

# Leadership of the Wise Kings of Bhutan



KARMA URA









# LEADERSHIP OF THE WISE

**Kings of Bhutan**

**Karma Ura**



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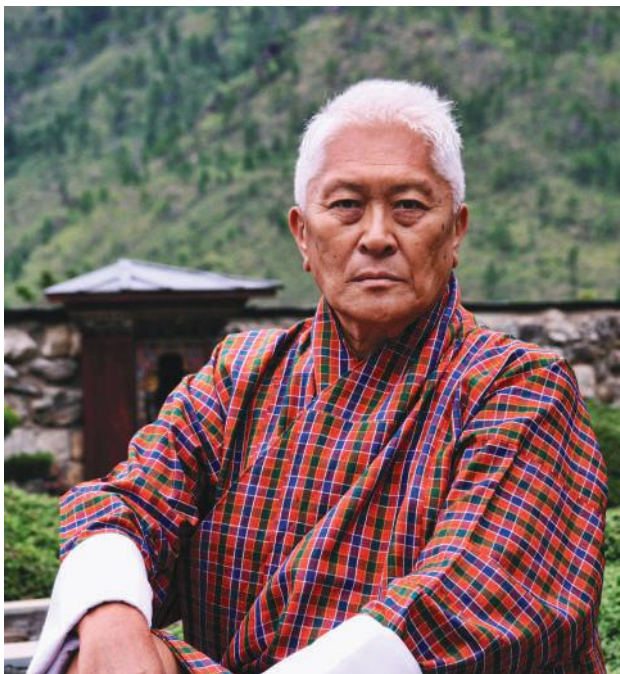
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HRH the Paro Penlop, Prince Namgyal Wangchuk



## Foreword by the Paro Penlop

Ever since he left university Karma Ura has devoted his life to understanding Bhutan's past and present from a variety of perspectives including the economic and religious in his capacity as a civil servant and scholar.

As a scholar, he has been attracted to the oral and textual records pertaining to history, poetry, biographies and religion that are at the core of Bhutan's literary heritage. This is not surprising as Karma Ura was the first Bhutanese who graduated from the hallowed halls of Oxford University. His background in economics has done nothing to narrow his range of interests and study and my appreciation of his work began with his first book, *The Ballad of Pemi Tshewang Tashi*, a moving translation of a 19th Century epic.



But his interests and devotion also reflect a wider esteem for both learning and Buddhism within his ancestry. Karma Ura belongs to one of the oldest families in Bumthang and hails from the village of Ura, which has produced a long list of distinguished and trustworthy court officials at Bumthang, once seat of the Monarchy. The hereditary title of Shingkhar Lam was inherited by his cousin, who later became Dasho Shingkhar Lam, while another brother, Dasho Karma Gayleg, was not only an orator and an authority on the history and culture of Bhutan but also an expert in arts and rituals.

As Karma Ura points out in this book, the history of Bhutan was originally maintained by monks and lamas, whose views of any historical event were deeply coloured by their monastic values. Karma Ura has painstakingly examined these documents and correlated them with other independent accounts, including those of the British. He has also sifted through a huge variety of official publications of more recent origin to build a fast-paced but concise picture of the country since its socio-economic development plans started in 1960s. In essence, he has written a factual account of the events that have guided the very destiny of the kingdom.

By structuring these facts chronologically, Karma Ura has created an absorbing narration of the 'Leadership of the Wise', and how each



successive leader since the 1840s have shaped the immediate and the long-term course of events. The story that unfolds within these pages is that of a people with extraordinary determination, courage and foresight who looked upon the Raven Crown not as a symbol of privilege, but as a symbol of immense responsibility.

In a symbolic gesture of appreciation for the immense contribution made by him in the fields of literature and history, His Majesty King Jigme Singye Wangchuck graciously bestowed on Karma Ura the ancient title of 'Dasho' in December 2006.

As a result of his meticulous concern in documenting the long history of Bhutan's evolvment as a kingdom, Dasho Karma Ura provides the reader with greater insight and accessibility into the events of the past. This book will stimulate the imagination of future generations about the nature of leadership that is always concerned with the welfare of the people.

HRH Prince Namgyal Wangchuk

Majaling, Summer 2010



## Acknowledgements

As the shadows of the global financial crisis lengthened across the world, Bhutan formally became a democracy in early 2008. The commencement of democracy resulted in plenty of celebrations for those individuals assuming new offices. The capital held a series of joyous functions. However, there were only two caveats for me during the happy transition.

Firstly, I heard about the fault lines of political parties in small villages consisting of just 20 to 30 houses, which was not so evident in the larger towns. Many thought that the polarising sociological impact of the election was a sad issue that we should address in the future, but they could not see any immediate solution. It was a constructive reflection on a side effect of the election. Democracies usually dismiss and deny that they fracture communities during electoral cycles. There is a way in terms of a better voting system, and I hope that we can revise the design of our electoral system so that elections are gentle on community cohesion.

Secondly, while public attention was focused during the aftermath of the elections on how the new bodies would perform and how this would



create their moulds over the long term, I found myself thinking more about what Bhutan had just bid farewell to: some 150 years of wise leadership. There were equally wise leaders in the more distant past but the monarchy and its progenitor, Desi Jigme Namgyel, were more vivid in my mind. I felt an urge to recollect the life and works of individuals who occupied the position of supreme authority. So for me, those days were an occasion to reflect on the virtuous kingship of the Himalayan Buddhist tradition that had just given way to the equally applauded parliamentary democracy of global institutions.

I began reconstructing the life of Bhutan's leaders since Desi Jigme Namgyel. This was made easier because I had translated history into paintings for the Druk Wangyel Lhakhang that Her Majesty the Queen Mother Ashi Dorji Wangmo built. Now, however, I had an opportunity to convert history into a conversation between me and Namgay, a talented, young TV reporter and producer from the Bhutan Broadcasting Service (BBS). Namgay's production team of three people took videos of our conversations at various sites in Thimphu, Paro, Punakha, Tongsa and Bumthang. Our conversations were screened by BBS TV in 16 parts, each episode being about 35 minutes long, between late 2008 and 2009. We also did a quick programme on His Majesty the King in



February 2010, to bring the series up to date.

I would like to thank BBS TV for its encouragement to make a programme that I believe its audience enjoyed, and thank Namgay and his crew for their energy and motivation. It was a pleasure walking and working with them. I would also like to thank two multi-skilled researchers, Sonam Phuntsho and Sangay Thinley, of the Centre for Bhutan Studies for editing the documentaries. The two of them made the documentaries lively by illustrating them with graphs, maps and old royal photos. Sonam Phuntsho is an unusually gifted computer graphic-artist.

I prepared notes after reading many sources each time we had a conversation to be filmed. My references were past issues of Kuensel, books on Anglo-Bhutan relations, unpublished official reports on Bhutan by the British officials, Kasho's of the first and the second kings, official documents about early five-years plans, interviews with retired officials and lamas, my own books and articles, old statistical yearbooks, and books published on the occasions of the centenary of the monarchy. The TV programme was informed by readings that I have listed at the end of the book. I have not listed Kuensel by issues, for that would be too tedious.



The TV programme grew out of those notes and commentaries inspired by being in those places associated with the monarchs. This book is a rough transcription of the TV series of the same title. Because of this process, the narrative is free from reference and footnotes. If I were to insert footnotes and references, it would require a month of free time. Instead of waiting for such a time, I preferred to put out the book even though it has this deficiency.

I transcribed a substantial part of the conversations. But Sangay Thinley of Bongo did the bulk of transcribing with amazing speed. Roger, an editor and writer of many years, cross-checked the manuscript with the audio-visual recording all over again. I thank Roger for his gracious help. The final layout of the book and its cover was done by Dorji Gyeltshen. I thank him for his help with in-design.

My ultimate gratitude goes to Her Majesty the Queen Mother Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck, the patron and creator of Druk Wangyel Lhakhang. As I said earlier, the seeds of this book lie in the Dochula Druk Wangyel Lhakhang where the essence of the book is found in its paintings as a visual narrative of the monarchy. Her Majesty the Queen Mother is an inspiring author and a sharp reader who saved



many manuscripts submitted to her by various authors from mistakes. This book has benefited from her corrections. But the mistakes that remain are mine alone.

At a broader level, I should also like to express my gratitude to Her Majesty the Queen Mother Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck for saving me not from the brink of death, but from death itself, twice. This is no mere metaphor. I also want to thank Dasho Wangchen for the kindness and generosity he showed in my critical period. Protocol inhibits me from expressing gratitude to two other paramount royal figures for the longevity they have given me. Yet gratitude to all of them is a state of my consciousness in spite of my inability to repay their deep kindness.



# CHAPTER ONE

**Desi Jigme Namgyel**

**The Invincible Risk Taker**

**Can you tell us why we should understand the political history of the period under monarchy?**

We should be interested in the political history of the monarchy and the period preceding that – mainly, the life and times of Desi Jigme Namgyel - which spanned the years from 1824 to 1881. People have presented, and they still do present, the successes of Desi Jigme Namgyel and King Ugyen Wangchuck as a matter of fate. The impression they created was that, regardless of the qualities and potential of these individuals, leadership would have fallen on their lot anyway; this simply reinforced the predominant idea of prophecies and destinies.

These concepts, however, rule out the role of individual effort and choice by which they have succeeded to such positions. The thing we call destiny is not only a matter of chance, but also a matter of choice. These individuals – Jigme Namgyel and Ugyen Wangchuck - rose on the wings of their extraordinary determination, courage and



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foresight. The fine qualities that they possessed need emphasising when there is an account of their successes so that the roles of their will power and talents are not underrated, in contrast to a prophetic and deterministic account of history.

The other reason why we should be interested in political history is that the position of any individual who wore the Raven Crown was one of immense responsibility, not of privilege and enjoyment. The successors of Desi Jigme Namgyel sacrificed a great deal so that the country could be secure, and the conditions of peace could be created. The Raven Crown is a symbol of responsibility to create peace and happiness for the people in the Kingdom. The leader, who wears the Crown, makes a commitment like a Bodhisattva to alleviate the suffering of the people. The throne has not been, and is not, a seat for respite and enjoyment.

Another reason why we should be interested in political history is that our country, like any other nation, has a specific culture and history. Being a member of the nation and subscribing to its membership requires an understanding of the specific history and culture of the country. This is very important in Bhutan, which is made up today of predominantly young people. The young, in particular, need to be sufficiently aware of the past, by knowing how we came to be a nation and held



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together through the centuries. In other words, history should matter today; otherwise, we will lose a narrative about ourself.

The last reason why we should be interested in political history is the sacrifices that our leaders have made, and to feel positive emotions about their devoted actions and motives. Our leaders have played critical roles in advancing and carrying this country, and, in doing so, they have had to make sacrifices. They gave their time to the cause of Bhutan. They gave their energies to resolve the problems that the country faced, and these sacrifices often cost them their health, and in some cases posed a risk to their life.

There are many instances of these sorts of risks taken by Desi Jigme Namgyel, HM Ugyen Wangchuck, HM the Third King and HM the Fourth King. They gave the very best that they could offer and those efforts sometimes involved risks to their own life. We should recall what they, and others, did out of the ordinary. In the case of the Fourth King, he not only risked his life but also relinquished his power so that Bhutan could become a democracy. For these reasons, it is appropriate for us to study the political history of the monarchy.



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### **Can you tell us something about the early life of Jigme Namgyel?**

Jigme Namgyel was from Kurtoe Dungkar, and a descendent of Pema Lingpa (1450-1521) through his son, Kheydrup Kuenga Wangpo. He was born in 1824 and died in 1881. The exact date of his birth is uncertain because we do not know for sure whether Dorji Namgyel or Jigme Namgyel was oldest of the three brothers. We certainly know that Dungkar Gyeltshen was the eldest brother. The uncertainty about the year of his birth could make a difference of a few years in his biographic chronology.

Historians do agree that Jigme Namgyel did have an extraordinary experience during his childhood: he had persistent haunting dreams, which told him to go the centre of power in eastern Bhutan, which was Tongsa. Urged by recurrent and lucid dreams to leave Dungkar, he finally departed. On the way, he stopped at Naru in Tang and Buli in Chumey, and by the time he reached Tongsa, he was already 22-years old. The year was around 1846. In this respect, the role of his dreams was providential and propitious. There was a magical aspect to the way he was driven by dreams.

After he joined the Tongsa administration in 1846, he rose rapidly. At Tongsa, the Penlop at that time was Ugyen Phuntsho. Jigme Namgyel became



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a boed (general attendant), and a mask dancer before he was made the Zimpon Nam of Tongsa Penlop Ugyen Phuntsho. Then he became the Zimpon of Tongsa. While he was the Zimpon of Tongsa, he was deputed to take over the Lhuentse Dzongponship. So, he was concurrently the Dzongpon of Lhuentse. It is somewhat difficult, due to a lack of detailed information, as to why he became Zimpon of Tongsa, and Dzongpon of Lhuentse as well as the Tshongpon of Tongsa, the official merchant of Tongsa Dzong. The fact that he held multiple posts points to his wide-ranging abilities.

Being the official merchant of Tongsa was, in my opinion, a very interesting and enriching experience for a young man like Jigme Namgyel. He led trade caravans for Tongsa Dzong and Tongsa Rabdey (the monastic body) to sell and buy goods at the trade fairs held at appointed dates and appointed places on the border between Tibet and Bhutan. There were many such trade fairs across northern Bhutan, which took place, for example, at Jumu, Phari, Hram, Tagtsekha, Taglung and Gomthangkha, where valuable cargoes were exchanged between traders of Tibet and Bhutan every year. These travels gave him knowledge about commerce, and insights into practices and customs in Tibet. It provided him very early on with knowledge about geography, terrain and caravan routes throughout Bhutan.



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His career rise was almost meteoric. At the age of 25, he became the Dronyer of Tongsa. At that time, the Penlop of Tongsa was Tshokey Dorji of Tang Ugyen Choling, Bumthang. Tshogkey Dorji was a descendant of the famous terton Dorji Lingpa (1346-1405). By 1853, at the age of 29, Jigme Namgyel became the Tongsa Penlop succeeding Tshokey Dorji. This major promotion came just seven years after he had reached Tongsa. For a person to become Penlop within seven years after starting his career at the bottom was extraordinary. There must be very good reasons why he could shoot up the heirarchy so fast, so high and so quickly. But there is room for speculation that he might have risen to the position of Dronyer of Tongsa when he was a bit older, by about three years, because we are not sure as to who was the older of the two brothers: Dorji Namgyel or Jigme Namgyel.

### **How did he succeed to the Penlopship of Tongsa?**

There is a particular event, which took place in Punakha in 1849. Jigme Namgyel was the Dronyer of Tongsa and he accompanied the Tongsa Penlop, Tshokey Dorji, to Punakha. The reason for their presence was that Punakha Dzong was being repaired after it was destroyed by fire in 1849.



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According to division of labour, it was the responsibility in those days for the eastern Bhutanese (those east of Pele La) to produce wooden shingles, perhaps hundreds of thousands of them, for Punakha Dzong. There was a plot by the leaders of western Bhutan to assassinate Penlop Tshokey Dorji. Jigme Namgyel quickly demonstrated his loyalty to his lord, Tshokey Dorji, by his willingness and readiness to save him.

For this act of courage, bravery and loyalty to his Lord, Tshokey Dorji promised Jigme Namgyel that he would be invested with the position of the Tongsa Penlop in preference over Tshokey Dorji's own son, Tshundrue Gyeltshen. As promised, Jigme Namgyel was elevated as the Penlop in 1853. Tshokey Dorji actually appointed his successor, but ceremonially Desi Damchoe Lhundup conferred Jigme Namgyel the Penloship in Punakha in 1853. Jigme Namgyel was only 29, an unbelievable age to rule over the whole of eastern Bhutan.

**In 1870, he succeeded as the Druk Desi. Can you tell us how he managed that?**

To do so, I have to explain the story in two parts. The first part deals with the general political setting of Bhutan at the time. If one does not understand the broad political backdrop of that period, it is unlikely that anyone can understand what an



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important contribution the Tongsa Penlop, Jigme Namgyel, made to the changing of the terrain of politics and governance at that time. The second part concerns the remarkable qualities of Jigme Namgyel compared to his colleagues and rivals at that time.

**Can you then give us an account of the general political setting, the first part of the backdrop to Jigme Namgyel's life?**

The general political setting at that time was one of fractiousness of central power. Nominally, there were Druk Desis, the civilian rulers, but the position was not systematically accessible. There were ambiguities in the rules regarding succession and tenure of office. Due to the inability to enforce vague rules, there were, occasionally, devious attempts to dislodge Desis and other high officials by contenders. I should explain that there was one chief civilian ruler and one chief abbot, each with separate powers, under the paramount spiritual head, the mind incarnation of the Zhabdrung Rinpoche.

From time to time, the Dratshang (monastic body) intervened as peacemaker, but ultimately, most feuds were resolved by force. In particular, the early part of Jigme Namgyel's career witnessed tension that centred on one individual called



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Chakpa Sangay, who was born in Wang Selekh. But he was, at that time, the Zhongar Dzongpon, who was governing the areas now under Pema Gatshel and Mongar districts.

Sometime in 1838, Chakpa Sangay went against the Druk Desi, Chokyi Gyeltshen, by appointing his younger brother Daga Penlop Dorji Norbu as the Druk Desi. As a result, his brother, Dorji Norbu, became the new Desi, the chief civilian administrator of the country. There was rapid turn over of Desis before 1851. By 1851, when Dronyer Jigme Namgyel was 27, Chakpa Sangay schemed to become the Desi himself, after his brother died. Zhabdrung Jigme Norbu was the Druk Desi in 1851. Yet Chakpa Sangay, then holding the position of Wangzop, declared himself Druk Desi even though Shabdrung Jigme Norbu was already the Druk Desi. For a brief period, there were two Druk Desis.

The situation was viewed as critical. The Paro Penlop, Agay Haap (his real name was Tshulthrim Namgyel), could no longer stay an idle witness in this political farce. He asked the Tongsa Penlop, Tshokey Dorji, to give him military assistance to dislodge Chakpa Sangay. Tshokey Dorji sent Dronyer Jigme Namgyel to help Penlop Haap, whose faction led by Jigme Namgyel defeated Chakpa Sangay's troops led by Dapon Migthoed.



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Chakpa Sangay was murdered through trickery. After the combat between their forces, Penlop Agay Haap sent Chakpa Sangay a gift of silk gho, which was infected with smallpox virus. There was a smallpox outbreak in the early 1850s. Not surprisingly, Chakpa Sangay died. As a result, Desi Damchoe Lhundup became the Druk Desi in 1852. We should remember: it was Desi Damchoe Lhundup, who ceremonially awarded the Tongsa Penlopship to Jigme Namgyel. I describe this whole episode because it illustrates the use of force in acceding to the throne of Druk Desi. This is not the only example: there are other similar events of political contestation, intrigue and violence.

However, these tensions did not plunge the whole of Bhutan into widespread turmoil. It is wrong, as many people believe, to assume that general disorder and anarchy were prevalent throughout the country in the 19th century. That is a false picture we should resist. There were localised tensions, which occasionally flared into violence. The physical confrontations were local and did not involve the whole nation. The fights and combats were between the pazaaps, zingaaps, boedgaaps - of one high official against the other. The rest of the Kingdom was able to go on with the realities of their daily life: engaging in agriculture, trade, paying taxes, ferrying official goods, raising families and carrying on with other chores of life.



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What we can deduce from these incidences of political tension is that the central power was fragmented. There was no stability in the leadership by the Desis, because the Desis and their immediate subordinates, like the Penlops and Dzongpons of the three western dzongs, were often part of feud. They were part of the problem. High positions were vulnerable and fragile. The necessary ideology of legitimacy had not crystallised yet for Desis or, for that matter, any other high positions. Challenges and competitions were mounted, often with use of force.

There is another perspective on the fractiousness of central power. The centre was simply unable to penetrate society and other regional centres of power as transportation and communication system were difficult. Such constraints led to fairly autonomous regional centres, which was, and is, desirable; but such autonomy needed to be accompanied by a clear delineation of responsibilities and power with the centre. That framework had not sufficiently crystallized in 19th century Bhutan, which resulted in fractiousness.

**You have explained the first part of the backdrop in the times of Jigme Namgyel. What was the second part of the backdrop throughout his life?**



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There were two conflicts, which festered throughout Jigme Namgyel's career, and his rise can be understood in the context of these two problems. We have touched on the first problem: the internal situation, which was full of rivalry and acrimony among the top leaders who were in contention for the positions of great importance like Desis, Penlops and Dzongpons, especially for the post of Wangdiphodrang Dzongpon. For some reason that we do not fully understand, the post of Wangdi Dzongpon was more coveted than any other dzongponships like Thimphu or Punakha. Perhaps, Wangdi Dzongponship was more desirable because of the comparatively higher volume of rice collected as in-kind tax.

The second continuing theme that affected our country during Jigme Namgyel's lifetime was the highly irritable relationship with British India. By the time Jigme Namgyel came to the scene, it was British India; but in the 1770s, it was the British East India Company – a private trading company. What was the lingering and inflammatory issue that existed for so long between Britain and Bhutan? We must understand this clearly. The Bengal and Assam Duars had long been part of Bhutan. The Duars consist of the area between the Teesta River in Bengal and the Dhansiri River in Assam. The land between the Dhansiri River and the Manas River constitute the seven Assam Duars, whereas



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the land between the Manas River and Teesta River near Sikkim constitute the 11 Bengal Duars.

This land is only about 20 km in width, but the length is considerable: about 220 kilometres long. In all, the area measured about 4,400 sq. km. The Assam Duars were long ago part of the Kingdom of the Ahom Kings of Assam. The founders of the dynasty were originally Burmese invaders who established their kingdom in Assam. The Ahom Kings ceded the Assam Duars to Bhutan on condition that Bhutan paid a certain amount in goods every year to the Ahom Kings, which consisted of musks, horses, yak tails, blankets etc. The amount to be paid was fixed. However, the Bengal Duars had been under the control and part of Bhutan for a long time, without having to pay anything to any foreign authority.

The British defeated the Ahom dynasty of Assam in 1824-25 in the Anglo-Burmese wars. As a result, Bhutan had to deal with British after those years. The British complained that Bhutan delivered the commodities neither on time nor in adequate value. The British finally annexed Assam in 1841, when Jigme Namgyel was still a young boy in Kurtoe. He arrived in Tongsa in 1846, five years after the annexation of the Assam Duars, yet the British problem festered until the 1860s.



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Having annexed the Assam Duars, the British authorities agreed to pay Bhutan an annual 'subsidy' of Rs 10,000 per year. This amount was part of the Assam Duar's tax revenue payable to the government of Bhutan by the British. There was an element of insincerity on the part of the British because they did not deliver this tax revenue every year to Bhutan on a variety of pretexts: that the Bhutanese raided the Assam Duars, attacked properties, seized cattle, and took captives.

