

## **Chapter 4: Culture and Tradition as a Development Policy**

### **4.1 Review of Five Year Plans and other official documents**

This section ultimately aims to understand the Bhutanese government's concept of development. I will explore the Bhutanese concept of development and compare it with notions of economic development, on which modernisation theories and development theories emanating from the Marxist schools of thought have put utmost priority. Bhutan started its development programme in 1961.<sup>1</sup> Since then development plans have been formulated every five years. This section considers why development planning was introduced at this particular juncture, and reviews the development plans. Some of the development objectives, such as self-sufficiency and sustainable development, will be given particular attention. The introduction of a policy of preservation of culture and tradition is also discussed. Finally the section examines the idea of Gross National Happiness as a uniquely Bhutanese philosophy of development.

Several works have been published on the subject of Bhutan's development policy, however most of them only give somewhat superficial accounts. Karan (1987, 1990) provides a brief overview of the development programme only in the last chapter. Bhattacharya (1996), Lama (1996), Mehrotra (1996) and Dharamdhasani (1996) have written short articles on development and development policy, and Basu (1996) and Misra (1988) can be classed as introductory works. What is common in these works is a unilinear perspective of development as a process in which traditional institutions are replaced by modern ones. They are therefore preoccupied in

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<sup>1</sup> Priesner (1996: p. 13) sees the year 1959 as the starting point of Bhutan's economic development based on his view that a major foreign policy shift took place in that year. In this book, however, the official launch of development programme in 1961 is considered as the starting point of Bhutan's development, as is maintained by other authors, for instance Ura (1994).

assessing, for instance, an “improvement” of the communication network both within Bhutan and between Bhutan and the outside world, and the establishment of modern health and education facilities. In Bhutan however the negative effects of modernisation, such as pollution and the possibility of deforestation, have also drawn much attention from government officials. These negative effects have led to a policy of preservation of the natural environment and Bhutanese culture and tradition. Former minister of planning, Lyonpo C. Dorji, emphasises the significance of these preservation policies by pointing to them as “the corner stone of Bhutanese development policy.”<sup>2</sup> The rigid perspective of much of the writing on Bhutanese development policy fails to incorporate these features of the development programme into the scope of their analysis. From their perspective the preservation policies are at best something “extra” which is worthy of only one line - as is in Lama (1996). Often they are effectively excluded.

Two works which give a closer examination of Bhutanese development policy are Pain (1996) and Priesner (1996). Pain notes that the word “mountainous” is extensively used in Bhutan’s development policy documents, and that its negative connotations are emphasised too much. He suggests alternative policy options, which arise from the positive attributes of being “mountainous” and “small.”<sup>3</sup> Priesner (1996) focuses on unique aspects of Bhutanese development

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<sup>2</sup> Interview. April 1998.

<sup>3</sup> Pain’s rather contrived argument is that being “mountainous” and at the same time “small” does not necessarily represent a problem since the disadvantages of being either “mountainous” or “small” can offset one another. According to Pain, while small countries generally tend to have less diversified economies largely because smaller areas have less diversity of raw materials, Bhutan’s mountainous environment leads to high diversity in both biological and human adaptations. Also, while smaller countries tend to lack import protection, Bhutan’s physical inaccessibility (derived from being mountainous) provides in some respects an effective trade barrier, as is clear from Bhutan’s history in which limited and clearly defined routes of access to the country enabled control to be placed on trade routes and trading opportunities. Above all, being small can mean lower transportation costs (Pain, 1996).

policy, such as cultural preservation, environmental preservation, self-reliance and human development. He argues that the uniqueness of Bhutanese development policy “originates in the distinct Buddhist and feudal value base which evolved due to the country’s century-long international isolation” (p. ii).

A striking difference between these two works is that while Pain sees Bhutan’s development policy as being framed by normative models of development and modernisation, Priesner views it as one of the rare examples of a “genuine indigenously-generated approach to development” which “self-confidently resisted to adopt [*sic*] donor-driven concepts” of development. These contradictory views on Bhutan’s development arise from the differences in attention paid to the “goal” of development and the “methods” used to reach the goal. Certainly most pages of development policy documents follow the Western approach to development when they emphasise income generation, increases in production, and improvements in health, education and communication facilities. For example, in the Eighth Five Year Plan (1997-2002) in the renewable natural resources sector implementation of irrigation schemes is expected to continue to raise productivity and thereby to increase rural incomes (Ministry of Planning, 1996: p. 102). In the health sector the building of more hospitals is planned and immunisation programmes are to be expanded (Ministry of Planning, 1996: p. 165). However, at the level of discussion of the goal of development, the concept of Gross National Happiness (GNH), and emotional and spiritual well being are emphasised. Lyonpo Jigmi Thinley, the Foreign Minister, said in his speech to the UNDP Regional Millennium Meeting for Asia and the Pacific, “Happiness is the ultimate desire of every human being. All else is a means to achieve this end. It should logically follow then that all individual and collective efforts should be devoted to this common goal.... Happiness must be a policy objective.” (Thinley, 1998: p. 2). The discrepancy between these two levels is embodied in these two views about Bhutan’s development. I will argue that Bhutan’s

development goal is indeed unique, in the sense that, as far as I know, no other country on earth has suggested that the maximisation of Gross National Happiness should be the ultimate goal of development. I will return to a more detailed discussion of this issue below.

We shall begin this chapter by briefly looking at the starting point of development, namely how and why did Bhutan initiate its development programmes?

### **Start of the development programme**

Planned economic development was started in 1961 during the reign of the third King, Jigme Dorji Wangchuck (regn. 1952-1972). Before planned development activities started, there were attempts made by the kings and his chamberlains to introduce limited modernisation programmes to Bhutan. According to Collister (1987: p. 163), in 1907, the first king, Ugyen Wangchuck, and John Claud White, then the Political Officer in Sikkim, discussed schemes for development including projects for education, trade, roads, minerals and the possible cultivation of tea. According to Aris (1994a: pp. 104-105), Ugyen Wangchuck and his chamberlain, Ugyen Dorji, were said to be keen to develop the modern education of selected boys. In 1914 forty-six boys were sent to a Scottish mission school in Kalimpong. In the same year a school was started in Ha, and in 1915 one was founded at the king's palace in Bumthang, especially for his heir and a few other boys. Lack of funds however prevented many other projects from getting off the ground. Aris (1994a: pp. 136-138) also points out that the second king, Jigme Wangchuck (1905-1952, regn. 1926-1952) repeatedly requested British aid through the Political Officer in Sikkim. He was advocating projects such as conservation of forests and improvement of communications. Aris reports that although the Political Officers in Sikkim who continued to make tours to Bhutan usually did their best to secure a greater commitment for development assistance, their approach invariably "fell on deaf ears in Delhi and London" (1994a: p. 105). Bhutan thus

had to wait until 1961 for the launch of comprehensive modernisation activities.

There are several different views on why Bhutan started comprehensive development programmes in 1961, but their differences seem to be ones of emphasis. Mehra (1974) and Pommaret (1997b) focus on initiatives by the third King. Rose (1977), and Karan and Jenkins (1963) analyse Bhutan's internal and external environment which, Rose argues, dramatically changed between 1947 and 1960 (p. 125). These views are not mutually exclusive, and the general agreement seems to be that changes in the external and internal environments convinced the third King and parts of the elite to launch modernisation activities in order to secure the nation's sovereignty and independence. The immediate threat was perceived to come from the country's northern neighbour. China's occupation of Tibet in 1950/51 revealed a possible Chinese military threat to Bhutan. In 1959, Bhutan closed its border with Tibet (Mathou, 1994: p. 53). This situation must have been particularly threatening to the Bhutanese because Tibet is the country with which it shares its cultural background, based on Tibetan Buddhism. Mehra (1974: p. 124) notes that the general feeling of security, well-being and tranquillity changed overnight to one of apprehension and concern. Another perceived threat arose from the Sino-Indian War in 1962. The conflict showed that there was a real possibility that Bhutan could be involved in a war between the two giant nations which sandwiched it. As Mathou remarks, Bhutan became aware that as long as it lacked an international presence, it would be vulnerable.<sup>4</sup>

There were also internal pressures which arose from the closing of the border with Tibet. According to Karan and Jenkins (1963: pp. 48-49), there had been trade between Tibet and Bhutan. Bhutanese rice was sold at high prices in Tibet and Bhutanese traders brought back salt, wool and other essential items. With the closing of the border, the price of rice in Bhutan fell by half, because the surplus could not

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<sup>4</sup> This view is also supported by Rose (1977: p. 125).

be taken to Tibet any more. There were complaints of the government's failure to provide an alternative market for rice in 1960. The reply of the government was "wait for the road", which was expected to connect Bhutan with India and was built with funding from the Indian government. The decision to cut off the country from all exchange with Tibet required Bhutan to open itself up to the south.

According to Pammaret (1997b: p. 233), the third King was determined to preserve the independence of his country. He knew that without strong international links, his country could be in danger and that self-imposed isolation had to end. Even before the launch of modernisation programmes, he initiated some major socio-economic reforms: in 1956, he abolished serfdom and proceeded to a redistribution of land. The ceiling on land holdings was fixed at twenty-five acres, and lands above this ceiling were given to landless people who were also exempted from taxes.<sup>5</sup> These structural changes were accompanied by important constitutional reforms. In 1953, the King established a National Assembly with one hundred and fifty members, of which one hundred and five were elected representatives of the people,<sup>6</sup> twelve represented the monk-body, and thirty-three were nominated representatives of the government (Pommaret, 1997b: p. 234).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> According to Rose (1977: p. 128), while tenants constituted only a small proportion of the country's population, a large proportion of former tenants and former slaves were allocated land through the reform.

<sup>6</sup> According to Imaeda (1994: p. 74), the method of selection of the people's representatives is as follows. Each household (*gung*) is represented by one person. These representatives of the households within a constituency hold a meeting to chose a *chimi* (a member of the National Assembly) through consensus. He adds that this process of decision-making through consensus is observed not only in the National Assembly and government organisations, but also in whole society, and that even in everyday life it is rare to decide by majority.

<sup>7</sup> When the National Assembly was established in 1953, all Assembly decisions could be changed by the King. In 1968, however, the King ceased to exercise this power, and all decisions of the National Assembly are now treated as final and do not require the approval of the King. In 1969, the King proposed that the King should be forced to resign if he receives a no-

Bhutan tried to secure its independence by obtaining recognition from the international community that it was a sovereign state and by acquiring equal status with other countries. In 1962 Bhutan joined the Colombo Plan,<sup>8</sup> and in 1971, the country became a member of the United Nations.

As we have seen, the regional environment played a significant role in convincing the third King and the political elite to start planned development. Moreover, “planned development” was common elsewhere in the early 1950s, and besides India, China also followed this path. In addition, the availability of financial and technical assistance from India was also an important factor, as India viewed Bhutan being situated on a frontier of critical strategic importance. One of the incidents through which India was convinced of Bhutan’s importance to its security was the Sino-Indian War in 1962 (Rose, 1997: pp. 80-81). Karan and Jenkins (1963: p. 45) argued that India was eager to bring the Bhutanese, who had ethnic ties with Tibetans, closer to India by improving communications. At the same time, they write, the development of transport would help build defences in Bhutan to combat possible aggression by the Chinese. India saw Bhutan’s development in the context of its own security needs and therefore agreed to give assistance to Bhutan’s development programmes.

