

Chapter 11

Conclusion

The preceding chapters have examined the growth of modern education in Bhutan illustrating the dynamics behind its development as well as the vicissitudes often as tantamount to impediments to steady progress. In this concluding section I would like to draw a brief summary of the study and like to present some of the salient findings.

The geographical position and historical tradition of Bhutan have played a major role in the growth of education in Bhutan. It is a mountainous kingdom blessed with numerous fertile valleys strewn across its landscape. These valleys, each detached from the other by series of high mountains, turbulent rivers, and hostile forests were the home of diverse ethnic, linguistic and cultural groups. Understandably, under the prevailing conditions it was very difficult to introduce a system of education suitable for entire population. At first Hindi was adopted as the medium of instruction largely because the kingdom could with ease draw from the abundant pedagogical materials and trained teachers, none of which existed in Bhutan, from neighbouring India. Later English was adopted as the medium of instruction on account of its strength as an international language of communication. In the initial stage modern education was introduced in the more densely populated and easily accessible valleys. The less populated valleys were naturally disadvantageous as there was a great distance from one school to another, and specially so if the covering distance posed hazards of wild animals, swift swollen rivers and uncharted forest routes. Thus geographical hindrances were the main hurdle to the growth of education system in Bhutan.

Historically Bhutan has been very rich in the sphere of art, architecture, painting, sports etc. Culture as an image of the linkage between the past and the present as well as among various groups of people living in different valleys has well bestowed itself with numerous forms of dance, painting, art, crafts and architecture. Likewise, in case of the dissemination of education, for centuries, Bhutan has had its own system of Buddhist religious education, known as monastic education; and historical tradition favoured this type of education. Monastic education includes the study of religious scriptures as well as other subjects, including literacy, numeracy,

philosophy, astrology, arts, painting, traditional medicines etc. So, before the initiation of the modern education, monastic education served the needs of the society. But after the introduction of modern education, monastic education has lost much of its influence in the society as the general people began to view modern education as the key to success in modern life, while monastic education retained its strong influence in the religious lives of the people.

Modern education was introduced through the initiative of the first King, Ugyen Wangchuck. After coming in contact with British India, he felt the need of formal education and established the country's first secular school at Haa in 1914. The second King, Jigme Wangchuck took on the legacy of his father and rapidly accelerated the pace of modernization by establishing schools in some parts of the country. However, the real architect of modern education system was the third King, Jigme Dorji Wangchuck. He realized that the country could no longer prosper enveloped in the long-standing insular traditional system despite its valuable contribution in the past. In a push to modernize the country he took the path of establishing schools not only in accessible and well populated areas but in every possible nook and corner of the country. Despite the well-meant and well-intended quest of the third monarch the residual discrepancies missed or unattended fell on the youthful shoulders of the fourth King, Jigme Singye Wangchuck. To iron out the remaining deficiencies, he took on a mission to eliminate, as far as possible, the regional disparity in education due to spatial disadvantages and other stumbling blocks. He can be said to have oiled and greased the wheels of the chariot of modern education to reach an internationally acceptable level.

Bhutan's modern education developed in parallel with its planned economic development. The first developmental steps taken to catch up with the rest of the world was the introduction of the Five Year Plans. But the country was too poor to pursue its ambition, and the Indian government totally financed the First and Second Five Year Plans. Modern education was given due importance in the first two and subsequent Five Year Plans, sufficient funds were allocated in the budget which led to the vigorous educational development of the country. My study period ends with the end of the Seventh Five Year Plan i.e., 1997, wherein the objective was to achieve compulsory primary education along with the introduction of non-formal and adult literacy programme. Today, modern educational system in Bhutan is based on a

system of primary, secondary and higher education. Besides these there are non-formal education, adult education, technical education, special education, etc. Facilities in schools in the beginning period of modern education system being very scarce, and till the end of 80s of the last century the Education Department had to depend on external assistance and non-national teachers. Commencing with very low literacy figure, the progress of education was hampered by some major constraints which attributed the low literacy rate, such as poor school facilities, high dropout and repeater rates, shortage of teachers, dearth of proper learning materials, awareness deficiency in the guardians of the benefits of modern education etc. With the launch of the system of community schools during the Sixth Five Year Plan (1987-1992) which were within easier reach of the remote communities' education penetrated secluded areas significantly contributing to an enhance in the number of presence of children in the schools. The government's vision may have been the trigger to this enormous leap forwards but due credit must fall on the community people who voluntarily furnished land, labour and materials in the construction of community schools. In keeping with the needs of the time, there were Sanskrit schools termed as '*pathsalas*' in southern part of the country which followed the primary schooling system of the neighbouring India. The curricula in primary education were rectified to incorporate the history, values and environment of the Bhutanese concept under the New Approach to Primary Education.

Secondary education had three stages- Class VII and VIII, followed by Class IX and X and then XI and XII. At the end of Class X students sat for the examinations of Indian Certificate of Secondary Education and then for the Indian School Certificate in class XII. In 1983, there was only one degree college, Sherubtse College, affiliated to the Delhi University providing three years courses in arts, science and commerce leading to a bachelor degree. Before the beginning of this first regular college there were also other educational institutions such as National Institute of Education at Samtse(founded in 1968), Royal Bhutan Institute of Technology at Dawathang (founded in 1972) Royal Institute of Health Sciences(founded in 1974), National Institute of Education at Paro(founded in 1975), The National Institute of Traditional Medicines in Thimphu(founded in 1971), to which were later added the Institute of Language and Culture Studies at Simtokha(founded in 1997) and Natural Resources Training Institute at Lobesa(founded in 1992). All these educational

institutions played their significantly important role in nation building by offering different types of training programmes.