Occasionally, Bhutan for one reason or another impounded Indian officials from the Duars. As a result, the British then deducted around Rs 3,000 worth of damage attributed to the Bhutanese, from the yearly subsidy. Withholding payment proved to be a serious ground for friction between the two countries. The other was general grievance over the loss of control over the Assam Duars among the officials of Bhutan.

If one looks from the Bhutanese side, the British were in arrears. If one takes the British perspective, their pretext was that the Bhutanese had been attacking life and property in the Duars. The Assam and the Bengal Duars were the most fertile part of Bhutan in those days. It was a fact the British officials were well aware. The tea plantations in the Duars were very valuable, along with timber and wildlife found in the Duars.



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Elephant capture was also a lucrative activity in the Duars and elephants were used to great advantage in wars, transportation and logging. They were used lavishly in pageantry.

As an example, in the Duar Wars in 1865, British deployed about 150 elephants. For these profitable reasons, and to secure the borders of their empire, the British were increasingly looking to extend their boundaries up to the foothills. As always, they were in an expansionist mood and were just waiting for the opportune period when they could mobilise their forces on the front with Bhutan. Although the Assam Duars were annexed in 1841, the British were unable to annexe the Bengal Duars. They would have annexed the area earlier as planned, but the British India was preoccupied with wars elsewhere in the 1840s, such as the Anglo-Sikhs Wars and the first Afghan War.

As a result, they could neither afford the resources nor the attention in taking over of the Bengal Duars, but it was still on their agenda. The rows between Bhutan and British Raj continued during the turbulent 1840s.

The British protested about the plundering of properties by the Bhutanese. From the Bhutanese side the grievance was longstanding; British



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interference in what Bhutan considered its land. By the late 1850s, it was still impossible for the British to launch any offensive against Bhutan because of the Indian Mutiny against the British Raj. In 1864, following the brutal put down of the Mutiny a few years earlier, the Raj sent Ashley Eden to the Bhutanese government, with a pre-scripted agreement to allow the British Raj to take over the Duars, which the Bhutanese rejected out of hand.

Desi Jigme Namgyel, then the Tongsa Penlop, had a counter proposal demanding the Duars to be given back completely, particularly the Assam Duars, because it affected the revenue that came to Tongsa. The account left by Ashley Eden noted the impolite treatment meted out to him by the Bhutanese as a national insult to Britain. That is his account, which could have been biased. He reported the reactions of the Bhutanese in very unfavourable terms to first the officiating Governor General Sir William Denison, and later to Governor General Sir John Lawrence.

The British then unilaterally issued a notice that, in addition to the Assam Duars already annexed, the Bengal Duars would be annexed to Britain permanently. Following this, the British sent forces to occupy vital passes into Bhutan - at Deothang, Sidli and Buxa. It was against this occupation that Jigme Namgyel went to fight and dislodge



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the British forces at Deothang. This deteriorating relationship with Britain was a recurrent theme in his career. I have a feeling that had Jigme Namgyel come to power some 15 years earlier, the course of history might have been different. However, that is history of what might have been. In reality, history is what happened and we have to take that as given.

### **What is the legacy of Desi Jigme Namgyel?**

Before, I answer the question, we have to talk about one aspect – his qualities and the causes for his rise. I have explained the political landscape from which he emerged as the national leader after 1853, the year he became Tongsa Penlop. Now I will explain the reasons for his rapid rise.

The first concerned his marriage. What I want to stress is that his marital relationship could have been an important influence among the causes of his early rise, but his own qualities were more important in the longer run. While he was the merchant of Tongsa, he met his future wife, Pem Choki, the daughter of the Tongsa Penlop, Ugyen Phuntsho, who was himself a powerful figure because of the official position, and because he was a descendent of Pema Lingpa from Tamzhing, Bumthang. That is why he was titled as the Tongsa Penlop, Tamzhing Choejey Ugyen Phuntsho.



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Furthermore, Ugyen Phuntsho's own wife was a very interesting woman being the daughter of Desi Sonam Drujay, and therefore politically significant. Desi Sonam Drujay founded the first structure of Lama Goenpa, which was later extended by Ugyen Phuntsho and Ugyen Wangchuck. Desi Sonam Drujay was Tongsa Penlop at one stage and gradually rose to become Desi. The wealth of Lama Goenpa in terms of land and cattle assets were created, to a considerable degree, by Desi Sonam Drujay and his sons who were high officials of eastern Bhutan.

Later, his son-in-law Ugyen Phuntsho, and Ugyen Phuntsho's son-in-law Jigme Namgyel, and Jigme Namgyel's own son, Ugyen Wangchuck, buttressed the fabulous wealth and family assets.

Jigme Namgyel had to mount several battles. As in any military campaign, a general needs to provide food and arms for his standing fighters. A ready stock of food, arms and incentives are just as important as inspiring leadership. It is my supposition that Jigme Namgyel had access to this wealth, food stocks and manpower created by Penlop Ugyen Phuntsho and Desi Sonam Drujay. This aspect is important, but glossed over so far in our history of this period.

His marriage to Pem Choki, the daughter of Tongsa Penlop Ugyen Phuntsho, also enhanced his



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noble lineage. People usually emphasise the Pema Lingpa's lineage of Jigme Namgyel on his father Pila Gonpo Wangyal's side. The ancestry of Jigme Namgyel's wife also went back to Pema Lingpa as she was the daughter of Tamshing Choejey.

The second important cause of Jigme Namgyel's rise was his relationship with Lama Jangchub Tshundru. Very early on in his career, while he was the Zimpon of Tongsa, he was sent to take over the Dzongponship of Lhuentse. On that journey, he came across a remarkable individual at Bumthang Kujey - Lama Jangchub Tsundru, who would have an enormous influence on him, as a wise moral counsel and spiritual companion. He is remembered more popularly as the designer of the sacred Raven Crown for Jigme Namgyel. It appears that the Raven Crown was not designed exclusively for battle, on the eve of Jigme Namgyel's departure for the Duar Wars. Lama Jangchub Tsundrue passed away in the late 1850s, while the Duar Wars took place in 1864-65. So the Raven Crown must have been designed long before the Duar Wars.

The overriding cause for a person to go far and high in his life was by making the best use of his abilities and potential. Jigme Namgyel was an outstanding military organiser. Jigme Namgyel would have been a great general if he had been a military leader of a big country where



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he could have given full play to his potential and talents. He was quite invincible. I must stress this because in any combat and fight in which he was involved, his faction always won. His military triumphs accumulated one after another; he was unbeatable in, at least, four major battles.

I would like to emphasise that besides his outstanding generalship, he had other qualities that we should not gloss over. I think he was very much a man of noble character in the traditional Bhutanese sense of being extremely honest and forthright, rather than scheming and manipulative. The Dzongkha words for such a person, *mizang* (good man) and *yaraab* (genuinely decent), were apt descriptions for him. Jigme Namgyel had a very magnetic personality because he was trustworthy, unlike some of the leaders at that time, who changed sides according to where the sun shone, being ambitious and opportunistic.

It is important to understand that Jigme Namgyel did not hatch any conflict himself and was never the source of any conflict. Not a single feud could be traced to him as the cause. His lords, Ugyen Phuntsho and Tshokey Dorji, assigned Jigme Namgyel to quell rebellions or provide military support to their allies. The only battle in which he took a keen initiative as the main protagonist



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was to confront and face the single most powerful global power at that time - the British Imperial Force in the Duar Wars in 1864-65. He went to dislodge them when they occupied four locations in Southern Bhutan. If these external garrisons were not established forcibly in these passes, Jigme Namgyel would have had no cause to launch the counter-offensive.

The qualities of loyalty, integrity and risk-taking were evident in Jigme Namgyel. He neither changed sides nor stabbed people in the back. These were qualities beyond political opportunism. His trustworthiness meant that his friends, his allies and everyone he had dealings with, could always count on him. They relied on him and he did not let them down, and offered military help during their hour of need. These characteristics were not emphasised in historical accounts, nor was his outstanding military generalship documented. Bhutanese history was written by monks and lamas. Penchen Tenzin Chogyel (1701-1767), the 10th Je Khenpo, from Yusa Gangjab in Nisho, was one of the first authors of this class, bringing out his famed 'Lhoi chosjung throthued jamgoen monthayi threngwa'. It is no exaggeration to say that without his historical work, we would have quite a blurred history during the early phase as a nation. The same can be said of the valuable work, 'Jebang ki rigrus jungkhung selwai droenme', by



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Bendhe Wamgendre (understood to be monk Ngawang from Tashigang), regarding central and eastern Bhutan. The later half of the last century also saw two monks - Lama Pemala (1926-2009) and Geshey Geduen Rinchen (1926-1997), who later became Je Khenpo- write a book each on Bhutanese history, besides other works. Naturally, lamas and monks did not have an eye for the tactical details of warfare.

**Which were the four main battles you mentioned?**

I would like to touch briefly on the four major battles in which he proved invincible. He was also triumphant in smaller engagements, but these particular military clashes illuminate his character more clearly. They also allow us to see how he consolidated power.

At one point in the mid 1850s, he was invited to be a mediator between Desi Damchoe Lhundup and his rival Jamyang Tenzin. His mediation succeeded and an important result arose from it: as Tongsa Penlop, Jigme Namgyel, received the authority to appoint all officials throughout eastern Bhutan. This was a very important outcome and it tells us something about the credibility of Jigme Namgyel, although he was only about 31 at that time. To be asked to mediate between the top leaders in the



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country must have meant that he had credence and was acceptable as the arbiter.

The first battle to which his Lord Tongsa Penlop Tshokey Dorji assigned, at the request of Paro Penlop Agay Haap, was to fight the self-declared Desi Chakpa Sangay. Chakpa Sangay was not killed but the battle was won by Jigme Namgyel and Penlop Haap. Penlop Haap emerged as an important ally of Jigme Namgyel.

The second big battle in which he participated took place in 1862. Jigme Namgyel was just 38-years old. The Druk Desi was Nagzi Pasang, who had a relative by marriage by the name of Darlung Tobgay. Darlung was the husband of sister of Nagzi Pasang's wife. Darlung Tobgay was the Punakha Dzongpon, but Darlung Tobgay expected, as a relative, the Druk Desi to appoint him Wangdiphodrang Dzongpon. As I mentioned earlier, Wangdiphodrang Dzongpon's position was always more desirable than that of the Dzongponship of Punakha or Thimphu. But Nagzi Pasang did not appoint him to the post greatly disappointing Darlung Tobgay. So Darlung Tobgay asked the help of Penlop Jigme Namgyel and together they defeated Desi Nagzi Pasang. As a result of this battle that took place around 1863, a number of Jigme Namgyel's allies and supporters were placed in sensitive positions.



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The third battle was a part of the Duar Wars in 1865. Jigme Namgyel was by then a very powerful voice in the governance of Bhutan and decided to mount a counter offensive with 5,000 men. He was successful in the January and February attacks on outposts in Deothang. However, later that year, Bhutan was forced to sign the Treaty of Sinchula to avert further invasion. The treaty brought some kind of stability to the relationship between the two countries. The Duars were finally ceded and incorporated permanently into the British Empire, and from then onwards, an annual subsidy of Rs 50,000 payable to Bhutan was instituted.

The last battle in which Desi Jigme Namgyel fought took place in 1878. Between 1870 and 1873 he was the Druk Desi, but in 1873 he retired, making his half-brother and companion at arms, Kitshelpa Dorji Namgyel his successor. Kitshelpa Dorji Namgyel and Jigme Namgyel shared the same mother. Yet Jigme Namgyel seems to have retained control over all appointments. However, in 1878, Paro Penlop Tshewang Norbu rose up in revolt against Desi Kishelpa. The consequences of the resulting victory by Desi Jigme Namgyel's side were many; one of them was that the seat of the Paro Penlop went to Ugyen Wangchuck, who was just 17-years old at that time.



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All the battles in which Jigme Namgyel was engaged in and was victorious led incrementally towards the consolidation of powers in the hands of Desi Jigme Namgyel, his allies and his relatives. There is an air of inexorable process to it. This brought a resolution to the fragmentation of power, which gradually became more unified and coherent in his hands. The centralisation of power also paved the way for the rise of Ugyen Wangchuck, but that would not be realized in Jigme Namgyel's lifetime. One major battle remained. It was the 20-year old Ugyen Wangchuck who had to fight a bitter engagement in 1885 to complete the process.

The legacy of Desi Jigme Namgyel cannot be outlined in the usual sense of social and economic reforms. The first and most important contribution he made was the reduction of internal conflicts among the top leadership by gradually bringing power into one centralised position over three decades, from the 1850s to the 1870s. It was necessary because bickering, feuds and divisions were taking place too frequently at high level. The future consequences of Jigme Namgyel in terms of consolidating power were enormous because the reduction of conflicts allowed for the laying of the foundations of the monarchy, that in turn allowed for a long and peaceful era in Bhutan. Peace became conducive to normal life.



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The second important contribution of Jigme Namgyel was that foreign relations could be conducted in a systematic and co-ordinated way, because the fragmentation of power among the top leadership had been reduced. The British could look towards a stable border with a stable neighbour, and also towards a legitimate person with whom they could negotiate and enforce a treaty. The Treaty of Sinchula, which went back to Jigme Namgyel's time, became the crucial, guiding bilateral legal instrument between Bhutan and British India and later, independent India. It was updated and revised in 1910, 1949 and 2006. So, the legal relationship with India in a way goes back to Jigme Namgyel's period.

Desi Jigme Namgyel left an identifiable centre of power that made it possible for treaties to be revised constructively and foreign relationships to be improved over the course of time. Indeed, Ugyen Wangchuck amply fulfilled that role later on.

The third important legacy of Jigme Namgyel was not political but architectural. Among his many cultural contributions is the magnificent Tongsa Dzong, which he restored. Within the dzong he added a temple dedicated to Sangwa Duepa. On the other side of the mountain in Bumthang, he built the Wangdicholing Palace, which he constructed



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soon after he became Tongsa Penlop and was completed by 1856. It is said that the stones were brought from the ruins of Drapham dzong though that seems unlikely because of the distance. It became his personal residence. Wangdicholing was the main residence of the Royal Family from Desi Jigme Namgyel's time to that of the Crown Prince Jigme Dorji Wangchuck. It was the political epicentre of the country for over a century, from the late 1850s to the early 1950s.

However, to stress again, the most important consequence of his life and times was the laying of peaceful foundation for this country because the frequency of conflicts diminished dramatically after 1878.

In 1881, Desi Jigme Namgyel passed away at Semtokha dzong in a manner befitting a man of action for all of his 57 years. He sustained a fatal injury from a yak ride at Lhongtsho. Paro Penlop Ugyen Wangchuck, then 21-years old, conducted the grandest funeral Bhutan had ever seen for his father, at Semtokha, engaging Tibetan and Bhutanese lamas and by sponsoring rituals throughout Bhutan and Tibet.





## CHAPTER TWO

HM King Ugyen Wangchuck

Strategist of Faith

Can you give a brief chronological summary of his life?

His Majesty King Ugyen Wangchuck founded the monarchy in 1907, although he had been more or less the actual ruler for almost a decade before that. If one looks back, Bhutan was ruled by the Druk Desis for 256 years until that time. That is, if one counts from the time Zhabdrung Rinpoche passed away in 1651. But if one counts the years since Bhutan was founded in 1626, 271 years had passed. Bhutan was actually founded in 1626 because Zhabdrung Rinpoche unified Western Bhutan under a sovereign central administration in that year. Eastern Bhutan was conquered towards the end of Zhabdrung Rinpoche's life.

Our country was ruled by 57 Desis in those 271 years. King Ugyen Wangchuck, I would like to think, was a man of tremendous faith and conviction in Buddhism, and that partly explains why he was so acute and refined in his thinking. It had to do with his assimilation of Buddhist



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learning and practice. At the same time, he was a great statesman and strategist. I think strategist of faith is an appropriate subtitle for King Ugyen Wangchuck.

To sketch his early life, he was the second son of Jigme Namgyel, the eldest being Thinley Tobgay, who was a monk in Lhalung before he was reluctantly inducted as Paro Penlop and Wangdidzongpon. Thinley Tobgay had gone to Lhalung where his maternal uncle was the Peling Sungrul.

Ugyen Wangchuck was born in 1862 in Wangdicholing Palace, which was built by his father, then Tongsa Penlop, Jigme Namgyel. Ugyen Wangchuck was born three years before Jigme Namgyel faced the mightiest global power in 1865, in the Duar Wars. Ugyen Wangchuck was no stranger to warfare, combat and unsavoury aspects of human nature. His first taste of battle came in 1878, at the early age of 17, when Paro Penlop Tshewang Norbu rose up in revolt against the Druk Desi, Kitshelpa Dorji Namgyel, who was the uncle of Ugyen Wangchuck and half brother of Desi Jigme Namgyel. The faction led by Paro Penlop Tshewang Norbu was defeated and the 17-year old Ugyen Wangchuck was appointed as the new Paro Penlop. For several years, his father was around to steer things safely for him. He was not



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present for long because in 1881, when Ugyen Wangchuck was barely 20, Desi Jigme Namgyel passed away. At this young age, he faced tragedies and threats that accelerated his maturity. Dangers and risks result in character development. In 1882, his maternal uncle Jakar Penlop Pem Tenzin was assassinated in Jakar Dzong and he went there to deal with the assailants. Again, in 1885, when he was 23 years old, he led 2,400 plus troops in the biggest fight in his life, which also happened to be the last battle in Bhutanese history, in which Paro Penlop Ugyen Wangchuck clashed with Alu Dorji and Phuntsho Doji, the Dzongpons of Thimphu and Punakha respectively. The most important outcome of this clash was that Ugyen Wangchuck now controlled all the key positions in the country. The seats vacated by the faction banding around Alu Dorji and Phuntsho Dorji were filled by Ugyen Wangchuck's relatives, allies and supporters.

Penlop Ugyen Wangchuck undertook pious acts early in his life. In 1894, aged 33, he undertook the construction of Bumthang Kujey. As a man of faith, he did extraordinary things. A year after the Kujey was built, he opened up the stockpiles of food of Lame Goenpa dzong to the local people. It was rare gesture of material generosity to commoners.

Penlop Ugyen Wangchuck married relatively late at the age of 36, in 1898. He married Ashi



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Rinchen and they had two princesses: Ashi Yangzom and Ashi Pedon. Ashi Rinchen died four years after their wedding. At the age of 40, sometime in 1903, he married for the second time, to Ashi Tsundru Lhamo. In 1905, the Crown Prince Jigme Wangchuck was born to Ashi Tsundru Lhamo at Lame Gonpa. This was a year after Ugyen Wangchuck, then Tongsa Penlop, joined the Younghusband Expedition to Tibet in 1904. Penlop Ugyen Wangchuck accompanied the expedition as a mediator between Britain and Tibet.

His next foreign excursion took place in 1906 when he travelled to Calcutta to meet the Prince of Wales. Penlop Ugyen Wangchuck was not yet formally the King, but the role he took clearly suggests that he was indeed the ruler for all practical purpose for many years before he was crowned the King.

King Ugyen Wangchuck's last visit to India took place in 1911, when he went to Delhi to meet King George V, who was the Prince of Wales when they met in 1906. His Majesty King Ugyen Wangchuck passed away in 1926 in Bumthang. He was 64. This is a brief chronological account of his life.



### **How was his early life?**

Looking back over his extraordinary life, Ugyen Wangchuck was apprenticed at the court of Desi Jigme Namgyel in the art of leadership and warfare at a very young age. He was a combatant at the age of 17, in the battle against Paro Penlop Tshewang Norbu. In 1885, following the death of his father, Ugyen Wangchuck led troops in a series of ferocious battles in Zompangkhar, Lungtenphu, Zilukha and Changlimethang. While still young, he had to undergo many trying circumstances that helped him to acquire an acute sense of judgment of human nature, which in my opinion, is one of the most important qualities for a leader.

But his view of human affairs, disagreeable though it was, was tempered by compassionate moderation. We know this from his many unexpected acts of forgiveness to people who had challenged him in 1885. For example, Alu Dorji and his faction were allowed to return and settle in Bhutan later on.

### **How was the economic situation, and what did King Ugyen Wangchuck do to improve it?**

Discussing the economic situation can reveal a valuable picture of the living conditions of the people at that time. In essence, the economic



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situation had not changed from medieval times. The country was closed and isolated by physical barriers. Everything was carried on horseback and on the backs of people, imposing critical limitations to what could be transported and traded both within and outside Bhutan.

People had to grow what they needed for their livelihood and only luxury and essential things could be imported such as soap, salt, sugar, clothes, yak-fat and sheep-fat. These goods were imported against exports of textiles, rice, processed maize, plant dyes, musk etc. Trade fairs were held along the borders of Tibet and Bhutan. Traders also visited the southern borders of Kalimpong, Gaudama and Siliguri.

At that time, the state continued to be the net receiver of income from society, unlike today when the state ploughs more money into the economy and society than it receives. Until the Third King's reign, the state was a net receiver of resources through taxes. There was an astonishing variety of taxes imposed on the people ever since medieval times: grain taxes, textiles taxes, handicrafts taxes, gun powder taxes, metal taxes, dairy produce taxes, bamboo and timber taxes. Whatever was needed to run the state became an object of taxation. Taxes were probably regressive, with the rich paying less tax than the poor. What is more, taxes were not



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evenly spread across dungkhags and commodities. As a result, taxes such as the textile commodities tax were prevalent in Kheng as well as Tashigang, but the value of these taxes was not uniform. Some regions paid heavier taxes than others.

Another aspect of medieval Bhutanese tax system was not just the payment but the delivery, as transport was still dependent on porters and horses. Labour taxes were equally heavy. There were requisitions to build and maintain dzongs, irrigation channels, mule track highways and bridges to carry official cargoes.

The severity of labour tax can be known from one special transportation tax called sarim woola. Sarim stood for express delivery. As soon as a piece of cargo was dropped in a village, that village had to continue carrying it onwards whether it was night or day, rain or shine, and if necessary negotiating footpaths with wooden torches at night. With sarim woola, a back load would reach Thimphu from Tashigang within four nights and four days.

However, deaths due to famine and starvation on a wide scale seemed not to have occurred in our history - even though it was a subsistence economy. The dzongs had granaries, which held extra food stocks, to cover localised famine or crop failures. The local dzong also issued loans of



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grain. The farming system was also designed to avert huge risks. A household grew many kinds of crops on plots, which were scattered in a valley, so that all the crops would not fail at the same time. The same principle applied to livestock holding. A household had a few of every kind of livestock such as chickens, sheep, cattle, horses, and pigs.

Nevertheless, both the people and government were helpless when epidemics like smallpox struck. There was no remedy and no immunisation in those days. In general, the economy was geared towards being self-sufficient primarily at the village level. People had to grow many types of crops to diversify risks. It was in this kind of economic environment that Ugyen Wangchuck became the First King of Bhutan.

