

Chapter 1 **Introduction**

The topic of my dissertation entitled “THE GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF MODERN EDUCATION IN BHUTAN (1907 TO 1997 A.D.)” is an attempt to explain thoroughly and critically the growth and development of modern education there.

Bhutan is situated in the Himalayan Mountains, with China to the north and India to the east, west and south. Nearly the entire tract of the country, apart from a small area along the Indian boundary, is hilly. The country had no contact with outside world for a long time, partially because of its mountainous terrains and partially because it wanted to keep itself aloof from the outsiders especially in view of the rapid conquests of Indian territories by the East India Company.¹

It was in 746 A.D. the Indian saint Padmasambhava first made his influence in the religious life of Bhutan.² In 1616, Ngawang Namgyal, the great Lama of Tibet came to Bhutan and established *Drukpa Kagyu* School of Mahayana Buddhism³ as the state religion. He consolidated his authority over the whole country and established himself as the undisputed ruler. For the overall governance of the country he created the office of the *Desi* which in western parlance came to be known as *Deb Raja*. He also founded the state clergy headed by a spiritual leader titled *Je Khenpo*⁴ (the Chief Abbot). This system of diarchy continued for almost three centuries; though the internal dissention, conflicts and even chaos were not uncommon in separate bids to gain power and control over the State. Ultimately a hereditary monarchy was established in the year 1907 under the leadership of Ugyen Wangchuck the *Penlop* (Governor) of Tongsa. He brought the entire country under the rule of an absolute monarchy.

The initial relation between India and Bhutan during the British period was characterized by misgivings, hostility, and eventual armed conflicts because of claims and counter claims over 18 passes leading out and into Bhutan. Ultimately the war culminated with the Treaty of Sinchula which was signed in 1865 restoring friendly relations. In 1910, the King Ugyen Wangchuck signed a treaty of friendship with the British India. Under the influence of the British Political Officers assigned to look after the Bhutan affairs, Ugyen Wangchuck first introduced the system of modern

secular education by opening two schools in Haa and Bumthang.⁵ Thus the newly established kingdom commenced its historic initiation of modern western system of education. He died in 1926 and his son Jigme Wangchuck ascended the throne.

Being an educated person he demonstrated support for his father's initiative but not just supporting the two old schools but also by establishing new schools in various parts of the country thereby cementing the foundation and broadening the reach of modern education system.

The third King, Jigme Dorji Wangchuck (1952-1972) is known as the 'Father of Modern Bhutan' due to his far reaching political reforms, introduction of the Five Year Development Plan which included provisions for better education. The fourth King, Jigme Singye Wangchuck (1972-)⁶ initiated a concept of Gross National Happiness which laid emphasis in the holistic and sustained development in education and all aspects of the Bhutanese life. During his reign the Bhutanese society saw the rapid growth through the establishment of various educational institutions such as schools, institutes, colleges and also the country's first university.

The beginning of modern education in Bhutan was not an easy process. People resided in isolated valleys and there was no communication among them. Geographical features of the country and the distances between the settlements made it difficult to provide education in every part of the country. These drawbacks were underscored by lack of common facilities like roads, electricity, wired and wireless communication, effective postal services etc. It cannot be overlooked that there was also no political unity till the beginning of the twentieth century. Even when the kingdom was united under a hereditary monarchy the ethnic diversity came as a hindrance to the establishment of a universal education system since there was no common language amongst the numerous castes and tribes in the country.⁷

Even after the establishment of modern education system there were still several problems to surmount - scarcity of teachers, communication to schools, scarcity of textbooks etc. It is understandable, therefore, that the growth of education system was not uniform in the whole country. In those valleys which had access to facilities schools were constructed and remote and inaccessible areas had to wait for years and even decades. Establishment of educational institutions started gradually

from few elementary schools to a laborious schedule in establishing higher learning institutions.

Formerly, education in Bhutan meant only the monastic education. This traditional education served the spiritual and intellectual needs of the country. Education was considered as a part of religion and monasteries were the centres of learning. When modern education system was introduced it was an untraded path for most Bhutanese and understandably parents did not want to send their children to schools. They even used to beg not to admit their children to school. But since the launch of development activities, peoples' views gradually changed. Modern English medium education ultimately became the dominant mode of education system in the country.

Modern education system, when it was first introduced in Bhutan it was an inheritance of the education system that existed in British India. The country did not have sufficient human and economic resources to introduce a new system, so it followed the pattern of education existed in India. The period of 1980s and 1990s is marked a period of advancement of the Bhutanese education system and eventually nationalization of the education system was introduced.

Today Bhutan has developed a lot in the field of education. At the end of the twentieth century significant changes have taken place in the growth of literacy rate, development of educational institutions, introduction of non-formal education system and over all development through education. Educating all the adult population above 15 years of age is almost achieved in fulfilling the national goal. With national policy of eradicating illiteracy in the country, the Royal Government has aimed to provide educational opportunities in every parts of the country. Besides the government's initiative, private sectors were also encouraged in establishing schools and learning centres to provide more and more educational opportunities to the masses. From the time of its founding, schools across the country catered free education thereby upholding children's right to education.

