

Chapter 1: Introduction

This is a study of what a people and a government in a so-called developing country think about modernisation and culture and tradition. It is an attempt to understand “development” from the perspectives of people and government in a developing country, the place where, after all, development activities are actually taking place. The location of the study is Bhutan and the focus is on the young generation in that society.

The reasons behind me taking up this topic and writing a book on it are twofold. The first hails from my encounter with a small Himalayan country, Bhutan, and especially its development policy. Bhutan first came to my attention when I saw a small article in a Japanese newspaper, dated September 1993. The article was about Bhutan’s “unique” development path, which was trying to balance modernisation on the one hand, and the conservation of the natural environment and the traditional Bhutanese way of life on the other. To a student of international relations with a strong interest in development in the Third World, it seemed an intriguing case; however, a lack of literature on Bhutan and the routine of course work did not provide me with an opportunity to explore Bhutan’s development further. The desire to know more about this small Himalayan country had to be set aside for a while.

Secondly my interest in these issues also started from a simple question which arose for me whilst reading development studies in a master’s course in 1994/95; Do people in the so-called Third World really want development? The developed countries have long been involved in, and often taken the lead in, development activities in the Third World all the while presuming that people in developing countries want development. But has anyone ever actually asked them? Shrestha writes:

We still insist that the poor need the kind of development we have practised since the early 1950s. Although the poor were never asked if they wanted to be helped or preferred Westernised development at all. (1995: p. 276)

I strongly felt that “development” must be a culturally bounded concept, which should incorporate people’s perceptions of “a good life” or “a better life”. I thought that unless we understand how people see development, modernisation, and their own culture and tradition, development activities become an imposition of Western values onto the non-West. Unless theories and practices of development incorporate the perception of people in the Third World, development cannot escape the accusation of hypocrisy. Towards the end of the master’s course however I was disappointed to find that not much of the literature I had read examined these cultural aspects of development seriously enough to satisfy my intellectual curiosity. Modernisation theories and development theories in the Marxist tradition seemed to overemphasise economic aspects of development, and their unilinear idea of development as a transformation of society from the traditional to the modern appeared to be too rigid to accommodate the diversity of the real world.

At the same time I came to know from the limited amount of material available on Bhutan, about the concept of Gross National Happiness, which is the ultimate aim of development for the Bhutanese government. Happiness? Some people might tilt their heads. Some might smile at the concept, but wonder about its practical implications. The concept might sound utopian, or even Epicurean. Some people may claim that happiness is too personal to be a development policy. But here is a government which in reality appears to strive for the maximisation of Gross National Happiness; which states the importance of striking a balance between modernisation and tradition; and which places emphasis on non-material aspects of human life. There were many questions I wanted to explore. I wondered what Bhutanese development policies have been

like both historically as well as in terms of sectoral details. I wondered what ordinary people in the country think about modernisation and their own culture and tradition. Thus the book is about the meaning of “culture” and “tradition” and how they are used by the state and local people. It is also about “modernisation” and “development”, since talking about culture in the context of development is at the same time to talk about modernity. The book examines these issues using discourse analysis in its broadest sense. It deals with the background and motivations which lie behind the usages and meanings of words such as “modernisation” and “culture”. It also investigates the interactions between two levels of development discourses - namely the state and the grassroots. The book presents different views on modernisation, culture and tradition in order to avoid an essentialised representation of the society, and the “motivations” for each of these views are investigated. Motivation in this context means the reason behind a particular view and how social structuring leads to the formation of certain views in people. At the same time it will also contextualise all the development discourses in Bhutan within the even wider context of globalisation.

Representation was always an issue for me, as I believe that development must be defined by the people who are supposed to be benefiting from it. It initially seemed to me that the representation of other societies would inevitably entail a mixture of hope, imagination, expectation and prejudice on the part of the one that undertakes the representation. I thought the representation of a society by people who belong to it is more “accurate” and “authentic” than the analysis of outsiders. During the fieldwork and during the course of writing this book representation has continued to be an issue for me. It has however become an issue in a different sense from before. Questions have now arisen about how best to narrate an intricate reality in a linear fashion, how to connect complexity of day to day life with theories which generalise and trim reality, and how to “translate” from one culture into another. As I put myself into a position whereby I began to represent “others”, the issue seemed to become a more

practical matter. The issue of representation matters not so much because of problems with authenticity or accuracy: the fieldwork experience taught me that people speak about “others” in a stereotyped way even within a society. Furthermore, my personal experience tells me that after living abroad for several years, my representation of my home country, Japan, is becoming different from that of my friends who have lived there throughout their lives. In the end, there are as many representations as the number of people who can talk, and I think each representation is more or less “accurate” within its own limitations. An important point instead would be to clearly define the limits of how the process of representation is undertaken.¹ This subject will be covered in detail in Chapter 3.