### **How was King Ugyen Wangchuck's relationship with other countries, in particular British India and Tibet?**

King Ugyen Wangchuk was acutely aware of our economic problems, especially after his visit to Calcutta in 1906, when he met the Prince of Wales. There, he was accorded official receptions as grand as those hosted for Indian Maharajas, because he was perceived as the ruler long before he was formally crowned. The Prince of Wales and the Viceroy called on him - as he called on them. In



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British records, he was referred by the British as the Tongsa Penlop - the ruler of Bhutan – since 1903. Then, in 1911, after he was formally crowned the King of Bhutan, he went to meet King George V in Delhi.

During those visits to Delhi and Calcutta, His Majesty was given tours of industries and educational institutes, which inspired him to develop Bhutan. The Political Officer was John Claude White until 1908; he was succeeded by Charles Bell.

John Claude White developed a deep respect for Ugyen Wangchuck, and wrote: “I have never met a native I liked and respected more than I do Sir Ugyen. He was upright, honest, open and straightforward.”

White was persuaded by King Ugyen Wangchuck to try and obtain British financial assistance to develop Bhutan. I must recall another sentence John Claude White wrote about Ugyen Wangchuck. “...and I wish it had been possible to remain in India till he had at least commenced some of the scheme of reforms.”

His Majesty Ugyen Wangchuck had various ideas to develop education, health and transportation, but the obstacle was always funds. There was never enough and the major source of money at the time



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was British India. Claude White was fully convinced that British India must help, because Bhutan turned out to be a solid ally under King Ugyen Wangchuck. Claude White was relieved from his foreign service in 1908 and Britain had no ear to listen to financial requests from Bhutan. In 1914, the First World War broke out and Britain was in no condition - or position - to help Bhutan.

Obtaining finance was the key constraint in changing the economy, by first developing basic infrastructure. Taxes could not be increased to generate additional funds, lest they become even more oppressive. Ugyen Wangchuck sought to increase the Duar War's subsidy, but the request was denied. The amount remained at Rs 100,000. His Majesty then explored other avenues for raising government revenue and some interesting options were explored. One was to offer licenses for capturing elephants in the forests adjoining Bhutan, Assam and Bengal. The forest ranges covering Assam, Bengal and Southern Bhutan were divided into three elephant capturing zones: Goalpara, Kamrup and Darang, which we call Dirang. Bhutan had to be involved in this enterprise because the best traps could be set up on the Bhutanese side. Elephants were valuable for logging, transport and pageantry all over India. It appears that a decent amount of money was generated, but not enough for any significant development in the Kingdom.



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His Majesty Ugyen Wangchuck also reviewed interest rate charged in those days. Capital is very important for development, for if people want to increase commerce and investment, the cost of capital must be reasonable. The cost of investment in Bhutan was traditionally very high - 25% per year. His Majesty, taking an unusual step, reduced interest rate from 25% to 20% through a kasho (Royal Decree) in 1908. The bankers at the time were the monastic establishments. The loss to the monastic establishments due to lower interest rate, His Majesty wrote, would be made good from his own resources. The monetary reform must have created an impact because the cost of debt service went down.

As I mentioned, the principle source of finance to undertake development would have been aid from India, but the real obstacle was Britain's involvement in the First World War, which put enormous strains on the British economy.

His Majesty King Ugyen Wangchuck was acutely conscious that Bhutan had to be protected through that time of conflict. The Kingdom's security could not be taken for granted. The long-term independence of Bhutan was a very strategic theme. His Majesty was exquisitely farsighted in updating the treaty of 1865 in 1910, with an additional clause. The new clause was that Bhutan



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would consult British India in its dealing with third countries. His Majesty took the correct view that being an ally of Britain was going to be the best safeguard for Bhutan. As a result, he took an active role in raising funds to be presented to the British in support of the First World War - Rs 200,000 in 1914 and Rs 100,000 in 1916.

Part of this money was raised by physically touring eastern Bhutan in 1914, which indicated that there was cash circulating in the economy. During his eastern tour, His Majesty commanded the construction of Dungkar Lhakhang Samdrupcholing in Kheng Kengkhar, which was noted in the karchag of that temple. There were several temples he sponsored during such trips. The King completely won over the British to the side of Bhutan through such efforts.

The other outstanding role His Majesty played was as a political mediator in the 1904 Younghusband Expedition. He was accepted by British Officials and the Dalai Lama, Ngawang Gyamtsho. At the time, the British were keen to thwart the influence of the Chinese and Russians in Tibet. Penlop Ugyen Wangchuck was well regarded by both sides, which was an extremely difficult thing to achieve. Tibetan high officials came first, at least on one occasion, to Penlop Ugyen Wangchuck before they visited the British



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mission. Likewise, the British sent the draft of the agreement to Ugyen Wangchuck, who then forwarded it to the Tibetan high officials.

Penlop Ugyen Wangchuck protected the interests of Tibet to some degree and was instrumental in reducing the indemnity imposed by Britain on Tibet. It was in recognition of his help in this mediation that Ugyen Wangchuck was awarded the Knight Commander of Indian Empire.

### **How was the status of culture and religion during his reign?**

His relationships were not only good with British officials. As a man of great faith he had affectionate relationships with many Tibetan lamas. He venerated holy artefacts in Lhasa like the Jowo, on whose altar he sponsored 1,000 butter lamps every month from Bhutan. One can imagine a regular supply of butter cargo being carried over the mountains to Lhasa.

The fact is, King Ugyen Wangchuck was a deeply spiritual man. He received empowerment and initiations from very high lamas, like Lama Serkong Dorji Chang. Serkong was invited to Bhutan soon after the 1878 battle with Paro Penlop Tshewang Norbu. King Ugyen Wangchuck was also very close to Karmapa Khachab Dorji and



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drew strength from Buddhism. We know from the colophon of the terma text of Chimed Sogthig that King Ugyen Wangchuck extended patronage to Tertön Zilnon Namkhai Dorji while the tertön was writing religious texts in Bumthang.

The middle lhakhang in Kujay, with its towering Guru statue, was built in 1894 by King Ugyen Wangchuck at considerable cost. One must bear in mind that in those days there was no technology and machinery; everything had to be done manually, and therefore it was a major undertaking.

His Majesty was a great benefactor to the Dratshangs (monastic bodies) throughout the country. As part of his vision for scholarship and education of young Bhutanese, he sent two groups of Bhutanese to study up to geshey level in Tibet. In 1915 and 1917, he sent young monks like Tenpa Rinchen, Acho Pasang, Rinchen Dorji, Pema Tshering, Kelzang, Rigzang, Ugyen Penjor, Mindru and Nim Dorji to Tibet. Some went to Zhenphen Choki Nangwa in Dokham and later returned to Bhutan and became influential geshe and lamas, serving as radiant sources spreading Buddhist teaching.

His Majesty's commitment was not limited to religious education. Following his visits to Calcutta and Delhi, he began to establish schools. The schools



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were opened in Lame Goenpa and Wangdicholing, with 14 Bhutanese boys from both eastern and western Bhutan. Later, the number increased to 46. By then, students were being sent to Kalimpong. The first school was opened under the Sikkimese teacher Phento and Pasa Kutshab Norbu. The first batch of students became important officials in the 1930s and 1940s. The King took the initiative to sow the seeds of western education, as well as strengthen the roots of dharma in Bhutan.

I mentioned the construction of Kujay as a leading example of his artistic and architectural heritage. But his contributions were not only within the country. One of the iconic pilgrimage centres of Buddhism is the Boudanath Temple in Kathmandu, which was renovated almost entirely with King Ugyen Wangchuck's personal funds. The renovation was supervised by Kagyu Lama Togden Shacha Shri, with whom Ugyen Wangchuck corresponded a great deal. King Ugyen Wangchuck also sent Geshey Sherub Jorden to assist Togden Shacha Shri in this task. In total, Ugyen Wangchuck spent some Rs 70,000, a great deal of money in today's terms. But, these sponsorships, education, construction and so forth, are somewhat external to the individual. Buddhism should be internalized.

His Majesty spent a considerable amount of time practising meditation. When he got older,



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he built a small meditation centre for himself - Tshamkhang Kunzangcholing - above Lame Goenpa. He was inaccessible everyday until one in the afternoon, and kept an attendant and 12 dogs to guard him. Later on, he moved to a holier place near Kujay and Jampa Lhakhang, and then built Phodrang Thinley Rabten, where he continued his prayerful and contemplative life.

In 1926, aged 64, His Majesty passed away peacefully in the lap of his son, the Crown Prince Jigme Wangchuck who was then about 23. There is a tale that his death, like his life, was attended by miraculous signs. The young monks he sent for geshey study in Dokham witnessed cloud formations that resembled the visage of Ugyen Wangchuck. The “face” was witnessed by Zhenphen Choki Nangwa. It turned out that the very day they witnessed this amazing sight in the sky, coincided with the day His Majesty King Ugyen Wangchuck passed away in Bumthang. Thus, the extraordinary life of King Ugyen Wangchuck, who brought real stability and long lasting peace to this Kingdom, came to an end.



## CHAPTER THREE

### HM King Jigme Wangchuck

#### Steadfast Defender

Could you give us a brief outline of the second King, Jigme Wangchuck?

His Majesty Jigme Wangchuck was the steadfast defender of Bhutan. It is important for Bhutanese to realize that the reign of Jigme Wangchuck could have attracted serious external risks to our Kingdom, yet he held the country together through the two decades when the nations around Bhutan were going through traumatic changes.

To the north of Bhutan, Tibet was increasingly slipping under the chaos of Maoist revolution. To the South British India was in the throes of civil disobedience. Although the region was going through a turbulent period, His Majesty managed to maintain peace and security in Bhutan.

Furthermore, his judgement in renewing the Treaty of Friendship with India in 1949, with appropriate changes, had beneficial consequences that resulted in the country's smooth transition with its relationship with Independent India.



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Prince Jigme Wangchuck was born in 1905 at Lame Goenpa in Bumthang, two years before his father, King Ugyen Wangchuck was formally crowned the King of Bhutan, and one year after King Ugyen Wangchuck returned from his historic mission as an interlocutor between Britain and Tibet.

Unlike his father or his grandfather Desi Jigme Namgyal, the new Crown Prince Jigme Wangchuck had a slightly unusual education. He was tutored traditionally, but also in Hindi. This resulted in his refreshing ability to hold discussions in Hindi with both Indian and British officials. He was articulate in Hindi. Every morning he listened to radio broadcast in Hindi, although he was often ensconced in far away places - like Bumthang valley or Kuenga Rapten. While he was being tutored, his rigorous training at his father's court continued. That was a shared experience of all our Kings. From a young age they were all trained in the court, along with skills in leadership and governance.

In 1923, at the age of 19, he was appointed the Tongsa Penlop. In the same year, he married Ashi Phuntsho Choden. In 1926, a few months after his father passed away, his Coronation was held in Punakha, which was attended by a British Political Officer. His Majesty was 23 years old.



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In 1929, King Jigme Wangchuck had Kuenga Raptan Palace built and in 1937 the Domkhar Tashichholing Palace was consecrated. I mentioned that in 1923, when he was 19, he married Her Majesty Ashi Phuntsho Choden, the mother of the Third King of Bhutan. Almost 10 years later, when His Majesty was 28, he married Ashi Pema Dechen, the younger sister of Ashi Phuntsho Choden. His Majesty had four children from Her Majesty Ashi Pema Dechen: HRH Paro Penlop Namgyel Wangchuck, HRH Ashi Choki, HRH Ashi Deki Yangzom, and HRH Ashi Pema Choden.

In 1934, aged 30, he visited Calcutta. Five years later, much of the world would be plunged into the Second World War. Once again, Bhutan became an ally of British India and HM supported British India in its war effort, as shown by his cash contribution to the British. India gained Independence in 1947. The Indo-Bhutan Treaty was renewed in 1949, and during his reign, the subsidy was increased from Rs one million to Rs five million. His Majesty Ugyen Wangchuck had strived hard to raise the subsidy, but the fruit only became visible during King Jigme Wangchuck's reign. His Majesty passed away in Kuenga Raptan in 1952. He was 47. This is an outline of the chronological milestones in the life of the Second King.



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**Could you tell us something about the development that he undertook during his reign, especially in the economic sphere?**

There were constraints to any intentions of transforming the economy. The level of taxes had almost reached the limits of what the people could bear, and could not be increased any further. Taxes were mostly collected in commodities, not in cash. In the past, heavy taxes led some people to run away and live in remote places. As a result, the government was unable to generate surplus funds through internal resource mobilisation to reinvest in development. The only other option was to try to seek financial aid from the government of India.

But soon after His Majesty's accession to the throne, the Second World War began in which Britain was a principle actor. As British India was not a donor, giving aid for the development of other countries, Bhutan could not expect any financial aid. The options were truly limited for King Jigme Wangchuck.

All he could do was to change our country's labour and commodity tax system to alleviate the burden on the people. Some truly revolutionary fiscal changes took place during the reign of the Second King. His father had advised him repeatedly that the country's



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tax system should be reformed, and in memory of his father King Ugyen Wangchuck's last words, he was determined to do so.

As soon as His Majesty ascended the throne, he started to systematically study the tax system. Before making any change, the incidence, severity, effects, and value of the various taxes were assessed. At his command, all the royal secretaries were involved in studying the entire tax system. This thorough investigation led His Majesty to realize that the layers of administration that had accumulated over the centuries were the main reason for the extremely high tax levels. There were gewogs, upon which were dungkhags. Further up the multiple tiers of administration, there were dzongkhags, before finally ending up with central entities like the Punakha Dratshang, where a portion of tax was delivered directly by the tax payers. At the time of Domche, all kinds of commodities were delivered to Punakha dzong. There were also taxes payable directly to organisations beyond the government. Taxes were paid to aristocratic families, like that of Wangdicholing and Lama Goenpa, by a considerable section of the population.

His Majesty found out that there were intermediary layers in the administration, which could be eliminated without affecting the service, law and order and regulations of the Kingdom. He



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realized that there were far too many dungkhags. We know from records that in 1747, Bhutan had 126 dungkhags. The problem associated with having so many was that the dungkhags subsisted on taxes from constituent households. Households had to provide goods and services to the dungpa's office and the dungpa. His horses had to be grazed and feed and fodder provided, his rations stocked, his fields tilled and his house maintained.

The burden of taxation was compounded when it came to dzongkhag level, where there were many high officials like dzongpon, droenyer, zimpon, tapon, gorab, etc. All had to be kept in a manner to which they had become accustomed at the expense of the people. As a result, His Majesty boldly dismantled a large number of dungkhags to reduce the tax burden on the people. In the mid 18th century, Bhutan had 126 dungkhags according to the list given in Desi Sherab Wangchuck's biography. And, this must have been roughly the number of dungkhags that existed when His Majesty contemplated abolishing most of them. Contemporary generations do not realize what a major reform it was at that time. Since the founding of Bhutan, taxes had gone up periodically without proportionate benefit accruing to the people. The Second King reduced the taxes and made them uniform throughout the country. It was a sweeping decision.



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Imagine the relief when a certain tax, like the tsatong tax, was abolished. And yet, the state still needed a fixed quantity of commodities. How could that be achieved? The number of actual tax units, the households, could rise and fall over time, while the number of households paying taxes was held constant, regardless of fluctuations in the number of households. For example, when a village was affected by smallpox, the number of households paying taxes went down as some households were wiped out. Some houses became empty, literally devoid of members, because all the occupants died. Such houses were called tsatong (literally emptied of root of the members) households. The emergence of tsatong household after an epidemic resulted in the lowering of the tax collection going to the government. The way to avoid any fluctuation in the tax level was to impose tax regardless of whether there were people living in the house or not. Even if the household was empty, the rest of the village had to share the burden of taxation on behalf of the empty household. When he realized this absurdity, the Second King abolished the tsatong tax.

Let me give another example. People bred horses. If a colt was male, it was unfortunate because it automatically became government property by tax as it needed horses for the transportation of high officials and cargo. Another kind of tax that was completely abolished soon after the Second



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King came to the throne was sarim woola, which was a labour tax for express delivery of goods or messages. Many other types of woola were also dropped during his reign. Here was a king who was faithful to the spirit of reform and intentions of his father.

Having lowered the taxes, His Majesty Jigme Wangchuck then turned his attention to doing something new and positive for the people, such as raising the productivity of the farming system and providing medical services on a far wider scale, as there was only a sporadic health service provided by indigenous doctors, the dungtshos. Aristocratic families trained individuals to go to Tibet to become dungtshos, who distributed herbal powder and conducted traditional medical clinics. The Second King introduced allopathic health services on a much broader scale.

From 1931 onwards, employing a few babus (as compounders were called respectfully, taking after honorifics in Hindi) who were trained in India, His Majesty allocated a modest budget to procure injections and basic drugs. Drug orders were a topic of his correspondence with some of his subordinate officials who were asked to procure them from India. He sent these babus first to Punakha and Wangdiphodrang and then to eastern Bhutan to diagnose and provide basic medicare for



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ordinary ailments, injuries, respiratory illnesses and sexually transmitted diseases that were prevalent in Bhutan at the time. His Majesty Jigme Wangchuck established many clinics and made a significant difference to the health of the nation.

Another way of promoting an agrarian society was to propagate high-yielding varieties of fruits and cash crops and this became the mainstay of Bhutan's First and Second Five Year Plans. His Majesty Jigme Wangchuck had anticipated the introduction of cash crops and established a medicinal plant centre in Dechenling- a place I have yet to identify. He visited Dechenling to supervise the planting on his way to Gelephug via Surey, according to a Kasho. Although he was not a plant breeder by any training, using his powerful intuition he attempted to grow rice in the temperate region. During the 1940s, His Majesty's efforts to grow rice in Garpang in Choekhor were successful, but he could not diffuse this technology due to the lack of administrative and extension agents. As a result, his success was confined to the planting experiment at Garpang where he did get a rice harvest. As a man of religion, His Majesty sent a symbolic amount of three dre (one dre = 1.37 kg) from the first harvest as an offering to the Jowo in Lhasa.

With more money, His Majesty could have launched a modern transportation system. In



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1946 he opened a short stretch of motorised road in Pasamkha. There are photographs of him inspecting it.

The Second King established the direction in medicine, health care, education, a modern transportation service and adaptive agriculture that Bhutan was to take in the 1960s and 1970s. The possibility of extensive developments during his reign was circumscribed by the lack of funds, not ideas.

### **How was the security situation during the Second King's reign?**

I can describe three important events related to security. First, in 1946, His Majesty was alarmed by rising immigration levels in parts of southern Bhutan. In one of his Kashos, he instructed officials to contain the flow. He also restricted in the same Kasho any officials from authorising the felling of forests unless he permitted it personally. Both these actions are evidence of his proactive and cautionary approach. Unfortunately, there was no evidence that the Kasho was followed strictly and immigration deterred.

Two years later in 1948, the government experienced a jolt when a minor political demonstration broke out in Dagapela. The third serious event followed China's occupation of



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Tibet when Tibetan refugees poured into Bhutan. Refugees began to trickle into the kingdom throughout 1940s and 1950s. Some left for India, others settled here. All these incidents prompted His Majesty to establish a modern armed force. His Majesty had recruited one batch of soldiers early on in his reign. Although the band of soldiers was not officially called the Royal Bhutan Army, it was the beginning of Bhutan's modern defense force. Zamadar Chenchu and Dungkar Namgyal Bahadur were assigned to recruit more soldiers and the Bhutanese army was founded in 1948.

The larger security question was tied to Bhutan's relations with foreign countries, which was essentially to deal correctly with British India. Like his father King Ugyen Wangchuck, His Majesty was a staunch ally of British India, just as British India was an ally of Bhutan. The relationship was mutual. In 1934, His Majesty was invited to Calcutta, and traveled by plane and was accompanied by a surprisingly large entourage of 200 officials. They stayed in Chawrangi Square in Calcutta for two months. As an ally of Britain during the First World War, His Majesty contributed Rs one million to the British war effort. He conducted relations with British India in a farsighted way. His Majesty played golf in Calcutta, thus becoming the first Bhutanese golfer. On his way back to Bhutan he visited Darjeeling, where he met Choegyal, the King of Sikkim.



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His Majesty was very keen on sports, not only as a spectacle, but as a physical activity which would have a positive impact on his health. Because of his interest in physical skills and exercise, during the 1930s and 40s he introduced football, boxing, and many other western games and sports to Bumthang. He was an excellent archer, and could play non-stop for a month. His arrows really were king size; much thicker and longer than the ones seen today. He was the initiator of modern sports in Bhutan.

On the whole, the tone of the Second King's reign was traditional. It could hardly have been otherwise given that the influence of foreigners was not yet apparent in Bhutan. As a result, the era was characterised more with continuity rather than any sudden moves towards change.

In terms of the conduct of societal relationships, the traditional norms persisted whether the relations were between the government and citizens, Royalty and commoners, or officials and villagers. Within that context, His Majesty the King was considered a Buddhist monarch and a patron of Dharma and Dratshang. He promoted Bhutanese culture and religion, although this was not always obvious to everyone due to poor documentation of his reign.

His Majesty renovated Tashigang Dzong in 1936, and that dzong we see today is largely what was reconstructed that year. It was a major renovation.



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Kuenga Rapten Palace and Domkhar Tashichholing Palace were constructed in 1929 and 1937 respectively. His Majesty also constructed the Samchiling Palace for Ashi Pema Dechen in early 1930s. Kuenga Rapten Palace is fairly well preserved but the Samchiling Palace has fallen into a derelict condition. Major renovation was carried out in Tongsa Dzong in 1930, and in Wangdiphodrang Dzong in 1948.

All of these building projects were completed without any technological or mechanical devices, and thus, they were major undertakings during two decades of his reign. In addition, he established many other Buddhist institutions, such as Chitokha Lhakhang in Wangdiphodrang in 1948, and the Nimalung and Tharpaling Shedras during the 1930s. He rebuilt Gogona Lkakhang in Wangdi and Jigjay Lhakhang in Tongsa in 1933. He enriched the monastic accoutrements for mask dances in many dzongs, most notably in Punakha Dzong. In 1928, he completely refurnished the mask dance costumes in Punakha with the most expensive silk brocade.

**Can you tell us something about his lasting legacies?**

His Majesty's lasting legacy consists of passing the country absolutely intact physically and politically from his father to the Third King. We take this for granted, but any mistake could have



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meant a different national status for Bhutan. World history is not kind to small countries. Over the centuries, many small nations have disappeared from the face of the earth. Here we are wedged between two the largest nations on the earth, with 1.3 billion people in the north and 1.1 billion in the south. We have been extremely fortunate, but that good fortune should not be attributed to destiny and prophecy. People have to work hard for it and we should remain conscious that the situation can be otherwise.

The Kings of Bhutan had that concern uppermost in their minds and this was the case with King Jigme Wangchuck. He successfully guided the country through those turbulent years when enormous changes were taking place in Tibet, India and China. Bhutan was able to come through into the post World War period where development awaited its people, like warm sunshine after a long winter.



