To cite this article: Bangsbo, Ellen (2004) 'The Tibetan monastic tradition in exile: Secular and monastic schooling of Buddhist monks and nuns in Nepal.' *The Tibet Journal*. Summer 2004, vol. 29, no. 2, pp. 71–82. ISSN 0970-5368.

Abstract:

This study examines schooling for monks and nuns amongst the Tibetan refugees and the ethnic Tibetan population in the northern Himalaya regions in Nepal. A Tibetan Buddhist monastery in Boudhanath, a suburb of Kathmandu, has arranged for its monks and nuns to attend its own secular school. It is argued that a combined monastic and secular education of monks and nuns is an effective means for the continuation and even the expansion of the Tibetan Buddhist monastic tradition amongst the Tibetans in exile.

The Tibetan Monastic Tradition in Exile:

Secular and Monastic Schooling of Buddhist Monks and Nuns in Nepal

Ellen Bangsbo[1]

During the last decade, global and local influences have caused an increased need for education in modern urban society. Amongst exile Tibetans living in Nepal the changed need for schooling has become manifest at the Tibetan Buddhist monastery, here referred to as Tashi monastery in Boudhanath, a suburb of Kathmandu. This monastery has arranged for its monks to attend its own secular school.

Nepal is one of the poorest countries in Asia (with 220 US$ GNP) (Danida 2000). Poverty and limited access to schools in the northern Himalayan rural areas has caused some parents to turn to a pragmatic and well known local strategy of using Buddhist monasteries for schooling and/or care-taking of their children. This study examines schooling for monks and nuns and the recent trends in parents' choice of schooling for their children amongst the Tibetan refugees and the ethnic Tibetan population in the northern Himalaya regions in Nepal. By examining the impact and consequences of sending monks and nuns to secular schools, I hope to provide a critical perspective on how the Tibetan monastic tradition in exile manages to adapt to and meet contemporary demands within a modern urban society.

* This paper is based on fieldwork in Kathmandu and Lower Mustang in Northwestern Nepal from January to May 1999. My fieldwork focuses mainly on a Tibetan Buddhist monastery in Boudhanath, Kathmandu, which has founded its own secular school where its monks receive secular as well as monastic schooling. Names have been changed to protect privacy. An earlier and abbreviated part of this article was previously published in NIASnytt, no. 3, October 2000.

I shall first consider how the interaction between the local population and the monastery is of great mutual benefit. Then I shall turn to how formal schooling according to local opinion, must provide a platform for learning the Tibetan language which is considered as an important means of cultural preservation. I shall argue that a combined monastic and secular education of monks is an effective means for the continuation and even the expansion of the Tibetan Buddhist monastic tradition amongst the Tibetans in exile.

ETHNOGRAPHIC SETTING

The last two decades have seen the building of a large number of monasteries by Tibetans in exile in Boudhanath, a rapidly growing suburb, 6 kilometres outside Kathmandu in Nepal. After the initial sight of many local Nepalese and Tibetan people circumambulating the Boudhanath Stupa[2], the picturesque buildings of the Tibetan monasteries capture the eyes of the visitor. With the Great Boudhanath Stupa monument as a unifying centre for Buddhist devotees, this area has since 1959 been the residence of an increasing number of Tibetan refugees. Originally a village, the whole area is in a rapid transition of urbanisation. In 1999, the number of Tibetan Buddhist monasteries in and around Boudhanath was nearing 32 compared to 12– 15 in the early 1980s. The Tashi monastery is situated within 50 meters of the Boudhanath Stupa. A low wall surrounds the front of the monastery and private houses are situated within an arm's length to its back and right side. A very busy pathway for pedestrians with local fruit sellers and other market shops is situated next to the monastery and thereby provides the monks with a close view and impression of the local community's daily life. The monastery was established in 1981, and by 1999 it had 283 registered monks. However, only 136 monks, mainly between the age of 7 to 35 years (plus a few middle-aged monks) actually live at the monastery, while the remaining monks live at affiliated monasteries in Nepal and India.