Bhutan started planned development activities in 1961. As modernisation has progressed, the preservation of Bhutanese culture and tradition has become an intense concern for both the Bhutanese people and the government alike. The government is making a strong attempt to preserve Bhutanese culture and tradition in the face of modernisation. Also as a small country surrounded by two giant nations, China and India, a sense of insecurity is constantly in the Bhutanese mind. The government therefore promotes the country’s unique culture as a weapon which can be used to preserve national sovereignty. The Eighth Five Year Plan (1997-2002) states that for a small country a distinct cultural identity is an important means by which national security may be safeguarded and strengthened (Ministry of Planning, 1996: pp. 25-26). In this context, culture and tradition in Bhutan is not linked with backwardness but instead highlighted to become a focal point of issues surrounding development, modernisation, westernisation, national

¹ It cannot be stated too strongly that I have spent *only* fourteen months in Bhutan so far, of which twelve months were for proper fieldwork for this thesis. My understanding of Bhutan comes primarily from this very limited period. I cannot forget a question from a graduate which I received during my visit to Bhutan from December 1999 to January 2000: “You came to our college. You stayed with us, participated in our life and interviewed us. And you now write about us. Do you think it is fair?”.

identity, and the nation's independence. It is on this point that the case of Bhutan holds special interest when considering modernisation, culture and tradition.

The book uses data collected during one year's fieldwork in Bhutan between 1997 and 1998. In the course of the fieldwork, many young people and government officials agreed to be interviewed. The focus on young people is largely because of the fieldwork circumstances, details of which will be found in Chapter 3: as such it arises from practical rather than theoretical concerns. It however happened to be a relevant focus in terms of the theoretical concerns of the research. In Bhutan young people are the focal point for the production of discourses on culture, tradition and modernisation in the society as a whole, because they are the group who are perceived, by society at large, to be most exposed to the outside world through modern education and the media. The social situation and the kind of education which they have grown up with is said to be very different from the one which the older generation experienced. The generation gap is perceived to be widening in the society. The older generation deplore young people for being fascinated by English films rather than old stories of Bhutan's past. The book will examine how this older generation's view of young people is seen by young people, how young people see themselves, and how these competing views between the generations play themselves out in society. It also investigates the existence of competing identities *among* young people.

In order to analyse the various discourses, I utilise Bourdieu's framework. This is used as a tool for analysis, and the book does not aim to examine the framework itself.

The structure of the book is as follows. Chapter 2 aims to establish the point of departure for the discussion both in terms of theory and the situation in Bhutan. It consists of three parts. It will firstly undertake a review of the theories with which this book is concerned. Works which discuss "development alternatives" as well as works which examine

development employing the method of discursive analysis will be investigated in detail. Issues of representation and Orientalism will be explored, and this will lead to a discussion of Occidentalism, the mirror image of Orientalism, and multiple discourse. Attention will be also given to theories of globalisation, within which Bhutanese discourses of modernisation, culture and tradition will be contextualised in a later chapter of the book. The second part of the chapter will present Bourdieu's framework and the third part will briefly introduce Bhutan, its education system and the regional environment.

Chapter 3 outlines the methodology of the book. The context of the fieldwork will be presented in detail. Sampling methods and other sources of data will also be discussed.

Chapter 4 and 5 are devoted to exploring development discourses in Bhutan. Chapter 4 examines the official development discourse, while Chapter 5 is concerned with discourses among young people in Bhutan. The first half of Chapter 4 will investigate the meaning of development in the five-year development plans and other official documents, and also focus on the position of culture and tradition in development policies. The concept of Gross National Happiness will be given special attention. The second half will concentrate on education policy as a juncture between general development policy and young people, and also as an expression of official views about young people. The concluding part of the chapter will examine the extent to which the hegemony of Western development discourse has influenced Bhutanese development thinking.

Chapter 5 aims to understand the different views on modernisation, culture and tradition which exist amongst young people. It will investigate the discourses in relation to the country's three different education sectors, namely English medium education, Dzongkha² medium education

² Dzongkha, pronounced with a silent "d", is the national language of Bhutan. Renderings of Bhutanese names and words in this book largely

and monastic education. Firstly, the different career paths for young people will be described in order to show the different contexts and positions of young people in society, and to help contextualise the analysis which follows. It will illustrate the way in which different modes of education, and the degree of success within these different modes, lead to varying career paths. Secondly, the key terms of discourses (such as modernisation, westernisation, exposure, and culture and tradition) will be deconstructed. In Bhutan, development provides an arena where different views on modernisation, culture and tradition contest. Both positive and negative meanings are attributed to the competing views. The book will explore the relation between these different views and the different kinds of education, in terms of both the curriculum and the medium of education. Students in each education sector are exposed to different kinds of knowledge and language. In this context, it is to be expected that differences in the medium of education and the curriculum will contribute to the production of different views about the outside world, and especially about the West. The book will investigate how differences in language and curriculum have affected young people's exposure to the outside world, and how they have impacted on the formulation of images of the West, Bhutanese Occidentalism, and created views about modernisation, culture and tradition. Thirdly the chapter will identify what Bourdieu calls "doxa", the universe of the undiscussed. These are the shared understandings which are taken for granted by all agents in the society, and are therefore left unquestioned. The universe of the undiscussed will be identified through observing the way in which young people defend their views against the elder generation and young people in other sectors of education.

Chapter 6 offers a concluding discussion. It tries to put Bhutanese development discourses in the context of the

follow what is found in *Kuensel*, the national newspaper, and government documents, although spellings are not always consistent even within a document. For instance, a place name, Lhuntse, sometimes appears as Lhuentse.

recent literature on globalisation and discuss them with reference to the discourse analysis of development.

The book attempts to understand a dimension of Bhutanese state and society on which not much research has so far been undertaken. By examining Bhutanese perceptions of development, it at the same time tries to make a contribution to understanding the idea of “development”.