

BHUTAN ECHOES

DRUKYUL'S LITERATURE FESTIVAL



POWERED BY



FESTIVAL REPORT

AUGUST 4TH - 6TH 2023



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FESTIVAL COMMITTEE

Royal Patron



Her Majesty the Queen Mother
Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck

Board of Directors



Tshering Tashi



Kalden Dorji



Sonam Wangmo
Dukpa-Jhalani

Producer



Kitso Pelmo Wangdi

WORDS FROM THE PRODUCER

Drukylul's Literature Festival, a name bestowed upon us by His Majesty the Fifth Druk Gyalpo Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck, carries with it a profound sense of hope, positivity, and boundless potential for the future of Bhutan.

In the wake of the challenges posed by the pandemic, we navigated through a virtual Bhutan Echoes during our 11th Edition last year. While this experience imparted invaluable lessons and innovative ways to overcome travel restrictions, we've come to realize that virtual gatherings can never replace the magic of in-person interactions. The past three years have deepened our appreciation for the value of coming together, celebrating, and rejoicing in the extraordinary power of literature, art, and culture.

Drukylul's Literature Festival is a testament to the strong bonds and friendship shared between global communities and Bhutan, bringing together brilliant minds and beloved authors from Bhutan and around the world.

This year's festival held special significance as it marked our reunion after nearly four challenging years. DLAF2023 has been a story, not just of literature, but of the collective effort of everyone who came together to work towards a shared passion for the arts and the written word. It has been an extraordinary tale of collaboration, dedication, and the power of unity.

We humbly offer our sincere gratitude to Her Majesty the Queen Mother, Gyalyum Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck for graciously guiding and inspiring us under your vision.

The India-Bhutan Foundation's trust and support have been instrumental in making DLF2023 possible. We are grateful to His Excellency Sudhakar Dalela, Ambassador of India to Bhutan, and His Excellency General V Namgyel, Bhutan's ambassador to India, and the India Bhutan Foundation's esteemed board members for believing in a new decade for Bhutan Echoes.

On behalf of the Bhutan Echoes, we extend our deepest thanks to our incredibly generous funders and partners: Office of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, UNDP Bhutan, DoMCIIP, International Embassies, Chaudhary Group, and others. Their support allowed us to continue our work, ensuring that Bhutan Echoes remained vibrant throughout the year, leading to this year's festival and beyond.

With gratitude,



Kitso Pelmo Wangdi

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Bhutan Echoes 12th edition of Drukyl's Literature Festival 2023, powered by India Bhutan Foundation marked a momentous occasion with its first in-person launch after four long years. The festival convened a diverse ensemble of acclaimed literary figures from Bhutan, India, and beyond, sparking conversations on a myriad of cultural and contemporary topics.

Our Royal Patron, Her Majesty the Royal Queen Mother Gyalyum Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck inaugurated the festival. Accompanied by the esteemed presence of Her Royal Highness Ashi Sonam Dechen Wangchuck, Excellencies and Dignitaries including Bhutan's Prime Minister, Lyonchhen (Dr) Lotay Tshering, India's Ambassador to Bhutan Sudhakar Dalela, Bhutan's Ambassador to India Major General Vetop Namgyel, IBF Board Members and UNDP Representatives, the festival's opening was truly an event to remember.

The festival served as a platform for engaging discussions on a spectrum of topical issues, ranging from the power of language, fashion, and film, redefining travel, the importance of human and community connections post-pandemic to environmental concerns, digital technology, and holistic well-being among others. The festival brought together authors, artists, and literary figures across generations to explore the evolution of oral storytelling and the transformative trajectory of literature, reading, and writing in Bhutan.

This year's festival luminaries included our Royal Patron, Her Majesty The Queen Mother, author Kunzang Choden, Bhutan's favorite children's author; French artist Benjamin Flouw known for his warmly illustrated children's books on nature; the man behind our favorite instant noodle brand Wai-Wai, Binod Chaudhary, the author of Making it Big; and Indian author Vikas Swarup, whose debut novel, Q&A, was adapted into the Oscar award-winning movie Slumdog Millionaire, Geetanjali Shree, winner of International Booker Prize 2022, and others.

The festival theme "Reconnecting and Reviving," held immense relevance in the world we live in today, shaped by post-pandemic and the constraints of the virtual realm. The theme urged participants not only to foster real human connections and rediscover each other but also to reignite a deep connection with storytelling, literature, culture, and the arts.

This year's edition of Bhutan Echoes pays a heartfelt tribute to the exceptional local talents and acknowledges their invaluable contributions to Bhutan's rich literary landscape. Her Majesty the Royal Queen Mother expressed her profound belief in the festival's significance as a unifying platform for everyone to come together in love and appreciation of literature.

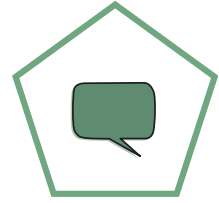
FESTIVAL IN NUMBERS



27
Sessions



300+
**Footfall per
day**



60
Speakers



10
Workshops

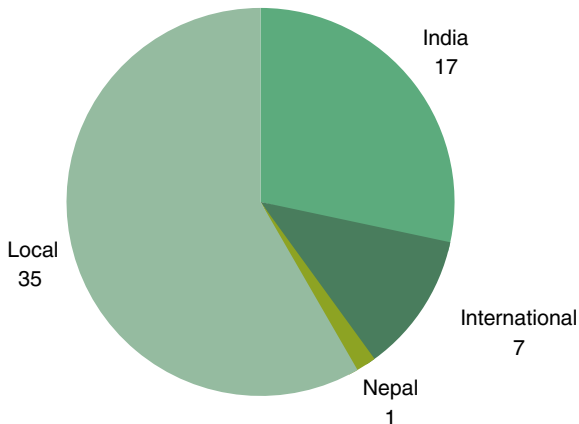


41
**Sponsors &
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13K
Peak live views

