parents and elders which were: "*a child who is shown love and affection through an excess of joy and peace will not be able to learn much*" and "*permitting one's child to display irresponsible habits is not affection; the growth of hump on the bull's back does not signify strength; let fondness be felt in heart; and let the head receive a smack or two often*". And Aum Nam remembered: "*align the sapling and the child when tender*".

In the villages almost every house had an altar room; this is the sacred place where all the family rituals, observances and ceremonies took place. Besides making these daily offerings, the family conducted annual rituals and prayers for good health and prosperity in this lifetime and a good rebirth in the next. This was brought forward by some of my rural parents in their reminiscences of their childhood days. As children themselves, they enjoyed the annual ritual (*lo chhoe*)⁸ that each household in the village performed.

It was very exciting for us...they would have to shout an invitation to each household and soon the whole village thronged their house for meals. Almost everyone in the neighbourhood came to watch and also sing and dance... it used to be very festive....(Aum Bida)

Regarding the ritual, Aap Tsheri had this to share:

⁸ (*lo chhoe*) conducted by each household to appease and invoke the household deities and the guardian deities of the valley

My village had many other rituals which were conducted both at household and community levels. ... there were rituals to invoke the local deities who were the fountain of harmony, peace and prosperity and which brought the whole village together in collective prayers.....all of us...each household contributed in kind or cash to perform this ritual for the benefit of the entire village. ... Rituals and community festivals were conducted so that the human beings and the supernatural forces lived in harmony with each other.

One community ritual that all the respondents remembered vividly was the *Lhabon* which means inviting the deities. This is a ritual performed by a medium for the community by sacrificing a sheep so that the local deities are appeased and they bless the village folks with timely rainfall, abundant harvest, prosperity and good health of the people and the domestic animals. The reason why they remembered this is that it corresponds with the winter solstice and therefore the new year for the locality. People, particularly the young boys and girls formed groups and went from one house to another singing a good wish song called *lolay* which means “May you have a good year”. The verses were shared jointly by Aap Tsheri, Aum Nam, Aum Zam and Aap Chungla which was freely translated as something like:

*“May you be blessed with a good year ahead;
May the stable be filled with horses;
May the shed be filled with cattles;
May the sty be filled with pigs;
May the store be filled with grains;
May the house be filled with people;
May the roof be filled with flags;
May you be blessed with a good year ahead;
Till this time of next year;
May you have good health;
May you have peace of mind;
May you be blessed with a good year ahead;
The Lady of the house is moving;
To shower us with a load of butter;
To shower us with a bunch of jerky;
To shower us with a sack of rice;*

May you be blessed with a good year ahead.

This good wish song is taken seriously by both the people singing it as well as those listening to it. If the household do not entertain the singers, they have the right to curse the family as a consequence of which the family would suffer from misfortune. So, people are generally called in and given drinks and then some rice. Some even give butter and meat. The group of people moving around singing would normally carry a sack to collect the rice and what people gave them. They normally organized picnic or a dinner with the items collected. If there are left over, they share it. This is what the urban respondents have not experienced.

My rural respondents also shared that during their childhood when people were sick, shamans and monks performed rituals, as there were no hospitals in the neighbourhood. To this Aum Zam added:

“When I reflect back to my childhood days I can remember that people suffered mainly from diarrhoea, dysentery, cough and scabies. I think it was caused mainly by absence of hygiene. I can still remember how people working in the field used to eat food even without washing their hand...”

It is through participation in such rituals and festivals that children acquire the beliefs and the ways of doing of their own community.

The discussions from rituals led to the parenting philosophy. As a Bhutanese myself I had often heard my parents and family elders say that *“pha gee ba ta bu so”* (parents grow old, children embody our hope). This popular proverb is what all of my rural parent respondents had heard during their childhood days and which they hold close to their heart.

In this context, the essence that I draw from the childhood reminiscences of my rural parent respondents is that their parents and elders worried about the conduct of funeral rites and rituals that are required to be performed on their behalf after they die. This is because death is a serious affair in Bhutan. Failing to bid proper farewell to the departed soul through the conduct of the funeral rites and the associated rituals would take the soul to lower realm of intensive suffering as performing them would help them take faster rebirth in the human realm. Specifically, Aap Chungla, the oldest respondent shared:

“... death of parents and elder members of the family is the moment to observe *pha dha bu gi tha damtshig* (reciprocity of gratitude between parent and children) and to prove that you are an honourable child by conducting all the rituals. I remember one of my father’s friends who did not have any children kept aside some land and valuable items as their *doog tay* (support). The reason was to ensure that his nephews and nieces conducted the funeral rites and the rituals so that they would inherit the land and the valuable items.”

Thus, what can be concluded from the childhood memories of my rural parent respondents is a wish for a peaceful old age and even more importantly, a quick and a good rebirth after their death. Put in this context, *pha gee ba ta bu so* embodies the parenting philosophy of the Bhutanese parents as so brought forth in their stories during *shedtho*, the finality of which is to have a worthy child who uphold the social values of *ley judray* and *tha damtshig*.

Against this context, my rural parent respondents share that they have heard their parents advice them on the need to have *ley judray tha damtshig*. For instance, all my respondents shared that from a very young age, they were taught to take care of their parents and grandparents by washing their clothes, preparing their bed and making hot water for their bath. Children were also advised to be good and help others whenever possible and the oft-quoted Bhutanese advice was based on the adage that “*The merit that you earn by making one person happy cannot be carried even by five score horses*”. The underlying idea is that, by doing so, the children will, at the end, accumulate merit and their *jawa lamdroe* - the ‘pathways’ to happiness and success will be cleared. On the other hand, by being unresponsive and uncaring to the needs of their parents and grandparents, they are bound to suffer a similar fate with their own children treating them likewise. In this regard, Aap Daw shared the story of “*Father in a wicker basket*.”

Once in a village there lived a father and a son. The father brought up his child with all the love and care in the world. The son grew into a man and soon married and became a father himself. As the father grew old and weak, his son found him useless and a burden to the family. So the son planned to get rid of his father. He therefore gave his son, who has also become a young man, a wicker basket and instructed him to carry his grandfather to the mountaintop and abandon him there, which he did obediently. However, he

brought back the empty basket. His father was surprised to see the wicker basket and asked “why did you bring back the basket?” The son replied, “I need this wicker basket for my son to carry you to the mountain top when you grow old and useless.”

Living in harmony with nature was another topic that all of my rural parents remember of their childhood. Aum Bida echoed with clarity what other respondents also shared:

My parents always told me that human beings shared this world with many other supernatural beings. They said, “the earth, trees, rocks, mountains and water are also owned by a variety of numinous forces who are the true owners of nature. In the lakes, ruled the water deity Tshomen, in the mountains resided Yul lha, on the cliffs, Tsen, on the land (soil) and rocks, Sabda and Lue, and in the shady marshy areas reigns the Dhue and Mem. Although invisible, they remained the chief occupants, the guardians, the owners, and the true keepers of nature. This is the reason why we make offerings to almost everything in our surrounding so that people are blessed with good health, timely rainfall, good harvest and peace by these super natural forces”.

Aap Chungla also shared an incident which best demonstrates how human beings can suffer if we breach the trust of interdependence (*tha damtshig*) and suffer its consequence (*ley judray*). Ap Chungla narrated:

One summer there was no rainfall and most of the vegetables and crops dried. We consulted the village astrologer and the cause of the dry summer was identified as the delay in conducting the collective community ritual because the shaman who appeased the deities was ill. This infuriated the deities and brought about drought.

Aum Nam too had a story of her own:

The water source of our village dried up. Later it was discovered that somebody had urinated near the water source which enraged the water spirit and caused the water to dry up. My village elders engaged the village shaman to conduct a ritual to appease the water spirit by offering small pieces of cloth and threads (representing prayer flags), milk and white rice mixed with butter

and chanting words of negotiation and making promises not to defile her environs again. It helped as in a few days we had water like before.

All my rural respondents also shared that their parents also told them that at home, spirits co-reside in every corner and angles of the house and we needed to respect their presence. For instance, the hearth is the abode of the hearth spirit so the hearth has to be dusted occasionally and kept clean and made offerings simply by placing few morsels of rice or food on the hearth. After churning milk, parents would make offerings to all the deities in the house, pasture lands, forests and the fields that the cows frequent. This was the childhood world of my rural respondents and they still continue to co-exist with the invisible supernatural forces.

3.3. Developmental niche of urban parents: Echoes of childhood in urban Bhutan.

I began my *shedtho* by asking my urban parent respondents to describe a typical day of their childhood. The following are the excerpts that I have transcribed from my respondents who reside in Thimphu, the capital city of Bhutan, but each grew up in totally different environment and settings....

I would get up early morning, prepared breakfast for my uncle, aunty and my cousin...my parents sent me to live with them in Thimphu to go to school... After school I prepared dinner and then wrote my homework. During weekends I accompanied my aunty to help carry her grocery bags...they were good to me but I used to miss my parents dreadfully... (Keza).

Zam shared:

I was fortunate...my parents were one of those few who had received Western education...my childhood days was a 'smooth sail' for me... my mother used to help me with my homework...and moreover I had two of my older siblings who attended to me... we used to go for picnics and watched many Hindi films...being the youngest, I did not have much responsibilities like my older siblings....they did all the cleanings and washings...I spent most of my time playing 'skip' and doing my homework....my teachers also liked me as I was sent to school clean and neat, did my homework on time...and never got beatings from my teachers unlike my other friends in the school who either

came to school untidy or did not do their homework...sometimes my teacher would ask me to keep count of my friends when they had to ‘up and down’⁹ exercise as a punishment....

From the *shedtho* and from my own experience of growing up in urban Bhutan, my urban respondents grew up getting exposure to the outside world and culture through movies, comics and story books. All my urban respondents remembered listening and singing Beatles, Eagles, ABBA and other English and Hindi songs. They danced to the Indian tunes as they picked from the movies that they watched. Only few remembered enjoying Bhutanese music or even singing or dancing to Bhutanese music. When asked ‘why?’ the urban respondents told me that during their time, there were rarely any Bhutanese movies to watch, and Bhutanese songs and dances came only from parents and teachers and did not appear much on cassettes or recorders.

During our time, we had only two movie theatres in Thimphu...both showed mostly Hindi movies and few English ...there were no Bhutanese movies then ...we learnt to speak, sing, dance to English and Hindi songs and music... (Tulsa).

Except for few periods in Dzongkha (National Language of Bhutan), my urban respondents remember being taught more in English and that too by Indians and the Jesuits. This meant that their microsystem was influenced by other cultures. The students learnt Bhutanese songs only when they were involved in the cultural programs of the schools where they had to dance to the Bhutanese music. My urban respondents shared that it was a time when many schools were opened in different towns and places near the towns and all these schools were staffed with teachers from other countries.

My urban respondents grew up experiencing a large amount of Western influence. This exposure to Western influence was part of their school experiences as well as their lives outside school.

We watched Indian and American movies (Laurel and Hardy, Charlie Chaplin, James Bond and cowboy movies...and as a child we read Cinderella, Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, Beauty and the Beast, Jack and the Bean

⁹ The ‘up and down’ punishment – a commonly used punishment which involved students with their hands holding their ear lobe and going down to their knees (squatting) and raising themselves up again and repeating this as many times as instructed by their teacher.

Stalk...they were very popular...we read Dzongkha books only for study and for exam and never read them for leisure.... As we grew older, we read Enid Blyton, Nancy Drew series, Hardy Boys, the Secret Seven, the Famous Five and comic books. Even today there are rarely any comics and very few children's storybooks written in Dzongkha. (Zam)

This is true because the Bhutanese movie industry made a late start and came about only around the mid-1990s. They grew up learning Hindi and English songs, language, and culture. The excerpts drawn from my shedtho also tells much about their childhood developmental niches...

I remember how those days were...life was tough...everything was difficult...yet when I think back, I know those tough days were important... it built us into tough people... we could do things which today's children cannot do... (Sherab).

Another parent echoed her thought.

We climbed trees, mountains... walked in the snow wearing just slippers... I don't know how we did that...but today we cannot...our feet is so spoilt today that we cannot walk without shoes or slippers...we were hardy beings...now we have become soft and spoilt... and weak... (Gytse).

Typical of a *shedtho*, another parent picked up his thought strands:

I was admitted into school very late...only when I was 12. I was studying and living with my maternal uncle in Thimphu. My uncle was a driver and my aunty who did not have any work. Thimphu was not like today, there were only few vehicles and few buildings only. So many people also kept cows to supplement their income. My aunty used to take care of three Jersey cows so after school hours I had to help her. During weekends I went to the forest to graze the cows, collect firewood and fodder from the forest. In those days, almost everyone cooked on firewood...only a few rich used gas for cooking. ... (Tamang).

Another common experience shared by my urban parent respondents is that their parents did not buy them any dolls, toys and play items. In the school they played

football, basketball, volleyball, table tennis and badminton games, all of which are not Bhutanese games.

All my urban parents remember that they had unpleasant school life, as the teachers were very tough. Teachers would beat students and learning was mostly rote learning and teacher centred. Penjor who studied in a boarding school in Thimphu recounted:

School wasn't really children friendly. Teachers beat, slapped and punished us. A very common punishment was putting a pencil in between two fingers and the teacher pressing from outside so that it caused pain. We were also made to hold our ears with our hands and then squat and get up a 100 times or frog jump from one end of the classroom to the other for very long time when we made mistakes. Teachers also whipped on the buttock, legs and hands. So we performed child play rituals to make those teachers that we disliked sick. One of my classmates once made a ritual cake of mud and chanted "Let my math teacher Mr "A" fall sick. To our surprise, for a few days the teacher was absent and my friend was happy. Of course it was sheer coincidence of the black magic performed by the student and the teacher taking leave to attend to some important domestic chores. But, students going to this extent indicated that school in those days were not the best place to go. Teachers were feared.

Another thing that fascinated the childhood of my urban parent respondents were the ritual and religious festivals. One thing that everyone remembers the most was the Thimphu Tshechu (mask dance festival to celebrate the noble deeds of Padmasambhava, a Great Buddhist Master) and the annual household ritual. There were other events that all of my respondents remembered how construction of a house began with the begging of land from the land spirit by performing a ritual. On asking the reasons for performing this ritual Penjor explained:

My parents explained that the land spirit will be unhappy and it will cause misfortune and illness in the family if we do not perform ritual before construction.

What I have observed is that social life and religion are so intrinsically linked in the Bhutanese culture and this is seen in the way Bhutanese turn festivals into a social event- indulging in jokes, playful pranks and teasing to create the spirit of

celebrations and festivity. This was one event, which the urban parents remembered as children themselves.

The annual ritual (lo chhoe) was one of my favourites.... children looked forward to this annual event as it was the time when the neighbours gathered...we had everybody come into our house and dance, sing and eat together while the monks performed rituals...(Pem).

Dem added:

What children enjoyed was that the house bustled with noise of the people and sounds of cymbals, trumpets and gongs as monks conducted the ritual. We watched the adults dance or become drunk; tease one another, flirt, laugh and have fun. During certain intervals of the rituals, family members had to go inside, prostrate to the monks and then to the altar, pray and make offerings. We were taught how to chant prayers and say our prayers for the year.... Throughout the year, may I, my family, relatives, friends and neighbours in the village enjoy good health and peace of mind. Please protect us from all evils, misfortunes and sicknesses.

Tamang shared:

We looked forward to the Tshechu which lasted for three full days with joy as there were new clothes, special food and remissions from work.

Rituals were also performed when people became ill. Pem recounted:

Once my mother became ill. She was taken to the hospital and given medicine but she did not get well ... My father consulted an astrologer who said that my mother had to go to her village and make offerings to the local deity. In fact, every year the whole family used to visit our village and make offerings but the year my mother fell ill, we could not go as my father had to attend to a very important government work... As advised by the astrologer, we went to our village which was two days by bus and half day walk through the forest...After the offering to the local deity, my mother got well....

All the other participants agreed that when they were children they had observed that their parents conducted ritual and also took the patient to the hospital.

From rituals and festivals, the *shedtho* wandered to discussions on disciplining beliefs. My respondents shared the use of harsh languages and beatings were common in the Bhutanese homes when they were children. All my respondents remembered that at one point of time that they had heard their parents, uncles and aunties and even grandparents resorting to use of strict language and phrases such as “*useless*”, “*good for nothing*”, “*worth to be sent as demon’s food*”, “*source of misfortune*”, and “*enemy of my past life have been born as my child to take revenge on me*”.