## CHAPTER FOUR

HM King Jigme Dorji Wangchuck

A Himalayan Revolutionary

**Can you introduce King Jigme Dorji Wangchuck?**

His Majesty Jigme Dorji Wangchuck was the Himalayan revolutionary. His reign really was the watershed between Bhutan as it was - and Bhutan as it would be in the future. His reign marked the true crossroad or juncture for Bhutan.

The Third King reversed the flow of resources. Up until then, resources flowed from the society and people to the state whether it was to the Dratshang (monastic body) or the administration. Taxes were collected and consumed by the state for many purposes including the maintenance of the country's security and the upholding of Buddhism. But His Majesty's reign marked a reverse flow of resources. Resources were mobilised from abroad and invested into society so that the people became healthy, more educated, ate better food, and had more time for leisure. He mobilised resources from the international sphere as aid. It was the first time that happened in Bhutan. He was a deft planner in the sense that he modernised Bhutan without



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surrendering its culture and tradition. He is a Himalayan patriot in this respect.

All the Himalayan entities - Ladakh, Sikkim, and other ancient kingdoms - collapsed one by one along with their culture. Bhutan is the only one left that can actually provide a ring of defence around Buddhist culture. His Majesty wanted to bring modern techniques and methods to preserve and promote culture of Bhutan, yet at the same time, he introduced Western science and technology. He was a forerunner among environmentalists in this part of the world. The Manas Sanctuary he established was one of the earliest in the region.

There are many fascinating aspects to His Majesty. He had a multifaceted personality. In his own way he was an artist and an aesthete, as the arts were important for him. His taste reflected fine design, and it came out in the design of stamps, currency, badges, military insignias, decorations, coins and buildings created in his reign. The costume of “bazawala” (army musical band) he created is still unrivalled in theatrical design. In some of these artistic works, His Majesty was supported by several cultured persons of his reign, like his successive secretaries Gaydon Thinley and Dasho Shingkar Lam.



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The Tashichodzong he rebuilt is an example of a highly cultivated taste. The central tower (Utse), Guru Lhakhang and Dukhang were not rebuilt and date from an earlier period. The rest of the Tashichodzong His Majesty rebuilt is not a baroque building or an overly ornamental in the use of carvings and colour. It does possess a fundamentally aesthetic proportion. It is the first modern dzong in this country that set its own standard.

His Majesty loved Bhutanese music, particularly vocals and melodies. From the late 1980s onwards, music became an excessive blend of xylophone, lute, dramnyen and high tone vocals. Similar dissonance was visible in urban architecture, although there is a semblance of a Bhutanese look to it. His Majesty was deeply drawn to the landscape and nature, and really felt himself organically part of it. The private, two-storey building at Sona Gasa he built for himself was deliberately simple, and set inconspicuously in nature, almost like a Zen structure. He was many things at the same time to many people: a very complex person.

His Majesty was brilliant at optimising the effects from small resources that he had at his command to cultivate relationships. For example, he would have the gift packets laid out in the audience room, while the discussions were in progress, to



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be given away at the end. In major discussions, he thought through the structure and sequence of the arguments, although parts of the arguments were later delivered by others.

Having said this, I can give a brief chronology of his life. His Majesty was born in 1928, in Thruelpang in Tongsa in the same two-storey building for which he held fond sentiments until the end of his life. The building now exhibits some of his personal belongings in his memory. At a young age, he was apprenticed in traditional disciplines and leadership at the royal court of his father.

In 1943, he was elevated to the position of the Tongsa Dronyer, and seven years later as the Paro Penlop in 1950, after the death of the Paro Penlop, Tshering Penjor, who held perhaps the longest tenure as the Paro Penlop. His Majesty married Ashi Kesang Choeden Wangchuck, the daughter of Gongzim Sonam Tobgay, in 1951. His Majesty and Her Majesty Ashi Kesang Choeden Wangchuck had five children: HRH Crown Prince Jigme Singye Wangchuck, HRH Ashi Sonam Choeden, HRH Ashi Dechen Wangmo, HRH Ashi Pema Choden, and HRH Ashi Kesang Wangmo. The following year, His Majesty became the King after his father, His Majesty Jigme Wangchuck, passed away in Kuenga Rabten Palace.



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His Majesty was educated in a British manner in Kalimpong and went on to visit many foreign countries, in particular Scotland and Switzerland where he got ideas of modernising his kingdom and found inspiration to choose elements that were suitable for Bhutan. One of the Kashos of the Second King, addressed to Gongzim Sonam Tobgay, contains advices to the Crown Prince when he was about to leave for Scotland. The far reaching initiatives he took are too many for us to enumerate, as his entire reign was studded with many brilliant moves he took one after another at a hectic pace.

During his brief 20-year reign that ended in 1972, the fundamental reorientation of our society began. His Majesty not only achieved the reorganisation of society and government, but also solidified Bhutan's sovereignty and security. For the first time, Bhutan was noticed internationally.

**His Majesty Jigme Dorji Wangchuck is called the father of modern Bhutan. Could you say something about how he undertook the development of modern infrastructure for the first time?**

Before focusing on infrastructure, I should remind you that His Majesty Jigme Dorji Wangchuck's first moves were mainly political and social, not economic or infrastructural. Economic changes had to wait until a reliable long-term



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partner could be found to assist Bhutan. It took some time for India to offer assistance and play a crucial role in Bhutan's development. Foreign aid did not become available immediately in early 1950s, and, throughout that decade, His Majesty devoted himself to the internal reorganisation of society – both politically and socially.

Administrative, social and political reforms preceded economic development. His Majesty was inherently interested in emancipation: the idea of giving greater freedoms to all individuals so that human development and potential could become possible. In the context of Bhutan, there were small groups in our society who were bonded labourers. They were not slaves. Slavery has a different connotation; these groups were indentured labourers. These consisted of textile weavers (thagma), garto, zaabs, draabs for aristocratic households. Indentured labourers for prominent families consisted of zaabs and drabs. In return, they would receive food, lodging and clothes, but the systems of what the indentured labourers received varied greatly. As soon as His Majesty became the King, the labourers who worked on the royal lands were turned into tenants and sharecroppers instead of indented labourers. Later, similar indentured labourers were set free in other areas of the country, especially in some parts of Eastern Bhutan where they were concentrated.



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Knowledge of the actual social and economic situation of Bhutanese peasants was crucial to His Majesty in planning his reforms. As there were no social scientists to assist him, but only wise elders who gave him information by way of conversation, this knowledge had to be a personal quest. As a result, His Majesty went to observe the realities and identify the problems himself. In 1957, a year after he became the King, he travelled to eastern Bhutan with 150 officials. It was an area that was unknown to him, but as the bulk of Bhutanese population were living there, the region had to be studied from the point of view of development potential.

In 1953, His Majesty was preoccupied with another matter. He realized that hitherto the decision of the King and that of the high officials were binding on the country. He wanted such decisions to be shared so that the outcomes were acceptable to everybody. As a result, His Majesty opened the National Assembly of Bhutan in 1953, in Punakha. For the first time elders from different gewogs were invited to voice their concerns, ideas and solutions for the future of this country. At the same time, it was a forum for His Majesty to share his larger vision for Bhutan in the years to come.

In 1955, he intensified the conversion of commodity taxes to cash taxes, by assessing land



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for cash taxation. Land holdings were measured by cadastral surveys using simple chain links. The inaccuracies involved were to cause considerable anxieties to the people later in 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s during remeasurements. Cash taxes were nominal, but moving from commodity taxes to cash taxes was a radical step.

After the National Assembly was established in 1953, His Majesty drafted and devised a series of progressive laws for the Kingdom. Previously, it was customary practice for disputes and litigations that could not be solved by elders and mediators in the village to be directed to the King. The Royal Secretaries arbitrated the litigations and the final verdicts were given by His Majesty - or in the name of His Majesty - by the Royal Secretaries. This process was considered insufficient and the King brought out a holistic set of laws covering fundamental aspects of Bhutanese life such as marriage, inheritance, properties and so forth. The Thrimzhung Chenmo (Supreme Law) was approved in 1959. His Majesty was the author of almost all the provisions contained within it. The influence of His Majesty's intelligence is evident: the laws are very organic and coherent among its provisions and to the reality, which was traditional. This is not so with the new legislations, which have obvious extraneous origins, as is apparent from their convoluted attempts at translations



into Dzongkha, and jar on a traditional audience. The comment that the Bhutanese legislators and bureaucrats cannot understand new raft of laws if there is no English translations in front of them is not completely satirical.

The reduction of taxes was a continuing aim from the Second King onwards and His Majesty continued to make significant reductions. Apart from better laws and tax reforms, The Royal Bhutan Army was formally established. Furthermore, the entitlements of all officials were converted from commodities to cash and new designations were given. Until then there were penlops, dzongpons, dzongtshabs, dronyers, zimpons, and so forth, but no ministers or deputy ministers; they were to become new inventions of His Majesty with the establishment of Ministries in 1968.

Along with the promulgation of Thrimzhung Chenmo, a mechanism to implement and enforce laws became necessary. His Majesty decided to initiate the establishment of judiciary, first with the appointment of Thrimpons (now called Drangpons) in districts, and then finally with the High Court in 1968. These administrative and social reforms were prior to any economic modernisation programmes. From a certain perspective, they were preconditions for modernisation.



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### **How about infrastructure development?**

Modernising Bhutan's infrastructure, transportation, communications, education, health system and agriculture had to wait until India was receptive enough to offer aid. India became independent in 1947, and was not in any immediate position to help Bhutan. After Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru's historic journey to Bhutan in 1958, King Jigme Dorji Wangchuck paid repeated visits to India after his initial trip as the King in 1954. Thereafter, aid became available.

When Nehru visited Bhutan in 1958, he was accompanied by Indira Gandhi and close ties developed between Gandhi family and the Wangchuck dynasty over the decades. The year 1959 was the historic point when the development of our infrastructure began in earnest with road construction. In the same year, a mass study tour to India took place as 100 elders from Bhutan went to visit India. This delegation must have been eye-opening for the Bhutanese.

Although road construction started in 1959, systematic approach to develop a network began two years later in 1961, with the commencement of the First Five Year Plan. The Plan envisaged 177 km of road construction, 108 schools, three hospitals, and 45 clinics. In 1961, motor road



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reached Thimphu and it became possible to use trucks and some machinery to ferry timber and stones to build Tashichhodzong, which was rebuilt between 1961 and 1968.

Government transport to move people and goods started with the establishment of the Bhutan Government Transport Service. Its acronym BGTS was one of the first that the Bhutanese had to get used to among the bewildering number that the bureaucracy kept on creating in English over the following decades. By 1966, Samtse, Thimphu, Paro and several other places in Western Bhutan were connected by motor road. The first development planners from India started working in Paro and Samtse. They opened an office in Samtse for the winter and Paro for the summer, because they could not face the harsh winter of Thimphu, just like the Bhutanese in the olden days who preferred to migrate to warmer valleys in winter.

The systematic envisioning of the economic future of this country through Five Year Plans started soon. The idea of budgeting and programming on a five-year basis is a legacy from that period. As initiated by His Majesty Jigme Dorji Wangchuck, India is still the major player in the Five Year Plans of Bhutan. In the first two plans, investment was concentrated on roads because without roads, the unit cost of doing anything else was too high.



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Without communication facilities the Kingdom could not be integrated; everything was too dispersed. That was part of the problem of medieval Bhutan. The central government's penetration was physically limited by the cost of transportation. Officials could not move fast or frequently from one place to another. The construction of roads expanded vigorously towards the end of His Majesty Jigme Dorji Wangchuck's reign. In fact, his last visit to eastern Bhutan was to open the Zhunglam, the highway between Wangdiphodrang and Tongsa, in 1971.

His Majesty's strategy was to broaden the source of aid by developing relationships with other countries, which was important for the sovereignty of the Kingdom. He made it possible for Bhutan to join the Colombo Plan in 1972, to access third country aid. By 1972, the western part of the Kingdom had already changed radically due the presence of health services, education, transportation, administration, and electricity. Electricity for Thimphu valley was generated from small hydels in Jungshina and Khasadrapchu.

### **How about culture and the education system during his reign?**

His Majesty invested considerable time and faith in Bhutanese culture so that we could perpetuate



ourselves as a nation, in particular as a country with a flourishing Buddhist culture.

The Third King established Simtokha Rigzhung Lobdra in 1967, where a new breed of traditional scholars could graduate, with Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche (1910-1991) as the founding principal. His Majesty increased the number of monks in many dratshangs. He understood that as a nation, we collectively stood to benefit far more if we preserved and promoted our culture and traditions, whether it was the preservation of our textiles, architecture, language or values.

His Majesty is the father of Dzongkha as our national language. The phonology and grammar of Dzongkha were adapted and devised under the command of the Third King. The brilliant brains engaged in this challenging task were Lopen Pemala (1926-2009), Lopen Nado, and Lopen Gyembo Tenzin. For the first time, a unity of tongues emerged, although we continued to preserve the diversity of languages. As a Kingdom that was moving, merging and integrating together, Bhutan needed a common tongue.

To propagate culture and traditions in schools, to study scientific disciplines and humanities, the King established modern education. He established what were then two centres of educational



## LEADERSHIP OF THE WISE, KINGS OF BHUTAN

excellence, inaugurating one public school, Yangchenphug, in western Bhutan in 1969, and the other, Kanglung, in eastern Bhutan in 1968. An agriculture department was opened to improve nutritional qualities and to generate income. The Kingdom's free health service was also founded.

**How did His Majesty manage to participate in international bodies and build international relationships with the other countries?**

His Majesty the King was acutely aware of the international currents at the time because he had acquaintances abroad. He could charm any foreign leader during his meeting with them. He had close friends, many of them from India, with whom he discussed his aspirations. He also talked over matters with his friend from Switzerland, Fritz von Schulthess, and with lamas coming out of Tibet. The XVIth Karmapa Rangjung Rigpai Dorji was a close friend of his. In addition, he established institutions like the Royal Advisory Council, which drew wise elders from the country to discuss their ideas with him. The early batches of Royal Advisory Councillors consisted of men of high native intelligence and eloquence like Dasho Kolai Lama (Councillor for three terms), Geyshey Tshewang, Lam Rinchen and Dasho Sedo. They fulfilled His Majesty's vision of the institution to a large degree.



## HM JIGME DORJI WANGCHUCK, HIMALAYAN REVOLUTIONARY

But His Majesty's first priority was to deepen the excellent relationship with India. That he did successfully, visiting India many times. The second priority was to diversify the relationship with other countries. Bangladesh figured quite high in his scheme of things. Bhutan was the first nation after India to recognise the independence of Bangladesh. In 1971, His Majesty raised Nu. six million for the victims of flood in Bangladesh. A fraction of this sum was raised by staging theatrical plays that he directed discretely. Some of the dramas and performances he orchestrated, in more than one sense, were social criticisms and took the function of a free press. A drama he surreptitiously directed caricatured his ministers.

The relationships with other countries, in concrete terms, widened as far as Australia. In 1970, Bhutan received 54 trucks, which were known as 'International', after its brand, from Australia. His Majesty poured his energy and his determination to make Bhutan a member of United Nations against many odds that the younger generation will not realize. One of the crowning glories of his era was enabling Bhutan to join the United Nations in 1971, when Bhutan became its 125th member.





Desi Jigme Namgyel (1824-1881)



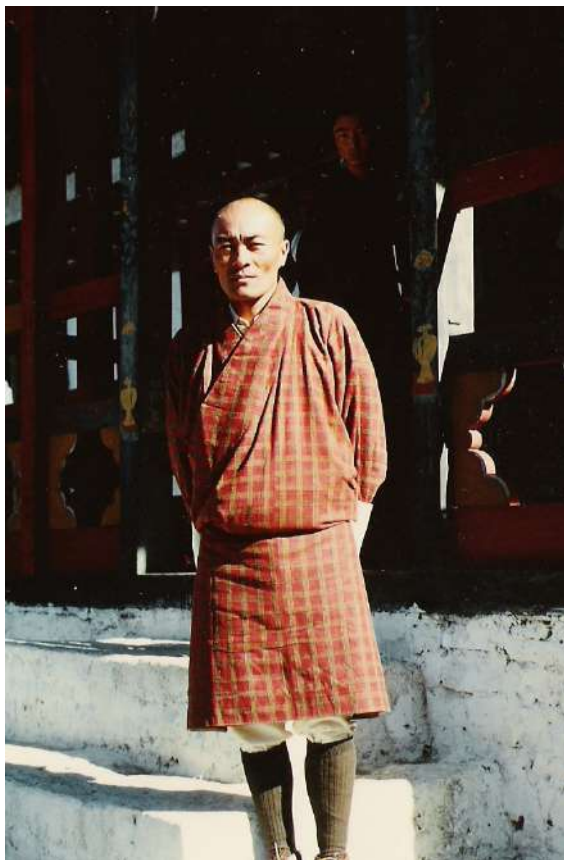
HM King Ugyen Wangchuck probably in 1904. On the left is Gongzim (Principal Chamberlain) Kazi Ugyen Dorji, the grandfather of Dowager Queen, Ashi Kesang Choedon Wangchuck



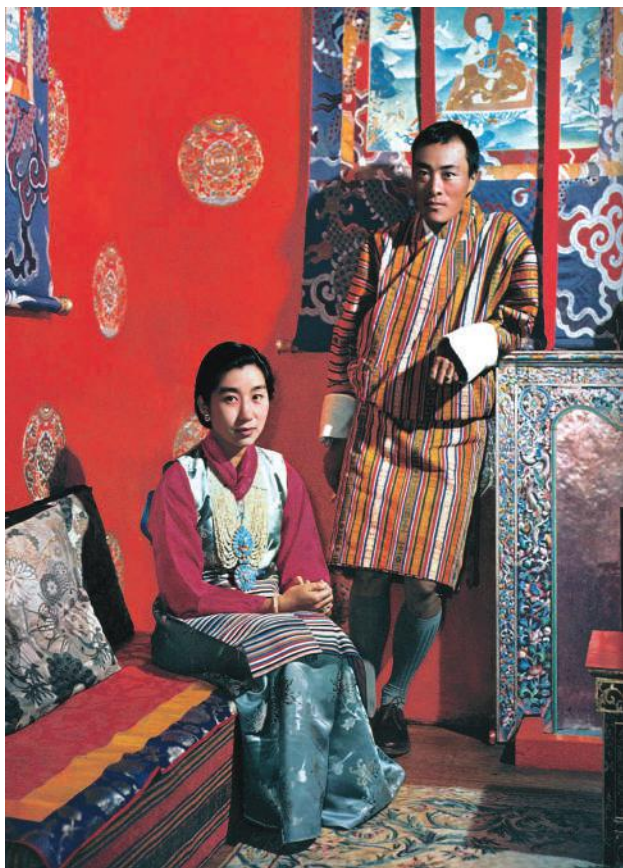
HM King Jigme Wangchuck with Queen Ashi Phuntsho Choden (right) and Queen Ashi Pema Dechen (left)



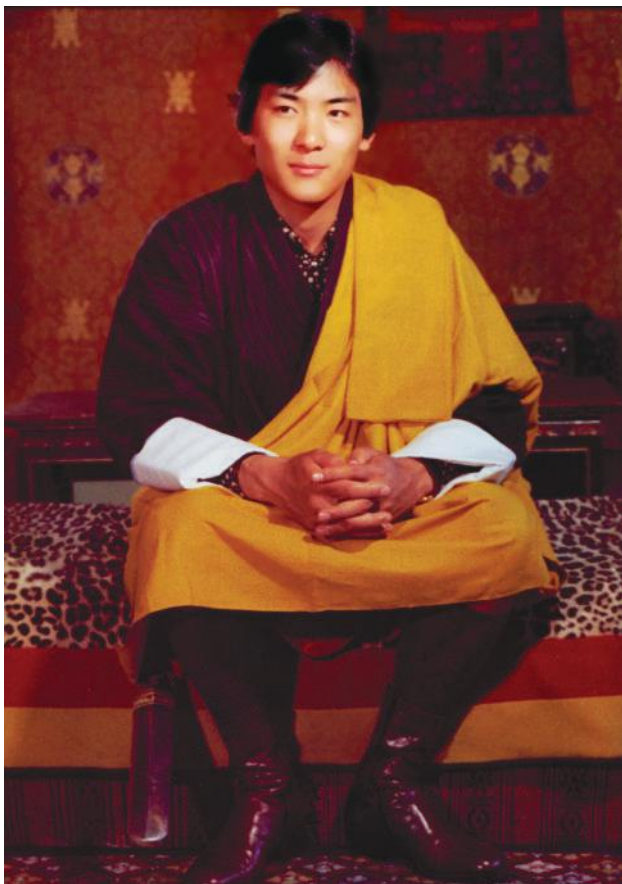
HM Jigme Wangchuck in Gangtok, Sikkim



HM Jigme Dorji Wangchuck at Kanglung Public School



HM King Jigme Dorji Wangchuck and HM Queen Kesang  
Choedon Wangchuck, 1951



HM King Jigme Singye Wangchuck



HM King Jigme Singye Wangchuck



From left: Her Majesty Ashi Tshering Yangdon, Her Majesty Ashi Tshering Pem, His Majesty the King, Her Majesty Ashi Dorji Wangmo, and Her Majesty Ashi Sangay Choden on the day of the royal wedding in 1988



HM King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck



His Majesty King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck and  
Indian Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh, 2008



HM King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck



## CHAPTER FIVE

### HM King Jigme Singye Wangchuck

#### Jewel of Men

The reign of the Fourth King was happily long and rich with achievements. Can you tell us how you wish to approach it?

If the Third King Druk Gyalpo Jigme Dorji Wangchuck was known as the Father of Modern Bhutan, we could call the Fourth King, His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck, the Jewel of Men, a phrase coined by Her Majesty Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck.

I plan to discuss, firstly, the early life and early reign of HM Jigme Singye Wangchuck. Then, I will focus on the socio-economic development during his glorious reign, which resulted in the most prosperous and peaceful period in our history so far. The last part will conclude with the political changes towards a democratic constitutional monarchy and the impact His Majesty created in the world in fields such as the environment and Gross National Happiness.



## LEADERSHIP OF THE WISE, KINGS OF BHUTAN

### Where was HM Jigme Singye Wangchuck born?

He was born at Dechencholing Palace. Though it was renamed Dechencholing by the Third King, it seems that at the time of the founder of the nation, Zhabdrung Rinpoche, this place was called Kaazhing Womi Drong. “Kaazhing” refers perhaps to certain types of trees growing here, and “womai” refers to milk. There must have been a village (a drong as it is called in Dzongkha). When the Third King shifted the capital from the Choskhor Valley in Bumthang to Thimphu, he had to build Dechencholing Palace as the new residence for the Royal Family.