During the 1990s many Tibetan monasteries in India and Nepal began teaching the monks secular subjects, mainly English and science, but also history, mathematics and geography. The teaching usually takes place within the confines of the monastery and by male teachers only. As pointed out by Bourdieu, a skillful player in a game should place himself where the ball is expected to fall and not where it has already fallen. Thus, the abbot of Tashi monastery was ahead of his time when he founded a private English Secondary day- and boarding school, called Mangal School, within the vicinity of the monastery in Boudhanath in 1986. The abbot of Tashi monastery explains this strategy in the following way:

> After leaving school many young people pick up habits like smoking and drinking and they are not inclined to become monks. So, there is no continuity in the institution of the monastery of people becoming monks. Whereas the monks, when they are just continuing being monks without having secular education, then the only thing they can do is just to do pujas.[3] When they are more exposed to modern education then they can develop their knowledge and skills also. Even if you have people becoming monks there is no 100 % guarantee that they all will stay monks, and if they get a modern education, it doesn't hurt them in any way.

Since 1986, the younger monks from Tashi monastery have attended Mangal School as full-time students together with lay children of both sexes. In addition, 16 of the younger nuns from Tashi monastery's affiliated nunnery have since 2000 attended the school as day students. Mangal School offers classes from nursery school to tenth grade. In accordance with Nepalese law, it is registered

under the Nepalese Ministry of Education and curriculum and exams comply with the official requirements. During 1999, approximately 80 monks (aged 6–17) from Tashi Monastery attended classes ranging from nursery school to ninth class and they also attend exams equally with their lay schoolmates, 109 boarders and 48 day students. Every morning, the 'school monks', all dressed in the traditional maroon robes of monks and carrying colourful nylon schoolbags on their backs, leave the monastery in a spectacular 30-metre-long file, and walk the 500 metres to Mangal School. At three o'clock in the afternoon, the 'school monks' return to Tashi monastery where they resume their monastic duties. The monks' schooling at the monastery is maintained in the traditional manner without altering the Buddhist curriculum. With its monks attending secular school together with lay children of both sexes, the Tashi monastery differs markedly from other Tibetan monasteries in the Himalayan region.

The Tibetan monastic tradition and Buddhist values are generally highly esteemed within the Tibetan society. However, the culturally accepted custom in pre-1959 Tibet that a family could achieve social status as well as the practical benefits of reducing the amount of persons in the household by sending one of their sons to be educated in a monastery is no longer considered attractive. During my interviews with exile Tibetans in Kathmandu, the importance of the continuation of the monastic tradition was often mentioned. A common opinion was:

> The only identity left with us is our religion–it is our culture. We have a unique culture, and if we throw away the monastic culture or if we think negatively about it, then we don't have much.

Ideals, however, do not compete well with pragmatism. Despite their high esteem for the monastic tradition, the majority of exile Tibetan parents choose not to send their children to the Tibetan Buddhist monasteries. Secular education is considered to be more useful, and many exiled Tibetans prefer to enroll their children in the Tibetan secular schools or, if the family is wealthy, to send their children to expensive boarding schools in India. During the last decade, an increasing amount of Tibetans in India and Nepal have preferred to send their children to secular schools rather than to a Buddhist monastery. This trend pertains not only to Tibetans in exile, but also to Tibetans living in Tibet (cf. Strom 1997, Bass 1998).

As newly arrived Tibetan refugees in Nepal are required by law to be sent on to India, then how do the Tibetan monasteries manage to recruit monks? At Tashi monastery, as in most other monasteries in the Kathmandu area, around 80% of the monks are recruited from the northern Himalayan regions in Nepal such as Dolpo, Manang, Nar, Tsum, Nubri, Yolmo and Langthang, where the population is ethnically Tibetan and in most cases very poor. Having an ethnic Tibetan identity signifies a common Tibetan Buddhist religion, Tibetan language (with dialects) and Tibetan cultural traditions. A large part of the local population in the northern Himalayan region are migrants from further north. Having lived within the political borders of Nepal for generations, these people distinguish themselves from exile Tibetans by not being refugees. The majority of the pupils in the Mangal boarding school come from the same rural regions as the monks in the Tashi monastery. Many are siblings to monks and both the novice monks and lay pupils are usually admitted at the request of parents to the head lama in charge of the monastery.

