

**Diminishing Food Tradition in Bumthang:**

***Khule (Buckwheat pancake) and Puta (Buckwheat Noodles)***

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## **Glossary of Bhutanese terms**

<i>Bumtaps</i>	People of Bumthang
<i>Bumthang</i>	One of the Dzongkhags, located in central Bhutan
<i>Dasho</i>	Title given to senior officials with red scarf
<i>Dzongkha</i>	National Language of Bhutan
<i>Dzongkhag</i>	A district- Administrative unit
<i>Gewog</i>	A Block- consisting of several villagers
<i>Khule</i>	Buckwheat Pancake
<i>Putu</i>	Buckwheat Noodles

## 1. Abstract

*Bumthang is best known for preparing ‘**Khule** (buckwheat pancakes) and **Putu**’ (buckwheat pancakes) for decades. It was, once upon a time, considered very important staple diet of the Bumtaps (people of Bumthang). However, this primordial tradition of preparing Khule and Putu has been gradually disappearing over the years and was being substituted by other provisions. Nowadays, Bumtaps do not even deem Khule and Putu a part of their habitual meals; rather they consider it a delicacy of yore.*

*An attempt in this paper was made to explain the diminishing traditional food of the Bumtaps basically by listing the contemporary provisions that has replaced it. The explicit information furnished in this study involves thorough review of available written sources, scant though. Further, an attempt was also made to trace the originality and significance of the traditional meals and ascertain the reasons for its gradual decline. The research was based on Focused Group Discussion, interviews with the people of Bumthang, some Bhutanese scholars and personal observations. The samples were selected based on the density of the population, socio-economic development of the community and location of the community. A structured questionnaire prepared in consultation with the established researchers was used to collect the secondary sources of data. The data furnished was then analysed using the software **Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS)** and **Microsoft Excel**. The study concludes by highlighting and breaking through some of the hereto unexplored significance of the meals and making some recommendations to help revive the diminishing food tradition. It also establishes a roadmap for the future researchers for further in-depth study.*

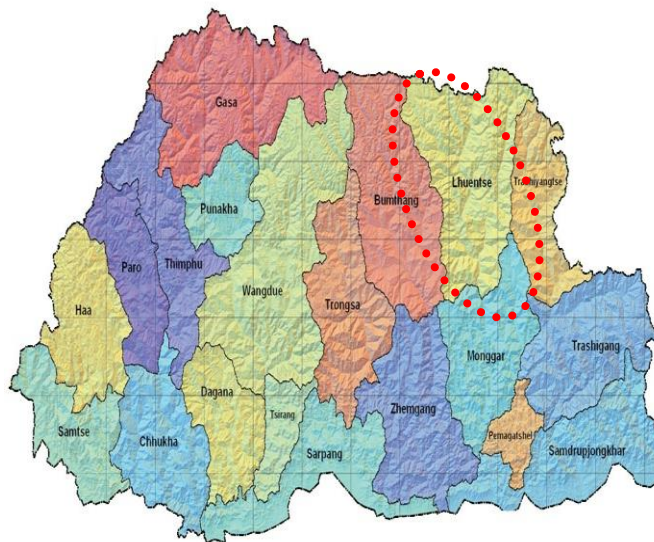
*The study indicates rapid decline of Khule and Putu tradition calling for urgent measures for its preservation. By and large, the force of modernisation has been significantly accounted for its gradual decline. Readily available other imported food sources have also resulted in the change in the lifestyle of the people of the community. Limited knowledge of people on the nutritional value of the buckwheat has resulted in negligence of it and choosing to go with other provisions.*



## 2. Introduction

Bhutan is a landlocked country sharing a common border with the largest communist country China to the North and largest democracy India to the South. Bhutan's total area is approximately 38,000 square kilometers (Rinzin, 2006). The maximum longitudinal distance of Bhutan is 300 kilometers and latitudinal distance is 180 kilometers. With population less than a million, the country is divided into three distinct geographical zones; the southern belt with hot and humid climate has a broad leaf forest, while central has cool temperate climate. Experiencing heavy snowfall, northern region has severe alpine climate. Bhutan is moist and warm in summer and dry and cold in winter

**Map 1.1: South Asian map showing Bhutan**



**Map 1.2: Bhutan Map showing Bumthang district**

Bumthang Dzongkhag has a total area of 2,708.46 Sq.Km with an altitude ranging from 2400-6000 meters above the sea level. It is divided into four Gewogs, namely Choekhor, Chhumey, Tang and Ura. Located in the central part of Bhutan, Bumthang falls in the temperate zone of the geographical distribution. Bumthang has a population of around 17,258 (2009) distributed sparsely. Bumthang has 1,462 households out of which 11,913 live in the rural areas. The extreme cold weather and lack of modern amenities like road, farm machineries and skilled

human resources in the ancient days largely defied the growth of most of the crops. Most people chose to become a nomad then. Under those hard living conditions Bumtaps bartered their dairy produce with the people of sub-tropical zone where rice, potatoes, chilies, corn etc. were grown. Buckwheat however, was cultivated in Bumthang region as well. With only buckwheat largely available in the region, people had limited choices then and they fed on buckwheat dishes most of the seasons. Indigenously, Bumtaps prepared myriad delicacies out of buckwheat.

For centuries, most Bumtaps relied on buckwheat as a staple food crop. Buckwheat farming is done mainly in the “non-rice growing areas and other highland where people have limited access to growing other cereals due to diversified (*sic.*) Agro-geo-climates of the country” (Norbu, 1995). And people living in various parts of “non-rice growing areas” of Bhutan made myriad uses of buckwheat. *Khule* and *Putu* are particularly the best dishes made from buckwheat in Bumthang Dzongkhag. *Khule* and *Putu* are both unique in its own simple ways and are well-liked. Although Buckwheat is also cultivated in other colder regions of Bhutan like Haa (one of the 20 Dzongkhags in Bhutan), *Khule* and *Putu* are not prepared. The unique food tradition of the Bumtaps is found nowhere else in the country. But now with the changing times, the picture of *Khule* and *Putu* tradition is quite different. The beautiful colours of the dishes which once occupied a special place in the hearts of the Bhutanese have been fading over the years.

Preparing of *Khule* and *Putu* gave Bumthang dzongkhag a distinct identity that remained attached to it for centuries. The chronological evidence of the origin of *Khule* and *Putu* remains unknown as it has been practiced for so long. It can only be gestured that the two dishes mainly originated because other food grains could not be cultivated in Bumthang. The fact that every Bumtap household kept a noodle press (Fig. 1&2) and the other apparatus required for preparing *Khule* and *Putu* which served their everyday purpose indicates that the two dishes was their identity.

