

EDUCATION SYSTEM AND THE “LADDER OF SUCCESS”¹

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Since Bhutan started its development activities in 1961, the country has experienced (and continues to experience) considerable changes in its social, political and economic conditions. Today’s young people live in an environment which is very different from the one in which their parent’s generation grew up. This paper focuses on, amongst many socio-economic changes, changes in the role of education (and people’s perception of it) in the society and its relationship to students’ future careers, and aims to understand the relationship among three different components of Bhutan’s human resource development, namely: the education system, the government grading system of civil service (which is the largest employer of the country), and changes in young people’s preferences in terms of their career, which appears to be changing following socio-economic changes of the country.

There are three kinds of education in Bhutan, namely English medium education, Dzongkha (Bhutan’s national language) medium education and monastic education. This paper first describes the background to the different kinds of education systems which operate within the society. Then it considers changes in the notion of “success” in the society. Next, the paper discusses the social context of each education system in Bhutan in terms of its influence on an individual’s career scope, and finally considers them in historical and theoretical perspective. In order to examine this social context, the paper employs French sociologist, P. Bourdieu’s concept of “mode of domination”, perspective, which provides several historical and theoretical insights.

The data presented in this paper was corrected during the course of my fieldwork in Bhutan from April 1997 to April 1998. “Young people” in this paper are people mainly from eighteen to thirty years old, and in some cases it includes sixteen and seventeen year old students.

Education System and Launch of Development Activities

Modern English medium education is the dominant mode of education today and encompasses the largest number of schools and students of the three types of system. Formal secular education, according to Driem, was introduced into Bhutan by the first king, Ugyen Wangchuck (1862-1926; regn. 1907-1926), with the opening of two schools. This number was expanded to five schools during the reign of the second king, Jigme Wangchuck (1905-1952, regn. 1926-1952). In the

mid-1950s, during the reign of the third king, Jigme Dorji Wangchuck (1928-1972, regn. 1952-1972), it was decided to set up a nationwide network of formal secular education (Driem, 1994: p. 95). In 1959, there were fifty-nine primary schools and 1,500 students in the country (Imaeda, 1994: p. 111). Before the launch of the First Five Year Plan (1961-1966), education covered only the primary level (Ministry of Development, 1971: p. 40). Thus, almost all of the higher education of Bhutanese students took place in India (Holsti, 1982: p. 28). In 1997 there were more than three hundred schools and institutions from primary to college level with about 90,000 students in them (Education Division, 1997). The gross primary enrolment rate, according to the Eighth Five Year Plan (1997-2002), is estimated to be seventy-two percent (Ministry of Planning, 1996: p. 178).¹

In modern English medium education students are taught science, mathematics, English and social studies in English. Dzongkha is the only subject which is taught in the national language.¹ The structure of English medium education at the time of my fieldwork consists of one year pre-primary, six years of primary education, four years of secondary education (two years in junior high school level and two years in high school level), two years of the junior college programme and three years in the under-graduate programme. Courses in training institutes are available for students who have passed various levels of education, however most courses are for those who have passed Class 10. English medium education is seen as the mainstream mode of education in Bhutan not only because of the number of students enrolled in the system but also in terms of the social attention given to it. When people talk about education, it almost automatically means English medium education. These days in Thimphu, "young people" are becoming an issue, because of problems of drugs, smoking and alcohol, and also, people think, because respect for Bhutanese culture and tradition is declining amongst young people. But when people talk about young people in this context they usually only mean those in English medium education. The opinions held by those young people educated in English medium schools therefore can be seen as the dominant view among young people in Bhutan.

Dzongkha medium education on the other hand is a minor partner in terms of number of schools and students. In 1997, there were five educational institutions¹ and one Dzongkha Honours Course in Sherubtse College. There are approximately five hundred students enrolled in these institutes and on the course. The curriculum of these schools are specialised: amongst them, the Institute of Language and Cultural Studies in Simtokha provides the most comprehensive and

general curriculum. The students learn Dzongkha, Chokey,¹ English, Buddhist philosophy, folk music, mask dancing, astrology, Buddhist painting, Bhutanese carpentry, as well as mathematics and science.¹ Teaching staff includes both monks and teachers trained in English medium institutes or colleges. This institute used to provide classes from primary level to Class 12. However, at the time of my fieldwork, primary education was gradually being phased out, and a new curriculum had started for Classes 11 and 12 which was available for those who had passed Class 10 in English medium education. The phasing out of the primary level in this Institute appears to have important implications for Bhutan's education in general. By phasing out the primary level, all secular primary education is now in English medium education. In other words all people who want a secular education must go through six years of English medium education where Dzongkha is treated as only one among other subjects. It is expected that the secular education system will not produce Dzongkha experts in the same quantity as it used to do and the quality will lessen. Dzongkha experts in this context include Dzongkha teachers and *dungtsho*, doctors of "traditional medicine."¹ The phasing out also appears to reflect changes in employment demands in the society, and also the government's own view about the human resources of the country. Students of this institute are increasingly aware of a narrowing down the careers open to them. Young people who have grown up in English medium education are much more in demand from both the public and the private sectors. However, this trend does not necessarily mean that Bhutan's education as a whole is shifting from Dzongkha to English. In fact, in English medium education the range of subjects taught in Dzongkha is expected to gradually increase in the near future. From 1995 Environmental Studies has been taught in Dzongkha, initially at the Pre-Primary level, and from 1997 up to Class 3. The Education Division plans to widen the scope of Dzongkha medium teaching in the English medium education sector.¹ Also students in English medium education now have a choice about whether or not to specialise in Dzongkha and its related subjects, such as Buddhist philosophy, at a higher level of education, whereas before there was a clear division between English medium education and Dzongkha medium education. The trend is towards a bilingualism of English and Dzongkha.