COLLECTIVE ADAPTATION IN SCHOOL

In general, Tibetan monasteries adhere to tradition but they are also subject to social and cultural change and the Tibetan monastic tradition no longer holds a dominant position in the transmission of knowledge, as compared to pre-1959 Tibet. Literacy in Nepal is generally low. Public sources estimate that the literacy in the urban areas of Nepal in 1991 was 67%, with the figure being only 37% in the rural areas. Furthermore, literacy is not equally distributed throughout the population: it is lower amongst women and varies according to caste and ethnic group (NHDR 1998:77). These figures are still high in comparison to earlier times. In the early 80s, the estimated general literacy was still only about 40%, and during the Rana regime until 1951, literacy in Nepal was only 5%, as schooling was only permitted for the aristocratic elite (Hoftun et.al. 1999:221, Skinner & Holland 1996:273-75). Parents now have several alternatives as to where and what kind of schooling they can choose for their children. In Boudhanath, there are several public and private Nepalese primary schools. In 1991, the Nepalese Ministry of Education (MOE) initiated a new school reform known as 'Basic and Primary Education Programme' (BPEP)[4] as part of a development plan (1991-2001) for primary schooling in Nepal. Curriculum as well as the mandatory exams for fifth, eighth, tenth grade and School Leaving Certificate (SLC) are determined by the Ministry (MOE). The fact that all schools in Nepal are obliged to follow the same school regulations and must use the same national curriculum signals the government's ambition and desire to unite and reinforce a national feeling amongst the multi-ethnic Nepalese community and its population of multiple ethnic, linguistic and regional diversities[5].

During the 70s, many Tibetan parents sent their children to Catholic boarding schools in various places in India. However, when the Nepalese government allowed the establishment of private schools during the 80s, the Tibetans in exile eagerly took advantage of this opportunity. During the last decades, several private Tibetan schools, as well as Tibetan schools managed by the Tibetan Government in Exile in Dharamsala, have been established in Nepal. In 1995-96 there were 13 Tibetan schools in Nepal. All schools are managed by the 'Department of Education' (DOE) under the Tibetan Government in Exile in Dharamsala and use textbooks published by the 'Department of Education of the Central Tibetan Administration of His Holiness the Dalai Lama'. Mangal School also uses textbooks published by the DOE in Dharamsala. All Tibetan schools have, since 1994, used Tibetan language at the primary level in all Tibetan schools (Tibetan Government 1996).

All schools in Nepal are obliged to follow official Nepalese school regulations, but the Tibetan schools are allowed to emphasize Tibetan tradition and Buddhist values for their students, and they are self-determining regarding the teaching of Tibetan history, Buddhism, culture and language. Minority groups are thereby given the opportunity to preserve their culture within the school's structure. At Mangal school the teaching language is English. Many of the monks from Tashi monastery enroll at an age late at the Mangal School. Several monks between the ages of 12–14 years are enrolled in kindergarten or first grade level, and these monks often drop out of school quickly, as it becomes too embarrassing for them to continue to participate in classes with much younger children. Most monks reach the seventh grade or the third–fifth grades by the time they are 16 years old.

Instead of being allowed to complete the school curriculum up to the tenth grade, as several monks told me with regret they would have appreciated, the monks are generally taken back to the Tashi monastery at the age of 16 in order to concentrate on the Buddhist philosophical training. So it is their age and not their grade level, which determines when their secular schooling comes to an end. This is despite the fact that the passing of tenth grade in a Nepalese school qualifies the student for enrolment

at an institution of higher education, for example the Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies in Sarnath, India.

In order to understand the choice of parents for their children, and sometimes the choice of the children themselves, to enter a life of celibacy as a monk or nun in a monastery, it is helpful to examine their relationship to Tibetan Buddhism.

A SHARED BUDDHIST WORLDVIEW

A monastic life in a monastery is generally considered to be safe and healthy but within the social and cultural context in Tibetan communities a Tibetan Buddhist monastery offers more than just a place for poor destitute children to be fed and raised. Children who receive Buddhist education at a monastery are given the opportunity to live a respected and valued life and to develop habits and ethics that attest to recognized Buddhist ideals. An important motivation for sending a child to a monastery is faith in the Buddhist doctrine and in the Buddhist concept of collecting or accumulating 'merit'. Offering donations is considered an effective way to earn 'merit', and donations are often made in a mode of public display as a means of converting economic capital into cultural capital. Some monasteries publicly display a list of donor names at the monastery entrance, which can include everything from private donors to western governments and the European Union funds. In the Buddhist comprehension, a morally and religiously correct way of living accumulates 'merit', a kind of 'karmic capital' which, from a spiritual point of view, leads to the attainment of Buddhahood or enlightenment. The life of a monk is, in particular, considered to be very 'meritorious', and many parents mentioned that should the child not remain a monk, the time spent in the monastery would undoubtedly provide him with good 'merit' afterwards.