The dissertation covers the period from 1907 to 1997. The year 1907 was the ascending year of the first hereditary monarch to the throne; and the first monarch did the tasks of initiating the beginnings of modern education in the country. The year 1997 marked the completion of the Seventh Five Year Plan period, with the goal of

compulsory primary education for all along with the introduction of non-formal and adult literacy programme. Thus the span of time covered by this study is nearly the entire twentieth century, a period that actually witnessed the development of modern education in Bhutan.

The present study attempts to make a broad enlarged description of the growth of modern education in Bhutan. There are certain key questions which in the present study have been well resolved in multifaceted analysis in different phases of the dissertation:

- i) Were the geographical and historical factors the main obstacles in the growth of modern education in Bhutan? Were also the inadequate communication system between the valleys and aloofness of the country from the outside world the barriers in the development of educational system?
- ii) What was the role played by the hereditary monarchy in the growth of modern education in the country?
- iii) What was the nature of education in the monasteries in the past till the end of the twentieth century?
- iv) What role did India and the Indians play in developing Bhutan's modern education?
- v) What was the contribution of the Christian missionaries and the indigenous Bhutanese in the establishments of schools in Bhutan?
- vi) How did Bhutan attempt to develop modern education through their Five Year Plans?
- vii) What was the overall condition of education from primary to tertiary level in the periods from 1907 to 1997?
- viii) What was the impact of modern education in Bhutanese administration, society and culture?
- ix) Whether the number of schools, colleges and university established in Bhutan can actually meet the need of the country and the requirement of the people or not?

x) Why residential schools have better served the students in Bhutan; and what connection does the system has with hazardous communication in the country?

xi) Why did the Government introduce English as the principal medium of education in the country; and what extra benefits did the English medium bring to the people and the country?

xii) What is the nature of free education in Bhutan and what is the tremendous role played by the government in this regard?

xiii) What has been the crucial role of modern education in the modernization of Bhutan?

The present work includes eleven chapters consisting of the Introduction as the first chapter and Conclusion on the eleventh chapter. In the second chapter an attempt has been made to study the geographical background of the country. Because it is imperative to know how the hilly terrain, isolated valleys, communication problems, language differences came as the main hindrances behind the growth of modern education. Keeping in mind the geographical disparity in the country the researcher has tried to present a study in the growth of modern education in Bhutan. Background of the condition of education has been presented along with the historical perspective because the primary objective is to study the growth of education from historical background. Bhutanese were conservative and Bhutan was an isolated country but when they came into contact with British India they also came in touch with modern British system of education. So the history of the growth of modern education system of Bhutan has kept a close pace, along with the overall development of the country and this has been viewed vividly.

The third chapter deals with the education in the monasteries of Bhutan. It is well known that Bhutan is a religious country and religion has a great impact in the state system. There was religious or monastic education system from the very beginning. The researcher has tried to highlight the education system in the monasteries till the end of the twentieth century because this system has a great impact in the society and culture of Bhutan. In spite of the introduction of the modern education monastic schools is continuing under the patronage of the Royal Government.

The fourth chapter tries to explain the growth of modern education under the hereditary monarchy. It is very common that the geographical and historical background of the country had a bearing in the mind-set of the people and in the beginning the people were indifferent to modern secular education. Political uniformity established in Bhutan with the ascendency of the first hereditary King, Ugyen Wangchuck. It was the hereditary rulers who actually led to the growth and development of modern education. Consequently, it has been attempted to study the contributions of the hereditary rulers in the growth of modern education.

In the fifth chapter, it has been attempted to look at the beginning of overall development of the country through the country's Five Year Development Plans stressing on the allocation of funds towards the development of modern education. It has been vividly described that though the country faced many basic problems such as communication, poverty, transportation, unemployment, still education was given prior importance which ultimately led to the overall development of the country.

The sixth chapter attempts to provide an overall description of the development of modern education from Second Five Year Plan to Seventh Five Year Plan. Allocations of funds for education in all the Plan periods have been discussed thoroughly and critically. An attempt has been made to show the initiative of the Royal Government to create opportunities for improving the standards of education in the country by allocating funds and establishing educational institutions.

The seventh chapter explains and analyses the development of education in Bhutan in different levels such as: primary, secondary and tertiary from the very beginning of modern education. This chapter deals with the school administration, curriculum, role of teachers, evaluation system etc. Non-formal education adult education and technical education have played a leading role in the country's development process and the researcher has given attention into these fields also.

The chapter eight has dealt with the role played by the Government of India and the hundreds of Indians in the spread of modern education in Bhutan. The research clearly shows that without the financial and technical assistance from the Government of India, Bhutan would not have found the path of rapid development. The contribution of the Indian teachers in the growth of modern education has been discussed elaborately.