The launch of development programmes, however, was not without opposition. A concern centred around the undesirable

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confidence vote of two thirds of the members of the National Assembly, and this proposal was approved by the Assembly. Although this was abolished by a proposal from the National Assembly in 1973, the vote of confidence in the King was reintroduced in 1998. From 1998, all cabinet ministers are to be elected by the National Assembly (Imaeda, 1994: p. 75; *Kuensel*, 4th July 1998 and 11th July 1998).

<sup>8</sup> The Colombo Plan was established in January 1950, and has twenty regional members in Asia and the Pacific and six major donor countries. It focuses on economic development and social changes (Ziring and Kim, 1985). Assistance under the Plan is approved by ministers at meetings of the Consultative Committee (the highest deliberative body), but each aid programme is negotiated bilaterally on a government-to-government basis within the framework of the Plan (Arnold, 1989).

effects of modernisation, such as changes in the values and lifestyle of the people. Even a decade after launching the development programmes, the then Foreign Minister claimed, “Modernisation exacts a high price. I’m not sure it’s ideal, but we have no choice. In the modern world you can’t live isolated.... But there is going to be an effect on peoples’ values and way of life.” (*New York Times*, December 11, 1973 in Priesner, 1996: p. 21).<sup>9</sup> Against this background, it is not surprising, as we will see shortly, that the development programmes were not exclusively about economic development and the introduction of “the modern”. Instead, Bhutan’s development seems to be a constant quest to achieve a balance between the introduction of “modern” aspects of life and maintaining Bhutanese identity.

### **Review of the development programmes**

This part reviews selected Five Year Plans, namely the Second (1966-71), the Third (1971-76), the Fifth (1981-87), the Sixth (1987-92), the Seventh (1992-97) and the Eighth (1997-2002). This “selection” is due to the availability of documents.<sup>10</sup> With regard to the two Five Year Plans which are lacking from this review, firstly, it should be noted that, according to other sources, the Second Five Year Plan does not show many changes from the First Five Year Plan in terms of priorities.

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<sup>9</sup> Although the simple opposition between the traditionalists and the modernisers is relevant to some extent, it should also be noted that the same opposition can be observed in one person’s mind. For example, during fieldwork I encountered young people who recognised the importance of preserving national dress, but at the same time tried to minimise opportunities to wear them. For details, see chapters four and five.

<sup>10</sup> The author consulted various ministries in Thimphu, the British Library and the US Congress Library with regard to the two missing Five Year Plans, but failed to obtain them. Although there are secondary sources which refer to the Fourth Five Year Plan, its references seem to come from sources other than the Fourth Five Year Plan itself. For example Parmanand (1992) appears to have obtained information about the outlay of the Fourth Plan from statistical data published by the Bhutanese government in 1989. As I enquired further about the Fourth Plan, I became more doubtful about its very existence in the form of a printed copy. The closest I reached was when an official in the then Planning Ministry found a file titled Fourth Five Year Plan in a computer in the office but was unable to open it.



Both plans put the highest emphasis on building roads in order to end Bhutan's isolation and on building transportation links with India (Planning Commission, 1981: p. 29). The Fourth Five Year Plan, however, seems to contain some changes from the previous three Five Year Plans in terms of the allocation of the budget. In a break with the past the agriculture sector received the highest priority (29% of the total outlay). Several large scale investments, some outside the Plan, emerged such as the Chukha Hydel Project and the Penden Cement Plant (Planning Commission, 1981: p. 31). As far as the overall aim of development is concerned, however, not much change can be observed. According to the Fifth Five Year Plan, the fundamental postulates of national economic policy remained unchanged during the first Five Year Plans: that is to improve the living standard of the people and ultimately achieve overall economic self-reliance (Planning Commission, 1981: p. 27). The changes in the allocation of the budget should therefore be understood in the light of the overall aims of the development activities and interpreted as an effort to strengthen the country's economic base. The plan documents which are not examined in this book do not therefore appear to be key documents which might reveal a turning point in the overall state development discourse.

Development documents usually encompass almost all activities undertaken by the government, except those in the area of security, i.e. the army. The development plans include both capital and recurrent budgets, and cover a wide range of subjects, from irrigation programmes to spending on the National Assembly. In the plan outlay, however, commercial projects funded by state, such as the construction of huge hydroelectric power plants, are excluded even if these are mentioned in the plan documents.<sup>11</sup>

The appearance and structure of Five Year Plan documents have changed over time. Their expanding volume itself shows the increase in development activities in Bhutan. The Second Five Year Plan is ninety-five pages and the Third Plan fifty-

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<sup>11</sup> According to Karma Ura, interview on 15th March 1999.

nine pages, whereas the Eighth Plan takes up two hundred and eleven pages.<sup>12</sup> This also represents an evolution from a document which was little more than a brochure to a colour printed book containing many maps and tables. During the early plan periods, overall development activities were small enough for details of each project to be written down in a small brochure. Secondly, the structure of the contents has also developed. For instance, the Second Plan is no more than a collection of project proposals, which are detailed enough to include, for example, the exact number of cows and pigs to be kept by livestock farms in various parts of the country, whereas in the Eighth Five Year Plan the main document does not provide such details but simply the overall aims and objectives of both the development activities as a whole and sector-by-sector. The Second and the Third Five Year Plans start with a very brief introduction of the country, its geography and economy, and then show plan aims, which are followed by a plan of each sector. From the Fifth Plan onwards, the economic condition of the country is examined more closely and there is a careful review of past development activities. A new chapter on the government's approach to development, which expresses a more holistic Bhutanese idea of development, is also added. Moreover, the Fifth and the Eighth Plans have a chapter which discusses development prospects for the next twenty years. From the Seventh Plan onwards new chapters are added on issues which encompass several sectors, for instance women's involvement in development, and environment and sustainable development. In other words, from the Fifth Plan onwards the plan documents began to present the wider, longer and holistic views and objectives of development more clearly, while earlier development plans tended to concentrate on describing individual projects and schemes. Development planning has become more visionary with clearer aims and objectives, and with longer and wider perspectives.

Sources of foreign assistance have been diversified a great deal. The first two plans were financed entirely by the Indian

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<sup>12</sup> This comparison concerns only the main plan documents.

government.<sup>13</sup> As well as funding, the Indian government provided much skilled and unskilled manpower. From the Third Five Year Plan onwards Bhutan started to receive aid from UN agencies, and also began to gradually diversify the source of foreign assistance. During the Fifth Five Year Plan Bhutan received external assistance from fourteen multilateral agencies, six countries and two NGOs (Planning Commission, 1981), whereas during the Eighth Five Year Plan sources of external assistance to Bhutan include nineteen multilateral organisations, nineteen individual donor countries, such as the Netherlands, Switzerland, Denmark and Japan, and some international NGOs (Ministry of Planning, 1996: p. 41). The share of aid from India has gradually decreased, from almost one hundred percent during the first two Five Year Plans to thirty-seven percent of the total official external assistance Bhutan received in 1996 (UNDP, 1998).

The following review of the Five Year Plans is primarily concerned with how the official discourse of development is expressed. I shall start by giving an overview of the Plans, and then proceed to examine the development plans in relation to four themes which are important in the context of Bhutan's development programmes, namely, (1) attitudes towards Western science and technology, (2) the preservation of culture and tradition, (3) the attempt at "self-reliance" and (4) environmental preservation and "sustainability".

The basic development thinking behind the Second Five Year Plan is not stated explicitly in the plan: it does however appear that here development is seen primarily as economic development. Thus, the main aims of the plan include economic growth through increasing production in agriculture

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<sup>13</sup> This excludes assistance provided through the Colombo Plan. Although exact figures are not available, it can be imagined that assistance from the Colombo Plan during the period of the first two Five Year Plans amounted to a very small sum, especially considering the fact that during the Third Five Year Plan period assistance from UN agencies and from the Colombo Plan combined amounted to only 3% of the total external aid Bhutan received (Planning Commission, 1981).

and improvement of education in order to provide the skilled manpower which is necessary for “development” activities (See Table 1). Construction of roads was not only for the purpose of opening the country to the outside but also to facilitate the search for alternative markets for the country’s surplus cereal. Bhutan used to export the surplus to Tibet and to import items such as salt and wool, but the border with Tibet was closed in 1959, as the situation in Tibet became more tense. The Second Plan highlights the decline in production incentives after the closure of the Tibetan border, because the plains of India were too far for profitable export from the northern part of Bhutan, and also because traditional markets for the export of Bhutan’s surplus cereal do not exist in India (Royal Government of Bhutan, 1966: p. vii). In the Second Five Year Plan the road sector is given the highest priority in terms of the budget, although as a proportion of the total outlay it declined from sixty-six percent in the First Five Year Plan to forty percent. With regard to the Third Five Year Plan, in terms of outlay, the share of the road programme declined to twenty percent, whereas the share of education and health services increased.

**Table 1: Development Objectives of Five Year Plans**

<b>Second Plan</b> (1966-1971)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) increase agricultural production</li> <li>(b) improvement of the level of education</li> <li>(c) construction of roads</li> <li>(d) exploring the possibility of exploiting the gypsum and limestone deposits.</li> </ul>
<b>Third Plan</b> (1971-1976)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) increase in agricultural production</li> <li>(b) improvement in infrastructure, such as roads, bridges and power supply</li> <li>(c) development of industries</li> <li>(d) improvement in education facilities</li> <li>(e) improvement in health services</li> <li>(f) urban development of Thimphu</li> <li>(g) protection and preservation of ancient monuments.</li> </ul>

- Fifth Plan**  
(1981-1987)
- (a) an acceptable and sustainable rate of growth of the economy
  - (b) economic self-reliance through attaining a level of internal resource generation
  - (c) distributional equity among various sections and regions
  - (d) involvement of the people in the planning and execution of development programmes - decentralisation.

- Sixth Plan**  
(1987-1992)
- (a) strengthening of the development administration of the government
  - (b) preservation and promotion of national identity
  - (c) mobilisation of internal resources through increasing income and strengthening the tax collection system.
  - (d) rural development including increasing income and improvement of housing
  - (e) improvement of development services including providing health services, sanitation facilities, education, and extension services in the areas of agriculture and livestock
  - (f) development of human resources
  - (g) promotion of people's participation and decentralisation
  - (h) promotion of national self-reliance

- Seventh Plan**  
(1992-1997)
- (a) self-reliance
  - (b) sustainability
  - (c) development of the private sector
  - (d) people's participation and decentralisation
  - (e) human resource development
  - (f) regionally balanced development

- Eighth Plan**  
(1997-2002)
- (a) self-reliance
  - (b) sustainability
  - (c) preservation and promotion of culture and traditional values

- (d) national security
- (e) regionally balanced development
- (f) improving the quality of life
- (g) institutional strengthening and human resource development
- (h) decentralisation and community participation
- (i) privatisation and private sector development

The Fifth Five Year Plan shows some important changes in terms of overall aims. Economic self-reliance is for the first time explicitly stated as being an aim of development. Another feature of the Fifth Plan is the emphasis placed on decentralisation. The plan states, “It is expected that as a result of the decentralization process, people’s participation in the development effort would be sustainably expanded and plans formulated at the dzongkhag<sup>14</sup> level would reflect the specific priorities of the individual dzongkhag.” (Planning Commission, 1981: p. 48). With regard to the reason for implementing decentralisation the Plan explains:

It has been long felt by His Majesty that the development process so far has progressively given the feeling to the people that it would be the Government alone which would bring about improvements in their living conditions. As a result, rising expectations has been increasingly translated into demands on Government. It is recognized that no development effort can succeed without the people’s co-operation and commitment and effective development cannot be only a top down process. While Government would give the lead in the overall direction of development and provide for resources and technical inputs which are beyond the capacity of the people, plans would have to be formulated in consultation with the people in order that these plans reflect felt needs and

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<sup>14</sup> *Dzongkhag* means a district in Dzongkha. Bhutan is divided into twenty *dzongkhag*.

execution is within the capabilities of the people. It is the Government's conviction that only when these conditions are satisfied and effectively pursued that the benefits of development would actually reach all sections of the population leading to increased distributional equity. (Planning Commission, 1981: pp. 48-49)

As part of the implementation of the decentralisation process the *Dzongkhag Yargye Tshogchung* (District Development Committees) are given a more effective role. The DYT is chaired by the *Dzongda*<sup>15</sup> (District Governor), and its members are heads of the various sectors in the *dzongkhag* administration, *chimi* (elected members of the National Assembly from the *dzongkhag*), *gups*<sup>16</sup> and *mang-aps*<sup>17</sup> in the *dzongkhag* (Ura, 1994: p. 41). The DYT carries out the formulation of each *dzongkhag* plan within the overall framework provided by the government. Also the DYT is responsible for ensuring that the plans that are prepared are in keeping with the capability of the people to provide voluntary labour which will form a major input both in the execution of plan projects and in their maintenance. Decentralisation continues to be one of the aims of the Five Year Plans right up to the present time. In 1991 a further step was taken to promote the decentralisation process by taking the decision-making process to the village level, and *Gewog Yargye Tshogchung* (Block Development Committees) were formulated under the aegis of the DYT.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> The civil administrator of a district (Ura, 1995: p. 366).

