

# ENSURING SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY: CAN BHUTAN'S EDUCATION SYSTEM ENSURE INTERGENERATIONAL TRANSMISSION OF VALUES? <sup>1</sup>

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## **Introduction**

The process of economic modernisation involves urbanisation, industrialisation, secularisation, media participation, education, and democratisation.<sup>2</sup> Other changes include the adoption of scientific technology and market economy resulting in a fundamental shift in people's values, attitudes and expectations as a response to the changing economic and social circumstances. In the case of Bhutan, the modernisation process initiated in the early 1960's had far reaching implications on the lives of the Bhutanese people in so far as it presented a distinct break from the isolated medieval past and ushered Bhutan into the modern world.

As a result of economic modernisation and the initiation of planned economic development, there has been a tremendous improvement in the living standards of the Bhutanese people.<sup>3</sup> Bhutan has also established diplomatic and trade links with many countries and is a member of numerous international organisations including the United Nations. On the flip side, modernisation has also led to the introduction of modern values that threaten to undermine the traditional values of the Bhutanese people.

Bhutan's development philosophy based on the idea of enhancing Gross National Happiness requires that development must be both economically as well as socially sustainable. The priority accorded to social sustainability is apparent in the inclusion of "preservation and promotion of cultural and traditional values" as one of the objectives and strategies of development.<sup>4</sup> Thus Bhutan faces a distinct challenge of adopting modern ideas to suit the economic needs of the country, as well as providing continuity in the spiritual, cultural and traditional lives of the Bhutanese people.

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Traditional values based on the Buddhist culture have a profound influence on the lives of a majority of the Bhutanese people. Traditional Bhutanese values not only address individual self-discipline and the conduct of interpersonal relationships but also delineate the responsibility of all sentient beings. The concept of *ley jumdrej* and *tha damtshig* is central to Bhutanese values. The concept of *ley jumdrej* essentially states that good begets good and vice versa. The idea of *tha damtshig* outlines the sacred commitment to others in society. This is best illustrated in the pairing of duty and obligation between: *pha da bhu gi damtshig* (parent and child), *lobey da lobtu gi damtshig* (teacher and pupil), *nyen da drok gi damtshig* (husband and wife), and *poen da yok gi damtshig* (master and servant). Such pairing of duty and obligations reinforces the need for social responsibility. In terms of individual self-discipline Bhutanese values emphasise the *domba nga* or the five lay Buddhist undertakings. They include: not killing; not taking what is not given to you rightfully; not lying; not consuming intoxicants and avoiding sexual misconduct.

Such traditional values are, however, being gradually undermined, as people become more self-centred, and materialistic. Considering that about eighty percent of the people are still dependent on traditional livelihood based on subsistent agriculture, it is important that traditional values are not undermined. Sudden changes and adoption of modern values could potentially alienate these people and create social disharmony. Thus there is a need to provide a sense of continuity amidst change. In addition, since culture and traditional values form the bedrock of Bhutanese national identity it is important for the Bhutanese to ensure that its culture and values are not undermined.

However, due to economic modernisation, the Bhutanese society is witnessing a shift in values, attitudes and expectations. External influences arising from the values accompanying economic development, the media and the modern education system, among others, challenge the continuance of the traditional values. Considering that education is a powerful medium for value transmission, this paper will consider if education in Bhutan provides adequate impetus in ensuring the intergenerational transmission of values. It is important to note that the modern secular education system, taught through the English medium, is predominant and popular compared

to traditional Buddhist education. Hence this paper will mainly look at the value education content in the modern education sector only. In particular, it will focus on the textbooks taught in the *Dzongkha* language classes as all other subjects are secular in orientation based on the western or Indian education syllabus.

To elucidate on this theme it is first necessary to consider the following: What are traditional Bhutanese values? Why is there a concern in preserving these values? Does the Bhutanese education system provide adequate impetus for imparting value education to the younger generations?

### **What are Traditional Bhutanese Values?**

Values can be described as a set of ideas and beliefs which influence the thought(s) and action(s) of a person. Values help people to organise social relations by distinguishing between what is socially acceptable from what is not. Values can be shaped by numerous factors including religion, socialisation, education and cultural norms among others. One of the main distinctions made between traditional and modern values is the impact of science and technology in the lives of the people. Unlike traditional societies that held religious and cultural beliefs in great reverence, emphasis has now shifted to scientific proof and rationality based on market capitalism. As a detailed discussion on all the traditional values is beyond the scope of this paper, it will mainly dwell on three aspects of traditional values that address the individual's relationship with nature, with others in society and individual self-discipline.

