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ENCYCLOPAEDIA OF  
SAARC AND  
MEMBER COUNTRIES

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# Bhutan and SAARC

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Foreword by  
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# BHUTAN AND SAARC



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## Foreword

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The completion of 21 years of SAARC is an appropriate occasion to have a fresh look at some of the problems and prospects involved in South Asia's march from conflict to cooperation. Although long recognized as a distinct region in the world, marked not only by geographical contiguity, but also by socio-economic and cultural commonalities, the history of international relations within the region, ever since its transformation from empire to sovereign states about 60 years ago, has been marked more by conflict than cooperation. As is well known, India and Pakistan have fought four wars during this period. Relations between India and other countries have not been marred by wars, but differences and tensions have been endemic. The region has been quite late in waking up to the need for regional cooperation and even after succeeding in giving the latter a firm institutional foundation (1985) evolving a set of sound principles and guidelines for its future growth and launching an impressive programme of cooperation, covering a wide range of activities, progress in cooperation has been really slow and halting. On the other hand, the areas of conflict have gone on multiplying and their intensity increasing. We must pause and consider why. Precisely this is what Dr. (Mrs.) Rashmi Sharma has tried to answer in these volumes.

To the external observer SAARC is a more elusive creation. Like a wellbred child one can trace its genealogy and acknowledge the passions which gave its life, but as it enters its third decade it seems confused and unwanted. The promise of its early years has all but vanished and its future appears dogged by uncertainties as once-loving parents erratically pay it



attention: perhaps it is the product of a divorce—this week with one parent, next week with another. 'Pure purple prose' you may well mutter, but for the world outside South Asia there is an unreal quality about SAARC which is underlined by its apparently determined failure to accomplish anything beyond the regular round of summit meetings, the creation of new South Asian organizations to deal with issues ranging from the environments to scientific cooperation, and the establishment of yet more bureaucracies.

Such view is doubtless both unfair and cruel, and is certainly simplistic. SAARC is more than an endless stream of meetings and the progenitor of more bureaucrats—it is an ideal, a dream, a pragmatic mechanism for cooperation, a meeting of minds, and a forum for moderating relations between neighbours in South Asia. It is an attempt to uplift South Asia, economically and socially, and to encourage confidence and transparency between neighbours through the joint effort of its peoples. And as such it must be supported both inside and outside South Asia. But the problem for outsiders is that they see little tangible returns after more than two decades of rhetoric. Summit follows summit, friendly dialogue—between scientist, politician, bureaucrat and technocrat—follows friendly dialogue, and CBMs follow CBMs, yet one is still haunted by the prospect of Himalayan catastrophes, of the daunting practical difficulties of traveling from New Delhi to Islamabad, of the failure to encourage links between the economies of South Asia, and the ongoing feuds over water, race, language and the environment.

I fully agree with Mrs. Rashmi Sharma that these difficulties are more apparent than real. Are these difficulties the manifestation of some deeper malaise which inhibits the positive development of SAARC? In some ways it might be argued that SAARC was an idea ahead of its time. It evolved when tensions between component parts of South Asia were very high, and when it was well nigh impossible to develop positive cooperative action in such fundamentally important areas as economic development and the coordination of transport areas as economic infrastructures given the nature of South Asian economies.

To date SAARC has eschewed any involvement with foreign affairs, yet the realities of global relationships in the nineties are founded in new approaches to economic processes and international relationships. All the states of South Asia are undergoing major processes of economic reform and liberalization as they respond to new global environment. But in most parts of the world this process of economic transformation is accompanied by various types of regional economic cooperation, impinging upon the relationships between states most notably in the substance of their foreign policies.

Much of Europe is being bonded by the EU, the states of North America are involved with the North American Free Trade Association (NAFTA), and in the Asia-Pacific region both ASEAN and Asia-Pacific Economic Council (APEC) are providing fora for the discussion and evolution of more intimate economic cooperation which is impinging more immediately on the formulation of their foreign policies. SAARC has not yet been able to give life to SAPTA and compared with the EU, NAFTA, ASEAN and APEC, SAARC has yet to exert any influence upon one of the most fundamentally important sovereign activities of its member states foreign policy. Consequently centrifugal forces in the area of individual member states' foreign policies in South Asia continue to undermine the viability of SAARC as any type of moderator between its members and between itself and the outside world.

South Asian societies have a complex and difficult agenda in the 21st century. They have embraced democracy but it has to be made effective down to the grassroots level. This would mean much greater accountability and transparency and an enormous cleansing of the political systems including the elimination of corruption. It also requires putting in place a polity of plural societies, and the establishment of a self-reliant economy. Here South Asia has an advantage over almost all other Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean Rim countries in that its culture and traditions make such an exercise easier if the will is available. In the last 60 years, entrenched elites have fought very hard to preserve their political and economic supremacy. Democracy and market forces are mantras to which lip service is paid but are not allowed to function effectively. If they did,

progress would be faster, but those in power would have to give way to new, upwardly mobile groups. There is reason to believe that with less centralized and more professional and open systems in the South Asian states, the linkages between them will grow much faster when driven more by economic and cultural leverages than by political and security concerns. The challenge is, will the leadership perceive this in time? Recent events indicate that the public would be more than willing to respond positively. The leadership should not let them down.

I welcome these volumes by Dr. (Mrs.) Rashmi Sharma. She is a serious scholar. It is not essential for anyone to agree with her prognosis, logic or even conclusions in all their details. But no body can deny that these volumes are based on extensive study and the author's own reflections and experience. It was a rewarding experience to go through these volumes. I hope she will continue her pursuits further in her chosen field of interest. I wish her all the best in her future endeavors. The present exploratism by her certainly make a useful addition to the growing literature on SAARC.

R.N. PAL

## Preface

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The developing and living organization SAARC has emerged as a major instrument in facilitating interaction among member countries on a wide range of issues of common concern to the countries. The value of this is not easily perceived, but it will perhaps not be an exaggeration to say that countries in South Asia would have been worse off without SAARC. The SAARC process has also created a new awareness about actions to be taken separately or jointly by member states on a number of other vital areas with specific relevance for the region.

Bhutan attaches great importance to SAARC. Ever since the inception of SAARC, Bhutan has firmly supported and promoted the activities, and worked towards making the South Asian region self-reliant. Consistent with its policy of developing friendly relations with all the neighboring countries, SAARC fulfils an important foreign policy objective of Bhutan. It has also displayed a keen interest in economic cooperation and various peacemaking efforts in South Asia.