Our featured speakers



About 1050 followers gained on Instagram and 1500 on Facebook during the pre and post-festival period

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

- **Diverse Participation:** The festival saw a diverse audience, including local and international attendees, authors, scholars, and artists.
- **Engaging Sessions:** A wide range of sessions, including author talks, panel discussions, workshops, and performances, kept the audience engaged and enriched.
- **Topics:** Bhutanese culture, technology, environmental concerns, women writers, art, textiles, film, the importance of human and community connections, the power of language, and redefining travel.
- **Book Debuts:** 1) 'Living?' By Sree Gaur - a poetry book on mental health. 2) 'Lhari' by Karma Tshering Wangchuk from Bhutan Street Fashion published a documentary fashion story with all his photographs and illustrations.
- **Recognition:** Honored four Bhutanese Literary Debutants who published their books during the pandemic.



THE PROGRAM IN DETAIL

August 4th Day 1

Opening Address by Her Majesty Gyalyum Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck

In the Opening Address at Bhutan Echoes 2023, Her Majesty Gyalyum Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck illuminated the festival's profound significance in celebrating the very essence of Bhutanese society through the arts and literature. With eloquence, she highlighted how these creative expressions serve as bridges, fostering understanding, embracing diverse perspectives, and nurturing emotional intelligence to weave a tapestry of harmony within our society.



Her Majesty encouraged Bhutanese youth to explore creativity in various forms, recognizing the importance of a balanced life that combines arts and science. She expressed her determination to see the festival thrive and evolve each year, inspired by the bonds and memories it creates. Her Majesty noted the transformation of Bhutan's literary landscape, attributing it to both established authors and aspiring talents. She urged young minds to be mindful of internet addiction and strive for personal growth while aligning their actions with their dreams. Her Majesty concluded by expressing her wish for DLF to be a resounding success, uniting all in the pursuit of creativity and wisdom, celebrating the boundless human imagination and the beauty it brings into our lives.

Dochula A Spiritual Abode in Bhutan

Her Majesty The Queen Mother of Bhutan, Gyalyum Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck, engaged in a compelling dialogue with Dasho Paljor Jigme Dorji centered around Her Majesty's recently published book, 'Dochula: A Spiritual Abode in Bhutan'.

The conversation provided a poignant exploration into Bhutan's historical tapestry, spotlighting the valor and contributions of the Fourth Druk Gyalpo and the armed forces during the pivotal 2002 endeavor, a testament to their commitment to preserving Bhutan's sovereignty.

Beyond the historical context, the discourses reverberated with themes of love, patriotism, and resilience, highlighting Her Majesty The Queen Mother's deep affection for both her monarch and her nation.



The symbolic importance of Dochula in Bhutan's moments of triumph was revealed, elaborating on the establishment of the temple of victory and its historical festival. The discourse and the book serve as a heartfelt tribute to the Great Fourth's selfless dedication and love for his country and people, illuminating his persona as a king like no other.

Living? A Dive into Mental Health Poetry



Sree Gaur's book "Living" was launched by Queen Mother Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck during the DLF 2023. During the launch, Gaur shared about the book delving into intricate aspects of mental health, anxiety, and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). She highlighted the severity of mental health issues, emphasizing the need for dialogue and support. Citing alarming statistics and sharing personal anecdotes of battling PTSD, Gaur took the audience through her journey as a survivor of sexual assaults. She credited therapy, supportive circles, and the therapeutic power of writing for her progress.

Gaur advocated for normalizing mental health discussions, dismantling stigma, and promoting resilience and self-discovery. She conveyed her progression from a victim to a survivor by reading three poignant excerpts from her book which begin with the description of her PTSD episodes, ending with the criticality of seeking help including the concept of a 'safety person' and rising from rock bottom symbolizing her ascent from adversity and her path to healing.

Searching the Himalayan Masters

In a dialogue moderated by Mita Kapur, Namita Gokhale, and Tshering Tashi discussed the interplay of faith and skepticism within the realm of Himalayan mysticism, centered on Gokhale's book 'Mystics and Sceptics: In Search of Himalayan Masters.' Gokhale expressed her belief in the mystical while acknowledging her inherent skepticism. Tshering shared a personal encounter with a mountain mystic and a transrunner that challenged his skepticism and taught him the power of simplicity. They explored the unique spiritual essence of the Himalayas, shaped by the strength of the mountains and their inhabitants. The dialogue also touched upon transformative encounters with gurus and extraordinary individuals like transrunners, highlighting the enduring allure of Himalayan mysticism and its cultural significance.



Bhutanese Folktales and Legends for Children

In a dialogue facilitated by Sonam Wangmo Dukpa, Kunzang Choden delved into the world of Bhutanese folktales, emphasizing their significance for all age groups. She described the intricate crafting and oral tradition of these tales, revealing their vital role in her own childhood as a form of imaginative art. Kunzang stressed the communal nature of Bhutanese storytelling, a tradition free from ownership that encouraged oral sharing and adaptation. She discussed the challenge of preserving these tales and proposed documenting and modernizing them. Additionally, she highlighted the therapeutic value of storytelling, especially in times of illness, and fostering hope. Kunzang's personal experiences underscored the importance of preserving cultural heritage in an age of cultural diversity.