<sup>16</sup> Head man of a *gewog*, or block (Ura, 1995: p. 366). In administrative terms, Bhutan is divided into districts (*dzongkhag*), and districts are further divided into blocks or *gewogs*. There are twenty districts and one hundred and ninety-six *gewogs*. A *gewog* consists of several villages (Ura, 1994: p. 39).

<sup>17</sup> *Mang-ap* literally means "father of the community". A *mang-ap* is elected in each village and he or she assists a *gup*.

<sup>18</sup> For details about decentralisation, see Ura (1994).

One of the features of the Sixth Five Year Plan is that the preservation of the national identity is for the first time clearly stated as an aim of Bhutan's development. Although the protection and preservation of ancient monuments is included in the Third Five Year Plan, the emphasis of the Sixth Plan is more on intangible Bhutanese values and ways of life. Most important of all, this new emphasis is associated with safeguarding the sovereignty and security of the nation. Several officials claim that at the time when the Sixth Plan was formulated in the mid-1980s people in Thimphu were starting to feel the negative effects of development.<sup>19</sup> These officials recount that from that time traditional Bhutanese values started to decline, and that the urbanisation of Thimphu accelerated. The concern to preserve national identity appears to have intensified during this period, and the emphasis on rural development can also be seen as a strategy to prevent excessive urbanisation. National self-reliance also continues to be a main aim: for example, one of the objectives of human resource development seems to be to replace expatriate personnel, which the county's development work had become increasingly dependent upon.<sup>20</sup>

Many of the aims of the Seventh Five Year Plan and the Eighth Five Year Plan are continuing those of the Sixth Plan or even earlier Plans. Although preservation of Bhutanese culture and identity is not in the main aims of the Seventh Plan, "ensuring the spiritual and emotional wellbeing of the population" and "the preservation of Bhutan's cultural heritage" are explicitly stated as less quantifiable objectives of the development of Bhutan (Planning Commission, 1991: p. 27). A new development aim included from the Seventh Plan is sustainability. In the Plans sustainability encompasses two areas, environmental considerations and population growth. In the Seventh and Eighth Plans, mobilisation of internal

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<sup>19</sup> Interviews with Tshering Dorji, on 27th December 1997 and Kunzang Dorji on 3rd February 1998.

<sup>20</sup> Bhutan employed over 113,000 expatriate personnel at the beginning of the Sixth Plan as compared to about 10,000 during the Fourth Plan period (Planning Commission, 1987: p. 20).



resources and increasing income do not appear to be the main aims, but they are considered to be components of self-reliance and improving the quality of life.

The trend of the changes in the objectives of the development plans is from an emphasis on sectoral objectives, such as the construction of roads, improving education facilities and enhancing agricultural production, to broader objectives which encompass different sectors, such as the promotion of national identity, decentralisation and sustainable development. In this sense the Fifth Five Year Plan seems to be the major turning point.

This change from sector divided objectives to cross-sector aims appears to show the way in which Bhutanese official thinking has developed. Development planning seems to have meant delivering modern infrastructure and services in the Second and Third Plans, whereas since the Fifth Plan it has meant a vision of what the government wants Bhutan to be in the future. In other words, as I have pointed out already, development planning has become more holistic and more visionary. At the same time, discussion about cross sectoral issues has made it possible to raise issues concerning the methodology of development, including matters such as people's participation and decentralisation.

The earlier plans show a tendency towards aiming for increases in agricultural production. The first two plans, which were formulated in consultation with the Planning Commission of India,<sup>21</sup> do not explicitly state what development means in Bhutan. It is however indicated that it

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<sup>21</sup> There are different views with regard to the influence of India over Bhutan's development plans. Holsti claims that the number of Indian advisers and officials swelled in Bhutan in the 1960s, and that by the end of the decade the Indian government had virtually taken over the entire planning function of Bhutan (Holsti, 1982: p. 26). Rose, on the other hand, points out the relative liberality of the Indian aid programme by saying that the Indian government granted a sum of money, and left it to the discretion of the Bhutanese government to decide on the allocation of funds to the various development programmes (Rose, 1977: pp. 91-92).

is taken for granted that development means the transformation of society from the traditional to the modern by means of economic growth. This assumption resonates with arguments made in both modernisation theories and work in the Marxist tradition. The broader development objectives which emerge after the Fifth Plan such as sustainability, decentralisation and participation have also become popular among Western donor agencies.<sup>22</sup> The following section will examine how these objectives are interpreted and adapted in the Bhutanese context. We will observe that some objectives which have been highlighted by Western donor agencies are also given Bhutanese contents, and that these are then presented as originating in Bhutan. I will also examine the idea of “Gross National Happiness”, a new perspective brought to development debates by the Bhutanese government. The concept was coined by the present king in the late 1980s, and it is said to be the fundamental principal behind Bhutan’s development.

### *Attitudes towards Western science and technology*

Attitudes towards Western scientific knowledge have changed over the plans. In the Second, Third and Fifth Five Year Plans the discourse of modernisation leads to an emphasis on scientific development, and focuses on technological solutions as opposed to social or institutional solutions. It is observed, firstly, that lack of manpower trained in Western scientific knowledge and technology can create great implementation difficulties in various areas of development such as health services and agriculture. For instance, in the Second Five Year Plan, the section on forestry says, “Unless the deficiency in technical staff is overcome, it will hamper to implement

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<sup>22</sup> According to Sachs (1992), environmental concerns moved to centre stage in the international debate with the report of the World Commission on Environment and Development, *Our Common Future* (1987). UNDP for example features sustainability in its 1992 *Human Development Report*. Participation and decentralisation are featured in the 1993 edition of the *Human Development Report* (UNDP, 1993) and the World Bank’s *World Development Report 1997* (World Bank, 1997).

[sic] the programmes...” (Royal Government of Bhutan, 1966: p. 43).<sup>23</sup> The section on health services notes, a “shortage of qualified technical personnel at all levels from Nurses and Compounders upwards to man the hospital and dispensaries” as one of the major difficulties (Royal Government of Bhutan, 1966: p. 51). The section on engineering services also points to the “shortage of experienced technical personnel” as a major difficulty (Royal Government of Bhutan, 1966: p. 89).

Secondly, the transformation of the “traditional” into the “modern” is presented as an achievement. The Fifth Plan notes that “in the past twenty years of planned development,... the predominantly rural barter economy has been progressively transformed into a modern one.” (Planning Commission, 1981: p. 27). A more striking comment contained in the documents is that one of the most important achievements of the agricultural development programmes during the first four plan periods was “to bring about a distinct and favourable change in farmers’ attitudes towards modern scientific practices” (Planning Commission, 1981: p. 33). On the other hand, Bhutanese counterparts of Western scientific knowledge are seldom mentioned in these early plan documents. In the health services section, indigenous medicine is not touched upon. In the forestry section, the traditional practice of forest conservation is not given attention, probably because it was not regarded as “scientific”. The overall consequence is that the documents emphasise what Bhutan did not have, namely Western scientific knowledge, rather than what it had. Bhutan seems to present itself as dependent in the area of science and technology, not only on developed countries but also on India which provided the entire funding and many of the technical personnel during the first two Five Year Plans.

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<sup>23</sup> Some of direct quotations in this book are grammatically incorrect. However I have chosen not to alert the reader to this fact any further, unless it influences the meaning of the quotation or makes the quotation difficult to understand.

However, from the Sixth Five Year Plan onwards we observe significant differences. The Sixth Five Year Plan includes, for the first time, the promotion of indigenous medical practices in the overall objective of health services provision (Planning Commission, 1987: p. 39). The Seventh Five Year Plan even says:

Indigenous medicine remains a popular form of health care in Bhutan.... The Department of Health recognises that traditional medicine has an important role to play in the health services and will take steps to increase access to traditional medical services and to integrate these services into the formal health care system. Traditional *Dungtshos* (doctors) will receive training at the National Research and Training Institute of Bhutanese Traditional Medicine in Thimphu, with the aim of increasing their skills and adding to the numbers of trained doctors.... A herbal garden for cultivating rare and valuable medicinal plant will also be established. (Planning Commission, 1991: p. 102)

The tendency for traditional medicine to be much more emphasised compared to before is also confirmed in the Eighth Five Year Plan. It says:

Since the introduction of modern health care services in Bhutan in the 1960's, careful attention has been given to traditional practice and the people's perception of illness. This has ensured the option for the people to seek services from the system they are comfortable with,... (Ministry of Planning, 1996: p. 165)

This does not mean that in these plans the role of Western medicine is downgraded. What is remarkable is, however, the way in which traditional medicine is acknowledged and integrated into the plan documents. The same tendency can also be observed in the agriculture sector. The Seventh Five

Year Plan acknowledges that traditional soil conservation techniques can be effective in keeping soil erosion to a minimum (Planning Commission, 1991: p. 102). An even more noticeable change in attitude can be seen in forestry sector. In the Second Five Year Plan scientific management of forests is seen as the most important and useful method of planning (p. 46), whereas the Seventh Plan also highlights the Buddhist faith, which plays an important role in the preservation of natural resources (p. 27).

In the section on Constraints to Development in the Seventh Five Year Plan, though the problem of the small supply of manpower is often mentioned, this tends to mean simply “the number of people who work”, rather than lack of scientific knowledge. Overall, the frequency with which the reader encounters phrases such as, “shortage of trained personnel” or “lack of skilled manpower”, is drastically reduced compared with the earlier plan documents. This is probably because trained personnel have increased as education proliferates in the country. But more significantly, it also appears to signify changing attitudes towards Western science as well as Bhutanese tradition. The change since the Sixth Five Year Plan is not a simple technical issue of which knowledge to use, for instance, in order to cure a disease, to prevent soil erosion, and to preserve forestry. I would argue that this appears to be a matter of cultural identity, since the change in attitudes towards Western scientific knowledge and indigenous knowledge coincides with policy changes which have led to greater emphasis on national identity and the preservation of culture and tradition. Furthermore, the negative effects of modernisation began to be perceived in society at about the same time.