SUITABLE SITES FOR THE PRODUCTION OF KNOWLEDGE

MONASTIC SCHOOLING

Why do the majority of the exile Tibetan parents prefer to have their children educated in a secular school when the Buddhist monastic tradition is generally highly respected? The answer lies largely in the issue of defecting monks. This issue is still taboo, as it is regarded as an embarrassment for the monastery and for the defecting monks themselves, and therefore it is very difficult to put a figure on how many monks actually leave the monastery. I estimate that 40–50% of the monks defect, usually between the ages of 16–25. It is free of charge to live as a monk in a monastery with all expenses of food, lodging and education covered by the monastery. It was mentioned to me that when a monk defects, it is a great loss for the monastery. Therefore, in a few monasteries it was suggested that defecting monks or nuns should pay a fine if they choose to leave the monastery or nunnery. This suggestion was actually put into practice at a nunnery within the Kathmandu area, where defecting nuns are charged 20 Nepalese rupees per day starting from the first day of their entire stay at the institution. The longer the period of time a nun spends at the nunnery, the larger the fine will be in order to leave it. This kind of fine has been strongly objected to by the monks at most other

monasteries. It was generally felt that monks must be free to leave if they really want to, although it is expected that a monk should sponsor an offering ceremony for the monastery before leaving.

Most monks are usually placed in the monastery by their parents at the age of six to eight years, and it is therefore understandable that many defect when they are capable of making their own choice. Some Tibetans argue that 'westernization' and an increased knowledge of English are the main reasons why many monks defect. Also, the location of the monastery in an urban area is presumed to pose a threat. Some monks leave the monastery because of boredom and lack of challenge. However, most people agree that contact with girls is the most common reason for the monks' defection. In this respect, it would therefore seem that the daily contact, which the 'school monks' from Tashi monastery have with the girls at Mangal school, presents a potential risk for the monks to lose interest in a life as a celibate monk at a monastery. But this risk is not seriously present before the boys reach the age of approximately 16 years, and many monks at Tashi monastery were even convinced that the amount of defecting monks at their monastery was considerably lower than at other monasteries. A main problem with defecting monks was explained in this way:

> It is rarely the smartest monks who become 'drop out' monks. It is rather those monks who don't manage so well in the monastery and one can often watch these monks hang out around the monasteries, as this is the place they used to stay.

A lay-Tibetan man working in a Tibetan monastery explained to me:

> By sending the young monks to a secular school, they grow up with the lay-girls and it is hoped that there will be a net for them to fall back on. They might not be good monks, but might become good citizens.

Very rarely will a defected monk return to the monastery to become a monk again, but most monks will usually maintain a casual connection to the monastery and pay a visit at Losar or other religious occasions.

For some lay boys, the acquaintance of the 'school monks' at the Mangal School was such an inspiration that they personally choose to become novice monks. Let me turn to some illustrative examples. Pempa is now 17 years old. Much to his family's surprise, Pempa decided at the age of 11 to become a monk. He explains his choice as coming from a strong inspiration from his monk classmates and also from the recognition that: *A monk's life is more disciplined; it is safe and one will always be protected.* His family lives in Kathmandu. He has several sisters and although he is the only son, the family did not object to his choice of becoming a monk. Pempa now works at the Tashi monastery. He considers himself to be lucky and expresses contentment with his present life.