In this regard, Sonam added two proverbs that he heard often from his parents and elders and which underscored the importance of disciplining: “*worthless children do not eat what is given and do not obey what is told*” and “*if the forehead of children had not received any hit by knuckles, they will learn no discipline*”.

But as a parent myself and having grow in a similar environment an interesting observation that I have made and which Tamang and Sonam also expressed is that such treatment were always justified by connecting action to intention. Penjor added:

If children grew up into worthless adults, the society blamed it as the failure of the parents. So parents had to prove that they a worthy parents by disciplining their children with the intention and hope of preparing them to grow into responsible adults.

What Penjor shared is reflected in a popular adage that Bhutanese hear in schools and at home: “*student of an unlearned teacher, buckwheat of infertile soil and child of an ignoble parent*”. Intention was therefore considered very important as underscored in another adage: “*If the intention is good, the path will be clear. If the intention is bad, the path will be obstructed*”. In this adage we notice the play of *ley judray* (law of cause and effect).

Children were also brought up in an environment where they recognized and appreciated the family value of “*pha ma gi drin len*” which means repaying for the sacrifices made by the parents. All my respondents shared that they had received advice from elders and teachers on the importance of taking care of their parents in their old age.

In this context, Dem shared a proverb: “*Even if you carry your mother on the left shoulder and your father on the right and tour the world you will not be able to repay the sacrifices that they have made for you*”.

Further, all my urban respondents shared that during their childhood they were made to understand social values of taking care of old parents. Failing to do so would mean that the child has breached the value of “*pha da bu gi tha damtshig*” the reciprocal affection between parents and child and that the child will suffer from *ley judray*, the cause and effect of negative action.

All respondents also heard elders and their parents mention the values of *ley judray* and *tha damtshig* in their *shedtho*. For instance, Pem recounted:

I remember my father and his friends talking about a man who had an accident and died with no one to look after him. My father said that it was because this man did not take care of his old parents, let alone the funeral rites when they died. We should value ley judary tha damtshig.

To this Dem added:

I also remember my parents and their neighbours discussing divorcing her husband and left her two children with him and went away with another man. The elders said that she did not have tha damtshig for her husband and children. So, today she is suffering from ley judary as her second husband is ill treating her.

In brief, *ley judray* and *tha damtshig* are the macrosystems and very important values that the parents ensured that their children imbibed.

3.4. Developmental niche of rural Bhutanese children of today: Bringing up children in the 21st century crossroad

The 21st century Bhutan witnessed several important milestones. The most important one is the transition of Bhutan from monarchy to democracy after 100 years in 2008. The first King of Bhutan was enthroned, unanimously by the people, on December 17, 1907. Unlike in many countries, the Fourth King of Bhutan initiated the writing of the constitution and the first democratic elections took place in 2008 with the Fifth King and the Members of the Parliament signing the constitution. People follow this transition as the gift from the Golden Throne to the people.

Even on the development front, so much has changed rapidly in the last few years. Almost all the villages are connected with electricity, roads and safe drinking water.

Schools and basic health care facilities are nearby or at walking distance. People, even in the most remote villages, use mobile phones. Rice cookers, water boiler, gas stoves and even refrigerators and washing machines have reached the villages. People in many villages watched live television broadcast of the 2013 parliamentary election. Now people have access to 50 plus television channels. Just a few months ago, Bhutan Telecom was advertising 4G services.

Today, Tabiting valley, where my rural ECCD centre is located, boasts one boarding school till Class X and 2 primary schools. A luxury resort and few others hotels catering to tourists have sprouted a few years ago. Almost all the village is connected with dirt road, which the government refers to as Farm Road, on which power tiller, tractors, taxis and tourist vehicles ply. Basic Health Unit, shops, restaurants, electricity and television have arrived in this once remote valley. It is in such a setting that I will discuss the developmental niche of the rural Bhutanese children of the 21st century.

All my rural parent respondents see disciplining as a big challenge as the way 21st children think is different. Aum Zam shared:

I discipline my children. I was brought up this way so I spank them and use harsh languages that I heard from my parents and elders when I was a child myself. But the problem is that my children listen from one ear and let it out from the other. It is useless but I feel it is my responsibility to bring them up properly so I never give up. I also ensure that like during my childhood the whole family eat together. But very often, during dinner time they refuse to join as they are hooked on some movies or television programmes.

Other respondents agreed that times have changed and that they have to give special attention to their children. These rural parents see disciplining as a way of making children responsible. Similar to their childhood days, all my respondents shared that they make their children to sweep floor, wash dishes and even feed the domestic animals and weed the vegetable garden.

Aap Chungla added that “*if parents do not command, children will have no discipline*”. This is a popular proverb that guides rural parents to bring up their children as it underscores the importance of disciplining children. Thus, the general

perception of the rural parents is that children should be made to do household chores and help parents in the farm when they are not studying.

During my stay at Tabiting, I observed that while the degree of influence of mass media is lesser here, yet its influence has pervaded the lives of people. I also observed in a few homes that school children even before they get changed or put away their schools bags, sat down to watch video or television.

Bhutan opened its door to television and internet on June 2, 1999 coinciding with the Silver Jubilee celebration of the reign of Fourth King Jigme Singye Wangchuck,. On this occasion, His Majesty addressed the public:

The introduction of TV and Internet in Bhutan today is a reflection of the level of progress that we have achieved. I would like to remind our youth that television and internet provide a whole range of possibilities, which can be both beneficial as well as negative for the individual and the society, I trust that you will exercise your good sense and judgment in using internet and television (Kuensel, The Editorial: June 5, 1999)

In the absence of easy accessibility of Internet, the option for Tabiting children is video and Television. Now, more than ever, the parents are not able to monitor the children's activities and their staying late into the night to watch movies or television and other entertainment programmes. In this connection Aum Nam said:

I am fed up actually...the minute they arrive home, their hands reach for the remote control.... they forget to eat...they are not hungry or sleepy if they can watch video or the television...

To this Aum Tinka added:

Being illiterate I have very little idea about how to help my children...I wish I could do something instead of beating my boys to stop them from watching all the time...I want them to study... they don't listen to me....

Other respondents agreed with this statement of Aum Nam and Aum Tinka.

As far as play is concerned my respondents do not play with their children. Only few mentioned that they bought toys for their children but it was just one or two items like toy cars and aeroplanes. Aap Tsheri revealed:

ECCD madams tell us that we should spend time with our children and even play with them but I don't have time for that.

While the parents do not play with their children or give much time to them, there are a few things that the rural parents insist that their children should know. What other parents expressed is summarised in what Aap Tsheri recounted:

I had been educating my daughter who is studying in a primary school on the importance of taking care of garbage and not littering the environment as we share this world with supernatural forces. If we keep our environs clean these forces are happy and do not cause natural calamities but instead bless us with peace and general wellbeing of the community. My daughter would take care of the garbage but was not really convinced with my explanation. One day, she came back from school quite excited and said "Aapa (father), we should not throw garbage in our environment as many things are not degradable and will make our soil lose its fertility. If we burn the garbage it will lead to global warming. If we cut trees our water sources will dry. All these will have negative impact on our livelihood. That is the reason why we have to preserve our environment and not because the supernatural forces will become wrathful and cause harm on us."

When it comes to participation in household and community rituals, all my parent respondents shared that their children take less interest. Aum Nam captured the essence of the *shedtho* on participation in rituals and festivals:

Children are not excited about rituals and festivals any more. When there is household ritual they have to be forced to get up and help us. When there are community rituals they go out to the shops or are busy watching movies and television. But I insist that they participate.

Ley judray and *tha damtshig* is another social value that my respondents try to infuse in their children. So, even if the children dislike it, the rural parents said that they make their children make the beds for their grandparents and when they reach certain age even wash their clothes. All my respondents agreed that this is a way in which they can infuse in the minds of our children to show gratitude to their parents. Aum Nam shared:

I make my children take care of their grandparents. I tell them that they will accumulate merit and that they will have a good and happy adulthood. So they take them to toilet, make their bed, wash their plates, and attend to their needs. I also do it myself at times so that my children will see and emulate what I do.

In this connection, all the rural parents expressed that it is the responsibility of the children to take care of their old parents and Aum Zam reminded me of the proverb “*Pha gee ba ta bu so*” (parents grow old, children embody our hope).

My respondents agreed that as far as health, hygiene and safety is concerned, children receive the best. They observed that even in the ECCD centre children are taught to wash their hands using soap after their play time, after going to the toilet and before meal times. Aum Nam shared:

My children take bath at least once a week. We now use plates, cups and even spoon and wash them after every meal. When children fall sick, conducting rituals prescribed by astrologer is still a common practice but we also seek medical treatment. Medicine and rituals should go hand in hand.

To this Aum Phub added:

Thanks to the government, today, there are Out Reach Clinics (ORC) in the proximity of the villages where we can walk to receive a regular check up for ourselves and our children, and for them to receive inoculations. Health workers visit the ORC once a month on a pre-fixed date to provide basic medical services.

Even on the front of safety, parents show more concern. For instance, my respondents shared that they do not allow their children to carry sharp knives and play in unsafe areas.

When it comes to the expectations of my rural parents from the ECCD it was straightforward. All of them agreed that it is easier to get admission in pre-primary when their children attend ECCD. They also expressed that they get time to work in their field when their children are attending the centre. Of course they also see it is as an opportunity to prepare their children for the school so that they will do well in their studies.

As far as the disciplining in the ECCD centres and schools are concerned, all my rural parents felt that the rules are very lenient and not allowing corporal punishment is seen as bringing up worthless children. Aum Nam echoed the essence of the discussion:

I did not go to school but when school was opened in my village some two decades ago, I observed that teachers were highly respected and also greatly feared.....It was unimaginable to argue with teachers and whatever they said or did was always correct and followed without any questions. They would beat and scold children but parents never raised any issues. Today our children complain to us even when their teachers scold them for not doing their homework or failing in examinations. I think we need corporal punishment as it disciplines children and helps them to grow into responsible adults.

Getting employment has become very competitive in Bhutan. So, to prepare their children to do well, my rural respondents shared that they send their children after they reach Class III and above to stay with their relatives who live in the towns. In this regard Aap Tsheri concluded:

“Keep child with others but cattle with oneself” so goes a Bhutanese adage. I really believe in this proverb so I sent my elder son who is in Class V to live with his uncle who is working in Paro town. He went last year. I feel that children grow and mature faster if they are kept with others because I noticed that he was more responsible and helped me, which he did not do before. I think when they are with parents they grow indulgent and remain pampered and spoilt....They cannot nag but instead have to work and eat what is served...so they become responsible and independent faster...they also do well in studies. When my son is here with me in winter I constantly remind him that if he did not study hard he will end up like me toiling and sweating in the sun while tilling the soil.

The other respondents added that those who do not have relatives living in the towns send their children to the boarding schools as they see it as the only pathway for them to succeed academically and receive good education and survive in the competitive world.

3.5. Developmental niche of urban Bhutanese children of today: Bringing up children in the 21st century crossroad.

On the other part of Bhutan, somewhere amidst city lights, noise and clamour, things appear to be moving fast for both parents and children. Sherab described her typical day:

I set my alarm because I cannot get up on time.... My two children sleep with us in the master bedroom.....morning hours are the busiest as I have to prepare packed lunch for all...My son studies in Class I and the daughter is in ECCD centre.

While I prepare breakfast and pack lunch and fill their water bottles with boiled filtered water for children going to school, the other members would get up one by one to brush their teeth and wash their faces. I feed children breakfast which is either bread with jam and butter or cereal and milk or fried rice made from the leftover rice. After breakfast, I help my children to wear their gho and kira; I make sure that their handkerchiefs are clean and crisply folded and pinned on their tego and gho, their hair is oiled and combed and sun screen lotion applied on their faces. In the evening sometimes I help them with their homework but very often I can't as I am tired too with office work and household chores. I also buy books for them to read at home and during bed time. If they have no homework I allow them to sit down to watch movies or television and go to bed after brushing their teeth.

As found in the *shedtho* strands of many of my urban parents, gone are the days of children when they came home and had their mother to attend to them, warming up their food and talking to them or the children going outside to play with their friends until it's time to do homework. Today, their children are often home alone or in the care of their older siblings. As a result, often they spend time playing video games, watching television, and browsing on the internet instead of doing their homework and other educational activities.

Pem, another mother and one of my respondents added:

I am overwhelmed...I don't know what I am doing at times...there are just too many things to do...wash clothes, clean the house, cook and pack food, eat, sleep, pray...and I always plan to spend time with my two children but it's so difficult...I feel guilty sometimes but I am giving them good education...I have admitted them to a private school and another in a private ECCD centre...at least that helps ...

As for Dem this is how she manages her children:

With my kids ...I have their study timetable ... they follow it sometimes and not always...they also get fed up studying all the time so I allow them to watch TV and play games...I live in a building and there is no space for games so all I can do is allow them to play because they throw tantrums if I don't let them...anyway they learn many new English words from the video games...sometimes during weekends I take them out to play games...I also give them small responsibilities such as brushing their teeth, washing their face, keeping their school bags in the right place after writing their home work, picking up dishes and plates after meal...all these they have to do without us telling them...

Generally, all my urban respondents agreed that their children hardly read any book and they also neglect their school work. They favour sitting in front of the TV, playing internet games, play stations and eating chips. My respondents expressed that they knew that it affects the health and well being of children but they helplessly watch these happen as they themselves are overwhelmed by the demands of everyday life and the fast change that is taking place.

My urban respondents have better awareness of health and hygiene. They shared that children are given utmost care in terms of food, clothing, bathing and general cleanliness. Few of the parents also said that they give supplementary vitamins to children while everyone ensures that the children are given a balanced diet and that they drink milk and eat fruits and try to reduce their intake of fizzy drinks, chips and junk food. My respondents also ensured the safety of the children by not letting them play with sharp things and in unsafe environment. In this context Gyetse shared:

I educate my children on electricity safety by advising them not to put their fingers in the electricity points and to play with electricity. I also tell my children to look carefully before crossing road.

Another core issue which featured in the *shedtho* of urban parents is the theme of striking a balance between fostering independence and promoting interdependence on the other hand. As much as all my parent respondents want their children to learn to become independent, they also try to impart the social values of *ley judray* and *tha damtshig*.

Children are now exposed to the world outside Bhutan via mobile phones, the internet, and other social media channels. In this regard, Tamang, a first generation urban parent shared his view on this change:

...My childhood world was limited to the confines of my little village. My children's world is the whole world. They are far more aware of the world beyond and they can manipulate their surroundings with greater ease and confidence that I could ever think of. There are fewer mysteries in my children's world ...

My parent respondents agreed that change is inevitable as we now live in a global village. But the challenge is preparing children to filter the positive impacts from the negative ones failing which can lead to unpleasant situation such as the one below:

The Thimphu crowd displayed the worst of urban stupidity when they ridiculed Zhungdra¹⁰ singers representing rural Thimphu during a music festival competition in 1995. Drunken youth booed and shouted down some very good classical artists" (Kinga, 1995).

At the time when this incident took place, many of my urban parents were school or college students. They belonged to the generation of the youths who booed and made fun of the classical artists. Today some 18 years later, this challenge is still continuing. All the parent respondents revealed that it was becoming difficult to provide proper guidance which has led them to realize the importance of keeping their children connected to the key Bhutanese values. Thus, the view of other respondents is expressed by Sonam:

¹⁰ Zhungdra is the classical Bhutanese song. Today, Rigzar or modern Bhutanese songs, the tunes and music of which is borrowed from other cultures, are gaining popularity.

One constant advice that I give my children is not to steal, kill or tell lies. It is important to bring up children in the right manner, mainly conforming to the core social values of ley judray and tha damtshig.

To this Namgay added and what she shared echoed the essence of other respondents:

I keep my children connected with spirituality. I make them say evening prayers together and prostrate. I also make my elder child make butter lamps and offer it. On some auspicious days, we visit different temples and sacred places. Initially my children complained but now they look forward to it. I also take them to my village where my cousins live so that they grow connected to their roots and know their relatives.

At home I lead them by example. I work as a teacher and my workload is very heavy as I have to prepare my next day's lesson, correct home works and also do the household chores. However, I make sure that I give time, good care and love to my ageing parents who live with me. I also remind my children to do the same to their grandparents so that they will earn merit. The hope is that they understand the value of ley judray and tha damtshig which are the basis of all the other values. People who understand and value these two interconnected values will naturally grow into responsible and good individuals. They will take care of their parents in their old age and keep connected to their relatives.