This book throws ample lights on the role of Bhutan in SAARC. Efforts have been made to cover relevant information about the subject. It has been a painstaking exercise to shape this work in its present form. Hopefully this informative and exhaustive book will be useful for researchers, scholars, students alike. If any suggestion comes, it would be acknowledged gratefully.

The Bhutan of today has moved far away from its historical past and entered an era of realization, assertion and the development of its sovereign personality. Its exposure to the outside world has given it confidence. The King's leadership is

forward looking and the new generation reflects a sense of pride and achievement. It faces its own dangers with equanimity. The realization of difficulties and efforts to overcome them is a sign of encouraging maturity. India is reconciled to the process of changes despite some major differences which arise partly as a result of the historical hangover and some due to Bhutan's hurry in assuming a new role. Both have their compulsions and limitations which time alone would resolve. If Bhutan avoids the pitfalls to which other developing countries become victim, it would find both bilateral and regional linkages of benefit, specially the Indian connection which has an important stake in the Himalayan region.

I am conscious that I am embarking upon rather an ambitious adventure, and I am equally conscious of my own limitations in doing so. But of late, I have found so much material on SAARC that I am tempted to say publicly what I have been ruminating in my mind during the last twenty years. I simply can not write anything, much less see it published without considerable help from outside. I gratefully acknowledge all that.

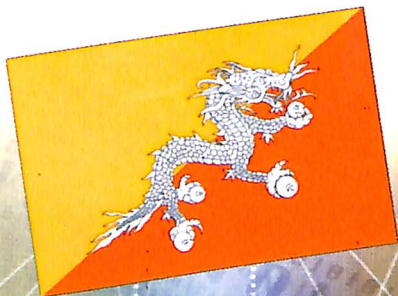
I am grateful to all who have cooperated in finalizing this book. I acknowledge with thanks the help of various librarians and authors of various books which have been referred to in this book. I would also like to thank the publishers for bringing this book out in time.

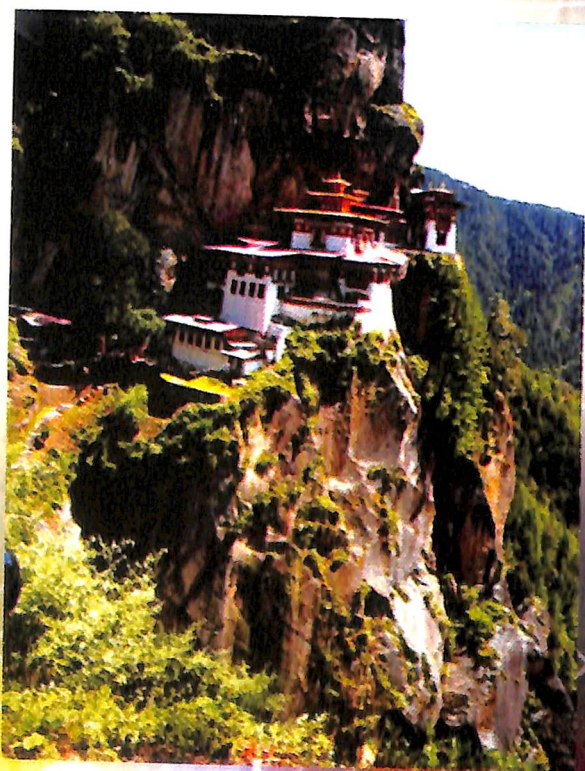
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SAARC  
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COUNTRIES



BHUTAN





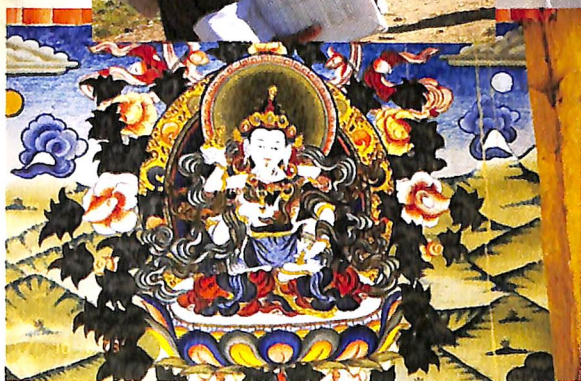
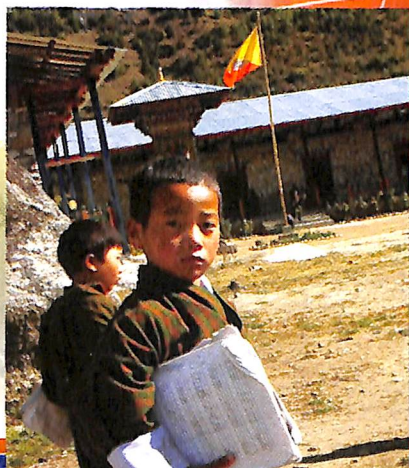
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BHUTAN



# 1

## Bhutan: A Himalayan Country

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### INTRODUCTION

Equal to Switzerland in size (north to south 110 miles and east to west 200 miles) and the quality of mountainous life, Bhutan is indeed a marvel of nature with its large number of climes and eco-systems. In the entire Himalayan region, western and central Bhutan is supposedly the most beautiful. The topography is irrepressible, changing form and allure between its three regions (north, central and south) separated by humbling mountain ranges. Within any region, high passes (or la's) separate the intervening valleys, through which flow perennially babbling rivers (or chu's). If western Bhutan is a pastoral delight with its cascading rice fields and fruit orchards, the black mountains and valleys of the central region have legendary beauty and hospitable terrain. The subtropical plains of eastern Bhutan, with depreciating forest cover, are the least visited. Though, to let out spiritual steam, this is the place among the most ancient spiritual sites. Monasteries uniformly pepper the country and are present almost everywhere. Naturally, a country that boasts a 'single' road (national highway) - the connecting link between Bhutan's bigger cities - perforce has to be unraveled on foot. Loosely construed as trekking, these walking options are plentiful, from the easy ones for the weak-limbed to the impossibly strenuous kind in the north with their views of firs, junipers, pine trees and snow-clad peaks. \

In western Bhutan, peaks range from 5,000 to 14,000 feet. Lush forests include conifers, laurels, maples, and oaks. On the Chelela pass at 12,000 feet, Mount Jhomolhari is visible through fluttering flags, a view sure to give one a 'high.' If not beers offered by the flag bearers will do the trick. This central-cum-western temperate zone is superbly suited for travel through the year, with frolicsome mildly warm summer days and withering cold winter nights. The northern arctic-like Bumthang and Mongar valleys separated by Thrumshing La are icy spectacles in the winter; summers are never warm either. End-May until end-September - the summer monsoon is the best for sightings of the wildest of orchids. For those who place Himalayan views above all else, fall brings the clearest blue sky imagined.

