



THE BODHISATVA KING

His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck

of

BHUTAN

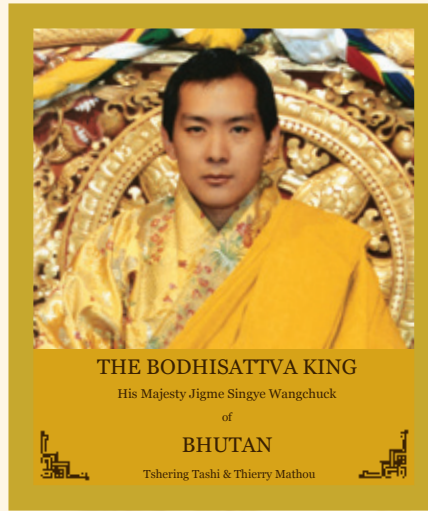
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THE BODHISATTVA KING

His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck

of

BHUTAN

Tshering Tashi & Thierry Mathou

Editors Anna Balikci Denjongpa,
Alex McKay & Kuenga Wangmo





*P*REFACE

In Buddhism, bodhicitta or ‘enlightened mind,’ is the mind that strives towards awakening and compassion for the benefit of all sentient beings. Although the Kings of Bhutan are not divine monarchs, Buddhism has been guiding the monarchy throughout history. In this context, His Majesty the Fourth Druk Gyalpo Jigme Singye Wangchuck can be described as a modern Bodhisattva. As a man and a ruler, he not only demonstrated genuine compassion and dedication to his people, but also chose to renounce the benefits of power in order to help his people in the interests of democracy.

His entire life has been marked by stunning decisions that have shaped present and future Bhutan: politically, economically, socially, diplomatically, but also culturally and spiritually. None of these decisions were taken under selfish or sectarian consideration. Although his abdication came as a surprise to his people and to foreign observers, it was the logical conclusion drawn by a King who did not rule for the sake of power, but as an act of vision as demonstrated by the holistic dimension of Gross National Happiness.

Published on the occasion of the celebrations of the Sixtieth Birth Anniversary of His Majesty the Fourth Druk Gyalpo, this book is neither a biography nor a portrait, but an illustration of his strong personality and a contribution to the knowledge of his achievements and his style of government. It demonstrates how his wise and farsighted leadership and his selfless service to the nation and the people are coherent with the concept of Bodhisattva-King. His reign (1972-2006)—the longest in the history of Bhutan—will remain a milestone for generations to come.

All the contributors to this book have had the privilege of meeting His Majesty a number of times under various circumstances. State officials, scholars, civil servants, diplomats, politicians, professionals in different capacities, simple citizens or friends of Bhutan, Bhutanese and foreigners, they all have witnessed his wisdom and foresight. Their various viewpoints offer a unique perspective on a unique character.

This book is divided into two parts. The first part is a review of His Majesty the Fourth Druk Gyalpo’s main achievements through various angles. It enlightens his unique vision and legacy and gives a comprehensive overview of his reign by picturing the Bodhisattva-King in action. The second part is a recollection of short personal testimonies that give unexpected perspectives on his rich personality.

While humbly taking over the compiling of the present volume, we have been deeply honoured to be given the blessing and the contribution of His Holiness the Je Khenpo.

We have also been equally moved by the support given by Her Majesty Ashi Kesang Choeden Wangchuck, Queen Mother of His Majesty King Jigme Singye Wangchuck, who has a unique perspective on the life of her son the Fourth Druk Gyalpo.

We would like to thank Ashi Kesang Choden Tashi Wangchuck for transforming the layout of the book. We would also like to thank HRH Ashi Pema Lhaden Wangchuck, Lyonpo Tshering Wangchuk, Lyonpo Jigme Zangpo, Lyonpo C. Dorji, Dasho Sonam Rinchen, Pema Wangdi and Tashi Lhendup for contributing materials, as well as Kinga Sithub and his Green Dragons Printing team.

Our gratitude to Khun Supawan Pui Lamsam for introducing us to the wonderful Amarin team consisting of Khun Mim, Khun Kris and Khun Jenny. Special thanks to Dr Anna Balikci Denjongpa, Dr Alex McKay and Dr Kuenga Wangmo for editing the book.

We would like to thank our sponsors who have contributed generously and supported the book. We would like to thank the 60th Birthday Celebration Committee, Royal Insurance Corporation of Bhutan, National Pension and Provident Fund, Bank of Bhutan and Bhutan Ferro Alloys.

Last but not least we express our deep appreciation to Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and Her Majesty Ashi Kesang Choeden Wangchuck who both share the values incarnated by the Noble Path shown by the Fourth Druk Gyalpo.

Tashi Delek!

Thierry Mathou & Tshering Tashi



FOREWORD

I am delighted that Dr Thierry Mathou and Mr Tshering Tashi, who possess unparalleled respect and loyalty, are publishing a book entitled: *The Bodhisattva King*, to commemorate the 60th Birth Anniversary of His Majesty King Jigme Singye Wangchuck, the Fourth Hereditary Monarch of the Glorious Wangchuck Dynasty of Bhutan. It is based on the information graciously provided by Her Majesty the Royal Grandmother Ashi Kesang Wangchuck, supplemented with additional information collected from other knowledgeable persons. His Majesty King Jigme Singye Wangchuck is no different from the Dharma King, Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, the protector and saviour of the beings of this magnificent land of Palden Drukpa. His Majesty represents the wish-fulfilling tree in the realm of gods, the wish-fulfilling gem in the realm of the *nagas* and the source of happiness and peace in the realm of the humans. His Majesty's physical emanation is an ambrosia to the eyes, His voice music of happiness to the heart and His mind a spontaneous rising sun of wisdom and compassion.

I wish His Majesty the Dharma King a very long life and may the harmony among the King, Ministers and subjects endure till the end of time.

30th of 4th month of Wood Sheep Year



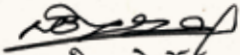
(Tulku Jigme Choeda)

70th Je Khenpo of Bhutan



རྩེ་ཡང་རང་རེ་དཔལ་ལྷན་འབྲུག་པའི་རྒྱལ་ཁབ་ལ་འདིར་འགོ་བརྒྱུ་མཁས་ཀྱི་སྐབས་དང་སྐྱོབ་པ།
 མགོན་དང་དཔུང་གཉེན་དམ་པ་རྒྱལ་དབང་པདྨའི་ལུང་གིས་ཟེན་པའི་སྐྱེས་བུ་མཐུ་ཚེན་ཚོས་ཀྱི་རྒྱལ་པོ་དང་གཉིས་སུ་
 མ་མཆིས་པ། ལྷེང་ལྷེང་དཔག་བསམ་ལྡོན་གིང་དང་། འོག་མ་ངོས་ཀྱི་ཡིད་བཞིན་ནོར་བུ་ལྟ་བུ། བར་མིའི་
 དགའ་སྦྱིད་དཔལ་འཛོམས་འབྲུང་བའི་གཞིར་གྱུར་པ། སྐྱེ་མཛེས་པ་མིག་གི་བདུད་ཅི། གསུང་སྙན་པ་ཡིད་ཀྱི་
 དགའ་སྦྱོན། ཐུགས་མཁྱེན་བཅེ་ཉེ་མ་རང་ཤར། དབང་ལྷུག་བརྒྱུད་འཛིན་ཀྱི་རྒྱལ་རབས་བཞི་པ་དཔལ་འཛིགས་
 མེད་མེད་གོད་བར་ལྷུག་ཅེས་མཚན་སྙན་ལྷེང་རྒྱ་སྤྱིད་པ་གསུམ་ན་བསྐྱབས་པ་གང་དེ་ཉིད་དགུང་གར་སུག་ཅུ་
 འཁོར་བའི་བཀའ་ངོན་རྗེས་བྱུང་གི་ཆེད་དུ་དང་དམ་ལྷག་བསམ་མཚུངས་མེད་ རྟོག་ཅར་ ཐེ་རིང་མ་ཐོ་དང་
 ཚེ་རིང་བཀྱིས་བྱུང་ནས་ ཚོས་རྒྱལ་ཚེན་པོ་དེ་ཉིད་ཀྱི་མཛེད་རྣམ་རྒྱལ་ལུ་སྐྱེ་བའི་མེད་པའི་པོ་ཆེ་སྐལ་
 བཟང་དབང་ལྷུག་མཚོག་གི་གསུང་ལ་གཞི་བྱས་གཞན་མཁྱེན་ལྷན་རྣམས་ཀྱི་གསུང་རྒྱུན་ཅི་རིགས་ཀྱིས་བྱུར་བརྒྱུན་ཏེ་
 མཛེད་རྣམ་དཔེ་དབ་ (ཚོས་རྒྱལ་བྱང་རྒྱལ་མེས་དཔའི་རྣམ་ཐར་དང་རྒྱལ་སྤྱིད་ཀྱི་རིང་། འབྲུག་རྒྱལ་བཞི་པ་
 འཛིགས་མེད་མེད་དབང་ལྷུག་ལ་གསུང་བརྒྱུད་འབྲུལ་བ།) ཞེས་པ་བརྒྱུ་མཁས་བསྐྱིགས་བཞིས་པ་དེ་ལ་རང་ངོས་ནས་
 རྗེས་སུ་ཡི་རང་བཅས་ཚོས་རྒྱལ་དམ་པའི་སྐྱེ་ཚེ་ཞབས་པད་བརྟན་ཅིང་དུས་འདི་ནས་རི་སྤྱིད་བར་རྒྱལ་སྐོན་འབངས་
 གསུམ་ཐུགས་མཐུན་ཞེས་གཙང་གི་རང་དུ་གནས་པར་གྱུར་ཅིག་ཅེས་པའི་ལེགས་སྦྱོན་བཅས་གནམ་ལོ་གིང་ལུག་
 བཞི་པ་ས་གཞུ་བའི་ཚོས་ ༣༠ ལ་རྗེ་མཁན་པོས།




 (སྐུལ་སྐྱེ་འཛིགས་མེད་ཚོས་ཐུགས་)
 རྗེ་མཁན་ལྷི་རབས་བདུན་ཅུ་པ།



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SPECIAL RECOLLECTION
OF
THE BIRTH OF A KING OF DESTINY
by

*Her Majesty Ashi Kesang Choeden Wangchuck
Queen Mother of His Majesty King Jigme Singye Wangchuck of Bhutan*





UGYEN TASHILING PALACE

MOTITBANG, THIMPHU
BHUTAN

In this Holy Hidden "Beyul" Kingdom of Bhutan, blessed abundantly by the Second Buddha, Guru Rinpoche, my son His Majesty King Jigme Singye Wangchuck was born at dawn on 1st November 1955 in the newly built Dechencholing Palace, fulfilling the "Prophecy" given by Guru Rinpoche to Tertön Drukpa Dorji in Tsalu-Ney, "the Realm of the Dakinis", that a King would be born in the Wood Sheep Year in a place called "Wom-dong" (Milk Village), the present day site of Dechencholing Palace, who would do great good for the Dharma.

Due to this auspicious "Prophecy" by Guru Rinpoche, many great and holy Lamas and Bhutan's Guardian Deities came to shower their great blessings and protection upon His Majesty since he was a young boy in extraordinary ways.

When His Majesty was 3 days old, Jye Yonten Tsondu the 62nd Jye Khenpo of Bhutan came to Dechencholing Palace to bestow his blessings on the new Crown Prince.

When His Majesty was 4 years old, he rode in a procession led by His Majesty King Jigme Dorji Wangchuck from Dechencholing Palace to the ancient Tashi Cho Dzong, where a grand ceremony was performed to mark Crown Prince Jigme Singye Wangchuck's first visit to the Dzong.

Marchang was offered to the Crown Prince wearing yellow silk dress and a little sword, in the Dzong Courtyard, and a grand "Zhugdal Phunsum Tsoqpa" Ceremony was performed in the Dzong Zimchung.

Although only 4 years old, His Majesty was very dignified throughout the Ceremony.

After the Zhugdal Phunsum Tsoqpa Ceremony, Drabai Lohen Namgye of Palaida offered the following Eulogy to the Crown Prince:

"The glorious and matchless son of god, the fearless and victorious bud of the Buddha, Jigme Singye Wangchuck, the combination of the power of all the Buddhas in a single physical form, solely envisages the flourishing of the wheel of dual system of the

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UGYEN TASHILING PALACE

MOTITHANG, TRINLEH
BHUTAN

religious Lord of Drukpa till the end of time. His wholesome actions, like the progress of the sun, never cease but thrive like a summer lake, intensifying and expanding like the waxing moon.

The reincarnation of the Buddha, who has descended for the liberation of the people; as he was presented as the Prince, although, it was the season of summer rains, by the power of unparalleled thoughts of the budding Prince coupled with the past prayers and immeasurable merit, his attires were not soaked by the rain. Even the religious gods voiced their congratulatory notes.

As the young Prince, the son of the Buddha, was led on the golden-saddled horse from Dechencholing with His Majesty the King at the head of the procession, the Prince arrived Tashicho Dzong amidst the sound of ceremonial horns, drums, cymbals, trumpets and bells. At that instant, the monks carrying victory banners, religious umbrellas and other religious articles came forward to receive the Prince into the heavenly abode. Upon arrival at Tashicho Dzong coinciding with the rising of the sun, a grand Zhugdal Phunsum Tsogpa Ceremony was performed after which, I made a speech in which I called, by name, upon the Buddha followed by "Tenzai Tenrab Dun", "Kalzang Sangay Tongsa Nyi", "Phakchen Neten Chutruk", "Dzaming Zepel Gyendrug Chhogy-nyi", "Drubthob Chenpo Gyerhu", "Chhogychui Gyativa Sechey", "Ugyen Padma Jungney", the Buddha with clairvoyance of the three times, "Jebang Nyer-nya of Tibet", "Kagyu Chho-zhi Chhung-gyed", along with all the lamas of Sakya, Geluk and Nyingma, and especially the efficacious religious leader Ngawang Namgyal and the successive Jo Khenpos, thus inviting all of them, resembling the opening of a pod of sesame, who performed and took part in the auspicious Zhugdal Phunsum Tsogpa Ceremony. This was followed by a gradual rain of flowers falling from the sky but not hitting the ground, indicating the continuity of the secular state from tens of thousands to tens of thousands of cons like a river. From the other direction shone the golden sun.

As I invoked the lamas as mentioned above during the "Tashi Ngasol", as the speech deliverer, I, Lama Loben Namgyal, being unable to bear the splendor, my hands trembled. I experienced extreme happiness of the five types in the mind beyond verbal expression. Signifying the reason for my inability to bear the splendor of the "Tashi Ngasol", upon completion of my speech and submitting it to the young Prince through His Majesty the King, the lamas, mentioned above, diffused into Thuchen Choeki Gyaspo, who had taken the form of standing Tshopyame. I mentally prayed and concentrated the diffusion of the event into the godly prince, Jigme Singye Wangchuck, and the Zhugdal Phunsum Tsogpa Ceremony came to an end.

After the "Dramnyen Chhuezhe" was over, Her Majesty the Queen, the Dakini who has taken the form of a human being, bearing the name Kalzang, said to me the speech

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UGYEN TASHLING PALACE
MOTITBANG, THIMPHU
BHUTAN

maker, that the auspiciousness witnessed, was something that had never happened before and that it was an excellent omen. Then His Majesty the King distributed gifts in plenty to all the subjects, and returned to Dechencholing amidst the ceremonial music as the sun shone and arrived at Dechencholing in the drizzle of flowery rain. Immediately after that, heavy rain poured down with a roaring sound. The torrential rain continued into the night and the next day. I, the former Drabai Loben, submit my vision of wisdom that the regime of the Religious Palden Drukpa will emerge unparalleled and without any challenge, as indicated by the gods and lamas.

The truth of my words will be revealed in the future."

During the recitation of the Eulogy, composed by Drabai Loben, to the Crown Prince Jigme Singye Wangchuck, Drabai Loben's hands trembled greatly.

Drabai Loben told me afterwards that his hands trembled greatly because our Guardian Deity Yeshey Gampo had entered into him because the Prince was a "Lunqten gyi Gyatso", A King of Destiny.

Since His Majesty was young he had deep faith in Guru Rinpoche.

~*~

In 1963 when His Majesty was 8 years old, He went to study in North Point, Darjeeling. Father Maurice Stanford was the Rector and he was most kind to us.

While His Majesty was studying in North Point, His Majesty King Jigme Dorji Wangchuck suffered a massive heart attack in Dechencholing Palace. Fortunately our dear friend the Scottish Missionary Dr. Albert Craig was staying with us in the Palace Guest House.

Dr. Albert Craig's prompt and expert care saved His Majesty's life.

My brother Lyonchen Jigme Palden Dorji brought the renowned British Heart Specialist Dr. Aubrey Leatham to Bhutan to take good care of His Majesty.

~*~



UGYEN TASHILING PALACE

MOTITHANG, TRINPER
BHUTAN

In April 1964 my Brother Lyonchen Jigme Palden Dorji was cruelly assassinated in Phuntsholing when he was serving our King and our Kingdom of Bhutan most faithfully. It was a time of great sadness for our Family.

~*~

In the autumn of 1964 when my children and I were staying in Ugyen Tashi Palace in Tharo, I was walking in the garden one evening at dusk, while His Majesty played in the Palace Courtyard with two small boys and waited for me.

His Majesty suddenly saw in the sky next to the Great Green Oak Tree, planted by the First King Ugyen Wangchuck, two men dressed entirely in white in a white tent with golden sun's rays enveloping the tent. His Majesty could see the white tent pegs and green grass around the white tent.

The two men dressed in white were sometimes looking towards me and sometimes at His Majesty.

His Majesty called the boys to look at this vision and the vision started to fade.

We were told that the two men in white were the "Dralha" Guardian Deities who had come to watch over His Majesty.

~*~

While staying with my Beloved Mother in Bhutan House, Kalimpong, on the 31st October 1964 before His Majesty's 9th birthday, His Majesty woke up one morning telling me he had seen a wonderful dream. His Majesty saw our Family with my Mother driving through a strange and beautiful land. Then we started walking uphill.

We were looking down a great mountain. His Majesty wanted to climb further up the mountain. While the rest of us were busy in a cave prostrating to photographs of our ancestors, His Majesty left us and climbed up the steep mountain and came to another cave where He saw Lord Buddha sitting with both hands on his lap. In one hand he was holding a bowl. Lord Buddha's hair was dark blue and curly. Two gelonggs in red robes were on either side turning the "Dhu" (Royal Umbrella) over Lord Buddha.

His Majesty bowed down. Lord Buddha gave His Majesty a large "Norbu" (Wish-fulfilling Jewel) reddish white in colour.



UGYEN TASHILING PALACE

MOTIBHANG, THIMPHU
BHUTAN

Lord Buddha said that if His Majesty had stayed in the other cave, he would have been too late, and someone else would have got the "Norbu".

Then His Majesty saw a lot of small mountains with glowing peaks, and one high mountain with a large round golden glow on its peak.

Gelong Ngachendep Tsering Dorji said, "Let us go up there. We might obtain another Norbu."

But my Mother said, "No, that is where Nigme stays." When we returned down the mountain there were many wild beasts – tigers and leopards in the forest and we were afraid. But a white parrot came and flew near us. My Mother told us not to be afraid as the white parrot was Uncle Nigme and he would protect us.

When we reached a town two boys came silently and attacked His Majesty. One tried to steal the Norbu and the other boy tried to stab His Majesty in the back. Dasha Lhendup came and pushed the boys away. He picked up the Norbu and handed it back to His Majesty.

His Majesty saw exactly the same dream a few years later but the two boys' strength had waned and their followers had decreased.

~*~

In 1965 His Majesty went to "Summer Fields" School in Hastings.

It was a beautiful school but closed down the next year because the property was sold. Most of the boys went to study in the main "Summer Fields" School, but His Majesty went to "Heatherdown" in Ascot because my daughter Sonam Choden and Dechen Wangmo were in "Heathfield" next door.

His Majesty enjoyed the school sports and his stay in Heatherdown.

One summer when His Majesty came home for His holidays, he brought 3 or 4 little silkworms from the school.



UGYEN TASHILING PALACE
MOTITHANG, THIMPHU
BHUTAN

Just before His Majesty left for school one of the silkworms was crushed and died. I remember His Majesty was very sad about it.

~*~

During another time His Majesty came home from Featherdown for His holidays. His Majesty told me of the strange dream He had in Dechencholing Palace.

His Majesty saw in His dream "Gyanen Jakpa Meten" the Guardian Deity of Dechenphu and the Thimphu Valley riding in a grand procession near "Bya Gja Gom" near the Palace.

"Ap Gyanen" as he was usually called told His Majesty, "If you continue to travel by plane to go abroad, you will die." I immediately realized that the Guardian Deity Ap Gyanen was warning and protecting His Majesty. So His Majesty stopped going to school in England.

~*~

I then went to Paro to look for a suitable site for His Majesty's school and bought the lovely land in Natsam Choten facing Paro Taktsang. While the school was being built, His Majesty and a group of Bhutanese boys, under the principal Mr. Filby, studied in my Mother's beautiful Home Namseyling Palace in summer and in "Sona Gassa" in Punakha, a lovely property given to my daughter Pem Pem by His Late Majesty, in winter.

My beloved Mother Mayuem Choni Wonyma Dorji advised me to take good care of Simtokha Dzong as it was a beautiful and historic Dzong and the first Dzong to be built by Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal in 1629.

In February 1959 when I was about to go to Kalimpong with Mayuem Thuntsu Choden to stay with my Mother for the birth of my daughter Pem Pem, I asked His Late Majesty to make Simtokha Dzong into a Buddhist "Stedra".

His Majesty told me to ask his Mother Mayuem Thuntsu Choden who would be a suitable teacher.



UGYEN TASHILING PALACE
MOTITBANG, THIMPHU
BHUTAN

One afternoon while walking in the garden of Bhutan House with Mayuem Phuntso Choden, I asked her who would be a good teacher for the Simtokha Buddhist Shedra

Mayuem thought for some time and then said His Holiness Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche would be the most suitable teacher.

This was conveyed to His Late Majesty and His Holiness Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche was invited to Bhutan in 1961.

His Holiness Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche started the first Buddhist Shedra in Wangditse Lhakhang in the same year. His Holiness Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche moved to the new Simtokha Dzong Buddhist Shedra in 1962.

In 1971 His Holiness Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche was asked to give the "Rinchen Terzo" (Precious Treasure Trove) Wang Lung in the Dechencholing Palace Guest House Garden.

Early one morning His Holiness Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche had a premonition and told his attendant Gelong Nodup to bring all the funds that had been offered to Khyentse Rinpoche, pack the money and send immediately to Paga Gumpa where at that time they were the most accomplished Gomchens, and ask them to read Kangyur (the Buddhist Canon) for Crown Prince Jigme Singye Wangchuck, for my daughters and for me.

Later that morning Crown Prince Jigme Singye, my daughters and I drove to Paro Airport and waited there for the Indian Air Force Helicopter to take us to Hasimara. While waiting at Paro for our Helicopter to land at any minute, the Helicopter coming for us exploded in mid air over Tsimalakha Guest Cottage. His Holiness Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche's timely prayers for us that morning at Paga Gumpa saved our lives.

Around the early 18th century the Treasure Revealer Tertön Drukpa Dorji came to Bhutan.

He was meant to find many "TER" Great Holy Hidden Treasures of Guru Rinpoche, to found a Nunnery in Paro, and to find a Dakini as His Spiritual Consort, which would bring great blessings and protection upon Bhutan.



UGYEN TASHILING PALACE
MOTITHANG, THIMPHU
BHUTAN

But the 8th Deb Raja Jow persecuted him and he was unable to carry out the wishes of Guru Rinpoche.

The Tertön fled to Tshalu Ney in Thimphu and in great despair beseeched Guru Rinpoche for His guidance and protection.

In Tshalu Ney Guru Rinpoche gave Tertön Drukda Dorji 15 predictions on Bhutan.

Great troubles were to come and Tertön kept weeping and fainting with grief.

~*~

Till then Tertön heard a voice from the sky.

Then Ugyen Guru Rinpoche appeared in person and told the Tertön "My son, do not grieve, I have something more to say." Then Guru Rinpoche predicted the birth of my son His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck.

~*~

Guru Rinpoche told the Tertön that beyond Tshalu Ney there are three places called Taktsang Rong (Tiger Valley), Ziktsang Rong (Leopard Valley) and Thomsang Rong (Bear Valley) and going beyond these three Valleys in the place called "Womdong" "Milk Valley" a King would be born in the Wood Sheep Year who would do great good for the Dharma.

~*~

However the incarnation of a "Dhamsi" demon born in the Dragon Year would be waiting to harm the "Palden Drukpa" (Glorious Bhutan) like holding a bow and arrow ready to harm Bhutan.

To prevent this many powerful "Kurims" prayers and rituals had to be performed.

~*~

The 65th Jye Khen Yeshey Singye believed that my son was the King in Guru Rinpoche's prophecy to Tertön Drukda Dorji.

Since His Majesty was a young boy Jye Yeshey Singye showed great devotion to His Majesty.

Whenever Jye Khen Yeshey Singye came to meet His Holiness Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche in Dechencholing Palace, Jye Khen Yeshey Singye (Sinphu Lama the direct descendant of Tertön Dorji Lingpa) would hold His Majesty's hands and placing his forehead on His Majesty's forehead he would pray deeply with great emotion.

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UGYEN TASHILING PALACE
MOTITBANG, THIMPHU
BHUTAN

Iye Xhen Yeshey Singye kindly gave me the manuscript containing Guru Rinpoche's predictions to Terton Drukda Dorji.

Because I received the Book of Guru Rinpoche's predictions, in the autumn of 1965 hearing that His Holiness Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche was staying with the Royal Grandmother Mayuem Phuntso Choden in Dechencholing Gumpa for a week before going to Bumthang as the Lama of Nimulung Monastery upon Mayuem's request, I sent Terton Drukda Dorji's prophecy book to His Holiness to read and asked His Holiness if it was my son who was mentioned in the prophecy.

His Holiness Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche read Guru Rinpoche's prophecies to Terton Drukda Dorji and said it was definitely the Crown Prince Jigme Singye Wangchuck who was mentioned in the prophecy, and His Holiness would perform all the necessary prayers in Mayuem Phuntso Choden's Gumpa in Dechencholing.

~*~

I requested His Holiness Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche that if it was really my son in the prophecy, then to please come to Paro to perform the Dokthap Kurims in a Holy Place like Paro Taktsang or Paro Kichu Lhakhang. In autumn of 1965 His Holiness most kindly came to Paro Kichu Lhakhang and performed the First Sacred Palchen Dubchen in the 7th century Paro Kichu Lhakhang.

I then requested His Holiness to stay with us and His Holiness also expressed the wish to stay. I asked His Late Majesty's permission for His Holiness to stay with us in Paro instead of going to Bumthang as the Lama of Nimulung, and His Majesty said it was more important for His Holiness to stay with us.

~*~

In 1966 His Holiness Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche advised my Mother and me to build a large statue of Guru Rinpoche in Paro Kichu Lhakhang for the Long Life and Protection of my son Crown Prince Jigme Singye Wangchuck.

His Holiness Khyentse Rinpoche stayed in Paro Kichu Lhakhang and gave all the detailed instructions for the building of Paro Kichu Guru Lhakhang.



UGYEN TASHILING PALACE

MOTITHANG, THIMPHU
BHUTAN

His Holiness Khyentse Rinpoche instructed our renowned Paro Sculptor Jinzop Damcho to erect a most beautiful and majestic statue of Guru Rinpoche Nangsid Zilnon, one and a half stories in height in the centre of the Lhakhang, a wrathful statue of Guru Horse Makdo on the left and an exquisite statue of the Tara Kurukuli on the right, each one storey high. The new Kichu Guru Lhakhang was completed in 1967.

In 1967 the first consecration of the Guru Lhakhang was performed by His Holiness the XVI Gyatso Karmapa Rangjung Kikpai Dorji and His Karma Kagyu monks.

The second consecration was performed by Jye Sinphu Lama Yeshey Singye with Punakha Drukpa Kagyu monks.

His Holiness Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche performed the third consecration with the most sacred and powerful Palchen Dubchen the mind treasure of Terton Jyame Lingpa in the newly built Kichu Guru Lhakhang. In the new year 2015 it will be the 50th year of the Sacred Paro Kichu Palchen Dubchen.

~*~

Just as Lama Jangchub Tsondu came to Bhutan from Tibet in the 19th century to bless, guide and protect Deb Jigme Namgyal at a critical time for Bhutan, so too, our Precious Root Guru His Holiness Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, the Mind Incarnation of Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo Dongu Lingpa, came to Bhutan in the midst of our great troubles, like Orgyan Guru Rinpoche himself to bestow His Holiness's Greatest Love, Blessings and Protection upon my beloved Mother Mayuem Chant Wangmo Dorji, my son His Majesty King Jigme Singye Wangchuck since he was in years old, upon our Family, our Bhutanese people and the Kingdom of Bhutan.

His Holiness Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche spent twenty six years of His Life in Bhutan performing the most sacred and powerful Dubchens and Kurims for the enduring great Peace, Happiness and Welfare of our Royal Family, our people and the Medicinal Kingdom of Bhutan.

~*~

In 1965 when His Majesty was 10 years old we were staying in the beautiful Ugyen Palri Palace in Paro. In this Palace His Majesty was blessed with a wonderful and auspicious dream.



UGYEN TASHILING PALACE
MOTITBANG, THIMPHU
BHUTAN

His Majesty saw the Dechog Padma Vajra Yab-Yuon, red in colour surrounded by flames and the Dechog Mantra Ha Ha resounding very loudly.

Two days later, His Majesty told me of the wonderful dream He had. That morning the 69th Jye Khen Gedun Rinchen then known as Geshey Bjaku (who had been born in a cave in Paro Taktsang and was the incarnation of Sogyal Tulku) came to see me in Paro Palace.

When I related Crown Prince's dream to him, Jye Gedun Rinchen or Geshey Bjaku became exceedingly elated. He said the Crown Prince had definitely seen the Red Yeshey Gampo Chazhupa that had appeared to Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal in Chime Lhakhang where next morning a villager offered a cane bridge to Shabdrung Rinpoche who then crossed the river and went to Punakha.

Jye Gedun Rinchen said he would go into 3 years Kunsam immediately to meditate on Yeshey Gampo for the long life of the Crown Prince which he very kindly did in Kunga Choling.

When I related Crown Prince's dream to His Holiness Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche and Khamtul Rinpoche VIII, Their Holinesses told me the Crown Prince might have been blessed with the vision of Dechog Padma Vajra. So due to Crown Prince's most auspicious dream, my Mother and I built the Dechog Lhakhang in Punakha Dzong, the Holy Ney of Dechog Khorlo Dor.

The beautiful Dechog Lhakhang was consecrated in 1978 first by Khamtul Rinpoche VIII Dongyud Nyima performing the Dechog with 60 deities. Next the 67th Jye Khen Nuanzer Tulku performed the second Rahney of the Dechog Lhakhang performing Dechog with 13 deities. His Holiness Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche performed the third consecration performing Dorsem Dubchen.

My beloved Mother requested His Holiness Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche to perform Annual Dechog Dubchen in the new Dechog Lhakhang in Punakha Dzong. His Holiness acceding to my Mother's request performed the first Dechog Padma Vajra Dubchen, the Mind Treasure of the Great Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo, in the newly



UGYEN TASHILING PALACE
MOTITHANG, TRIMPEL
BHUTAN

built Dechog Lhakhang in Punakha Dewachen Phodang Dzong in the autumn of 1979 for 13 years till 1990.

After His Holiness Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche passed away in September 1991, His Holiness Jye Khenpo Gedun Rinchen and the Punakha Monk Body continued to perform the Dechog Dubchen in the Dechog Lhakhang in Punakha Dzong annually without fail. It will be the 37th year of Dechog Dubchen in Punakha Dzong in year 2015.

~*~

His Holiness Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche advised us to build a Gesar Lhakhang above Dechencholing Palace for the protection of the Crown Prince.

The exquisite Gesar Lhakhang was built according to the Palace of Gesar that His Holiness Khyentse Rinpoche had seen in His "Gungter" Mind Treasure when he was twenty five years old in Tibet.

~*~

Polo Khenpo Rinpoche Thubten Kunga Gyaltzen was born in 1896 and passed away at Dechencholing Gompa in 1970.

He was one of the principal disciples of Khenpo Ngawang Palzung. He was regarded as one of the most accomplished Dzogchen Masters of recent times.

Mayuem Phuntso Choden had invited him to Bhutan and together with Jye Yeshey Singye started the First Buddhist Shedra in Tango Giampa.

Polo Khenpo Rinpoche was also a great Astrologer, so when His Majesty was about 12 years old, His Holiness Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche requested Polo Khenpo Rinpoche to make a detailed horoscope for Crown Prince Jigme Singye Wangchuck.

~*~

Polo Khenpo Rinpoche very kindly made a most elaborate and detailed horoscope for His Majesty which guided His Holiness Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche to perform all the most vital and powerful pujas for the protection and Long Life of His Majesty.

~*~



UGYEN TASHILING PALACE
MOTITBANG, THIMPHU
BHUTAN

Polo Khenpo Rinpoche also believed that His Majesty was the King Born in "Wamdong" who would do great good for the Dharma as prophesied by Orgyan Guru Rinpoche to Terton Drukda Dorji.

In 1970 when Polo Khenpo was about to pass away, his thoughts and concern were for the Crown Prince Jigme Singye Wangchuck.

Polo Khenpo Rinpoche repeatedly told Jye Khenpo Kinley that he wished to see me as he had something to say to me.

Polo Khenpo told Jye Kinley who was attending Rinpoche to tell me that I must request His Holiness Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche to bestow the most sacred and powerful "Ngawang Rinpoche Rinchen Karwai Wangkur" upon the Crown Prince as soon as possible.

—*—

Jye Khenpo Kinley kindly sent me Polo Khenpo Rinpoche's message through Jye Rinzer Tulku.

In 1970 His Majesty continued his studies in the new school at Para Satsam Chorten till 1971.

—*—

The greatly beloved yogi Menri Loben Sonam Zangpo was most kind to us. Loben Sonam Zangpo was the incarnation of Lingchen Reju, the Root Guru of Dowai Gonpo Chojai Tsangpa Gyawai. Loben Sonam Zangpo was also one of the main disciples of Togden Sakya Shree.

Once when Loben Sonam Zangpo went to Tibet he met the Treasure Revealer Terchen Lerab Lingpa also known as Sogyal Tulku, who was believed to be the reincarnation of Nanam Dorji Dunjom, one of the Twenty Five Heart Son Disciples of Orgyan Guru Rinpoche. Terton Sogyal Tulku was also a teacher of His Holiness the Great Thirteenth Dalai Lama Ngawang Lobsang Thubten Gyatso of Tibet.

Terchen Lerab Lingpa or Sogyal Tulku had revealed a Hidden Treasure of Guru Rinpoche a large "Terma" nine-spoked Vajra (Dorji).



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MOTITHANG, TRIPHI
BHUTAN

He gave this sacred "Terma" to Loben Sonam Zangpo saying that it was destined for the King of Bhutan and would bring great blessings and benefit to Bhutan.

In the Holy Beryl of Khenpa Jong, Loben Sonam Zangpo placed the Terma Vajra as "Yeshey Sempa" into a large beautiful gilded bronze statue of Guru Nungsi Zilnon.

Around 1973 Loben Sonam Zangpo brought the sacred Guru Rinpoche statue to Holy Kichu Lhakhang in Paro where His Holiness Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche was performing the Annual Pachen Duchen in Kichu Guru Lhakhang. He offered the statue with the sacred Vajra to my son His Majesty King Jigme Singye Wangchuck with Loben's prayers for His Majesty's Long and Glorious Life and Reign.

This sacred statue with the Vajra of prophecy is now the main deity in Majun Naikhang next to His Majesty's Throne Room in Tashicho Dzong.

~*~

In 1972 when His Majesty was 16 years old His Late Majesty installed His Majesty as Tongsa Penlop in a grand ceremony in Tashicho Dzong on 15th May and again in Tongsa Chokor Rabdentse Dzong on 15th June 1972.

In July His Majesty accompanied His Father to Nairobi where His Late Majesty wished to go on Safari but His Late Majesty became too ill and suddenly passed away on 27th July 1972 causing great sorrow to our Family and our Kingdom of Bhutan.

His Late Majesty was cremated in Holy Kurjey Lhakhang in November 1972. Immediately after the cremation the Royal Grandmother Mayuem Ashi Phuntso Choden and Mayuem Ashi Pemat Dechen went to Kalimpong to stay with my Mother for about nine days, and attended the Duchen performed by Late Dudjom Rinpoche in the Bhutan Gumpa in Kalimpong.

~*~

On 27th November 1972 Water Rat Year His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck went to Punakha Dewachen Phodang Dzong where he received the Auspicious Five-coloured Scarves from the Machen of Shabdang Ngawang Namgyal signifying the "Inner Coronation." The 67th Jye Khenpa Nizer Tutku performed Tashi Montam and offered Tashi Zaigyai.



UGYEN TASHILING PALACE
MOTITBANG, THIMPHU
BHUTAN

On Thursday 6th February 1974 -- i.e. 15 of 12 month of the Wood Tiger Year, Tiger Month, Tiger Day, Tiger Hour with the Star Karma Phurba Gyal shining in the firmament, His Holiness Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, the incarnation of Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo, the Master of All Treasure Revealers, bestowed upon my son His Majesty King Jigme Singye Wangchuck, seated upon the Golden Throne in the Throne Room of Tashicho Dzong, the most sacred "Ngawang Rinchen Barwai Wangkur" "The Blazing Jewel of Sovereignty Wangkur" on exactly the same Tiger hour, Tiger Day, Tiger Month of the Tiger Year with the Star Karma Phurba Gyal shining that Orgyan Guru Rinpoche bestowed this same "Ngawang Rinchen Barwai Wangkur" on the great Tibetan Dharma King Chogyal Trisong Detsan in Samye Chumphu in the 9th century.

My beloved Mother Mayum Choni Wangmo Dorji, my daughters Sonam Choden, Dechen Wangmo, Pema Lhaden, Kesang Wangmo and I and Paro Pentop Namgyal Wangchuck attended the "Sangwa" Secret Coronation of His Majesty King Jigme Singye Wangchuck in the Throne Room of Tashicho Dzong.

~*~

On 5th February 1974 His Holiness Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche spent the night in a room near the Magon Neykhang Chapel in Tashicho Dzong before bestowing the Sacred "Ngawang Rinchen Barwai Wangkur" on His Majesty on 6th February morning.

Early that morning before bestowing the Wangkur on His Majesty His Holiness Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche heard a voice telling him that His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck was the True Incarnation of Terton Padma Lingpa, and would do great good for the Dharma.

~*~

From then on whenever His Holiness Khyentse Rinpoche performed His Holiness's "Gomter" Mind Treasure Nyak-Phur Phurba Dubchen, His Holiness would also perform Padma Lingpa's Phurba Sogi Pudri because Dilgo Khyentse said His Majesty was the incarnation of Padma Lingpa.

His Holiness the 69th Lye Khenpo Gedun Rinchen has written about His Majesty's Sangwa Coronation in His Biography of Zhabeling Ngawang Namgyal as follows:

On the 1st day of the Tiger of the 1st month of the Tiger of Wood Tiger Year, on the most auspiciously compatible day, coinciding with the day of consecrating King Trisong



UGYEN TASHILING PALACE

MOTITHANG, THIMPHU
BHUTAN

Deutsan of Samye Tibet as the Religious King of the world during the 9th century by the great Guru Padma Jungney, Her Majesty the Queen Mother Kosang Choeden Wangchuck, through great affection and faith both for the King and the subjects, invited His Holiness Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, who offered Empowerment Blessings (Ngawang Rinchen Barwai Wangkur) to His Majesty, and with Her Majesty's profound prayers, elaborately conducted the auspicious Investiture Ceremony in Tashicho Dzong, and also opened the Secret Mandala that reveals the path of the Secular activities and their auspiciousness.

~*~

Our dear friend and great historian and scholar of Bhutan Loben Padma Tsewang has written in the History of Bhutan on the Outer Coronation of His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck:

On 2nd June 1974 in the Secret Medicinal Land of Druk, a country blessed with sovereignty, His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck was auspiciously crowned in the presence of people from all over the world, as the Fourth Hereditary Monarch, by the various classes of Gods and people in the great Palace of Tashicho Dzong, and this is a greatly auspicious day.

~*~

In December 1975 when His Holiness Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche went to Europe for the first time, Khyentse Rinpoche told me upon his return to Bhutan, that when Khyentse Rinpoche reached France, our Guardian Deities of Bhutan appeared to him and would not let Rinpoche sleep for three nights.

Our Guardian Deities beseeched His Holiness Khyentse Rinpoche that he should not go to Europe but should remain in Bhutan. We were greatly touched that our Guardian Deities of Bhutan were protecting us all the time.

~*~

One day when His Majesty was about 26 years old, His Majesty came to have lunch with us in Dechencholing Palace.

His Majesty expressed His deep wish to build a great statue of Padchen Chechog Heruka. A few months later my beloved Mother Mayuem Choni Wangmo Dorji expressed her deep wish to build a great statue of Phurba Vajra Kilaya.



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MOTITBANG, THIMPHU
BHUTAN

I informed the wishes of His Majesty and my mother to Rinpoche who was staying in Paro at the time. His Holiness Khyentse Rinpoche was very pleased and advised us to build a Ka-Gon-Phur Sum Lhakhang in Holy Kurjey in Bumthang.

His Holiness Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche kindly gave all the detailed instruction for the building of the Lhakhang, the great statues and the wonderful murals depicting the Greater Life Story of Gjuru Rinpoche on the top most floor, the "Gongter" Mind Treasure Visions of Terton Sangye Lingpa, Terton Ratna Lingpa and Terton Ugyen Lingpa on the second floor, and a Neten Chutruk Lhakhang on the ground floor. His Holiness Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche instructed our Master Sculptors Omtso and Karma to build a 34 feet statue of the most sacred Palchen Chochog Heruka with 21 heads as the main deity of the Lhakhang.

The building of the new Ka-Gon-Phur Sum Lhakhang in Holy Kurjey in Bumthang started at the end of 1983 and was completed after 7 years in 1990.

His Holiness Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche instructed us to build 108 stone stupas enclosing the three Kurjey Lhakhangs like Samye in Tibet.

In the summer of 1990 His Holiness Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, with His Holiness Shechen Rabjam Rinpoche and over 160 monks from Shechen Gompa in Nepal, Tharpaling Monastery, Nimalung Monastery and Tongsa Rabdey performed the First Grand Consecration of the newly built Ka-Gon-Phur Sum Lhakhang in Kurjey with the performance of the First Ka-gyui Daishek Duba Dubchen.

In the spring of 1991 His Holiness Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche accompanied by His Heart Son Disciple His Holiness Dzarong Trulshik Ngawang Chokyi Lodoe Rinpoche (the direct descendant of Dowai Gonpo Chujey Tsangpa Gyurai's nephew Gen Rai Dharma Singye) and His Holiness Shechen Rabjam Rinpoche with over 160 monks from Shechen Gompa in Nepal, Tharpaling Monastery, Nimalung Monastery and Tongsa Rabdey performed the Second Consecration of Ka-Gon-Phur Sum Lhakhang in Kurjey and the First Consecration of the Neten Chutruk (16 Disciples of Lord Buddha) Lhakhang on the ground floor with the second performance of the most sacred and powerful Ka-gyui-Dai-shek Duba Dubchen.



UGYEN TASHILING PALACE
MOTITHANG, TRINLEH
BHUTAN

In the newly Consecrated Neten Chutruk Lhakhang His Trulshik Rinpoche gave Gelong and Gelongma Vows to many monks and nuns from all over Bhutan.

In September 1991 His Holiness Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche was not well, but Rinpoche insisted on coming to Bhutan House in Kalimpong where Khyentse Rinpoche most lovingly bestowed 125 Long Life Blessings upon my Beloved Mother Mayuem Choni Wongmo Dorji as Khyentse Rinpoche did every year.

I returned to Bhutan with His Holiness Rinpoche. A week later His Holiness started the 25th Year of the Sacred Palchen Dubchen in Paro Kichu Guru Lhakhang but His Holiness became seriously ill in Kichu.

On 27th September 1991, our most precious Maha Guru His Holiness Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche passed away after bestowing Khyentse Rinpoche's unceasing great Blessings, Guidance and Protection upon my Son His Majesty King Jigme Singye Wangchuck since he was 10 years old, my Beloved Mother Mayuem Choni Wongmo Dorji, our family, our people and the Medicinal Kingdom of Bhutan for 26 years.

Due to the great good fortune of our Family and the Bhutanese people, it is the greatest joy and blessing to have His Holiness Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche's true incarnation His Holiness Dilgo Khyentse Yangsi Ugyen Tenzin Jigme Lhundub Rinpoche with us in Bhutan blessing us with His presence and performing the most sacred Ka-Gyat Dai-shek Duba Dubchen in holy Kurjey Ka-Gon-Phur Sum Lhakhang every year without fail.

It will be the 26th year of the sacred Ka-Gyat Dai-shek Duba Dubchen in Kurjey Ka-Gon-Phur Sum Lhakhang in the year 2015.

~*~

On this auspicious 60th Birth Anniversary of my son His Majesty King Jigme Singye Wangchuck, it gives me Great Happiness to know that His Majesty is a True Dharma King who continues to serve the Dharma, our people and the sacred Kingdom of Bhutan with complete selflessness and with single-minded devotion and fidelity.

His Majesty has indeed succeeded in securing unparalleled Peace, Happiness and Prosperity of the people, and safeguarded the pristine environment and the great security and sovereign independence of our Kingdom of Bhutan

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UGYEN TASHILING PALACE

MOTITBANG, THIMPHU
BHUTAN

May Ugyen Guru Rinpoche and all our deities, our Great Protector Shabdung Ngawang Dumgyal, our precious Guru His Holiness Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche and all the Holy Lamas continue to shower their greatest love, blessings and protection upon my dearest son His Majesty King Jigme Singye Wangchuck and the Royal Family, and upon the Bhutanese people and the Sacred Medicinal Kingdom of Bhutan!

May the Triple Gem and Ugyen Guru Rinpoche bless my dearest son His Majesty King Jigme Singye Wangchuck with a Supremely Long, Joyous, Glorious and Blessed Life.

May the Dharma Kingdom of Bhutan flourish and grow from strength to strength.

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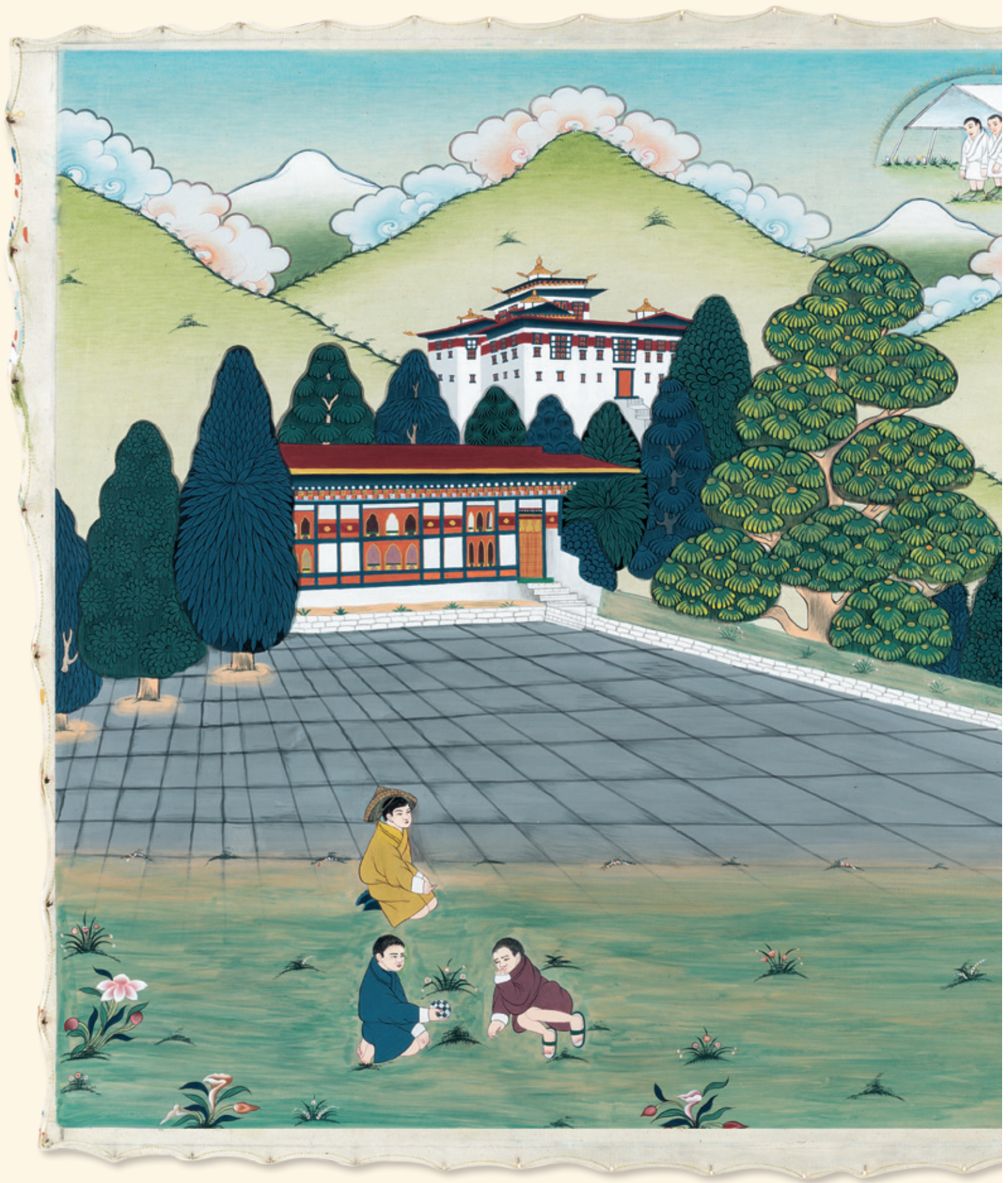
Kesang Choeden Wangchuck
Her Majesty Queen Mother of His Majesty King Jigme Singye Wangchuck





When His Majesty was four years old, he rode in a procession led by His Majesty King Jigme Dorji Wangchuck from Dechencholing Palace to the ancient Tashi Cho Dzong, where a grand ceremony was performed to mark Crown Prince Jigme Singye Wangchuck's first visit to the Dzong. 'Marchang' was offered to the Crown Prince wearing yellow silk dress and a little sword, in the Dzong Courtyard, and a grand 'Zbugdal Phunsum Tsogpa' Ceremony was performed in the Dzong's Zimchung. Although only four years old, His Majesty was very dignified throughout the Ceremony.

Her Majesty Ashi Kesang Choeden Wangchuck





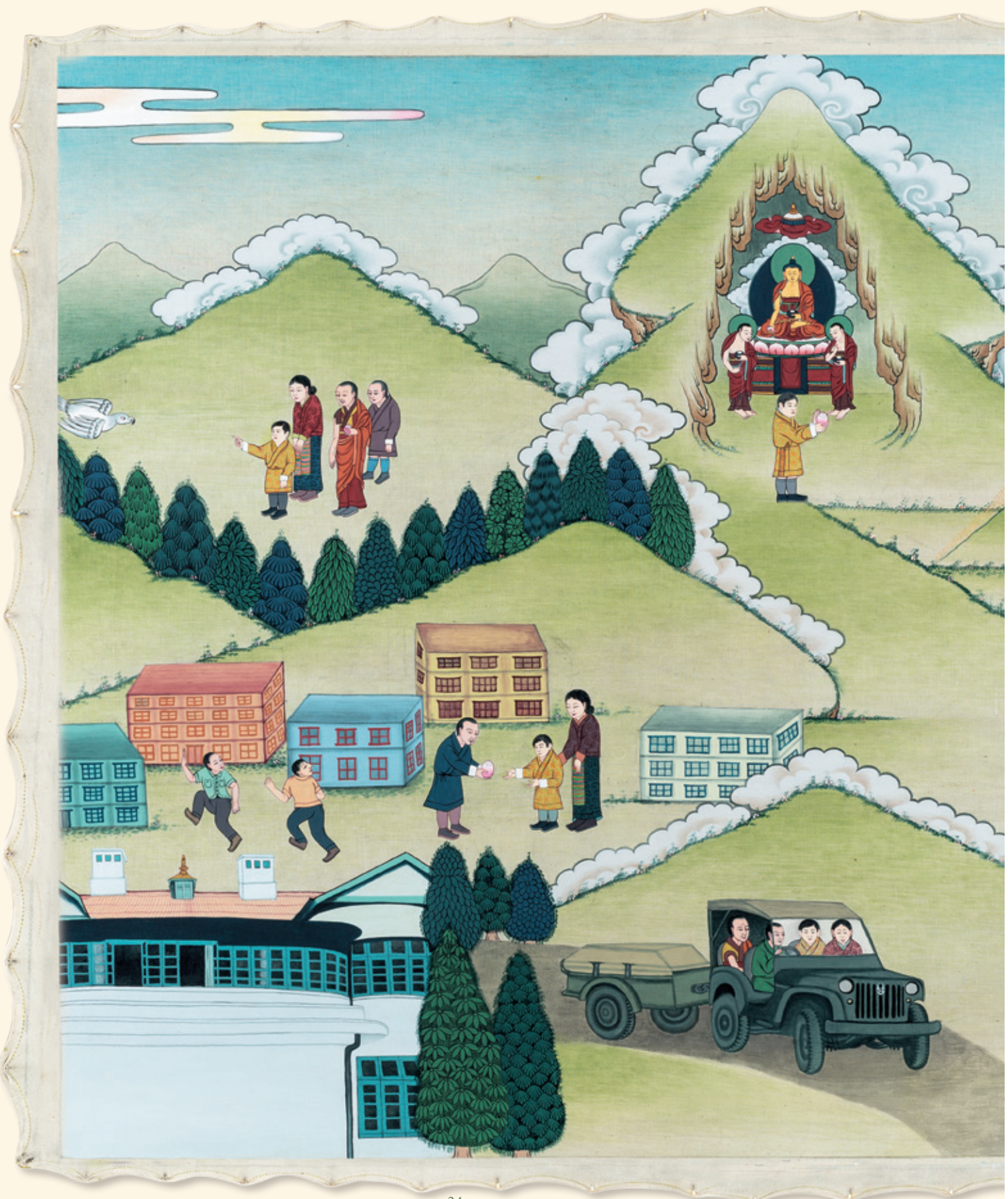
In April 1964 my Brother Lyonchen Jigme Palden Dorji was cruelly assassinated in Phuntsboling when he was serving our King and our Kingdom of Bhutan most faithfully. It was a time of great sadness for our Family.

In the autumn of 1964 when my children and I were staying in Ugyen Palri Palace in Paro, I was walking in the garden one evening at dusk, while His Majesty played in the Palace Courtyard with two small boys and waited for me.

His Majesty suddenly saw in the sky next to the Great Green Oak Tree, planted by the First King Ugyen Wangchuck, two men dressed entirely in white in a white tent with golden sun rays enveloping the tent. His Majesty could see the white tent pegs and green grass around the white tent.

The two men dressed in white were sometimes looking towards me and sometimes at His Majesty. His Majesty called the boys to look at this vision and the vision started to fade. We were told that the two men in white were the 'Dralba' Guardian Deities who had come to watch over His Majesty.

Her Majesty Ashi Kesang Choeden Wangchuck



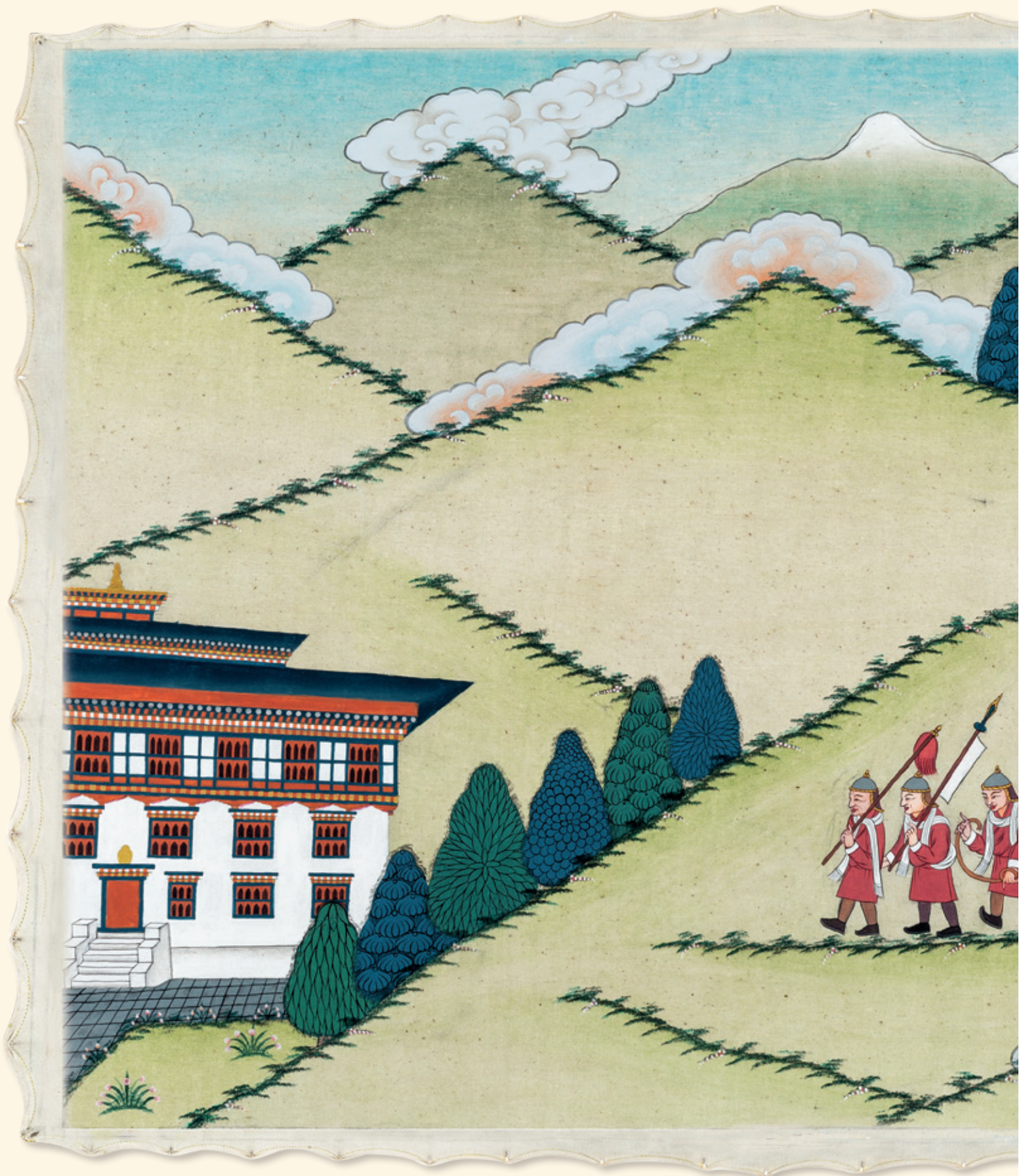


While staying with my Beloved Mother in Bhutan House, Kalimpong, on the 31st October 1964 before His Majesty's 9th birthday, His Majesty woke up one morning telling me he had seen a wonderful dream. His Majesty saw our Family with my Mother driving through a strange and beautiful land. Then we started walking uphill.

We were looking down a great mountain. His Majesty wanted to climb further up the mountain. While the rest of us were busy in a cave prostrating to photographs of our ancestors, His Majesty left us and climbed up the steep mountain and came to another cave where He saw Lord Buddha sitting with both hands on his lap. In one hand he was holding a bowl. Lord Buddha's hair was dark blue and curly. Two gelongas in red robes were on either side turning the 'Dhu' (Royal Umbrella) over Lord Buddha.

His Majesty bowed down. Lord Buddha gave His Majesty a large 'Norbu' (Wish-fulfilling Jewel) reddish-white in colour. Lord Buddha said that if His Majesty had stayed in the other cave, he would have been too late, and someone else would have got the 'Norbu'.

Her Majesty Asbi Kesang Choeden Wangchuck





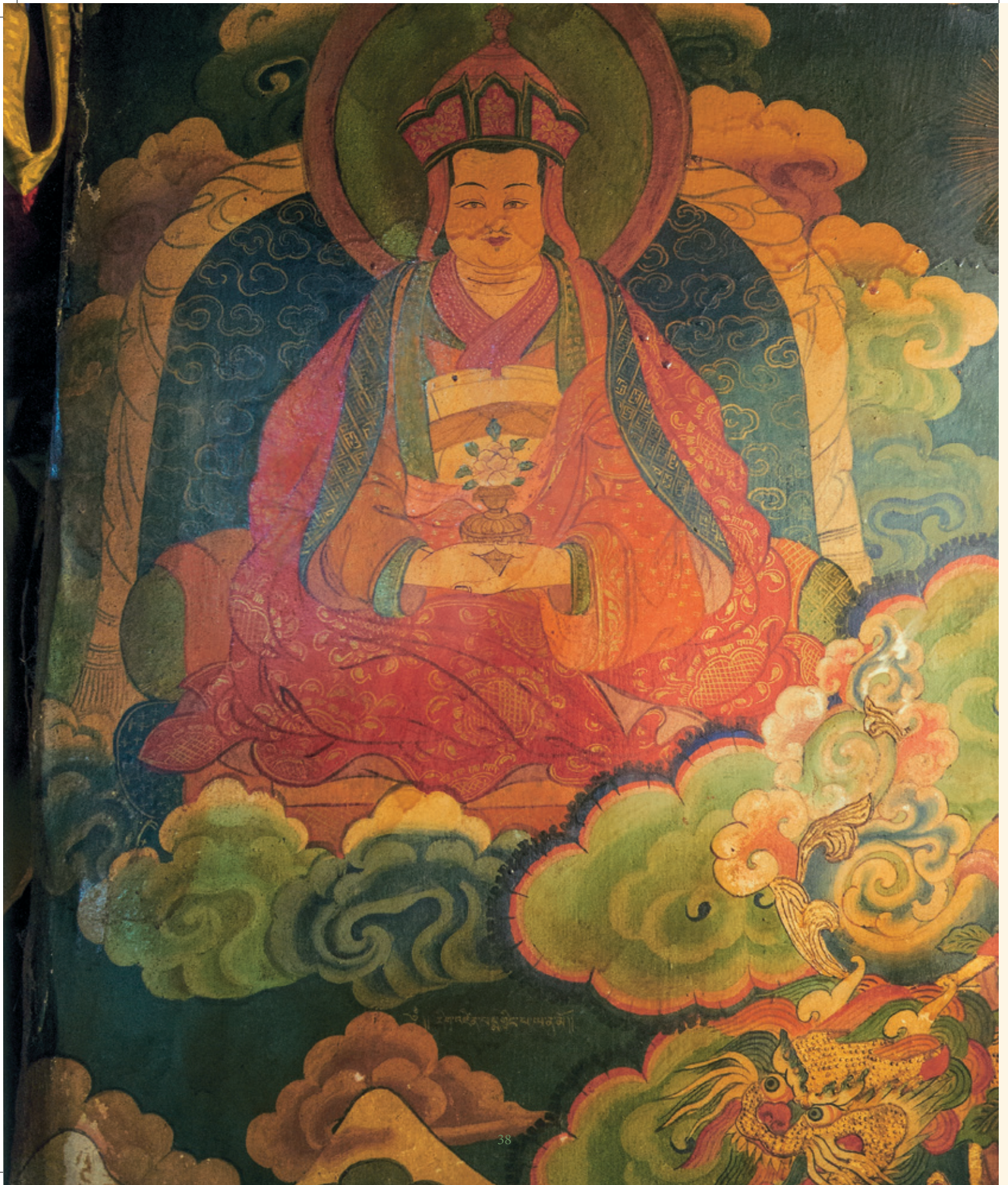
During another time His Majesty came home from Heatherdown for His holidays, His Majesty told me of the strange dream He had in Dechencholing Palace. His Majesty saw in His dream 'Gyanen Jakpa Melen' the Guardian Deity of Dechenphu and the Thimphu Valley riding in a grand procession near 'Bya Ga Gom' near the Palace.

'Ap Gyanen' as he was usually called told His Majesty, "If you continue to travel by plane to go abroad, you will die." I immediately realized that the Guardian Deity Ap Gyanen was warning and protecting His Majesty. So His Majesty stopped going to school in England.

I then went to Paro to look for a suitable site for His Majesty's school and bought the lovely land in Satsam Choten facing Paro Taktsang. While the school was being built, His Majesty and a group of Bhutanese boys, under the principal Mr Filby, studied in my Mother's beautiful home Namseyling Palace in summer and in 'Sona Gassa' in Punakha, a lovely property given to my daughter Pem Pem by His Late Majesty, in winter.

Her Majesty Ashi Kesang Choeden Wangchuck

(Illustrations p.30-37 courtesy Ashi Kesang Choeden Wangchuck. Painted by Lharip Phuntsbo Wangdi)





UGYEN TASHILING PALACE
MOTHBANG, THIMPHU
BHUTAN

ANCESTRY OF THE GREAT DHARMA KING “JIGME SINGYE WANGCHUCK”

From the father's side, he is a descendant of Nyoe Clan, an undefiled clan that descended from a son of the Clear Light Gods. From among the successive descendants of this clan, the thirty-ninth descendant was the extraordinary being Gongsa Ugyen Wangchuck, the First King of the Wangchuck Dynasty prophesied by Ugyen Pema Jungney. His son was His Majesty Jigme Wangchuck the Second Hereditary King of Bhutan.

The son of His Majesty Jigme Wangchuck was His Majesty Jigme Dorji Wangchuck the Third Hereditary King of Bhutan. He was the father of His Majesty the Dharma King Jigme Singye Wangchuck.

From the mother's side, he is a descendant of the Kings of Minyak from the dynasty of the three ancestral Tibetan Dharma Kings (Songtsen Gampo, Trisong Detsen and Tri Ralpachen) belonging to the pure Sakya Clan. A prophecy was delivered by Guru Drakmar to the Minyak King that his descendants would benefit the sentient beings in the Southern Land of Dremojong (Sikkim). The King of Minyak had a son called Gyebum from who descended the successive Dharma Kings like Phuntshog Namgyal in the Secret Land of Dremojong (Sikkim). The Ninth Dharma King was Thutob Namgyal. Ashi Choni Wongmo, the daughter of King Thutob Namgyal married Gongzim Sonam Tobgyal, a descendant of the undefiled Nyoe Clan. An embodiment of a Dakini popularly known as Ashi Kesang Choeden Wangchuck was born to them. She is the reputed godly mother of the splendid His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck.

Translated from page 21 and 22 of the book called Dharma King.

~*~

◀ Pema Lingpa (1450-1521) was born in the Tang Valley of Bumthang into the prestigious Tibetan lineage of Nyoe which arrived in Bumthang via the son of Jikten Gonpo (jig rten mgon po, 1143-1217), the founder of the Drigung Kagyu tradition. Pema Lingpa, however, followed the Nyingma tradition and is one of the five most important 'treasure-discoverers' (tertoen) of Himalayan Buddhism. He had several sons and one of them settled in Dungebar in the Kurtoe Valley. The Wangchuck Royal Family descends from this son. (Photo: Department of Culture, RGoB)



The historical genja or 'contract' of Bhutan's hereditary monarchy adopted during Gongsar Ugyen Wangchuck's coronation on 17 December 1907 in the Punakha Dzong. The Zhabdrung's seal is applied at the top; others are those of leading Buddhist monks, government officials and headmen. The seeds of Bhutan as a nation state were sown in 1907 with the election of the hereditary monarch akin to 'The Great Chosen One' (Mahasammatta), which bore fruit a century later in 2008 with the adoption of the Constitution.
 (Photo: Courtesy Her Majesty Ashi Kesang Choeden Wangchuck)



*His Majesty Ugyen Wangbuck (1862–1926), the First Druk Gyalpo (King of Bhutan) reigned from 1907 to 1926. The temporal and secular administration was consolidated and unified in the person of His Majesty. He united the nation, secured stability, ensured domestic tranquility, and strengthened the friendship and co-operation with British India.
(Photo: Courtesy Her Majesty Ashi Kesang Choeden Wangbuck)*



His Majesty Jigme Wangchuck (1905-1952), the Second Druk Gyalpo reigned from 1926 to 1952. His Majesty continued his father's centralisation and modernisation efforts, built more schools and consolidated the sovereignty of Bhutan. His Majesty was conscious of the protocol and dignity of Bhutan.

Her Majesty Ashi Phuntsbo Choden Wangchuck was born in 1911 at Wanduecholing Palace and married the Second King in 1925. Her Majesty was known for her love and concern for the country and the Bhutanese people.

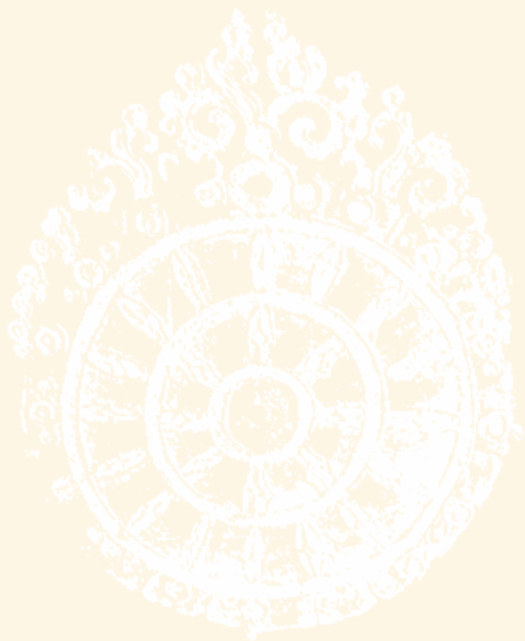
(Photo: Courtesy Her Majesty Ashi Kesang Choeden Wangchuck)



His Majesty Jigme Dorji Wangchuck (1929-1972), the Third Druk Gyalpo reigned from 1952 to 1972. His Majesty is revered by all Bhutanese as the father of modern Bhutan. His Majesty modernised Bhutanese society by abolishing slavery, serfdom and the caste system. The prominent political reforms initiated by His Majesty include the establishment of the National Assembly in 1953. His Majesty also enacted the Thrimzhung Chenmo (The Supreme Law) in 1959.

Her Majesty Ashi Kesang Choeden Wangchuck (b. 1930) married the Third King in 1951. She is well read and studied in the House of Citizenship, London. In 1955, Her Majesty gave birth to His Majesty the Fourth Druk Gyalpo. Her Majesty is a Patron of the Arts and a staunch supporter of the conservation of culture and the environment.

(Photo: Courtesy Her Majesty Ashi Kesang Choeden Wangchuck)



His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck
(Photo: Courtesy Her Majesty Asbi Kesang Choeden Wangchuck)





*His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck
with the five multi-coloured scarf; one of
the symbols of monarchy of Bhutan.
Anonymous artist
(Courtesy: Tshering Tasbi)*



THE HEIR: THE WORLD'S YOUNGEST MONARCH

Tshering Tashi

On the 21st of July 1972 as the nation grieved the death of the Third King, his son quietly took on complete responsibility for running the nation. The boy was only seventeen years old and had no time to grieve the loss of his father. On the saddest day of his life, he became the fourth hereditary monarch of Bhutan.

DASHO JIGME: A MODERN PRINCE

Born on the 11th of November 1955, our King was the only son among four daughters. As the Crown Prince, our King was fondly addressed as Dasho Jigme.

Dasho Jigme received a unique Bhutanese education and upbringing before he became the ruler of Bhutan. He received both a modern and a traditional education. His early formative years were spent under the careful guidance of private tutors in close proximity to and under the careful supervision of his progressive parents.

Following this training and a traditional upbringing for future kings in the Royal Family, he received close and careful instructions from selected royal tutors in the fundamentals of primary education, the customs and traditions of his people, the deep

significance of religion in national life, together with the need for a sense of justice and unfailing willingness to take responsibility.¹ At the age of six, His Royal Highness began to study under the royal tutor Dorji Tshering.²

From 1962 to 1963, Dasho Jigme studied at St. Joseph's College. Better known as North Point, this school is in the hill station of Darjeeling, India. The school is widely known because of the way it was run by Jesuits. It is considered the Harrow of the East and its alumni include the royal families of Nepal, Cooch Bihar and Burdwan. Dasho studied in Class I and Mrs F. Matthew was the class teacher. Out of the twelve boys in the class, three were Bhutanese.³ Dasho Jigme, however, had to leave the school during the Sino-Indian conflict. It was rumoured that the Chinese were preparing to launch paratroopers in the nearby town of Siliguri.

After the brief stint with the Jesuits, Dasho Jigme studied in the elite Heatherdown Preparatory School in England. This school is an independent preparatory school for boys. It is near Ascot, in the English country of Berkshire. The school was a leading 'feeder school' for Eton College before



*“When HRH DASHO JIGME SINGYE WANGCHUCK was three days old JYE YONTEN TSONDUE the 62nd JYE KHENPO of Bhutan came to Dechencholing Palace to bestow his blessings on the new Crown Prince. His Holiness named the boy JIGME LBENDRUP and after consulting his birth horoscope, KENPO KUENGA GYALTSBEN, gave him the name PEMA SINGYE. Later the two names were joined together as JIGME SINGYE followed by WANGCHUCK, the dynastic name.”
(The Dharma King, Zhung Dratsbang)
(Photo: Courtesy Her Majesty Ashi Kesang Choeden Wangchuck)*

it closed down in 1982. The Prime Minister of the United Kingdom David Cameron, Prince Andrew and Prince Edward are among its alumni.⁴

Our late King wished to see his son study at home. But he respected the wishes of the Queen who wanted the heir to, “study at least some years in the UK.”⁵ While Dasho Jigme spent four years studying in England,⁶ he always spent his vacations with his parents. The King announced that “He will spend his summer vacation in Thimphu and Paro before returning to his school in England.”⁷ Dasho’s three months winter vacation was spent partly in Bhutan House in Kalimpong, Calcutta and Bhutan.

In 1969, Dasho Jigme completed his studies at Heatherdown. He returned to Thimphu on 25th

July, according to the wish of his parents. On 17th September 1969, Dasho Jigme joined his sisters and resumed his studies in Tashichhodzong under the supervision of the eminent educationist Mr J.T.M. Gibson. Twelve boys from Class VIII studied with the heir.

To mark the auspicious beginning of the 1969 school year, a tea party was held on 18th September evening at Tashichhodzong with Their Royal Majesties the King and Queen, senior officials, students of the school and Mr Gibson present. Interesting colour slides were shown on the occasion by Mr Gibson. The school was intended to remain in Thimphu until new school buildings were constructed in Paro and Trongsa.⁸



His Royal Highness turned fourteen years old on 11th November 1969. He continued his studies in the country, attending summer school at Paro and autumn school at Trongsa. Buddhism, Bhutanese language and history formed an important part of the curriculum.⁹ For a few weeks, in 1970, Dasho Jigme studied with Father William Mackey (1915-1995). The Canadian Jesuit called him 'Jimmy'. Kuensel reported that "During this time, Dasho Jigme stayed with his father at Tashichhodzong, the huge *dzong* in Thimphu that housed the national government."¹⁰

The tutoring went well and Father Mackey enjoyed it. He taught a bit of English and French plus some math and science. Jigme did not lack intelligence, but he was not very interested in school.¹¹ Father Mackey described 'Jimmy' as a good-looking boy, at the same time cute and quite distinguished in the national dress for men.¹² He was a thoughtful child and talked less on matters of less significance.¹³

As a young boy our King, "acted like the school-boy he was."¹⁴ For one thing, he didn't like homework. Father Mackey assigned some the first day. Next morning he checked the boy's work and it seemed all right. That evening he assigned more homework. The following morning he found that the homework had again been done, and quite well, but the handwriting was different. It was not difficult for the Crown Prince to find someone to do his homework for him, but the same person wasn't always available, and here he'd slipped up. He hadn't bothered to copy the work himself!¹⁵

After the brief stint with Father Mackey, Dasho Jigme moved to Paro to study in the new Ugyen Wangchuck Academy. The Academy was especially established for the purpose. While it was being built, Dasho Jigme studied in Namserling Palace in the summer and in the winter studied in Punakha. On occasion he would be joined by his mother and sisters.¹⁶

Following his education at Ugyen Wangchuck Academy he joined his father, the Third King, in

Tashichhodzong to undertake training in national administrative matters.

UGYEN WANGCHUCK ACADEMY

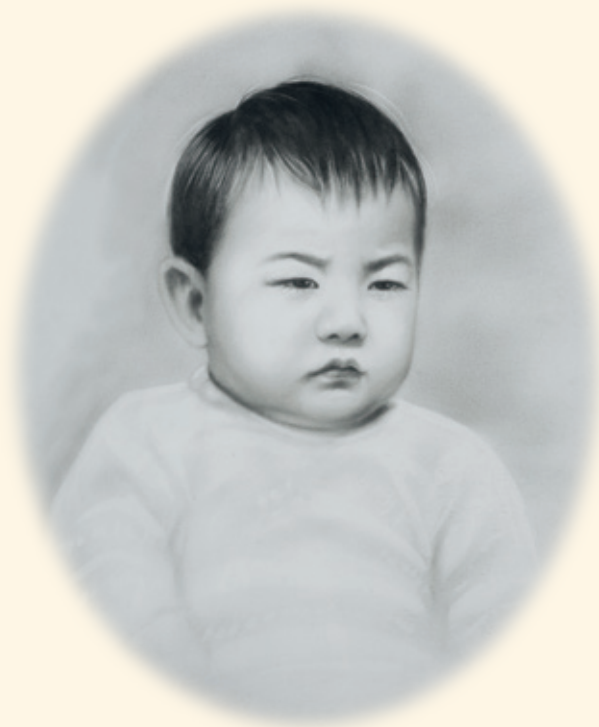
Our late King and Queen had always placed great emphasis on keeping their son closely associated with national administration as a form of training for his future duties as a king.

In 1970, Their Majesties established the Ugyen Wangchuck Academy. It was built at Paro on a wonderful site opposite Taktsang Gonpa (Tigers' Nest). Built on a cliff, the monastery is an architectural marvel. It is one of the most sacred sites in the country as it is believed that Guru Rinpoche flew on the back of a Tigress and meditated in the caves. The seventeenth century monastery is now a world heritage site.

The Academy had its roots at an Oxford dinner party in a chance meeting between Michael Rutland and a close friend of the then Queen of Bhutan, Her Majesty Ashi Kesang Choeden Wangchuck.¹⁷ In 1970 Rutland, with another Englishman, Stuart Philby, was invited by Her Majesty Ashi Kesang Choeden Wangchuck to Bhutan to help set up a small but well resourced school to be called the Ugyen Wangchuck Academy.¹⁸

A large hostel was also built for the twelve boys, including the Crown Prince, and two houses for teaching staff. It was announced that "To begin with, 12 Bhutanese boys from all over the country will study with the Crown Prince."¹⁹

Great care had been taken in the construction of the Academy, and the teaching block was a jewel of Bhutanese architecture. The main building consisted of two classrooms, a library, offices and three laboratories, for physics, chemistry and biology classes. According to Rutland, the science laboratory was well equipped, with apparatus sourced from India and the United Kingdom. The library was also very well stocked; some of the books being gifts from diplomatic missions in Delhi.



*HRH Dashi Jigme Singye Wangchuck on his tricycle.
(Photo: Courtesy Her Majesty Ashi Kesang Choeden Wangchuck)*



*HRH Dashi Jigme Singye Wangchuck posing for a
photograph in a studio in India.
(Photo: Bourne & Shepherd 141, SN Banerjee Rd
Calcutta Ref No. 64/6. Courtesy Her Majesty Ashi Kesang
Choeden Wangchuck)*



*HRH Dashi Jigme Singye Wangchuck taking His first steps.
(Photo: Courtesy Her Majesty Ashi Kesang Choeden Wangchuck)*



HRH Dasbo Jigme Singye Wangchuck enjoying His walk.
(Photo: Courtesy Her Majesty Ashi Kesang Choeden Wangchuck)



HRH Dasbo Jigme Singye Wangchuck wearing gho, the traditional dress and playing with his friends.
(Photo: Courtesy HRH Ashi Pema Lhaden Wangchuck)



*HRH Dashi Jigme Singye Wangchuck with his two sisters.
(Photo: Courtesy HRH Ashi Pema Lhamden Wangchuck)*



(Photo: Courtesy Her Majesty Ashi Kesang Choeden Wangchuck)



*HRH Dashi Jigme Singye Wangchuck in a yellow brocade gho.
(Photo: Courtesy Her Majesty Ashi Kesang Choeden Wangchuck)*



*His Majesty Jigme Dorji Wangchuck and Her Majesty Ashi Kesang Choeden Wangchuck.
(Photo: Courtesy Her Majesty Ashi Kesang Choeden Wangchuck)*



*The Ugyen Wangchuck Academy in Paro.
(Photo: Phub Dorji)*

Buddhism, Bhutanese language and history formed an important part of the curriculum at the Academy, which was situated at Paro in summer and Trongsa in the autumn. Only a few teachers taught Dasho. A Buddhist monk, Lopen Pemala taught him the traditional subjects, Headmaster Stuart Philby, who joined the Academy from the Paro Gopay School taught English, History and Geography and Michael Rutland taught Science and Mathematics.²⁰ The boys were divided into two classes and teaching the students was a new challenge and great fun. The Crown Prince fitted in like any other pupil; assiduous in his studies and often showing a piquant sense of humour.

Philby remembered clearly how he timed the Crown Prince as he rode on his new motorbike to illustrate the principles of velocity and acceleration.

Dasbo Jigme had been presented with a Japanese motorcycle, probably the first in Bhutan, and we learned about the physics of speed and acceleration by timing Dasbo as he rode the motorcycle on the road between Paro and the Ugyen Wangchuck Academy. I will recall a heart-stopping moment (for me!) when I handed Dasbo Jigme a beaker of hydrochloric acid, and he accepted it, with usual Bhutanese good manners, on the palms of his two hands... and it almost fell over!

Rutland remembers Pema Tshewang, a scholar monk popularly known as Lopen Pemala (1926-

2009) with great affection. From his everyday life, Rutland said he learnt much about the Buddhist approach to life. He also recalled with great delight how he used bamboo bows and arrows to teach some of the principles of mathematics and physics!²¹

Classes in the Ugyen Wangchuck Academy continued for the students who did not join the service of His Majesty but it closed down in 1974. The traditional two storied house still exists today.

LOCAL STUDY PROJECT AT PHUNTSHOLING

From a young age, Dasho Jigme was known to hold the welfare of his country and people at heart. Along with other students of the Ugyen Wangchuck Academy in Paro, under the direction of Mr Philby, the future King carried out a geo-political study of Phuntsholing.

The study included visits to all government departments as well as meeting and questioning the local shop-keepers and public concerning the development of Phuntsholing and the problems faced by the border town. Through the keen interest and cooperation of both the public and the government departments, the pupils were able to produce a comprehensive report on Phuntsholing and came to appreciate more fully its role in the development of Bhutan.



THE BODHISATTVA KING

The project also included a visit to Samchi to study the work being carried out by the Food Preservation Factory and the Geological Survey of India Institute. The Phuntsholing-Samchi project was the second of the series of local studies to be completed by the Academy.²²

THE CAR ACCIDENT

In 1970, Dasho Jigme met with a severe motor vehicle accident in Assam, India a few hundred miles from the border town of Phuntsholing. A senior retainer recalled that “At that time the sun almost set prematurely. I have not experienced such great anxiety in my life.”²³ The astrologers had predicted 1970 would be a black year of misfortune and their forecast proved to be accurate in regard to the severe accident in which the Crown Prince was involved.

The Queen and the King were then in Paro where they were both involved in establishing the Ugyen Wangchuck Academy, which provided an opportunity for the first time in many years for the Royal Family to get together.

Recalling the incident Dorji Gyeltshen, who was at the service of the Crown Prince, said that in November Dasho Jigme had made a quick trip to Manas Wild Life Sanctuary in South Bhutan on the week-end before his first day of attendance at the Academy. Dasho’s driver Wangda drove a left-hand drive jeep and Dasho’s companions Tobgay, Sharop Gyeltshen and Lepcha were all in the jeep when the tragic accident took place. By some miracle, Lepcha and Dasho Jigme were thrown off the jeep and escaped with minor injuries while Tobgay, Sharop Gyeltshen and Wangda were killed instantly.

The facts of the incident were detailed by B.S. Das, the first Indian ambassador to Bhutan. In his book, ‘Mission to Bhutan, a Nation in Transition’,²⁴ Mr Das talks about the accident and how it brought the Royal Family together and showed the closeness between a monarch and his son. In addition the

Queen—touched by the Indian help—opened up to them and the incident helped to develop Indo-Bhutanese friendship.

At the request of the Third King, Das arranged a helicopter in which he, Sarin, the Defence Secretary, and the King were flown to the scene of the car crash. Mr Sarin successfully arranged for a team of Indian doctors to tend to the Crown Prince and his surviving companions at the scene of the accident. Das also observed,

I have never seen the King emotional but this was a different day. He was shattered. The Queen who was in Paro rang me up and one could hear her sobbing over the phone.

None of them knew the condition of the Crown Prince till the helicopter landed in the border town of Phuntsholing. Das observed,

The king saw his son, feet covered with bandage yet standing and waiting to receive his father. Before the engine of the helicopter could be shut off, the king jumped out of the aircraft and ran to his son in tears.

The King calmed down only after embracing his son.

While his son and the team of doctors flew to Paro the King drove to the site of the accident in India to look after the injured, before returning to Paro later that same night. In Paro the Queen waited for her son and was relieved when the Indian doctors declared the Crown Prince out of danger. Das observed again, “For four days and nights the king never left his son’s bedside until everything returned back to normal.”

Dorji Gyeltshen, who later became the Royal Chamberlain, confirmed this as he also stayed up all day and night, never leaving the bedroom. He recalled that the King would hold his son’s head and that he suffered back and hand pain from sitting behind the King supporting his back. He also remembers how Dasho Jigme would often



ask for Coca-Cola to quench his thirst but never complained about any pain.

In hindsight Dorji Gyeltshen agrees with Das:

We thanked God for the miraculous escape of the heir to the throne who lived only by an act of God in being thrown out of the jeep into a soggy ditch. We were even more thankful for bringing the king and queen closer after years of misunderstanding. The queen did not need any more convincing of how much his son meant to the king.

Das, who first saw the Crown Prince when he was thirteen and saw him grow up in the four years that he was in Thimphu, made this observation of the Crown Prince: "Deep in his heart, he admired his father, the hero of his dreams." The feeling was reciprocated as the King always told Dorji Gyeltshen, "My son is the pride of my life."