### *Preservation of culture and tradition*

An emphasis on the preservation of culture and tradition is one of the features of Bhutan’s development programmes, and starts to be articulated consistently from the Sixth Five Year Plan onwards. Previous plans, however, also show an

awareness of the importance of preserving Bhutanese culture. For instance the Second Plan allocates some of the budget<sup>24</sup> for the preservation of valuable ancient monuments and old *dzongs* which have deteriorated over the course of time (Royal Government of Bhutan, 1966: p. 95). The Third Plan proposes the establishment of a school of Dzongkha medium education to help in the preservation of the cultural heritage of the country and to provide a supply of Bhutanese language (Dzongkha) teachers (Ministry of Development, 1971: p. 50). The Fifth Plan extends the range of culture not only to the ancient monuments but also to intangibles, namely traditional values. It points out the significance of the education sector in this context by saying that the preservation of traditional values is one of the fundamental ends of education (Planning Commission, 1981: p. 133). The Fifth Plan also reveals the government's view on tourism and cultural preservation. It says that although certain cultural monuments and art can be open to visitors, monasteries and *dzongs* where monks are involved in spiritual teaching and meditation have to be kept out of tourists' reach (Planning Commission, 1981: p. 131). Thus the preservation of culture and tradition is not a very recent idea - the Bhutanese government has been aware of it since a very early stage in the development process.

The Sixth Five Year Plan, however, is seen as a watershed in cultural policy both in terms of its emphasis and its logic. Since the Sixth Plan preservation of culture and tradition have been major objectives of development in Bhutan. The Sixth Plan describes the need for the "preservation and promotion of national identity through promoting all aspects of the nation's traditions, culture and customs" (Planning Commission, 1987: p. 17). The Special Commission for Cultural Affairs was established in 1985 and plays a pivotal role in preserving both material and non-material aspects of Bhutan's culture and tradition. It aims to consolidate and strengthen Bhutan's spiritual traditions, to promote *driiglam*

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<sup>24</sup> Five hundred thousand Indian rupees. This is about 0.2 percent of the total plan outlay.

*namzha* (the official code of etiquette), to renovate ancient monasteries, to keep a record of cultural sites, monuments and articles of antiquity, to preserve ancient documents and literature, and to strengthen existing cultural centres and institutions (Ministry of Planning, 1996: p. 193).

Moreover, the preservation of culture and tradition is seen as being directly connected to the nation's independence and sovereignty. The Sixth Plan explicitly states that measures to promote the nation's traditions, culture and customs are taken in order "to consolidate and safeguard the sovereignty and security of the nation" (Planning Commission, 1987: p. 17). According to the Eighth Plan:

For a small country with neither military might nor economic strength the distinct cultural identity is seen as an important means to safeguard and strengthen the national identity and security. (Ministry of Planning, 1996: pp. 25-26)

The impetus for such statements is not spelled out in the planning documents, but it is clearly related to the fact that Bhutan is a small country sandwiched by two giants, India and China, and as such the nation's security must be always of concern to the authorities. Bhutan's northern neighbour, Tibet, has been invaded by China and its western neighbour, Sikkim, was annexed by India. Both Tibet and Sikkim have a cultural background based on Tibetan Buddhism, which is also extremely important in Bhutan. Furthermore, Bhutan has had a border dispute with China. Cultural policy, therefore, can be interpreted as a serious attempt to ensure the nation's security and independence through emphasising Bhutan's "distinct culture".

The preservation of culture and tradition is also emphasised as a fundamental principle of Bhutan's development policy. The Seventh Plan, for example, says:

Simply imposing development models from outside which do not take religion and tradition into account will not only serve to diminish existing culture, but will also meet with limited success.... The preservation of cultural traditions and religious institutions is one of the major objectives of the Royal Government and the need to give full recognition to these factors has been realised, particularly in health and education. This does not mean that new technologies will not have a place in the development of Bhutan or that the Government intends Bhutan to remain static, but that the relevance and impact on society of new technologies will need to be carefully assessed. (Planning Commission, 1991: p. 66)

The former minister of planning, Lyonpo C. Dorji, also writes:

An important objective underpinning our development approach have always been the preservation of our culture and values. Programmes for social and economic change must not ever precipitate any decline in our hallowed tradition and institutions. We have witnessed...the coming of modern conveniences in our society; and we are justly proud of advances that improve the general standard of living. But I am convinced that such achievements would be hollow if the development process leads to any loss of our cultural identity and value system. (Planning Commission, 1987: p. xvi)

In addition to the earlier accounts given by government officials, both the Fifth Five Year Plan and interviews with another two government officials<sup>25</sup> reveal a perception that, since the launch of modernisation, traditional Bhutanese values have started to decline: this was realised from mid-1980s. Social changes such as the urbanisation of Thimphu are said to have become more visible during the 1980s. The

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<sup>25</sup> Interview with Dasho Sangay Dorji in February 1998 and with Lyonpo Sangay Ngedup in March 1998.



Sixth Plan, which was prepared in the mid-1980s, suggests that Bhutan's unique identity must be preserved and safeguarded from the negative attitudes and influences that emerge during the development process (Planning Commission, 1987: p. 17). The development of a policy of preservation of culture and tradition can therefore be seen to be a reflection of an official recognition of the negative effects of modernisation.

However, whilst the negative effects of modernisation are well recognised, the basic stand point of the government is that in principle socio-economic development and cultural integrity are not mutually exclusive (National Environment Commission, 1998: p. 18). The government therefore says that its development efforts are directed towards harmonising the benefits of economic prosperity with spiritual well-being (Ministry of Planning, 1996: p. i). Nevertheless "Bhutanese culture and tradition" and "modernisation" are presented as being separate, if not actually in opposition. This separation makes it possible to talk about what is Bhutanese tradition and what is not. For instance, indigenous medicine falls under in the sphere of Bhutanese tradition whereas Western scientific medicine does not. Monastic education and Dzongkha medium education are traditional by definition, while modern education is not. Thus the dichotomy of the traditional and the modern remains.

However, in Bhutan, this powerful dualism of traditional and modern is seen in a different light to the way it is normally presented in modernisation theories and Marxist development theories. In these theories the word "tradition" has a negative meaning, such as backward and static, while being "modern" is worthy of praise. In the plan documents of Bhutan, however, there is an official recognition of the negative effects of modernisation which legitimises a cautious stance towards it. On the other hand, "tradition" is seen as something precious and vital. The meaning of "tradition" became positive through its connection with the nation's independence and the spiritual well-being of the population. This positive view of tradition infuses every discussions about development,

modernisation, culture and tradition, backwardness, westernisation, people's well-being, national identity and the nation's very survival.

### *"Self-reliance"*

Since the Fifth Five Year Plan "self-reliance" has been included as a core idea in the development objectives of Bhutan. What follows will examine the history of the Bhutanese idea of "self-reliance". Before the Fifth Plan, Bhutan's self-reliance, or even self-sufficiency is seen as "a used-to-be story". The Third Five Year Plan says:

Before the advent of planned development in Bhutan, ... [e]xcept for a few pockets here and there, all regions in Bhutan were self-sufficient in foodgrains, a small surplus of foodgrains being exchanged for salt and other essential articles from neighbouring countries. (Ministry of Development, 1971: pp. 3-4)

Although the idea that Bhutan should become self-sufficient once again appears as early as the Second Five Year Plan, it only suggests this should be the case in the area of agricultural production, and even this idea is not listed as one of the main objectives. It is the Fifth Plan in which self-reliance is explicitly stated as one of the most important development objectives. According to the Plan, Bhutan had by this time started to see the negative effects of modernisation. One such effect was Bhutan's increasing dependence on external aid. This was stated by the fourth king, Jigme Singye Wangchuck in his coronation address as early as June 1974. He said:

From year to year Bhutan is receiving increasing financial and technical assistance.... [W]e have achieved tremendous progress within a short span of time. In spite of this progress, our present internal revenue cannot even meet a fraction of our Government expenditure. Therefore, the most

important task before us at present is to achieve economic self-reliance to ensure the continued progress of our country in the future. (Planning Commission, 1981: p. 48)

The Sixth Plan shows the government's firm determination on this point:

Prior to the initiation of development activities, the country even without external aid assistance was fully self-sufficient. With the introduction of major development programmes in 1961, including large scale development infrastructure works, it became necessary for the Government to rely on external assistance. Every effort must now be made to bring the country to its original self-reliant state as soon as possible. (Planning Commission, 1987: p. 22).

It must be noticed firstly that the Bhutanese concept of "self-reliance" is different from the idea which is generally used in discussions in the development literature. Rist (1997) defines it as a strategy to avoid exploitation or trade related inequality through reducing ties with the outside world. For dependency theorists it then becomes a logical conclusion to operate a strategy of "delinking" from the system (pp. 123-139). Bhutan's case is different however. I will not try to assess whether Bhutan has been inserted into the "international system", or whether it has been "exploited" through unequal trade. These are questions too broad to answer, and dependent upon assumptions employed by the dependency school. What can be said is that in Bhutan's development policy the discourse of the dependency school is not prevalent. Rather Bhutan's idea of "self-reliance" is derived from its sense of "independence" and not from a sense that the nation has unequal trade relations with the outside world. The present king gives a definition of "self-reliance":

National self-reliance in the Bhutanese context means ultimately to be able to stand on one's own feet, have the power of decision in one's own hands, and not be

dependent on others. (Ministry of Planning, 1996: p. 25)

Practically speaking this means aiming at a state of development where there is no external assistance. The Seventh Five Year Plan says:

Although Bhutan's development has been greatly assisted by development cooperation with the Government of India and with other aid donors, the Royal Government is determined not to perpetuate dependence on external assistance. Efforts are thus being made and will continue during the 7FYP to increase Bhutan's technical capacity, through human resource development and through effective technology transfer. In addition, the ability to finance RGOB [Royal Government of Bhutan] activities continues to remain a priority, particularly self-sufficiency in the recurrent and the Royal Government recognises the need to increase domestic revenues. (Planning Commission, 1991: p. 23)

Therefore Bhutan's "self-reliance" does not aim at reducing trade ties with the outside world. The Seventh Plan explains:

Self-reliance does not mean that Bhutan will aim to produce all its requirements but that the Government will encourage the production of those goods and services that can compete in export markets. The revenue earned will provide for the import of goods and services that cannot be efficiently produced in Bhutan. (Planning Commission, 1991: p. 23)

In other words, as far as Bhutan can pay for development from its own pockets, it is self-reliant. One official in the Planning Commission told me,<sup>26</sup> "We are not beggars. We know what we are doing, and we are fully responsible for

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<sup>26</sup> Interview with Neten Zangmo, then Director of the Ministry of Planning - April 1997.

matters concerning our own country.” The Seventh Plan also states that aid must complement Bhutan’s own efforts and must not be a substitute for them, and that the responsibility for deciding national priorities and development strategy must remain with the Royal Government (Planning Commission, 1991: p. 61). It is a sense of independence, rather than exploitation, which seems to propel Bhutan toward its goal of self-reliance.

The objective of “self-reliance” also includes a strategic focus on mobilising internal resources and raising domestic revenues. Apart from strengthening the tax collection system, economic development in general is given importance in this context. In other words the ultimate aim of economic development, besides raising people’s living standards, is to achieve national self-reliance. Development of industry (especially hydropower) is seen as very important. During the Seventh Five Year Plan the hydroelectric power sector<sup>27</sup> accounted for almost twenty-five percent of government revenue (Ministry of Planning, 1996: p. 146). Several other hydropower plants are under construction. They are supposed to contribute further to government revenues by exporting electricity to India and also through providing power to domestic industries. The Eighth Plan forecasts that although for the next ten years or so, social and economic development is likely to require continued external assistance, towards the end of that period Bhutan will become increasingly self-sufficient in terms of both capital and recurrent resources (Ministry of Planning, 1996: p. 25).