Over the years, buckwheat has been losing its significance due to its low commercial value and also because buckwheat farming involved hard labour. The Bumtaps now prefer to cultivate cash crops and crops that are easy to cultivate. Rapid socio-economic development and improved facilities resulted in gradual shift from cultivation of buckwheat to other food crops like rice, apples, potatoes etc. With the decrease in cultivation of buckwheat, this food habit is also on gradual decline. Diverse cultivation of other crops like rice, potatoes, apples, etc, has led to decline in Buckwheat farming wherein the preparation of *Khule* and *Putu* was virtually forgotten. Also because buckwheat has been looked at as a food crop of the poor and the two dishes as a “poor man’s dish”, people no longer want to attach that status to their name. Most Bumtaps do not prefer to have it as their meal like in the bygone days since Bumthang dzongkhag is considered as one of the prosperous Dzongkhags in the country today.

In 2003, the then Agriculture Minister, Lyonpo Sangay Ngedup, initiated rice cultivation program in Bumthang and ever since then people only worked harder to cultivate rice over

buckwheat. This has also resulted in conversion of dry lands into wetlands where people largely concentrated on cultivating rice instead of buckwheat. Overall this impacted the preparation of *Khule* and *Putu* making it lose its place as a traditional dish. And these days, even if it is prepared, most people do it only on occasions to be served as a delicacy. Today, *Khule* and *Putu* are served more as delicacies for tourists and also as special dish during grand occasions. Yeshi, (2010), highlights that “The popular Bumtap *Khule* and *Putu* are delicacies today and served only on occasions. The plating the dish could completely disappear from the table if buckwheat cultivation is not revived in the Dzongkhags.” Potatoes have also dominated the Bumtaps’ farming routine. It is grown mainly as a cash crop whereby people make a living out of it and ignore buckwheat. “The main sources of income for the people of Bumthang are from potatoes, livestock farms and more recently tourism related activities. The sale of Cordyceps, Masutake and medicinal plants are also supplementing their income.” (National Statistics Bureau, 2010) People have now resorted to other means of earning, not realizing that they are overlooking their ancestral dishes.

Shifting the focus of farmers from cultivation of buckwheat to rice, potatoes, apples, etc, has resulted in transforming subsistence farming into commercial farming. This is also due to easy accessibility of modern amenities like farming machineries, roads, improved seeds, pesticides, insecticides, etc. that aid in cultivation of food grains other than buckwheat. “A favorable terrain condition coupled with easy road accessibility has brought manifold changes in the socio-economic development of Bumthang.” (*ibid*) With the accessibility of road, it has become easier for people to transport their cash crops to markets and also import goods. The decline in the tradition of *Khule* and *Putu* is also because of the increasing import of exotic food items that are easily accessible. More and more so, people are now dependent on the cheaper and easily accessible wheat flour (Maida and Atta) that are imported from India.

Buckwheat is of high nutritional value and has the potential to become a laudable commercial crop:

“Buckwheat possesses an exceptionally high nutritive value with higher content of protein, lipids and minerals as well as balanced composition of essential amino acids as compared to cereals. It is evident that owing to high nutritional value, buckwheat could become an important ingredient of food and have ample people for utilization in the form of processed food products. It is, thus, desirable that a place of buckwheat in the farming system in Bhutan is necessary in order to maintain nutritional standards of the Bhutanese population”. (Norbu, 1995)

If only people knew how nutritious Buckwheat is, then the most nutritious dishes of the Bumtaps would remain intact for the longest time ever. To increase the awareness on the nutritive value of

buckwheat or the two dishes, more initiatives must be taken. Government initiatives taken are not enough since the farming of buckwheat itself is dying which consequently has led to decrease in consumption of *Khule* and *Putu*.

There is little or no literature available on the subject. Although Kunzang Choden (2008) has briefly touched on Buckwheat farming in her book ‘Chilli and Cheese: Food and Society in Bhutan’ in general, she does not give a detailed account on *Khule* and *Putu* in particular. She only mentions that *Khule* and *Putu* “has become a Bhutanese specialty for tourist and for those seeking a change from rice”. Hence, today this age-old tradition of preparing *Khule* and *Putu* remains close to non-existent.

The main objective of the research was to study the diminishing food tradition of Bumthang by focusing specifically on current status of *Khule* and *putu*. Although the two dishes held a special place in Bhutanese culture, several reasons have led to its decline. So it included the causes for the diminishing tradition.

The study also focused on why the significant dish is suddenly disappearing and the nutritional value the dish contains. It tries to explain how other food provisions have replaced *Khule* and *Putu*. The study also briefly touches on buckwheat farming in general being substituted by cultivation of other food grains. The overall findings of the research indicate an urgent need for the concerned authorities to make a thorough study on the two and take up measures to preserve it. It concludes with recommendations that would help to stimulate interest in the hearts of the Bumtaps which is needed to keep a dying tradition vibrant.

### **3. Problem Statement**

Bhutan has chosen to cautiously embark on the road of modernisation only in early 60s with the introduction of five year plans. The focus shifted from sole accumulation of material wealth to balance between material and spiritual aspects of life. This paradigm shift came as a result of declaration of Gross National Happiness (GNH) superseding Gross National Product (GNP) by the fourth King Jigme Singye Wangchuck.

GNH rests on four pillars of development principles namely; Sustainable and equitable socio-economic development, Conservation of environment, Preservation and promotion of culture and Good governance. Largely, to this day, this unique concept has attracted lots of international attention. The concept basically encompasses the constituents of individual happiness (keeping individual at the center) like spiritual aspects, emotional aspects, economics concerns and cultural aspects.

Preservation and promotion of culture has been accorded one of the highest priorities while considering socio-economic development of the country. It has been identified as a crucial factor

for survival and sovereignty of the nation state. The need to preserve traditional Bhutanese cultural values has been primarily focused while considering the philosophy of Gross National Happiness.

This study tries to deliberate on one of the small cultural aspects i.e. culinary that have been declining over the years. It tries to understand the process involved during its gradual decline and factors accounting for the same. It also tries to study its implication on the society and how firmly it has been once rooted in the community. In this connection, following research questions has been farmed:

*In detail, how can the gradual decline of the Khule and Puta be understood and what are the factors accounting for it?*

Primarily, with this research question, the focus will be made at understanding the dish *Khule* and *Puta*. The culture of buckwheat farming in the community has been unreel to get the insight of *Khule* and *Puta*. It goes on to listing of nature and condition of buckwheat farming and general knowledge people possess on its nutritional value.

While accounting the factors for gradual decline of the cuisine, individual knowledge about the cuisine has been explored. Country's socio-economic development and import of exotic produce has also been explored that have given new meaning to Bhutanese culture and value systems. The tradition of preparing of *Khule* and *Puta* is one of the Bhutanese value systems that have been endangered by modernisation and gradually vanishing.