Dasho Paljor J. Dorji, the cousin of the King, recounted the story of the accident which was gathered from the Crown Prince's retainers who were in a jeep following the Crown Prince's jeep. Dasho, who was then the acting judge in Paro, stated, "That was a miracle." He then described the details of the accident. The Crown Prince had fallen asleep in the front seat of the jeep and the driver had also fallen asleep and the speeding jeep ran headlong into a moving truck.

The front seat passenger should have been thrown forward, but instead the Crown Prince was thrown through the canvas window. However, his overcoat got caught in the door handle and as the coat ripped, it slowed him down but maintained sufficient velocity to propel him clear of the road and into a bush in a grassy ditch. The only injuries he sustained were from the bushes and the shock of the landing. Concluding with a look of disbelief, Dasho Paljor said, "If that was not a miracle then what is?" Dorji Gyeltshen confirmed this fact as he saw a photo of the jeep which had been almost rolled into a ball because of the impact of the crash.

Meanwhile, although his son had completely regained his health, the Third King was experiencing a bout of poor health. He wanted to see his son more often and hence every week-end Dasho Jigme drove from Paro to Thimphu in his Indian Jeep numbered RBG No 5 to serve at his father's court.

In 1971, Dorji Gyeltshen accompanied the Crown Prince to Delhi, India. He said that the King wanted to introduce his son to the Indian leaders as the future monarch of Bhutan. On 2nd April 1972 Kuensel reported,

In a recent meeting of the Lhengye Shuntsbog which consists of the Council of Ministers and Royal Advisory Council, it was decided to recommend to the king the appointment of the crown prince His Highness Jigme Singye Wangchuck as Penlop of Trongsa.

If the king accepts this recommendation, the appointment, in view of the importance will have to be approved by the National Assembly in its next session.

SPORTS

From a young age, Dasho Jigme was an active youngster. He displayed keen sportsmanship and showed great interest in the outdoors. He was a keen footballer, enjoyed marksmanship, played archery, was an excellent athlete, an adept horse rider, and was the team maker of his basketball team. He also played rugby, cricket and golf.



HRH Dasho Jigme Singye Wangchuck getting ready to shoot his rifle.
(Photo: Courtesy HRH Asbi Pema Lhaden Wangchuck)



▲
Anonymous artist
(Courtesy: Tshering Tashi)

*Crown Prince XI Claim Namgyal Wangchuk Soccer Trophy
Changlimithang (Thimphu): In a keen contest, watched by several
thousand people, the Crown Prince XI defeated Army XI by five
goals to one in the final of the Namgyal Wangchuk Trophy Soccer
Tournament at Changlimithang on August 28. Led by HRH the
Crown Prince, playing in goal, the Crown Prince XI dominated
the match throughout with calculated passes and lightning attacks
by a team of players who maintained their vital combination yet
displaying superb flexibility and individual skill.*
(Kuensel, 21 September 1971 Vol. VI No.6)

◀ HRH Dashi Jigme Singye Wangchuck was the goal keeper of his
team Crown Prince XI.



In his younger days, our King was the goalkeeper of his football team. On 28th August 1971, his team, the Crown Prince XI became the champion. In a keen contest, watched by several thousand people, the Crown Prince XI²⁵ defeated the Army XI by five goals to one in the final of the Namgyal Wangchuck Trophy Soccer Tournament at Changlimithang. Many of the shots that the Army strikers made went woefully wide of the mark, while those that did go straight were firmly grasped by HRH who was at his peak. His only lapse came when Mani managed to get within four yards of the post and slammed a beautiful shot past His Royal Highness whose vision was blocked by another player. Several other attempts on goal were beautifully foiled by His Royal Highness who made some sparkling saves.²⁶



HRH Dashi Jigme Singye Wangchuck loved animals as a child and is seen here playing with one of them.

(Photo: Courtesy Her Majesty Ashi Kesang Choeden Wangchuck)

A great football enthusiast, he enjoyed playing in goal, and it must be said that the profound aura of respect in which he was held discouraged many a shot from reaching its target! His team wore black silk football shirts with multicoloured dragons handembroidered on the back. It was during those years that football emerged as a popular sport in Bhutan.²⁷

Michael Rutland remembers a large flat area which, in one day's work, was turned into a splendid grassy football pitch. It is most likely that some of the very first football games in Bhutan were played on the grounds of the Academy.

After ascending the throne, our King continued to play sports. One observer recalls how "The only form of recreation from his unremitting duties to the state was a range of athletic activities, from soccer to archery."²⁸

INTEREST IN WILDLIFE AND NATURE

Dashi Jigme spent most of his childhood in Dechencholing Palace. He used to picnic and play in the woods, which were teeming with wild animals. From a young age Dashi Jigme showed interest in animals and studied their behaviour. He even reared birds and silk worms.

Father Mackey was impressed by the mini-zoo at the Palace, apparently Jigme's project. There seemed to be about thirty or more different animals, especially young animals—tiger cubs and other wild cats, jackals, monkey and a great variety of birds. Father Mackey learned that the boy had taken part in catching many of these animals. His father had passed on a great interest and knowledge of wildlife and nature.²⁹ He had an otter and a dog named Lucy as his pet.³⁰



DECHEN CHOLING

Thimphu

Bhutan

Dear Granny

I hope you
 are all well. My rick worms all
~~had~~ have come out and
 they are all laying eggs.
 I am sorry that I did not
 write to you. I have been
 swimming a lot up here.
 We have been staying in
 Thumpos for some few.
 We are going to Pono
 today with Paddy. I heard
 that there is a white
 deer up near Poverampo.

(Photo: Courtesy Her Majesty Ashi Kesang Choeden Wangchuck)



*HRH Dasbo Jigme Singye Wangchuck with Her Majesty Asbi Kesang Choeden Wangchuck, HRH Asbi Dechen Wangmo Wangchuck and grandmother Rani Choni Wongmo Dorji in Kalimpong.
(Photo: Courtesy Her Majesty Asbi Kesang Choeden Wangchuck)*





THIRD KING AS ROLE MODEL

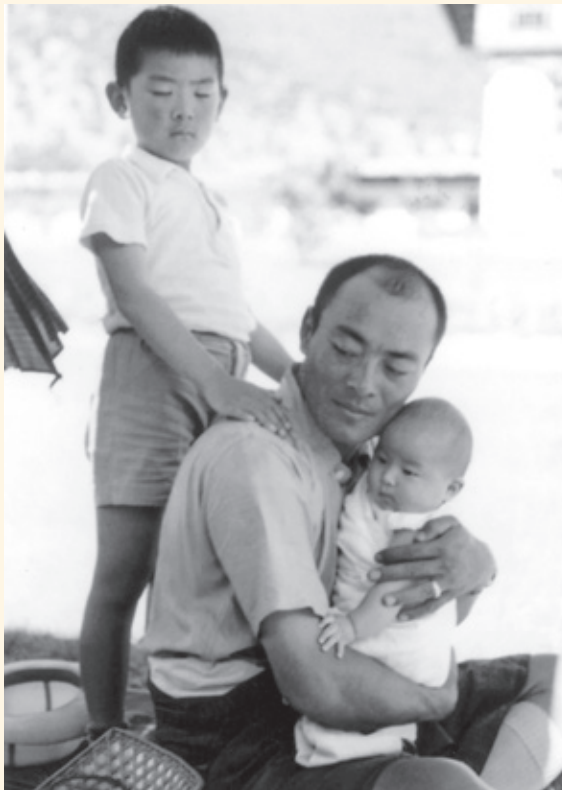
The Third King himself had had an early start³¹ in his own training at his father's royal court,³² where he had received "practical instructions from his father and court officials on Bhutan's rich tradition of custom and etiquette and had maintained meticulous notes."³³ The Crown Prince now began similar training from his father. According to the traditions of Bhutan's royal lineage, he served as an attendant in his father's court, and helped in discharging royal functions.

As the senior most retainer in Dasho Jigme's court, Dorji Gyeltshen accompanied his young master from the Ugyen Wangchuck Academy in Paro to Thimphu every week-end. (He said that he learnt later that both the Queen and the King had been closely monitoring his behaviour before he received the stamp of approval from the King to hold this responsible position.)

After completing his studies at the Academy, Dasho Jigme worked in the court of his father full time, being groomed as the next leader. It was during his time at his father's court, that he was thoroughly immersed in the rich culture and tradition of the country.

It was reported that after six months the Crown Prince would proceed to the United Kingdom for a year's further studies before returning to Bhutan to join His Majesty the King and Their Royal Highness Ashi Sonam and Ashi Dechhen in Tashichhodzong in the service of the nation.³⁴ The early years of the Crown Prince's life under the guidance of his father took on a special significance because these precious personal interactions were to last only sixteen years.³⁵

By 1972 the Third King was confident that "Even if I am not there, my Jigme can rule this country well. You know he has a great destiny ahead."³⁶



*HRH Dasho Jigme Singye Wangchuck with his father and sister HRH Ashi Kesang Wangmo Wangchuck.
(Photo: Courtesy Her Majesty Ashi Kesang Choeden Wangchuck)*

◀ *HRH Dasho Jigme Singye Wangchuck with his parents and sisters.
(Photo: Her Majesty Ashi Kesang Choeden Wangchuck)*



VISITS

The Crown Prince accompanied his father to far-flung corners of the country. This was part of his training. By travelling the length and breadth of the country for long periods he learnt about his people and the true state of the country. By travelling outside the country, he learnt diplomatic skills and about the world.

In August 1969, he had accompanied his father to Darjeeling, where the King was receiving dental treatment.³⁷ In December of that year they both made a brief visit to Switzerland.³⁸ After the state visit to Bhutan by the President of India, Shri V.V.Giri, from the 23rd to the 28th of April 1970, His Majesty the Third King paid an official state visit to New Delhi. He was accompanied by Dasho Jigme. They remained in Delhi from the 7th to the 12th of April 1970.³⁹ In a colourful ceremony at the Rashtrapati Bhawan, Delhi on 11th April, H.E. the President of India Mr V.V. Giri, presented two horses, Sujata and Rustom to HRH Jigme Singye Wangchuck, Crown Prince of Bhutan. The presentation took place in the Moghul Gardens after a reception in HM the Druk Gyalpo's honour.⁴⁰



*HRH Dasho Jigme Singye Wangchuck playing with his puppy.
(Photo: Courtesy Her Majesty Ashi Kesang Choeden Wangchuck)*



Dasho Jigme loved animals in general and dogs in particular. He spent a lot of time with them and some dogs even slept with him on the bed. From an early age, our King demonstrated compassion. In Buddhism, compassion expands to all sentient beings and thus his love for animals was a natural manifestation of his boundless being.



◀ HRH Dasbo Jigme Singye Wangchuck holding his hunting dog. (Photo: Courtesy Her Majesty Asbi Kesang Choeden Wangchuck)

One of Dasho's favourite dogs was Norbu, a small Apso predominately white with shades of blue. The other dogs that Dasho Jigme was fond of were Sintu, Dema and also Basay, a black hunting dog who even appeared in a photo with Dasho Jigme in Kuensel Vol. III, No. 24 dated 31st December 1969. Dasho Jigme took the dogs with him wherever he travelled both within the country and in India.

The Third King enjoyed hunting. Dasho Jigme used to accompany his father on most of these hunting trips and took all his dogs with him. The Third King was not particularly fond of dogs but took care of them in his son's absence. While his son was away studying, the King himself took on the responsibility of looking after the dogs and personally supervised their meals. The King expected the best service for his son's dogs.





*HRH Dasbo Jigme Singye Wangchuck sharing a simple meal with his father His Majesty Jigme Dorji Wangchuck.
(Photo: Courtesy Her Majesty Ashi Kesang Choeden Wangchuck)*



HRH Dasbo Jigme Singye Wangchuck during a trek in the mountains of North Bhutan.

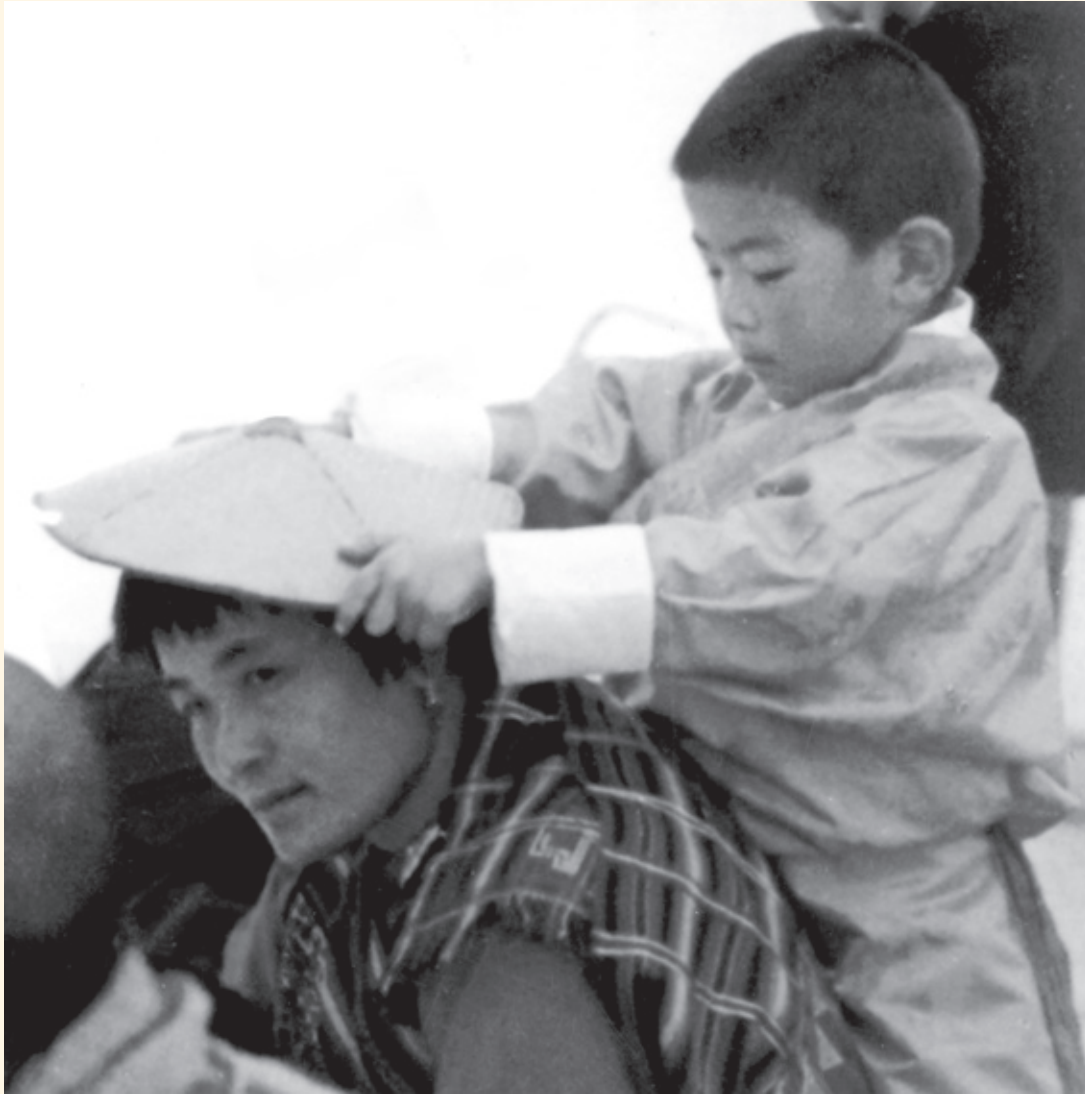
(Photo: Courtesy HRH Asbi Pema Lbaden Wangchuck)



HRH Dasbo Jigme Singye Wangchuck with his father the Third Druk Gyalpo in the mountains in North Bhutan.

(Photo: Courtesy HRH Asbi Pema Lbaden Wangchuck)





*HRH DASHO JIGME SINGYE WANGCHUCK WITH HIS GRANDMOTHER HER MAJESTY ASHI PHUNTSHO CHODEN WANGCHUCK.
(PHOTO: COURTESY HER MAJESTY ASHI KESANG CHOEDEN WANGCHUCK)*



*HRH Dashi Jigme Singye Wangchuck and his sister, HRH Ashi Pema Laden Wangchuck with their father, His Majesty Jigme Dorji Wangchuck, grandmother Her Majesty Ashi Phuntsbo Choden Wangchuck, uncles Lyonchen Jigme Palden Dorji and Dashi Lhendup Dorji and senior government officials.
(Photo: Courtesy Dashi Tobgye Dorji)*





*His Royal Highness the Crown Prince to work with His Majesty
"His Royal Highness Jigme Singye Wangchuck, the Crown Prince of Bhutan has commenced to work with His Majesty the King in Tashichhodzong, Thimphu from this month for period of six months, after which he will proceed to the United Kingdom for a year's further studies. On completion of his studies, His Royal Highness will return to Bhutan and join His Majesty the King and Their Royal Highness Ashi Sonam and Ashi Dechen in Tashichhodzong in the service of the nation. His Royal Highness, a keen footballer and horseman, has till now been studying at the Ugyen Wangchuck Academy in Paro."
(Kuensel, 19 March 1972, Vol. VI No.30)
(Photo: Courtesy Tsbering Tashi)*



His Royal Highness Dasho Jigme Singye Wangchuck during the meeting between President V.V. Giri and His Majesty Jigme Dorji Wangchuck in 1970.

(Photo: Courtesy Tsbering Tashi)



*"I don't see any essential breakage from my father's line of thinking. With the changing times some policies necessarily have to change. My father began the development process. In my time, there has been consolidation of the government, with emphasis on the creation of a small and efficient administration. What is important is to face challenges that will arise, and it is my job to produce and display the necessary qualities of leadership to my people. This year has been earmarked as the year for consolidation of government." His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck (Asiaweek, 27 September 1985)
(Photo: Courtesy Tshering Tasbi)*



*Like his father His Majesty was also a great athlete and enjoyed sports.
(Photo: Courtesy Tshering Tasbi)*



THE BODHISATTVA KING

“For the first time in her history Bhutan celebrated National Day on December 17th, 1971, on the 64th anniversary of the ascension to the Throne of His Majesty Ugyen Wangchuck, the first hereditary King of Bhutan in the Royal House of Wangchuck.

In Thimphu, a grand function was organized at Changlimithang ground befitting the importance of the occasion. Special tents were set up on either side of the Royal Pavilion and the whole area was colourfully decorated with festoons and flags. Members of the Royal Family, Ministers and Senior Executives of the Royal Government, invited guests which included H.E. Mr B.S. Das, Representative of India in Bhutan and Mrs Das, and a good number of public were present at 10 a.m. when His Royal Highness the Crown Prince Jigme Singye Wangchuck arrived.

After their arrival, His Royal Highness the Crown Prince unfurled the National Flag and the entire gathering sang the National Anthem of Bhutan. His Royal Highness took salute as men of the Royal Body Guards, Royal Bhutan Army presented arms.”
(Kuensel, 19 December 1971, Vol. VI No. 17)

Ceremonial Colours for RBG and RBA

In 1971, Dasbo Jigme represented his father at all the official functions during the Army Sports Celebration. The function held from 1st to 7th October was an historic event. This is because, for the first time, the Royal Body Guards and the Royal Bhutan Army presented the royal salute to Dasbo, who banded the armed forces their respective colours. It was also historic as it was the first time Dasbo Jigme attended an event of such importance.

“The Army Sports Week 1971 proved to be a week of military pageantry, full of fun and excitement... The week opened with perhaps the finest military parade in the Army’s history... On the opening day, the 9th of October, HRH looking very smart in a red beret, received for the first time the Royal Salute from the combined parade.”
(Kuensel, 19 December 1971 Vol. VI No.17)
(Photo: Courtesy Tshering Tashi)





His Royal Highness the Crown Prince installed as Trongsa Penlop
"In one of the most important ceremonies that Bhutan has seen in several decades, His Royal Highness Jigme Singye Wangchuck, Crown Prince of Bhutan, was installed as the Trongsa Penlop (Governor) in a short but impressive ceremony in the Throne Room of Tashichhodzong, Thimphu in the presence of His Majesty, all members of the Royal Family, His Holiness the Jey Khempo, the Council of Ministers, senior lamas of the Central Monk Body, the Indian Representative in Bhutan His Excellency Mr Ashoke B. Gokhale, His Excellency the Swiss Ambassador to New Delhi, Mr Fritz Real, Mr Fritz von Schultbess and senior dignitaries of Bhutan on the morning of 15 May, 1972."
(Kuensel, 21 May 1972, Vol. VI No.39)
(Photo: Courtesy Tsbering Tashi)



TRONGSA PENLOP

At the age of seventeen, Dasho Jigme was installed as the Trongsa Penlop. Historically, the post of Trongsa Penlop is of great importance. Before the establishment of the hereditary monarchy the Trongsa Penlop held the real power in Bhutan. This ceremony can be compared to that of the installation ceremony of the Prince of Wales in Great Britain and the ‘coming of age’ ceremony of the crown prince of Nepal. On his installation as the Trongsa Penlop, His Royal Highness was regarded as the heir to the Bhutanese Throne.⁴¹

The deeper significance of the ceremony is that before becoming the first hereditary ruler of Bhutan in 1907, the Crown Prince’s great-grandfather His Majesty King Ugyen Wangchuck (1862-1926) was the Penlop of Trongsa. As Kuensel reported, “Since then each Crown Prince of Bhutan has always been installed as the Trongsa Penlop signifying his true heritage to the Throne.”⁴²

In 1972, the Lhengye Shuntshog⁴³ or the special cabinet, recommended the appointment of the Crown Prince as the Trongsa Penlop.⁴⁴ The recommendation was based on two premises. The first was that the Crown Prince had reached the age of eighteen (according to the lunar calendar). Secondly, that Dasho Jigme was intelligent and mature enough to assume higher responsibilities. It was the first time that the National Assembly had passed a resolution offering the rank to a member of the royal dynasty of Bhutan.⁴⁵

His Majesty the Third King Jigme Dorji Wangchuck accepted the recommendation and in the spring session, the National Assembly approved it by a majority vote 150-4.⁴⁶ On 15th May 1972, our Crown Prince was installed as the Trongsa Penlop. For decades, our parents had not seen such an important ceremony. Official who organised and witnessed the event describe it as a short but impressive ceremony. Most of the formalities were held in the Throne Room in Tashichhodzong in Thimphu.

The most significant part of the ceremony is when the Crown Prince bows down before his father and receives the ceremonial scarf. The scarf marks the defining moment of the ceremony and from that point on, the Crown Prince is officially the Trongsa Penlop, and is equivalent in rank to that of a Minister, and he formally becomes the heir to the Golden Throne.

Our late King, members of the Royal Family, heads of the clergy and the Council of Ministers attended the function. The Indian Representative in Bhutan, the Swiss Ambassador and our late King’s good friend Mr Fritz von Schulthess and senior dignitaries of Bhutan were also present on the morning of 15th May 1972.⁴⁷

The Bhutan national newspaper Kuensel reported:

On the morning of May 15, 1972 the route from the Dzong bridge [to the Palace] was lined with lamas from Punakha and Trongsa, red scarf officers from all over the country, soldiers of the Royal Body Guards dressed in the traditional costumes of ancient warriors of Bhutan; dancers, flag bearers, musicians and soldiers in modern olive green uniforms.

After the ceremony, the press reporters and photographers were admitted for three minutes to take photographs and record this historic occasion. This was followed by three-day (16, 17, 18 May) celebrations held at Changlimithang grounds to felicitate His Royal Highness on his installation as Trongsa Penlop. After the celebrations, the Royal Family hosted a grand reception at the Dechencholing Palace.⁴⁸

Dorji Gyeltshen remembers clearly that the King had sent a set of clothes, the scarf and a sword for his son to wear for the investiture ceremony. Dasho Jigme, wearing his father’s outfit, was escorted in a lively and colourful traditional procession through the inner courtyard of the Thimphu Dzong on his way to the Throne Room for the installation ceremony.



*HRH the Trongsa Penlop Jigme Singye Wangchuck after receiving the multi-coloured scarf; one of the symbols of monarchy during his Trongsa Penlop investiture ceremony.
(Photo: Courtesy Her Majesty Ashi Kesang Choeden Wangchuck)*



THE BODHISATTVA KING

Kuensel reported that,

As His Royal Highness entered the Throne Room, the king was seated on the Golden Throne to receive him. Dasbo Jigme bowed before his father and received the ceremonial scarf which signifies his true rank as the Trongsa Penlop. Then, the king left the throne and Dasbo Jigme ascended it.⁴⁹

INSIGHTS

What many people did not realise is that the Third King had handed over his responsibility as the King during the investiture ceremony of the Trongsa Penlop. Before the installation of his son as the Trongsa Penlop, the King told Dorji Gyeltshen,

'For all purposes the Trongsa Penlop is the fourth king of Bhutan. From this day onwards, he will function as a king. The official coronation can take place at a later date,' so the Trongsa Penlop ceremony was actually the coronation ceremony of the Fourth King.⁵⁰

Almost prophetic about his own death, the third Druk Gyalpo publicly appointed the Crown Prince as Trongsa Ponlop on an auspicious day of the third month of Water Male Rat year, 1972. But it was in fact, the coronation of his successor.⁵¹

TRONGSA RECEPTION

Trongsa in Central Bhutan is the birthplace of our Third King. In addition to being the old seat of power, the district is known for its natural beauty that is a part of our colourful and historic heritage.

On 15th June 1972, the people of Trongsa officially received the heir in a short but dignified *shugdel*⁵² ceremony in the 'inner sanctum' or *Zimchung* within the solid ramparts of Trongsa Dzong. With the official reception, the Trongsa Penlop now stepped into the role of the rightful heir and received the official status of future King of Bhutan.

Henceforth he would assume important duties and began training for the role of monarch which he would one day become. Not only was it an important milestone in the life of the young prince and Penlop, it was also significant for the people of Bhutan in that he had now become accepted

officially. The people were fully assured of a true heir to the throne to which they gave their willing allegiance and service, for they realised that in a secure monarchy lay the progressive future of their nation, Bhutan.⁵³

CHAIRMAN OF THE PLANNING COMMISSION



HRH the Trongsa Penlop Jigme Singye Wangchuck receiving the salute during the Trongsa Penlop investiture ceremony at Tashichhodzong, Thimphu.

(Photo: Courtesy Tsbering Tashi)

While Dasho Jigme learnt statecraft by serving as an attendant in his father's court, he learnt about politics and governance by attending cabinet and official meetings. In 1971, the Planning Commission was established. The erstwhile organisation, now the Gross National Happiness Commission, was the nerve centre of the Government. The organisation's main responsibility was to formulate socio-economic development policies and oversee the implementation of the five-year socio-economic development plans.



HRH the Trongsa Penlop Jigme Singye Wangchuck inspecting a guard of honour after becoming the Trongsa Penlop.



*During a ceremony at Trongsa Dzong, Dasbo Keiji Nishoka was invited as a guest for the Trongsa Penlop's investiture ceremony and took this photo.
(Photo Courtesy: Satoko Nishoka)*



Dasho Jigme was only seventeen years old when he was appointed the Chairman of the Planning Commission on 3rd April 1972, and he remained its chair until 1991. This was his first formal public service role. Records and results show that the Crown Prince executed this responsibility with verve and flair.

DEATH OF THE THIRD KING

On the 21st of July 1972 our Third King passed away at the age of forty-four in Nairobi, Kenya. Dasho Jigme was with him and flew back to Bhutan with the mortal remains. Three days later, His Majesty succeeded to the Golden Throne of Bhutan as the Fourth Druk Gyalpo.

After the untimely death of third Druk Gyalpo, the Royal Advisory Council and the cabinet called upon the Crown Prince to take the reins of the country. Subsequently on July 24, 1972 in the 321st dyelo, a low key coronation ceremony was conducted in Tashichbodzong.⁵⁴

This initial investiture was marked by

...natural and wonderful auspicious signs that were never witnessed during the period of foregoing Kings. Internally, on 24th of July, 1972, corresponding to the 13th of the 6th month of the Water Rat Year, after three days from the expiry of His Majesty the Third King, the following Ministers, the High Court, the Royal Advisory Council as a connection between the Government and the People and the Armed Forces, being fully responsible for the country, submitted the following petition, on the basis of Bhutan's 1907 undertaking, and vested the responsibilities of the new King (in the then Trongsa Penlop).⁵⁵

The oath was signed by the King and eighteen people.⁵⁶ The list consisted of senior officers of the Government, Council of Ministers, representatives of the judiciary and clergy, and representatives for the people of East, South and West Bhutan, including representatives of the religious organisations and armed forces.

Your Royal Highness the Trongsa Penlop

With humble respects, we submit that the country being unable to endure the merits of our Third Hereditary King His Majesty Jigme Dorji Wangchuck, His Majesty's reign has abruptly come to an end at the place of his treatment. Therefore, we the Royal Advisory Council, the Council of Ministers and the following signatories, representing the nation, ministers and the general public, starting this day the 24th July, 1972, corresponding to 13th of the 6th month of Water Rat Year of the Sixteenth Rabjung, offer our unreserved undertaking, in Tashichho Dzong the capital of the country, vesting the full secular responsibilities of the country in Your Highness the Trongsa Penlop Jigme Singye Wangchuck. Submitted on behalf of the nation on the 13th of the 6th month of Water Rat Year. Thus, the initial investiture was conducted.⁵⁷

The origin of the 1972 oath has its roots in the 1907 Oath of Allegiance. Almost seven decades earlier, the people of Bhutan decided unanimously to elect the Trongsa Penlop Ugyen Wangchuck as the First King of Bhutan and make the title hereditary. The oath had forty-four seals and the King's cousin, Gongzim Ugyen Dorji presented it to the Trongsa Penlop.

As Yab Ugyen Dorji (father-in-law of the Fourth King) stated,

With the sudden demise of King Jigme Dorji Wangchuck, His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck was swept into public duty. The youth and adolescence he might have enjoyed were soon overshadowed by the leadership he had to exercise.⁵⁸

The people of Bhutan and the world at large watched His Majesty the King take over the reins of the country with complete poise and aplomb.⁵⁹

After the death of his father, His Majesty's displayed a remarkable maturity and dignity. In his actions, he unified every level of society, each rank of Government, in the tremendous task he had to perform to the last sacred rites. For it was indeed a task of enormous proportions to be thrust upon his young shoulders. But in the true tradition of his



late father, His Majesty balked at nothing and with confidence and clarity of thought and intention went ahead and performed this last duty to a father and king.

The highest tribute to the memory of His late Majesty Jigme Dorji Wangchuck is manifested in His Majesty King Jigme Singye Wangchuck.⁶⁰ Prime Minister Indira Gandhi of India:

the richest legacy of His Majesty Jigme Dorji Wangchuck is his worthy son, and successor, His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck in whose hands now rests the destiny of Bhutan.

YOUNG KINGS

Since the coronation of the First King in 1907, Bhutan has had five kings. There has been no glitch when a leadership transition took place. Interestingly, all of them were groomed and ascended the throne when they were young. For example, our First King became Trongsa Penlop at the age of twenty-one and at the age of forty-five he became king. Likewise our Second King was appointed as the Trongsa Penlop at the age of eighteen and became king at the age of twenty-one. Similarly, our Third King was installed as the Paro Penlop at the age of seventeen and was enthroned as king at the age of twenty-four.

The Wangchuck dynasty has always been good at succession planning and believed in the maxim, “The son exceeds the Father.”⁶¹ As Kuensel concluded, “Despite the early age at which each king gained high office they did not fail in their tasks in the least degree and even exceeded those of other men.”⁶²

On becoming the Fourth King of Bhutan, the succession followed a pattern inherent in the Royal Family’s history in that he was only seventeen years old at the time. Like all his predecessors and successors, the Fourth King was already well groomed and within two years Kuensel reported that the young King had “clearly illustrated his obvious qualities of firmness, wisdom, clarity of thought

and judgment and a trait of leadership in which his people place an absolute and united confidence.”⁶³ On succeeding his late father as King, the first order of business for His Majesty King Jigme Singye Wangchuck was to console and reassure his subjects. Therefore he spoke as follows:

... just as we, having been born will all have to die one day, it should be remembered that my father has only succumbed to the transient nature of worldly existence.

Our grief is also somewhat lessened when we recall that during the period of His Majesty’s lifetime, besides serving him well and with full loyalty, none of us acted other than in accordance with his wishes. Now there is no benefit to be gained by abiding in our grief and I am sure it would be much better if, instead, you all prayed for his departed soul.

During His late Majesty’s reign all his actions were qualified by his desire to benefit the nation. It is as a result of this that Bhutan, from being a remote and isolated country, has now entered the forefront of the world affairs. All of you are aware that His late Majesty not only acted for the present and immediate welfare of the country, but also looked to its future security as well.

With regard to the cremation rites of my late father, Thimphu as the capital may be seen as the most fitting place for its performance. However, when His Majesty was suffering an illness at Phuntsholing last year he said that all his forebears had been cremated at the temple of Kurjey Lhakhang in Bumthang, he himself would be very pleased if later the same could be done for him. The preparations we are making for His late Majesty’s cremation ceremonies at Kurjey Lhakhang are therefore in accordance with his will.

In respect of the Government works which we share and which have to be undertaken from now on, I feel that for sometime it would be best to continue with the wise policies laid down by my father.

Although, I myself do not possess the wide experience in Government work, I shall be able to consult with the Royal Advisory Council and with the Lhungye Shungtsbog.^[64] In addition to this, it will be convenient to refer important matters of state to the bi-annual meetings of the Assembly. Speaking for myself, I have an earnest desire to



THE BODHISATTVA KING

serve our beloved country and its people as best as I can with all powers. I also hope that all of you, the Monks of the state monasteries, the Government servants and the public, will assist me as well as you can, as you assisted my late father.

I would like to say that I hope very much that our relations with the Government of India, who have been assisting us as well as it can be up to the present, will now grow even stronger.

The state of peace and happiness which our country has been able to enjoy up to the present is in general due to the fact that, since ours is a Buddhist country, everyone is able to give recognition to the Lord Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha and therefore believe in the Law of Cause and Effect.

In particular our condition of peace and happiness is due to the strong and undefiled sense of faith and loyalty which existed between Ruler and subjects. I believe that if the Monk Body, the Government servants and the public gave careful consideration to the welfare of the Kingdom with full loyalty, the Kingdom will be able to enjoy its state of peace and prosperity for long time to come.⁶⁵

According to the wishes of his father as articulated in this eulogy, our King fulfilled the sacred duty of cremating his father in Kurjey monastery on 28th October 1972.

REGENCY COUNCIL

In 1970, the National Assembly during its 32nd session drew up an Agreement to appoint a council of regents. Clause 7 of this Agreement stated that if a crown prince should succeed to the throne on the death of his father before attaining the age of twenty-one, while the crown prince should be enthroned king, a council of regents consisting of four members should be appointed by the National Assembly.

His Majesty commanded the National Assembly to pass a resolution as to the appointment of the members of this council with the following decree:

I concurred with this resolution since I am not yet 21. With regard to the question of regency, in Clause No. 7 of an Agreement drawn up by this Assembly there is a provision for the appointment

of a Council of Regency to be appointed by this Assembly which will stand till I reach 21 years of age. It will be very useful if you can pass a resolution as to who should be appointed to this Council of Regency.⁶⁶

The National Assembly discussed the issue and a unanimous decision was reached without need of debate, to the effect that, since the aforesaid agreement was originally drawn up with the case in mind of a crown prince of too young an age to reign in a proper manner. In view of the fact that the Crown Prince was now eighteen years of age and fully capable of reigning, and taking into consideration the fact that he himself had given a clear declaration to the Assembly that he intended to follow the policies laid down by his late father, the entire public was overjoyed and with full faith submitted that it would be most grateful if His Majesty would take upon himself the right to rule.

It was therefore decided that the council of regents as provided for in the Agreement drawn up and passed by the Assembly in 1970 would not be appointed. This was a historic moment as it was the first session of the National Assembly that our King attended formally as the King of Bhutan.⁶⁷ In his address to the assembly, our King said,

You ... have vested me with the powers of a Ruler. I have little experience but I shall rely upon the sound judgment of this august body, and endeavour to serve the nation to the best of my ability. Till now, all our achievements have been due to the selfless dedication and generosity of our late King who led the country so nobly till he passed away peacefully.

Our country's independence has been due to the blessings of the Lord Buddha, our guardian deities and our forefathers. Also, we owe this to the strong and undefiled faith between the Ruler, the Monk Body, the Government and the people. Therefore, despite the facts that the source of our happiness and our beloved parent has left us, if we continue to maintain this bond, it would far enhance national progress. His Late Majesty's primary desire was that this country should enjoy greater peace and prosperity. If we keep this in mind and tread the path that he showed us, we can be confident of achieving our unified aim.⁶⁸



VOTE OF CONFIDENCE

On 13th November 1968, King Jigme Dorji Wangchuck had circulated a document to the National Assembly members, which stated:

During the last Spring Session of the National Assembly, I had expressed my desire to form a Government combining the monarchial and democratic systems in order to ensure stability and solidarity of the country.

The document further stated,

In the case of misunderstanding between the king and the people or if the king resorts to repression, the people instead of rebelling should convene the National Assembly. The king will have to abdicate if either a majority or a three fourth majority vote against him.⁶⁹

The vote, to be held every three years, was introduced by the Assembly during the 30th session after it was personally proposed by His late Majesty the King Jigme Dorji Wangchuck.⁷⁰

VOTE OF CONFIDENCE WITHDRAWN

In 1973, the 39th session of the National Assembly in a spontaneous and unanimous decision, did away with the system of a vote of confidence in the king. Right at the beginning of this session, deliberations on the matter began and the decision was agreed upon by all members that His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck, Fourth hereditary King of Bhutan, had the complete confidence and overwhelming loyalty of the people, and as such, the vote of confidence in him by the Assembly were wholly unnecessary.⁷¹

Kuensel reported that

The recent action of the National Assembly members, themselves capable persons in possession of the people's confidence and support, in doing away with the vote of confidence in the king has manifestly proven that in the one year of his reign, His Majesty has shown his most obvious qualities of leadership. Many may have harbored misgivings at the outset that a king so young and inexperienced would be able to continue the happy

trend of development and change set in motion by his father, a man who set in permanent objective of raising the standard of living of his people.⁷²

His Majesty the King, the only son of enlightened, progressive parents, was fortunate in that he began to receive the necessary training for his future role in life at an early age from a master of statesmanship, diplomacy and national administration. That he assimilated this careful instruction, which complemented his natural talents and the virtues of his lineal blood, cannot be disputed. The impulsive and ill-advised temperament of so many youths was not part of his mental make-up. Rather, selflessness, devotion to his people and self-sacrifice have been the hallmarks of his rule and the measuring standard of his actions. He has become the living symbol of these epoch-making times when Bhutan has increasingly forged ahead with his able hands at the helm of affairs.⁷³

Kuensel reported that,

Under Point Number 1 of the decisions reached during the 29th session held in November 1968, all decisions of the National Assembly are treated as final. Therefore, this historical action by the members in doing away with the vote of confidence in the king, also remains final. This spontaneous and unanimous agreement by the members is well justified by the unhesitating and mutual love, respect and devotion that exists between the king, and his people. Beyond doubt, this decision will be welcomed heartily by all sections of the people.⁷⁴

A heavy burden lay on the shoulders of the young King. Fortunately, he had inherited the shrewdness, wisdom and farsightedness of his late father.⁷⁵

CORONATION

In Bhutan, there are three types of coronations; the *Chi*, *Nang* and *Sang*—or the outer, inner and secret coronations. While an initial investiture was held on the 24th of July 1972, three days after the death of his father, the actual coronations were held later.



On June 2, 1974, King Jigme Singye Wangchuck, the world's youngest ruling monarch, will be publicly crowned the King of Druk Yul, the Dragon Kingdom. The country is agog with excitement and preparation, writes **DESMOND DOIG**, recently returned from a pre-Coronation visit to Bhutan.



HIS MAJESTY IS EIGHTEEN



"**H**E'S a terrific chap," said the young Bhutanese I met on the way to Thimphu, Bhutan's capital. "He mixes freely with everyone but keeps a correct distance. He knows his job and that's saying something. Everyone respects him: he has his late father's interest in everything and everyone, and he's a natural sportsman—football, shooting, horse-riding, archery, basketball, boxing, you name it." The young man, himself hardly older than the King, looked as if he had just abandoned some exotic game, with his tousled hair escaping from under a plastic crash helmet and a denim jacket flung carelessly over a tight-fitting track suit. I wondered if all young Bhutan looked like this as, when I had last visited the country, just two years before, all Bhutanese, young and old, wore traditional hairstyles.

As if sensing my curiosity, the young man smilingly informed me that, though it was still considered an offence (Rs 500 fine on the spot) to wear other than Bhutanese clothes in public, there had been a general relaxing of such carping rules as how long to grow one's hair, what to wear, and when to wear it. "Really, long hair is out, even for girls," he said, "and you won't see me dressed like this when I'm on duty."

A few days later I watched the King playing football on a field below the Palace, sounding and looking like any of the other young players. He was goalkeeper for his team and if the opposing side was being respectfully considerate for His Majesty's person (Bhutanese football is a special tough variety), it didn't show. The only sug-

OVER ▼

The young King at work and play. Photographs by **RAJESH BEDI**.



(Photo: Courtesy Malcolm Lyell)



In keeping with the monarchy's traditions the first 'sacred inner' coronation was held in Punakha. The ceremony took place in the Machen Lhakhang or the room where the mummy of Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal (1594-1651) is kept. Entry to this sacred room is restricted and only the Je Khenpo, the King and the chamberlain of the Zhabdrung are allowed entry. The highlight of this ceremony was when the King received the five-coloured scarf. On 27th November 1972, coinciding with 21st of the 10th month of the Water Rat year, the 67th Je Khenpo Ninzer Trulku Thinley Lhendup [d.2005] offered Tashi Monlam and Shudel Phunsum Tshokpa.⁷⁶

The second 'secret' coronation was held over a year later in Thimphu:

...in the Throne Room of Tashichho Dzong on 10th January 1974 at the hour of the Tiger, the day of the Tiger and the month of the Tiger in the Male Wood Tiger Year. Just as the Second Buddha, Guru Padma Jungney bestowed the Ngawang Rinchen Barwai Wangkur (the Blazing Jewel of Sovereignty) upon Chogyal Trisong Deutsen of Tibet in Samye Chimphu, on the same day i.e. at the hour of the Tiger, the day of the Tiger, the month of the Tiger and the year of the Tiger, His Holiness Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, the mind incarnation of Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo, bestowed this same Ngawang Rinchen Barwai Wangkur upon His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck.⁷⁷

In a hereditary monarchy, on the death of the King, the first-born prince becomes the king automatically. If so, then one could argue there is actually no need to vest him with powers and the title. The Bhutanese argue that the investiture ceremony is essential and important.

Hearing one's popularity is the essence of happiness, so the worldly saying goes. Therefore the investiture ceremony is essential for making one's name known in all directions. It is also necessary (for the King) to undertake activities for the country that is higher than Mount Meru through one's powers. Internally, he is the supreme ruler of the gods, nagas and the people. He is also the wizened man of the world. Representing the powers, prosperity, wealth, life and the merits of the Four Guardian Deities, the

sun, the moon and the Brahmans, are the various auspicious articles. Through their natural powers, the profound truths are ensconced in the subject by way of rituals. Both internal and external empowerment of auspicious fortune is widely accepted requirement.

As per the secret code, when Lord Buddha neared his passage into Nirvana, the Buddhas from the ten directions blessed him with great rays which resulted in the immediate attainment of Buddhahood. Here too, the essence of the powers and blessings of the Buddhas and Boddhisattvas of the ten directions are fused together and blessings offered for the king to be bestowed with powers for the fulfilment of immense interests of the country and the secular system; for bringing the external world under control; for subduing the three transmigratory worlds; and finally for the attainment of ultimate bliss. Therefore, the bestowal of powers is a matchless requirement. With the external, internal and secret empowerment ceremony leading to the subduing of the three transmigratory worlds, one's physical state becoming supreme in the external world, the need for conducting the investiture ceremony [is hence justified].⁷⁸

It was a move that paid off in manifold ways. His Majesty introduced into the Wangchuck reign the vibrant freshness of youth and renewed determination for national achievement. That youth belied the wisdom, clarity of thought and foresight, the mature imagination and noble integrity which oils and accelerates his people's rapid progress into greater and brighter vistas of development and prosperity. His Majesty has more than filled the temporary void in royal leadership created by his father's sudden demise.⁷⁹

The third 'outer' or public coronation of His Majesty, held on 2nd June 1974, was not only a grand occasion of pomp and pageantry, but a historically significant ceremony in which his people found a common expression of their unity and ethnic identity. He had become to them a living symbol of their times, a king who was no more a figure-head but the very essence of their hearts, their aspirations, their future purpose. To the world, he demonstrated royal leadership, a kind which one finds very rarely today.⁸⁰



*His Majesty delivering the coronation speech to the people of Bhutan at the Changlimithang ground on 3 June 1974.
(Photo: Courtesy Her Majesty Asbi Kesang Choeden Wangchuck)*



**HIS MAJESTY THE KING'S SPEECH TO THE PEOPLE
OF BHUTAN GIVEN ON JUNE 3, 1974**

Two years ago when my father passed away, all the Datsangs (Monk body), officials and you, my people, placing your trust in me made me King. During the short while that I have been on the throne, I have not been able to render any great service to our country. However, I offer my pledge to-day that I shall endeavour to serve our beloved country and people with fidelity and to the best of my ability.

From year to year Bhutan is receiving increasing financial and technical assistance from many countries; among them we have received the greatest assistance from our good friend India. Although the process of socio-economic development was initiated in our country only a few years ago, we have achieved tremendous progress within a short span of time. In spite of this progress, our present internal revenues cannot meet even a fraction of our Government expenditure. Therefore, the most important task before us at present is to achieve economic self-reliance to ensure the continued progress of our country in the future. Bhutan having a small population, abundant land and rich natural resources, sound planning on our part will enable us to realize our aim of economic self-reliance in the near future. As far as you, my people, are concerned, you should not adopt the attitude that whatever is required to be done for your welfare will be done entirely by the Government. On the contrary a little effort on your part will be much more effective than a great deal of effort on the part of the Government. If the Government and people can join hands and work together with determination, our people will achieve prosperity and our nation will become strong and stable.

In olden times, when our country was passing through a critical period and our people were suffering greatly due to civil wars and internal strife, Ugyen Wangchuck was unanimously elected as the first hereditary King of Bhutan on 17 December 1907, ushering in a period of great peace and happiness for Bhutan. The fact that our country continues to enjoy peace and stability is due to the blessing of our Deities and the great loyalty and devotion shown by the Datsangs, officials and people to our kingdom.

The only message I have to convey to you to-day, my people, is that if everyone of us considering ourselves Bhutanese can think and act as one, and if we have faith in The Triple Gem, our glorious kingdom of Bhutan will grow from strength to strength and certainly achieve prosperity, peace and happiness.

To-day we are extremely happy to have with us representatives of friendly countries and other guests to participate in our celebrations. To you, my people, and to all our guests, I offer my Tashi Delek!



THE BODHISATTVA KING

Never before had Thimphu and for that matter Bhutan received so much publicity in the world press and television screens as it did from the coronation. Professional journalists all over the globe had long expressed their desire to do feature articles on Bhutan and only a few had so far succeeded. The Indian papers had of course been closely covering events in Bhutan for many years and many Indian papers reprinted reports from Kuensel while a good number of books on Bhutan were brought out by Indian and other foreign authors. The foreign press described our King as the ‘teenage king’ and the youngest king in the world.

But this great occasion provided the whole world with a wide open window on Bhutan, with the Royal Government’s invitation going out to practically all the great newspapers, magazines and wire and TV services.⁸¹

The coronation was a significant occasion. For the first time a large number of guests from overseas were invited to attend the ceremony in this previously secret kingdom. This gave the country the confidence and eventually it opened up to tourism. Today, the tourism sector contributes the largest amount of hard currency to the state coffers.

CONCLUSION

The measure of a king’s worth is gauged by his actions as a monarch and the effects of his reign on the history of his nation. The world, in its many centuries of history, has seen many kings—some outstanding, many mere figureheads and others outright tyrants. The degree of devotion, loyalty and love that people feel and demonstrate for their king is ample proof of his concern for and action on behalf of their welfare and upliftment. His Majesty’s life and work on behalf of the people of Bhutan as the Fourth King can be described in nothing less than the most superlative of terms.

The Fourth Monarch held the reins of governance for thirty-four years and steered the kingdom into the new millennium as a strong, independent sovereign and dynamic nation. He was an ardent democrat in the guise of an absolute monarch. He made many sacrifices, worked selflessly in the interest of the country with clarity of thought. He never ceased to work at self-improvement. He was an avid reader and taught himself economics, philosophy, history and politics. Bhutan saw unprecedented progress during his reign, and enjoyed prosperity and peace. The history of modern Bhutan records the reign of our King as the ‘Golden Era.’

At the end of a thirty-four year reign (1972-2006), our King proved the great treasure revealer, Tertön Drukdra Dorji’s prophesy true;

*If he becomes king;
He would bring good changes in the country;
Within twelve years;
He would benefit Buddha’s teachings;
All the people would enjoy peace and happiness.*

To conclude, we may note that,

In an interesting development and in the fashion of combining religious prestige with political authority, the 70th Je Khenpo [head abbot] of Bhutan identified the 4th King of Bhutan as an incarnation of [Bhutan’s Founding Father] Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal [1594-1651].⁸²



Mural of Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal (1594-1651). Zhabdrung is revered as the founder of Bhutan and regarded as one of the greatest historical figures of the country. As a statesman, ruler and spiritual leader par excellence, his political and social initiatives and reforms changed the course of Bhutanese history and touched every aspect of the nation's social and cultural fabric.

(Photo: Tasbi Lhendup)



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"Ours is a religious Kingdom and because of the compassion of Lord Buddha and the guardian deities of our country, the strong and unbroken faith existing between the ruler and subjects, and because the fact that the servants of the government are doing their utmost to serve the country, I feel that the Kingdom will not fall into serious decline." His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck
(Photo: Guy van Strydonck)



THE REVOLUTIONARY KING: THE FATHER OF DEMOCRATIC BHUTAN

Thierry Mathou

As I hand my responsibilities to my son, I repose my full faith and belief in the people of Bhutan to look after the future of our nation, for it is the Bhutanese people who are the true custodians of our tradition and culture and the ultimate guardians of the security, sovereignty and continued well-being of our country. —King Jigme Singye Wangchuck, Tashichhodzong, 15 December 2006

The announcement made by the Fourth Druk Gyalpo on 15 December 2006, stunned the nation. His last *kasbo*—royal decree—was issued to transfer his power to his son, King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck. Although this abdication, two years earlier than initially expected, came as a surprise for the people of Bhutan, it was the logical conclusion of a long reign dedicated to devolution of power, which started with decentralisation and ended with democratisation.

King Jigme Singye Wangchuck has always been animated by a long term vision. His objective was to enable the nation to take care of its own future. Such an ambitious program had to be comprehensive in order to succeed. Yet it was a major challenge in a country where the parameters of democracy had to be created virtually from scratch.

The Fourth Druk Gyalpo handed power to his successor with a sense of fulfilment. Contrary to what happened in most countries in transition, the democratisation process in Bhutan was initiated neither by the aspiration of the people nor under the pressure of the international community. It emerged as the result of the sole desire and the genuine commitment of a ruler who was vested with the powers of a quasi-absolute monarch at the beginning of his reign and who decided to gradually relinquish those powers while creating the overall conditions for their devolution. Due to the Fourth Druk Gyalpo's personal involvement, the transition process in Bhutan emerged as a rare example of “transformational leadership”¹ which has been described as “Democratization by Decree” or “Democracy from Above”.² The abdication was the apex of this process. King Jigme Singye Wangchuck turned to be a ‘revolutionary’ king in the sense he always challenged his own power by arguing against the maintenance of political status-quo. To some extent he even questioned the monarchical institution itself when remarking that he did



not believe that a system of absolute monarchy, wholly dependent on one individual, is a good system for the people in the long-run. Eventually, no matter how carefully royal children are prepared for their role, the country is bound to face misfortune of inheriting a King of dubious character.³ The flaw in monarchy (...) is that you reach that very high and important position not due to merit but due to birth. Too much depends on one person.⁴

It had always been clear in the mind of King Jigme Singye Wangchuck that the fate of a nation should not be determined by a single person and that the future of leadership lay in the hands of the Bhutanese people.

His abdication had several dimensions. Psychologically it revealed a high level of moral leadership and a total absence of selfishness. The Fourth Druk Gyalpo has always put his acts in accordance with his words. Politically it marked the beginning of a new era for Bhutan: constitutional democracy. Historically it was a distant echo of the way the great grandfather of the Fourth Druk Gyalpo received power in 1907 through a founding *genja*, an Agreement of Allegiance, when “the whole body of the lamas, the state councillors, the *chillabs* of different districts, and representatives of the people met at Punakha, and unanimously elected him as the first hereditary king of Bhutan.”⁵

To some extent King Jigme Singye Wangchuck gave back to the people what the people had given to his ancestor a century earlier. This dimension is essential to understand the Fourth Druk Gyalpo’s motivation. Indeed he had his own democratisation agenda. Yet he was also keen to follow the footprints of the Wangchuck dynasty, especially of his predecessor the Third Druk Gyalpo, who has been portrayed as the father of modern Bhutan.

The Bhutanese monarchy has often proved to be adaptable and reformist. Although unnoticed on the international scene, one of the most spectacular demonstrations of revolutionary spirit within a kingship was the introduction in 1968 of a vote of no confidence against the king. Such a privilege was never used by the people of Bhutan and this provision fell into abeyance. However in 1998 the Fourth Druk Gyalpo decided to reintroduce the provision invented by his father. This unique system allowed the National Assembly to cast a vote of no confidence against the monarch. If this vote was approved by a majority of three-fourths, the King had to abdicate in favour of his legitimate successor. It would be excessive to pretend that King Jigme Singye Wangchuck ascended to the throne with the idea of abdicating when his task was completed. However he had always been consistent in his endeavours. Retaining power for the sake of ruling had never been on his mind. While re-introducing the vote of no confidence system which was later on embedded in the constitution and further completed by the obligation for the King to retire as a simple citizen upon reaching the age of sixty-five years, the Fourth Druk Gyalpo stated that “whether I or any other King or even the institution of monarchy itself is wanted or not rests in the hands of our people.” It was clear at that time that he saw “the destiny of Bhutan being handed to the Bhutanese people in the most sacred sense”.⁶

This is why his abdication, although revolutionary by essence because monarchs rarely step down by choice, can also be seen as the most sensible and logical decision taken by a man of deeds and honour. It would have been very easy for the Fourth Druk Gyalpo after thirty-four years of his reign and impressive achievements to retain power and remain as a ruler and beloved father of the nation. While everybody from the simplest villagers to the most influential state officers supplicated him not to abdicate, it was simply impossible according



to his mindset, both politically, technically and philosophically speaking.

During an audience he gave me a couple of years after his abdication and, although remaining very discrete and modest as usual regarding his own destiny, the Fourth Druk Gyalpo even argued that staying in power could have compromised the transition process itself. The tutelary presence of a charismatic monarch who used to be almighty throughout his reign could have inhibited the young democracy. To some extent the Druk Gyalpo acted like a father who voluntarily sacrificed himself to allow his well-educated child to find his own way without constantly getting the approval of his tutor.

Of all the Fourth Druk Gyalpo's achievements, his conception of the role of the monarch was probably the most consistent with the spirit of a Bodhisattva whose duty is to fulfil his objectives not for himself but for the benefit of all. Another parallel can be made with Buddhism in what can be described as the Noble Path to democracy initiated by King Jigme Singye Wangchuck.

Although the final act of his ruling was spectacular, it was only the climax of a silent revolution that started at the beginning of his reign. It marked a change in continuity rather than a holistic political transformation, because the Druk Gyalpo was wise enough not to artificially import a Western-type constitutional monarchy. He preferred to create the conditions of a genuine local democracy with Bhutanese characteristics. This is why the democratisation process in Bhutan was not only a question of elections and institutions that could be introduced overnight but also a global issue dealing with culture, national identity, and sustainable development.

One of the major challenges the Fourth Druk Gyalpo had to face in terms of political reformism was that his people had never been prepared to

spontaneously welcome changes that have been introduced by the monarchy. Nor have they organised themselves to provoke these changes. Bhutanese society is essentially conservative. In that context the first achievement of the Fourth Druk Gyalpo was to inject into the peoples' minds the seeds of reformism.

When he ascended to the throne, Bhutan was still an isolated country with a conservative and traditionalist outlook. Indeed his father had initiated significant and substantial reforms between 1952 and 1972 in the political, diplomatic, social and economic spheres. None of the changes occurring during the Fourth Druk Gyalpo's reign would have been possible without going through this period. Yet those reforms had little impact on the way the general populace was able to picture itself as an actor of modernisation. Its political consciousness was very low. The politicisation process that had significant impact on large sections of the population in other South Asian countries had not mobilised Bhutanese crowds, except for Bhutanese of Nepalese origin in the Southern districts.

Various factors explain this situation. Bhutan's ability to insulate itself over many decades from the influence of social and political forces that dominated South Asia had been decisive. Another determinant had been the low level of education of the average population. The existence of a ruling elite, largely unchallenged by adverse forces, and willing to keep the initiative in leadership as far as modernisation was concerned, had prevented the emergence of organised factional politics. Last but not least, consensus politics, which has been one of the major characteristics of Bhutanese traditional society, had provided little scope for popular participation in the decision-making process.

Therefore, the Fourth Druk Gyalpo had to guide his people through a long journey to enable them to get the flavour of democracy. It took him thirty-



four years to reach his objective through a gradualist approach which involved four complementary and parallel dimensions: development of political awareness; nation building; political theorisation; and institutional building.

CREATING POLITICAL AWARENESS THROUGH SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND DECENTRALISATION

The Third Druk Gyalpo Jigme Dorji Wangchuck who reigned from 1952 to 1972 had created the foundations of modern Bhutan. He initiated the socio-economic modernisation of the kingdom and gradually opened it to the outside world. Yet when the Fourth Druk Gyalpo ascended to the throne, Bhutan was still facing major development issues, challenges and problems. It was one of the poorest nations in South Asia. All human and economic indicators were very low.

Moreover the kingdom was totally dependent on India which had the full responsibility of not only financing but also designing Bhutan's national development plans. Unless the Bhutanese took responsibility for their own development, it was uncertain how the process could benefit the people in the long run. What has always been presented as an economic and sovereignty issue was also a major socio-political challenge. Only a country where the people would be responsible of their own development could become suitable for democracy. According to the Fourth Druk Gyalpo's vision:

Every individual must understand the need and importance of the objectives of the government and bear equal responsibility to promote the system of co-operation between [the] people and the government. [The] government should be able to bear the responsibility of executing the functions for the benefit of the people and the country, and [the] people also should support in creating a strong and trustworthy government.⁷

Therefore the first priority of the new King was to draw up the Five Year Plans (FYPs) and have them implemented by Bhutanese. It was no accident that King Jigme Singye Wangchuck personally took up the reins of planning. Throughout the 1970s, the 1980s and the 1990s, planning was not only a question of socio-economic development but also of political leadership. It was also a major education issue, the population being largely illiterate. The Druk Gyalpo had to find ways to educate the people and convince them of the benefit of development to help them build their capacity in order for them to face future challenges and contribute to the identification of solutions.

The third FYP (1971-1976) was the first to be implemented under the Druk Gyalpo's direct chairmanship. The focus was put on improving communications, irrigation, agriculture and most importantly health and education. Diversification of external funding also started to become a priority. Yet the most significant objective on the Druk Gyalpo's planning agenda was still to come. Although improving socio-economic indicators was crucial, involving the people in the making of the FYPs was no less essential. Not only did the Druk Gyalpo spend months and years reviewing programs and proposing amendments, he was also keen to transfer his vision and responsibility to the people at a very early stage of his reign.

The best way to reach out to the people and to mobilise them was to meet them frequently, to listen to their concerns, and to tackle their problems at the grassroots level. Social networks did not exist at that time. The Druk Gyalpo developed a unique networking technique while touring the country, even to the most remote areas, often travelling by foot through rugged terrains without any concern for personal comfort. The image of the Druk Gyalpo seating on the grass like a commoner, surrounded by villagers, exchanging views without



*His Majesty meets the people of Dumpha village during his tour of Bhangtar Dungkha on 6 March 1993.
(Photo: Kuensel)*

protocol with local communities about development objectives and government's constraints has become a common way of portraying the style of government popularised by King Jigme Singye Wangchuck who acted as a true people's king.

Such meetings were the occasion not only to exchange views, ideas and proposals, but also to educate the people in a rather direct and unusual manner for a monarch. Although such an approach can be described as paternalistic, there were no other ways to involve the people.

Educated middle class actors—who played a key role in most revolutionary movements and democratisation transitions around the world—were virtually non-existent in Bhutan. The Druk Gyalpo turned out to be the sole vector of political transformation. When meeting the people of Sibsoo in Southern Bhutan in 1974, the Druk Gyalpo told them that they “must never think that every measure of development and every effort will be taken by the government alone”.⁸ In that context decentralisation became a major feature of his endeavours.

Local communities had always played a key role in rural Bhutan but organised decentralisation had been rather new in the kingdom. The objective of the first two kings was to enhance centralisation in

order to strengthen the monarchy. Reorganisation of local powers both at the district and village levels had already been part of the Third Druk Gyalpo's modernisation programme. Yet it is King Jigme Singye Wangchuck who really initiated the process of administrative decentralisation in order to involve the people at the grassroots level. During the fourth FYP (1976-1981) District Development Committees (*Dzongkhag Yargay Tshogchung* or DYT) were established as a first step. Twenty DYT's were created with more than 560 elected members. Since then DYT's have been closely involved in preparing the FYP's.

These consultation bodies were meant to have an advisory role to local governments, to make development proposals to the central government and to implement and monitor development activities at the community level in the best interests of the people. It was the first time the people of Bhutan were invited to participate in the formulation of policies. This initiative was the first step to familiarise the population, notably in rural areas, with local democracy.

While reorienting subsequent FYP's towards economic development and improvement of quality of life, the Druk Gyalpo insisted on furthering the decentralisation process. In 1991 Gewog Development Committees (*Gewog Yargay Tshogchung* or GYT's) were set up at the block-*gewog* level. During the sixth FYP (1987-1992), the administrative system was reorganised in order to strengthen local governments. During the ninth FYP (2002-2007) the last to be implemented during the Fourth Druk Gyalpo's reign, the responsibility for planning and implementation of development programs was taken further down to the block-*gewog* level.

In 2002 the DYT's and GYT's *Chatrim* (Code of Rules and Regulations) consolidated the powers of these local bodies which played a key role not only in formulating the FYP's but also in



diffusing democratic values all around the country. The Fourth Druk Gyalpo was keen to strengthen those local forums by developing people's participation in the socio-economic decision process. Although largely dominated by local elites DYT and GYT proved to be useful platforms for community consultations and interaction with government officials. The creation of these committees has been a significant institutional innovation.⁹

These elected bodies that have spread all around the country have been used by their members as forums to articulate local needs and grievances. They have participated fully in the legislative process.¹⁰ Further effective measures were undertaken to deepen the decentralisation process with special emphasis on devolving local development planning, implementation and monitoring. To improve the quality and experience of the GYT leadership, a nation-wide election of *Gups* (leaders of respective GYTs) was held on the basis of universal suffrage, from September to December 2002. Another significant change was the replacement of the leadership of DYT, from the *Dzongdag*, the higher civil servant in the *Dzongkhag*, to an elected DYT member, allowing a better response to the development needs of respective districts. It is no surprise that the empowerment of local governments became a key feature of the 2008 Constitution. As stated in its article 22:

Power and authority shall be decentralised and devolved to elected Local Governments to facilitate the direct participation of the people in the development and management of their own social, economic and environmental well-being.

To some extent the implementation of planning was the first rehearsal exercise for local communities to learn about democracy. As mock elections were organised in 2007 to prepare the population of Bhutan for the imminent change to democracy, DYT and GYT were instruments

created by the Fourth Druk Gyalpo to transform his people from simple recipients of development aid into actors in their own destiny.

Decentralisation was not the only way for the Druk Gyalpo to contribute to the development of political consciousness among his people. The focus put on education of the people and the training of capable civil servants was also part of this project. In that context the creation in 1982 of the Royal Civil Service Commission (RCSC), as the Central Personnel Agency of the Government, was a major milestone, as was the creation in 2005 of an Anti-Corruption Commission.

Throughout his reign the Fourth Druk Gyalpo put a special emphasis on ensuring effectiveness and efficiency in the Civil Service. He insisted on the importance of loyalty and integrity among civil servants by ensuring uniformity of personnel actions throughout the kingdom. This agenda had a double impact. First it created a sound base for good governance.

Secondly it enlarged the base of the ruling elite and paved the way for the political transition that started in 1998 when the Druk Gyalpo delegated executive power to a Council of Elected Ministers, who were all former civil servants at that time.

GROSS NATIONAL HAPPINESS: INVENTING A COHESIVE NATIONAL IDEOLOGY

One of the most interesting features of the planning theory developed by the Fourth Druk Gyalpo was the necessity to adapt its priorities to Bhutanese characteristics. King Jigme Singye Wangchuck was careful to modernise his country without Westernising it. Preserving Bhutan's rich cultural heritage was regarded as most important. What was clearly a matter of identity and sovereignty also became a powerful vector of political self-identification for a nation which has never been



dragged into the nets of the grand ideologies which were formed during the nineteenth century.

Theocratic tradition prevailing before the establishment of the monarchy provided little ideological support to the new regime other than religious principles. The ruling elite has therefore been influenced by those principles and avoided extreme political rhetoric. After Bhutan opened to the outside world during the 1960s, official rhetoric tended to be modernist in content, due to the influence of foreign patterns, essentially coming from India, and to the requirements of development. But Bhutan has never classified itself in terms of socialist or liberal policies, although egalitarianism has occasionally appeared in public statements. The country had lacked a mobilising concept that could symbolise both the peoples' aspirations and the government's endeavours.

King Jigme Singye Wangchuck filled this gap when he coined the term Gross National Happiness (GNH). In formulating national goals and policies not only on the basis of socio-economic progress and Gross Domestic Product (GDP) but also by taking in account less quantifiable factors such as the spiritual well-being of the people, he made an explicit commitment to preserve Bhutan's cultural heritage and natural environment.

He has also engaged the country in a politicisation process. While philosophical in content GNH has become an ideological tendency. It has, to some extent, been a part of the progressive political maturation of the people who have been given the opportunity to view modern advancement in the context of genuine sustainable human development rather than just income growth.

This approach has been inspired by traditional principles like conciliation, pragmatism and compassion. The welfare of the public is a modern version of Buddhist doctrine—the fundamental

need for harmony in human relations. Although the concept was first introduced in the 1980s, the term has been “a popularisation of the distinct Bhutanese perception of the fundamental purpose of development which can be traced throughout the period of development”.¹¹

The tendency to describe this concept with reference to Buddhist cosmology¹² is clear evidence of its ideological content. Among the main features of this ideology—the importance of environment preservation—is also inherited from Buddhist values. The role of welfare state, through a paternalist approach to political organisation, is a prolongation of the feudal organisation that was prevailing in traditional self-sufficient local communities.

So far this concept has proved to be a fairly cohesive national ideology, which has served as a legitimising principle for the monarchy. It has provided a coherent political basis to the regime, something which was an innovation in Bhutan. It has also laid the basis of a new Bhutanese political consciousness. As illustrated during the 2013 elections, the issue was not to challenge GNH but to discuss its implementation by the incumbent government. As demonstrated throughout various seminars and papers,¹³ GNH has created a comprehensive framework in order to structure potentially substantive political and social debates around four essential platforms: economic development, environmental preservation, cultural promotion and good governance.

A certain degree of incompatibility may be seen to exist between Western-derived rhetoric relating to politicisation and Bhutanese practice. Since the former may be irrelevant to the latter, it can be argued that the development of a cohesive nationalist ideology in Bhutan has been the first step in a broader process, one which has started to influence all sectors of the society, including those, like Bhutanese of Nepalese origin, who have expressed doubts about certain aspects of the cultural promotion platform.



The essence of an ideology is to promote a structured and coherent social and political model that can be exposed to criticism within or without the model. So far GNH has had this function.

King Jigme Singye Wangchuck has been remarkably wise in coining this global concept without involving himself in the complex theorisation process, one which was conducted by others. It allowed him to remain the driving force of modernisation and to generate a stimulating debate among the community of civil servants, scholars, and development agencies. At the same time he always emphasised the principles of his philosophy. In 1985, the Druk Gyalpo who was “saddened by the fact that (the) people were copying the culture of other countries”, called for the creation of a *Special Commission* for Cultural Affairs (SCCA) “to promote the kingdom identity, culture and etiquette”.¹⁴ The Planning Commission, which later became the GNH Commission, was instructed to ensure that “the basis for the evaluation of the plan is to see whether the people enjoy happiness and comfort”.¹⁵ Regarding people’s happiness as the outcome of public policy and investment clearly demonstrated that the Druk Gyalpo was ahead of the times. It was also an invitation to the people to consider politics not as a power game but as an instrument to improve their lives, an instrument they were invited to use themselves through power sharing and public participation in the decision-making process. In that context GNH should be considered not only as an innovative development theory but also as an effective way of promoting democratisation. Yet decentralisation and conceptualisation were not enough to create the framework for a sound democratisation process. Other factors had to be involved.

SOCIAL MOBILISATION AND NATIONAL INTEGRATION

The Fourth Druk Gyalpo had shown clear evidence of his willingness to allow a free democratic debate to emerge in Bhutan. However he had to take into account the low level of political consciousness among the population and potential disruptive factors that could have interfered with the democratisation process. This is why his moves have been cautious and gradual. While judging his democratic record, one should never forget that his objective was to transfer power to the people without undermining national unity and cultural identity. It is also essential to remember that in the absence of structural factors like a sufficient degree of economic development, a wide exposure to the outside world or the existence of a middle class, the Druk Gyalpo’s voluntarism was the sole vector of reformism.

As already noted, consensus politics has always been essential in Bhutan. The tradition of conciliation is deeply rooted in the kingdom’s religious and political DNA. “Mediation as a means of political conciliation”¹⁶ has been present throughout Bhutan’s history. Therefore preserving consensus politics has been a key feature of the Fourth Druk Gyalpo’s democratisation agenda. This does not mean he refused to allow opposition. On the contrary, real consensus only emerges from genuine compromise resulting from the confrontations of ideas.

Yet the conditions for a democratic debate had to be organised in Bhutan, in order for the whole process to move forward. It involved education, media and private sector development, party politics, and even nation-building. King Jigme Singye Wangchuck had to face the most daunting challenge a ruler could be confronted with: how to allow fault lines a legitimate role in the democratisation process without undermining consensus politics. As already mentioned, the promotion of education was the



basis of the overall process. Bhutan was and is still—despite impressive progress—a country where the level of illiteracy is an impediment to political reformism as shown in 2007 when the Election Commission had to organise mock elections to familiarise the population with the very concept of an election.

Yet thanks to King Jigme Singye Wangchuck's voluntarism, Bhutanese society has undergone dramatic structural changes evinced by impressive achievements in education which have permitted gradual evolution, especially among young Bhutanese.

The Fourth Druk Gyalpo has always considered education as a prerequisite to create political awareness and to develop the meritocracy which became the engine of his government system.¹⁷ From 1972 to 2006 educational coverage expanded rapidly at all levels. The gross enrolment rate exceeded 70% by the end of his reign. While initial government's efforts had been directed at attaining universal primary education and ensuring basic education for all, the Fourth Druk Gyalpo also insisted on expanding the quality and capacity of secondary and tertiary levels and on strengthening technical education and vocational training.

The establishment in 2003 of the Royal University of Bhutan, a decentralised structure with eleven constituent colleges spread across the kingdom, was a significant move, as was the financing by the government of scholarship programs that provided the opportunity for a number of Bhutanese to study abroad.

Interestingly, most of the Southern Bhutanese dissident leaders who became very critical towards the regime during the 1990s' had benefitted from such scholarships. Judging by the growth of the civil society and by the number of people in their thirties and forties who have joined politics during the 2013 election campaign, King Jigme Singye Wangchuck

has succeeded in preparing the next generation for their responsibilities.

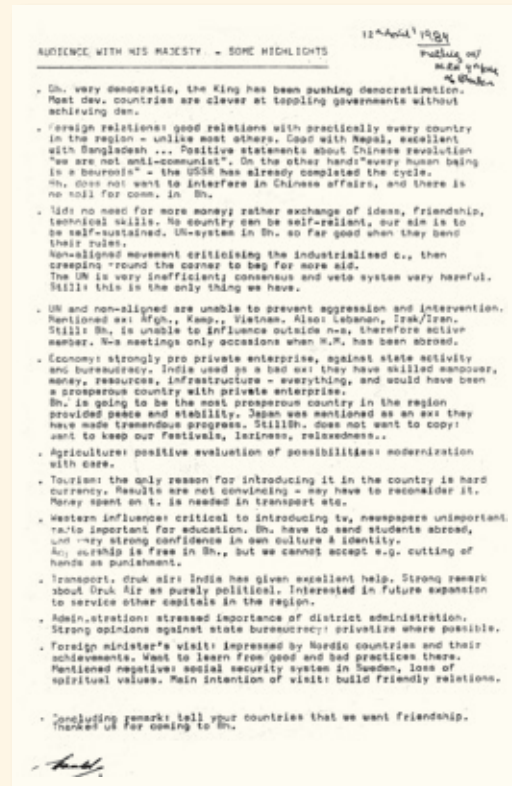
Another example of the Fourth Druk Gyalpo's desire to help the people get on their own feet was his overall attitude regarding social autonomy. The reason why he has always tried to prevent the Westernisation of his society was not because he was hostile to Western values but because he rightly thought this was the only way for the people of Bhutan to make their own choices. "To remain sovereign for all times to come was important for the government and the public to think as one and protect (Bhutan's) identity, culture and etiquette."¹⁸

It is with this spirit that the Druk Gyalpo gradually promoted the development of public media. Kuensel, the national newspaper which started as a government news bulletin in 1965 was granted autonomy in 1992. TV and Internet were introduced in Bhutan in 1999 on the occasion of the Silver Jubilee of His enthronement. It is no coincidence that one of the last major bills enacted by the National Assembly in July 2006 while the Fourth Druk Gyalpo was still in power was the Bhutan Information, Communications, and Media Act that opened an era of freedom of expression and media expansion in the kingdom. King Jigme Singye Wangchuck also made a strong commitment to private sector development starting from the sixth FYP (1987-1992). This sector has remained weak and is nowhere near its expected position of providing employment for the increasing number of educated Bhutanese youth, but it has contributed a great deal to the development of social and political awareness. More generally speaking, private initiative has been encouraged in all sectors of the society and traditional constraints have been alleviated as shown in 1996 when the Druk Gyalpo decreed the abolition of the *goongda woola*, a free labour contribution for development works that used to be compulsory for the people of Bhutan.



The most significant illustration of the Druk Gyalpo's ability to deal with social mobilisation was his handling of the Southern problem, which turned out to be a major challenge for the Bhutanese polity as it questioned the nation-building process. National integration has been a sensitive issue in Bhutan as in other South Asia nations where ethnic tensions had long challenged national unity and cultural identity.

Although the Northern Bhutanese culture associated with the Drukpa tradition has been the prevailing one, the kingdom has always been a multi-ethnic, multi-religion, and multi-lingual nation. National integration was generally considered a success in the kingdom where all the minorities could enjoy their own culture within the mainstream of Bhutanese society. However during the 1980s, sections of the Lhotshampa (people of Nepalese origin) minority started to consider that national integration was detrimental to their identity and that homogenisation resulting from modernisation was leading to the exclusive domination of the Drukpa culture. The declaration of Dzongkha as the national language, the promulgation of a code of etiquette (*Driglam Namzha*) and the identification of illegal immigrants through census operations were understood by a section of the population as a 'Bhutanisation' process designed to serve the interests of the culturally and politically dominant group. As a result of unfortunate misunderstandings and local bureaucratic wrongdoings, the problem was amplified by external factors which contributed to its extreme politicisation. Contrary to the rest of the population, people of Nepalese origin had been exposed to politics since the 1950s. Political developments in Sikkim during the early 1970s, the permanence of Gorkha militancy in the Darjeeling Hills during the early 1980s and political upheavals in Nepal from 1989 contributed to the exacerbation of the crisis.



Audience with His Majesty - Some Highlights
(Photo: Courtesy Barbara Adler)

The influence of radical movements based in India and Nepal had a direct impact on the growing dissent in Southern Bhutan. The departure of thousands of people from the Southern districts to refugee camps in Eastern Nepal came as the apex of tensions that went far beyond what Bhutan could handle. Eventually the development of anti-Bhutan activities and a potential nexus between the ULFA Bodo outfits and Bhutanese refugees eventually led to military action against Indian insurgents lodged in Bhutanese territory, which clearly demonstrated that the kingdom's unity, sovereignty and integrity were at stake.

Compassion and mediation have always guided King Jigme Singye Wangchuck's policy, even during the most difficult periods of the crisis. He always tried to mitigate extreme positions whether they came



from the Southern Bhutanese dissident leaders or from the National Assembly, where the spirit of nationalism flourished in reaction to anti-Bhutan activities in the South. His intention has never been to antagonise any section of the population. As demonstrated by an insider who was both a close adviser of the Druk Gyalpo and a member of the Lhotshampa community,¹⁹ achieving national unity was clearly an inclusive process in the mind of the Fourth Druk Gyalpo, who always wanted to bring together the Bhutanese family without undermining any of its members' specificities, whether linguistic, religious or ethnic.

No doubt the Southern problem was very painful for the monarch who had to deal with the worst crisis the kingdom had faced in decades. To some extent the Lhotshampa issue was the first significant challenge to the GNH philosophy as people of Nepalese origin had seriously questioned several of its cultural objectives.

The presence in the kingdom of a large ethnic minority which was the most recognisably disenfranchised under the hereditary monarchy²⁰ was problematic for the regime and for the unity of the nation. This issue had a considerable impact on the whole of Bhutanese society, which was in some ways traumatised. Paradoxically the situation contributed to the democratisation process organised by the Druk Gyalpo not because it forced him to reform the polity under the pressure of ethnic tensions, but because it illustrated the relevance of his vision of politics which involved promoting differences to prevent divisions—as shown by the way he prepared the ground for party politics.

Until his decision to allow political parties in the kingdom, Bhutanese had never been familiarised with this type of organisation, one which did not correspond to the needs of the people and which had only flourished among exiled communities in India and Nepal. Because solidarity

has always been strong in local communities, social and political categorisation as applied in the West, was not relevant to describe traditional rural Bhutanese society prior to the 1970s.

At some point it became necessary to adapt the polity to the new realities brought by modernisation and by internal political strife. The fault lines found in all developing countries—between rural and urban societies, rich and poor, younger and older generations, men and women—had been progressively developing in Bhutan too. Population growth, urbanisation and the expansion of the tertiary sector has brought many changes. Even individual behaviour has been affected. New trends have emerged with either good or negative impact on the overall society.

While the ancient elite had been socialised under traditional cultural principles only, a growing number of young Bhutanese have been influenced by foreign trends. In some cases traditional values have resisted quite well. In other cases they have suffered from modernisation. New social needs have emerged. The Southern problem revealed ethnic fault lines. In order to cope with such a systemic transition, King Jigme Singye Wangchuck felt the need to introduce party politics to “provide choices based on the values and aspirations of the people for responsible and good governance” without undermining the unity of the nation. As clearly stated by the Constitution, party politics must “promote national unity and progressive economic development and strive to ensure the well-being of the nation”. For that reason they “shall not resort to regionalism, ethnicity and religion to incite voters for electoral gain”.²¹

What could be considered as a restrictive clause in a Western democracy was the best decision for Bhutan taking into account the level of political consciousness of the overall population. Any other decision would have been detrimental to the democratisation process. Postponing the



formation of political parties would have hindered the democratic transition.

Allowing ethnic or regional parties would have created artificial divisions in a small country whose future lies in its unity, although a time might come when its civil society is mature enough to tolerate such an evolution. In any case history will remember that King Jigme Singye Wangchuck was the one who initiated the process of emancipating Society from the State.

INSTITUTIONS BUILDING: THE MARCH TOWARDS DEMOCRACY

While creating the overall conditions that allowed for the empowerment of the people, the Fourth Druk Gyalpo had been keen to gradually reduce his own power. Apart from decentralisation he promoted a comprehensive program of institutional reforms at the national level based on the devolution of powers and on good governance, which eventually led to the drafting of the Constitution.

DEVOLUTION OF POWERS: THE 'SERVANT-LEADER'

Although no constraint forced him to do so King Jigme Singye Wangchuck gradually transferred his powers in a very systematic and consistent way when he considered the time had come to move forward. In 1991 he relinquished the chairmanship of the Planning Commission which had become a central body in the government system of Bhutan. He had been holding this position since 1971 when he was still the heir to the throne. His decision was meant to ensure a greater decentralisation in the decision-making process.

It was taken only when the Druk Gyalpo was sure that Planning Commission members consisting of the representatives of the King, the Chairman of the Royal Advisory Council and all ministers, deputy ministers, senior secretaries of the government and

the Chief Operations Officer of the armed forces had reached the necessary level of collegiality and maturity.

In 1998 the Druk Gyalpo went further when he decided in a most unexpected move to devolve full executive powers to an elected cabinet, the authority of which was defined by the National Assembly during its 1999 session. At this occasion he also decided to re-introduce the principle of his own responsibility through the vote of no-confidence. According to his own words

It is important to promote participation of people in the system of decision making. There is a need for a permanent system of administration that should be able to provide a fair and effective management as per responsibilities of our people. There is also a need for a method of check and balance, and limitation, to safeguard the national interest and security in the system.²²

From that time on ministers were no longer appointed by the King. They had to be voted for by the National Assembly for a five year term. Moreover each minister of the cabinet was to assume the nominal position of head of the government on a rotation basis for a period of one year. After such a dramatic move, the King still remained the Head of State and retained responsibility for two issues: sovereignty and security. The idea of a cabinet with elected ministers and a Prime Minister came as a surprise to most Bhutanese who were not familiar with such a concept. Giving to the National Assembly (*Tshogdu*) the power to choose cabinet members, even on the basis of a pre-selected short list, has contributed a lot to the political maturity of MPs.

The *Tshogdu*, which had progressively emerged as a key player in the Bhutanese political system, had always been conservative. Being involved in the designation process of cabinet members did not change its global attitude towards fundamental political issues. However it forced this body to



adopt a new perspective. The impact of this reform was also important for cabinet members and for the overall bureaucracy. Although prominent state officers and MPs pleaded with the Druk Gyalpo to keep his position of Head of Government, King Jigme Singye Wangchuck insisted on renouncing this function.

To some extent his decision was a rehearsal for his later abdication. However, it was then too soon for him to leave the ship of State. Cabinet members, even unwillingly, had to learn to move beyond the King's guidance. At the same time the monarch continued to inspire national politics. Contrary to what some observers suggested when the Southern problem was growing, the formation of an elected cabinet was not a tactic to deflect the criticism of democratic militants and dissidents in exile. It was a new step in a visionary strategy towards further democratisation as demonstrated by later reforms and this was dramatically confirmed by the abdication. At that time it was necessary to persuade bureaucratic elites that they could diverge from the Druk Gyalpo just as it was important to educate the people to handle their own destiny.

The Druk Gyalpo not only gradually reduced his powers. He also regularly challenged their relevance. The most dramatic example of this approach was his decision to reintroduce the impeachment procedure. But there was other evidence of his intentions such as the way he insisted on submitting himself and his family to the rule of law, like common citizens. In 1978 in a *kasbo* relating to land disputes (always a most sensitive issue in Bhutan), he urged thorough investigations in all cases regardless of whether disputed land had been granted by his own order.²³ In 1986 he issued a decree to amend the Land Act in order to impose on the Royal Family members the land holding ceiling prescribed to all. As stated in one of his subsequent *kasbo* issued in 1996 regarding the judges of the High Court, he reiterated that “all

the people in Bhutan, be they the royal family, civil or armed officials and the citizens, whether rich or poor, are equal before the law”.²⁴

This approach was consistent with the very modest way of life the Druk Gyalpo has always favoured, a tradition that was passed to his son. Contrary to the materialistic ostentation usually found around monarchies all across the world, King Jigme Singye Wangchuck has been an adept of an ascetic practice of power. An audience in his palace—which resembles more a country cottage than a royal mansion—would convince any sceptical mind. As correctly described by some observers, his conception and use of power has been typical of a “servant leadership”:²⁵ modesty, unselfishness and the humility of the servant. As a ‘servant-leader’, the Fourth Druk Gyalpo had been a servant first, one at the service of his people, not only in rhetoric but also in practice.

GOOD GOVERNANCE:

FOLLOWING THE NOBLE PATH

Good governance was both a prerequisite and the consequence of the devolution of powers envisaged by the Druk Gyalpo who encouraged the Royal Government of Bhutan (RGOB) on many occasions to rationalise and strengthen the bureaucracy. Promoting efficiency, transparency, accountability and professionalism is a major part of his legacy. New administrative bodies like the Employment Agency were created. The introduction of a clearer hierarchy, the establishment of a career line for civil servants and the elimination of corruption have also been promoted. The Anti-Corruption Commission was created in 2005.

At this occasion the Druk Gyalpo noted:

At a time when we are establishing parliamentary democracy in the country, it is very important to curb and root out corruption from the very beginning. Therefore it is imperative to establish the Office of the Anti-Corruption Commission before the



*adoption of the Constitution and build a strong foundation for the Commission to effectively carry out its functions and responsibilities.*²⁶

The Position Classification System introduced in December 2005 is a good example of what has been done to enhance good governance in the Civil Service, which has acquired a high standard of performance and is one of the most effective in the region.