In brief, coming to these two key Bhutanese values my parent respondents consider it very important and as the very foundation of parenting and guiding children into good, confident and trustworthy individuals. However, Dem shared some worries:

Now values are changing and people are struggling to earn their livelihood. Living is becoming expensive, life is becoming more stressful, so our children will not have much time to take care of their parents even if they want to help. So we should set our expectations low. We should not hope for the same level of care that we are giving our parents...

What also featured prominently from the *shedtho* is that all my parent respondents wish to see their children succeed in life and enjoy opportunities that they themselves

have missed in life. All my respondents see children as an extension of the parents' dreams and aspirations. In their success and achievement, the parents see the fulfilment of their own dreams and goals. So degree of liberty that they grant their children today is seen as helping their children realize their goals for restricting them would mean stopping them from exploring and growing. It is a self-fulfilment. As shared by Keza:

I want my children to enjoy what I did not have in life...let them ... they belong to different times and no longer think like we did in the past....However, I want my child to study hard and I will do any anything to see him graduate and have a good comfortable life....I will give him the best education...it will be most satisfying to see my son graduate and get a good job....

This group of urban parents have divided perspectives on the issue of today's school environment. Namgay, one of the respondents who is a teacher echoed the opinion of those who believed that the school environment is much better now:

Now our schools are child friendly as teachers do not beat and scold children. The innovation initiative of the education ministry known as 'Educating for Gross National Happiness' that focuses on balancing the Western theories with that of the Bhutanese in the curriculum has made learning enjoyable. Even corporal punishment is replaced with positive disciplining... so children unlike before are no more afraid of the teachers. They now ask many questions. This is what we need in the 21st century Bhutanese education system.

To this Keza added:

These initiatives are a platform for children to grow into confident, independent and responsible individuals.

However, the views of those who do not believe that the school has become better is summarized in the words of Dem:

I know what it is to raise an undisciplined child... many talk about creating a child friendly school but I think today we need to prepare a teacher friendly school...today's children hardly respect their teachers... With some

exceptions, most Bhutanese parents would still see merit in using the rod to groom the child despite all the talks about child rights and positive disciplining.

However, everyone agreed that disciplining is important. The difference is only in the approach. While one group feel that parents should avoid using rude languages and spanking, the other think that spanking is still necessary. Whatever the approaches of disciplining, all of them expressed that their children seek more liberty but at the same time are not taking much responsibilities so they consider obedience, respect and discipline as important traits that adults and teachers need to infuse in a child. This wish was echoed by Penjor:

Children should obey family rules, respect elders, run errands for family members, help at home and behave in a way that honours the family and preserve family cohesion and tradition.

Bringing up children in the 21st century was expressed as one of the biggest responsibilities and challenges by all the parents. What Sherab shared captures the main idea of what came out from the *shedtho*:

Every year thousands of Bhutanese graduate from colleges in Bhutan, India, Australia, Europe and USA so getting employment has become very competitive. So we have to bring up our children in a way that they are able to compete with others. So we send our children to private ECCD centres and schools. My neighbour has sent both his children to study in private schools in India in Classes V and VII. I also try to guide my children and support them personally as there is a heightened sense of competition in the society. Parents too have higher expectations of their children. Providing strategic support in studies, allowing greater space for individual choice and setting clearer goals from early on could support achievement of better outcomes.

Driven by this sense of more competition my urban respondents shared that they get annoyed with the ECCD centres when children are engaged in too much of play. Their expectation is mainly to build a sound foundation for their children so that they will do well in studies. During the *shedtho* session none of the parents mentioned about the importance of teaching indigenous values, knowledge and skills. Om, one of

the ECCD professionals working in the private ECCD centre echoed the essence of her colleagues who also participated in the *shedtho*:

Before admitting their children, all the parents have one common question. They always ask the Head of the centre if the staff could speak good English. They are not worried about other facilities such as space for play, toys and learning materials. If teachers speak with some American or English accent parents are happy. So we always speak in English. It is only one day in a week that we communicate in Dzongkha and teach Bhutanese culture and songs. Parents also don't like when children play in sand pit. I remember a few parents complained about it so the sand pit was closed. We focus more on teaching them speaking, reading and writing that too mostly in English. Besides this there are also parents who bring children as they do not have baby sitter as both parents work.

3.6. Summary: key themes of the four developmental niches.

In this section I will discuss the key themes that emerged in each of the four developmental niches. They will be presented in the following order:

- 3.6.1. Key themes of the childhood experiences of the rural parents.
- 3.6.2. Key themes of the childhood experiences of the urban parents.
- 3.6.3. Key themes of the experiences of the 21st century rural children.
- 3.6.4. Key themes of the experiences of the 21st century urban children.

I will not make any comparative analysis between the different developmental niches as it will be done in the next chapter, which is an extension of this chapter.

3.6.1. Key themes of the childhood experiences of the rural parents.

- Shouldering early responsibility: Children had to take responsibilities very early. By the age of six years they had to help their parents with the household chores, take care of their younger siblings and collect water and firewood. They also had to accompany family elders into the pastureland and look after the cattle.
- Telling stories to teach values: Stories were narrated in the pasturelands, in the evenings around the hearth. It was generally the grandparents who shared

stories that not only entertained the children but also transmitted the Bhutanese beliefs, values and ways of doing. Interestingly, children also engaged themselves in story telling competition; they narrated stories that they heard from elders.

- Singing and dancing to the tune of traditional songs: Children, particularly girls, learnt Bhutanese songs from their elders particularly when grazing cattle. Songs were also a way of transmitting values and beliefs. The themes revolved round nature, relationship, interdependence, religion and love.
- Testing intelligence with riddles: Children also enjoyed the indigenous riddles and puzzles that they learnt from their elders. Knowing more riddles and being able to ask those that other children could not respond to was an indication of intelligence.
- Stealing time for pretence play: In the traditional Bhutanese society there was no dedicated play time for children and neither did parents play with them. So, they played a wide array of indigenous games in between work. One common play was pretence play where children took up role of elders. Girls acted as woman and would cook meals, milk cows and wash clothes while boys took up roles of man and ploughed fields, chopped firewood and played archery games. We can therefore observe that through the pretence play children actually learnt their roles for when they grew up.
- Harnessing the bounty of nature: Children accompanied their elders into the pasturelands. This was an occasion for children to learn about the secrets of the forest such as identifying plants, herbs, fruits and roots that are edible and those that are not. They also learnt to put traps for birds and animals. The skills and knowledge that they acquired are used at a regular basis as they continue to harness the bounty of nature as they knew the right season and the place.
- Living in an environment characterised by poor health, hygiene and safety: The childhood memories of my rural respondents are living in houses where

domestic animals were kept in the ground floor and people occupied the upper floors. Flies and mosquitoes would swarm in the rooms in summer. People did not wash their plates. Even clothes and bodies were washed only seldom.

When it came to safety of children, adults did not mind their children using big knives, playing in unsafe areas or climbing steep ladders all alone. In times of illness, people consulted the monks and local shamans who conducted rituals to cure the sick. Medicine was not an option.

- Growing up in an environment with obedience and respect for elders: Parents and elders exercised authority and demanded obedience and respect from children. Any mark of disobedience and absence of respect for elders was considered a sign of ill-bred child. So children grew up in an environment where they did not ask many questions but listened and carried out the chores as instructed by their elders.
- Participating in religious activities: Many religious activities, both household and community, dotted the calendar of the people of Tabiting, my rural research area. In the absence of any form of entertainment, children excitedly participated in the religious activities. It was also an occasion for them to take a day off from their daily errands and socialize and meet their friends. Most importantly, these religious activities kept the children connected to the values, beliefs and tradition of the village. It created a sense of belongingness and their community identity.
- Existing in harmony with super natural forces: The elements of nature comprising peaks, land, trees, stone and water does not belong to human alone. Children are taught to respect nature and the environment in which they live as people and supernatural forces co-exist in harmony. So, children grew up observing their parents making offerings to different elements of nature and revering them. Today, these children who are parents themselves uphold this tradition and continue to live in harmony with the supernatural forces as breaching this trust of co-existence will cause natural calamities and misfortune.

- Learning to repay the sacrifices of their parents: Parents demand that they bring up children so that they have someone to take care of them in their old age and conduct the funeral rites when they die. Children are therefore brought up in this environment where they are taught to help their grandparents and old members of the family. The need to repay the sacrifices of the parents is vividly illustrated in this proverb “Parents grow old, children embody our hope”.
- Inculcating the core social values of *ley judray* and *tha damtshig*: The core social values of *ley judray* (law of cause and effect) and *tha damtshig* (interdependence and reciprocity) are omnipresent in the life of the Bhutanese. Therefore, my rural parent respondents during their childhood had heard these two values from parents, elders and even friends. The filial duty to the parents, co-existence with super natural beings, in all types of relationship these two values feature in. Thus, parents remind their children to value *ley judray* and *tha damtshig* as it is around these that other values and beliefs are woven.

3.6.2. Key themes of the childhood experiences of the urban parents.

- Helping parents during free time: Children went to school but during holidays, weekends and even after school parents made them help with household errands. Children helped parents by picking up the dishes after meals, sweeping the floor, weeding the kitchen garden, looking after younger siblings and other household chores. When they reached a certain age, particularly girls, washed clothes and cooked meals. Thus, in a way children were kept occupied between school work and household chores.
- Listening to songs and watching movies from other cultures: During the childhood of the urban parent respondents, recorded Bhutanese songs were rare, while on the other hand, cassettes of Hindi, Nepali and English songs were easily available in the market. Thus, these respondents grew up listening to and singing songs from other cultures. Similarly, they grew up watching English, Hindi and Nepali movies as there were no Bhutanese movies.

Through the exposure to songs and movies of other cultures many literate and even illiterate Bhutanese can communicate well in Nepali and Hindi languages.

- Growing up with no dedicated play time: Childhood memories of all my respondents converges on the point where they did not have any dedicated play time when at home. Even when playing outside with friends, parents would call them in when there is work. Parents hardly bought their children any toys and play items and never played with them. In school my male respondents remember playing mainly soccer but in uneven and rough fields while it was throw ball for the girls. On the other hand, my respondents who went to boarding schools had more opportunities to play different types of games such basket ball, volley ball, table tennis and badminton after school hours when children were left on their own for few hours.
- Studying in an unfriendly environment: School was not an enjoyable place for children to go. Teachers were very strict and beat children and used abusive and unkind languages. Inside the classroom, pedagogy was teacher centred and children learnt rote learning. Students never asked questions of the teachers as they were highly respected and even feared which is captured in this proverb; “Even if you have learnt only four words from your teachers, you should treat your teacher like a Great Master. Or else you will be reborn as a dog for five hundred times”.
- Participating in religious activities: During the childhood days of my respondents, even in the capital city people participated in religious activities with deep devotion. So children participated in the rituals which were conducted at both household and community level. Thimphu has changed but these parents continue to stay connected and participate in the religious activities with the same faith. They continue to consult the astrologers for any activity that they conduct.

- Observing elders live in harmony with nature: As children, my respondents had observed their parents and neighbours making offerings to natural elements. They would burn aromatic leaves as a way of purifying the surroundings and to keep the supernatural forces happy. My respondents had also learnt from their parents not to defile the environment as it is inhabited by supernatural forces.
- Taking care of health, hygiene and safety: The health, hygiene and safety conditions received attention. Children had to take bath at least once a week. They brushed their teeth and applied cream on their face. Parents barred them from playing in unsafe places and with sharp and hazardous things. When they fell sick, they were taken to hospital. Rituals were performed when medicine failed.
- Growing up obeying and respecting elders: Disciplining was an important affair as a proverb states: “*when parents themselves are ill-bred how can we expect children to be disciplined*”. If children are ill mannered it is because of the parents. In this idea we see the social values of *ley judray* (law of cause and effect) coming into play in the sense that parents do not discipline their children and the effect is ill-bred children. Thus, spanking and using harsh languages was a part and parcel of the life of my urban respondents during their childhood. They grew up obeying and respecting their parents and elders.
- Imbibing the core social values of *ley judray* and *tha damtshig*: These two core social values are what my respondents have heard from their parents and elders. These concepts emerged in the discussion and conversations of their parents where people who did not know *ley judray* and value *tha damtshig* suffered. Besides this children were implicitly reminded of these two core values.
- Learning to care for parents: From a very young age children are reminded of their filial duty of taking care of their parents. Children also observed their parents taking good care of their own parents and this eventually helped

children to appreciate and uphold the value of *drin len*, repaying the sacrifices of the parents.

3.6.3. Key themes of the experiences of the 21st century rural children.

- Helping parents during free time: Children in the 21st century are exposed to many facilities, which is the case even for Tabiting children. They seek more liberty and are less responsible. However, parents who have grown in a different development niche continue to impose their way of doing on their children. Thus, children are obliged to help parents with household errands and during weekends even with farm work. Children resist but parents continue to persuade their children to help them and try to keep them engaged with household chores when not studying or going to school.
- Spending free time watching videos and television: One of the challenges that parents face is keeping children away from video and television. They sleep late and get up late despite the scolding and use of abusive languages by parents.
- Caring for health, hygiene and safety: Children now take bath and wash their clothes regularly. They brush their teeth and apply face cream. They eat in plates that are washed after each meal. When they are sick they visit the Basic Health Unit. But at the same time parents conduct rituals when the illness is serious. Children are also protected from playing in unsafe environment and hazardous things.
- Applying scientific mind: The explanations of parents for why we should respect and live in harmony with super natural beings are apparently losing hold on the children. Some of the beliefs are to be respected and not questioned. However, school children try to give scientific explanations which render this value of living in harmony with supernatural forces illogical. This is the environment in which children are growing, applying more logic and reasons and very little of the beliefs that their parents upheld.

- Participating in religious activities: Children see no charm in participating in religious activities and festivals anymore. Parents have to oblige them to participate. Left on their own they would rather watch video or television.
- Spending on a few toys and play gadgets: While parents do not play with children, they buy toys and play gadgets for their children but just a few when children persist. Otherwise, children hardly get any toys and play gadgets from their parents let alone play with them.
- Preparing children for the future through ECCD centre: Children go to ECCD centre as the parents see this as an opportunity to prepare them to do well in future. ECCD centre is a place from where parents expect children to learn literacy and numeracy skills. Thus, children grow up preparing for school readiness so that they will do well in schools.
- Growing up obeying and respecting elders: Children seek more liberty and independence but the parents insist that they are disciplined. Parents believe that children without discipline are worthless and will not succeed in life. Thus, children despite their resistance grow up in an environment where they adhere to the rule of obedience and respect for elders.
- Valuing the core social values of *ley judray* and *tha damtshig*: As core values of the Bhutanese society, the children grow up hearing their parents talking to them of *ley judray* and *tha damtshig*. Children also hear proverbs such as “*People without ley judray and tha damtshig have no fortune and good luck*” from their parents. All these to inspire their 21st century children to value these two core values.
- Learning to care for parents: The concepts of *drin len* and *pha gee ba ta bu so* are so dear to the heart of the parents that they create a niche where their children can imbibe these values. For instance, children from a very young age are made to make the bed for their grandparents and help them. Children also observe their parents taking good care of their own parents. Through such modelling and frequent reminders 21st century children of rural Bhutan

grow with the hope that when they become adult they will be able to offer love and care to their parents who had sacrificed so much for them.

3.6.4. Key themes of the experiences of the 21st century urban children

- Growing in an environment with high Western lifestyle influence: Children are highly exposed to the Western world through movies, television, internet, songs and books. English is the medium of communication at home for many urban families. Owing to this, children now seek more liberty and independence and privacy as well.
- Spending time with internet games, play stations and face book: One of the challenges faced by urban parents is the internet games, face book and other gadgets that children stay occupied with. As children grow up in this not so conducive environment, parents worry but are not able to do much to help their children.
- Disciplining with a different approach: Disciplining is considered as important but there is a feeling that the traditional way of doing it through spanking and using abusive language is not the right way. Thus, parents try their best to apply positive disciplining.
- Spending on toys and play gadgets: While parents know that they should spend time with children they do not have time and do not play with their children. Parents have now started to spend on toys and play gadgets but try to look at the educational value.
- Studying in child friendly school: Children now study in schools not only with better facilities but also with teachers who use positive disciplining. The learning is also more student centred and therefore enjoyable.
- Staying connected to spirituality: Keeping children connected to spirituality is still on the agenda of parents. They see this as a way of ensuring that their children grow up imbibing Bhutanese values most of which emerge from religion.