Before modern education started, monastic education was almost the only form of education in Bhutan. At the present time figures for those engaged in monastic education are not very clear, primarily because statistics on the numbers of monks (with age break down) are

not available. The total number of monks who are supported by the state is five thousand (Ministry of Planning, 1996: p. 190). In addition to that, there are about three thousand monks living on private patronage (Pommaret, 1994: p. 54).¹ According to Pommaret-Imaeda and Imaeda (1984), boys are admitted to the monasteries at an early age, i.e. five or six years old. The young monks first learn to read and write. Then they learn numerous religious texts by heart, which includes two major Buddhist texts, the complete works of eminent masters, and treatises of philosophy, medicine and astrology. In addition they participate in performing rituals in the monasteries as well as in local households (Pommaret-Imaeda and Imaeda, 1984: pp. 73-74).

Changes in Notion of "Success"

Since the launch of development activities, people's views of education appear to have changed. Formerly, education meant monastic education, and literacy in Dzongkha and Choekey used to be the hallmark of being well-educated. Today, people generally see English medium education as the means of success and English has become an important language among the well-educated.

The meaning of "success" has also changed as socio-economic conditions change rapidly. According to Imaeda (1994: p. 229), before development activities started, almost all the population lived largely on subsistence farming with limited trade between neighbouring valleys through barter.¹ This meant that there was little change in a person's social position. Success came rarely, and was usually restricted to the small number of officials who worked for the king, who might be given the rank of *dasho*.¹ Ura (1998: p. 228) also notes that the society was very stable and that people imagined they would live in the same way as their parents and grandparents had lived. While his description may overemphasize the contrast between the present and the past, he nonetheless provides a careful outline of the life of a village. Recalling his childhood he writes:

Most of my friends thought the future would be like the past and saw no reason to continue their studies. They dropped out of the village school, which had difficulty in getting enough students to keep going. (1998: p. 228)

Probably not many people thought of life in terms of success, because success was not usually achieved by individual effort, but rather it was more often "given" by birth and social position.¹

Further describing life about twenty-five years ago, Ura remarks that children learnt prayers by rote and acquired basic literacy in

Dzongkha and Choeky through the teaching of Buddhist priests. He continues:

People turned to lamas¹ to be cured of illness.... Death was not always prevented by rituals, which were the remedies of first choice. But the bereaved took solace in knowing that the best that could have been attempted was done. For more than a generation, a few enlightened lamas and respected elders provided remarkable leadership for the village. With a moral stature that set them above others, they together possessed an alchemy of leadership that allowed them to keep peace and order, never betraying the motto that within a village, achievements are collective and misfortune should be shared. (Ura, 1998)

Religious practitioners were relied on by the people for every occasion. They were multi-functional, offering basic education, healing people, governing the village with village elders and providing moral and ethical guidance based on Buddhism. They were respected and hence had a certain social status. This status was acquired through their useful knowledge of people's everyday lives, and also through people's perception of their enlightened nature as religious practitioners. These figures may not have been seen as "success" stories, but they are people whom villagers looked up to.

This was the situation, according to Ura, twenty-five years ago. These days, he continues, with parents realizing that education leads to jobs and financial success, enrolment in the primary school of his natal village has jumped to more than eighty percent. This is not only the case in his village - in the rest of the country as well enrolment rates have increased dramatically. More and more schools have been built, and more and more children are being absorbed into the modern education sector.¹ Life for these children is not the same as in their parent's days any more. People have started to see that they have a choice about their own future. As more people go on to higher education, a certain number of people have to be "selected" based on the examination. This procedure has defined and produced losers and winners. And more importantly "the ladder of success" has been come into existence.