In the case of Bhutan, traditional values have largely been shaped by the Buddhist culture. In addition to universal values like honesty, compassion, harmony, tolerance etc., the need for empathy, reciprocity, responsibility, self-development and recognition of interdependence are prominent features of the Bhutanese value system. Traditional values are comprehensive as they include the conduct of an individual's relationship to the natural environment, interpersonal relationships, and addresses issues of individual self-discipline.

Apart from the spiritual Buddhist precept, the need for respecting interdependence featured strongly in traditional societies for pragmatic

reasons also. For example, the harsh living conditions in isolated mountain valleys necessitated a cordial conduct of relationship among the inhabitants of the community as well as harmonious co-existence with the forces of nature. In the case of rural subsistence farming, unpredictability of weather, pests and diseases naturally led to interdependence within the community to overcome misfortunes. Similarly, the belief in natural spirits led people to respect nature and avoid pollution of streams and forests lest the natural deities may be disturbed. Such pragmatic considerations also reinforced the traditional perceptions of interdependence.

According to traditional values individual self-discipline is considered important for harmonious co-existence. Considering the effect of the good person on his or her surroundings, traditional Bhutanese values advocate *domba nga* or the five undertakings of the layperson to foster personal self-discipline. Observance of these five lay Buddhist undertakings is said to foster personal development and also accumulation of positive "karma" or merits.

Although, the values prescribed by *domba nga* are mainly geared towards individual self-discipline, its applicability is not limited to the individual alone. Rather these values are metaphors for greater issues. For example, the idea of not taking others life could also include habitat destruction and senseless exploitation of the environment. Similarly, the value related to "not taking what is not rightfully given to you" can be looked at from the point of view of social justice. In effect, the fact that twenty percent of the people control eighty percent of global wealth shows that there might be something wrong.

The ideas of *ley jumdrej*<sup>5</sup> and *tha damtshig* are central concepts of Bhutanese traditional values. The concept of *ley jumdrej* states that the individual's present actions will determine the future outcome, metaphorically just as sowing good quality seeds brings about a good harvest, and vice versa. *Tha damtshig*, a concept that is often referred to in the schools, homes and the statements of government officials, essentially stands for honour and sacred commitment. It means that one must not deviate from certain inviolable actions that are deemed virtuous and honourable in society.

Traditional Bhutanese values delineate the sacred commitment between various pairs of relationships such as *pha da bhushi gi damtshig* (parent and child), *lobey da lobtu gi damtshig* (teacher and pupil), *nyen da drok gi damtshig* (husband and wife), *poen da yok gi damtshig* (master and servant). Such pairing of relationships is used to state the duty and obligations of one to the other. For example, in the relationship between the parent and the child, the parent is obliged to ensure proper upbringing and care for the child. The child is, in turn, expected to obey and care for the parents in their old age. In the case of the husband and wife, both are expected to be faithful and treat their marriage as an ultimate binding union. Hence faith and trust are important virtues in a marital relationship. Finally, in the master servant relationship, the master is obliged to ensure the welfare of his servant. The servant is in turn expected to serve his master with dedication. Such pairing of relationships ensure stability and predictability in the social context.

The relationship between the teacher and the pupil is accorded great importance according to traditional values, because it is the teacher who helps the student to overcome his ignorance. The teacher is expected to show compassion and love for the students by observing impartiality among his pupils and ensure that all his students acquire knowledge and wisdom. In turn the student is expected to concentrate on his studies and show life long gratitude to the teacher.

In accordance with the Buddhist culture, traditional Bhutanese values address the need to respect all sentient beings. This is reflected in the idea of interdependence which is viewed as "the fundamental law of nature where all forms of life regardless of religion, law, education survive by mutual cooperation based on their interconnectedness."<sup>6</sup> This interconnectedness is captured in Buddhist iconography as with the mutually reinforcing relationship between the "*thuenpa puenshi*" or the "four friends." This is a common iconography in Bhutan and is painted on the walls in people's homes and in the monasteries, or painted in the form of thangkas. In view of such reverence for all species, the values of environment protection, aversion to pollution of land, water and air are important aspects of traditional values.