*Khule* and *Puta* are well-liked dishes among the Bhutanese and the outsiders as well. Yet all it remains today is reminiscences from yester years and now serves more as a special dish for the tourists. To further delve into scrutinizing where the problem lies, the main question has been split as below:

*Why a well liked traditional dish is suddenly disappearing then?*

Modernisation has provided people of Bumthang with various provisions that might have led to the change in their food habits. Accessibility to varied modern food provisions has given people myriad choices. Mostly exotic cuisines and rice seems to have replaced the traditional food habits of the Bumtaps which will be justified through this study. What could have been the most nutritious and most-liked dish is now threatened in this modern era. Modernisation has affected the traditional dish in such a way that it has changed the whole farming routine of the Bumthang farmers. The impact is so immense that people are showing less interest in buckwheat farming lately. The main reason for this could be the introduction of rice cultivation.

Further, fewer government's initiatives to preserve the diminishing tradition is also leading to the erosion of a tradition. Therefore, it is important that the government take initiatives to preserve

the tradition from dying. Or rather the government must review the initiatives taken so far to help in keeping the tradition vibrant.

Since not many households in Bumthang that the researcher has visited prepared *Khule* and *Putu*, it indicated that the tradition is close to non-existent. Moreover, some of the youths of Bumthang do not even care what significance *Khule* and *Putu* have in their culture. As for those youths who know that it is a part of their culture and that it gives their district a unique identity, they are least interested in knowing the process of its preparation or rather the buckwheat farming as a whole.

Not much literature can be found on the Bumtaps' *Khule* and *Putu* and this indicates serious threats to disappearance of a tradition. Most literature emphasizes on the diminishing buckwheat farming but there is no particular valid literature that talks about the diminishing *Khule* and *Putu* tradition. Since detailed recorded information on the subject is very scant, this attempt will be to assemble and record available standing information and to help revive and keep the unique food culture vibrant.

#### **4. Literature review**

Buckwheat, although is considered a minor crop at present, is an indispensable food for the Bhutanese people, particularly in non-rice growing areas and other highland where people have limited access to growing other cereals due to diversified agro-geo-climates of the country. Over 70% of the marginal farmers depend on this crop. Considering that the crop is a sub-subsistence crop, no research relating to crop improvement work has been done nor have its characteristics been properly described so far, and hence complete information on this particularly crop is not available. Nonetheless, it is a multipurpose crop in the Bhutanese context with a wide variety of uses. The cultivation practices and its use vary with the agro-climatic conditions. (Norbu, 1995)

For some reason, the reputation of buckwheat was rather biased from the beginning – it was considered a “poor man’s” food. One speculation is that, compared to rice, buckwheat produced a “dirty-looking mush” when cooked, unsuitable for the tender stomachs of the aristocrats. Nevertheless, buckwheat is among the most nutritious, healthful natural foods available today. I cannot even compare it to rice, white or brown! (Victress, n.d)

Buckwheat is the main staple diet in central Bhutan, since it is situated at an altitude that is too high to grow rice. The Bumthang region of central Bhutan is known for its buckwheat pancakes and noodles. (SAARC Tourism, n.d). Prior to developmental activities, many Bumtaps have been brought up on buckwheat when it was not a priced commodity unlike rice which was grown in the lower altitudes and considered a delicacy. These days, the Bumtap *Khule* (buckwheat

pancakes) and *Putu* (buckwheat noodles) are regarded as delicacies and served only on occasions. (Wangmo, 2012)

"In the olden days we ate rice only on special occasions, later we started importing rice from Mongar and Kheng, but we never dreamt that we would produce our own rice". Now rice production in Bumthang may become a regular feature of the farm economy for many Bumthaps and other Bhutanese farmers living at higher elevations. (Chophel, n.d)

Buckwheat has been the main diet for the Bumthaps for many generations and their cousins like the famous *Putu* and *Khule* are enjoyed by people both within and outside the country. With the change in cropping pattern and the introduction of many cash crops with varieties of diet in the market, there has been a decline in the production and cultivation of Buckwheat in Bumthang Dzongkhag. Most people especially amongst the youth do not favor buckwheat, but it's the favorite for the old folks and the rural village life for it has a very high nutrient content which not only prevents many serious diseases but also keeps one fit. (RGoB, 2010)

Although buckwheat is a staple food crop, the lack of commercial value has led to its decline. Many farmers, said another farmer, shifted to potato and rice cultivation. "The decline started about three decades ago, when potato was introduced as a cash crop," he said. Although a few cultivated barley and buckwheat side by side to prevent their land from falling fallow, mass potato cultivation drove out buckwheat. (Yeshi, 2010)

Buckwheat and barley are the oldest crops of Bumthang. Buckwheat was a staple food crop of Bumthang in the past. However the area under buckwheat cultivation has decreased radically with the change in food habits and food culture from the traditional use of buckwheat as a staple food to use of rice, commercialization of potatoes as a cash crop, easy availability of cheap rice, growing of apples, economic development, improved accessibility, less manpower to work the fields etc. This led to the following situations:

1. Change of food habit resulting in loss of traditional food culture.
2. Gradual loss of indigenous knowledge on use of buckwheat.
3. Farmers' greater reliance on imported rice resulting in vulnerability on food security.
4. Increasing farmers' reliance on potatoes as a cash crop as other crops have less prospects in temperate agro-ecological zones again increasing farmers' vulnerability in terms of food security.
5. Significant decline in cultivation resulting genetic erosion of buckwheat. Buckwheat conservation and utilization towards food security and measure to cope with climate change, (Drukpa, et al., 1993)

The District Agricultural Officer of Bumthang, Gyalong, said the humble buckwheat, once considered a poor man's staple diet is more expensive than rice today'. Currently, the rate for a kg of buckwheat is Nu 70 and increasing by the day. (Wangmo, 2012)

Sonam Chigthuen Rangzhin Tshogpa (SCRT) of Jalikhar, a farmer group, is trying to revive the cultivation of the crop, which Bumthaps have relied for generations as a staple food crop. "Had the national biodiversity centre (NBC) and the agriculture division of Bumthang not gone from house to house to collect grains, we wouldn't have realised that buckwheat is out of production in the dzongkhag," said a member of the Tshogpa, Sonam Tobgay, 58. "When officials came to collect grains, no one had a single grain to contribute. Puta and Khule could have become history," he said. This trend, according to Sonam, was commercialisation of agriculture, especially the advent of a cash crop like potatoes in Bumthang. "Cash crop has overtaken food crop and, when paddy cultivation was introduced in Bumthang, farmers forgot to cultivate buckwheat as dry land were converted to wetland and potato fields." Although buckwheat is a staple food crop, the lack of commercial value has led to its decline. Many farmers, said another farmer, shifted to potato and rice cultivation. "The decline started about three decades ago, when potato was introduced as a cash crop," he said. Although a few cultivated barley and buckwheat side by side to prevent their land from falling fallow, mass potato cultivation drove out buckwheat. "If this project (reviving buckwheat cultivation) didn't happen, in a few years buckwheat cultivation would have vanished from Bumthang, at least from around Chamkhar," said a farmer, Kezang Dema." (Yeshe, 2010)