- Growing up in an environment with good health, hygiene and safety: Health, hygiene and safety receive priority. We have seen that some parents even give supplementary vitamins and regular bath, for instance. However, when it comes to health, along with medicine parents also consult astrologers and conduct rituals, particularly when visits to hospitals do not help.
- Helping to grow in a competitive world and expectation from ECCD: The main expectations from the ECCD are more of study and less of play. This is seen by parents as building the basis for their children to do well later in schools. Children who are in school are also sent for tuition so that they can perform well in their studies and prepare for the competitive world.
- Imbibing the value of *ley judray* and *tha damtshig*: Children seek more liberty and independence but parents remind their children of the values of *ley judray* and *tha damtshig* as a basis of becoming a responsible person.
- Reminding the core values of *pha gee ba ta bu so*: Deep inside, parents wish for their children to take care of them in their old age but with the competitive environment and change in lifestyle they know that they will not receive the same level of care that they are giving their parents. More than they themselves, the first expectation is that children will complete their studies and get a good job and then comes the filial duty. This is how the modern parents see it but children are often reminded of the importance of taking care of their parents.

3.7. Views of the ECCD facilitators and officials from relevant organizations

Besides *shedtho*, I also observed the ECCD centres and the interaction of the ECCD facilitators with the children. As I got inside the rooms of both centres I could see the degree of Western influence. Almost all the picture cards and the play items were Western. In the urban centre, there were even posters of Mickey Mouse and soft toys of Teddy bear. I could hardly find anything Bhutanese. The two ECCD facilitators of the rural centre explained that they have to use the colourful readymade Western

materials as this is how the quality of the ECCD is measured. When asked about the quality of the ECCD centres, an education officer mentioned that the private ECCD centres are better as compared to government ones as they are well equipped with Western materials. Even, all the parents with whom I had *shedtho* shared the same view. Thus, the ECCD facilitators said that they are obliged to use Western materials to cater to the expectations of the parents which is to develop their literacy and numeracy skills and knowledge and children's ability to communicate in English.

The ECCD facilitators of both rural and urban areas as well as the official from the UNICEF, MoE and Save the Children shared that parents of both rural and urban areas take pride when children can speak in English. The head of the urban ECCD centre shared:

Few urban parents came to see me one day. They said that some of the ECCD facilitators in my centre are not able to communicate well in English. Parents do not see how ECCD facilitators actually help the child grow and develop holistically.

The officials from the Education Ministry, Save the Children and the UNICEF said that the domains of child development such as motor development, physical health & well being, language, literacy and communication, approaches towards learning and cognition and general knowledge are covered well. However, the ECCD facilitators added that the socio-cultural domain does not receive the same importance as only one day in the week is allotted to Bhutanese culture. On this day children learn about Bhutanese culture and tradition while the rest of the days are more in English. The rhymes and songs for children are in English, stories are read in English, materials used are mostly in English and children are taught to communicate in English. Local funds of knowledge are rarely used because of two reasons shared by the ECCD facilitators. The first one is the pressure from parents to develop the skills of their children to communicate well in English and the other reason is their lack of sound knowledge on local funds of knowledge and the paucity of materials. I also observed that the ECCD facilitators greeted the children in English and not in Bhutanese, a very simple example of Western influence on the ECCD programme.

Tshering, one of the ECCD facilitators of the urban centre echoed the voices of her colleagues when she said:

We have to deal carefully when children misbehave. We have to use positive disciplining approach.....It is not like during our times when teachers would beat us, scold us....

The field findings tell that in rural areas, parents still believe in disciplining the traditional way by spanking and scolding. So the two ECCD facilitators shared that the parents actually tell them to spank on the bottom if their children misbehaved but the rule of the MoE does not allow.

Talking about the challenges that the ECCD facilitators face, what came out clearly from both the rural and urban respondents as well as the key ECCD staff in UNICEF, MoE and Save the Children is that the majority of the ECCD facilitators passed up to Class XII in their education and they do not have sound grounding in ECCD. Therefore, they use the ECCD toolkit as a guide and follow it closely without much input from their own. In the absence of research skills the facilitators are also not able to tap the local funds of knowledge.

Another issue the facilitators and the key ECCD officers of the MoE shared was the absence of any certificate, diploma or degree courses that the ECCD facilitators can benefit from. They expressed the need to introduce such a programme on distance mode so that the ECCD facilitators can work and study simultaneously.

Therefore, the environment and the setting of the ECCD centres are more conducive for enhancing Western values and beliefs rather than that of Bhutanese.

CHAPTER FOUR

The four developmental niches: points of convergence and divergence

This chapter is an extension of the results in chapter 3 in which the narratives from the field were discussed. In this chapter, I will present the similarities and differences between the different developmental niches and then discuss the key cross cutting themes of the four developmental niches. This chapter has five sections that compare the developmental niches of rural children of the past and rural children today; urban children of the past and urban children today; rural and urban children of the past; and rural and urban of 21st century. Finally I will discuss the key themes that emerge from this discussion.

4.1. Developmental niches in the rural areas over time — comparison of rural children of the past and rural children today.

4.1.1. Similarities

- *Shouldering early responsibility:* The rural parents grew up helping parents with household errands from an early age. Today, in the 21st century, while they did not attend school, their children go to an ECCD centre and school. However, despite the resistance of their children they persuade their children to help them with household chores after school hours and during weekends.
- *Participating in religious activities:* Many household rituals and community religious festivals mark the calendar of the general Bhutanese community life. The rural children of the past who are now parents actively participated in these activities with faith and interest. Today, children are forced to participate, otherwise if left on their own they will rather loiter in the shops or visit their friend's house indicating the dwindling interest and faith in such matters.
- *Growing up with obedience and respect for elders:* Proverbs quoted by parents are clear indications that they grew up obeying and respecting their parents and elders. This is exactly the way that they bring up their children. In this regard, children of the past do not remember their parents playing with

them and now they do not do so with their own children.

- *Inculcating the core values:* There are two root values which are *ley judray* and *tha damtshig* that the rural parents had imbibed. Connected to these two values is also the filial duty that they value. Similarly, thus, the 21st century rural children growing up in a similar manner to their parents remind them of these key values.

4.1.2. Differences

- *Stories and riddles to videos and television:* Rural children of the past grew up listening to stories and testing their intelligence through exchange of riddles. Today, the interest has shifted to watching videos and television.
- *Traditional songs and dances to those from other cultures:* Traditional songs and dances were a part of life of the rural parents during their childhood. Now their children listen to sing and dance to the tune of music from songs of other cultures. At the best, they would listen to modern Bhutanese songs which are mostly imitation of Western music and themes.
- *Caring for health, hygiene and safety:* As demonstrated in the earlier results in Chapter 3 in the past there was poor hygiene and care for health as well as concern for safety of children. In the 21st century as children attend educational centres this area has witnessed much improvement. Just a simple example, in the past people did not wash their plates but today it is unimaginable.
- *Beliefs to rational mind:* Rural children of the past lived in harmony with nature and believed that if they defiled the environment, for instance, throwing garbage, the numinous forces will show their wrath and cause misfortune. Such an explanation are now seen as irrational as the 21st century children are now more inclined towards scientific reasoning.
- *Playing indigenous games to Western games:* Rural parents grew up playing indigenous games many of which have not faded away from the community

where I conducted my study. Today's children hardly know even the names of several games except for a few like *dha* (archery) and *khuru* (darts). Instead they play games imported from the west. However, while the children of the past did not get to play with toys, today parents buy toys for their children, though these are few in number.

4.2. Developmental niches in the urban areas over time — comparison of urban children of the past and urban children today.

4.2.1. Similarities

- *Listening to songs and watching movies from other cultures:* The childhood experiences of both parents and that of their children converge as songs and movies from other cultures influenced their lifestyle.
- *Playing football, basketball and other ball games:* Even in games, the children and parents share the same experiences of Western influence. Indigenous games, for instance, 'two tigers and a herd of cattle' are foreign to their ears.
- *Taking care of health, hygiene and safety:* While parents share that during their childhood they received good health care, hygiene and safety, the niche that they have created is even better to the extent of giving supplementary vitamins to their children.
- *Growing up obeying and respecting elders:* Children today seek liberties but parents insist that they respect the family and the social rules of respect and obedience for elders. The parents themselves were brought up obeying and respecting their elders. The only difference is that they did not seek liberties.
- *Imbibing the core social values:* *Ley judray* and *tha damtshig* and the filial duty are the values that the parents of the urban children transmitted to their children. Despite rampant globalization and acculturation in the 21st century, children of the 21st century are brought up in an environment in which

children have opportunities to understand, appreciate and practise core values of *ley judray* and *tha damtshig* and *pha gee ba ta bu so*.

4.2.2. Differences

- *Helping parents with errands to seeking liberty*: The children of the past helped their parents with household chores after school hours and weekends. On the other hand, today's children seek liberties and do not help parents with errands at home.
- *Growing up with no toys to having toys*: The parents did not receive any toys during their childhood but now they buy toys and play gadgets for their children. However, they do not play with their children.
- *Helping to grow in a competitive world*: The school days of the parents were more relaxed as it was easier to get employment. Thus, they did not have to strive and struggle to compete with others. On the other hand, today's children grow up in a competitive environment. So they receive extra care and attention from their parents throughout childhood so that they can perform well in their studies and eventually find employment.

4.3. Developmental niches of parents – comparison of rural and urban children of the past

4.3.1. Similarities

- *Shouldering early responsibility*: The rural children of the past did not go to school while the urban children did. However, both categories of my respondents had shouldered early responsibilities during their childhood. The rural parents helped their parents throughout the day and the urban children did after school hours and weekends. As these two categories of respondents shouldered responsibilities from early age they did not have dedicated play time. Their parents also did not buy toys and play gadgets for them, let alone play with them.

- *Participating in religious activities*: Religious activities conducted at the household and community levels framed an important developmental niche for the children of the past. They participated with interest and faith. They also learnt from their parents the importance of co-existing in harmony with the supernatural forces as an approach of avoiding natural calamities and misfortune.
- *Growing up with obedience and respect for elders*: Both categories of my respondents grew up with respect and obedience for elders. As narrated in the Part 1 of Chapter 3 their parents beat them and used harsh language as a form of discipline. The childhood days of my parent respondents marked the period when disciplining was an important method to prepare children to grow into responsible individuals. This was illustrated through many proverbs and anecdotes that had been quoted earlier.
- *Connecting to the core social values*: Parents of both rural and urban areas remember hearing terms such as *ley judray*, *tha damtshig* and *pha ma gi drin len* (gratitude to parents) from their parents and elders during their childhood. They grew up in an environment where people valued these core social values so much so that people take good care of their old parents being role model for younger ones to emulate as they are considered people who knows *ley judary* and *tha damtsig*.

4.3.2. Differences

- *Stories and riddles to videos and television*: Two most contrasting childhood experiences that each parent recollects are evident in their childhood memories. While the rural child recollects in deep nostalgia, the storytelling sessions by the grandparents as the most cherished memories, the urban child carries vivid memories of “movie special times.”
- *Bhutanese songs and dances to those of other culture*: As discussed earlier in the comparison section between rural children of the past and rural children of today, the rural parents’ memories are those of singing and dancing to the

rhythm of traditional songs. On the other hand, the urban children of the past were already exposed to the music, songs and dances of other cultures.

- *Pretence play and indigenous games to Western games:* The childhood memories of the rural parents revolve around pretence play and indigenous games mentioned in the Part 1 of Chapter 3. In contrast, the urban parents grew up in an environment where they played Western games.
- *From poor to good health, hygiene and safety:* Health, hygiene and safety was poor in the childhood setting of the rural parents while those of the urban parents received good care already discussed in the earlier sections of this chapter.

4.4. Developmental niches of 21st century children – comparison of rural and urban children of today

4.4.1. Similarities

- *Spending more time for videos, television and internet games:* The way that the 21st century rural and urban children spend their free time is similar. If there is a difference it is only that of the inaccessibility of the rural children to the internet facilities and their inability to afford play stations and other expensive play gadgets. While children remain habitually attached to television programmes, movies and internet games, parents of both rural and urban areas do not have time to play with their children.
- *Caring for health, hygiene and safety:* The health, hygiene and safety environment for both rural and urban children is of a high standard. For instance, we have seen in the Part 1 of the discussion Chapter 2 that they take regular baths, wash their plates, go to hospital when sick but of course rituals continue as they believe in *menchoe rimdroe* where medicine and ritual is seen as a good combination to cure illness. As regards safety, children are taken good care of with parents, for instance ensuring that their play areas are safe and secured. However, comparatively, the urban children are in safer, more

educational and more stimulating environment as compared to the rural children.

- *Applying the scientific mind:* The rural and urban parents explain to their children the importance of co-existing in harmony the supernatural beings so that there is no misfortune and natural calamities. However, their children who are studying science in the schools are exposed to a counter argument based on logic. Thus, the two categories of parents create an environment where children have to stay connected to spirituality by making them say their daily prayers before going to bed, obliging them to attend to rituals and festivals and visiting temples on auspicious days.
- *Helping children to grow in a competitive world:* Finding employment has become very competitive. Therefore, the field findings show that both rural and urban parents help their children to grow in the competitive environment. For instance, the urban parents send their children to private ECCD centres and private schools and the rural parents send their children to government ECCD centres and when their children reach a certain age they send them to boarding schools. If they have relatives living in the town, they also send children to live with them and study there as the rural parents see the schools in the town as better compared to those in the rural communities. The findings also show that parents are happy and consider the ECCD centre to be of good quality if their children are able to communicate well in English and also emulate Western ways of behaving, for instance, narrate stories of Cinderella or sing songs in English.
- *Valuing the core values:* Children are brought up in an environment where they are made to understand *ley judray* and *tha damtshig*. The rural and urban parent respondents remind their children about the importance of valuing these two core values if they wish to grow up into worthy individuals. As regards taking care of parents in their old age, there is more expectation from the rural parents than from the urban respondents. The urban parents have expectations but they do not wish to impose as the world in which their children will live in as adults is becoming more competitive and stressful.

4.4.2. Differences

- *Helping parents during free time:* The rural parents persuade their children to help them with household errands and other work during school hours and on weekend after school hours even though they resist. They see this as an important part of bring them up so that later even if they do not do well in their studies, they can fall back and will have knowledge and skills to work in the field. In contrast, the urban children do not help their parents at such tasks and the parents also do not impose much on them either.
- *Disciplining with a different approach:* Disciplining children and ensuring that they value obedience and respect for elders is considered important by rural as well as the urban parents. However, the rural parents believe in beating and using abusive language, the urban parents are more inclined to use positive disciplining methods because they feel that this will boost the self esteem of their children. Thus, while discipline is important the rural and the urban parents bring up their children with different disciplinary approaches.

4.5. Key themes from the comparisons of the developmental niches

- *From stories and riddles to movies, IT and face book:* The field findings reveal a difference between those who had received a Western education and those who did not. As children, the rural parent respondents grew up listening to stories around the hearth and in the pasture land. They also learnt riddles and enjoyed exchanging it with their friends. Stories and riddles kept the childhood of my rural parents entertained and connected to their roots. In contrast, those who went to school, the urban parents, and the 21st century rural and urban children are inclined towards watching movies and television programmes, playing online games and chatting on the face book. This shift was revealed by the field findings which is contributing towards the decline in

the story and riddle background that the Bhutanese shared in the rural communities of the past.

- *Indigenous games lost in the world of Western games:* The situation is similar to the preceding key theme. The field findings show that it is only during the childhood of the rural parents that the indigenous games were played. Those who went to school played Western games such as football and basketball. The field findings also indicate that even the rural children of the 21st century do not know some of the popular games that their parents played as children.
- *Applying scientific mind to understand beliefs:* The findings from the four developmental niches confirm that compared to the childhood days of their parents, the 21st century rural and urban children are applying their scientific mind to understand some of the beliefs that their parents valued. For instance, if there is an unprecedented rainfall that destroys the crops, the parents would connect it to the display of wrath of the supernatural forces as people have defiled their abodes and breached the trust (*tha damtshig*) of harmonious co-existence. On the other hand, school children would link it to changing weather patterns even to climatic change which they had studied in their science subject.
- *Growing awareness on health, hygiene and safety:* The comparison of the findings between the four development niches show that the developmental niches of the childhood of the rural parents indicated poor care for health, hygiene and safety. The findings also show that with development the awareness on health, hygiene and safety is improving. Thus, the urban children of the 21st century are receiving better care in these areas.
- *Parents still do not play with children:* The strands of thoughts expressed by the rural and urban parent respondents converge well when it comes to playing with children. These respondents grew up in an environment where their parents did not play with them and now they are creating the same environment for their children.