For the majority of young people these days, "success" means going to a college, becoming a civil servant and hopefully becoming a *dasho*. A *dasho* with his red scarf signifies power, privilege and respect in society. The factors, which make the civil service a popular and envied career, are manifold. Firstly, it is an occupation which can only be attained after achieving successful examination results. In other words, one has to be a

winner in the current education system. Secondly, as stated in numerous interviews with young people, a civil servant has job security. In the current situation in which the private sector is embryonic in Bhutan, it is a common perception that if you are employed in the private sector, you are employed entirely at the employer's discretion. Moreover, if you are self-employed a day off, for sickness or otherwise, directly affects your income, whereas one can expect regular payment in the civil service, and people do not have to worry so much when they become sick. The third reason is that some people, especially college students perceive that working in the government is "prestigious". One student in Sherubtse College says:

Authority and power are attached to a government job. And this makes life easier, because one can get lots of conveniences, such as being able to build your own house cheaply because of some favours from a contractor. Therefore, people join the government. Also the way people treat you is different. Even if getting the same amount of salary and responsibility, if one is in government, people show respect, but if one is in private business they do not. Although salary is not very good compared to the private sector, if you think about the various conveniences, overall expenditure will be less.

This student is talking about a government officer and his description is not applicable to all government employers. Many students have reservations about becoming a teacher for instance, as they say that people in general do not pay respect to teachers. One student relates that:

Teaching is generally seen as inferior to the position of a government officer. For example one who became an officer, and one who joined in teaching, even if they were classmates, after some years, the officer drives a government vehicle, while the teacher is still riding on a scooter, though their grade¹ is the same.

The fourth reason is an opportunity to go abroad, especially training opportunities and further degrees. Getting a training opportunity is something most people desire. Whether it is easier to get these opportunities sometimes even becomes a determining factor in choosing a job. A student in the college told me, "A lecturer in a college does not have a chance to get a training. So a high school teacher is better. They can get the opportunity to do master's degree abroad."

Climbing Up "the Ladder of Success"

There are several ways of climbing up the Bhutanese ladder of success. The most desirable way for young people in Bhutan is to get the

so-called “professionals” after finishing Class 12 of English medium education. The “professionals” are courses which offer an opportunity to study abroad and to get a degree in a university. These are financed either by the government or donor countries/agencies, and are available for the brightest group of students. The courses offered are mostly in scientific subjects and usually in specialized areas such as medicine, engineering, and architecture. For people in these fields a job in the government sector is guaranteed, and in most cases they can join offices at the highest starting grade, Grade 7. In the grade system of civil service in Bhutan, it takes five years to be promoted to the next grade. Therefore people at any level think carefully about their entry grade. In some cases this is not consistent with the length of the training period needed to be able to take up a particular type of job. For instance, the course for the Certificate in Financial Management at the Royal Institute of Management (RIM) is available for students who have passed Class 10 and takes two years to complete. The entry grade on the completion of the course is 12. Similarly, the Primary Teacher Certificate Course at the National Institute of Education (NIE) is for students who have passed Class 10 and also takes two years. However, the entry grade for those who finish this course is 10. The difference between these two grades equates to ten years of work. This means those who finished the course in RIM can enjoy the same level of income and responsibility as primary school teachers only after ten years of service. One of the main reasons for this is that the government tends to give incentives to areas where more human resources are needed.¹ Getting your “professionals” guarantees a job in the civil service at the highest entry grade possible.

Most courses which fall under the heading of “professionals” are in the field of science.¹ This in turn makes the science stream of Classes 11 and 12 very popular. There is a perception in society that students in the science stream are brighter than those in any other streams.¹ One educationist explains that this is because mathematics and science are subjects in which most Bhutanese students do not take much interest, and so they struggle with them. There are also less Bhutanese science teachers¹ compared with other subjects. It seems to be also the case that the fact that a student gets their highest chance to obtain their “professionals” in the science stream, raises the popularity of science subjects. Thus among Class 10 students, for whom the result of the exam at the end of the year determines whether they can go on to Class 11 or not, the science stream is the most popular. Almost everyone told me that they wanted to be in the science stream. Not surprisingly the requirements for being admitted to the science stream are the most demanding. In the essays which I asked students in Classes 8 and 9 to

write in one of the high schools in Thimphu, the two most popular occupations were doctor and engineer.

Another way of climbing up the ladder of success is to go to a college, obtain a bachelor's degree, and then to try to be selected in the examination held by the Royal Civil Service Commission (RCSC). The examination to select government officers among graduates is seen as somewhat opaque by college students, mainly because the number of officers taken each year is not fixed and known only when names of the selected graduates are announced based on the exam results. In 1997 twenty-two graduates took the examination, and fifteen were selected.¹ If you are selected to be a government officer through this examination, the entry grade is eight. This is the second best way to climb up the ladder of success, after getting your "professionals". In this way, you can start in government service from Grade 8, one level lower than those who have obtained their professionals. It should also be noted that you have to take the RCSC examination to become an officer, whereas for those who get professionals this is not necessary, since the post of officer is guaranteed at the time when they get their "professionals".