Finally, it should also be noted that the concept of self-reliance is strongly connected with the nation’s sovereignty and the dignity of its people. The Sixth Plan states:

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<sup>27</sup>Hydropower plants in Bhutan are said to be relatively environmentally friendly. According to Munro (1989: p. 20), Chukha hydroelectric plant, the biggest power plant in operation in Bhutan at present, does not involve any damming of the river. The plant is composed of an underground tunnel and artificial waterfall with turbines at the bottom.

In fact all social, economic, political, cultural and development objectives and efforts will have no meaning if an acceptable level of national self reliance is not achieved. The quest for self reliance ... is vital for the sovereignty and dignity of the people and the country. (Planning Commission, 1987: p. 22)

Indeed economic development is not the only area which has been promoted in the name of self-reliance. Human resource development is another area which has been focused upon with the aim of replacing foreign expatriates. The “Bhutanisation” of the material and human resources of development and an emphasis on “standing on one’s own feet” would be the best description of the Bhutanese idea of self-reliance. Furthermore, one of the features of Bhutan’s development policy is the connection it makes between its development objectives and the ultimate national goal - the nation’s security and independence. The policy of preservation of culture and tradition and the promotion of national identity is, as has been seen, also connected to this more fundamental aim. The effect of this is that the significance of both objectives - self-reliance and preservation of culture and tradition - is enhanced.

### *Sustainable Development*

The concept of sustainable development is often discussed in the context of debates about the impact of economic development on the natural environment. As Lélé (1991) points out, sustainability is understood as ecological sustainability, therefore the phrase, sustainable development, is interpreted as environmentally sound development (p. 608). The Bhutanese concept of sustainable development however seems to be different in the sense that it incorporates not only the natural environment but also religion and culture. In Bhutan, the official definition of sustainable development is:

The capacity and political will to effectively address today’s development and environmental problems and

tomorrow's challenges without compromising Bhutan's unique cultural integrity and historical heritage or the quality of life of future generations of Bhutanese citizens. (National Environment Commission, 1998: p. 28)

It is not a completely new idea to incorporate culture and religion into the concept of sustainable development, and some of the theoretical literature pays attention to indigenous knowledge in the context of environment management. Redclift (1987), for example, argues that the practices of indigenous people are sustainable because of the sheer need to guarantee survival (p. 150). Developing the argument, he remarks that although the practices make sense, the epistemology employed in arriving at these practices is usually obscure to outsiders. This, he continues, is because indigenous people see nature differently. He claims that in order to incorporate environment management effectively in development planning, we need to be aware not only of differing epistemological positions, but also of different cosmologies (p. 155).

In Bhutan's development plan documents, before the Sixth Five Year Plan the only environmental issues raised are about forest management. It is from the Seventh Five Year Plan that sustainable development starts to be emphasised and that culture starts to be explicitly included in the concept. It is also from this point that environmental considerations are extended to all the sectors of development, such as forestry, construction of roads, industry and mining, population and urban development. The environment and sustainable development are stressed to such an extent that they are allocated their own chapter in Plan documents. Moreover a feature of Bhutan's approach to sustainable development is the constant reference to culture, and the assertion that culture and tradition should be seen as not only the means but also the aim of sustainable development. The Seventh Plan says:

Sustainable development, we believe, is a concept that is in harmony with the cultural and religious traditions of Bhutan. Our nation already has a strong conservation ethic, and indeed, respect for the natural world is a central tenet of Buddhism. It is therefore essential that the traditional culture be kept strong so that its values can guide our sustainable development path. (Planning Commission, 1991: p. 28)

Here, traditional beliefs and religion are seen as “useful” for the preservation of the natural environment. In addition, it is not only religion which is seen as significant in preserving natural environment: indigenous farming practices and knowledge are also valued in several documents. *The Middle Path*, a document published by the National Environment Commission Secretariat, gives a brief description of indigenous practices which are environmentally sustainable, and also highlights some examples of indigenous institutions which manage community grazing land, irrigation channels, forests, breeding stock, foot paths and bridges. The document insists on the importance of preserving these institutions and clearly shows that it is farmers’ everyday practices which have maintained the environment. It states that there is a need to better understand how farmers think strategically, and to get to know what their objectives, constraints, and long-term priorities are (National Environment Commission, 1998: pp. 40-44).

Sustainability also requires “that all development is consistent with environmental conservation and cultural values” (Ministry of Planning, 1996: p. 25). In other words, in the government’s view, without cultural consciousness, any development programmes and projects will not be sustainable. This is because, as one official<sup>28</sup> told me, indigenous beliefs are very strong amongst the population. *The Middle Path* says that Bhutan’s mountains, rivers, lakes, streams, rocks, and soil are the domain of spirits and that

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<sup>28</sup> Kunzang Dorji, National Environment Commission. January 1998.



preserving them is one of the many intangible aspects of Bhutan's development, whose ultimate aim is maximisation of "Gross National Happiness" (National Environment Commission, 1998: p. 31). Indeed, "the spiritual and emotional wellbeing of the population, [and] the preservation of Bhutan's cultural heritage" are included in Bhutan's development objectives (Planning Commission, 1991: p. 22).

There is a parallel between theoretical works on indigenous environment management (such as Redclift's) and Bhutan's policy of sustainable development, in the sense that both see indigenous practice as useful for environmentally sustainable development, and therefore as a necessary component of development planning. The difference is that Redclift does not really examine what "development" should aim at, while Bhutan's Plan documents constantly examine, reflect, and ponder over what development means for them. According to Redclift indigenous practices are simply the means to achieve the goal of development, whereas in Bhutanese documents - where spiritual well-being is included in the purpose of development - indigenous practices, religion and Bhutanese culture in general are both the means and the end of Bhutan's development.

### **Gross National Happiness**

"Gross National Happiness is more important than Gross National Product."

King Jigme Singye Wangchuck

Since the Seventh Five Year Plan, development plan documents have been more confident in stating that gross national product is too narrow a concept to be used as a measure of Bhutan's development. That is to say that Bhutan's development objectives include, apart from increasing GNP at the national level and income at the household level, ensuring the spiritual and emotional well-being of the population, and preserving Bhutan's cultural

heritage and its rich and varied natural resources (Planning Commission, 1991: p. 22). King Jigme Singye Wangchuck's innovative expression, "Gross National Happiness" (GNH), sums up Bhutan's holistic idea of development. The concept indicates, as government documents suggest, that development has many more dimensions than those usually associated with gross national product, and that development should be understood as a process that seeks to maximise happiness rather than economic growth. It asserts that spiritual and emotional development cannot and should not be defined in exclusively materialistic terms of increased consumption of goods and services (Planning Commission, 1999: p. 45).

The idea of incorporating "happiness" into its development policy does not seem to be very new in Bhutan. If we look simply at a single word "happiness", rather than GNH, we can find references to it in the Sixth Five Year Plan. In the section on rural housing we find the statement that

Since a comfortable house is a source of security, happiness and contentment for people particularly in the rural areas, the objective during the Sixth Plan will be to improve the overall standard of rural housing and enhance the quality of village life and living standards. (Planning Commission, 1987: p. 19)

According to Priesner (1996: p. 16), much earlier, in 1968, the third King Jigme Dorji Wangchuck expressed his view about development: "There would be no point in developing our country if our people are to suffer. After all the objective of development is to make the people prosperous and happy." Although the term GNH appears little in the successive Five Year Plans, it does not mean that it has been a neglected concept. The emphasis on the emotional and spiritual well-being of the population can be seen to be a translation of GNH into the development plans.

The concept is a challenge to the conventional definition of development. It poses a fundamental question for us. Does

more wealth make people happier? The government document, called *Bhutan 2020*, which presents the direction of Bhutan's development for the next twenty years, explains:

The concept of Gross National Happiness ... rejects the notion that there is a direct and unambiguous relationship between wealth and happiness. If such a relationship existed, it would follow that those in the richest countries should be the happiest in the world. We know that this is not the case. This marginal increase [of population that consider themselves to be happy] has also been accompanied by the growth of many social problems as well as such phenomena as stress-related diseases as well as suicides - surely the antithesis of happiness. (Planning Commission, 1999: p. 46)

The concept of GNH does not reject economic development. It recognises the importance of material progress, but emphasises that economic development is only a means to development. The role of economic growth is only to lay the basis for a society in which people feel secure and enjoy the peace and comfort, and in which human lives flourishes in all its richness (Ministry of Planning, 1996: p. 16). GNH, according to *Bhutan 2020*, highlights the importance of continuing to seek a balance between the material and non-material components of development and of ensuring that the non-material aspects are not overwhelmed by the negative forces of modernisation (Planning Commission, 1999: p. 47).<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> To explain the Bhutanese way of balancing material and non-material (emotional and spiritual) aspects of life, Lyonpo Jigmi Y. Thinley illustrates the example of a farmer:

There are many telling experiences of how ordinary Bhutanese themselves strive for a balance between spiritualism and materialism. When I was the regional governor of Eastern Bhutan some years ago, a prominent man was persuaded to undertake double cropping of a high yield rice variety. The man was rewarded with two bumper harvests that year. We had a perfect success story to motivate other farmers. Then, to our astonishment, our model

There are parallels between the Bhutanese way of thinking and some of the development literature. The idea that economic development should not be the end but the means of development can be also found elsewhere. The UNDP's *Human Development Report 1990* for example says that "the expansion of output and wealth is only a means. The end of development must be human well-being" (p. 10). Furthermore, the idea of a utopian world which human society is predicted to reach eventually can be found in classic socialist thought. In this sense, Bhutan's development strategy may not be as unique as Bhutan insists. Nevertheless the concept of GNH was invented in Bhutan, and no other countries, development agencies or academics have ever referred to it. The uniqueness of Bhutan's development philosophy is that "happiness" is the fundamental objective of development. No other development alternatives have been as comprehensive as GNH, or probably as evocative as GNH in expressing the antithesis to the conventional idea of economic development as the ultimate development goal.

The way in which the Bhutanese government presents its development discourses as being different from the classical, Western inspired discourse has, in the 1990s, become increasingly clearly defined. This appears to form part of a process of cementing the overall official Bhutanese development thinking in Five Year Plans, and in other official documents such as *Bhutan 2020*, and *the Middle Path*.<sup>30</sup> Throughout these official documents there are several points

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farmer refused to grow any crop the following year. His decision was to live leisurely and spiritually rather than allow himself to be trapped by greed. (Thinley, 1998)

<sup>30</sup> More recently, inspired by the address by the Foreign Minister, Lyonpo Jigmi Y. Thinley at the UNDP Regional Millennium Meeting in 1998 in Seoul, and also after the celebration of the Silver Jubilee of the coronation of the present King of Bhutan in 1999, the discussion of the concept of GNH has been enriched. A workshop and a conference were held on the theme of GNH. For the proceedings of the workshop and the conference, see Centre for Bhutan Studies (ed.) (1999) and Royal Institute of Management (ed.) (1999).

which persistently come up. Firstly, the negative aspects of modernisation have been repeatedly emphasised in a particular manner. The points always raised are that traditional Bhutanese values and cultural heritage have been and will be eroded by the forces of modernisation. Many socio-economic changes are talked about, but when they are judged to be negative this is mostly because of their connection with the decline of Bhutanese culture and tradition. Urbanisation is, for example, recognised as being a negative effect of modernisation largely because it is seen as one of the factors which erodes traditional Bhutanese values and customs, such as community support.

