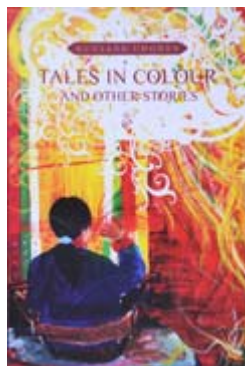


Celebrating the traditional Bhutanese woman

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Book Review 27 September, - 2009 - Taking inspiration from the lives of ordinary women in rural Bhutan and from her own experiences, Kunzang Choden's latest book, *Tales in Colour and Other Stories*, provides us stimulating tales about Bhutanese women, who, in the face of changing and often difficult circumstances, manage to negotiate or find a way through it and over it all.

The circumstances portrayed are both old and new, rooted in tradition and imported via modernisation. The protagonists are women, depicted as either wife or mother or daughter and come off as being strong willed and independent, evocative of the traditional Bhutanese women.

A chapter narrates the story of a woman, who is constantly betrayed and left alone with her sons by her promiscuous husband. Years later, unable to stand it any longer, she leaves a note written by her son and walks out taking her children with her.

Title: Tales in Colour and Other Stories, fiction, 145 pages

Author : Kunzang Choden

Publisher: Zubaan

Price: Nu 250

Another chapter tells about a young rural girl, who takes up the traits of a chameleon as she travels back and forth between her village and Thimphu. In the city, when she visits her brother, she transforms into a well-groomed young girl with a ring on her belly button. In the village she digs into the manure, her fingernails clogged with dirt and her gumboots squishing with water.

The setting is ordinary and the stories are ordinary but the complexity and poignancy of rural life emerges. There is no intensity or excitement that makes the reader want to flip through the pages in haste. It is mellow like the sun on a lazy afternoon.

The book is laced with nostalgia about rural Bhutan, most conspicuously with Bumthang, the home of the author, who is 57 today. The first chapter also shares the author's experience as a young girl sent to school in India in the 1960s. Her non-conformance to the outside world's convention of surname is portrayed as an assertion of an independent identity.

"Women's lives may have become easier in terms of less hard work and more leisure time, but their economic roles and self-esteem have perhaps diminished," says the author in the first chapter. "We must not let go of our hold on our traditional archetypes of strong and independent women."

The book will be available in the Bhutanese market soon.

By Kinley Wangmo

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