Leadership Lessons: Inspiring a New Generation

Sangay Tshering moderated a dialogue with Binod Kumar Chaudhary, exploring leadership lessons from his book 'Making it Big.' Binod emphasized that 'making it big' transcends financial success, using 'Wai Wai Noodles' as an illustration. He underlined that today's youth have boundless opportunities due to technology. Binod applauded Bhutan's leadership for their endeavors to create opportunities for young people, stressing the importance of building success stories that believe in Bhutan to inspire hope. Binod's shift from businessman to philanthropist to politician stemmed from his aspiration to cultivate prosperity and his belief that politics holds the potential for meaningful change. He shared personal struggles and unwavering self-confidence as pivotal to his success, concluding that 'Wai Wai' is filled with the secret ingredient of love.



Embracing Your Mother Tongue



Siok Sian Pek Dorji moderates a conversation with Geetanjali Shree, centered around her book 'Tomb of Sand,' composed in Hindi. Geetanjali reflects on her childhood, which exposed her to both English and her mother tongue, fostering a profound connection with Hindi during her travels across North India.

When asked why she chose Hindi for her book, she emphasizes that the language chose her, resonating with her at a deep level. Geetanjali stresses that like other writers, she primarily writes for her own inner exploration, with the desire to share, emerging later. The discussion touches on the impact of mother tongue and English on culture and thinking, advocating for embracing both languages while preserving heritage and culture in mother tongues, and emphasizing the value of linguistic pluralism.

From the Page to Screen: The Journey of Slumdog Millionaire

Chador Wangmo and Vikas Swarup engaged in a two-part dialogue offering insights into the writing process while representing nations through their protagonists. Chador's early connection to Swarup's 'Q and A' set the stage for their engaging conversation. They emphasized the writer's insatiable thirst for knowledge as they delved into two segments. 1 - "Knowing Vikas Swarup" unveiled the background of the Oscar-winning author, shaped by years of reading and diverse character perspectives. 2 - "Knowing the Book" unraveled how 'Q and A' gained prominence for its inclusivity, inspiring readers worldwide. Its transformation into 'Slumdog Millionaire' captivated audiences. Vikas Swarup shared wisdom with aspiring artists, highlighting the importance of Curiosity, Confidence, and Computers (the 3 C's). The session culminated with a tribute to dreams: "Don't stop dreaming; fairy tales do come true."



Visual Storytelling: The Power of Images on Film

In this dialogue, facilitated by Lhamo Thaye, John Wehrheim, Nyema Zam, and Arun Bhattarai explored the synergy of visual arts and photography in filmmaking. Their diverse experiences converged as they reflected on the significance of visual media in storytelling. John's Hawaiian character portraits, Nyema's insight into Bhutanese visual preferences, and Arun's storytelling through film highlighted the pivotal role of visuals in conveying ideas.



The discussion delved into how visual images and memories wield influence, enhancing narrative depth. It highlighted the fusion of tangibility and imagination through visual media. The session also examined the ubiquity of digital platforms and their implications. It concluded with an illuminating Q&A that shed light on the camera's role in capturing profound moments beyond artists' initial visions.

Bhutan Climate Stories

Thinley Choden, Khurshid Alam, and Karma in conversation with Namgay Choden . The speakers shared their perspectives on what Bhutan Climate Stories meant to them. They discussed how Bhutan, despite its environmental stewardship and contributions to mountain ecosystems, is still impacted by climate change. They highlighted the need to move beyond a singular narrative and involve individuals in environmental leadership at a human level. The panel explored strategies for meaningfully engaging young people in the climate conversation, emphasizing the emergence of conscious consumerism. They also discussed Bhutan's potential to harness opportunities by promoting diverse narratives, leveraging grassroots and local initiatives, and encouraging innovative social entrepreneurship, thus shifting the focus from a solely negative lens on climate change to one that recognizes opportunities.



Exploring Identity, Breaking Narrative Conventions



Dr. Kuenga Wangmo moderated a captivating conversation with Sheela Tomy, an author from Wayanad, about her book 'Valli' and her unique journey as a writer. 'Valli' intricately delves into the history and challenges of Wayanad, a lush region grappling with environmental consequences, through its compelling characters. The dialogue provided insight into Sheela's transformation from an electrical engineering student to a writer.

They explored how 'Valli' could be interpreted as a socio-political commentary, an environmental narrative, or a parable depicting human-nature relationships. Sheela expressed her hope that readers would discover their own connection to the story and underscored the significance of literature in addressing societal issues and promoting cultural awareness.

Publishing in Bhutan, Addressing the Need for Professional Publishing Houses

In a four-way discussion, Kunzang Choden, Meru Gokhale, Yeshey Choden, and Passang Tshering deliberated on the necessity of professional publishing houses in Bhutan. They discussed the challenges and opportunities associated with publishing in Bhutan, considering whether to follow traditional publishing routes or explore international audiences and innovative local approaches. Meru provided insights into the essential aspects of publishing, including the editorial and logistical processes. Yeshey shared her experience with self-publishing in Bhutan, highlighting its simplicity and accessibility. Passang discussed past publishing challenges and introduced the concept of crowd publishing as a potential solution. They also touched on the financial aspirations of Bhutanese authors and the reality of royalties. Meru encouraged aspiring authors to focus on the art and passion of writing. The dialogue concluded with a discussion on the crucial role editors play in enhancing the quality of published works.



Saang: Ura's Festival of Women

The Loden Foundation showcased "The Saang," one of their ten cultural documentaries. The foundation's sincere hope is that the centuries-old Saang ceremony, carried out by the women of Ura, will endure for generations, effectively safeguarding their invaluable cultural legacy.

The Saang ceremony remains a cultural tradition unique to Ura and the adjacent Shingkar village. Both are performed almost entirely by local women and most likely existed long before Buddhism had an influence. It is a remarkable festival where women take the lead in the entire ceremony. However, the festival is in decline as most young ladies go to school, college, or find jobs outside the village.

