

## Training on Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage: 1-5 February 2011, Japan

### A brief introduction on Bhutan

Bhutan is a small Kingdom located in the eastern Himalayan region between India in the south and China in the north. Bhutanese terminology for Culture is *lam-Sroel*, a path paved by our illustrious forefathers, religious and political leaders. It is a small country rich in its varied culture, traditions, beliefs and life styles,

Bhutanese culture is regarded as one of the most ancient culture which is based on Buddhism. Bhutan was isolated from the rest of the world for many centuries, which inevitably led to the development of her own culture, which can be considered as living culture now. The main strength of Bhutan lies primarily in her rich culture heritage, the socio-economic characteristics are based on culture heritage which promote nation discipline. The customs, religious practice, dance and habits of dress and food are something unique.

The promotion of Culture is one of the four pillars of the Bhutan's unique development philosophy of 'Gross National Happiness'. The Royal Government of Bhutan emphasizes the need to conserve and preserve the culture heritage for the benefit of younger generations as national immortal treasure.

The government has created cultural section in every district administration and appointed a cultural officer each particularly to preserve and promote the tangible and intangible culture heritage in the 20 districts in 2005.

### Types of Culture in the Country:

In a broad sense, culture can be categorized into two groups. i.e **Tangible and Intangible** which are closely related to each other. Generally, tangible culture covers all property and structure which can be physically seen and touched and intangible culture includes those aspects which are formless and not perceptible.

### Some of the Intangible Culture in Bhutan are:



1. Dance (folk and mask dance)
2. Music (folk and mask dance)
3. Drama and Play.
4. Sports (Traditional and modern)
5. Etiquette.
6. Belief and faith.
7. Songs (classical and modern)
8. Ballads and elocution.
9. Language and linguistic.
10. Literature (written and oral version.
11. Legends.

12. Stories (fiction and non-fiction)
13. Proverbs and sayings.
14. Habits and custom.
15. Ceremonies (Death, Promotions, Inauguration, etc.)
16. National and Local annual Festivals.
17. Celebrations (Birth day, new year, anniversary etc.)
18. Medication and treatment.
19. Worship, ritual and religious practices.
20. Astrology and etc.

### **Introduction of the target ICH – Sustenance of Folk songs and dances:**

Nestled in the southern foothills of the eastern Himalayas, Bhutan is the last Mahayana Buddhist kingdom. Buddhism has had a tremendous impact on the rich culture and traditions and way of life of the Bhutanese people. Among the most vivid manifestations of Bhutan's unique culture are the *Chham* (mask dances) performed at local temples and monasteries during *Tshechu* (annual festival), and *Zhabdro* (folk song and dance), which are popular throughout the country. While both monks and laypersons perform mask dances, monks participate only during religious festivities. Traditional dance forms play an important role in the religious and social life of the people and reflect the deep devotion, compassion, tolerance, and harmonious living.

Bhutanese folk song and dance pre-dates mask dances, and can be classified into two categories: *Zhungdra* (classical form), and *Boedra* (court form). However, most of the popular folk songs and dances can be attributed to the period of renaissance in the arts that occurred during the reign of Zhabdrun Ngawang Namgyal (1594-1652), who unified Bhutan into a single political entity in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

The folk songs are natural and intuitive expressions of social mores and beliefs. In addition to the universal themes of love, joy and sorrow, folk songs reflect the interdependence and harmonious coexistence of man, all sentient beings and nature, values that are deeply ingrained in the Bhutanese psyche. Musical instruments like the *dranyen* (lute), *pi-wang* (fiddle), *lim* (flute) and *yangchin* (dulcimer) accompany the songs and dances during formal occasions and gatherings.

Folk songs and dance forms a crucial part of the Intangible cultural heritage of Bhutan. Sustaining and keeping its continuity to pass it on to our younger generations has been a top priority of the Royal government. All efforts are made to promote and preserve these dances by the government and the community for sustenance. With modernization and globalization it is very difficult to keep pace with it and keeping these dances vibrant is a challenge for everyone.

The Royal Academy of Performing Arts is the institution responsible for preservation and promotion of all forms of performing arts in Bhutan thereby making it the custodian of the country's rich intangible cultural heritage.

The Royal Academy of Performing Arts (RAPA) is making its first effort to document and perform life dances of different regions of the country. In Bhutan there are three types of songs namely *Zhungdra* (traditional songs and dances performed in slow motion with very long tune), *Boedra* (traditional songs with short tunes) and *Rigsar* (newly composed songs of present era) and special type of dance composed by Zhabdrung known as *Zhay* (special unique songs from some region of the country related to spiritualism).

### **Objectives of the project:**

The objective of the project would be to ensure that traditional folk songs and dances are kept vibrant and sustained.

### **Methods of project implementation:**

The following methods will be used for the project.

- Involvement of the local community
- Initiation by the National government
- Collaboration with agencies both national and international
- To secure funding from international agencies.

**Outcomes of the project:**

The project is expected to increase the continuity and awareness of the prevailing folk songs and dances of the country. The project will take into account the promotion and preservation of these folk dances through research, support and also through learning and inculcate these values in the minds of the younger generations. The Bhutanese folk songs and dances will be kept vibrant and ensures its continuity for all times to come.

**Playing traditional musical instrument and village woman performing folk dance**

RAPA Artists performing folk dances during Thimphu Tshechu (annual festival)

**Conclusion:**

The Constitution of Bhutan states that “The state shall endeavor to preserve, protect and promote the cultural heritage of the country, including monuments, places and objects of artistic or historic interest, *Dzongs* (fortresses), *Lhakhangs* (temples), *Goendeys* (, Ten-sum, Nyes (sacred places), language, literature, music, visual arts and religion to enrich society and the cultural life of the citizens.”

The Bhutanese culture including music is being threatened owing to accelerating infiltration of other cultures. To combat this trend, the Royal Government has been making every effort to reorganize the existing activities at the academy to enable its efforts to preserve and promote the performing arts traditions. Bhutan faces many challenges in preserving her unique culture due to global trade relations, modern education, economic development and other influences from outside countries. To address this issue, all the Ministries, Organizations, Co-operations, Agencies and every individual citizen are taking every necessary responsibility to safeguard our rich culture heritage to pass it to the future citizens of Bhutan.

This project is expected to promote, preserve and raise awareness on the importance of traditional folk songs and dances to the younger generations.

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