In the ninth chapter an attempt has been made to assess the contribution of Christian missionaries. Because they had contributed a lot in the growth of modern educational system, so assessments of their contribution is very noteworthy. The researcher has also made an attempt to deal with the role played by the indigenous Bhutanese in the development of modern education in the country.

The tenth chapter takes into account the fact that whether the growth and development of modern education has strengthened the cultural aspect of the people. The main aim of the researcher is to highlight how modern education served as an instrument in the process of social and administrative changes in the country.

The study closes with the Concluding chapter which provides a detailed account of researcher's findings. The researcher has tried to prove that though the work is historical it is undeniably an interdisciplinary work because the growth and development of a country is related with the society, administration, cultural and political background as well. Education of a country cannot be examined with any heed to the backdrop from political, social and economic conditions which influence its growth and development. The materials so far collected have been cross-examined and cross-compared in order to arrive at transparent conclusions in the midst of any kind of confusion and contradiction.

It is fully an empirical research work. For source materials the present study depends on archival materials as well as published government sources. The researcher has visited the various wings of the Ministry of Education in Bhutan several times to collect government published and unpublished documents. Various materials have been collected from the National Library, Thimphu to analyze the development of education in Bhutan. Archival materials have been collected from the Indian National Archives, Delhi, to interpret the relationship between India and Bhutan and contribution made by India in the development of modern education in Bhutan. Some archival materials have been collected from the State Archives, Kolkata to study the relationship between the Bengal government and Bhutan during the British period. The researcher has also collected some valuable rare documents related to the study from the National Library, Kolkata. Interviews were held with various personalities in Bhutan who had contributed in the growth of modern education in the country. The researcher met with them several times to tap their experiences as actual field workers in the growth of country's modern education.

Respondents also include many who had no direct contribution to the development but were beneficiary or living witnesses to the benefits of modern education. Most of the data consulted and collected in the process of research work have been presented in the form of tables with necessary notes and interpretations. In preparing this work, all accessible source materials, both primary and secondary sources have been cautiously scrutinized. Primary materials have been accorded more importance whenever conflict has been detected between primary sources and secondary sources. The target of research has always been to arrive at verifiable truth as to the main issue of modern education in Bhutan.

Being a citizen of India which is always a privileged partner and friend of Bhutan, when Bhutan was preparing for celebrations of 100 years of modern education in 2012, then the researcher decided to take up research work on this subject. In preparing the dissertation paper she has faced lots of hardships due to the scarcity of sources related to her field of study. The researcher visited Bhutan several times but found that methodical documentation of historical documents and preservation of archival material is a recent phenomenon there and is still in the process of evolution. Another problem is that uniform spelling pattern of the Dzongkha words are not found in the books or documents or even in governments records, even the names of the places has been mentioned differently in different sources, naturally she followed the spelling as found in the related sources and which also varied according to the sources. So there were many limitations as her work was related to a foreign country and paucity of documents were the main hindrance in the way of documenting the growth and development of modern education of that country.

Anyway the researcher has tried her best to overcome all the difficulties and dedicated herself to put a narrative and analytical record of the growth and development of modern education of Bhutan on the basis of limited primary and secondary sources. The thesis has laid emphasis on the expansion of modern education in Bhutan from the beginning till the end of the twentieth century broadly viewing its effects in the overall development of the country. The dissertation covers the period from the year 1907 to 1997 i.e., covering almost a century. The researcher's endeavour is to draw attention to the problems and progress the small kingdom faced during the first ninety years of the beginning of modern educations.

An attempt has been made to explore, understand and place on record Bhutan's development in the multifarious aspects in the field of education and to render a compact as possible study for future reference of scholars, administrators, historians, educationists and anyone interested in the subject.

Notes:

1. In the north the Himalaya acted as a natural barrier and in the south the notorious malaria belt became a natural deterrent. Penetration to the interiors was a task for the brave because of the difficult terrain and a general unwelcome attitude of the government. Often internal political struggles and even civil wars foreclosed any official permission for legal entry.
2. Padmasambhava (Sanskrit: Lotus born) is reverentially referred to as *Guru Rimpoche* (The Precious Teacher) by the Bhutanese.
3. Mahayana is divided into four sects or schools of Nyingmapa, Sakyapa, Gelukpa and Kagyupa. Kagyupa has its own sub-sects following different interpretations of the religion as well as some differences in rituals and *Drupka Kagyupa* is one such sub-sects.
4. *Je* superior, great, eminent etc and *khenpo* abbot.
5. Haa in South-west and Bumthang are in Central Bhutan.
6. He abdicated in 2006 in favour of his eldest son.
7. There are about 20 different languages/dialects spoken in Bhutan among which Dzongkha (the official national language), Tsangla (Sharchopkha) and Nepali (Lhotshamkha) are the three major languages.