The Loden Foundation, a pioneering CSO in Bhutan, has been dedicated to fostering a happy and enlightened society through education, social entrepreneurship, and preserving culture and traditions since 1999. As part of their efforts, they have been working to preserve vanishing traditions in written, audio, and visual formats to benefit future generations.



"Stories we Share"
Spoken word by Ninzi, Choni and Pinda

India-Bhutan Friendship: Celebrating a Timeless Bond

Dr. India to Bhutan Ambassador Shri Sudhakar Dalela and Ambassador of Bhutan to India Major General Vetsop Namgyel in conversation with Namgyal Choden



Ambassador V Namgyel traced the history of Bhutan-India relations and their close ties, from the time of the Buddha to the formal establishment of diplomatic relations. The Ambassador emphasized India's role as a key partner in Bhutan's socio-economic development. Ambassador Dalela highlighted the significance of this special relationship and its direction, citing two important events: His Majesty The Third Druk Gyalpo's state visit to India in 1954 and Pandit Nehru's visit to Bhutan in 1958.

He attributed the enduring relationship to Bhutan's wise leadership, particularly His Majesty the Fourth King's guidance and vision for the future. They identified the environment and technology as focus areas for future partnerships.

A Melange of Artistic Expressions with Tara Sutaria

Tara Sutaria engaged in a conversation with actor Tandin Sonam, describing Bhutan Echoes as an "amalgamation of the arts, literature, like-minded individuals, and the young." Reflecting on her own upbringing and the importance of exploring various art forms, she encouraged parents to support their children's holistic development and artistic pursuits for personal growth and the development of essential life skills.



Stories of 50 Years in Bhutan

Mohammad Younus in conversation with Ugyen Choden



UNDP Regional Representative, Mohammad Younus, commenced the discussion by reminiscing about his initial encounter with His Majesty the Fourth King on television. He also shared his earliest impressions of Bhutan, where he first learned about the country's seamless transition to democracy. Bhutan's rich culture, history, and the wisdom of its leadership captivated him from the start.

Upon arriving in Bhutan, he drew a vivid parallel with his landing at Paro International Airport. The modern aircraft, the runway, the picturesque valleys and mountains, and the enchanting music that surrounded him symbolized the harmonious coexistence of nature, tradition, and sustainable development in this remarkable nation.

Lhari - Artist's Vision Series - Bhutan

Karma Tshering Wangchuk in conversation with Julia Booth

Karma Tshering Wangchuk, known for the popular Bhutan Street Fashion blog, discussed the gho and kira as symbols of Bhutanese identity and sustainability. He emphasized that individualism can coexist within the collective identity represented by these traditional garments. His book, *Lhari: Artist's Vision Series*, made its debut at the Festival.



The Scent of Everlasting Stories

Aanchal Malhotra conversed with Mita Kapur about her writing process and the genesis of her first non-fiction book, 'The Scent of Everlasting Stories.' She drew from letters written by South-Asian soldiers during the war, which became a major source material for her book. She highlighted the unexpected tenderness of war depicted in the letters, characterized by vibrant language and attempts to describe scents with words.



Artificial Intelligence in Bhutan: Balancing Traditional and Technological Advancement

Prof. Toby Walsh and Dr. Cigay Dorji in conversation with Zina Choden Yonten. The panel engaged in a comprehensive discussion regarding the potential use of AI to enhance the quality of life. They acknowledged Bhutan's leadership and its abundant data resources, including universal healthcare, education, and pristine forests, which could be strategically leveraged.



Dr. Cigay emphasized the importance of government-led investment in AI, infrastructure development, and digital literacy within Bhutan. Furthermore, the panel emphasized the need for regulations that promote the ethical and value-driven use of AI.

How to encourage reading habits and culture? The Case of France

Julia Trouilloud, drawing on the French experience, identified focus areas for building a reading culture, including promoting literary events and festivals, supporting libraries and bookstores, advocating for reading through all media, nurturing a love for reading from an early age, and promoting translations to expand horizons.



Revitalizing Cultural Landscapes and Landmarks



Lopen Karma Phuntsho in conversation with Pramod Kumar KG. Drawing inspiration from classical Buddhist literature, including the Sa-Chhe texts, and the Rabney rituals, their discussion delved into the vital undertaking of revitalizing landscapes. They emphasized the significance of aligning these efforts in harmony with material aesthetics, functionality, the natural environment, local traditions, culture, and spiritual essence.

The panel explored the delicate balance between secular functionality, economic utility, and cultural sensitivity in conservation, emphasizing the role of intangible cultural heritage in revitalizing tangible cultural landscapes and landmarks.

Reimagining Travel: Technology and Trends Shaping the Future of Tourism

Carissah Nimah, Tshering Denkar and Jigme Tshering in conversation with Thinley Choden. The panel discussed the intersection of travel in a post-pandemic world, amidst climate change, technological advancements, and economic challenges. The panel delved into emerging trends within the travel industry, including the utilization of machine learning, virtual reality, and augmented reality. They also highlighted the growing emphasis on sustainable tourism and the importance of both physical and spiritual well-being. The discussion contemplated how these trends could shape Bhutan's tourism sector, fostering locally rooted, high-value, and personalized experiences.



Writing Across Borders

Radha Chakravarty in conversation with Chimi Nangsel Dorji. Radha delved into her lifelong relationship with Tagore. She discussed how the relevance and interpretations of Tagore's works evolved for her and for different individuals over time, even though the original texts remained unchanged. Additionally, the session explored the challenges of translation, particularly in terms of considering the target audience, maintaining the originality of the source texts, and ensuring accessibility to a diverse, cross-cultural readership when translating into English.