Before the beginning of modernization, the subsistence level of most Bhutanese households served to make villagers interdependent. Back then, if a person wanted to construct a house, most of the other households in the village would generously contribute their labour. Today, however, most people are unwilling to help unless they are compensated financially. This loss of community spirit is widely bemoaned,... (National Environment Commission, 1998: p. 77)

This is not a call for going back to the period of inconvenience and relative poverty before modernisation started, but it does represent an acknowledgement of one of the negative impacts of modernisation on culture. The following quotation is more direct.

We must recognize that many powerful forces are arrayed against Bhutan as it seeks to safeguard its sovereignty and identity and to implement an approach to development that falls outside the development orthodoxy. Many of the forces will be antithetical to the values we seek to conserve and to build upon (Planning Commission, 1999: p. 50)

Secondly, throughout the official documents, the state is represented as neither a moderniser nor a traditionalist. It is

not seen as a moderniser because it takes pride in Bhutan's culture and tradition, and never presents culture and tradition as backward. It does not see culture and tradition as a harmful force preventing the modernisation of the country. It is however not an obstinate traditionalist, as it commits to modernisation and acknowledges some of its positive aspects. Examining both the growth in per capita income and the improvement in Bhutan's position in UNDP's Human Development Index, the government takes pride in the progress Bhutan has recorded. It attributes the success of nearly four decades of modernisation to Bhutan's "development assets". Among twelve development assets identified, nine are seen as being derived from its history and traditional values, customs and institutions.<sup>31</sup> The state is modernising the country utilising the development assets which are inherent to Bhutan.

The state defines its role as a "social synthesizer" (Planning Commission, 1999: p. 27), exercising a cultural imperative to distinguish between the positive and negative forces of changes and also to "assimilate the positive forces for change, making them our own and accommodating them within our own distinctive model of "development" (Planning Commission, 1999: p. 27). In other words the state is a filter and at the same time a processor of the numerous changes occurring during the process of modernisation; it also judges modernisation against Bhutanese values. *Bhutan 2020* says:

Our belief and values, so deeply rooted in the perceptions and behaviour of our people, provide us

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<sup>31</sup> The nine development assets are (1) unity as a nation, (2) maintaining independence (avoiding being colonised), (3) the monarchy, which has played a pivotal role in the formation of policies, (4) an approach to development which has been shaped by the beliefs and values of the faith the Bhutanese have held for more than one thousand years, (5) strong tradition of self-reliance, (6) the Bhutanese character traits of being strong-willed, disciplined and law-abiding, (7) hard-working and enterprising people, (8) sound policies which have been especially bold in the field of social development, and (9) institutions such as decentralised systems of decision-making (Planning Commission, 1999).

with the prisms through which we will continue to interpret the world and to distinguish between positive and negative forces of change. (Planning Commission, 1999: p. 50)

We can see that culture and tradition are interpreted in two ways: one is as something which has to be preserved. Culture and tradition are externalised in this context, as if they are tangible entities. The other is as something which works as a “prism”. Traditional values act as a criterion against which developments are assessed as good or bad, positive or negative, proper or improper. In this interpretation, culture and tradition is more intangible, and something to be used.

The most distinctive feature of the official documents is their insistence on Bhutan’s development policy being original and independent, and their strong claim that Bhutan is the owner of its own development path: the word “unique” is frequently used. With regard to terms which are in fashion and used by international development agencies and in the area of development studies, it insists that these should be placed in the context of Bhutan’s history. For example, with regard to decentralisation and people’s participation, the Sixth Five Year Plan says, “decentralized administration has been a traditional practice in Bhutan...” (Planning Commission, 1987: p. 13). “People’s participation in community and public works is not a new practice in Bhutan; it has a long tradition” (Planning Commission, 1987: p. 14). Other terms such as sustainable development and self-reliance are given new interpretations, which are often slightly different from what they usually mean in the development literature. In this sense the following quotation is very Bhutanese:

... many of the priorities now advocated by international development institutions, such as human development, environmental conservation, self-reliance, decentralization, participation and empowerment, and gender sensitivity, are not new for Bhutan. Although we have not always referred to these priorities in the terminology favoured today, they have

for decades been essential component of our distinctively Bhutanese approach to development. (Planning Commission, 1999: p. 25)

Bhutan does not want to be identified with either mainstream development thinking or other countries' development paths:

Bhutan stands apart from many other developing countries for our more cautious interpretation of the benefits of modernization and for the way in which we have chosen to articulate a cultural imperative in formulating our development priorities and policies. Our approach to and model of development differs in important respects from 'mainstream' development strategies, while some of the values we choose to stress cannot easily be accommodated in the theoretical orthodoxy advocated by others. Our decision to adopt a distinctively Bhutanese approach to development has led us to follow a path along which few other developing countries have travelled. (Ministry of Planning, 1998: p. 3)

Bhutan finds the source of its uniqueness and distinctiveness in its history, and the fact that Bhutan has never been colonised appears to be a strong source of pride:

Unlike many other developing countries, we were able to resist colonization and we entered the modern world in the confident knowledge that we were our own masters. We were never forced to assimilate an ideology of inferiority and subservience that colonial masters imposed on subjugated peoples.... We realized and accepted early on that, while others may have considered us poor and backward, our future was firmly in our own hands and that whatever future we built would be the result of our own efforts. (Planning Commission, 1999: p. 21)

This is an expression of identity, pride and the desire to be independent physically and spiritually, unlike Sikkim or



Tibet, two neighbouring Buddhist countries which have been assimilated by India and China respectively, and unlike many developing countries which, from Bhutan's point of view, have been overwhelmed by Western ideas of economic development. It is an expression of the nation's firm determination to be a sovereign independent state and to be the owner of its own future.

I would argue that the idea of Gross National Happiness can be seen as embodying an almost instinctive and natural response to the Western concept of development as material progress, which to the Bhutanese feels so alien. *Bhutan 2020* says:

[F]rom our traditional perspective, poverty and underdevelopment should not be defined only in terms of the absence of wealth but also in terms of the persistence of ignorance and prejudice. (Planning Commission, 1999: p. 25)

This assertion in turn clearly shows how the conventional concept of development is culturally defined, and the argument that development as material progress is a Euro-centric concept has real validity here. Through the lens of such a different definition of development, we can now see vividly how biased the "conventional" idea of development is.

There is an ambiguous but curious dichotomy in Bhutanese attitudes towards tradition and modernisation which runs through many of the official documents. On the one hand they emphasise the importance of seeking a balance between spiritual well-being and material progress, and they assert the necessity of harmonising the traditional and the modern. The documents insist that the preservation of Bhutanese traditions should not be understood as a conservative (or static) act, and that Bhutanese values change as society alters during the process of modernisation. The important thing is to maintain a sense of "Bhutanese identity" amidst modernisation and rapid socio-economic changes. On the

other hand, however, the documents constantly state that Bhutanese values have been eroded by the forces of modernisation. In this context the picture is clearly an either/or story: Bhutan cannot have it both ways - culture and tradition are something which cannot be consistent with modernisation. This coexistence of seemingly contradictory comments might be ascribed to the official recognition that traditional Bhutanese values have been declining as modernisation progresses, and to the desire of officials, who want modernisation without losing Bhutanese culture, tradition and, most of all, Bhutanese identity.

#### **4.2 Education policy and culture and tradition**

This section focuses on education policy as an element of Bhutan's development policy. Firstly, it looks at education policy as a point of juncture between modernisation and cultural policies on the one hand, and the young people of Bhutan on the other. Secondly, it examines education policy as an expression of the official view of young people, and the generalisations it makes about young people as a group. This section is also particularly concerned with the discourse around "wholesome education" and "value education", both of which are relatively new terms in Bhutan and which can be seen as interpretations of cultural policy.

#### **Overall structure of the education system**

In the Second and Third Five Year Plans the main aim of education seems to be to provide the technical personnel needed for the implementation and planning of Bhutan's development (according to the description in the Second Plan, this was also the same for the First Five Year Plan (Royal Government of Bhutan, 1966: p. 29)). The nation's ultimate aim is to "become self-sufficient in regard to the need of educated personnel for its developmental programmes" (Ministry of Development, 1971: p. 48). Consequently the emphasis is on the quality of education rather than quantity during the first three Five Year Plans, "in order to create cadres of qualified technical personnel at all levels of manning

the various services” (Royal Government of Bhutan, 1966: p. ix). The Third Plan even expects to close down some primary schools where attendance was very poor, and to upgrade some of the primary schools to junior high schools. This policy seems to reflect the low priority given to Western education among ordinary people. An ex-official of the Education Division said:

When modern education started, nobody wanted to send their children to school. Parents used to say, ‘Western education is useless. It does not send children to heaven when they die.’ They did not see any significance in Western education at all.

Before modern education started, education meant monastic education, and the above impression arises from a comparison between modern education and monastic education. Modern education did not seem to be important for ordinary people in the society at the beginning of the modernisation processes.

The Fifth Plan still emphasises the quality rather than the quantity of education. It also aims at providing educated and trained manpower to meet the needs of development programmes. More importantly, education is given an additional role, namely preserving and promoting “the country’s rich cultural and spiritual heritage, preventing the alienation of the educated from this heritage.” (Planning Commission, 1981: p. 118). The Plan clearly states that preserving the traditional values and rich culture of the country is one of the fundamental ends of education (Planning Commission, 1981: p. 133). The preservation of culture and tradition was also referred to in the Second and the Third Plans. In the context of establishing the National Museum, the Second Plan says:

... with the impact of Education and modern living condition much of the cultural heritage of Bhutan is being lost. It is therefore, felt necessary to preserve example of the ancient culture such as paintings,

photographs, old books, armour and arms carvings, handicrafts, old archives ... in a properly organised museum. (Royal Government of Bhutan, 1966: p. 35)

The Third Plan touches on a Dzongkha medium school established during the First Plan and says

This institution intended to help preserve the cultural heritage of the country is also providing Bhutanese language teachers required for the school. (Ministry of Development, 1971: p. 10)

Thus it is not appropriate to say that education policies were not sensitive to the need for preservation of culture and tradition at an early stage. However a clear difference is that the Fifth Plan for the first time situates the preservation and promotion of culture and tradition as amongst the main objectives of education. Moreover, cultural policy in the area of education has been more or less the same since then. It has pointed out the need to maintain, or to infuse if necessary, traditional Bhutanese values among young people. Yet it was only from the Sixth Plan that the preservation of culture and tradition became one of the overall development objectives of Bhutan: the education sector was therefore one step advance in this respect.

From the Sixth Plan onwards, not surprisingly, the preservation of culture and national identity has been more strongly asserted in education policy. One of the roles of the education sector is to promote “loyalty to the monarchy, a sense of pride and commitment to the nation and a feeling of communal harmony and shared destiny based on the country’s rich traditions and customs and the values of the Bhutanese System”<sup>32</sup> (Planning Commission, 1987: p. 18). Furthermore, as preservation of culture and promotion of national identity is emphasised in connection with the nation’s security, providing educated and trained manpower is discussed within the same context.

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<sup>32</sup> The Plan documents do not give any definition of “Bhutanese System”.

... Bhutan employed over 113,000 expatriate personnel in the beginning of the Sixth Plan compared to about 10,000 during the Fourth Plan period (1976 - 81). 80% of the country's development work was therefore dependent on non-nationals<sup>33</sup>.... It is essential to close this gap [between the volume of its development programmes and Bhutan's ability to implement them] to a manageable level by developing the nation's own human resources. Otherwise, the need to protect the country's long term security and well-being would make it necessary to slow down the pace of work and cut back on development programmes. (Planning Commission, 1987: p. 20)

Education is expected to play the main role in producing the trained and educated manpower necessary for the country's development process, and to allow the replacement of expatriates with Bhutanese.