Christian missionaries, specifically the Jesuit Catholics, devoted themselves to the growth and development of modern education in Bhutan. In 1963, Father Mackey, a Canadian Jesuit, who had been heading St. Roberts High School in Darjeeling, was invited to the country to build Bhutan's first high school in Kanglung on the model of schools in Darjeeling. Father tried to initiate a uniform curriculum in all the schools, brought text books from India and due to his initiative English was adopted as the medium of instruction. Besides Father Mackey there were many other Jesuits who visited the country in 60s and 70s of the last century, taught in remote schools, helped in establishing schools and solemnly contributed in the educational development of the country. The Salesians, another group of Christian missionaries, have their own significant role in establishing technical education in Bhutan.

The native contribution has to be viewed with lofty esteem. Headmen and villagers of remote mountain villages and smaller settlements, people who had never seen a school, freely gave of their treasure, time, talent and terrain to establish primary schools. It is not surprising that eventually Bhutan began to produce its own brood of pioneer Bhutanese educationalists as the product of modern education. I find it fitting to cite the names of Bhutanese educationists who are the products of this system of education like Nado Rinchen, Dasho Jagar Dorji, Dasho Pema Thinley, Gagay Lhamu, Chandrakala Gurung, Thakur Singh Powdyel to name a few. Despite the various difficulties in acquiring modern education, due to hard work and tenacity, the fruits of modern education have reached to all parts of the country.

Along with the very conception of modern education in Bhutan, India has generously contributed to its development. After primary schooling Bhutanese students were sent to schools in India as Bhutan had no secondary schools till the end of 1960s. Even after the establishment of institutions of higher learning in Bhutan, the Government of India provided numerous scholarships for Bhutanese students to pursue higher education in different institutions of higher learning in India. However, because of the enormity of the financial aid and the strength of political bond, scholars invariably gauge the Indo-Bhutan relationship with the spotlight entirely on the political and economic dimensions to the exclusion of the Indian contribution to the potent educational and cultural relationship between these two countries. The

cultural relationship between the two countries finds an ancient and indelible thread in Buddhist philosophy. Even today Bhutanese monastic scholars come for higher Buddhist learning in the Tibetan centres in India. At the beginning of the 21st century, most of the Indian teachers had been replaced by Bhutanese teachers; but Indian presence was still visible in the teaching of science and technology. For the present, it still can be visualised that the necessity of Indian teachers remains intact in imparting education in sciences.

The first schools in Bhutan were run by teachers recruited from India, who had to endure the hardship of trudging over mountain passes and through dense forests to convey education to the most remote parts of the country. Postal, telegraph and telephone facilities were rudimentary or in most places non-existent, roads were to come decades later, modern medical facilities were scarce, at places, the temperature dipped to freezing point; and the Indian teachers readily underwent such hardships and troublesome conditions mainly for the purpose of the spread of modern education in Bhutan.

Different agencies of the United Nations and many other non-government organizations from different parts of the world also took various steps from 1970s to assist in the development of modern education in Bhutan. UNICEF extended educational facilities to Bhutan in the form of construction materials, teaching aids and sanitation, modernization of syllabi and training and refresher courses for teachers. Food and Agricultural Organization's World Food Programme (WFP) supplied foodstuffs to improve the nutritional standard of the school going children and thus helped to increase enrolment and attendance of students in several schools. Swiss Development Corporation through Helvetas, a non-governmental organization helped in human resource development through scholarships in undergraduate and graduate studies, workshops, seminars etc. for teachers. International Development Organization (IDA) of the World bank financed various projects to improve the educational structure. Non-governmental organizations such Save the Children Federation (USA) and Save the Children Fund (UK) provided substantial financial support to the education sector.

Bhutan has been on the way of tremendous progress in all spheres within half a century after the implementation of modern education system. Today, this education system is seen as the indispensable means to achieve socio-economic development and progress. Gradually modern education system has become the dominant mode with a well defined structure supporting a system of 1 year of pre-primary, 6 years of primary, 6 years of secondary (2 years of lower secondary, 2 years of middle secondary and 2 years of higher secondary), and 3 years under graduate programme. With the launch of the Five Year Development Plans, the Bhutanese view on education radically changed. As a part of these Plans, literacy rate has increased; girls have found the doors of schools unlocked to educate them. Gradually the number of schools increased, so also the number of girl students.

In order to keep pace with the modern world, Bhutan felt the English medium education as the means of success. Parents realized that modern education leads to job and financial security. Thus, many new schools have been built and more and more children are being enrolled into this education system. In less than fifty years, since the formal introduction of educational system, Bhutan's economy and society have improved greatly. Education in Bhutan has made a giant leap forward when we consider the time that it has taken to assume its present status and the vastness in terms of its expansion, variations, trained manpower, physical facilities and the level of education obtainable. The Royal Government is making every effort to promote education throughout the kingdom. In order to fulfil the objective, the Government is rendering free education so that the light of education reaches the common masses.