- *Helping to grow in a competitive world:* The childhood of the rural parents was filled with helping parents with errands but it was relaxed and particularly under pressure. This is also the case with the childhood days of urban children. They went to school but the environment was more relaxed. Today, the findings show that the children of both rural and urban communities grow in a competitive setting. Against this background, the ECCD facilitators shared the view that the expectations from ECCD are more on developing literacy and numeracy skills of the children. Further, the parents, particularly, the urban respondents judge the quality of the ECCD centre by the ability of the ECCD facilitators to communicate in English and that also with some Western accent. To ensure that a sound foundation is built for their children, parents even object to children having a long play time. Further, the conclusions that can be drawn based on my own observations and the *shedtho* sessions with the ECCD facilitators is that ECCD centres are founded mainly on a Western model with very little infusion of Bhutanese culture. In brief, Western theories and Bhutanese culture is not well harmonized in the ECCD programmes.
- *Sustaining the culture of respect and obedience:* Findings from the field indicate that the disciplining beliefs have changed over time for the urban respondents. They grew up in a niche where their parents disciplined them by spanking and using rude language. Today, most of these children who are now parents believe in sustaining the culture of respect and obedience for elders through positive disciplining. On the other hand, the rural parents believe in spanking and using humiliating language to discipline their children similar to their childhood experiences. Whatever the approach, the common point is that respect and obedience is important and that their children should imbibe this value.
- *Persuading to uphold the core values:* The *shedtho* sessions on all the four developmental niches with the rural and urban parent respondents revealed that *ley judray* and *tha damtshig* are two core values that these respondents heard during their childhood and today these values are something dear to their heart. Thus, in this 21st century study, the field findings inform us that they create an environment for their children to imbibe these two core values.

- *Pha gee ba ta bu so* is still an important parenting philosophy: The importance of filial duty expressed through the proverb “*Pha gee ba ta bu so*” during the *shedtho* session is also valued in all the developmental niches. The urban and the rural parents grew up observing the joy and satisfaction expressed by the elders for being able to take care of their old parents and then being able to conduct the funeral rites successfully when they died. These parents also grew up listening to their elders’ advise on the value of *drin len* which is reciprocating for the sacrifices made by their parents for them. Thus, the field findings show that they try their best to provide good care to their parents so that their children will emulate it when they grow up.

In Chapter 3 (results chapter Part 1), I presented the developmental niches of the childhood of the urban parents, childhood of the rural parents, childhood of today’s urban children and childhood of today’s rural children. Then, in this chapter (results chapter Part 2), I compared the different developmental niches and drew the key themes that cut across all the four developmental niches. The comparison of the different developmental niches will serve as a basis for me to discuss in more detail in the next chapter on how these relate to the Bhutanese parenting philosophies and then compare it with the Western theories and values. This will give us a comparative view of the Western and Bhutanese parenting philosophies.

CHAPTER FIVE

Parenting philosophies: East-West dialogue

We have seen in chapters three and four how the developmental niches (Super & Harkness, 1986) of children have been influenced by the different but interconnected systems (micro, meso, exo and the macro) of the ecological model of Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1999, 2005). The field findings show that the developmental niches of Bhutanese children are influenced by the Buddhist worldview of interconnectedness from which stems the core Bhutanese cultural values of *ley judray* and *tha damtshig*. Similar to this, Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (1979, 1999, 2005) and Super and Harkness's developmental niche (Super & Harkness, 1986) inform us that culture structures the environment in which the development of a child occurs.

As revealed in the field findings, the microsystem of the childhood of the rural parent respondents is deeply influenced by the Bhutanese culture, the macrosystem, which are the values of *ley judray* and *tha damtshig*. However, in case of the childhood experiences of the urban parent respondents, field findings unveil that their microsystem or the developmental niche is also influenced by their other microsystem which is their school, the mesosystem which is the interrelationship between their home and the school. The school provided a different microsystem to the urban parents during their childhood, which the rural parents did not experience as most of them did not have the opportunity to go to school. The *shedtho* sessions with the urban parent respondents show that all the teachers, except for the Bhutanese language teachers, in the schools were from other cultures and that all the textbooks, except for few Bhutanese, that they studied were all in English and with Western themes and values. This meant that not only did they read stories in English with Western values and beliefs but also interacted with people from other countries and therefore other cultures. The urban parent respondents, reflecting on their childhood, see this as the first wave of the emerging Western values and ways of doing, particularly, in the urban areas since many schools were opened in many towns and places near the vehicle roads. Outside the mesosystem, the exosystem also indirectly influenced the children. As shared by the urban respondents, the context in which they grew up was changing as Western influences accompanied development process.

Analysis of the *shedtho* strands of the four developmental niches (rural children of the past, urban children of the past, rural children of today and urban children of today) discussed in the two results chapter also show the influence of time on the 21st century children. The field findings indicate that over a period of time there is a shift in the environment in which the development of children occurred. This is the chronosystem in the five-layered ecological model of Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1999, 2005). The voices from *shedtho* that I had with my rural and urban parent respondents tell us that the developmental niche in which that their children grow is highly influenced by the Western values and culture.

What I infer from the *shethod* that I had with the parents, ECCD facilitators and the key ECCD officers from the education ministry, UNICEF and Save the Children is that the influence of the macrosystem that determined the developmental stages of the childhood of the parent respondents is changing as other cultures and values are impacting on the Bhutanese macrosystem. Therefore, the key point of the field findings is that the influence of the outside cultures and values is becoming more dominant. This is reflected in the ECCD policies and programmes as was voiced their concern during the *shedtho* with the urban parents, ECCD facilitators and the key ECCD officers of Education Ministry, UNICEF and Save the Children.

The *shedtho* sessions also reveal changes in the developmental niches of the parents and that of the 21st children. Their chronosystem (changes taking place over a course of time) is constantly changing (Bronfenbrenner 1979, 1999, 2005) and therefore the context of the environment in which they are growing up is changing accordingly. Thus, what we draw from the *shedtho* session is that over a period of time the developmental niches, the microsystem in which the 21st century children are growing is shifting and is reflecting more of Western influences. Thus, as the Bhutanese adage says “*prepare the canal before water flows and perform ritual before illness invades*”, it is time for the Bhutanese educationists to discuss and look for ways and means to harness the best of both the worlds— the Western and the Bhutanese world.

This chapter will therefore look at the nuances of the Bhutanese and Western values and beliefs so that this can be used for designing pathways to harmonize the East and West in the ECCD policies and programmes.

5.1. The structural nuance

What underpins my participant's stories gathered from the *shedtho*, is that the structural fabric of Bhutanese society is founded on *ley judray* and *tha damtshig*. These two key concepts as explained in the methodology chapter propagate the idea that we don't live all by ourselves. Our lives are intertwined with others; we co-exist and live together with many others on this earth. The voices from the field- both rural and urban have echoed this line of thought and belief, which are widely and deeply held beliefs amongst Bhutanese (Barth & Wikan, 2011; Phuntsho, 2004; Powdyel, 2005, 2007; Wangyal, 2004; Whitecross, 2008).

As revealed in the data, this concept of interdependence and reciprocity goes even deeper and is more complex with the Bhutanese belief in life after death. The complexity lies in the belief in cycle of rebirths: that all sentient beings have been our parents at one time or the other and so all beings on earth must be treated with love and respect. This is the construct of the Bhutanese social structure, the underlying social belief, which rests on the premise that all actions are connected, all fortunes that they enjoy or misfortunes that they suffer, are but the outcome of merits or demerits accumulated by each person. It is from this law of karma that the concept of *ley judrey* is derived from (Phuntsho, 2004; Wangyal, 2004; Whitecross, 2008). As mentioned in the results chapter (page 62), the wicker basket story that one of my respondents shared with me is just a reminder of the quintessence and the infallibility of *ley judray tha damtshig* that the Bhutanese populace observe even today. Some of my respondents used the words *ley judray tha damtshig* directly while talking about subjects such as filial piety, relationship between siblings, friendship, community relationship and so forth. For Aap Daw, *ley judray tha damtshig* meant 'gratitude' and paying respect' to his grandfather from whom he had received so much love and care...

I think no grandparent ever gave so much as my grandfather gave me....he is no more now but I make offerings for him in the temple ...I must keep my

tha damtshig...

For Aum Pem, *ley judray tha damtshig* is the ‘moral obligations’ that her sister owes her,

I was small myself when I carried Yangki on my back...now that they are doing well in life...she is a teacher, the other two also government officials, my children are with them in Thimphu....so it's tha damtshig which keeps life going...all my siblings have that....they owe me that that's why they are taking care of my children just as I took care of them when they were little....

For Aap Chungla, *tha damtshig*, is ‘obedience’ and ‘respect to ones parents’ ...

...that's their wish...I couldn't disobey my parents...I was afraid I would be punished by god if I don't listen to my parents...I think I partly fulfilled their wish...but I had to make my escape...so I got married.....(pause).....but now that I am old, I hope my son hopefully will observe a proper funeral rites and rituals...that's all I wish at this age....

For, according to Phuntsho (2004, p.568), “To be a moral man is to abide by *ley judray* through engaging in virtuous actions... and ...to have no regard for *ley judray* is to be morally unconscientious, irresponsible and reckless”.

Beyond these pairing of relationships and embedded in the daily practises of the respondents is also the act of conducting rituals and making offerings to the deities and spirits which they believe reside in the mountains, trees, rocks, water and land (Barth & Wikan, 2011; Pedey, 2005; Powdyel, 2005). Such practises underscore the value and observance of *ley judray* and *tha damtshig* as also evidenced from the *shedtho* strands. This is also validated by Powdyel (2005). Thus exploitation of nature without limit is seen as a breach of *tha damtshig*, a trust founded on harmonious co-existence which when broken will result in natural disasters. My field data shows that the respondents, particularly rural parents’ lives are punctuated with “prayers”, “burning incense”, “rituals” and “ceremonies” which again underlines the principles of *ley judray* and *tha damtshig* that they share with other beings on earth. From the stories of the respondents, the excerpts of which had been shared in the result findings as well as those that I have just shared earlier, *ley judray* and *tha damtshig*, as featured in their talks during *shedtho* carry many connotations and are associated with

hosts of meanings such as filial piety, trust and loyalty, obedience love, respect, moral duty and obligation, gratitude, responsibility that binds the person to another in reciprocal relationships that they share with one another.

Furthermore, from my own knowledge and understanding as a Bhutanese, I can say that the concepts of *ley judray* and *tha damtshig* have always played a key role even outside of our own personal lives, featuring also in the political domains and in the functioning of other institutions (Phuntsho, 2004; Wangyal, 2004). The Bhutanese populace underscore the importance of serving the *Tsawa sum* with *tha damtshig* (pure loyalty in this context). *Tsawa Sum* from a political dimension means the three roots which are “the country, people and the king”: a concept borrowed from the Buddhist concept of “Triple Gem” (Teacher, his teachings and the institution). Thus, Bhutanese believe that for the country to enjoy peace and prosperity, the three must honour and respect the reciprocal relationship they share with one another; they must observe *tha damtshig* by all means. If people reciprocate the good actions of the king negatively, the bond of interdependence is severed and turmoil will spread across the land. This is what we mean by *ley judray*, the law of cause and effect. These two concepts have become so strongly embedded in the minds of Bhutanese that politicians in democratic Bhutan continue to make pledges of serving the *Tsawa Sum*.

Of ley judray and tha damtshig, Powdyel (2007, p. 70) remarks: It's a simple equation: we receive what we give. As I am, so is my family. As I am, so is my nation. By the inexorable law of ley judray, I can only expect the result of my thoughts and actions to repeat their own quality.

Since the 1980s the concept of Gross National Happiness has guided Bhutan in treading the path of balanced economic development. The discussions of Gross National Happiness (GNH) also revolve around *ley judray tha damtshig* in the sense that conservation of the environment is one of the ideas that it propagates (Powdyel, 2005). All these illustrate that the structure of the Bhutanese Society is founded on the two concepts of *ley judray* and *tha damtshig*: honouring the law of interdependence will eventually result in positive outcome and vice-versa. Thus, like in the societies guided by the concept of interdependence and collectivism where a relationship is bound by “obligation and duty to an in group” (Edwards, Knoche, Aukrust, Kumru, &

Kim, 2005, p. 147), Bhutanese too observe this moral duty and obligation as so evidenced in the *shedtho* with the respondents.

The definition of competence is context-specific. What may be considered as competence in one culture may not be so by another culture and vice-versa. For instance, societies whose structure is founded on the core belief of interdependence will lay emphasis on family and community and any success is connected to group dynamics (Chao & Tseng, 2002; Harkness, Super, & Keefer, 1992). As clearly revealed in the data from the field, group dynamics and group coalitions are also important phenomena that have been identified as playing a dominant role in the lives of the respondents and are more strongly illustrated in lives of the rural respondents. This comes out prominently in the structure of the family (extended family), the power structure and the role of each member, the interactive home environment, the communication process, the running of the household, the family rituals and ceremonies as well as the community rituals that rural parents talked about during the *shedtho* session. Such events and activities are organized to cater for the mutual needs and benefits rather than just an individual alone and according to shared values and what is in their best interest. The social microcosm of the family as well as the community functions in order for all to strive for their common goal and each member's behaviour becomes both the cause and effect in their reciprocal relationship of *tha damshig*. We can see that, rather than the individual working in isolation, each is interdependent with others for the success of the group such as a family and a community. Thus, with the Bhutanese society founded on the idea of interdependence, children are encouraged to view difficulties as a group issue and are made aware of their responsibilities to their family and community.

In contrast, Western society is constructed on the concept of individualism (Chao & Tseng, 2002; Edwards et al., 2005; Keller, 2003; Keller & Otto, 2009; Suizzo, 2004; Tamis-LeMonda et al., 2007; Wise & da Silva, 2007; Yunus, 2005). Individualistic societies “place greater emphasis on the fostering of individual achievement in their children” (Edwards et al., 2005, p. 147). They value personal independence and autonomy and are willing “to leave relationships that are not beneficial to the person” (Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier, 2002, p. 36; Tamis-LeMonda et al., 2007). Further, unlike the societies that value interdependence, the Western individualist

encourages expression of emotions and “children are taught to communicate their personal feelings” (Wise & da Silva, 2007, p. 3).

Individualism and independence of the Western society on one hand and the collectivism and interdependence of the Bhutanese society are defining elements of two different kinds of people with differing mindsets. However, living in a globalized society and with exposure to constant Western beliefs, urban Bhutanese are beginning to bring up their children following the Western individualist model which may act as a barrier to their belief in interdependence and relatedness. The question is how can these two polar end beliefs of two different kinds of societies be harmonized so that the best of both is drawn to benefit Bhutanese children and eventually Bhutanese society. It is in this sphere that the role of ECCD policies and programmes will come into play so that there is a dynamic co-existence of both autonomy and relatedness, which will be discussed in the concluding chapter, will come under consideration.

5.2. Differences in parenting philosophies & developmental goals

Similar to the other East Asian societies, where children are expected to fulfil the needs of their parents and make efforts to make their parents happy (Chao & Tseng, 2002; Liu & Kendig, 2000; Yunus, 2005), the data reveals strong traditional and cultural values such as filial piety and caring for aged parents are looked upon as one of the highest virtue. As has been expressed by both rural and urban parents, one of the hopes and expectation of the parents is that their children will, in future, take responsibility to fulfil the needs of their ageing parents. This is reflected in Bhutanese society where caring for elderly members of the family is a collective responsibility of the younger members and not just that of one individual. The concept of *ley judray* and *tha damtshig* which the respondents spoke aloud during the *shedtho*, manifests itself in the parenting philosophy where different layers of interdependence are displayed. As noted, there are the relationships between ageing parents and their children on one hand and between the children themselves to provide care for their parents. For this reason, as articulated by one of the parents, the children are constantly reminded of the need to observe filial piety and the moral duty that “even if you carry your mother on the left shoulder and your father on the right and tour the world you will not be able to repay the depth of their love and kindness that they

brought you up with.” Through this proverb the Bhutanese are reminded of the need to show unconditional gratitude to their parents.

