



Onomastics Online

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Microsoft Teams

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Bhutanese Personal Names and Identity

Abstract: Bhutan, a small Himalayan kingdom between India and China, promotes Gross National Happiness (GNH). Bhutan has preserved its unique culture, strong Buddhist values, and lively social and cultural legacy despite its 400-year-old political structure. Bhutanese personal names are one of the most important ways people express themselves. Lamas and other religious figures often give Bhutanese names spiritual meaning. Buddhist philosophy, morality, and protection inspired these names. South and Southeast Asia often base names on family or ancestry, whereas Bhutan does not, ensuring equality. However, Bhutanese personal names rarely follow these patterns. Instead of ancestry, they value egalitarianism and community. Thus, in this lecture, I will briefly address Bhutanese names' cultural, social, and linguistic significance and uniqueness. I will also discuss how the names reflect Bhutanese culture, society, and religion. Finally, I will analyse how Westernised or hybrid naming patterns may affect Bhutanese culture expression and identity and belonging in modern Bhutan.

Keywords: Bhutan, Personal Names, Culture, Identity, GNH

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Biography: Sonam Tshering is an Associate Professor at Jigme Singye Wangchuck School of Law (JSW Law), where he also serves as Associate Dean for Research, Library Services, and Archives. He teaches contract, procedural, and media law and has written a weekly legal column for Bhutan's leading newspaper for seven years, promoting social justice and civil rights. Formerly a journalist, legal officer, prosecutor, and parliamentary secretary, he is a certified legal counsel and national arbitrator. Sonam has contributed to international treaty drafting and represented Bhutan at major global forums, including the Conferences of the Parties on Climate Change and Tobacco Control.

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Onomastics Online lecture series:

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