At the beginning of his reign King Jigme Singye Wangchuck was the supreme judiciary authority. Although this was consistent with the monarchical tradition and with the history of Bhutan where the father of the nation, Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, laid the foundation of the contemporary Bhutanese legal system codified in the seventeenth century, it was far from what an independent judicial system was supposed to be in a modern democracy. Therefore enhancing the judiciary system was an essential component of the Druk Gyalpo's endeavours in favour of good governance. While meeting judges in 2002, he noted: "When our people get sick, they need good doctors; justice when they are wronged. Governance is good when the laws are good and justice dispensed".²⁷

This evolution has been one of the most interesting in Bhutan as it has combined traditional factors and modernisation forces. As noted by Lyonpo Sonam Tobgye, the former Chief Justice of Bhutan, a remarkable state officer and a key adviser to the Fourth Druk Gyalpo, Bhutan had to "draw inspiration from the wisdom of the past. At the same time it must face the challenges of changing times."²⁸

At the beginning of the 1970s the Supreme Law of 1957 was the only Law in Bhutan. Thanks to the Druk Gyalpo new laws were gradually conceptualised on the basis of Royal Decrees. An annual National Judicial Conference was launched in 1976. A Law

Reform Committee was established in 1978. The position of Chief Justice was created in 1985. A Penal Code was passed in 1995. The creation of an independent Office of Legal Affairs was proposed in 1999 in order to facilitate the evolution of the justice system to meet challenge ahead. The National Legislative Committee was established in 2003 to "strengthen the Judiciary of Bhutan".²⁹ At the same time the National Assembly (*Tshogdu*) gradually took over its legislative role which eventually superseded its function as a consultative body. From a rubber stamp institution mainly concerned with local issues since its creation in 1953, it became a key body involved in national decisions related to budget, planning, security and foreign relations. Numerous important pieces of legislation were adopted during King Jigme Singye Wangchuck's reign such as the Bhutan Citizenship Act (1977 and 1989), the Royal Monetary Act (1982), the Foreign Exchange Regulations (1997), the Environment Assessment Act (2000), and the Media Act (2005).

This evolution contributed to widening the scope of political debate. Processes of negotiation which are consistent with the Bhutanese tradition of consensus have been promoted by the Druk Gyalpo to allow differences to be channelled through dialogue procedures. As already noted, local development committees have contributed a great deal to this effort. Although the main function of the GYT's and DYT's has remained the development process, these committees have had a momentum of their own which has enhanced the political awareness and participation of the people. So did the National Assembly. Debates in this body have been often vigorous, as shown by the discussions on the annual budget which became more and more incisive. Debates have been more and more open to criticism. On various occasions the MPs (*Chimis*) have expressed views that differed significantly from those defended by the Druk Gyalpo and the RGOB.



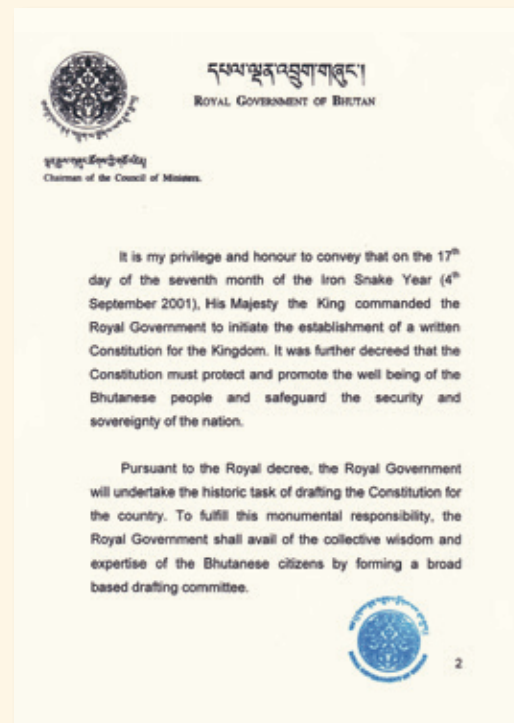
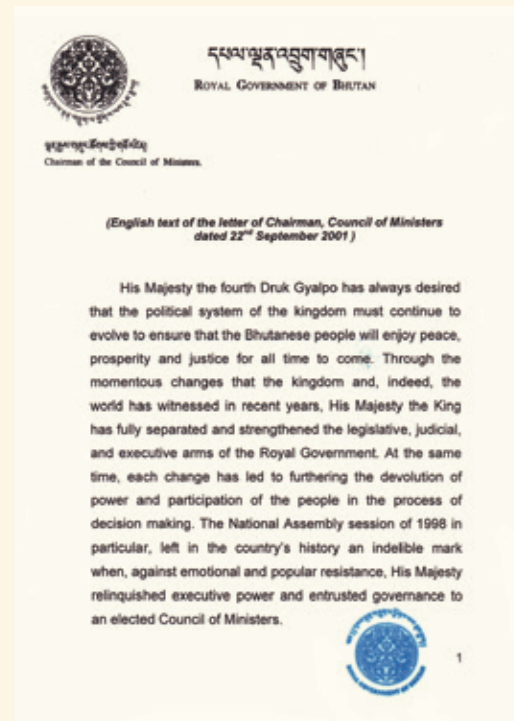
Even the contest in national elections, although on a limited basis as MPs were not elected within the framework of a one-man-one-vote suffrage, gradually became more controversial. In 1998, the reintroduction of the impeachment procedure against the King, although symbolic, was meant to enhance the authority of the National Assembly as a representative of the people. Fourteen years earlier in 1984, the Druk Gyalpo had decided that the Royal Advisory Council could report against him in the National Assembly. At an early stage of his reign he was clearly convinced that the parliamentary system had to supersede the absolute monarchy.

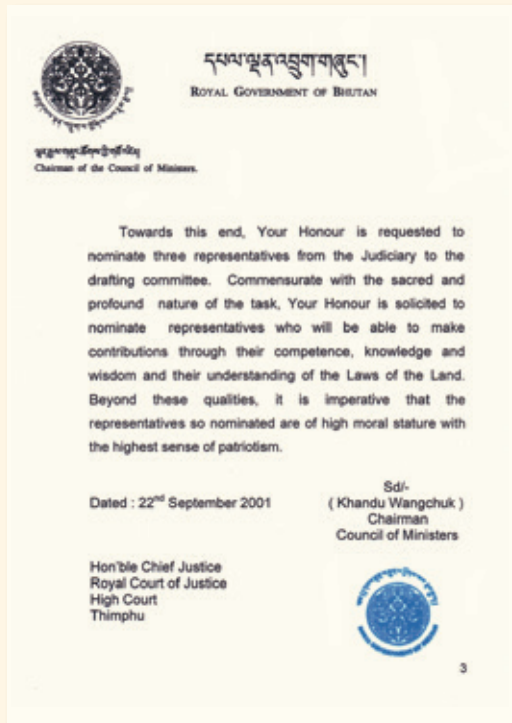
THE DRAFT CONSTITUTION, “OF DESTINY”

Eventually the drafting of the Constitution was the conclusion of King Jigme Singye Wangchuck’s long journey towards democracy. It was his last and most significant legacy to political reform in Bhutan and generations to come. It was also the culmination of the devolution of power which ended with the abdication, the most dramatic act in a King’s life. It came at a time when the Druk Gyalpo felt he had achieved what his reign was meant to achieve.

*The King, government, and the people in all sections of society, enjoyed a level of trust and fidelity that had never been seen before. The security of the country was ensured and the people enjoyed peace and stability. The genuine rapport in Bhutan’s relations with India had reached a new height. (...) Bhutan also enjoyed close relations with its development partners as well as other countries that appreciated the Kingdom’s wholesome policies for development and change. (...) Unlike other countries where Constitutions were drafted during difficult times (...) Bhutan was fortunate that the change come under no pressure or compulsion.*³⁰

The time had come when the people and the nation, although not willingly, were ready for this change, thanks to the Druk Gyalpo’s dedication in embarking on this new journey.





The Druk Gyalpo commanded the drafting in September 2001. A Constitution Drafting Committee, comprising of thirty-nine members whose Chairman was the Chief Justice Lyonpo Sonam Tobgye, was formed. King Jigme Singye Wangchuck insisted that all sections of the nation, the government, the clergy, and the people be involved in the overall process.

The initial project had evolved through intense deliberations on the principles of state policies, rights and duties of citizens, religious pluralism and the state monastic community, separation of powers of the main organs of the state, the concept of democratic government based on a party system, political neutrality of the civil service, autonomy of the constitutional offices, local governance and decentralisation, the structure of government, power and authority of the state apparatus. The

Druk Gyalpo personally rejected any attempts to safeguard his own powers and privileges. His intention was clearly to establish a parliamentary system in which the monarch would only retain limited constitutional prerogatives. The first draft was released in March 2003.

It was extensively distributed and discussed throughout the country often in presence of the Druk Gyalpo himself, who had been visiting all twenty districts to hold consultations with the public before its presentation to the National Assembly. The drafting Committee completed its work in 2004. The thirty-five article constitution has been written as the basis of a completely new system intended to create the conditions for a stable and long-lasting democracy. Although the institution of monarchy remains central many changes have been introduced. Some are quite unusual, such as the obligation for the monarch—who can be a woman, which is new in Bhutan—to step down and hand over the Throne to his successor upon reaching the age of sixty-five years. So far the concept of an automatic monarchical retirement is unique in the world as a constitutional clause. Indeed provision has also been included for the monarch to abdicate for wilful violations of the Constitution. Fundamental rights have been proclaimed. The pursuit of Gross National Happiness has been embedded in the Constitution, which significantly increases individual rights, including the freedom of expression, assembly and association. A bicameral Parliament has been created with an elected National Council and National Assembly.

Most significantly, political parties have been legalised for the first time in Bhutanese history. They may run for the lower house (National Assembly) but not for the upper house (National Council). Representation in the National Assembly has been introduced on the base of a two-party democratic system. The principle of



National referendum has also been introduced. Five Constitutional Bodies have been proclaimed: the Royal Audit Authority; the Royal Civil Service Commission, the Pay Commission, the Election Commission and the Anti-Corruption Commission. In order to prepare for the ratification of the Constitution that was due under the new Parliament elected in 2008, the Druk Gyalpo prepared the ground for the new regime until the end of his reign. He insisted on the necessity to “ensure that elections are conducted properly”. Therefore in 2005 he ordered the creation of the Election Commission which received precise instructions to

*conduct training and familiarization for the people in the electoral process during the next two years in 2006 and 2007 so that the first general elections in the country can be carried out successfully in the year 2008.*³¹

Having planned the future, the Druk Gyalpo announced his intention to hand his power to the *Chhoetse Penlop* (Crown Prince) Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck in time for the national elections to be organised and the Constitution to be enacted. The formal announcement came on 17 December 2005 at the end of National Day in a very simple manner.

I would like our people to know that the Chhoetse Penlop will be enthroned as the Fifth Druk Gyalpo in 2008. As it is necessary and important for a King to gain as much experience as possible to serve his country to his fullest capacity, I will be delegating my responsibilities to the Chhoetse Penlop before 2008.

The nation was so stunned by the announcement that nobody realised the Druk Gyalpo did not intend to wait till 2008 to hand over the reins to his son. One year later on 15 December 2006, his abdication act was as modest as one would expect from a monarch who never put himself above the nation. No lavish ceremony nor grandiloquent statement. The Druk Gyalpo simply announced

that “the time had come for (him) to hand over (his) responsibilities” and wished

to express his gratitude to the Clergy, the officials of the Royal Government, the members of the business community and (the) security forces, and to all the people of the twenty Dzongkhangs for their unfailing support and loyalty to (him) and the country (...) as taking note of the progress that (the) nation had made over the past thirty four years, (...) whatever we have achieved so far is due to the merit of the people.

The next day, the national newspaper *Kuensel* rightly entitled its editorial “Of Destiny”. The abdication might have been a “bitter-sweet moment”³² in Bhutan for most of the citizens, but the nation was not to “mourn the departure of the King but celebrate the achievement of his destiny”.³³ King Jigme Singye Wangchuck’s abdication was a true departure. Since 2006 he has never tried to influence the course of action from behind a curtain. The page has been turned, but the book he wrote will stay forever.

The Fourth Druk Gyalpo’s reign has shown that voluntarism can be stronger than systemic patterns. Contrary to Huntington’s general principles,³⁴ it has demonstrated that political modernisation is not necessarily fatal to monarchy. On the contrary, in the case of Bhutan the King has been the main if not the sole agent of modernisation, and his abdication has even enhanced the legitimacy of his dynasty. Indeed reformism in Bhutan has not followed patterns generally observed in other parts of the world.

King Jigme Singye Wangchuck’s main historical legacy lies not only in the nature of the reforms he introduced in his country but also in his willingness to promote a genuine democracy with Bhutanese characteristics. He has demonstrated that reformism in a traditional society does not necessarily imply the destruction of that society and that a top-down



*On 9th December 2006, during the special cabinet meeting, His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck announced his abdication. Eight days later, during the National Day Celebrations His Majesty made the formal announcement to the people of Bhutan.
(Photo: Kuensel)*

approach can apply to a democratisation process as long as its initiator understands that in the end the people must take control of the process. Far from conservatism or paternalism, change in continuity has been a credible alternative to revolution in Bhutan. While the kingdom has entered uncharted political waters, the Fourth Druk Gyalpo's vision will remain an inspiration for

further political changes both at home and abroad. Bhutan remains one of the least developed countries in the world. Its democracy is still in its infancy. Yet thanks to King Jigme Singye Wangchuck, the kingdom has become not only a living conservatory of Buddhist culture but also a laboratory for political reformism. So far the Bhutanese model remains unique.



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*His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck serving the farmers of Zhemgang during the Integrated Development Project in 1978 at Matanguri.
(Photo: Courtesy Her Majesty Asbi Kesang Choeden Wangchuck)*



THE DEVELOPER: A MONARCH WHO STRIVED TO MODERNISE HIS KINGDOM

Tsbering Tashi and Tom Maxwell

INTRODUCTION

Bhutan has one of the highest living standards in South Asia. With a GDP per Capita (2014) of USD 2,661,¹ it is among the highest in South Asia. It boasts a high literacy rate (2012) of 63%,² life expectancy of 67.4 years³ with 90% health coverage⁴ and pristine environment. Bhutan has enjoyed economic prosperity with an intact culture, harmonious society and unprecedented peace. Much of the credit goes to His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck (r.1972-2006) the Fourth Druk Gyalpo.

In this, he followed the earlier works of his father. Over three decades, the Third King led the transformation from a traditional rural economy into a modern one and then handed the leadership of that development over to others. After accession to the throne and until his abdication, strengthening the security and protection of the sovereignty of Bhutan was uppermost in the King's mind. However, in relation to planned economic development, Bhutan had a late start. It was only in 1961 that Bhutan started its first planned socio-economic development programmes. But in a relatively short time, Bhutan

has already made Middle Income Country status.⁵ This is a significant achievement and much of this is due to the careful processes incorporated into the five year plans (FYPs).

In this chapter we focus first on a few important precursors to the modernisation period. We then move on to the development of Bhutan during the period of the first six FYPs (1971-2001) and His Majesty's role in it. This is followed by a consideration of the major achievements of these times and their present outcomes.

SELF-IMPOSED ISOLATION POLICY

Until 1961, Bhutan was largely cut off from the rest of the world.

The policy of national isolation was motivated in the past by self-interest due to geo-political considerations and not because of lack of desire or capacity to play an active role in the international community.⁶

This policy resulted in the preservation of the country's sovereignty and independence.



During the winter vacation of 1977, school children help their parents with the Integrated Development Project at Malandue, Ngangla sub-district in Zhemgang.

(Photo: Courtesy Her Majesty Ashi Kesang Choeden Wangchuck)

However, the extreme isolation meant that Bhutan lagged behind in many developments that were potentially useful for its people. Many aspects of Bhutan's society up until then could be best understood as medieval. Aspects of feudalism were evident right up to the 1950s.⁷ It was during the Third King's reign that serfdom was abolished. Bhutan's economy was a closed one and based upon pastoral self-sufficiency. There was little infrastructure, no organised sectors, no access to skilled labour, no banks or any kind of monetary institutions. Motor roads were close to non-existent; mules and people carried essential items from one place to another, over mountains and across fast flowing rivers. Social amenities like access to education were open only to a few. "There were only 59 primary schools and no middle schools and higher secondary schools."⁸ Western medical and public health services were scant. "There were only four hospitals and 11 dispensaries and only two hospitals with under qualified doctors. Trained 'compounders' manned the other hospitals."⁹ Bhutan was largely without electricity and modern communication facilities. In fact, in the decades prior to modernisation, Bhutan's was largely a barter economy and ruled by absolute but benevolent rulers. Religious orders received

major support from the state.¹⁰ These and more were to change under the Fourth Druk Gyalpo following the lead of his father.

HISTORY OF DEVELOPMENT

The changes really began in 1961 with the initiation of the first planned socio-economic development. The three main factors that induced the change were the historic visit in 1958 of India's Prime Minister, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the fast paced development of the nearby Kingdom of Sikkim, and lastly, Bhutan's aspiration to join the United Nations.



India's Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru with His Majesty Jigme Dorji Wangchuck.

(Photo: Courtesy Her Majesty Ashi Kesang Choeden Wangchuck)

Nehru had actually planned to visit Tibet. However, "political reasons prevented Panditji's [Nehru] visit. Instead, in 1958, he visited Bhutan."¹¹ Nehru became the first head of government to visit Bhutan. By all accounts, the visit was a great success. Nehru spent ten days in Bhutan and fell in love with the people and the country. "By his own admission, those ten days in Bhutan had soothed him more than a six-month holiday in the best tourist resorts in the world could have."¹² Nehru bonded well with the Third King and the Royal Family, which laid the foundation for the Indo-Bhutan relationship. As a result of this successful visit, Nehru offered India's assistance to help modernise Bhutan through planned socio-economic development. Immediately after the visit by Nehru, a delegation led by the



Third King's brother-in-law, the Bhutanese Prime Minister Jigme Dorji, was sent to New Delhi for follow up discussions. The objective was simply to secure technical and financial assistance from India for the construction of a system of roads linking the two countries. Two years later, in 1961, the Third King visited Delhi. He held various discussions with Nehru and other senior leaders of the Indian Government on the economic development of Bhutan and how India could assist. As a follow up, Nehru sent a team to Bhutan later that year to help draft the first Five Year Plan (FYP). Through this, His late Majesty initiated a series of measures for socio-economic transformations.

The second factor was the development of Sikkim, which shares a border with Bhutan. By 1952, Buddhist Sikkim had already launched her planned economic development. With India's assistance, Sikkim had started building a network of motor roads and bridges. Sikkim, now a state of India, had embarked on the path of modernisation and by 1958 had also built numerous schools and hospitals. Bhutanese traders passing through Sikkim noticed these developments and realised the potential and the inevitability of similar changes in Bhutan.

The third factor that encouraged Bhutan to modernise was her aspiration to join the United Nations in order to secure her sovereignty. As the first step toward joining the United Nations, Bhutan joined the Colombo Plan for Co-operative Economic Development in South and South East Asia in 1962. In becoming a member of the international community, the isolation policy had already begun to be overtaken. In 1971, Bhutan became a full member of the United Nations.

The late King Jigme Dorji Wangchuck (1928-1972), the Third Druk Gyalpo, was the main driving force of the early changes and is appropriately remembered as the father of modern Bhutan. He was an excellent role model for his son. The Third King instituted

major changes including land reform, establishment of a parliament and the *Lodrey Tshogdey* (Royal Advisory Council) and the separation of judicial, legislative and executive powers.¹³ Most significant amongst these was the introduction of the Five Year planning mechanism as the key process to assisted development. "The Government with the King at the helm (was) the prime mover behind social, legal, political and economic progress attained through a series of five year plans."¹⁴

THE FIVE-YEAR PLANS

In 1961, Bhutan launched its first planned economic development program by which the economy was guided through development strategies called 'Five-Year Plans' (FYPs), which were a series of national economic development plans. The FYPs were intended to manage economic development to enable the country to modernise its economy and harness some of its natural resources. From the beginning, the Third King ensured that the country modernised but did not 'Westernise.' Bhutan wanted to embrace the good things of the West such as communications, optimism, science and technology but also wanted to avoid the pitfalls of individualism and consumerism. Development would not be at the cost of the special qualities of Bhutan such as its rich culture, spiritual aspirations, communal well-being, and a pure and protected environment. In the words of the Foreign Minister of the time:

Our government and people are now fully committed to a policy of modernization, although we are at the same time aware of the importance of preserving our national identity by retaining the best in our ancient culture and traditions. None of us imagine that this will be an easy thing to do – to achieve this fine balance and synthesis – but with all our mind and efforts directed towards this goal, we are confident of success.¹⁵

The difficulty in achieving this "fine balance and synthesis" was prophetic; it remains a tension to this day.



His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck with Mr G.N. Mehra, the Development Adviser of India to Bhutan going through the blue print of the policy documents.

(Photo: Courtesy Her Majesty Ashi Kesang Choeden Wangchuck)

THE FIRST AND SECOND FIVE YEAR PLANS

The first two FYPs were devoted to establishing goals, understanding the environment, and identifying the constraints on the implementation of the plans. A technical team from India's Planning Commission drew up the plans. Both FYPs (1961–71) were implemented under the late King's watch. The first plan had a budget outlay of Nu 107.2 million (about USD12 million today) and the second plan budget was almost doubled to Nu 202.2 million. India generously provided the financial assistance requested. In this first decade of development the Government focused its resources on financial budgeting within a broad framework of priorities. These priorities were related to basic needs such as roads in particular, but also communication, educational facilities, health services and human capacity building. Bhutan's first motor roads were built in the first FYP. Recognising the need for sustainable economic growth, the Government accorded 10% of the plan budget to agriculture and recognised it as a priority sector. Many years later a former Planning Minister commented:

The first and second five-year plans emphasized the establishment of a basic physical infrastructure, in particular roads and communication network; and an education system to provide human resource development to meet the expanding needs of the economy.¹⁶

The first two FYP development plans were intended to transform the economy of the country thereby providing the base for future programs. With the creation of the basic infrastructure, the living conditions of the people improved dramatically. The construction of motorable roads and establishment of communication facilities opened up many inaccessible areas, which eventually assisted internal trade. Various developmental organisations were set up and the general public was now aware of the potential for future development. However, the shortcoming of the first decade of planned economic development was that it failed to set clear priorities for development.

THE THIRD AND FOURTH FYPs

The Fourth King was directly responsible for planning and implementation of the third, fourth, fifth, and sixth FYPs (1971-91). He thought that, for the third FYP to be implemented successfully, annual plans should be prepared according to the overall framework of each FYP. Thus in the third FYP, for the first time, all the agencies prepared an annual plan. This made it "possible to take into account the experience gained in the preceding years and strengthen areas which have lagged behind or divert resources to areas which may become more important."¹⁷

In September 1971 Bhutan became a member of the United Nations. The third FYP, for the first time appearing as a printed document, stated:

With our membership to the United Nations there has been an all-round increase of interest in Bhutan and it is, therefore, only appropriate that interested people should be able to know of our efforts to modernize our country and bring a measure of prosperity to our people.¹⁸

During the third FYP, Bhutan issued its own currency, the Ngultrum (Nu.). The value of it was linked to the Indian rupee. The Fourth King used his coronation to launch the national currency



and this achievement further secured Bhutan's sovereignty.

In September 1970, a technical team from the Planning Commission of India again visited Bhutan and developed the third FYP after detailed discussions with the officials of the Royal Government of Bhutan. Unlike the previous plans, which were entirely financed by India, the third FYP was partly financed from Bhutan's internal resources. Out of the total budget outlay of Nu. 350 million, the Government of India contributed Nu. 330 million. Three percent of the total funding for the third FYP came through the United Nations.

Under the third FYP significant changes were made. Operation of public enterprises on commercial lines was introduced as was the mobilisation of additional resources to finance development plans and to curb inflationary tendencies. Setting up of standing committees for electricity, road transport, and commercial enterprise amongst others also took place. Public works, still primarily roads, continued to take a significant share of the Nu. 350 million¹⁹ development budget (17.8%) but had decreased from its 58.7% share in the first plan and 34.9% share in the second plan. Investment in education gradually increased (from 8.8 to 18.9%) in the same period and the third FYP also allocated significant funds for developing forestry, power and mining for the first time.

One of the major achievements of the fourth FYP (1976–81) was the establishment of the *Dzongkhab Yargye Tshogchugs* (district planning committees). This bottom up planning process allowed the people to participate in the decision-making processes in the development of their economy and to become more aware of policies. Agriculture and animal husbandry came to the fore, taking 29% of the Nu. 1.106 billion allocated for the fourth plan. In 1977, Bhutan made its first effort to establish the value of its GDP (Gross Domestic Product), which

amounted to Nu. 1.0 billion with agricultural and related activities contributing 63.2%, services 13.1%, government administration 10.4%, rental income 8.1% and manufacturing and mining 5.2%. The per capita GDP was estimated at USD 105.²⁰

However, to measure economic progress in Bhutan in terms of annual products, domestic saving, investment capital, and so on would be to completely miss the underlying spirit of Bhutanese progress at that time. As a Ministry of Development publication²¹ stated in 1971:

Because of the newness of the development experiment one should not expect too much from Bhutan by way of modern statistical data or other information defined in scientific economic terminology. Bhutan has its own yardstick, its own systems, and its own measuring tapes for determining the differentials of growth.

The Publication went on to say:

A better gauge would be to measure the smile on the faces of its people, to see the contentment of its family life, to experience the depth of religious feelings and to sense the inner peace of the country. These are indicators which scientific economic [data do] not provide for but which are, in fact, what economics is all about.²²

Perhaps already the Fourth King's ideas of GNH were having their impact on the thinking within the Government.

The Royal Government of Bhutan requested a team of experts from the Planning Commission of India to visit Bhutan in October 1975. The team assisted the Royal Government of Bhutan in formulating their fourth FYP. India contributed, as a grant, Nu.700.29 million.

The fourth plan envisaged an integrated composite programme which would involve affording a package of facilities to the rural areas of Bhutan, with a dispensary, a primary school, a road and above all, a composite agricultural attempt instead of taking either the education or health plans in isolation.²³



THE BODHISATTVA KING

In fact the fourth FYP reflected a major shift. While the road development and maintenance, expenditure on education and manpower development remained important, there was a new emphasis on development of agriculture and the natural resource sector. Forestry accounted for 10% of the planned budget, and industry and mining about 16%. For the first time, Bhutan opted for enhancing productivity through selective investments made in these sectors with the aim of obtaining the maximum returns.

An endeavor will be made during the Fourth Plan to further improve the economic conditions and living standard of the people. No real improvement can be made in living standards and no progress can be achieved without adequate growth of economy and generation of increased incomes.²⁴

In doing this, the King was mindful of the need to introduce checks and counter-checks which would inevitably bring changes in the lives of those in the agriculture and other sectors but he also wanted to minimise changes to the traditional Bhutanese pattern of life. This shift in development goals was possible due to the prior investments in infrastructure and human resources. The Government had the confidence to gradually begin investing and develop the natural resource sector of the country. However, the rate of change had been rapid.

THE PLAN HOLIDAY

Sometimes we have to look back to move forward. In 1980, in an unusual move, the King stopped all socio-economic development activities. The fourth FYP had just ended and the fifth was due to start. 1980 was declared a ‘plan holiday.’

Until 1981, all plans were centralised and made at the headquarters in Thimphu. That year, His Majesty established the *Dzongkhag Yargay Tshogchung* or the District Development Committee to promote people’s participation in the decision-making process. It was during the Plan Holiday that His Majesty started to delegate power, authority,

resources, responsibilities and functions from the central agencies to the *Dzongkhag Yargay Tshogchung* to formulate, approve and implement *gewog* and *dzongkhag* plan activities.

THE FIFTH AND SIXTH FYPS

As a consequence of this recess, the fifth FYP (1981/82-87) was the country’s most ambitious in the first twenty-five years of developmental efforts and “spread over a period of six years.”²⁵ For the first time, detailed planning involving the people at the district level was begun and the bureaucracy was overhauled. Because of the complexities involved, the fifth FYP had a budget of Nu. 4,711.2 billion,²⁶ which was a 150% increase from the fourth FYP. The underlying objective of the fifth plan was to increase Bhutan’s economic self-reliance and the funding became more multilateral.

Industrialisation in the fifth FYP was a conscious decision to ensure a measured pace of development using the resources and skills that had developed during the past four FYP periods. The Government deliberately did not pursue a plan of rapid economic development that would have led to undue strain on the existing economic and social structure. Using a comparative advantage in natural resources and indigenous raw materials, industrialisation was given a higher priority. The Government believed that the investment in this sector could yield quick and tangible returns, and strengthen the resource base of the government. Industrialisation was also necessary for processing local raw materials for domestic consumption and to increase the value added components to maximise the benefits of exports. An important development was in hydropower.

The Chhukha Hydel Plan was funded by a combination of grants and soft loans from the Government of India, and was treated as additional to the basic FYP aid. India has also provided significant technical assistance, both in training of Bhutanese nationals and in providing the services of Indian experts.²⁷



In 1977, His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck initiated the Zhemgang Integrated Development Project. This photo taken in May 1978 shows the reclamation work and building of the terraced paddy fields in Soemantang. (Photo: Courtesy Her Majesty Ashi Kesang Choeden Wangchuck)

The sixth FYP (1987–92) budget was Nu. 9.5 billion (USD 730 million). It was about 25% more in real terms on the outlay for the fifth FYP. Internal funding increased to 29% and grants from the Government of India were about 42% of the total.²⁸ A World Bank Country Report noted that the sixth plan continued the objectives of the fifth FYP, that is, an emphasis on “economic self-reliance, people’s participation in the development process, improvement of rural conditions, government administration, development services, and human resource development.”²⁹ Economic self-reliance depended upon Bhutan’s capacity to exploit nearby markets. Human capacity building was mainly in the areas of education and health.³⁰ The Government’s conservative approach to tourism meant that numbers would only gradually increase. “A total of 232 hotel rooms (were) available, of which 184 (were) in the public sector”³¹ indicating that the capacity was in any case low. In order to promote privatisation, “The Companies Act of Kingdom

of Bhutan, 1989” was passed leading to increased privatisation in the seventh FYP and beyond.

All the planning and investment could not quickly provide sufficient human capacity in all the different areas as Bhutan undertook its modernisation plans. “A common feature in the review of all economic sectors is the shortage of technical and administrative personnel. This pervasive shortage is the single most serious constraint on the development of the economy.”³² Despite these and other difficulties one commentator, reflecting upon three decades of planning and development, observed:

The pace of modernization ... has been slow and steady. An extensive network of roads [more than 3000km in difficult terrain], schools, hospitals, telecommunication and power projects provide basic services ... Agriculture and animal husbandry extension services (have been) provided. ... Cash crops like apples, oranges (and) mushrooms have brought prosperity to farmers. Industries have been established. ... The national income ... was only Nu. 40 million as against Nu. 1,000 million today [1996].³³



The Government implemented budget restraint by the end of the sixth FYP due to a number of factors including a decline in grants from India and increasing Government expenditure.³⁴



His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck always hosted and joined the public for a meal during his travels. In this photo, His Majesty shares a meal with the people of Tsirang during the Eighth Five Year Plan meeting in Tsirang in November 1997. (Photo: Kuensel)

THE SEVENTH, EIGHTH AND NINTH FYPS

These FYPs continued the self-reliance approach of previous FYPs but did not have His Majesty as the direct leader or the head of the Planning Commission. Instead he had general oversight as Head of the Government. In consultation with the people and the levels of government, principles of development enunciated in the seventh FYP (1992-97) were:

- self-reliance;
- sustainability;
- efficiency and development of the private sector;
- people's participation and decentralisation;
- human resource development; and
- regionally balanced development.³⁵

In other words, development activities fell into these categories. The seventh FYP adopted a more

sophisticated approach to development; it was “a means of securing consensus on objectives and priorities, and of developing consistent strategies to achieve these objectives. The Plan provides a framework for the policies to be followed and for the allocation of resources.”³⁶ In this plan, manufacturing was identified as the key sector for development. However, the budget remained about the same as that of the Sixth FYP in real terms constituting a consolidation of activities rather than an expansion.³⁷ In the first three years of the seventh FYP, funding assistance was USD 262.3 million (multilaterals contributed USD 70 million, bilateral donors USD 173.7 million, and NGOs, USD 18.6 million).³⁸

His Majesty led the planning of the seventh FYP but the Eighth and Ninth FYPs were executed by the CCM (Cabinet Committee of Ministers) form of government of one year rotating Chairman (Head of Government) from 1998 to 2008. The 10th Plan was executed by the DPT government and the 11th Plan is being executed by the PDP government.

The CCM form of government had full executive powers and was a new form of government leading up to the parliamentary form of government in 2008 but the DPT and PDP governments would be the truly new form of government. The eighth FYP (1997-2002) included projections, for example, that GDP growth would be at least six percent through to the tenth FYP.³⁹ However, in addition to the principles of the seventh FYP, national security, the preservation and the promotion of cultural and traditional values as well as improving the quality of life of the people were added to the principles.⁴⁰ Privatisation continued to be encouraged including private schools and health clinics.⁴¹ Tourist arrivals increased from 5,363 in 1997 to 7,559 in 2000. The number of tour operators had more than doubled.⁴² During the eighth FYP GDP grew on average by more than 6.5%.⁴³



The ninth FYP followed the new 'Bhutan 2020: A Vision for Peace, Prosperity and Happiness' document produced by the Planning Commission (1999). There were five goals:

- Improving quality of the life and income, especially of the poor;
- Ensuring good governance;
- Promoting private sector growth and employment generation;
- Preserving and promoting cultural heritage and environment conservation; and
- Achieving rapid economic growth and transformation.⁴⁴

Construction of rural access roads was the main area to receive development funds. Devolution of decision-making was supported and the new Constitution was adopted.⁴⁵ The budget was Nu. 70,000 million of which about half was to be funded externally. GDP growth was projected as over 7%.⁴⁶

KEY CHANGES

The FYPs led by the Fourth King and operationalised through the Royal Government of Bhutan created the environment in which key areas were developed. The Planning Commission, chaired by the King, was an important innovation taking over the work originally done by the Indian Government. The developments in the economy were also critical. Tourism and hydropower were the key for Bhutan creating hard currency. Infrastructure and capacity building were no more evident than in the Ministry of Education and Health where education took a prominent role. The decision for English to be the language of instruction was also an important one with long lasting effects. However, none of these would have been possible without the assistance of multinational governments and agencies and in particular the relationship that the kings had developed with the rulers of India. In this part of the chapter we will consider each one of these.

THE PLANNING COMMISSION

A significant landmark of the third FYP was the establishment of the Planning Commission. Prior to this there was no agency exercising overall control of the planning and implementation of the FYPs.⁴⁷ The Planning Commission was an independent body with the then Crown Prince, HRH Jigme Singye Wangchuck as the Chairman and HRH Ashi Dechen Wangmo Wangchuck as the Vice-Chairperson and 13 other members.⁴⁸ Its six main functions were to:

- Spell out the overall plan objectives;
- Approve annual plans;
- Critically review the progress of the overall plan programmes;
- Determine the inter-sectorial priorities and select specific development schemes for implementation; and
- Identify future needs for development and formulate future plans.⁴⁹

Later the broad functions of the Planning Commission and its Secretariat were to formulate overall development strategies and coordinate sectorial activities, policies and programmes, and formulate FYPs. The Commission was also responsible for aid management, coordinating inter-ministerial development programmes, and monitoring and evaluating programmes at the macro-level. It was also the role of the Commission to ensure the timely implementation of the FYPs according to specified objectives and priorities.

The Fourth King, who reigned from 1974 to 2006, was only sixteen years old when he was appointed the chairman of this new organisation. Right from the start, he displayed a trait that he continued to display throughout his reign; he built on Bhutanese structures already present, always improving the system, sometimes with innovative ideas. He followed the policies set by his father. Under his leadership he also added the objectives



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of Gross National Happiness (GNH) together with national self-reliance.

The Fourth King was not a symbolic but a working chairman. He showed great interest and enthusiasm and undertook the process of development with a sense of purpose while bearing in mind the country's rich culture, tradition and value system. Right from the beginning, he would ask all his directors to compile their plans. His Majesty would then go through these plans with the heads of department in Thimphu. Often he would ask for more details and clarification and then independently verify the facts and figures. After these adjustments His Majesty would travel to all the *dzongkhags* (districts) to present them. People from the villages would attend these consultation meetings. The directors would present the details of the plans and the King would present the overall plan and chair the consultation meetings. After taking the people's views and feedback into consideration, the plan would be fine-tuned for implementation. Then, half way through the implementation of the plan, the King would travel back to all the *dzongkhags* and hold a mid-term review. Again all the stakeholders would be invited to the meeting and following those consultations the plan would be adjusted. His Majesty followed this system even after 1991 when he still chaired the Seventh FYP planning meetings in the *dzongkhags* as Head of Government. Given the complexities of regional politics and the terrain, the King's *modus operandi* was difficult and may well have been unique. Additionally, in 1979, His Majesty merged the Foreign Aid Section, under the Ministry of Development and Planning, with the Planning Commission. This was an important decision as the Planning Commission was by then the central agency for coordinating development activities and funding from multinationals. It was responsible for ensuring that all the plans conformed to the National and Economic Policies of the Government.

THE ECONOMY

Prior to modernisation, Bhutan's was a non-market (barter) economy. The FYPs assisted in transforming Bhutan to a planned trade economy. The Fourth King, on taking the throne, got to the root of problems by studying the constraints under which the previous plans had to be implemented. Then he ensured that clear goals were set; a trait he displayed throughout his thirty-two year reign. He framed the country's first economic policy which became the blueprint for economic development. Through this blueprint, the King indicated that he wanted a more integrated and holistic economic policy with the people at its centre.

On August 4th 1973, the King, then eighteen years old, called for a meeting of the Planning Commission. The meeting was held in the chamber of his sister, Ashi D.W. Wangchuck who was His Majesty's representative in the Ministry of Development. Although Bhutan was in the third year of the third FYP, it did not have clear goals or a strategy. The socio-economic plans did not have any short or long-term objectives and no goals had been set. The King set clear goals for the Planning Commission. The four main goals were to eliminate poverty, raise the standard of living of the masses, create equitable development of the rural areas and to reduce the gap between the rich and the poor. These national goals would help to integrate the various plans of the ministries.⁵⁰

It is interesting to note that during the meeting, two general models of economic development were presented and discussed; the capitalist and the socialist systems. The then Secretary of Ministry of Development and Planning commented:

As our country is a small country and our population is manageable, socialistic pattern of society would be most ideal and therefore our development policies and plans should be formulated on the basis of socialism. We would, thus, be able



*not only to increase the national product and per capita income but (the) benefit(s) of the planning (would) be felt by all.*⁵¹

The King also influenced the policy direction. Ninety percent of the people at that time based their living on agriculture and agro-based small-scale industries. All the members present in the meeting were also of the same opinion as His Majesty to give agriculture the top most priority. His Majesty the King was “pleased to command that the Department of Agriculture should be asked to formulate agriculture plans with short term and long-term objectives.”⁵²

There were also procedural outcomes from that meeting on the 4th of August, 1973. Departmental plan deadlines were required six weeks hence. The second directive was to “formulate their plan with short term and long-term objectives for five and ten years respectively”⁵³ and these were, presumably, to articulate with the four goals identified by His Majesty. The absence of an overall coherent policy manifested in a lack of co-ordination between the six different departments of the Government. This was the first major flaw identified at this time.

The Fourth King also realised that one of the major problems of Bhutan’s economic development was the heavy reliance on external assistance. He believed that while economic aid could induce the growth process, it would not be sustainable. Hence it was important that Bhutan generate its own internal resources. The far-sightedness of the King meant that self-reliance was a long term goal.⁵⁴

The third fundamental flaw in Bhutan’s economic system was the existence of socio-economic disparities. After a decade of development certain

sections of the society had benefitted more than others. Although there was a gap, the percentage of the population belonging to either the very rich or the very poor was still quite small. Nevertheless there was an incentive to address these socio-economic differences. It should be noted that the Ministry of Development, under which the first two plans were executed, was largely dependent on foreign experts and technocrats who rarely, if ever, travelled to the remote areas in Bhutan where development was acutely needed. The Fourth King wanted to address this problem. The rationale was that unless the Bhutanese took up the responsibility of planning it was uncertain how the FYPs were going to benefit the people in the long run. Bhutanese leading the development of the country meant that the long term goals were more likely to be achieved. Under the guidance of His Majesty, the Government drafted and adopted its first National Economic Policy in 1974 to address these shortcomings. There were high hopes for it.

*The National Economic Policy provides for consolidation of the traditional institutions and values of the land and at the same time ordains that attainment of economic self-reliance and improvement in the living standards of the people would be the major postulates of future economic progress. It seeks to consolidate the essential aspects of traditional culture with the modern trends of development. At the same time it gives (a) realistic call for harnessing all available natural resources for achieving economic self-reliance to the extent possible. The National Economic Policy also provides for substantial improvement in the living standards of the people in a manner which will not only remove socio-economic disparities but also lead to a balanced and all round development of human character.*⁵⁵

Policies were also formulated within each ministry to align with the National Economic Policy.



The Fourth King built upon the socio-economic development started by his father. The former ensured that these plans helped build a sustainable economy that was meaningful to his people. All the plans were straightforward with clear objectives, clear strategies and identified constraints under which the plans were to be implemented. Accordingly, the economy grew based upon the ideas set out in the FYPs. The King was at the helm. “The entire edifice of growth would however be firmly rooted in a monarchical system of government which embodies the past traditions of the land.”⁵⁶

Each economic program took into account the Government’s desire to protect the country’s environment and cultural traditions. For example, the Government cautiously expanded the tourism sector. Detailed controls and uncertain policies in areas such as industrial licensing, trade, labour, and finance continued to hamper foreign investment at this time. Hydropower exports to India did, however, boost Bhutan’s overall growth. The Bhutanese Government also made some progress in expanding the nation’s productive base and in improving social welfare.

Coming late to the development scene, Bhutan was eager to avoid mistakes committed elsewhere. Although strongly dependent on foreign aid, Bhutan was determined to follow its own set of priorities, keep public finance on an even keel, build up a well-trained but lean bureaucracy, and prevent environmental damage from over-exploitation of the forests or uncontrolled growth of tourism.

To help avoid further mistakes, the Government used traditional social institutions and involved people at the local level in planning and implementation for their own district, sub-district or village.⁵⁷ As a result of these factors development in Bhutan has been remarkably free from economic, social, or cultural disruption.

In 1974, when the Fourth King was crowned, the Bhutanese economy was mainly based on agriculture

and animal husbandry. According to government documents,⁵⁸ the total area of cultivation was about 9,000 acres, which constituted about 9% of the total area of Bhutan. The main agricultural products were rice, wheat, buckwheat, barley, maize and potato. The livestock population was estimated at close to six hundred thousand. About 70% of the total area of the country was dense forest, full of unexploited wealth in its timber.

In 1987, after twenty-six years of planned economic development, Bhutan’s economy was still one of the world’s least developed and smallest. The 1987 International Monetary Fund Report described the economy as still predominately agricultural. This sector, including animal husbandry, still provided the main livelihood for over 90% of the population. According to the report, the per capita annual income was estimated as USD150. This placed Bhutan in the category of the world’s least developed countries.⁵⁹

Today, Bhutan is considered an economic development success story. In contrast to the situation forty years ago, a recent World Bank report (2013) noted that “Bhutan’s growth remains strong, with real GDP growth at an average annual rate of over eight percent over 2009-2012, in-line with the 10th FYP target.”⁶⁰ Hydropower is the main contributor to GDP. Manufacturing and services (including tourism) also contributed but performance in the agriculture sector was below average.

TOURISM

As mentioned above, the opening up of tourism was gradual. In 1971, when the Third King visited New Delhi, a journalist asked him about Bhutan’s policy on tourism. He replied:

*We have not encouraged tourism so far because we have limited facilities for looking after tourists. However, with the construction of hotels and improvement of transport and other facilities, we hope to develop tourism gradually. Once the facilities are there Indian and foreign tourists will be welcomed in Bhutan.*⁶¹



The Government followed the Third King's policy and continued to adopt a cautious tourism policy. The Third King was mindful and acutely aware of the impact tourists can have on the environment, unique and pristine landscape and culture. He recognised tourism as an important means of achieving socio-economic development. He believed that tourism, in affording the opportunity to travel, could also help promote a deeper understanding among people and strengthen ties of friendship based on a deeper appreciation and respect for different cultures and lifestyles.

In 1972, groundwork for opening up the tourism sector was started and during the spring session, the "National Assembly vested the Ministry of Foreign Affairs the responsibility of issuing permits to foreign tourist wishing to visit Bhutan."⁶² The three objectives articulated by him for opening up tourism were: to generate revenue, especially foreign currency, to play an active part in Bhutan's socio-economic development and lastly to publicise Bhutan's culture, religion and people to the outside world. A year later the National Assembly framed the first national tourism policy⁶³ that has shaped the essence of the present tourism policy. All tourists had to come in a group of between six and ten. Individual tourists were not permitted. They had to all bring hard currency that could be exchanged at the Bank of Bhutan. Tourists of that time were not allowed to stay in the country for more than ten days. There was prohibition of photography of images, paintings and frescos of wrathful and protective deities and this is still in force today. Today there is still a restriction of entry into temples devoted to guardian deities and places used by ancient saints for meditation. The high value low impact' policy continues to this day and Bhutan is regarded as one of the most exclusive travel destinations in the world.

In September 1974, as a result of the Government policy laid down for tourism by the National Assembly, Bhutan opened its door to selected package visitors for the first time. In 1974, 287 tourists visited Bhutan through the selected packages.

Thereafter, the number of tourists gradually increased. Initially, only four districts were opened to tourists: Phunthsoling, Samtse, Thimphu, and Paro. Samtse was later dropped from the programme as it was found unsuitable. By 1976, the Punakha and Wangdi areas were added to the programme and trekking was also introduced in the Thimphu, Paro, and Dagala regions with the objectives laid down in the National Tourism Policy.⁶⁴ In 1976-77, 544 tourists came to Bhutan with a further increase to 934 in 1977-78. The year 1978-79 recorded the highest figure to that date of 1300 tourists.⁶⁵ The number of tourists remained stagnant with about 1,600 visitors in 1982.

Although many tourists were interested in visiting Bhutan, they faced problems obtaining transit permits.⁶⁶ While visas for tourists were issued from the Bhutanese embassy in Delhi and at the Phuntsholing border, tourists still had to obtain a transit permit from India to cross the Indian border as there were no flights into Bhutan until 1983. The introduction of the Dornier 228-200, an 18-seater aircraft, which flew only from Kolkata, India to Paro in Bhutan had only a marginal effect on tourist numbers in its first three years. In 1988, Bhutan bought its first jet, BA 146. In 1990 the airstrip was expanded to accommodate larger aircraft and in 2003 Drukair replaced it with an Airbus. By 2006, Drukair was flying to three countries. Since then the number of tourists visiting Bhutan has progressively increased.

Although the number of tourists fell in the first few years of air travel, revenue from tourism did not. In 1979-80, the tourism industry generated USD 1 million. By 2006 the sector generated USD 23.92



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million in annual revenue, making it the biggest source of hard currency. Thus, as envisioned by the Fourth King, tourism has played an active part in the country's socio-economic development. There is a big boom in the development of hotels and the tour guide industry. In addition, tourism has created awareness of Bhutan in the world.

After building infrastructure and training personnel, under the leadership of the Fourth King, the Government gradually privatised the tourism sector. Today, the tourism industry is vibrant and provides employment to young people and is the biggest source of hard currency to the state exchequer.

HYDROPOWER

While tourism is Bhutan's biggest hard currency earner, the biggest revenue earner is hydropower. Bhutan is a landlocked country but is blessed with fast flowing rivers. The Fourth King saw hydropower energy production as a unique opportunity for revenue development. Thus, he initiated a mutually beneficial and successful partnership in hydropower with India.

During the Fourth King's reign, four hydropower plants with the capacity of 1,416 MW were built. The revenue generated from the environmentally friendly plants enabled the country to be more self-reliant. Bhutan's first mega hydropower project was the Chukha Hydropower Project (336 MW). India assisted this historic project, which commenced with an agreement signed on March 23, 1973 between the two governments.⁶⁷ On the completion of the project, the Bhutanese Government gradually expanded the hydropower projects in the country to Kurichu (60 MW)⁶⁸ and Tala Hydro Electricity Project (1,020 MW).⁶⁹

EDUCATION

In 1961, the Government began to set up a Bhutanese secular system of education. There were only about a dozen schools at this time and more

wealthy parents sometimes sent their children to India for their education. This changed as the early FYPs enabled schools to be built and teachers to be employed. In the 1980s, under the guidance of the Fourth King, the national education policy was framed. He continuously promoted it and ensured that the Government adhered to it. For example,

His Majesty was also pleased to desire that, while framing the education plan, emphasis should be laid on increasing the rate of general literacy throughout the country by providing maximum possible primary educational facilities.⁷⁰

The Government also learned that

His Majesty the King also desired that the standard of technical education in Bhutan should be improved at all levels and the necessary incentives should be provided to encourage the younger generation to take up technical (skills) as their career.⁷¹

In fact the Fourth King actively led the development of education and this is seen in the aspirations of the policy. For example, one of the aspirations stated was:

Because of the prime importance of education in shaping the future citizens of Bhutan, the approach to the new policy must take into account the type of society envisaged by His Majesty.⁷²

The four aspirations in the policy were developed into nine objectives, two of which were:

1. *Knowledge: to offer adequate knowledge, information and skills relevant to a predominately agricultural economy involving in future, more technology; and*
2. *Culture and Tradition: to preserve, develop and promote spiritual, cultural and traditional values, and national and social cohesion.⁷³*

Eventually the Indian curriculum and external assessment system became 'Bhutanised.' From the 1990s education came to many mountainous areas for the first time⁷⁴ and the colleges and institutes that were originally associated with Government



His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck dining with students. The photograph was taken on 5 April 1992.

(Photo: Kuensel)

Ministries were amalgamated into Bhutan's first university, the Royal University of Bhutan, in 2003.

The modern education system has developed such that Bhutan is close to achieving all of its Millennium Development Goals.⁷⁵ Expansion of education in Bhutan has been prodigious. In a little over five decades, the number of schools has grown from eleven to 659 and student annual attendance grew from 400 to 172,222. While in the early decades teachers were mainly expatriate, presently there are 8,572, mostly Bhutanese, teachers.⁷⁶ Moreover, the Fourth King made two important decisions in the education sector that had far reaching consequences: to institutionalise the use of Dzongkha as the national language and to continue to use English as the medium of instruction.

MULTILATERAL ASSISTANCE

India was Bhutan's major support, particularly in the early years. Since then many countries have given aid of various kinds to Bhutan as have NGOs. In 1962, Bhutan became a member of the Colombo Plan, an organisation formed to promote economic and social well-being in South and South East Asia. However, in the decade after becoming a member of the United Nations, Bhutan began seeking multilateral assistance for its FYPs. For example, in

1972, the UNDP launched its first four-year country programme for Bhutan. The budget allocated was USD 2.5 million for eighteen projects of which eleven projects were completed in the first phase and seven projects completed in the second phase. The second cycle programme between 1977-1981 was an integral part of the fourth FYP, funded to the tune of USD12.5 million, which enabled the Government to approve seventeen projects. The third country programme coincided with the fifth FYP 1981-1986 and had a budget of USD30 million. The aim of UNDP in Bhutan was to assist Bhutan in accelerating economic growth and in attaining a level of development in accordance with the UN strategy for development in Bhutan.

Other UN agencies assisted Bhutan. In 1974, UNICEF assistance to Bhutan became operational. The UNICEF representative to Nepal and the King discussed and signed a plan of operation. UNICEF pledged USD 1.37 million for its program in Bhutan during the first cycle from 1974-1977 and the funds were channelled through the four departments under the Ministry of Development. In 1978, the executive director of United Nations Fund for Population Activities visited Bhutan and after some discussion, UNFPA pledged a fund of USD 2.12 million to be established.

Bhutan also received assistance from other countries for its development. In 1975, a two-man team from the Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA) came to explore the feasibility of starting a project of temperate vegetable seed production. In July 1978, the project was launched with a Danish contribution of USD 414,000. During 1974 and 1977 the Government of Japan provided agriculture equipment amounting to USD 120,000. In 1979, the Japanese Ambassador visited Bhutan and requested the Japanese Government to provide more agricultural equipment during the fifth FYP. Bhutan was also given fifty-four scholarships for study in Japan. The Government of



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the United Kingdom provided USD 75,631 in kind and technical assistance to the Department of Health and Education. In addition, fifteen scholarships were awarded for Bhutanese to study in the UK. Australia also provided occasional assistance to Bhutan in the fields of horticulture development including the establishment of a cold storage facility in Phuntsholing and the development of cattle, sheep, and dairy farms. Seventy-five scholarships for study in Australia were established in various fields at this time and these scholarships have continued. Further assistance to Bhutan also came from the Netherlands, Switzerland, Austria, Canada, and New Zealand.

Bhutan began with a subsistence economy in 1961 and initially depended entirely on India for development funds. That progressed to support from multilateral government and NGO support especially from the UN agencies. Bhutan's dependence upon multilateral support has declined markedly over time. However, it is India that has provided continuous support from the first FYP.

THE KING AND INDIA

His Majesty the Fourth King carried on and developed the ties between India and Bhutan that had begun with the Third King. During his thirty-four year rule, His Majesty travelled only twenty-three times out of the country. About half of his travels were to India and these enabled him to strengthen his relations with the leaders of India. Additionally, many Indian leaders visited Bhutan. The consequence of these visits has been the strengthening of the ties between the two countries.

There are many examples of such visits. His Majesty the Fourth King visited New Delhi in December 1974 during which India and Bhutan resolved that regular consultations and close coordination were essential for the fulfilment of the mutual interests. They decided to intensify contacts and exchange of

visits at various levels to promote greater economic and social cooperation. Also, after the formation of the Janta party government in India, the King visited New Delhi in April 1977 seeking reassurance of India's continued assistance for Bhutan's social and economic development. As a result of this visit, the existing economic ties between the two countries were further consolidated. In 1979, senior officials from the Government of India visited Bhutan to discuss the progress of on-going projects and to identify fields for enhanced co-operation in future development projects.

In his visit to New Delhi in February 1980, His Majesty met with Prime Minister, Mrs Gandhi, who assured him of India's continued multi-faceted cooperation with Bhutan. The King returned to India in January 1981 for talks with Mrs Gandhi and other Indian leaders. It was decided to start air services between Bhutan and India, India's Minister for External Affairs, P.V. Narasimha Rao, visited Bhutan in June 1981 resulting in the expansion of cultural exchanges between the two countries.

This exchange of visits and frequent consultations between the two governments helped Bhutan keep up the tempo of its socio-economic progress. His Majesty was integral to these negotiations. During these meetings, not only were broad policies regarding Bhutan's development schemes and the nature and the extent of India's assistance determined, but their meetings also gave the Bhutanese leaders insight into the day-to-day progress of their country.

CONCLUSION

In 1991, after twenty years (1971-1991) His Majesty relinquished the chairmanship of the Planning Commission in order to ensure greater decentralisation in the decision-making process. The Minister of the Planning Commission Secretariat was appointed as the new Chairman. Four years later, in 1995, the Planning Commission Secretariat



became the Ministry of Planning. It reverted back to Planning Commission Secretariat in 1998 when the King dissolved the then *Lhengye Zhungtshog* and devolved executive powers to an elected Council of Ministers as part of the move toward democracy.

Much of the successes of all the four FYPs between 1971 and 1991 can be attributed to His Majesty the Fourth King. He spent years reviewing plans and programs, correcting mistakes and proposing alternative policies. His leadership was essential in improving the living standards of rural households, in launching long-term plans for key sectors like hydropower, tourism and education, which resulted in the transformation of the country.

Despite his long reign, the Fourth Druk Gyalpo has always been a 'young King.' His own education and his age made him a modern monarch in tune with his time. Education and the young generations have always been his priority. The literacy rate was very low when he came to power and educating the people was high on his agenda; he sought universal access to basic education in order to improve the life of the people and support socio-economic development; and the fostering of higher education in order to improve national capacities. When the King abdicated in 2006, Bhutan enjoyed a strong economic performance with GDP growth averaging 6% per year over the past two decades. The per capita GDP was USD 1,414. According to the National Statistics Bureau, in 2006 the total tourist arrivals were 17,342 and the revenue earnings from it was USD 23.92 million. Health coverage reached 90% with twenty-nine hospitals, 176 basic health units, and one traditional hospital in Thimphu, with 150 doctors and 548 nurses employed in these institutions. In the education sector, enrolment increased dramatically. By 2006, twenty-one high schools had been built and numerous other schools including community schools in remote areas. Over six thousand teachers were trained. Bhutan generated

3,357.2 million units of electricity; most of it was exported to India. With a GDP of Nu. 2214.263 million, the electricity sector contributed 31.75% to the revenue of the Government making it the second biggest source of revenue.⁷⁷

Bhutan now enjoys a reputation for authenticity, remoteness and a well-protected cultural heritage and natural environment. Today tourism is a vibrant sector with a high potential for growth and further development. In addition to economic prosperity, the people enjoy peace and political stability, and retain their cultures and traditions. The environment remains intact and Bhutan is an active member of the United Nations.

In 2006 after dedicating thirty-four years of his life to the development of Bhutan, the Fourth King abdicated. In announcing the abdication, it was typical of him, in a trait of a Bodhisattva, that far from taking credit for the achievements made under his rule, he gave the credit to the people. His Majesty said on that occasion:

In taking note of the progress that our nation has made over the past thirty-four years, I would like to state that whatever we have achieved so far is due to the merit of the people of Bhutan. I am happy to mention, that by the year 2007, Bhutan will no longer be among the countries categorized by the United Nations as least developed countries. While other nations have taken hundreds of years to reach their present level of development, for us in Bhutan, we have achieved tremendous socio-economic development in every field in the 44 years since we started implementing development programmes. How much our country has developed and how the lives of our people have changed and improved during this period in our own lifetime is there for all of us to see. This unprecedented progress has been possible due to the sound policies followed by the government and people of Bhutan can be truly proud of this great achievement.⁷⁸



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An old painting of Songtsen Gampo (569-650) or (617-650) with his two consorts from Tango Monastery in Bhutan. The seventh century Tibetan King is regarded as an emanation of Avalokitesvara. His two consorts were Bhrikuti of Nepal and Wen Cheng of China who each brought a sacred statue of Buddha Shakyamuni to Lhasa. Songtsen Gampo built the first Buddhist temples in Tibet, established a code of laws based on Dharma principles, and had his minister Thonmi Sambhota develop the Tibetan script. During his reign the translation of Buddhist texts into Tibetan began.

(Photo: Tasbi Lhendup)



My dear Malcolm,

Thank you so much for your letter. Please forgive me for replying so late.

I know that you were a close friend of my father and a well-wisher of Bhutan. I would also like to thank you for all your kind thoughts and wishes for my future and your confidence in me. Although a great responsibility has now fallen on me, I am confident and fortified by the love and support of my people and together we will work for the welfare and happiness of Bhutan.

Yours sincerely,

Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck.

(Photo: Courtesy Malcolm Lyell)



THE VISIONARY: THE INVENTOR OF GROSS NATIONAL HAPPINESS¹

Sonam Kinga

THE CONTEXT

Gross National Happiness is more important than Gross National Product.²

This apparently simple but profound statement made by His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck, the Fourth King of Bhutan, has caught the attention of scholars, national leaders and economic thinkers. By prioritising happiness over material well-being, his statement questions and contests the primary economic argument of our time that happiness is a consequence of economic growth and consumption.

This is not to suggest that he dismisses economic development and consumption as constituents of happiness. Rather, he has redefined happiness by making material well-being just one among many other constituents, which has thus far received either negligible or no consideration at all in public policies and institutions of governance. In his thinking, economic development and consumption alone do not enjoy hegemony as the determinants of happiness and well-being. This is indeed revolutionary thinking to the extent that global economic policies and institutions rooted in neo-liberal Western capitalism continue to place production and consumption of material goods and services, and hence GNP, at the heart of a good life and good governance.

BUDDHIST INTELLECTUAL TRADITION: BASIS OF GNH

His Majesty is a visionary leader of a small society whose geographic locale, culture, tradition, history and economic organisation are deeply intertwined with Buddhism. He is therefore, the interlocutor of this rich intellectual tradition and GNH is indeed the crystallisation of this tradition. In this tradition, how is happiness presented, explained and perceived?

1. The primary Buddhist goal is to minimise and eliminate suffering. However, minimisation and elimination of suffering for oneself does not suffice.
1. This goal has to be pursued with an approach that takes into account the inter-dependence of all life forms. One's happiness or freedom from suffering cannot be pursued at the cost of another's misery. Suffering as well as happiness of all beings is inter-connected, and hence, the motivation and efforts to achieve happiness for oneself must necessarily include the happiness of others.
2. Buddhism goes even deeper by teaching that all beings, which are as limitless as the



sky, have been one’s parents in one lifetime or the other. It thus advocates the need to cultivate compassion for all life-forms. Inter-dependence has to be thus perceived through an inter-generational or multiple life-times perspective which is inclusive of all life-forms!

- 3. Action matters! Good deeds and positive actions sow seeds for happiness. The reverse is true for impious deeds! The law of karma is the denominator for our suffering and happiness.

His Majesty’s idea of happiness cannot have been removed from the contents of this intellectual tradition in which he grew up. As we shall observe later, Gross National Happiness is indeed an idea that is strongly moored in its Buddhist orientation. However, this does not make the idea of happiness as articulated in GNH exclusive to Buddhism. Its charm and therefore its appeal resonate far beyond Bhutan.

MANDATE OF MONARCHY

Bhutanese monarchy was founded in 1907. It is very modern in terms of the timing of its founding, genesis and role in nation-building. Although it is not within the scope of this paper to discuss all the details, a few important points must, however, be mentioned. Firstly, monarchy ushered into Bhutan a continuity of leadership when the nation had been beleaguered for more than two centuries as exalted reincarnations (of the founder of Bhutan, his son and a scion of the family) appeared intermittently to reign as sovereigns. Secondly, it ensured institutional transfer of power through hereditary assumption of the top job in contrast to titular occupants (the exalted reincarnations) who were mere pawns put on the throne for a period of time by those who wielded support of certain factions and commanded muscle-power—until they too were removed by

a more powerful faction. Thirdly, it symbolised national unity and political stability as opposed to centuries of civil wars, invasions and breakdown in governance.

Monarchy was founded based on a written contract (*genja*) signed on 17th December 1907 between the First King and different signatories who represented different sections of Bhutanese society. It is indeed a coincidence of history that the modernity of Bhutanese monarchy is expressed in the timing of its founding as well as the basis of its being, which is ‘consent’ as opposed to ‘divine right.’ The mandate for the First King and the Wangchuck dynasty as spelt out in the *genja* was ‘to lay a secure future for Bhutan.’ Peace and security were national dividends expected from monarchical governance, an aspiration that remained elusive under the earlier regime.³

HAPPINESS OF BEINGS: MANDATE OF DHARMA KINGS!

The mandate of a Dharma King is certainly not a mandate of heaven or divine right. The written mandate of the monarchy is spelt out in the *genja* of 1907; yet there is beyond this an unwritten mandate for a Dharma King. The idea of the Dharma King is not exclusive to Bhutan but common to the Buddhist world. In the Himalayan Buddhist polities, certain ideas of Dharma Kings have been articulated both in classical texts and stories as well as folklore. Let us look at a few of them.

Songtsen Gampo, the Thirty-Third King of Tibet’s Yarlung dynasty, advises his son on the idea of Dharma kingship. “Prince, son of god, listen to me. If kingship is not held by Dharma, secular kingship is the seed for bad transmigration. Harmonize the kingship of this life with Dharma.”⁴

A legal code of Bhutan called Kathrim published in 1729 also states;



*If the king becomes enamoured of Dharma,
It is the path to happiness in both life-times;
Even subjects will act as the king acts,
Hence learn to live according to Dharma.*

It further states;

*If there is no law, happiness will not come to beings.
If beings do not have the happiness there is no
point in the Hierarchs of the 'Brug-pa upholding
the doctrine of the dual system...'⁵*

An oft-cited popular saying in both popular and official domains is as follows

*The people are the beloved of the King,
The people need peace and happiness,
The basis of peace and happiness is laws!*

All these point to an important Buddhist perception of a king as the source of laws, and those laws being the basis of happiness. In articulating this perception through the idea of Gross National Happiness, His Majesty has not only crystallised the innate wisdom of Buddhist thought but became an expression of that image and idea of Buddhist kingship!

GUIDE AND CRITIQUE OF PUBLIC POLICIES

GNH is both a guide and critique of public policies. In the first place, there is today a habitual falling back upon the notion of GNH to challenge or criticise public policies or projects when people feel they are contrary to popular perception of equity and social justice. This in itself is a critique of tendencies to project Bhutan as a happy country as if GNH is a done deal. GNH is not a status quo. It is an aspiration that may not be realised during our lifetime. As a collective aspiration that has popular sanction and endorsement, public policies and programs must be oriented to actualise it over time. GNH is about public policies and programs for social change and progress within Bhutan.

However, organised efforts project Bhutan as a happy country abroad. The commercial bias

that projects GNH as a state of being in Bhutan finds expression in GNH products. There is a GNH hotel, incense stick, buses, taxis, books, biscuits and even a GNH combo meal combining coke and local noodle dish. There was once a Happiness bar. Compulsions of a global market economy have extended their tentacles into Bhutan. The tendency to 'commodify' happiness will increase.

GNH therefore, requires Bhutan to be seriously mindful of such tendencies. It needs to be redeemed from the complexity of academic discourse and penchant for preaching to the world. GNH is about a vision for Bhutan, a vision that can be actualised through creative and continual re-thinking of public policies within Bhutan. It needs to be articulated simply as His Majesty has done so that all Bhutanese including rural people understand and own it.

INTELLECTUAL IDENTITY

What His Majesty has done is consciously bring to the fore of public policy thinking and practice the essence of a spiritual tradition. By identifying happiness as the objective of governance, he has elevated happiness from being a domain of individual concern and mere offshoot of development. In this thinking, it is not enough for the state to be a development state, whose end goal is development. Development is not the end but only a means to collective happiness. Besides, development also cannot be perceived as that which enhances factors of production and the creation of limitless wealth. Development is more than closing the gap between haves and have-nots. Public policies and development must minimise or remove obstacles and create conditions and enabling environment for the individual and community to pursue and achieve happiness. Happiness is a concern of the state, not just of the individual. GNH frees development from being moored in the earlier ideological deadlock between the Capitalists and Communists and from the contemporary hegemony of free market ideals.

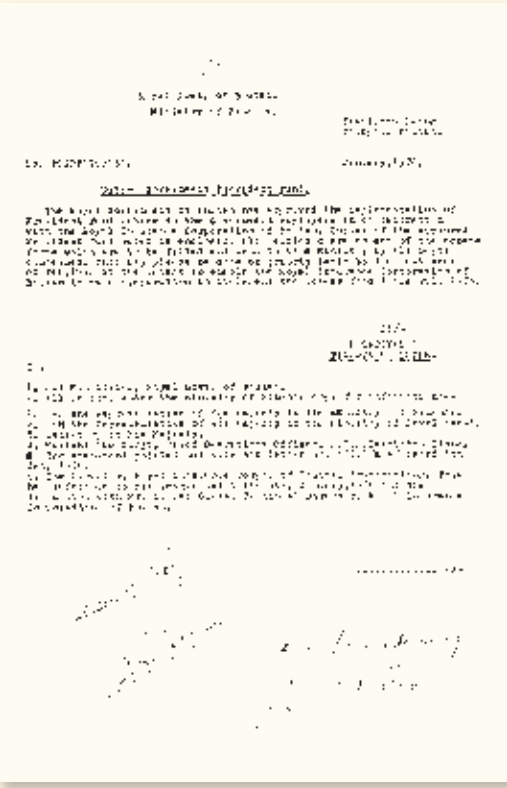
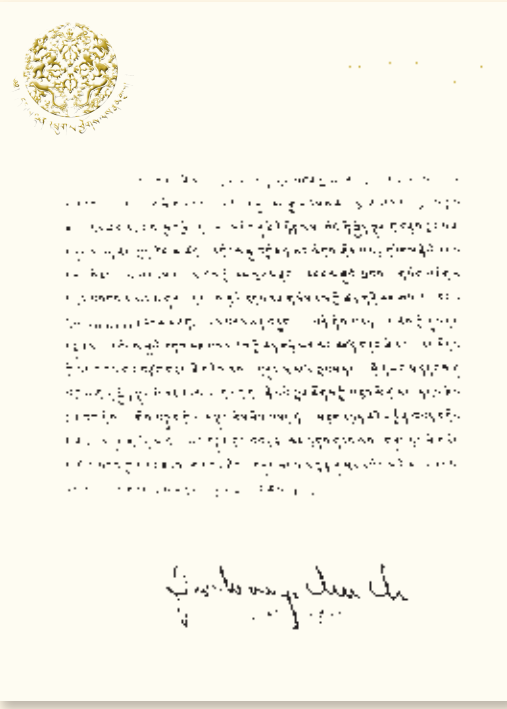


PENSION SCHEME

All honourable members are fully aware of the great importance that the Royal Government attaches to having a small, competent and honest civil service. In order to make the civil service attractive and to further improve their well-being, the Royal Government approved substantial increase in the pay and allowances of civil servants during the last two fiscal years. His Majesty the King, however, felt that the existing retirement benefits, namely the gratuity and the provident fund, were inadequate and commanded the Ministry of Finance to study the feasibility of instituting a pension scheme. Accordingly, the Ministry of Finance, with technical assistance of the UNDP, carried out a study to see what kind of a pension scheme would be feasible for Bhutan keeping in mind benefits to the civil servants and costs to the government.

His Majesty the King was pleased to Command in a Kasho issued on the 3rd day of the fourth Bhutanese month to the Royal Civil Service Commission that in order to encourage the civil servants to be loyal and dedicated to the government and the country, it was the desire of the Royal Government to improve the overall welfare of the civil servants including their post-service benefits. As per the present rules, retiring civil servants are entitled to the accumulated amount in their Provident Fund account and a lumpsum gratuity with an upper ceiling of Nu. 100,000.00. In line with the changing times, it was necessary to review the merits of increasing the gratuity limit vis-à-vis introduction of a pension scheme, keeping in mind the costs to the government and resulting benefits to the retiring employees. His Majesty was pleased to Command that the two options be thoroughly reviewed by the members of the RCSC and the Ministry of Finance. His Majesty also desired that the views of the civil servants be taken into account in arriving at the final recommendation.

Proceedings and Resolutions of the 76th Session of the National Assembly, Compiled by National Assembly Secretariat, Thimphu. (June 29th to July 30th, 1998)





It thus critiques dominant Western political and development theory. GNH is Bhutan's modern intellectual identity.

The distinguishing feature of the thirty-four-year reign of His Majesty was the formulation of a distinct Bhutanese modernity. In European intellectual life, modern was understood in contrast to tradition, and tradition to be a sort of excess baggage on the journey towards modernity. Tradition was largely associated with a sense of primitiveness in terms of a cultural world view and an agricultural occupation. Modernisation was thought of as a transition that an agrarian society makes to an industrial one. In sum, the benchmarks for a country to be called modernised are an industrial economy based on a free market, a non-agricultural urban society, and a political community that is democratised.⁶

Reproducing modernity in the context described above would have required Bhutan to pursue policies and enact laws that would pay less attention to religion, culture, agriculture and environment, and concentrate more on economic development and industrialisation. So, how has His Majesty actualised GNH as a public policy program during his thirty-four-year reign? The policies formulated, decrees issued and laws enacted during His Majesty's reign (beginning in 1972) promoted traditional culture, supported agricultural development, advocated environmental conservation and preserved the country's spiritual heritage. It is only apt that I discuss each of these briefly since they reveal how His Majesty articulated and applied GNH. I have organised this article around the 'four pillars' of GNH although it must be pointed out that these pillars are later academic constructs. I shy away from delving into the nine domains of GNH elaborated again in later academic discourse, not for their irrelevance but owing to the scope and extent of this paper.

CULTURE AND RELIGION: RE-DEFINING BHUTAN'S MODERNITY

If the shedding of tradition and culture is the hallmark of the conventional path to modernisation, the reverse is true in Bhutan's context. His Majesty has emphasised on many occasions the significance of culture for Bhutan's identity, particularly in view of its geo-strategic location between two most populous and powerful nations, India and China. In a *kasbo* (royal decree) granted to the Special Commission for Cultural Affairs (established in 1986), he commanded,

I am saddened that our people copy the culture of other countries despite the existence of our distinct culture and etiquette. If we do not think now, we cannot show our religious and culture to the world in the future. This, as you know will affect our sovereignty.

Thus culture took on a new meaning in the context of building national identity and reinforcing sovereignty.

From the very beginning of his reign, we see scarce resources being allocated for preservation of ancient monuments, temples and *dzongs*, which are not just relics of the past but testimony of a vibrant cultural and value system that informs our everyday life. Hundreds of monasteries were renovated. Protection and renovation of ancient monuments were identified as a development objective in the third five year plan (1971-76). Its commencement coincided with the beginning of His Majesty's reign. Important national monuments like the Punakha Dzong, Taktshang monastery and Tango Buddhist Centre for Higher Learning were almost entirely rebuilt, their original splendour restored and surpassed. Cultural preservation was a conscious effort undertaken in view of the impacts of modernisation that were being gradually felt.



THE BODHISATTVA KING

His Majesty initiated the formation of the *Dratshang Lhentshog* (Council of Ecclesiastical Affairs) under the chairmanship of the Je Khenpo (chief abbot of the monastic community) in 1984 in order to address issues of cultural and religious interest. Support to the monastic establishments of all faiths continued. The Constitution of Bhutan has identified Buddhism, not as a state religion, but as a spiritual heritage, and therefore, advocates state support to preserve this heritage. There are over 2000 monasteries in the country today.

The pursuit of cultural interests and religious scholarship was not left to the monks alone. Opportunities were made available to others in cultivating professionalism in traditional arts and crafts. Thus, many state-owned training institutes as well as private establishments developed aided by the interest of a growing tourism industry. Be it in architecture, performing arts, linguistic development and research, indigenous medicine and health care, the promotion of culture as a signature constituent of Bhutan's modernity was a hallmark of His Majesty's reign.

Geography is delimited into nations by political boundaries. But it is also delimited into a specific social and cultural category by the people who inhabit that geographic space. For Bhutan, leadership has played a critical role in carving out a unique landscape and soundscape, visual and aural that represents various ethno-linguistic groups in the mountains and valleys. The distinctive architecture, clothes, languages, food, songs and dances and value system gives Bhutan its identity as a national community.

Forces of globalisation however, tend to make everything uniform. Compulsions of consumerism have gradually but profoundly influenced some important aspects of cultural identity such as

language, clothes, food, songs and dances etc. Culture is not fixed. It changes and reformulates. However, if these changes and reformulations are not oriented around the core Bhutanese value-system and do not draw strength from local culture and tradition, the distinctive landscape and soundscape can become diffused and lose its prominence.

There are competing demands for scarce resources. In a democracy, political compulsions can often override other considerations in allocating these resources. Therefore, it is highly possible that important sectors and institutions that are important for preservation and promotion of culture may receive less attention and resources. Social groups such as members of the monastic community that remain separate and above politics are a critical agency for cultural and spiritual tradition to flourish. However, disengagement from active politics should not disadvantage them in terms of access to resources and opportunities.

GNH cultural policy in a democratic era must draw inspiration from His Majesty's approaches that not only preserve our cultural monuments, performing arts, costumes and architecture but devote resources and creativity to rethink forms and expressions of culture that strengthens our identity and nourish our value system in the age of globalisation. This must receive renewed priority. Our focus needs to re-emphasise the primacy of local languages, performing and creative arts, architecture, costumes, festivals and so on. This must not be for the sake of creating content for a cultural industry. Rather, it must be more as a commitment to strengthening the inner values of personhood, family, society and national community that find expression in these cultural forms.



*His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck planting a tree at the Ludrong Memorial Garden in Thimphu with the help of Her Majesty Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck and Her Majesty Ashi Tshering Pem Wangchuck.
(Photo: Thinley Namgyel)*

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION: CHAMPION OF THE EARTH

Bhutan's socio-economic modernisation began in 1960. We are a resource poor country but one resource that was available for exploitation was a rich endowment of forests. The imperatives of development, our need for resources and some degree of industrialisation generated pressures to exploit forest resources. However, this is exactly what His Majesty decided against. The National Forestry Policy formulated in 1974, the year he was formally enthroned, stated that Bhutan must maintain 60% of our forests for all times to come. This policy has received even greater impetus in the Constitution promulgated in 2008, which maintains the same provision.

It is important to emphasise that Buddhist conservation ethics do not reduce forests to mere natural resources. They are perceived as a living entity, animated by innate spirit and life forms. Conservation is thus viewed in its own right rather

than being incidental to human well-being. Conservation strategies sacrificed immediate economic gains for long-term environmental sustainability. This is not to deny that forest resources were not extracted at all. A cautious and sustainable approach was adopted in harvesting some of them. Timber export and wood-based industries became important economic activities but not on a scale or magnitude that would cause irreversible long-term damages.

Legislation and policies ensured that conservation efforts were not jeopardised. The Forest and Nature Conservation Act was passed in 1995, National Forestry Master Plan was made for the 1996-2010 period, National Environment Commission was set up, National Environment Strategy consolidated in 1998 and Environment Assessment Act passed in 2000. Legislation and institutional frameworks and strategies thus safeguarded Bhutan's natural environment.



Fuelwood has remained the most important source of energy for Bhutan although it is being increasingly replaced by electricity. In order to ensure successful conservation efforts, investments were made early on in the hydropower development projects in partnership with the Government of India. Revenues earned from these projects constitute the major portion of our GDP. As electricity lights up remote communities, the impact on forest is lessened. With external assistance, the government has also been able to provide corrugated zinc sheets for roofing purposes to communities in national parks, who otherwise cut down trees to produce wooden shingles.

Today, Bhutan's reputation as a forerunner in conservation efforts is globally well-known. In 2005, the United Nations Environment Program awarded the Champions of the Earth Award to His Majesty the King and people of Bhutan. In 2011, His Majesty was recognised for his contribution to environmental conservation by being inducted into the Kyoto Earth Hall of Fame.

A robust environment is key to the conception of GNH. His Majesty has made Bhutan a leader in environmental conservation. The interdependence of the health and longevity of the natural environment and human beings is an essential matrix in GNH approach to development. Thus, irrespective of what development approach the state adopts, it cannot compromise on the state of our natural environment. Constitutional and legal provisions stand to safeguard our forests.

Nevertheless, the responsibility of safeguarding our environment should not be relegated merely to laws and regulations. Once again, we must draw inspiration from His Majesty's innovative approach in this regard. GNH's environment policy must follow the royal footsteps in primarily upholding traditional rights to resources and

customary practices of conservation. Laws and policies respected different systems and practices of resource use as well as local institutions and organisations to protect them. His Majesty did not seek to create one mode of managing resources or protecting environment. His laws and policies did not undermine traditional rights and customary practices by establishing a uniform system. Thus, national legislation did not compete with customary local practices for primacy and legitimacy. Rather, they reinforced each other. This is a very important lesson that leaders in democratic polity must learn in formulating a viable GNH environment policy and conservation approach.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: MEANS TO SELF-RELIANCE

One of the most important themes of His Majesty's coronation address was self-reliance. It was indeed a bold and ambitious statement after only a decade of socio-economic development which was formulated and financed with the full assistance of the Government of India. There are two very important aspects of his development approach. One, economic development with minimal industrialisation, and two, focus on agriculture for self-sufficiency. Had he followed the conventional development approach, it would have required greater industrialisation, movement of labour forces from the rural to industrial sector and consequently, a shrinking of the agriculture sector.

Despite the ambitious goal of self-reliance, His Majesty neither increased the tax rate nor broadened its base to raise revenue and finance development. Let me reiterate that Bhutan's economic modernisation began in 1960 with the launching of the first five-year plans (1961-65). When it began, Bhutan was largely a subsistence agricultural society. The tax obligation of rural people continued to be negligible. On the other hand, the budget allocated for rural development



increased substantially over the years. Even half-way into the eleventh five-year plan (2013-18), over 60% of Bhutanese people still depend on agriculture and their tax obligation remains negligible. But a major target of the goal of self-reliance, which was to meet recurrent expenditure from domestic revenue, has been met. How?

India has financed both the first and second five-year plans. One of His Majesty's early efforts was to diversify the source of development assistance. Bhutan's membership of the United Nations and Colombo Plan has already brought in a degree of alternative sources of development funds. Thus, while India continues to remain an important source of development capital, alternative bilateral and multilateral sources have been roped in. Self-reliance needs to be seen within the perspective of dispersed reliance!

Our relationship with India matured from being a donor-recipient one to that of mutually beneficial partnership. One of the best examples of His Majesty's imaginative and resourceful investment is in the hydropower sector. Recognising its potential, he signed an agreement with the Government of India to construct the 336 MW Chukha Hydropower Project in 1974. Besides being a standing monument of Indo-Bhutan friendship, the economic benefit of this project for Bhutan was the substantial revenue generated from sale of surplus electricity to India. India's investment in Bhutan to meet her energy needs and Bhutan's clean hydropower potential has become an exemplary economic cooperation model. This success was followed by investment in the construction of 1020 MW Tala Hydropower Project. Many hydropower projects are in the pipeline.

In 2007, the contribution of hydro-rupees to GDP was 23.4%. For the first time, it surpassed the contributions of the agriculture, livestock and forestry sector. GDP per capita in 2006 was estimated at USD 1,414. Real DGP in 2007 was

estimated at Nu.37.5 billion. Today, Bhutan's domestic revenue meets all her recurrent expenditure. This has been a major realisation of the goal of self-reliance.

Unlike the two previous five-year plans, Bhutan's Planning Commission formulated and implemented the third five-year plan under the chairmanship of His Majesty. Of the total outlay of Nu.3355 million, social services were earmarked the highest amount followed by transport and communication and agriculture. As in the first two five-year plans, the emphasis on transport and communications continued. This is an important consideration of His Majesty's development approach. Minimal industrialisation kept rural people in the agriculture sector. Investments in social sector and infrastructure development, on the other hand, ensured nation-building—an important project for national survival!

A defining aspect of socio-economic development policy was the high priority given to the agriculture sector with an outlay of Nu.77.9 million. For agriculture, the main objectives were i) expansion of agriculture production through intensive methods of cultivation, use of high yielding varieties of seeds, improved irrigation facilities, ii) setting up co-operative marketing societies to eliminate middlemen and ensure fair prices to the farmers for their produce, and; iii) improve and upgrade local livestock by distributing good breeds and extending veterinary facilities all over the country.

The country has also met 7.8% of the third five-year plan budget from domestic revenue and saw diversification in aid sources by way of receiving USD 4 million from UNDP. In the fourth five-year plan, agriculture continued to receive priority. It is thus that the goal of self-reliance particularly conceived from the perspective of self-sufficiency in food crops reaffirmed the



importance of agriculture for the Bhutanese economy. From the very beginning of his reign, His Majesty gave policy direction concerning the modernisation of agriculture. After all, agriculture is not merely a source of livelihood but a way of life. This is because preservation of Bhutan's distinct identity was His Majesty's deepest concern throughout his reign.

Bhutan is a country of villages, rural villages. Most of His Majesty's policies and programs were directed to alleviate poverty in rural communities. Following in the footsteps of his father and grandfathers (the first three kings), he ensured that tax burdens and corvée labour obligations of rural people were reduced over time. Contrast this with the compulsions of a modernising society to build up domestic capital and revenue by raising taxes and deploying workforces in development projects. Even the negligible rural taxes that peasants pay are retained by local governments and not remitted to the state, although all rural development budgets are provided as state's grants to local governments.

With resources mobilised from bilateral and multilateral sources as well as domestic sources like tourism and hydropower revenues, His Majesty ensured that basic social services were made accessible even to most remote communities. Constructions of drinking water supply schemes, irrigation channels, electricity network, rural connectivity in terms of farm roads, postal and telecommunication services and micro-credit schemes had a profound impact in improving the everyday lives of ordinary people.

The new and alternative modernity that Bhutan pursued under His Majesty's reign was not through rapid urbanisation and industrialisation. Certainly, some degree of urbanisation and industrialisation took place but not at the cost of marginalising or

undermining rural development. It is fair to say that the prosperity of village life came to express Bhutan's modernity under His Majesty's reign.

Once again, it is critical that economic development policies follow such leads shown by His Majesty. Agriculture is not just an economic activity but a way of life. Urbanisation is argued as an inevitable process. Agricultural lands are being lost to new town development programs. The spatial, aesthetic and other aspects of urban design do not take their inspiration from rural villages. GNH policies must re-think agriculture from being a subsistence livelihood activity to being a rural business enterprise.

In initiating an amazing resettlement program for landless farmers, His Majesty the Fifth King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck has successfully established new villages in remote communities. These appear as modular villages for Bhutan's future. His Majesty's direction shows that urbanisation is not the answer to everything, ruralisation is also possible. It can be very much part of Bhutan's new modernity.

Despite the call for GNH economic policies, the mantra that 'private sector is the engine of economic growth' continues to be emphasised. The critical question is 'what is the private sector in Bhutan's context?' A handful of industrialists and business houses certainly cannot monopolise the identity of Bhutan's private sector. Small rural and urban enterprises encompassing agriculture, livestock and forestry amongst other industries must flourish and constitute an important part of the private sector.

Gross National Happiness is more important than Gross National Product. But every annual budget presented and discussed in parliament still reports on economic growth in terms of GDP. An initial attempt at the greening of national accounts was made a few years ago but it did not make much



The position of the elected members of the Thugpa Shugyang should be vacated by His Majesty the King.

A vacated member should serve for a term of five years after which the member must face a vote of confidence in the Thugpa Shugyang.

All decisions adopted by the Thugpa Shugyang will be issued on ceremonial advice from the King. Strategically, the government should work with the executive branch, it must also keep His Majesty the Druk Gyalpo informed of all matters that concern the security and economic well-being of the country.

A committee for the Thugpa Shugyang should be formed by a committee consisting of members of the government, clergy and people's representatives of the Dzongkhags. The Dzogpa Chhemsal should be duly consulted and consulted by the Thugpa Chhemsal during its life span.

Having observed the political systems of other countries, it is suggested that His Majesty should have a system of government that is best suited to the needs and requirements of the country.



His Majesty should ensure that the results of the national election are secure, transparent and independent. The Accounting Officer, the Minister of Finance and his/her relevant agencies should ensure that the procedures for the election of elected members of the Thugpa Shugyang are regulated by written laws. There is a particular emphasis on the issue of the laws which are related between the election and the process of election. The election should be held in a free and fair manner. The election should be held in a free and fair manner and should be held in a free and fair manner.

The members of the Thugpa Shugyang should be elected by a majority vote of the members of the Thugpa Shugyang. It should be a matter of record that the Thugpa Shugyang should be elected by a majority vote of the members of the Thugpa Shugyang. It should be a matter of record that the Thugpa Shugyang should be elected by a majority vote of the members of the Thugpa Shugyang.

His Majesty the Bodhisattva King should be elected by a majority vote of the members of the Thugpa Shugyang. It should be a matter of record that the Thugpa Shugyang should be elected by a majority vote of the members of the Thugpa Shugyang.