Another way of joining the civil service in Grade 8 is through the national financial services course which is offered to graduates with economics or commerce degrees. Becoming a high school teacher is another way of joining the government sector at Grade 8, and is achieved by taking the postgraduate certificate in education course at the National Institute of Education. However, as we have seen, teaching jobs tend to be seen as of a lower status than those of government officials or professions such as doctors and engineers. One college student remarks, "Respect towards teachers exists only within the school campus, whereas the power of and respect towards government officials exists all over the country." A senior government officer recalls her experience. She went to India to study engineering, but after getting a bachelor's degree she worked as a lecturer in one of the training institutes specializing in engineering for some time. She says:

When I went back to my village during holiday, I met an old lady who knew me from my childhood. She asked, 'Where are you working now?' I said, 'I am teaching'. Then she replied in so derogative manner, 'You went to all the way to India to become an engineer. And now you only became a teacher!'

These then are the four ways to climb up towards the top of the ladder of success. From these four the first two are seen as probably the most successful and glamorous. They are respected office jobs with good job security, a reasonable amount of power and income, and hold the

prospect of training opportunities abroad. These jobs are accessible almost exclusively through the modern education sector. There is one job for which entry grade is seven, the highest, and accessible exclusively for those from Dzongkha medium education. This is as a doctor of traditional medicine,¹ or *dungtsho*. However, the course to become a *dungtsho* is not available for the coming years due to a shortage of medicine, which is made of medicinal plants, minerals and parts of animals. The Sherubtse College started a Dzongkha Honours course in 1997, but at the time of writing it is not clear what kind of opportunities are available for Dzongkha graduates.

For those people who could not climb up to this top stage of the success ladder, there are still various options available in the government sector. Almost all options are through training institutes. This means that one has to undertake a certain period of specialized training after completing a level of general education in school. For those who have passed Class 12 but could not manage to get enough exam marks to go on to a college, a course of diploma in financial management in RIM is an option. After two years of training on this course, you will be posted to a government office at Grade 10. For those who have passed Class 10 there are several options. A diploma course in agriculture in the Natural Resource Training Institute (NRTI) is one example. Trainees are posted to agriculture extension centres in different parts of the country at Grade 10 after completing a three year long course. There are also several options available for students who have passed Class 8.¹ However, these days people see that passing Class 10 is a minimum qualification to get a decent, clean, office job, whether in the private or in the government sector.¹

As is probably noticeable from the above description of the various options available for people with different educational qualifications, most training courses are directly related to a job which one can obtain on the completion of the course. Being admitted to a training institute therefore, in most cases, guarantees a job in the government sector. On the other hand, despite a gradually growing (but still embryonic) private sector, it means that there are roughly only the same number of areas for employment as there are training courses. Historically a job has been provided by the government for the educated population. However, the result of this lack of choice is a situation in which young people have to look first at available options rather than thinking about their own interest and aptitudes.

Whatever position on the ladder of success you have reached, the desirable job is a job in the government sector. Although generally speaking income is much higher in the private sector and young people

know this, the majority of them still prefer a job in the government sector. However, recently there has been a small change in this trend. One of these changes is that graduates have started to look for employment in public corporations. Public corporations are those which have previously been owned by the government, but which have now become independent companies. The only newspaper company, *Kuensel*, the Bhutan Broadcasting Service (BBS), and the Food Corporation of Bhutan can be included in this category. *Kuensel* has noted this new trend among graduates:

For university graduates seeking employment the civil service has always been the first choice. But this could be changing going by the decreasing number of graduates appearing for the civil service examinations every year. Out of this year's total 98 (non-professional) graduates only 18 (excluding four from previous batches) sat for the RCSC examination compared with 49 in 1993 and 27 in 1995. (*Kuensel*, 1st November 1997)

This trend can be explained from some of the responses I gathered from college students in Sherubtse. Before I started interviewing the students, I expected to hear many ambitious comments about their future, since the college is the highest in the Bhutan's education system. It was the place, I thought, where the country's elite were concentrated. As I talked with the students however, I found their attitude more modest than I expected. Less students than expected seriously considered taking the RCSC examination. This is firstly because everyone recognizes that getting through the RCSC examination is very tough. They said they would decide whether to take the exam after looking at possibilities in the private sector, corporations and other opportunities in the government sector. In 1997, when I was in Bhutan for fieldwork, the RCSC examination was scheduled at the end of the period in which job interviews were conducted by various public corporations and private companies and for different cadres of government sector, such as teaching. Thus by the time of the RCSC examination the majority of graduates had found a job which held a reasonable level of satisfaction. Only very confident and determined students waited for the RCSC examination. It does not seem to be a common practice to retain other job offers as an insurance and yet still take the examination. The implication is however that if you wait for the examination and then you are not selected, you must lose a year. This is perceived by young people as a serious loss of time. Most of the students pointed to the fear and disappointment of not being selected in the examination as reasons for

not taking it. It is thus not only physically losing one year, but also psychological factors, which make them hesitant to take the examination.

Secondly, public corporations have started to be recognized by graduates as a decent job option in terms of the job security they offer. A student in his final year tells me,

Corporations like Kuensel, BBS, and BDFC (Bhutan Development Finance Corporation) have a security as good as the government services, and the salary is a little better in the corporations. Before nobody wanted to join the corporations.