### ORIGINS

Although knowledge of prehistoric Bhutan has yet to emerge through archaeological study, stone tools and weapons, remnants of large stone structures, and megaliths that many have been used for boundary markers or rituals provide evidence of civilization as early as 2000 B.C. The absence of neolithic mythological legends argues against earlier inhabitation. A more certain prehistoric period has been theorized by historians as that of the state of Lhomon (literally, southern darkness) or Monyul (dark land, a reference to the Monpa aboriginal peoples of Bhutan), possibly a part of Tibet that was then beyond the pale of Buddhist teachings. Monyul is thought to have existed between 500 B.C. and A.D. 600. The names Lhomon Tsendenjong (southern Mon sandalwood country) and Lhomon Khashi (southern Mon country of four approaches), found in ancient Bhutanese and Tibetan chronicles, may also have credence and have been used by some Bhutanese scholars when referring to their homeland.

Variations of the Sanskrit words *Bhota-ant* (end of Bhot, an Indian name for Tibet) or *Bhu-uttan* (meaning highlands) have been suggested by historians as origins of the name Bhutan, which came into common foreign use in the late nineteenth century and is used in Bhutan only in English-language official correspondence. The traditional name of the country since the seventeenth century has been *Drukyul-* -country of the Drokpa, the Dragon People, or the Land of the Thunder Dragon—a reference to the country's dominant Buddhist sect. Some scholars

believe that during the early historical period the inhabitants were fierce mountain aborigines, the Monpa, who were of neither the Tibetan or Mongol stock that later overran northern Bhutan.

The people of Monyul practiced the shamanistic Bon religion, which emphasized worship of nature and the existence of good and evil spirits. During the latter part of this period, historical legends relate that the mighty king of Monyul invaded a southern region known as the Duars, subduing the regions of modern Assam, West Bengal, and Bihar in India.

### Arrival of Buddhism

The introduction of Buddhism occurred in the seventh century A.D., when Tibetan king Srongtsen Gampo (reigned A.D. 627-49), a convert to Buddhism, ordered the construction of two Buddhist temples, at Bumthang in central Bhutan and at Kyichu in the Paro Valley. Buddhism replaced but did not eliminate the Bon religious practices that had also been prevalent in Tibet until the late sixth century. Instead, Buddhism absorbed Bon and its believers. As the country developed in its many fertile valleys, Buddhism matured and became a unifying element. It was Buddhist literature and chronicles that began the recorded history of Bhutan. In A.D. 747, a Buddhist saint, Padmasambhava (known in Bhutan as Guru Rimpoche and sometimes referred to as the Second Buddha), came to Bhutan from India at the invitation of one of the numerous local kings. After reportedly subduing eight classes of demons and converting the king, Guru Rimpoche moved on to Tibet. Upon his return from Tibet, he oversaw the construction of new monasteries in the Paro Valley and set up his headquarters in Bumthang.

According to tradition, he founded the Nyingmapa sect—also known as the “old sect” or Red Hat sect—of Mahayana Buddhism, which became for a time the dominant religion of Bhutan. Guru Rimpoche plays a great historical and religious role as the national patron saint who revealed the tantras—manuals describing forms of devotion to natural energy—to Bhutan. Following the guru’s sojourn, Indian influence played a temporary role until increasing Tibetan migrations brought new cultural and religious contributions. There was no central government during this period. Instead, small independent monarchies began to develop by the early ninth century. Each was ruled by a *deb* (king), some

of whom claimed divine origins. The kingdom of Bumthang was the most prominent among these small entities. At the same time, Tibetan Buddhist monks (*lam* in Dzongkha, Bhutan's official national language) had firmly rooted their religion and culture in Bhutan, and members of joint Tibetan-Mongol military expeditions settled in fertile valleys. By the eleventh century, all of Bhutan was occupied by Tibetan-Mongol military forces.

### Tantric Buddhism

Padmasambhava, also known as Guru Rimpoche, is usually credited with bringing Tantric Buddhism to Bhutan, but two rare sites representing an earlier influence predate him. Kyichu in Paro and Jambey in Bumthang where built in 659 AD, a century or so ahead before Guru Rimpoche's arrival, by the quasi-legendary King of Tibet Songtsen Gampo. In the 8th century the Indian Guru Padmasambhava arrived in Bhutan, bringing Tantric Buddhism (which would evolve into Tibetan Buddhism over the next 400 years). He established a number of temples and monasteries, including the famous Taktshang monastery built high on a cliff face above the Paro valley and Kurjey Lhakhang in Bumthang.

### Rivalry among the Sects

By the tenth century, Bhutan's political development was heavily influenced by its religious history. Following a period in which Buddhism was in decline in Tibet in the eleventh century, contention among a number of subsects emerged. The Mongol overlords of Tibet and Bhutan patronized a sequence of subsects until their own political decline in the fourteenth century. By that time, the Gelugpa or Yellow Hat School had, after a period of anarchy in Tibet, become a powerful force resulting in the flight to Bhutan of numerous monks of various minor opposing sects. Among these monks was the founder of the Lhapa subsect of the Kargyupa School, to whom is attributed the introduction of strategically built *dzong*. Although the Lhapa subsect had been successfully challenged in the twelfth century by another Kargyupa subsect—the Drukpa—led by Tibetan monk Phajo Drugom Shigpo, it continued to proselytize until the seventeenth century. The Drukpa subsect, an unreformed Nyingmapa group in Tibet, spread throughout Bhutan and eventually became a dominant form of religious practice. Between the twelfth century

and the seventeenth century, the two Kargyupa subsects vied with one another from their respective *dzong* as the older form of Nyingmapa Buddhism was eclipsed.

## HISTORY

Pre historical evidences show that the mountain valleys of Bhutan have been inhabited for several thousand years. The Bhutanese believe the Lhopu (a small tribe in southwest Bhutan who speak a Tibeto-Burman language) to be the aboriginal inhabitants of the country, who were subsequently displaced by the arrival of Tibetans of Mongolian descent. Others consider the identification too narrow, and suggest that various other tribes represent the aboriginal peoples. The Ngalop, the ethnic group that comprises the majority of the population concentrated in the central and western valleys, are clearly related to the Tibetans to the north, sharing physical, linguistic, and cultural traits, indicating that at some unknown time in the past a significant migration of Tibetans arrived over the Himalayan mountain passes to establish the base of the present population. Archaeological evidences show that Bhutan was inhabited as early as 2000 BC.

