

What does it mean to be a Bhutanese?

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Being born in Bhutan is not enough for an individual to call himself or herself a Bhutanese. One has to have all the moral values and attitudes that make the Bhutanese distinct from any other people in the world.

Being a Bhutanese is being a patriotic citizen, preserving our age-old culture and traditions, enhancing our moral values and attitudes, and being responsible.

A strong belief in the traditional culture and religions is a striking characteristic of a true Bhutanese. Although the Bhutanese from different valleys have developed their own ways of worshipping their local deities, their beliefs have the same roots. And this encourages unity and gives a common identity to the Bhutanese. If the origin of our beliefs were, however, diverse, there would be conflicts among the citizens, which might lead to the erosion of our sense of nationhood in the long run.

Our attitude and sense of responsibility towards Bhutan define our national identity. Attitude is a behavioural activity of a person influenced by generations of practices in a society. Genuine compassion for the community, generosity towards others and a hospitable attitude to others make the Bhutanese special. Responsibility comes in different ways and especially Bhutanese take the responsibility of being a host very seriously. They put the guest before themselves and do whatever they can to make sure that the guest is comfortable. Richelle Martin, an intern from Canada at Sherubtse College, said, “The strong sense of community and caring for one another that I felt in Bhutan is something that I have never experienced before”.

The Bhutanese always offer a helping hand to the needy in times of hardships and are also eager to share in their joys. They have an inborn attitude to help each other and cooperate with others which makes for the uniqueness of the Bhutanese identity. The welcoming attitude of the Bhutanese to strangers itself is an important aspect of their identity for the Bhutanese. The Bhutanese have a deep sense of belonging to the country.

It is the way that they think and the way they do things that adds up to the Bhutanese DNA. Every Bhutanese is related to the other, whether it be family, co-workers or friends. These relationships of the Bhutanese contribute to the strong bond among them and bind the country together.

The Bhutanese have a habit of addressing even a stranger as “brother” or “sister” to create a sense of oneness. This is a value the Bhutanese hold dear. To be a Bhutanese is to respect others whether young or old, in high positions or low. One way of showing respect to someone is by bowing down and avoiding eye contact. This deep respect for others helps create mutual understanding.

Bhutanese culture is unique. There is a wide variety of religious and cultural ceremonies, different national dresses and diverse beliefs compared to many other countries.. There are mask dances, *tshechus* and philosophies that determine the identity of a Bhutanese. The different aspects of its culture help in preserving and sharing what one might call the Bhutanese values.

To be a Bhutanese is to be aware of moral values. We recite *tomche* (grace) before eating and pray when we go to bed or wake up. These rituals create a sense of being protected by the local deities and create a feeling of well-being. To be a Bhutanese is to dress properly. The peculiar dress of the Bhutanese itself is a strong signifier of the Bhutanese identity.

A unique culture and tradition, individual attitude and high moral values are among several fundamental values that contribute to the Bhutanese identity. It embodies within it the uniqueness of different regions, races, dress codes, languages, practices, religions and the country.

If a nation only has people with a homogenous identity with one language, one set of beliefs and practices and the same *ghos* and *kiras*, it could lead to overt uniformity.