In this context the actual contents of Bhutanese education become relevant. Making the curriculum contents more relevant to Bhutan - the Bhutanisation of curriculum - becomes a new focus of education policy from the Sixth Plan onwards. The Plan is also a turning point in terms of the emphasis placed on the quantity rather than the quality of education. It sets the goal of "Universal Primary Education and eradication of illiteracy" (Planning Commission, 1987: p. 33).

The Seventh and the Eighth Plans are not much different from the Sixth Plan in terms of priority areas and objectives. Both put importance on the expansion of education, preservation of traditional Bhutanese values and the Bhutanisation of the curriculum. A difference can be found however in an introductory comment in the education section of the Plan. The Seventh Plan (as well as the Eighth Plan) for

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<sup>33</sup> Until very recent, in Bhutan "non-national" is conventionally used to mean "non-Bhutanese".

the first time refers to monastic education as Bhutan's "traditional" form of education.

Education has been an important part of religious life in Bhutan for centuries and continues to be so today with approximately 4,000 monks, nuns and lay priests receiving education in religious institutions, supported by the state, throughout the country. This figure does not include those studying in private monasteries. Monastic education involves the study of religious rituals as well as other skills, including literacy, numeracy, philosophy, astrology, literature, arts and in some cases traditional medicine. Formal western education was started in the 1950s. (Planning Commission, 1991: p. 72)

In previous plan documents education has automatically meant modern education: in this sense these comments represent a change. However, it does not mean that the government stance to modern education has altered dramatically. Apart from the introductory section of the chapter on education, "education" is taken to mean "modern education" without the need to add qualifying adjectives such as "modern" or "Western". The main sector of education is still predominantly modern English medium education, and the government places enormous attention on its facilities, curriculum and staff. The reference to monastic education can be seen as a part of the overall trend in the development plans in which Bhutan's culture and tradition has been increasingly emphasised. Also it should be noted that there is an institutional constraint: the monk body is under a different administration, and so is not a concern of the Education Division.

### **Bhutanisation**

Modern education in Bhutan started with the adoption of the Indian education system: this was unavoidable because of the acute shortage of qualified teachers and administrators. Not just staff but also the whole curriculum were imported from

India (Rose, 1977: p. 133). English was also set up as the medium of instruction in modern schools in Bhutan (Royal Government of Bhutan, 1966: p. 29).<sup>34</sup> This was convenient and inevitable at this first stage considering the fact that almost all of the higher education of Bhutanese students took place in India (Holsti, 1982: p. 28), and so these students had to be prepared for entry into the Indian university system.

This situation did raise the question of the relevance of education to Bhutan's needs and from then onwards, the education policy of Bhutan appears to be a constant effort to Bhutanise the education system. The focus of the Bhutanisation of education however has been changed over time. The Second and the Third Five Year Plans suggest translating textbooks into the Bhutanese language. From the Sixth Plan onwards however the translation of textbooks is not central issue for policy-makers. Instead of translation, Bhutanisation meant making the contents of the curriculum more relevant to Bhutan's own needs and situation. The Sixth Plan says that "having been structured on the Indian system, the education system in Bhutan needs to be reformed to relate it to the values, environment and the history of Bhutanese people" (Planning Commission, 1987: p. 33). Hence textbooks were to be rewritten rather than translated. Revision of the contents of curriculum was necessary "to incorporate the history, values and environment of the Bhutanese people" (Planning Commission, 1991: p. 74) starting from the lower levels of the education system. English textbooks were re-written, and environmental studies, Bhutanese history and geography textbooks were prepared (Planning Commission, 1991: p. 77). From the 1995 academic year onwards Environmental Studies (EVS), which combines history, geography and social studies, began to be taught in Dzongkha in Pre-Primary (PP) Class in twenty-six selected schools. From 1997 it has been implemented nationwide. The Eighth Plan directs that environmental studies should be taught in Dzongkha between the Pre-Primary Class and Class

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<sup>34</sup> Initially the medium of instruction in secular education was Hindi. Hindi was replaced by English in 1964 (Driem, 1994: p. 95).

3. Here, the issue of language comes back. Dzongkha is seen by educationists as “a powerful and effective means to teach Bhutanese values, belief and religion.”<sup>35</sup> The separate policy of the promotion of Dzongkha as the national language also seems to have given an impetus to this policy direction. A document by the Education Division even indicates the possibility of a change in the medium of instruction from English to Dzongkha (Education Division, 1994b: p. 5).

However, for secondary education the fact that the students have to take the Indian Certificate for School Examination (Class 10) and Indian School Certificate (Class 12) makes it difficult for Bhutan to launch an independent curriculum.<sup>36</sup> Nevertheless, the Bhutanisation of education does not stop at the revision of textbooks. Under the slogan of “wholesome education” and new phrases such as “value education”, “dignity of labour” and “career counselling”, it goes beyond the academic curriculum. I will now examine these terms as well as the context in which they are used.

### **Wholesome Education**

The phrase “wholesome education” appears in official education documents as early as 1989 (Department of Education, 1993: p. 18). It “aims at the all-around development of a child, including mental, emotional and physical education.”<sup>37</sup> The Minister of Health and Education, Lyonpo Sangay Ngedup, says that wholesome education means a move away from exam-oriented and academic studies as the sole purpose of school education to an emphasis on the overall development of the child. Therefore, he continues, education should include appreciation of and the development of skills in music, art and sport, which are

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<sup>35</sup> An interview with an official in CAPSS (Curriculum and Professional Support Section), the Education Division, on 9th February 1998.

<sup>36</sup> The first joint examination between BBE (Bhutan Board of Examinations) and ICSE took place in March 1996 (Education Division, 1996b: p. 5).

<sup>37</sup> Pema Thinley, the Director of Education Division, then the principal of the Sherubtse College, speaking to BBS on 16th March 1998.



not in the curriculum, and also an appreciation for physical labour (*CAPSS*<sup>38</sup> *Newsletter*, April 1997).

One area which is highlighted under the banner of wholesome education is “skills”; alongside this, “dignity of labour” is a phrase which has been used to promote so-called “blue-collar jobs” or manual labour. As early as the Sixth Plan the need for education in Bhutan to impart to students “a healthy attitude towards agricultural occupation and psychological acceptance of rural life” is addressed (Planning Commission, 1987: p. 34). The reason that the government has to promote “skills” and manual labour is strongly connected with the socio-economic changes which Bhutan has experienced for almost forty years, and the changes in people’s aspirations which have run alongside them. The Eighth Five Year Plan addresses the problem as one of “students’ expectations.”<sup>39</sup>

One of the growing concerns facing the development of education in Bhutan is the increasing expectation amongst students for ‘white-collar’ employment in government. Related to this is the general reluctance to under take any manual work and the preference, instead, for office-related jobs no matter how unproductive and lowly paid these may be. This has led to the disproportionate demand for academic education compared to training in technical and agricultural skills, which has further contributed to

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<sup>38</sup> Curriculum and Professional Support Section.

<sup>39</sup> A similar change in education policy in which a debate about the relevance of an imported curriculum has led to an emphasis being placed on practical subjects is also observed elsewhere. In Swaziland, for example, educational planners have continually debated the relevance of the colonial school curriculum for Swaziland’s new national goals and development plans. According to Both, the Ministry of Education expressed official concern over the academic emphasis of the colonial curriculum, and started to diversify the curriculum at the primary level to include practical subjects, such as agriculture and home science, from the early 1990s. The trend towards white-collar job among students is a concern for the country’s elite. Furthermore, modern education is perceived by many people, and parents and students alike, as the key to access to modern sector employment and economic success (Both, 1997).

the emerging problems related to youth and rural-urban migration. (Ministry of Planning, 1996: p. 182)

It has been pointed out in previous chapters that the value of modern English medium education has these days been inflated in Bhutan. This is largely because modern education is almost the only entrance to the “Bhutanese ladder of success”, which would ultimately result in a student becoming a high official, or a *dasho*. A *dasho* with his red scarf signifies power, privilege and respect in society. Even if a person has not aspired to that high level, education and being in school mean an escape from hard physical labour in the fields. Therefore manual labour implies going down (or being unable to climb up) the ladder of success. Furthermore, according to an official in the Planning Commission,<sup>40</sup> students are inspired by the colourful and exciting town life, and do not want to live in a remote village. This Bhutanese ladder of success has in fact been socially imposed on many young people in one way or another. One foreign volunteer teacher, who worked in a school in eastern Bhutan for two years told me:

One day we were in a town with some students. A Bhutanese teacher pointed to road maintenance workers from a distance and told to students, ‘If you do not want to be like that in the future, you must study hard.’ It is disgraceful because a parent of those students might be in similar kind of manual work!

A man, who runs a hotel in Thimphu, told me on my casual visit to his office:

I feel sorry for children. For them school is headache. They have to carry a heavy bag everyday, and they have got lot of pressure at school. But they have to study hard to get a white collar job. A white collar job means luxury, television, video, refrigerator... I brought my child to this hotel the other day and told

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<sup>40</sup> Interview with Neten Zangmo on 27th November 1997.

him, 'If you do not want to sweep the floor like that in the future,' I was pointing at one of the sweepers of the hotel, 'You've got to study hard'.

From a student's point of view, it is the same picture again. They feel the social pressure imposed by the "ladder of success". One graduate, who climbed up the ladder, presents his observation in the newspaper:

Going abroad has become such a passion [in Bhutan].... In the wake of ISC result declaration, we see many of our students and their parents suffering from a frustration syndrome,<sup>41</sup> one that is socially induced. We have always told them that qualifying for professional courses in India and abroad is the better ultimate.... Many students do not question as to why they prefer to go for professional courses. They say they are interested. On closer discussion, you realise that their interests are quite often forced upon them by our social attitude. (*Kuensel*, 3rd October 1998)

While young people are under pressure from various directions, and also aspire to climb up the ladder of success, the government is concerned about a possible situation in which many educated people are going to be unemployed. The Education Division says:

While the general education system ... face every year severe pressure for enrolment and is already over congested, the various technical institutes ... are finding it increasingly difficult to attract school leavers to join their respective training programmes. The unfortunate scenario exists mainly because our students and, worst still, their parents carry

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<sup>41</sup> Based on the results of the ISC examination at the end of the Class 12, it is decided whether a student can get a scholarship to study on a professional course in a collage in India or abroad. For those who can get the scholarship, a future job in a government office is guaranteed in the current system.

unrealistically too high aspirations and expectations on the career prospects. ... It has become imperative on part of all our teachers and the other concerned authorities to appropriately caution our students and their parents on the real danger of educated unemployment in the very near future. Students completing formal schooling system, unless equipped with some specialised skills of one form or another generally provided in one of the training institutes, have the real danger of not getting any employment. (Education Division, 1994b: pp. 12-13)

It is however not very easy to get rid of the psychological barriers against going down the ladder of success after a certain amount of formal schooling has occurred. It is disappointing and frustrating for young people to feel they might have to take up blue-collar jobs. The slogan of “dignity of labour” is used by the Education Division and other concerned sections of the government to help crack this perception barrier, and to moderate students’ aspirations. One of the programmes which has been developed along this line is Socially Useful Productive Work (SUPW) which includes agriculture and social forestry. Agriculture and social forestry “as practical experience programs are carried out by all schools in the form of creating and maintaining kitchen garden and social forestry programs” (Education Division, 1996a: p. 6). Its aims encompass, among others, the need to “develop respect for manual labour and agriculture” and also to “build positive attitude towards agricultural occupation” (Education Division, 1996a: p. 50). Furthermore, vocational education programmes have been introduced in schools. The Education Division has conducted some vocational courses such as barbering, plumbing and carpentry in selected high schools and junior high schools in order to provide “life-related skills” for students (Education Division, 1996b: p. 9).