Historians have theorised that the state of *Lhomon* (literally, "southern darkness"), or *Monyul* ("Dark Land", a reference to the Monpa – the aboriginal peoples of Bhutan) may have existed between 500 BC and AD 600. The names *Lhomon Tsendenjong* (Sandalwood Country), and *Lhomon Khashi*, or Southern Mon (country of four approaches) have been found in ancient Bhutanese and Tibetan chronicles. The earliest transcribed event in Bhutan was the passage of the Buddhist saint Padmasambhava (also called Guru Rinpoche) in the 8th century. Bhutan's early history is unclear, because most of the records were destroyed after fire ravaged Punakha, the ancient capital in 1827. By the 10th century, Bhutan's political development was heavily influenced by its religious history. Various sub-sects of Buddhism emerged which were patronised by the various Mongol and Tibetan overlords.

After the decline of the Mongols in the 14th century, these sub-sects vied with each other for supremacy in the political and religious landscape, eventually leading to the ascendancy of the Drukpa sub-sect by the 16th century. Until the early 17th century, Bhutan existed as a patchwork of minor warring fiefdoms until unified by the Tibetan lama and military leader Shabdrung

Ngawang Namgyal. To defend the country against intermittent Tibetan forays, Namgyal built a network of impregnable *dzong* (fortresses), and promulgated a code of law that helped to bring local lords under centralised control. Many such *dzong* still exist. After Namgyal's death in 1651, Bhutan fell into anarchy. Taking advantage of the chaos, the Tibetans attacked Bhutan in 1710, and again in 1730 with the help of the Mongols. Both assaults were successfully thwarted, and an armistice was signed in 1759. In the 18th century, the Bhutanese invaded and occupied the kingdom of Cooch Behar to the south.

### **Bhutan as a Country**

Until the early 1600s, Bhutan existed as a patchwork of minor warring fiefdoms until unified by the Tibetan lama and military leader Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal. Escaping political foes in Tibet he arrived in Bhutan in 1616 and initiated a Programme of fortification and military consolidation, overseeing the construction of impressive dzongs or fortresses such as Simtokha Dzong which guards the entrance to Thimphu valley. An insightful leader, he used cultural symbols as well as military force to establish a Bhutanese national identity, including the initiation of a number of sacred dances to be performed in the annual tsechu festivals.

The Shabdrung also established the dual system of government by which control of the country was shared between a spiritual leader (the Je Khempo) and an administrative leader (the Desi Druk), a polity which exists in modified form to this day. After the Shabdrung's death, infighting and civil war eroded the power of the shabdrung for the next 200 years until 1885, when the Penlop of Trongsa, Ugyen Wangchuck gained an upper hand over rival forces and sought to cultivate ties with the British in India.

### **Defeat of Tibetan Invasions**

In the seventeenth century, a theocratic government independent of Tibetan political influence was established, and premodern Bhutan emerged. The theocratic government was founded by an expatriate Drukpa monk, Ngawang Namgyal, who arrived in Bhutan in 1616 seeking freedom from the domination of the Gelugpa subsect led by the Dalai Lama (Ocean Lama) in

Lhasa. After a series of victories over rival subject leaders and Tibetan invaders, Ngawang Namgyal took the title *shabdrung* (At Whose Feet One Submits, or, in many Western sources, *dharma raja*), becoming the temporal and spiritual leader of Bhutan. Considered the first great historical figure of Bhutan, he united the leaders of powerful Bhutanese families in a land called Drukyl. He promulgated a code of law and built a network of impregnable *dzong*, a system that helped bring local lords under centralized control and strengthened the country against Tibetan invasions. Many *dzong* were extant in the late twentieth century.

Tibetan armies invaded Bhutan around 1629, in 1631, and again in 1639, hoping to throttle Ngawang Namgyal's popularity before it spread too far. The invasions were thwarted, and the Drukpa subject developed a strong presence in western and central Bhutan, leaving Ngawang Namgyal supreme. In recognition of the power he accrued, goodwill missions were sent to Bhutan from Cooch Behar in the Duars (present-day northeastern West Bengal), Nepal to the west, and Ladakh in western Tibet. The ruler of Ladakh even gave a number of villages in his kingdom to Ngawang Namgyal. During the first war with Tibet, two Portuguese Jesuits—the first recorded Europeans to visit—passed through Bhutan on their way to Tibet. They met with Ngawang Namgyal, presented him with firearms, gunpowder, and a telescope, and offered him their services in the war against Tibet, but the *shabdrung* declined the offer.

Bhutan's troubles were not over, however. In 1643 a joint Mongol-Tibetan force sought to destroy Nyingmapa refugees who had fled to Bhutan, Sikkim, and Nepal. The Mongols had seized control of religious and civil power in Tibet in the 1630s and established Gelugpa as the state religion. Bhutanese rivals of Ngawang Namgyal encouraged the Mongol intrusion, but the Mongol force was easily defeated in the humid lowlands of southern Bhutan. Another Tibetan invasion in 1647 also failed. During Ngawang Namgyal's rule, administration comprised a state monastic body with an elected head, the Je Khenpo (lord abbot), and a theocratic civil government headed by the *druk desi* (regent of Bhutan, also known as *deb raja* in Western sources). The *druk desi* was either a monk or a member of the laity—by the nineteenth century, usually the latter; he was elected for a three-year term, initially by a monastic council and later by the State



Council (Lhengye Tshokdu). The State Council was a central administrative organ that included regional rulers, the *shabdrung's* chamberlains, and the *druk desi*.

In time, the *druk desi* came under the political control of the State Council's most powerful faction of regional administrators. The *shabdrung* was the head of state and the ultimate authority in religious and civil matters.<sup>1</sup> The seat of government was at Thimphu, the site of a thirteenth-century *dzong*, in the spring, summer, and fall. The winter capital was at Punakha, a *dzong* established northeast of Thimphu in 1527. The kingdom was divided into three regions (east, central, and west), each with an appointed *ponlop*, or governor, holding a seat in a major *dzong*. Districts were headed by *dzongpon*, or district officers, who had their headquarters in lesser *dzong*.

The *ponlop* were combination tax collectors, judges, military commanders, and procurement agents for the central government. Their major revenues came from the trade between Tibet and India and from land taxes. Ngawang Namgyal's regime was bound by a legal code called the Tsa Yig, which described the spiritual and civil regime and provided laws for government administration and for social and moral conduct. The duties and virtues inherent in the Buddhist dharma (religious law) played a large role in the new legal code, which remained in force until the 1960s.