From the above, it is apparent that traditional values are comprehensive in

so far as they outline the values on conduct of relationships across species. These values are, however, increasingly being undermined today as the process of modernisation brings about a new set of values that run contrary to traditional value and belief systems.

### **The Changing Context and The Emerging Challenges**

One of the main challenges in preserving traditional values in modern Bhutan is the need to reconcile the fact that the social, cultural and economic context in which these values developed through the past centuries is very different from Bhutan today. The introduction of a market based economy and monetisation of economic activities as a part of the development process in itself introduced new values in a society that depended on exchange and barter of goods and services. The construction of motor roads and telephone services has made distance no longer a barrier for communications. Improved trade linkages with neighbouring countries and the world has provided access to goods and services that were unimaginable even twenty years ago. Apart from influences of foreign travel and tourism the mass media is perhaps one of the greatest sources of external influence and values. The recent introduction of television and the Internet has enabled the Bhutanese to have instant access not only to global news and information but also whetted their appetite for consumer goods.

The process of modernisation has thus had a profound impact on the social, economic and political outlook of the Bhutanese people leading to a gradual shift in their values, attitudes and expectations. It is, perhaps, necessary here to qualify that the impact of modernisation is felt most greatly in the urban centres of Bhutan, which constitute only about 20% of the population. A vast majority of the people continue to live in the rural areas practising subsistence agriculture. Although the urban population is comparatively small, as with most centre-periphery relationships there is a steady flow of ideas and information from the urban centres to the rural hinterlands. Much of this flow is uni-directional since the centres are perceived as modern, advanced, and hence desirable.

To provide a sharper focus on the impact of modernisation on traditional values, this paper will focus mainly on the changing attitudes, values and expectations of the urban population. The urban population is not only most influenced by modernisation, but also deserve attention as the decline of traditional values threatens to unleash the uglier aspects of modernisation namely alienation, self-centredness, materialism and the consequences of such extremes. The values of modernisation exhibited by the urban population in many ways run contrary to traditional Bhutanese values. The change in values can largely be attributed to pragmatic considerations of urbanisation as much as to changing values of the people.

For example, it is an accepted fact that the living costs in the urban areas are high and steadily increasing. Therefore, many migrants who come to Thimphu or Puentsholing for employment or commercial reasons leave their aging parents in the villages. Owing to the rising costs, families also prefer the nuclear family to the traditional joint family system. Such considerations gradually weaken the family bond and undermine *pha da bhu gi damtshig* and the values associated with *phama dinlen jelni*.<sup>7</sup>

Similarly, the pressure arising from work and the distractions in the urban areas also weaken the bond between the parent and the child. Young children are often left with their nannies when they are young and in front of the television sets at a later stage. This deprives the children of spending quality time with their parents and makes it impossible to imbue the child with social and cultural values which are so important at a young age. In this case the urban person is not able to fulfil his or her duty and obligation as a parent.

Modernisation, foreign travel and the mass media have also exposed the population to new ideas and material goods consequently heightening desires. Influenced by the images from the celluloid screen, the people become materialistic and think that material acquisition can increase happiness just as the couple in the TV advertisement seem to be filled with happiness with the purchase of a new gas stove. The insatiable appetite for material acquisition in turn diverts resources from charitable and socially beneficial activities. For example, many urban residents loathe visiting their villages, as the expectation to bear gifts to the relatives and neighbours becomes a financial burden. Thus an earlier social practice that would have



enabled the redistribution of income between the urban and rural folks is gradually fading. In its stead, the surplus income is spent on acquiring rice cookers, refrigerators and TV sets which are increasingly becoming items of necessity. Thus urbanisation also alienates the individual from his or her rural origins.

The ability to earn cash income in the urban areas instills the urban resident with the notion of being independent.<sup>8</sup> Unlike the rural people who lead an uncertain life - due to their dependence on natural forces like weather patterns, pests, diseases for their livelihood as subsistence farmers - the urban person is free from such fears so long as one is able bodied and employment opportunities exist. This idea of being "independent" in turn undermines the traditional values of interdependence. Thanks to modern facilities, if one falls ill, one can receive free treatment in the hospital made possible by the government's free health care. Though one is dependent on the government, the idea of who the government is, is more abstract compared to direct interaction with the village medicine man. Thus traditional loyalties to individual and immediate community are transferred to more national and abstract entities. This feeling of independence can, if taken to the extremes, undermine traditional values since values and practice, thereof, are usually seen in the context of social interdependence.

Although development and modernisation creates numerous opportunities, many people are also marginalised in the process. Due to a general dissatisfaction with their lives and possessions, many young people resort to petty crime, substance abuse and a few even to prostitution. Yet others who are more ambitious resort to desecration of sacred *chortens* and monasteries to profit from the sale of religious artefacts and antiques. This represents human greed at its most depraved form draining away the spirituality that has helped shape traditional Bhutanese values in the people.

Reading the editorials and the letters to the editor in Kuensel, the national newspaper, and speaking to people, there is a general concern expressed over the decline of traditional values in Bhutan today. A cynic might question the need for such concern after all traditional values have themselves developed in a certain socio-economic context, at a bygone time. Similarly modern market based societies have their own values. For example, the logic of interaction in a market economy is that of competition

rather than empathy and compassion. Material gratification and consumerism may unseat the primacy of virtue accumulation and spiritual development. This could alienate the Bhutanese people from the cultural and traditional values that have enabled society to attain harmony and progress thus far.

Thus the Bhutanese have to cautiously consider benefits and costs of modernisation since autarky and isolationism are no longer options for Bhutan development and modernisation programmes have to be carried out in an inclusive manner so as not to alienate large sections of the society. Unchecked adoption of foreign ideas and ideals may alienate these people from the urban population and destroy the social and cultural networks that are important for sustainability at the community level.

In addition Bhutan's development philosophy based on the idea of Gross National Happiness also emphasises the need to include the spiritual and cultural needs of the people in the process of development. Thus the traditional values that emphasise the need for reciprocity, responsibility, and interdependence among others, are needed to ensure that the development process in Bhutan is inclusive and sustainable.

Considering the relevance of traditional values in addressing trans-individual and global issues, it is now more necessary than ever to ensure the intergenerational transmission of values. Otherwise, unbridled modernisation may destroy the very spiritual and cultural fabric that has enabled the Bhutanese society to live in harmony with each other and with the natural environment.

### **Education As a Vehicle for Transmission of Values**

Whatever value(s) a society intends to impart education is perhaps one of the most powerful tools to propagate the intended value(s). In terms of policy too, the society or the state apparatus can determine the values that are taught. In the case of the Bhutanese education system, value education, as a separate subject was formally introduced only in the past year or two. Earlier, value education was hidden in the form of stories in the textbooks. This however, does not mean that the education system was devoid of value education since the *Dzongkha* language textbooks provide a wealth of input for value education. Although *Dzongkha* classes in the schools is perceived

as a language course only, it is heavily influenced by Buddhism and the textbooks include Buddhist ethical treatises and biographies of successful Buddhist practitioners.

In order to understand the relevance of education in value transmission it is first necessary to delve briefly into the background of Bhutanese tradition and culture and the changing focus of the education system. Bhutan is often referred to as the last bastion of Mahayana Buddhism and is officially a Buddhist state. Buddhist precepts play an important role in the lives of the Bhutanese. The unification of Bhutan in the 1600s is attributed to the rule of Shabdrung Nawang Namgyel, a Tibetan Buddhist abbot. Till the establishment of hereditary monarchy in 1907, the monastic order played an important role in the political administration of the country. Before 1907, the central administration of Bhutan was based on Buddha-cratic principles where the principal function of the state was to support the monastic community.

However, with the establishment of hereditary monarchy in 1907, and the initiation of planned economic development in the 1960's, the role of the state shifted from one of supporting the monastic order to that on delivering social welfare through economic development.<sup>9</sup> This policy shift is evident in the Eighth Five Year Plan budget outlay where the *Dratshang Lhentsog* (Council for Ecclesiastical Affairs) received only 0.8 percent of the total budget compared to 18 percent for the health and education sector.<sup>10</sup>

Since the launch of modernisation programmes one of the main development priorities for the government has been the enhancement of human resources in the country. Consequently, there has been a rapid growth in the modern education sector from virtually no schools prior to the 1960s to about 343 schools today. As apparent in Table 1, enrolments in modern schools outnumber the traditional institutes of learning and this trend is expected to continue.

**Table 1: Comparison Between Monastic and Modern Institutions**

	Number of institutions	Number of Students
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Monastic institutions	288	10, 035*
Modern schools	343	107,792

Source: National Commission for Cultural Affairs, Abstract  
Statistics, January 2000, Thimphu Bhutan.

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\* It should be noted that this figure does not include the novice monks and lay priests that are trained in the village monasteries

The emerging gap in student enrolments between the two types of institutions is also an evidence of the changing importance that parents attach towards providing modern education for their children. While it was every parents wish to send at least one son to become a monk earlier, it is the dream of every parent, today, to see that his or her children complete college education and become a "graduate". A graduate degree is seen as the passport to a "decent" job and a comfortable life.

Thus education today is viewed more as a means to an end i.e., a better job and a better salary. In the context of the modern economy, the people increasingly place importance on modern scientific education, and knowledge of the English language. This is mainly due to the need for such education to enter into the job market. This is in contrast to the traditional notion of education where education was more or less seen as an end in itself in the individual's quest to remove ignorance and attain greater knowledge for its own sake.

Monastic education today follows the traditional methods of teaching and imparts lessons in Buddhist philosophy, logic, astrology, traditional medicine and literature. The medium of instruction is either *chos kyed* (classical Tibetan) or *Dzongkha*. The monks are trained in meditation and ritual practices. Monastic education is provided in the *Dzongs*, the *Shedras* (Buddhist Colleges), *Lhakhangs* (temples) and *Dubdras* (meditation centres) that are spread all over the country. In addition to *gelongs* or ordained monks, there are also *gomchens* or lay priests who follow monastic education in the numerous *lhakhangs*.

In contrast to the traditional monastic education, modern schools teach the modern secular subjects in the English medium. This content and the medium of instruction dominates the education curriculum is described in table two.

**Table 2: Education Curriculum in the Schools of Bhutan**

Grades/ Subjects	Pre- Prima- ry	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<i>Dzongkha</i> (national language)											
English											
Mathematics											
Environment Science											
Science											
Physics											
Chemistry											
Biology											
Social Studies											
History											
Geography											
Economics											
Computer Science											

Note: Shaded portion represents the subjects taught at various levels in Bhutanese schools.

Source: Adapted from Education Division, Education in Bhutan, Annual Statistical Report 1999, Royal Government of Bhutan.

The heavy emphasis on the English language and modern scientific courses can be traced to pragmatic considerations to meet the needs of economic development. The English language was not only necessary for communicating with other countries but also important for Bhutanese students who went to study in India and the west for higher scientific and technical education. Furthermore, the lack of appropriate *Dzongkha* equivalents for mathematical and scientific terms also necessitated the use of English.

Hence English is the medium of instruction for all subjects, except of

course for *Dzongkha* the national language of Bhutan. The modern secular subjects are based on an education curriculum borrowed from India and the west. Thus the very introduction of modern education has brought about the introduction of modern and essentially western ideas. These modern subjects place great emphasis on scientific values and the idea of empirical proof rather than on faith and superstition. Accordingly, rationality gradually displaces traditional beliefs in supernatural forces.

Owing to its scientific and secular orientation value education as such did not feature prominently in the education of Bhutanese children. In some of the English text books published in Bhutan, the Education Department attempted to introduce value education hidden in the form of stories and folk tales. It was only in 1999 that the Education Department formally introduced value education as a separate subject to be taught in schools once a week from the pre-primary level to grade twelve. A value education booklet titled "Learning to Be"<sup>11</sup> is to be released in the year 2001. The booklet, written in the English language, dwells on various themes ranging from personal hygiene to generosity, honesty and loyalty to the country (A full list of the value education themes is attached in Appendix I). Although such initiatives are timely and appreciated, the texts seem to deal with the themes of value education in a manner that is isolated and removed from the Bhutanese context.<sup>12</sup>

Unlike modern secular subjects, the texts taught in the *Dzongkha* classes have a very strong value education content although it is taught as a language class. The *Dzongkha* texts in the form of biographies, ethical treatises and poetry have their origins in Buddhism and are based heavily on Buddhist ethical principles. Table three provides a sample of the *Dzongkha* texts taught in Bhutanese schools.