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Issued on the Festival Day of the Fourth Month of the Year of the Male Earth Tiger corresponding to the Tibetan Day of June 1998 at the Thugpa Shugyang.

His Majesty the Bodhisattva King

headway. What would the structure and design of a GNH budget look like? How would our economic, monetary and fiscal policies look if and when they were formulated around a GNH perspective?

THE GOLDEN BOWL OF DEMOCRACY

The goal of good governance is to create the right socio-economic conditions for members of society to maximise happiness and minimise suffering. The system of governance needs legitimation by those governed in order to endorse that system as best suited for the creation of conditions for generating and maximising happiness. His Majesty has repeatedly said that the future of Bhutan lies in the hands of Bhutanese people. For more than three decades, he has gradually prepared the Bhutanese people for democratic governance through steady decentralisation of monarchical authority. This was characterised by a great sense of sacrifice culminating in voluntary abdication in 2006.



Two distinct phases of decentralisation and democratisation are noteworthy. In the first phase, His Majesty focused on establishing local institutions of collective decision-making. Next, he focused on the central level by reforming the erstwhile legislature—National Assembly and the cabinet. In hindsight, we understand that His Majesty was establishing institutions as well as preparing Bhutanese people to assume responsibility for governance with the introduction of parliamentary democracy in 2008. The success of democracy cannot be guaranteed without embedding democratic institutions and political culture in the society. It is even more difficult for people to accept democracy as an alternative when the monarchy had done so well and delivered dividends in terms of national security, political stability and socio-economic development. Thus, people had to get used to the idea of self-determination and assume responsibility in terms of governance.

The following line stands out quite remarkably from His Majesty's coronation speech.

As far as you, my people are concerned, you should not adopt the attitude that whatever is required to be done for your welfare will be done entirely by the government. On the contrary, a little effort on your part will be much more effective than a great deal of effort on the part of the government.⁷

This reflects his trust in the ability of the people to address their own needs.

A traditional Bhutanese proverb says, “If you have to milk the snow lion, you need a golden bowl.” In order to create the golden bowl in which the milk of political authority can be contained, His Majesty started a process of decentralisation in 1976 with the establishment of a local government institution. By 1981, a *Dzongkhag Yargay Tshogdu* (DYT) or District Development Committee was established in each of Bhutan's twenty districts. Its purposes were two-fold. One, to make collective decision-making

institutional at the local level and two, to make that institution popularly represented. The idea of the participation of people's representatives in the DYT initially meant assisting the district administration in identifying local needs and priorities that can be fed into the formulation of five-year development plans and later in implementing them. It could not determine the plan for itself.

Hence, His Majesty established the *Gevog Yargay Tshogchung* (GYT) in 1991 in every district. A *gevog* is a constituent of a district and consists of many villages. This institution enabled people's participation beyond mere articulation of local needs to district authorities by having decision-making powers. Decentralisation was intended to build real autonomy at grassroots community levels with an administrative structure that was efficient, transparent and accountable. Autonomy demands capacity-building to strengthen independent decision-making, formulating, implementing and monitoring development projects. The government recognised the need to transfer skilled and qualified officials and other manpower from the centre to lower levels. Perhaps, the most important decentralisation event in Bhutan was the transfer of financial power and responsibility to GYT's and DYT's. Budgets earmarked for projects in each districts would be under their discretion. The GYT's and DYT's became the primary institutions of local governance in village communities, which have now become full-fledged local governments.

The year 1991 was important in other ways. His Majesty commanded that the seventh five-year plan, which also began that year, had to be *gevog*-based. At the same time, he relinquished the chairmanship of the central Planning Commission. These two demonstrated his genuine intent to empower grassroots communities and the seriousness of the *gevog*-based plan instead of one that was centrally planned and prescribed.



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The decentralisation process thus far, has focused on training community leaders and villagers both in the electoral process and assumption of responsibilities for power devolved to them. Seven years later, in 1998, His Majesty pushed through an even more historic reform. The long-standing cabinet was dissolved and a new one appointed to which he devolved all executive powers. What is important is the fact that the King devolved his powers not to the existing cabinet but rather to a new one, which had to be endorsed by the National Assembly and would serve a fixed term of five years.

His Majesty stepped aside from governance to serve as head of state. The position of head of government was assumed by the minister who secured the highest number of votes in the National Assembly. He would however, hold the post for only one year. It would rotate among the cabinet ministers depending on the number of votes they secured. Another highlight of the reform was the arrangement for the National Assembly to cast a vote of no-confidence in the King. He would abdicate in favour of the next in line if two-thirds of the members of National Assembly supported a motion of no-confidence.

Five years later, in 2002, two important political events took place. Firstly, a nation-wide election of *gyaps*, the chairman of GYT was held. It brought in a new element of secret ballot and adult franchise. Secondly, the tenure of the new cabinet ended and fresh elections were held in the National Assembly to elect as well as expand the cabinet. It is important to mention that he had commanded the drafting of a Constitution a year earlier. The draft was later consulted with all of the people in the twenty districts, where His Majesty and the then Crown Prince travelled extensively to discuss the provisions with the people before their promulgation. Before his voluntary abdication in 2006, he had also established the Election Commission, Anti-

corruption Commission and opened the media to allow private players to come in.

Thus, for thirty years, His Majesty has prepared the golden bowl of fundamental institutions, both local and constitutional, to hold the milk of political authority. This process of gradual but steady devolution of powers was done without any popular domestic demand, crisis of legitimacy or international pressure. His Majesty abdicated at the height of his power, success and fame and at a young age of fifty-two years. Both parliamentary and local government elections were held in 2008 and 2011 based on provisions of the Constitution. Second parliamentary elections were held in 2013 and the next round of local government elections will be held in 2016.

Democracy has come to Bhutan at the royal initiative to serve as a means to further enhance the happiness of the people. It has not come through conventional methods of regime change identified in transitology narratives. Democratisation has not been a consequence of peasant or bourgeoisie rebellion, middle-class movement, elite struggle or compromise, nor was it a response to regional or international pressure. It has been a mark of enlightened and innovative leadership! Monarchy has become the site and agency of Bhutan's democratic transition. Monarchy will continue to be the bedrock for the success of Bhutan's democracy. This in itself is an expression of an alternative modernity that has been possible owing to a unique trajectory of Bhutan's history and culture.

CONCLUSION

I began this paper by arguing that Gross National Happiness as articulated by His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck is a vision of an alternative modernity for Bhutan. By situating my arguments within the four pillars of GNH, I have illustrated how this alternative modernity has come to be expressed in the policies pursued by His Majesty.



Modernity has conventionally come to be perceived in relation to urbanisation, industrialisation and jettisoning of culture and tradition. The culture and tradition of rural populace are deemed non-conducive for an industrial workforce and lifestyle. This idea of modernity has its root in the industrial revolution of Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and it has become the mainstream narrative of modernity.

However, Gross National Happiness as advanced by His Majesty has made culture and tradition the font of Bhutan's modernity. In fact, its significance has been underscored by the fact that His Majesty has said time and again how culture and tradition has to be integral to Bhutan's national identity and sovereignty. This is important in view of the fact that Bhutan is geo-strategically located between two world powers, who are also the most populous nations in the world. Thus, Bhutan's modernity cannot be imagined by de-linking it from culture and tradition.

As I highlighted earlier, Bhutan's modernisation began with minimal industrialisation. Therefore, there has neither been aggressive urbanisation nor huge displacement of population from rural villages. People continued to remain in villages. Modernisation focused a lot more on delivery of basic services to rural people, who constituted more than 80% of the people when modernisation began. These people who now constitute about 68% of the population still depend on agriculture. Thus, an important aspect of Bhutan's modernity in the context of minimal industrialisation was its attention to development of agriculture not just as an economic activity for self-reliance but as the foundation of our value-system and way of life.

GNH however, does not reject the importance of economic development of which industrialisation and urbanisation are important parts. The Bhutanese state has pursued economic development by initiating state-owned enterprises, corporatising or privatising them later on, and investing immensely in

hydro-power projects. For its resources, it has relied largely on revenues from state-owned enterprises and credits from bilateral and multi-lateral sources. It has not taxed its people heavily. Tax obligations of the rural people are negligible but their share of national budget is increasingly growing, which is returned as grants to local governments.

Bhutan's modernisation process has paid great attention to the conservation concerns for our natural environment. His Majesty has taken the initiative to ensure the widespread coverage of floral and faunal diversity in the country, and instituted laws early on to protect and preserve them. A strong Buddhist ethics and value-system has aided in our conservation efforts. Environment has not been seen as means for human well-being alone. Recognising the inter-dependence of all life-forms, environmental concerns occupied a central place in our development thinking rather than being marginal to it.

It must be pointed out that this vision of alternative modernity emanates from the experience and trajectory of Bhutan's own history. Therefore, it does not seek to be prescriptive to other societies but remains open to share experiences that may have relevance beyond Bhutanese people. It has taken on board ideas and practices from other societies when they were felt to be in sync with the pursuit of GNH.

Parliamentary democracy has been advocated by His Majesty as a political system best suited to meet the aspirations of Bhutanese people. He has led the country for more than three decades. The state's presence in rural areas and its impact through socio-economic programs have greatly affected the everyday lives of the people. These programs and projects needed legitimation and endorsement by those who were affected. Parliamentary democracy provides the political space and opportunity for the people not only to endorse these programs and projects but enable them to determine the choice of plans and policies. The trajectory of consolidation of parliamentary democracy will also follow a



*The Speaker of the National Assembly offering the Golden Wheel to His Majesty during the Silver Jubilee Celebration of the Coronation of His Majesty in 1999.
(Photo: Courtesy National Assembly)*

course that is based on Bhutanese experience and aspirations. It cannot follow a modular path since a uniform modular democratic system does not exist. That too is an opportunity for fashioning out an alternative modernity.

In a democratic polity, His Majesty's policies are even more relevant as directions for how Bhutanese leaders and people imagine and organise our journey into the future. Here are some of the pertinent challenges. The agriculture sector has been relatively neglected as seen from its contribution to GDP. More and more young people leave their village in search of employment leaving the elderly as the major population in rural areas. But urban areas do not have enough employment opportunities.

ENDNOTES

- 1 This Chapter builds on the contents and arguments of a shorter article I previously wrote. See, 11 Greatest Accomplishments of a Dharma King. In *11-11-11, a tribute* (2013), Thimphu: MPC Publications. It also draws extensively from my book *Polity, Kingship and Democracy* (2009). Thimphu: Ministry of Education.
- 2 King Jigme Singye Wangchuck as quoted in Elliott, John (1987) *The Modern Path to Enlightenment*, London: *The Weekend FT*, May.
- 3 See Kinga (2009) *Polity, Kingship and Democracy*. Thimphu: Ministry of Education, p.188-193 for a detailed study and analysis of the *genja* of 1907.
- 4 Ishima, Y. (2004) The Notion of 'Buddhist Government'. In *The relationship between religion and state (chos srid zung'bre)* in *traditional Tibet*, Lumbini: Lumbini International Research Institute, see p.17 for a translation and transliteration of the original text.
- 5 Aris, Michael (1986) *Sources for the History of Bhutan*. Vienna: Wiener Studien zur Tibetologie und Buddhismuskunde, Heft 14, p.129-131.
- 6 Barnard, Alan and Spencer, Jonathan (1996) *Encyclopedia of Social and Cultural Anthropology*. London and New York: Routledge, p.377.
- 7 His Majesty King Jigme Singye Wangchuck Coronation Address in 1974 as reproduced in *The Bhutanese*, 14 November 2014.

Reasons for Offering the Golden Wheel to His Majesty the King:

The eight-spoked Golden Wheel, resplendent with Norzin Patra and Meri, which are studded with turquoise and coral, is implanted in the centre of a silver lotus. The lotus is placed on top of the golden throne held high by eight lions. It was prepared with utmost care and purity and contains the complete and noble affluence of the Monarchs of the three realms of the universe. The National Assembly, on behalf of the people of Bhutan, offers it wholeheartedly to His Majesty on the special occasion of the 25th Anniversary of the enthronement. The offering is a token of their deep appreciation and gratitude to His Majesty the King for his extraordinary and unparalleled service to the nation. May this auspicious and pure offering, by its inherent virtue, bring His Majesty victory over all outer, inner and secret adversaries and be symbolic of the power and wisdom that can turn the Universal Wheel.

Consumerism is also on the rise and is aggressively promoted by exposure through multiple media channels and sources. On the other hand, the roots of traditional culture such as Buddhism are challenged. Issues such as declining enrolment in the monastic community are not receiving adequate attention. Globalisation is having significant impact on the attitude and life-style of a new generation of Bhutanese. Thus, it has become even more important to reclaim and renew ownership of the vision and policies of His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck. Fortunately, His Majesty Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck, the present King of Bhutan, has commanded that working towards the realisation of GNH would be key to his reign.



"It is my wish and prayer that, during the reign of Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck, the Palden Drukpa will remain strong and glorious, that our country will achieve greater prosperity with the sun of peace and happiness shining on our people, that all the national objectives of the country and the hopes and aspirations of our people will be fulfilled, and the Bhutanese people will enjoy greater level of contentment and happiness." His Majesty the Fourth Druk Gyalpo
(Photo: Courtesy ROM)



Above: Mount Jomolhari (7,326 m) is one of Bhutan's most sacred mountains. It is the highest peak on the western border and dominates the border with China. It is worshipped as the abode of the deity Jomo. Its symmetrical peak, the summit, is considered fit to be the throne of the deity and worshipped as a divine being. The mountain is considered to be the bride of Mount Khangchendzonga. (Photo: Tshewang R. Wangchuk)



THE ENVIRONMENTALIST: A KING AHEAD OF HIS TIME

Tshewang R. Wangchuk

Throughout the centuries, the Bhutanese have treasured their natural environment and have looked upon it as the source of all life. This traditional reverence for nature has delivered us into the twentieth century with our environment still richly intact. We wish to continue living in harmony with nature and to pass on this rich heritage to our future generations.¹ —His Majesty the Fourth King Jigme Singye Wangchuck

In 2012, a team of Bhutanese and international biologists, and staff from Jigme Dorji National Park, conducted assessments in the remote mountain villages near Mt. Jomolhari to plan an innovative project. The goal was to protect the area's snow leopards by involving community members and turning the snow leopard into an asset to the community rather than a liability to the local yak herders. Residents would assist with conservation efforts and benefit from snow-leopard-based ecotourism. In addition, yak herders' livestock would receive preventive veterinary care to lessen their losses to disease, so that the less-frequent loss to snow leopards could be better tolerated. During the visit, they met a villager in his seventies named Ap Zangpo, who was an active participant in all the meetings. The elderly grandfather always spoke

with a mischievous grin, revealing his few remaining betel-stained teeth. He seemed to have a special motivation for protecting the big cats, despite their impact on the local livestock. He said that Drukgyel Zhipa (His Majesty the Fourth King of Bhutan Jigme Singye Wangchuck) would always say, "The snow leopards are the jewels of our mountains."

In many ways, this anecdote is a reflection of the Fourth King's visionary and progressive environmental leadership, which was based on the "traditional reverence for nature" quoted above. His people believed in him—and he believed in them. As king, he was a champion of decentralisation of power and involved the citizenry in solutions. He understood like no other leader that protecting the environment would generate short and long-term economic benefits for Bhutanese. He balanced economic development with protection of the environment, and he exercised restraint in the development of roads and industry. The four pillars of Bhutan's development philosophy of Gross National Happiness—conservation of the environment, equitable and sustainable development, good governance, and preservation of culture—were



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evident in his leadership decisions. The Fourth King was different from other leaders in the region. This was leadership with a heart; this was a guardian of Bhutan's environment.

Like its neighbours, Bhutan is located in an area with high biodiversity, but this region of South Asia also has tremendous human population density and pressure. Over 200 million years ago, the Indian tectonic plate drifted away from the African landmass and collided against the Eurasian plate. The ensuing pressure gave rise to the Himalayan mountains, creating an environment that represented elements of both the temperate Palearctic bio-geographical realm as well as the tropical Indo-Malayan realm. Because of this, the Eastern Himalayan region is an area of tremendously high biological diversity. Only in Bhutan would one find tigers and snow leopards often sharing the same habitat at the foot of glaciers—staff of Jigme Dorji National Park confirmed the presence of tigers at 4,200 metres above sea level, where one would also find snow leopards.² More recently, Bhutanese biologists recorded tiger evidence at 4400 metres, the highest altitude ever recorded for tigers anywhere in the world! Prior to this knowledge, most tiger biologists believed that they inhabited lowland jungles, and they were not known to live at such high elevation. Notwithstanding that Bhutan lies in the ecologically rich Eastern Himalayan region, it also represents a refreshing oasis in a part of South Asia that is fast losing its biodiversity because of political instability, unrestrained development and commercial exploitation, and human overpopulation. The Indo-Gangetic plains and the Brahmaputra river basin are areas with some of the highest human densities on earth, often with over 250 persons crammed in an area as small as one km². But Bhutan shines as an island of hope in a sea of humanity.

Less than one million people live in Bhutan. The country's 38,394 km² area is home to some 200 species of mammals, over 700 species of birds, and

more than 5,000 species of vascular plants, with 70.46 percent of Bhutan still forested. Indeed, Bhutan is like the ecological heart of the Eastern Himalayas—pumping out tigers and snow leopards into a landscape that has abundant prey and is a flourishing host of plants and rivers and sky. How does Bhutan do it in the face of tremendous biodiversity loss globally and such anthropogenic pressures regionally? Simply put, Bhutan's biodiversity remains intact to this day because of the Fourth King Jigme Singye Wangchuck's forward-thinking leadership.

VISIONARY LEADERSHIP:

A DELIBERATE BALANCE BETWEEN DEVELOPMENT AND CONSERVATION

During its colonial rule, the British Empire considered forest management to be important, as timber extraction in India and other colonies was one of the main activities that helped expand infrastructure such as railways. The British developed a professional forestry cadre in India. After India finally gained independence in 1947, and Bhutan started its modernisation programs in the late 1950s, the first professional foresters in Bhutan were Indians, as Bhutan did not have any of its citizens trained in modern forestry and silvicultural practices. The Bhutan Forest Act of 1969, as one of the earliest pieces of modern legislation in Bhutan, was therefore distilled from the Indian Forest Act (1927), which was itself a vestige of British colonial rule. Subsequent to the passing of this Act, for the first time, local peoples' rights to use forest resources were abrogated and nationalised in the hands of the government. People could no longer use forest resources as they had been doing until then—regulations, fines, and penalties were put in place. Any land not registered under a private individual's name was classified as a Government Reserved Forest, and ownership reverted to the state. This totally undermined local institutions and practices that had kept Bhutan's rich biodiversity largely intact for a population that lived very close to nature.



Soon after the Fourth King's coronation in 1974, a revolution happened in the legislation of forest resources, which charted the course of Bhutan's enlightened leadership in environmental conservation. One of the first pieces of legislation the young monarch passed would have a profound impact on how Bhutan spearheaded its development into a modern society. The Bhutan Forest Policy was passed in 1974. According to the new policy, Bhutan committed to maintaining at least 60 percent of its area under forest cover at all times. This was a major commitment for a country just setting out on its course of modernisation and development—schools, hospitals, and industries would have to be built—yet it chose to put a restraint on wanton exploitation of its forest resources.

The importance His Majesty accorded the natural environment over revenue from timber resources was the beginning of modern conservation leadership in Bhutan. For the first time, a developing country put conservation above economic gains, and that would be the hallmark of Bhutan's development trajectory. The new legislation also incorporated decentralisation of forest resource use (through social and community forestry) and comprehensive biodiversity protection through a system of game sanctuaries and wildlife reserves. Most important of all, forest management and protection now accommodated human dimensions through resource use and management. Conservation was now considered something that would benefit local communities and global interests.

His Majesty has always considered Bhutan's youth as its future. On every official visit to different parts of the country, he would make it a point to stop in schools and talk to the students and teachers. Conservation, for His Majesty, was not to remain an abstract topic relevant only for foresters and conservationists. He considered every Bhutanese as the custodian of our environment,

so it was important for our youth to learn about our natural environment. In 1985, His Majesty commanded that environmental studies be started in all primary schools so that children were exposed to facts about our environment and became responsible citizens. By this time, Bhutan was also well on its way to developing an important source of revenue by harnessing a resource Bhutan has been plentifully endowed with—its fast-flowing rivers. Hydropower would soon become Bhutan's number one source of revenue. Between this and the fact that Bhutan's population depended mainly on subsistence agriculture, there was even more reason for the country to protect its forests and watersheds. General awareness on the importance of Bhutan's environment was vital for its young population. Environmental studies have now become an important subject in middle and high school curricula and play an important role in shaping young Bhutanese as custodians of their environment.

His Majesty understood well that civil society should play an important role in safeguarding the country's environment, and that this sacred responsibility should not rest on the government alone. Under His Majesty's patronage, the Royal Society for Protection of Nature (RSPN), the first Bhutanese conservation NGO, was set up in 1987. One of the first activities RSPN carried out was to organise country-wide art and essay competitions among schools and colleges in Bhutan. Since then, RSPN has now grown substantially in terms of its size and responsibilities. Quite befittingly, every November, RSPN and the Phobjikha community celebrate the Black-necked Crane festival to coincide with His Majesty's birth anniversary.

For a country that depends heavily on its natural resources, His Majesty knew that enlightened governance should guide conservation in Bhutan. He had consistently maintained that the fate of the



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country (including its natural environment) should not rest in the hands of one individual. So it was in 1990 that His Majesty commanded the establishment of the National Environment Commission (NEC), a high-level multi-sectoral body established to protect, maintain, and improve Bhutan's environment for present and future generations. Among other things, the NEC was to provide guidelines for protecting Bhutan's tremendous natural biodiversity and environment. For the first time, industries and businesses (representing the brown sector) were brought under the fold of environmental compliance through requirements for monitoring and safeguards to ensure environmental protection. The NEC is also the main body coordinating and negotiating with international conventions on behalf of the country. It is through the NEC that Bhutan interacts with the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), and the Ramsar Convention, among others. As more development activities were undertaken, the NEC developed 'The Middle Path, the National Environment Strategy for Bhutan' in 1998.

While visionary and far-sighted, His Majesty was also very pragmatic in his approach. As the country was making major commitments in conservation, the King also knew that this decision would inevitably entail sacrifices on other fronts. After all, conservation also had real and opportunity costs. So, in 1992 he issued a Royal Charter to create the world's first environmental trust fund. With the help of World Wildlife Fund and several bilateral and multilateral agencies, the Bhutan Trust Fund was a bold attempt to raise an endowment of US\$ 20 million to pay for Bhutan's conservation efforts. The success of the Bhutan Trust Fund model was later emulated in over 60 countries as a sustainable mechanism to fund conservation efforts around the world. Now called the Bhutan Trust Fund for Environmental Conservation (BT FEC), the interest

accrued from the over US\$ 50 million endowment finances conservation activities in Bhutan.

Any profession, and certainly one that entails safeguarding the country's natural heritage, requires a skilled workforce. Bhutan could not afford to continue sending its professionals abroad for training forever. Realising the importance of in-country capacity-building, His Majesty oversaw the establishment of the Natural Resources Training Institute in 1992, with support from the Swiss Development Corporation and Helvetas. It trained mid-level professionals in the forestry, livestock, and agriculture sectors. Graduates from this institute would be sent to districts and villages across Bhutan to ensure sustainable use of natural resources over the ensuing two decades or so. Presently, the institute has been upgraded as the College of Natural Resources under the Royal University of Bhutan, and it offers degree courses at the undergraduate and graduate levels. In addition, the government of Bhutan continues to send select individuals for specialised training in conservation abroad. Even when Bhutan did not have many trained specialists in the various disciplines of conservation, His Majesty the Fourth King had the vision to keep opportunities for exciting discoveries and research for future Bhutanese. In a letter to the Chief Justice of the time, Dasho Paljor J. Dorji (Dasho Benji), His Majesty commanded that research opportunities in wildlife science be given to Bhutanese researchers first. If one was not available, we should wait until one became available in the future, according to that edict.

Presently, Bhutan has one of the highest percentages of protected areas in the world for a country its size, at over 51 percent of its total area. The history of Bhutan's protected areas really started with the monarchy. Even as early as 1914, the First King of Bhutan, Gongsar Ugyen Wangchuck, communicated his desire to conserve Bhutan's forests. He told B.J. Gould, British Political



Officer in Sikkim, that he was “anxious to make suitable measures for the conservation of Bhutan’s forests, but that it is difficult to take the necessary steps owing to lack of funds.”³ During the winter the Royal Family used to visit special places in Bhutan rich in wildlife, such as Manas along the sub-tropical Southern border. The wildlife and raw beauty of these natural spaces gained popularity as royal retreats, and they were thus protected. Later on, starting from 1966, wildlife sanctuaries were established, mainly along the Southern borders, starting with Manas. Then in 1974, the Jigme Dorji Wildlife Sanctuary was established in the northern part of the country in honour of His Majesty the Third King. During the reign of His Majesty the Fourth King, the nation’s protected area network underwent a significant overhaul. More science was injected into the process through a major revision of the protected area system in 1993 to make it more representative of Bhutan’s diverse ecological zones. The alpine North and large areas with only rock and ice were over-represented in the erstwhile Jigme Dorji Wildlife Sanctuary, which covered a third of the country. The subtropical South consisted of a few small reserves along the Indian border, and the middle hills were under-represented. The large swath of alpine areas included inside Jigme Dorji National Park was truncated to its present size of 4,316 km², and several protected areas were created in the middle hills of Bhutan to ensure coverage of cool broad-leaf forests and the mixed conifer forests. The newly revised protected area system covered over 26 percent of the country and soon gained recognition as Bhutan’s stamp of leadership and commitment in conservation.

Around that time, farmers around the country were lamenting the profusion of wild pigs that were destroying crops in agricultural fields. Just a decade or so earlier, herders had complained about the rise in wild dog populations that were wreaking havoc on their cattle population. Poisoning the predators in response to cattle depredation soon

led to an increase in its prey population when wild dogs were removed from the system. The growing recognition of the impact of imbalances in the populations of selected species indicated the effects of development on the natural environment. Bhutan’s protected area network revision was a timely intervention to ensure that the country’s rich natural heritage remained protected for posterity. His Majesty, in his address to the people, would often emphasise the importance of conservation and the need to “care for our environment.”

Around 1995, a new Forest and Nature Conservation Act was passed by the National Assembly. This was a major update in conservation legislation, and the bill was deliberated clause by clause in the National Assembly before passing into Act. The country’s vision for conservation was thus given a legal foundation to support it by the highest legislative body of the country. In the same year, the National Assembly also endorsed ratification of two international conventions—the United Nations Framework Convention for Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)—clearly pitching Bhutan into the conversation of global environmental conservation.

Learning from mistakes in Southeast Asian countries such as Indonesia and Malaysia, and recognising that the export of raw timber could drain the country of its forests, the Timber Marketing and Pricing Policy of 1999 made it illegal to export raw timber. Only value-added timber could be exported. Now there was no reason for large-scale logging operations within Bhutan. Later that year, some nine percent of the country was set aside as biological corridors based on new data on movement and occurrence of key species, such as the tiger. The biological corridors were later presented as the people of Bhutan’s ‘Gift to the Earth’. In total, Bhutan’s network of protected areas and biological corridors totalled 35 percent of the country’s area.⁴



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Ever the statesman who believed in decentralisation and devolution of governing powers to the people, His Majesty followed through on his words with action. He had no desire to hold on to power forever. By 2001, he commanded the creation of Bhutan's constitution drafting committee that saw representation from all sections of Bhutanese society—government, private sector, clergy, academia, and civil society. Constitutions of numerous countries were consulted and referred to in order to guide the foundation of the world's newest democracy. When the final draft constitution of Bhutan was completed in 2003, His Majesty had consulted with his people numerous times, going over each clause and section in detail. The draft constitution was taken for exhaustive consultations to every district across the country to ensure that every voice was heard and every doubt cleared. A watershed moment for the Bhutanese people arose when His Majesty declared that he would abdicate the throne in 2006 in favour of his son, the Crown Prince—the ultimate act of devolution of power. By that time, Bhutan was graduating from the league of low-income countries and knocking on the door of the middle-income country category. With everything still going favourably for the country, Bhutan transitioned into a parliamentary democracy in 2008 without a revolution, coup, or unrest, and in peaceful times. The transformation was planned, deliberate, and seamless. And thanks to the forward-thinking leadership of the Fourth King during his reign, environmental conservation in Bhutan could continue to flourish.

INTERNATIONAL ACCLAIM: THE WORLD TAKES NOTE OF BHUTAN'S EXAMPLE

As remote as Bhutan is, it was only a matter of time before the world would become aware of His Majesty the King Jigme Singye Wangchuck's extraordinary feat of Bhutan's environmental conservation legacy. It provided a successful example of what has always been promoted in theory, but

has never been shown in large-scale practice by any other country—that better livelihoods and quality of life can be achieved through a balance between development and environmental conservation. In an interview in the 1970s, the Fourth King famously said, “Gross National Happiness is far more important than Gross National Product.”⁵ That happiness, he posited, is dependent on conservation of the environment, equitable and sustainable development, good governance, and preservation of culture. The world took note of this novel—and balanced—development philosophy. And with that awareness came international recognition of what Bhutanese citizens already knew: that the King's environmental leadership resulted in revolutionary policies that had a genuine impact on Bhutan's environmental conservation and the country's wellbeing.

In 2005, King Jigme Singye Wangchuck received a United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Champions of the Earth Award. The award is the United Nations' highest environmental recognition of “outstanding visionaries and leaders in the fields of policy, science, entrepreneurship, and civil society action” and honours those “whose actions and leadership have made a positive impact on the environment.”⁶ In an acceptance speech for the King, Bhutan's Ambassador to the United Nations in Geneva, Daw Penjo, said,

Bhutan will continue to be guided by the vision and path to development charted by His Majesty the King and the People of Bhutan. This Award is a source of great encouragement for Bhutan and its people to stay the chosen course.⁷

The following year, the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) awarded the Fourth King the 2006 J. Paul Getty Award for Conservation Leadership, one of the most prestigious conservation awards in the world. His Majesty was honoured with the award in recognition of his three decades of leadership and impact on environmental conservation in Bhutan. It came with a \$200,000 cash prize, which it was decided



was to be used to establish graduate fellowships for Bhutanese conservationists in honour of the King and the people of Bhutan. WWF President Carter S. Roberts said, “WWF congratulates His Majesty for his farsighted approach to preserving some of the world’s most spectacular wildlife and habitats.”⁹ In his acceptance letter, His Majesty said, “We have sacrificed present gains of harvesting the country’s natural resources for future sustainability of the environment and have enshrined in our laws that sixty percent of the total land area shall always be maintained under forest cover.”¹⁰

The Earth Hall of Fame Kyoto honours the achievements of those who have “contributed to the conservation of the global environment.” In 2011, King Jigme Singye Wangchuck was bestowed with this respected award. The Earth Hall of Fame Kyoto Management Council cited that

*[The King] proposed the concept of Gross National Happiness, stressing ‘a better way of life’ respecting both culture and nature. This concept caused a stir in our modernized world, which overvalues convenience and material wealth, and [helped] spread environmental consciousness globally.*¹¹

Although the world was eager to recognise the Fourth King’s success in conserving Bhutan’s natural environment, one suspects that he was only doing what came naturally to him. After all, protecting Bhutan’s abundant biodiversity was a Bhutanese priority, not just his own, and development would have to happen in harmony with nature or not at all.

A CONTINUED LEGACY: THE FOURTH KING’S BLUEPRINT FOR BHUTAN’S ENVIRONMENTAL FUTURE

Presently, Bhutan is the envy of the conservation world. Even in the face of rapid species and habitat loss globally—often referred to as the sixth mass extinction—Bhutan continues to shine as a beacon of hope for the rest of the world. There are fewer than 3,200 tigers in the wild, and fewer than 6,000 snow leopards globally, but both species of large

cats are thriving in Bhutan along with several other species of wild cats. Images of female tigers or snow leopards with two or more cubs are commonplace in scientists’ automatic cameras. Recent studies confirm that Bhutan harbours 30 percent of all the wildcat species in the world. By sheer acreage, 51.32 percent of the total area of Bhutan is conserved within its network of protected areas and biological corridors. And while the country’s constitution mandates that 60 percent of its area remain under forest cover at all times, currently 70.46 percent of Bhutan is forested.

Climate change has hastened the retreat of Himalayan glaciers and remains the primary cause of impending doom, wreaking havoc on millions of lives downstream through erratic weather patterns, glacial lake outburst floods, windstorms, and unpredictable rain and drought patterns. Yet again, while the country has made a commitment to the international community through the UNFCCC’s Conference of Parties to remain carbon neutral, it is presently carbon-negative, sequestering more carbon than it emits.

Bhutan is able to shine through as an unwavering leader with conservation foresight and follow-through mainly because of decades of meticulous planning, inclusive governance, and the care for the environment demonstrated by His Majesty the Fourth King. He was a true environmentalist at heart who knew all too well that the fate of Bhutan would lie in the soundness of its environment. His policies, speeches, and actions demonstrated that—from the Forest Act of 1969, to speeches he would give to students across the country, to the simple life he lived, His Majesty would always lead by example. Successive governments would only have to follow his lead.

However, as a new democracy, Bhutan is aware that populist actions may often hold sway over decisions that would safeguard Bhutan’s environment, which would ultimately determine the country’s fate for future generations. To quote an old Bhutanese



*The source of Chamkarchu in the Bumthang Valley. The mountain behind it is Gangkar Punsum.
(Photo: Yeshey Dorji)*

saying, “It is wiser to milk the brown cow many times than to kill it and eat beef only once.” Bhutan’s brown cow—its environment—is the source of most of its revenues: hydropower, tourism, agriculture, and mineral resources. Wanton destruction of its environment would equal killing it for immediate benefits, and at immense cost to future generations. Already, work has begun to dam all its major river systems for hydropower. Whereas His Majesty trod cautiously in this area during his reign, lately there has been a sudden push for hydropower projects that risk driving the country into further debt and economic chaos. When a contentious road was planned through core tiger habitat within Thrumshengla National Park, it got the blessings of the government. While His Majesty felt that the excitement of discovery and exploration of the Bhutanese wilderness should be kept for Bhutanese scientists, decision-makers

unwittingly often allow foreign researchers to take the lead. While such actions may be well intentioned, all Bhutanese today must question the soundness, equity, and fairness of such decisions. With the onset of parliamentary democracy, there is risk of populist decisions overriding true environmental protection and justice as dispensed by His Majesty the Fourth King.

Overall, today’s approach to environmental conservation in Bhutan reflects the Fourth King’s priorities and wisdom, despite the challenges of development, and serves as an example for the world. The mantle of Bhutan’s sovereignty has now been handed to His Majesty King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck as the present constitutional monarch. But today’s Bhutan is also a parliamentary democracy, and the elected government will play



an important role in the day-to-day governance of the country. While the people of Bhutan have full faith in the leadership of the kings so far, they must question, challenge, and support, where necessary, the successive governments that come to power. Bhutan's environment, as His Majesty the Fourth King said on numerous occasions during his reign, should be safeguarded by its people.

Increasingly, Bhutan's governance must include heeding citizens like Ap Zangpo, the grandfather living in the mountains of Bhutan, who laments that more rock faces are visibly exposed now where there used to be permanent snow fields. In the

minds of the Bhutanese (young and old alike), the seed of environmental conservation has been sown, and the soil prepared well through the nurturing leadership of His Majesty the Fourth King. Long before environmentalism was the in thing to do, His Majesty demonstrated that it was the right thing for Bhutan to do. He was truly a leader ahead of his time. Going forward, development projects must continue to be balanced with their effect on the environment. But if Bhutan is ever faced with an environmental dilemma, the country only needs to ponder one question seriously: What would His Majesty the Fourth King do?

ENDNOTES

- 1 His Majesty the Fourth King Jigme Singye Wangchuck. Quoted in acceptance speech by Ambassador Daw Penjo on behalf of His Majesty for the United Nations Environment Programme, 2005. Champions of the Earth Award. http://www.unep.org/champions/laureates/2005/H.E.DawP_Ac.asp#sthash.btyHQhOF.dpfp
- 2 Even in the face of scant data, people are often quick to associate the presence of tigers at high elevations with the effects of climate change. However, the Bhutanese always knew that our mountain tigers roamed the breadth of the country because of the abundance of connected habitat, prey (often supplemented by livestock), and above all, protection. In Laya, in northwestern Bhutan, a popular legend has it that a tigress visits Gangchen Taag (Great Tiger Mountain) every year.
- 3 British Library, Confidential Letter, No. 103-E.C., dated Gangtok, 11th (received the 23rd) June, 1914. From B.J. Gould, Esq., I.C.S., Officiating Political Officer in Sikkim, to the Secretary to the Government of India in the Foreign and Political Department, Simla.
- 4 A new national park, the Wangchuck Centennial National Park, was declared in 2008. With this addition and a revision in the country's boundary, the total coverage of Bhutan's protected areas and biological corridors currently stands at over 51 percent of the country.
- 5 His Majesty the King Jigme Singye Wangchuck. In *The Legacy of a King: The Fourth Druk Gyalpo Jigme Singye Wangchuck* (2007) Siok Sian Pek-Dorji, Ed. Department of Tourism, Royal Government of Bhutan.
- 6 United Nations Environment Programme Champions of the Earth Award website.
- 7 <http://www.unep.org/champions/about.asp#sthash.ovOsljde.dpbs>
- 8 Ambassador Daw Penjo. Acceptance speech for the United Nations Environment Programme Champions of the Earth Award on behalf of His Majesty the King and the People of Bhutan, 2005.
- 9 Carter S. Roberts, as quoted in World Wildlife Fund press release, October 17, 2006.
- 10 His Majesty the Fourth King of Bhutan in an acceptance letter for the 2006 J. Paul Getty Award for Conservation Leadership as quoted in World Wildlife Fund press release, October 17, 2006. <http://www.worldwildlife.org/press-releases/king-of-bhutan-receives-prestigious-getty-conservation-award>
- 11 Kyoto Prefecture website. <http://www.pref.kyoto.jp/en/1264665552641.html>





Gangkar Punsum - The World's Highest Unclimbed Mountain. Bhutan has the unique distinction of being one of the few countries in the world with a total ban on mountaineering. There are over 20 mountains above 6,000 feet in the country.

So far, there have been four expeditions to Gangkar Punsum but none have succeeded. The British Expedition was the last to make an attempt. The ban was triggered by the British Expedition's attempt to scale Gangkar Punsum in 1986.

Locally known as the Three Sibling Mountain, the summit sits on the border of Bhutan and China. While two peaks fall within the boundary of China, the two countries share the tallest peak. At 7,570 metres it is now the tallest mountain in the country and is regarded as the world's highest unclimbed mountain.

(Photo: Steve Berry)



*His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck escorted in a traditional Chirdrel procession. The procession is colourful and is headed by a man carrying a bell and ends with Pawa dancers moving on either side of the Chirdrel procession.
(Photo: Courtesy Tshering Tashi)*



THE PATRON OF CULTURE: THE WISE KING WHO HELD CULTURE IN HIGH ESTEEM

Needrup Zangpo

THE OVERARCHING VISION

For His Majesty the Fourth Druk Gyalpo, the Bhutanese cultural heritage¹ is synonymous with the Bhutanese identity and a unique identity, the cornerstone of Bhutan's sovereignty and security.

His Majesty has underlined the importance of culture for Bhutan in many of his speeches and numerous commands to the people's representatives in the pre-democracy National Assembly (NA).² The obvious or underlying message running through his commands is that it is culture that singularly sets Bhutan apart from other countries. The premise is that what Bhutan lacks in military and economic terms, it should make up in cultural terms.

His Majesty's cultural preservation efforts have focused on both tangible and intangible elements. The former include the outward manifestations of the Bhutanese traditional way of life that informs the behaviour and attitudes of the people. The latter includes subtle, but more profound, cultural elements mostly rooted in the country's Buddhist spiritual heritage.

The *gho* and *kira*, Dzongkha, performing arts, places of spiritual worship and practice, and *Driglam Namzha* (traditional etiquette),³ among others, have been dominant themes of cultural discourse inspired by His Majesty and expanded by the *Chimis* or the people's representatives in the NA and policymakers in the higher echelons of His Majesty's Government. This is abundantly clear from the deliberations that took place in the NA between 1974 and 2006 when His Majesty was at the helm of governance and state affairs.

As a small country between two giant neighbours, it is imperative for Bhutan to be different and look different from others. And His Majesty the Fourth Druk Gyalpo recognised this. In the 68th session of the NA in 1989, His Majesty said that unlike larger countries that had economic and military advantages, Bhutan needed to promote a distinct national identity for social harmony and unity among its people to ensure the future well-being and security of the country.



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His Majesty repeated this many times over the years. At the 1993 Silver Jubilee Celebrations of Sherubtse College, then the only degree college in Bhutan, His Majesty said,

Our small size and population make it imperative for us to preserve and promote our cultural heritage and unique national identity as a means to strengthen and safeguard our sovereignty and security.

His Majesty said that even as the country was facing a “serious problem that threatened the future survival of our country,” it was poised to enter the twenty-first century. The twenty-first century, His Majesty foresaw, would test Bhutan’s ability and wisdom to withstand the ever powerful forces of mass media and global acculturation.

Sixteen years later in 2005, he brought home the same message when he said this to the people of Paro during the consultation meeting on the draft Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan:

If the neighbouring countries in the North and the South, who have a population of about 2.4 billion, pose a threat to our national sovereignty and security, we have no other defence but our unique cultural identity.⁴

In his *kasbo* of 23 July 1985 establishing the Special Commission, His Majesty noted that he was

saddened by the fact that our people copy the culture of other countries despite the existence of our distinct culture and etiquette, which is better than any other country’s.⁵

The *kasbo* added,

If we are to remain sovereign for all times to come, it is important for us to serve our country with loyalty and dedication. Our government and public should think as one and protect our identity, culture and etiquette.

His Majesty has looked at the Bhutanese culture in the broadest sense of the term although discussions in the NA among the village representatives mostly

centred around Dzongkha, national dress, religious monuments, and *Driglam Namzha*. His Majesty has emphasised culture as a means to forging a national consciousness through unity in diversity. Therefore, he stressed awareness beyond symbolism, education beyond traditional norms, and responsibility beyond legal adherence.

For example, the NA’s deliberation in 1999 on His Majesty’s 1989 *kasbo* on the need to preserve, promote and strengthen Bhutan’s national identity, otherwise called Bhutan’s cultural heritage, highlighted *Driglam Namzha*, the way of thinking, and the concepts of *Tha Damtshig* (loyalty) and *Lay Judrey* (karma) as being part of Bhutan’s cultural heritage.

The concepts of *Tha Damtshig* and *Lay Judrey* take Bhutan’s cultural heritage to a profound, inner level. His Majesty’s cultural policies reaffirm that this inner cultural experience is not achievable without the elements that cultivate outer grace and politeness. This is where the emphasis on dress and *Zacha Drosom* (the graceful way of eating, behaving, and walking) looms into relevance. And this is when the promotion of a single tongue everybody can speak and understand becomes important.

At the heart of His Majesty’s cultural policy is discovering and reaffirming the link between outer behaviour and inner values. For example, the recognition and practice of inner values of *Tha Damtshig* and outer behaviour of *Zacha Drosom* is expected to bring about harmony and elegance in society.

Even as His Majesty commanded that school curricula be revised to prepare the Bhutanese children to live up to the demands of Bhutan’s traditional cultural and social mores, he stressed that the Bhutanese people continue to conduct themselves elegantly and that social and official functions be organised tastefully. The underlying message is that good taste and elegance inspire good intentions and behaviour.



Dasho Dorji Gyeltshen, who was Gyalpoi Zimpon (Lord Chamberlain) throughout His Majesty the Fourth Druk Gyalpo's thirty-four-year reign, says His Majesty "always gave importance to the traditions and culture and he took great pains and interest to observe all ceremonies." Dasho closely supervised every important national ceremonial function since the coronation of the Fourth Druk Gyalpo, including all National Day Celebrations, the Silver Jubilee Celebrations of the Fourth King, and the Fifth King's Trongsa Penlop investiture ceremony, among others. And he is known to be a stickler for detail with regard to ceremonial protocols and *Zacha Drosom*.

Incidentally, in 'Bold Bhutan Beckons,' Dasho Dorji Gyeltshen recollects learning *Driglam Namzha* from the Third Druk Gyalpo thus:

At that time the king was in bad health, yet, he spent lot of time with Dasho Jigme and me. He took great pains to explain in depth the importance of culture and tradition, and personally taught us Bhutanese etiquette. The king said, "Most countries have realised the importance of tradition and culture and are making an effort to look after it. Our culture and tradition will be our main identity in years to come. It will be our most effective tool to cultivate foreign relations. It will also be our most powerful weapon to defend the security and sovereignty of the nation. You must help Dasho Jigme preserve our culture and tradition. It must not only grow but thrive. It is also your responsibility to help Dasho Jigme to ensure that the country is governed with strong influence of Buddhist values."

So, we learn from Dasho Dorji Gyeltshen that Bhutan's vision of cultural distinction has run through our monarchs. This grand vision is inextricably linked to Bhutan's strong perception of external and internal threat and survival instinct.

In Bhutan, there is a thin line between the cultural heritage and spiritual heritage because the former has roots in, or derives its significance from the latter. Therefore, for His Majesty the Fourth Druk

Gyalpo, the preservation of culture not only meant renovation of old *lhakhangs* and safeguarding the relics inside them, but also keeping the spiritual traditions in them flourishing. This meant building and maintaining monuments as well as building and promoting institutions in them. The renovation of Tango Monastery and the founding of an institution of monastic higher learning in it is a case in point.

Article 4, section 1 of Bhutan's Constitution recognises *dzongs*, *lhakhangs*, monastic institutions, and religion as part of the cultural heritage of Bhutan. This clearly shows that Bhutan's religion or spirituality is an essential part of the country's cultural heritage.

'Bhutan 2020: A Vision for Peace, Prosperity and Happiness' (1999) sums up His Majesty's cultural vision succinctly as does the ninth five-year plan document.

This [cultural] imperative, which has been linked to our identity, sovereignty and even survival as a nation state, must find clear expression in the priorities and directions we set for the future

says Bhutan 2020, Bhutan's vision statement document. The ninth five-year plan emphasises that

economic and technological progress will be pursued hand in hand with the preservation of spiritual and cultural heritage of the country. Both of these contribute to the well-being and happiness of the people.

WHY THIS VISION

His Majesty the Fourth Druk Gyalpo's vision of cultural preservation was born of a strong sense of nationalism shaped by the country's size, location, threat perception, modernisation, a rapidly westernising population, and domestic cultural reorientation.

Since the time of Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal until Gongsar Ugyen Wangchuck became the first king of Bhutan, Bhutan's sovereignty had been sorely tested. Generations of Bhutanese fought numerous wars with powerful neighbours in the North as well



Monks must adapt

“But even within Buddhism, certain changes have to take place. Monks can no longer, like in the past, live in the four corners of the dzongs, but will have to go out and do social work. We would like them to be doctors, be health workers, help the farmers, help the poor people. I think that in this day and age, the Buddhist institutions in Bhutan will have to reach out to the people.”

(Drukgyal Zhigpa to the The New York Times, 23 March 1991)

(Photo: Courtesy Tsbering Tashi)



as in the South to defend the country's territorial integrity. It is this painful historical memory that makes Bhutan's sovereignty precious.

Therefore, since the founding of hereditary monarchy, one of Bhutan's foremost causes of nervousness has been its location between two Asian giants, China and India. Persistent disturbances in China and the Indian Subcontinent fuelled by territorial ambitions have made Bhutan nervous and constantly alert.

A few examples of how Bhutan's threat perception has been made stronger over time will help put this in perspective:

In a short period after Gongsar Ugyen Wangchuck's enthronement as the first King of Bhutan, China sent a 20-member military mission to Bhutan under a commander with the objective of asserting their political control over Bhutan... The threat of China was always a shadow of fear over Bhutan's sovereignty.⁶

In 1959, Tibet lost its independence to China. China's invasion of Tibet and resulting influx of Tibetan refugees into Bhutan came as a harsh reminder of Bhutan's vulnerability. This led to the closure of all the routes to Tibet. Since then, Bhutan turned to the South, to India, for friendship, assistance and trade.

Bhutan's sense of vulnerability was deepened when in 1975 Sikkim became the 22nd state of India. Two once independent Buddhist kingdoms, Tibet and Sikkim, lost their independence in less than two decades. In between, in 1962, India went to war with China which could have had huge implications for Bhutan. The region was becoming geopolitically more volatile in the twentieth century than it had been in the past two centuries. What could it mean to Bhutan? How could Bhutan assert its independence?

Across the border with India, the expansionist Nepalese population was viewed as a demographic and security threat to Bhutan in the 1980s. The Buddhist kingdom of Sikkim was culturally invaded by Nepalese immigrants and the growing ethnic

Nepalese population in the Southern districts of the country was not yet well integrated into the mainstream Bhutanese community. Sikkim presented an important demographic lesson to Bhutan.

Moreover, dissidence brewed in Southern Bhutan among the Bhutanese of ethnic Nepalese origin after a census in 1988 alerted Bhutan to the importance of cultural integration and assimilation. In the meantime, India constantly cast a long shadow over Bhutan. India's cultural and economic presence in Bhutan was becoming painfully noticeable.

Here was a country with a strong perception of internal and external threats. How could Bhutan respond to a neighbourhood which was in a state of flux? Without economic power or military might, Bhutan's only defence lay in being different from its neighbours and looking similar at home.

However, although Bhutan was largely different from its neighbours, looking similar or the same at home was not easy. Bhutan is home to nineteen different indigenous languages and the people are not culturally homogeneous. When His Majesty the Fourth Druk Gyalpo ascended the throne, Dzongkha as the national language was just beginning to pick up and the *gbo* and *kira* were struggling to gain popularity among some sections of the population.

For example, in the 51st session the NA in 1979, the *Chimi* of Samtse and a few members from Southern Bhutan submitted that wearing the national dress was inconvenient for them. They requested that they be exempted from wearing the national dress.

In the 52nd session of the NA in 1980, the Home Minister reported to the house that, despite repeated deliberation on the importance of Bhutanese cultural heritage (national dress, national language, and *Driglam Namzha*), some government officials were reluctant to abide by the country's cultural policy. The people's representatives raised concerns over the Bhutanese diplomats living in foreign lands not wearing the national dress.



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His Majesty recognised that, as a small country, Bhutan should be homogeneous culturally and linguistically. He believed that all Bhutanese should identify themselves with a common cultural and linguistic identity which was markedly different from that of other countries, particularly that of our neighbours. In this context, to get the Bhutanese of ethnic Nepalese origin in the South to align themselves to the mainstream Bhutanese cultural identity was an important national policy in the 1980s. What His Majesty said to the 68th session of the NA in 1989 underscores this policy. His Majesty said,

There is a tendency among our people to identify themselves more closely with nationalities of other countries than with our own Bhutanese people. Such a tendency will obviously have long-term adverse effects on the unity and security of the country.

His Majesty added that if such problems did not exist, there would be no need to promote a national dress and language or *Driglam Namzha*.

This policy of cultural homogenisation, otherwise called the policy of ‘one nation, one people,’ has been carefully pursued to promote cultural unity aimed at building a single national identity, rather than many cultural identities. Cultural diversity, although desirable in the broadest sense of the term, was neither desirable nor appreciated in the 1970s and 1980s. The resolutions of the NA during those two decades recorded *Chimis* from the Southern and Eastern districts of the country repeatedly calling for the use and promotion of Dzongkha although the people in the districts they represented spoke different languages.

Bhutan’s vision of cultural homogenisation was also prompted by the pace at which the young Bhutanese were acculturating to popular Western lifestyles, especially in terms of language and dress. As modernisation—mostly observed as Westernisation—swept across Bhutan’s urban

centres, English and shirts and pants started appealing to educated young Bhutanese more than Dzongkha and the *gho* and *kira*. The urban community, which was wealthier and more influential, was undergoing rapid change and was becoming less Bhutanese in terms of dress and behaviour.

An extended deliberation on the national dress in the 77th session of the NA in 1999 saw at least six representatives express their concern over Bhutan’s elite bringing in ‘improper values.’ The representatives, who included the *Chimis* of Trongsa, Wangdi, Haa, and Punakha, submitted that it was mostly the children of high officials and wealthy people in Thimphu who were not observing the national dress code. They said that in earlier times, it was the well-to-do who set the right examples. Their children were now bringing in undesirable cultures.

The Home Minister noted that before His Majesty issued a *keasbo* in 1989 on the importance of promoting a distinct Bhutanese identity through the preservation and promotion of traditional cultures, the *gho* and *kira* were worn mostly by people in the rural areas. People in the urban areas had preferred to wear Western outfits while the Lhotshampas of Southern Bhutan wore either the Nepalese dress, *downra sural*, or other forms of dress. There were also some schools where the *gho* and *kira* were not the school uniform.

HOW THE VISION SHAPED BHUTAN’S CULTURAL IDENTITY

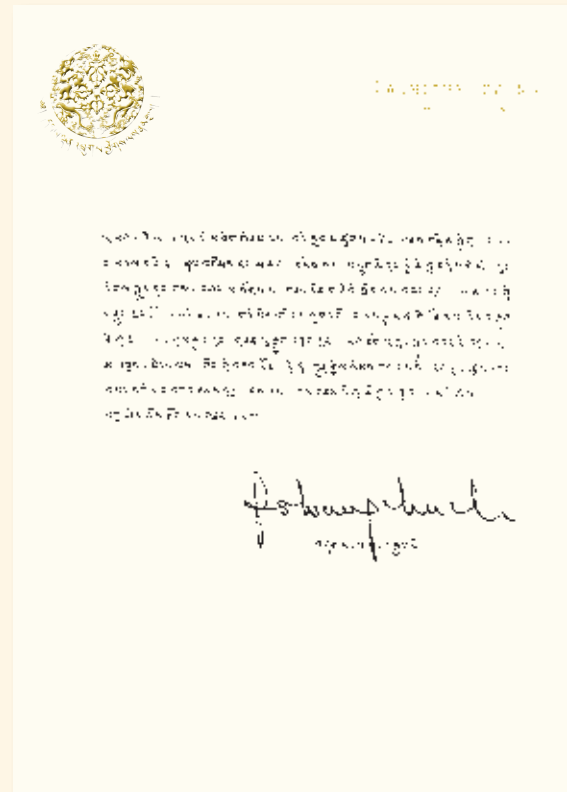
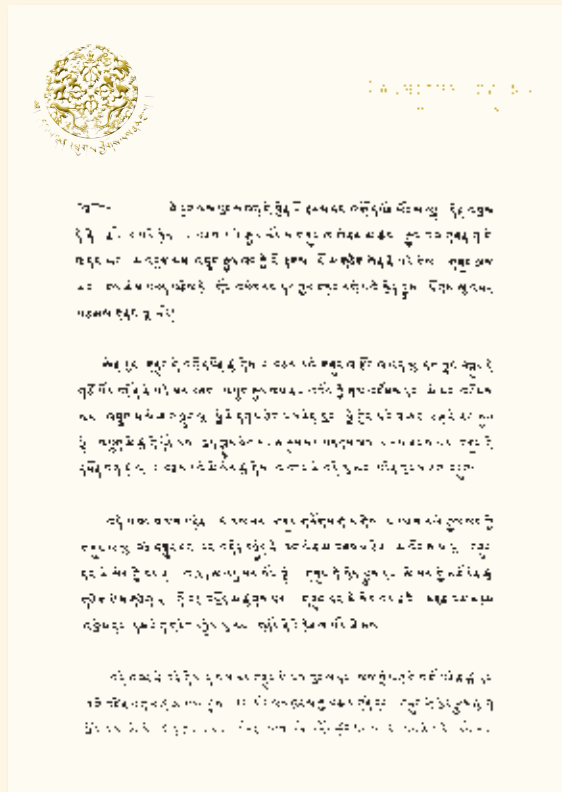
His Majesty the Fourth Druk Gyalpo meticulously pursued his cultural vision and translated it into realistic plans and policies. Thus, his cultural vision discussed above branched out into successful national plans and programmes that have made huge contributions to the cultural life of Bhutan. I will not attempt to list all plans and programmes undertaken to preserve and promote the Bhutanese culture here,



but discuss a few that illustrate and represent His Majesty's vision.

The establishment of the Special Commission on 23 July 1985 through a special *kasbo* signified the importance that His Majesty gave to Bhutan's cultural identity. The commission was to function as a high-level nodal agency to chart out policies and plans to preserve and promote Bhutan's cultural heritage under the guidance of His Majesty the King himself. The Special Commission, which was restructured and renamed in 1998 as the National

Commission for Cultural Affairs and placed under the Ministry of Home and Cultural Affairs, would put His Majesty's cultural vision into greater focus and concretise many ideas and plans that had failed to materialise owing to lack of a lead agency to implement them. The commission planned and supported the establishment of the Royal Academy of Performing Arts, the School of Traditional Arts, the National Library, the National Museum, and the Division for Cultural Properties, among many such state agencies.





*His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck catching a breeze during his coronation in 1974 held in Changlimithang.
(Photo: Guy van Strydonck)*

Barely a year later, His Majesty established the Dzongkha Development Commission (DDC). Chaired by the Finance Minister, the commission's members consisted of Dorji Lupon of the Central Monastic Body, six ministers, and six senior officials. The significance of the commission—and through it, the seriousness of promoting Dzongkha—is immediately clear from the high-powered membership of the Commission.

The DDC immediately set out to promote and develop Dzongkha. Between 1991 and 1995, it wrote sixty-one Dzongkha text books and distributed them to all primary schools and high schools in the country. The Commission notified that all sign boards, receipts, and forms be written in Dzongkha. The Commission also notified that all appointment orders and circulars, and internal written communication, should be in Dzongkha. These are some of the many initiatives that the Commission has undertaken to promote Dzongkha.

Senior Bhutanese in public service say Dzongkha has come a long way although it is now fast losing out to the 'more fashionable' English language.

A special *kasbo* issued in 1989 gave fresh impetus to the strengthening of Bhutan's cultural identity. The *kasbo* in which His Majesty reiterated the need to preserve, promote, and strengthen Bhutan's national identity entrusted the responsibility for the implementation of cultural plans and programmes to all government agencies, *Dzongkhab Yargye Tshogchungs* (now called *Dzongkhab Tshogdu*), *Gewog Yargye Tshogchungs* (now called *Gewog Tshogde*), and all the people of the twenty *dzongkhabgs*. In other words, that *kasbo* charged all the Bhutanese with taking responsibility for their common cultural heritage. Judging by the huge amount of cultural discourse the *kasbo* sparked off in the NA over many subsequent years, it managed to create a shared national consciousness which continues to this day.



His Majesty the King considered Bhutan's traditional institutions of learning—particularly *dzongs*, *lhakhangs*, and *gonpas*—as the bastions of Bhutan's cultural heritage. Therefore, he paid particular attention to their physical robustness and spiritual vitality.

For example, in the 65th session of the NA in 1987, His Majesty commanded that there was a growing need for timely renovation of places of worship in the country. His Majesty observed that it was particularly regrettable that the Bhutanese were beginning to neglect their own monasteries, temples, and *stupas* that they traditionally looked after. Given the importance of places of worship for the country's cultural strength, His Majesty said the Royal Government would consider every possibility of assisting people keep all village temples and monasteries in good shape externally and internally. This cultural and spiritual imperative articulated by His Majesty the King resulted in the establishment and upgrading of several religious and secular institutions, and renovation and construction of numerous monuments. It also resulted in national policies and plans to safeguard sacred religious relics contained in the temples and *choetens*. His Majesty issued a *kasbo* exempting *lhakhang* and *choeten* caretakers from *woola* (corvée).

An important aspect of the Fourth Druk Gyalpo's cultural policy is education and awareness beyond rules and regulations. His Majesty believed that for the preservation and promotion of culture, education, understanding, and conviction are as important as the enforcement of laws, rules, and regulations. The premise is that if younger generations are educated on culture and its importance, they will develop appreciation of the finer elements of the Bhutanese culture like *Driglam Namzha*. This is how culture can be perpetuated.

Towards this end, *Driglam Namzha* was incorporated into the school curriculum and tangible cultural elements like wearing the national dress and *kabney* were made more vibrant. His Majesty's vision of bringing up the younger generations of Bhutanese

with a sound understanding of traditional culture was helped by the concurrent drive to write school textbooks in Dzongkha with strong moral and religious contents. The Bhutanisation of the school curriculum constituted writing of school textbooks by Bhutanese educationists as well as training and recruiting more Bhutanese teachers. Besides textbook writing, His Majesty's Government initiated the publication of a number of publications in Dzongkha aimed at cultural preservation. Publication in 1999 of 423-page book on *Driglam Namzha* called *Norbui Threngwa* (Rosary of Gems) written by Gyalpoi Zimpon Dorji Gyaltsen is a good example.

In the meantime, mass media was becoming a powerful force to contend with. The increasing popularity of foreign cinema and video programmes was posing a threat to the Bhutanese value system, otherwise called the Bhutanese cultural heritage or, in modern diplomatic parlance, soft power. But the new audio-visual media also presented an opportunity to promote Bhutanese culture in more powerful ways. Recognising this opportunity, the Government planned audio-visual programmes on culture and traditions and put prominent figures in the forefront of this new venture. The Government instructed Gyalpoi Zimpon Dasho Dorji Gyaltsen and High Court Judge Dasho Tsheten Dorji to prepare a video on *Driglam Namzha* along with *Norbui Threngwa*.

When the Internet and television were allowed in, in 1999, during the Silver Jubilee Celebrations of His Majesty's coronation, the power and threat of mass media became immediately perceptible. The people's perception of the threat of mass media was heightened by the impending parliamentary democracy which, they feared, might make the Bhutanese irresponsibly outspoken and disrespectful to the traditional cultural values of Bhutan. The NA deliberations in the years leading up to the parliamentary elections in 2008 demonstrated a sense of urgency in putting cultural preservation within a stronger legal and regulatory framework. As part of these deliberations, the NA resolved



*His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck - the Fourth Druk Gyalpo of Bhutan
(Photo: Guy van Strydonck)*

that the two private newspapers licensed in 2006, Bhutan Times and Bhutan Observer, be required to publish Dzongkha editions to promote the national language through the news media. This requirement was later applied to all English language private newspapers although the separate Dzongkha edition was gradually reduced to a few pages of insert in the English editions.

To promote the use of Dzongkha, His Majesty issued several *kashos* requiring government ministries and departments to conduct all official correspondence and meetings in Dzongkha, not English. But they could not prevail against the government officials' partiality for the English language. Between 2004 and 2006, the NA repeatedly brought up the issue of government officials' reluctance to use Dzongkha for correspondence and meetings, but to no avail. Today, except for a few public institutions that use Dzongkha for correspondence and meetings

with a particular sense of commitment, English has largely become the preferred official language.

A shining testimony to the Fourth Druk Gyalpo's commitment to preserving and promoting culture is the establishment of a Trust Fund for Cultural Heritage in 1999 through a royal charter for the preservation, promotion, and sustainability of the cultural heritage of Bhutan. US \$10 million was invested in the fund. The fund maintains an inventory of cultural properties in Bhutan, suggests laws for the preservation of the cultural heritage, develops and implements plans for the restoration and renovations of cultural properties, and provides institutional support to private and public agencies involved in the promotion of culture, among others.

Above all, His Majesty the Fourth Druk Gyalpo epitomises the culturally grounded Bhutanese and personifies the national language and national dress of Bhutan.



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- Resolutions of the National Assembly (1st to 87th session).
- All five-year plan documents.

ENDNOTES

- 1 The 77th session of the National Assembly in 1999, presided over by His Majesty the King, listed the following as the key components of Bhutan's cultural heritage: *dzongs, lhakhangs, gondeys*, religious institutions, *kusung thuktens* (sacred objects of worship), the national dress, language, the *Zorig Chusum* (13 traditional arts and crafts), songs, dances, music, sports, *Driglam Namzha*, attitude, and the way of thinking, including the precepts of *Tha Damtshig* (loyalty) and *Lay Judrey* (karma).
- 2 The National Assembly comprised 130 members representing the government, the people and the monastic body.
- 3 A representative of the monastic body explained *Driglam Namzha* in a National Assembly session as follows: *Driglam Namzha* is derived from the Dharma. The Vinaya outlines 253 rules for monks which may be summarised into *Phampa Zhi* (Four Transgressions). For the laity, it may be summarised into *Lhachoe Gewa Chu* (the Ten Virtues of Gods) and *Michoe Tsangma Chudruk* (the Sixteen Pure Virtues of Humans), which may be further condensed into *Zacha Drosom* (the graceful way of eating, behaving and walking) or *Driglam Namzha*.
- 4 As recorded by Lyonpo Sonam Tobgay in his book *The Constitution of Bhutan – principles and philosophies*. His Majesty is quoted as having repeated the statement in Trashiyangtse and Tsirang in 2006.
- 5 *Portrait of a Leader: Through the Looking-Glass of His Majesty's Decrees*, p.7.
- 6 Damchu Lhendup, *One Hundred Years of Development* (English translation), p.86.



*Taksang, popularly known as the Tiger's Lair was damaged by a devastating fire in 1998. His Majesty the Fourth King initiated its rebuilding and the construction was implemented with his blessings. Here we see the rebuilt temples built on top of a cave where Guru Rinpoche meditated in the eighth century after he flew here on the back of a tigress.
(Photo: Peter Lowe)*



THE ARCHITECT:

THE PROMOTER OF TRADITIONAL ARCHITECTURE AND CONSERVATION

Ingun Bruskeland Amundsen

THE CONTEXT

Bhutanese architecture is recognised for its exceptional beauty and intrigue. Much can be learnt from Bhutan and its architectural heritage. The reign of King Jigme Singye Wangchuck between 1972 and 2006 was a crucial period for Bhutan. Gradually, the country and its people were exposed to the influences of the world outside, and the King had extensive powers initiating and monitoring this process. In relation to architecture, a careful and thoughtful process was adopted, where the aim was to integrate the new with the old. His Majesty the Fourth King followed up on his father's initiatives of merging traditions with reforms.

Early in his reign, he expressed the importance of what he termed Gross National Happiness (GNH), signalling that qualitative human development is more important than material and economic development.¹ He thus challenged the established benchmark of development, Gross Domestic Product (GDP), as the only method to measure the progress of nations. His Majesty guided Bhutan on a development path where material and spiritual development occurred side by side in order to complement and reinforce

each other. This inclusive approach to development has been of utmost importance for architecture and conservation in Bhutan. As will be elucidated in this chapter, we find a living legacy of architectural traditions in Bhutan as well as a supporting formal and institutional framework. This is largely due to the leadership of His Majesty the Fourth King who guided Bhutan's meeting with the modern world in an exceptional and enlightened manner in order to benefit the well-being of the people.

As this chapter will explain, it has also contributed to the significance of Bhutanese architecture to the world at large.

THE IMPORTANCE OF BHUTANESE ARCHITECTURE IN A REGIONAL AND GLOBAL CONTEXT

Bhutan is a country with faith in the values of its own culture. It was never a colony and has remained broadly a self-reliant society where nature and man-made creations live side by side in an ecological balance. The Bhutanese experience with the development process thus differs in some significant respects from that of most other Asian countries.



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Bhutan is now the only remaining representative of the Tibetan cultural area within a sovereign nation. In addition to Bhutan, this area included Tibet, Sikkim, Ladakh, and parts of Himalayan Nepal, Mongolia, and China. In many of these areas, the traditional culture has been threatened or partly destroyed today—much has irretrievably been lost.

The living knowledge of Bhutan's architecture still represents an unbroken lineage to the past. Here, we find buildings reflecting what may be termed 'the basics of architecture.' Today, as in the past, we find many people who live within an ordered cosmos centred in their own house. A cosmic harmony is reflected, if imperfectly, in the buildings, and the sacredness of architecture is maintained through mindfulness and rituals. Bhutan's legacy of architecture thus represents a 'window' into past traditions, and it enables us to understand what architecture used to mean to people—not only in Bhutan, but globally.

Bhutan is one of the last places on earth where architecture is still strongly integrated in the socio-religious fabric of the culture. In a global context, the presence of the sacred has largely been ignored in established discourse on architectural theory and history. This omission has serious consequences in terms of how architecture is conceived, both within the discipline and profession itself and for people in general.

Within the context of Gross National Happiness, it becomes important for the people of Bhutan to maintain their distinct sense of place and the continuation of a sacred architecture and its ritual performative meaning. The religious traditions are vividly maintained and religious beliefs and ideas are deeply embedded in architecture, and in rituals accompanying the building processes. The way society is organised reflects age-old traditions simultaneously as new developments are taking place.

This fundamental harmony between architecture and culture, and the important role of architecture in society, were studied in my Ph.D. 'On Sacred Architecture and the Dzongs of Bhutan. Tradition and Transition in the Architectural History of the Himalayas,'² and the contents of this chapter are based on the findings of my research. It has also been supplemented by valuable inputs from Dorji Yangki and the Division for the Conservation of Cultural Heritage Sites under the Royal Government of Bhutan.³

HOW TO DEFINE ARCHITECTURE?

How will the term 'architecture' be applied in this context? Firstly and briefly, I shall present some East versus West perspectives on material culture. What material culture represents for people within Western civilizations today is vastly different from what it means, and what it meant to the people of Bhutan.

In the West, artefacts including buildings are, in our age, regarded as earthbound and material. Their properties are largely limited to the physical realm of substance and functions. For example, in the West, we often differentiate between items of art and mere artefacts—and we make a similar distinction between architecture and mere buildings, where aesthetics may raise buildings to the level of 'architecture.'

Architecture is thus often described as being more or less successful according to aesthetic norms. In the West, there are also traditions of sacred architecture such as churches, and it is these considerations we need to keep in mind when approaching *all* Bhutanese architecture.

A secular view of architecture evolved in the Western world, influenced by philosophical developments such as the dualistic division between sacred and secular, mind and matter. This separation dating back to the ancient Greeks resulted in a break from their ancient legacy of sacred architecture.



By comparison, the Himalayan Buddhist tradition has maintained the historical legacy of sacred architecture. Here, the architectural ornaments, the mandala concept, and the ritual context of architecture have been maintained because the perception of meaning, as well as the importance of historical authority, has *not* changed—at least not yet.

Many cultures are facing a break with their architectural traditions, and a major reason for this can be found in what in very simplified terms is called modernism in architecture. Starting roughly a century ago, this modernism swept through the Western world like a kind of cultural revolution. In architecture, modernism is associated with building practices that discarded historical styles in favour of rational planning, simple geometric forms, and undecorated surfaces.

The modernist tradition combined positivist rationality with a reaction to the historicism of the late nineteenth century, a movement where eclectic copying of historical precedents was common. Modernism itself developed to become a part of the establishment. It became an established tradition often called ‘International Style’ with its own rules to conform to. Modernism is the prevailing paradigm in architecture today, both in the Western world and, to some extent, globally.

Modernism in architecture also implied a derogative attitude towards vernacular traditions, supported by conventional art and architectural history’s limited focus on the ‘high art’ of monuments and individual artists. In this context, the Bhutanese architecture contributes to a widened perspective on the discourse of vernacular and traditional architecture in general.

In Bhutan there appears to be a homogeneous building tradition, where the farmhouses of the people and the *dzongs* are expressions of the same continuum. Historically there were no fundamental differences between dwellings and monumental buildings in Bhutan. They were all built by the community, utilizing traditional technologies, and thus they reflected the values of the society that produced them. The variations in scale and detailing may be seen as elaborations within a common architectural language. This could also have been the case in other ancient traditions before monumental buildings were erected in non-perishable materials. Here more research is required, and it would be interesting to explore to what extent, and how the sacred significance of the Bhutanese entablature resembles that of other cultural traditions such as those of ancient Greece and Rome as well as those of India, Nepal, and China.

Bhutanese civilization is deeply rooted in religious, mainly Buddhist traditions of thought, and the strong ‘invisible’ elements of this architecture reach far beyond material properties and aesthetics. By bridging the gap between the real world and a cosmic order, architecture in this culture reflects an ideal universal order. Seen through the eyes of those who create them, the buildings are charged with power. Cosmological symbolism and rituals are incorporated into construction ceremonies and buildings. There are, of course, distinctions in the religious significance of the buildings; for example, temples are naturally regarded as more sacred than houses. What is important to understand, however, is that even with such nuances, all these items of matter are a part of the religious realm. It is only in this perspective that the Bhutanese architecture may be fully understood.



FORMAL AND INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENTS IN BHUTAN

His Majesty the Fourth King was foresighted when in 1983 he contributed to building rules, which stated, “buildings should look traditional Bhutanese style.”⁴ The Special Commission for Cultural Affairs was established two years later in response to a Royal Decree—a *Kasbo* which stated that the Government must promote Bhutanese culture as it was practiced in the past, and “...find ways of promoting our identity, culture and etiquette.” The *Kasbo* further stated, “...I hereby establish the Special Commission ... which will work as per my specific orders.”⁵

With this, His Majesty the Fourth King laid the foundations for conservation work in the country. The reasons for the institutionalisation are outlined in the *Kasbo*:

*It has been 24 years since we began our development plans and programmes for the public welfare, and it has benefitted our people enormously. But I am saddened by the fact that our people copy the culture of other countries despite the existence of our distinct culture and etiquette, which is better than any other country's. If we do not think well at this juncture, we cannot preserve our religion and culture. This, as you know, would certainly affect our sovereignty.*⁶

The Special Commission for Cultural Affairs (SCCA) was thus established and architects were employed. Among them was Dorji Yangki who was in charge of conservation works from 1997 until 2010.

His Majesty the Fourth King personally initiated the steps for conservation and development of heritage. One of the first tasks, which had to be carried out was the rebuilding of Taktsang Monastery after the devastating fire in 1998.

In an email, Dorji Yangki writes:

His Majesty's special personal consideration in numerous heritage projects, including the restoration of Trongsa Dzong, Semtokha Dzong, Trashichhodzong, Punakha Dzong, Taktsang

*Monastery, and Dechenphu Lhakhang, was an inspiration to local Bhutanese people working to conserve our heritage. His Majesty regularly took the time to personally visit the project sites during implementation of works, which was a particular strong encouragement to the Bhutanese building artisans and professionals like me working at the sites. The projects not only conserved the heritage sites, but also helped to keep alive the ancient, local intangible traditions of building arts and crafts, which was equally significant.*⁷

His Majesty initiated all these projects and they were implemented with his blessings. The Division for Conservation of Architectural Heritage was established in 2000, and in their ‘Architectural Heritage Journal,’ it is written that

*Bhutan has over 2000 lhakhangs and goenpas, over 10,000 chortens and a large number of vernacular heritage buildings scattered in every corner of the Kingdom. Each region in Bhutan is also graced with the grand monumental dzongs. Every Bhutanese thus live their daily lives among this architectural heritage backdrop providing daily links to their rich and proud heritage.*⁸

Today, the Division for the Conservation of Heritage Sites has four sections, namely, Inventory and Research, Heritage Buildings, Cultural Sites, and Archaeology, and their workload is expected to increase with the upcoming Heritage Sites Bill, which has been forwarded to the Parliament.

A gap evolved between what may be termed the traditional and modern sectors involved in construction. In order to facilitate cooperation between these traditional and modern forces, the Traditional Architectural Guidelines were issued in 2001. The foreword explains that the Guidelines were necessary because the architectural traditions were seriously threatened by dependence on modern technology, imported materials and labour, the shrinking number of skilled artisans, and the deterioration of traditional building styles and practices.⁹



This illuminates how new values, new materials, and foreign trends in architecture contest traditional architecture. Bhutan was aware of the dangers, and did not want to make the same mistakes that many other countries made, where architectural heritage was often sacrificed in the name of progress.

In 2001, His Majesty the Fourth King initiated the drafting of the Constitution for Bhutan. Special care was taken to include the preservation and promotion of cultural heritage that was also in line with the principles of Gross National Happiness. The good governance and the policies of His Majesty the Fourth King contributed to the creation of a fine balance between tradition and change in Bhutan. The Constitution is a significant and exceptional milestone in recognising culture as an evolving, dynamic force, and according to the text it is both a right and a duty to preserve, protect, and respect the environment, culture, and heritage of the nation. A quote from the Home Ministry explains the background for this policy:

...we feel that preservation and culture are an important balance to our development activities. It is our tradition and cultural heritage, after all, which continue to lend dignity to our land and its people.¹⁰



Sacred landscape in Paro with Dumtse Lhakhang built by the divine builder Thangtong Gyalpo in 1433. This temple is built in the shape of a chorten, and placed on a geomantic 'key-spot' with a hill behind.
(Photo: I.B. Amundsen)

AN INTRODUCTION TO BHUTAN'S SACRED LANDSCAPES AND ARCHITECTURE

Traditionally all buildings in Bhutan have a religious dimension and could thus be termed 'sacred architecture' and possibly also 'tantric architecture' since the Vajrayana path is often called 'tantric Buddhism.' The essence of *tantra* implies the interdependence of ritual and reality—the world of spirit and the world of matter—content and structure.

Tantra thus implies unity of thought and action, where action is often seen symbolically and dealt with in terms of ritual. Ritual ceremonies have the power to transform the individual, but also the physical form and appearance of buildings are believed to have innate powers. This again has parallels in other cultural traditions, such as the sacred geometry of the mandala concept. In the cosmology of the mandala everything is interconnected and interdependent.

In architecture, the mandala generally reflects a sacred enclosure, an ordered and protected space. The Buddhist tradition of the mandala mirrors an ideal cosmic diagram with the Buddha's divine palace in the centre. For instance, the outer buildings of the *dzongs* can be seen as an enclosed perimeter



The mandala is the key to understanding the symbolic dimensions of the Bhutanese architecture. The mandala ideal is mainly reflected in temples and monasteries, but also in buildings in general. Here we see a three-dimensional model of a Kalachakra mandala in the Potala Palace.
(Photo: I.B. Amundsen, 1996)



*In Bhutan symbols from the mandala diagram are often painted on buildings. Especially around the windows and doors one often finds elements from the circles protecting the inner centre. The elaboration of such paintings varies with the importance of the building. This is from Trongsa Dzong.
(Photo: I.B. Amundsen, 2011)*

wall protecting the inner, consecrated space. Such sacred enclosures are marked with a red band, the *kemar*, around the top part of the walls. The unifier of Bhutan, Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal's first *dzong*, Semtokha, initiated in 1629, follows the mandala pattern, while later *dzongs* adapted this more pragmatically.

One enters most *dzongs* from the outer, administrative area before proceeding to the more sacred, inner areas of monastic cells and temples. The transition between the two parts is marked by the towering peak called the *utsé* in the centre of the mandala palace.

The thresholds are important features in the buildings, and the artworks around windows and doors express the need for extra protection of these points. This can be observed in the way they are carved and painted, where the rings of the lotus flowers and *dorjés*, which protect the mandala, often form a part of the frame.

The architecture is thus both a representation and a revelation of the hidden presence of the divine. Similar architectural patterns for all types of buildings are found in Bhutan, though they vary in how elaborate they are. This is determined by the importance of each building.

There is a strong relationship between art and the built form in Bhutanese architecture. The imprints of local artisans and painters make the buildings aesthetically pleasing, and at the same time they relate deeply to the spiritual and communal values, beliefs and traditions of the Bhutanese people.

In Bhutan, architecture and landscapes are interlinked, and this harmony evolved through centuries. In the early belief systems, nature was regarded as wild and unpredictable, representing dangerous powers. The forces of nature were an enemy, but also a potential ally, and had to be attended to, and propitiated accordingly.

A personality with magical powers has been honoured for his leading role in the successful spreading of Buddhism in the Himalayas. This was the tantric master and exorcist Guru Rinpoche (Padmasambhava) who visited Bhutan and Tibet in the eighth century. The factual historic role he played during his lifetime may have been limited, but his importance has taken on mythical dimensions. He is regarded by many in Bhutan as the Second Buddha. The conversion to Buddhism is often described as a process of subjugation and taming of the pre-Buddhist spirits who ruled the landscapes. Thanks largely to Guru Rinpoche, these nature spirits and demons were converted into protectors of Buddhism, and the landscapes were turned into more peaceful environments.



The material world of buildings, chortens, mani walls and prayer flags, combined with prayers and rituals, are the basic elements maintaining the sacredness of the landscape. It is important to understand that these man-made, sacred structures are still seen as essential for maintaining control over, and harmony with, the land they stand on. The traditional architecture and cultural landscapes of Bhutan have developed and endured over many centuries, and are significant in creating a unique Bhutanese sense of place, a sense of belonging, continuity and identity.



*The traditional farmhouse is very well adjusted to climate, the availability of skills and local materials. Farm house in Göen Damji, below Gasa.
(Photo: I.B. Amundsen, 1995)*

ON THE ARCHITECTURAL TYPOLOGIES OF BHUTAN

Today a great variety of building types are found in Bhutan. However, until quite recently there has been a strong continuity in the typological patterns. This reflects the strong continuum of the historical legacy, and in brief, the main types have been:

- temples and monasteries
- the *dzongs*—fortress-like buildings which incorporate both temples, monastic quarters, and civil district administration
- palaces
- dwellings—farmhouses which incorporate both housing facilities, livestock and storage of crops

In addition to these main building types, there are structures such as bridges and mills, and also the *chortens*, which have a symbolic significance for Buddhists rather like the cross in Christianity. *Chortens* may be physical structures, of varying sizes, and they are also made as sculptures. There are also other religious structures such as the *mani*-walls and water-driven prayer-wheels.

In all Bhutanese architecture, we find elements of an entablature that represents the presence of the sacred with varying degrees of elaboration, expressing the hidden presence of the divine. In Bhutan, religion has been fully integrated in people's concept of space, time and material culture.

Today it is recognised that the traditional architecture has its limitations. New functional requirements—whether for classrooms, operation theatres, or electric substations—have to be met with a creative approach. After all, traditions are roots, and by definition roots grow, and need to receive continual nourishment. This in turn leads to new branches. When we want to support the life and continuity of traditions, we need to think carefully about this analogy to roots.

THE RATE OF CHANGE IN THE PAST AND TODAY

Tradition is generally defined as that which is handed down. Tradition is a process of cultural transmission, and may be linked to aspects such as custom, manner and habits. Architecture is man-made, and all that is made by humans can be reproduced by others. Traditions as such are not static; however, to what extent have changes taken place in the Bhutanese architecture? The research of my Ph.D. confirmed that there was a continuous process of small changes taking place in the *dzong* architecture between 1783 until about 1960.

Today's architecture has its roots in the past, but how did the architecture actually look at different



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points in history? The visual records made by the British during their expeditions to Bhutan include drawings and watercolours made by Samuel Davis in 1783. There are also photographs from 1863-4 onwards.¹¹ One of the methods applied in my research was thus termed ‘visual archaeology’ since these visual records were used to determine the chronology of the architectural developments of selected *dzongs*. Through the centuries, the architecture of the *dzongs* became more and more elaborate. This is further illustrated by the example of Punakha Dzong.

The visual images of Punakha Dzong made by Samuel Davis in 1783 show a compact, rectangular *dzong* with a towering *utsé* in the centre maintaining the three-dimensional mandala typology. This general pattern may have been established from the very beginning in 1637, but quite possibly on a smaller scale. The Dzong was built on a sacred site where a saint built a temple in the thirteenth century. This is where the Dzongchung stands today. It was also a geomantic key-spot by the confluence of two rivers.



View of Punakha Dzong in 1783 with towering utsé in the centre. (Samuel Davis, watercolour, Yale Centre for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection)



View of Tasbichbodzong and footbridge in 1783. (Samuel Davis, watercolour, Yale Centre for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection)

Punakha was to become the most sacred and thus most important of all Zhabdrung's *dzongs*, and his remains are kept here and attended to in the Machen Lhakhang. The Dzong has been partly damaged and rebuilt several times due to attacks, fires, floods and earthquakes. After the last fire in 1986, His Majesty the Fourth King initiated extensive rebuilding, alteration and repairs, and now the Dzong appears even more impressive than before. A new kitchen block was also built outside the Dzong walls, which was wise in view of the fire hazard. The huge undertaking of rebuilding Punakha Dzong demonstrates that the skills of traditional craftsmanship are maintained and also able to excel in impressive detailing. In times of peace, such as today, the dzong walls are being opened up, changing the previous fortress typology.¹²

The *dzongs* were built along the main routes all over Bhutan, and they expressed a distinct architecture. The *dzong* architecture may thus have slowly influenced the architecture at large. In a sense, the *dzongs* became architectural trendsetters. This has sometimes created confusion. For instance in the book ‘An Introduction to Traditional Architecture of Bhutan,’¹³ the palace of Wangdichöling is wrongly included among the *dzongs*.



The changes that took place in Bhutan until the 1960s were changes that can best be described as ‘adjustments.’ These took place as a slow process of transition within the framework of the traditional society. As elucidated above, the good governance of His Majesty the Fourth King contributed to balancing tradition and change. This had the advantage of reducing the harmful effects of rapid change, since there was more time for people to adapt, and less conflict—for example between rural and urban areas.

With the policies of the Fourth Monarch, more time was provided for changes to be experienced, and the possibilities for reflective feedback were strengthened. A consequence of rules such as the traditional dress code and the traditional architectural guidelines is that both dresses and buildings are slowly adapting to new types of textiles and new types of materials and technology. This implies that changes are taking place within the framework of established traditions, in line with the same adaptation process that occurred historically.

It is interesting to make a short comparison with the way in which traditional architecture evolved in Norway where there is solid documentation on Norwegian building traditions. In Norway, the most extensive changes took place during periods of economic growth and increased wealth,¹⁴ which is not surprising. These findings in Norwegian research correspond well with the findings of my doctoral thesis on Bhutanese architecture, despite substantial differences related to the socio-religious context and the building typologies in question.

Homogeneous architectural patterns mirror a society where the population has a common understanding of norms and values. What Bhutan faces today may be a change away from this common understanding, as young people in particular go on a quest for new lifestyles. Today contradictions are arising that have parallels to similar processes experienced by other

countries in the early critical phases of exposure to a larger world and outside influences.

Today the rate of change has speeded up extensively. The danger arises of larger and more fundamental changes taking place, representing a potential threat of deformation to the historical buildings, the sacred landscapes and the sense of place. More than ever, people in Bhutan are exposed to the world at large, and these external influences may prove to be far more powerful than the cultural momentum from within. Broadly speaking, one might say that the future choice lies between cultural sustainability and that of materialistic progress.

The processes taking place today could thus be called a ‘transformation’ of the traditional society rather than a ‘transition.’ This might eventually have serious consequences for how the legacy of architecture is followed up in the future, which in turn may affect both cultural and architectural sustainability.

