

WHAT WE DO, WHY WE DO cont'd

Following the Buddhist theory of non-self, Bhutanese do not believe in an independent and singular personhood. A person's identity is composed of many constituents and parts, of which the name is an important one. Thus, Bhutanese normally receive names with positive and auspicious significance from lamas. However, there are many Bhutanese who grow up with names based on terms of endearment used by their parents or elder siblings when they were young. Such common names of endearment include Tstagay (Idiot), Tegpo (Stout), Phento (Comical), Lemo (Dummy), Pentang (Flat-faced), Nakchung (Small Dark One), etc.

Titles

There is a profuse use of titles in Bhutan. It is impolite and ill mannered to address or refer to anyone superior or older than oneself just by his or her name. Hence, one always addresses or refers to an older person by using prefixes such as terms of relation such as Ashang, Aku, Aue, etc. or honorary terms such as Dasho, Lopen or Aum. Although in its official use Dasho is an honour conferred by the monarch, many people use it to address people, especially men, of importance. Bhutanese also use Lopen for mostly men and Aum for women in the same way. The use of titles before someone's name indicates respect but does not preclude intimacy like in some cultures, although use of some titles suggests more intimacy than others.

All senior family members and relations are addressed by using kinship terms such as Apa, Ama, Agay, Angay, Acho, etc. It is generally possible to know the kinship relations in a family through such titles but occasionally one can find very misleading use of titles like Aku (paternal uncle) being applied to a father and Ama to a grandmother. Such deliberate misapplication of titles is often done to avert misfortunes and confuse malicious spirits. However, in some places, some titles are ambiguous. Ajo, for instance, can refer to both elder brother and father and Ashi, can refer to both one's elder sister and an important lady. Kinship titles are also loosely used for strangers. What to use for whom is mainly determined by the age of the person for whom the title is used. The Dzongkha term Aue, which refers to an older sibling, is a very convenient one to use for both men and women who are not much older than oneself. However, in some places, it is also used as term of endearment for children and younger siblings. Ama (mother), Aum (Mrs) and Angay (grandma) are often used to refer to a woman who is much older. The term Apa (father) and Agay (grandfather) are often used to address an older man.

Honorific Terms

Unlike in Tibet, there is no tradition of using the suffix *la* at the end of names to make it honorific. On the contrary, it is condescending in many parts of Bhutan to call someone with the *la* suffix, such as Dorji-la or Deki-la. The *la* suffix is generally used while disdainfully referring to a man of lesser rank or age and the *mo* suffix used in the same way for a woman. However, there is no pejorative connotation if the *la* or *mo* syllables form part of the name, as in the case of Zangla or Wangmo. The *la* and *mo* suffix are also used frequently when the person has only one name, i.e. Kezang la, Dechen mo, Sithar la, etc. Bhutanese use the *la* suffix as a marker of respect by attaching it to titles in vocative forms, i.e. Lopen-la or Dasho-la, and at the end of sentences to make the entire statement honorific.

Bhutanese are avid users of honorific terms but the use of honorifics for one's parents is rare and occurs mainly among Tibetanised circles. The most honoured are seldom referred to by their names. The founder of Bhutan is referred to by the title Zhabdrung, (At the feet), the King is called Zhab (Feet) and the Chief Abbot, Je (Chief), this last one being dangerously homonymic with the Dzongkha word for penis. And it is worth noting that mention of sexual organs and intercourse is indecent.

More can be said about names but what is there in a name. 'That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet.' A name, according to the Buddhist masters, is a label we give to the psychosomatic phantoms we are in our real nature.