In Chapter 3 (results section) we have also heard parents say that “Parents grow old, children embody our hope”. The hope that this adage implies is the care that they need in their old age and more so the hope of their children organizing the funeral rites and rituals when they die. In the Bhutanese society death is an important milestone in the cycle of birth, death and rebirth. Bhutanese, like all Buddhists, believe in life after death. Thus, as expressed by some parents, one of the important roles of the children of the departed parent is to conduct rituals so that they may take a swifter rebirth. The expectation of Bhutanese parents and their parenting philosophy is also connected to the social values of *ley judray* and *tha damtshig* upon which the Bhutanese social structure is founded. In contrast, founded on the concept of individualism, Western societies have adopted a welfare society where there are policies that ensure that the state provides care and protection for senior citizens (Estes & Phillipson, 2002; Liu & Kendig, 2000; Quada, 1988).

What can be concluded is that in the west the social value of individualism provides the legal grounding for aged welfare policy while in the east, in contrast, is the social value of filial piety which ensures that the old members of the family are taken care of. Unfortunately, both east and west are failing to continue with the provision of support for their ageing members. The economic crisis in the west is making it difficult to continue the welfare policy for ageing while the emergence of nuclear families and change in lifestyle, seeking education, employment, home making in new locations and even wider political and social responsibilities to the whole country has led to fading of the filial piety (Liu & Kendig, 2000).

The social value of “*pha gee ba ta bu so*” is on the threshold of change even in Bhutan. The emergence of nuclear families and more so, exposure to Western lifestyle, ideas and philosophies is likely to take the Bhutanese across the threshold into that of others if the same trend continues. This would mean that the Bhutanese would also experience the same transition as those of the other East Asian societies. Probably the establishment of the National Provident and Pension Fund some decade ago by the government for their employees is a preparation towards such a change.

Elders at least will have some regular financial support in case their children breach the social value expressed through “*pha gee ba ta bu so*”.

5.3. Outlook on beliefs on discipline

Yuen found out that Chinese parents attribute children’s misbehaviour to the failure of the parents in their “socialization attempts” (2011, p. 23). Similar to this, as mentioned in the Chapter 3, is this Bhutanese proverb shared by one of the parents while referring to a disobedient and an ill-mannered child “*Children of worthless parents and students of unlearned teacher*”. This proverb is the premise on which the beliefs about the source of discipline among Bhutanese parents are founded as it demands that parents to show their worth by preparing their children to grow into caring and responsible individuals. Generally, the Bhutanese view lack of discipline and ill mannerism of a child to be the result of ineffective parenting and lack of proper upbringing. On the other hand, Yuen (2011) says that Americans considered immature development of the child as the cause of misbehaviour. Thus, like Chinese and Asian parents (Chao, 1996; Chao & Tseng, 2002; Liu, 1986) Bhutanese parents also, as discussed in Chapter 3 the results chapter, demand obedience and compliance as well as respect for parents from their children.

Studies have also shown that Chinese parents are more restrictive and less warm than American parents. They also rarely give verbal reinforcement and physical affection (Yuen, 2011). Chao (1996) adds that European-American parents are more patient, praise their children more and avoid negative comments. Their focus is on building children’s self esteem, a concern, which is not given the same importance in Chinese society.

Further, in East Asian societies children are introduced to the essence of deep devotion and respect to one’s parents (Chao & Tseng, 2002; Liu & Kendig, 2000). This means that children are obliged to “show unqualified obedience to parents even if parents were known to be wrong” (Liu & Kendig, 2000, p. 13). As shared by an urban parent respondent, children are generally brought up in an environment where they are made to understand the importance of respecting and obeying parents in the

context of *drin len*, which means showing gratitude to the parents for what they have sacrificed for their children. *Drin len* is a filial value that has in a way been instrumental in keeping alive the respect and obedience to the parents and the elder members of the family.

The Bhutanese share similar ways of disciplining their children with the Chinese. As drawn from the words of respondents in the Chapter 3 result chapter, “*A child who is shown love and affection through an excess of joy and peace will not be able to learn much*”, “*permitting one’s child to display irresponsible habits is not affection; the growth of hump on the bull’s back does not signify strength; let fondness be felt in heart; and let the head receive a smack or two often*” and “*align the sapling and the child when tender*” are some popular sayings that the respondents freely quoted which centred around Bhutanese disciplining beliefs. These proverbs tell us how a Bhutanese child is brought up in a traditional society and even now among many literate families but particularly in rural communities. As concluded by one of the parents, the worth of a parent and their affection for their children as judged by Bhutanese society is on the parents’ ability to live by the truth of these proverbs. The outcome of disciplining children based on these sayings is expressed further by a proverb “*A child of good parentage is known by the quality of mind; the sheath of a superior knife is known by the shape*”. Also presented in Chapter 3 result chapter is the voice of a parent who brought forth the essence of the proverbs on discipline “*only those who have faced hardship will bear good fruits*”. The idea of *ley judray*, the operation of cause and effect, which is one of the cornerstones of the Bhutanese social structure, is apparent in this proverb that the Bhutanese hear both at home and in the school.

Using Baumrind’s (1967, 1971) classification of parents into permissive, authoritarian and authoritative as the basis, the Bhutanese are found to be more authoritarian. They enforce obedience and compliance and exercise restrictive measures in comparison with the Western parents who are authoritative as they express warmth and support and are more democratic.

5.4. Stance on play

In their study of Euro-American and Asian parents, Parmar, Harkness, and Super (2004), found two different perspectives in their children’s play. Euro-American

parents believed play to be an “important vehicle” for the early development and growth of preschool children. They considered “play helpful in enhancing physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development of preschool children” (Parmar et al., 2004, p. 102). On the other hand, “Asian parents did not value play for the development of preschool children. They did not believe play helps children get ready for school. The Asian parents stressed the idea that getting a head start in early academics is important for the cognitive development of children in preschool years” (Parmar et al., 2004, p. 102).

Further, the Euro-American parents bought many toys and play items which were for fun and enjoyment. These parents also made time to play with their children as it is considered as the basis for developing children’s academic and social development. More importantly it is valued as a means of bonding; and also to stimulate interests and imagination. In contrast, the “Asian parents facilitated cognitive development by serving as teachers and academic coaches at home” (Parmar et al., 2004, p. 103). Interestingly, most of the toys that they bought were also educational and not for fun and enjoyment (Parmar et al., 2004).

These findings of (Parmar et al., 2004) in relation to the contrasts between Euro-American and Asian parenting connect well with the findings of this thesis. The narratives of the ECCD facilitators and parents of both rural and urban areas showed they placed very little importance on play. This is also further reinforced in the report on the situational analysis in Bhutan conducted by Save the Children (2008, p. 15) that “play and learning materials in some day care programs appear limited.” Further, all the rural respondents and some of the urban parents shared the view that they hardly ever buy toys and play gadgets for their children. My own childhood experience and also that of a mother matches that of the respondents’ views. For example, during my visit to the urban ECCD centre, the proprietor of the centre told me that the sand pit was closed as the parents complained about their children playing in the sand pit. According to my respondents, playtime in the centre is waste of time as they saw no learning and did not contribute to the child’s development. As voiced by many parents “*play will not earn a livelihood*”. Generally, parents are not happy when ECCD centres engage children in more play as expressed by one urban parent “*I am paying for my child to attend the ECCD Centre and learn to speak, read and*

write in English and not to learn how to play. Our centres spend more time on play which annoyed me so I communicated it to the ECCD facilitators.”

Thus, what can be concluded is that play is not a priority of the Bhutanese parents and they also want more of academic activities such as reading, writing and singing than play in the ECCD centres. Play is, therefore, another area on which the Western and the Bhutanese societies take a different stance.

5.5. Perspectives on domains of child development

Western research tells us that child development is multidimensional and varies according to “nutritional and biomedical status, genetic inheritance, and social and cultural context” (Spratt et al., 2012, p. 4). As discussed, the early period of a child’s life experiences laid the foundation for later life, impacting on overall development and growth. Thus under-nutrition, poor health, and non-optimal caregiving can have an adverse effect on the cognitive, motor, psychosocial, and affective development of the child (Engle & Lhotska, 2012; Grantham-McGregor, Fernald, & Sethuraman, 2012; Meisels & Atkins-Burnett, 2012; Pollitt, Huang, & Jahari, 2012; Pollitt & Triana, 2012; Spratt et al., 2012; Wachs, 2012). In rural Bhutan in the semi-nomadic communities, 53.5% of the parents do not make their children wash hands after play and 68.4% the children report that they do not wash hands after going to the toilet. These conditions pose high risk for children living in these communities and attending ECCE centres. Barth and Wikan (2011) as well as Save the Children (2012) report that rural homes in Bhutan have poor hygiene as floors are never washed and just swept and even clothes and bodies are not washed on a regular basis, as also found out by Save the Children. Many Bhutanese, particularly, in rural Bhutan, still resort to conducting rites and rituals to attend to sicknesses and ailments (Barth & Wikan, 2011; Pedey, 2005) before seeking medical treatment. My research data from childhood narratives of the rural parents again validates this further as they say that illnesses of children are associated with spirits and other supernatural forces and the way to cure these was to perform rituals and appease the spirits. While there are over 31 hospitals, 184 Basic Health Units, 46 Indigenous staffed with 184 doctors and 723 nurses catering to a small Bhutanese population of about seven hundred thousand (National Statistical Bureau, 2011, p. 1). All my rural respondents and a few of my

urban parents explained that they resorted to a mix of rituals rather than going to hospitals (which is popularly known as *menchoe rimdroe*).

5.6. Inside the ECCD centre

What is drawn from Western literature (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000; Super & Harkness, 2002) on childcare and education is that the early years of childhood are a very important phase in the life of a child and that culture should be one of the bedrocks to be considered in ECCD programmes. However, discussions with the staff working in the two ECCD centres I visited revealed that there is more Western content than Bhutanese in their programmes and activities. Domains of child development such as motor development; physical health & well being; language, literacy and communication; approaches towards learning and cognition and general knowledge are given importance. However, the socio-cultural domain received very little attention. In the centres I visited, only one day in a week is allotted to Bhutanese culture, which leaves very little room for local knowledge, the source of cultural enrichment, to be used as classroom materials. On this day children learn about Bhutanese culture and tradition while the rest of the days the children spent time learning English. The children are taught rhymes and songs in English, stories are read in English, materials used are mostly in English and children are taught to communicate in English.

While the Western theories recommend contextualization of ECCD centres with culturally appropriate programmes (da Silva & Wise, 2006; Denham & Weissberg, 2004; Guilfoyle et al., 2010; Lerner et al., 2001; Rosenthal, 2007; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000; Sims, 2004; Super & Harkness, 1986, 2002) the environment and the setting of the ECCD centres I visited are more conducive for enhancing Western values and beliefs rather than that of Bhutanese. The classroom observations I carried out and interaction with the staff there indicated how little the Bhutanese culture is given attention. Furthermore, the staffs themselves are young and untrained. They mentioned that it is more convenient and easier to teach English rhymes and songs as they are widely known than Bhutanese. There are only limited children's poems and songs in Dzongkha and are not easily available in print or in

recorded forms. Interestingly, it is also the wish of some parents that their children learn English at the centres:

“The parents here evaluate their child’s progression by how many English words have been learnt, how many nursery rhymes she can sing and what the child can write. They become disheartened and do not approve of their children spending time on play”(Urban ECCD staff).

The proprietor of the centre also mentioned that:

“if we do not cater to the demands and needs of the parents, we do not get children and lose our market to other centres. So as far as possible we try to keep on with their demands and keep them with us... The market has stiff competition and there are many centres coming up... we have already lost a few of our children already. That’s why, we had to lift the sand pit as our parents did not like their children playing in the sand pit and found it be useless.”

5.7. Summary of the East-West dialogue

Founded on the field findings and literature review several key differences can be noticed between Bhutanese parenting philosophies and child rearing practises. The main difference is the social value of Western individualism and Bhutanese interdependence grounded on the concepts of *ley judray* and *tha damtshig*. I see these two values as the basis of the social structure of these two different communities as other social values appear to be connected to these two.

Bhutanese parenting philosophies arising out of this key element of *ley judray*, *tha damtshig*. The study indicates that Bhutanese parents believe that it is the responsibility of children to take care of their parents as they age, while the west has built a welfare system whereby the state takes a major role for the care of their senior citizens in their society. Beliefs about discipline also vary between Western and Bhutanese societies. The Bhutanese belief in obedience and compliance of their children make them authoritarian. On the other hand the Western parents express warmth and are more democratic and are authoritative.

The stance on play of the two societies also stand apart as the Western parents appreciate play as fundamental to the development of their children and therefore spend time on play. The Bhutanese, as do parents in other Asian societies, do not regard play as important and necessary and therefore the parents, as shared in the *shedtho* session by the ECCD facilitators, give more importance to literacy and numeracy skills.

On the different domains of child development, particularly in physical development, health, hygiene and safety, Bhutanese families demonstrate poor attention and awareness to these areas. In the Chapter 3 we have seen that parents let their children play in unsafe environments, and do not follow Western standards in relation to children's hygiene and health. In contrast, the domains of child development receive attention by the Western parents.

Western theories identify the importance of designing culturally sensitive and appropriate ECCD programmes to ensure positive outcomes for children. However, in Bhutan, ECCD programmes are strongly influenced by Western values and very little Bhutanese local knowledge are used to contextualise culturally appropriate learning.

Reflections on the 'west' and 'east' have presented early educators with fundamental differences between the Western and Bhutanese societies in their social values. Therefore, the final chapter will discuss the implications of Western influence on the ECCD centres and how Bhutan can draw on the best of both societies so that the Bhutanese children can benefit from a harmonized ECCD programmes.

CHAPTER SIX

Recommendations for ECCD in Bhutan

The findings from the field and the comparative analysis conducted between the four developmental niches revealed the influence of the Western ways on Bhutanese from both rural and the urban homes. The level of influence is much deeper on the two urban niches – the urban parents' childhood niche and today's urban child's niche and less on the two rural niches. Further, my observations of the two ECCD centres and the *shedtho* sessions with the ECCD professionals also validated my findings and revealed that the environment and programmes are generally set on Western model with very little Bhutanese culture and local knowledge infused.

Bhutan is deeply aware that today's globalised society entails a wider and a more universalised perspective and ways of doing but at the same time is deeply conscious of the need to uphold our own Bhutanese tradition and culture and therefore, seeks a way forward to harmonising the best of the two worlds. In response to this call for harmony, we have the philosophy of Gross National Happiness - this guiding developmental philosophy which leads the pathway to setting that balance.

I have heard the urges in the voices from the field, echoing the same line of views and thoughts during my *shedtho* sessions with my parent respondents. They have spoken their thoughts aloud and it is their wish that their children grow up deeply rooted in the core Bhutanese values and be distinctly Bhutanese Sons and Daughters connected and rooted to the Bhutanese soil. The field findings also tell us something more - that they wish also that their children be equipped with the right knowledge and skills that will prepare them to face the competitive globalized world. Hence, this calls for drawing the best of the Western theories and Western ways of doing and harmonizing these with Bhutanese values and ways of doing in the institutions such as ECCD centres and schools so that the Bhutanese children grow up as proud Bhutanese citizens and yet also carry a global outlook and perspectives fully in tune with the outside world.

Against this background, this section will make recommendations on how the Western principles and practises and Bhutanese childrearing philosophies can be harmonized in Bhutanese ECCD centres. The recommendations are premised on the

following key conclusions drawn from the field findings and supplemented by the literature review.

- The structure of Bhutanese society is founded on the two core values of *ley judray* (law of cause and effect) and *tha damtshig* (reciprocity and interdependence).
- The value of *drin len* (gratitude), particularly the *drin len* that the children owe their parents is deeply rooted in the Bhutanese culture.
- Obedience and respect is still instilled through spanking and using harsh words while the urban parents are now linclines towards encouraging these values through positive disciplining.
- ECCD policies, documents and ECCD centres are highly influenced by Western theories and values. Therefore, there is a need to harmonize the Western and the Bhutanese values and ways of achieving desirable goals.

The implications of the field findings and the recommendations are presented under three broad themes namely:

- 6.1. Policy implications
- 6.2. ECCD programme delivery implications
- 6.3. Research implications.