A student in the first year says that he thinks a job in one of the corporations is as respectable as one in the government service. These responses show that confidence in public corporations is building among students. They see that employees are not laid off abruptly, and the corporations will not go bankrupt easily. At the same time, there is a tendency to want to avoid tough competition. As the number of well-educated people increases, competition among them is becoming greater. A government official tells me his impression as a father of two children, "It is really difficult to become a civil servant through the RCSC examination these days. Probably it is almost impossible to be a civil servant, unless one can get the professionals."¹

This new trend amongst graduates however does not seem to show that the criteria for a good job have changed. "Job security" is still a key word for them. What has changed however is that they have started to see job security as achievable within public corporation. A student explains from a slightly different perspective why job security, rather than salary or one's own interests, is so important:

Wanting security is the Bhutanese mentality. Bhutanese people try to avoid risk. People want a permanent contract rather than a short contract because they want security. So I prefer a permanent contract for a not very interesting job to a short contract for an interesting job.

More radical change has been observed among even younger people, including high school students. In Drukgyel High School, many students told me that the salary-level is the main criteria for selecting a job. Some students prefer the private sector to the government, simply because the wages are better. Some students answered that they do not mind working in either the private sector or the government, but that they will go for the job with the higher income attached to it. Job security is not the main criteria, and thus the government sector is not the prime choice. There are fundamental changes occurring in young people's criteria for employment. Even amongst those who prefer the government sector, the reason is not status but overall economic gain. They say that, if

one calculates overall benefits, such as using a government vehicle and living in a government quarter, working in the government sector leaves you better off. The social status attached to government officers however in itself does not mean much for these high school students. Economic gain is now the main criteria. They say, "Everyone is crazy about money these days." One student explains:

Nowadays if one is rich, people respect that person. In the past a businessman was someone who cheats [to make profits]. But these days people respect a rich person. In these days everyone goes for money.

In most cases salary is the determinant factor for students in terms of their choice of job. Most of the students on the commerce course dream about becoming a chartered accountant believing that they will be in demand and earn a high income. Younger people perceive that richer people get more respect. This appears to be a reflection of social changes: we have seen earlier how far money has penetrated a society in which barter used to be predominant until the 1970s: naturally people have started to see it as more important. A student says, "With money I can get everything. Money talks!" Another student says, "If you are rich you can wear nice clothes. Then people show respect. Even if you fail to go on to Class 10 or Class 12 in Bhutan, if you have money you can go to a school or a university abroad. Then you can get a degree." It may sound a little unrealistic to say that a person who fails to go on to the next level of education in one country can do so in another place. But in Bhutan it happens. Some young people who are not qualified to go on to the next level of education in Bhutan are financed privately to go to high school or college in India.

So far we have seen that different career options are available at various stages of the ladder for young people in modern English medium education. For those in Dzongkha medium education, options are fairly narrow. For those who have passed Class 10 in the Institute of Language and Cultural Studies in Simtokha, only three training courses are available. The most popular of the three is a training course to become a Dzongkha teacher in an English medium school. After completing a two year course you will be posted to a school in Grade 10. Almost all the students in the Institute opt for this course. This is because one of the other options, a course at RIM leading to work in a government office where strong Dzongkha ability is needed, equates only to Grade 13, in spite of it necessitating the same length of training. The last option is a compounder's course at the National Institute of Traditional Medicine. However, the course can accommodate only a few people each year, and not many students opt for that. For students who have passed Class 12 of

the old curriculum,¹ there are even fewer options: they can either go on to a Dzongkha Honours course in Sherubtse College or on to the above mentioned course to become a Dzongkha teacher. But for the students who have passed Class 12 prospects are grim. Since the Dzongkha Honours course has only just been launched, they do not know what kind of options will actually be available after graduation. For the teacher training course, they will get the same grade as those who have passed only Class 10 and went straight on to the teacher training course. A diminution of future prospects is very much felt by students taking the old curriculum in Simtokha. Students told me, "This school is good to have a better next life¹, because we learn lots about religion. But as for career prospects the scope is very narrow." Some students even said that they regretted joining the school. As regards the students in the new curriculum of Class 11, which started in 1997, students did not know for certain what kind of options would be available, since there was no one who had completed the course at the time of the fieldwork. Although the school brochure which has been distributed to the students suggests a ranges of possible options, the principal of the school told me that some negotiation with concerned authorities must still take place to make those options available for the students.

Young people in English medium education and Dzongkha medium education are eventually included in the same grading system in the government sector. This fact makes the two different education sectors comparable in terms of career prospects. The wider job scope of English medium education has made it more attractive to people. Furthermore, in the current situation opportunities to climb up the ladder of the success to the top are almost exclusively for those in English medium education. This is, I would argue, the main reason for the inflation of modern English medium education and at the same time the downgrading of Dzongkha medium education in society. The fact that among new Class 11 students in Simtokha, who finished Class 10 in English medium education, all of them, except two, were not qualified to go on to Class 12 of English medium education further shows people's preference for English medium education to Dzongkha medium. At the same time this also suggests that majority of the population see education as a means to get a decent job. Education is judged in terms of the kind of job which follows, and the grade which is attached to it. A young lady in her mid-twenties, who studied in Sherubtse College, told me that, "Parents in Thimphu would not usually send their children to Dzongkha medium school. There is no future prospect." With diminished career prospects for most people, and especially those in town areas, Dzongkha medium education is seen as less colourful and less glamorous. There are far less

students from urban backgrounds in Simtokha than in Drukgyel High School. While I was in Drukgyel High School, I constantly encountered the children of high officials. In Simtokha on the other hand, this was very rare, and I saw many students who were from remote villages.

