

FLORA DAVIS

Have Much & Be Confused, 2009
Patinated metals, gold leaf, on paper, 23 x 30 in



CANDACE CALSOYAS

Song for Each Other Who Will Decide for Bhutan?

Who has decided—who has the right to decide—for the countless legions of people who were not consulted that the supreme value is a world without insects, even though it be also a sterile world ungraced by the curving wing of a bird in flight? The decision is that of the authoritarian temporarily entrusted with power; he has made it during a moment of inattention by millions to whom beauty and the ordered world of nature still have a meaning that is deep and imperative.

—Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring*

I am in Bhutan to talk about environmental awareness, encourage indigenous organic farming practices, and inform the Bhutanese about the successes of the California organic movement. Bhutan is a poor country, but one with a unique mix of sublime beauty, Buddhist values, and respect for the environment. It is a country that appreciates its indigenous ways and culture. Flanked by China, India, and Nepal, its rarefied atmosphere, carved-painted wooden buildings, few roads, and pervasive quiet attract Westerners willing to pay \$250 a day for the experience of being there.

Elsewhere, we have seen how rapid modernization—economic development, industrialization, and commercialization—can have a devastating effect on tradition. Can Bhutan go forward while maintaining what is worth preserving? To illustrate the evils of corporate farming, I start a lecture to middle-school teachers by quoting Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*. “Who has decided?” she asked. And I wonder, who will decide in Bhutan?

Bhutan is a musical country, filled with festivals and dance. But most striking is the quiet that reigns. Prayer flags strung in unscalable canyons: how did they get there? They flap, suggesting inaudible secrets known only to spirits. The colorful flags punctuate narrow river valleys that are strangely quiet, with no buzzing city noises. As I lecture, my thoughts emerge from that silence to form what I think of as a “song for each other.” I've been sent to Bhutan on a Fulbright Scholarship so that, as Lhundup, my sponsor from the Royal Education Council (a think tank appointed by the king), says, “We can learn from each other.” But can we?

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America has lost so much, and Bhutan has everything to lose. Bhutan is pristine in its quiet, with no high-rises, neon, malls—it's the world as it is... a beatific country, with whispers of sound and not an ugly picture in sight. Its constitution mandates preservation of 60 percent of the forests, and prohibits killing of wildlife, including fish. Can we learn how Buddhist principles protect your land?

You can learn from us: we lost our land, our bears, our wolves, our birds, the wild plants... and out of that came activism—angry people who raged at watching forests fall with a snap and a thud. Americans mad while watching