The palace closely reflects the Third King’s Bhutanese aesthetics, a simple yet pleasing style, in its symmetry, proportion, and colour harmony. Using his own design, the King had it constructed by his dependable site engineer and builder, Dasho Paap Yoser. Dasho Paap Yoser was also the person who supervised the challenging task of rebuilding Tashichhodzong, as we see it today, under the direct guidance of the Third King between 1961 and 1968.

The construction of Dechencholing Palace started in 1952, and was consecrated in 1954, a year before the birth of His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck. Dechencholing Palace is important in



## HM KING JIGME SINGYE WANGCHUCK, JEWEL OF MEN

another way in our national life. As the only place where the reigning monarch can hosts banquets, often on its lawns for high foreign dignitaries, Dechencholing Palace has contributed to many successes in national diplomacy conducted under its serene and quiet setting.

**Could you briefly tell us something about the birth of His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck, and his early childhood?**

His Majesty was born on 11 November, 1955. In a metaphysical sense, his birth was foretold by Terton Drukdra Dorji. His Majesty the Fourth King was born to Ashi Kezang Choden Wangchuck and His Majesty Jigme Dorji Wangchuck at Dechencholing Palace. Her Majesty was the daughter of Rani Choying Wangmo, the youngest daughter of Thuthob Namgyal Dorji, the King of Sikkim and Raja Sonam Tobgye, the Gongzim of the Second King. Raja Sonam Tobgye was the son of Kazi Ugyen Dorji, who became Gongzim of the First King in 1911, having served him for a long time.

His Majesty the Fourth King was the only prince or male child. So the birth of the baby prince was a happy occasion that was celebrated by the Royal Family, citizens and well-wishers from abroad. The Third King was so pleased that he composed a song



## LEADERSHIP OF THE WISE, KINGS OF BHUTAN

commemorating the birth. The political officer of India stationed in Sikkim and the representative of the Sikkim government came to offer felicitations to the royal parents and to pay their respect to the new born prince. The Third King organised for the prince to enter Tashichhodzong in a grand procession at the age of three, sometime in 1958, and there in the dzong, the young prince received the offerings of good wishes and respects by the public, monks and officials for the first time.

The prince grew up in Dechencholing Palace, playing in the woods of Dechencholing Goenpa and Dechencholing Palace gardens. The young prince was very fond of the outdoor life, and he used to go to woods of Samtenling, Dechencholing, Sonagasa, and Pangrezampa, Jungshina and Paro Garden Palace.

**Can you give an account of his formal education?**

The Crown Prince acquired occidental and traditional learning in various locations. He began studying at Dechencholing Palace, when he was six years old, in 1961. Soon afterwards, he went to study at St Joseph's Darjeeling. Around 1964, as the Crown Prince, he attended Summerfield and Heathersdown Schools in England where he completed his studies in 1969.



## HM KING JIGME SINGYE WANGCHUCK, JEWEL OF MEN

He returned to Bhutan during his school holidays, and during such breaks he accompanied his father, HM Jigme Dorji Wangchuck on visits around the country. It was a wholesome and diversified education, but increasingly His Majesty Jigme Dorji Wangchuck wanted the Crown Prince to be near him to have practical experience in governance and leadership, while he continued his formal education. The next phase of his formal education took place at Namselling Palace in 1969, and lastly at Paro Ugyen Wangchuck Academy at Satsham Choten, Paro, which was established for that purpose in 1970, along with a class of selected students from all over Bhutan.

Besides Western subjects taught by foreign tutors, lessons included dzongkha grammar, evening prayers, driglam namzha (Bhutanese code of etiquette) and several other indigenous learnings.

As a young boy, the Crown Prince was a very tough athlete, rigorous outdoor adventurer and utterly fearless. He rode horses and bikes along mud trails at perilous speed and trekked across the country, through jungles and villages. He had a tremendous presence of mind and courage. His decisiveness and leadership were in evidence early on: even as a boy, he took charge whenever there were critical moments, such as a road accident requiring immediate co-ordination.



## LEADERSHIP OF THE WISE, KINGS OF BHUTAN

His Majesty lived in the Linkana Palace, which became the residence of the Fourth King during the early part of his reign. Can you tell us about the place?

The Linkana Palace, as it is known nowadays, is located very close to the Wangchu and Tashichhodzong. It is a narrow strip of land between the river and Tashichhodzong bounded by a bazam (wooden bridge) upstream and motor bridge below it. It is now the residence of the Fifth Druk Gyalpo, who, as everyone can make out from the modest size of Linkana cottage, lives in an astonishingly unassuming way, devoted to working for the people. The cottage was built by the Third King to house the Indian Prime Minister Mrs Indira Gandhi when she visited Bhutan for the second time, for two days in May 1968.

However, HM Jigme Dorji Wangchuck changed his mind and furnished Tashichhodzong for Mrs Indira Gandhi to stay. HM moved out to this cottage by the Wangchu, and so it came to be known as the Royal Cottage in the early part of his reign. It is also the place where HM Jigme Dorji Wangchuck lay-in-state from 23rd July to 19th October, 1972 before he was taken for cremation at holy Kujay. HM the Fourth King lived in the Royal Cottage for much of his early reign.



HM KING JIGME SINGYE WANGCHUCK, JEWEL OF MEN

### **What challenges of leadership did HM face at a young age in the early 1970s?**

The responsibilities of governing fell more and more on his young shoulders. In 1971, His Majesty Druk Gyalpo Jigme Dorji Wangchuck appointed the Crown Prince as the Chairman of Planning Commission, charged with the planning and co-ordination of the Five Year Plan. The following year, on June 16 1972, he was elevated to the state position of the Tongsa Penlop investing on him directly the yellow robe or kabney.

The 3rd Five Year Plan, which spanned the period 1971-77, was in progress when his father, His Majesty Jigme Dorji Wangchuck passed away. The Crown Prince was 16 at that time. For the Royal Family, particularly the Crown Prince, and the people of Bhutan, the untimely demise was like “the sun of happiness setting at noon and night falling during the day.” In the familiar words used to describe the event at that time, a profound and solemn responsibility fell “like a mountain” on HM Jigme Singye Wangchuck. Reality cut short his boyhood. He gave up his youth to assume the mantle of leadership, when Bhutan was at a crossroads both domestically and internationally. I would like to stress the fact that the country was at a critical crossroads.



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Increasingly, his determination and foresight unfolded, amplified further by his charismatic and magnetic personality. International media remarked on his dashing looks and striking personality. Some magazines compared him to the first global oriental celebrity, the disciplined martial arts star, Bruce Lee. There was an unmistakable aura about His Majesty's deeply thoughtful and serene personality. Like many other Bhutanese, I happened to meet some foreign dignitaries after they had an audience with HM in his later reign. They were rather stunned by his charm, sharpness and insights into not just regional but global issues. At the same time, foreign dignitaries sensed the heaviness of his seven-day-a-week responsibilities in staying the course of a country between two giants, between modernity and traditions, between straight forward economic growth and development that was focussed on contentment. He preferred to use the word contentment instead of happiness or the newly coined Dzongkha equivalent for GNH.

We can retrospectively analyse the early leadership of HM in the first ten years, from 1972 to 1981. 1972 to 1976 was the period of the 3rd Five Year Plan, and 1976 to 1981 was the period of 5th Five Year Plan. As both King and the Chairman of the Planning Commission, the clearing house for the programmes and projects, His Majesty began to guide the planned activities first in broad terms and then increasingly in detail.



HM KING JIGME SINGYE WANGCHUCK, JEWEL OF MEN

**Can you give us an idea of what the actual development status of Bhutan was in 1974, when he acceded to the throne? Is there any precise information?**

Statistics were not collected in early 1970s. There is no quantitative information about the social and economic situation of our country, say for 1972 or 1974. The baseline data we use for comparison over time were first collected in 1985, the year when time series data becomes available. There is some information that indicates the low level of infrastructure that existed in 1974. Let me give some examples. There were 13,410 students enrolled in schools compared to 1,51,260 or so in 2006. There were 11 ill-equipped hospitals, manned mostly by foreign doctors, and 45 basic health units in 1974.

One of the constraints in education and health was the lack of qualified people. In 1976, His Majesty commanded the establishment of the Royal Institute of Health Sciences and the first batch of Health Assistants and Basic Health Workers graduated in 1986. Sparse networks of 1,332 km of roads had been laid out by 1974, compared to 4,544 by the end of his reign in 2006. Telephone connections, mostly for officials in Thimphu, were limited to 480 compared to 31,526 in 2006. In 1974, the country was linked



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primarily by a network of 24 wireless stations. Just four million units of electricity were generated in 1974, compared to 3.357 billion units by the end of his reign in 2006.

In his Coronation Address on June 2, 1974, His Majesty stressed the need “to attain self-reliance and preserve Bhutan’s sovereignty and independence.” HM also stressed that development undertakings should be a genuine collaboration between the people and the government. He conceived of grander, long-term goals in the industrial, hydro-power and communications sectors. These came to fruition in the 1980s. But during the 1970s, His Majesty’s immediate aims for rural households unfolded in terms of intensive valley projects, cash crops - especially potatoes - irrigation, and resettlement.

**Enhancing the income and livelihood of the rural people were the main focus of the 3rd and 4th Five Year Plans. Can you tell how HM wanted to improve the living standard of the rural households?**

### **Valley Projects**

Soon after he acceded to the Throne, His Majesty launched the Tashigang and Tsirang Intensive Valley Development Projects in 1972.



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These projects were part of a larger vision of food self-sufficiency and income generation. Tashigang included Tashi Yangtse in those days. The valley development projects in Tsirang and Tashigang mobilised people to contribute labour to build irrigation channels, schools, dispensaries and roads. There were visible successes and revealed a new, co-operative effort between the people and the government.

HM visited Tashigang and Mongar again in August 1974, after the Coronation. Encouraged by the achievements in the Tashigang and Tsirang Intensive Valley Projects, similar valley projects were replicated in Mongar and the newly created Shumar district (soon renamed as Pemagatshel, a name sought from the late Dudjom Rinpoche Jigdreng Yeshey Dorji (1904-87)) districts. These projects were also sites of experimental and participatory decision-making. It led to the formation of dzongkhag yargay tshogchungs (DYTs), which brought the chimis, gups and officials to prepare plans together. By 1981, Tashigang and Tsirang had fully functional DYTs.

### Potatoes, Oranges and Apples

At higher altitude, a new initiative by His Majesty in early 1970s consisted of diffusing potatoes as cash crops, relying on the advantageous timing that



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our potatoes were harvested when potatoes were sown in Bengal and Assam. Incidentally, I should remind that a variety of potato was in Bhutan even before the Bogle Mission planted it, for example, at Meritsemo in 1774. The older variety is contrasted by its name from the Bogle's variety, which was called Jaga's kewa (Indian potato). In the 1970s, initial seeds were brought from Kashmir and Himachal Pradesh and multiplied at the royal pasture land of Longtoed and Longmed, which was converted to potato farms. Beginning with the large scale production in Khaling and Chapcha, potatoes became a key export crop, reaching 60,000 metric tons, grown by over 10,725 households by 2006.

In the south, the focus was on citrus fruits. For example, in 1977, His Majesty encouraged the people of Dagana to start cardamom and orange plantations. Both of these cash crops are now major sources of rural income as 3,400 metric tons of cardamom, 55, 558 metric tons of oranges and 7, 400 metric of apples were produced in 2006 due to the initiatives taken first in 1970s.

### **Irrigation Canals**

Increasing food grain production, and particularly rice, was a very important theme in agricultural development in the early years of HM's reign. In an address to the people of Sibsoo



## HM KING JIGME SINGYE WANGCHUCK, JEWEL OF MEN

in January 1974, HM expressed his hope for food self-sufficiency. Within that context, His Majesty emphasised the importance of restoring old irrigation canals across the country, and building new ones. Bhutan was already divided into eight major irrigation zones for that purpose. Let me give you an example of the construction of an irrigation canal marking one of his early initiatives. HM visited Tashiyangtse to celebrate National Day on December 17, 1976 and during that occasion His Majesty initiated the huge Khamdang Irrigation Project that would increase the amount of fresh drinking water, and water for irrigation for the densely settled slopes. The following year in December 1977, HM inaugurated the Khamdang Irrigation Project.

### **Resettlement and Land Grants**

In some places, His Majesty diagnosed that the land was either too poor or the acreage too small to provide a good life for the farmers. Back in 1973, HM gave land grants to the landless. This evolved into large scale resettlement programmes. The fact is, resettlement has a long antecedent, although people mistakenly believe that such programmes started in the 1990s. The first was the Sershong Resettlement Project, consisting of Sershong, Pemaling, Norbuling and Tashiphu. It was launched by His Majesty in 1976 for 270 families (or 1,400



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members) who were relocated from Zhemgang and Tongsa districts to Gaylegphug. Likewise, 56 families from Lhuentse and Mongar were resettled at Gyposhing in December 1976. The following year, in 1977, HM granted lands to another 200 landless people from Lhuentse.

### **Review and Decentralisation**

At the end of the 4th Five Year Plan (1976-1981), HM spent considerable time extensively reviewing the successes and challenges of the last four years of development, which also included the physical inspection of the field projects. This review took almost a month and was held in the Banquet Hall (now functioning as the meeting hall of the National Council) where the King discussed in detail the various future policies and strategies with dzongdags, people's representatives, government officials and project co-ordinators. HM envisioned an entirely different planning system for the 5th Five Year Plan (1981-86) emphasising decentralisation. New dzongdags were appointed in all the 18 districts, with responsibilities of managing public finances and co-ordinating district development plans, in their capacities as chairmen of DYT's. Dzongdags were delegated broad powers to make decisions at the local level in conjunction with the gups and chimis.



HM KING JIGME SINGYE WANGCHUCK, JEWEL OF MEN

**His Majesty had long-term plans for other sectors such as industry, hydropower and tourism. What were the programmes in these areas started by HM soon after he came to the throne?**

During the 3rd and 4th Five Year Plans (1972-1981), many landmark industrial and hydro-power projects were undertaken. HM's special attention on the farming sector went hand in hand with preparation for the hydro, industry and tourism development, which were to bring major benefits a decade later in the 1980s.

### **Tourism**

Let us start with tourism, which has become a promising industry today. HM introduced an unconventional tourism policy of “high-value, low-volume”. Thoughtful people find this policy both farsighted and exceptional. Soon after the Coronation, in October 1974, the first group of 20 tourists entered the country through Phuntsholing, as there was no air service then. If we had followed the usual tourism model, perhaps our country would have undergone huge stress by now, due to a combination of the lack of facilities and infrastructure on the one hand and a high number of tourist arrivals on the other.



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### **Chukha Hydro-Power Project**

One of the landmark developments, soon after his Coronation, was the signing of the ambitious Chukha Hydro-Project in March 1974. Earlier, HM had several rounds of talks with the Indian Government about the Chukha Hydro-power Project on its financing modality. Construction began in 1983 and the President of India, Shri R. Venkataraman and HM inaugurated Chukha Hydro-Project on 21st October 1988, nearly 13 years after the first discussion on it took place, in 1974. Chukha changed the revenue situation and the financial capacity of the country. Chukha was important in itself, but also as a model for hydro-power generation with India and for other projects that were taken up later.

### **Penden Cement Authority 1979**

In the industrial sphere, an early landmark project planned soon after HM acceded to the Throne was the development of a complete Master Plan for the construction of the Penden Cement Factory. The actual construction started in 1979 and the company was in production by 1983. The Penden Cement Authority produced about half a million MTs of cement every day in 2008. It has fuelled construction in the country and without the Penden Cement Authority, construction projects would have been far slower and more expensive.



HM KING JIGME SINGYE WANGCHUCK, JEWEL OF MEN

**The Fourth King, HM Jigme Singye Wangchuck lived in Samtenling Palace from the early 1980s onwards. Can you introduce Samtenling Palace?**

In a strict sense, it is not a palace. It is a simple, single storey, log house built on a foundation of mud and stone. He preferred to use organic and natural materials. It is a practice to refer to the log house in such honorific terms because it is where HM lives. Before he moved there, he lived in the Royal Cottage, now known as Linkana, and that too was a humble dwelling, which is not comparable in any sense to a palace, as it usually is understood in other countries.

The log house and the environment dominated by the pine woods around it are spartan and natural. The atmosphere is almost monastic. It reminds me of the Buddhist literature on leadership. A great leader has to have three overarching attributes: strength (nuspa); knowledge (khyenpa), particularly knowledge of the pattern of suffering, and compassion or love (tse wa). All of these qualities are unlikely to be integrated well without contemplation or deep reflection. The clarity of HM's visions and decisions was probably facilitated by a deep reflection made possible by living in the simple, pure and inspiring woods of Samtenling, and leading a life profoundly directed towards national goals. His love for nature is integral to



## LEADERSHIP OF THE WISE, KINGS OF BHUTAN

his personality. His humble residence set in forest like a renunciate illustrates this powerfully, along with his humility characteristic of a great Buddhist leader.

**Before we discuss the socio-economic development, can we discuss the relationships HM fostered with other countries? Socio-economic development could take place mostly because development aid came from outside the country.**

Yes, relationships with other nations widened rapidly after 1974. The Coronation of 1974 was a watershed in foreign policy; representatives of some 18 nations attended the Coronation. Notably, Chinese representative also attended. Bhutan had supported China's seat in the United Nations in 1971 soon after Bhutan became a member of the UN.

In parallel to the increase in development assistance, the decade between 1980 and 1990 was a period of enhanced diplomacy for Bhutan. In this decade, under the guidance of His Majesty, Bhutan established diplomatic relations with 17 out of 22 countries with whom we had by 2008, and became associated with 12 out of 20 organisations of the United Nations family.

His Majesty emphasised a two-fold foreign policy for Bhutan: to deepen our relations with



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India and to create new bonds of friendship with fellow members of the UN. To diversify the sources of funding, Bhutan cultivated close relationships with the UN, ever since the visit of a UN Under-Secretary General in 1974. In May 1979, the UNDP office in Thimphu was established and opened by His Majesty and Mr Bradford Mores. Following that, the UNDP office helped in channelling multilateral assistance from various UN bodies to the Kingdom. Bhutan became a member of the International Bank of Reconstruction, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the International Development Association (IDA) in 1981. In the same year, Bhutan became a member of the World Bank.

But the most important foreign relationship is between Bhutan and India, with whom we share so many things in common including 602 kilometres or so of porous border. With such a long and insecure border, His Majesty thought it desirable to have border co-ordination committees between the two countries to ensure peace, security, and trade in the border areas.

HM met the Chief Minister of West Bengal, Jyoti Basu, in 1991. Similar co-ordination mechanism was established with Assam in 1994. Since then, the administrators and heads of police of particular districts adjacent to Bhutan from



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Assam and West Bengal held regular consultative meetings with their Bhutanese counterparts.

There were many exchanges of visits at the highest level between India and Bhutan. Indian PM Rajiv Gandhi visited Bhutan in 1985, when PM Indira Gandhi was posthumously conferred the Order of the Druk Wangyal. Indian PM Narasimha Rao visited Bhutan in 1993. In his 34 years of reign, the Fourth King visited Delhi as many as 17 times, and on average every second year in 1975, 1977, 1978, 1981, 1982, 1985, 1989, 1993, 1996, 1997, 1998, 2003, 2005, and lastly in 2006. The relationship between India and Bhutan became ever more close and warm under His Majesty. Consequently, India has remained Bhutan's main development partner.

Our relationship with India was largely formalised with the 1949 Treaty. During his visit in July 2006, His Majesty proposed to India to review and rewrite the 57-year old treaty. On 10th February, 2007, the new 'Treaty of Friendship' was signed between His Majesty Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck and the Indian External Minister, Mr Pranab Mukherjee. That revision was of profound significance for Indo-Bhutan Friendship in a new way.

The other giant neighbour is China, with whom we share 427 km or so of border, some of which



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has yet to be clearly demarcated. Back in May 1981, Bhutan proposed talks on issues about the border with China. Since then, the Bhutanese government had a series of amicable discussions, which will eventually result in complete demarcation of the northern boundary.

During his reign, His Majesty received many high level foreign visitors to Bhutan. In chronological order, they included the following:

- The Prime Minister of India, Mr Rajiv Gandhi, and PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat in 1985;
- HRH Prince Naruhito of Japan in 1987;
- HRH Princess Galyani Vadhana of Thailand, the King and Queen of Nepal, and President Muhammad Ershad of Bangladesh in 1988;
- UN Secretary General, Perez de Cuellar in 1989;
- SAARC Chairman, President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom of Maldives, and HRH Prince Vajiralongkorn in 1991;
- SAARC Chairman, President Ranasinghe Premadasa of Sri Lanka in 1992;
- Indian Prime Minister Narasimha Rao in 1995;



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- SAARC Chairperson, Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia of Bangladesh, and King Carl XVI Gustaf and Queen Silvia of Sweden in 1994;
- Indian Foreign Minister, Mr. I. K. Gujral in 1996;
- Australian Deputy Prime Minister, Mr. Tim Fischer and Their Imperial Highnesses the Prince and Princess Akishino of Japan in 1997;
- HRH Prince Charles, the Prince of Wales; former Prime Minister of Japan, Toshiki Kaifu; and SAARC Chairman, President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom of Maldives came to Bhutan in 1998.

Bhutanese participation in international conferences at various levels increased. HM attended the non-aligned and SAARC summits until 1997, travelling to Colombo in 1976 for the 8th Non-Aligned Summit; to Havana in 1979 for the 6th Non-Aligned Summit; to New Delhi in 1983 for the 5th SAARC Summit, and again in 1995 for the 8th SAARC Summit; to Harare in 1986 for the 8th Non-Aligned Summit; to Kathmandu in 1987 for the 3rd SAARC Summit; to Islamabad in 1988 for the 4th SAARC Summit; to Belgrade in 1989 for the 9th Non-Aligned Summit; to Male in



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1990 for the 5th SAARC Summit; and to Dhaka in 1993 for the 7th SAARC Summit.

Diplomatic links were struck with many other nations such as Bangladesh in 1973; Kuwait in 1983; Nepal in 1983; the Maldives in 1984; Denmark in 1985; Norway in 1985; Sweden in 1985; Switzerland in 1985; the Netherlands in 1985; Japan in 1986; Finland in 1986; South Korea in 1987; Sri Lanka in 1987; Austria in 1989; Thailand in 1991; Bahrain in 1992; Singapore in 2002; Australia in 2002; and Canada in 2003.

His Majesty cultivated these bonds, strengthened our international relationships and diversified our sources of development assistance. Bhutan became far more known throughout the world.

**What were the major social and economic developments Bhutan achieved in the 34 years of the reign of HM Jigme Singye Wangchuck? How did living standards and the well-being of the common people change in the country during his reign?**

A Kasho issued by His Majesty in 1986 directed the Planning Commission to ensure that “the basis for the evaluation of the achievements of the sixth plan is to see whether the people enjoy happiness and comfort”. So that should be the ultimate yardstick of progress. The social and economic



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indicators point towards sub-ordinate goals, not ultimate goals to be measured from a holistic, GNH point of view. There have been spectacular achievements during his reign.

