The colours of Thimphu Tshechu

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Thimphu Tshechu, one of the most popular festivals in the country, has come and gone but the colours and vibrancy that came along with the festival can still be felt in every corner of the capital. Men and women, young and old who attended the festival dressed themselves in their best.

Bright, colourful and expensive weaves were taken out from the closets once more while many dug deep into their pockets for a new set of clothes.

Ugyen Wangmo, 27, a corporate employee, excitedly began the first day of tshechu as she adorned herself with a new set of silk kira, tego and wonju that was stitched and kept ready weeks ahead of the festival. She spent around Nu 80,000 for the set.

With the latest design (*pesar*), the beige colour kira, mixed with colours such as pink, yellow, blue and green, was breathtakingly beautiful. It was a dress fit for a princess. The dominating designs, such as diamond and triangle in old weaves of *kushuthara*, *ngosham*, *lungsem* and *ikapur*, could be seen in her kira.

It took about an hour for Ugyen Wangmo to get ready with her hair and make up set properly and like a princess she looked. She completed her look with a beige handbag and high stilettos.

They say we have to own at least one such kira and it's important that we are well dressed for the occasion, Ugyen Wangmo said.

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Ugyen Wangmo reached Tashichhodzong as the tshechu began and there she was greeted with the most intricate set of designs in Bhutanese weaves, which were worth more than thousands of ngultrums. A sea of colours that was teamed with bright brocade tegos, intricately patterned rachus and traditional jewellery literally shimmered and sparkled the arena.

On the green carpet, in the middle of Tendrelthang, the story of Pholey Moley, who is said to be the most good looking male and female, were being performed as Atsaras, with his wooden mask, crooked nose and a permanent grin, the jester of tshechu, joyfully cracked jokes that made audience roar with laughter.

As Ugyen Wangmo looked for a spot to sit, among the thousands of people that attended the day, she met her friends that were equally well dressed. They soon found a spot to sit.

Tshewang Yuden, 29, a corporate employee, wore a kira that was worth more about Nu 50,000. She was with her two-year-old son who was dressed in brocade silk gho.

Tshechu is a perfect time for the family to spend some time outdoors and also see what others are wearing, Tshewang Yuden said. "It's an exciting time of the year to not only wear our best clothes but also receive blessings for the year. It is an auspicious time."

Marvelling and observing the colourful crowd was Dechen, 72, who attended tshechu along with her grandchildren. Dechen wore a kira, an heirloom that was passed down in her family, which gave a glimpse into the history.

The fabric was first bought from the borders between Bhutan and Tibet during my grandmother's time, Dechen recalled. "Not many wear this type of fabric anymore. Once it was a rage when I was a young girl. Today, many prefer to wear a woven intricate kira instead of these type of fabrics."

In the olden days, people used to borrow clothes and jewellery to outdo one another during tshechu, Dechen said.

"They used to compete even in the kinds of food they brought for lunch. It's like a competition. If your neighbour is wearing a beautiful or unique patterned kira today, the next day, you have to show up in a better and more expensive one," she said.

Today, the competition still remains. Everyone is trying to outdo the other by wearing more expensive and unique textile garments and jewellery, Dechen said. "Despite the competition, it's good that people are still respecting the festival by turning up and wearing beautiful clothes."

In men's wear, there is some vibrant change that can't go unnoticed. Though the designs are the usual such as diamond and boxes, the colours are much brighter and the materials worn are expensive. Many men wore gho made of pure silk, *bura* (raw silk) and brocade.

A government employee, Ugyen, wore a *bura* gho to the festival. He paid Nu 10,000 for the material. He wears the gho during special occasion. Unlike women, men don't have to dig deep into their pockets during tshechu, they can make do with a single special gho that could be worn for several such occasions.

During the three days, Thimphu had been much more festive and brighter. Not only Tashichhodzong but also the Norzin Lam was equally packed with stalls and food court that gave the much needed festivity atmosphere in the capital.

After all the happenings during the three days, these prized possessions once again returned to the closets until the next festival.