The three broad themes are intertwined and are envisaged as possible pathways to harmonize Western theories and the Bhutanese values in the ECCD centres and programmes.

6.1. Policy implications

The *shedtho* sessions were conducted with the ECCD key persons of the MoE and UNICEF reveal that the ECCD guiding documents such as the National ECCD policy and the Early Learning Development Standards have been developed with the technical support of non-Bhutanese experts whose grounding is in Western theories and philosophies. These experts have consulted and involved the Bhutanese ECCD

officials who also lack substantial ECCD knowledge and expertise. In this context, Ball (2011) who conducted an ECCD scoping study in Bhutan, also confirms that Bhutanese ECCD policy has borrowed extensively from Western models. The review of the National ECCD policy document confirms the statement. In the whole document, culture has received a brief mention on one occasion where the policy document states that “*Early Childhood Care and Development programmes/ services in Bhutan shall be based on the principle of developmental appropriateness, contextual relevance and cultural integrity*” (MoE, 2011b, p. 7).

As discussed, studies have shown early childhood to be the most critical period as it is the time when the child’s brain is most sensitive and responsive to the external environment. This tells us how indispensable it is for the adults to set appropriate and favourable conditions in which the child should grow (Gammage, 2006; Kostelnik & Grady, 2009; Sims, 2013). Findings from the field suggest that while the majority of Bhutanese parent respondents’ own childhood has been steeped in Bhutanese socio-cultural values and beliefs, that of their children is now shifting towards the Western mores. The macrosystem, which operates outside of home and ECCD, may be beyond the control of the parents. However, within the microsystem of the ECCD centres, it is possible to create the required conditions by framing and putting into place appropriate policies and programmes that support Bhutanese culture. Thus, the first step towards building an enabling environment and steering the pathways for harmonizing Western theories with Bhutanese values in the ECCD centres should begin with a review of the ECCD policy which is still in its draft stage. When reviewing the ECCD policy, clear policy statements that call for ECCD programmes to draw in the “Best of Both Worlds” (Ball, 2011, p. 6) should be identified clearly. An appropriate policy will ensure that the core values such as *ley judrey, tha damtshig* on which the structure of the society is founded and from which emanates the Bhutanese practises and ways of living are firmly established. A policy, which aspires to establish a Gross National Happiness (GNH) inspired ECCD programme would certainly ensure a balance of both the worlds as so desired by my respondents, both rural and the urban parents. For instance the policy could have statements that ensure that the ECCD programmes:

- infuses Gross National Happiness, the principles of balance
- creates enabling environment to tap on the local knowledge

- builds physical setting that is compatible and suits Bhutanese.
- builds learning resources that transmit the core values of *ley judray* and *tha damtshig*.

6.2. ECCD programme delivery implications

Founded on the National ECCD Policy document, the Education Ministry with technical and financial inputs from UNICEF has developed the Early Learning Development Standards (ELDS) for Bhutan. The ELDS, as discussed in the *shedtho* session with the ECCD key persons of Education Ministry and UNICEF, is the document that guides the development of programmes and activities of the ECCD centres. A review of the ELDS shows that the ECCD programme focuses on six domains: physical well-being, health, and motor development; social and emotional development; language, literacy and communication; approaches to learning ; cognition and general knowledge; spiritual, moral and cultural development. Culture features in as just a sub-domain of the spiritual, cultural and moral development domain (UNICEF, 2013). Based on the ELDS, a toolkit has been designed and it is used in all the ECCD centres as a guiding document. From the *shedtho* sessions that I conducted with ECCD facilitators and the key ECCD staff of education ministry, indicated that the kit is used as a guide and all the centres which use the activities in the toolkit with very little variations. My visit to the centres and the *shedtho* with the same group of people also indicated that only one day in a week is observed as Bhutanese cultural day where the day begins and ends with Bhutanese cultural activities at the centres.

However, by isolating teaching Bhutanese culture to a separate day and keeping it to just one day is not enough to harmonize the Western theories and the Bhutanese values. It must be borne in mind that cultural immersion for children are vital not only for their development, but also because it contributes to building their cultural identity as well strengthening the parent-child bonding (Giugni, 2008; Purcell, Lee, & Biffin, 2007) . This can be done through use of various approaches such as building the linguistic capacity of the children through use of their own home language, or the use of “addictive approach” “wherein content about particular ethnic or racial groups is added to (without changing the structure of) the existing school curriculum” (Sensoy

et al., 2010, p. 4). Cultural artifacts, and resources such as reflected in the costumes, food, music, dress and so forth of the various ethnic groups can be interwoven into the mainstream curriculum and featured as daily programmes and activities and not kept for one day in a week. Such events and activities can help the children to find the connecting link between home and the centre which “meaningfully reflect the lives and experiences” of their own home lived experiences (Sensoy et al., 2010, p. 12)

Thus, it will be more meaningful if a manual for ECCD facilitators is developed or the toolkit reviewed to ensure this principle of harmonizing the best of Western theories with Bhutanese culture. This document should help the ECCD facilitators to blend the practises of the two worlds together and make the activities relevant to the needs of the contemporary parents. This would mean that the capacity of the ECCD facilitators should be built on mainstreaming local funds of knowledge, culture and values in the ECCD programmes and services. Sims (2011) demonstrates that even the regular activities if planned well can stimulate interest in the children to participate and eventually learn. In a similar manner, if the ECCD facilitators are trained to plan well the local knowledge that they use can become meaningful to the children. Not only will the children learn Bhutanese values but also benefit from other domains of development. By playing the game of “Two Tigers and a herd of cattle”, children will benefit from the same developmental process similar to playing a Western game. For instance, when playing this game, children will learn to plan their moves intelligently which improve their cognitive skills; arranging the play items enhances their fine and gross motor skills; winning or losing the game helps them to regulate their emotion and also builds their social and literacy skills. More importantly, engagements in such Indigenous games and activities keep the children connected to their cultural roots and traditions. Thus, the outcome of such an initiative will be an enhanced knowledge and skills to harmonize Western theories and Bhutanese culture by tapping on the local funds of knowledge and also initiate culturally appropriate and informed activities.

One of the factors that determines the quality of an early childhood programme is the quality of the people working in the centres (Winton, McCollum, & Catlett, 2008). The *shedtho* sessions with the key ECCD officers and the ECCD facilitators of the two centres revealed that the ECCD facilitators have mostly Class XII level and have merely a basic training in ECCD. During the *shedtho*, the ECCD facilitators also

admitted that they do not have the skills and expertise to use the local knowledge as classroom materials. This dearth is illustrated in the Scoping Study of ECCD in Bhutan by Ball (2011, p. 16) where she mentions that “...the facilitator stated that she had no idea what else to do with the children besides having them sing the same songs over and over....” Studies (Bueno, Darling-Hammond, & Gonzales, 2010; Degotardi, 2010; Whitebook, 2003) have highlighted the importance of relevant and appropriate qualification. For instance, in the study of Degotardi (2010) that investigated the factors that influenced the quality of early childhood practitioners’ interaction with infants reveal the level of qualification of the practitioners is important for the delivery of quality early childhood programme. Quality impacts directly on the ability of the practitioners to create appropriate experiences that help children to blossom and grow in an environment that nurtures their growth and development. The study also shows that the qualified practitioners build pathways for children to think in a more complex manner.

Thus, investing in the capacity building of the ECCD facilitators can be very useful to ensure that Bhutanese children receive the best of both the worlds – the Western and the Bhutanese.

In the same regard, Ball (2011, p. 16) also re-emphasises that “facilitators could benefit from additional education on how to engage children and older family members in gathering natural materials and how to recycle household objects to create interesting learning materials.” So improvising from common Bhutanese materials and natural products will become a harmonizing activity.

The key ECCD officers of the Education Ministry informed me during the *shedho* that currently the Colleges of Education in Bhutan do not offer any certificate, diploma or Bachelors degree in ECCD. While degree courses will take a long time to develop, the immediate plan of action to fill in this capacity gap for ECCD facilitators could be for the Education Ministry to collaborate with the Royal University of Bhutan and introduce certificate programmes initially. Classes can be scheduled during vacation time to allow facilitators to attend, or there could be a distance education model so that current ECCD facilitators can study whilst they remain in their ECCD centres. If, for example, a certificate programme of six months full-time study is introduced, existing ECCD facilitators can attend the programme during vacation, or study off-campus, and complete the course over duration of three years. However, for pre-

service candidates the Royal University of Bhutan can plan an on-campus programme. Then, as the human capital with certificate level increases, the Royal University of Bhutan may introduce a two-year diploma course following the same model. Gradually, a three-year Bachelor programme and finally a four-year Bachelor with Honours programme may be introduced following the same model. Such an initiative will culminate in enhancing the quality of ECCD in Bhutan.

6.3. Research implications

From my observations of the two ECCD centres and the *shedtho* sessions that I had with the ECCD facilitators, key ECCD staff from the Education Ministry, UNICEF and Save the Children, also informed me there is a total absence of research on, or documentation of, the local funds of knowledge, let alone studies addressing opportunities for harmonizing Western ECCD theories and practises with Bhutanese values and practises. In the face of this vacuum, there is also a loud cry for investment in research and development so that children receive knowledge and skills founded on the hybrid blended approach based on research. The debut could be literature reviews on multiculturalism in ECCD so that the theoretical understandings are in place. Then, with a sound theoretical and practical understanding of multiculturalism in ECCD, the next plan of action could be development of Bhutanese strategies to address the challenges that we discussed earlier through investments in improving staff qualifications, developing guidelines, developing resources and modelling activities.

Investment in publicity is also important so that there is increased community valuing of our own Bhutanese culture, our own worldviews and the ways of doing things and showing how the best of western learning and practises can be achieved in this unique Bhutanese manner.

The field findings of the childhood experiences of the rural parents inform us that there are many kinds of indigenous knowledges which they enjoyed. There are games and riddles, songs and dances, stories and lessons based on social values, connection with nature and spirituality, among many others. Unfortunately, *shedtho* sessions with

the ECCD facilitators and my own observations of a few classes at the centres revealed that the Bhutanese ECCD programme have not harnessed and tapped this rich indigenous knowledge. Rather the ECCD centres have relied on using the readily available resources such as nursery rhymes, stories, posters, charts, puzzles, among others in English language only which are necessarily laden with Western values. This information that was gathered is confirmed by Save the Children (2008, p. 15) in the situation analysis of ECCD in Bhutan, with a comment that “...one sees English language posters and books but nothing in national or local languages. This is a missed opportunity... the rich Bhutanese culture does not appear to be reflected in programmes’ physical environment, curriculum and learning materials”.

Thus, one of the pathways towards creating an enabling environment for the harmonization of Western theories and Bhutanese values and local funds of knowledge is building the capacity of the ECCD key personnel in the MoE and the ECCD facilitators capable of carrying out research.

With an enhanced knowledge and capacity of the ECCD facilitators and an GNH inspired ECCD programme, alongside English rhymes, songs and stories, we will also certainly hear our own Bhutanese rhymes, songs and stories which will give a more distinct voice that is uniquely and truly identifiable as Bhutanese. Indigenous riddles and games such as “two tigers and a herd of cattle” that the rural respondents are familiar with, are one such local knowledge, as shared by the ECCD facilitators, which are the missing fabrics of the ECCD activities that should be incorporated in ECCD programmes to enrich the classroom learning experience. More posters and the charts can also be developed with a Bhutanese context but without sidelining the Western theories and practises. Research should also lead to development of resource books which the ECCD facilitators can use to infuse the relevant funds of knowledge in their activities. Research should also build the capacity of the ECCD facilitators to document the local funds of knowledge of the community where they are working.

Research and development is therefore a vital pathway that will ensure the harmonization of the Western theories and the Bhutanese values and eventually enhance the quality of ECCD programmes.

6.4. Concluding remarks

The *shedtho* sessions tell us that 21st century Bhutanese children are growing up exposed to Western ways of thinking and doing and they are losing links with their socio-cultural roots and traditional values with which their parents grew up. This is particularly obvious in urban areas where children are exposed to Western values both in the home and in their ECCD centres. In the rural areas, exposure is more likely in the ECCD centres than in children's homes. It's the wish of every parent to see their children get a good job and lead a successful life when they grow up but at the same time they also want their children to grow up upholding the Bhutanese core values of *ley judray* and *tha damtshig* from which also stems the parenting philosophy of *pha gee ba ta bu so* (parents grow old, children embody our hope). In this regard, the policy implications, ECCD delivery implications and research implications discussed earlier are seen as possible pathways leading towards sustaining the aspiration of the parents articulated in this proverb in the 21st century and thereafter. These three pathways are linked directly to harmonization of Western ECCD theories and Bhutanese values and philosophies in the ECCD programmes in Bhutan.

When discussing the notion of harmonization, I immediately think of looking at ECCD policies and programmes through the GNH lens. The Education Ministry of Bhutan has implemented a new educational initiative which is known as "Educating for Gross National Happiness (GNH)" in the schools. The idea is to create a learning environment that provides holistic development and eventually prepare children to complete their studies as GNH graduates, who are Bhutanese in mind and in practice, who respects culture of others and who at the same time have the knowledge and skills to able to earn livelihood in this competitive world (Department of Curriculum and Research Divisions, 2010).

However, the ECCD programmes have not tapped into the GNH model of education which is about drawing a balance and taking the middle path. If the ultimate purpose of education as per the GNH Guide, a document of Department of Curriculum and research Development (Department of Curriculum and Research Divisions, 2010) is to prepare children to complete their studies as GNH graduates, it only makes sense to introduce this into ECCD programmes. So, why not initiate a GNH infused ECCD

programme which is all about harmonizing the best of the two worlds? The task might seem daunting but if we follow the implementation model of the Educating for GNH model it is feasible and doable. In this connection, the erstwhile Education Minister, Powdyel remarked “We already have the basic material in our curriculum sufficient to support GNH way of thinking and living. What is required is a creative reorientation of attitude and approach in the way we look at ourselves and perceive our relationship with our field of work” (MoE, 2011b, p. v). Further, His Majesty the Fifth King of Bhutan as quoted in the UNICEF 2013 Year Planner: “A nation’s future will mirror the quality of her youth – a nation cannot fool into thinking of a bright future when she has not invested wisely in her children” (UNICEF, 2013, p. 1).

If Bhutanese values and ways of doing are to continue to live in the heart of the 21st century Bhutanese and the generations that will follow, I see GNH inspired ECCD programme as the only pathway as GNH transmits balance and harmonization, taking that middle path which enables children to develop holistically. This way then we will fulfil the wishes and aspirations of parents, give a distinct Bhutanese identity while also preparing the Bhutanese children to become world citizens.

EPILOGUE

In the prologue, I shared with you my childhood days and my childhood world and also told you why I have done that. Now in the epilogue, I will talk about myself as a mother. It makes total sense to me to share and end my thesis talking a little about my children - how I bring them up –my wishes and aspirations, my child rearing style and practises, my beliefs about motherhood and children, my own ethno-theories which surround and impact my children’s growth and development. Having visited the niches of parents and the children, hearing their voices and listening to their stories, and also seeing my childhood niche in the prologue, it is only right and fair that I present to you the niche that I create for my children so as to understand my thesis in its entirety.

As shared in the prologue, as a child I had the opportunity to study in urban schools in Bhutan and have lived watching and absorbing what surrounded my life. In school and college I read works of many English novelists, dramatists and poets as a part of the curriculum. The medium of communication was English. I also had the wonderful chance to live in some of the big cities such as Paris, New York and Chennai and as I write this epilogue, I am in Armidale, Australia. I met and interacted with many amazing people from many different cultures. Despite this exposure, I find myself still deeply rooted in the values of *ley judray* and *tha damtshig* and connected to the principle of *pha gee ba ta bu so* and upon reflection, I seem to bring up my children very close to the ways I was brought up.

My first child was a caesarian-born child. When I was admitted for the delivery, my mother worried that the baby may not hear the first human utterances. This is important to me because when the baby is born, the first sound that the baby hears is very significant and momentous, especially for the baby. Bhutanese believe that when a baby steps out from its mother’s womb onto the earth, it has the intelligence to understand and distinguish the first sound that it hears. So hearing a human sound immediately soothes him, for that fraction of a moment allows him understanding of his own being as a “human being” before he returns into his baby world of not knowing. So traditionally, the baby is given a very hearty welcome as *Trashhi Delek* or *janpalegkso*- meaning “Welcome” or “Good luck.”