## 5. Research Methodology

This section presents how the main research question '*In detail, how can the gradual decline of the Khule and Puta be understood and what are the factors accounting for it?*' is investigated. It involves gathering of data, both primary and secondary, and field observation in two phases. The first phase data gathering emphasised on the factors accounting for the declining of *Khule* and *Puta* tradition. In the second phase of data gathering, mostly youths have been interviewed exploring their intrinsic attitude towards the tradition of *Khule* and *Puta*.

The study includes both primary and secondary sources of information. A conglomeration of Focused Group Discussion (FDG), Individual Household Interview Survey (IHIS) and key informant methods were adopted for data collection in the sample selected for field work. The integration of above mentioned methods during the data collection process provided an opportunity to evaluate the causes for the diminishing food tradition and the significance of the dishes from different sources in depth. Primary data was collected by conducting interviews with essential stakeholders like the villagers, Dzongkhag agriculture personnel and some youths of



Bumthang. Basically two rounds of interview have been conducted to gather the primary sources of data. Mostly online sources have been referred as secondary sources for the study.

### **5.1. Data Analysis**

The data was analysed using SPSS software and Microsoft Excel. The information furnished was then interpreted using basic descriptive tools like tables, pie diagrams, charts etc. The study is mainly focused particularly in Bumthang district since it is the only district popularly known for *Khule* and *Putra* tradition.

### **5.2. Sample size**

The problem of diminishing food tradition of *Khule* and *Putra* is fast increasing and is becoming a concern in Bumthang. Therefore this study has focused mainly in the community of Bumthang where Buckwheat then has been cultivated massively. About 200 people have been interviewed in different villages. During the initial field visit, only 76 people were interviewed and the subsequent field visit has been major breakthrough for the study by interviewing 123 respondents. Focused group discussions and interviewing the Bhutanese scholars outside Bumthang has also largely contributed in gathering primary sources of data.

### **5.3. Characteristics of the respondents**

The study included respondents belonging to different age, sex and professional groups. Some of the Bhutanese Scholars have also been consulted for their opinions and gather the general data about *Khule* and *Putra*. The respondents were carefully chosen to represent the whole district. Since Bumthang is fast developing and changing now, most *Bumtaps* are now educated and this is also becoming a reason for people to change their food habits.

### **5.4. Sampling Procedure**

Since Bumthang is divided into four *Gewogs* (Blocks), views on how people look at *Khule* and *Putra* differed from place to place. Also because people belonging to different age groups reside in those places, their understanding of *Khule* and *Putra* were not the same. So it was better to firstly stratify the respondents in groups as per their age, qualification, profession, gender and the

place they lived in. This helped in collecting the data and analysing it. Then simple random sampling technique was used to select the respondents for the study.

## **5.5. Limitations**

To carry out the time bound research especially on social science in Bhutan is constrained by dearth of secondary sources of information and data base as not many studies were conducted before in this field.

The field chosen was in the central part of Bhutan (Bumthang). Having to travel very long distance for data collection was found to be one of the major challenges confronted. Rugged terrain coupled with heavy rainfall in the summer made some of the villages inaccessible during the field study.

During the time of field study, most of the targeted respondents were found occupied in their field works. Compromising their time involved money; this to some extent was a challenge for the researcher.

Communication also proved to be a major challenge as apart from their local dialect majority of the respondents hardly speak English and Dzongkha (National language of Bhutan).

## **6. Findings/ Results:**

Following findings were presented based on the thorough field study conducted using various research methods as indicated in the research methods. During the Individual Household Interview Survey, structured questionnaires were used and within the given time frame, the number of respondents interviewed was 200.

### **6.1. Recipe for Puta**

Most of the mentioned apparatus below and ingredients required for the preparation of *Khule* and *Puta* are presented in the images.

#### **6.1.1. Apparatus required**

- ❖ A bowl
- ❖ A Bucket of cold water
- ❖ A Pot
- ❖ Minimum of four people
- ❖ A noodle press (Usu. Wooden-made)
- ❖ Frying pan
- ❖ Colander

#### **6.1.2. Ingredients**

- ❖ Buckwheat flour (both sweet and bitter buckwheat can be used)
- ❖ Salt
- ❖ mustard oil/butter or any other oil
- ❖ Onion leaves
- ❖ Red Chili powder/or some fresh chilies
- ❖ Black pepper
- ❖ Garlic
- ❖ Eggs

#### **6.1.3. Procedures**

The following shows the stepwise procedure process for preparation of *Puta*.

- ❖ Put the flour in a bowl and add cold water
- ❖ Boil water in a pot
- ❖ Knead the flour into a dough
- ❖ Put the dough into the noodle press
- ❖ Put the noodles in the boiling water
- ❖ Cook the noodles until the noodles float
- ❖ After the noodles are cooked, take it out and rinse in cold water
- ❖ Leave the noodles in a bowl
- ❖ Next heat oil in a pan
- ❖ Put garlic (crushed), onion leaves and chilies(only if its fresh)
- ❖ Pour it over the noodles
- ❖ Add crushed black pepper, salt and chili powder
- ❖ Mix thoroughly
- ❖ Put eggs if desired

## **6.2. Recipe for *Khule***

The apparatus required for preparation of *Khule* is much simpler and even the process to prepare *Khule* is easier as compared to *Putta*.

### **6.2.1. Apparatus required**

- ❖ A bowl
- ❖ A griddle
- ❖ A ladle
- ❖ A container

### **6.2.2. Ingredients**

- ❖ Buckwheat flour
- ❖ Eggs (only if desired)

### **6.2.3. Procedures**

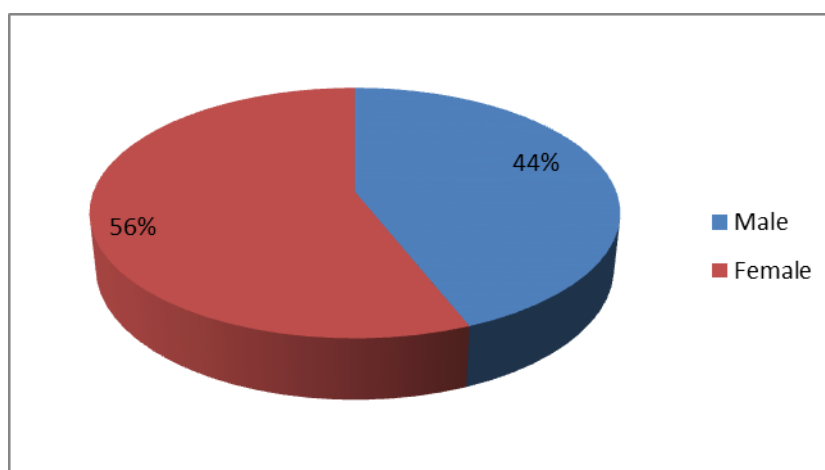
The following shows the stepwise procedure process for preparation of *Khule*.

- ❖ Mix buckwheat flour and cold water to prepare batter
- ❖ If eggs are desired, put it while beating
- ❖ Heat the griddle (preferably non-stick)
- ❖ Pour a small cupful of batter in the centre of the griddle
- ❖ Gently even out the batter

- ❖ When the batter dries up, turn and cook the other side
- ❖ Keep the cooked pancakes in a container

### 6.3. Respondents knowledge on Khule and Puta

Buckwheat is one of the oldest staple crops of Bumthang. However, with the change in food habits and food culture, the area under buckwheat cultivation decreased tremendously. The “wide use of rice, commercialisation of potatoes as a cash crop, easy availability of cheap rice, growing of apples, economic development, improved accessibility, less manpower to work the fields etc.” (Drukpa, G et al. 1993) cut the traditional use of buckwheat as a staple food greatly.

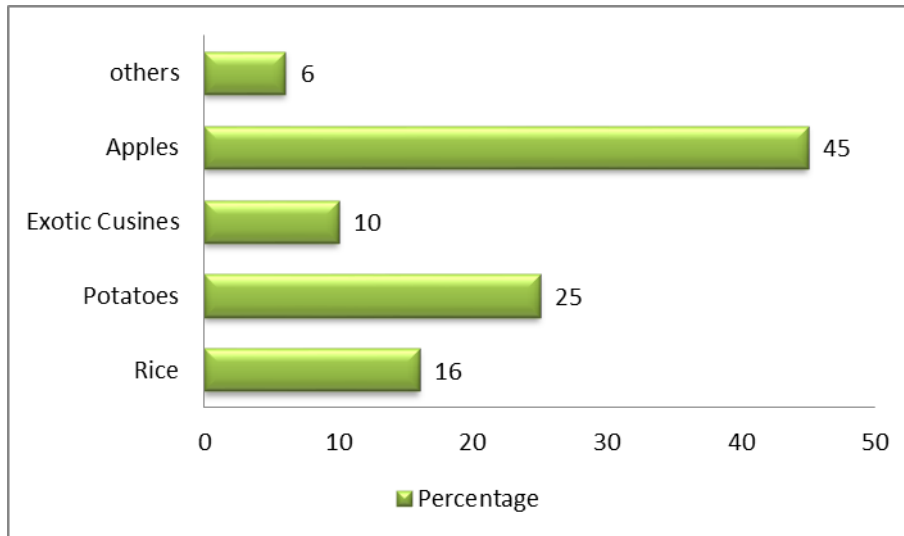


**Figure 1.1: Percentage of male and female who knows about *Khule* and *Puta***

The figure 1.1 depicts the percentage of male and female respondents who possess knowledge on *Khule* and *Puta*. It constitutes whether they are aware of the existence of the dish, how to prepare it, its recipes, apparatus required and buckwheat cultivation as a whole. In this regard, female respondents (56%) possess more knowledge than the male respondents (44%) as shown in the figure above.

### 6.4. Provisions replacing Khule and Puta

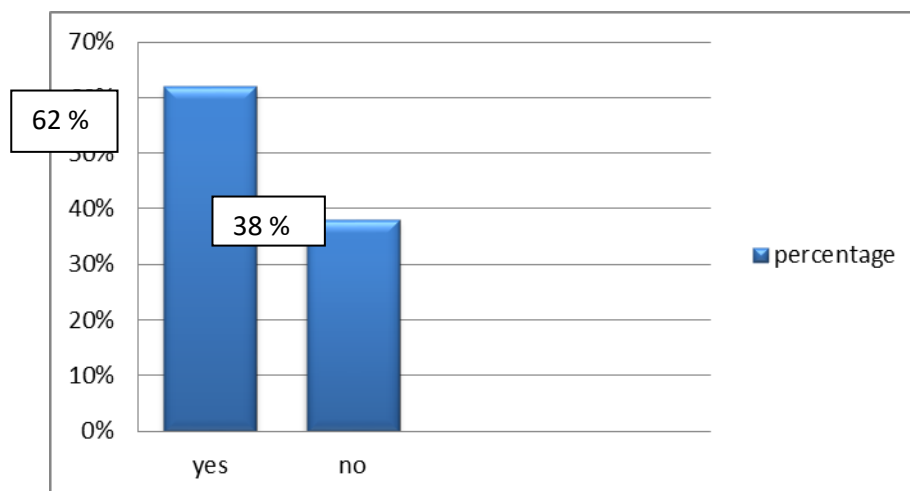
The figure below shows the accounting provisions that replaced the indigenous buckwheat cultivation and preparation of *Khule* and *Puta*.



**Figure 1.2: Provisions that has replaced *Khule* and *Putu***

Due to greater commercial value, easy for cultivation, and readily available hybrid seed to suit the changing climatic conditions, apples, potatoes and rice constitute the major chunk of substituent for *Khule* and *Putu* (45%), (25%) & (16%) respectively as illustrated in the figure 1.2. Exotic cuisines and other provisions like, plums, barley, wheat and vegetables contribute to lesser extent (10%) & (6%) respectively in replacing *Khule* and *Putu*.

#### 6.5. Percentage respondents who like *Khule* and *Putu*



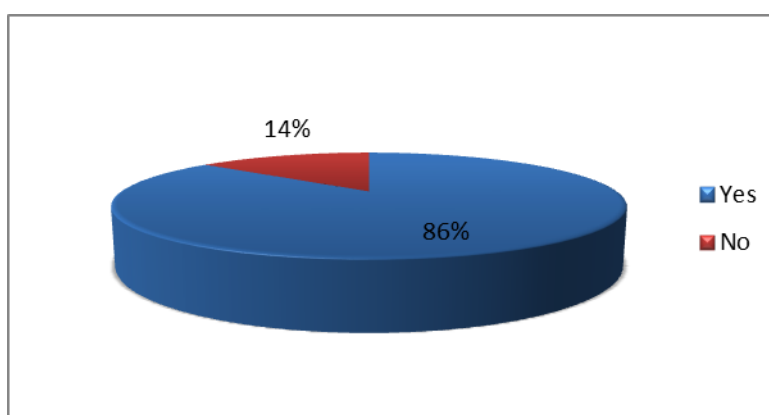
**Figure 1.3: Percentage of people who like *Khule* and *Putu***

The figure 1.3 depicts the percentage of people who likes *Khule* and *Putu* as a part of their daily meals. 62% of the respondent's gestured positive for *Khule* and *Putu* while the remaining 38%

dislike their traditional meal. It is interesting to note that although greater portion of respondents liked to have *Khule* and *Putra* as their habitual meal, the tradition is still declining.

#### 6.6. Percentage respondents who agrees that *Khule* and *Putra* tradition is declining

The chart 1.4 shows the percentage of respondents who believe that their food tradition is diminishing (86%), however, only (14%) which shows that the tradition is really diminishing. Even when the major percentage of respondents believes that the tradition is diminishing, less has been done to retain it.



**Figure 1.4: Respondents who think the *Khule* and *Putra* tradition is diminishing**

As greater portion of the respondents were aware of the rapid declining of the *Khule* and *Putra* tradition, it should also accord greater chance of recognising it and reviving it before long. However, as most of the respondents were from rural area of Bumthang, the chance of reviving is parochial as rural people in Bhutan are considered least influential.

#### 6.7. Percentage of respondents who accounts modernisation for declining *Khule* and *Putra* tradition

Table 1.1 shows the percentages of respondents who believe that their culture has been affected by modernisation. While respondents were investigated with modernisation, it has taken into account the accessibility of road, farm machineries, myriad choice of hybrid seeds that can adopt to harsh climatic conditions, availability of pesticides, insecticides and herbicides, easily accessible markets for trading, etc. 64 % of the respondents believe that their culture has been affected by modernisation, while there are some of the respondents (36%) who think that modernisation has not affected this culture. We could infer that modernisation has really affected the tradition of preparing *Khule* and *Putra* with 64 % of the respondents positive.

Sl. No.	Status	No. of respondents	Percentage
1	Yes	128	64
2	No	72	36
	<b>Total</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 1.1 Influence of modernisation**

#### **6.8. Accessing the knowledge on nutritional value of Buckwheat**

The table 1.2 accesses the knowledge content of the respondents on nutritional value of buckwheat. The study carried out and the respondents chosen constitute mostly those living in the rural areas as they comprise dominant section of the society. Although, they enjoy basic modern facilities, the knowledge content of the individual on nutritional value of buckwheat is scarce.

Sl. No.	Status	No. of respondents	Percentage
1	Yes	30	15
2	No	170	85
	<b>Total</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 1.2 Awareness on the nutritional value of Buckwheat**

Table 1.2 clearly explains that majority (85%) of the respondents are not aware of the nutritional value of buckwheat while only 15 % of the respondents are aware of it. This gives an explanation to why the culture is fast diminishing. Besides modernisation, less awareness on the nutritional value of buckwheat has also led to decline in the *Khule* and *Putta* tradition.

#### **6.9. Frequency of *Khule* and *Putta* preparation by the residents**

The table 1.3 illustrates the frequency in which *Khule* and *Putta* is being prepared. It depicts that major portion of the respondents choose to prepare *Khule* and *Putta* on occasions.



Sl. No.	Frequency	No. of respondents	Percentage
1	Always	14	7
2	Occasionally	126	63
3	Not at all	60	30
<b>Total</b>		<b>200</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 1.3 *Khule* and *Putu* on occasions**

While 30 % of the respondents do not prepare the dish on any occasions, the majority (63 %) responded as preparing their traditional dish only on occasions. The study found that only lesser portion (7%) of the respondents enjoy the meals habitually. This clearly reveals that people are either using it for commercial purpose or just as a specialty on occasions which means the tradition as a habitual meal then is seriously declining.

## **7. Discussions**

### **7.1. Impact of Modernisation**

Over the years, modernisation has proven to affect the indigenous tradition immensely. With modernisation, people now have access to roads which meant easy access to markets where they could earn income by selling their crops and also buy other essential commodities. People also have access to improved machineries and seeds which meant they do not have to leave their land fallow and depend on buckwheat only. Rather they could now cultivate other cash crops and chose to trade. Therefore, people started to neglect buckwheat farming which ultimately meant negligence of *Khule* and *Putu*. Instead people preferred cultivation of rice, potatoes, and also apples so that they could make an easy living out of it.

### **7.2. Climate change**

Bhutan is also experiencing the consequences of climate change which is a big concern today. Erratic climatic conditions have greatly hampered the patterns in which crops in the region grew. Due to climate change, the colder regions in Bhutan which were not able to cultivate food crops other than buckwheat are now changing. That colder region like Bumthang then welcomes

varieties of crops today whereby they can generate income. This resulted in ignoring buckwheat cultivation which ultimately meant ignorance of *Khule* and *Putu*. Hence, climate change has also some part to play in the decline of the tradition of the two buckwheat dishes.

### 7.3. Availability of cheaper substitutes

While buckwheat cultivation involved hard labour and earned less income, with the introduction of modern amenities, other substitutes were available that brought in good income. Thus, people resorted to cultivation of other food grains which led to decrease in buckwheat cultivation and use of buckwheat consequently. Availability of cheaper substitutes which are mostly imported gave people an option to live an easy life. Substitutes like *maida* and *atta* (wheat flour brought in from India) substituted buckwheat flour largely.

Table 1.4 AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTIONS, BUMTHANG, 2007 TO 2009

Details	2007	2008	2009
Paddy			
Area (Acres)	24	27	151
Production( MT)	55	50	285
Price per kg (Nu.)	n.a	n.a	60
Maize			
Area (Acres)	5	3	9
Production( MT)	4	1	11
Price per kg (Nu.)	n.a	n.a	15
Wheat			
Area (Acres)	642	560	883
Production( MT)	230	915	358
Price per kg (Nu.)	n.a	15	30
Barley			
Area (Acres)	419	501	523
Production( MT)	184	367	440
Price per kg (Nu.)	n.a	n.a	25
Buckwheat			
Area (Acres)	611	836	1,253
Production( MT)	257	86,544	542
Price per kg (Nu.)	n.a	n.a	15
Fruits			
Apples			

Number of fruit bearing trees	7,071	3,881	9,020
Production (kg)	172,336	84,606	2,073,754
Production (Nu.)	6,272	249,982	4,082,071
Pear			
Number of fruit bearing trees	n.a	18	387
Production (kg)	n.a	630	5,532
Production (Nu.)	n.a	n.a	81,600
Plum			
Number of fruit bearing trees	18	26	158
Production (kg)	67	65	2,866
Price (Nu.)	n.a	n.a	60,000
Areca Nut			
Production (Pon)	N.A	N.A	N.A
Production (Nu.)	N.A	N.A	N.A
Vegetables and Spices			
Potato			
Production (kg)	3,563,397	2,251,200	10,516,852
Production (Nu.)	11,898,830	n.a	61,248,646
Chili			
Production (kg)	7,019	n.a	52,128
Production (Nu.)	n.a	n.a	2,340,950
Onion			
Production (kg)	3,000	2,000	4,000
Production (Nu.)	n.a	n.a	n.a
Cabbage			
Production (kg)	25,444	6,453	77,348
Production (Nu.)	37,967	33,795	1,340,070
Cauliflower			
Production (kg)	n.a	n.a	45,500
Production (Nu.)	n.a	n.a	182,000
Asparagus			
Production (Bundles)	n.a	n.a	2,150
Production (Nu.)	n.a	n.a	96,750
Tomato			
Production (kg)	1,018	n.a	n.a
Production (Nu.)	n.a	n.a	n.a
Carrot			
Production (kg)	n.a	1,551	25,105
Production (Nu.)	n.a	37,700	731,700
Egg Plant (Brinjal)			
Production (kg)	n.a	n.a	n.a

Production (Nu.)	n.a	n.a	n.a
Radish			
Production (kg)	18,095	n.a	115,510
Production (Nu.)	n.a	n.a	1,033,900
Garlic			
Production (kg)	2,259	n.a	14,022
Production (Nu.)	n.a	n.a	847,280
Oil Seeds and Legumes			
Mustards			
Production (kg)	137	164	38,182
Production (Nu.)	n.a	8,276	37,200
Beans			
Production (kg)	n.a	n.a	6,525
Production (Nu.)	n.a	n.a	117,012

Source: Annual Dzongkhag Statistics, 2010, National Statistics Bureau

The above table (1.4) represents the abundance of other provisions introduced in Bumthang Dzongkhag, the area of cultivation and their respective yield over the years. As of 2009, it can be furnished that although buckwheat has been relatively cultivated on the larger area (1,253 acres of land) as compared to rice (151 acres), wheat (883 acres) and barley (523 acres), the productivity of buckwheat in terms of quantity (542 Kgs) and market value (Nu. 15 per Kg) is comparatively lesser with respect to the area of land cultivated than other crops as the yield of the other crops are; annual yield of rice is 285 Kgs and market value is Nu. 60 per Kg, annual yield of wheat are 358 Kgs and market value is Nu. 30 per Kg.

However, these crops are cultivated on the very small portion of land and the most dominant were apples that were cultivated on the area of 9020 acres of land. It has also very huge annual production of 2,073,754 Kgs. As shown in the table, other cash crops like Potatoes, pear, plum, cabbages, beans, mustard, reddish Garlics and carrots are also dominantly cultivated and traded with very high market value as compared to the buckwheat.

#### **7.4. The changing food preferences of the Bumtaps**

With lots of development in Bumthang, the taste of people has also changed. What earlier used to be a daily meal is now being overthrown by the changing food preferences of the people. With lots of new foodstuffs available, people no longer rely solely on the two buckwheat dishes.

Instead people now opt for foodstuffs that are foreign and better in taste. They also go for foodstuffs that are easily available and cheap over buckwheat that involved hard labour.

### **7.5. Lesser government initiatives**

Government aims to be one of the self-sufficient nations by the year 2020. However, initiatives to encourage buckwheat farming that could possibly serve the purpose have not been so concrete to this day. Although many other initiatives have been prioritised by the government, buckwheat cultivation that once served majority of Bhutanese living in the central and northern region has been virtually forgotten. More initiatives need to be taken and government must reconsider its priorities and build an inclusive module which could draw the interest of the people in buckwheat cultivation and make *Khule* and *Putu* more fashionable and palatable.

### **7.6. Biased reputation as a poor man's food**

The notion of the upper class societies of the world that buckwheat is a poor man's food has affected Bhutan too. In the Bhutanese societies also, buckwheat in general and *Khule* and *Putu* in particular was looked down as a poor man's dish. This tag "poor man's dish" was attached to the dishes for a very long time. Following its poor reputation, people looked for alternatives they could substitute it with. So it was never considered a special dish until recently. Today the fact is totally different. *Khule* and *Putu* serves as specialties today. While the district known for it has turned its head in other directions, other districts are now copying the tradition and minting money. Views expressed by the respondents for the research still indicated that those two buckwheat dishes have not changed their status despite the fact that people are now beginning to understand the nutritional value of the food grain.

## 8. Conclusion

Bhutan has incorporated the philosophy of Gross National Happiness (GNH) as the blueprint for its developmental activities. This paradigm shift in the approach of developmental activities of measuring happiness drew attention of the outsiders. Today the concept of GNH is being applauded and is gaining the momentum around the world. The philosophy of GNH has four pillars of which ‘preservation and promotion of culture’ is one.

Preservation and promotion of culture has been accorded great importance in this era of rapid socio-economic advancement. For its ability to command over nation’s sovereignty, survival and security, it has been identified as crucial for a nation state like ours.

This study deliberated on one of the small cultural aspects of Bhutan i.e. culinary of Bumthang; *Khule* and *Putu* that has been declining over the due course of time. Though confronted with many challenges in doing the research, the study identified various factors accounting for its decline.

One of the major factors accounting for the gradual decline of *Khule* and *Putu* tradition is identified as modernisation whereby 64% of the respondents agreed. Bhutan has embarked on the planned socio-economic development in early 1960s with the commencement of five year plans. Although, preservation of most of the cultural aspects during the developmental activities were taken into consideration and taken care of, some of the smaller aspects like *Khule* and *Putu* tradition have been almost neglected. With modernisation, many other exotic provisions have been introduced in the region, as study shows that 45% of the substituent were apple wherein potato and rice constitutes 25% and 16% respectively. It can be also be inferred that greater productivity and market value of apples, potatoes rice and other provisions over buckwheat as shown in the table 1.4 have resulted in gradual declining of buckwheat farming thereby adversely impacting the *Khule* and *Putu* tradition.

Modernisation has made accessibility to farm machineries and tools, improved varieties of hybrid seeds and fertilizers easy, hence increasing the fertility of the soil. Since buckwheat cultivation involved hard labour and brought in less income, people opted for better and easier modes of farming where they can earn more. Mechanisation of buckwheat farming can be a timely intervention that could revive the *Khule* and *Putu* tradition.

It is interesting to note that only a small portion (15%) of the respondents were aware of the nutritional value of the buckwheat in general and *Khule* and *Putu* in particular whereas majority (85%) of the respondents do not possess any idea on nutritional value of *Khule* and *Putu*. Should Bumtaps possess the explicit knowledge on the nutritional content of the dishes, it would give people a reason to still enjoy the dishes habitually. However, it is sad to know that today the dishes are served mostly as delicacies.

The study reveals that today, the primordial dish *Khule* and *Putra* were served mostly on the occasions (63%), 7% of the respondents do enjoy the dishes habitually and 30% of the respondents do not at all enjoy the dishes. The reason stated were lack of availability of buckwheat flour due to decreased in buckwheat cultivation, lengthy procedure for preparation and lack of knowledge on the nutritional value of the dishes.

Although there are very few government interventions in preserving the tradition, more government initiatives would be a valuable contribution to revive this declining tradition. Improving the market values of the dishes and reconsidering it owing to its great nutritional values would also help the dishes gain popularity and survive. The pressing need for the farmers is market for their buckwheat dishes to enhance their cash income.

The findings of the research will be a roadmap for future researchers interested in studying the unique food tradition. It may also help in identifying interventions that would guide the concerned authorities to work on plans to keep the *Khule* and *Putra* tradition vibrant. The findings of the study can also become a source of data for conducting comparative study with other countries.

## **9. Recommendations**

### **9.1. Increasing Buckwheat Productivity**

When the productivity of a crop is poor, it means that it has lesser scope to sustain. The productivity of buckwheat must be improved so that *Khule* and *Putra* as two important dishes can survive too. When the buckwheat productivity is low, it directly impacts the two dishes. Farmers must be encouraged to increase the yield by providing improved seeds, modern machineries and farming tools and fertilizers.

Increasing the productivity of buckwheat also depends on the interest of the farmers. If farmers showed lesser interest in buckwheat cultivation, this ultimately is going to affect the productivity which has a direct effect on the scope of *Khule* and *Putra*. So keeping the interest of the farmers buoyant in buckwheat cultivation by using various measures is highly recommendable.

### **9.2. Incentives and subsidies**

Since buckwheat has less productivity and earned less income, it always remained at the back seat considered secondary when it came to cultivation. When buckwheat brought in less income, the farmers are discouraged to cultivate it. Instead they preferred to cultivate other cash crops. This consequently affects *Khule* and *Putra*. Providing the farmers incentives could keep them interested in cultivating buckwheat and preparing the two dishes. Supporting the farmers with subsidies is going to change the farmers' attitude towards buckwheat which ultimately can boost *Khule* and *Putra*.

### **9.3. Encourage Special Farmers' Group**

Forming Special Farmers' Group that is focused on buckwheat cultivation can help in increasing the buckwheat production. That group of people can come together and face challenges together. This way, they will also be able to come out with ideas that can help in keeping buckwheat farming vibrant. If buckwheat farming remains intact, there is no question of the two dishes disappearing. Therefore, such Special Farmer' Group must be encouraged with some government incentives



#### **9.4. Improved awareness on the Health benefits and nutritional value of the buckwheat**

Poor awareness on the nutritional value of buckwheat, or rather poor awareness on the health benefits of buckwheat has led to negligence of buckwheat farming. Negligence of buckwheat farming meant negligence of the two important dishes- *Khule* and *Putu*. The government must initiate awareness programs to improve people's knowledge on the benefits of buckwheat so that they can start preparing *Khule* and *Putu*. Educating the people can play a crucial role as it has the potential to change the entire story of the dishes.

#### **9.5. Market Accessibility and market price**

Farmers need good priced markets to sell their products. But if they do not have the easy access to markets for trading the products, it is most likely that they will stop growing the crops and opt for other cash crops. When the crop is being recognised and fairly traded, it would inject interest in the people that would ultimately make the resulting dishes more common.

#### **9.6. Recognise *Khule* and *Putu* as an important traditional dish**

Until now, *Khule* and *Putu* has been neglected or even overlooked. While the fact is that it is a dish that carries huge significance, people have failed to recognise it. It is high time now that Bhutanese in general and Bumtaps in particular recognise the two dishes as their ancestral dish and work towards keeping it vibrant.

#### **9.7 Separate land for buckwheat farming**

What earlier used to be dry and fallow land are now being transformed into wet lands. The required land for buckwheat cultivation is now filled with other cash crops. This has resulted in the ignorance of the buckwheat which threatens the two dishes. If the government takes initiative and identifies separate land to be used for buckwheat farming permanently, then it will increase buckwheat cultivation. Increase in buckwheat cultivation ultimately means increase in *Khule* and *Putu* preparation.

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Figure 2: the noodle press



Figure 3: pressing buckwheat noodles



Figure 4: mixing the ingredients



Figure 5: Buckwheat noodles ready to serve



Figure 6: Khule ready to be served



Figure 6: Buckwheat





Figure 7: Buckwheat field



Figure 8: Buckwheat field

## 11. Appendices: Research Questionnaire

I am doing a research on the diminishing food traditions in Bumthang by specifically focusing on the popular *Khule* and *Putu* with assistance from the SAARC Cultural Centre, Sri Lanka. I would like to gather some information regarding the two dishes and how it has changed over the years. It will not have any direct or indirect bearing upon the respondent whatsoever.

Gender:

Age:

Occupation:

1. Do you know about the traditional *Khule* and *Putu*?  
Yes ☐ No ☐
2. Do you know how to make it?  
Yes ☐ No ☐
3. Do you like it and why?  
Yes ☐ No ☐
4. Do you think it is a part of your culture and tradition?  
Yes ☐ No ☐
5. If yes, how important is this food tradition for you?
6. Do you think that the *Khule* and *putu* tradition is dying or has died?  
Yes ☐ No ☐
7. What do you think has replaced *Khule* and *Putu* tradition?

Type	Yes/No (please tick)
Rice	
Potatoes	
Exotic cuisines	
Apples	
Others (specify)	

8. Do you think modernisation has affected your food tradition? If yes, how?  
Yes ☐ No ☐
9. Do you think your tradition can be revived? If yes, how?  
Yes ☐ No ☐

10. Does your community prepare Khule and puta on occasions (festivals, religious rituals, and celebrations?)

Yes ☐

No ☐

11. Why do you think people now prefer to prepare Khule and puta only on occasions?

12. What do you think the government or the concerned authorities should do about preserving a dying tradition?

13. Are you aware of the nutritional value of Buckwheat? (If no, go to question 13.)

Yes ☐

No ☐

14. What should be done to create awareness?

15. Your final comments on the *Khule* and *puta* tradition.