### **Between 1651 and 1728**

To keep Bhutan from disintegrating, Ngawang Namgyal's death in 1651 apparently was kept a carefully guarded secret for fifty-four years. Initially, Ngawang Namgyal was said to have entered into a religious retreat, a situation not unprecedented in Bhutan, Sikkim, or Tibet during that time. During the period of Ngawang Namgyal's supposed retreat, appointments of officials were issued in his name, and food was left in front of his locked door. Ngawang Namgyal's son and stepbrother, in 1651 and 1680, respectively, succeeded him. They started their reigns as minors under the control of religious and civil regents and rarely exercised authority in their own names. For further continuity, the concept of multiple reincarnation of the first *shabdrung*—in the form of either his body, his speech, or his mind—was invoked by the Je Khenpo and the *druk desi*, both of whom wanted to retain the power they had accrued through the dual system of government.

The last person recognized as the bodily reincarnation of Ngawang Namgyal died in the mid-eighteenth century, but speech and mind reincarnations, embodied by individuals who acceded to the position of *shabdrung*, were recognized into the early twentieth century. The power of the state religion also increased with a new monastic code that remained in effect in the early 1990s. The compulsory admission to monastic life of at least one son from any family having three or more sons was instituted in the late seventeenth century. In time, however, the State Council became increasingly secular as did the successive *druk desi*, *ponlop*, and *dzongpon*, and intense rivalries developed among the *ponlop* of Tongsa and Paro and the *dzongpon* of Punakha, Thimphu, and Wangdiphodrang. During the first period of succession and further internal consolidation under the *druk desi* government, there was conflict with Tibet and Sikkim. Internal opposition to the central government resulted in overtures by the opponents of the *druk desi* to Tibet and Sikkim. In the 1680s, Bhutan invaded Sikkim in pursuit of a rebellious local lord. In 1700 Bhutan again invaded Sikkim, and in 1714 Tibetan forces, aided by Mongolia, invaded Bhutan but were unable to gain control.

## Duar War

In 1772, Cooch Behar appealed to the British East India Company who assisted them in ousting the Bhutanese, and later in attacking Bhutan itself in 1774. A peace treaty was signed in which Bhutan agreed to retreat to its pre-1730 borders. However, the peace was tenuous, and border skirmishes with the British were to continue for the next hundred years. The skirmishes eventually led to the Duar War (1864–1865), a confrontation over who would control the Bengal Duars. After Bhutan lost the war, the Treaty of Sinchula was signed between British India and Bhutan. As part of the reparations, the Duars were ceded to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland in exchange for a rent of Rs. 50,000. The treaty ended all hostilities between British India and Bhutan.

During the 1870s, power struggles between the rival valleys of Paro and Trongsa led to civil war in Bhutan, eventually leading to the ascendancy of Ugyen Wangchuck, the *ponlop* (governor) of Tongsa. From his power base in central Bhutan, Ugyen Wangchuck defeated his political enemies and united the country

following several civil wars and rebellions in the period 1882–1885. In 1907, an epochal year for the country, Ugyen Wangchuck was unanimously chosen as the hereditary king of the country by an assembly of leading Buddhist monks, government officials, and heads of important families. The British government promptly recognised the new monarchy, and in 1910 Bhutan signed a treaty which let Great Britain to 'guide' Bhutan's foreign affairs. After India gained independence from the United Kingdom on August 15, 1947, Bhutan became one of the first countries to recognize India's independence.

After the British left the region, a treaty similar to the one of 1910 was signed August 8, 1949 with the newly independent India. After the Chinese People's Liberation Army entered Tibet in 1951, Bhutan sealed its northern frontier and improved bilateral ties with India. To reduce the risk of Chinese encroachment, Bhutan began a modernisation Programme that was largely sponsored by India. In 1953, King Jigme Dorji Wangchuck established the country's legislature – a 130-member National Assembly – to promote a more democratic form of governance. In 1965, he set up a Royal Advisory Council, and in 1968 he formed a Cabinet. In 1971, Bhutan was admitted to the United Nations, having held observer status for three years. In July 1972, Jigme Singye Wangchuck ascended to the throne at the age of 16 after the death of his father, Dorji Wangchuck. Since 1988, Nepalese immigrants as well as illegal immigrants have accused Bhutan of violating human rights. The Bhutanese regime they allege to be responsible for atrocities and crime against her Nepali speaking minority population. The allegations range from rape, executions and eviction of over 100,000 of its minority population, which accounts almost 15 per cent of its people. These allegations remain unproven and are vehemently denied by Bhutan. Most of these refugees settled in UN run refugee camps in south-eastern Nepal where they have remained for 15 years.

In 1998, King Jigme Singye Wangchuck introduced significant political reforms, transferring most of his powers to the Prime Minister and allowing for impeachment of the King by a two-thirds majority of the National Assembly. In late 2003, the Bhutanese army successfully launched a large-scale operation to flush out anti-India insurgents who were operating training camps in southern Bhutan. In 1999, the King also lifted a ban on television

and the Internet, making Bhutan one of the last countries to have introduced television. In his speech, he said that television was a critical step to the modernization of Bhutan as well as a major contributor to the country's Gross National Happiness (Bhutan is the only country to measure happiness) but warned against the misuse of the television that may erode traditional Bhutanese values. A new constitution has been presented in early 2005 which will be put up for ratification by a referendum before coming into force. In December 2005, King Jigme Singye Wangchuck announced that he would step down as King of Bhutan in 2008. The King said he would be succeeded by his son, the crown prince Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck.

### Civil Conflict

Civil war ensued when the "first reincarnation" of Ngawang Namgyal, Jigme Dakpa, was recognized as the *shabdrung* in 1728. A rival claimant, however, was promoted by opposition forces supported by Tibet. The Tibetan-backed forces were defeated by Jigme Dakpa's supporters, but the political system remained unstable. Regional rivalries contributed to the gradual disintegration of Bhutan at the time the first British agents arrived. In the early eighteenth century, Bhutan had successfully developed control over the principality of Cooch Behar.

The raja of Cooch Behar had sought assistance from Bhutan against the Indian Mughals in 1730, and Bhutanese political influence was not long in following. By the mid-1760s, Thimphu considered Cooch Behar its dependency, stationing a garrison force there and directing its civil administration. When the *druk desi* invaded Sikkim in 1770, Cooch Behari forces joined their Bhutanese counterparts in the offensive. In a succession dispute in Cooch Behar two years later, however, the *druk desi's* nominee for the throne was opposed by a rival who invited British troops, and, in effect, Cooch Behar became a dependency of the British East India Company.