The position of monastic education in Bhutanese society is very different. Monks do not participate in the ladder of success of the secular world. There are several views among young people in English medium education about people who have become monks, and about becoming a monk as “a career”. A girl who passed Class 10 in English medium education and then worked as a house-help for a foreign expatriate tells me that people say that naughty boys would become monks, because in monastic education discipline is very strict. “And also,” she continues, “people who are physically weak, and become ill constantly are sometimes recommended by a monk to become a monk, so that he can practice religion more, gain more religious merit and would not suffer from being ill so much.” A student in Sherubtse College gives his perspective:

If I hear that a bright student who has passed Class 10 has joined in the monk body, first I would be surprised, because it is rare that a student passing Class 10 with decent academic performance becomes a monk. Secondly I would appreciate his decision, because he will sacrifice all his life, giving up marriage, smoking, and having fun. He will devote himself into a religious life, and pray for the well-being of all the creatures in this world and for the next life. Thirdly I would doubt if he will continue the life as a monk, and suspect that he might quit and get a job. If a student who finished Class 8 decided to be a monk I would think that he had made a right decision.

Becoming a monk is not related to climbing up the ladder of success. People see that joining the monk body is not something for those who are educated in English medium education. It does not mean much in terms of success which, in the secular world, is measured by income and power. But it has its own merit, which is also recognized by young people in English medium education. Religious life is something sacred in their eyes. For them it is something which needs determination, and the ability to sacrifice one’s own pleasure. The college student also says:

Many people send one of their sons or daughters to the monk body, because it is a tradition and also useful. Usually people send other children to English medium school or keep them at home to work in the fields. People think that if they send one child to monk body, it is enough. It is useful to have their son or daughter in the monk body, because it is easier to call monks to

their house for *puja*. In other words, *puja* is guaranteed. That is very important. If you do not have anyone you know in the monk body, sometimes no monks are available for your *puja*. Also you can call more monks for a *puja*. It is also very important. People who are invited for *puja* first ask the host how many monks are there. If there are only two or three monks, the host feels ashamed. But if there are more than fifteen monks, the host feels very proud and he will announce very loudly, (for example) ‘Seventeen monks!!’. Also if the altar room is full of monks, that itself signifies good fortune. Another reason that many people send their son or daughter to the monk body is that monks and nuns are respected in the society. The respect shown towards monks is different in nature from the respect shown toward high officials in its nature. People show their respect to high officials because they are powerful and people have their own interests to keep in mind. It is a respect which is obliged in some way. On the other hand, respect towards monks and nuns comes naturally from inside of people. The red robe of monks itself signifies something to people. On special occasions, monks are always there.

It seems that monks are people upon whom everyone in society depends in one way or another. However, even though monks may be seen as ethically and morally purer, a monk’s life is certainly less glamorous in the eyes of those in English medium education. They say that monks are respected. But becoming a monk is totally another issue. When they think about their careers, becoming a monk is not even an option. It is probably more precise to say that a monk is not considered as a “career”. Thus, as seen above, a college student would be surprised if he heard that a student who had passed Class 10 had become a monk, and might also start to suspect whether or not he would quit at some point in the future. However, he would not be surprised to hear that a student who has passed Class 8 has joined the monk body - in fact he would probably think that the student has made the right decision.

It also appears that the monk body works as a kind of social security net. From interviews with some monks, it seems that they are often from “humble” backgrounds. A monk in a *shaydra*¹ told me that his father died when he was small, and that his mother and sisters live in a village in eastern Bhutan. Because of his “humble background”, he thought it would be better to become a monk. He did not tell me about his “humble background” in detail, but a friend of mine, who acted as an interpreter during the interview, said that probably his family are not well-off, and so he had thought it would be sensible to become a monk. Although

there is no tuition fee, these days in Bhutan parents have to buy school uniforms and other necessary items to send their children to an English medium school.¹

Among monks there is a perception that they are losing status compared to the past, when they were accorded the highest level of respect. One monk said that they are not treated with as much respect as monks used to be, and this tendency is more obvious in urban areas and amongst young people. Once, their knowledge had both religious value and usefulness in everyday life. Religious rituals were an absolute necessity for a good harvest, healing sick people and being reborn in a better next life. With the introduction of development programmes people started to go, for example, to consult agriculture extension workers about getting in a good harvest and to a hospital for treatment. As competing forms of knowledge emerged, monks saw the value accorded to religious practitioners decline, especially compared to past times when development programmes had not taken place in the country.