As a result of broad-based development, every man, woman and child's life have been affected positively by the transformation of this kingdom. Everybody's welfare and livelihood has improved towards happiness and contentment. Data, which enables us to compare achievements over time start from 1985 onwards, some 14 years after His Majesty became King. A few statistics that were available from 1974 until the end of his reign were cited earlier. Here, we should present other, additional comparative statistics.

By 2006, school enrolment touched 90%, literacy 60%, and both were mainly due to a free education policy. There were 56 health establishments in 1974; by 2006, there were 715, resulting in 90% free primary health coverage. In 1985, there was almost 50% health coverage. Infant mortality fell from 142 in 1985 to 60 in 2006. This was mainly due to the success of universal child immunisation and the free supply of safe drinking water. There were 150 water supply schemes in 1985; this increased to 3,852 by 2006, giving 78% coverage in supplying safe drinking water. The maternal mortality rate dropped from



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7.7% in 1985 to 2.6% in 2006. Health services, safe drinking water and better nutrition had led to a 66-year life-span and lower morbidity by the end of his reign.

Besides these human development indicators, material prosperity rose remarkably. The distance between Bhutan and the outside world collapsed through road and air services. Druk Air began to fly between Paro and Calcutta in 1983. His Majesty visited Delhi in 1978 and, during that visit, he discussed the possibility of having air links with India to promote Bhutan's trade and commerce. The discussion was fruitful and led to Donier flights between Paro and Kolkata in 1983.

In 1985, nearly 10,000 households had electricity, and the number had reached over 65,000 metre-point units by 2006. Metre-point units should not be confused with structures. In rural Bhutan, a house is equivalent to one consumer unit of electricity because only one metre-point unit is installed. The metre-point units means consumer units. In urban areas, a rented building can contain several families. I mention this to avoid the existing confusion created by the statistics on the coverage of electricity by consumer units that includes urban meter-point units. If we wish to get any idea of electricity coverage of the whole country, there should be a separate statistics taking account only



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of structures supplied by electricity.

There is less need to do physically taxing manual labour due to the introduction of technology in his reign. The connectivity of our country increased in his reign through air services, the internet, and surface transport. Internet reached Bhutan in 1999. The spread of faxes, telephones, satellite TVs, computers and the internet brought Bhutan into a transnational or globalised world, with both opportunities and risks to our way of life, culture and institutions.

The national income of the country, as measured by GDP, was Nu 2.4 billions in 1985. This increased to Nu 36.9 billions in 2006, which was a 15-fold nominal increase in 21 years. However, the GDP statistics, especially of 1980s should be treated with caution because they were calculated in short hand way. Our per capita income reached 1,500 USD in 2006. However, this is not the number we should use if we want to compare it, for example, with income of the US citizens. In purchasing power parity terms, our per capita income in 2006 was nearly USD 4,085. In 2008, the GDP was Nu 5.42 billions. At an estimated population of 672,000, the per capita GDP was US \$ 1,852. This per capita income in US \$ was converted from per capita income of Nu, 80,580 at an exchange rate of Nu



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43.5 per US \$. I mention this income level for a sense of international comparison but not for any indication of the wellbeing and happiness of the people. I believe that the overall living standard of the average Bhutanese family was much higher than this level of per capita income suggested, because of the uncosted goods and services people enjoyed in our country such as free health and education. People enjoyed also a higher level of wellbeing because of our rich ecology, culture, and community.

**You described the rapid socio-economic development of our country. What are the major reasons for the rapid development brought about by HM the King?**

It is not possible to discuss the improvements brought by the reign of the Fourth King in the same manner as we have done with our previous kings. The tallies and list will be too long and their description time consuming. The pace and scale of progress was so tremendous that we cannot account HM's reign in the way we reviewed the earlier reigns.

In the 34 years of His Majesty's reign, from 1972-2006, development programmes penetrated every village and hamlet, and every sphere of life. Every part of the country was transformed in a



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positive way. We have to understand why rapid development was possible by dwelling on the causes His Majesty brought to bear.

The causes for the rapid development for which HM was responsible were (1) preservation of our culture, (2) long term development partners, (3) efficient government and efficient community organisations, and (4) preservation of environmental and other natural resources.

Let me discuss these causes one by one, while noting that none of these causes could have been co-ordinated harmoniously without His Majesty's visionary leadership. His Majesty preserved our strong culture as he obviously realized its importance: if a culture is not strong, people's cohesion and confidence in their own society can be undermined. What constitutes us Bhutanese as a people, a political community, a nation, in terms of our respective identities is an important focus that His Majesty wanted maintained. The values and institutions deemed desirable for the solidarity of our nation were promoted. Under his leadership, Bhutan aimed to maintain the basic indigenous values in the face of challenges from competing ideologies, world views and global culture.

The country strived to preserve major local languages, knowledge, beliefs, customs, skills, trades and institutions, and even species of crops



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and plants. Our society also remained cohesive because of the cultural identities we shared and promoted under the Fourth King's reign. It is important to remember that his emphasis on cultural preservation was not only for its intrinsic values, but also for extrinsic values. As part of extrinsic values, HM emphasised the distinctive character of Bhutanese culture. He stated that it is the "distinct identity of our country", and not the nation's "wealth, weapons and armed forces", that was the vital instrument in securing the sovereignty of the nation.

**As an example of His Majesty's support to culture, he had Tango Shedra built. At Tango Shedra, monks take their Bachelors degree or shastri qualifications. Can you tell us briefly about Tango Shedra, as an example of similar institutes HM opened?**

Phajo Drugom, aged 40, arrived in Bhutan in 1224. He was the disciple of Onrey Dharma Singye (1177-1237). Onrey Dharma Singye was the first Chief Abbot of Druk Ralung, as well as the disciple and nephew of Tsangpa Jarey (1161-1211). Tsangpa Jarey Yeshey Dorje was the founder of Drukpa Kagyu. After Phajo arrived in Bhutan, he established a meditation place in Tango, formally called Tango Choeying dzong, according to his vision of a certain deity, Yidam Tandin. He laid



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the foundation of Drukpa Kagyu in Bhutan.

Tango is important for two main reasons. Firstly, with reference to initiatives of HM Jigme Singye Wangchuck, he reconstructed and expanded the Tango Shedra to its present form. He made it possible for Tango Shedra to be the apex of education according to classical system of cultural sciences, Rignas. Tango Shedra has become the quintessence of classical knowledge and culture. There, academic monks complete their long studies with bachelor's and master's degrees. In 2008, 163 candidates – with 14 master's degrees and 149 bachelor's degrees - from Tango Shedra and Sangngag Chokhor Shedra in Paro held their graduation ceremonies at Tango.

Secondly, Tango is associated with a great figure among the Buddhist intellectual circle. As a product of His Majesty's reign that stimulated works of great philosophical and scholarly value, Geshey Geduen Rinchen (1926-1997) is probably unrivalled. He was unusually versatile, intellectual, earthy, ironic, and humorous enough to write the Bhutanese version of the biography of Drukpa Kinley, which is the basis of Keith Dowman's translation into the popular book, "The Divine Madman, Drukpa Kinley".



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But Geshey Geduen's most dazzling work is "Jue tagpa nyi ki drasbu", an exacting investigation on the Buddhist logic of emptiness (tong nyid). He wrote the text while he was the principal of Tango Shedra for 10 long years. In 1990, he was elevated by His Majesty to become the 69th Je Khenpo, and he was on the abbotical throne until 1996.

I should add that there is another lama active in the cultural field as well, also with an unusual talent, but in a different way from late Je Geduen Rinpoche. A younger man, Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse is a filmmaker and a teacher with an international dimension. As we can discover from his films like *The Cup*, *Travellers and Magicians* and a documentary in Tshangla based on a story by Rabindranath Tagore, he embodies a rare kind of consciousness and sensitivity that reflected the excellence of a Bhutanese in the reign of His Majesty the Fourth Druk Gyalpo.

**What policies and programmes on culture were promoted in HM's reign? Can you give a clear account?**

Traditionally, the concept of culture was constructed around rignas (shepar ja wai nas), which were divided into five major and five minor cultural sciences. The traditional concept of the literate and cultured was constructed around these notions.



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In the five minor ones are grammar (dra), poetics (nyan ngag), metrics (deb jor), dance-drama (doe gar) and lexicography (ngon joed). These are more concerned with the science of writing and literature, and dance-drama (doe gar) is concerned with communication and media.

The five major cultural sciences are the sciences of language (dra rigpa), science of logic (tan tsig rigpa), science of healing (so wa rig pa), science of construction (zo rigpa including physics, engineering, painting, sculpture), and science of meaning (nang don rig pa or Buddhism). I include zorig chusum as one of the five major cultural science classified as zo rigpa.

In the 34 years of His Majesty's reign, the ten cultural sciences received considerable attention, although, in general, development planners and bureaucrats were, unfortunately, more concerned with introducing knowledge, techniques and materials from outside. His Majesty, however, attempted to cherish the importance of both the intangible and tangible aspects of Bhutanese culture.

Since medieval times, the transmission of all the different subjects under rignas took place in the monastic institutions. The exception was zo rig pa, which dealt with lay people's artisan



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skills. Zo rigpa was supported critically by HM: he opened the Kawangjangsa Institution of Zorig (earlier known as Kawangjangsa Painting School because it was so) in 1971. At first, this institute concentrated on traditional fine arts. A similar institution was opened in 1997 in Tashi Yangtse. The Folk Heritage Museum started by Her Majesty Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck in Kawajangsa, Thimphu drew attention to the heritage of lay people's sustainable products and their lifestyle. Likewise, in 2001 the first Textile Museum opened by Her Majesty Ashi Sangay Choden Wangchuck promoted the weaving skills of our country. The decline of skilled artisanship – painters, statue-makers, carpenters and masons - was arrested in HM's reign not only because of these new institutions, but also by receiving on the job training in many new temples and dzongs constructed in the country.

The profile of so wa rig pa also became higher under HM's reign. Indigenous medicine is now spreading as a parallel health service. Because of the demand for its products, there is excessive harvesting of herbs for traditional medicine, and that could undercut its sustainability unless herbs are grown in farms.

The main transmission mechanism for the ten cultural sciences or rig nas chu was the monastic



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institutions and that is where the impact of His Majesty's reign in the cultural sphere is most noticeable. There were about 3,000 monks in the state supported monasteries in 1972 when his reign started. There is no clear source on their exact number at that time. By 2006, the number of monks subsisting on state allowances in the twenty dzongs had increased to 6,807. This number does not include monks and nuns on stipends given to those outside the twenty dzongs.

In parallel to the increase in the number of monks and nuns, the monastic infrastructure that included tutors, lamas, temples, dratshangs, gomdeys, shedras, lobdra had to increase, and indeed it did in HM's reign. Many new official dratshangs in the district headquarters were opened, such as Tsirang, Gaylegphug, Tashi Yangtse, Samtse, Pema Gatshel, Chukha, Jakar and Zhemgang district monasteries. Numerous affiliate monasteries to each dzongkhag rabdey were opened throughout the country.

Our discussion on numerical expansion in terms of new monasteries and consolidation of the old ones will be indeed long. I could give you an impressionistic summary. By 2006, there were 13 sheydras located in Tango, Dodeydrag, Khothokha, Sanga Choekhor, Gontey, Tshangkha, Tharpaling, Nimalung, Talo Nalanda, Sewla, Ngatsang, Drametse, and Bartsham with a total enrolment of



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some 700 monks. There were over 24 drubdeys or meditation places, stretching from Singye dzong in the east to Tagchu Goenpa in Haa, enlisting 300 officially supported people, who were meditating on a long-term basis in 2006. There were over 45 monastic lobdras, where teachers received official stipends and where gomchens studied. Such monastic schools could be found in Surey Goenpa in Sarpang in the south to Goen Ritsho in Punakha. In 2006, there were 10 nunneries located in Jashar Goenpa in Pema Gatshel in the East to Kila Goenpa in Paro in the West.

In each dratshang, rabdey, shedra, drubdra, gomdey lobdra and nunnery, pupils take monastic literacy lessons. But they also participate in tshechu, bumdey and kurim. So the number of dance-drama festivals has increased along with bumdeys and kurims.

**His Majesty cultivated long term development partners as a basis of rapid development. The presence of a long term commitment was crucial to developing social and economic plans, and avoiding ad hoc schemes. Can you expand on this point?**

Conceptualising and implementing development plans with the people was one of the Fourth King's development principles. This strat-



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egy became a cause of rapid development because it mobilised the energy of the people. In order to do that, he decentralised planning and decision-making from 1980s onwards. Decentralisation and devolution were a recurrent theme of His Majesty, but he also foresaw the need to increase the organisational efficiency. Organisational efficiency was focussed on government agencies, which was delivering development goods and services, as well as on community organisations, which were receiving goods and services. He enhanced human, social and cultural capital at the bureaucracy, business sector and rural community levels.

One early initiative was to bolster community organisations as social capital. His Majesty recognised that if the community organisations were not invigorated, they would disintegrate; over time, much money would have to be spent on institution building. Strengthening the governmental sectors went hand in hand with strengthening local bodies like Dzongkhag Yargye Tshogchung (DYT) that His Majesty founded in 1981, and the Gewog Yargye Tshogchung (GYT) he founded in 1991. He increasingly devolved authority of the central agencies on them.

At the same time, the justice system received His Majesty's increasing attention to make it fair, simple, and accessible (at low cost). This required,



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as HM wrote in a Kasho in 1989, a selection of capable and upright people with impeccable values as judges. He foresaw that integrity of judges was more important than qualifications. In 1974, there were nine district courts and four sub-district courts. In some places, dzongdags arbitrated minor cases at that time. The Annual National Judicial Conference was introduced to broaden legal education and standards in 1976. Courts were established in dungkhags. The National Legal Course was introduced in 1995. A Penal Code to aid the judges in the proper interpretation of laws and effective adjudication came in 1995, followed by an Anglo-Saxon oriented Civil and Criminal Procedure Code in 2001. If the rule of law were to be attested by the number of laws enacted during His Majesty's 34-year reign, some 87 laws were enacted.

His Majesty enhanced the protection of the natural resources such as forests and biodiversity, and harnessed our hydro-power as a strategic industry. The exploitation of hydro-power was one of the main reasons for the rapid development under the reign of the Fourth King. The economy grew at high rate of growth in the mid 1980s, fuelled by the construction of the 336-megawatt Chukha hydro-power station. Kurichu and Basochu were completed, and Tala hydro project also produced electricity during his reign.



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The pattern of growth dependent on the construction of hydro-stations and electricity production was to become the main characteristic of the economy. The commissioning of each hydro-power project brought an upward shift in the growth curve and revenue. The foundation for a future, which could harness judicious choice of technology and electrical energy, was in place by the end of his reign.

**Could you elaborate on His Majesty's emphasis on environmental preservation as one of the main principles of rapid development?**

The emphasis His Majesty had on the preservation of nature was of prophetic importance to Bhutan. His Majesty foresaw the potentially adverse impacts of both increased economic activity and increased population on the fragility of the mountain ecosystem. He raised the importance of preservation of environment during policy discussions, which resulted in vast areas part of the country being devoted to national parks and sanctuaries. The following list demonstrates it.

- 1974, Jigme Dorji National Park declared.
- 1974, Khaling Wildlife Sanctuary declared.
- 1974, Phibsoo Wildlife Sanctuary declared.
- 1985, Environmental Studies started in



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schools.

1988, Bhutan identified as a global hotspot.

1990, National Environment Commission established.

1992, Bhutan Trust Fund for Environment established.

1993, Toorsa Nature Reserve established.

1993, Jow Durshing National Park (Black Mountain), now known as Jigme Singye Wangchuck National park, established.

1993, Phrumsengla National Park established.

1993, Sakteng Wildlife Sanctuary established.

1993, Bomdeling Wildlife Sanctuary established.

1995, UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and Convention on Biological Diversity signed.

2000, Environment Assessment Act passed.

2003, The Bio-diversity Act of Bhutan, 2003 passed.

2005, His Majesty the King and the people of Bhutan received the “Champion of the Earth” Award from UNEP.

The preservation of our Buddhist culture and our environment are not counter to each other, rather they are completely convergent. As part of a Buddhist culture, all life is valuable and precious. They cannot be deprived for human



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uses, especially extravagant ones, from a strict Buddhist perspective. Furthermore, the richness and diversity of the sentient and non-sentient environments both contribute to our well-being, yet that continued contribution depends on not maximising our consumption.

The conventional planners with a singular focus on the maximimisation of production and consumption can often prove to be a folly. Leaders and policies have a particular impact on lifestyles of the general population. In that respect, the Fourth King's ideas, and his lifestyle was a model of balance between modernity and traditions, between straightforward economic growth and GNH-guided development. Yet balancing is not a question of arithmetic means. It is difficult, because it has to flow from a deeper grasp of what GNH is. His policies and legislations had that deeper intuitive grasp.

**At this stage, we should bring up the royal wedding of 1989.**

His Majesty had married four sisters in a private ceremony in 1979. The formal royal wedding of His Majesty and Their Majesties the Queens, Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck, Ashi Tshering Pem Wangchuck, Ashi Tshering Yangdon Wangchuck, and Ashi Sangay Choden Wangchuck took place



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in Punakha dzong on 31 October 1989. The public occasion of Tashi Ngasol held in Punakha Dukhang on 31 October 1989 was conducted by late Dilgo Khyentse (1910-1991) and 68th Je Khenpo Tenzin Dondup.

Their Majesties are the daughters of Yab Ugyen Dorji and Yum Thuji Zam. Yab Ugyen Dorji is the elder brother of Zhabdrung Chogley Jigme Tenzin (1919-1949), the sixth speech incarnation of Zhabdrung Rinpoche. At the same time, Yab Ugyen Dorji is the nephew of Zhabdrung Jigme Dorji (1905-1931), the sixth mind incarnation of Zhabdrung Rinpoche. Their Majesties are very near descendants of the religious nobility of Sersang Lamas from eastern Bhutan. They were titled as Sersang Lamas, meaning golden lamas, because their weight was considered worth as much as gold, having descended from Lhase Tsangma, the son of King Muntri Tsenpo and brother of King Ralpachen. Lhase Tsangma came to settle in Bhutan in the ninth century because of strife in the Tibetan court. The genealogy of Yab Ugyen Dorji and Yum Thuji Zam, as well as the royal wedding are described in “Of Rainbows and Clouds: The Life of Yab Ugyen Dorji as told to his Daughter” by Her Majesty the Queen Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck.

On his father’s side, Yab Ugyen Dorji is a relative of Choley Trulku Yeshey Ngedup who was the last



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Druk Desi, and who later became Je Khenpo of Bhutan. He was the last Druk Desi before the political system changed into monarchy.

His Majesty and Their Majesties the Queens have ten children. They are His Majesty King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck (b. 1980), Princess Chimi Yangzom (b. 1980), Princess Sonam Dechen (b. 1981), Princess Dechen Yangzom (b. 1981), Princess Kesang Choeden (b. 1982), Prince Jigyel Ugyen (b. 1984), Prince Khamsum Singye (b. 1985), Prince Jigme Dorji (b. 1986), Princess Euphelma Choden (b. 1993), and Prince Ugyen Jigme (b. 1994).

**The royal wedding was held in Punakha dzong in 1989. Soon after this event, His Majesty commanded the renovation of the Punakha dzong. Could you briefly give an account of the renovation, as it was one of the grandest rebuilding tasks undertaken in his reign.**

Punakha Dzong has always been significant in the lives of our rulers, and more so in the reign of His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck and his life. When His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck became the king, like past rulers, he took a vow of commitment to the welfare of this country and people in front of the Marchen (Machen), the holy physical remains of the first Zhabdrung Rinpoche, the founder.



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Punakha Dzong is significant in the reign of His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck in that it was completely rebuilt by His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck from 1990 to 2003. Renovation work on small scale started in 1990. But in 1994, after the Puna Tsangchu floods caused by the glacial outbreak, a major project was started to renovate the dzong. The project took ten years to complete. The consecration of Punakha dzong took place in 2004. His Majesty took a personal interest in the renovation and frequently visited it to oversee the quality of workmanship. Punakha Dzong best represents the flowering of architecture and fine arts during his reign.

The original Punakha Dzong was constructed by Zhabdrung Rinpoche and it was completed sometime in 1638. We know from our history that Trulpai Zow Balip was the main architect and engineer under the supervision of Zhabdrung Rinpoche himself. The Dzong that they built in 1638 stood more or less in its layout and design uptill 1990, for 352 years. During that long period, there was some minor damages to the Dzong from fire (about five times) and from floods (about two times). So the Dzong was restored time and again. But it was never reconstructed in the way it was done by His Majesty. The reconstruction lasted 14 long years from 1990 to 2003. The result is astounding. It is a marvelous and inspiring piece



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of work, with no parallel in Bhutan or outside Bhutan.

Among the numerous buildings he had restored, Punakha Dzong and Paro Taktshang stand out. Punakha Dzong was consecrated in 2003 and Paro Taktshang was consecrated in 2005. Both of these massive and elaborate projects were executed under His Majesty's painstaking supervision, with the chain of command going directly to himself. His preference for indigenous building methodology meant that both were built in olden ways using artisan skills rather than modern engineers and modern construction techniques and materials. Many talented artisans were involved in the reconstruction of Punakha under His Majesty's guidance, but two persons merit mention. One of them was Zopon Wangmo from Olakha. The other person was a Jhinzop by the name of Omtong, who was responsible for supervising the statue making in Punakha Dzong.

**What were some of the measure he took to strengthen sovereignty and security of the country?**

Security and sovereignty measures can also be called state building. State building means making our country more and more viable over time. Part of it can be done by domestic measures, and part of it



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can only be done by measures taken in relationship with other countries. The strengthening of Bhutan's relationship with India and the broadening of our international relationships as a whole is, in my opinion, the first major factor in state building during his reign. The second major contribution of His Majesty in this field is the completion of border demarcation between India and Bhutan. The boundary with India was demarcated and boundary issues are about to be resolved with China. The third major factor that fostered state building is the resolution of southern problem of the 1990s. Under his calm handling, the country overcame the militancy of the illegal immigrants from Nepal in the 1990s. A reading of the newspapers and proceedings of the National Assembly certainly suggested that there was a critical threat to the country's stability during the early 1990s owing to the southern problem. The fourth and the last factor that His Majesty had to overcome was the threat to our national security posed by the Indian insurgents camping within the country.