CONSERVATION IN BHUTAN AND THE CONCEPT OF AUTHENTICITY

When the conservation of cultural heritage needed to be addressed in Bhutan, this marked a new era, where knowledge of history and artefacts such as buildings as historical monuments and cultural heritage represented new dimensions to cultural perceptions. This heralded a change from the previously ‘timeless,’ or relatively ‘time-unaware’ cultural continuum. The introduction of conservation in a culture like Bhutan raises important questions, some of which are highly relevant to international discourses on concepts of authenticity and established charters for conservation.

The Venice Charter of 1964 was an important milestone, which codified internationally accepted standards of conservation practices and principles relating to architecture and sites. Since then it has been a reference point for conservation policies. It was formulated by experts steeped in modernist



ways of thinking, and according to this charter old monuments are to be strictly preserved, while new building parts are to be architecturally defined as such.¹⁵ The preserved buildings thus become a kind of assemblage with clearly defined layers, and restoration becomes the means to define the modern itself. This reflects the fundamental dualism in modernist theory and a practice which is alien to Bhutan.

In Bhutan, important buildings such as *dzongs* and temples are being rebuilt time and again, and this phenomenon combines merit with an incentive to create even more beautiful buildings than before. These rebuilding processes are in principle contradictory to an approach where buildings themselves are defined as historical. It is contradictory because it is the spirituality that is eternal, not the buildings.

To suggest otherwise, by raising material artefacts to that status, would be to alter and partly denigrate a cultural tradition. One might go as far as saying that ‘sacralising’ buildings—in the sense of making monuments of them—actually ‘desacralises’ them since they then become profane, inert material attractions where the spiritual can no longer move, grow, change or decay.

Conservation practices where one freezes the state of a building according to its appearance at a given historical moment, can be called stage-setting or perhaps even an attempt at inventing authenticity. ‘Authentic’ is associated with terms such as true, as opposed to false, an original versus a copy, honest versus corrupt, and right versus wrong. This series of dichotomies reflects that the concept of authenticity has assumed a kind of absolute value, based on some seemingly universally valid principles.

The modernist credo of the Western world implies that in order to be authentic, architecture has to be an expression of its time. If this concept is applied to Bhutan, it is clearly in conflict with, for instance, the rule which states that new buildings should

also have the appearance of traditional Bhutanese style. The Bhutanese strive to retain a distinct and homogenous character in their surroundings and built environment.

The Venice Charter has been supplemented by other charters catering for some of its shortcomings. In Australia, they adapted the so-called Burra Charter, which was tailor-made for their specific requirements. The Burra Charter advocates a cautious approach to change, in order to care for places of cultural significance and make them useable, but otherwise change them as little as possible.

In the Burra Charter, ‘place’ is defined as a geographically defined area which may include elements, objects, spaces and views, and a place may have both tangible and intangible dimensions. The cultural significance includes social and spiritual value for past, present, or future generations.¹⁶

Bhutan is now in the process of passing a bill on heritage sites, and once enacted the objective of the bill is to deal with and promote the protection, management, and regulation of heritage sites.¹⁷ It is important to recognise that preservation of the past should not represent the antithesis of progress. In order to convey historical understanding, preservation needs to relate both to present needs, and to reflect the fact that the past was continuous processes of change.

Preservation in the technical sense is certainly necessary, but how rigidly should this be approached in technological and stylistic terms? Cooperation between traditional and modern forces as well as international expertise may be useful in the context of conservation. Perhaps one could agree that certain important examples should be preserved for historical reasons, whereas the majority should be allowed to adapt along with the processes of renewal and change. This is an appeal for a dual approach, and above all, an appeal to process-thinking. The middle way approach inspired by, for instance, the Burra Charter could be a suitable solution.



*Tashichhodzong by night.
(Photo: Courtesy Tshering Tashi)*

In terms of conservation, many buildings in Bhutan are beyond doubt worthy of being classified as listed buildings, and important cultural environments also need to be protected as such. Examples of the Bhutanese architecture deserve to be acknowledged and included in the canon of our global world heritage, and a serial nomination of selected *dzongs* is underway. This will demand that the prevailing conventions are viewed in a critical perspective in order to avoid undermining Bhutan's living, cultural traditions.

SUSTAINABILITY AND TRADITIONAL ARCHITECTURE

Today the balanced development stewarded by His Majesty the Fourth King is being challenged. A new push for economic growth may in the long term destabilise Bhutan's delicate cultural and natural ecosystems, thus breaking the core goals of Gross National Happiness; namely, to integrate equitable economic development with environmental and cultural conservation. A break with traditions may leave an existential vacuum, and a loss of identity, which is the very root of self-reliance and hence of sustainability. This is because sustainable development is not just

concerned with environmental efficiency; it is also about society, culture, qualities and values.

Today, climate change and sustainable development are on top of the global agenda. We need to ensure that development happens sustainably and in line with environmental, socio-cultural, and economic concerns. Sustainability can be seen as an ambition to move towards a better, more just society, with the claim to ensure that the needs of those living today are respected without compromising the capability of future generations to meet their own needs.¹⁸

This is an important argument in favour of traditional architecture and heritage buildings, which need to be viewed as valuable assets. These buildings are commonly composed of a few natural materials, with little embodied energy,¹⁹ small ecological footprints, and limited health hazards. To erect a new building will in comparison imply extensive use of new materials and other resources, and thus lead to larger climate emissions. Sustainable, green design has a lot to learn from principles applied in traditional ways of building. More research needs to be carried out in order to learn from the traditions of the past.



Trongsa Dzong
(Photo: Courtesy Tsering Tashi)



*Punakha Dzong after His Majesty the Fourth King initiated extensive rebuilding, alterations and repairs following the 1986 fire.
(Photo: Courtesy Tshering Tasbi)*



Old building principles can be reinterpreted and merged with new technology. By allowing for sustainable retrofitting and re-use, traditional architecture may be adapted to new needs and requirements. Life-cycle assessment is a key issue today, and due to their long lives, heritage buildings are very sustainable.

The value and potential of traditional architecture in creating a sense of place and belonging in cultural landscapes, as well as in urban areas, needs to be emphasised. Cultural heritage promotes familiarity and a sense of identity. It also contributes to sustainable practices and quality of life in a society that is constantly evolving.

EPILOGUE

At the turn of the millennium, Dasho Karma Ura wrote a review of the last thousand years of Bhutan's history, pointing at:

...the notion that all places, however remote and provincial, were blessed and visited by Guru Rinpoche, gave the people of Bhutan a common history, or a common myth. ... The land was not only a blessed hiding place ... it was considered hidden from the larger and more well-known nations around it. ... Bhutan has been idealised as an arcadian hidden land (sbas yul). This romantic notion is taken up happily by the outside media today, which is inclined to consider Bhutan as a Shangrila. Yet, the introduction of satellite TV, telecommunications, and tourism now weakens the concept of any hidden land, and probably signals that we are entering a new epoch.²⁰

Here Ura develops the notion of secret valleys to that of Bhutan as a secret nation where sacred traditions are maintained. However, he also points at the powerful processes of globalisation that are taking place. The secular, global reality represents a threat to the traditions of sacred architecture. Thus, it appears urgent to follow up with further research and documentation on Bhutan's hidden treasures, and to strengthen heritage work in Bhutan itself.

Returns to the past are not the point, since history is not to be copied or imitated. However, we may learn from history, and adapt this knowledge to today's requirements by merging tradition and modernity. The modernist paradigm has important consequences for how architectural traditions are seen and how new buildings are conceived. In this respect, modernism has tried to close the doors to something important—both in terms of understanding the past, and also the possibility that this knowledge may be relevant for the modern man. Whether one likes it or not, ancient cultural traits may influence our perceptions today. The enduring importance of these other dimensions may explain why the modernist project in architecture can partly be said to have failed.

Today, there are signs of increased awareness and interest in spirituality and religion, and in Bhutan, we find the presence of such elements in architecture. The architectural traditions of Bhutan and the Himalayas are largely unknown and undocumented. It seems likely that through further research one may trace the threads of Bhutan's architectural legacy far back to other ancient traditions. The Bhutanese legacy of architecture is thus extremely valuable, not only to Bhutan and to the Himalayan region, but also as a source to rediscover and give insights on how architecture, and our perceptions of architecture, have developed historically.

Thanks to the wisdom of His Majesty the Fourth Druk Gyalpo Jigme Singye Wangchuck, we still find a living legacy of architectural traditions in Bhutan. Today, it may appear as though Bhutan is developing away from its traditions; however, the roots are very much alive. It is necessary to constantly breathe new sense and meaning into traditions. The integrity of the traditional society is challenged in its meeting with the outside world and its limited focus on material well-being. The present changes are transforming the existing society, but Bhutan may still be able to show the rest of the world an inclusive way of developing *with* tradition—also in architecture.



ENDNOTES

- 1 This quote is found on the web-page of The Permanent Mission of the Kingdom of Bhutan to the United Nations in New York <http://www.un.int/wcm/content/site/bhutan/pid/4088> visited 25.12.2014.
- 2 Amundsen, Ingun Bruskeland (2003) *On Sacred Architecture and the Dzongs of Bhutan. Tradition and Transition in the Architectural History of the Himalayas*. Oslo: Oslo School of Architecture.
- 3 Dorji Yangki worked as Chief Architect and the first Head of the Division for Conservation of Heritage Sites (DCHS) in the Royal Government of Bhutan from 1997 to 2010. From then onwards Nagtsho Dorji was in charge of this Division. I am grateful to both of them for support and inputs to this chapter.
- 4 Royal Government of Bhutan, Building Rules, 1983. The building rules were updated in 2002.
- 5 Nishimizu, Mieko (2008) *Portrait of a Leader. Through the Looking-Glass of His Majesty's Decrees*. Thimphu: The Centre for Bhutan Studies. See p.7 - this Kasha was issued 23th July 1985.
- 6 Ibid., p.7.
- 7 Dorji Yangki in an email, dated 10.12.2014.
- 8 *Architectural Heritage Journal*, no.1 (2006), p.3. Thimphu: The Royal Government of Bhutan, Dept. of Culture, Division for Conservation of Architectural Heritage.
- 9 *Traditional Architectural Guidelines* (2001), Department of Urban Development and Housing, Thimphu. See the foreword by Leki Dorji, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Communications.
- 10 Ministry of Home Affairs (1991) *Dzongs in Bhutan*. Vol.1 Punakha Dzong, p.7. Thimphu: The Royal Government of Bhutan.
- 11 See for instance Michael Aris (1982) *Views of Medieval Bhutan: The Diary and Drawings of Samuel Davis, 1783*. The archives of British Library (OIOC) and The Royal Geographic Society possess historic photographs dating back to Ashley Eden's mission of 1863-64. The next missions took place in 1905 and 1907, and were carried out by J.C. White. White was followed by increasingly frequent missions, and they all took photographs.
- 12 Amundsen, op. cit. p.314-348. One chapter in my Ph.D. presents the history of Punakha Dzong.
- 13 Department of Works and Housing (1993) *An Introduction to Traditional Architecture of Bhutan*. Thimphu: The Royal Government of Bhutan.
- 14 Amundsen, op. cit. p.478-79.
- 15 The Venice Charter see; http://www.icomos.org/charters/venice_e.pdf visited 25.12.2014. The articles referred to are in particular Article 9, 12, 13 and 15.
- 16 The Burra Charter (2013), the Australia ICOMOS Charter for Places of Cultural Significance, p.1-2.
- 17 See the draft Heritage Sites Bill (visited 25.12.2014); <http://www.heritagesites.gov.bt/publication/files/HeritageSites%20Bills%20eng%28final%29-140724.pdf>
- 18 World Commission on Environment and Development (1987) *Our Common Future*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. *Our Common Future* is also known as the Brundtland Report in recognition of former Norwegian Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland's role as Chair of the World Commission on Environment and Development.
- 19 Embodied energy is the sum of all the required energy consumed by the production processes of a building. It includes everything from the mining and processing of natural resources, to manufacturing, transport and product delivery.
- 20 Karma Ura (2000) Bhutan: A Thousand Year's Journey. In *Kuensel* 01.01.2000, p.4.





THE COMPASSIONATE RULER

Om Pradhan

His Majesty King Jigme Singye Wangchuck, the Fourth Druk Gyalpo, compassionate in nature, and a practitioner of Buddhist values, since his enthronement in 1972 (formally in 1974) was keen on furthering the welfare of the people, and promoting the sovereignty and independence of the country.

One of the key ways to achieving these laudable goals was to further integrate and unify the different sections of the people of Bhutan. Prior to the era of motor roads, that is, before the 1960s, Bhutan's Himalaya had proved a serious barrier between the country's different regions, and had isolated communities and the various linguistic and ethnic groups.

However, with improving road and other communications after the 1960s, interaction amongst East and West, South and North increased dramatically. His Majesty desired to bring all Bhutanese people closer together like in a family. Linguistic, religious and ethnic differences had to be acknowledged and turned into positives for national unity and integration.

Diversity in a large and populous country was inevitable, but excessive diversity in a tiny country like Bhutan with a population of about half a million may not be conducive to forging a unified, resilient, strong, and a closely-knit sovereign nation. The national language, Dzongkha that all Bhutanese could utilise to communicate with fellow citizens, had to be promoted, as without it inter-regional and national level communications would prove awkward especially in the eyes of the outside world. How could Bhutanese communicate in different dialects or in a foreign language?

National symbols including a Bhutanese identity through national dress, and more so, knowledge about the country, its history and cultures needed to be part and parcel of Bhutanese education. Unifying the different parts of the country, and closer integration among the people would be the key to long-term peaceful coexistence and understanding in Bhutan, and for achieving the objectives of Gross National Happiness.

If we look at the history of the country, the first Trongsa Penlop, Migyur Tempa, largely accomplished

◀ *His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck in Dagana Dzongkhabag during the National Day Celebrations on 17 December 1983. (Photo: Courtesy Tshering Tashi)*



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the physical and political task of unifying the East and central parts of the country with the Drukpa Kagyupa West during the latter half of the seventeenth century.

Subsequent rulers of the country, and the Kings of Bhutan in particular, have further consolidated the country's unity. However, in recent Bhutanese history the attempt has been to focus on consolidating and unifying the people of Southern Bhutan with the rest of the country. This is the region where the government's policy had been to settle people of Nepalese origin known as Southern Bhutanese or Lhotshampa.

This was a more arduous task in view of the ethnic, religious, social and cultural differences with the rest of the country. From the public pronouncements in the first few years of his golden rule, His Majesty the Fourth Druk Gyalpo made the following statesmanlike, compassionate and heartfelt proclamations (translated from Dzongkha), clearly outlining the country's policy and approach to the people of Southern Bhutan.¹



His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck addressing the people of Gelephu during the National Day Celebrations on 17 December 1978.

(Photo: Kuensel)

Sibsoo, 1 January 1974:

You, the citizens of Southern Bhutan must never regard yourselves as aliens, because you and your forebears also were born and raised in Bhutan, and as such, all of you are Bhutanese. Regarding the cultural differences that seem much more glaring as compared to the east and west parts, you yourselves must look to the betterment and progress of Bhutan. All of us must remain united as one people and as one nation, and forge ahead together.

National Day, Gelephu, 17 December 1978:

I have often heard that some of our Southern Bhutanese people do not consider themselves as true Bhutanese. Those of you, who think thus cannot be true, because our people of Southern Bhutan are not people of Nepal nor are you Indians from Kalimpong and Darjeeling. But there is a great difference and that difference is because you are all people of the Palden Drukpa.² All of us are like one family.

Towards addressing the development and personal problems of the Southern Bhutanese, His Majesty said:

From tomorrow onwards we will be holding development meetings and I will be meeting your representatives and mandals [headmen]. I would like you to know that as far as the development of Southern Bhutan is concerned in the field of Animal Husbandry, Agriculture, Schools, Hospitals, Cash Crops and overall development, I will myself personally look after them.

It is our desire to start such development work which will be useful, beneficial and necessary to the people. As far as your individual problems and difficulties are concerned I want you to know that they will also be looked into personally by me and I will try to solve them as in one family.

How much more clearly could the Fourth Druk Gyalpo outline the royal and national policy towards the Southern Bhutanese?



His Majesty, as his father had been before him, was concerned and sympathetic towards the Southern population. He felt that there was a need to remove social and psychological barriers to enhance acceptability and unity. The first was to recognise the Southern Bhutanese as being part and parcel of the Bhutanese fold. In this regard, each section of the Bhutanese population had a regional name.

The people of the West, that is, those of Dzongkha-speaking Haa, Paro, Thimphu, Wangdiphodrang and Punakha were generally referred to as Ngalongs, Tshangla-speakers of Eastern Bhutan as Sharchhops, those of Central Bhutan as Bumthaps and Khengpas and the inhabitants in the North as Layaps and Brokpas, not forgetting minorities like Tabadamteps and Doyas. So it was felt that the Southern Bhutanese should have a similar Bhutanese reference name to enhance acceptability in the country.

His Majesty approved the name Lhotshampa, meaning ‘inhabitant of the Southern (Bhutanese) border region’ from among the various proposals that were put forward. The Southern Bhutanese at once welcomed this name as it enhanced their Bhutanese identity, and since then this is the official reference for them.

In his speeches to the Lhotshampas during the royal tours in the 1980s His Majesty also recognised that there were two distinct religions, Buddhism and Hinduism, being practiced in the kingdom. He explained that in fact these religions were two branches of the same tree. Practically all the deities were the same—Wangchhen (Indra), Lhachhen (Shiva), Penden Lhamo (Goddess Kali) who is also Bhutan’s protective deity, Jongneyma (Durga), Chhoda Lham (Ganesh), Zo Lha (Vishwakarma), Drolma (Tara), Chenrezig (Avalokitesvara), etc. His Majesty encouraged and supported the continued promulgation of Sanskrit studies in the five Sanskrit *pathshalas* (schools) in the South.

An additional way of enhancing the acceptability of the region and to encourage national unity and



On February 11, 1990 His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck gifted a statue of the God Ganesh to the representative of the Bhutanese people living in South Bhutan. (Photo: Kuensel)

integration was to promote a national dress for the South that would make the Southern Bhutanese recognisable from the people across the border. This would be important when they travelled within the country, visited *dzongs* and offices where government officials would easily recognise them, extend the courtesies and help accorded to citizens, and when they participated at national functions.

Consultations and discussions on this issue were held extensively with the entire Southern population. Always thorough and diligent in whatever he undertook, His Majesty asked practically every head of family in the South.³ The unanimous view that emerged was that the Southern Bhutanese should adopt the *gho* and *kira* as their national dress. His Majesty travelled to the Southern *dzongkehangs* several times and inquired from the people again and again to see if this was the decision in their interest and what they wanted.

His Majesty explained that he would have no objection if the people chose a different national dress from those of the Northern Bhutanese that would take climatic conditions into account, and as long as it identified them as nationals of Bhutan. Despite this concerned view expressed by His Majesty, the Southern Bhutanese representatives submitted that they felt strongly that the *gho* and *kira*



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would be the right choice. This would more than anything else enhance their Bhutanese identity. So finally, everyone agreed to this viewpoint and this was accepted as a national decision and policy to be pursued.

His Majesty continued the generous act of granting land to the landless from amongst Lhotshampas who were largely agriculturists and contributed to the cash economy through exports of cardamom, ginger and oranges. Such landless people usually emerged due to inadequate land after sharing amongst inheritors in families. In the 1970s, land allocations were made mostly in the Samdrup Jongkhar Dzongkhag, namely in Samrang and Daifam. Persons from the economically backward region of Southern Kheng or the Zhemgang Dzongkhag, were also encouraged to settle in Gelephu through grants of land and other facilities like irrigation, schools and basic health units. Such mixed settlements helped enhance north-south integration.⁴

At the same time His Majesty felt that the involvement of the Lhotshampas should be made significant in the national life of the nation. Despite reservations from some sources His Majesty went out of the way to promote several Lhotshampas to prominent positions in the civil service, the army, the royal



*His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck offering tika to a Hindu Pandit in 1992 during Dussebra festival.
(Photo: Kuensel)*



*His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck invited representatives of the Bhutanese people from South Bhutan to Samtenling Palace to celebrate the Hindu festival of Dussebra on 23rd October 1993.
(Photo: Kuensel)*

bodyguards and the police. Their numbers dwindled only after a number of them unwisely decided to leave the country and get involved in the dissident movement in 1990-91.

His Majesty, in order to promote inclusiveness, then recognised the major religious festival of the Lhotshampas, *Dasain* or *Dussebra*, as a national holiday for the first time in Bhutan's history, and even granted financing for the event in the capital from state funds. His Majesty and the Royal Family participated enthusiastically in the functions and especially at the *tika* ceremony. Due to all these actions taken by His Majesty the Fourth Druk Gyalpo, today in 2015, when we look at the Bhutanese scenario, we see Lhotshampas, Sharchhops, Ngalongs and other groups within the country learning and talking freely in the national language, proudly wearing the *gho* and *kira*, worshipping in both Buddhist and Hindu shrines, celebrating in all festivals, intermarrying and living together in increasing peace and harmony. Bhutanese have also been converting to Christianity and some have even become Muslims. We can conclude that all this has been possible due to the compassionate magnanimity and the great political statesmanship of His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck in the herculean task of forging



the different regions and peoples of Bhutan into a sovereign nation.

In a way, this royal initiative has been a continuation of the nation-building task begun about three and a half centuries ago by Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, the religious founder of Bhutan. The Kings of Bhutan are at times recognised as the ‘reincarnations’ of the Zhabdrung in view of their role in having fulfilled the primary goal of the Zhabdrung in firmly establishing Druk-yul, promoting Drukpa Kagyu, and forging a nation from the country’s diverse groups.

The solemn duty of generations to come is to sustain and strengthen what the Zhabdrung and his successors, the Kings, have bequeathed to this land of Gross National Happiness, blessed by Lord Buddha and Guru Padmasambhava.

BACKGROUND ON SOUTHERN BHUTAN

The geographical location of the Himalayan region, and to which Bhutan belongs, between the eastern plains of India and the Tibetan plateau of China, made the area most amenable to migratory forces from both Central and South Asia. Though the reasons for migration over the centuries vary, the location of holy places⁵ visited by people from both sides of the Himalayan Mountains was one reason; trade was an enticement, and no doubt a more pleasant climate for agriculture and settlements attracted persons especially from the Tibetan plateau.

Other reasons would be the spreading of religious sects, the military and political ambitions of Mongols and Tibetans, and some refuge-seekers like the historical Sindhu Raja, and the fleeting ambitions of a Mughal *satrap* who ventured towards Trashigang from where he was promptly expelled.

Bhutan’s location in the Eastern Himalaya, which is extremely rugged with high altitudes, made

human habitation challenging. Settlements in the higher valleys like Haa, Phobjikha, Bumthang, Mera and Sakteng, touching nearly nine to ten thousand feet above sea level were pleasant and mostly cultivable only during the warmer summer months.

This encouraged inhabitants who could afford to do so, to find the warmth of lowlands to spend the winter months. People from Haa went south towards Samtse. The monastic body keeps up this tradition by moving between Thimphu (2,350m/7,710ft) and Punakha (1,310m/4,300ft), as well as between Bumthang and Trongsa.

The Bumthaps also went south of Trongsa. The Brokpa tribes of the East moved to warmer climates towards Trashigang and Mongar, while those from Laya and Lingshi came down to Punakha and Wangdiphodrang. The winter in the Himalayas tended to encourage people to travel south, and this also gave rise to political and economic interactions with the Southern region of the country and the Indian plains.

But the inhabitants of the highlands dreaded the summer heat and malaria prone areas adjacent to what are today Assam and West Bengal. The area, which came to be known as Southern Bhutan, was sparsely habited till the mid-twentieth century. The region was covered mostly by thick tropical and sub-tropical vegetation, and despite new settlements and poaching, is still home to wildlife including the golden langur, tiger, buffalo, Indian rhinoceros and elephant. The Northern population avoided settling in this area to evade the summer heat and humidity, and the disease-prone climate that such circumstances produced—until of course, motor roads were built from 1960s onwards, and the coming of electricity, with modern amenities, made living conditions more pleasant.

Until the British Raj got involved, there seemed little concern regarding the exact demarcation of the



border with fixed boundary pillars between Bhutan and the kingdoms of Ahom (Assam), Koch (Cooch Behar), Denjong (Sikkim) and the Tawang region (Arunachal Pradesh, earlier known as North East Frontier Agency, NEFA) resulting in occasional conflicts over territorial claims.

In most Asian situations, establishment of rights through historical usage was more important than physical demarcation of the boundary. However, the border demarcation initiated by the British on European or Western lines by fixing boundary pillars crystallised the borders in the South in a way which resulted in land lost to British encroachments.

The areas known as the Assam and Bengal Duars were extricated from Bhutan through annexation in 1841⁶ with a payment of 10,000 rupees annually “by way of compensation.” The payment of increasing amounts of annual subsidies beginning in 1865 continued till the erstwhile 1949 treaty.

The British would never have paid these subsidies—though compared to the gains being made, such subsidies were insignificant for them—if they had not verified that the Bhutanese claims to the Duars were historically valid and legal in their eyes. The British, with their know-how and worldwide access to markets, were able to exploit the rich tropical forests and convert the area into tea and jute plantations.

On their part, Bhutanese authorities seemed to value the cash subsidies as the country’s economy was largely based on barter and subsistence agriculture until as late as the mid-1950s.

The porous Southern border despite official demarcation has always been susceptible to encroachments from the Indian side. Indian tribals and other local inhabitants crossed the indistinct border to extract firewood and timber, poach the rivers for fish and the forests for wild animals. From the 1960s onwards and until the Bhutan Forest Department got wiser, some people from the Darjeeling District, who had become knowledgeable about the profits that could be derived from orchids, would enter to scour the virgin forests for rare orchids and other forest products. Until the decades after the 1970s, it was impossible for the Bhutanese to police this forested and inhospitable terrain especially with its then scanty administrative system.

BHUTAN HOUSE, KALIMPONG: KAZI UGYEN DORJI AND RAJA SONAM TOBGYE DORJI

Even after the annexation of the Duars, British Indian encroachments continued along the Southern border, the most prominent being the loss of territory to the east in the present Deothang (Dewangiri) area, and the chance of losing more towards the



*Bhutan House in Kalimpong, India.
(Photo: Her Majesty Ashi Kesang
Choeden Wangchuck)*



southeast. Bhutanese authorities, especially after the establishment of the hereditary monarchy in 1907, were keen to do something effective that would strengthen the country's grip of the Southern frontier.

Soon after his historic ascension to the Golden Throne, Trongsa Ponlop Gongsar Ugyen Wangchuck, the First Druk Gyalpo, judiciously utilised the services of Kazi Ugyen Dorji, a Bhutanese from Paro who had settled in Kalimpong. Kazi Ugyen Dorji had established a good rapport with British Indian authorities who had converted Kalimpong and Darjeeling into hill stations to escape the summer heat of Calcutta and the Indian plains. At the same time, Kalimpong was the trade centre for the Tibetans coming to India across the mountains with their long mule trains carrying wool, borax and other goods. With his strategic location in Kalimpong and his linguistic skills in Tibetan, Nepali and English, Kazi Ugyen Dorji could also mediate between the British and the Tibetans on various issues, earning him their respect and a reputation as a diplomatic asset. On his part, the Bhutanese King appointed Kazi Ugyen Dorji as the Bhutan Agent, something akin to an ambassador-cum-representative. At the same time, Kazi was also made responsible for dealing with British surveyors and authorities when border issues cropped up with India. In turn, Kazi Ugyen Dorji, and later his son and successor Raja Sonam Tobgye Dorji, helped recruit the services of Southern Bhutanese officials, the most prominent among them and the first Commissioner of Southern Bhutan being Dasho Jhullendra B. Pradhan, a veteran of Southern Bhutan issues, who had served in various capacities from the First to the Third kings of Bhutan, and from Kazi Ugyen Dorji to Prime Minister Jigme Dorji.

SOLUTION TO SAFEGUARDING THE SOUTHERN FRONTIER

One of the significant solutions to safeguarding the Southern borders was to have people occupy these areas and make it into a buffer zone before there were further encroachments and

loss of territories to the all-powerful and ever-interfering British Raj. With Bhutan's military capacity being miniscule when confronting the Raj, the next option and the most ideal situation would have been to settle people who were Bhutanese subjects. But as the conditions mentioned above indicated there were few takers at the time, and the Northern population itself was sparse in the early 1900s—rough population figures recalled from the 1950s indicate hardly 200,000 scattered from Haa to Trashigang. It would have been meaningless to settle Indians, as they were subjects of the British Raj whose encroachments Bhutan was trying to stall. The solution was to attract the only non-British India subjects, the Nepalese, some of who had already settled in the past in the Sibsoo-Samtse area. Kazi Ugyen was familiar with the Nepalese as people of Nepalese origin populated Kalimpong and Darjeeling, and he and his family lived amongst them. Other Bhutanese migrants had also settled over the years in the area and had assimilated with Nepalese, including the sprinkling of Tibetans, Chinese, English and Anglo-Indians who had come to live in the hills. Hence, Kazi Ugyen and his family had many friends and acquaintances amongst the Nepalese as well as the broader Darjeeling community, which practically gave them the status of local royals. Such settlements along Bhutan's Southern border would not only be a buffer between Bhutan and India but the economy would prosper through agriculture and animal husbandry, and taxes could be collected in Indian coin in the absence of Bhutanese currency, rather than in kind as prevalent in the North. In view of these circumstances the decision to increase the settlement of people of Nepalese origin was launched.

The Nepalese were versatile farmers and settlers both in the hot and humid Himalayan foothills and also in the upper hilly tracts like Surey and T'sirang. Very soon, that is, by the mid-twentieth century, almost the entire foothills from Sibsoo to Daifam were more or less settled. The buffer zone was successful and did effectively prevent further encroachments and



THE BODHISATTVA KING

the borders became secure and recognisable. It was only in the latter half of the twentieth century with roads connecting Thimphu, Trongsa, Bumthang, Trashigang and Mongar with the Southern townships of newly named and established Phuntsholing, Gelephu and Samdrup Jongkhar that businessmen and traders from the North began to find settling in the South conducive. Again, with hydroelectricity, life became still more convenient and tolerable for those coming from the North.

FORGING A SINGLE NATION

It takes a long time, or a major political event, for migratory populations to dilute or cut off ties with the places of their origin. The strong ethnic, and the historic, religious, trade and cultural ties between Bhutan and the Tibetan region could be broken off abruptly in view of the circumstances after the 1962 Indo-China war.

Subsequently, regional politics dictated the closing of borders thereby cutting off all north-south trade and people-to-people interactions. When about 4,000 Tibetan refugees entered Bhutan around 1959 and thereabouts, in view of Bhutan's limited capacity and resources, the understanding with the Government of India was that they would continue to the camps in India, and their sojourn in Bhutan would be temporary.

However, when delays occurred, on humanitarian grounds, the refugees were given land for settlement in Begona and Hongtsho in the Thimphu District, while some undertook shop-keeping in the townships of Thimphu, Bumthang and Trongsa. In order not to jeopardise but to maintain working relations with China especially along the border, the Bhutanese government could not permit any political activities by the refugees. Instead, the government graciously offered the Tibetans citizenship, should they decide to live in the country. About 2,300 agreed to settle down in Bhutan while others continued to the Tibetan refugee camps in India. There is, however, still a small number remaining in Bhutan declaring to be refugees.

Over the years and especially after the start of development plans from 1961 onwards, a few hundred Indian nationals were licensed to do business and open shops in the Southern towns. Their successor generations continue to do so mostly on rented properties or shops built on land leased out to them by the government. They have not taken up Bhutanese citizenship but there are a few cases of intermarriage with Bhutanese, thereby giving them rights of residency.

For the citizens of Nepalese origin in the South, the contacts could be kept up more easily with populations across the open border in India, and in the Darjeeling District of West Bengal, and sporadically with a more distant Nepal. Southern Bhutanese also had language, religious, diet and cultural differences with their Northern neighbours making close social contacts problematic in the beginning.

Recognising these factors and the need to bring the Northern and Southern populations closer to each other and bond them into a single nation has therefore been the consistent policy of the Druk Gyalpos as already seen. In this regard, the Dorjis of Kalimpong, namely Kazi Ugyen Dorji, Raja Sonam Tobgye Dorji and Prime Minister Dasho Jigme Dorji played an instrumental and consistent role. Towards this end, from the time of the Third Druk Gyalpo His Majesty Jigme Dorji Wangchuck, the National Assembly of Bhutan also took decisions to facilitate national integration.

The Assembly, after its formation in 1953, made it clear that the Southern Bhutanese were responsible for safeguarding the international border in their neighbourhood. Dzongkha would be promoted as well as Buddhism towards national integration. The Third Druk Gyalpo gave equal representation to Southern Bhutanese in the National Assembly as citizens of the country. In fact in the 1950s and even during the 1960s most of these representatives came to the assembly hall in their traditional Nepalese costumes, and spoke in the Nepali language. Some



Brokpas also came in their own local dresses. But in due course of time the Southern Bhutanese and government officials amongst them felt the need to identify more closely with Drukpa culture and traditions and highlight their Bhutanese identity. This was possible because the King encouraged their acceptance into the Bhutanese fold. The representatives and officials then started to wear the *gho* and *kira*. They began speaking in Dzongkha. These actions were voluntary and there was no coercion from any side. In fact these representatives requested the government to send Dzongkha teachers to begin teaching the language in the South, as well as promote Buddhism. However, for a long time the Monk Body and the Education Department were unable to fulfil these requests in view of resource constraints and a severe shortage of Dzongkha teachers in the country during those days.

The Third Druk Gyalpo also encouraged intermarriages by giving couples a *sohra* or gift amounting then to ten thousand Ngultrums. The Fourth Druk Gyalpo, His Majesty King Jigme Singye Wangchuck doubled the amount soon after ascending the throne. This practice is now no longer in vogue as intermarriages across the country have become common, especially due to improved regional communications, increased intermingling through mixed settlements, schools and colleges, government institutions, and common workplaces.

In order to facilitate the new citizens the Third Druk Gyalpo was most flexible and forthcoming, and attached considerable importance to the Southern Bhutanese. A special regional administration was created for Southern Bhutan in 1953-54. All government work in the South was conducted in the Nepali language, and as far as possible in keeping with their traditions and culture. It is pertinent to quote Professor Ram Rahul, an authoritative Indian scholar of Bhutan and the Himalayas, when he describes the Bhutanese administration under the Third Druk Gyalpo in his historic work 'The Himalaya Borderland':⁷

Bhutan is a hereditary monarchy. The King of Bhutan is the fountain of all State power in the country. Jigme Dorji Wangchuck, the present King, established the Tsongdu (Assembly) as the kingdom's legislative body in 1953 and reorganized the administrative set-up in 1953-54. He created in particular the office of Commissioner of Southern Bhutan with headquarters at Sarbhang.

The Commissioner, like the two Ponlops of Eastern and Western Bhutan, is the chief civil authority in Southern Bhutan. He is assisted by two Deputy Commissioners (who are equal in rank to the Thimpons under the Ponlops), one functioning from Chirang and the other from Samchi. The designations of Government officials in Southern Bhutan are the same as those of neighbouring Assam and Bengal.

The Third Druk Gyalpo in this way established a special regional administrative structure in Southern Bhutan for the recognised citizens of this area. It took into account their linguistic, social and religious issues, and the need to deal closely with the Indian states of West Bengal and Assam across the border in India. His Majesty also recognised the fact that integration had to be gradual to make adaptations acceptable, convenient and sustainable in the long-term. At the same time the sympathetic encouragement and engagement of the government was essential. If the Southern Bhutan population had simply been economic migrants or labourers there would have been no need to establish a separate and an elaborate administrative region for Southern Bhutan. However, during the 1970s the government and the National Assembly felt that the earlier Commissioner system had served its purpose and the time was ripe to have the same administrative system in the whole country including the South. The objective was to build a more homogeneous nation, with one system and one law. It was awkward to have two systems of administration in a small country like Bhutan, and this would also go against the declared policy of unity and integration. In this way, towards the end of the twentieth century, the Southern Bhutanese administration was brought under the



single reformed system within the framework of the twenty *dzongkhags* and 205 *gewogs* in the country, giving up the system of having the Office of the Commissioner of Southern Bhutan with deputy commissioners and sub-divisional officers. The designations of the officials were also rationalised as *dzongda*, *dungpa*, *gup*, etc., akin to that in the rest of the country.

SEEDS OF PROBLEMS IN THE SOUTH

Then the question arises: If everything was fine with the Lhotshampa, where did things go wrong, especially in 1988-1990 onwards?

Where the situation in the South was adversely affected was mainly on several counts referred to below. Firstly, in view of the development activities started under the first five-year plan in 1961, especially construction of roads, Bhutan had to import thousands of people as labour. In the early 1960s Indian labour like Biharis, Oriyas, Bengalis and Assamese, from the plains was reluctant to work in the higher altitudes, as they were not used to the cold and harsh mountainous conditions especially with the then poor living facilities. The Northern population could not fill this requirement in view of the small numbers and lack of labour skills despite the sincere efforts made by the government with introduction of systems like *Chuni-dom*, *Duk-dom* and *Goongdang Woola*,⁸ which also applied to Southern Bhutanese. The foreign Nepalese were then more forthcoming. As a result, an almost exclusively Nepalese labour force was inducted into the country for the Indian Border Roads Organization, DANTAK, as well as Bhutan Engineering Services, precursor of the PWD and later the Department of Roads. At the same time, besides intermarriages, there were other ways in which outside Nepalese were able to find their way into the country as officials, engineers, technicians, clerks, accountants, drivers and office workers, as these skills were lacking at that time in Bhutan. In fact some of those who were inducted from the Kalimpong area were even of Bhutanese origin, especially those from the settlement of

Pedong. Their presence blurred the distinction between citizens and outsiders. Several of these outsiders were given Bhutanese citizenship over the course of the years. Several had the status of having married Bhutanese nationals and hence qualified as residents and citizens.

The Department of Forests in the late 1950s and early 1960s engaged a mixed group comprising mostly Indians and a few Nepalese as *taungya*⁹ labour in order to carry out forest plantations and maintenance of forest areas in the South. As compensation, and to reduce the financial burden on the government's limited budget, such labour were given patches of forestland to cultivate as long as the work would last, but it seems that such forestry work became a long drawn out process. Some of these *taungya* labourers also integrated into the Bhutanese population. Again, since there was a shortage of labour to undertake agricultural activities some Bhutanese families began to 'adopt' or even surreptitiously keep persons from across the border. The adoption of children from outside the country was legally permissible in law on humanitarian grounds, but unscrupulous persons were not averse to exploiting the situation to increase the number of domestic workers. The tendency to migrate into Bhutan was also enhanced because of intermarriages with persons from across the border, Sikkim, Darjeeling and Kalimpong. This applied in fact to people in all stations of life and from all parts of the country and not only to the Lhotshampas. The family members of such persons tended to make their way into Bhutan sometimes to make a living, for business or to settle down, as happens everywhere else in the world. The government was well aware of such tendencies and the current laws demonstrate the efforts of the government to discourage, though not ban, marriages with foreigners. In this way some of those entering Bhutan along with families began identifying themselves with the legal inhabitants, and were also able to get onto the citizenship rolls.

So it can be clearly seen that those Nepalese coming into Bhutan after the mid-1960s were in fact in a different category from those who had



been legally settled as citizens for a specific national objective from the beginning of the last century. However, these categories being mostly of the same ethnic or cultural origins, speaking a common language, practicing forms of the same religion, culturally and dress-wise similar, there was somewhat of a confusion regarding the differentiation of the Bhutanese and non-Bhutanese categories amongst these on all sides, and unfortunately, among the home ministry officials. This situation was further exacerbated when the administrative system in the South was reformed with the rest of the country, especially in relation to the maintenance of census records.¹⁰

With the changing of the nature of the earlier administration in Southern Bhutan, and in the absence of proper administrative handing-taking over and debriefing, the immigration records that had been maintained meticulously were either lost, abandoned or the methods simply became lax.¹¹ Hence, this situation was exploited wherever outsiders were determined to be included in the local registration records. This seems to have contributed to an increase, though not significant, of the number of Southern inhabitants due to unsupervised registration. In due course of time this situation was the cause for sounding alarm bells by the newly established Bhutanese immigration authorities who, due to lack of proper guidance, insufficient knowledge and experience, largely misunderstood and misinterpreted the situation. This was especially so as most being newly recruited officials under new heads with little knowledge of the circumstances and unfamiliar with the situation in the South, were sometimes unable to identify and differentiate the genuine Lhotshampa population from the outsiders. Hence, in the thinking of the census teams and officials, illegal immigrants seem to have become synonymous with ethnicity.

On the other hand, this situation of migration, intermingling and settlement had also taken place between Northern Bhutan and the Tibetan region until travel between the two became

restricted, but this situation did not call for alarm as ethnicity did not come into question. The numbers also dwindled by the 1950s, and the tide gradually shrunk due to the border closure.

So one can conclude that the Southern Bhutan problem that climaxed in 1990 was not the direct result of the original settlement and integration policies, but due to later migrants who had come in various guises, and settled in the country. It seems that some newspapers and writers misunderstood this situation, and dissident leaders tried to exploit the circumstances and did not hesitate to call the actions of the Bhutanese government 'ethnic cleansing,' and a deliberate attempt to cut down the numbers of people of Nepalese origin. There are other writers who have tried to dramatize the situation, create disunity and disharmony for reasons best known to themselves by implying that the objective of the dissident movement was to achieve a so-called fictitious greater Nepal.¹²

When the census figures were seen to be bloated in the late 1980s by a government administration that had become more modern, computerised and qualified, fingers were pointed at the immigration authorities of the Ministry of Home Affairs during 1987-88. The ministry's response was to immediately and urgently rectify the situation, as it was the ministry's responsibility that had come into question. The obvious step was to show that they were taking action by launching census exercises of the population in Southern Bhutan towards identifying illegal settlers. The Lhotshampa, because of the ethnic background outlined in the previous paragraph, had to face the brunt of the suddenly strict and hyper-efficient census teams that were hurriedly put together to tackle the problem. But unfortunately, these teams consisted of mostly persons who had little knowledge of Southern Bhutan's social and political background and lacked appropriate guidance and briefing from their superiors. Similar problems affected the cadastral land investigations launched to identify illegal land holdings. Hence, the home ministry's



actions resulted in a situation where an overall negative impression emerged and gave the exercise an ethnic politically confrontational bias, which was not the intention of the government's long-standing policies. But when this happened then different forces moved in to exploit the situation. Human rights organisations found reasons to criticise Bhutan. The Indian and Nepalese press, including those beyond the Subcontinent, gave it an ethnic or political twist and did not hesitate to brand it as ethnic cleansing. But the real intentions of the Bhutanese cabinet of the day were simply to get the population numbers right to utilise for development purposes, and where possible identify people who had settled illegally in the country, whether Nepalese, Indian or others.

The damage was, however, soon done, and complaints and tempers on all sides were flaring. The home ministry could still have achieved its objectives had they carried out the exercise in a less insistent and coercive manner. The result was the 1990 uprising in Tsirang, Gelephu and Samtse. Political overtones, with popular slogans for multi-party democracy and protection of human rights, which had nothing to do with the issues at hand, were made by various persons from all directions posing as leaders, some of who had personal political ambitions and exploited simple villagers for their ends. Misinformation and manoeuvring were the order of the day.

FOURTH DRUK GYALPO COMES TO THE RESCUE

The cabinet chaired by His Majesty soon began receiving reports of the happenings in the South not only from the home ministry but also directly from the Royal Advisory Councillors and others from Southern Bhutan. His Majesty made it very clear in the cabinet that the exercise was to get the correct census figures for development of social services. His Majesty advised that even those identified as illegals, should not be simply thrown out of the country. They should be given legal

recourse, and even the right to petition the King. At the same time His Majesty had received reports that several Lhotshampas had been inadvertently left out of the citizenship records and these needed to be regularised urgently. When His Majesty received complaints that some officials in Tsirang may have been trying to force genuine citizens out of their houses with intentions of acquiring the properties themselves, His Majesty immediately deputed High Court Judge Dasho D.N. Katwal armed with a royal *kasbo* (decree) that no one could throw people out of the country without proper legal process having been undertaken. The government officials involved were removed and action taken against them. His Majesty also put an end to the so-called green belt proposal along the Southern border as it affected the land holdings of the people.

When His Majesty heard that Southern Bhutanese, instigated by their newfound leaders, had gathered in the thousands in Gelephu and were preparing to leave for camps in Nepal on false promises, His Majesty rushed down to the border. He tried to persuade them not to take such a hasty and unwarranted step. "His Majesty described his appeal to the people asking them not to leave Bhutan in the cabinet by saying: 'But for going down on my knees I appealed to the people not to leave the country.'"¹³

When the Royal Bhutan Army (RBA) had to get involved to control the demonstrations and marches, His Majesty issued an unambiguous command to the Army Chief, Goongloen (Lt. Gen.) Lam Dorji that there should be absolutely no firing, even if violence was perpetrated against army personnel. This was a very difficult command to carry out but His Majesty did not want any violence and bloodshed. It is to the great credit of the Royal Bhutan Army that they followed His Majesty's command to the letter and handled the situation well. In fact dissident forces and the international press seemed disappointed, as only violence and bloodshed would have helped achieve their objectives and enabled sensational reporting.



FIFTH DRUK GYALPO CONTINUES NATION BUILDING

The Fifth Druk Gyalpo, His Majesty Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck, with wide international experience and exposure, has been instrumental in furthering the national unity and integration process. His Majesty has undertaken difficult journeys—including on foot—on a regular basis to reach out to the people of the more distant villages in order to resolve long-standing land issues and to enhance their welfare. Their Majesties the King and Queen visit and pray at the Hindu temples in the South, and make donations for their construction, repairs and maintenance. His Majesty initiated and financed the prominent Hindu temple in the heart of the capital, Thimphu, and has expressed during the 2013 *Dasain* worship and celebrations, the royal desire to celebrate the coming *Dasain* festivals with the Lhotshampas, Hindus and Buddhists alike at the new temple site.

The Fifth Druk Gyalpo also took the step of resolving the citizenship issue of thousands of Lhotshampas after these were jeopardised in the aftermath of 1990. This action has been the most compassionate on-going step for normalising the lives of many within the country, and continuing the process of integration and enhancing the unity within the country.

His Majesty also consistently reassures the Bhutanese people of the national policies as seen when a royal address was made to the graduates on August 22, 2014 at Thimphu when, *inter alia*, His Majesty stated: “Our most important goal is to protect the sovereignty of our nation as assiduously as our ancestors have done before us.”

Another national goal is to maintain peace through unity. “We must ensure that differences in ethnicity, region, religion, politics, and economic status never divides us,” His Majesty said.¹⁴

2008 CONSTITUTION: ONE NATION, ONE PEOPLE

So, as far as the Lhotshampas were concerned, the approach initiated by the Kings of Bhutan, with the understanding and acceptance of the Southern Bhutanese population, was unambiguous.

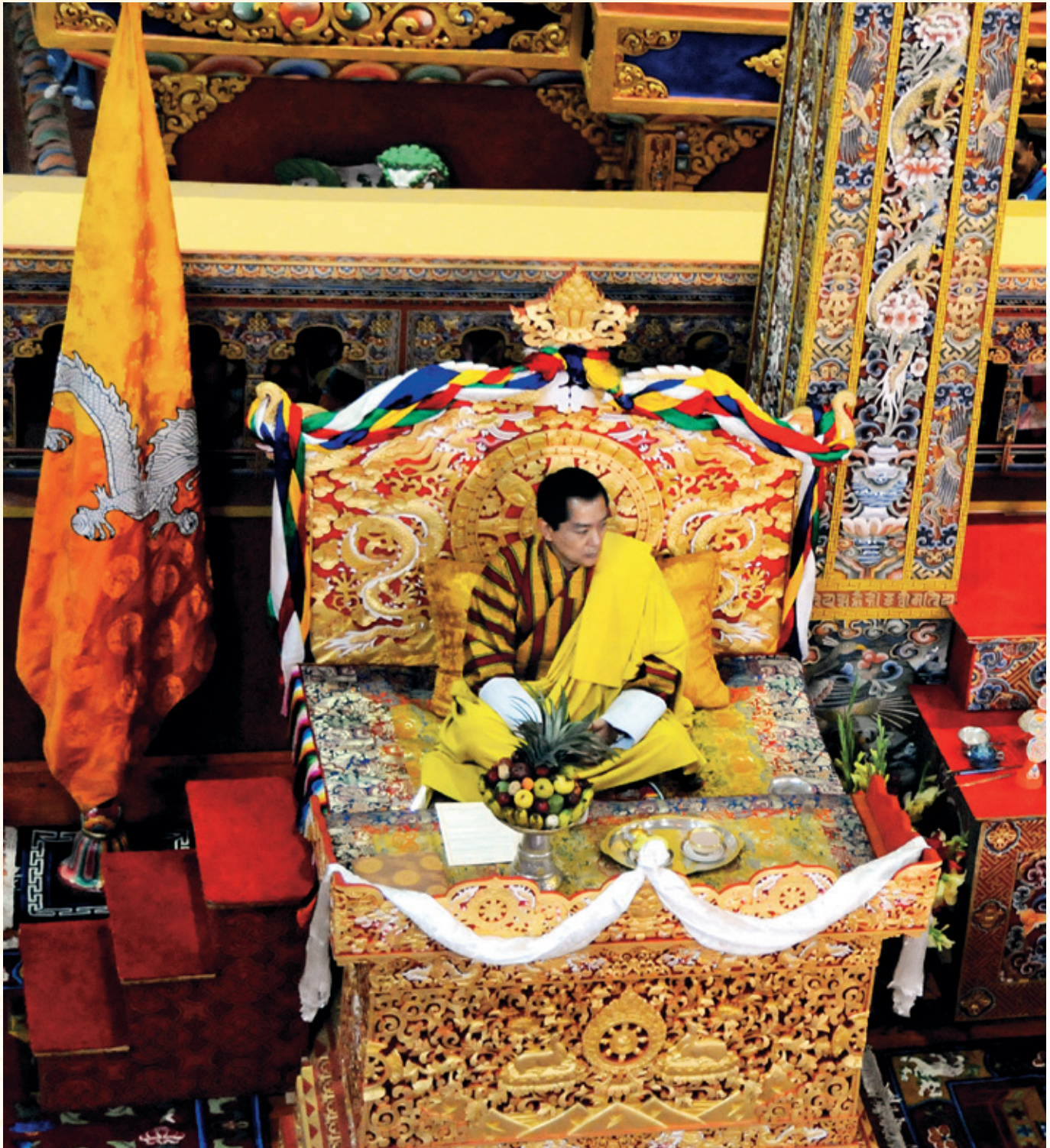
Hence, from a long-term national perspective and interest of the Bhutanese people, including Lhotshampas, it is to the ultimate credit of His Majesty the Fourth Druk Gyalpo that many of the problems relating to these were addressed through the introduction of the new Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan that gave rise to democracy in 2008.

Democratic norms and elections brought all sections of the people into the mainstream of political life of the nation as clearly seen from the representation in parliament and the cabinet. The Bhutanese Constitution ensures that citizens will not be discriminated in the life of the nation, officially and individually, on the grounds of race, sex, language, religion or politics.¹⁵

Today, the National Assembly, the National Council and the Cabinet have proportional representation from all sections of the Bhutanese people.

In the context of Bhutan’s future after the introduction of democracy in 2008, this author in the introduction to his book, ‘Bhutan - The Roar of the Thunder Dragon’ summarised the expectations of the people of the ultimate role of the monarchy in Bhutan:

Whatever the system of governance, it is evidently inherent in the belief of the Bhutanese people of all ethnicities and background that while adopting constitutional democracy they will always look to their Monarch “for comfort” and to confront dangers to the nation and those that affect their personal welfare and wellbeing. The people will continue to look up to the King to meet the expectations of the vulnerable sections of society and be their shield against all forms of bullying, exploitation, corruption and suppression.



*On 18th July 2008, Bhutan adopted the Constitution. His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck looks while his son His Majesty Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck delivers his speech. "The Constitution... is a sacred document that placed the power of governance and the future of the nation in the hands of the people."
(Photo: Thinley Namgyel)*





ENDNOTES

- 1 Parmanand (1992) *The Politics of Bhutan: Retrospect and Prospect*, Pragati Publications: Delhi-6. Also see The Department of Information, Ministry of Development, Our Beloved King, Royal Government of Bhutan Press, Thimphu (1979) p.11.
- 2 The expression *Palden Drukpa* refers to the Kingdom of Bhutan.
- 3 The author witnessed these events personally.
- 4 The author was then appointed the chief coordinator for this land distribution project.
- 5 Examples are Taktshang, Singye Dzong, Ajana, and sites of Shiva and other Hindu gods in the Southern part of the country.
- 6 Rahul, Ram (1970) *The Himalaya Borderland*, Vikas Publications: Delhi, p.60-61.
- 7 Rahul, Ram (1970) *The Himalaya Borderland*, Vikas Publications: Delhi, p.11.
- 8 *Chuni-dom*: One person out of every twelve for working in government/development projects. *Duk-dom*: One person out of every six for working in government/development projects. *Goongdang Woola*: Supply of labour based on household count for people's projects usually financed by the government. These practices are no longer in vogue.
- 9 *Taungya* is an Indian term for labour utilised in government forest areas where the labour is also permitted to use certain forest areas for their personal cultivation and consumption.
- 10 For further explanations in this context and a fuller analysis of the Southern Bhutan issue, see book by this author: (2012) *Bhutan - The Roar of the Thunder Dragon*, K Media publications: Thimphu.
- 11 Information given by Yeshey Tshering, senior home ministry official who had been in-charge of census activities around the 1990s.
- 12 As an example, see article written in *The Telegraph* dated 4 March 1993 titled: *Dragon kingdom divided* by Tapash K. Roy Choudhury. Also see books: *Towards a Grass-root Participatory Polity* (1999) by Bhabani Sen Gupta and *Bhutan Society & Polity* (1996) by Ramakant and R.C. Misra.
- 13 See, Pradhan, Lyonpo Om, (2012) *Bhutan The Roar of the Thunder Dragon*, K Media: Thimphu, p.175-176.
- 14 "His Majesty asks graduates to never give up and to strive for excellence." *The Bhutanese* dated 23 August 2014.
- 15 See, Pradhan, Lyonpo Om (2012) *Bhutan The Roar of the Thunder Dragon*, K Media: Thimphu, p.181.



*"Buddhism is the spiritual heritage of Bhutan, which promotes the principles and values of peace, non-violence, compassion and tolerance." The Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan
(Photo: Courtesy Her Majesty Ashi Kesang Choeden Wangchuck)*



*His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck at the 7th NAM Summit in New Delhi in 1983.
(Photo: Courtesy Tshering Tashi)*



THE DIPLOMAT:

THE ARCHITECT OF BHUTAN'S MODERN FOREIGN POLICY

Thierry Mathou

Self-reliance and independence through interdependence within the framework of regional co-operation is not only desirable but imperative in the face of the present global realities. — King Jigme Singye Wangchuck, Dhaka, First SAARC Summit, 13 May 1985

When King Jigme Singye Wangchuck came to power in 1972, Bhutan's foreign policy was still in its infancy. After a period of self-imposed isolation which had ended in the early 1960s, a close but unbalanced relationship with India had emerged as a fundamental parameter of the kingdom's diplomacy that needed to be adjusted. Bhutan had no direct communication links with foreign countries except India and all foreign visitors had to get inner-line permits from New Delhi.

Bhutan had formally joined the United Nations eleven months earlier, which barely gave her experience of international politics although her first window onto the world had been opened in 1962 when the kingdom joined the Colombo Plan. Bhutan did not even have a full-fledged foreign service at that time. She had only two representatives abroad, in New York and in New Delhi. The latter was not even formally called an embassy according

to diplomatic standards. At the same time several daunting diplomatic challenges were awaiting the young King in a very instable regional scene.

The Third Indo-Pakistan war had ended up in 1971 with the independence of Bangladesh, a new neighbour that Bhutan was the first nation to recognise. The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) had not yet been created. The very idea of regional cooperation in South Asia, which became one of King Jigme Singye Wangchuck's priorities, had still to be coined.

The Sikkim monarchy with which the Royal Family of Bhutan had close relations was on the verge of collapse and its territory was to become a part of India. Although Bhutan and Sikkim had forged a different relationship with their common neighbour, the latter was a buffer state between Nepal and Bhutan. Concern that Bhutan would follow Sikkim into India was high in Thimphu as the population of Nepalese-origin living in the kingdom was again very significant. This question turned out to be a major national issue twenty years later—although with a very different outcome.



THE BODHISATTVA KING

While the threat from the South had still to be neutralised, pressure from the North was also a concern. Bhutan did not have to face the Chinese factor as dramatically as she did back in the 1960s, but the new King was rapidly confronted by the challenge resulting from the growing number of Tibetan refugees on Bhutanese soil.

This was both an internal and a diplomatic issue. Since Bhutan is sandwiched between China and India, the Druk Gyalpo's main challenge was to gain recognition of Bhutan's sovereignty from all of her neighbours. Last but not least King Jigme Singye Wangchuck, whose destiny was to modernise his country without undermining its identity, was perfectly aware, thanks to his dual education, of the need to stay away from the two driving forces that were leading the world at that time: bipolar politics and consumerist economy.

When he ascended to the throne, the new monarch was only sixteen. Although he had been familiarised as Trongsa Penlop—the equivalent of England's Prince of Wales—with the role India had acquired in the development process of his country, he did not have a global view of the regional quagmire. Upon taking the reins, he was wise enough to adopt a cautious approach by walking in the footsteps of his father. His entourage was crucial in giving the young King insights into international affairs. His uncle, Prince Namgyal Wangchuck who had led the first Bhutanese delegations to the United Nations, was a valuable adviser at the beginning of his reign. Another man also played a critical role at the King's side during the next twenty-seven years.

Lyonpo Dawa Tsering had become the first Foreign Minister in the history of Bhutan soon after the kingdom joined the U.N. When he retired in 1998 he was the longest-serving

Foreign Minister in the world and the longest-serving cabinet minister in Bhutan. Although the Druk Gyalpo was the only authority responsible for the country's foreign policy, his minister, who was twenty years older than him, was his closest confidant and adviser as far as foreign affairs were concerned. While cultivating a low profile on the international scene, Lyonpo Dawa Tsering who was a master of diplomacy, was aware of the limited options and immense challenges of steering Bhutan's foreign policy. His natural inclination towards a gradual approach was in line with King Jigme Singye Wangchuck's vision which sought to create the long-term conditions that would allow Bhutan to strengthen her sovereignty and independence. They believed that the modernisation program was a matter not only of democratisation and economic development, but also a sign of diplomatic maturity.

Although the Third Druk Gyalpo, rightly portrayed as the 'father of modern Bhutan' had played an eminent role in opening-up his country and laying the foundations of her relations with India, King Jigme Singye Wangchuck, was the real architect of her foreign policy. While following the model of his father, he was keen to 'play his own role' in a changing domestic and international context, as shown by the three pillars of his diplomatic legacy: upgrading of Bhutan-India relations; launching of borders talks with China; and asserting Bhutan's international personality. On this basis the Fourth Druk Gyalpo created the founding principles of Bhutan's modern diplomacy.

THE GLOBAL ARCHITECTURE: FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES AND MAIN FEATURES OF BHUTAN'S FOREIGN POLICY

In 2006 when the Fourth Druk Gyalpo handled the reins to the present King, Bhutan had diplomatic relations with twenty-one countries plus the



Back left to right: General V. Namgyel, General Lam Dorji, Lyonpo Tobgay, Lyonpo Sangay Ngedup. Front: His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck, Lyonpo Dawa Tsering and Lyonpo Dago Tshering. (Photo: Courtesy Her Majesty Ashi Kesang Choeden Wangchuck)

European Union.¹ She maintained four resident diplomatic missions abroad—New Delhi, Dhaka, Kuwait, and Bangkok—and two permanent missions to the United Nations in New York and Geneva.

Apart from India all the other countries were brought into the diplomatic sphere of Bhutan under the reign of the Fourth Druk Gyalpo, who took the opportunity to personally interact with all the ambassadors who visited him to present their credentials.

While this formal ceremony is often limited to protocol in most of the countries, King Jigme Singye Wangchuck was keen to have thorough conversations with his visitors on bilateral relations and international matters. The diplomats who met him at these occasions were always surprised by his simplicity and impressed by the accuracy of his questions and analysis.

Following Bhutan's long period of self-imposed isolation, some ambassadors were not expecting to meet a visionary—as many of them described him on several occasions. As a matter of

fact Bhutan was not secluded any more. She joined more than 150 international organisations during the reign of King Jigme Singye Wangchuck.

While only two countries, India and Bangladesh, had embassies in Thimphu, fifty-four international agencies were involved in development projects in the country. Bhutan had become an active member of SAARC and had been admitted to the BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectorial Technical and Economic) forum and to the Asian Development Dialogue (ACD). A fruitful interaction had also been initiated with China. On a more personal level, his studies abroad, mainly in the United Kingdom, had helped the young prince in broadening his horizons.

He had learnt about the importance open minds and intellectual interactions would play in modernising his country. Although he voluntarily limited the number of his official visits abroad, the Druk Gyalpo, who preferred contact with his people to lavish international tours, encouraged Bhutanese nationals, mainly students, civil servants and scholars to engage in international exchange programs.



While cultivating a low profile on the international scene, he implemented a skilful and surprisingly developed diplomacy. Among the three Himalayan kingdoms that existed when he came to power, Bhutan was the only remaining monarchy at the end of his reign. While internal factors caused the transformation of Sikkim and Nepal, only Bhutan had succeeded in the four objectives that were priorities for King Jigme Singye Wangchuck: sovereignty, preservation of cultural heritage, a special relationship with India, and a broadening of foreign relations. As described by the Druk Gyalpo himself during his coronation address, Bhutan's foreign policy was based on three fundamental principles:

Firstly, we are committed politically to a strong and loyal sense of nationhood, to ensuring peace and security of our citizens and the sovereign territorial integrity of our land. Secondly, to achieve economic self-reliance and the capacity to begin and complete any project we undertake, and thirdly to preserve the ancient religious and cultural heritage that has for so many centuries strengthened and enriched our lives.²

Sovereignty has always been a tricky issue for a landlocked country which has to cope with the pressure from mighty neighbours. Notwithstanding Bhutan's good relation with India, most of its trade depends on her. Therefore it has been essential for Bhutan to cultivate this relationship to preserve free trade between the two countries and to facilitate trade with third countries like Bangladesh, Nepal, Singapore or Hong Kong. In that context self-reliance was the boldest and more ambitious statement the Druk Gyalpo could make when his country was totally dependant on India's assistance. It revealed two features of his character which were demonstrated throughout his thirty-four year long reign: courage and long-term vision. It also demonstrated two other qualities, most useful in diplomacy: pragmatism and patience.

Preserving the national culture was not only a personal commitment of King Jigme Singye Wangchuck to traditional values but also the solution he had envisaged to promote the country's sovereignty. In that respect the three fundamental principles of Bhutan's foreign policy are closely interconnected. Should the Druk Gyalpo have decided to embark his country on the path of consumerism and productivity, it would have been impossible to resist the growing pressure coming from the outside world. Later on, by coining the concept of Gross National Happiness (GNH), he succeeded in giving substance to Bhutan's foreign policy, the objective of which has never been to export a model which has proved to be difficult to imitate elsewhere, but rather to conciliate apparently contradictory features: modernisation and tradition, sovereignty and dependence. As mentioned by King Jigme Singye Wangchuck himself: "the Bhutanese felt that unless some initiatives were taken, Bhutan's identity as a sovereign, independent country would be completely eroded in the next twenty years".³

This approach illustrates another feature of the Fourth Druk Gyalpo's character: determination. Although his country was small and vulnerable, he never accepted defeat. In order to implement his foreign policy, King Jigme Singye Wangchuck imposed a line which was both a style and a code of conduct based on four principles: pacifism, utilitarianism, neutrality and traditionalism.

PACIFISM: THE BODHISATTVA-KING'S WAY

Bhutan has always been suspicious of ideologies, as is the Fourth Druk Gyalpo. None of the large ideological movements that spread throughout the Third World after the Second World War and during the 1960's had influenced King Jigme Singye Wangchuck. This does not mean however that he was hostile to theoretical and philosophical



considerations, on the contrary. The promotion of peace and non-violence has been one of his guiding principles. This was based not only on his Buddhist faith but also on a genuine comprehension of theoretical writings both from Asia and the West.

I have often been impressed by the extent of his literary knowledge. I will always remember the first time we met, how surprised I was when he referred to Albert Schweitzer during our conversation. Best known in Europe as a physician and a medical missionary in Africa, this German—and later French—Lutheran theologian received the 1952 Nobel Peace Prize for his philosophy of ‘Reverence for Life,’ which most people ignore, even in Europe.

The fact that Schweitzer’s thought had been influenced by Indian religious philosophy, and in particular by the Jain principle of *ahimsa* or non-violence, had probably a special meaning for a Buddhist King. Yet to include in his personal pantheon a Western Christian philosopher was most revealing about the Druk Gyalpo’s open mind. Interesting enough, Schweitzer thought that Western civilization was decaying because it had abandoned affirmation of life as its ethical foundation, a principle one can also find in GNH. Obviously the political implication of King Jigme Singye Wangchuck’s Buddhist ethics, mainly compassion for all life, has been his attachment to pacifism as shown by the importance Bhutan has given to the United Nations Charter and to the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. It was indeed significant for Bhutan that the first formal codification of these principles had been contained in a treaty signed in 1954 to establish the relations between China and India. It was deeply rooted in the spiritual heritage of King Jigme Singye Wangchuck who never sought confrontation to solve problems—with the notable exception of the military operation he conducted in 2003 against

the ULFA camps in Bhutan. That only came after having exhausted all diplomatic possibilities and with an exceptional spirit of compassion for the insurgents.

UTILITARIANISM: A PRAGMATIC CHOICE

The Fourth Druk Gyalpo founded his foreign policy on a theory based on normative ethics. His philosophy was simple and pragmatic: taking the proper course of action in order to optimise the benefits without ignoring negative impact. In economic sciences, this approach is usually described as utilitarianism. In Bhutan it got its diplomatic translation as described by King Jigme Singye Wangchuck himself: “Diplomatic relations alone are not of great importance for the kingdom’s sovereignty. One or a hundred missions abroad make no difference”⁴.

While the Fourth Druk Gyalpo was directly in charge, the kingdom did not make a single diplomatic move that did not strictly correspond to a practical need. Therefore each of the kingdom’s partners has been assigned a specific role, either political or economic, in its diplomatic spectrum. Bangladesh was a new neighbour with which Bhutan could develop a promising partnership.

Nepal, the Maldives, Sri Lanka, and Pakistan were all members of SAARC which was to become one of Bhutan’s priorities in the region. The European Union, Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, Finland, Japan, Austria and Canada became key partners for Bhutan and enabled her to diversify her source of development aid. Although the initial enthusiasm for bilateral relations with Kuwait and Bahrain has waned since Bhutan realised repayment of Arab loans was a major burden for her economy, the kingdom’s interaction with oil-rich countries of the Middle East was intended to be a wise move in the context of rapidly rising energy prices.



His Majesty presenting the prestigious Druk Wangyal Medal awarded posthumously to Prime Minister Indira Gandhi to Shri Rajiv Gandhi, Prime Minister of India during his state visit to Bhutan in 1985.

As far as the Republic of Korea, Thailand and Singapore were concerned, the motivations of Bhutan were essentially linked to growing trade perspectives. Most important for the Druk Gyalpo, none of those countries would drag Bhutan into complex world politics.

NEUTRALITY: A MATTER OF INDEPENDENCE

This pragmatism was relevant with King Jigme Singye Wangchuck's low profile on the world scene. The importance he gave to neutrality on international matters had a lot to do with Bhutan's geographical position as a buffer state between China and India, although the kingdom did not choose to keep the same distance between its two neighbours.

This approach had also a lot to do with the Druk Gyalpo's attachment to the Panchsheel principles. His decision to join the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in 1973 was in line with Bhutan's traditions and philosophy. It gave him the opportunity to travel to destinations like La Havana (Cuba), or Harare (Zimbabwe) in countries estranged from Bhutan's diplomatic sphere, where

he met many leaders of the developing world. Although he did not personally attend all NAM summits, this new window onto the world gave him the opportunity to expand his international horizon and to deliver strong statements such as the one he made at the Colombo Summit in 1976, when he emphasised the fact that the ever increasing expenditure on weapons of mass destruction was a vicious circle leading mankind closer to disaster. Although non-alignment and neutrality were key elements of the Druk Gyalpo's vision, he never thought to transform it into a leverage for his country. In the mid-1980's, while Bhutan had hosted two rounds of the Sri Lanka peace talks that led some observers to picture the kingdom as an 'Asian Geneva,' he swiftly remarked that "Thimphu, unlike Geneva, never had deliberate policy of acting as a forum".⁵

TRADITIONALISM: THE ROLE OF PERSONAL DIPLOMACY

Neutrality had a lot to do with King Jigme Singye Wangchuck's philosophy which excluded all kinds of unnecessary immodesty. Discretion and modesty are personal qualities the Druk Gyalpo applied to his ruling both in internal and external affairs.

With limited international ambitions the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was maintained with a relatively modest number of staff. This was compensated for by the broad experience of the Foreign Minister and by the qualifications of highly skilled bureaucrats who became remarkable diplomats, with many serving in the UN and becoming ministers like Lyonpo Om Pradhan and Lyonpo Ugyen Tshering. It also emphasised the role of personal diplomacy which revealed a certain degree of traditionalism.



As head of state and government King Jigme Singye Wangchuck was personally involved in all major international events attended by Bhutan with the notable exception of the UN General Assembly where he was usually represented by the Foreign Minister. In 1998 after he decided to transfer part of his executive power to an elected cabinet, he no longer found it necessary to personally attend SAARC and NAM summits. Although this decision reduced his international horizon during the last part of his reign as his travels abroad diminished, he remained exposed to international matters through his visitors. As already mentioned, the Druk Gyalpo insisted on granting audiences to most of the foreign dignitaries visiting the country, including ambassadors. He has always maintained a close relationship with all the Indian Prime Ministers, with a special mention for the late Rajiv Gandhi whose family, starting with Jawaharlal Nehru, had always been attentive to the fate of Bhutan. He also encouraged the development of informal friendship channels which have played a significant role in creating Bhutanese networks all-around the world. Interestingly enough, aid programs coming from Japan, Switzerland and Canada all started from personal relations between individual citizens from those countries and the Royal Family of Bhutan as shown by the example of the close and long lasting relation created with the kingdom by the von Schultess family from Switzerland.

The Fourth Druk Gyalpo has been cultivating this tendency which started during the reign of his father. Several friendship associations had been created abroad on this ground with the support of King Jigme Singye Wangchuck.

BHUTAN-INDIA RELATIONS: FROM DEPENDENCE TO INTERDEPENDENCE



*His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck with Her Excellency Mrs Indira Gandhi in January 1984.
(Photo: Kuensel)*

King Jigme Singye Wangchuck has always cultivated Bhutan's relationship with India which was the country he visited the most. In December 1974, six months after his coronation when the mourning period had ended, his first official visit abroad was to New Delhi. He was invited twice, in 1989 and in 2005, as chief guest of honour at the occasion of India's Republic Day.

The Druk Gyalpo never had any intention of undermining Bhutan's close relations with her neighbour but he was equally determined to strengthen the kingdom's sovereignty and economic status. As noticed by Lyonpo Dawa Tsering: "India, by virtue of its size and technological achievements, had a pre-eminent role in the region. The smaller South Asian countries had to live with this reality".⁶

Contrary to others, Bhutan has never tried to twist this reality. Yet the new King was eager to reach all his objectives. He was keen on



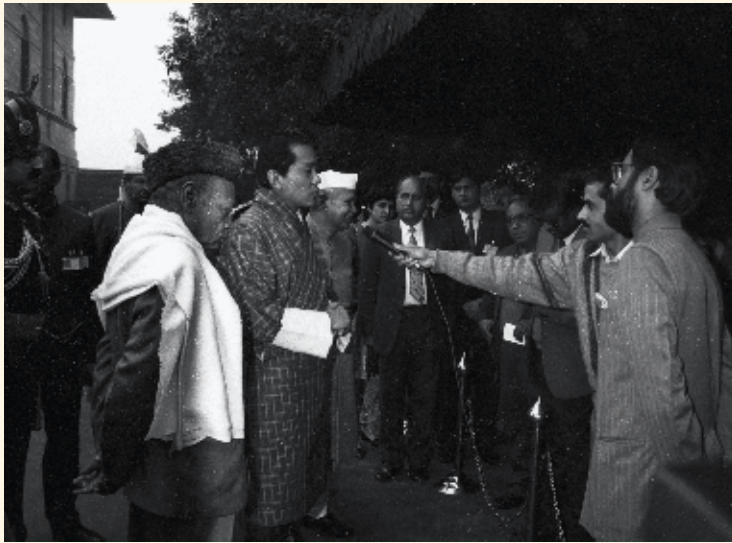
promoting a friendly bilateral relationship based on trust, understanding, mutual benefits, equality and frankness and not on ceremonial and legal considerations as shown by his formula “Friends do not stand on ceremony”.⁷ Therefore he adopted a gradual and subtle approach towards India as shown by the way he handled the Indo-Bhutan Treaty of 1949. When he came to power this treaty reflected the imbalance of the Bhutan-India relationship. As often described by Indian observers at that time, the kingdom “was not one hundred per cent independent because of the treaty”.⁸ Thirty-four years later, when the Fourth Druk Gyalpo left the throne, all the conditions were met for his son to sign a new treaty of friendship with India that got rid of past incongruities and clearly recognised Bhutan’s sovereignty and independence including in the conduct of her foreign policy, something which had been a source of controversy.

According to Article Two of the 1949 treaty, the Government of Bhutan agreed to be guided by the advice of the Government of India in regard to its external relations. While India considered the ‘guidance clause’ as totally binding, Bhutan although realistic about her limited capacity to take diplomatic initiatives on her own, interpreted it as being optional. This has always been the case in Thimphu but it became more obvious with King Jigme Singye Wangchuck. Although the monarch never tried to provoke India, he took all opportunities to softly impose his way of thinking throughout the years. Indeed they both shared the same view but some of their public statements sounded contradictory as shown below. This was due to a very interesting and subtle distribution of the roles. The distribution of the roles between the Druk Gyalpo and his Foreign Minister was rather subtle on this issue. Addressing his first Press Conference on 20 August 1972, King Jigme Singye Wangchuck, who was not yet enthroned, recognised that he did not intend to “propose to review the treaty of 1949” as it was “working well”.⁹

Two years later during the coronation address, he paid tribute to the good friend India in presence of President Shri V.V. Giri, for the great assistance rendered to Bhutan from year to year, and noted that the “treaty of 1949 was satisfactory and did not provide a cause of friction”.¹⁰ A few months later Lyonpo Dawa Tsering seemed to take a different stand. According to him “the treaty did not bind Bhutan to accept each and every advice given by India in conducting its foreign affairs”. This advice was “entirely optional” as it was “up to Bhutan to follow it or not”.¹¹ On such a key issue, the Foreign Minister could not have made statements without the Druk Gyalpo’s approval.

Their views were not contradictory but their roles were different. While becoming confident in the new King’s approach regarding Bhutan-India relations, New Delhi gradually accepted his vision based on a win-win relationship. King Jigme Singye Wangchuck knew it was better to be patient and pragmatic than provocative. He was never attracted by Nepal’s balanced diplomacy between India and China, which turned out to be a failure. Bhutan had everything to gain from its partnership with India both in terms of economic development and political autonomy.

Although no public declaration was made at that time, the first visit of the Druk Gyalpo to New Delhi was the occasion for him to get assurances from Prime Minister Indira Gandhi that what was happening in Sikkim could not be replicated in Bhutan. As a matter of fact the kingdom was more frightened by the growing politicisation of the Nepali-speaking Sikkimese population and by its possible spread to Bhutan with collateral consequences on its monarchical system, than by the attitude of the Indian Government, whose strategy was to keep a buffer state on its north-eastern border with China.



During a visit to New Delhi on 4 January 1993 His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck talks to a group of Indian Media while the Indian Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao looks on. (Photo: Kuensel)

Following this episode, Bhutan had no reasons to doubt India's support and no intention of challenging its interests. Therefore what were often presented by scholars as concessions made by Bhutan on the diplomatic scene during the 1970's were actually the result of King Jigme Singye Wangchuck's pragmatism. This was the case regarding Bhutan's decision not to establish diplomatic relations with any of the five permanent members of the Security Council of the United Nations. Although India was clearly opposed to such a move, the Druk Gyalpo had no desire to include these countries in his diplomatic sphere as it would have created more harm than good and would have dragged Bhutan into messy international politics. This approach started to be rewarded when India launched the concept of 'beneficial bilateralism' in South Asia under the Janata Government (1977-1979). Although this concept proved to be volatile throughout the years as bilateral relations in the region have often been erratic, it has always been the dominant feature of Bhutan-India relations. In 1978 India agreed to upgrade the level of the respective heads of mission in New Delhi and Thimphu from 'Special Officers' or 'Representatives' to 'Ambassadors.' The Druk Gyalpo made the most of the 'beneficial

bilateralism' advocated by Morarji Desai and Charan Singh. In 1979 during the Havana NAM Summit, Bhutan took a different stand to India's on the issue of Kampuchea.¹²

The same year a controversy erupted in Indian newspapers. Following a press conference in Bombay, the Druk Gyalpo was misquoted as saying that the 1949 treaty needed to be updated. In February 1980 he disavowed any intention of seeking a revision of the treaty, but he seized the opportunity to point out that Bhutan intended to take the final decision on all questions affecting its interests. "If the treaty does not create a problem, there is no need to discuss it with India".¹³

This was a new step in asserting Bhutan's interpretation of Article Two of the treaty. Interesting enough, one of the charges made by Indira Gandhi during the campaign for the Lok Sabha elections in 1980 was that the Janata Government had conducted its foreign policy in so spineless a manner that even Bhutan had begun to create problems for India which was not the case but turned out to become a regular strawman in Indian politics. Simultaneously the Fourth Druk Gyalpo accepted India's support which has become the key



to sustaining Bhutan's development. The signing of the Chukha Hydropower Project agreement in 1974 and of a new trade agreement in 1990 was essential to strengthen the bilateral relationship between the two countries which was also nurtured by the development of people-to-people relations, as shown by the establishment of the Bhutan-India Foundation in 2003.

Despite a history of friendly relations, bilateral border issues went long unresolved. Indo-Bhutanese borders had been delineated by the peace treaty signed in 1865 between Bhutan and Britain, but it was not until the reign of the Fourth Druk Gyalpo that a detailed delineation was eventually made. Discussions started in 1973. When King Jigme Singye Wangchuck abdicated, the border demarcation was completed.

Throughout the years, the Druk Gyalpo succeeded in convincing India not only not to oppose Bhutan's claims on the international scene but also to support them. The Eighties were an unprecedented period of diplomatic expansion for the kingdom, which established diplomatic relations with seventeen countries and became associated with twenty UN-related organisations and twenty-one sport and other international organisations. Bhutan even started official contacts with China.

During the Nineties and at the turn of the new century, the King had to face two major internal crises which were the occasion to test the strong bond he had created with India, as they both had diplomatic consequences. The first resulted from the unrest that developed among the people of Nepalese origin living in Bhutan. Although some parallels were made with the situation in Sikkim back in the Seventies, India never tried to take advantage of her neighbour's difficulties. The second crisis had much to do with Bhutan-India relations as it arose when Indian insurgent groups, from the ULFA and Bodo

movements, decided to establish their camps on Bhutan's territory from where they launched assaults on Indian Security Forces on the other side of the Southern borders.

The security of both states was threatened and activities like border trade were severely disrupted. Bhutan was under strong pressure from India to flush out these camps whose existence was seriously undermining Indo-Bhutan bilateral relations. Although King Jigme Singye Wangchuck was receptive to India's concern, he was eager not to antagonise the Assamese and Bodos or to allow Bhutan to become their target. For that reason he explored a peaceful approach to the extent possible. Eventually he decided to take military action only when dialogue became a dead-end.

The approach of the King demonstrated that he was keen to help India in view of the close relations existing between the two countries, but it also illustrated that the most important concern for him was to take care of Bhutan's own interest and to protect its sovereignty. In that respect the way he finally implemented the military solution was indicative of the maturity he had introduced in Bhutan-India's relations. Since 1949 the Indian Army has been acting as an umbrella for the protection of Bhutan, whose defensive capacity is minimal. It has also taken an active role in training the Royal Bhutan Army (RBA) and in building and maintaining the road network in the kingdom which is under the responsibility of the Indian Military Training Team (IMTRAT). Yet King Jigme Singye Wangchuck was keen not to let the close security relationship between the two countries overlap the self-determination of the RBA. For that reason he never allowed the Indian Army to pursue the insurgents inside Bhutan. As a matter of fact, the RBA has become "one of the greatest stabilising factors in the Bhutan-India relations" under the reign of the



Fourth Druk Gyalpo.¹⁴ Its relationship with the Indian Army has demonstrated the concept of independence within interdependence.

Like Lyonpo Dawa Tsering who played a key role as the closest adviser to the King on diplomatic matters, a remarkable army officer also had an equivalent role as far as defence issues were concerned: Goongloen Gongma (Lieutenant General) Lam Dorji. Trained in India and highly knowledgeable about India's security concerns, he was the longest serving army chief in the world (1965-2005). He developed a close relation with the Indian Army but never compromised with the independence of the RBA.

Logically the outcome of the long confidence-building and interaction process with India conducted by King Jigme Singye Wangchuck was the conclusion of a new friendship treaty between the two countries. Although the treaty was formally signed by King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck on 8 February 2007 two months after his father stepped down, it was one of the Fourth Druk Gyalpo's major legacy.



*His Majesty with Rajiv Gandhi, the Prime Minister of India
(Photo: Courtesy Lyonpo Dawa Tsering)*



*His Majesty with the Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and President Abdul Kalam, the 11th President of India.
(Photo: Kuensel)*

"When Congress Party of India won the general elections in 2004 and came back to power after a gap of eight years, Mr J. N. Dixit, former Foreign Secretary of India, was appointed as the National Security Advisor (NSA) to the Prime Minister of India. One day, soon after Mr Dixit assumed office, his Personal Secretary (PS) popped his head into NSA's office and said 'Sir, there is someone called Jigme on the line from Bhutan and he wants to talk to you.' Mr Dixit, almost jumping out of his chair yelled at his PS, 'That is the King of Bhutan, you silly fellow. Put the line through, right now!' His Majesty the King had called Mr J. N. Dixit, an old friend of Bhutan, to congratulate him personally on his appointment as the National Security Advisor of India. Mr J. N. Dixit, popularly known as Mani among his friends, also served as Chief Administrator of Indian aid in Bhutan." Rinchhen Kuentsyl, Senior Diplomat



His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck with Mr Qi Huaiyuan, Vice Foreign Minister of the Republic of China and other delegates in August 1990.

(Photo: Kuensel)

Most of the work on the 1949 treaty revision was done during his reign. In 2006 following the successful military operation against ULFA and Bodo insurgents the Druk Gyalpo had earned the gratitude of the Indian Government which was now indebted to him. Therefore he seized the opportunity like the brilliant tactician he was. He suggested to India that time had come to rewrite the treaty of 1949: “The Treaty’s provisions were increasingly at odds with the new realities within Bhutan”.¹⁵ The time had come and circumstances were ideal to publicly consecrate Bhutan’s long lasting interpretation of the 1949 treaty. Contrary to previous occasions when the treaty was questioned, King Jigme Singye Wangchuck’s stand did not create problems in New Delhi. The Government of India did not have any reservations concerning his proposal and agreed to make a historic change in the treaty. Although the new text is an update of the old treaty, it clearly reflects the contemporary nature of Bhutan-India relations.

The previous Article Two was erased and replaced by new provisions that promote an equal relationship between the two countries which “shall cooperate closely with each other on issues relating to their national interest”.

While signing the new treaty, India made a strong statement that consecrated King Jigme Singye Wangchuck’s strategy when saying that thanks to this text, “Indo-Bhutan relation had become an enduring element of [India] foreign policy”.¹⁶ Indeed Bhutan has remained dependent on India as far as economics is concerned. India is not only Bhutan’s main development aid provider but also its largest economic partner by far.

During the reign of King Jigme Singye Wangchuck, Indian assistance increased steadily. It has played a critical role in social sectors such as education and human resources development, health, hydropower development, agriculture, and roads. The two economies have become more and more interconnected through trade and monetary policy. All major infrastructures and industrial projects from hydropower to cement have been financed by India.

Yet the Druk Gyalpo succeeded in obtaining preferential clauses in most of the deals concluded with India. It was the case in the sector of civil aviation, a key factor for Bhutan’s sovereignty. After it began commercial operation to India in 1983, Bhutan’s national airline Druk Air, was granted several rights on concessional terms and was permitted to land at different Indian airports (New Delhi from 1983, Calcutta from 1988, Bagdogra and Guwahati from 2000, and Bodhgaya from 2003) without having to compete with an Indian airline. This monopoly and Druk Air’s ability to open international routes to other destinations like Nepal, Bangladesh and Thailand—and later on Singapore—has been important in asserting Bhutan’s de facto independence. The kingdom has also largely benefited from the free trade agreement signed between the two countries. King Jigme Singye Wangchuck’s most significant achievement as far as Bhutan-India relations are concerned has been to transform dependence into interdependence.



BHUTAN-CHINA RELATIONS: OPENING THE CHANNEL OF COMMUNICATIONS

When coming to power King Jigme Singye Wangchuck inherited a paradoxical situation. Bhutan had a long tradition of cultural and religious interaction with Tibet and was sharing a common border with China. But the kingdom was China's only neighbour which did not have any kind of official relationship with her.

Even trade was small and the border was sealed. However the status quo resulting from the turmoil that had followed the integration of Tibet into the PRC and the Sino-Indian border conflict in 1962 was about to change as this situation had generated a certain degree of uncertainty regarding Bhutan's capacity to deal with her northern borders.

As already noted, King Jigme Singye Wangchuck was not a leader to allow matters of concern regarding the sovereignty of his country to linger indefinitely. Interesting enough, his first significant diplomatic gesture happened to involve China which was one of the seventeen countries¹⁷ to be invited to his coronation ceremony on 2 June 1974. It was a unique opportunity for Bhutan to assert her personality on the international scene. The Chinese delegation was led by the *Chargé d'Affaires ad interim* of the Chinese Embassy in New Delhi. Although the Druk Gyalpo had no intention of establishing diplomatic relations with Beijing, he was considering normalising the Bhutan-Chinese relationship to a certain degree providing that India would accept this. While awaiting the proper timing to do so, he had to face an immediate challenge coming from the North. Tibetan refugees, who had started pouring into Bhutan from 1959, had been welcomed in the kingdom. Cultural and religious ties had facilitated their installation. The RGOB had even distributed land. During the Sixties, the Tibetan community had prospered in Bhutan.