Bourdieu's "mode of domination"

In Bourdieu's framework, an agent's power is defined by the overall volume of *capital* each agent possesses, and by the composition of *capital* (Bourdieu, 1985: p. 724). There are, according to Bourdieu, three kinds of capitals, namely *economic capital*, *social capital* and *cultural capital*. In his theory the state is presented as the culmination of a process of concentration of different capitals, and is therefore regarded as the dominant class in society.

In order to understand the mechanisms through which, following the progress of development activities, changes in composition of dominant class have occurred, I would like to use Bourdieu's concept of "mode of domination". Bourdieu presents two very different forms of domination, which are located at each end of a scale, and argues that any particular mode of domination must fall somewhere between these two forms. The first kind of domination is the domination which is maintained by constant personal interactions. The dominant agents, according to Bourdieu:

have to work directly, daily, personally, to produce and reproduce conditions of domination.... ...they are obliged to resort to the elementary forms of domination, in other words the direct domination of one person over another.... They cannot appropriate the labour services, goods, homage and respect of others without 'winning' them personally, 'tying' them, in short, creating a bond between persons. (Bourdieu, 1990: p. 129)

It is when “a system of mechanisms automatically ensuring the reproduction of the established order is constituted” that the dominant agents can be content with letting the system they dominate follow its own course (Bourdieu, 1990: p. 129). Bourdieu’s second form of domination refers to a system of mechanisms which ensures the reproduction of the relationship between the dominant and the dominated and which entails objective mechanisms “such as those producing and guaranteeing the distribution of ‘titles’ (titles of nobility, deeds of possession, academic degrees etc.)” (Bourdieu, 1977: p. 184). This objectification, Bourdieu argues, guarantees the permanence and cumulativeness of material and symbolic acquisitions. It also tends to reproduce the structure of present relations of domination and dependence (Bourdieu, 1990: p. 130). This mode of domination, through its objectification of institutions, does not need the personal touch any more, as the system reproduces the relationship between the dominant and the dominated almost automatically.

Bourdieu argues that the effects of objectification are greater in magnitude for those coming out of the educational system. He says:

By giving the same value to all holders of the same certificate, so that any one of them can take the place of any other, the educational system, minimizes the obstacles to the free circulation of cultural capital... it makes it possible to relate all qualification-holders (and also, negatively, all unqualified individuals) to a single standard, thereby setting up a *single market*¹ for all cultural capacities and guaranteeing the convertibility of cultural capital into money (Bourdieu, 1977: p. 187)

This objectifying mechanism is useful in explaining the change in the composition of those representing the dominant class in Bhutan from people who have grown up in Dzongkha medium education to those educated in English medium education.

Bourdieu’s Mode of Domination and Bhutan’s Education System

We have seen that in order to climb up the ladder of success, one has to be in the modern education sector. Students in English medium education see a less bright future for those in Dzongkha medium education. Becoming a monk is simply not an option. Students in Dzongkha medium education agree that there is not much scope for them in terms of future job options. The validity and usefulness of knowledge which is acquired in English medium education is appreciated in society in the form of higher grades in the civil service for those who have achieved good levels of academic performance in English medium

education. The usefulness of knowledge acquired through English medium education is confirmed and further reinforced through its association with a regular and decent income, power and status, and in the case of the younger generation, simply through its association with a higher future income and prospects of greater luxury in life. On the other hand, the validity and usefulness of knowledge acquired in Dzongkha medium education has declined relatively. The present government grading system has contributed to this situation. Combined with the tendency among young people to seek job security and a better salary, it has reinforced the high value given to English medium education, and at the same time devalued Dzongkha medium education. The sacred status accorded to a monk places monastic education on a completely different level, and the fact that the government grading system does not apply to monks makes it impossible to compare monastic education with the two other kinds of education.

The emphasis on modern English medium education, not least in relation to government jobs, was associated with the change of policy and the initiation of development activities. This shift of policy meant that the existing *cultural capital* of the dominant class was re-valued. Developmental values gained ground in relation to the old Bhutanese cultural values. Before development programmes started in Bhutan, the civil service was not considered to be the domain of those people who had been educated in the modern education sector.¹ This was not least because modern education was practically non-existent. There were a very small number of primary schools which provided modern education, and as for higher education, a very limited number of people went to India to study.¹ Hence, at the time of the launch of the development programmes, or just before it, the dominant class were the kind of people who had Dzongkha medium education,¹ and who, it seems clear, were not very much exposed to Western knowledge.