### British Intrusion

Under the Cooch Behari agreement with the British, a British expeditionary force drove the Bhutanese garrison out of Cooch Behar and invaded Bhutan in 1772-73. The *druk desi* petitioned Lhasa for assistance from the Panchen Lama, who was serving as

regent for the youthful Dalai Lama. In correspondence with the British governor general of India, however, the Panchen Lama instead castigated the *druk desi* and invoked Tibet's claim of suzerainty over Bhutan. Failing to receive help from Tibet, the *druk desi* signed a Treaty of Peace with the British East India Company on April 25, 1774. Bhutan agreed to return to its pre-1730 boundaries, paid a symbolic tribute of five horses to Britain, and, among other concessions, allowed the British to harvest timber in Bhutan. Subsequent missions to Bhutan were made by the British in 1776, 1777, and 1783, and commerce was opened between British India and Bhutan and, for a short time, Tibet. In 1784 the British turned over to Bhutanese control Bengal Duars territory, where boundaries were poorly defined. As in its other foreign territories, Bhutan left administration of the Bengal Duars territory to local officials and collected its revenues.

Although major trade and political relations failed to develop between Bhutan and Britain, the British had replaced the Tibetans as the major external threat. Boundary disputes plagued Bhutanese-British relations. To reconcile their differences, Bhutan sent an emissary to Calcutta in 1787, and the British sent missions to Thimphu in 1815 and 1838. The 1815 mission was inconclusive. The 1838 mission offered a treaty providing for extradition of Bhutanese officials responsible for incursions into Assam, free and unrestricted commerce between India and Bhutan, and settlement of Bhutan's debt to the British. In an attempt to protect its independence, Bhutan rejected the British offer. Despite increasing internal disorder, Bhutan had maintained its control over a portion of the Assam Duars more or less since its reduction of Cooch Behar to a dependency in the 1760s. After the British gained control of Lower Assam in 1826, tension between the countries began to rise as Britain exerted its strength.

Bhutanese payments of annual tribute to the British for the Assam Duars gradually fell into arrears, however. The resulting British demands for payment and military incursions into Bhutan in 1834 and 1835 brought about defeat for Bhutan's forces and a temporary loss of territory. The British proceeded in 1841 to annex the formerly Bhutanesecontrolled Assam Duars, paying a compensation of 10,000 rupees a year to Bhutan. In 1842 Bhutan gave up control to the British of some of the troublesome Bengal Duars territory it had administered since 1784. Charges and

countercharges of border incursions and protection of fugitives led to an unsuccessful Bhutanese mission to Calcutta in 1852. Among other demands, the mission sought increased compensation for its former Duars territories, but instead the British deducted nearly 3,000 rupees from the annual compensation and demanded an apology for alleged plundering of British-protected lands by members of the mission. Following more incidents and the prospect of an anti-Bhutan rebellion in the Bengal Duars, British troops deployed to the frontier in the mid-1850s.

The Sepoy Rebellion in India in 1857-58 and the demise of the British East India Company's rule prevented immediate British action. Bhutanese armed forces raided Sikkim and Cooch Behar in 1862, seizing people, property, and money. The British responded by withholding all compensation payments and demanding release of all captives and return of stolen property. Demands to the *druk desi* went unheeded, as he was alleged to be unaware of his frontier officials' actions against Sikkim and Cooch Behar. Britain sent a peace mission to Bhutan in early 1864, in the wake of the recent conclusion of a civil war there. The *dzongpon* of Punakha—who had emerged victorious—had broken with the central government and set up a rival *druk desi* while the legitimate *druk desi* sought the protection of the *ponlop* of Paro and was later deposed. The British mission dealt alternately with the rival *ponlop* of Paro and the *ponlop* of Tongsa (the latter acted on behalf of the *druk desi*), but Bhutan rejected the peace and friendship treaty it offered. Britain declared war in November 1864.

Bhutan had no regular army, and what forces existed were composed of *dzong* guards armed with matchlocks, bows and arrows, swords, knives, and catapults. Some of these *dzong* guards, carrying shields and wearing chainmail armor, engaged the well-equipped British forces. The Duar War (1864-65) lasted only five months and, despite some battlefield victories by Bhutanese forces, resulted in Bhutan's defeat, loss of part of its sovereign territory, and forced cession of formerly occupied territories. Under the terms of the Treaty of Sinchula, signed on November 11, 1865, Bhutan ceded territories in the Assam Duars and Bengal Duars, as well as the eighty-three-square-Kilometre territory of Dewangiri in southeastern Bhutan, in return for an annual subsidy of 50,000 rupees. In the 1870s and 1880s, renewed competition among

regional rivals—primarily the pro-British *ponlop* of Tongsa and the anti-British, pro-Tibetan *ponlop* of Paro—resulted in the ascendancy of Ugyen Wangchuck, the *ponlop* of Tongsa. From his power base in central Bhutan, Ugyen Wangchuck had defeated his political enemies and united the country following several civil wars and rebellions in 1882-85.

His victory came at a time of crisis for the central government, however. British power was becoming more extensive to the south, and in the west Tibet had violated its border with Sikkim, incurring British disfavor. After 1,000 years of close ties with Tibet, Bhutan faced the threat of British military power and was forced to make serious geopolitical decisions. The British, seeking to offset potential Russian advances in Lhasa, wanted to open trade relations with Tibet. Ugyen Wangchuck saw the opportunity to assist the British and in 1903-4 volunteered to accompany a British mission to Lhasa as a mediator. For his services in securing the Anglo-Tibetan Convention of 1904, Ugyen Wangchuck was knighted and thereafter continued to accrue greater power in Bhutan.

### **Establishment of the Hereditary Monarchy, 1907**

Under British influence a monarchy was formally established on December 17th, 1907 with Ugyen Wangchuck as the First King of Bhutan. His emergence as the national leader coincided with the realization that the dual political system was obsolete and ineffective. He had removed his chief rival, the *ponlop* of Paro, and installed a supporter and relative, a member of the pro-British Dorji family, in his place. When the last *shabdrung* died in 1903 and a reincarnation had not appeared by 1906, civil administration came under the control of Ugyen Wangchuck. Finally, in 1907, the fifty-fourth and last *druk desi* was forced to retire, and despite recognitions of subsequent reincarnations of Ngawang Namgyal, the *shabdrung* system came to an end. In November 1907, an assembly of leading Buddhist monks, government officials, and heads of important families was held to end the moribund 300-year-old dual system of government and to establish a new absolute monarchy.