His Majesty resolved brilliantly the problematic presence of foreign militants from Assam and Bengal states of India for over a decade in the southern jungles. To explain the background to the expedition led by His Majesty in 2003, militant outfits from Assam had intruded into the Bhutanese jungles in southern Bhutan and set



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up their training camps, in the wake of an Indian military operation, called Operation Rhino, against them in 1992. The Bhutanese authorities detected clearly the presence of militants of the United Liberation Front of Asom and National Democratic Front of Bodoland in the jungles of southern Bhutan in the mid 1990s. A new outfit called Kamtapur Liberation Organisation was founded in 1995 in Bengal state, and they too had opened clandestine camps in southern Bhutan. All three militant organisations were fighting against their respective states - Assam state and Bengal state - but their goals were slightly different. The United Liberation Front of Asom wanted to establish a separate country. The aim of the National Democratic Front of Bodoland was to create a distinct state for themselves within Assam for the Bodo tribes, while the Kamtapur Liberation Organisation wanted to establish a separate state within Bengal for the Koch-Rajbhangsi tribes.

The Government of Bhutan tried to persuade them to vacate their camps in Bhutan, for three reasons. Firstly, they caused disruptions and harm to the Bhutanese people in their daily life. Secondly, they used their bases in Bhutan as a springboard to launch attacks in Assam and Bengal. Thirdly, they violated the territorial integrity of Bhutan. However, they did not take Bhutan's peaceful persuasions at all seriously. The last round of discussion asking them



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to leave our country took place in October 2003 with the United Liberation Front of Asom, and in November 2003 with National Democratic Front of Bodoland. The representatives of Kamtapur Liberation Organisation did not respond to the invitation to the talk. As the last resort, the militants were served 48 hours notice to leave the country. That too went unheeded.

On 15 December 2003, left with no other option, His Majesty personally led his troops into the jungles to oust the militants. There is probably no precedence in modern times of a head of state and government leading troops at the front and risking his life. Within two days, 35 training camps were captured. 485 insurgents were rounded up and handed over later to Indian authorities, 11 Bhutanese lost their lives, and 35 Bhutanese were wounded in the expedition. This was the first major armed conflict the Bhutanese had to undertake in 138 years since Desi Jigme Namgyel clashed with the British forces in Dewangiri in the Duar Wars. The expedition His Majesty personally led was remarkable in two ways. First, it was remarkable for the brevity of the armed conflict. Armed conflict can usually simmer and last long, but his brilliant generalship enabled his troops to secure the objectives within an inconceivably short time. The 35 training camps were spread far and wide, from the western tip of Bhutan to the eastern edge



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of Bhutan. Secondly, the expedition was remarkable for the low casualties because of His Majesty's generalship. The Indian insurgents were ousted with a minimal loss of life. The militants were dangerously well armed: 841 arms and 144,000 rounds of ammunition were recovered from them.

What came as counter intuitive to the government officials and the people was also the lack of a sense of triumph in His Majesty when he returned from the campaign. The successful end of the military expedition was not celebrated. He decried the celebratory arrangements the ministers had made when he came back to Thimphu, and forbade any glorification. Instead, the loss of lives on both sides in the military confrontation was mourned in what was an unavoidable and necessary thing for him to do for his country. The low-key approach was typical of His Majesty's profound character, and it speaks of his subtle Buddhist values. Prayers and butter lamps offerings, dedicated for all those who lost lives on both sides, were hosted in Tashichhodzong. But such rituals, butter lamp offering and prayers can be forgotten over time. Time will slowly erase the memory of the sacrifices His Majesty and the security forces have made in defense of our country. There will be no tangible reminder that they took a huge risk to protect the values and lifestyle we cherish.



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In this respect, it is a matter of national satisfaction that Her Majesty the Queen Mother, Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck built the 108 khangzang chortens from 2003 to 2007 and the Druk Wangyel Lhakhang in June 2008 in Dochula. They will be a reminder of the event. The temples and chortens were built on the crest of Dochula from where the nine majestic snow peaks of North and Eastern Bhutan are visible on clear days over a vista of yawning bluish green valleys. The Druk Wangyel Lhakhang and the 108 chortens are monuments of tribute of the leadership of the wise Kings of Wangchuck dynasty in general, and to the wise leadership of the Fourth King in particular.

**Can we discuss more about the southern problem or the issue of the people in the camps in Nepal? It is important because it was a major challenge faced by the country. How did it come about?**

You ask how it came about – the southern problem. It is an important question. Most people in Bhutan would not recall how and when it happened because it happened 19 years ago, which is long time in a man's short life. They would not know how and why it started.

If you were present in Southern Bhutan between August and December 1990, the situation you would have seen in Southern Bhutan was critical



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and risky. Agitators and rebels claiming to be Bhutanese had built camps in bordering Indian tea estates and in Bhutanese forests. They were moving fluidly in and out of Bhutan creating disorder. The country faced, simultaneously, three kinds of subversive campaigns for the first time in our history. It was unprecedented.

Firstly, there was a campaign of subversive propaganda through pamphlets, newspapers, magazines denouncing the government of cultural domination and ethnic evictions. The claims of cultural domination in terms of dress and language were somewhat convenient pretext in 1990, because the need for the dress and language of a different kind has been a consistent theme since 1973. As far back as 1973, a National Assembly resolution advocated that dress was an important aspect of distinctive identity. Similarly, the appeal for all Bhutanese to learn Dzongkha was emphasized as far back as 1982. This linguistic appeal was made to all Bhutanese in general, because all of them spoke dialects more than the national language. But the campaigns on the alleged grounds of cultural domination made an impression on the young southern Bhutanese, who were also coerced to join their ranks. The number soon became impressive.

Secondly, there was a campaign of looting, kidnappings, and destruction of public properties



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like schools, clinics and bridges between September and December 1990. For the first time in our history, small arms were used in a domestic insurgency. Khaduwas, detonators, muzzle guns, loaders, fuse wires, and bombs were recovered from the agitators. The Home Minister of the time reported to the 77th National Assembly held in July 1999 summarising the incidents of lawlessness caused by agitators. I cite a sample of the data from his report: 73 murders, 63 rapes, 64 vehicle hijacks, 31 vehicle destruction, 996 injuries due to ambush, and destructions of 12 clinics, 30 schools, 13 police stations, 21 forest offices, and 16 bridges.

Thirdly, there was a campaign of demonstrations and marches reaching a peak in September 1990. For example, on 26th August 1990, demonstrators tried to force themselves through Phuentsholing gate from Jaigaon. On 25th September 1990, agitators marched into Phuentsholing Dungkhag office and occupied it. It was coordinated because on the same day another group of agitators occupied Gelegphu Dungkhag office. During their night of occupation of the office, they destroyed documents and equipment. On the same day, a sizeable group of demonstrators marched on to Tsirang Dzong and threatened to burn it down. A larger number of demonstrators, several thousand, marched on 4th October 1990 to Tsirang Dzong



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for the second time. The size of the demonstrations dwindled after that because the government began to taken stern actions. On December 3rd 1990, Chengmari Dungkhag was ransacked, moveable properties and equipment in it went missing.

These incidences show the belligerence and destructive nature of the demonstrators by the rebels and campaigners. Accompanying the demonstrations was an effective print propaganda machinery. News began to come out in the international media that the Bhutanese government was imposing northern culture on the south. The southern problem was portrayed by the external media as a case of cultural domination by one part of Bhutan on other. But the external media had no on site coverage at all.

It is important to understand the true causes which were wider and actually external to Bhutan. The first of these wider causes was that the activities of the Nepalese diaspora living in Sikkim, Bengal, Assam, Nagaland, and Meghalaya strongly affected the political perception of the Southern Bhutanese at that time. The Nepalese diaspora was spread across the borderlands around Bhutan. In this respect, the rise of the Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF) and its splinter party, the Gorkha Liberation Organisation (GLO), triggered and stoked a new political belief of a certain section of



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southern Bhutanese. The GNLF and GLO actually succeeded later on in establishing the Gorkha Hill Council in Darjeeling district of Bengal. Together with GNLF and GLO, the southern rebels aimed to form a regional movement to join all the Nepali speaking people living in Bhutan, Sikkim, and other parts of Northern India. That was the greater ideology that was influencing their behavior and beliefs. The manifesto of the agitators from southern Bhutan claimed in writing that the Gorkha state of Sikkim and the adjoining Darjeeling and Kalimpong districts could easily extend across whole of southern Bhutan. Their manifesto noted that the Gorkha state of Sikkim and the adjoining districts of Kalimpong and Darjeeling could easily include the whole of Southern Bhutan.

Thus, the campaigners drew inspiration from outside. That was sustained by their external links with GNLF and GLO and its sister party like Nepali Raksha Samiti, which were openly in favour of the rebel's causes by 1990.

What I want to underline is that the successes achieved by the GNLF, GLO and Nepali Raksha Samiti as well as the Congress movement in Nepal in 1990, which succeeded in bringing out a new constitution for Nepal, heightened the expectations on the part of rebels. The perception of the events



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outside Bhutan motivated them.

To continue some kind of campaigns for a long term requires organizations, needless to say. The agitators set up at least four different organisations, which were based outside. Their physical location also suggests availability of external support. The four main organisations were Bhutan's People Party, Bhutan's Student Union, People's Forum for Human Rights and People's United Liberation Front. The Bhutan's People's Party set up a Bhutan's Support Group in Kathmandu. As far back as August 1990, Bhutan's Support Group based in Kathmandu reportedly raised funds for this organisation.

The second wider external reason for the growth of southern problem was that the government of Nepal, which was at that time under His Excellency Prime Minister Koirala, got the United Nation Commission for Human Rights to set up a camp for the people who claimed to be from Bhutan in September 1991. The installation of camps for such claimants led them to draw some of the Nepalese diaspora back. The Bhutanese government criticised the lack of proper procedure to check whether the people who came to these camps were Bhutanese, Nepalese or somebody else. Camps admitted people as refugees without identifying their nationalities.



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His Majesty the King met Prime Minister Koirala in December 1991 at Colombo when he asked Prime Minister Koirala to either disband the camps or set up a proper procedure. In three years, from 1991, 1992 to 1993, the camps became flooded with people. The number of people in the camps increased and reached a size of over 100,000 by early 1993. The UNHCR were unable to establish a proper screening procedure until by July 1993.

The basic position that the Bhutanese government has maintained was that the nationality of the people in the camps have to be verified jointly according to established criteria. And having agreed to the procedures for verifying bonafide Bhutanese, the Khudunabari camp verification was carried out. Out of 12,000 people in the camp, who were verified by the Joint Verification Team, about 300 turned out to be Bhutanese citizens who were eligible for repatriation.

The Joint Verification was interrupted, after the Bhutanese team was man-handled at Khudunabari. The internal political changes sweeping Nepal, such as election of the constituency assembly and formulation of new constitution of Nepal, has not allowed them to focus on the issue of the people in



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the camps. In the meantime, many governments in the West led by the United States have generously agreed to accept people from these camps in their countries as immigrants. As of 2009, 20,000 people were resettled in third countries.

### **What were the major reforms that His Majesty undertook in the political field?**

The major reforms in the political field are too numerous to mention, but suffice to say that His Majesty made this country very strong politically. The number of institutions that he established during his reign laid the groundwork for both a very strong government and society, though we must be watchful in future about the overhead expenditure they involve. The number of legislations that were passed during his reign came to around 87. As a result, the institutional bases were strengthened. The ultimate political reform by His Majesty was to democratise this country by drawing up a constitution, which was adopted by the Fifth King of Bhutan.

Because the monarchy was so self-denying and self-sacrificing, the people of Bhutan did not want the monarchy to give up the critical role it has always played. They genuinely did not feel comfortable without the leadership of the Throne, and wanted to continue enjoying the experience, wisdom and



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weight of the monarchy, not only nationally but also in our international relations. The monarchy, especially the Fourth King, leveraged our weight in the international sphere to the benefit of our people and the national interest.

**Bhutan is well-known to the outside world mainly because of His Majesty's vision of Gross National Happiness. Could you explain and elaborate on that?**

His Majesty was still a teenage monarch when he spoke about GNH and questioned the then prevailing assumption that GDP could largely deliver happiness and well-being to society. When His Majesty pronounced the concept of Gross National Happiness, it was a contrast to that dominant idea of development focussed on GDP. It was a breathtakingly bold and profound observation; more so because it came out of the mind of a teenager. The world-wide development experience of the last 40 years shows his observation to be pertinent, because economic development has failed to provide as much contentment and happiness in the North as it was expected. Meanwhile, the ecological footprint the North exerts on the planet is unacceptably heavy. There is probably no chance for every person in the world to exert the same ecological footprint



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as a North American does today without taking down the planet. In the South, there is aspiration for economic development to fulfill basic needs. The deprivation and, therefore, the sense of despondency is considerable.

As so happens with born leaders, his insights were decades ahead of his time. The world now has many problems. In the world outside as much as within Bhutan, GNH reflects a deep-seated search for a rebalanced, holistic development. A substantial number of people around the world now understand that conventional development is a non-linear process — things can backfire. The side effects of mindless development are increasingly evident in social, cultural and ecological spheres.

In the reign of the Fourth King, the actual road map for good development towards GNH in terms of corresponding laws and policies were developed, and we enjoy that legacy now. As we can infer from Kashos, from other proclamations, and from the policies heavily influenced by him, he believed that happiness (he preferred to use contentment) was an indicator of good development and good society.

GNH stands for a holistic concept guiding governance and development. It also stands for the holistic needs of the people. These



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include physical needs (we must not be in poor circumstances where our body and soul are torn apart) and it recognises a range of other needs such as emotional, spiritual, social and economic.

At another level, GNH stands for the preservation and renewal of a holistic range of wealth or capital. Wealth is not exactly the right word, because when we talk about wealth, we normally talk about material things. Hence, we should perhaps use the word capital. In that respect, it is not only economic wealth or capital - which is measured, though not so well, by GDP - but there are also other capitals, which we should value and measure. These capitals are ecological, human resource, and cultural.

There are many things that we must not sacrifice for economic growth, such as good governance, environment, culture, spirituality, balanced use of time, psychological well-being, health and education. His Majesty expressed that as a society, we must have a distinctive, development philosophy if we are to make our people contented. The ultimate message of HM's development philosophy of GNH is that we should not end up by having everything, except happiness and the contentment of a meaningful life. I should end here by paying my own humble tribute to His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck for his profound thoughts.





## CHAPTER SIX

HM King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck

### A King for the 21st Century

**Could you tell us something about His Majesty's birth? Why should it be celebrated?**

Let us first take the events surrounding the birth of His Majesty, and then focus on the first few years of his life. His Majesty's birthday is on 21st February and is celebrated keenly throughout the country by the Bhutanese people, and also by friends and well-wishers of our country throughout the world, as an extremely important day in the official calendar. The celebration of HM the King's birthday is important in and of itself, but also for several other reasons in modern times.

Firstly, the remembrance of the Royal Birthday is a practice that reveals the true antiquity of the royal line going back to the majestic tertön, Pemalingpa (1450-1521). Although a religious, literary, artistic and philosophical icon, Pemalingpa had a huge political consequence because his biological lineage, including the Kings of Wangchuck dynasty, would gradually build the unity of the entire national community down the centuries. HM the King is



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the 17th lineal, or direct descendant, of the great terton Pemalingpa who was born 560 years ago. And the celebration of the birth of the Crown Prince each year is a recurrent, national narrative marking the unbroken succession of the royal line with its origin starting with Pemalingpa.

Secondly, the celebration of the Royal Birthday is a welcome occasion for the people of Bhutan to express their good wishes, respect, love and prayers for the health and longevity of HM. The King is the embodiment of the national well-being. The health and longevity of HM reflects, and in turn is reflected by, the happiness and prosperity of the national community.

Thirdly, HM's birthday celebration, like the National Day on 17th December, is politically important, especially abroad. These two days serve to create and sustain the diplomatic and popular images of nationhood around the world when our embassies and friendship associations observe them.

His Royal Highness, the Crown Prince, Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck, was born on February 21st 1980. He was the first prince born to His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck (born 1955) and Her Majesty Tshering Yangdon Wangchuck (born 1959). HM the Fourth King was 24 and HM the Queen was 21 in 1980, when the Crown



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Prince was born. HM the Queen Mother Tshering Yangdon Wangchuck is a particularly pious lady and her attitude and behaviour are deeply permeated by Buddhism. She has been an outstanding patron of Bhutanese nunneries and the welfare of nuns. One of her first religious undertakings was the construction of the splendid Khamsum Yuley Namgyel Chorten, consecrated in the year 2000, on the luminal site of Nyizergang in Punakha. The chorten contains, among other priceless religious objects, a Vajrakila laid inside the main statue.

In his early years, Her Royal Highness Prince Khesar was brought up in Namgaycholing and Samtenling Palace in Thimphu, and Phuntsho Pelri in Punakha. The Crown Prince was tutored early on at Samtenling Palace before he became a student at Lungten Zampa School.

An exemplary student, the young Crown Prince largely followed the routines of a normal student, not being exempt from anything, which is a testimony to the idea that the Crown Prince must be subjected to common experiences of a Bhutanese youth both in our educational system and social environment.

**HM studied in Thimphu at Lungten Zampa and Yangchenphug. Can you tell us something about him as a student?**



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The Crown Prince joined Lungten Zampa School, which is just like any other school in Bhutan and was a student there until the end of 1992. Then, in 1993, the Crown Prince went to Yangchenphug Secondary School for the next five years. He left Yangchenphug in 1997 having completed class 12. So, up to the age of 18, the Crown Prince studied in Bhutan. For the next seven years or so - between 1998 and 2005 - the Crown Prince studied abroad for his higher education.

The long period of schooling in Bhutan rather than studying abroad was a conscious choice, besides simply being near his parents and the Royal Family. The Crown Prince assimilated an immeasurable amount of knowledge by learning from his father. To spend his formative years, till his late teens, in the country closely observing the lessons in leadership derived from His Majesty the Fourth King was a way of being thoroughly grounded in the realities of Bhutan. After all, discerning the true condition of the country and the people are the most important tasks of the future King.

In retrospect, the Crown Prince said that his father had overwhelming impact on shaping his ideas and aspirations. Because of this, the filial respect for his father grew in a marked manner throughout his youth. Later, His Majesty was to



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recall “To me personally, His Majesty (the Fourth Druk Gyalpo) is both my teacher and my root guru.” The hands-on experience of being in the country at the feet of his father was of crucial importance to the Crown Prince. And the impact of this learning experience would have been less if the Crown Prince had gone abroad earlier.

**The Crown Prince also had other public duties and responsibilities by virtue of being the successor to the throne. Can you discuss that role?**

One must remember that there was a different and changing milieu of governance and politics during the 1990s, when the Crown Prince was growing up as a sensitive teenager. It was a decade of rapid change. The southern problem was a recurrent theme affecting both perceptions and realities. The decentralisation process was being enhanced, which changed relationships between the central and sub-national bodies. It finally culminated in the devolution of executive authority to the Council of Ministers in 1998.

The Crown Prince, even as a school student in Thimphu, would sometimes join the royal tours throughout the realm, and at other times participate in the functions he was invited to grace. It was customary for the Crown Prince as a teenager to open events for sports and concerts,



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and other festivities, and open new facilities such as bridges, schools and monasteries. He also took on public speaking quite early, an aspect of his potential, which began to flower in an astonishing way as he grew up.

These royal itineraries provided the first opportunities for the Crown Prince to see and know the land, the people, and gradually feel and think about the conditions affecting the people. Conversely, the public itineraries of the Crown Prince fostered and unfolded the idea of a young and promising leader in the minds of the people, as they witnessed his serene and gracious royal conduct. The contours of his ability to transcend ceremonies, rituals and pageants, and touch people by his exquisite and charming personality were already visible in his teens.

**Can you give me some examples of the royal itineraries he attended while he was still a student?**

The public engagements the Crown Prince undertook during his school years added to his duties, despite being a teenager. He had to attend many functions in addition to his schooling. To that extent, the childhood of HRH was different from those of normal school children, in spite of the attempts to experience a normal school life. Such public involvements gradually scaled up in



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complexity. Let us recall a sample of his public engagements which became heavier as he grew up.

Take the first example, which happened in 1991, when the Crown Prince was 11. Perhaps in his first public speaking role, the Crown Prince opened the Zilukha School Fete Day and spoke to the gathering with assured poise and calmness.

Take the second example. The Crown Prince was 12 in 1992. As the Crown Prince, and hence the future commander-in-chief of the armed force, he presided over the passing out ceremony of Royal Body Guards.

Take the third example. The Crown Prince spoke at the Japan Day while he was just 13 in 1993. One could notice the tremendous presence he had even at that age.

Take the fourth example, which happened when the Crown Prince was 15 in 1995. November 26, 1995 was the 64th memorial service to Zhabdrung Jigme Dorji, who passed away in 1934. It was a special memorial service in the Buddhist tradition because it was attended by His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck and Their Majesties. During that occasion, the Crown Prince offered the symbolic oblations of three items – a statue, a scripture, and a miniature chorten - to his father, His Majesty the Fourth King, for his long life and good health.



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Take the last two examples. The first event took place in 2001, when the Crown Prince was 21 and on vacation from his college in England. The Crown Prince chaired the meeting of the 8th Plan Mid-Term Review meeting in Dagana. In the same year, he also addressed the National Day celebrations in Punakha.

**His Majesty has had an international education. Could you tell us about his higher studies abroad?**

In 1998, at 18, HRH the Crown Prince left for studies in the USA, specifically for Phillips Academy, Andover, USA. After completing Phillips Academy, HRH joined the Cushing Academy and then in 1999 for Wheaton College, Massachusetts, USA. Wherever he was abroad and whoever taught him, he left a strong positive impression of a thoughtful and diligent student “thinking, absorbing and analysing”.

The extraordinary thing about the educational pursuits of the Crown Prince was that he was making his own decisions about the places and subjects he was going to read. His attitude to educate himself to the highest possible level exemplified this. So, after Phillips Academy and Wheaton College, he took a personal and independent decision to attend Oxford University in 2000, where he was admitted into



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Magdalen College, one of the most beautiful and learned places - and a famous cradle of Anglo Saxon leaders. There too, his future responsibility as the King became a guiding principle in what he studied. The President of Magdalen College, Anthony Smith, wrote of the Crown Prince: "When he saw how teaching is carried out at Oxford, his mind clearly travelled back to Bhutan to see what could be borrowed from this country or this university and adapted to the needs of his country".

One must again remember that the climate of governance was changing in Bhutan during the time when the Crown Prince was at Oxford University. Executive authority had already been devolved to the Council of Ministers in 1998. After the Constitution Drafting Commission was established by His Majesty the Fourth King in 2002, the nation was swept into impending constitutional changes. As a result, the very role of the future King had to be re-envisioned by the Crown Prince, and that was uncharted waters for a sensitive youth as he entered his twenties.

His professor of Politics and International Relations, Dr Mark Philip saw in His Majesty the heart, intellectual interests and concerns of building Bhutan as a prosperous democracy that would represent a blend of global democratic system and Bhutan's traditional structure of governance.