As modernization has progressed, the status of this group of people has been undermined. It was the time when a previously dominant group started to be gradually replaced by other groups who possessed different educational backgrounds. As modernisation has taken place, the civil service has become the domain of people who are educated in English medium education. For instance, a capable civil servant, who worked as the Secretary of the Royal Secretariat and was once elected as the speaker of the National Assembly felt sidelined after the late 1970s: an observer writes that his lack of English ability circumscribed his sphere of influence within policy-making circles, though he was a person who was particularly praised for his Dzongkha ability during the time of the second king (Ura, 1995: pp. 356-358). In terms of the family background

of civil servants, however, it is arguable to what extent the composition of the dominant group has been changed. Rose found that, in the early 1970s, a high percentage of students in local schools in most areas of the country came from non-elite families, and that many of the children in the local elite families saw no need for an education beyond the first few years since their families had dominated the local areas without formal education for several generations (Rose, 1994: p. 185). On the other hand, my interviews with the graduates who were selected in the RCSC examination show that about the half of them have a parent working in the civil service. It is unlikely that the trend laid out by Rose has been sustained until today. It seems that the process of replacement of the former dominant group by a new dominant group has been more dramatic in terms of their educational background than their family background.

It is here that Bourdieu's theories about the "mode of domination" and "objectifying mechanisms" provides a useful insight in explaining the change in the composition of the dominant class in Bhutan from those people who had grown up in Dzongkha medium education to those educated in English medium schools. Bourdieu says that the dominant class reproduces itself through the objectification of institutions, and thereby the structure of the relationships between the dominant and the dominated is almost automatically maintained. Since the launch of development activities in Bhutan in 1961, when this process of change was set in motion by the state, an increasing number of civil servants have received modern English medium education. This emerging dominant group has consolidated the validity of their educational qualification firstly by creating more modern education schools. Thereby more and more people have been absorbed into a single scale of measurement, what Bourdieu calls "objectification". Secondly, the state puts people from the Dzongkha medium education in the same government grading system despite the fact that qualifications gained in the Dzongkha medium education system cannot, in any academically meaningful way, be compared to those gained in the English medium education system. Thus these two different education systems have eventually become comparable in terms of their conversion rate into economic capital and social capital. This represents a process of incorporating more and more people in society into a single objectified scale. In this scale the ladder of success is made more difficult to climb for those who are educated in Dzongkha medium education. That is, the conversion rate between a Dzongkha medium education and income and social status is worse than for English medium education, and thereby the dominant class reproduces itself.

It must be however noted that of three education sectors in Bhutan only two have been made somewhat comparable. Monastic education is still outside the objectification process. Monks, I would argue, can be seen as part of the dominant class, still have a certain social status which relates to the special historical and political position of the monk body in Bhutanese society. Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, who unified Bhutan in the seventeenth century, himself was a monk (Imaeda, 1994: p. 37). He created the office of *Desi*, which looks after the temporal administration, and the *Je Khenpo*, who looks after religious matters.¹ Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal and his incarnations¹ were on the top of this dual system of administration. Although the actual administrative power of these offices since the mid-eighteenth century is questionable due to the power struggles which have taken place among the *Desi*, the *Penlops*¹ and the *Dzongpons*¹, the institution remained until 1907 when the hereditary monarchy was established (Pommaret, 1994: p. 61). Even today *Je Khenpo*, the head abbot of Bhutan, enjoys a status equivalent to the king. According to Rose (1977: p. 29), he is the only person in Bhutan other than the king entitled to wear the saffron-coloured scarf, a symbol of the former's spiritual authority and the latter's temporal authority. Out of one hundred and fifty members of the National Assembly, ten members represent the monk body. The Royal Advisory Council which consists of nine councillors includes two monks. According to Imaeda (1994: p. 65), temporal authority and spiritual authority are independent from each other, and therefore in principal even the king cannot intervene religious matters.

The social and religious status enjoyed by the monks seems to be different from the status attached to high officials of the government. A student in Sherubtse College remarked:

Monks and nuns are respected in society. This respect is different from the respect shown to the high officials. People show their respect to high officials because they are powerful and people have something to do with them. This respect is kind of obliged. On the other hand, respect towards monks and nuns comes naturally, because they are religious beings. The red robe of the monks signifies something to people. And on the special occasions monks are always there.

Another student emphasizes the importance of religion in society:

Religion has mobilizing power. If something religious is happening, young and old, uneducated and well-educated, everyone comes without being asked by anyone.

Through the objectifying mechanisms those people coming out of Dzongkha medium education have had their ability to accumulate economic capital and social capital weakened; in turn, those from English medium education have started to replace them as a dominant class. The position of monks is outside of this objectifying process, and they thus seem to be able to maintain a relatively high social and cultural status.

Conclusion

Since the launch of development activities in 1961, English medium education seems to have replaced literacy in Dzongkha and Choeky as the means of climbing up the ladder of success. It appears that young people's preferences for a kind of education system, a training institute, and a course they choose is responsive to the government grading system of the civil service. It in turn means that the civil service grading system is a valid means to give incentives and dis-incentives to selected areas of the country's human resource development. It however, can be a useful means as long as the present notion of "success", i.e. going to a college, becoming a civil servant and hopefully becoming a *dasho*, stays unchanged. There is as we have seen an emerging trend among younger people towards public corporations and the private sector and it remains to be seen whether or not the new trend is going to become mainstream.

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