Like any family, the birth of my first child brought great joy and excitement into the family. As customary to Bhutanese, on the third day of its birth, my baby and the whole house received *lhabsang*, the cleansing ritual after which we opened our door to receive relatives, friends and neighbour who came to offer *khaddar* (white silk scarf) and drank *changkoey*, wine prepared from fermented rice to celebrate the happy occasion. As practiced and observed by many Bhutanese parents even today, my boys were named by high priests, and astrologers were referred to seek for favorable days for all new events that they were about to experience. To many Bhutanese parents, these events in the child's life set important milestone which mark not only the child's well being, success, happiness but also their survival and longevity. Thus, their horoscopes were prepared and read by monks, and astrologers were referred to for favourable days for them to start school.

Visiting monasteries and temples, making offerings to the deities to ask for their protection, prostrating and circumbulating *choeten* (stupas) became a part of their lives. Saying our daily prayers was a pervasive element in my house, which the boys picked up naturally. Seeing me in the shrine room with folded hands or prostrating, my elder one would just walk in and imitate me. So without understanding what he actually was doing, he would mimic prayers and do prostrations, and his younger brother would join in imitating his older brother. This encouraged me to get their lives attuned to spiritual practises. So at very early age, the boys were taught some simple daily prayers. I was convinced that boys may not understand the prayers now but saying the prayers everyday would be embedded in their daily lives – a habit which will become a part of their life for them to understand the meaning later. By engaging the boys in the prayers, make them do the water offerings and tidying the shrine room created a healthy mental atmosphere and good habits. Alongside we tried to help them connect their daily prayers with their everyday dealings with their elders, friends, animals, plants and so forth. Thus my boys were taught to run household chores and help the elders from very young age.

Beyond books and learning – being successful and socially useful members of family and society, it is my earnest wish to see my boys imbued with deep understanding of human values, develop their own personal wisdom and insights. More than anything else, I want them to grow up as good human beings, kind, considerate and compassionate to others. I want them see themselves as the operators of their own

karma, so that they learn to observe and honour *tha damtshig* and fear the breach of *ley judray* and its consequences. While we think children may not be able to grasp the notion of *karma* and that it may be far too grand a concept for them to comprehend, we can actually help them to see and understand how the immediate karma operates in their own young lives. As in the lives of any growing child we have fighting episodes where Sonam would punch Pema on the face and Pema would hit Sonam back with his toy or, at other times, loving episodes where Pema would share his favorite chocolate, and the other would willingly share his favourite toy in return. I make such episodes an occasion to point out the cause and the effect relationship, the law of *karma*. In an instant they understand what they receive is what they give – a punch for a punch and a chocolate for a toy.

Other times, I describe how I feel about their actions – good or bad. “See the tear in my eyes, I am hurt” or “watch your *aapa* smile as you tell him the good news.” I teach them how as a family we effect one another, how we feel about each other’s actions and accomplishments. These are good building blocks for their minds to grow and develop. Learning the true meaning of *karma* and how their actions today is going to impact later in their adult life, I believe will help them make better choices, even if in theory.

Amidst these beliefs and ethno-theories that surround my boys’ lives, I am also deeply aware of the challenges that lay my path as a parent as well as the challenges facing my boys. Living in this day and era, I am also confronted with the same challenges and dilemmas that other contemporary parents are challenged with.

I realize....

Examining closely my own parenting style, I realize that every situation requires different approach: use different words, different rules, a different tone, and different tactics in order to see the difference in the outcomes.

Aside from this, my hope is that they will grow into adults steeped in the Bhutanese values yet also get good employment in the global market. I know I cannot be fully bound by what is Bhutanese; as a parent I need to move along with time and adapt to the change that the 21st century children are experiencing.

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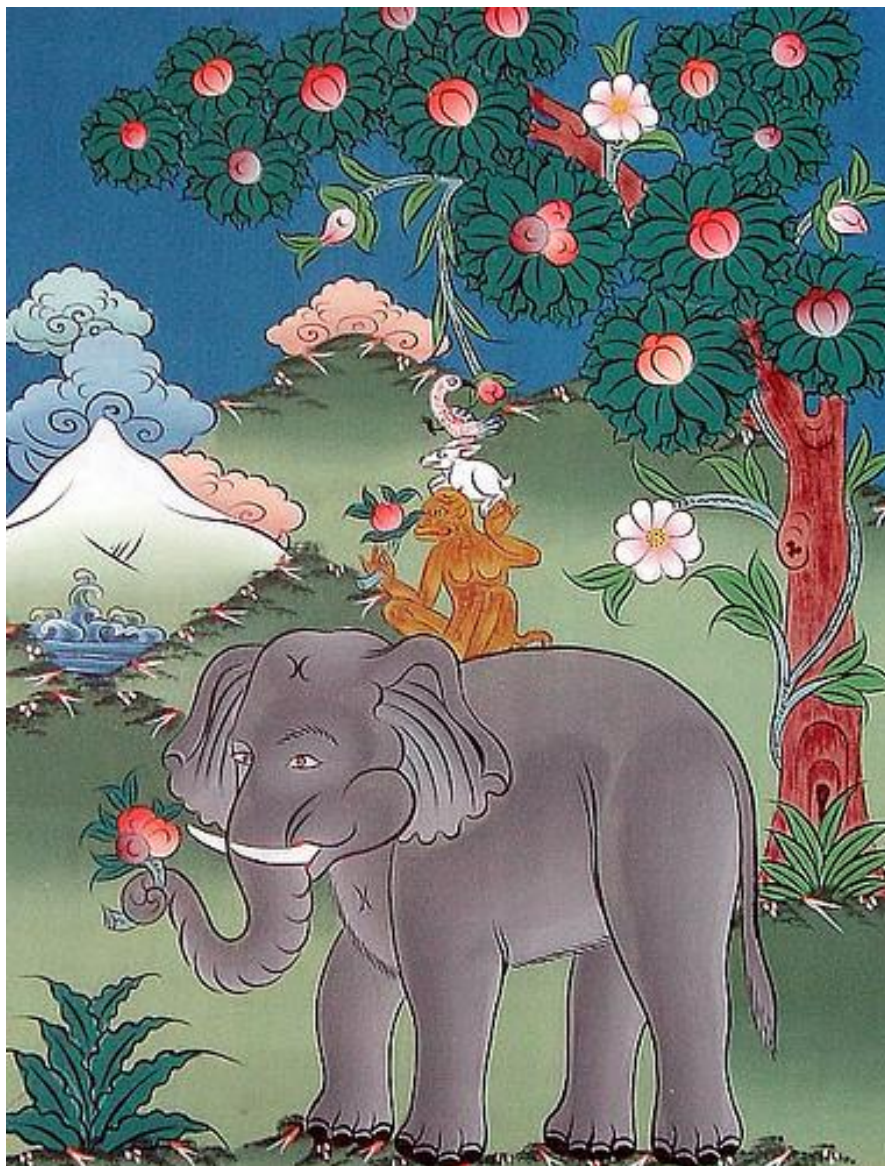
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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Understanding the symbolism of Thuenpa Puen Zhi (Penjore, 2005)

Farmer Rinchen has a brand new painting of the Four Harmonious Friends or Thuenpa Puen Zhi on the wall of her altar room. Hotelier Nima has a huge painting of the same on his restaurant wall. A beautifully done Thangka (scroll painting) of the Four Friends hangs from the sitting room of Karma, a Thimphu businesswomen.



To Richen, the painting would ensure harmony in the family, to Nima, it means peace, and to Karma, it is a beautiful art for decking up her cozy sitting room. The painting of the four animal friends - an elephant, a monkey, a rabbit, and a bird - positioned on

top of each other varies in size and in fact, the bird looks different on all the three paintings and the monkey on Rinchen's wall has a phallus painted in glowing red.

Differences in shape, sizes, colours, and the simplicity of the painting aside, the Thunpa Puen Zhi forms one of the first and lasting impressions of Bhutanese paintings.

But even as the painting takes its place in most Bhutanese homes, lhakhangs and monasteries, and dzongs in the form of a wall painting or a Thangka, there are few who understand its real connotations.

While many believe that the painting symbolises harmony and unity in family or society, it has a world of meaning contrary to its commonplace perception as an obvious symbolism of harmony.

According to a Bhutanese scholar, Dasho Lam Sanga, the Puen Zhi can be traced back to various life cycles Lord Buddha attained before his enlightenment. “It is in the context of the teachings of Lord Buddha,” said Dasho Lam Sanga.

It symbolises interdependence despite the difference in size and strength of the animals. It is an epitome of friendship, cooperation, good relation without considering hierarchy, strength, power or even size. It depicts the virtues of Buddhist morals. At a single glance one will know that four different species of animals are united in harmony.

He explained the animals are representations of Lord Buddha himself and his close advocates: the bird is Buddha himself, the rabbit is Sheribu (Shari Putra), the monkey Mou-Gelgi-Bu (Mugyalyana), and the elephant Kingau (Ananda). “The painting teaches most of the Bhutanese values of etiquette like respect for elders, cooperation, and generosity. You need not become a monk or a nun to practice religion, the four animals can be an example,” said Dasho Lam Sanga.

In modern Bhutan, the concept of the Puen Zhi can also be interpreted as the basis of His Majesty’s concept of Gross National Happiness, according to the scholar. “To achieve Gross National Happiness we need harmony and unity among the people. The four animals can be compared to the four pillars of GNH,” he said.

The principal of Institute of Language and Cultural Studies, Lopon Lungten Gaytso, says the painting of the Puen Zhi, like many other Buddhist paintings, depicts

Buddhist morals. “It depicts harmony, unity, and integrity despite their sizes and strength,” he says. It can be interpreted as the need of unity in the country despite having different races. People paint the four friends at home with a belief that there will be no separation, discord, and partition within the family.

Although the origin of the painting is difficult to trace scholars like Lam Sanga trace the origin to the forests in present day Varanasi in India. “It is a Buddhist concept because no Hindu epics say anything about it although the story took place in India,” he says.

The story of the four friends was an account Lord Buddha narrated to his disciples. The story goes thus: Once in a forest in Varanasi, four animals, an elephant, a rabbit, a monkey, and a bird (partridge) disputed about the ownership of a tree where all of them happened to come to feed on. The elephant claimed it was his because he saw it first.

The monkey said that it was his because he had been feeding on the fruits of the tree. The rabbit claimed that he had been feeding on the leaves of the tree when it was a small sapling. The partridge who had been watching the argument said that the tree belonged to it because the tree wouldn't have grown if it had not spit out the seed from fruit it had eaten.

The elephant, monkey, and rabbit, all then bowed to the partridge and regarded it as their bigger brother. The four animals became friends and decided to share the tree together in peaceful harmony enjoying the beauty of the tree's fragrance, the nourishment of the tree's fruits, and the bounty of the tree's shade.

Other animals in the forest often saw them together with the partridge on top of the rabbit who was held up by the monkey who rode on top of the elephant. Henceforth, they were called “the four harmonious brothers”. The four animals were looked upon as an example and peace regained in the forest.

According to another account, in one of the Buddha's previous lifetimes, in the forest of Kashika, there lived four noble beings - a bird, a monkey, a rabbit, and an elephant. The four, who drank at the same spring, soon became friends. One day they decided that it would be proper to show the greatest respect for the eldest among them. To

determine their respective ages, each one recalled the height of a nearby banyan tree when he had first seen it.

The four then showed each other respect accordingly. The elephant placed the bird on the crown of his head, the rabbit on his neck, and the monkey on his back. Then the bird said, “Now we must keep the five basic disciplines throughout our lives?”

This they did, and to ensure that all other beings did the same, the bird initiated all those with wings, the elephant initiated all those with fangs, the rabbit initiated all those with paws, and the monkey initiated all those with fur. Thus, these animals are depicted in Buddhist art as a portrait of harmony.

There are about five different version of the story, but according to Dasho Lam Sanga, they all had the same moral- respect to elders, love and affection to live harmoniously. “None of the animals were primarily concerned with themselves,” he said. Each of the animals was concerned with trying to help the others rather than being dominated by selfish concern.

According to a former Dzongkha lopon, wherever a picture of the four brothers is displayed, the ten virtues will increase and the minds of all will become harmonious. “The painting is an example of cooperation, unity and harmony, as such it is painted in places like lhakhangs where people gathered,” Thinley Wangchuk said.

While the story of the painting originated from the forests in India, nobody knows who painted the first Puen Zhi or where it was done.

Internet sources say that Tibetan families used the picture of the painting as letters of advice to families who were going through difficult times. “The four friends are often used as an example of how the family needs to stay together and help each other,” an Internet source, Vinayavastu (foundation of Discipline) says.

Bhutan’s renowned painter, 73-year old Lhadip Ugen Lhundup says that the paintings could have originated in Tibet and came to Bhutan when Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal brought along Lhadips with him in 1616. Lhadip Ugen Lhundup who started painting since 1950 says the paintings of the Puen Zhi was there on frescos of dzongs and monasteries. “It could have done during the era of Gyelse Tenzin Rabgye who

renovated and reconstructed many dzongs and lhakhangs in Bhutan,” he said. The theme of the paintings could have originated from the Kanjur and the Tenjur.

Unlike Western art, Bhutanese arts, especially paintings are difficult to trace since paintings were considered an act of devotion, according to the Lhadip. The co-founder and tutor of Bhutan’s only art studio, Volunteer Artist Studio of Thimphu (VAST) Kama Wangdi agrees.

According to Kama Wangdi, a traditional Bhutanese artist never signed his finished work because it was not serving the artistic value. “Traditional artists were viewed as religious icons. Their perspective was not important as long it served the religious purposes,” he says.

One reason why painters never signed their work could be because most painters were commissioned to work, Kama Wangdi adds. When a painting or a Thangka is commissioned, an artist considers it as a gewa (doing virtuous deed). Signing it would distort the importance of the work. The value of artist loses after he completes his work. Once the painting or the Thangka is consecrated, it loses the art value.

This is why Farmer Rinchen only hangs her Thangka during her annual rituals and painted the Puen Zhi on the wall of her altar room. “If you pray to this painting, it will pacify conflicts and bring harmony in the family,” she says.

Appendix B: *Shedtho* guide

1. General ethics

- Always invite participants for *shedtho* and not for interview as the term interview scares people away. Invitation can be extended by telephone, letter, email or in person as appropriate.
- Prepare the key themes to guide the *shedtho* session which is generally semi or unstructured.
- Number of in a *shedtho* group should be maximum of five and a minimum of two.
- Put people who know one another in the same group.
- Always wear gho and kira when on survey and visiting places.
- Talk off you cap/hat when you meet people, particularly elders as a mark of respect.
- Greet *kuzu zangpo*.
- Offer *Doma pani* .
- Allow elders to occupy the best place or the upper end of the circle or line.
- Always talk politely and maintain discipline.
- Inform the participants that there is no right and wrong answers
- Keep audio-recorder in an appropriate distance and never take it in front of the person who is talking.
- Thank the respondents at the end.

2. Points to remember during *shedtho* session

- *Relationship building stage*: Never start straight away. Spend enough time inquiring on whereabouts of the participants or anything that participants can easily participate like introducing themselves. This stage is very important as *shedtho* ambiance is created and relationship with the participants is built. It also helps participants to know and understand one another leading to relationship building among them also. This is a very effective prelude to a *shedtho* session.
- *Gradual and smooth shift to the topic*: Once you know that participants are comfortable enough gradually shift to the topic. Begin with the purpose of the

study followed by explanation of the consent form and signing it. After explaining the consent form, if some participants are not willing to participate let them leave. Never force or oblige to participate as their presence will disrupt the *shedtho* ambiance.

- *Shedtho with a purpose is interactive and inclusive where everyone participates:* *Shedtho* by nature is informal where people interact without having to be asked. It can sometimes be chaotic so the researcher should cautiously intervene at appropriate moments without actually offending anyone. There can also be occasions where some people might not participate much. So, the researcher should again try to include and engage this kind of participants tactfully.
- *Relaxed ambience but remember that there is a purpose:* Always remember that *shedtho* appears relaxed there is a purpose and the discussion should be woven to get the research information.
- *Drawing shedtho to a close:* Take note of time and remind people that you are taking so much of their time when people tend to side track a lot. This will ensure that people will try to stick to their point. Look for an appropriate moment and draw the *shedtho* to a close. This moment could be when you know that no new ideas are emerging. Otherwise, you will be transcribing unnecessary information.