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His close connections with Oxford led the Oxford Centre for Buddhist Studies to invite the Crown Prince to be its Patron. This was very appropriate because Bhutan is the last country practicing Mahayana Buddhism in the world. His formal education did not end at Oxford, as he attended the Kennedy School of Governance at Harvard, and then took a year's course at the Indian Defense Academy in New Delhi in 2005, which is an international institute attended by military strategists from all over the world and India. While in India, His Royal Highness became, as expected, a respected celebrity, not least due to his natural good looks.

In sum, the Crown Prince is the most qualified and educated Bhutanese leader ever to lead the nation. He has, having lived abroad in several academic institutions in the USA, Britain and India, the most broadened horizons. Thus the Crown Prince came to acquire a wide knowledge of the world and Bhutan, as well as accomplish physical and emotional development, and intellectual maturity with a blend of both western and Buddhist approaches.

**His Majesty was honoured by universities abroad. How did HM achieve these honours and distinctions while he was still the Crown Prince?**



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Even as the Crown Prince, he struck people, both in Bhutan and abroad, with his outstanding grace and nobility, and breadth of knowledge. Above all, he showed the greatness of his spirit and vision and his commitment to service. He demonstrated what he always said: “I have no aims besides that of serving our country. Throughout my studies, I have had only one thought, and that was how best I could serve my people and country.”

This sense of mission to inspire, energise and groom Bhutan’s young citizens came to be noted beyond our borders. His Royal Highness was already involved in a number of projects with our youth, which largely forms Bhutan’s demography. He was engaged with the younger members of our society on a regular basis addressing them in schools, universities and other institutions and occasions. He also addressed the United Nations on this theme. He was the Chairperson of the Bhutan Trust Fund for Environmental Conservation, Royal Society for Protection of Nature, President of Bhutan-India Friendship, Patron of Centre for Bhutan Studies and several other non-political bodies. He personified renewal, hope and inspiration of the youth, not only in Bhutan but in unlikely places such as Thailand. He spelled out the centrality of values as a theme in most of his speeches.



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International recognition soon came. The University of New Brunswick in Canada conferred an Honorary Degree of Doctor of Law on the Crown Prince in 2005. This kind of honour from a reputed university was absolutely extraordinary for a Crown Prince, not only in Bhutan but anywhere else.

He went to Thailand to pay respect to the world's longest reigning monarch, His Majesty Bhumibol Adulyadej of Thailand in June, 2006, on the occasion of his 60th Anniversary. During that short visit, the charismatic Crown Prince stunned the people of Thailand with an unusual combination of humility and nobility, that he became a household name in Thailand ever since. The serious purpose in his life was noted not only by a north American university, but by an Asian one too. In November 2006, the Crown Prince travelled to Rangsit University in Thailand to receive an Honorary Doctorate degree in Philosophy, Politics and Economics.

These awards were tributes to his nature that manifests greatness of spirit, integrity and transformative leadership. The offering of these honours from prestigious universities were both new and auspicious for Bhutan. In the following month, in December 2006, the Crown Prince succeeded to the Throne of a country, which he beautifully described as “a jewel on the earth”.



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## **Can we discuss HM's emphasis on timeless values?**

“Timeless values” is a phrase derived from His Majesty the King's speeches. One of the main themes cutting across all of his eloquent talks and lectures that were delivered both inside and outside the country was that human values are crucial to any time, and especially today. He said that “while the need for values is stronger and more urgent than ever before, the climate in which they would flourish grows more and more unfriendly.”

Let me refer directly to three sources found in HM's speeches. The first instance is found in HM's lecture given at the Convocation Ceremony in the University of New Brunswick, Canada, in 2005. HM the King said that, “An inherent sense of values has gone missing in the modern world”, with huge negative ramifications. Let me also quote him from his other speeches.

“The power of the individual has never been greater than at this time in history and yet, the helplessness of the less fortunate may never have been as distressing either - in an age of plenty. Modernisation and political change have raised the individual's freedom, but it has also led to a less desirable and unconscious freeing of the individual from his obligations to society and



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the greater good. An inherent sense of values has gone missing.”

So the yawning disconnection between the individual and the society caused by deterioration in values was a major concern for HM.

The second instance, where HM had stressed values, was in his Coronation speech. Here too, he thought it important to explicitly mention that we Bhutanese may lose our fundamental values, which define our character as a nation and people. He emphasised in the Coronation speech the qualities of a good human being – honesty, kindness, charity, integrity, unity, respect for our culture and traditions, love for our country and for God.

The third instance where HM talked extensively on values and connects them to leadership to face global crisis at the Madhavrao Scindia Lecture that HM was invited to deliver in 2008 in New Delhi. The title was ‘Changing World and Timeless Values’. In this lucid lecture, he said that the great contemporary crises like environmental degradation, terrorism and world poverty could only be resolved through a re-orientation towards good values. He also spoke about Gross National Happiness as ‘Development with Values’, explaining that ‘GNH is the bridge between the fundamental values of kindness,



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equality and humanity and the necessary pursuit of economic growth.’

In his inimitable style, HM spoke of living his life by those human values. He said that ‘first and foremost’, he will and must strive to be a good human being in the form of simple daily acts carried out from moment to moment. He viewed Bhutan as “a jewel on the earth” and “a spiritual land” where “the qualities of a good human being” are treasured.

For HM to engage people on a discourse on values at the centre of governance and development is very ethical, and extremely pertinent. It is also very Buddhist but in a universally relevant way. Enlightenment in a Buddhist sense is surely a change in values of a person, from self-centredness to universal relatedness, from selfishness to compassion. Good development in a society can occur much faster only within the framework of good values.

**We discussed about the higher education of the Crown Prince. Could you tell us chronologically how his life changed from being a college student to becoming a King?**

We should recall that His Royal Highness completed his postgraduate studies at Oxford



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University, completed a course at the Kennedy School of Governance at Harvard and completed a one-year course at Indian Defence Academy in New Delhi, in that order. But HRH combined his studies abroad with public functions as a Crown Prince during his vacations here in Bhutan.

As his pursuit of higher education was coming to an end, HRH was gradually given higher and higher traditional vestments of rank and responsibility. Such vestments occurred every two years. As a result, we had a nationally important occasion unfolding in the life of HM every two years in 2002, 2004, 2006, and 2008.

His Majesty the Fourth King conferred the red robe (namza-maap) with the title of Dasho, on the Crown Prince in 2002. As regards the other princes, the vestment of the purple robe changed in 2008; they now use an orange robe to signify them as HRH.

In 2004, two years after the Crown Prince was vested with purple robe, the investiture ceremony of the intermediate position to becoming the king - the Tongsa Penlop - was held first held in Tashichhodzong by bestowing on him with its marker of an orange-yellow robe. The Crown Prince was installed as the Tongsa Penlop in Tongsa. The assumption of the position of Tongsa Penlop has



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been incorporated traditionally as an auspicious, intermediate step towards the throne, because both Tongsa Penlop Jigme Namgyel and Tongsa Penlop Ugyen Wangchuck succeeded to the throne from the position of Tongsa Penlop. The two of them exercised successful decision-making in the country for a long time before they became the rulers, while the rule of Desi became increasingly a symbolic and anachronistic concept.

On 14 December, 2006, His Majesty the Fourth King abdicated the throne in favour of the Crown Prince, the Tongsa Penlop. That was the day when HM acceded to the throne, although the Coronation was held two years later in November 2008. So ascension to the throne and Coronation of the king happened at different times. We could see how much the people were delighted by the investiture ceremony of Tongsa Penlop and by the Coronation. There was an unprecedented massing of people in Thimphu to render homage with white silk scarves (khadar) to HM on both occasions.

Besides the highest number of people in Thimphu during the dazzling festivities of the Coronation, the spontaneous crowds who came out to greet HM as he passed through different towns and villages across the country soon after the Coronation were a breathtaking show of reverence for the newly enthroned King.



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**Let us talk briefly about the significance of the Coronation of HM the Fifth King. What were the important elements of the Coronation?**

Essentially, the Coronation had three main sequential stages. The first consisted of the sacred and private rite of consummating His Majesty's commitment to govern for the well-being of the nation and the people. This was carried out in the immortal and exalted presence of the founder of Bhutan, Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyel. It was marked by His Majesty draping his shoulders with the silken bolts of five colours at the shrine of Marchen, the entombed holy body of the founder in the golden reliquary in Punakha Dzong.

As regards to the five colours, each celestial Buddha of the five cardinal directions is represented by a different colour: white, yellow, red, blue, and green. That is one interpretation for the five silken bolts. In another credible interpretation, the five colours represent the rainbow, the symbol of heavens. The garland of five colours during the sacred ceremony denotes the aspiration towards the nature and ideals of a Bodhisattva by His Majesty the King. It is a practice that goes back at least to Mipham Wangpo, as noted in the biography of Desi Sherab Wangchuck.



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The second stage consists of the crowning of His Majesty the King with the Raven Crown by His Majesty the Fourth King in the Throne Room in Tashichhodzong in the presence of assembled dignitaries, from both within the country and abroad. Among the foreign dignitaries present were the President of India, Pratibha Patel, and members of the Gandhi family led by Sonia Gandhi, Priyanka Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi.

Alongside the draping of the five colours ceremony at Punakha Dzong and the enthronement ceremony in Tashichhodzong, ritual offerings were made to HM of the seven royal emblems, eight auspicious signs, mendel ku sung thug ten, which itself has three elements directed at the longevity of HM. However, the most exalted parts of the Coronation are the empowerment ceremony of HM, the draping of the five colours in front of the Marchen and crowning of the King in Tashichhodzong. The third stage of the Coronation consisted of His Majesty addressing the nation from the Changlingmethang on his aspirations for the reign, and presenting himself to his people. Celebrations at Changlingmethang pavilion featured three days of spectacle and pageantry from all parts of the country. All three stages of the Coronation included a rendering of homage by offering khaddar to His Majesty by the people gathered at the event.



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**Could you summarise the salient features of the Coronation Address of HM the King as it will be the point of reference for this reign.**

As points of reference, there are actually two speeches. The first was his Accession Speech on 17 December, 2006 and the second was the Coronation Speech on 7 November, 2008. The Accession speech introduced five interrelated cornerstones for his reign in terms of

1. maintaining the peace and tranquillity of the nation,
2. fulfilling the vision of GNH,
3. enhancing the security and sovereignty of the country,
4. promoting a dynamic economy, and
5. strengthening democracy.

These goals are considered timeless and unchanging although the means towards their pursuits would change, he explained. However, introducing and strengthening parliamentary democracy was a completely new discourse for our country, and his reign will go down in national memory as having both established and sustained a new bench mark in polity. After all, it is in his reign that two party elections were launched, the Constitution was promulgated, and governance was reorganised accordingly.



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The Coronation speech had a kind of brilliant sanity about it in talking about fundamental things. He framed his speech with the opening point that he is coming to the throne at a time of profound change, in both the economy and polity. This profound change was the democratisation process as well as globalisation underway in Bhutan.

Delivered in Dzongkha (the national language of Bhutan) the Coronation address resonated deeply with ordinary people who essentially have a Buddhist world view, though this view is now being increasingly challenged by globalised, consumer capitalism. Later, I found out by talking to rural people that they had felt the true authenticity of a Bhutanese King, as he spoke from within the framework of vocabularies and concepts from our culture in his Coronation address. People were expecting something, but not the profound concerns and hopes raised by HM in his speech.

The examples of such important issues raised in the speech were “pursuing timeless goals of becoming good human beings”, “re-fertilising the country for spiritual growth”, “promoting the greater well-being and happiness of people in the world and of all sentient beings”. He saw his own role as a King being not so much to rule, but to protect as a parent, care as a brother and serve as a son, as the situation needed.



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Correspondingly, people have a powerful concept of ‘the Monarch as the father and mother of their welfare’. Indeed, if we follow to the letter these roles of the King cast in the image of a family member, they are so demanding and require more skilful means, more space, more commitment and more institutional flexibility. These are the passages that struck the people most, and what they now remember most after the jubilant festivities. Of course they also remember the close encounter with the charismatic figure as he mingled with them and talked to them. People valued the fact that he created a more informal space and tried to reach out to them.

**You touched on the introduction of parliamentary democracy and the Constitution as a new benchmark in polity at the beginning of His Majesty’s reign. Could you elaborate a little more?**

Strengthening democracy was one of major goals HM the King outlined in his Coronation Speech. It is interesting to note that Bhutan became a democracy, in 2008, around the time when freedom, liberty and democracy had, according to some global assessments, entered the lowest point in the last 40 years, since the Cold War.

Let us go over his fundamental role as the midwife at the birth of democracy. The bulk of the contents of



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the draft Constitution were completed by early 2004. From then, until its formal promulgation in 2008, both the Fourth and the Fifth King toured the country inspiring and mobilising people towards a new set of institutional arrangements and a new mechanism of government. The personal endorsement of the draft Constitution and the mobilisation of public opinion to accept it, was indeed the most crucial factor in the passage of the document. We should remember that the legitimacy of the Constitution among the people depended on Their Majesties support for the draft Constitution. Were they not authoring and supporting it, it could not have materialised at all. In that sense, the legitimacy of the monarchy in no way depends on the Constitution.

The first concrete enactment of the Constitutional contents was the elections held in late 2007 and early 2008. The elections themselves were remarkably free and successful. The votes cast for the two parties were quite balanced, with the opposition, PDP (People's Democratic Party), getting 33% of the votes and the winner, DPT (Druk Phuensum Tshogpa) getting 66%. Nevertheless, only two opposition members ended up in the National Assembly because of the particular voting system – First Past the Post or winner takes all electoral system - which in hindsight was not the best voting formula we could have chosen.



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However, the organisation of the first elections was indeed impressive. And this happened primarily due to HM's exhortation to the people, issued through a Royal Decree (or Kasho), to participate unstintingly in voting, which the people did with an impressive 80% turnout. Without HM's urging, a good fraction of the voters might not have trekked so far to cast votes.

After the elections and the opening of the Parliament, the Constitution was formally debated in the Parliament, in addition to nation-wide consultations on the draft led by Their Majesties. HM the King finally bestowed the Constitution on the country on 18 July 2008, in the Grand Gathering Hall, Kuenray, in Tashichhodzong. The Constitution was signed, witnessed by Their Majesties the Fourth and the Fifth King on one level. Since the entire ceremony took place in front of the giant statue of Buddha, there was also an aura that it was being witnessed by Buddha at another level, and that His Majesty the King promulgated it to the Gods, as much as to men.

That day marked a paradigm shift from the institution of governance first started by the first King, Ugyen Wangchuck, one hundred year before. Yet, for the people, because of such acts of bestowing the Constitution, and the historical memory of fine leadership, HM and the Kingship



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remain the centre of the good governance and the centre of our society.

However, as is well-known, electoral democracy is only the beginning of a desire for realising the HM's vision of GNH. Other conditions for democracies to function well, also received HM attention. Not only should the rule of law be strong, the making of laws must also reflect our timeless human values and the certain values of GNH that His Majesty has defined such as kindness, equality and humanity. The establishment of the Supreme Court by HM in 2010 was therefore a judicial landmark because it opened up systematic avenues for cases on the interpretation of the Constitution and on cases related to human rights.

In addition to the low cost and fair litigations by the courts, there are other essential elements for electoral democracy to function well. The media is an extremely important agency in that regard, but it suffers from dependence on officials' adverts and low readership. But the media should be understood in the broadest sense of the term: it consists of not only newspapers, radio and TV but also films, books, oral traditions, academic journals, fine arts, and music etc. Truth and hard-analysis are important staple diets of a well-functioning democracy, or any society. In



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this regard, the launching of the Bhutan Media Foundation on 21st February 2010, under a Kasho, that would support the media was a profoundly far-reaching step.

**Let us move on to foreign relationships that affect our security and sovereignty. Has anything notable changed over the last four years of His Majesty's reign?**

His Majesty has emphasised that one of the unchanging goals is the safeguarding the sovereignty and security of our country. Relationships with foreign governments or foreign commercial entities have ultimately to be viewed primarily from this greater standpoint.

His Majesty has explained that it is not simply physical defence that is the primary concern today. The concept of security can also be applied to the economic and psychological dimensions of our lives. Internationally, the most important and cherished relationship concerning security in this non-territorial or military sense is with India in terms of trade and development assistance. So it is natural for HM to foster and renew close relationships with India. Way back in 2001, at the age of 21, the Crown Prince went on his first state visit to India when he met a number of important Indians. There was another state visit in 2003.



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This was followed by another state visit in 2007, after his ascent to the throne. Finally, HM went on a state visit to India for the first time after his Coronation in 2009. HM also paid a state visit to Singapore in 2007.

In a reciprocal manner, during the last four years, many high level delegations from various countries have come to Bhutan. These included President Pratibha Patel, PM Dr Manmohan Singh, and a number of ministers, secretaries, and military officials from India.

In 2007, His Royal Highness the Prince of Orange, Willem Alexander of the Netherlands and His wife Princess Maxima of the Netherlands, His Majesty King George Tupou V of Tonga, and Her Royal Highness Princess Chulabhorn Mahidol of Thailand visited our country and called on His Majesty the King.

One of the most important achievements in the last four years in regards to our foreign relationships was the signing of the revised Indo-Bhutan Treaty of Friendship in 2007, in New Delhi. The new treaty was signed in the true spirit of friendship and equality. And the signing of the Treaty was so important that it was presided over by HM the King and the Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh.



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His Majesty paid tribute to India's friendship with Bhutan while delivering the Madhavrao Scindhia Memorial Lecture in 2009. "Another factor that has always played a central role in our success – without which we would certainly not be where we are today – is India's friendship. Some say Bhutan was wise to seek strong bilateral relations with India. After all, whether we speak about our socio-economic progress or our recent transition to democracy, India has been our steadfast partner and friend... If we view the India Bhutan Friendship - through the prism of simplicity – the perspective of fundamental human values, the Indo-Bhutan friendship began as a bond between two men – two leaders – and that our best future lies in an unaltering bond between our two peoples."

In addition, Bhutan has fostered friendly relations with China, the other Asian superpower, considering that it is a necessity, as we have a contiguous border that has not been demarcated in some zones. Since HM the King ascended the throne, China and Bhutan have held a round of amicable border talks in 2009, and there is no doubt that the border demarcation will be resolved under his leadership.

**We have discussed the initiatives taken under each important goals HM outlined in his Coronation**



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**speech. Strengthening the economy was another of the goals. Has there been any progress?**

The accession of HM to the throne on 14 December 2006, was soon followed the production of the Tala Hydro Project, which opened in 2007. Income from the electricity output doubled in 2007 to Nu 9.7 billion, outstripping the money made in any other sector, and pushing up income levels of the Bhutanese.

In the last three years - 2007-2009 - construction of two hydro-electric power projects - Puna Tshangchu I and Dagachu Hydropower - have begun. Meanwhile, the Mangdechu and Puna Tsangchu II projects are about to be signed and launched. These projects were also started in response to the Druk Phunsum Tshogpa government's target to generate 10,000 MW by 2020. Once they are completed by around 2016, there will be a substantial easing of the budgetary situation.

Since the beginning of HM's reign, many new initiatives have been undertaken to improve public infrastructure and create new industrial and commercial activities.

On the institutional side, one of the outstanding innovations HM launched was the founding of the Druk Holdings Investments under a Royal Charter



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in 2007. Some of the large public enterprises owned solely by the government became part of the Druk Holdings Investments. The institutional environment for commercial public investments, or corporate performance, has improved under Druk Holdings Investments.

Our discussion concerning important economic issues must appear somewhat remote to people in the far flung villages. However, it is in those isolated places that HM was most visible and caring and decisively compassionate in the course of his sweeping and tough treks across the country. It was not only the epic nature of his long treks, intended to cover all 202 gewogs of the country, but also His Majesty's decision to travel frugally, with an extremely small entourage, that endeared him to the people. Forget about riding a magnificent horse through the rural landscape, HM the King, in a truly down to earth mobility, travelled on foot and stepped into the modest hamlet-houses to have genuine conversations with the family members within. Nothing gave people more satisfaction than to be in communion and conversation with HM in their own hamlet.

During these rural progressions on horse and foot, HM changed the economic status of thousands of households in Bhutan. Their sense of economic security and future that depended so



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much on land assets in an agrarian society suddenly looked a lot brighter. After a systematic study of the landholdings in eight gewogs of Kurtoe, Tashi Yangtse and Mongar, HM the King gifted land, averaging 1.1 acre per household, to 8,000 households, thus substantially enhancing their wealth and livelihood.

**Land kidu** His Majesty the King grants are underway for the country as a whole. Besides that, there are other kidu that HM grants for those facing disasters and hardships. Can we discuss that?

Land grants are not the only approach to revive rural economies and rural living standards. HM the King has alleviated the circumstances of hardships through several targeted means. In general, it is easier to minimise suffering than maximise happiness. As a result, the infirm, the disabled and the dispossessed youth have all found social and economic support from His Majesty the King. More than 3,000 people, most of whom are students in the country, who have fallen on hard times, receive a monthly stipend from HM the King. And more than 200 meritorious students receive overseas scholarships for higher education from HM's scholarship programme.

It is these kinds of measures that HM has initiated to help the weak and disadvantaged that glues the



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country together, because they reduce the stark inequalities and engender a sense of sharing and belonging to the enlightened Bhutanese society.

The year 2009 was a testing time for our country. On September 21, October 8, and December 31 – the eastern part of the country was struck by earthquakes. The scale of suffering and loss in Eastern Bhutan due to the repeated earthquakes was significantly reduced and mitigated by HM's instantaneous and merciful response. Sorrow suffered alone is much heavier than when suffered together. The people of Eastern Bhutan could bear it with resilience because HM was there with them immediately to face the calamity and start the grim task of helping the 7,000 householders that were affected by the shocks and aftershocks. HM the King immediately gave cash grants to each household to tide them over during the crisis, while the commodity grant for construction timber and CGI sheets were on their way to their collapsed doorsteps.

The 20th Century began with the leadership of the first King Ugyen Wangchuck. He steered the country, possibly out of colonialism, in the footsteps of his father Desi Jigme Namgyel. The 21st Century has begun for Bhutan with the leadership of His Majesty the King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck. HM has said that he has come to the throne at a time of profound change. The changes are broadly two types: democratisation in terms of



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polity, and globalisation in terms of economy. In both democracy and economic globalisation, how much we can discern is of no value to us, and how we can harness what is advantageous will shape our national journey into the 22nd century. It goes without saying that there are many new challenges. Strangely, the challenges can arise more out of inertia of conventional ideas and institutions.

But the leadership of His Majesty is indeed like a brilliant sunrise or dawn, at the start of this century. As his subject-citizens, we would like to wish His Majesty the King health and longevity. Further, may he be honoured in many countries. May he be renowned in all directions. May he dispel misery in the world. And, may he make all beings experience happiness by realizing the vision of Gross National Happiness.





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**Front cover:** A wall painting from Druk Wangyel Lhakhang at Dochula depicting the Coronation of King Ugyen Wangchuck in 1907. Printed with the permission of Her Majesty the Queen Mother Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck.