

Name: SARISH SEBASTIAN

Supervisor: Prof. Mohammed Badrul Alam

Faculty: Social Science

Department: Political Science, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi-110025

Topic: "Bhutan's Changing Political Structure: A Study of Tradition and Modernity"

The Kingdom of Bhutan is a landlocked nation in the South Asian region sandwiched between India and China. Bhutan, the land of the Thunder Dragon is indeed a treasure house of precious and colourful traditions, culture and religious practices. The rulers of the nation tried to preserve its rich heritage of unique traditions and culture even during the process of modernisation and development. Changing the socio, economic, political, religious and cultural elements in human beings is natural process and eternal phenomenon. Core and skirt of any sacred complex always play a vital role to change and modernize the socio- economic-political and cultural factors.

In the case of Bhutan, the modernization process initiated in the early 1960's had far reaching implications on the lives of the Bhutanese people in so far as it presented medieval past and ushered it in to the modern world. It was only in 1961, that Bhutan ended its self- imposed isolation and embarked on the path of modernization. As a result of political modernization and the introduction of democratic changes in the political set up, there has been tremendous improvement in the political scenario of Bhutan. Contrary to most countries with monarchies where royals have restricted democratic politics, Bhutan's king has always been the leading force of change.

The period from 17th century till 20th century provides a vivid picture of Bhutan's political activities and the struggle to modernise the political system of the country by preserving its tradition and culture. Under the Third King, the modernisation process touched its zenith with his unique philosophy of Gross National Happiness (GNH). The influences of globalisation and modernisation have given a new momentum to the administrative system of Bhutan.

In the modern period, GNH has been the overarching development philosophy of Bhutan by guiding the rulers in policy development. Under this principle, the development aspects need to understand that the objective of the modernisation process is to maximize the happiness of the people rather than purely economic growth and profit. Since 2005, the steps towards introduction of a Democratic Constitution for the country have begun. The historical event took place in 2008 when the nation went for first ever General Elections based on universal adult franchise. Contrary to other monarchs where the rulers restricted any political change or democratic processes, Bhutan stands as a unique case with its Kings themselves been the leading factors of change. The political behaviour and political culture of Bhutan was different from that of the western political theories and practices.

The nation within a short period of time witnessed a transition from its traditional agrarian economy and society to a modernised industrial one without losing its culture and religious values. The Kingdom of Bhutan has adopted a multi-dimensional approach to modernisation and development by balancing the spiritual and material factors together, guided by the principles of GNH. The rulers of the nation are hopeful that the process of modernisation guided by GNH will help the country to grow further and develop all its community and face the onerous challenges smoothly.

In the last five decades, Bhutan has provided a benchmark to the international community that there is something more important than money and market economy that is the holistic promotion of happiness of the people, traditions and culture of a community. Bhutan is a unique nation in the international politics by modernising its socio-economic and political spheres while keeping alive the spirits and socialisation of the tradition and cultures of the nation.

Key Words: Modernisation, Gross National Happiness, Political System, Development, Monarchy