Another area which has been enthusiastically promoted by the government is “Value Education”. The phrases “value education” or “moral education” have appeared in official documents since the mid-1990s, although similar concerns

and policies have become explicit since the Fifth Five Year Plan. The kind of values which the Education Division has tried to promote may be divided into three areas, namely patriotism, awareness of Bhutanese culture and tradition, and good manners and consideration for other people. The first two areas have been present since the Fifth Plan, while the last area is relatively new, and has been raised in the context of “Value Education”. The Fifth Plan includes the introduction of a strong national-cultural orientation to educational content (Planning Commission, 1981: p. 118). The Sixth Plan takes on a more nationalistic tone, as promotion of national identity is included in the objectives of overall development. It directs that the curriculum in the schools should be oriented towards cultivating ethical values and patriotism and fostering an understanding and appreciation for the salient features of Bhutanese culture and ethos, and a sense of “oneness” which can cut across linguistic and regional differences (Planning Commission, 1987: p. 34). The concentration on Value Education was initiated by the *kasho*<sup>42</sup> of 1996, which recommends the formation and launch of value education programmes.<sup>43</sup> The recognition of a decline in Bhutanese values among young people has also given a strong impulse to the introduction of value education. This decline has been felt not only by officials of the various ministries but also by ordinary adults above thirty years of age. Furthermore, it is stated that manners and self-discipline are deteriorating (Education Division, 1994b: p. 14). *The CAPSS Newsletter* notes that the following kind of comments are increasingly heard in social gatherings where education is discussed.

Modern society is becoming increasingly more lawless, violent, undisciplined and permissive and this trend is most apparent among the younger generation. There is a general decline in such things as respect for authority, politeness and good manners, resulting in

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<sup>42</sup> Royal Decree.

<sup>43</sup> Information from an interview with an official in CAPSS on 9th February 1998.

children today being ruder, using more bad language and caring less about their appearance and dress than ever before. (*CAPSS Newsletter*, April 1996)

Juvenile delinquency is another area with which educationists in urban areas, especially in Thimphu and Phuntsholing, are increasingly concerned. The Youth Guidance and Counselling Section (YGCS), which was established in 1996, was set up to address the issues of declining Bhutanese values, to implement value education through various youth programmes, as well as to provide career counselling and run the Youth Centre in Thimphu (Education Division, 1996b: pp. 5-7). The YGCS is also expected to provide some rehabilitation for young people who have committed juvenile delinquency.<sup>44</sup>

A document issued by the Education Division presents the wide range of “values” which schools should stand for. The document - called *The Purpose of School Education in Bhutan* (Education Division, 1996a) - divides values into three categories, “Values Relating to Education”, “Values Relating to Self and Others” and “Values Relating to Civic Responsibilities”: the second and third categories are probably most relevant to the discussion here. They include the following recommendations.

2.1.1 The love and loyalty to the king, country and the people or Tsa Wa Sum; the traditional values of “Phada Bugi Thadamtse Lay Jumdey” or mutual trust will be encouraged and developed in the children.

2.2 The students in the schools will be helped to recognise their own worth as individuals... the school education in Bhutan will :

2.2.1 promote individual growth in relation to social needs through the provision of knowledge, information and skills relevant to a pre-dominantly agricultural economy and responsive to other needs of the over all economy;

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<sup>44</sup> Interview with an official in the YGCS in May 1997.

2.2.2 develop in students an attitude of resourcefulness and self-reliance which can lead to self employment as well as to seek out and find employment in the private sector;

2.2.3 promote in students a sense of self-discipline and duty; this would involve accepting responsibility for one's own actions, being punctual and fulfilling commitments, taking pride in personal cleanliness, and grooming, and actively pursuing personal health and fitness;

2.2.4 help students to learn to be honest, open and being co-operative in their dealing and relationship with other people;

2.2.5 help develop an attitude of pursuing excellence in their personal and group endeavour;

2.2.6 help children to learn to think not only of their **material advantage**,<sup>45</sup> but also how to serve others, less fortunate than themselves and to think of the positive welfare of others in a warm and caring fashion.

3.1 Students in Bhutan will be helped to:

3.1.1 develop a pride in being Bhutanese in a world community and sharing its unique cultural heritage;

3.1.2 realise and appreciate the importance of the unique Bhutanese identity as a sovereign nation;

3.1.3 develop a commitment to the Buddhist Philosophy of non-violence, tolerance, compassion, love and peace which has enabled the Bhutanese to live in harmony, respecting individual differences.

3.2 Schools in Bhutan will also promote positive attitude towards lawful and just authority ...

3.4 The students will be encouraged to participate and support economic development efforts of the government, the conservation of heritage and environment and to care for the public and private properties as one's own.

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<sup>45</sup> Emphasis in original.

The Education Division tries to promote these values, as well as Bhutanese curriculum contents, through certain school activities and also everyday interaction between teachers and students. Several activities are suggested such as morning assembly which consists of a prayer, a short talk on important religious, cultural, moral values and discipline by the head of the school, teachers or students, and the singing of the national anthem. Wearing *gho* and *kira* as a school uniform is compulsory. As regards everyday interaction, a document suggests:

All teachers in their interactions with individuals, groups and classes are seen to support certain values by their encouragement of certain forms of behaviour. What teachers say and do, what they reward and punish, what they smile and frown at indicate the importance they place on values such as, truthfulness, perseverance, considerateness, tolerance, patience and so on. (Education Division, 1996c)

To conclude this chapter on official development discourse, I would like to examine the extent to which Western development discourse has influenced Bhutanese official discourse. As we have seen, conventional development thinking, which projects Western society as a model of development and regards economic indicators as the prime index of development began to be criticised as early as the 1970s. As Nederveen Pieterse (1998) points out, the dissatisfaction with conventional development thinking crystallised into an alternative, people-centred approach, and this approach has been further carried out under the leadership of the basic needs and alternative development schools of thought (p. 346). According to Nederveen Pieterse, this alternative development approach has been incorporated into the policies of donors, bilateral and multilateral, over the years, and a commitment to participation, sustainability and equity is shared by various donors, including NGOs, donor states and international agencies (pp. 369-370). The UNDP *Human Development Report* which has been published



annually since 1989 is testimony of this. It highlights the Human Development Index as an alternative indicator of development. In the 1980s, a group of people, including Escobar, went further and started to reject the whole idea of development, and to seek alternatives *to* development. What this group shares is an interest in culture, local knowledge, the critique of science and the promotion of localised, pluralistic grassroots movements (Nederveen Pieterse, 1998: p. 362).

This situation can be interpreted in two ways: firstly that Bhutanese development policy, which is culturally-aware and environment-friendly, is mainly influenced by Western development discourse; or secondly, that the Bhutanese government has exploited a change of climate within Western development discourse in order to realise development priorities which it has had for a long time. Changes in development discourse and the focus of donors may have created an environment in which a different idea of development is more acceptable to donors. The environment has certainly been conducive for Bhutan to press forward with its own development policy which emphasises not only socio-economic development but also the importance of preserving culture, tradition and the natural environment. It has become easier for the government to articulate a culturally-aware development policy.

It is unlikely that donors have pressurised Bhutan to follow their development discourse. Firstly at the policy level, we have seen that attention to the preservation of culture and tradition has been observed at a very early stage in the development plans in Bhutan, and that this was because the government, at the point of introduction of modernisation, tried to show its cultural awareness, as we will see later in this book, in order to keep up its posture of observing the *doxa*. For instance the Second Five Year Plan (1966 - 1971) states that the country's rich cultural heritage has to be preserved (Royal Government of Bhutan, 1966: p. 95). The Fifth Five Year Plan (1981 - 1987), which was prepared

around 1980, suggests that traditional Bhutanese values have to be preserved through education (Planning Commission, 1981: p. 133). Therefore the policy of the preservation of culture and tradition, and its harmonisation with modernisation is not very new to Bhutan. Furthermore, this policy has been expressed even more strongly since the Sixth Five Year Plan (1987 - 92), probably as a result of a growing perception of negative effects of modernisation (especially in town areas), rather than changes in views among donors or in development discourse.

Secondly, the government has carefully chosen donor countries and agencies which fit Bhutan's development objectives. Major donors to Bhutan have expressed their appreciation towards the development policy. For instance, the Chairman of the Danish Parliament's Finance Committee said on his visit to Bhutan in May 1999 that he hoped Bhutan would be able to continue to protect its culture and identity and to maintain the balance between its traditions and modernisation (*Kuensel*, 8th May 1999).<sup>46</sup> The Dutch government has committed funds towards the restoration of cultural monuments in Bhutan.<sup>47</sup> A member of the Asian Development Bank's Board of Directors commented on his visit to Bhutan, "the ministers here are very committed to development and modernisation and to preserving the cultural identity of Bhutan. In Asia, some countries have lost their culture and are now facing difficulties." He also said that if he were a Bhutanese minister, he would do exactly what Bhutanese Ministers are doing (*Kuensel*, 29th August 1998).<sup>48</sup> Moreover, Bhutanese development policies in general have

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<sup>46</sup> In 1996 assistance from Denmark made up 9.7% (US\$10.5 million) of total external assistance to Bhutan. Denmark is the second largest bilateral donor to Bhutan (UNDP, 1998: p. 44).

<sup>47</sup> According to *Kuensel*, the Dutch government committed Nu 5.5 million for the renovation of ten temples and monasteries. The agreement was signed in December 1997. Eight temples and monasteries were also renovated with Dutch assistance in 1994 (*Kuensel*, 27th December 1997).

<sup>48</sup> In 1996 assistance from the ADB made up 4.9% (US\$5.0 million) of total external assistance to Bhutan (UNDP, 1998: p. 43).

drawn sympathy and gained in their persuasive power. The Danish Development Minister said:

Visiting this country, seeing the nature, and meeting people face to face is realising that there is still in this world such a thing as alternatives and different ways of doing things. The right to be different should be preserved as not only a human right but also a right of nations in this world of globalisation where it is actually in our best interests. And I think Bhutan's contribution in this respect should be seen and cherished and not just be looked upon as something curious. (*Kuensel*, 19th September 1998)

Thus the view that Bhutan's development policy has been directly and indirectly forced on the country by donors and Western development discourse does not take into account the fact that the Bhutanese government has also manipulated its environment for its own ends. Thirdly, a very important aspect of Bhutanese development policy is not even envisaged in Western development discourse: this is the idea of Gross National Happiness, the main aim of current Bhutanese development policy. The fact that the phrase resembles "Gross National Product" is a clear signal that this idea is in competition with the Western model of development. Finally, throughout the formulation of development policies the government has described these policies as unique and original. This is another indication of their determination to be different. Bhutan's case suggests that the real world is not as hegemonic as these theories of discursive analysis of development would suggest.

Bhutanese official development thinking appears to have developed its own discourses. I would argue that this is because Bhutanese development policy and development discourses have neither been motivated primarily by economic factors nor encouraged by Western models. The path of development which Bhutan is trying to trace is mainly directed by political motivations, that is survival of the

country in difficult geopolitical circumstances and the survival of Bhutanese identity in the face of a huge wave of modernisation. That is to say that in order to articulate Bhutanese identity, Bhutan must be different from the West and the Western model of development.