**Table 3: List of Texts Taught in Bhutanese Schools**

Text	Author	Main Theme
Sumtag	Thumi Sambota	<i>Dzongkha</i> grammar and linguistics
Dashung	Education Dept	-do-
Legshed langdor	Anonymous	Worldly Ethics
Chu-shing gi toenchoe	Gungthang Toenpai Donemay	-do-
Gyelse Laglen	Thumed Zangpo	-do-
Chonjug	Shantideva	-do-
Sheting	Nagarjuna	-do-
Tsig Nyen Nga gi melong	Anonymous	Poetry
Biography of Ashi Nagsa	Anonymous	Biography of successful Buddhist practitioners
Biography of Dowa Zangmo	Anonymous	-do-
Biography of Drimed Kuenden	Anonymous	-do-

Source: Information collected from the schools in Thimphu and Sherubtse College, Tashigang, November 2000.

The texts taught at the tertiary level can broadly be categorised as: linguistics and grammar; biographical literature of successful Buddhist practitioners; and Buddhist ethical treatises. All the texts are based on Buddhist philosophy and promote what are essentially Buddhist values emphasising virtues like altruism, compassion, reciprocity, and interdependence among others.

The three biographical texts listed above deals with the lives of successful Buddhist practitioners and convey the importance of cultivating a compassionate mind. The *ley jumdrej* or the dependence of future results/fortunes on one's present action underlies all three biographies.



Written in the form of life stories, these biographies simplify the complex Buddhist concepts of reincarnation so that lay people can comprehend such concepts clearly. The biographies are also inspiring in so far as they explain that human beings are perfectible and that Buddha-hood is attainable through successful practice.

The biography of prince Drimed Kuenden elucidates many of the central Buddhist themes clearly. Although, he was born a prince, Drimed Kuenden showed a disposition for spiritual quest from an early age. Realising the ephemeral nature of material wealth he gives the wealth of the palace including the most sacred relic away in an act of altruism. On discovering this, the King exiles him into the forest where Drimed Kuenden gives away his treasures - his children, his wife and even his own eyes to a monk. Such virtuous actions, though depicted in the extremes, shows that true selflessness and compassion are the qualities of the Buddha, for Drimed Kuenden in a later life is reincarnated as Buddha Shakya Thupa.

The other category of Buddhist works taught through the *Dzongkha* medium deals with ethical treatises of Buddhist scholars. These texts mainly focus on Buddhist ethics in the form of verses. The values promoted by these Buddhist texts apply across species rather than limiting the values to human relations alone. This is in view of the Buddhist belief that all sentient beings are interdependent. Thus the values fostering virtuous thought, actions and speech apply equally to humans as well other animate beings.

The text titled "Sheting" is the translation of the text "Letter from Nagarjuna to King Gautimiputra" by the ancient Indian Buddhist scholar Nagarjuna. The central theme in "Sheting" is the need for individuals to follow moral values in their thought, action and speech. This text states that "morality is the foundation of all virtues, just as the earth is (the supporter of both) animate and inanimate things."<sup>13</sup>

In order to attain positive merit one is urged to practice the ten precepts. The idea being that following the right path will bring about the right result. Thus there is a verse that urges both the monks and the lay people to remain steadfast in the ten precepts as follows:

Always practice the path of the ten virtuous deeds (performed) through, body, voice and mind; refrain from alcohol, and also delight in wholesome livelihood.

This verse urges the monks and the lay person to avoid the ten non-virtuous actions: three of the body - killing, stealing, sexual misconduct; four of speech - lying, slander, malicious speech, idle speech; three of the mind - covetousness, malevolence, erroneous views. The six lay Buddhist undertakings that are emphasised in traditional Bhutanese values discussed earlier are also covered by the ten precepts.

The text "Gyelse Laglen" or the Thirty Seven Bodhisattva Practices<sup>14</sup> urges the reader to acquire knowledge and cultivate the compassionate mind through a process of listening, thinking and meditating if they want to attain Buddha-hood.

It also deals with Buddhist precepts and emphasises the need for virtues like selflessness and altruism.

For example, the tenth verse states that:

What is the use of one's own happiness when all mothers who have been kind to oneself since the beginning-less of time are in distress? Therefore, in order to ferry all sentient beings, generating the altruistic mind of Enlightenment is the practice of Bodhisattva.<sup>15</sup>

Similarly, the twenty-fifth verse states that:

It is necessary to give even one's own body when desiring enlightenment, what need is there to mention other objects? Therefore, it is the practice of the Bodhisattva to give gifts without the hope of future gains.<sup>16</sup>

One of the underlying themes of this text is the need to cultivate a compassionate mind by practising the six virtues: *Jinba* (altruism); *thsultrim* (observance of the virtuous path); *zoeba* (controlling angry

temperament); *tsendru* (concentration of the mind); *samten* (meditation) and *sherab* (acquiring knowledge).

From analysing the texts it is evident that the *Dzongkha* courses taught in the schools provide a viable mechanism for the transmission of values as these texts promote Buddhist ethics which is the source of most traditional Bhutanese values. Unlike the value education themes in the "Learning to Be" booklet, value education imparted through the *Dzongkha* texts dwell on familiar Buddhist ideas and can relate to the social and cultural context of the Bhutanese society.

However, it is not sufficient that these ethical values are outlined in the texts alone. It is also important that the students are proficient in the *Dzongkha* language to understand and appreciate the contents of the textbooks. It is also equally important that the method of teaching provokes thought and reflection rather than merely focusing on the language aspect alone. One of the most common criticisms leveled against the *Dzongkha* teaching system is that too much emphasis is given on rote learning rather than on understanding. This reflects the need for change in the teaching methodology as well as a greater emphasis on improving the *Dzongkha* language skills of the students.

Although efforts are being made to popularise the *Dzongkha* language through the establishment of the *Dzongkha* Development Commission, it is important to note that the state also needs the co-operation of parents in improving the *Dzongkha* reading and writing skills of the children. For example, in most households where both parents are educated, English is replacing *Dzongkha* and other local dialects as a medium of conversation. There is an ascribed value to the knowledge of the English language as it is common to hear compliments when a child exhibits fluency in English. Furthermore, the dominance of the English language media, through television, newsmagazines, children's books, and comics also reduce the frequency of *Dzongkha* usage. In addition, the acceptance of English for official correspondence in the bureaucracy and businesses also displace the need for *Dzongkha*.

One of the other factors contributing to a relatively weak *Dzongkha* skill is, perhaps, the limited time devoted to the language in the education curriculum. On a typical school week, *Dzongkha* is one of the six or nine subjects taught in the various classes allocated. Referring to table two, a student in grade eight learns six subjects. On a typical school week the student attends forty-three classes out of which 9 classes are for *Dzongkha*. Thus the total time devoted to *Dzongkha* is only one fifth of the total school time. Similarly in grade twelve, a student studies six subjects (depending on the choice of Science, Commerce or Arts stream) in thirty-four classes a week. The time spent on *Dzongkha* is reduced to less than one fifth as the student reaches grade twelve as shown below.

**Table 4: Assessing Time Devoted to *Dzongkha* As a Percentage of All Subjects Taught\***

Subject/ Grade	<i>Dzongkha</i>	Others	<i>Dzongkha</i> as % of other subjects
8	9/43	34/43	21%
10	9/44	35/44	20%
12	6/34	28/34	18%

Source: Information obtained from schools in the Thimphu valley, November 2000.

Thus the education system, for reasons stated earlier, fosters an inherent bias towards the English language leaving most students with mediocre skills in *Dzongkha* reading and writing. All the above factors and the nominal attention given to teaching *Dzongkha* in the education curriculum contribute to the difficulty in learning *Dzongkha*. Hence continuous efforts have to be made to improve *Dzongkha* education to ensure the intergenerational transmission of values.

### Conclusion

From the preceding discussions it is evident that the forces of change brought about by modernisation and economic development increasingly undermine traditional values. In order to ensure a balanced sustainable and inclusive development process, it is important those traditional values like compassion, altruism, duty, responsibility and reciprocity are sustained. While efforts have been made recently to introduce value education in the schools, the *Dzongkha* courses in Bhutanese schools perhaps provide a powerful means for value transmission. These *Dzongkha* textbooks place the values imparted in the context of Buddhist philosophy and the Bhutanese culture, making it all the more relevant and comprehensible for the students. Furthermore, these texts also have a spiritual element that challenges the student(s) to imagine and think beyond the material and

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\* The numerator represents the number of *Dzongkha* (or other classes) in a week, the denominator represents total number of classes in a week. Each class lasts about 45 minutes.

tangible realm.