*China and Bhutan complete ninth round of boundary talks in 1993. His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck with Mr Tang and members of the Chinese delegation at Tashichhodzong in June 1993.
(Photo: Kuensel)*

When King Jigme Singye Wangchuck took the reins, this community represented approximately 6,300 refugees. It had gained visibility in Thimphu, Trongsa, Trashigang and Bumthang, mainly in the trade sector. There were eleven Tibetan monasteries in the country. Yet the number and the influence of Tibetan refugees had become a concern in domestic politics. Although they respected Bhutan's political and religious institutions, their primary allegiance was towards the Dalai Lama and not to the Druk Gyalpo.

There was a risk that Bhutan could become a shelter for political activists who would use the kingdom's territory to back up actions against China. Suspicion was also nurtured by the influence of Tibetans in business circles and in the entourage of the Third Druk Gyalpo, something that created resentment and jealousy. This situation coincided with an atmosphere of conspiracy that culminated in the assassination of Bhutan's Prime Minister Jigme Palden Dorji in 1964.

The pressure increased with the arrival of the new King. In 1974 a plot intended to prevent the young monarch from ascending to the throne was thwarted. Although no evidence was officially established, Tibetans were said to be involved.



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People were arrested. Others were expelled. Although King Jigme Singye Wangchuck proved to be very lenient in the way he handled this case, he could not ignore the growing pressure resulting from the influx of refugees pouring into Bhutan in numbers quite beyond her capacity to handle.

Therefore he had to take action. In 1979, the National Assembly decided that Tibetans who had arrived in Bhutan after 1959, had to choose between becoming Bhutanese citizens or leaving the country. The Druk Gyalpo supported this move. About 2,300 people agreed to pledge allegiance to him and to become Bhutanese citizens. The situation of the remaining 4,000 refugees proved to be a difficult question to solve.

The Druk Gyalpo dismissed the proposal made by members of the National Assembly who suggested their deportation. Such a drastic solution was not consistent with his principles. Therefore, he instructed the RGOB to negotiate with the Indian Government to organise their departure. Eventually half of the refugees settled in India, while the others scattered in the West, mainly in Europe and North America.

This episode was not intended to please or displease China as the King's main concern was to protect the sovereignty of his country. Yet it proved to be beneficial to the opening of a channel of discussion between the two countries. Although Bhutan had affinities with Tibet despite a complex and often



*His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck grants an audience to China's ambassador to India Mr Cheng Ruisheng and Mrs Li Lu Ruisheng at the Tashichhodzong in September 1994.
(Photo: Kuensel)*

tumultuous historical relation, the RGOB never took a pro-active stance in favour of the Tibetan question which was too sensitive for the kingdom both for internal and regional reasons. This was enough for the Chinese to have a positive approach towards her small Himalayan neighbour which she had no intention of swallowing up.

Following the preliminary protocol meeting between the Druk Gyalpo and the Chinese *Chargé*, Xinhua News Agency announced a “new page in the friendly contacts between the two countries”. The Chinese congratulatory message sent to the new monarch emphasised the “desire of the Bhutanese government in developing its economy and safeguarding its national independence”.¹⁸

At this stage the intention of the Druk Gyalpo was not to develop a major relationship with China but to create the conditions that would allow the solving of border issues. The Chinese military presence along the border had long been perceived as hostile in Bhutan, especially their presence in the Western sector next to the Chumbi Valley. China had been claiming sovereignty over several areas of Bhutan territory.

Grazing and logging incidents had been common on Bhutan's soil where Chinese border guards were sometimes located alongside illegal Tibetan herders and loggers. In 1979, intrusions happened on a larger scale than previously and the need for negotiations became urgent. The intention of Bhutan to discuss matters with China was officially announced in 1981 after a trip to Thimphu by the Indian Minister for External Affairs and before a visit to New Delhi by the Chinese Foreign Minister. Although the Druk Gyalpo did not consider that this move had to be submitted for the formal approval of India, the least the RGOB could do was to inform its ally which did not object as they were confident that King Jigme Singye Wangchuck would ensure that Indian security interests would not be neglected.



*His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck with the Bhutanese delegation at the 9th NAM Summit in Belgrade on 5th September 1989.
(Photo: Courtesy Tshering Tashi)*

The Druk Gyalpo's initiative had significant consequences. It allowed the two governments to talk to each other after decades of ostracism. Contacts were established in New York in 1983 between Lyonpo Dawa Tsering and his Chinese counterpart Wu Xueqian. The first boundary talks were formally held in Beijing in 1984. Sixteen rounds of talks were held during the reign of the Fourth Druk Gyalpo, alternatively in China and in Bhutan. Starting at the beginning of this century delegations were upgraded to the ministerial level and the King himself gave an audience to the Chinese delegation.

Although the purpose of the talks, which are still going on, has been to find a settlement to the border issue, they have demonstrated that Bhutan and China are capable of dealing with a mature relationship. The two countries have been using their consultations to exchange views on various ways to expand bilateral relations. In 1994, the Chinese Ambassador to India started to pay working visits to Bhutan where he was received by the Fourth Druk Gyalpo. In 1998 during the twelfth round of talks in Beijing, the two countries signed an "Agreement on Maintenance of Peace and Tranquillity in Bhutan-China Border Areas".

This agreement was a significant step not only for border talks but also for the global relationship between the two countries. At this occasion China reaffirmed that it "completely respects the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Bhutan". Both sides stood "ready to develop their good-neighbourly and friendly co-operative relations on the basis of the Five Principles of peaceful Co-Existence".

Thirty-six years after the Sino-Indian border conflict which had forced his father to seal the kingdom's border with China and had led to the emergence of a whole new Bhutanese political and economic pattern based on an exclusive relationship with India and the shunning of her northern neighbour, King Jigme Singye Wangchuck has prepared the future of Bhutan-China relations without undermining the kingdom's relation with its southern neighbour.

FORGING BHUTAN INTERNATIONAL PERSONALITY: THE IMPORTANCE OF MULTILATERALISM

As much as he deepened their relationship with India, King Jigme Singye Wangchuck also expanded Bhutan's diplomatic sphere. Diversifying Bhutan's partnerships in order to find complementary if not alternative sources of development funds, was as important for the Druk Gyalpo as getting a broader recognition of Bhutan's sovereignty on the regional and international scene. Therefore he was keen on organising Bhutan's diplomatic sphere around three circles—multilateral, regional, and bilateral—assuming that India would remain at the centre of the sphere.¹⁹

Although the kingdom had joined the UN before the Fourth Druk Gyalpo ascended to the throne, it was under his reign that Bhutan's membership took on its full significance. King Jigme Singye Wangchuck insisted on Bhutan acting as an active and responsible member of the world body.



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*Top Left: His Majesty welcomed by President Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe on his arrival at Harare for the 8th NAM Summit in 1986.
Top Right: His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck with President Fidel Castro of Cuba at the 6th NAM Summit in Havana in 1979.
Center: His Majesty delivering his statement at the 4th SAARC Summit in 1988 in Islamabad.
Bottom Left: His Majesty with Sheikh Nasser Mohammed Al-Jaber at Dechencholing Palace.
Bottom Right: His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck with Crown Prince Naruhito of Japan during the Crown Prince's visit to Bhutan in 1987.
(Photo: Courtesy Her Majesty the Queen Mother Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck)*



Served by highly qualified ambassadors who were often called back to assume ministerial positions in Thimphu, Bhutan has held several important responsibilities such as the vice-presidency of the UN General Assembly, the chairmanship of the Third Committee of General Assembly in New York and the Presidency of the Trade and Development Board of the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) in Geneva.

Bhutan steadily asserted her international personality according to her own interests and values. Being located in the same region and having a close bilateral relationship, Bhutan and India have had identical views on most important world issues. Yet Bhutan has not aligned her behaviour at the UN with India's policy. As a small underdeveloped land-locked country, she supported all initiatives aiming at establishing a new and equitable world economic order, even though India had shown doubts on specific issues such as the charter of economic rights and duties of landlocked states regarding free access to the sea.²⁰ As a peaceful nation Bhutan approved all resolutions concerning the control of international weaponry, contrary to India which had to take into account her military interests as a regional power. Although Bhutan condemned nuclear proliferation, she declined to support Pakistan's proposal for a nuclear-free zone in South Asia, in order not to undermine India's interests after she had become a nuclear power in 1974.

Yet Bhutan insisted on expressing confidence that India would use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. As a non-aligned nation, the kingdom remained neutral on international issues in which India often took pro-active positions. King Jigme Singye Wangchuck had a strict interpretation of non-alignment. As mentioned during his speech at the Seventh NAM Summit on 9 March 1983 in New Delhi:

*the essence of Non-alignment is the rejection of all forms of subjugation, dependence, interference and intervention. Its commitment is to the resistance of all pressures-political economic military cultural.*²¹

This statement made Bhutan's foreign policy stand out clearly to all countries, including India. According to the Druk Gyalpo's priority for economic self-reliance, Bhutan also used the UN as a platform to obtain financial assistance for its economic development. A UNDP Resident Office, which turned out to be a key player in Bhutan's development program, was established in Thimphu in 1979. Other UN agencies like FAO, WHO, UNESCO, UNICEF, etc. gradually opened offices in Bhutan.

Another key element of King Jigme Singye Wangchuck's foreign policy has been his support for SAARC, which was the ideal forum for Bhutan to expand its regional diplomacy and develop its economic relations with neighbours like Bangladesh and Nepal without undermining India's position. Bhutan played its part in the preparation process that led to the formal creation of SAARC during its first summit held in Dhaka on 13 May 1985. Interestingly enough it was during a preparatory meeting of the seven Foreign Ministers in Thimphu on 13 and 14 May 1985, that South Asian Regional Co-operation (SARC) was envisaged as an association—the South Asian Association for regional Co-operation (SAARC)—and formally endorsed the objective of collective self-reliance—which was the exact replica at the regional level of the Druk Gyalpo's national priority.

To some extent, SAARC is a distillation of his foreign policy philosophy as shown by the quote mentioned as a foreword of the present chapter. “Self-reliance”, “independence through interdependence”, “regional co-operation” and the need to cope with “global realities” had been



the main features of this philosophy. On the operational level, joining SAARC proved to be a major milestone in Bhutan's foreign policy as the Association's development activities address most of the kingdom's concerns such as agriculture, forestry, rural development, communications, resource planning, industry, trade, and tourism. For the first time in history it also gave Bhutan the opportunity to see one of its citizens, Lyonpo Chenkyab Dorji, the former Minister of Planning, get the key position of Secretary General of an international organisation from 2005 to 2008, a symbolic milestone at the end of the Fourth Druk Gyalpo's reign.

Last but not least, King Jigme Singye Wangchuck cultivated a limited, as far as the number of countries was concerned, but most efficient in substance, bilateral diplomacy. All designated countries have become close partners of Bhutan and active supporters of its development programs. Bangladesh has played a key role in diversifying its trade activities. Japan and the European countries have brought significant sources of financing and expertise. Thailand and South Korea gave Bhutan the opportunity to develop a 'look east' policy. The Druk Gyalpo himself made few bilateral visits abroad except to SAARC countries, in particular India, or for special occasions like the funeral ceremony of Emperor Hirohito in Japan in 1989. Contrary to other world leaders he never intended to become a visible international player.

Yet he succeeded in creating an exceptional network of international support for his country. In 1998, the Fourth Druk Gyalpo decided to relinquish part of his executive power to an elected cabinet. Foreign Minister Jigmi Yoeser Thinley, who subsequently became the first elected Prime Minister of Bhutan under the reign of the present King, turned into a very dynamic diplomatic agent whose initiatives would have not been possible if King Jigme Singye Wangchuck

had not created the sound and solid foundations of Bhutan's international status.

The reign of the Fourth Druk Gyalpo has been a period of exceptional diplomatic activity for Bhutan. Contrary to a general perception in outside circles, the kingdom did not act under constant pressure from his southern neighbour. India's attitude has often been an advantage for the Druk Gyalpo who never sought overexposure for his country. Indeed Indian leaders were not spontaneously convinced of the necessity for Bhutan to promote its international personality.

Yet the Fourth Druk Gyalpo was not a ruler to let frustrations or doubt take the lead. Diplomacy is the art of letting someone have your way. That is exactly what King Jigme Singye Wangchuck did, step by step. As taught by Buddhism, patience is an invulnerable armour. In foreign relations, dealing with friends is sometimes more complicated than confronting adversaries. In that respect the Fourth Druk Gyalpo had shown exceptional expertise. The Bhutan-India relationship has become much more complex and sophisticated than in the Sixties. Though it might appear too subtle for some observers, the concept of 'independence through interdependence', which is the main diplomatic legacy of the former King, is a key principle that allowed Bhutan to firmly assert its international personality and to deal with its sensitive geopolitical location in the most effective manner.

As far as China is concerned, King Jigme Singye Wangchuck drew the logical conclusion from an irrational situation. Given historical conditions that existed in the region and the obvious geographical conditions, it was abnormal for Bhutan to avoid direct relations with its Northern neighbour, assuming that those relations must go through a transition process—something which is not unusual in diplomatic history. It took nearly sixty years for Bhutan to upgrade its political relationship with its



closest ally. It is no surprise that the normalisation of its overall relations with China also needs time. In both cases, the Fourth Druk Gyalpo has set the course of history.

There is no doubt Bhutan's international personality has gained considerable ground during King Jigme Singye Wangchuck's reign. Few leaders, especially from such a small country as Bhutan, have been able to leave a worldwide legacy as he did with Gross National Happiness.

Though his intention has never been to propose GNH as a model for other countries, the worldwide success of this concept has a lot to do with the image the Fourth King of Bhutan has forged for his country on the international scene. As the architect of Bhutan's foreign policy, the 'Bodhisattva King' also provided his country with a unique soft power which has become one of the best guarantees of its independence and sovereignty.

ENDNOTES

- 1 These countries and the dates of establishment of diplomatic relations are as follows: India (1968), Bangladesh (1973), Kuwait (1983), Nepal (1983), the Maldives (1984), Denmark (1985), the Netherlands (1985), Norway (1985), Sweden (1985), Switzerland, (1985) Finland (1986), Japan (1986), Republic of Korea (1987), Sri Lanka (1987), Pakistan (1988), Thailand (1989), Austria (1989), Bahrain, (1992) Australia (2002), Singapore (2002), Canada (2003). Diplomatic relations with the EU were established in 1985.
- 2 *Windows on Bhutan* (2005), Official publication of the Embassy of Royal Government of Bhutan, New Delhi.
- 3 Mathou, Thierry (1995) The growth of Diplomacy in Bhutan 1961-1991: Opportunities and Challenges. In *Bhutan: Aspect of Culture and Development*, Michael Aris & Michael Hutt (eds), Gartmore: Kiscadale Asia Research Series N°5, p.62.
- 4 *Asiaweek* (Hong Kong), Interview of the King of Bhutan, 27 September 1985, p.44.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 *Far Eastern Economic Review*, Hong Kong, 22 October 1982.
- 7 Gulati M.L. (2003) *Rediscovering Bhutan*, New Delhi: Manas Publication, p. 220.
- 8 *The Hindu*, New Delhi, 3 June 1960.
- 9 *Link*, New Delhi, 20 October 1972, p.30.
- 10 Kharat, Rajesh S. (2005) *Foreign Policy of Bhutan*, New Delhi: Manak Publications, p. 73.
- 11 Kohli, Manorama (1986) Bhutan's strategic Environment: Changing Perception, *India Quarterly*, New Delhi, 42 (2), April-June, p.149.
- 12 India wanted to keep the Kampuchea seat vacant, while Bhutan voted to allow it to be occupied by a representative of the ousted Pol Pot Government. Bhutan has condemned the invasion of Cambodia by Vietnamese troops.
- 13 Mathou, Thierry, *ibid.*
- 14 Lyonpo Om Pradhan (2012) *Bhutan, The Roar of the Thunder Dragon*, Thimphu: K. Media Publisher, p.109.
- 15 *India Express*, New Delhi, 9 January 2007.
- 16 Press note from the Government of India on the Signing of the India-Bhutan Friendship Treaty, New Delhi, 8 February 2007.
- 17 The 17 countries invited to the crowning ceremony were India, the five permanent members of the UN Security Council (China, France, United Kingdom, USA, and USSR), Australia, Bangladesh, Burma, Canada, Japan, Nepal, New Zealand, Sikkim, Singapore, Sri Lanka, and Switzerland.
- 18 Mathou, Thierry (2004) Bhutan-China Relations: Towards a New Step in Himalayan Politics. In *The Spider and the Piglet: Proceedings of the First Seminar on Bhutan Studies*, Thimphu: Centre for Bhutan Studies, pp.388-411.
- 19 Mathou, Thierry, The Growth of Diplomacy in Bhutan 1961-1991: Opportunities and Challenges, *ibid.*, p.66.
- 20 In 1975 Bhutan was among the five Asian countries—with Afghanistan, Laos, Mongolia and Nepal—to be granted the status of 'least developed landlocked country' by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP).
- 21 King Jigme Singye Wangchuck's speech at NAM Summit, Kuensel, 13 March 1983.



*On 15th December 2003, His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck led on foot the Royal Bhutan Army to flush out three groups of Indian militants from Bhutan. This mural from Dochula Lhakhang or monastery shows His Majesty with the flag of Bhutan after His Majesty demolished the Headquarters of the ULFA at Phukaptong.
(Mural by Dasbo Karma Ura)*



*T*HE BUDDHIST WARRIOR

THE STRATEGIST WHO SAVED THE SOVEREIGNTY OF THE NATION

Tsbering Tashi

In 2003, Bhutan had to fight a war. Although, the war lasted for only two days (15-16 December) it turned out to be both a strategic and tactical success.

Billed as the 'Low Intensity Conflict' and dubbed as 'Operation Flush Out,' it was fought using a combination of guerrilla and conventional tactics. The overall strategy went against many established military doctrines but adhered strongly to the Buddhist principles of non-aggression and restraint.

As the Supreme Commander in Chief of the armed forces and the militia,¹ the Fourth King, His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck (r.1972-2006) led his soldiers on foot and fought the battle fearlessly with intelligence, precision and humaneness in the same spirit as the legendary Buddhist warrior, King Gesar. In recent history, the Fourth King is the only head of state to lead his troops into battle.

A Buddhist warrior uses the ability to look within and recognise the cowardly nature of the mind. In doing so the warrior develops the courage to cut through the small-minded struggle for security and develop the expansive vision of fearlessness, openness and genuine heroism.

THE INDIAN INSURGENTS

Around 1995, three groups of Indian militants entered Bhutan illegally. They were not economic migrants but rather armed resistance groups—each fighting for the independence of their own native lands.

By 2003, thirty camps and thirty-five observation posts² had been established on strategically located vantage points in the foothills of Bhutan close to the border. From these strategic positions it was possible for the insurgents to conduct raids across the border.

THE MILITANTS

The Indian militants who had set up camps inside Bhutan comprised of three distinct groupings: The National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB), The Kamtapuri Liberation Organization (KLO), and the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA). There was also a minor sub-group, the Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT).

The NDFB is an armed opposition group that was seeking to obtain a sovereign Bodoland for the Bodo people in Assam. The aim of the second group, the



KLO was to obtain the independence of Kamtapur, a sub-region of the Indian state of West Bengal. Of the three groups, the ULFA was the biggest. It was a secessionist group fighting India for an independent socialist country of Assam.³ It took shape in April 1979 and was a title that would strike terror through the state of Assam.⁴ These militants were fighting the Government of India and the Indian Army.⁵

In its effort to curb the growing militancy in these states, which was threatening the stability and sovereignty of the country, the Indian Army carried out two military offensives against. The first one named; Operation Bajrang started in November and ended in April 1991. Five months later, in September, the Indian Army launched the second anti-insurgency Operation Rhino, which lasted till August 1992. Fleeing the Indian Army, the militant group found a safe haven in the forests in Bhutan adjoining the Indian Territory.

FIRST ENTRY

As a result of Bhutan's conscious decision to maintain minimum forest cover of 60% at all times, there was an increase in forest cover in the country, including in the border areas where human inhabitation was minimal. The militants took advantage of this, particularly in the border areas where the forest cover was thick and dense. The militants infiltrated into these forests and set up camps. As a result, their first entry into Bhutan was virtually undetected.

Also, in the 1990s, the Government of Bhutan was busy solving a similar undetected entry of illegal immigrants from Nepal.

Throughout the 1990s, the National Assembly, which was the highest legislative body, was engaged in finding solutions to resolve the threats posed by the 'Southern Bhutan problem' to the survival of a nation. Taking advantage of the situation, the Indian separatists had been secretly setting up camps inside Bhutan.

The Indian militants found Bhutan to be an ideal location to set up their camps. The inhospitable terrain with the thick forests, rolling hills, and the lack of presence of Bhutanese security forces, made it the perfect hideout. The natural abundance and steady source of water and food in the form of game made Bhutan a convenient base for the Indians. Additionally, the sparse Bhutanese population with their scattered villages made it ideal for the militants to train and recuperate.

The Indian militants had taken advantage of the fact that Bhutan is a small country with a very small population and forcefully established camps in the country.⁶ The insurgent groups carried out training in their camps in Bhutan and frequently launched attacks across the border in Assam, India.

BRUTALITY

The militants were brutal and displayed their brutality even to the harmless Bhutanese. On 21st December 2000, within the span of two days, "unidentified militants belonging either to the ULFA or Bodo outfits opened fire on Bhutanese passenger buses plying [through Assam] between [the Bhutanese border towns of] Samdrup Jongkhar and Phuntsholing."⁷ Later, it was confirmed that the BLT had carried out these attacks.

On 20th and 21st December, the BLT ruthlessly attacked and burnt three of five Bhutanese vehicles, mowed down fifteen Bhutanese citizens and left nineteen injured. Most of the dead were innocent women and school children.⁸

These unbearable acts of violence against Bhutanese travellers exemplified the brutal element among the militants who were well equipped and well armed. These incidents resulting in the death and injury of innocent Bhutanese engendered deep anger in the Bhutanese population and the National Assembly. The senseless killing of innocent Bhutanese travellers that took place on the highway in Assam in December 2000 had deeply shocked and saddened the whole nation.⁹



Upon hearing the news of these tragic accidents, our King immediately drove through the night to the area where these incidents had occurred. In Samdrup Jongkhar, our King personally consoled the relatives of the deceased, and provided assurances of safety to the people living in the borders. The drive was over 400 km and through the troubled region.¹⁰

While the media failed to report His Majesty's visit, the National Assembly recorded it.

*Out of his love and compassion for those affected by the tragic incident, His Majesty the King had personally attended the funeral rites of the deceased and granted cash compensation and comforted the bereaved family members. The noble and touching gesture of compassion and kindness by His Majesty will never be forgotten by the people of Bhutan.*¹¹

By 2001, the National Assembly of Bhutan recorded that the ULFA had set up nine camps and twenty-eight observation posts in Bhutan. In addition, the NDFB had established five camps and ten observation posts.

As a result of these camps, the people of the Southern districts of Bhutan faced great difficulties in going about their daily business. They were under constant threat and lived in fear. Almost all developmental activities and projects had to come to a standstill. The presence of these armed Indian militants threatened the security and undermined the sovereignty of Bhutan.

NEGOTIATIONS

For eight years (1995-2003), Bhutan negotiated for the peaceful dissolution of these camps. After three years of discussions to remove the Indian militants peacefully, the speaker's opening address to the 78th National Assembly in 2000 reflected the mood of the nation.

The speaker said, "that anxiety over the situation had robbed the Bhutanese people of their sleep and made their food tasteless." The National Assembly

always accorded the people's concern highest priority and urgency so the house once again held lengthy discussions aimed at finding a peaceful and lasting solution to the threat posed to the nation's sovereignty by the presence of the Indian militants on Bhutanese soil.

Reviewing the resolutions of the Assembly discussions over six years, it was clear that the people were united in thought and placed the country's sovereignty above all else. The speaker would often remind the members that Bhutan was a Buddhist nation that promotes the Buddhist values of peace.

As the National Assembly in Thimphu debated on ways to resolve the issue, our Fourth King had trekked through the forests to all the thirty militants' camps and met most of their leaders in attempts to reach peaceful negotiations. Our King went with a small group of people to indicate to the militants that he could be trusted for negotiations.

A former hardcore ULFA militant Raktim Sharma¹² included in his account that he met the King on five occasions in ULFA's Central Headquarters. In Rajeev Bhattacharyya's latest book, 'Rendezvous with Rebels', in his interview with Paresh Baruah, ULFA's chief of staff, he asks the obvious question, "Wasn't the king a frequent visitor to the camps?"

In 2003, during the 81st Session of the National Assembly, His Majesty the Fourth King strengthened the executive branch of the government in anticipation and preparation for the flush out operation.

He said,

*Bhutanese people were aware of the grave security threat that the nation was facing with the illegal presence of Indian militants. The country and the people would go through difficult times over the next few years. Therefore, it was particularly important, at this time, to have a strong and dynamic government.*¹³



"I talked to NDFB, ULFA, KLO and tried to reason with them and explain to them, but they were not responsive. They wanted the independence of Assam and Bodoland. I said how can you have two independent states, including Bodoland inside Assam? I told them that this was impractical since they were surrounded by Indian states. They gave the example of East Timor. I was not successful in convincing them." His Majesty the Fourth Druk Gyalpo as quoted in The Statesman, 30 May 2004. "I met the leadership in every camp. I went to practically all their camps. It was not easy for them to come for a dialogue they said. KLO never came here for a dialogue. I went without security and without being announced, without a big entourage, to these heavily fortified camps where they had been living for years."

(The Statesman, 30 May 2004)

(Photo: Courtesy Tshering Tashi)



The King reminded the Assembly that he was “responsible for the security of the nation as well as the establishment of a written constitution ensuring the well-being of the Bhutanese people.” He stressed the importance of “the election of a capable and a dynamic team of *Lbengye Zhungtsbog*¹⁴ Ministers,” which His Majesty reiterated was “more significant than the king.”

In a final attempt to resolve the conflict peacefully, the 81st Session of the National Assembly resolved after four days of intense discussion in its first ever closed door session that the government would make one last attempt at peaceful negotiations to solve the problem of the Indian militants illegally camped in the Southern districts.

After the Fourth King’s visit to India, and as part of the build-up to action, further negotiations took place with the militants but without any successful breakthrough. There was no response from ULFA. Their leadership assumed that there was no need for alarm because such reminders had been coming for so many years.¹⁵

This laid the groundwork very carefully for the events that later came to be known as the ‘Two Day Low Intensity Conflict.’ It became a declaration for switching from negotiations to military action. We were now in a countdown for full-scale military action to deal finally with the rebels; an action that if anything had gone wrong could have destroyed the independent existence of Bhutan.

THE OPERATION

As Kuensel reported;

When all efforts at a peaceful solution failed the royal government in the hopes of avoiding bloodshed, gave the militants 48 hours notice but this too was not heeded by any of the groups.¹⁶

Yet there had been ample indications that the ULFA’s days in the kingdom were numbered. The Royal Bhutan Assembly had passed a resolution in its

seventy-eighth session asking ULFA and the other rebel groups to leave Bhutan. The government had also issued an ultimatum to the militants to vacate the territory peacefully, failing which the military option would be exercised.¹⁷

When the final talks broke down, the country was forced to respond. Eventually, on the 15th of December 2003, the government issued a major thirteen-point statement which Kuensel carried out and also posted on their website. The operations began on the 15th of December, after the government had given the militants forty-eight hours notice to quit.

THE BHUTANESE POSITION

To face the estimated 3,000 militants, Bhutan should have needed at least 30,000 soldiers or the equivalent of about half of the 68,000 US soldiers in operation in Afghanistan in 2013. That requirement is based on the general military doctrine that states that the force ratio for guerrilla warfare is 1:10; for every militant ten soldiers are required.¹⁸ Thus the leadership reckoned that attack was simply not possible. The Royal Bhutan Army was weak and lacked the experience and weapons for a full-scale offensive.¹⁹

Bhutan’s army was only ceremonial and “a symbol of sovereignty. [The] *Pazap*, a form of militia was part of Bhutan’s heritage.”²⁰ Bhutan’s army does not have a long history. In the past the country did not have a standing army. It was only during the reign of the Third King that a fighting force was established. Since then the King has been the Supreme Commander in Chief.

But as the King pointed out;

In the age in which we live, the army occupies a position of extreme importance in the affairs of the state. From the 3rd month of the Earth Monkey Year I have been handling this portfolio personally.²¹



THE BODHISATTVA KING

The National Assembly reminded the people that Bhutan had fought

*twelve wars with the Tibetans in the north and eleven wars with British in India to defend the security and sovereignty of the country, and in these conflicts the Bhutanese prevailed over the odds.*²²

But the last war had been fought in 1865 and so the Royal Bhutan Army did not have any experience in warfare. Its deployable strength was 6,109 soldiers and a militia of 627 men.²³ Bhutan was thus 23,264 soldiers short of the ideal force. Clearly, an operation against such opponents would not only require an unusual strategy and clever tactics but also an un-conventional Commander to implement them.

HOTEL MIKE

By the first week of December our King was already in position in the hot-spot of Southern Bhutan. He had met all the units along the border. On 6th December 2003, in a historic address to over one thousand soldiers, His Majesty said, “All peaceful measures taken to resolve the conflict has failed. The Government’s unconditional offer of money has also been rejected.”

An Indian writer claims that Bhutan made an offer of Rs.200 crores to the Indian militants.

*After a meeting with ULFA representatives in Thimphu in 2001, he [King] offered to give 200 crores to the outfit. He [King] reiterated the same stance in another meeting, two months before the operation when a delegation comprising [ULFA] Foreign Secretary Shashadhar Choudhury [real name is Sailen Choudhury] and two of the other topmost functionaries, Bhim Kanta Buragohain and Asanta Baghbukan, had called on him. Choudhury claimed that the king’s proposal could have been implemented and the operation prevented.*²⁴

Senior officials of the Royal Government of Bhutan confirmed that Bhutan offered to bear the financial expenses for shifting their camps, if the militants

moved out of Bhutan. This offer was rejected by the militants. This offer was made by way of proposal during one of the negotiations with the militants and no figure, however, was mentioned. Since the offer was rejected by the militants, Bhutan did not make any payments to the militants and as a result the above claims of the Indian writer is not correct.

According to Lyonpo Thinley Gyamtsho the then Home Minister, the talks with the Indian militants were not done secretly but in a transparent manner. The minutes of the meetings were always shared with the Cabinet Ministers and the seven *Tsbodgu* members. Every year, during the National Assembly, he reported the full details of the talks to the members.

Choudhury claimed that if the King’s proposal could have been implemented then the operation would have been unnecessary.²⁵

As a militia officer, I was one of the thousand soldiers who had gathered in the helipad ground of the Central Headquarters in Gelephu. Our senior officers gave His Majesty the code name ‘Hotel Mike’. This was Hotel Mike’s first address to his troops in the wake of possible conflicts with the Indian militants.

Hotel Mike briefed us about the militant’s motives and our efforts to resolve the problem peacefully. He also informed us about our jurisdiction and our strength, stating that: “The RBA has 5170 men including 188 officers and with the 939 Royal Body Guards with forty-three officers, the total strength was 6,109.”

The 627 soldiers of the militias, which included twenty women, provided additional strength for the armed forces. It was obvious that our actual fighting force was not sufficient. In an unusual but wise move His Majesty had identified the militia as integral to



the regular army. He asked us to rise and then said: “These are the true sons of *Palden Drukpa*.”²⁶

As in all cases involving a mixture of conscripts and volunteers, some army officers doubted the abilities of the militia. Some friction arose because of the mixture of quickly trained ‘60-day Wonders’ and seasoned officers with four years of professional training under their belt. However, the causes of survival and sovereignty, and the military priorities quickly overwhelmed any internal difficulties.

After the briefing by Hotel Mike, Yangbi Lopen, a senior monk addressed us.²⁷ He informed us that we should have compassion and treat our opponents just as we would treat any other human beings. He reminded us, that just as we are a spouse, a son, a parent, a brother or a friend; the militants too were someone to somebody. He reminded us that as Buddhists, we do not believe in killing. Reflecting on these words, one can recall a report by the English;

*There is one quality, however, which rebounds very much to their credit as soldiers; they are singularly humane people, not a single instance of mutilation of the dead, or ill-treatment of prisoners, having occurred throughout the whole of the operations.*²⁸

In hindsight, we realised that by using Yangbi Lopen to speak to us, His Majesty had contradicted the first of Sun Tzu’s twenty point strategy for waging war which states, “Now in order to kill the enemy our men must be roused to anger.”

The meeting dispersed as Hotel Mike personally handed each soldier an amulet.²⁹ Our ancestors had also worn similar amulets when they drove away invading armies in the early seventeenth century. Yangbi Lopen informed us that the founder of Bhutan, Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal (1594-1651) had personally blessed the amulets that had been stored in the *dzong*.

Later in the evening Hotel Mike hosted a dinner for the army and militia officers of the Gelephu region

on the lawns of the modest ‘Inspector’s Bungalow.’ It was a quiet and clear night where all the stars shone very brightly. Over the previous two decades, I had been fortunate to have had the opportunity on various occasions to see the King at close quarters and immediately noticed that our King had lost a considerable amount of weight.

Later in Thimphu, a television cameraman reported, “Seeing His Majesty’s shrunken body through the zoom lens; my heart missed several beats.”

Hotel Mike said, sipping his jasmine tea,

If we had 7,000 troops, they could be divided and posted in thousands in the affected areas. If the numbers were large enough, they could be used as backups for the army, allowing many more of the troops to be released for the actual operations. With the present militia numbers, this is not possible.

The only saving grace is that the militias who have volunteered are one hundred per cent genuine and deeply committed, and willing to die for the nation.

In the years to come those who did not join the militia will regret not having come forward to safeguard the country.

He briefed us on the background and the entry of the militants.

There are thirty known camps and an additional one in Botla between Bangtar and Daifam. Their actual strength could not be determined because they were firing at our scouts and not allowing them in the vicinity of their camps.

Because of the proximity of Bhutan to Assam and the terrain our border areas are feasible locations for the militants to set up their camps.

Updating us on the outcome of the most recent talks with the militants, Hotel Mike said,

ULFA has made it clear that they will not reduce the number of their camps nor give up their Central Headquarters and their General Headquarters, as for them it is as good as giving up their goal of independence. As for the intentions of the various militants, the ULFA leaders said that many of



their people had died for their cause and that they could not justify any betrayal of their own people. The NDFB said that Bhutan had two choices: to honour the two thousand years of relationship with the Assamese or the fifty years of relationship with India. NDFB stated that if they were removed from Bhutan, they would simply come back. They say this, not because they are stupid or being frank, it's because they believe the Bhutan Government is scared to do anything to them and the Indian Army will have to enter Bhutan to attack them.

We must prevent Bhutan from becoming the area of conflict between the Indian Army and the militants.

Elaborating his concern, he said,

Bhutan does not have combat experience; the militants have been fighting the Indian army for many years. We have no manpower, aircraft, or sophisticated weapons. In spite of all the inherent weakness of the army, we shall prevail. What is of utmost importance is that the Bhutan armed forces have full faith and follow my every command.

Instructions that are passed on and orders must be executed to the best of your ability. In this conflict I need you and you need me.

Hotel Mike spoke of the need to be decisive and brave. He added that if the Bhutan Army was not able to evict the militants the threat of Indian Army intervention was very real.

If we cannot protect ourselves and have to depend on another country for our security, then we will pay a big price. If we lose our security, we have lost our sovereignty. The Bhutan armed forces therefore have a special role. It is the armed forces honour and privilege to protect the security and the sovereignty of our nation. Destiny has given us the opportunity. Once we move forward we will not relent until we have sent the militants out of our country.

I will not stay in the capital and give orders. I hold the responsibility of safeguarding the security and independence of our nation. I am here today to look after the safety and welfare of our soldiers, because I am concerned about your well-being as you are all like my children. This is my true duty and responsibility.³⁰

Let it be remembered that Hotel Mike spoke to the Bhutanese armed forces in the field rather than making statements from behind imposing wooden podiums far away from the reality of danger. It was spine chilling to consider the thought that our King and ourselves might not return to Thimphu if we failed to succeed.

It was clear that Bhutan could not afford a Plan B. There was no second string to the bow. For Bhutan, Sun Tzu's statement in the art of war was prescient, "The skilful soldier does not raise a second levy, neither are his supply-wagons loaded more than twice." The forthcoming battle proved Sun Tzu's statement that, "It is a matter of life and death, a road either to safety or to ruin."

However, it was becoming clearer that in addition to our efforts we also had to rely heavily on the monks and pray that they had also done their job. Therefore, there was a lot to motivate us as we made our final preparations.

The Indian militants who had set up camps illegally in Bhutan were in essence guerrilla fighters. Fighting a guerrilla war is one of the most difficult kinds of warfare. T.E. Lawrence, better known as 'Lawrence of Arabia', compares guerrilla fighters to a gas.

The fighter disperses in the area of operation more or less randomly. They or their cells occupy a very small intrinsic space in that area, just as gas molecules occupy a very small intrinsic space in a container.

The fighters may coalesce into groups for tactical purpose, but their general state is dispersed. Such fighters cannot be 'rounded up' and they cannot be contained. They are extremely difficult to 'defeat' because they cannot be brought in significant numbers. The cost in soldiers and materials to destroy a significant number of them becomes prohibitive, in all senses, that is physically, economically, and morally.³¹



ESTABLISHED STRATEGIES AND TACTICS

A military operation, in the thick forests of Southern Bhutan, against such a battle-hardened and well-fortified force would, indeed, represent a very major undertaking for any country.

Military Commanders in the West follow different strategies. Most of them are based on a set of standard doctrines, principles, and practices relating to battlefield tactics. Whilst different countries develop their own tailored versions of these, their similarities demonstrate a common way of thinking.

A proposal to conduct a military operation in disregard for such standards would be met with derision by many military leaders. But the German Field Marshal Graf von Moltke (1800-1891) considered one of the greatest military strategists, famously stated that “no plan survives contact with the enemy.” He wrote that it is only possible to plan the beginning of a military operation and the key to success was in having a plan that incorporates numerous contingencies. Throughout history Moltke’s philosophy of flexibility has been a key consideration in battle planning. Accordingly, commanders have always kept a reserve force for tackling the unknown.

A commander, who plans an operation in accordance with these established practices, will recognise the fundamental principle of the unpredictability of the battlefield situation and the necessity of having back-up plans or alternative scenarios. Hence, it is vital that the commander is located in a strategic position ensuring him reliable communication, control of his reserve forces, logistical supply, and his fighting forces in order to be able to adapt the plan as the battle evolves.³²

THE BHUTANESE STRATEGY³³

As the Commander in Chief of the army, the Fourth King took personal responsibility for safeguarding its sovereignty and protecting the security of the country.

Prior to December, the King had already endured a lot of hardship and repeatedly risked his life and met all the leaders in an attempt to persuade them to leave the country peacefully. By the end of 2003 the King had visited all of the thirty camps. He had studied the militants and knew how they lived, how they fought and how they thought. It was with this knowledge that he was able to use their own tactics to defeat them.

The Bhutan Army operated in the same manner as the guerrilla fighters: few in number, familiar with the terrain and mobile. Hence, no permanent headquarters was established.

THE WAR

On 15th December, the King led the *gho* company, a company of infantry soldiers, on foot and launched an attack on the main camp of the Indian militants. By leading from the front, the King gave up his strategic oversight role and hence had little immediate control over his fighting force, the reserves and the logistical support, something generally considered to be vital for military success.

The only advantage of the King’s position at the front was that by sharing the highest risks with his soldiers, he was able to be a model of restraint and non-aggression and to inspire and instil courage in the soldiers around him. The King’s plan had to be absolutely faultless—from his position it would be impossible to modify it in the heat of the battle. Consequently, the plan not only had to survive the first engagements with the insurgents, but also offer viable guidance throughout.



WHY WERE THE BHUTANESE TO BE SO SUCCESSFUL IN THIS MILITARY OPERATION?³⁴

Instead of operating with multiple or alternative scenarios, the Bhutanese preparation aimed at identifying a single ‘appropriate’ strategic approach and excluding all others. In order to overcome the odds, the plan had to take into consideration the very distinct challenges of the specific situation that was so much in favour of the militants. Therefore, it was necessary to ensure that the plan would not only survive the first engagement with the insurgents but also offer viable guidance throughout the battle. Bhutan did not have the resources or backup for repeated confrontations; they had only one chance to succeed.

Drawing on Buddhist principles, the King’s strategy mobilised the inner strength and courage of the soldiers and their understanding of the necessity of the operation itself and the long-term goal of peace. For many, the stereotype image of a soldier is an individual trained and conditioned to be strong, direct and aggressive.

In modern warfare, this image does not paint a complete picture. We often hear of commanders striving for ‘courageous restraint’ or ‘tactical patience’, whereby troops need to show restraint in the face of hostility. Examples of this strategy used by forces in conflicts in Afghanistan or other theatres of war are often partnered by images of operational failings, where the front-line troops have felt exposed and powerless. The 2003 conflict showed the world how such restraint could be well executed and pivotal to a successful outcome, one conforming to Buddhist principles.

Prayers and rituals were part of the army’s preparations for battle, cementing the bond of trust between the King and his soldiers. The spiritual preparation emphasised the need to avoid any unnecessary

aggression and to recognise the opponent as another human being. Shortly before the battle the Fourth King addressed his army. His Majesty updated his soldiers on their immediate situation, and emphasised the need to be mindful and the importance of restraint.

“As we have no back-up,” Hotel Mike said that evening;

We are like a weak boxer entering a ring to fight a strong opponent. We have to be the first one to strike and we have to do it with all our might, then pray that the monks had done their job too. [In support of the negotiations and the campaign, our monk body had chanted many prayers for a peaceful outcome.]

If not then it would be the beginning of the end of the state of Bhutan.

Yangbi Lopen, one of the senior monks who accompanied HM, said that sensing possible conflict in 2003, the monk body had performed prayers. They had read the 108 volumes of the *Kangyur*, recited over 100 million chants of Guru Rinpoche over a two-month period and also performed special prayers to the main protective deity of the country, Yeshe Goenpo or Mahakala.

The Bhutanese believe that Yeshe Goenpo (Mahakala) appears in the form of the Raven. The Bhutanese Buddhist believes that the deity is also the nation’s defender. Various saints had subdued violent demons and made them understand the values of peace; the demons often became protectors of peace. The basis of the policy of the two-day conflict could possibly originate from this long tradition where much stress is laid on making opposing forces lifelong friends.



His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck, the Supreme Commander of the Royal Bhutan Army addresses the soldiers just before the operation against the Indian Militants in 2003. "I will not stay in the capital and give orders. I hold the responsibility of safeguarding the security and independence of our nation. I am here today, to look after the safety and welfare of our soldiers, because I worry from the heart for you are all like my own children. This is my true responsibility." Deothang, 2003

(Photo: Courtesy Her Majesty the Queen Mother Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck)

KAMI DUWHA JHUB

The Je-Khenpo (head abbot) used the Bhutanese metaphor 'like a meteor crushing a cliff,' to describe the 2003 operation. Little did the spiritual leader know that his words would be enacted literally. It is interesting how often nature transforms events. On the eve of the battle, the night sky was filled with fireballs. What were these fireballs? Our elders call it *kami duwba jhub* and describe it as a fireball with a long tail.

However, astronomer Mark Talley said that the fireballs are known as Geminid meteors. It is the

single most active and consistent meteor showers of the year, often appearing as very large fireballs. The phenomenon gets its name 'Geminid' because it appears to radiate from the constellation Gemini. Stargazers can see the meteor from 6th December, when one appears every hour. The rate increases to 50-80 per hour and the shower peaks on the night of 14th December. The last meteors are seen on 18th December. It is one of the favourite displays for stargazers and never lets observers down. It is also NASA astronomer Bill Cooke's favourite meteor shower because the phenomenon defies explanation.



The Geminid Meteors
(Photo: Mark Talley)

HOTEL MIKE AT WORK

One of the keys to the success of the 2003 operation is attributed to the wise leadership of our supreme commander and the clever strategies he commanded. One such strategy was the use of the mortars. The Royal Bhutan Army does not have artillery. The 81 mm mortar is the only long-range support weapon available in our army's arsenal. Traditionally, a battalion of foot soldiers use mortars as support weapons. Because the Bhutanese army is ceremonial and small, the mortars had to be used as the main weapon.

Although the mortar is an important weapon for attacking enemy defences, it is a weapon most effective in areas without any forest cover. Conventional military wisdom would discourage the use of mortars in Bhutan, because of the rolling hills and the thick tropical forest. But its shells can be timed to burst in the air and thus when fired into a forest can turn trees into projectiles themselves. Though the mortars may not be as effective as in open grounds it is a useful weapon in mountainous areas because of its ability to be used for indirect fire and crest clearance.

The Bhutanese mortar company was under the direct command of our King and consisted of 400 soldiers and eighteen officers. Preparations for the campaign had been meticulous. Over several months the Bhutanese army had discretely carried mortar bombs to key strategic locations in the area without arousing the suspicion of the militants who walked freely in the forests and towns of Southern Bhutan.

Actually the intention of our supreme Commander-in-Chief was not to harm the Indian militants, but to use mortar skilfully and accurately to warn, frighten and disperse the militants, giving them sufficient time to flee southwards back into India.

As the morning mists of 15th December 2003 evaporated across the Southern foothills of Bhutan, all was in readiness for one of the greatest tactical mortar barrages to be staged this century anywhere in the world.

Two deadlines were set for the mortar company to go into action: 9:00 a.m. for south-east Bhutan and 10:00 a.m. for south-west Bhutan. From their positions north of the militant camps, the mortar company armed and fired the 81 mm mortars with great accuracy, pounding most of the thirty insurgent camps. Within thirty minutes, 9,720 shells were fired with great accuracy. This was possible because during the ten years, our King had taken GPS readings of all the camps.³⁵

After the mortar barrage, the forward elements of the Bhutanese armed forces swept into the camps, and found most of them empty. The militants had deserted their camps in panic—as intended by the King's strategy. "Those who were able to wriggle out dispersed to Assam, Meghalaya and Bangladesh."³⁶

Kuensel reported that "By mid-day the troops were able to overpower the Central Command Headquarters and the following day the General Headquarters at Merengphu was taken by the



RBA.³⁷ The clean up action continued across all the militants' camps and within two days, Bhutan had achieved her objective. By 17th December 2003, Bhutan had fought and won peace. The King's forces had dislodged all the 3,000 Indian insurgents and destroyed all the thirty camps and thirty-five observation posts set up by the three separatist groups from India.³⁸

While the Royal Bhutan Army would not give any figure of casualties suffered by both sides, the spokesman said that every effort had been made to keep the casualties as low as possible.³⁹ The spokesman also stated that,

*Our objective was to remove the presence of the militants and their camps from our soil and we have tried our best to do that with minimum loss of lives on both sides. After all as Indian nationals from Assam and West Bengal, the militants and their kith and kin are our immediate neighbours with whom Bhutanese people have always enjoyed close fraternal bonds.*⁴⁰

Despite all cautions, eleven of our soldiers lost their lives and thirty-five were wounded.⁴¹ 485 militants were apprehended and handed over unharmed to the Indian Army. The women and children were handed over safely to the Indian civil authorities.⁴² Women and children who surrendered to the army were later handed over to India.⁴³

At the end of it all it was clear that our King had removed the threat to the security of our nation and further strengthened our sovereignty. Despite facing overwhelming odds, after two days we could once again rejoice in the beauty of peace.

Gone are the days when kings or heads of states personally led their troops into battle. Now rulers remain far away from the battlefield, ensconced in the cosy, couches of their drawing rooms or official chambers. But the King of Bhutan and his son took up a brave fight—without a care for their own safety—against the insurgents from India who took

shelter in inaccessible jungles. He has thus become a role model.⁴⁴

All in all the Low Intensity Conflict ended well for the tiny Kingdom of Bhutan. The hard work of the Bhutanese soldiers and the police who laid solid groundwork for the conflict in the preceding years and the brilliant planning and execution of Hotel Mike paid off.

The militants were driven out, and unity and security reinforced to the Nation. Although the considerable risk of defeat in the conflict has proved easy to overlook in the subsequent years, no one should underestimate how delicate the situation had been for Bhutan. The gunfire heard in our forests, the chants of our monks, the prayers of the people that filled the air of the mountains during those days will linger long in our minds.

Kinley Dorji, the editor of Kuensel wrote;

*It might seem too much to ask that there should be no hard feelings at the end of such as conflict, but it is characteristic of Bhutan and the Bhutanese people that the overriding emotions even now are regret and empathy. We have assured the people of Assam and West Bengal of our continued friendship. Oddly, there was never any sense of animosity during the entire operation, only a regretful feeling of necessity.*⁴⁵

Plato said, “No law or ordinance is mightier than understanding.” Fortunately, the Assamese understood Bhutan's position and there were neither any post-conflict repercussions nor collateral damage. In fact, life on the borders continued as normal on the day after the operation.

At the end of 2003, Bhutan did not celebrate the victory but expressed our sentiments in prayers and with butter lamps.

Although the operation against the militants was successful, there was little rejoicing in the country. All the people were aware that His Majesty the King had wished to solve this problem peacefully.



However, military action had to be taken as the country was left with no other choice. The Royal Government had delayed to take military action with the hope that the militants would leave our country peacefully and the concern of His Majesty the King for the peace and tranquility of the State of Assam.⁴⁶

The Bhutanese soldiers were happy to fulfil the sacred duty to protect the security and sovereignty of the country and looked forward to returning home to their families.

The Fourth King has always maintained that the purpose of the Bhutanese army was not to make war but to make peace. Our King did not lead his troops into the conflict to show his heroism. He did so to ensure that by sharing the highest risks with them he would ensure a quick and successful operation, which was crucial given the small size of the army. I believe that Hotel Mike felt that if the job of flushing the Indian militants was just left up to the army, casualties would be higher than with his personal intervention, and that he wanted to minimise casualties on both sides and ensure not only that his soldiers were safe but also that the militants were treated with proper care.

DINNER AT THE GUEST HOUSE: 27 DECEMBER 2003

Speaking softly but clearly, His Majesty said;

There is no reason for you to rejoice although the conflict is over. The victory was swift and the results good by army standards. There is no pride in war. When a country is in conflict situation, it is not a good indication, as it is always in the best interest of the country to resolve conflicts peacefully. Bhutan must never rely on the might of the army to fight wars. Bhutan is sandwiched between the two most populous nations in the world, so geography does not allow us to entertain the idea of securing our sovereignty through military might.

Speaking about the operation, His Majesty told us about the recovery of arms and ammunitions, which

included AK56 assault rifles, grenades, machine guns, and anti-personnel mines.

The Bhutan armed forces also recovered cash and rations all of which they burned at the sites. I learned later from the soldiers that their army commanders gave strict instructions to burn all rations, clothes and money on the site. The senior officers had warned the soldiers of punishments if they took anything from the militant camps.

His Majesty poured himself another mug of hot water from the dented steel flask, and then informed us that the Bhutan Army had captured all the top brass of the ULFA, NDFB and KLO residing in Bhutan; some of them surrendered to our army and Bhutan had then handed them safely over to India.

The Royal Bhutan Army had destroyed all of the thirty camps except one in Gobarkunda. On the day of the operation the Bhutan Army could only shell it and was unable to burn the camp because of the shortage of soldiers. His Majesty told us that he would soon send a team from the army to destroy the camp.

His Majesty informed us that we were not going to return home without flushing out any remaining Indian militants, and that he did not expect any of his soldiers to leave him behind. Then he told us that a few minutes earlier he was on the phone with the Indian leaders in Delhi who had not only congratulated us on our efforts to flush out the militants from our soil, but also thanked us profusely.

Just before the dinner, His Majesty shared with us his intimate feelings for the country. He told us that Bhutan has a great future. We could harness our abundant water to generate power and sell it to India. Our neighbour India had an acute shortage of power and given Bhutan's capacity to generate 30,000 MW the economy would see unprecedented progress in the coming years.



In addition to having a secure economy, Bhutan has political stability, His Majesty said,

I have introduced many political reforms to devolve power to ensure that the fate of the country does not lie in the hands of one individual. These systems will assure that the Bhutanese people will continue to enjoy peace and prosperity irrespective of the calibre of the Kings of Bhutan.

However, His Majesty was brutally honest and cautioned us when he said, “the bright future will be meaningless if the Bhutanese people do not change their outlook and their attitude.” His Majesty gently cautioned us about our expectations when we reached home. He said that “people have short memories and it is easy for them to forget how close Bhutan came to losing our sovereignty.”

CONCLUSION

Today, one of the few visible traces of the ‘Two Day War’ are the AK56 rifles and 81 mm mortars that can be seen hanging on the walls of various *lhakhangs* in the country.

Most of those who catch sight of these rifles are intrigued. Tourists find it strange to see a weapon on display in a temple, as it seems to violate the serenity radiated by the spiritual sanctity and contemplative space. It is also a repulsive thought that an instrument designed to kill should infringe upon such pious space.

However, we the Bhutanese understand that these assault rifles were distributed to various temples in reverence and gratitude to the protecting deities of Bhutan for the success of the armed forces and the militia. As one of my friends put it, the AK56 rifles displayed in the temples commemorate the victory, blending the need, at times, for violence with the highest aspirations of the human spirit.

By the end of the operation, the RBA recovered more than 500 AK 47/56 assault rifles and 328 other assorted weapons including rocket launchers and mortars, along with more than 160,000 rounds of ammunitions from the camps. An anti-aircraft gun was also found at the site of the General Headquarters of the ULFA.⁴⁷ The King gave the majority of the weapons to India and a few were distributed to the monasteries in the country.

Imagine a war with few casualties, no collateral damage and no post-war repercussions. That was the ‘Two Day War.’ By military standards the result of the operation of the 2003 Low Intensity Conflict was a big success but the Bhutanese chose not to celebrate the victory. Instead, many butter lamps were lit in all the monasteries of the country and 108 temples were built as an expression of repentance.

Throughout this sharp well-planned battle and in the aftermath, our King was never triumphal. He vetoed any victory parades and played down the scale of the sweeping victory. As a result the outcome has stood the test of time and peace has returned to the region.

Because the mind of a Buddhist warrior is developed to overcome uncontrolled aggression, he is neither arrogant nor conceited. He becomes humble and compassionate, not trapped by the pettiness of hope and fear. It is the use of these qualities that made the Bhutan experience of resolving conflict unique.



ENDNOTES

- 1 Article 28, Section I of the Constitution of Bhutan (2008) further re-confirms this position.
- 2 *Kuensel* (2004) 3 January, Vol.XIX.
- 3 Phuntsho, Karma (2013) *The History of Bhutan*, Random House, p.582.
- 4 Hazarika, Sanjoy (1994) *Strangers of the Mist*, Penguin Books, p.167.
- 5 Proceedings and Resolutions of the 79th session of the National Assembly (2001) Home Minister's report, National Assembly of Bhutan.
- 6 Proceedings and Resolutions of the 79th session of the National Assembly (2001) National Assembly of Bhutan.
- 7 Proceedings and Resolutions of the 79th session of the National Assembly (2001) National Assembly of Bhutan, p.162.
- 8 *Kuensel* (2000) 23-29 December, Vol.XV No.50.
- 9 Proceedings and Resolutions of the 79th session of the National Assembly (2001) National Assembly of Bhutan, p.177.
- 10 Fischer, T & Tashi, T (2009) *Bold Bhutan Beckons*, CopyRight Publishing Company Pvt. Ltd, p.150.
- 11 Proceedings and Resolution of the 79th session of the National Assembly (2001) National Assembly of Bhutan, p.177.
- 12 Raktim Sharma wrote a *Borang Ngang* (which means 'Song of the Jungle' in Bhutanese) based on his flight from Bhutan. Sharma joined the ULFA in 1996 and lived in the Central Headquarters of ULFA in Bhutan as a junior commissioned officer until 2003. I am uncertain if the book was ever released.
- 13 Proceedings and Resolution of the 81st session of the National Assembly (2003) National Assembly of Bhutan.
- 14 *Lhengye Zhungtshog* means 'Council of Ministers'.
- 15 Bhattacharya, Rajeev (2014) *Rendezvous with Rebels*, HarperCollins India, p.179.
- 16 *Kuensel* (2003) 20 December, Vol.XVIII No.50.
- 17 Bhattacharya, Rajeev (2014) *Rendezvous with Rebels*, HarperCollins India, p.180.
- 18 Tshering Tashi, Andrew Bowes Lyon, and Barbara Adler (2013) The Buddhist Warrior, *Kuensel*, 14 December.
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- 20 Tobgye, Lyonpo Sonam (2015) *The Constitution of Bhutan-Principles and Philosophies*, p.453.
- 21 *Kuensel*, A Fortnightly Official Bulletin of the Royal Government of Bhutan, for the Fortnight Ending 31st October (1969) Vol.III No.20.
- 22 Proceedings and Resolution of the 79th session of the National Assembly (2001) National Assembly of Bhutan.
- 23 Fischer, T & Tashi, T (2009) *Bold Bhutan Beckons*, CopyRight Publishing Company Pty Ltd, p.163.
- 24 Bhattacharya, Rajeev (2014) *Rendezvous with Rebels*, HarperCollins India, p.179.
- 25 Bhattacharya, Rajeev (2014) *Rendezvous with Rebels*, HarperCollins India, p.179.
- 26 'Sons of Palden Drukpa' refers to the 'sons of the Kingdom of Bhutan.' According to Dr John Ardussi (personal communication with the editor 18 April 2015), the phrase 'Palden Drukpa' occurs in the royal seal and in the constitution to mean the state. The complete phrase is *dpal ldan 'brug pa phyogs las rnam rgyal* — "glorious Drukpa, victorious over all."
- 27 Yangbi Lopen is one of the five senior most monks. His rank is equivalent to a minister.
- 28 L/MIL/17/12/54. British Library. *Military Report on the Country of Bhutan*, p.65.
- 29 A square cloth, the contents are ancient relics.
- 30 His Majesty the Fourth King's address in Deothang, South Bhutan, the de-facto army headquarters, 12 December 2003.
- 31 www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guerilla_warfare
- 32 Tshering Tashi, Andrew Bowes Lyon, and Barbara Adler (2013) The Buddhist Warrior, *Kuensel*, 14 December.
- 33 The following three sections describing the war are adapted from an earlier article published in *Kuensel* (2013) 14 December, The Buddhist Warrior, by Tshering Tashi, Andrew Bowes Lyon, and Barbara Adler.
- 34 Ibid.
- 35 Bhattacharya, Rajeev (2014) *Rendezvous with Rebels*, HarperCollins India, p.180.
- 36 Bhattacharya, Rajeev (2014) *Rendezvous with Rebels*, HarperCollins India, p.180.
- 37 *Kuensel* (2003) December 15, Prime Minister Address to the nation.
- 38 *Kuensel* (2004) 3 January, Vol.XIX.
- 39 *Kuensel* (2004) 3 January, Vol.XIX.
- 40 *Kuensel* (2004) 3 January, Vol.XIX.
- 41 Dorji, Lham (2008) *The Wangchuck Dynasty*, Center for Bhutan Studies, p.133.
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- 43 Bhattacharya, Rajeev, (2014) *Rendezvous with Rebels*, HarperCollins Publishers India, p.180.
- 44 Majumder, Tarakdas, (2004) 5 January, *The Statesman*, Kolkata.
- 45 *Kuensel* (2003) December 20, Vol.XVIII No.50.
- 46 National Assembly Resolution of the 82nd Session (2004).
- 47 *Kuensel* (2004) 21 February.





Chenrezig (Avalokiteshwara) the Bodhisattva of Compassion. Painting from Phajoding Monastery. The Fifth King, in his address to the National Assembly on 16 May 2014, described his father, the Fourth King, as the Bodhisattva Chenrezig for his compassion and Chana Dorji for his power. During his National Assembly speech on 17 December 2014, the Fifth King explained why his father was the embodiment of the Three Protectors in the following ways: For the remarkable transformation His Majesty brought to the nation, the people consider His Majesty to be the embodiment of Rigsum Gonpo. When the nation's security was threatened, his form was like Chana Dorji (Vajrapani) bravely defending the country without fear for his life. His Majesty took the cause of well-being and happiness of his beloved people like a manifestation of the Bodhisattva of Compassion, Chenrezig (Avalokiteshwara). The clarity of His Majesty's visionary policies that still shine and guide us in our path of good development was similar to that emanating from Jambayang (Manjusri). Chenrezig (Avalokiteshwara) the Bodhisattva of Compassion. Painting from Phajoding Monastery (Photo: Karma Yeshey and Kuenga Wangmo)



THE CAKRAVARTIN-KING: SYMBOLISM OF THE BHUTANESE MONARCHY

Françoise Pommaret

When I arrived in Bhutan in the early 1980s, the country still looked very much like the 1914 photos by J.C. White in the National Geographic.¹ Thirty-four years and a reign later, the people of Bhutan have prospered, roads have been built, communications are available, health and education are thriving, a constitution has been enacted, democracy is a reality and the Fourth King has voluntarily stepped down in 2006 to hand over the throne to his son, the Fifth King.

This time capsule of a generation and changes which I personally experienced, calls for a reflection on what the Fourth King embodies for his people and how Buddhist and ancient kingship concepts have been upheld by the monarchy in Bhutan. Bhutan was built as an independent state in the seventeenth century and had to fend off several Tibetan invasions but its cultural and religious matrix remained the Tibetan culture at large.

The monarchy in Bhutan dates back to 1907 when it took over from a Buddhist theocracy in what was at that time, an overwhelmingly

Buddhist country. It was, therefore, logical that terminology and rituals from the theocratic regime were carried on by the monarchical institution.

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His Majesty took the cause of wellbeing and happiness of his beloved people like a manifestation of the Bodhisattva of Compassion, Chenrezig (Avalokiteshvara). The clarity of His Majesty's visionary policies that still shine and guide us in our path of good development was similar to that emanating from Jambayang (Manjushri).



The extraordinary nature of the Fourth King is well documented in Bhutan and might have been first noticed by Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche (1910-1991) in 1972. In Rinpoche's biography, 'Brilliant Moon,'³ Her Majesty the Royal Grandmother, Ashi Kesang Choeden Wangchuck describes the close relation between the spiritual master and the King:

At the age of sixteen or seventeen, Crown Prince Jigme Singye Wangchuck, prior to the coronation encountered obstacles created by the secret underground movements, who were preparing to cause trouble through various means.

Prior to the Public Coronation, on an extremely auspicious Thursday, at the tiger hour, three o'clock in the morning, on the tiger day of the tiger month, in the tiger year 1974, Dilgo Khyentse bestowed the Blazing Gem of Sovereignty empowerment and long-life initiation on His Majesty.

This empowerment was originally given by Padmasambhava to the young King Thrisong Detsen in Samye at the same hour, day and month in the tiger year, in order to protect the king and subdue all enemies and obstacles from the Bon masters. Before the enthronement Khyentse Rinpoche slept near the throne room at the Dzong and said that early that morning he dreamed that His Majesty was a true reincarnation of Tertoen Pema Lingpa and that he would do great good for the Dharma.

In the first month, the miracle month, Khyentse Rinpoche headed the accumulation of one hundred thousand Raksha Tontreng recitations at the Dechenchoeling Palace as a beneficial ceremony for the public enthronement and to prevent obstacles with a fixed amount of time.

In Tashichoedzong, he performed the Mahakala and Mahakali Ransom Offering for averting war which lasted for a full month. Then, on the fifteenth of the fourth month of the wood-tiger year, 1974, Khyentse Rinpoche attended the public coronation of His Majesty the Fourth King of Bhutan.

Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche and the Fourth King had a religious preceptor-officiant and ruler relation known in Classical Tibetan by the compound term

Choeyoen (mchod yon) or Yoenchoe (yon mchod), which goes back at least to Sakya Pandita (1182-1251). It was used when his nephew Phagpa (1235-1280) signed an agreement with the Mongol Emperor Qubilai.⁴

The Fourth King's special nature as perceived by Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, is emphasised by his epithet, King of Prophecy (*Lung bstan gi rgyal po*). His birth was announced in a prophecy attributed to Tertoen Drukdra Dorji (late seventeenth century).

It is said that Drukdra Dorji was meditating on the border between Bhutan and Tibet, when Guru Rinpoche appeared in person before him and prophesised the birth of the Fourth King and the flourishing of the Dharma under his reign:

*Dear son, listen to me once again,
In the hidden lowland of the southern country,
Where three valleys merge in a beautiful place
called Womtrong; [Old name for Dechenchoeling]
In that sacred place, in the Female Wood Sheep
year [Year 1955]
A boy of unsurpassed character will be born.
He will ascend the Golden Throne at the age of
20 and take his country to the greatest heights of
success unopposed.
The sentient beings in that land will enjoy
unprecedented peace and prosperity.⁵*

The Fourth King is also known as the Dharma King or Raja. The concept of Dharma Raja takes its root in ancient India. During the spread of this concept throughout Asia, it evolved differently, influenced by different historical contexts though some features remained unchanged.

It was applied by the Tibetan tradition to the first three Buddhist kings of the seventh to ninth century, Songtsen Gampo, Trisong Detsen, and Relpacen who were assimilated to the three Bodhisattvas: Avalokitesvra, Manjusri, and Vajrapani.

In the Tibetan world, the concept of Dharma Raja was then translated as *Choegyel* basically meaning a King who reigns according to Buddhist precepts.



*Mural of His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck at the Information Centre of the Ludrong Memorial Garden in Thimphu. The final year students of the Zorig Chusum School of Traditional Arts in Thimphu painted it.
(Photo: Tashi Lhendup)*



THE BODHISATTVA KING

The British called the successive Zhabdrungs who were the theocratic rulers of Bhutan Dharma Rajas. This was also the official title of the rulers of Sikkim. In Bhutan, however, the term *Choegyel* is not used and the king is instead called *Druk Gyalpo*, King of Bhutan.

A Buddhist monarch is not a king by divine right or ancestry. He is chosen by the people. The *Agganna Sutra*⁶ in which the Buddha expounds the principle of kingship, the Buddha calls the king *Maha Sammata* or the ‘Great Elected.’⁷ This Indian concept was embodied by Ashoka (304-232 BCE) of the Maurya dynasty who is considered the model of the Buddhist King, the Dharma Raja. Although he was never elected *per se*, he ruled with the approval of the monastic community and in accordance to its Buddhist precepts.

The concept of election by the people is at the core of the Bhutanese monarchy narrative as the First King was ‘unanimously elected’ on 17 December 1907 by the representatives of the clergy, governors, and lords of Bhutan. The ‘oath of allegiance’ (*genja*) between people and king is renewed each time a new king is crowned, legitimising the new king.

The Fourth King once said, “I have always made it clear that the people are more important than the King. We cannot leave the future of the country in the hands of one person who is chosen by birth and not by merit.” This concept also infers the notion of accountability to the people, which was one of the core principles of the Fourth King’s governance. In fact, he created the Anti-Corruption Commission in December 2005, just before he left power.

A Buddhist monarch is also called Cakravartin (*Khorlo gyunwa Gyalpo*), the ‘one who turns the wheel of Dharma’ and rules benevolently. This universal ruler who is the King of all kings, is accompanied by the Queen and his attributes are the wheel, the elephant, the horse, the wish-fulfilling gem, the treasurer, and the adviser.⁸ In

Bhutan, these are often depicted in the fortress entrances and are called the *Gyalsi Na Dun* (Seven Treasures of the King).

All the ‘jewels’ assist the King in carrying out his duties in a fair manner. Elephants and horses, Indian symbols of stability, speed, and power are also paraded during the public coronation ceremony as was the case for the Fifth King’s coronation in 2008. Such ceremonies are, as might be expected, loaded with Buddhist symbols and in Bhutan, it is believed that they stem from the anointment of the Tibetan King Trisong Detsen by Guru Rinpoche at Samye in the eighth century.⁹

The person of the King embodies the religious and secular orders (*Choesi nyiden*), a concept which has been much written about.¹⁰ The 2008 Constitution of Bhutan, which marks the passage to a constitutional democratic monarchy retains this primordial aspect of the monarchy. Article 2.2 of the Constitution states, “The Chhoe-sid-nyi (both religious and secular) of Bhutan shall be unified in the person of the Druk Gyalpo (King) who as Buddhist shall be the upholder of the Chhoe-sid.”

This article echoes the conception of the Zhabdrung, the head of state, as interpreted around 1675 by Tsang Khenchen, the Karmapa scholar and biographer of the Zhabdrung. Tsang Khenchen, taking inspiration from the *Kanjur Sa’i snying po ‘khor lo bcu pa’i mdo*, thought that the head of state in Bhutan was “himself simultaneously a Bodhisattva and a Dharmaraja, the embodiment of a militant Avalokitesvara taking command as its chief of state.”¹¹

The symbols of the Dharma Raja are very much in evidence on the King’s Golden Throne, which is adorned with a wish fulfilling gem and a wheel of Dharma. The throne is placed between the *thangka* of Guru Rinpoche and of Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal (1594-1651) who created Bhutan as a state in the seventeenth century and introduced the dual system of governance.



The symbols of the previous theocratic system emphasise the king as Dharma Raja, a title also attributed to the Zhabdrung. The role of the Zhabdrung as warrant of the King's legitimacy is evident in the part of the coronation ceremony which takes place in the *Machben* temple inside the Punakha Dzong. This temple contains the relics of the Zhabdrung enshrined in a *chorten* and can be entered only by the King, the Je Khenpo, and the Zhabdrung's chamberlain.

The King offers a white scarf to the *Kudung Chorten* and in exchange receives the five-coloured scarf (*dar nya nga*) of his function from the altar. This scarf was first worn by Desi Jigme Namgyel (1825-1881), the father of the First King.

Its five colours (white, red, blue, yellow and green) represent the five activities associated with religious beings: speech, mind, body, knowledge and blessings. Placing it on his neck, the King is considered 'crowned.' At that moment he would visualise the presence of the Zhabdrung. This ceremony is so important that it is enshrined in the 2008 Constitution under Article 2. 4:

The successor to the Golden Throne shall receive the dar from the Machben of Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal at Punakha dzong and shall be crowned on the Golden Throne.

The Zhabdrung's importance as the founder of the state and its political legacy are underscored in all the events related to the monarchs. It was his



The seven precious treasures of the Cakravartin King. The painting is from Kabuna in the Trongsa Dzong. (Photo: Kuenga Lhundrup)



seal, the *Ngachudrugma*, which was placed on the top of the oath of allegiance to the First King on his coronation, indicating that the King was a successor to the Zhabdrung but not his replacement.¹²

On 10 November 2014, a Longevity Prayer (*Tenzhu*) was offered at Tashichhodzong in Thimphu for the Fourth King entering his sixtieth year. Led by His Holiness the Je Khenpo, the ceremony included auspicious offerings and a prayer, the *Zhabdrung Daknang Sungchok*, which is a pure vision of the Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal. The Prime Minister presented a statue of the Zhabdrung to the Fourth King.¹³ The Fourth King himself in the Royal edict of 9 December 2006, announcing that he was passing power to the Fifth King, ends with a religious homage and a prayer for the nation:

May the blessing of Ugyen Guru Rinpoche, the father of our nation, Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, and our guardian deities continue to guide the destiny of our country and protect the future of the Glorious Palden Drukpa.

The different rituals of the coronation and their symbols have already been described by Kinga (2008), Phuntsho (2013), Tashi (2008) and Mathou (2013), but here I would like to point out the continuity of the Dharma Raja concept in Bhutan from a seventeenth century theocrat to a monarch who initiated the country's constitution and gave democracy to the country. The political system changed three times but the concept at its core remains alive as demonstrated by the state ceremonies.

The duty of a Dharma Raja is to benefit the religion and look after the welfare of his people in a selfless manner. Lam Pemala (1926-2009), the great Bhutanese scholar and monk, gives the most apt testimony:

His Majesty King Jigme Singye Wangchuck is a King who embraces religion and all that is good (Choe len) to benefit all sentient beings. His Majesty has demonstrated that he thinks and lives

only for the benefit of the people, and because of that, His Majesty has an auspicious and strong aura that has helped to dispel ill fortune from Bhutan.

He stated that the Fourth Druk Gyalpo has a natural inner aptitude for spirituality and has been identified by great Dharma teachers like Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche as a Bodhisattva.

His Majesty's initiatives show his dedication to the spiritual path. In the past, monks had to go around begging for food; His Majesty has given the monk body security and allowed spiritual practice to flourish. He has been responsible for the establishment of the shedras and drubdras, and the support has enabled so many people to practice Buddhism and to generate wellbeing.¹⁴

The Fourth King was known to travel tirelessly all over Bhutan to meet his people. This reminds us of a poem by the great Fourth Desi, Tenzin Rabgye (1638-1696):

I must also possess the glorious legacy of a Universal Emperor, a Cakravartin for, if not, then why do I so love to travel throughout the many districts of the land?¹⁵

One of the great achievements of the Fourth King during his reign was to reform the justice system because for him, the Bhutanese had two essential needs: health and justice. The reforms started in 1991 and in 2002 presiding over the Annual Judiciary Conference, the King said:

...governance is good when the laws are good and there is justice. During the adjudication of cases, as difficulties occur, it is essential to provide justice, and the justice should be provided as expeditiously as possible, inexpensively and fairly without prejudice.¹⁶

The independence of the judiciary was strengthened with the enactment of the Judicial Service Act in 2007, and the Constitution enshrined this independence, following in this the French seventeenth century political philosopher Montesquieu who was a strong proponent of the



independence of the judiciary. Article 21 of the Constitution is devoted to the Judiciary, which

*shall safeguard, uphold and administer Justice fairly and independently without fear, favour, or undue delay in accordance with the Rule of Law to inspire trust and confidence and to enhance access to justice.*¹⁷

The accessibility of people to the courts was one of the main reforms of the King and Article 21.18 states that:

Every person has the right to approach the courts for enforcement of the rights conferred on him by this Constitution or by the laws.

The accessibility of the common people to the highest authorities has always been important for the Fourth King who is known to meet people on the roads and people could appeal to him if they were not pleased with the court judgment. According to the Constitution, the King still has the prerogative to grant amnesty, pardon, and reduction of sentences.¹⁸

When I first heard about people petitioning to the Fourth King while he travelled on the roads of Bhutan, the image of St Louis rendering justice to everybody under an oak tree, which is a staple of French history textbook, came to my mind.

In late 2014, at the time this article was written, there was a revival of interest in King St Louis in France with his 800th birth anniversary celebration. In fact there are some similarities between the Fourth King and Louis IX (St Louis 1214 -1270), King of France.

There are historical parallels between the two Kings. Both Kings, after the demise of their fathers, ascended the throne young and both had a very strong belief in fair justice and reformed the judicial system in their respective countries.

St Louis reformed the justice and everybody was allowed to appeal to him to seek amendment of a

judgment. He banned the terribly unfair system of trials by ordeals and introduced the presumption of innocence. He also created a new judiciary corps to ensure the application of the legal system. Some 800 years later, the Fourth King of Bhutan steered his country into a modern judiciary system by implementing the same reforms.

The Constitution, seven years in the making and signed in 2008, was another great achievement of the Fourth King. It ushered Bhutan into a democratic constitutional monarchy, much to the amazement of the Bhutanese people themselves who considered it as another selfless action of the King for the stable future of the country.

However, being a Dharma Raja does not mean the King has to always act peacefully. Ashoka as well Songtsen Gampo were great conquerors. The Fourth King had to take up arms in 2003 against the Bodos, Indian insurgents who had taken refuge in the dense jungle of Southern Bhutan and were launching attacks against India. After years of peaceful negotiations, which did not yield any result, the King was compelled to lead his army against their camps in December 2003.

After a swift victory and an amazingly small number of casualties, the King went to pray for the Bhutanese soldiers but also for the Bodos who had perished showing his compassion for all.

Tshering Tashi, who served as a young militia during the conflict, wrote:

*As Commander in Chief of the Bhutanese army, the Fourth King, led his soldiers on foot and fought the battle fearlessly with intelligence and gentleness; in the same spirit as the legendary Buddhist warrior, King Gesar. Being a Buddhist warrior means using the ability to look within and recognize the cowardly nature of the mind. In doing so the warrior develops the courage to cut through the small-minded struggle for security and develop the expansive vision of fearlessness, openness and genuine heroism.*¹⁹





The concept of Dharma Raja is today much alive in Bhutanese society, and by stepping down in 2006 at the age of fifty-one, the Fourth King stunned the world and the people of Bhutan. He gave the ultimate lesson in non-attachment by not clinging to power.

By this gesture, the Fourth King put in practice worldly detachment, which is a Buddhist ideal while at that time his decision met a lot of incomprehension from the ordinary people who could not understand why the King would step down voluntarily. This unprecedented action certainly contributed to his aura and his mystic as a King above the others.

The Fourth King's humility is demonstrated in his last edict (*keasho/ bka' shog*) in December 2006, which said:

In taking note of the progress that our nation has made over the past thirty-four years, I would like to state that whatever we have achieved so far is due to the merit of the people of Bhutan.

I, therefore, wish to express my gratitude to the Clergy, to the officials of the Royal Government, the members of the business community and our security forces, and to all the people of the twenty Dzongkhags for their unfailing support to me and the country [...]

As I hand over my responsibilities to my son, I repose my full faith and belief in the people of Bhutan to look after the future of our nation, for it is the Bhutanese people who are the custodians of our tradition and culture, and the ultimate guardians of the security, sovereignty, and continued well-being of the country.

It echoes his first speech as the King on his Coronation Day on 2 June 1974 where he stressed that if “the government and people can join hands and work together with determination, our people will achieve prosperity and our nation will become strong and stable.” This self-effacement and his trust in his people are hallmarks of the Fourth King and are viewed by all the Bhutanese as proof of

his exceptional and supra-human nature, which are found only in the Dharma Raja.

Through his actions during his reign the Fourth King has come to embody for the Bhutanese the Ten Royal Virtues found in the Indian texts:

*Liberality, generosity and charity
High Morality
Self-sacrifice for the good of the people
Honesty and integrity
Kindness and gentleness
Austerity and self-control
No ill will and enmity
Promotion of peace and non-violence
Forbearance, patience and tolerance
Ruling in harmony without giving offence and opposing the will of his people.
(Rabula 1985: 84-85)*

Helkias²⁰ elaborates that these virtues serve as ethical guidelines for the rulers of states and have a powerful effect in so far as they trickle down to the ministers and the people. In ‘The Book of the Fours,’ the Buddha explains to his listeners:

But, monks, when rajabs (kings) are righteous, the ministers of rajabs also are righteous. When ministers are righteous, brahmins and householders are righteous. This being so, moon and sun go right in their courses. This being so, constellations and stars do likewise; days and nights, months and for nights, seasons and years go on their courses regularly; winds blow regularly and in due season. Thus the devas (gods) are not annoyed and the sky-deva bestows sufficient rain. Rains falling seasonably, the crops ripen in due season. Monks, when crops ripen in due season, men who live on those crops are long-lived, well favoured, strong and free from sickness. (AN. II.85)

Therefore the right behaviour of the King not only impacts the governance but also the whole cosmic system and brings well-being to the country.

This concept was integrated in Tibet, amongst others, in the famous *Mani bka' 'bum*, a text

◀ *An old painting of Songtsen Gampo (569-650) or (617-650) from Tango Monastery in Bhutan. (Photo: Tashi Lhendup)*



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attributed to King Songtsen Gampo which is popular in Bhutan. In the volume *Wam*, King Songtsen Gampo explains to his son:

*Listen to me my prince. If you do not administer the kingship according to the Dharma, a secular kingship will become the cause of bad transmigration. Bring the kingship and the Dharma together in this life. Consult and attend the acarya. Practice the Ten Virtuous Deeds that bring us a happy transmigration.*²¹

While the Fourth King reigned in accordance to Buddhist principles, the monarchy in Bhutan still retains principles, which were for many years associated with the ancient Tibetan kingship. The topic has been much debated amongst historians (Tucci, Karmay, Dotson, and Ramble amongst others) since Tucci's 1955 paper, which has been recently put in a comparative perspective by Dotson.²²

What were thought, since Tucci's article, to be specific characters of the ancient Tibetan kingship (the king transmits and guarantees four powers: the religious law, the majesty/power, the temporal power and the helmet) are in fact found in many other cultures such as Central Asia or South East Asia, and relate strongly to the great scholar Frazer's general theory on sacred kingship (1915).²³

In the 'Golden Bough,' a comparative study of myths and religion, Frazer associates the body of the king with the well-being of the country. His well-being ensures prosperity, fertility and peace. The consequence is that the king should not grow old as his health deteriorates and impacts negatively the people and the country.

The king also absorbs the negativity of the country and rituals must be performed to cleanse him. Whatever were the reasons behind the Fourth King's decision to retire at fifty-one, this move although unexpected by most people and certainly unprecedented, fits very well with Frazer's theory and in the same spirit, Article 2.6 of the Constitution even enshrines the King's retirement age:

Upon reaching the age of sixty-five, the Druk Gyalpo shall step down and hand over the Throne to the Crown Prince or the Crown Princess, provided the Royal Heir has come of age.

Numerous rituals are carried out for the well-being of the Fourth King and especially in his sixtieth year. They range from *Moelam* to *Tenzhu* and are carried out not only by the state Drukpa clergy (*Zhung Dratshang*) but also by the religious practitioners of other lineages. One of the most interesting rituals is the *Pchi Dhoe*, which takes different forms.²⁴

The *Gyanag Pchi Dhoe*, a week-long religious ceremony held every year in the first Bhutanese month at the Pangri Zampa Institute of Astrology near Thimphu is dedicated to the well-being of the King, the clergy and the people. In March 2015, it was specially dedicated to the sixtieth year of the Fourth Druk Gyalpo in order to remove obstacles from his life.

The second one, on a grander scale and with a slightly different name,²⁵ is the *Sipay Pchi Dhoe*, held every twelve years.²⁶ It is being organised for the peace and security of the nation and the well-being of Their Majesties and the Bhutanese people.

In 2015, it was especially dedicated to the sixtieth Birth Anniversary of His Majesty the Fourth Druk Gyalpo for his long life.²⁷ The striking coloured string structures (*mdos*) represent the universe and comprise the representations of the palaces of two main protecting deities of Bhutan, Yeshey Goenpo (Mahakala) and Palden Lhamo (Mahakali).

The structures are covered with offerings representing every aspect of material and spiritual wealth and life forms found in the universe, from harvests grains to jewels and religious images. Real life effigies (*glud*) of the Kings, the Queens and the Je Khenpo of Bhutan are placed in front of the structures.²⁸



The ceremony concludes with the dispersion of offerings. People rush to the structures, dismantle them and grab some pieces of them to take home as spiritual and material talismans. According to Bhutanese tradition, this ritual was initiated by Guru Rinpoche and performed in Bhutan since the time of Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal in Punakha. The *Sipay Pchi Dhoe* offering is made to all the deities and beings of the universe, and more specifically to the three worlds *steng lha* (gods from the sky), the *'og klu* (water-deities from underneath) and the *bar mi* (people in the middle) to balance the forces of good and evil.

This grand ritual is a *lue* (ransom) rite as mentioned in the title of the booklet published in 2003 on the occasion of the previous ceremony held in Mongar: *Brug lugs mdos glud kyi ngo sprad* (Introduction to the *Doe* ransom of the Bhutanese tradition).

Originally a pre-Buddhist ritual, it was later adopted by the Buddhists. This ransom rite for the well-being of the ruler is one of the oldest rituals documented in the Tibetan cultural world. Already found in the Dunhuang documents (seventh-ninth century, Thomas: 1957, ch.IV), the rite consists of tricking a negative force to take a ransom instead of a person.²⁹

A famous ransom myth is the one describing the restitution of King Drigum Tsenpo's corpse, which is available in the Dunhuang manuscript called 'Old Tibetan Chronicle.'³⁰

Guru Rinpoche is said to have performed the ritual called the *Gyalpo Tse Dhoe* in order to cure Prince Mune Tsenpo, the son of King Trisong Detsen (742-797). This text is not available but similar rituals were performed in the seventeenth century in Lhasa for the Regent Sangye Gyatso.³¹ Therapeutic rituals, practiced by both Bonpo and Buddhist, can also take the form of the popular *Gyazhi*, but the Bonpo tradition has an ancient ritual text called *Srid pa spyi mdos*. Karmay demonstrated the importance of the ransom rite for the Tibetan Kings of the Empire.³²

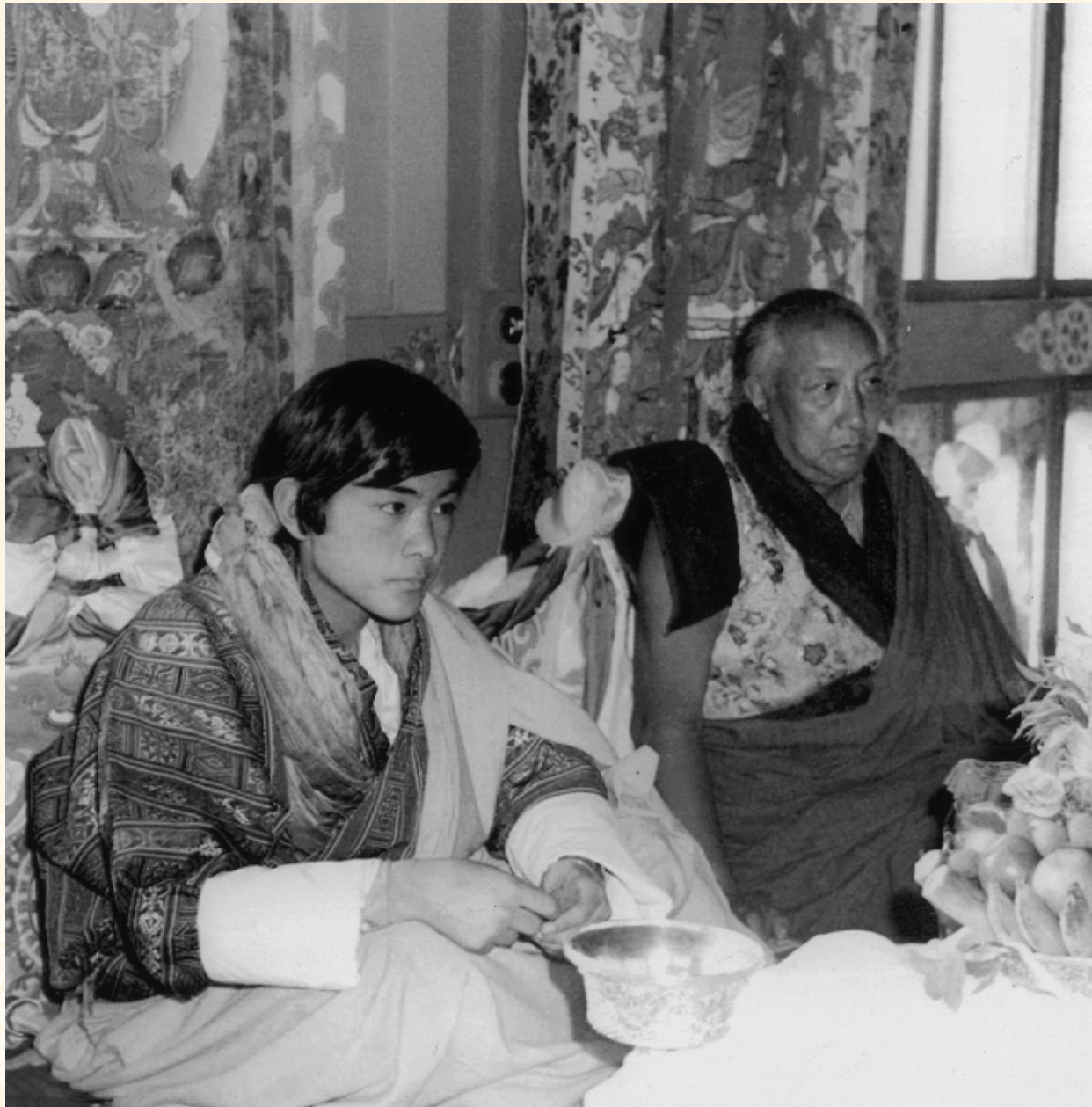
Its role in the contemporary Bhutanese context is telling of the long continuity of ritual practices regarding the well-being of the King, and by extension of Bhutan. Both King and country are looked after by the protective deities Yeshey Goenpo and Palden Lhamo. These deities which were linked to the Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal are the state of Bhutan's (Palden Drukpa) guardian deities and are propitiated on most official occasions.