Ugyen Wangchuck was elected its first hereditary Druk Gyalpo. The Dorji family became hereditary holders of the position of *gongzim* (chief chamberlain), the top government post. The

British, wanting political stability on their northern frontier, approved of the entire development. Britain's earlier entreaties in Lhasa had unexpected repercussions at this time. The China, concerned that Britain would seize Tibet, invaded Tibet in 1910 and asserted political authority. In the face of the Chinese military occupation, the Dalai Lama fled to India. China laid claim not only to Tibet but also to Bhutan, Nepal, and Sikkim. With these events, Bhutanese-British interests coalesced. A new Bhutanese-British agreement, the Treaty of Punakha, was signed on January 8, 1910. It amended two articles of the 1865 treaty: the British agreed to double their annual stipend to 100,000 rupees and "to exercise no interference in the internal administration of Bhutan." In turn, Bhutan agreed "to be guided by the advice of the British Government in regard to its external relations."

The Treaty of Punakha guaranteed Bhutan's defense against China; China, in no position to contest British power, conceded the end of the millennium-long Tibetan-Chinese influence. Much of Bhutan's modern development has been attributed by Bhutanese historians to the first Druk Gyalpo. Internal reforms included introducing Western-style schools, improving internal communications, encouraging trade and commerce with India, and revitalizing the Buddhist monastic system. Towards the end of his life, Ugyen Wangchuck was concerned about the continuity of the family dynasty, and in 1924 he sought British assurance that the Wangchuck family would retain its preeminent position in Bhutan. His request led to an investigation of the legal status of Bhutan vis-à-vis the suzerainty held over Bhutan by Britain and the ambiguity of Bhutan's relationship to India.

### **Centralized Government**

Ugyen Wangchuck died in 1926 and was succeeded by his son, Jigme Wangchuck (reigned 1926-52). The second Druk Gyalpo continued his father's centralization and modernization efforts and built more schools, dispensaries, and roads. During Jigme Wangchuck's reign, monasteries and district governments were increasingly brought under royal control. However, Bhutan generally remained isolated from international affairs. The issue of Bhutan's status vis-à-vis the government of India (was Bhutan a state of India or did it enjoy internal sovereignty?) was reexamined by London in 1932 as part of the issue of the status of



India itself. It was decided to leave the decision to join an Indian federation up to Bhutan when the time came. When British rule over India ended in 1947, so too did Britain's association with Bhutan.

India succeeded Britain as the de facto protector of the Himalayan kingdom, and Bhutan retained control over its internal government. It was two years, however, before a formal agreement recognized Bhutan's independence. Following the precedent set by the Treaty of Punakha, on August 8, 1949, Thimphu signed the Treaty of Friendship Between the Government of India and the Government of Bhutan, according to which external affairs, formerly guided by Britain, were to be guided by India. Like Britain, India agreed not to interfere in Bhutan's internal affairs. India also agreed to increase the annual subsidy to 500,000 rupees per year. Important to Bhutan's national pride was the return of Dewangiri. Some historians believe that if India had been at odds with China at this time, as it was to be a decade later, it might not have acceded so easily to Bhutan's request for independent status.

### **Modernization under Jigme Dorji**

The third Druk Gyalpo, Jigme Dorji Wangchuck, was enthroned in 1952. Earlier he had married the European-educated cousin of the *chogyal* (king) of Sikkim and with her support made continual efforts to modernize his nation throughout his twenty-year reign. Among his first reforms was the establishment of the National Assembly—the Tshogdu—in 1953. Although the Druk Gyalpo could issue royal decrees and exercise veto power over resolutions passed by the National Assembly, its establishment was a major move toward a constitutional monarchy. When the Chinese communists took over Tibet in 1951, Bhutan closed its frontier with Tibet and sided with its powerful neighbour to the south. To offset the chance of Chinese encroachment, Bhutan began a modernization Programme. Land reform was accompanied by the abolition of slavery and serfdom and the separation of the judiciary from the executive branch of government. Mostly funded by India after China's invasion of Tibet in 1959, the modernization Programme also included the construction of roads linking the Indian plains with central Bhutan. An all-weather road was completed in 1962 between Thimphu and Phuntsholing, the overland gateway town on the southwest border with India.

Dzongkha was made the national language during Jigme Dorji's reign. Additionally, development projects included establishing such institutions as a national museum in Paro and a national library, national archives, and national stadium, as well as buildings to house the National Assembly, the High Court (Thrimkhang Gongma), and other government entities in Thimphu. The position of *gongzim*, held since 1907 by the Dorji family, was upgraded in 1958 to *lonchen* (prime minister) and was still in the hands of the Dorji. Jigme Dorji Wangchuck's reforms, however, although lessening the authority of the absolute monarchy, also curbed the traditional decentralization of political authority among regional leaders and strengthened the role of the central government in economic and social programs. Modernization efforts moved forward in the 1960s under the direction of the *lonchen*, Jigme Palden Dorji, the Druk Gyalpo's brother-in-law.

In 1962, however, Dorji incurred disfavour with the Royal Bhutan Army over the use of military vehicles and the forced retirement of some fifty officers. Religious elements also were antagonized by Dorji's efforts to reduce the power of the state-supported religious institutions. In April 1964, while the Druk Gyalpo was in Switzerland for medical care, Dorji was assassinated in Phuntsholing by an army corporal. The majority of those arrested and accused of the crime was military personnel and included the army chief of operations, Namgyal Bahadur, the Druk Gyalpo's uncle, who was executed for his part in the plot. The unstable situation continued under Dorji's successor as acting *lonchen*, his brother Lhendup Dorji, and for a time under the Druk Gyalpo's brother, Namgyal Wangchuck, as head of the army. According to some sources, a power struggle ensued between pro-Wangchuck loyalists and "modernist" Dorji supporters.

The main issue was not an end to or lessening of the power of the monarchy but "full freedom from Indian interference." Other observers believe the 1964 crisis was not so much a policy struggle as competition for influence on the palace between the Dorji family and the Druk Gyalpo's Tibetan mistress, Yangki, and her father. Nevertheless, with the concurrence of the National Assembly, Lhendup Dorji and other family members were exiled in 1965. The tense political situation continued, however, with an assassination attempt on the Druk Gyalpo himself in July 1965.

The Dorjis were not implicated in the attempt, and the would-be assassins were pardoned by the Druk Gyalpo. In 1966, to increase the efficiency of government administration, Jigme Dorji Wangchuck made Thimphu the year-round capital.

In May 1968, the comprehensive Rules and Regulations of the National Assembly revised the legal basis of the power granted to the National Assembly. The Druk Gyalpo decreed that henceforth sovereign power, including the power to remove government ministers and the Druk Gyalpo himself, would reside with the National Assembly. The following November, the Druk Gyalpo renounced his veto power over National Assembly bills and said he would step down if two-thirds of the legislature passed a no-confidence vote. Although he did nothing to undermine the retention of the Wangchuck dynasty, the Druk Gyalpo in 1969 called for a triennial vote of confidence by the National Assembly (later abolished by his successor) to renew the Druk Gyalpo's mandate to rule. Diplomatic overtures also were made during Jigme Dorji Wangchuck's reign. Although always seeking to be formally neutral and nonaligned in relations with China and India, Bhutan also sought more direct links internationally than had occurred previously under the foreign-policy guidance of India. Consequently, in 1962 Bhutan joined the Colombo Plan for Cooperative, Economic, and Social Development in Asia and the Pacific known as the Colombo Plan, and in 1966 notified India of its desire to become a member of the United Nations (UN).

In 1971 after holding observer status for three years, Bhutan was admitted to the UN. In an effort to maintain Bhutan as a stable buffer state, India continued to provide substantial amounts of development aid. Jigme Dorji Wangchuck ruled until his death in July 1972 and was succeeded by his seventeen-year-old son, Jigme Singye Wangchuck. The close ties of the Wangchuck and Dorji families were reemphasized in the person of the new king, whose mother, Ashi Kesang Dorji (*ashi* means princess), was the sister of the *lonchen*, Jigme Palden Dorji. Jigme Singye Wangchuck, who had been educated in India and Britain, had been appointed *ponlop* of Tongsa in May 1972 and by July that year had become the Druk Gyalpo. With his mother and two elder sisters as advisers, the new Druk Gyalpo was thrust into the affairs of state. He was often seen among the people, in the countryside, at

festivals, and, as his reign progressed, meeting with foreign dignitaries in Bhutan and abroad.

His formal coronation took place in June 1974, and soon thereafter the strains between the Wangchucks and Dorjis were relieved with the return that year of the exiled members of the latter family. The reconciliation, however, was preceded by reports of a plot to assassinate the new Druk Gyalpo before his coronation could take place and to set fire to the Tashichhodzong (Fortress of the Glorious Religion, the seat of government in Thimphu). Yangki was the alleged force behind the plot, which was uncovered three months before the coronation; thirty persons were arrested, including high government and police officials.

## **ARCHITECTURES**

One of the most striking physical features of Bhutan is its architecture. The characteristic style and colour of every building and house in the Kingdom is a distinct source of aesthetic pleasure. The Dzongs - themselves, imposing 17th century structures built on a grand scale without the help of any drawing and nail - are outstanding examples of the best in Bhutanese architecture. Patterns of rich colours adorn every wall, beam, pillar, door in traditional splendour.

## **ARTS AND CRAFTS**

Like its architecture, its art and painting are important aspects of Bhutanese culture and they depict the spiritual depth of Bhutanese life. Whether it is on a wall, or one of the renowned Thangkhas or murals, painters use vegetable dyes to give their work the subtle beauty and warmth seen nowhere else in the world.

Bhutan also boasts an unparalleled wealth in its cottage industry. Its fine handicrafts of wood and bamboo, ornaments of gold and silver, an highly developed weaving skills represent an advanced art form. One of the main attractions in the Kingdom is its annual religious festivals also known as TSHECHUS, celebrated to honor Guru Padmasambhava also known as "Guru Rimpoche". For local people, Tshechus are an occasion for reverence and blessing, feasting and socializing. Two of the most popular Tshechus are held at Paro in spring and Thimphu in autumn, but

there are various others all the year around at temples, dzongs and monasteries throughout Bhutan. Staged at different places at different time of the year, it provides an opportunity to outsider to experience the extraordinary.

## **Bhutan in Outside World**

When civil war broke out in Pakistan in 1971, Bhutan was among the first nations to recognize the new government of Bangladesh, and formal diplomatic relations were established in 1973. An event in 1975 may have served as a major impetus to Bhutan to speed up reform and modernization. In that year, neighbouring Sikkim's monarchy, which had endured for more than 300 years, was ousted following a plebiscite in which the Nepalese majority outvoted the Sikkimese minority. Sikkim, long a protectorate of India, became India's twenty-second state. To further ensure its independence and international position, Bhutan gradually established diplomatic relations with other nations and joined greater numbers of regional and international organizations. Many of the countries with which Bhutan established relations provided development aid. Modernization of life brought new problems to Bhutan in the late 1980s.

## **King Jigme Singye Wangchuck**

The fourth hereditary and the current King Jigme Singye Wangchuck (1972 -) was born on 11 November 1955. His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck, King of Bhutan is the reigning monarch and head of Bhutanese Royal Family. He received modern education. He briefly studied in India and the United Kingdom. He returned to the Ugyen Wangchuck Academy in Paro, Bhutan in 1970. However, he could not complete his school education due to the sudden death of his father. He became king on 23 July 1972 at the age of 17. His official coronation was held on June 02, 1974. In 1979 His Majesty King Jime Singye Wangchuck married four sisters—Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck, Ashi Tshering Pem Wangchuck, Ashi Tshering Yangdon Wangchuck and Ashi Sangay Choden Wangchuck as queens.

An official royal wedding and a public ceremony was held on 31 October 1988. They were five princes and five princesses. HRH Dasho Jigme Khesar Namgyal Wangchuck is the Crown Prince. His Majesty King Jime Singye Wangchuck also carried

forward the socio-economic progress of the country initiated by his father. Bhutan has made tremendous progress in the field of communications, hydro-electric power development, education, health, financial sector, environmental protection, and industrial and infrastructural development during his reign. The per capita GDP stood at its highest of US\$ 712.8 (Nu 32,006) in 2000. Bhutan became the member of. ESCAP in 1972, NAM in 1973, IFAD, IMF, IBRD, IDA and FAO in 1981, WHO, UNESCO and ADB in 1982, UNIDO in 1983, ITU in 1988, ICAO in 1989, ECOSOC in 1992.

Under his reign, Bhutan established diplomatic relations with Switzerland, Denmark, Sweden, EEC, Norway and Netherlands Kuwait, Japan, Finland, South Korea, Austria, Thailand, Bahrain, Hongkong, Singapore, Macaw, Maldives, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Bangladesh, India and Nepal.

### **Political Problems in the Country**

However, Bhutan has been facing its biggest political problems during his reign. Over 100,000 Bhutanese refugees are now living in the UNHCR administered refugee camps in Nepal since 1991. Bhutan has been facing its biggest security threat from the militants of India's north-east provinces, who have taken shelter in Bhutanese territories since a decade. These militants outlawed by the government of India are operating against the government of India and Indian army from their bases in Bhutan.