In order to foster a better understanding and appreciation of the traditional values embedded in the *Dzongkha* texts, it is important that continuous effort is made to promote the national language and popularise it through the generation of *Dzongkha* novels, comics and newsmagazines. It is equally important that the Bhutanese people in their roles as parents and individuals understand and appreciate traditional values and pass it to the future generations. While education is necessary, it is in itself not sufficient to enable the transmission of values.

### Note

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<sup>1</sup>I would like to thank Lopen Yonten Phuntsho, Mynak Trulku Rimpoche, Aum Nyima Om, Ms. Misa Tanaka and many other friends for their assistance.

<sup>2</sup> Huntington, S.P. *Political Order in Changing Societies*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968 p. 32-33

<sup>3</sup> Recent human development indicators show that average life expectancy has increased to 66 years, literacy rates have risen to 57 percent, primary health coverage to 90 percent and primary education coverage is near 72 percent.

<sup>4</sup> The other development objective and strategies of the Eight Plan include: Self Reliance; Sustainability; National Security; Balanced development; Improving the quality of life; Human resource development, Decentralisation and community participation and private sector development. Ministry of Planning, Eighth Five Year Plan (1997-2002), Volume I Main document, Thimphu. p. 25

<sup>5</sup> *Ley* means action; *jum* means cause or root and *drey* is the result or effect brought about by the action.

<sup>6</sup> Gyatso Tenzi, the 14th Dali Lama, *Compassion and the Individual*, Wisdom Publications, 1992 p.5

<sup>7</sup> *Phama dinlen jelni* which translates as reciprocating the parents, is an important concept in traditional social relationships. Just as the parent cared for the child, the child is expected to care for the parents in their old age.

<sup>8</sup> Emphasis on independence being notional only, because according to Buddhist culture all living beings are interdependent on one another.

<sup>9</sup> Ura Karma, "Development and Decentralisation in Medieval and Modern Bhutan" in Aris, M., & Hutt, M. (eds) *Bhutan: Aspects of Culture and Development*. (UK: Kiscadale Ltd) 1994 pp. 25-51

<sup>10</sup> Ministry of Planning, *Eighth Five Year Plan (1997-2002)*, Volume I Main document, Thimphu p. 76

<sup>11</sup> Curriculum and Professional Support Division, Education Department, *Learning to Be Thimphu* (to be released in 2001)

<sup>12</sup> For example in order to elucidate the concept of *ley jumdrej*, or the maxim that good begets good, the text *Learning to Be* uses a story of two Alaskans and a St. Bernard Dog rather than using a story from Buddhist story or a Bhutanese folk tale. Ibid. Section II, pp. 23-24

<sup>13</sup> Acharya Nagarjuna, *Letter from Nagarjuna to King Gautimiputra*, translated by Jampal L. (Motilal, Benarsidass, Delhi, 1983), p.6

<sup>14</sup> Acharya dNgol-chu Thogs-med ñbZang- po *The Thirty Seven Bodhisattva Practices*, translated by Archarya Rigzin Dorjee and Bonnie Rothenberg, Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies, Varanasi 1988

<sup>15</sup> ibid. p. 4

<sup>16</sup> ibid p.9

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## **Appendix I**

Value Education lessons taught at various grades in the book *Learning to be*

Pre Primary Level	:	Love of Family, Cleanliness (personal hygiene), Obedience to Parents and Teachers
Grade I	:	Love of Animals, Honesty, Friendliness, Thankfulness to parents, teachers and friends
Grade II	:	Love for Plants, Respect for Teachers and Friends, and Punctuality
Grade III	:	Love for Friends, Care of properties, Responsibility and Generosity
Grade IV	:	Obedience, Love for Friends and Family, Respect for Friends and Family and Cleanliness
Grade V	:	Helpfulness, Thankfulness, Punctuality and Respect
Grade VI	:	Helpfulness, Responsibility, Friendliness and Fairness
Grade VII	:	Honesty, Responsibility, Loyalty and Unity
Grade VIII	:	Honesty and Gratitude
Grade IX	:	Gratitude, Responsibility and Loyalty

Grade IX	:	Determination and Loyalty
Grade XI	:	Dignity of Labour, <i>Ley jumdrej</i> and Determination
Grade XII	:	Tolerance, Compassion and <i>Ley jumdrej</i>