Two ceremonies (*Drubchen*) are dedicated to them, one in Thimphu and another in Punakha. They are the warrant of the country's sovereignty and the ultimate protectors in peace as in war. These protective deities whose seats are in the *Dhoe*, receive the offerings and are expected in return to protect the King and the country.

In the Bhutanese *Sipay Pchi Doe*, once the ceremony is over, the people rush to take away any piece of the structure one can get hold of as well as offerings of all kinds. Thus they are blessed and expect to have good luck and prosperity.³³ The protector Yeshey Goenpo also has a special relation to the monarchy.

As Goenpo Legon Jaro Donchen (raven-headed), Yeshey Goenpo adorns the headdress of Jigme Namgyal (1825-1881), the father of the First King of Bhutan and subsequently the different crowns of the Kings. The raven-headed Goenpo was combined with Goenpo Jangdu, a local form of Yeshey Goenpo and was given in 1853 to the Trongsa Penlop Jigme Namgyal by his lama, Changchub Tsonдру.³⁴

By his own account, Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche performed a Yeshey Goenpo and Palden Lamo ransom (*lue*) ritual in the 1st month of 1974 before the Fourth King was enthroned. In 2014, a similar ritual was conducted by the state clergy for his well-being on his sixtieth anniversary year. The institution of the monarchy evolved tremendously during these forty years but the religious beliefs, which are part of a much-cherished tradition, remain as vibrant as ever.



*His Royal Highness the Trongsa Penlop with His Holiness Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche (c.1910-1991). Rinpoche was one of the greatest Vajrayana masters, as well as a scholar and poet. This photograph was taken at Dechencholing Palace in Thimphu on 15 March 1972. Earlier, His Royal Highness had received the ceremonial scarves of the Trongsa Penlop at Tashichhodzong.
(Photo: Courtesy Her Majesty Ashi Kesang Choeden Wangchuck)*



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GLOSSARY

Chana Dorji	ཕྱག་ན་དེ་མེ
Changchub Tsonдру	ཕྱང་ཚུབ་བསྟན་འབྲུག་པ་
Chenrezig	ཕྱུན་པམ་གཟིགས་
Choegyel.....	མཚན་ལྡུལ་
Chhoe-sid-nyi.....	མཚན་མེད་གཉིས་
Dar	དར་
Desi Tenzin Rabgye.....	ཡུལ་འབྲུག་བསྟན་འཛིན་པམ་རྒྱལ་
Dhoe.....	མདོམ་
Drubchen	ལྷན་བཞུགས་
Druk Gyalpo	འབྲུག་རྒྱལ་པོ་
Drukdra Dorji.....	འབྲུག་རྒྱ་དེ་མེ
Gesar	ག་མར་
Gonpo Jangdu,	མགོན་པོ་བྱང་བདུན་
Gonpo Legon Jaro Donchen	མགོན་པོ་ལམ་མགོན་བྱེད་པོ་གཤོང་ཅན་
Gyalpo Tse Dhoe.....	རྒྱལ་པོ་ཚེ་མདོམ་
Gyanag Pchi Dhoe	རྒྱ་ནག་ལྷི་མདོམ་
Gyelsi Nadun	རྒྱལ་མེད་སྐུ་བདུན་
Genja.....	གན་རྒྱ་
Gyazhi.....	བརྒྱ་ལཞི་
Jambayang.....	འཇམ་པའི་དབྱེང་མ་
Jangdu	བྱང་བདུན་
Je Khenpo.....	མེ་མཁན་པོ་
Jigme Namgyal	འཛིགས་མེད་རྣམ་རྒྱལ་
Kasho	ཕྱག་འཕྱོགས་
Khorlo gyurwai gyalpo.....	འཁོར་ལོ་བསྐྱར་བའི་རྒྱལ་པོ་
Lue	ལཱེད་
Lungten gi Gyalpo	ལུང་བསྟན་གྱི་རྒྱལ་པོ་
Machhen.....	མ་ཚེན་
Monlam	མོན་ལམ་
Muni Tsenpo	མུ་ནེ་བཅོན་པོ་
Ngawang Namgyal	ངག་དབང་རྣམ་རྒྱལ་
Padma Lingpa	པདྨ་ལིང་པ་
Palden Drukpa	པལ་ལམ་ཕྱུན་འབྲུག་པ་
Paldan Lhamo	པལ་ལམ་ལྷན་ལྷ་མོ་
Phagpa	འཕགས་པ་
Rigsum Gonpo	རིགས་གསུམ་མགོན་པོ་
Sakya Pandita Kunga Gyeltshen	ས་པན་ཀུན་དགའ་རྒྱལ་མཚན་
Sangye Gyatso	སངས་རྒྱལ་ལྷ་མོ་ཚེ་
Sipay Pchi Dhoe	ལྷོ་དཔའི་ལྷི་མདོམ་
Songtsen Gampo	ལྷོ་བཅོན་རྒྱལ་པོ་
Tenzhu	བདུན་བཞུགས་
Tertoen.....	གཏོང་མཚན་
Trisong Detsen	ཁྱེ་མེད་ལྷོ་བཅོན་
Tsang Khenchen	གཏོང་མཁའ་ཚེན་
Yeshey Goenpo	ཡེ་ཤེས་མགོན་པོ་
Zhabdrung.....	ཞབས་རྒྱུད་
Zhabdrung Daknang Sungchok.....	ཞབས་རྒྱུད་དགའ་སྐྱེད་གསུང་མཚོགས་
Zhung Dratshang.....	གཞུང་བྲག་ཚང་



ENDNOTES

- 1 White, J. C. (1914) Castles in the Air: Experiences and Journeys in Unknown Bhutan. In *National Geographic*, p.365-453.
- 2 In this article, for the readers' convenience, I will use the Dzongkha and Choekey ordinary English transcription in the text, but will provide a table of equivalences at the end of the article.
- 3 Palmo, A. J. (2008) *The Brilliant Moon*. Massachusetts: Shambala Publication, p.252.
- 4 Ruegg 2004: 9.
- 5 bhutanobserver.bt/3438-bo-news
- 6 The Aggañña Sutta is the 27th Sutta of the Digha Nikaya collection.
- 7 Sinha 1992: 5- 12. Sinha quoting the Dialogues of the Buddha, Rhys Davids, p.7. This Sutra is seen by the great Buddhologist R. Gombrich as a satire of a Vedic text.
- 8 Source: Geoffrey and Santi's Webpage: Glossary for Mahayana and Tibetan Buddhism www.wisdomlib.org/definition/cakravartin/index
- 9 Tashi 2008: 10.
- 10 Cüppers (ed.) *The Relationship between Religion and State (chos srid zung 'brel) in Traditional Tibet. Proceedings of a seminar held in Lumbini, Nepal, March 2000*. Vol.1. Lumbini International Research Institute, Lumbini, 2004.
- 11 Ardussi 2004: 41.
- 12 Phuntsho 2013: 520-522.
- 13 BBS bbs.bt/news/?p=46053
- 14 Rutland, Michael (2007) *The Legacy of a King*, Tourism Council of Bhutan.
- 15 Ardussi 2008: 99.
- 16 *Kuensel*, 31 August 2008.
- 17 Constitution of Bhutan, art.21.1
- 18 Article 2. 16 c
- 19 Tshering Tashi (2013) *The Buddhist Warrior*, *Kuensel*, 14 December. www.kuenselonline.com/the-buddhist-warrior/#.VKd95idfeAE
- 20 Helkias 2013: 496-497.
- 21 Shihama 2004: 17.
- 22 Dotson 2011: 86.
- 23 For a full discussion on the topic, refer to Dotson, RET.
- 24 For the *spyi mdos* in Tibet, refer to Richardson, Karmay.
- 25 The difference in the purposes of the two rituals is not clear.
- 26 The last ritual was organised Jan 1-5th 2015 at Punakha.
- 27 *Kuensel*, 2 January, 2015. www.kuenselonline.com/sipa-chi-dhoe-attracts-hundreds-of-devotees
- 28 Phuntsho 2015.
- 29 Karmay [1991] 1998.
- 30 Dotson 2011: 88-90.
- 31 Karmay [1991] 1998: 349-350.
- 32 Karmay [1987] 1998:
- 33 A similar ritual for the deities is performed by the Bonpos and is called the *mKha' klon gsang mdos*. As these ceremonies are too expensive to be held individually, it is always a community/group ritual. Blondeau 2000: 249- 287.
- 34 Pommaret 2004: 73-89.



THE BODHISATTVA KING







SPECIAL TRIBUTE
DAW AUNG SAN SUU KYI



*Photo of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, aged 26, in Bhutan in March 1971 on a visit to Taksang together with Michael Aris. It was on this occasion that Michael proposed to Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.
(Photo: Aris Family Collection)*



**54 - 56 University Avenue
Bahan Township
Rangoon**

It need hardly be said that it is an honour and a pleasure to have been asked to write a special tribute to His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck, the Fourth Druk Gyalpo of the Kingdom of Bhutan. However, I must confess that I am probably the least qualified of all the contributors to this volume that celebrates the sixtieth birthday of His Majesty. My links with Bhutan came through my late husband, Michael Aris, whom I met through a mutual friend while I was studying at Oxford and he at Durham. Michael's interest in Tibet had been sparked off when he read Heinrich Harrer's 'Seven Years in Tibet' as a schoolboy, by the time he was a university student, this interest had broadened to cover the whole of what is now termed 'Himalayan studies.' It therefore did not come as a surprise that immediately after he obtained his university degree he went off to a job in Bhutan.

I cannot recollect if I had heard of Bhutan before Michael told me about it but after he became tutor to the two youngest daughters of His Majesty Jigme Dorji Wangchuck I quickly learnt much about this remote Himalayan country. After Michael and I were married in 1972, we lived in Thimphu and I came to know some of the members of the Royal Family but the only time I ever caught a glimpse of the then seventeen year old JHRJ Jigme Singye Wangchuck was at the celebrations related to his investiture as Crown Prince. Not too long after this event, the Third Druk Gyalpo passed away at the relatively young age of forty-five.

Looking back to that time, what strikes me is that despite the grief of the people of Bhutan at the unexpected loss of their king, there was a calm confidence that all would be well under the new monarch, young as he was. In retrospect, that was the greatest tribute the people could have given to both their old ruler and their yet untried new one. They believed that Bhutan would be safe in the hands of their Druk Gyalpo.

Michael and I left Bhutan in 1973 but we continued to keep up with developments in the country. The picture that emerged of the reign of the Fourth Druk Gyalpo was one of great changes shaped by a vision that was sensitive to the legacy of the past as well as to the needs of the future. We met more and more young Bhutanese who had benefited from the far-sighted education policy of the government. Their confidence and enthusiasm with regard to the place of their small country in the big world was certainly a tribute to their government, headed by their king. His view that Gross National Happiness was more important than Gross National Product is an illustration of the mixture of old style patriarchal monarchy and modern governance that set the tone of his reign.

Ang San San Vlyi



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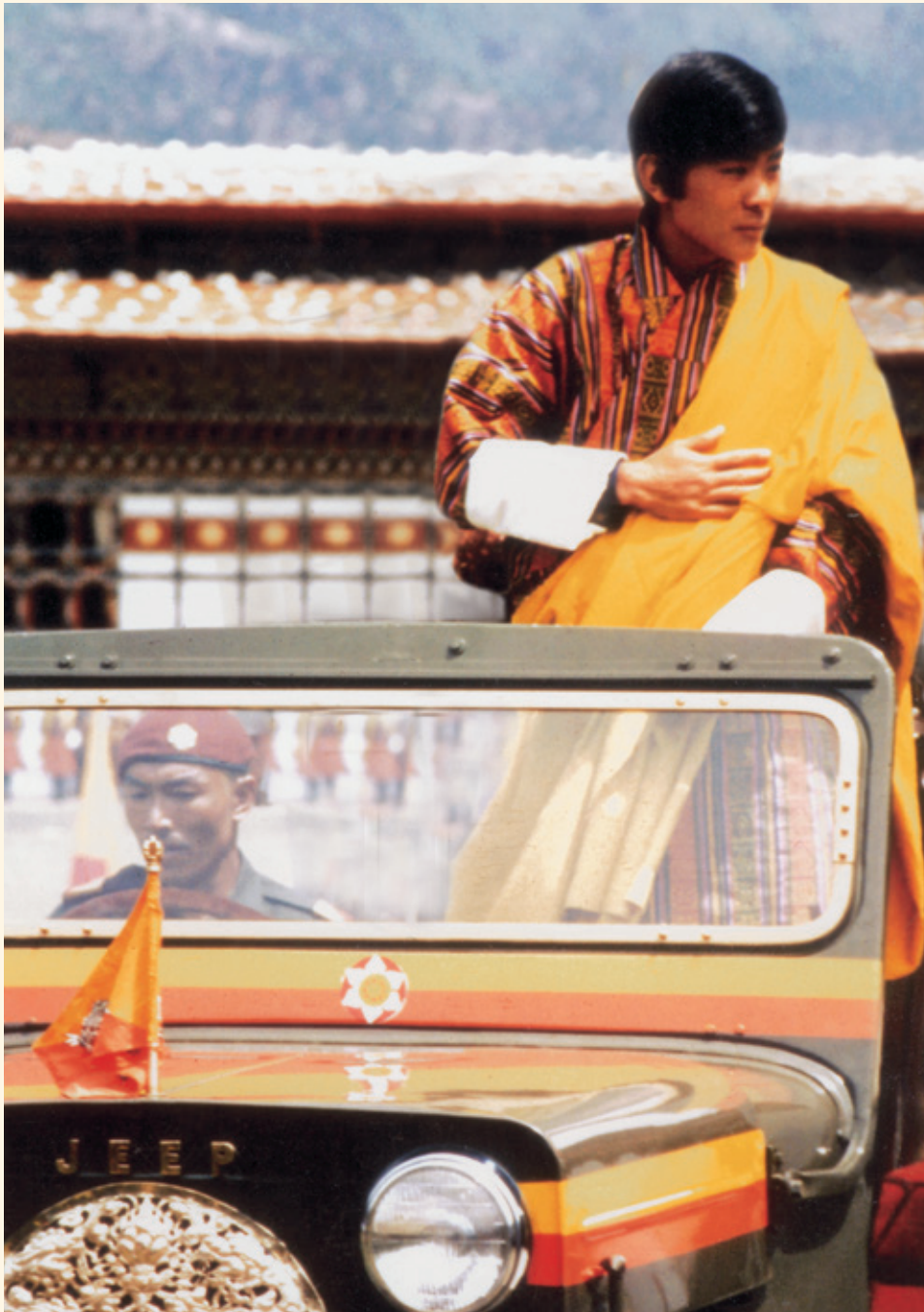
After 1988, my political work in Burma distanced me from old friends and once familiar places but I continued to get news of Bhutan from time to time. There were challenges and changes but the general impression was one of steady progress along the path of modernisation without undue damage to what was most precious in this beautiful Himalayan kingdom. The sensible development course chosen by the King gave his subjects both security and pride.

That His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck was not just an able ruler but also a warm and caring human being was brought home to me when Michael became ill with cancer in 1999: the Druk Gyalpo made arrangements for special prayers to be said in Bhutan for Michael's health. I know this gave him much comfort during his last days.

As my only contact with the then Crown Prince in 1972 was but a fleeting glimpse, my contribution to this volume of tributes is no more than fleeting glimpses from afar. The last glimpse was provided by the Prime Minister of Bhutan, H.H. Lyonchen Tshering Topgay, when he came to Burma earlier this year. The Prime Minister represents the kind of young leader I would like to see emerging in my country, in our world: capable, intelligent, well educated, energetic and most likable. He told me about recent political developments in his country and explained that it was the policies of the fourth Druk Gyalpo that had made it possible for him, a young man of humble origins, to become the head of government. He also expressed the utmost confidence in the arrangements that had been made by His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck to abdicate at the age of fifty in favour of his twenty-six year old son: their Druk Gyalpo could be depended on to do what would be best for their country.

The greatest tribute that could be given to His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck is not anything that could be written in a book but in the Gross National Happiness that he has made possible for his people.

His Son Sam Vajra



“To be very frank, when my father died in 1972, there was very little that I knew about the governing of the country. People thought that, well he must have a lot of experience because he was there with his father all the time. But in reality, I didn’t know what Bhutan’s foreign policy was, I didn’t know what Bhutan’s national objectives were, I didn’t know what Bhutan’s government priorities were.” His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck. The New York Times, 23 March 1991 (Photo: Courtesy Her Majesty Asbi Kesang Choeden Wangchuck)



"Upon reaching the age of sixty-five years, the Druk Gyalpo shall step down and hand over the Throne to the Crown Prince or Crown Princess, provided the Royal Heir has come of age." The Constitution of Bhutan

*"I am not aware of any other place where anyone in power is prepared to step down voluntarily unless there is a divine mandate. The provision that the Monarch will step down and what more to prove the political sovereignty is vested in the people." Justice J.S.Verma
(Photo: Courtesy His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck)*



THE STORY OF A LIVING LEGEND

Afroze Bukht

His legacy is the future. A future bright and shining. His legacy is the Fifth King who shall secure that future.

It is said that in answer to a thousand years of our prayers, the divine powers ordained that a man of supreme wisdom shall ascend the Golden Throne and would ultimately become one of its greatest rulers. With the birth of His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck on 11th November 1955, the prediction began to manifest itself. On that auspicious occasion the people saw the resplendent colours of the rainbow light up the early morning sky. For it was on that day, that there descended in the Royal Household, a little prince who was predestined to be the greatest King Bhutan had ever seen. Endowed with the wisdom of centuries of ardent prayers, he was destined to bring to the people of Bhutan in unprecedented measures, unity, peace and prosperity.

In 1963 when I visited Bhutan, I had the honour of calling on the Queen Mother in Dechencholing Palace. I remember seeing a young boy scampering across the lawns of the compound. Later on I learnt that the young man was the Crown Prince of Bhutan. His demeanour and his gait portrayed him as a man of supreme confidence. It was that trait which would come to his rescue when he was called upon to shoulder the responsibilities of the kingdom at the tender age of sixteen years. His doting father, His Majesty King Jigme Dorji Wangchuck (the Third King), we were told, was

quietly peering through one of the windows, keeping a watchful eye over his precious son. We did not dare to look up into those dark windows but we did see the bonds of love and affection between the father and son grow stronger over the years.

Even though at that time I was not residing permanently in Bhutan, I did keep in touch with the people I had met during my earlier visits. The only mode of communication was the postal service through Dalsingpara Post Office on the Indian side. The speed was sluggish but surprisingly the letters were faithfully delivered by the postal runners to the recipients and the much awaited replies would eventually arrive at my doorsteps. I learnt that after a brief stint in St Joseph's college, Darjeeling, in 1963, the Crown Prince had left for a prestigious school in the UK. England was a preferred destination as Her Majesty Ashi Kesang Choeden Wangchuck had also studied there.

After spending four years in England, the Crown Prince returned back to Bhutan on the insistence of His Majesty who seemed to have strongly felt the pangs of separation. In view of his deteriorating health a sense of despondency must have crept in and His Majesty began to feel the urgent need for preparing his extremely young son to shoulder the responsibilities of his kingdom. As soon as the Crown Prince arrived back on 24 July 1969, His Majesty immediately took him on a two-month tour of the entire country to acquaint him with



the intricacies of social and cultural nuances that differed from place to place. It also provided His Majesty with an opportunity to expose his young son to the people as the future King of Bhutan. And yet, for a while fate seemed to play truant when the jeep carrying the Crown Prince met with a near fatal accident in Cooch Behar, in India. Miraculously the Crown Prince escaped unharmed protected by his guardian deity Palden Lhamo.

The adolescent Crown Prince had a prodigious mind which easily picked up the slightest change in the political arena of his country. The Third King had set in motion the process of development, which threw open the doors of his hitherto isolated kingdom. But the process also brought in its trail challenges to the established concepts of administration and governance. To remedy that situation a program for restructuring the central administrative system was set in motion. The reforms laid down by his father ultimately became a source of inspiration for His Majesty the Fourth King, who embellished these with the stamp of his own personality and his pristine vision of the future. I have no doubt that the evolutionary changes which the Crown Prince witnessed at that time, prompted in his mind the formation of a grander image which would ultimately become the cornerstone of his future plans.

During this period a strong bond must have developed between the father and son because we saw the Crown Prince being suddenly transformed into a matured young person extremely solicitous about his father's health and most subservient to his wishes. I am fortunate to have lived long enough to see the same traits ruling the relationship between the Fourth King and his son, the Crown Prince.

From 1969 onwards, events developed in rapid succession. Bhutan had already become a member of the Colombo Plan. Then, in 1971, through astute political manoeuvring, the Third King managed to make Bhutan a member of the United Nations.

That same year diplomatic relations were also established with Bangladesh. Her Majesty Ashi Kesang Choeden Wangchuck's contacts with the von Schultess family facilitated the flow of Swiss aid into the country. Through these dramatic events Bhutan entered into the limelight of the international arena and His Majesty could now lay down the road map for a grander future. But alas the Third King was not destined to travel on that road and it fell to the Crown Prince to take the country forward on that luminous path.

It seems to me that His Majesty had a premonition about the impending tragedy. As his health started to fail, he set for himself an accelerated pace of work in order to complete the tasks he had in mind. During this period we saw the Crown Prince spending more and more time with His Majesty. The year of 1972 turned out to be a historic year for Bhutan, tragic but not without hope. The investiture of the Crown Prince as Trongsa Penlop took place on 15 May 1972. After the celebrations in Thimphu, His Majesty moved on to Trongsa for the installation ceremony on June 16th that same year. Despite his frail health, His Majesty did sometimes participate in the celebrations. It all ended when a traumatised crowd heard him say, "I am playing archery for the last time." This poignant statement not only marked the conclusion of the celebrations but also announced the impending conclusion of his reign. For ten days His Majesty lingered in Thrupeang Palace where he was born, and finally after much persuasion by Her Majesty the Queen Mother and all the other members of the family, he agreed to go to Switzerland for treatment. But at the last moment he changed his mind and proceeded to a game sanctuary in Nairobi. His Majesty was accompanied by Her Majesty the Queen Mother, Ashi Phuntsho Chhodron, his beloved son and few of his favourite attendants. Fearing the worst, the Queen Mother had sent Dudjom Rinpoche to Talo Monastery to seek the blessings of the Gods for the quick recovery of His Majesty. On his return from Talo, when the Queen Mother saw the dejected



look on the face of the Rinpoche, she asked no further questions and immediately decided to carry with her some of the sacred relics which would be required in case the predictions came true. Her apprehensions were not misplaced.

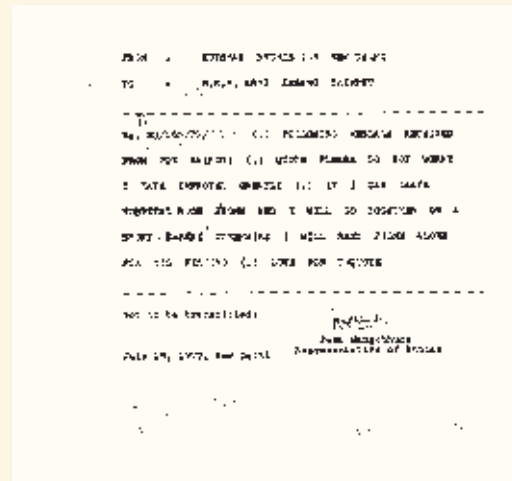
History might have been written differently had His Majesty gone to Switzerland and not to Nairobi. You can write history differently, but you cannot change destiny.

And so it came to pass that His Majesty was inexorably drawn to Nairobi to keep his tryst with destiny. There he spent his last few days in the company of his beloved son. His Majesty was fully aware of the end looming large. And to his son He is alleged to have said, “This is the last time we are together and I hope and pray to meet you in our next life.”

Imagine the agony and the anguish which young Crown Prince must have suffered when he heard those words from his father. Imagine the searing pain which must have rent his heart as he saw with his own eyes his adoring father passing into the realm of timeless eternity. It is said that the butter lamp which Her Majesty the Queen Mother had lit in front of sacred images in her room, flickered and extinguished itself exactly at 10:30 p.m. on 21 July 1972.

It was the darkest night they had ever seen. It was then that the Crown Prince must have made his steely resolve not only to fulfil the wishes of his illustrious father but also to serve the people in a manner which would make his father proud. Jigme Singye Wangchuck had entered the guest house in Nairobi as the Crown Prince of Bhutan but he stepped out of the premises as the King of Bhutan, walking slowly behind the pall bearers who carried the casket containing the sacred remains of the Third King.

A pall of gloom had descended on the nation but the despondency of the subjects mourning the death of the late King finally lifted on 2nd June



(Photo: Courtesy Her Majesty Asbi Kesang Choeden Wangchuck)

1974 when His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck was crowned. In a magnificent ceremony, the sixteen year old King was enthroned as the Fourth Druk Gyalpo of Bhutan thereby becoming the youngest king in the world. The series of spectacular events that were put on display became the highlights of the day and we saw the people of Bhutan celebrating that occasion with delirious joy. It was a sunny day without a speck of cloud in the clear blue sky. I was told that lamas were specifically deputed to the peaks of the mountains ringing Thimphu Valley to chant special prayers to drive away the encroaching clouds. Apparently their prayers did not go unheeded.

Luck would once again favour me with an invitation to witness the coronation celebrations from close quarters. The Coronation Committee under the Chairmanship of HRH Prince Namgyal Wangchuck had done a wonderful job in organising cultural shows and march-pasts full of pomp and pageantry. For the first time a large range of international cuisine was introduced in the menu. We were astonished to see such a vast variety of dishes being laid out on the table, but it was the invitees who were even more surprised as they thought that Bhutan did not have the wherewithal for displaying such refined culinary capabilities. I



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remember seeing the dignitaries from all over the world, including Mr V.V. Giri, the President of India, being totally mesmerised by the display of cultural shows which the country had put up on that occasion. On that day, I saw the exuberance of a youthful adolescent King being transformed into the stately Majesty of a sovereign King.

They say that nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm. It was the enthusiasm of His Majesty for greater heights and greater perfection that set the pace and the tone of the development efforts of the Government. Progress occurs when courageous leaders seize the opportunity to change things for the better. No word of tribute can fully convey the feelings of admiration and esteem which people worldwide have for the Fourth King. It seems that for His Majesty destiny was not a matter of chance; it was a matter of choice.

In shaping our destiny His Majesty has once again proved that there are no peaks that cannot be scaled and there are no boundaries that cannot be crossed. And by doing so His Majesty has moulded the country and its people in His own image, the image of an indefatigable leader who has carried the insignia of our country to the remotest corner of the world. We are now the proud citizens of a proud country. Our relationship with His Majesty was sedulously inspired by the total trust and confidence reposed in His Majesty as the lode star of our country.

His Majesty could easily visualise that the future belongs to the youth of the nation. And to strengthen that future He felt an urgent need to penetrate the darkness of uncertainty and provide illumination through better education and healthcare. Development in these fields was given the top-most priority. Healthy citizens are the greatest assets of the country and to meet this challenge hospitals and healthcare units were set up in every corner of the country. Within a short period the life-span of an ordinary Bhutanese jumped from thirty-four to sixty-two. Side by side,

there began a concerted effort to set up schools and colleges even in remote areas.

When we hear the school bell ring in every village and in every hamlet, we shall know that the dream of His Majesty has been fulfilled. When we see the bulb light up the home of every villager, we shall know that yet another dream of His Majesty has been fulfilled. When we see the feeble and the infirm of the village being taken care of by the health workers, we shall rest assured that these are not dreams, these are realities created by the greatest visionary leader the country has ever seen. I have often wondered if there is such a thing as a miracle but when I see all these developments taking place within the short span of thirty-four years of His golden reign, I believe that miracles do happen.

His Majesty guided the nation with a unique brand of enigmatic and inspirational leadership backed by enlightened policies which rapidly changed the face of our nation. Rapid changes required focus on agility as a strategic imperative. We remained spellbound and intrigued by the way His Majesty mastered the changes without losing continuity and conquered adverse circumstances with constructive ideas. The greatest change was the introduction of democracy which became a sensational event in the history of not only Bhutan but of the entire world.

It was during His Majesty's reign that Bhutan discovered that what is oil for Arabia, water is for Bhutan. And that became the hub of our economic activity. Most of the vast resources that we possess today have been created through those activities. Then having set us on the path of economic emancipation, His Majesty moved on to fulfil our social and spiritual needs.

Far away in the sunshine are the highest aspirations of mankind. It is those aspirations which have been re-incarnated by His Majesty the Druk Gyalpo in his felicitous policies which have given birth to the concept of Gross National Happiness. Bhutan's unique culture and tradition dictated that the soul's aspiration cannot be choked by a miasma



of worldly prosperity, that complete fulfilment of life cannot be achieved by ignoring the spiritual needs of mankind. That became the genesis for the philosophy of Gross National Happiness. Gross National Happiness is not one of those slogans created by a marketing honcho. It is a concept which erupted out of the depths of His Majesty's heart, designed to give his people a more conducive and fulfilling environment. It is a concept which is based on creating harmony between progress and tradition. It is a concept based on that eternal truth that man liveth not by bread alone. Significant as this concept is not only to our daily lives but also to the very existence of our society, it had remained ignored by the world leaders till His Majesty jolted them awake with his announcement.

We have seen His Majesty overcome most disastrous situations which the country had faced. He had always remained calm and steadfast in those distressing circumstances. The opposition of some of the misguided leaders of the Southern belt threatened to divide the country on ethnic lines. It was Your Majesty's firm but benevolent handling of that situation which took the wind out of their sails and united the country into a kingdom of one nation and one people. Later on we saw the militants of North-East India threatening the very sovereignty of the country by setting up camps within the borders of Bhutan. As the Commander-in-Chief He led the army in a blitzkrieg operation that literally wiped off all the camps within a few minutes. Yet we learnt that His Majesty was there on the frontlines not to revel in the victory which was inevitable; His Majesty was there on compassionate grounds to prevent the slaughter of the vanquished by an over-zealous army spurred by their victory. They had won the war but the battle for the hearts and minds of the people living in border areas had just begun. It was the demonstration of faith in humanity and the subsequent humane treatment of the prisoners that won the respect of the militants and established peace in the region. Yesterday's enemies are today His most ardent admirers.

But all these achievements were subsequently surpassed by His decision to give the people freedom: freedom from injustice, freedom from inequality, freedom to shape their own destiny. There is no doubt in my mind that the greatest achievement of His Majesty was the introduction of democracy through a written constitution. But I was even more impressed by the efforts made by His Majesty to introduce it to the people of Bhutan. People in every village were appraised with the contents and they were thoroughly prepared to make the best use of this unique gift which His Majesty had bestowed on them. We saw His Majesty and the Crown Prince travelling to all corners of the country trying to make the people aware of their rights and their responsibilities. We saw the results of those efforts in the two subsequent elections where people openly and freely spoke their minds.

We pay tribute to His Majesty as the most transformational leader the world has seen. You have changed the country, you have changed the people and you have changed the very soul of Bhutan. We, the people of Bhutan are proud of the phenomenal changes that freed us from the trammels of poverty and spiritual bankruptcy. We are proud that out of this country has arisen a towering personality, a great and wise King whose policies and sacrifices have become the beacon for the leaders of the world. His Majesty has blazed a path in an orbit where few will ever reach. It is a path which leads to immortality

Through his enlightened leadership His Majesty has enthused the nation with vigour and vitality. The glorious achievements of the past portend an even more magnificent future. It is easy to outline achievements, more difficult to define the attributes that makes a leader great. His Majesty was born to rule and yet he chose to serve. His Majesty was born to live in a palace and yet he chose to live in a small 'barkle cottage' stripped of all luxuries. Where others covet power, He had surrendered it. What more can a King sacrifice? His Majesty is the icon representing a fusion of traditional



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values of the East with the materials advancement of the West. His Majesty has in the world's eyes, become the symbol of a leadership that must serve its people with greatest humility and sacrifice. His benevolence, integrity and fortitude have set a new standard for the leaders of the world. The moment of truth had finally arrived. For at that juncture of history, the world recognised him as a rare and outstanding leader, and we the people of Bhutan recognised him as our only world.

Today Your Majesty is standing like a colossus reaching into the stratosphere where few will ever traverse those heights. And yet, after reaching the very apogee, You have gracefully chosen to retire. You may never hold a position more exalted or a covenant more sacred but we hope and pray that in your retirement Your Majesty will be blessed with a life more happy and more content. It is for this moment that we must invoke the blessings of Lord Buddha to grant you a very happy retired life. It may prove to be yet another reward for a life spent in fulfilling the very tasks which the Gods had ordained for Your Majesty. Until the end of time, the story of the living legend shall remain etched in our hearts; a story of impossible dreams and glorious accomplishments. It is the story of a legendary King who is not only a part of our history, but also a part of our destiny. May the legend live on forever!

His Majesty loves horses and is an excellent rider. This photo was taken during the DANTAK sports week celebrations. His Majesty is playing a sport called 'tent-pegging' which is a cavalry sport of ancient origin.

(Photo: Courtesy Her Majesty Ashi Kesang Choeden Wangchuck)







*At 3100m, the 108 chortens or stupas sit on the Dochula Pass like sentries guarding the entrance to the Punakha Valley and beyond. In 2004, His Holiness the Je Khenpo Trulku Jigme Choeda consecrated these chortens. Her Majesty the Queen Mother Asbi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck built these chortens in honour of His Majesty the Fourth Druk Gyalpo Jigme Singye Wangchuck.
(Photo: Tshering Tashi)*



RARE HONOUR

Lee Kwang Boon

11 November 2015 marks the sixtieth birthday anniversary of His Majesty the Fourth Druk Gyalpo Jigme Singye Wangchuck. On this happy occasion, I am honoured and privileged to be part of this publication that is being brought out to celebrate the occasion. I would like to share my first meeting with His Majesty the Fourth King, an awe-inspiring experience that I have no words to describe. Nevertheless, I shall endeavour to give it some form.

It started with my trip to Bhutan in the fall of 1996, when I first visited this fascinating country as a tourist. From the start, I have been mesmerised by its tradition, culture, magnificent landscape, art, architecture and simple everyday village life. It is particularly fascinating for someone like me who comes from a culture that has long since shed the traditional way of life. Bhutan is a living example of how life can be lived happily and with contentment—without the trappings of modernity.

My exposure to Bhutan has been most enriching and rewarding both physically and spiritually. However, even more than the Bhutanese way of life and its harmonious coexistence with the natural world, I was intrigued by a personality so monumental that every Bhutanese I met seemed to hold him with an almost God-like reverence—His Majesty King Jigme Singye Wangchuck. In an era where monarchy and monarchs have lost their lustre, it is amazing how His Majesty

the Fourth King continues to command so much veneration.

One day, not too long after my first visit, I resolved to meet this phenomenal person who has captivated not only his subjects but also leaders and academicians around the world with his uncommon logic about happiness and well-being and why it should be given central place in a country's development.

Consequently, I began to take special interest in Bhutan and started to build good relations with every Bhutanese I came in contact with. For the growing love that I have for the Kings and country I have tried, in my own small ways, to help them as far as I could. My connection with Bhutan remains very special.

I had always wanted to be blessed with an audience with His Majesty the Fourth King. My perseverance and persistence finally bore fruit. I have had the rare honour and privilege of meeting His Majesty the Fourth King at the first Druk Wangyel Tsechu on 13 December 2011.

All my past trips to Bhutan were either during spring or autumn. I had never visited Bhutan in winter. I wanted to experience all four seasons in this beautiful Himalayan nation, and this was particularly fascinating for me as someone coming from Singapore that has only one season. So I decided to make a winter trip.



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It was during that trip that Dasho Karma Ura encouraged me to attend the first inaugural Druk Wangyel Tsechu that was being held on 13 December 2011. The Tsechu was inspired by His Majesty the Fourth King's leadership and to commemorate the highly successful 2003 military operation against Indian militants that His Majesty had personally led. This sacred festival was instituted by Her Majesty the Queen Mother Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck who personally guided and oversaw the building of the monument.

To be at the inaugural Druk Wangyel Tsechu was truly an amazing experience. The presence of Their Majesties the Kings, the Queen, Their Majesties the Queen Mothers and Princes and Princesses, among their citizens invoked in me a feeling of nationhood. The bond between the Kings and their subjects was so very apparent and special. This explains why Bhutan is so unique in ways that are the envy of many around the world.

The Tsechu celebrations concluded with Their Majesties, the Royal Family and all the spectators joining in to perform the Tashi Lebey, the concluding dance of the festival. I was so enthralled by the colours and grandeur of the Tsechu that I decided to join in the Tashi Lebey. As it was the first time for me, I stood at one corner of the ground before everyone started coming in. It was during this time that His Majesty the Fourth King approached me and asked me if I was Mr Boon from Singapore. I was awed and taken aback by His Majesty's familiarity. I managed to respond with a deeply respectful "Yes, I am."

His Majesty thanked me for looking after Dasho Jigme Dorji Wangchuck while he was studying in Singapore—a minor service that I was happy and willing to provide as an admirer of the country and its Monarchy. As much as His Majesty places great importance on providing good education to his own children, he attaches equal importance

and priority to providing His citizens with the best education and employment opportunities. It is for this reason that the Bhutanese are singular in their dedication and loyalty to become productive citizens of the country.

The presence of Their Majesties among their subjects is uncommon. To me it signifies Bhutan's security, spiritual strength and protection, all coming together to safeguard the great legacy of Guru Rinpoche, Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal and all their great forefathers. It is an expression of Their Majesties' deep love, confidence and trust in the people of Bhutan.

I have been most touched and honoured by the graciousness and kindness extended to me by His Majesty the Fourth King and Her Majesty Ashi Tshering Yangdon Wangchuck. It is difficult to find words that can adequately express the deep gratitude I feel. I thank the people of the Himalayas who introduced me to Guru Rinpoche, whose blessings I believe have made this possible.

It was a moment that I will cherish forever. Joining in the Tashi Lebey with the people of Bhutan and dancing together with them fully immersed in joy and laughter was an added bonus. It was a special experience that inspired in me a feeling of strong nationhood.

On a happy and auspicious occasion during the wedding of Dasho Jigme Dorji Wangchuck and Ashi Yeatso Lhamo, it was an eye-opener to personally witness His Majesty the Fourth King interacting and shaking hands with the guests present with His uncommon grace and generosity of spirit. I felt an aura of humility, benevolence and strength.

The most memorable moment was having a photo taken with His Majesty the Fourth King. I was deeply touched when I received a printed copy of the photo sent to me by His Majesty.



I couldn't be more fortunate on that day to also meet the mother of His Majesty. A brief encounter with Her Majesty, the Royal Grandmother Ashi Kesang Choeden Wangchuck was a blessing. I have always been inspired by her deep religious devotion and active involvement in the preservation and restoration of Bhutan's rich Buddhist heritage, including her on-going support to promulgate the teachings of Her root teacher, the late Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, and her support for thousands of monks all over Bhutan. The full faith and belief in the well-being of its citizens exemplified by her mother and the son is deeply respected and primordial pure.

Bhutan and her people are so fortunate to have the blessing and guidance of Their Majesties the Fourth and Fifth Kings. The unwavering love of Their Majesties for Their people and Their unfeigned dedication to protect their well-being is a source of great inspiration and optimism for the future of Bhutan.

I pray for Their Majesties' long lives. May Bhutan and its people continue to be blessed and guided by Their Majesties' glorious reign. May the Sun of Peace and Prosperity always shine on the people of Bhutan.



*The 108 chortens at the Dochula Pass to commemorate the 2003 operation.
(Photo: Tshering Tashi)*



*His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck with Dr Singye Dorji during one of the talks with the Indian militants who had set up camps in South Bhutan.
(Photo: Courtesy Dr Singye Dorji)*



ULTIMAX

Singye Dorji

A while before the military operation began, there were suspicions regarding the loyalty of the residents of the Eastern regions of our country. This was due to rumours that some people residing in that region were aiding ULFA militants in return for financial benefits. However, as with all rumours, this needed verification since action can be taken on facts alone. Therefore, it is in this light that I shall endeavour to give a first-hand account of my experiences.

We commenced moving on 13 December 2003, with His Majesty leading us, to Martsala in south-eastern Bhutan. The next day was the consecration ceremony of the Martsala Lhakhang after which we left for Kaptang Lhakhang. During these two days of trekking and marching, we encountered various villagers of that region. What we saw was not very encouraging.

The people seemed to have lost all hope as they stared at us with lifeless faces. They did not even return our courteous greetings, though some returned an empty smile. A few of the villagers continued with what they were doing ignoring our party and they seemed not to care whether this would displease us all. I remember thinking at that time that this just may be how the people of the region were. It never occurred to me that they might have believed that the operation would not be successful. I was humbled by what I witnessed a few days later when we were returning along the same path after our successful operation.

The look of joy on people's faces struck me. They looked nothing like the lifeless people from a few days ago. The change that had overcome them was so vast that it is quite difficult to put into words. It was not just the look on their faces but the way they carried themselves, the way they reacted to our safe return after the success and how they behaved towards us. On the morning of 16 December 2003, during our return along the same path, the villagers offered our whole team tea, *Suja*, *Singcha* (local alcohol), *seep* (pounded corn) and told us that we could take as many oranges from their trees as we wanted.

We accepted this gratefully and proceeded to climb the orange trees and filled our bags and ate as much as we could. We also accepted most of the *suja* and *singcha* to quench our dire thirst from all the trekking and climbing. We gave each villager we met along the way Nu. 50 but as it turned out, we didn't have enough for the last few people, even after borrowing from each other.

The happy faces of the villagers said it all. This sight was unparalleled to anything I had ever seen. It then struck me; how much suffering, pain, and agony they must have endured under the reign of terror of the ULFAs. I remember thinking that the amount of joy they must be feeling could only be matched by how much suffering they must have undergone.



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The villagers now found freedom, their own identity and pride. Their King had rescued them. They were proud to be Bhutanese.

One of the most memorable moments in my life will be the hike towards Phu Keptang where the ULFA civil HQ was based. His Majesty the Fourth King left with the first group at nine in the morning. About an hour later, the orders were received for the second group led by His Royal Highness, Dasho Jigyel Ugyen Wangchuck, to move. The order given to us in the beginning was for our group of five, which consisted of a doctor (myself) and four paramedics, to accompany the second group. However, our medical group received no order when the second group began to move. So we were left behind along with Colonel Chencho Thinley's team. Another hour later the order for Colonel Chencho's team to move arrived and we were yet to receive any orders.

We kept waiting for an order for our group to move which did not come. By noon, it was beginning to get late for us to be able to do anything. So I made a decision. I told my group about this decision. I told them that we had come a long way away from home and that we had a duty to perform. That duty was to provide medical services to His Majesty and his soldiers. Now we would not be fulfilling our duty if we stayed behind when everyone we had come to serve had moved ahead. So we all decided to leave.

I wanted our group to follow the previous groups towards Phu Keptang. Not everyone in my group agreed with my decision. Some wanted to go back via Martsala to Bangtar. So we decided to put it to a vote. Two from our group wanted to go back while three voted to move forward. So I reasoned with the two that wanted to go back. I told them the risk of going back was the same as moving forward and that it would be better for us with more people to move ahead. They were smart enough to agree.

The victim of our decision was our guide. He was the one who showed the routes used by the ULFAs to His Majesty, the soldiers, and other Government officials before the operation. Now he was frightened and refused to lead us. Without him, we would never be able to find the correct path on our own. It was his misfortune that he was the only one who knew the way and we did not allow him the freedom of choice. In the end, after a lot of persuasion, he agreed to lead us till the junction from where we would not lose our way since there was only a single path to Phu Keptang. The guide was trembling with fear when we let him go at the junction.

In our medical group, only two of us including myself were carrying firearms. I was carrying a hand gun (Browning 0.32 pistol) and the RBG health assistant was carrying a Glock 9mm hand gun. Since I was the oldest in our group and most of the others were recently married and had small children, I lead the way with the RBG health assistant covering the rear.

I kept my right hand holding the gun in my *bemcho* (fold of the *gho*) pointing forwards with my finger on the trigger. I told my friends behind to put their hands in the *bemcho* and use their index finger to point to make it look like they had a gun. I knew that our handguns would be no match for the Ultimax (100 round machine guns), which we heard the ULFAs carried. Still, we hoped that our handguns would give us precious seconds to escape if we were ambushed and we might manage to get off a few random shots which would distract them.

The jungle was so thick that we could hardly see more than two metres all around us. The person following me glanced back and saw that the person behind him did not have his hands in his *bemcho*. He asked him why he wasn't doing so. The person promptly replied that he needed the use of both his



hands to climb up the steep and treacherously thick jungle in case we were ambushed. This answer provided a moment of comic relief.

A few moments later, by the grace of god and a lot of luck, we survived what could have been a very tragic incident. All soldiers of the Elite group were supposed to wear green *ghos*. We were approaching the Phu Keptang camp when the footpath suddenly opened up to a small clearing where Colonel Chencho's team was waiting. The soldier at the post of the entrance to the camp informed his team that a group of men in *ghos* were approaching the camp.

Someone in their group suggested that it might be the medical group but someone else replied that we were supposed to be in Phu Keptang Lhakhang. They had thought that we were the enemy and had almost opened fire. The ULFAs were known to wear *ghos*.

Fortunately for us, the RBG in our group was wearing a green *gho* and was sighted and firing was prevented. Had he arrived a few seconds later we would've all been dead from friendly fire. We laughed in relief after our narrow escape from death.

Bravely fought the King

THE ISSUE: rld.
Of all the heads of state in the world, only the king of Bhutan could have personally led his troops into battle.

THE king of Bhutan did a yeoman's service to his country. For long, the serene and idyllic Himalayan country had served as a haven for various insurgent outfits from India, KLO, KPP from North Bengal are the main groups who have had their camps spread all over the country. Operating from their hide-outs in Bhutan, the terrorists were playing havoc with the lives of innocent villagers.

Ostensibly, Jigme Singye Wangchuk was under pressure from the government of India. But the king acted sensibly. He appealed to the outfits to wind up their camps and leave the country for good. Unfortunately, this fell on deaf ears.

Egged on by nationalistic spirit, the king undertook the responsibility of leading his army. He braved enormous risks with remarkable courage and aplomb to confront the militants. The king was largely successful in dismantling many camps — some even in the remote areas — flushing out the leaders of the various outfits. The government of India is happy with Bhutan's role and has promised full cooperation. The king in turn requested proper manning of the border areas. The king's role is laudable. He

was also concerned about the security of the innocent population while carrying out Operation Flush Out. That he led his troops into battle proves his military prowess. He is perhaps the only king to have led his army into battlefield.

PB SAHA,
29 December,
Kolkata.

Friend of India

THE battle embarked upon by the Royal Bhutan Army against the anti-Indian insurgents is praiseworthy. The Bhutan King left no loopholes in accomplishing this difficult task. The army seized a large amount of arms and ammunition from the insurgents which has undoubtedly weakened the latter's power and confidence. The king has also gone a step ahead by temporarily suspending all Thimpu-Dhaka flights so as to prevent the insurgents from escaping. Hats off to this tiny nation for this earnest endeavour. The gesture far outweighs those of the so-called democratic nations like Pakistan and Afghanistan who

sofas of their drawing rooms or official chambers.

The army feels inspired and confident when led by the head himself. The King of Bhutan and his son put up a brave fight — without bothering about their own safety — against the insurgents from India who took shelter in inaccessible jungles. He has thus become a role model. There is a lurking apprehension in some quarters that the Indian Army had helped him. But there is no gainsaying that the Bhutan King set the ball rolling and faced the insurgents who were armed with modern weapons. This episode should instill confidence in the Indian Army and it should try to track down Veerappan, the elusive brigand. Men like President Bush and other chicken-hearted heads of states should emulate the Bhutan King.

TAKAKDAS MAJUMDER,
31 December, Salt Lake.

Lesson for all leaders

GONE are the days when kings or heads of states personally led their troops into battle. Tipu Sultan is a shining example of such bravery and concern. Now, rulers remain far away from the battlefield, ensconced in the cosy

the army took place in Panbari and other places. The king also handed over the captured militants to the Indian Army and police. Wangchuk is the only king and head of state in the world to have taken such action by himself. India should award him for such a friendly act.

SRIDHAR CHANDRA MAITY,
2 January, Kolkata.

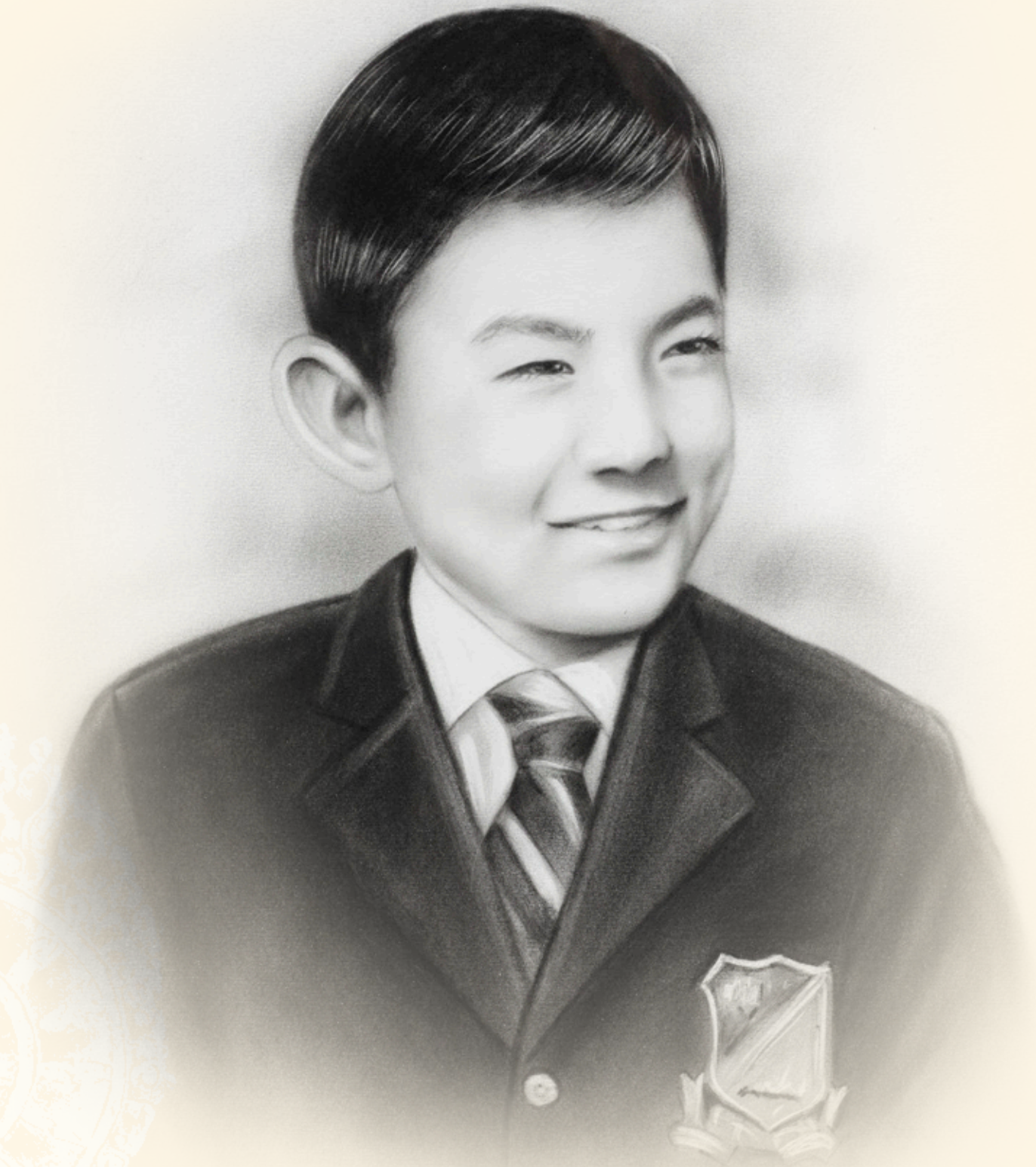
Ray of hope

HATS off to Jigme Singye Wangchuk Dorji for the marvellous job of personally destroying the breeding ground of terrorism in the jungles of Bhutan! Bhutan, a small kingdom in the lap of the Himalayas, has set an example for its counterparts such as Pakistan and Bangladesh. Operation Flush Out is a befitting reply to militant outfits whose bases are in India.

Since the last few decades, terrorism has become a grave problem for South-east Asian countries. India has been at the receiving end of much trouble from Pakistani insurgents. Bangladesh, too, adds fuel to the fire as it is a haven for terrorists who carry out their activities under the indirect help of the government. Terrorism has reached such an alarming height that it seems that all roads to peaceful solution have come to an end. In such a situation, the action taken by the Royal Government of Bhutan is a ray of hope.

JAYDEV BISWAS,
1 January, Shyamnagar.

(Photo: Courtesy Dasho Kunzang Wangdi)



*His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck wearing his North Point School blazer.
Anonymous artist
(Courtesy: Tshering Tashi)*



MY CLASSMATE

Thinley Dorji

I was among the eighteen boys privileged to attend school with His Royal Highness Crown Prince Jigme Singye at the Ugyen Wangchuck Academy (UWA) in Paro, over thirty years ago.

I would like to highlight a few of the many qualities that I recall seeing in the young Prince, which, in my opinion, contributed to making him the legendary Fourth Druk Gyalpo we have come to love, admire and revere.

The first was his simplicity. While a one-bedroom cottage had been built near the school for him, he preferred to be in the hostel where the rest of us lived and slept in one of the rooms, which he shared with two roommates. He often joined us for meals at the common dining hall. This penchant for simple living continued after he became King, endearing him to his people and earning the respect of the world.



*HRH Dasbo Jigme Singye Wangchuck's cottage at the Ugyen Wangchuck Academy in Paro.
(Photo: Phub Dorji)*



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The young Prince had an uncanny ability to zero in on the essence of complex issues. And so it came to be that a young King with no formal training in academic research, who seldom travelled outside his remote, isolated country would amaze the most accomplished diplomats, journalists and leaders of the world with his incisive views on regional and global issues.

Dasho Jigme possessed the twin characteristics of a natural born leader—that of putting the welfare of others before his own and of leading from the front. He was at his best when he was solving problems and helping others. During a trip to Manas, circa 1973, exhausted and barely able to move after a day of arduous trek in the subtropical jungle terrain, I saw Dasho at the helm of a rubber dinghy, mirthfully ferrying members of the entourage to the other side of a choppy tributary of the river. Late at night, I could see him going from enclosure to enclosure, making sure everybody was comfortably settled before he himself retired for the night.

His physical attributes are perhaps the most obvious and well known. But I bring this up because they had a great bearing on his reign and indeed, on the country's destiny. As a teenager, his love for sports and outdoor activities was often a bane for his companions, because he pursued them with relentless passion. And he outlasted and outplayed them all. He applied the same zeal and energy to his duties of state when he became King. His peak physical condition enabled him to work harder and longer than any top civil servant from whom he demanded and extracted the best.

Dasho's strikingly handsome features, analytical powers and abundant charisma easily made him Bhutan's most effective diplomat. And the nation first saw a hint of his courage, when, at only fifteen years of age, he not only walked out unharmed from a devastating motor accident inside Indian territory that left several of his companions, including his closest aide, dead on the spot, but calmly took charge of the scene.

Years later, his physical prowess and dignity under duress came to play. This time the stakes could not have been higher. Thousands of militants from the neighbouring Indian states established camps inside Bhutanese territory. More than a decade of soft-peddalling, including an offer of money could not persuade them to leave and Bhutan's sovereignty was at stake. When modern leaders declare war, they do so from the safety and comfort of their plush offices; it is the frontline troops that end up with their boots on the ground and flown back in body bags or with missing body parts, suffering a life-time of the horrors of war. This King physically led his small, untested army into battle against the dreaded ULFA militants whose guerrilla warfare tactics often bested the elite anti-insurgent units of the over million-strong Indian armed forces. His Majesty demonstrated his willingness to go beyond making the ultimate sacrifice for his country by permitting one of his beloved sons to also put his life in harm's way.

On a lighter note, Dasho's most endearing quality was his irrepressible sense of humour, which ensured we were always entertained, especially when the joke was on an unsuspecting visitor to the school. These were often carefully staged, replete with actors and imported props. The most famous one, which was used at the expense of a visiting dignitary, was a huge, lifelike phallus, which was strapped to Gup Wangchen's hip under his *gho*. He would be strategically seated on a chair in the front row directly facing the visitor. Every once in a while, he would spread his legs and a selected few, no doubt, those who Dasho felt would be able to stomach the joke, had the privilege of being treated to the magnificent view of apparently Bhutan's best-endowed man!

Dasho delighted us once or twice a year as he earned a day or two surprise holidays from the strict Principal of the school, Mr Stuart F. Filby, the English Parson who had been handpicked by



Her Majesty the Queen to run the Academy with a firm, steady hand. But Dasho's charm could draw even Filby to partake in an unthinkable sin of gambling! The two of them—both keen fishermen then—would wager on who would land the bigger or heavier catch, and the last arbiter in case the winner could not be determined visually, would be the weighing scale. While a win by Dasho would earn us a holiday, I don't recall what Filby wanted if he won—probably classes on Sunday! But if I don't remember, it is because Dasho never lost. If Mr Filby suspected on a couple of occasions, why his catches, which appeared to be of the same size or even slightly bigger, were invariably outweighed by Dasho's, he did not make an issue of it. During a reunion several decades later, a couple of the boys felt it was safe to confirm his long-held suspicion that his opponent's fish has been stuffed with lead pellets just in case it came to the scale!

It would probably shock many people to learn that Dasho was not fond of wearing his *gho* all the time. On a couple of occasions he came to class in his comfy attire only to be summarily shooed out by Mr Filby. But the moment he became King, he became one of those who wore his *gho* 24/7. And if there was one thing that was a source of great comfort to me as I watched the young King's overnight rise to the occasion, it was my conviction after knowing him in school that he would not let personal likes and dislikes interfere with his duties of state.

But what I would regard as one of his greatest qualities as a human being and as a Prince, was his transcendental tolerance to let the other person be. Perhaps tolerance is an understatement. Dasho not only gave space to people who wanted and needed to be left alone, he seemed to regard individual quirks as deserving of respect, which even he, the future King in an absolute monarchy, did not want to transgress. Despite having the power of life and

death over each one of us, he seemed completely oblivious of it and I have never seen him using it to get his own way. In fact, what really amazed me was that far from being angry and vindictive with those who occasionally indulged in behaviour that could easily have been misinterpreted as being disrespectful if not disloyal, he went on not only to tolerate but to regard with respect! It was only years later, that I began to appreciate the nobility and magnanimity of this particular aspect of Dasho's character and to understand how fortunate the people of Bhutan are to have been blessed with a King like him.

Today, as a youthful sixty, His Majesty can look at his legacy with a deep sense of satisfaction. He had always said that it was too risky to leave the responsibility of running a country in the hands of a single person. His entire reign was a step-by-step preparation to hand over power back to the people, which he did almost a decade back. At the same time, he groomed and crowned a great new King for today's Bhutan—a King who like his father and grandfathers before him, has all the required qualities of heart, speech and mind that the country needs.



*The Hostel at Ugyen Wangchuck Academy in Paro.
(Photo: Phub Dorji)*



The King - on the
fence of the animal enclosure.

(Photo: Malcolm Lyell)



THOUGHTFUL BALANCE

Tim Fischer

It was a cool and sunny morning when we headed out of Thimphu for the short drive north then north-east to the log cabin, literally a log cabin, which is the home of the King Father or K4, namely His Majesty King Jigme Singye Wangchuck.

It is a humble abode, in no way can it be described as a Palace and there standing on the steps under the portico was the King Father, ready to extend a sincere greeting with a big smile. He started with an apology as he had only confirmed the meeting late the day before but explained he had come back from the East with a bug and he was worried it might have been infectious but the doctors gave the all clear.

I thanked him for his time and we walked into a very tidy formal lounge and sat down for tea and more than an hour of intense discussions but conducted with warmth and friendship plus a 'cut through' dimension that made for interesting comments. Occasionally a wry smile would emerge as the King Father and I shared a joke or agreed on a particular comment.

As ever the King Father was mostly concerned about security and stability along with the well-being of the people. He had greatly helped initiate the Gross National Happiness concept and remains strongly in support of its further evolution, albeit accepting that the democratically elected Government of the day now had considerable sway on priorities and policies as well as determining various infrastructure projects.

However it was on the matter of international and regional affairs that the King Father had much to say, many wise observations that it would not be proper for me to reveal in detail but I can make some broad observations about. As tiny Bhutan sits jammed in between the giants of China and India, national security questions are to the fore.

One area of then topical interest, which we examined in detail was the huge changes then emerging in Myanmar and the possible reasons for the U-turns and opening up taking place at very senior levels within SLORC (State Law and Order Restoration Council). The overdue ending of the incarceration of Aung San Suu Kyi was noted plus the steps towards elections and power changes.

A few years before, as then National's Leader, I had met Aung San Suu Kyi at her University Avenue residence, a very sad looking residence I have to say. There she was living under house arrest, for years upon years, just near the large lake that an unhelpful American had swum across and this had caused further complications.

I realised that Aung San Suu Kyi was one very brave and smart lady with absolute dedication that left you with deep admiration for her endeavours but also for the good lady herself. I took the opportunity to explain this to the King Father and we agreed that her stamina, physically and politically, had been outstanding.



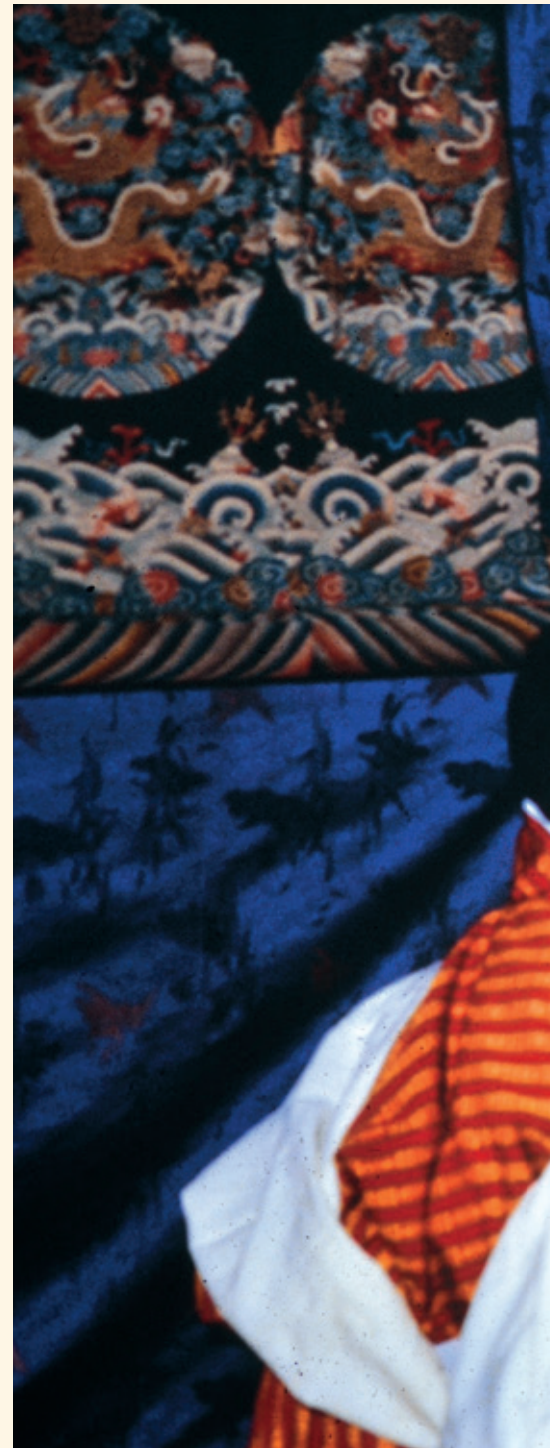
THE BODHISATTVA KING

It is not possible to go into all the comments we exchanged but I realised that the King Father had been following regional events very closely and further offered some wise counsel and comments on the reasons Myanmar had suddenly changed direction. It was a unique take on the situation that I had not previously encountered and frankly the King Father had hit the nail on the head.

Subsequent events have proved the King Father was right on the ball on Myanmar but also on many other regional happenings, it was really a pleasure to listen carefully to his quietly spoken utterances and soak up his deep convictions. I thought that the current King of Bhutan, His Majesty King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck was lucky to have a close relationship with his father and therefore the bonus of an ‘in house / in family’ key and wise advisor.

Eventually I knew it was time to hit the road but there was no pressure to do so. As Australian Ambassador to the nation city state of the Holy See in Rome, I always maintained the habit of not staying too long in meetings with busy people, that way they were always happy to give you appointments when you needed them. Likewise with the King Father I could have listened to him for another hour and a half but it would not have been right to do so.

We farewelled each other on the steps and under the portico, there was a friendly wave and away we went, enriched by the conversation in every way. The next day as the Druk Air modern jet climbed out of the Paro Valley and turned south I looked back in the direction of Thimphu and the Himalayas and thought that once again my visit to Bhutan had been very informative and incredibly good also for body, mind and soul. I also thought Bhutan was lucky to have such a learned and wise—stability creating—Royal Family.





His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck with his three sons. "Children are our treasures. They hold the promise of the future and, therefore, it is not only right that they should be given every opportunity to develop their physical, mental and spiritual potential to the fullest extent in an environment free of want and free of fear."

(Photo: Guy van Strydonck)



*When asked what makes His Majesty content: "Happiness isn't that important to me. It is enough that I can achieve my responsibilities to strengthen Bhutan and give it a bright future." His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck (Time Magazine in 1998)
(Photo: Courtesy Her Majesty the Queen Mother Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck)*



THE GNH LEGACY

Lungtaen Gyatso

THE GNH LEGACY

2015 is a special year for Bhutan, a year of joy and celebration for the Bhutanese people. On 11 November, His Majesty the Fourth King, Jigme Singye Wangchuck, will attain sixty fulfilling years of age. As a proud subject of this great leader, I submit this article in a humble attempt to take part in the celebrations and express my gratitude to His Majesty. In recent years, Gross National Happiness (GNH), an invention of His Majesty, has been discussed chiefly as an academic subject but less so from a human values perspective. In this article, I first propose a reason why people constantly strive for happiness, despite great leaps in material progress. I then explore GNH in terms of human aspirations and explain what it means in terms of human values. I suggest that true happiness is predicated not on satisfying unfulfillable cravings, but on cultivating right understanding and right feelings and connecting with the natural world, which will ultimately lead to mutual happiness and prosperity.

BHUTAN CRAFTS ITS DESTINY

The architects of modern Bhutan have been successive hereditary kings since 1907, and these kings have shaped the reality of today's Bhutan. Their selfless and compassionate leadership has captured the perpetual veneration of the people of Bhutan, so much so that to this day, despite reforms in all levels of governance, the monarchs remain the centre of the Bhutanese socio-cultural-political system.

The period between 1972 and 2006 can be seen as the most fulfilling in Bhutan's history, as during this time the country saw unprecedented development in all sectors. Bhutan began advancing its socio-economic progress by developing its roads and public transportation, offering free education and improving its schools, creating a free health care system and upgrading hospitals, and establishing diplomatic relationships with many foreign countries.

It was also during this era that the concept of Gross National Happiness (GNH) was introduced, and this new paradigm has now become the guiding principle of Bhutan's approach to development. Since the formulation of GNH, the monarchy has enacted a series of remarkable political transformations, chief among which was the royal command to draft the constitution of Bhutan and usher in democracy.

MORE THAN A KING: A MAN OF THOUGHT AND ACTION

The event that ultimately took both the Bhutanese people and the world by surprise, though, was the extraordinary decision made by His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck, the Fourth Druk Gyalpo,¹ to abdicate his throne at the prime age of fifty-one in favour of his young son, the then Crown Prince Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck. His Majesty is a strong believer in compassionate realism, with the main objective of his reign being the happiness and well-being of his citizens. For this reason he has become known as 'The People's King, the Great Fourth.'



THE BODHISATTVA KING

The best way to understand His Majesty the Fourth King as a unique leader and an extraordinary human being is by looking at his legacy: his visions and governance and the political decisions he made during his reign. In a world driven by materialism and consumerism, where many highly industrialised countries have failed to see the debacle underlying the prevalent development models, promulgating the unique notion of GNH and therein challenging the conventional Gross Domestic Product (GDP) model requires wisdom and foresight. Similarly, ushering in democracy when Bhutan was in its heyday and abdicating the throne when he was a popular and beloved monarch could only be the way of a wise and realised² person. His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck's way of life is nothing short of the historical Siddhartha's—far apart in time, yet very similar in approach, with both holding firm to their ultimate missions of bringing happiness to the whole of humanity.

GNH: THE AVATAR OF SECULAR BUDDHISM

The hallmarks of great beings are their legacies that are both time-tested and have a global impact. GNH is His Majesty's legacy for humanity: a multifaceted solution to varied and complex problems that are present on many levels. GNH is the versatile avatar of secular Buddhism for the twenty-first century and beyond. For a state, GNH is a development philosophy used as a means to measure national wealth and development through the prism of collective well-being and happiness. For a government, it is a development policy, and for individuals, it is a human values education, a guiding principle for self-exploration. Although this discussion begins with concerns of the individual, as GNH is a holistic approach, one cannot discuss the self in isolation from community and the greater natural world.

According to Buddhism, primary happiness resides at the level of the mind, which can be fulfilled only

by right understanding and right feelings, while secondary happiness resides at the level of sensation and joy, which is closely connected with the body and can be fulfilled by material objects. GNH takes care of both levels, and is therefore holistic and all encompassing.

RIGHT UNDERSTANDING: THE BRAIN OF GNH

To understand ourselves as human beings we have to imagine the body (the material unit) and the mind (the consciousness unit) in coexistence. It is from the fulfilment of the needs of these two units that we attain our feelings of well-being and happiness. If we acknowledge that happiness is our fundamental desire and we understand that our bodies and minds are in coexistence, then we can assume that in order to be happy, the needs of both the body and the mind must be fulfilled.

The body's basic needs are food, clothing, and shelter; all are essential needs because one cannot survive without them, but they are purely material things. An accumulation of material wealth becomes undefined and without limits and continues to give one the feeling of deprivation, of having less than is required. Craving for yet more will always be there, and if craving exists one cannot be prosperous; in actuality, one is poorer by that much. Satisfying the needs of the body will not suffice the need of the mind, although we misguidedly think it will. Chasing after material wealth is not necessarily a problem, but neglecting the need of the mind is always a disaster.

We must acknowledge that basic material wealth is required for our well-being, and for this the state provides basic amenities and services through the GNH socio-economic development pillar. Without right understanding, sensual (material) pleasures such as joy can be mistaken for true happiness. The kind of pleasure one gets from material wealth is nothing more than the fleeting joy attained by



eating a favourite dish or experiencing a pleasant sight, sound, touch, or smell. No matter how delicious a dish is, after some time one cannot continue experiencing gratification from it; there is a saturation point with sensual pleasures.

Sensations are derived from physical objects, the value of which is determined by individual expectations and taste, so that the experience of material fulfilment is different for different people. A bitter gourd can provide pleasure to someone who likes a bitter taste, but for others this flavour is unsavoury. Happiness derived from sensual pleasure is largely subjective, and anything that is subjective is based on a temporary urge, which one eventually tires of. This can supply fleeting joy at the most; it is not true happiness.

We relentlessly pursue material wealth in anticipation of happiness, overlooking the fact that happiness lies in the consciousness unit—the mind—and can be fulfilled only by right understanding and right feelings. GNH is a guide to understanding our ultimate needs through self-exploration and self-verification by teaching the ways of right understanding. It focuses clarity on the needs of both the body and the mind, so that balance is maintained between the material and spiritual life. Only when a balance in human aspirations exists does one become happy. Moreover, as the level of right understanding improves, the needs of the body will reduce proportionately, for one will begin to have the feeling of prosperity, which lies not just in having material wealth but in the feeling of having more than what is required.

True happiness is ensured when our desires, thoughts, and expectations are guided by right understanding and right feelings. Human relationships then become the currency with which the transaction of feelings such as trust, respect, affection, care, guidance, reverence, glory, gratitude, and love

take place. These transactions ensure synergy and harmony in the individual, family, community, and society in general, leading to mutual happiness and prosperity.

GNH AND THE NOTION OF COEXISTENCE

GNH works on the level of individuals and their values, but perceives them with an all-encompassing worldview, linking human beings to animals and all of nature, and the physical to the spiritual realms. It recognises the fact that we exist by way of coexistence—that no entity is independent, but rather all units are interdependent. GNH subscribes to the idea of nurturing, protecting, and utilising nature in a proper way, since it is an indispensable source of life. When left intact and undisturbed, everything in nature is self-sustaining, self-organised, and mutually congruent with other units of nature. The sun, moon, stars, planets, mountains, oceans, rivers, animals, plants, atoms, molecules, molecular structures, cells, organs—all units in nature mutually recognise and aid each other and therefore function in perfect harmony.

Human beings need do nothing in order for all in nature to function on its own. We do, however, need to understand the science of existence and our participatory role in the larger order so that we as individuals, community—indeed inhabitants of the natural world—mutually fulfil each other and live in harmony with nature. GNH endeavours to guide people to understand existence as coexistence and appreciate our role in the greater whole. Ultimately, the well-being and happiness of all humanity depends on our relationships with each other and with the natural world around us.

CONCLUSION

Despite great leaps in material progress, people still constantly strive for happiness, which suggests that there is something beyond the spectrum



The Garden Palace in Thimphu

“Proposals for a suitable palace for His Majesty has been made in the past by the government officials and people. However, let alone the construction of a palace, His Majesty the King does not even approve the procurement of new vehicles to replace the old vehicles in the royal garage or even the regular maintenance and re-furbishing of the log cabin in which he resides.”

(Speaker of the National Assembly, 76th Session of the National Assembly, 29 June – 30 July 1998)

When the Speaker apprised His Majesty the Fourth King about this particular item on the agenda (building palace), His Majesty had commanded that the National Assembly should deliberate on issues of national concern and importance instead of discussing such matters like the building of a palace.

(Resolution of the 76th Session of the National Assembly, 29 June – 30 July 1998)

of the material world. GNH endeavours to show the way forward to supply the missing link, giving the world a new development paradigm, one which recognises that the fulfilment of individual human aspirations is inextricably linked to the health and welfare of all sentient beings and all of nature. As individuals, we come to understand that happiness is indeed key to this achievement, but that in order to attain it we must fulfil the needs of both our body and our mind. We do so by cultivating right feelings and right understanding and recognising that we must all coexist and live in harmony with the natural world.

This year, we joyously celebrate a milestone birthday of His Majesty King Jigme Singye Wangchuck, the inventor of GNH. His creation and realisation of GNH has given him the will to live a natural life of simplicity, even when he has everything from which to choose. He has indeed demonstrated a life guided by its values. This is what makes him a special and a great human being. Although His Majesty the Fourth Druk Gyalpo is only sixty years old in 2015, we know that his concept of GNH, with its appeal to right understanding and harmonious coexistence, will live on for millennia, proving true the saying that to be remembered for thousands of years one need not be a thousand years old.




ENDNOTES

- 1 Dzongkha term for the King of Bhutan.
- 2 Someone who has understood the fact that the primary purpose of life is to be happy and that true happiness is a natural state of mind that is predicated on right understanding and feelings and not on any form of material entity. Such person will always endeavour for the happiness of all of humanity.



Group photograph of HRH the Crown Prince Dashi Singye Wangchuck with his parents, His Majesty Jigme Dorji Wangchuck and Her Majesty Ashi Kesang Choeden Wangchuck, and his sisters their Royal Highnesses the Princesses on the day of his installation as Trongsa Penlop on 15 May 1972.

(Photo: Her Majesty Ashi Kesang Choeden Wangchuck)



“I do not have the urge to travel outside Bhutan. I think the best place to have a holiday is Bhutan itself. We haven't really got this legacy of protocol, so we can afford to mix with people at all levels, be relaxed. There is no threat to personal security.”
His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck
(Asiaweek 27 September 1985)
(Photo: Courtesy Kuensel)



BHUTAN AND THE FOURTH KING

Salman Haidar

The twentieth century was kind to Bhutan. At a time when the world was in turmoil, countries were being made and unmade at the whim of distant great powers, and global war lapped at the Himalayas, Bhutan found a new destiny and began to mould itself into a modern state. The process of nation building on which it embarked when so many others were going under owed everything to the ascendancy of the newly installed King, who united and consolidated under his leadership what had been a fractious and uncertain polity. Under the First King, Bhutan achieved internal consolidation and established the territorial limits that largely continue even today, while strengthening the deeply held religious and social values that give the country its distinctive character.

Thus reinforced and internally unified, Bhutan was able to face the challenges of post-war transformation. New opportunities were now available for the betterment of the country but Bhutan's rulers were careful not to open their doors too wide, for there was the risk of being swamped by the surrounding world. At the same time, it was necessary to modernise the country in response to the new-found democratic spirit of the age which could not be ignored. A small country like Bhutan with two giant neighbours in India and China, themselves in an uneasy relationship, risked being buffeted on all sides from abroad while also facing rapidly changing circumstances within. It took clear-sighted leadership to deal with the many new

demands upon the country and to thread a path between them, and it was Bhutan's good fortune to have the guidance of a royal line of leaders well aware of global trends and able to come to terms with new realities. The Third King played a notable part in leading his country towards orderly transition and gave a decisive lead in laying the groundwork for democratic governance, which he considered necessary for Bhutan's own security and welfare. The public may have wanted nothing more than continuance of the monarchy unchanged, for it had served them well. But despite strong loyalist dissent the King insisted that the National Assembly, at that stage a largely consultative body, should be invested with real authority, including even the power to recall the monarch. This was a visionary step and harbinger of further dramatic change.

The premature demise of the reformist Third King brought his young son Jigme Singye Wangchuck to the monarchy and with him the process of change quickened and expanded. When he ascended to the throne the Fourth King was not yet sixteen years of age but had already displayed qualities of leadership that inspired confidence and gained him unchallenged support. It was now for him to take matters forward and build for the future. The Fourth King carefully initiated re-examination and reform of the major state institutions, which became a programme of wholesale reform. The King was very familiar with the temper of his people and though his reforms were sweeping in



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their effect, he proceeded in a manner and at a pace that the public could readily accept. Many other countries stumbled over their own comparable reform programmes, but not Bhutan.

When he embarked upon his modernising course, which was virtually from the beginning of his rule, there was no reformist template for the King to adopt and he had to work out his plans according to his own instinct and judgment. At a young age, when he might have been excused a certain amount of impetuosity, he was conspicuously sober and thoughtful in the exercise of authority. Not unduly solemn, however: there was plenty of good cheer and light heartedness at the royal court and a shared sense of high adventure. Around the court the demands of protocol were respected but kept within bounds and not permitted to become a barrier between the King and his subjects; the King's afternoon game of basketball invariably drew a large crowd of ordinary people who came to watch their ruler at play, and the easy informality of these occasions was characteristic of his style of rule. He never permitted himself to be shut inside an ivory tower. On the contrary, he was constantly on the move around his country, visiting the remotest parts of it, meeting people of every estate and learning for himself about the real needs of the public. The constant tours within the country permitted him to direct effectively the nation building activities of his administration including schools, roads, food, doctors, and shelter for his people. These were the basic tasks long before the UN and others got into the act of promoting human development targets as the measure of successful state activity.

No less important than social and economic development at home was management of the country's external relations; dealing with the world provided opportunity for rapid advancement but could also unbalance the state if incautiously

handled. The King, like his ancestors before him, took a practical and down-to-earth approach, essentially seeking from abroad only those material inputs not obtainable at home, and keeping well clear of entanglements that could impose burdens and bring Bhutan no benefit. The traditional external link was with India, and it is a credit to both countries that they were able to develop and greatly expand their relations while maintaining a harmonious relationship between themselves. The leaders on both sides have been at pains to maintain this friendship, and in the early days Jawaharlal Nehru himself paid a visit to Bhutan, when going there it was no simple matter and visitors had to resort to trekking and horseback riding. Prime Minister Nehru's visit laid the foundation of the modern relationship of close mutual understanding and support which remains a model of good neighbourly ties.

Bhutan has looked to India for economic and technical partnership but has chosen its own goals and methods in its development strategy. In this, the imprimatur of the Fourth King is everywhere to be seen. He permitted the use of the country's abundant water resources to generate electricity for Bhutan and to earn revenue by selling the surplus to India, but insisted on run-of-the-river projects with minimum environmental impact. Contrast the experience of developed countries like the USA where indiscriminate dam building in earlier days has caused environmental damage requiring the present-day dismantling of several dams to revive badly damaged river valleys. Apart from the rivers, Bhutan's great natural resource is its abundant forests, and these are zealously protected, so much so that Bhutan's forestry practices are regarded as a model for others. Moreover, Bhutan has also been bold enough to enunciate its own distinctive model of development with Gross National Happiness (GNH) as its governing ideal, in this departing significantly from the more frequent



and more materialistically measured standards in use elsewhere. The GNH concept answers a growing urge in an increasingly stressed world and commands international appreciation and respect.

Perhaps the most striking and unprecedented of the Fourth King's achievements is the manner in which he has promoted democracy in his country. He never craved the power and authority to which he was born, not out of a spirit of renunciation but because he understood clearly, as did his royal forbears, that for its security and advancement his people had to stand on their own feet and not depend on one individual or family. Bhutan's strength rested ultimately on its people. Popular institutions were needed to give substance to the democratic urge, and where they did not exist, they had to be created. Step by step, the King divested himself of his royal prerogative and passed on responsibility to institutions under public scrutiny. The untrammelled right to appoint state officials, something that other rulers elsewhere have jealously guarded, was devolved upon a Royal Civil Service Commission and transparent processes of recruitment and promotion were instituted. A far-reaching step was the decision to codify laws, hitherto administered by traditional methods and concepts, so as to establish uniform civil and criminal codes and thereby transform the administration of justice. The keystone of reform was the framing of a Constitution which was done after wide consultation and debate, and which was ultimately adopted with full public consent. This is now the ultimate source of state authority. Under it, the National Assembly has enhanced authority while the voting roll has been expanded to include all citizens. By such means, over just a few years under the leadership of the Fourth King, Bhutan has acquired the sinews of a modern state and taken its place in the world democratic community.

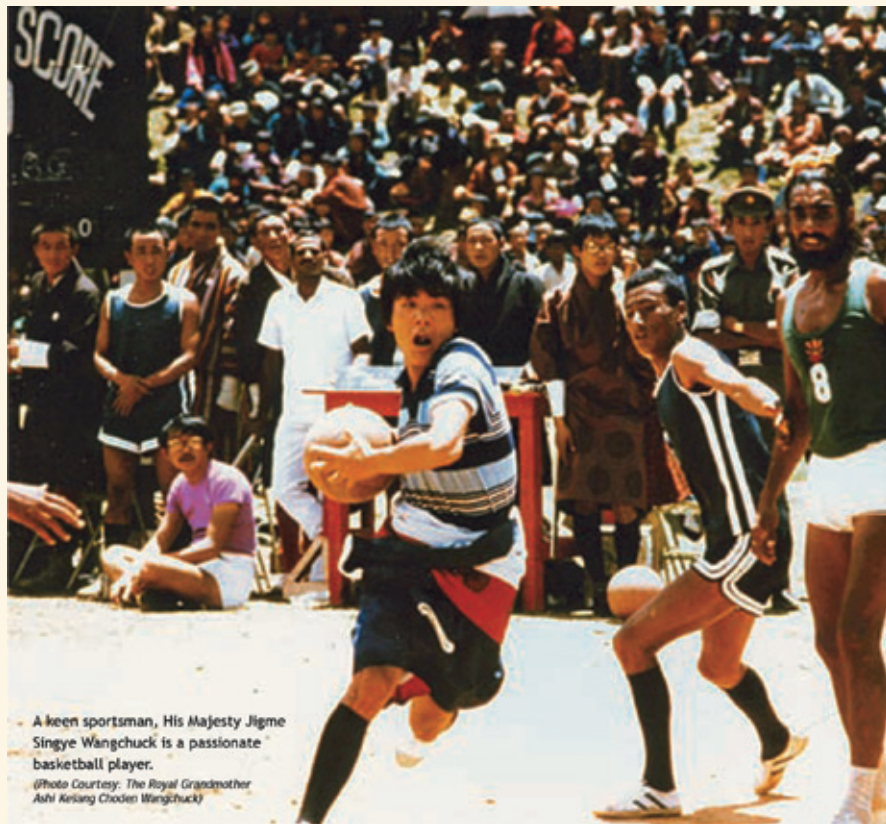
The wide-ranging reforms that transformed the country were not the result of pressure from outside. Bhutan itself, led by the Fourth King, made all the essential choices and shaped its own destiny. Traditional ways of life were adapted to changing circumstances, so that the reforms adopted by the country were firmly rooted. The Fourth King was in full control as he wrote himself out of the picture and systematically handed over authority to the Parliament to bring about popular rule through the ballot.

It is difficult to find a parallel to the Fourth King's achievement. He left voluntarily at the peak of his power and influence, driven by his own convictions about what his country needed for a secure future. The benefits were immediately evident in the smooth transition that Bhutan has experienced to full-fledged democracy, most particularly the ability to change its government through the popular vote. Thanks to the wise leadership of the Fourth King, Bhutan has become a well-established constitutional monarchy with a bright future for its citizens.



“As a youngster, Jigme Singye Wangchuck stopped playing goalie in soccer when he realized that none of the players dared to knock one past the future King of Bhutan. So he switched to a more egalitarian sport: basketball, where the game’s fast pace and sharp elbows tend to blur any distinction between royalty and commoners.”

(Time Magazine, 21 December 1998)



A keen sportsman, His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck is a passionate basketball player.
(Photo Courtesy: The Royal Grandmother Ashi Kelsang Choden Wangchuck)

“The King still plays hoops with his palace guards: at 1.8 m, he is a playmaker and three-point shooter.”
(Time Magazine, 21 December 1998)

(Photo: Courtesy Tsering Tashi)



A PIECE OF CAKE

Yoshiro Imaeda

From 1981 through 1990 I stayed in Thimphu as advisor to the National Library of Bhutan. During the first few years of my stay, I often watched His Majesty, then in his late twenties, casually playing golf, basketball, archery, etc. with his entourage. His Majesty definitely had a commanding presence, but to an outside observer like myself, the whole atmosphere seemed like intimate comrades playing together rather than attendants serving their master. I almost envied the attendants and wished to be part of them. Nevertheless, I had no opportunity to be in personal contact with His Majesty.

It was not until April 1987 that, all of a sudden, I received a call from His Majesty's office. I was asked to serve as interpreter for a Japanese visitor who had an audience with the King but could not speak English. The visitor was the late Venerable Shoseki Tsurumi, 20th Chief Abbot of Naritasan Shinshoji Temple in Narita, Japan. He was particularly interested in Tibetan Buddhism and had a close personal relationship with His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama. He therefore wished to visit Bhutan, the last sovereign kingdom with a Tibetan Buddhist culture.

The audience took place in His Majesty's chamber in Tashichhodzong, the official administrative headquarters of Bhutan. When the curtain of the chamber was raised, His Majesty was standing alone to welcome his guest. After receiving the *kata* (traditional ceremonial silk scarf) from the guest, His Majesty invited him to sit at his right on a sofa.

An attendant brought in a tea set on a tray and I presumed he would serve it. To my great surprise, His Majesty told the servant to put the tray on the table and leave. His Majesty then served the tea himself: arranging the teacup, pouring the tea and asking if sugar and milk were needed. Again by himself, His Majesty served a piece of cake before starting the conversation.

Following an exchange of greetings, Venerable Tsurumi said that after a stay of several days in Bhutan, he truly felt he was indeed in a genuinely Buddhist country, almost one of the Buddha's realms on earth. He expressed his sincere wish that Bhutan would continue to maintain and further develop Buddhist values and traditions.

His Majesty listened attentively to his guest's impressions and comments on Bhutan. Then he thanked him for sharing his thoughts and particularly for giving him suggestions and advice for the future of Bhutan. It was a session between an elderly abbot and a young novice—not at all an audience granted by a monarch to a foreign monk.

His Majesty must have noticed when he received the elderly man that he had a slight difficulty walking, because after the audience, His Majesty took his guest by the hand and led him to the door. Throughout the audience, which lasted almost an hour, it was above all this humaneness, simplicity and humility that impressed me the most in the person of His Majesty.



THE BODHISATTVA KING

Twenty years later in March 2007, just a few months after the sudden and unexpected abdication that took place in December 2006, I was given a private audience with His Majesty. Unlike the previous official audiences, which were all held in Tashichhodzong, this time I was called to Samtenling Palace, His Majesty's personal residence.

From various sources I had heard this Palace described as a modest log cabin. It was situated in the middle of a serene pine forest at some distance from Tashichhodzong. The whole structure was indeed very modest, especially for the residence of a monarch. The room where we sat together was extremely simple with hardly any decoration.

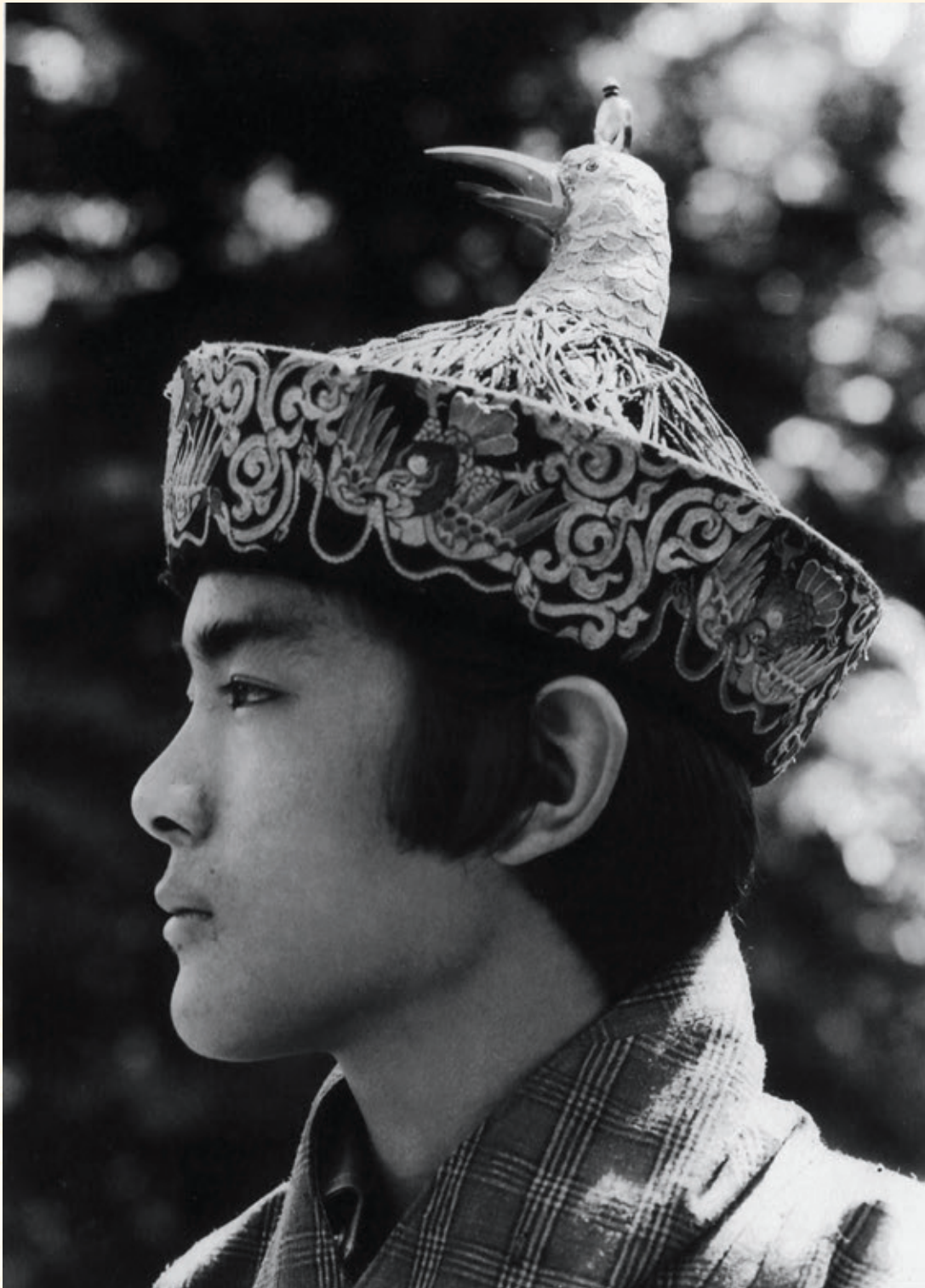
Overall, it was far more humble than I had expected. His Majesty must have noticed my reaction and said: "I am the first and only Wangchuck monarch who has not constructed a palace." Having just stepped down from the heavy burden of the monarch, he seemed quite relaxed and said: "I have done what I wanted to achieve. For several years to come, there should not be any serious problems for Bhutan. It is like a honeymoon period. I do not need it and it is for the new king to enjoy it." In his words and in his living environment, I felt His Majesty as a person to be plain, unassuming and frugal to the point of stoicism, and at the same time, I found in him an affectionate, doting father.

From my personal contacts over the last thirty-odd years, His Majesty the Fourth Druk Gyalpo Jigme Singye Wangchuck emerges as a person of exceptional modesty, simplicity and integrity. It has been almost a decade since His Majesty began enjoying his 'retired' life and I wish him many more years of health and happiness to come.



*Archery is the national sport of Bhutan and His Majesty promoted it.
(Photo: Guy van Strydonck)*





The Raven Crown, designed by the Tibetan 'avant-garde' Changchub Tsöngrü (1817-1856), is known as Usa Jaro Dongchen because of its raven head. The crown's brim is embroidered with the motif of the Garuda bird. On the bird's head sit the sun and the moon symbolising longevity, steadfastness and enlightenment.



TOWERING LIGHT HOUSE

Bjorn Melgaard

His Majesty the Fourth King of Bhutan, Jigme Singye Wangchuck, is a towering lighthouse. This is a very high praise for those who live near the sea, but for those who grew up in a landlocked country like Bhutan, this comparison may not carry the same significance.

So, let it be qualified. The lighthouse is an essential and important landmark that rises high above the surroundings. It shines its light on the land and the sea. It provides illumination for the people and its guidance is priceless and without comparison. It provides direction for the traveller and a sense of belonging to those who live on land. Without a lighthouse, ships will lose direction, become wrecks, people will suffer, and the society will become ill in turn.

Having had the privilege of meeting His Majesty the Fourth King a number of times since the Kingdom of Denmark established its office in Bhutan, the wisdom, the foresight and the light that emanated from this lighthouse was glaring. It was no coincidence that our two countries became so closely associated as they did—and still do. The development philosophy promulgated by His Majesty and the resulting strategies that were rolled out by the Royal Government of Bhutan resonated well with the strategies that guided the Kingdom of Denmark in its search for partnerships. It became a fruitful partnership that was of immense benefit to both partners over many years. Needless to say, this partnership was held together through

human relationships and the relations between the Bhutanese and the Danes were—and are—not only harmonious but also buoyed by a shared sense of humour and a shared set of goals for the collaboration between the two countries, our cross-culture understandings, and our people in general. There are numerous Danes who have worked in Bhutan with Bhutanese counterparts and have taken back to their country a wealth of experience as well as gratitude towards the exposure to a different and enriching culture. And there are many Bhutanese who have studied in Denmark and have returned home with new knowledge and experience that have supported and helped further the development of their country.

Over the years, this collaboration matured and entered new phases based on mutual trust and confidence. Cultural exchange and business-to-business relations are today's prominent fields of collaboration as the days of financial development assistance have passed. This is a clear evidence of the forward strides taken by Bhutan under His Majesty the Fourth King's leadership. As His Majesty once told us, "What is good for the King is not necessarily good for the people—and vice versa." He has, indeed done great by proving that the opposite can also be true.

There are many memories about audiences where the stewardship of His Majesty the Fourth King has made unforgettable impressions on Danish delegations. There are also memories where the



THE BODHISATTVA KING

unexpected occurred, such as when His Majesty—during a lunch—told the guests how he had dispatched a photographer to catch a picture of the yeti, to prove—once and for all—that this abominable snowman exists. And indeed, the photographer found the yeti, but his hands were shaking so violently that the picture was quite blurred, according to His Majesty—with a twinkle in his eye.

But perhaps my most fascinating encounter with the Fourth King happened a few years ago—several years after His Majesty had abdicated and I had retired. A long conversation covered a vast range of subjects. It showed clearly how well informed His Majesty continued to remain in world matters and in the challenges facing the Kingdom.

We went around the world and we went around the history of Bhutan. We covered small and large subjects—not least those that pertain to the freedom of retirement. We discussed how travelling could enrich life—not shopping in big cities—but going to remote places, such as the interior of Kazakhstan or the high plateau of Tibet. I suggested Greenland—but His Majesty was reluctant. Too many mosquitoes he claimed—and he was right.

The History of Medicine in Bhutan was foremost on my mind and it was a rich treasure trove of information that His Majesty provided as well as suggestions about alternative sources and offering access to all photos and files in the Royal Archives. The encouragement I received was a constant inspiration when we—my co-author and I—proceeded to put together the chronicle of this chapter of the history of Bhutan; a cultural heritage for the benefit of future generations. We were so fortunate as to have Her Majesty the Royal Grandmother Ashi Kesang Choeden Wangchuck, contributing a story which includes an account of the birth of His Majesty the Fourth King on 11 November sixty years ago.

At the threshold of a new decade and a new cycle for the Fourth King of Bhutan, it is time to reflect on how fortunate Bhutan has been to have a monarch with such wisdom and foresight. And it is time to wish that this wisdom and foresight will continue to guide pervasively the development of the Kingdom of Bhutan and shine over its people.

Hip Hip Hurray!



“Almost 30 years ago, long before ‘positive psychology’ became a boom in the West, King Jigme now 50, suggested that nations be measured by ‘Gross National Happiness’; the rich are not always happy, after a while the happy generally consider themselves rich.”

(Time Magazine, 30 April 2006)



"The greatness of a country is determined by its people. The productiveness and character of the people is in turn determined by the quality of education they receive."
(Photo: Courtesy Her Majesty Ashi Kesang Choeden Wangchuck)



LEGACY OF HAPPINESS

Dalip Mehta

I would like to give some of my thoughts and observations on what happiness means to His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck. I have known His Majesty for forty years, since my first posting in Bhutan in 1975. His Majesty ascended the throne in 1972 when not quite seventeen years of age, when most of us were leaving school. Yet the responsibilities of office brought out overnight his innate qualities of leadership and statesmanship. There are several aspects of his personality that struck me then, and continue to do so now. He is deeply reflective and at the same time decisive and a man of action—a rare combination. He is a man who has always followed a Spartan life style, and shunned all the pomp and perks of a monarch, indeed, he looks most at ease when mingling with his people in the remote corners of his kingdom.

I feel it is important to understand the geopolitical complexities and tensions that existed when he became King; Bhutan's northern neighbour Tibet was integrated into China, its western neighbour Sikkim was soon to lose its special status; in the southeast there was the birth of Bangladesh after a hard fought war and then in India, Indira Gandhi declared the Emergency. Within Bhutan itself, there was ethnic tension in the Southern regions. Not the easiest or happiest circumstances for a young King suddenly burdened with huge responsibilities. And yet, he very quickly developed a clear and long term vision for his country and his people, with a determination to see it become reality.

Being King of a small country, sandwiched between two immensely larger neighbours, India and China, he was determined to safeguard the sovereignty and independence of Bhutan, to preserve its unique identity and culture, and to ensure the well-being of its people through well considered policies and

good governance. Happiness for His Majesty was when he saw his policies, social and economic, cultural, and environmental, bear fruit. Happiness at seeing the living standards of his people improve and his country playing a well-respected role in world affairs. Perhaps most importantly, seeing the success of the democratisation of Bhutan's political institutions, and consequently the disappearance of the absolute powers that he had inherited. He had always believed that the people of Bhutan must play their essential role in determining their own future.

In Bhutan today the monarchy and democracy happily co-exist with the King loved and revered by his people. In creating this polity, at considerable sacrifice to himself, His Majesty the Fourth Druk Gyalpo has shaped the evolution of his country from what was less than fifty years ago a medieval kingdom cut from the rest of the world into a modern and vibrant nation at ease in the twenty-first century world. I believe that is His Majesty's legacy—the creation, step by step, of modern Bhutan, through his wisdom, foresight, perseverance; his deep understanding of his people's needs and aspirations, as well as the forces of history and the spirit of our times.

His Majesty the Fourth Druk Gyalpo unerringly found the fine balance that enabled him to lead his country seamlessly and peacefully into the modern age while at the same time keeping alive its finest cultural, social and spiritual traditions. And he instilled in every citizen of his country an immense pride in being Bhutanese. As we celebrate his sixtieth birthday, this year, we celebrate a life every moment of which has been lived in selfless service to his people, because in their well-being lies his happiness.



*The Heatherdown boys dressed in boiler suits preparing to visit nearby woods.
(Photo: Nick Raison)*

JIGME

Nick Raison

Throughout this document I shall refer to His Majesty the Fourth King of Bhutan simply as Jigme. Heatherdown School near Ascot in Berkshire in the UK was where Jigme was educated for a time, and 'Jigme' was the name by which he was called by teachers and boys alike. It might sound disrespectful, but in truth Jigme was held in the highest esteem by anyone who met him.

I was a teacher at Heatherdown when Jigme arrived and he was in my English class. I subsequently met his mother Her Majesty Kesang Wangchuck on one of her visits to the school and was later invited to Bhutan by His Majesty the Third King of Bhutan and Her Majesty the Queen in the summer of 1967 (July/August) to do some extra teaching of general subjects to Jigme .

I flew from the UK with Jigme and visited Calcutta for a few days before I went with Her Majesty to stay with the Chogyal of Sikkim and Queen Hope. Their son Crown Prince Tenzing (fourteen years old) showed me around Gangtok in his Hafinger Jeep.

Jigme had meanwhile returned direct from Calcutta to Bhutan to see his father the Third King. The Third King was at this time not in good health and decided that, while Jigme was in his country it was more important for him to travel his realm and meet his subjects than to have extra lessons with me.

I had audience with the King soon after my arrival in Bhutan from Sikkim, and I was invited to stay for a holiday instead of tutoring Jigme in Bhutan, although from time to time I would meet up with Crown



*"With Crown Prince Jigme on my Bhutan visit."
Nick Raison*

*(Photo: Her Majesty Ashi Kesang Choeden Wangchuck,
courtesy: Nick Raison)*





*Group photo at Heatherdown School. HRH Dasbo Jigme Singye Wangchuck is in the fourth row, third from the right.
(Photo: Courtesy Her Majesty Ashi Kesang Choeden Wangchuck)*



(Photo: Nick Raison)

Prince Jigme. We did some hunting together and we did some travelling. He always had his dogs with him wherever he went. Royal Queen Grandmother and I have stayed in touch by letter on and off since those days.

JIGME

Jigme arrived at Heatherdown, a small private boarding school of about ninety boys aged between eight and thirteen years old. No boys were given special treatment because of their birth or background. (Two of the Queen of England's boys, Prince Andrew [now the Duke of York] and Prince Edward [now the Duke of Wessex], were also at the school at the same time as Crown Prince Jigme.) All boys were treated as equals.

In his early days at the school Jigme was very cautious, measured and observant and was extremely respected by the other boys and members of staff. It was a strange and different world that he was in, and his mother, Her Majesty the Queen of Bhutan,

on delivering Jigme to the school as a New Boy, won over the admiration of those she met with her charm, beauty and wisdom. Both the Queen and Jigme had beautiful smiles.

It is extraordinary to remember how well Jigme fitted into this community. He even attended lessons in French and Latin without complaint. I taught him English, and he was very hard-working and

industrious in the classroom. He was also a 'natural' at sports. He even got into the First XI Cricket Team. He played Wicket Keeper. [For those who do not know the game, this is one of the most important roles in a cricket team]. He liked challenges and adventure and the outdoors. He was always courteous and full of fun and humour ... with a boisterous twinkle in his eye.

I was particularly impressed with his general stature at this little school because I subsequently saw him in his own bit of planet Earth in Bhutan amongst those he loved and those who loved him.

Jigme and the King and Queen were all so kind to me on my visit there and it has always been one of the most treasured times of my life. I have never been able to adequately thank those three important people, and also Captain Rinzi Dorji (ADC to the Queen) who was 'lent' to me by the Queen during my stay to make sure I was Okay.



*Anonymous artist
(Courtesy: Tshering Tashi)*



DASHO TROUT

Sunanda K. Datta-Ray

Fishing has been called the true king of sports. It is also the sport of true kings. The truth of both sayings was borne out to me among the rugged hills and gushing streams of Bhutan some months before the consecration ceremony of His Majesty the Fourth Druk Gyalpo, King Jigme Singye Wangchuck. Somehow, the picture I had seen earlier of England's late Queen-Mother, who was also the last Empress of India, in Wellingtons and Mackintosh freezing in a Scottish river with the icy water swirling about her knees, didn't convey the same message.

Her Majesty was angling for salmon which the assistant in a Tesco supermarket in London tells me is so extensively farmed nowadays that it will soon be cheaper than the common or garden North Sea cod. Neither can compare with trout, especially with the dressy rainbow trout with red bands and black spots that you find only in certain Bhutanese rivers that are even more exclusive than the Royal Enclosure at Ascot. Carp and koi dare not intrude into those elitist enclaves.

The trout came from Kashmir, whose rivers British officers had stocked with fish from their native Scotland. King Jigme Singye's maternal grandfather, Raja Sonam Tobgye Dorji, had fingerlings transported by porters some 2,000 miles along the Himalayas to Bhutan. Apparently, the mammoth earthenware jars in which the journey was made are still displayed in Ha Dzong, ancestral seat of the princely Dorjis.

Being unmarried then, I had gone alone to Bhutan in 1974. Her Majesty Ashi Kesang, the Queen Mother, had very hospitably invited me to stay in

what she called her 'little palace' in Paro. The fish in the river there were less welcoming. I dangled an honest rod and line but they just looked at me, turned imperious tail and stalked—I mean swam—away. Young Pasang arrived from Dechencholing Palace early next morning, armed with his own fishing tackle, and the trout were suddenly a different breed. They swam in circles round our hooks sniffing and smiling, or so it seemed to me. Although the bait wasn't actually taken, the fish seemed to bow and curtsy in apology for not doing so. They must have sensed Her Majesty had sent Pasang.

It wasn't until many years later when my son Deep was nearly ten that the subtleties of sophisticated piscine psychology were confirmed. I had braved wind and weather to try my luck in the Thimphu river just below the upturned eaves of the Royal Cottage where His Majesty, then a bachelor, had first received me shortly after ascending the Dragon Throne. I remember thinking it was an austere abode for a monarch. His lifestyle seemed equally spartan. Apart from the *khada* I presented, the audience was totally without ceremony. When I needed to use the lavatory, His Majesty had to ask someone to find the key: the sweeper had cleaned the room, locked the door from the outside and gone away.

It was an eventful time then in Himalayan affairs, and I was greatly impressed by the King's acute perceptions. I was flattered, too, by the candour with which he shared them. The sturdy little boy I had first seen at a reception in a Calcutta flat in the sixties had grown into an astute but engaging



statesman with a lively sense of humour. It has been instructive talking to him since then in Delhi, Dhaka and Colombo.

But the trout can't have known that as they rejected every line I cast. I wondered if they snubbed me because I hadn't—and still have not—paid my respects to their ancestral receptacles, Ha being one of the few *dzongs* I have yet to visit. Now I know that the trout, being royalist to the gills, recognised the less than kingly hand that held my rod. Yet, they queued up dutifully twenty feet downstream where Deep pranced ecstatically with young Sonam, his cheerful escort from the eastern hills.

Deep excitedly explained the mystery that evening when he came bounding up the steps of the Mothithang Guest House where we had a suite. Driving down from the Royal Cottage, His Majesty had caught sight of him fumbling with his rod while the faithful Sonam tried to instruct him. The Druk Gyalpo stopped to show Deep how to cast a line, wait for the bait to be taken, reel in the line, and play the catch.

Such gestures of consideration were by no means uncharacteristic of His Majesty. On one occasion when I had difficulty climbing stairs, he received us in the ground floor sitting room of Thimphu's State Guest House instead of the throne room at the top of Tashichhodzong where he usually gave audience. I knew already that His Majesty was a vigorous basketball player. I discovered from Deep he was also the 'complete angler.' The snobbish trout must have seen the King with my son. After that



*Fishing for trout in the Thimphu Chu River near the Royal Garden Palace in Thimphu.
(Photo: Malcolm Lyell)*

they couldn't wait to swallow Deep's bait—hook, line and sinker. They did so in droves.

But that wasn't what most excited him. He told us with glistening eyes that the boot of the royal Mercedes was packed with Coca-Cola. His Majesty had even given him one! Coke had disappeared from the Indian scene in the late seventies. Deep knew of it only as a fantasy beverage that loomed large in the dreams of all small boys.

The trout had other priorities. They know that the rivers Deep and I fished then and on our subsequent visits were royalty's preserve. Not many guests were fortunate enough to be granted the privilege. Given this paucity of fishermen, the trout might have been expected to jump at the chance of celebrating our rare fortune. Normally, they have nothing to do but eat, sleep and swim. No one would blame them for wearying of this tranquillity and yearning for the twang of the nylon line, the hook's metal shimmer and the flash of the fly. They might even pray to the river gods to send anglers to give them some rare sport. Not a bit of it. The trout are content to grow fat and lazy, enjoying being in turns coy and superior and giving a peremptory brush-off to commoners.

My line went taut once as one fish more adventurous than the rest nuzzled the hook. Then the line sagged as the fish decided it was beneath his dignity to take it. Once, I even pulled an unresisting trout out of the water. But no sooner had it glimpsed me than it fought back furiously, twisted, turned and leapt back into the river with a spectacular splash.

"It often happens!" Sonam consoled me. He and Pasang were both very solicitous. They were concerned I might feel inferior. Of course, I know I am. I know the trout wouldn't have jumped back if King Jigme Singye had wielded the rod. On the contrary, it would probably have bowed in gratitude and laid itself down submissively at the royal feet. I am convinced Deep didn't fare better than me because of his superior angling skill. It was because the fish sniffed the royal hand that had taught him all those years ago. As I said, Bhutan's rainbow trout are snobs.



“His Majesty has no desire for material wealth and he would have made an excellent lama.”
(Time Magazine, 21 December 1998)

His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck dressed as a Buddhist monk during a fancy dress party organised by Dantak in Deothang in South Bhutan in 1974.
(Photo: Courtesy Dasbo Shingkar Lam)



SENSE OF HUMOUR

Rob van Schaik

There is an old French saying: Exactitude is the virtue of Kings. The first time I met King Jigme Singye, now thirty years ago, it was, indeed, the exactitude with which he expressed his ideas, the precision with which he, with figures and examples, supported the views he wished to convey, that struck me most. As we say in Dutch, you could not get a pin in-between. His Majesty's persuasiveness was only matched by the calm self-confidence, an intrinsic quality of his personality, and by the sincerity with which he spoke, without detours. Like a professional archer, right on the target. Perhaps the Noble price winner for literature, Gao Xingjian, was right: 'Sincerity leads to exactitude.'

A pinch of mild humour, putting matters in proportion, was part of the King's prepossessing way of presenting matters. I remember His Majesty's reaction to the loud applause he received from the public when he announced a breakthrough, the introduction of TV in the country. He noted with a smile that other reform measures, even tax reductions, had not yet met with the same enthusiasm. I wish I could listen to his humorous comments, perhaps slightly ironical, when reading these pages.

Bhutan, amidst super powers, was one of the topics on which the King gave his vision during my first visit to the Tashichhodzong. At the time, I was ambassador in Geneva. Bhutan remained a small country, vulnerable in a world where powerful

nations could impose their will on others. Bhutan's size and strength could not be compared to big, heavily armed nations with strong economies. Therefore, Bhutan's unique character, its natural and cultural heritage should be preserved and strengthened. Bhutan's identity was the key. In my own words: Preserving Bhutan's identity was the country's secret weapon.

It was because of my previous function in The Hague—with responsibilities for development cooperation—that the Bhutanese government had been so kind as to invite my wife and myself for a visit to the country. In the early eighties, talks with Foreign Minister Dawa Tsering—orchestrated by another friend of Bhutan, Maurice Strong—had paved the way for a programme of Dutch volunteers, SNV. Since then, this organisation had been instrumental in various development projects, in its turn preparing the ground for more comprehensive cooperation between the two countries.

'Monarchy is the soul of the country' was a motto I had heard before arriving in Bhutan. Being myself a citizen of a kingdom, with a widely respected and loved royal family, I was intrigued by the saying. I did not know exactly what it meant. I understood that the King himself, time and again, underlined that not he but the Bhutanese people should make true his vision. The heart of the country lies in its people. But on the day of our arrival, we got a taste



of what may be the spirit in which this wisdom must be understood.

My wife Lot gave to a good friend of ours a small gift, a Dutch cheese. Immediately, our hostess said: 'This is the cheese that Her Majesty the Queen Mother likes so much. I shall bring it to her'. And she did. This, of course, is an example of the type of connection privileged people may have with members of the Royal House. Yet, it is part of a picture of the interweaving of the relations with the Royal House, as perceived by the people. Where in the world do you find a public personality who openly declares that it is thanks to the advice of the King that he had stopped drinking? Love for the King, as Druk Gyalpo the spiritual leader, seems to be engrained in various ways in different layers of the population. At the same time, and that remains for me the Bhutanese miracle, the people seem to go their own way, easy-going, in tune with their life.

When in later years Lot and I returned to the country, His Majesty again granted us an audience. He then sketched his long term vision, how step-by-step the people could be made ready for decentralisation, as it then was called. To combat illiteracy by access to basic education were amongst the first steps envisaged. A minimum standard of living was also a vital requirement for ultimately realising the final goal: democracy.

In the course of time, I changed hats a few times. First, in 1992, I was a representative of my country at the Rio Conference on environment and development, which on the sideline became the starting point for an entirely new type of cooperation between The Netherlands and Bhutan. Afterwards, upon my retirement as Ambassador to the United Nations, I was asked by the Government of Bhutan to become Honorary Consul of Bhutan (later Consul-General) in The Netherlands. From then onwards, I met His Majesty as his representative.

In Rio, leaders of the delegations of the two countries signed a Declaration of Intent on 11 June 1992, for Bhutan her Royal Highness Sonam Choden Wangchuck gave her signature. This was the start of a new type of sustainable development cooperation, based on the concepts of equality, participation and reciprocity. Reciprocity because, in the spirit of Rio, both developed and developing countries are responsible for the world's environment and balanced development. It was not only up to the wealthy country to offer comments on the management of the environment in a poor country, the recipient country of aid should in its turn give its views on relevant practices and policies affecting nature and the environment in a country granting aid. In 1994, along these lines, sustainable development agreements were concluded with Bhutan, Costa Rica and Benin.

Dutch assistance became part and parcel of the five-year development plan and on the whole cooperation went well, to the satisfaction of both sides. In Thimphu, a more or less independent secretariat, attached to the Bhutanese Ministry of Finance, had the final say on how and where to spend the money. In practice, Dutch bureaucracy was not always free from a mind-set of 'knowing better,' but incidental differences could be smoothed out. Anyhow, those were not topics in the talks with His Majesty. It was not the King's style to enter the domain of bureaucrats.

In The Netherlands, there was one man who firmly believed in the philosophy that it was up to the receiving country to have a fundamental, yes the final say in the way in which money was spent. This was Prince Claus of The Netherlands, the husband of Queen Beatrix. Prince Claus was also chief advisor of the Dutch minister for development cooperation. He had a major share in the forging of bonds of friendship with Bhutan. He was kept informed on developments in the country in regular



talks he had with visiting ministers from Bhutan. I remember one minister who, literally dumfounded, was so impressed by the words of Prince Claus and the ideas the Prince had presented that he later said: 'It was *His Majesty* whom I heard.' Unfortunately, Prince Claus and King Jigme never met. Prince Claus' failing health prevented him from making the journey he would have loved to make.

Yet, an invisible bond was forged between the two kingdoms. It found its ultimate expression, when, upon Prince Claus' death in October 2002, a spontaneous high-level manifestation was held in Thimphu in his honour: a candle ceremony in the presence of His Majesty, members of the Royal Family, as well as the members of the Cabinet. Five years later King Willem-Alexander, then Crown-Prince, together with his spouse, Princess, later Queen Máxima, trod in the footsteps his father would have liked to make. It consolidated the sustainable friendship between the two countries, even at a moment when the light over the sustainable development agreement was fading out.

A few years later, when I had given up my post of Consul-General, Lot and I went for the last time to Bhutan. We again were allowed to visit His Majesty Jigme Singye, now 'K4.' This became

his nickname after his son, 'K5,' had ascended the throne. We first were received by the ruling King, His Majesty Jigme Khesar Namgyel, in the same room where before we talked to his father. All over the place yellow and orange tulips were put in vases, a reminder of the earlier visit by Prince Willem Alexander and Princess Máxima.

When for the last time we met King Jigme Singye, in his remote country house—in fact not so far from Thimphu—it was early spring. Blossoming camellias bordered the lane leading to the house. 'Your visit is overdue' were the first words of His Majesty. Her Majesty Ashi Dorji Wanmgo Wangchuck asked about our travel plans. The King gave advice on the lodge where we could stay. The Queen said she liked travelling abroad, but her husband wished to stay in the country. This time, King Jigme did not elaborate on policies of the day. The conversation was lively and relaxed, but his tenure of office was over.

Yet, the King remained for me the same impressive personality as I had known him for thirty years: a visionary, courageous and resolute leader. As a statesman he opened with foresight the country to the outside world and gave guidance on the road towards a society in which people have a say.



*Since retirement, His Majesty spends many hours cycling on the trails of the Thimphu Valley. Many people have met His Majesty and had the opportunity to discuss wide range of subjects informally.
(Photo: Unknown)*



THE CHANCE ENCOUNTER

Pema Thinley

BACKGROUND

Through out his thirty-four¹ year reign, among so many, His Majesty King Jigme Singye Wangchuck has promoted decentralisation and devolution of power to his people as part of the structural change in governance. *Dzongkhag Yargay Tshogdu* (DYT)² was established in 1981 and *Genyog Yargay Tshogchhung* (GYT)³ in 1991. Executive power was devolved to the council of elected ministers in 1998.⁴ Thereafter, His Majesty remained as the Head of the State. The Chairman of the Council of Ministers, who received the highest votes from the people's representatives in the National Assembly, became the Head of the Government. On 4th September 2001, His Majesty issued a royal decree to draft the constitution. A thirty-nine-member Constitution drafting committee was thus formed.

The national consultations on the draft Constitution in some districts were presided over by His Majesty himself. Subsequently, key democratic institutions like the Election Commission of Bhutan, Anti-Corruption Commission and private media houses were established. Political parties were formed in 2007.⁵ The historic national democratic election was held in December 2007 and January 2008 for the National Council. The general election for the National Assembly was held on 24th March 2008. No primary round was held as there were only two parties.

Thus, democracy was established in Bhutan by His Majesty even though the people insisted that they preferred monarchy to the untried waters of democracy. Democracy in Bhutan is a 'gift' from the Throne. His Majesty the Fourth King groomed the people inconspicuously for almost over three decades for the democratic process.

The Druk Phunsum Tshogpa (DPT) formed the first democratic government after its landslide victory in the 2008 general elections. The DPT's five-year tenure ended in April 2013. The second general elections were due for 13th July 2013. The historic primary elections were held amongst the governing party, its opposition and the new parties, Druk Nyamrup Tshogpa (DNT) and Druk Chirwang Tshogpa DCT) on 31st May 2013. As predicted, the incumbent won in majority of the constituencies and secured 44.5% of the total votes followed by People's Democratic Party's (PDP's) 32.5% of the 210,835 total ballots.

THE ENCOUNTER

It was Sunday, the 7th July 2013. The day was unusually bright and exhilarating. However, I was preoccupied with the political developments among the political parties vying for the 13 July general elections. Amongst so many issues, the politicisation of Indo-Bhutan relationships had sunken my heart. The situation had become worrisome. I didn't know what to do. I felt helpless. All sorts of information flooded in the media. The more I read newspapers



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and watched television news, the more the situation seemed to aggravate. Thus, I decided to engage myself in reading a book.

I drove until Sangaygang⁶ and walked uphill towards Chhorkhortse⁷ carrying a bag loaded with a book, a bottle of water, an umbrella and a mat. Half-way towards Chhorkhortse, I felt disenchanted and suddenly my enthusiasm to visit Chhorkhortse started waning. Without any second thoughts, I descended the hill and walked towards Wangditse.⁸

I could not wait any further to find a right spot and then get started to read Ajay B. Agrawal's 211-page book titled 'India, Tibet and China: The Role Nehru played.' I sat under the tree nearby the *Manidungkhor* (prayer wheel), towards the right side of Wangditse Lhakhang, overlooking the beautiful Thimphu Valley. The exhilarating scene of the muddy Wangchhu on that bright sunny day snaking by the heart of green Thimphu Valley was fascinating. The more mesmerising and panoramic vista was the high-flying Tashichhodzong with its glittering golden pinnacles under the bright blue sky.

I started flipping the pages of the book—the contents were captivating. The chapters read; “Unfolding of the Tragedy... The Chinese Threat and the Status of Tibet... 1950 and Thereafter... Rebirth of Suzerainty... Alarm in Tibet... Tibetan Mission to India... Tibet at UN... Tibet in Indian Parliament of 1950... Tibet on the Way to Loosing Freedom... If Protests were Lethal Missiles... Flight of the Dalai Lama... The Wronged Prime Minister... Wrong Decisions all the Way... End of the Delusion... Thagla: The Murderous Adventure... The Chinese Attack-1... Who was to Blame?... Still not Ready to Learn... The Chinese Attack-2... When it was all Over...”.

I became anxious about the content of the book. As I started reading, my thoughts became pensive and preoccupied. I intuitively thought about India's

decision to cut the LPG (gas) and kerosene subsidy on 1st July 2013.⁹ Many questions came into my mind—was India sending a political message to Bhutan by withdrawing the fuel subsidies just before its poll day? More so, there were no abrupt economic emergencies in India that would have authenticated such a sensitive decision. If it was either decided much before 1st July 2013 or otherwise, then its explanations for such a sensitive decision would have been credible.

After having read a few chapters, I decided to leave Wangditse for home, walking towards Sangaygang. It was already 4:30 p.m. or so. Moreover, it became windy. As I walked, I kept on reading the book. I had walked and covered almost half the distance between Wangditse and Sangaygang.

To my greatest delight, I saw our revered His Majesty the Fourth Druk Gyalpo approaching towards me from a distance of about less than twenty metres, exuberantly riding a bicycle over a footpath with an intrusion of a lush blue pine and shrubby oaks. Within a limited space of about a metre long width of Sangaygang-Wangditse footpath, I stood with a stooped posture out of pure and unconditional reverence on the edge of the footpath. It was unbelievable! Within a few moments, His Majesty passed as he pedalled steadily towards Wangditse.

I was overwhelmed by the aroma of His Majesty's person that the breeze brought along. I am sure even the plants and insects nearby could have felt what I had inhaled. I could not look at him directly, though I wanted to catch a glimpse, yet with great hesitation and reluctance, I attempted to fix my subdued eyes towards him sneakily after he whizzed passed me.

Coincidentally, His Majesty from his riding bicycle craned back towards me and said (in his most commanding and attractive voice but with a bit of panting); “What are you doing here?” (*Choe na ga chi baw mo...aaahh?*). I was incapacitated to reply



anything and was completely dumbfounded yet I felt so ecstatic. Tears of joy rolled over from my elated eyes. A few seconds later, I saw another cyclist. I assumed that cyclist was His Majesty's bodyguard who followed His Majesty at a distance.

I continued to walk towards Sangaygang with a great sense of achievement after having seen His Majesty in person at a very close quarter. I assumed that His Majesty and his bodyguard would take some time to reach Wangditse and then return from the same way. I continued to read the remaining chapters while walking. Nothing got inside. My mind was occupied only by the grandeur of His Majesty riding on a bicycle. The thunderous voice of His Majesty reverberated and resounded in my mind. As one completes over eighty-five percent of the total distance towards Sangaygang from Wangditse, one has to do a slight uphill walk across thick pines and shrubs and then reach a normal path. I neither walked too fast nor too slow. I was within my normal pace and was reading at the same time. Probably, my subconscious mind would have predetermined to see His Majesty again and thus held back within a much slower pace.

Who would not want to see in person our revered His Majesty the Fourth King given a chance? I knew I was nearing Sangaygang and thought His Majesty and his body guard could have just reached Wangditse. I kept my ears wide open to listen to the bicycle track, for the very pleasant sound of His Majesty's bicycle. At one point in time, I was afraid and felt so worried that I might not get an opportunity to see him again. I thought I might reach Sangaygang and drive back home before His Majesty catches me on the way. But no sooner did I walk up over a gentle slope and reached a slightly atop-narrow-plain path similar to a tiny table land, than I heard a sibilant and clinking sound of a bicycle's wheel rim and disc. It was intuitive to look back. I again saw His Majesty the Fourth Druk Gyalpo

climbing upward over a slightly gentle slope. As he pedalled over the upward slope, I noticed His Majesty slightly panting.

Like before, I instantly withstood on the edge of the path with a subdued and bowed posture out of immense reverence. I was stunned that His Majesty stopped as he reached near me. I could not make even a tiny budge within a very limited space. As His Majesty dismounted from the bicycle, I saw him almost all in black including his sturdy bicycle. His Majesty wore a black *gbo*. The upper part of his body was covered by an ultra light and sporty jacket. He wore an ordinary navy blue stocking along with ankle length white socks and black sneakers. His helmet was black in colour. I saw sweat rolling from his robust, flawless and fair countenance. As the sweat rolled off from His Majesty's flawless countenance, it resembled like a falling diamond with a shiny and colourless crystalline form.

His Majesty asked me, "What are you doing?" I replied with immense nervousness but with unmistakable excitement, "I went to Wangditse to read this book *la*." He then asked, "Who are you?" I instantly replied without any second thoughts, "I am Pema Thinley *la*." His Majesty interrupted and asked again, "No, no, I mean, who is your father?" I replied, "I have no father *la*. My father died in 2005 *la*." He further asked, "What are you carrying on your back?" I replied, "It's my bag *la*." "No, no, what's on the top of your bag?" "...It's a mat *la*." "...No, no, on top of your bag with a brownish colour?" I then realised what His Majesty was referring to. I replied, "It is an umbrella *la*." Thus, His Majesty exclaimed: "Eeehhh...!" At that time I was carrying a foot long, black Benetton laptop bag. Along with it, I was also carrying a small piece of mat, and a folded umbrella with a brownish handle that almost looked like a butt of a rifle.

Further His Majesty asked, "Are you student? Where do you study?" I submitted that I am not a student



but I work with the Centre for Bhutan Studies and GNH Research. His Majesty further went on to ask about my family members. He asked, “Are you married? How many kids? Is your child son or daughter? What is your wife doing? How are they doing?”

His Majesty took off one of his gloves and then took the book titled ‘India, Tibet and China’ which I was carrying. As His Majesty flipped through the title and contents of the book, he asked me, “What made you pick up this book for reading?” Without actually giving me a time to respond to this earlier question, out of nowhere, His Majesty went on and said, nowadays, there are some issues (*Dha ri nam par juuw suubdu mosb?*). I assumed that His Majesty was referring to some of the political issues that were happening between the political parties during those days after 31st May’s primary elections. I submitted: “*Embay la.*” His Majesty continued and said: “Whoever happens to win the upcoming elections, their first and foremost responsibility is to solve and to reinstate the subsidies on LPG and kerosene.”

His Majesty then said, when he became the King at the very tender age in 1972, the situation was very difficult. It was really a tough time in those days. By and large, as compared to the past, today everything has improved significantly with so many changes and developments. Even our relationship with India had further strengthened and reached newer heights. His Majesty said there is nothing to worry about concerning Indo-Bhutan friendship. His Majesty added, if one wants something from someone, then one has to be good, polite, kind and diplomatic. For instance, if I happen to threaten you, do you think you would want to give me whatever you have or help me whenever I would be in need of help? Looking at me, His Majesty said, no. Who would want to give anything and render any sorts of help in such a case?

Likewise, His Majesty said, India is our dearest friend and the closest neighbour who always helps us whenever we are in need of them. India has been giving us everything that we require for our improvement and development. At times, India must be feeling that we are also attempting to follow Nepal’s policy. As a trusted friend and a close ally, India might be getting worried. For instance, for the first time, twenty Chinese made buses are plying in Thimphu. This year, the Chinese tourists’ arrival to our country had surpassed the number of Japanese tourists and in total they were now second only to American tourists. Moreover, there are more and more Bhutanese who frequently visit China. However, His Majesty said that there is nothing to worry about.

His Majesty then asked me about the book: “What does this book say?” I submitted to His Majesty with a little sense of hesitancy and reluctance, “The book says that Tibet lost its freedom and independence due to the inefficient role played during those periods by the then Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru.” Instantly, His Majesty giggled and paused for a while and then said that on the whole, the Tibet issue was a completely different case—it concerned the issue of recognition of Chinese suzerainty over Tibet and its liberation and autonomy. It was an issue that showed the difference between suzerainty and sovereignty.

His Majesty added, however, that, today the Indo-China relationship had changed a lot and made huge improvements. Most of their past issues and policies have become redundant and irrelevant to modern times. They are enjoying a good relationship. Their trade amount, by the end of 2013, is expected to exceed 100 billion dollars.

Meanwhile, His Majesty was still holding the book titled, ‘India, Tibet and China’ and was flipping through the pages. I built up my confidence and



took the opportunity to point out a specific page to His Majesty—a line in the book which talks about the boundary disputes. It reads, “...it accepted the McMahon Line in Burma and did not dispute its boundary with Nepal, Bhutan and Pakistan.” I had pointed this out, as I expected that His Majesty would say something about Indo-Bhutan-China boundary disputes.

His Majesty then explained to me about the McMahon Line and its associations and implications. His Majesty also said that the Sixth Dalai Lama Tsangyang Gyatso was born in Mon, Tawang. He added that all ridges and passes in Tawang are called *la*. All lakes in Tawang are called *tsbo* and all rivers are called *chbu*...

Most importantly, I was blessed to be given a precious piece of advice by His Majesty. He advised me that it is necessary and indeed very important to read a book which talks about history, politics, economy, etc. Sometimes though, the contents of the book may seem redundant or dated over time, yet it is still important and necessary to understand what had happened and how the situation had been in the past. Only by understanding the past, could one be in a position to strategically plan for the unknowable future and be prepared to take any course of action necessary.

His Majesty also stressed that books are written after having followed rigorous processes and from sheer hard work and notable sacrifices on the part of every author. Authors would have read hundreds of other books, materials, sources and might have met so many resource persons and experts in the process of gathering the necessary information about their respective subjects and would have taken years to publish their books. In contrast, we have the luxury of reading it within an hour or a day or so. Reading is a very important habit and one must keep on reading a lot.

After that, His Majesty returned the book. As he returned my book, His Majesty gave his right hand and said, “I am very happy to have met you and I wish to meet you in future.” Soon after we shook hands, His Majesty got back on his bicycle. Within a few seconds or so, His Majesty had disappeared from my view. His Majesty’s bodyguard, who had waited and must have closely observed our conversation, had also ridden his bicycle and followed His Majesty.

I could not believe what happened was for real and that I had met His Majesty and spent almost ten minutes or so with him and had shook hands with him. I am sure even the invisible spirits, forces, birds, insects and plants nearby too would have enjoyed seeing and hearing His Majesty’s voice and hearing his most precious pieces of advice.

I then rushed and followed them. Just before reaching Sangaygang, there was a meandering short narrow and uphill path. I could sense that His Majesty was carrying his own bicycle on his back. I did not know how I reached Sangaygang out of sheer excitement. As I reached right above the Sangaygang Tower, I had a last view of His Majesty. I saw Him unfastening his sleeves and then putting his *gho* on a full version, and getting ready to descend over the paved road. He then rode down on the bicycle and whizzed off sharply out of sight. It was, in fact my final chance to see His Majesty.

Until that moment, I had felt so anxious. But that brood feeling had instantly gone from my psyche. All sorts of worries, anxieties, and suspicions were either forgotten or completely healed. I felt awfully relieved, as if I was being induced with analgesic opium. Whoever gets an opportunity to have a glimpse of His Majesty in person should find it sufficient to dispel all mental confusion. It was certainly more than sufficient to dispel all of my perplexity and confusion.



CONCLUSION

No kings and leaders across the world would be that considerate, humble, and compassionate like our revered His Majesty the Fourth Druk Gyalpo. The irrefutable evidence is that His Majesty had been so considerate and asked me, “Who are you? How are you? What are you doing? Where are you from? Are you a student? Are you married? If married, what is your wife doing? Do you also have children? Is your child a son or daughter? How are they doing?” etc. His Majesty’s kindness and humility speaks volume. These questions which I was asked by His Majesty are beyond anyone’s imagination. No other kings within this human realm would care to ask such questions to his common citizens, but our revered His Majesty the Fourth Druk Gyalpo does it so often and he did it to me.

Although our common human eye sees His Majesty as only a human being, yet in reality, he is an embodiment of Avalokiteshvara—a true Bodhisattva king in human form—a king who always looks upon the sufferings and misfortunes of his people with compassion and concern, and always strives to enhance the wellbeing and happiness of his people.

His Majesty has always been an inspiration to Bhutanese citizens and to the foreigners alike. As an ardent and peerless sportsman himself whose basic lifestyle included an exemplary regime of physical

activities, His Majesty not only inspires others to lead a life of sports and activity, but in his glorious reign he has also put in place the required infrastructure and systems for the practice of both traditional and modern sports. The combination of strict dietary habits and regular physical exercise makes him look like a sixty year young and not sixty year old. Above all, His Majesty is the symbol of unity, stability, peace, security, sovereignty and the source of happiness for his people. He is the true patriot and guardian of the nation.

His Majesty is known for his farsightedness and compassion. “A King like His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck has never been born in the Kingdom of Bhutan. I know this more than anyone else” [His Majesty Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck]. Indeed, a king like His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck has never been born before in Bhutan, and will never be born hereafter in the world. He really is the king of all kings. May His Majesty’s vision, ideas and thoughts continue to touch and make a difference in the lives of millions of people across the world. May I also take this rare opportunity to pay my tribute and offer my humble prayers for the good health, unfaltering happiness and long life of our revered His Majesty the Fourth Druk Gyalpo. May I have the honour to remain His Majesty’s most obedient and humble citizen for all times to come. May the Triple Gem and the guardian deities always bless and protect him to live healthier and longer than ever.



ENDNOTES

- 1 His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck became the Fourth king of Bhutan in 1972 at the age of 17 after the untimely demise of his father, His Majesty the Third King in Nairobi, Kenya. He had abdicated the throne in favour of His Majesty the Fifth King in 2006. Thus, His Majesty served Bhutan for 34 years.
- 2 District Development Committee established by His Majesty in 1981 as a decentralisation process. Bhutan has twenty districts known as *Dzongkhag* in the national language.
- 3 Block Development Committee established by His Majesty in 1991. There are currently 205 blocks headed by non-politically elected leaders called *Gup*.
- 4 Until 1998, His Majesty the King was the Head of State and Government.
- 5 People's Democratic Party was formed on 20th March 2007 and Druk Phunsum Tshogpa on 25th July 2007.
- 6 Sangaygang is a hillock which stands at an altitude of over 2600 metres above sea level. It is one of the most strategic and priceless scenic spots located towards the north-west vertex overlooking the panoramic vista of south-east Thimphu Valley. People from all walks of life visits the place on a regular basis for various reasons such as recreation, physical exercise, etc. This is also where Bhutan Broadcasting Services' tower is erected. It is also the spot where the paved motor road ends.
- 7 Chhokhortse stands on the ridge above the Sangaygang hillock at an altitude of over 3000 metres. It takes less than an hour uphill walk to reach there. The breath-taking scene of Babesa and Dechencholing towards the extreme north, and lower Thimphu towards extreme south is seen elegantly.
- 8 Wangditse is also a hillock located towards the north of Sangaygang, and above Dechenphodrang Lhakhang (above the Supreme Court) at an altitude of over 2600 metres. The majestic Wangditse Lhakhang stands overlooking the Thimphu Valley. There is an eco-bicycle track between Sangaygang and Wangditse. It is half an hour walk distance.
- 9 The Government of India withdrew all subsidy on cooking gas and kerosene which is being provided to Bhutan on 1st July 2013, just before its 13th July 2013 general elections poll day. This decision had more than doubled the prices for LPG and kerosene.



“Since people-centred development lies at the heart of Bhutan’s development policy, good governance constitutes one of the four pillars of Gross National Happiness. His Majesty the King has always desired a system of governance that is efficient, transparent, accountable, and most importantly a system that is responsive to the needs of the people. His Majesty the King has initiated a process of political reform to enhance people’s participation in determining the future of the country. The voluntary devolution of executive powers from the throne to an elected Council of Ministers is a highly estimable event that is unprecedented in the world. The process of decentralisation is also well underway and the Royal Government has already begun to formulate the 9th Five-Year Plan which is gewog-based. These wide ranging political reforms are a testimony of His Majesty’s trust and confidence in the Bhutanese people. The Bhutanese people must, however, remember that this places greater responsibilities on them and that they must work to fulfil His Majesty’s noble aspirations.” National Assembly Resolution
(Photo: Courtesy Tsering Tashi)



THE SERVANT KING

Michael Vinding

*But you're gonna have to serve somebody
Yes, indeed, you're gonna have to serve somebody
Bob Dylan*

To me, His Majesty the Fourth Druk Gyalpo is not only a king, but more important a servant—a humble servant of the Bhutanese people. Like his son, His Majesty the Fifth King. Like the other members of the Royal Family.

His Majesty is truly relaxed in the countryside in the company of villagers whom he does not consider his subjects, but members of his family, friends and fellow countrymen. Much more relaxed—and happy—than performing the duties of Head of State to visiting foreign dignitaries and officials. These duties were the price His Majesty had to pay to serve his fellow countrymen as well as possible.

To me, the most touching photographs from the Royal Family's visit to the districts are His Majesty and Their Majesties the Queens serving *suju* to villagers or sharing a simple meal sitting on bare ground in their midst. This is a testimony of the unique bond between the Royal Family and the people of Bhutan.

Another photograph (taken by former Lyonpo Sangye Ngedup) touches me very much. It shows His Majesty sitting on a low stone wall at a school, listening carefully—and reflectively—to a young student in front of him. It illustrates more than words that His Majesty listens to and considers the views of his fellow countrymen regardless of

status, age and gender. And that his door is always open.

It is intimidating for the first time to meet a person whom you only know from currency notes and photographs. The first time I met His Majesty the Fourth King was in 1996 when I accompanied Ove Ullerup, Head of Asia Department (who later became Lord Chamberlain to Her Majesty the Queen of Denmark's Household) to Bhutan. The photograph taken during our audience shows a rather uncomfortable and tense Michael. The last photograph with His Majesty shows us relaxed and smiling. In between these two photographs, I had spent many interesting hours with His Majesty. Some during official functions, some in private.

Official meetings are often tedious. However, His Majesty always managed to captivate visitors with his wisdom and knowledge. Honestly, I have not met one visitor who was not impressed with His Majesty. His Majesty and Their Majesties the Queens were most gracious and benevolent to host a luncheon for the visiting Danish dignitaries whenever their busy schedules permitted. I am forever grateful for this kindness. Although His Majesty and Their Majesties the Queens always managed to create an informal and relaxed atmosphere at these luncheons, I informed the male visitors that a tie was *de rigueur*.

Once, a Danish delegation included Frank Aaen, MP for the Red-Green Alliance. He is famous in



Denmark for being a vocal critic of monarchy. At the Palace, he turned up for lunch in a fashionable black shirt but without a tie. During the lunch, I apologised to His Majesty for Aaen's dress. His Majesty brushed it aside—he was obviously not at all interested in his guests' attire. I also informed His Majesty about Aaen's views on monarchy. Now His Majesty became interested and a little later, I noticed His Majesty in an intense conversation with Aaen. I am told that they had the following exchange, among others:

Aaen: "I am against monarchy."

His Majesty: "Really! ... So am I!"

The following day, Frank Aaen was wearing a badge with the picture of His Majesty!

You do not take your own photographs when you are with the Royal Family. At the Palace, there was always a photographer at hand to record the occasion. However, due to the relaxed and cordial atmosphere, visiting dignitaries sometimes took the liberty of asking permission to take photographs. It was on such an occasion that Pia Kjærsgaard, a well-known Danish politician, asked His Majesty for a photograph. His Majesty graciously consented and kindly asked me to stand next to him. That photograph is one of my cherished possessions from Bhutan.

I was in Bhutan when the constitution was being drafted. The vast majority of the Bhutanese people were strongly against democracy. They were content with what they had and did not want any change in the system. But His Majesty was adamant. For His Majesty constitutional monarchy was the best safeguard to the future of Bhutan. During a conversation, I mentioned to His Majesty that I—like many others—was grateful that he gave away his power. His Majesty looked me in the eyes and said rather sternly, "Michael, the power always belongs to the people! Never forget that!"

In 2002, my wife Bina and I left Bhutan for Afghanistan where I was assigned to establish and head a Danish Mission. During our farewell lunch with His Majesty and Their Majesties the Queens, His Majesty expressed his deep sorrow at the Taliban's destruction of the Buddha statues in Bamiyan the previous year. I replied that as a lover of art, I too was outraged and sad at the destruction of the 1,700 years old statues, but Buddhists should not feel sorrow, because through their barbarous crime, the Taliban had proved the truth of one of the cornerstones of Buddhism—impermanence.

Later the same year, Her Majesty the Queen of Denmark conferred on me the Knight of the Danish Royal Order of Chivalry, The Order of Dannebrog. When I went to the Palace to express my gratitude for this honour, the Private Secretary to Her Majesty The Queen asked me about Bhutan. I ebulliently described the country, its people and the concept of Gross National Happiness in most favourable terms and added that Bhutan had the best monarch in the world. I should have been a diplomat on this occasion, but I could not hide my very strong belief that His Majesty is truly extraordinary—not an ordinary human being.

It has been my privilege and good fortune to personally have known this *Chogyal*.





*His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck with Prime Minister Noboru Takeshita of Japan in February 1989.
(Photo: Courtesy Her Majesty the Queen Mother Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck)*



WHO IS HE?

Dorji Wangchuk

Twenty-six years ago, on a bleak and chillingly cold, grey, raining February day in 1989, in Tokyo, the Fourth King of Bhutan, His Majesty King Jigme Singye Wangchuck, made such a gesture at the State Funeral of the Emperor of Japan, Hirohito, that it got Bhutan etched on every Japanese's mind forever. Almost without exception, on that day, the people of Japan were in mourning.

At Shinjuku Gyoen, in an open pavilion, the heads of states, from superpowers to kings from small monarchies such as Bhutan, gathered from around the globe for the State Funeral of Hirohito. The Fourth King had also travelled to Japan to mourn the Showa Emperor.

The regal State Funeral was held on a bleak February day at the end of winter in Japan. Usually along the Asian Pacific coast it is dry and sunny as spring replaced winter. But on the day of Hirohito's State Funeral there was a misty, cold rain. It seemed almost as if the heavens were reflecting the grief of the Japanese people.

World leaders from 163 nations, including some former foes of Japan in World War II, had gathered for the event. Presidents of the Americas, Europe, Africa, and the Asia Pacific nations were all there to pay their respects and bid their final goodbyes to a political monarch of a geopolitical partner, the nation of Japan. US President George H. Bush, French President Mitterrand, King Juan Carlos of

Spain, and many others were dressed in appropriate (for them) Eurocentric mourning black, not Japanese culturally-correct mourning white.

Most VIPs were warmly dressed and insulated from the near freezing weather in the two white tents at Shinjuku Gyoen. His Majesty King Jigme Singye Wangchuck was there too but in his traditional Bhutanese attire—the knee-length *gho*. He wore no gloves, no coat, no mufflers or anything but a simple, honest *gho* to survive the three-hour long ceremony.

Then the officials and leaders were called upon, one by one, to bow to the Showa Emperor's casket. The VIPs got up, walked towards the imperial coffin, bowed to it—reluctantly in some cases—turned and bowed to acknowledge the new Emperor, Akihito. Then, their official duty done, most left in their limousines.

His Majesty the Fourth King, when his name was called, stood up, walked solemnly towards the imperial casket, stopped and bowed deeply showing his deep compassion for the man who had been the Emperor. He then bowed respectfully to the heir to the Chrysanthemum Throne, Akihito. Then instead of leaving, like many other leaders, he returned to his seat on the stand. As other leaders paraded, bowed twice, and departed, His Majesty the Fourth King endured the biting cold, in dignified mourning—for hours until the ceremony ended.



THE BODHISATTVA KING

NHK, Japan's national television broadcaster televised the entire State Funeral of Hirohito live and telecasted it globally. One of the NHK cameras on several occasions went back to the lone figure of His Majesty in the VIP seating. The announcers and audience began asking, *ka-re wa darey deska?* (Who is he?) Soon they found out, as the commentator introduced him as the young King of Bhutan. His Majesty the Fourth King was just thirty-four.

The commentator also added that the King of Bhutan genuinely shared the grief of all Japanese people by staying until the end of the ceremonies. This simple genuine gesture moved a grief stricken nation. His Majesty the Fourth King became very popular in Japan, which in turn led to the Japanese people knowing about Bhutan. He received wide press coverage.

Japan was going through an economic boom and rivalling the US as the world's most generous countries in terms of overseas development assistance. That was the actual focus of several leaders from the developing countries who took the opportunity of Hirohito's funeral to seek aid money from Prime Minister Takeshita.

But Bhutan was different. Some Japanese foreign ministry officials thought that there must have been some errors in the agenda for His Majesty's meeting with the Japanese PM. However when enquired, His Majesty the Fourth King is said to have sent words to his hosts that he was only there to pay his respects to the late Emperor and not to discuss economic or political matters.

His Majesty the Fourth King's grace, humility, and dignity stunned the Japanese officialdom—attracting tremendous respect and admiration. Perhaps as a result of that simple gesture, in the years that followed, Japan rewarded Bhutan for the King's

solidarity and respect to their culture. Japan provided much needed assistance to Bhutan during this Himalayan country's emergence into the twenty-first century.

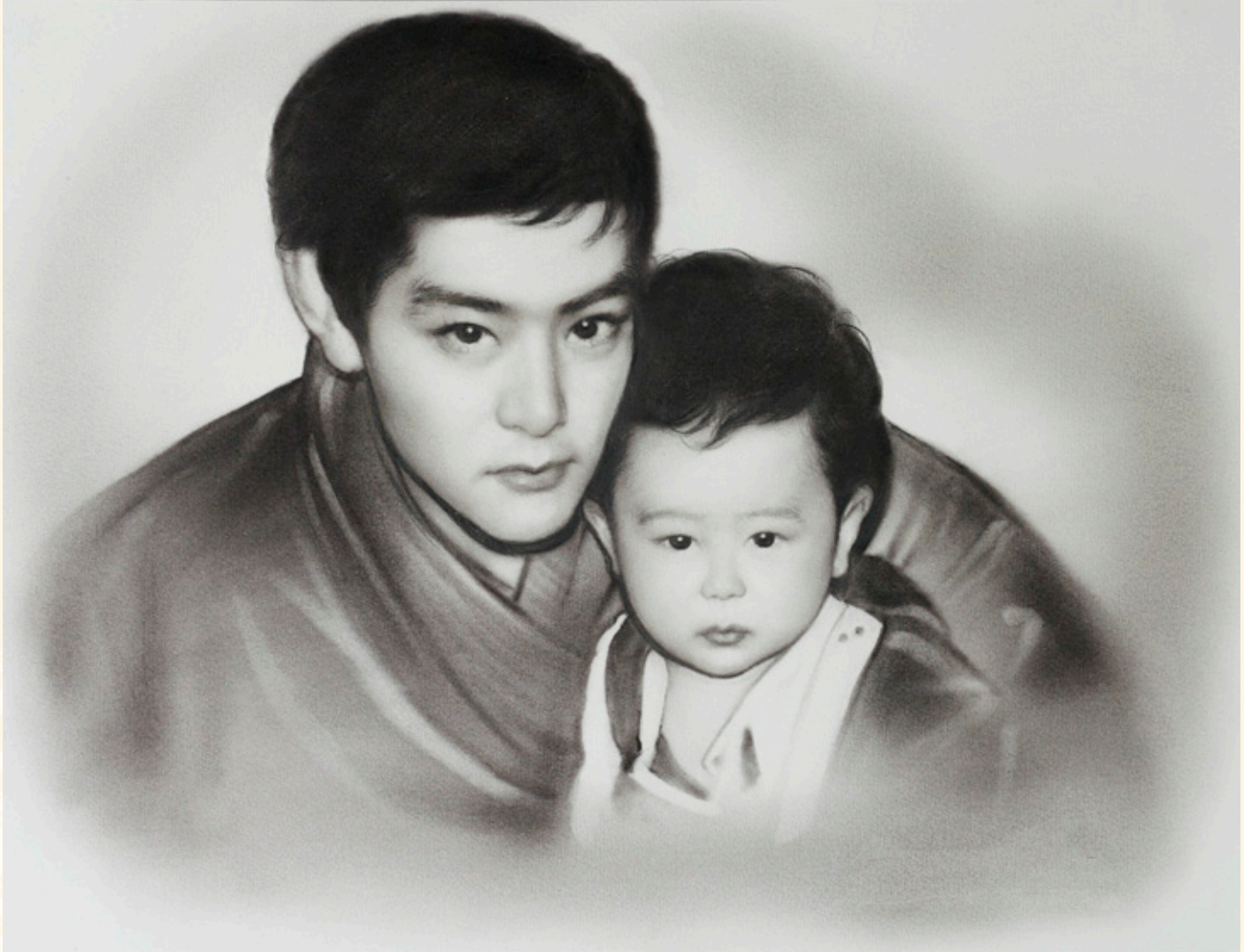
Almost three decades later, the Japanese people still talk with awe about that simple genuinely sympathetic action of His Majesty the King. It generated immense goodwill, which continues to strengthen the bonds between the Japanese and Bhutanese people even today.

His Majesty the Fourth King has gone on to make another simple yet profound gesture. In 2006, His Majesty abdicated the Golden Throne of Bhutan and established democracy in Bhutan. Perhaps in the simple life that he leads now, one can find the greatest inspiration in the greatest monarch of our times. And as His Majesty turns sixty, one can only pray that the heavens shower him with good health so that he can continue to inspire and touch more lives and hearts—not just in this country but in the whole world.



*"I have had the honour of knowing His Majesty since the mid-seventies, soon after he ascended the throne. I have always been struck by his rejection of the trappings of office, the pomp, and pageantry usually associated with monarchy. His lifestyle is frugal, living as he does in a modest log cabin, tucked away in a forest, uncluttered by material possessions. His Majesty's incisive and eclectic mind, his keen sense of observation and his mastery of facts and figures enable him to instantly get to the essence of things from policies to personalities. He has a sensitive and deeply reflective personality and a delightful sense of humour. His amazing memory, even for small details, makes those fortunate enough to interact with him feel very special." Dalip Mehta, former Ambassador of India to Bhutan, 2007
(Photo: Guy van Strydonck)*





His Majesty the Fourth Druk Gyalpo with his son His Majesty Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck.

“As for me—he just became eleven on the 21st of February—I am trying to give him a normal life and a normal education,” His Majesty the Fourth King said about his son. “I am going to make him study in schools in Bhutan, and without any special privileges. He should not be separated from the problems or the way of life of the Bhutanese people.” (The New York Times, 23 March 1991)

*Anonymous artist
(Courtesy: Tshering Tashi)*



LEADERSHIP LESSONS

Dorji Wangchuk

In 2018, Bhutan will become one of the few countries to graduate from the category of ‘least developed countries’ to a ‘developing country.’ This would mean that Bhutan will have developed a productive and income generating economy, made significant progress in education and health, and built an economy that is both strong and resilient to external shocks. This is an incredible story for a country that started modern development very recently.

Bhutan is today seen as a leader and a pioneer in many areas with its vibrant and inclusive democratic values, balanced approach to economic development, and rich cultural heritage and environmental wealth. From a nondescript small country in the Himalayas, Bhutan has transformed and carved herself a distinct place in the world where it contributes to and influences regional and global developments.

Many individuals and organisations, within and outside Bhutan, have played major roles in this transformative journey over the last four decades. However, these achievements would not have been possible without the enlightened leadership of our beloved Fourth Druk Gyalpo Jigme Singye Wangchuck—the one constant and the lodestar for Bhutan and her people.

Bhutan’s success is an outcome of a very clear vision, a deliberately crafted strategy of development,

and an implementation of initiatives personally led and directed by His Majesty the Fourth King. One of the many pinnacles of His Majesty’s vision was witnessed by the world in 2008 when the Bhutanese people celebrated the most precious gift of democracy by ushering in the first democratically elected Government.

The two elected Governments since then have done well to manage the transition and embed the principles of democracy within the Bhutanese society. Over the last seven years, Bhutan has seen decent economic growth although not without a few challenges such as the rupee shortage and persistent youth unemployment. Major initiatives within the public and the private sectors are underway to address these challenges, which call for stronger leadership skills.

It is in this area that the people of Bhutan should closely study how our Fourth Druk Gyalpo, since 1974, steered Bhutan to become a very successful story. There are countless lessons one could learn from His Majesty’s long reign, which would be applicable to our personal and professional lives, and to leaders within our communities and organisations.

What follows is my attempt to distil five key lessons, which reflect and demonstrate His Majesty the Fourth King’s absolute will and distinct approach to leadership.



LEADING IS ABOUT KEEPING THE ORGANISATION RELEVANT IN A DYNAMIC, CHANGING WORLD

One of the finest qualities of His Majesty the Fourth King was that all his decisions and actions were underpinned by a strong understanding of the geopolitical, economic, and social realities within and outside Bhutan.

This ensured that Bhutan developed with the times, accessing the opportunities offered by the changing world at the right times without any detrimental impact on our core Bhutanese values of respecting our tradition and culture, preserving our environment, and our pursuit of happiness.

His Majesty the Fourth King always counselled his ministers and senior civil servants that policies and initiatives of the Government must respond to the ‘need of time’ and serve ‘the future of the country’ without impacting the ‘political system, traditional etiquette, culture, and religion.’

One can see His Majesty the Fourth King’s wisdom in his gradual establishment of foreign relations, measured opening up of the country, and focus on a Western education system which has delivered a country ready to participate as a voice in the twenty-first century.

IT IS ABOUT HAVING AN AMBITIOUS BUT A REALISTIC VISION

His Majesty the Fourth King had a vision of a prosperous Bhutan, rooted in tradition and culture, secure with the blessings of ‘liberty, justice, and peace’ and driven by the people fully participating in governance and decision-making. Everything His Majesty undertook was to realise this vision.

The pursuit of Gross National Happiness as an alternative approach to development, the investments Bhutan made in education, health and economic development, and our relationships

with our neighbours, and the subsequent political changes were geared to deliver outcomes aligned to this overall vision.

CRITICALLY, IT IS ABOUT GROWING A TEAM AND TRUSTING THEM

No one knew better than His Majesty the Fourth King the importance of having high performing teams to deliver his vision for the country. Over several decades, His Majesty worked with a group of very accomplished individuals who, under his direction headed key departments and ministries and delivered important projects. His Majesty had a very good eye for talent and took care to develop and nurture them—having them work in different departments and areas where they could stretch themselves. He consistently challenged them to produce results to better and higher standards.

A key element of His Majesty’s approach was that he trusted the abilities of his people to deliver outcomes and represent Bhutan well. He trusted his ministers and secretaries on all important policies fundamental to Bhutan’s development. When democracy was introduced in 2008, Bhutan had a group of people who were ready and able to manage the transition to Democratic Constitutional Monarchy smoothly and successfully.

LEADING IS ABOUT MAKING DIFFICULT DECISIONS AND PROVIDING STABILITY

Throughout his reign, His Majesty the Fourth King was never averse to making difficult decisions and had an acute understanding of risks and benefits involved with those decisions. We can find many such instances—whether it was the introduction of democracy in 2008 or the military operations in 2003—where His Majesty has made major decisions, which have bearings on the overall direction of the country.



His Majesty the Fourth King was the fountainhead of stability for Bhutan, providing the people the political, social, and economic environment in which to pursue their goals and dreams.

ULTIMATELY, LEADERSHIP IS ABOUT TAKING THE ORGANISATION ON A JOURNEY OF DISCOVERY AND ACHIEVEMENT

The true test of leadership is not in whether a change has been delivered but in ensuring that people believe in the change and that it can be sustained.

Bhutanese people have been on a very interesting and fulfilling journey since His Majesty the Fourth King's ascension to the throne. For everything His Majesty has accomplished, he engaged with the people, from the conception of an idea to its final implementation, in all development activities. His Majesty's approach has always been to put his people at the centre of development.

This is evident from the many tireless plan meetings he held in all the *dzongkhags* throughout his reign. Everybody witnessed His Majesty's adeptness in leading and inspiring a nation and impressing upon the people on the need and importance of becoming a Democratic Constitutional Monarchy in 2008.

His Majesty the Fourth King continues to remain a source of inspiration to the people of Bhutan and the world. When the Scottish Economist and Philosopher Adam Smith wrote in his book, 'The Theory of Moral Sentiments' about a leader as someone who can

*assume the greatest and noblest of all characters,
that of the reformer and legislator of a great state;
and, by the wisdom of his institutions, secure the
internal tranquillity and happiness of his fellow-
citizens for many succeeding generations,*

he was describing His Majesty the Fourth Druk Gyalpo.



*His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck with Gup Minto and Dasho Sonam Tobgye who later became the Chief Justice of Bhutan.
(Photo: Courtesy Gup Minto)*



MOMENTS

Chimi Zangmo

Memory is what we have to re-live moments and there are those moments, which critically mould life. And as I re-live that particular moment, it is one of mixed emotions, as it always will be.

19 May 1992 – Zhemgang High School, at twelve minutes to midnight under my blanket with a torchlight, I was penning down my day’s thoughts. I could hear a few senior girls whispering and suddenly with no warning we heard our matron come in with the Dzongda (Governor), looking for the Gelephu Drungpa’s (Deputy-Governor) daughter. In a great hustle I found myself in a big white vehicle, hugging a plastic bag stuffed with my clothes, heading towards Gelephu.

When I reached home in the early mornings, I felt confused and lost in the midst of all the adults hugging, staring, and patting. As my mother gently broke the news, I wanted it to be a bad dream from which, I would soon wake up to assume my daily boarding school schedule. Well, I never did. I woke up to find that I would have to grow up without a father around. I woke up to find happiness distanced away every day.

In the array of floating lows of this feeling, I tried to find myself. I found myself, each time a bit differently. While as a teenager, every time my memory brought back this moment, it made me angry and bitter deep from my soul. In my twenties, this memory made me ask a thousand questions. Why? Today, this memory I realise, always had one very intricately woven moment of its own,

which has and had given me tremendous hope and strength through the years.

22 May 1992 – Samtenling, Thimphu. Along with my recently widowed mother, grandparents, and two younger sisters, we were seated in a warmth-filled log cabin; we were all intently listening to the most powerful and at the same time the kindest voice. I was just thirteen and these words have deeply made a difference in my life:

You have lost a son, father, and a husband and we deeply feel your loss and as we grieve together, do know this, that Druk Gyalghab [Bhutan] has also lost one of her true sons. Chimi Dorji's loyalty and sacrifice to his motherland will be remembered. And be assured I will take care of you.

Sincerely, at that moment, the statement “I will take care” superseded everything else; I guess I knew the meaning of ‘Hope’ then, at that very moment. His Majesty King Jigme Singye Wangchuck, in our darkest hours, lifted our souls. Yes, we were all blessed to be touched by such compassion.

Over the years, my King’s words kept echoing especially during times when I missed my father terribly. The words “Druk Gyalghab has also lost one of her true sons” gave me solace that my father’s death was not in vain, that his life had a higher purpose.

And at times when I felt desolate, I found myself drawing lessons from His Majesty’s life. I had by the time learnt about His Majesty’s own loss and



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responsibility at such an early age and I had a living example of someone who faced enormous pressure with such wisdom and still found unwavering faith in the good of humanity.

On His Majesty's command, my whole family was re-settled in the capital, Thimphu. We felt he wanted us safe and near. His Majesty ensured that we had a permanent house, which we could make our home and most importantly, His Majesty granted education scholarships for my two sisters and I, if we wanted to pursue higher learning in the future.

Today all three of us are university graduates and our education is truly our strengths. Together, on the land His Majesty gave us, we have been able to build an enterprise that will provide more than sustainability, a true test of relationship bonding and unity amongst us siblings. I feel every day that I am so blessed to be born a Bhutanese, for the beautiful life my sisters and I have and this could not have been possible without our King.

Well, ours is just one story, there are deeper, more meaningful bearings His Majesty has made for our motherland and his people. Every Bhutanese probably will have a story to tell. Accounts of how His Majesty has travelled under harsh conditions and visited homes of villagers in remote areas, met with the poor, felt their hardships, and kept his promises for their well-being, are known to all of us.

A very few have been fortunate to witness first hand, how superbly sharp and intelligent His Majesty is and I have heard these fortunate people mention that Bhutan is too small for His Majesty King Jigme Singye Wangchuck. For this, I am truly grateful to our *Khoenchosum* for favouring us with the birth of His Majesty in this indeed small yet independent sovereign country.

We still hear soldiers and volunteers narrate personal stories about His Majesty's bravery and wisdom in how the 15 December 2003 operations were planned and executed. While they continue to relive these moments, one can sense in their voices the tremendous admiration and loyalty they have for His Majesty.

And like myself, many others have had moments with His Majesty that we cherish and treasure. Undoubtedly, each one of our personal stories collectively makes our King not just a king but a selfless leader, whose greatness truly lies in his profound sense of duty to his country and people. It springs from humility and not pride, from wisdom and not knowledge alone, from compassion and not just passion, from love and not because of power.

His Majesty shall live in our memories forever and for generations to come; his legacy will be passed down through a conduit brimming with our memories.



*When His Majesty first toured the countryside people were too awestruck to confront him about their needs. Stories are told of how his ministers would coax the villagers into speaking out. A few years later, things changed and His Majesty was besieged with demands. During his reign, every Bhutanese citizen had easy access to him.
(Photo: Courtesy Tshering Tashi)*



*"It has been my constant endeavour to build Bhutan into a country that retains the best aspects of its rich traditional and cultural heritage while at the same time achieving economic growth and social progress. It is my fervent wish and prayer to be able to leave behind the legacy of a strong, prosperous and cohesive nation with a secure future for all the Bhutanese people." His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck
(Photo: ROM)*

CONCLUSION

King Jigme Singye Wangchuck was not yet seventeen years old when he took over the reins after his father had passed away. He was just over fifty-one years old when he handed over those reins to his son King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck. Here again, he was ahead of the times as he was throughout his reign, which was the second longest in the history of the kingdom, behind only the reign of Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, the founder of Bhutan. The Fourth Druk Gyalpo's reign lasted for more than thirty-four years, from September 1972 when he was formally installed as Head of Government during the 37th session of the National Assembly, until his abdication on 15 December 2006.

Although the length of his tenure was in itself exceptional in this most tormented Himalayan region where all other monarchies have collapsed, more remarkable was the substance of his reign, which was punctuated by a succession of foresighted decisions that profoundly marked the kingdom both nationally and internationally.

It is rare for a leader to have a true vision. It is even more unique for him to implement this vision in a comprehensive way. Yet it is unprecedented for such a leader not to claim any personal recognition as did the Fourth Druk Gyalpo when he decided to hand over his responsibilities with a true sense of fulfilment and a genuine sense of humility.

Nine years have passed since the Fourth Druk Gyalpo voluntarily retired. Many changes have

since taken place in Bhutan and many challenges still lie ahead. The kingdom is one of the most recent members of the community of democratic nations in the world. Yet it succeeded in distancing itself from most of the turmoil that usually undermines transition processes.

The causes of this unusual situation are deeply rooted in the Fourth Druk Gyalpo's vision and in the way he transcended his own destiny, something which has been embodied in his successor, His Majesty the King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck, who is equally imbued with a deep sense of respect for traditional values along with a commitment towards modernisation. To some extent, the greatest achievement of the Bodhisattva-King was to make his son the new embodiment of Bhutan's past and inspiration for its future. This is an illustration of 'Change in Continuity' which will remain for generations to come, the seminal mantra taught by the Fourth Druk Gyalpo.

A few months ago when I presented the concept of this book to the Fourth Druk Gyalpo, he strongly denied being a Bodhisattva-King even metaphorically. This was to be expected. True leaders never seek credit for themselves. Although Bhutan is a small country, King Jigme Singye Wangchuck has joined the list of great political icons of all time. No doubt history will give him credit.

Thierry Mathou



*His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck with his mother
Her Majesty Ashi Kesang Choeden Wangchuck and son,
His Majesty Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck during
the inaugural of the Ludrong Memorial Gardens
at Thimphu in 2015.*

(Photo: Thinley Namgyel)



*His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck with his mother
Her Majesty Ashi Kesang Choeden Wangchuck
Anonymous artist
(Courtesy: Tshering Tashi)*







*"In a discreet ceremony in 1979, His Majesty married my daughters Asbi Dorji Wangmo, Asbi Tshering Pem, Asbi Tshering Yangdon and Asbi Sangay Choden. The private ceremony if known widely would have built immediate anticipation of a public wedding ceremony. So the news about it was not made public until much later. My daughters were very young, had first seen His Majesty in Punakha Dzong in 1969 when his presence graced the annual festival (Domchey) of Punakha. ...To my great happiness and pride, Prince Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck, now the Crown Prince, [now King] and Princess Chimi Yangzom were born in 1980. The next year, Princess Sonam Dechen and Princess Dechen Yangzom arrived, followed by Princess Kesang Choden in 1982, Prince Jigyel Ugyen Wangchuck in 1984, Prince Khamsum Singye in 1985, Prince Jigme Dorji in 1986, Princess Euphelma Choden in 1993 and Prince Ugyen Jigme in 1994." Yab Dasbo Ugyen Dorji from 'Of Rainbows and Clouds,' Asbi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck
(Photo: Courtesy His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck)*





*His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck
with Her Majesty Queen Mother Ashi
Kesang Choeden Wangchuck, Their
Majesties the Queens and HRH Ashi
Kesang Wangmo Wangchuck and Their
Royal Highnesses the Princes and Royal
Highnesses the Princesses.
(Photo: Courtesy ROM)*





*The Royal Family of Bhutan at the wedding of His Royal Highness Prince Jigme Dorji Wangchuck and Ashi Yeatsso Lhamo at Domkhar Dzong in Bumthang in October 2013.
(Photo: Courtesy His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck)*



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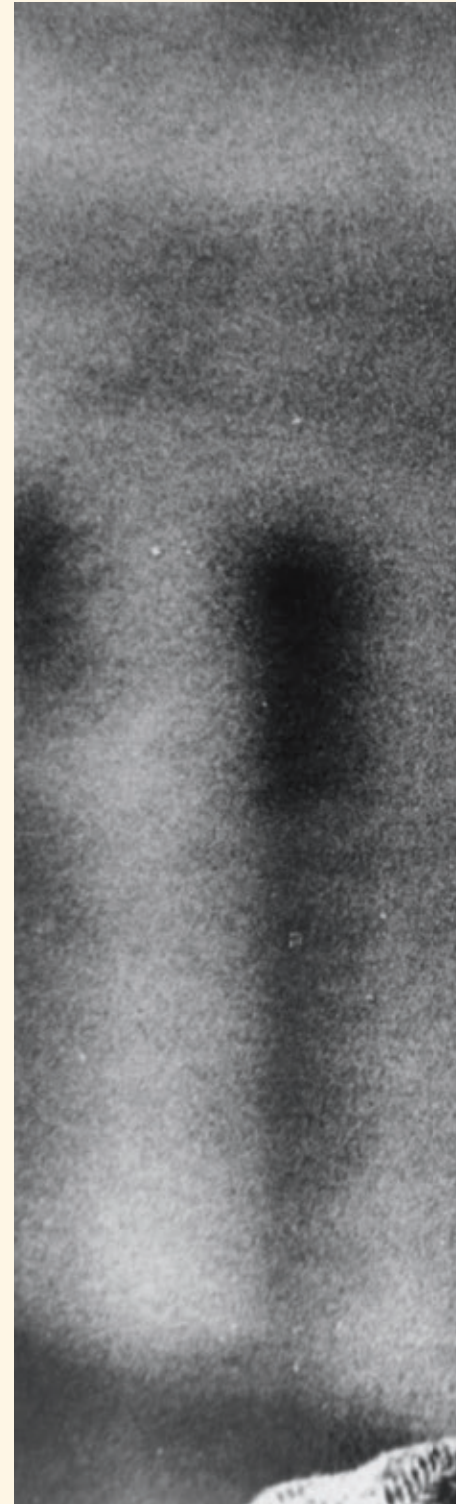
LEE KWANG BOON has a Master's of Science in Applied Finance from Macquarie University. He is the Deputy President (former Secretary-General) of the United Nations Association of Singapore and an Executive Committee Member of the World Federation of United Nations Associations (WFUNA). He is a dedicated supporter of Bhutan, and promotes the informal Singapore-Bhutan Friendship Association and believes passionately in development paradigms that are grounded on the highest human values, such as well-being and happiness.

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BJØRN MELGAARD opened the Danish Liaison Office in 1991 and was intimately involved in developing the Bhutanese-Danish partnership over the following years. He initiated the Health Sector Programme that became one of the largest partnerships in health. Since his time as Danish Coordinator he has visited Bhutan numerous times, primarily working as a senior adviser to the Ministry of Health. He considers Bhutan his second home.

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OM PRADHAN holds a Ph.D. degree in International Relations from the U.S. After relinquishing his positions at the United Nations and the Royal Government, he now resides in Thimphu where he devotes his time to writing. Recently, he has become a trustee on the board of the Loden Foundation. He is the author of the book: *Bhutan - The Roar of the Thunder Dragon*, K-Media, Thimphu, 2012. He is a keen observer of the politics of Bhutan and the region.

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TSHERING TASHI

Tshering Tashi is the son of Dorji Gyeltshen, the Gyalpoi Zimpon or the Lord Chamberlain of His Majesty the Fourth Gyalpo. From 1988, since the age of fifteen, he accompanied his father on most of the royal tours. During the 2003 military operation, he served as militia officer under His Majesty the Fourth Druk Gyalpo. Tshering lives in Thimphu with his family. He has written several books on Bhutan and is passionate about recording the history of Bhutan and conserving the environment.



THIERRY MATHOU

Thierry Mathou is both a career diplomat in the French diplomatic service and a scholar of Asian Studies. He served mainly in the U.S.A. and in Asia, notably in China where he had three different postings. His first assignment as Ambassador was in Myanmar. He is currently serving as Ambassador of France to the Philippines, also accredited to Micronesia. As a scholar, Dr Mathou specialised in Himalayan Studies and China-India relations. For the last thirty years, one of his main focuses has been Bhutan politics and geopolitics. He wrote several books and articles on the subject. He holds a Ph.D. in Political Studies and Asian Affairs, and is associated with the National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS) in Paris.