Kali's Daughter

In this riveting panel discussion featuring Kimi Hnamte and Raghav Chandra, the atmosphere was set with Kimi's gripping reading of "Kali's Daughter." Raghav Chandra illuminated his transition from civil servant to writer, sharing how his 36 years of service provided rich material for his writing.



His protective connection with the protagonist shone through as he adeptly addressed India's persistent societal issues with a contemporary twist. Raghav's insights into character and theme excerpts offered a profound look into his work. He passionately condemned ongoing injustices against India's Dalit community, emphasizing the need for change. His admiration for ostracized community members in administrative and foreign service spheres underscored their remarkable resilience. With hopes of instigating positive change, Raghav concluded the session, leaving the audience inspired.

Mastering the art of gardening with Ekta Chaudhary



In a captivating panel with Tshering Dolma Sherpa, Ekta shared her transition from college to becoming a gardening enthusiast, a journey that resonated with most of the audience and inspired them. Despite facing academic struggles, she discovered her true passion for gardening, which stood as a testament to the importance of following one's heart.

Ekta's entrepreneurial advice, which involved balancing risk and dealing with regret, had a personal resonance for many. Her ability to blend research and entrepreneurship highlighted the value of adaptability. Drawing parallels between motherhood and entrepreneurship struck a chord, recognizing the multifaceted roles that people often take on. She emphasized and reassured novice gardeners that a green thumb would develop with time. The session concluded with her sharing practical gardening insights, ranging from plant selection to transforming outdoor spaces, providing valuable resources for nature enthusiasts.

August 6th Day 3

An informational Discourse for Budding Writers

Renowned author Aanchal Malhotra led an enlightening session, offering insights to aspiring young writers. She plays a pivotal role in South Asia Speaks, an organization formed in 2020, which extends a year-long, cost-free mentorship to emerging talents across South Asia. This program includes distinguished mentors from various literary fields, such as novelists, historians, poets, translators, and journalists. Notably, there's no age restriction, and all genres are embraced. Aanchal Malhotra expressed the need for Bhutanese submissions, urging students in attendance to seize the opportunity. Mark your calendars for the upcoming cycle in September 2023, destined for 2024.



Opening Remarks by Director General of The Department Of Tourism

Dorji Dhradhul, Director General of the Department of Tourism, led an inspiring session reflecting on the Festival's last two days. He also explored literature's multifaceted dimensions and its extraordinary potential in bridging cultures. Dorji Dhradhul connected the dots, stating, "Much like literature, tourism creates mutual appreciation among diverse people and nations." Highlighting Bhutan's evolving tourism landscape, he drew inspiration from the national brand 'Bhutan Believe'.



This emblem of transformation represents a designed future, not mere happenstance. Delving into the logo's significance, he unpacked the five core tenets of the 'Believe' tagline: in the future, ourselves, elevated values, our worth, and nature. Dorji Dhradhul encapsulated the essence: "Steeped in history, our gaze fixed on the future. This is our evolution." This message radiates through the 'Bhutan Believe' brand, resonating with the world.

Threads On Tradition: Unveiling the stories behind Bhutanese and Indian Textiles

In this captivating panel exchange, Dr. Vandana Bhandari engaged in a heartfelt conversation with Royal Textile Academy's Chief Curator Pema C. Wangchuk, deftly moderated by Mrs. Namrata Dalela. Dr. Bhandari illuminated the pivotal role mentors played in her personal journey to success. Her fascination with North West Indian textiles ignited from unraveling the stories behind women's garments tied to significant life moments. Reflecting on the struggles faced during earlier textile documentation due to technological limitations, she contrasted it with the seamless digital archiving of today. Pema Wangchuk shed light on Bhutan's historical textile preservation and challenges. The session's visual showcase brought to life diverse fabric patterns, vibrant colors, and intricate seals from Bhutan and India.



The discourse also touched on the resurgence of traditional attire with contemporary influences. Pema beautifully concluded the session by sharing the Royal Textile Academy's inspiring efforts to breathe life into fading artistic traditions through design competitions and transformative programs.

Fuelling Success With Unstoppable Motivation



Sonam Rinchen, the CEO and Co-founder of iBEST, opened with a profound quote: "An entrepreneur's journey is a tale of perseverance, creativity, and determination." He recounted iBEST's evolution, from its humble beginnings with just two employees to a thriving team of 100. Rinchen's own story began after his father's demise, raised by a single mother and lacking business privilege. The journey commenced with a consulting firm, ironically advising on financial matters despite their modest beginnings.

Through tough times and 18-hour workdays, they flourished into Bhutan's premier consultancy. Rinchen's talk reflected on challenges and strategies for boosting team spirits, and he proudly announced iBEST's upcoming milestone: Bhutan's first learning platform, three years in the making. He urged the audience to transcend their backgrounds and embrace entrepreneurial paths, inspiring youth to forge their own journeys.

From Concept to Creation



Renowned French author Benjamin Flou and famous Bhutanese artist Ugyen Dorji intertwined their artistic journeys in a captivating conversation. Benjamin shared how comic books ignited his artistry, underscoring the transformative potential of a single illustration. Ugyen extended this, revealing how nature's embrace inspired his art. The dialogue explored the amplifying power of social media and the significance of publishers in crafting stories. They pondered what drives an artist's creation, drawing parallels with a craftsman's dedication to their work. Both voices united in advocating fair value for an artist's energy. They mused on art's boundless essence and its ability to defy neat conclusions. The discourse culminated with a shared sentiment—an artist's lens captures art in all, while art becomes life's language.



Desperately Seeking Shah-Rukh

Shrayana Bhattacharya and Dolma Roder engaged the audience in a lively talk, beginning by gauging their Shahrukh Khan fandom, revealing a room full of enthusiasts. The duo delved into the non-fiction book, based on 15 years of research, shedding light on its origin from a mundane statistics session in 2008 that transformed into a life-altering research path. The book's narrative follows ten individuals, exploring their economic independence and their adoration for Shahrukh Khan.



With humor, Shrayana shared the unique reasons behind women's affection for Shahrukh, mainly revolving around his ability to maintain a perfect balance between masculine and feminine traits. She also highlighted the heartening impact on male readers striving to be better caregivers. Interestingly, Shahrukh Khan himself endorsed the book. The session hinted at a future work, "The Tyranny Of The Indian Uncle," leaving the audience intrigued. The discussion revolved around accessible statistics and the importance of appreciating valuable information.

Humans Of Thimphu by Dechen Wangdi

Dechen Wangdi's heartfelt session shed light on the captivating journey of "Humans of Thimphu." Three years ago, a group of six individuals united to create a space for photography, creative writing, and storytelling. Despite initial doubts about rivaling global counterparts, like Humans of New York, the platform swiftly garnered a devoted following. Bhutan's conservative landscape posed challenges, inhibiting open discourse on taboo subjects, particularly affecting women and LGBTQIA+ members. Guided by empathy and understanding, the team embraced anonymity to discuss sensitive matters like mental health, domestic violence, and more. Inspired by the film "Lunana," they ventured to make a difference, sparking "Stories From The Mountains" through a book donation initiative.



Dechen provided moving insights into the experiences and stories of their interviewees.

Poetry and the Power of Language



In a poetic exchange moderated by Sonam Pem Tshoki, Rolf Hermann eloquently connected the landscapes of Bhutan and his native southern Switzerland through the medium of poetry. He fondly recalled his grandmother's influence, sharing her poetic dreams of venturing beyond the boundaries of Switzerland. A treasured poem, a gift from his late grandmother, served as a conduit to carry her spirit on his poetic journey. Rolf's resonant recitations, initially in German and then in English, profoundly resonated with the audience.

He acknowledged Emily Dickinson as a significant influence and discussed how constructive criticism enriched his creative process. Nature's enchanting allure deeply captivated him, with a substantial portion of his work dedicated to celebrating its beauty. As a special treat, Rolf shared two more mountain-inspired poems, expertly capturing the essence of nature's grandeur.

Exploring Human Experience with Literature

In a lively moderated discussion led by Kinley Phyntso, acclaimed authors Erlend Loe and Christopher Kloeble delved into a thought-provoking conversation exploring the complexities of the human condition. They embarked on a quest to unravel the essence of this complex concept, drawing inspiration from their respective literary works. Christopher's "The Museum of the World" delved into the life of a 12-year-old Indian boy navigating the complexities of identity in the face of colonial influences, while Erlend's "Doppler" followed a protagonist who abandoned societal norms in favor of solitude in the forest. Despite their divergent narratives, both authors explored profound aspects of human experiences, including family dynamics, societal interactions, and the pursuit of dreams.



Throughout their discussion, the authors revealed their personal connections to their characters and emphasized the role of imagination and perception in understanding the human condition. They advocated for the liberating power of occasional rule-breaking as a means to truly experience life in its most authentic form.

Award Ceremony for “Our Children’s Stories” Video Storytelling Competition



As part of the closing at DrukYul’s Literature Festival 2023, His Serene Highness DASHO JIGJE SINGYE WANGCHUCK awarded the winners of the English and Dzongkha category of Bhutan Echoes “Our Children’s Stories” National Storytelling Competition. The endeavor was an esteemed initiative of His Serene Highness DASHO JIGJE SINGYE WANGCHUCK in collaboration with ELC High School and Bhutan Echoes.

The competition invited students across Bhutan, from grades 7 to 12 to share real stories in English or Dzongkha from their families and communities. The competition aims to inspire young minds to connect with their roots and nurture a vibrant literary culture in Bhutan. The competition not only celebrated our rich cultural heritage but also the immense storytelling potential of our young people. With an overwhelming 300 plus video submissions to Bhutan Echoes from students all over the country, a panel of distinguished judges from among Bhutan’s literary community selected eight winners.

We are thankful and grateful to all the students who participated, shared their captivating stories, and breathed life into the competition. All the story videos are uploaded and shared on our YouTube channel.



Congratulations to the following young luminaries:

- Dzongkha Category: Dorji Om, class 12, Karma Academy, Paro
- English Category: Yeshe Lhamo, class 8, Trashigang MSS, Trashigang
- Class 12 Category: Tshewang Namgay – Drametse HSS, Mongar
- Class 11 Category: Kinley Sonam Phunsum, Ugyen Academy, Punakha
- Class 10 Category: Pema Choden Tshering, Ugyen Academy, Punakha
- Class 9 Category: Yeshe Lhamo, Tashidingkha HSS, Punakha
- Class 8 Category: Maylam Wangdi, ELC HS, Thimphu
- Class 7 Category: Samden Jurmey Dema, Samtse LSS, Samtse
- Honorable Mention: Siddhant Chhetri, class 7, Norbugang HSS, Samtse

Honoring Bhutanese Literary Debutants

In celebration of DrukYul's Literature Festival 2023 making its grand return in-person after three long years, we proudly honored Bhutanese storytellers who debuted their books during the pandemic period. These talented authors were recognized by our Royal Patron, Her Majesty the Queen Mother, Gyalyum Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck, during the festival's closing ceremony.

Congratulations to the following authors for their contributions to Bhutan's literary landscape:

- 1) "WHISPERS UNHEARD" by Rakesh Bastola and Phurba Sonam Waiba
- 2) "The White Heart" by Tshering Lulu Dekey
- 3) "The Tourist Within" by Tshering Denkar_
- 4) "108 Book" by Yangday La and team



Workshops

August 4th

The Art of Story: Pushing Creative Boundaries in Journalism by Meru Gokhale

This engaging 60-minute workshop provided Bhutan's top newspaper and TV editors with interactive sessions focused on embracing creativity and innovation in the modern media landscape. The workshop delved into a comprehensive exploration of AI's advantages and disadvantages while also encouraging the generation of unconventional storytelling approaches.



Attendees were encouraged to think audaciously, challenging themselves to transcend traditional boundaries in their pursuit of compelling and impactful journalism. Upon completing the workshop, participants departed with concrete strategies and a renewed wellspring of inspiration to infuse a spirit of invention into their newsrooms. Through group collaboration and dynamic activities, this workshop provided a creative spark for leaders seeking to reimagine the future of journalism in Bhutan.

August 5th

Creative Writing by Christopher Kloebe

The "Creative Writing" workshop, led by author Christopher Kloebe, was an inspiring journey into the art of character creation and storytelling. In this engaging workshop, participants explored the vital role that characters play in driving narratives and learned how to intricately weave them into their stories.



The workshop ignited participants' imaginations and provided them with the tools and insights needed to embark on their writing journeys with confidence. By understanding the essence of characters and their significance in storytelling, attendees left the workshop better equipped to craft engaging and memorable narratives.

A Leap Into the Unfamiliar, poetry workshop by Rolf Hermann



In Rolf Hermann's poetry workshop, participants delved into the world of poetry, transcending language boundaries to ignite their creativity. This engaging and fun workshop encouraged them to navigate the unfamiliar, explore the nuances of form and expression, and playfully translate enigmatic poems. This process helped participants enrich their own writing and overcome the fear of the blank page.

Photography by John Francis Wehrheim

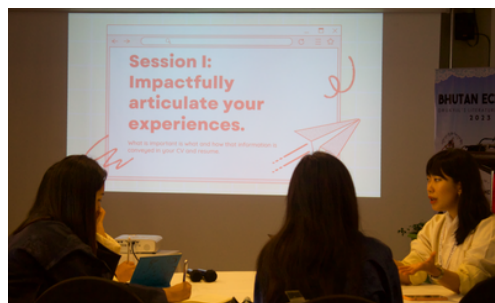


Award-winning American photographer, writer, and filmmaker, John Wehrheim, hosted a captivating photography workshop at the Nehru-Wangchuck Cultural Centre. Participants had the chance to learn from his distinguished career, which included capturing compelling portraiture and documenting unique subjects such as "Taylor Camp" in Hawai'i and the landscapes and portraits of Bhutan.

This transformative workshop refined attendees' technical skills, enhanced their artistic vision, and provided valuable critiques on their photographs.

CV Writing by Namgay Choden

Namgay Choden, founder of Wisely Bt provided an exclusive workshop designed to assist young Bhutanese individuals, aged 18 to 30 in advancing their careers. Many young participants had already accumulated a wealth of experiences, yet they often struggled with translating those experiences into an effective CV or resume. The workshop aimed to bridge this gap by helping attendees make sense of their educational, professional, and personal experiences. It provided valuable guidance on how to articulate these achievements effectively for maximum impact.



Throughout the session, participants learned strategies for curating CVs and resumes tailored to different job opportunities.

Children's Classical Indian Dance Workshop by Purnaa Arts



The workshop led by Madhura Phatak, founder of Purnaa Arts, introduced children to the art of storytelling through dance, focusing on basic movement patterns. It aimed to help them express themselves using gestures, facial expressions, and body movements as tools for non-verbal storytelling. Madhura Phatak's expert guidance enriched their understanding of Indian classical dance, expanding their creative horizons. Attendees gained valuable insights into the fusion of dance and narrative, empowering them to convey stories through the mesmerizing language of movement.

Discovering the World of Illustrations with Benjamin Flouw



Benjamin Flouw hosted an interactive discussion session aimed at introducing children to the captivating realm of illustration. Throughout this session, he passionately conveyed his love for plants, wildlife, and environmental conservation, providing intriguing glimpses into the intricacies of illustration and his distinctive creative approach.

Attendees had the inspiring opportunity to learn from a celebrated illustrator and acquire valuable insights into the fascinating world of art and illustration.

Sunset Gong Meditation through Sound Healing by Fran Bak



Attendees were treated to an enlightening session of Sunset Gong Meditation, led by Gong Practitioner Frank Bak. This session explored the ancient art of sonic Vibrational Medicine, showcasing the transformative power of the Gong in harmonizing the body, mind, and spirit. Under Frank Bak's expert guidance, participants discovered the Gong's ability to alleviate stress and cleanse negative energies. The workshop offered a distinctive opportunity to engage with this ancient healing practice, leaving participants enriched and connected to the therapeutic potential of sound vibrations.

The Art of Indian Embroidery by Dr.Vandana Bhandari

Dr. Vandana Bandari led a captivating workshop on the art of Indian Embroidery, drawing an audience of 35 enthusiastic participants. This dynamic and engaging session immersed attendees in the intricate techniques and stitching methods that define Indian embroidery traditions. The workshop became even more enriching with the presence of Lopon Pema Dorji, an expert embroider, who not only showcased mesmerizing examples of Bhutanese embroidery but also generously shared insights into the unique stitching styles and techniques rooted in Bhutanese culture. It was an inspiring exploration of the world of embroidery and a celebration of cross-cultural artistic exchange.



A sneak peek into the world of Kathak: Dance Workshop by Purnaa Arts

The mesmerizing 90-minute journey into this enchanting Indian classical dance form was hosted by Madhura Phatak. Participants explored diverse movements, challenged established norms, and delved into Kathak's intricacies, including hand gestures and storytelling through facial expressions. Purnaa Arts guided attendees through this captivating experience, fostering self-discovery and leaving a lasting appreciation for Kathak.



Short Film Screening

The Short Film Screening was held the Nehru-Wangchuck Cultural Centre on August 7th, featured three compelling films followed by a Q&A session with the directors.



1. "*Sound of Chewing Leaves*" by Suraj Bhattarai: This film follows a filmmaker from the Himalayas navigating the bustling city of Brussels in search of silence. Along the way, he engaged in intimate conversations with the city's residents, providing a unique perspective on the city and its people. The film beautifully captured the essence of seeking familiarity in a foreign land and making unexpected connections.

2. "*Why is the Sky Dark at Night?*" by Kelzang Dorjee: The film revolves around Dema, a 17-year-old girl working in a butcher's shop in Thimphu. Through her interactions with customers and strangers passing by, Dema discovered the city she lived in. Amidst the backdrop of the shop's raw reality, the film explores the juxtaposition of life and the impending birth of Dema's child.

3. "*Mountain Man*" by Arun Bhattarai: This film followed eleven-year-old Yangchen's father, Bhutan's glacier specialist, as he measured melting ice thickness due to climate change. Local beliefs about disturbing the mythical snow lion added a unique cultural dimension to the story.

The film screening was successful, attracted attendance from the local community, and delivered a thought-provoking cinematic experience.



Mic Check: Unleash Your Words

As part of the 2023 Drukyl's Literature Festival events, in collaboration with Urban Dumra and Bhutan Echoes, an Open Mic Night took place on August 5th, Saturday. This event provided a platform for individuals passionate about the power of words to come together in a beautiful setting. It celebrated the diverse talents of our community, promoting creativity, self-expression, and a sense of connection through spoken word.

The evening began with pre-registered participants, and later, the floor was opened to the entire audience, encouraging impromptu performances. It was a delightful showcase of the talents of our community, featuring young and emerging singers, bands, and poets.



PERFORMANCES

A Tribute to Karma: The Black-Necked Crane of Phobjikha Valley

An experimental movement piece crafted by the visionary Ms. Charmi Chedda, film and theater director. This extraordinary performance, inspired by Bhutan's unwavering commitment to environmental preservation and the conservation of its iconic species, was graciously brought to life with the support of the Bhutan Trust Fund. The performance was part of the grand opening dinner of DLF 2023 at the Indian Embassy in Thimphu on August 3rd.

The performance unfolded the story of the Black-Necked Crane and the passionate conservation efforts in Gangtey through a captivating blend of music and dance. The inclusion of the cranes' migration to Bhutan added an element of intrigue and wonder to the narrative.

In essence, this performance served as an exceptional launch of the festival, weaving together Bhutan's rich cultural heritage, its profound environmental ethos, and the eloquent language of art.



What Could Have Been My Last Words



On the closing day, Sangay Lodgyal presented a powerful and emotionally charged journey through a five-year creative odyssey. From 2016 to 2021, Sangay had been crafting poems, essays, and stories that served as poignant reflections of their innermost emotions. In this captivating performance, Sangay skillfully curated a monologue by selecting a single line from each of the numerous pieces created during this period.

IN THE MEDIA

THE STORY KEEPERS OF BHUTAN

These writers, historians, designers and artists are gathering the tales of their people, textiles, artefacts and symbols to preserve the country's legacy

Access through song and art

THE ARTISTS

THE WRITERS

Bhutan Echoes: Drukyl's Literature Festival

Her Majesty The Queen Mother in conversation with Dasho Paljor Jigme Dorji

Travel + Leisure

In its 12th edition, the rebranded Bhutan Literature Festival celebrates stories, traditions, and the joy of storytelling

The Hindu

"TRENDS will come and go but I believe that our NATIONAL DRESS will stay for a very LONG TIME—we have subconsciously realised that this is our ARMOUR"

Karma Tshering Wangchuk

Harper's Bazaar

Bhutan's Funny Women and Brave Dreams

A literature festival in the mountains shows a Bhutan that straddles the ambition of its youth with the wisdom of centuries — with a little help from good and bad jokes.

The Wire

Thanking Her Majesty, The Queen Mother of Bhutan, Tara wrote, "There is nothing I treasure more than to share my love for music, theatre, film and dance"

Hindustan Times

ThePrint

Bhutan's Drukyl Literature Festival to return on ground after 3 years; Geetanjali Shree, Toby Walsh among speakers

New Delhi, Jun 7 (PTI) International Booker Prize winner Geetanjali Shree, AI scientist Toby Walsh, former diplomat Vikas Swarup and historian Ananchal Malhotra are among the noted names taking part in the 12th edition of Bhutan's Drukyl Literature Festival (DLF), starting August 4. Organised by Bhutan Echoes, the three-day fest is returning on ground after [...]

Indian Express

BHUTAN ECHOES

Themed "Reconnecting and Reviving", the annual literary festival has something for everyone as it covers issues ranging from redefining travel and rebuilding human connections post-pandemic to environmental concerns, the economy, and holistic well-being. (www.drukyl.org)

International Booker Prize winner Geetanjali Shree, AI scientist Toby Walsh, former diplomat Vikas Swarup and historian Ananchal Malhotra are among the noted names taking part in the 12th edition of Bhutan's Drukyl Literature Festival (DLF) starting August 4.

MOMENTS



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