NUNS ATTENDING SECULAR SCHOOL

In contrast to the monks, most girls enter a nunnery as teenagers or older at their own request. Six of the lay girls had requested to become nuns after leaving Mangal School (after the fifth or eighth grade). The independent choice of some girls to enter a nunnery can be, but not necessarily, a choice based on religious motives. Life in a nunnery can provide an attractive protection, education and social solidarity, which otherwise can be hard to obtain for women in Nepalese society. The historical status of nuns in the Tibetan society was traditionally inferior and considered less attractive than that of the monks. This fact is still visible in the Kathmandu Valley with its large number of monasteries (about

32 in 1999) compared to only four nunneries. The inferior status of nuns in the traditional Tibetan society was partly due to the general lower status of women, but also because nuns were denied full ordination (*dge slong ma*)[6] and thereby deprived of undertaking higher Buddhist philosophical education.

An independent nunnery at Swayambunath in the Kathmandu area has (since 1994) made an arrangement for some of their younger nuns to attend a nearby Tibetan School. The young nuns attend school as day students and according to school regulations they must wear regular school uniforms while attending classes. After returning to the nunnery in the afternoon, the young nuns change from their school uniforms to their Buddhist robes and resume regular life at the nunnery. The nunnery wants the 'school nuns' to complete school up to the tenth grade and both 'schoolgirl nuns' and leaders of the nunnery expressed great contentment with this arrangement and expect that the educated nuns will be of great benefit to the nunnery in the future.

The right of admission to undertake the nine-year study program in Buddhist philosophy at the 'Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies' (CIHTS) in Sarnath, India, requires the completion of eighth grade in a secular school in addition to the Institute's own admission exam. Since 1975, both nuns and lay people have been given admission to the CIHTS Institute. However, some monks have difficulties to meet these requirements for admission and so there have been years where qualified nuns have been offered vacant seats from the monk's quota. With the possibility of obtaining an officially recognized degree with a valued social and cultural capital, the former inferior status of nuns is now under transition.

SECULAR SCHOOLING AND BOARDING SCHOOLS

One impact of modernization in Nepal shows itself in the number of parents who apparently feel a loss of ability to raise their own children. The last decades have seen a steady increase in the expansion of boarding schools in Nepal. Not only was this frequently mentioned during interviews with my informants, but it is also obvious in the statistics on private schools, many of which are boarding schools. In 1984, the public/private school ratio at the lower-secondary and secondary level was 30:1 and 5:1, while in 1994 it was 1:1 and 0.94:1 respectively (NHDR 1998:87). It appears that both poor and well-to-do parents have been hit by a kind of '*boarding school syndrome*'. Illiterate parents admitted that they were unable to assist their children with the daily school homework. Literate (and sometimes) wealthy parents complained of having a hard work schedule and limited time, the consequence being that their children were left to themselves after school-hours and would spend too much time playing computer games, which was regarded as 'unhealthy' behaviour. Also, three out of five students annually who do not pass the SLC exam are from the public schools (ibid.). For these reasons, many parents regard boarding schools as superior educational institutions with an ability to offer favourable conditions and facilities for children, in addition to being a place where the child has an opportunity to make good social connections. While private educational institutions may be of higher quality, they have also given rise to distinct modes of educational and social exclusion and segregation (ibid.). With the increasing need for an education in modern societies, many parents now feel a social pressure to secure an education for their children, and to accommodate this expense it may be necessary to utilise a large part of the families' financial resources. For the local people, the

transmission of values can now be seen in the form of providing an education for their children, rather than the traditional inheritance of land and gold.

Sponsorships for Mangal School are mainly supported through the Tashi monastery and local donors cover finances only to a very limited extent. Donations are instead collected through a global network of affiliated Buddhist centres and from either private or official donors abroad, usually in Western or South Asian countries. About half of the students at the Mangal School are boarding students and more than half of the boarding students are sponsored. As earlier mentioned, the aim of the Nepalese government's introduction of a national school reform (BPEP) is to provide access to primary school in all areas of Nepal. However, I was frequently told that in the remote northern Himalayan regions like Dolpo and Nubri the few existing primary schools are often located three days' walk from the villages. Not all people living in the remote areas understand and value their children's education, as children are often needed for domestic labour. Those parents who do are often left with no other alternative than to send their child to a monastery, or to find a (usually foreign) sponsor to pay the expenses for the enrolment of the child in a private boarding school.

Most boarding schools in Nepal are situated in the urban areas. As school and home constitute different sites for social interaction these should not be seen in total opposition to each other, but rather as complementary, as the milieu of the family equips children with valuable cultural knowledge. Both at the Tashi monastery and the Mangal School there are children who have very limited contact with their home. Some of the boarding students at Mangal School barely leave the school during their entire stay and 10-20 students leave the school only one month a year. For these children, the very secluded sphere of the boarding school comprises their entire world. A Sherpa girl, Nyima, from the border regions to Tibet, complained that she didn't know which subjects to talk to her mother about: *My mother has absolutely no idea about the world I live in here in Kathmandu*. Her parents are illiterate and have never been to Kathmandu. Nyima is very conscious about her advantages in getting an education, and she does not want to return to her village: *What should I do there apart from having children?* Yet schools are not the only places where education occurs, and we must continually broaden our vision of education to extend our analytic tools well beyond the schools (Levinson 1999:595).

How is it then that culture is passed from one generation to the next, and how is it that culture is transmitted and acquired or learned? The Mangal School's students are mainly children from the Himalayan region. An additional purpose for establishing the Mangal School was to offer boys and girls of the Himalayan region an education in a Buddhist school. Most schools in Nepal are Hindi-oriented, and according to the abbot of Tashi monastery, the fact that the Mangal School offers children the opportunity to learn to read and write Tibetan provides a means of preserving Tibetan religion and culture. But is the knowledge of indigenous religion and language a sole and sufficient means of preserving a culture? At the time of my fieldwork, the students at Mangal School spent a considerable part of their free time watching MTV and violent Hindi films. I would therefore question whether the proposed aim of the Mangal School to preserve Tibetan culture in the Himalayas actually meets the idealistic goals proposed by the abbot and printed in the school brochure.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE COMBINATION OF SECULAR AND MONASTIC SCHOOLING

According to the abbot of the Tashi monastery, the secular schooling for the monks is instrumental in insuring that the monks will choose to remain at the monastery, and without this secular knowledge, the monks would have difficulty adjusting to modern society. He regards the monastic training as an important foundation that will benefit the boys whatever they may choose in later life, regardless of whether or not they remain monks. A monk with knowledge only of the Buddhist scriptures will often face a difficult life if he leaves the monastery and in this respect, secular primary schooling provides a basic and useful knowledge. It should be remembered that when a boy child enters the monastic life already at the age of seven, it is solely the choice of the child's parents. Therefore, primary schooling is important, as it provides the young novice monk (or nun) a stronger position should they choose to leave the monastery. I shall therefore argue that an offer of secular schooling for monks (or nuns) is a must for a monastery, which is situated in a modern society.

Like the nuns, the monks at other monasteries also have the opportunity to attend Tibetan secular schools along with their monastic schooling. However, the abbot of Tashi monastery explained a specific need for the monastery to have the Mangal School. The monks (and nuns) were required to wear their robes while attending the Mangal School, and this was of utmost importance, as by not wearing the robes much of the monastic discipline is lost. This attitude explains why other Tibetan monasteries refuse to enroll their monks as day students in the Tibetan schools. In this respect it is very interesting to note how the abbess of the nunnery tolerates that the nuns wear school uniforms during school-time. Such a compromise proves an ability to adjust and this can be crucial as a means of raising the previous inferior status of nuns.

The presence of the monks in the Mangal School conveys valued Buddhist moral ethics and behaviour to the laychildren. Also, many of my local Buddhist informants agreed that a combined secular and monastic schooling considers the need for the monks to be trained to contend with the modern world as well as to respect and practice traditional ways. In this way it is believed that success through modern education combined with ancestral blessings provides social capital and new opportunities for wealth, prestige and power. I shall therefore argue that a combined monastic and secular education of monks is an effective means for the continuation and even the expansion of the Tibetan Buddhist monastic tradition amongst the Tibetans in exile.

Some notable distinctions between the 'school-monks' and the lay children should be mentioned. The monks appeared to learn remarkably faster than most of the lay children. This could be due to the training they receive in the monastery in the memorisation of Buddhist texts, used in rituals. It could also be because the monks in general are much older than their classmates. Some teachers complained that, not being refugees themselves, the children from the Nepalese Himalayan regions don't take much interest in the 'case for a free Tibet'. While the monks read and write Tibetan well, the Himalayan ethnic Tibetan lay children don't care much for learning the Tibetan language. Although the majority of the children at both the Mangal School and the Tashi monastery come from the same Himalayan regions in Nepal, the common language at the school is Nepalese, whereas the monks in the monastery mainly speak Tibetan. It therefore seems that living at Tashi monastery reinforces a stronger sense of Tibetan culture and tradition than do the conditions at the Mangal School.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SECULAR SCHOOLING FOR TASHI MONASTERY

Although a Tibetan monastery is to a certain degree an academic institution, it is also a social center where local people gather and also a place for the cultivation of Tibetan tradition. In traditional Tibet (before 1959), as well as in contemporary Tibet it is only about ten percent of the monks who pursue an academic education (cf. Goldstein 1989, Strom 1997). In addition to participation in the philosophical studies at the monastery, monks are obliged to contribute with various work assignments. Even though it might be argued that the monastery has spent (and some would say lost) resources on defecting monks, it should be emphasised that the participation of monks in the performance of daily Buddhist ceremonies is crucial for the maintenance of the monastery. Likewise are the monks' work assignments, as without monks there would be no monastery and obviously, no donations either. Also, if all monks remained their entire life in the monastery, there would probably be no vacancies for new and younger monks. Therefore, even with the amount of defecting monks, the relation between the monastery and its monks is a situation of mutual benefit.

None of the monks or the boarding students I talked to at Mangal School expressed any desire of returning to their villages. All children from the Himalayan regions can not be brought down to Kathmandu for schooling nor is this desirable. Alternatively, I would suggest the establishment of secular semi-boarding schools in the rural areas, possibly in the northern regions of Pokhara or at Yolmo, as this could provide children an opportunity to visit their families more often, and thereby diminish a potential risk for alienation to local culture. Such a solution could also reverse a threatening 'brain drain' from the rural areas into a 'brain gain'. With the gradual implementation of the BPEP school programme in Nepal, it is hoped that children living in the remote Himalayan regions will 'in the near future' have access to primary schools in the proximity of their home. If the Tashi monastery still aspires to recruit their monks from these regions it will be crucial for the monastery to offer relevant and attractive education in order that parents will continue to enroll their children in the monastery.

The value and significance of schooling is globally acknowledged, and managing the Mangal School provides Tashi monastery with a significant 'symbolic and cultural capital', which has a potential for being converted to 'economic capital'. A combined secular and monastic education can provide the monks with the capability to present their knowledge of Buddhism in the present global context. The strategy of Tashi monastery in offering its monks a combined secular and monastic schooling proves the monastery's ability to adapt to and expand its social relations. This case study illustrates the successful outcome of this struggle.

Notes

[1] This paper is based on a presentation at the panel 'Present-day Schemes and Problems in Primary Education in South Asia at the 'ICAS 2' (Second International Convention of Asian Scholars) in Berlin 9-12th August 2001. I thank the Danish Council for Development Research for supporting my participation at 'ICAS 2'.

[2] Boudhanath Stupa was built in the 5th Century and is one of the largest stupas in the world with a height of 36 meters and a diameter of more than 100 meters (Skilton 1994). The Boudhanath Stupa has for centuries been the centre for local Buddhist worship and attracts Buddhist devotees from the entire Himalayan region.

[3] Pujas are ritual ceremonies usually dedicated to a deity, and monks perform them in the monastery. The ceremonies are usually open to lay people.

[4] 'Basic and Primary Education Programme' (BPEP) is a donor coordinated project, which is sponsored by The World Bank, Danida, UNICEF and JICA (Japanese International Co-operation Agency).

[5] There are approx. 50-55 different ethnic groups in Nepal.

[6] The ordination of monks and nuns is only permitted through a transmission recognised to descend directly from Buddha. In order to take the vows of a fully ordained nun, the ceremony requires the presence of a combination of monks and nuns. However no fully ordained nun ever came to Tibet to conduct such an ordination ceremony. Thus, in the past in Tibet, novice nuns could not take the vows of a fully ordained nun. However, at present, among the Chinese Great Vehicle tradition, there are fully ordained nuns. Through the initiative in the last decades, mainly from western women, Tibetan nuns have been given the opportunity to take a full ordination according to the Theravada tradition through observing 227 vows (monks observe 253 vows) from Chinese nuns in Taiwan and Singapore (H.H. Dalai Lama 1988:140-141).

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