

Sanctuary: Bhutan, Transcript

[00:00:17] **Kinley Tenzin** We had this workshop called Bio-Democracy, where we talked about the environment, forests, nature and its connection to democracy. And the traditional beliefs in the country, and that beliefs' correlation with nature and conservation, protections.

[00:00:38] **Lam Kezang** During my young age, I had a gun, I killed so many animals. I killed a monkey, a fox, a wild goat. That was a blunder. My father was a religious man. He said, "Now you have to chant ten million Baza Guru, the prayer for Guru Padmasambhava." It satisfied, no doubt. It's totally cleansed. In the world, people don't do that. There are a few countries that do it like Bhutan. But people like yourselves, highly qualified people in the world... You don't believe. Right? You don't believe.

[00:01:31] **Kurtis Schaeffer** We're here because Bhutan has a concentrated Buddhist culture. This is a source of cultural power that people can work with to get things done in the day-to-day world.

[00:01:45] **Jon Cannon** The world is a text to be interpreted. That's what Matthew does with his music. That's what Karen does with her science. I mean, the techniques of interpretation are different, but it's basically trying to understand and make meaning of a set of phenomena that are presented to us. I think that's what all of us, in a way, are struggling to do here.

[00:02:08] **Willis Jenkins** This is an interdisciplinary team made up of artists and scientists and a law professor. And we're especially interested, in sites that have overlapping ecological, religious, cultural significance.

[00:02:20] **Matthew Burtner** We have a kind of think tank. We have this topic and we have these places. And so everyone was coming with their own expertise. We're always trying to find the points of connection between the disciplines.

[00:02:36] **Ariana Maki** I'm an art historian of the Himalayas. My main area of focus is Bhutan. And these days, I'm the Fulbright scholar to Bhutan.

[00:02:44] **Kurtis Schaeffer** I'm the chair of the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Virginia. My research is in the history and literature of Buddhism in Tibet and the Himalayas.

[00:02:56] **Karen McGlathery** My research focuses on climate change impacts on ecosystems and resilience of communities to climate change. So exciting being here with people who think about the environment in different ways.

[00:03:12] **Martien Halvorson-Taylor** Working together really does transform the questions that we ask, that has shaped my perception of what is at stake in the work that I do. There are songs associated with certain valleys. There are poems that have made these places sanctuaries in the minds of the people now.

[00:03:48] **Willis Jenkins** There are 81 families of birds, so hundreds and hundreds of bird species and learning birds is a good way into a new landscape. And often, you know, stories about birds and what's happening with them and where they're going are stories about places too.

[00:04:13] **Ariana Maki** Pema Lingpa was one of Bhutan's foremost religious individuals. He's one of the five great treasure revealers in all of Tibetan Buddhism. The text says he fell into a trance, completely disrobed and just plunged into the water. When he emerged, he had a treasure with him.

[00:04:35] **Matthew Burtner** The guides were explaining that this is a special confluence because of the way these rivers join. So there's some energy about the way the water comes together that it's not in conflict. There's probably an environmental reason for that that we can hear.

[00:04:54] **Matthew Burtner** I'm interested in setting up listening exercises for the scientists and philosophers so that they can approach the world from a listening perspective.

[00:05:05] **Martien Halvorson-Taylor** Matthew literally counts down three, two, one and then we stop everything. You know, we're absolutely silent, can't even unzip your jacket, and we experience not through a text, not through history, not through dates and numbers and the names of great people, but as we are.

[00:05:29] **Matthew Burtner** By reweighting our perceptions towards audition, we feel differently in the world. It's fascinating to imagine how that approach could affect philosophy, ethics and science.

[00:05:51] **Devin Zuckerman** I'm thinking a lot about how religion happens in places where through the lens of religion, people have really taken on environmental conservation and made that an important part of their religious practice. And how people are practicing in a world that's becoming increasingly more difficult due to climate change. My research is on Tibetan Buddhism and specifically about a person who lived in the 14th century, called Longchenpa. And today we're in a Longchenpa place. This is where Longchenpa meditated.

[00:06:45] **Kurtis Schaeffer** Longchenpa came from Tibet south to Bhutan, and the reason that we're here is because he wrote a very famous poem here called "The Guide to the Bumthang Valley". We're at the entrance to the bon-ton valley here.

[00:07:06] **Tshering** Dharma rock, is just down that way. "The views in all directions are radiantly clear and gloriously beautiful. One imagines that the gods vie for this land. By virtue of being within earshot of the hill that resembles a vase, it is called Bumthang. Its very nature, beautiful in every way."

[00:07:25] **Matthew Burtner** There's something going on up there that was very powerful.

[00:07:28] **Jon Cannon** I couldn't have gotten that emotion or that sense of epiphany from the text itself. It took the place to put it all together.

[00:07:39] **Devin Zuckerman** I don't think that really came through to me that it's like a love poem about a place until we were there.

[00:07:45] **Martien Halvorson-Taylor** His voice was mediated through his poetry.

[00:08:09] **Ariana Maki** There's plenty of space on the side of the truck that stopped because of its load. They are going to maneuver the cars through this space. We are welcome to join them in the cars or walk if we so prefer. I'm going to walk.

[00:08:21] **Willis Jenkins** It's up to you, Jon.

[00:08:22] **Jon Cannon** I'd do it. Do it in a minute.

[00:08:24] **Willis Jenkins** I'd ride on top.

[00:08:26] **Kurtis Schaeffer** I've only ever been here in the summer, so I've never experienced the cold or the snow, you know, and I wasn't expecting to experience it on this trip either.

[00:08:48] **Willis Jenkins** The crane numbers have been increasing and the hypothesis was habitat pressure in China.

[00:08:53] **Tshering** They feed on those leftover seeds, roots, potatoes

[00:08:59] **Karen McGlathery** So this is the perfect place because you have both farming and then you have the wetlands.

[00:09:02] **Tshering** Yes, yes, yes. Especially this valley has been just been protected for them. Yeah.

[00:09:07] **Kinley Tenzin** Fifteen years ago, the black-necked cranes coming to Bhutan were not really that pronounced. It was the flagship species for Bhutan long time back. And [The Royal Society for Protection of Nature] was established to look after the conservation of the black-necked cranes under His Majesty's command. Now we have realized that the black-necked cranes coming from Tibet to Bhutan is actually increasing every year.

[00:09:39] **Martien Halvorson-Taylor** Being in a place transforms your knowledge of a place in a way that all the advanced work and all the advanced reading and all the advanced preparation can't account for.

[00:09:58] **Willis Jenkins** Without quite being traditional pilgrims in our own way, we try and follow in paths that have been historically sacralized in a way that opens us to the experience of what about this place may have drawn people to make it sacred in the way that they have.

[00:10:11] **Jon Cannon** I found a lot here that's personally satisfying. I think what I don't know yet and probably won't know is how stable this culture and this institutional system is in a rapidly changing world.

[00:10:30] **Karen McGlathery** It's been really enlightening for me to think about religious history and how that intersects with people's behavior, that's really helped me think more broadly about the connections between people and their environment and how people make decisions, which is really what it's all about.

[00:10:47] **Willis Jenkins** It's hard to create shared research questions across music and law and science and three different ways of doing religious studies.

[00:10:55] **Martien Halvorson-Taylor** This is what the humanities does. It integrates a lot of different perspectives with some sense that we're getting some sort of a roadmap for how to go forward.

[00:11:07] **Willis Jenkins** We are coming to questions that everybody can find their own research contribution toward. We're tightening our questions and then we're going to carry those questions into our next two sites.