

His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuk King of Bhutan

Born in Dechencholing Palace, Thimphu, on November 11, 1955, His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuk received his early education in Bhutan from private tutors. Later, he studied briefly at St Joseph's School, Darjeeling, before proceeding to England for further studies. In 1970 His Majesty returned to Bhutan and joined the Ugyen Wangchuk Academy at Paro, where his education included familiarisation with the kingdom's rich spiritual and cultural heritage.

As Crown Prince, his mind was moulded from a very tender age by his enlightened and progressive father, the late King Jigme Dorji Wangchuk. From 1972 onwards, he participated in the meeting of the Cabinet, and was appointed the first Chairman of the Planning Commission. He was installed as Tongsa Penlop on May 5, 1972 amidst nation-wide rejoicing.

Three days after the premature passing away of the late King in Nairobi, Kenya, on June 21, 1972, His Majesty acceded to the throne at the age of 17. The formal coronation took place two years later on June 2, 1974, when Heads of States of neighbouring countries and representatives of numerous friendly countries attended the coronation celebrations.

His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuk is one of the youngest leaders in the world. His Majesty combines in his person a deep love for the kingdom's cultural and natural heritage with an appreciation of the need to harness modern science and technology for the kingdom's progress. His Majesty is hardworking, conscientious and serious and he travels regularly throughout the kingdom to study at first hand the problems, needs, and aspirations of his subjects. Whether in Thimphu or on tour, His Majesty is freely accessible to the humblest of his subjects, and he takes personal pains to redress their grievances and to promote their welfare. His Majesty has decentralized the administration as he believes that the participation of the people is essential in the task of building a self-reliant nation. His Majesty firmly believes that Gross National Happiness is as important as Gross National Product. His Majesty's reign has been marked by peace, progress, and prosperity within the kingdom, gradually expanding contacts with the outside world, and enhanced cooperation with India in diverse fields.

His Majesty is a keen conservationist and he had done much to preserve the kingdom's rich flora and fauna. His Majesty's youthful vigour and dynamism finds ample expression in sports and outdoor life. His Majesty is also extremely fond of reading books on a wide range of subjects.

A year before his death, his father the late King had said, "If I were to say a prayer, I would wish that in my son's time the people of my country become far more prosperous and happy than they are today." Under the wise benevolent and far-sighted leadership of His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuk, that wish has certainly been fulfilled.

Bhutan-Bangladesh Trade Relations

THE friendly relations between Bhutan and Bangladesh dates back to the dawn of Bangladesh's independence. Bhutan was the second country to recognise Bangladesh, and ever since, Bhutan has been keen to foster closer relations with Bangladesh.

In 1980 Bhutan and Bangladesh exchanged resident Ambassadors and have since strengthened their ties.

Close cooperation between the two countries led to the signing of the Trade Agreement in 1980, whereby both the countries aspired to promote their bilateral trade. However, due to time involved in identifying viable transit routes, actual trade did not commence until 1988.

Despite a late start, trade between the two countries has developed significantly since then.

Bhutan's major exports to Bangladesh consist of fruits, fruit products, timber, dolomite, cement, limestone, stones and boulders, calcium carbide and coal.

On the other hand, Bangladesh's major exports to Bhutan consist of jute products, condensed milk, garments,

edible oils, leather products, ceramic products and pharmaceuticals.

Trade between two countries over the last six years had been in favour of Bhutan. This imbalance would however be less if one takes into account the unaccounted imports by small traders and tourists who frequently visit Dhaka. It has been estimated that garments and other items worth more than US\$1.5 million are imported annually into Bhutan by small traders and tourists of Bhutan.

Although the smallest of Bhutan's population and her economy have not favoured any large scale imports, recent trends have been encouraging. A variety of products from Bangladesh that includes dairy products, jute carpets and products, garments, vegetable oils, leather products and ceramic products have been gaining popularity in Bhutan with consistent efforts by Bangladeshi exporters to take advantage of the favourable terms of trade between the two countries, exports from Bangladesh to Bhutan could increase significantly, bridging the present imbalance.

National Day of Bhutan



PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS: The Kingdom of Bhutan covers an approximate area of 46,500 square kilometres; roughly 150 km north to south and 300 km east to west. However, because of the mountainous terrain, the actual distance on the ground is more than twice as long. The king is bordered by the Tibetan region of China and the Indian States of Sikkim, West Bengal, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh.

The terrain is among the most rugged and mountainous in the world, as most of the country includes part of the Himalayan ranges. The land rises from an elevation of about 160 metres above sea level in the south to more than 7,550 metres above sea level in the north. The variations in climate are correspondingly extreme. Southern Bhutan is generally hot and humid, while the high Himalayan mountains in northern borders of Bhutan are under perpetual snow. Climate can vary considerably between valleys and within valleys depending on levels of altitude. Rainfall, in particular, can differ within relatively short distances due to rain shadow effects. Annual rainfall is concentrated in the monsoon season mid June to September. Rough estimates of rainfall are:

Flora

The flora of Bhutan is exceptionally diverse as a result of a great range of altitudinal zones and varied climatic conditions. An estimated 56% of the country is covered by forests of alpine scrub, fir, mixed coniferous species, temperate scrub,



An exotic rhubarb flower of the high Himalaya

and broadleaf species. In addition to a wide range of species, there are many species unique to Bhutan: about 47 species have been listed (Grierson and Long, 1984), and it is thought that there are many more which have not been identified. Moreover, much of Bhutan's flora has remained undisturbed so that Bhutan probably has the richest flora in the Himalayan region. The floral wealth of Bhutan is highly appreciated by both Bhutanese and the outside world. Many tree species are of high timber quality, while others are tapped for resin. Over 300 species largely of alpine plants are used in Bhutanese traditional medicine. Horticulturalists all over the world also prize Bhutanese flora: Grierson and Long (1984) list 168 species introduced to Europe from Bhutan, including many wild relatives of cultivated species: strawberries, cheery, and apple. These plants have significant value as a genetic resource for crop improvement.

Fauna

Because Bhutan's flora has remained undisturbed, a number of rare animals can still be found in Bhutan. The exact number of species is unknown, but over 160 species have been reported. Rare animals include the langur, taking and blue sheep and are distributed quite widely. Tigers, leopards, snow leopards, red panda, gaur, serow, Himalayan black bears, brown bears, wild pigs musk deer and various kinds of deer are common in many parts of Bhutan. The phobjikha valley



The elusive snow leopard of the high Himalaya

MONARCHY: Till the beginning of the twentieth century, Bhutan was ruled by the dual system of administration known as 'Chhosi' which was initiated by Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal in 1651. Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal created the office of Druk Desi to look after the temporal administration of the country and Je Khenpo to look after religious matters. Although the successors of Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal lacked his stature and vision this remarkable system provided a very workable form of government for over two centuries. However by the second half of the 19th century, the elective nature of the post of Druk Desi and frequent disputes over the issue of succession to the office of Shabdrung brought internal strife and instability to the country. The desire of the clergy, officials and the people for political stability and internal peace therefore led to the establishment of hereditary monarchy.

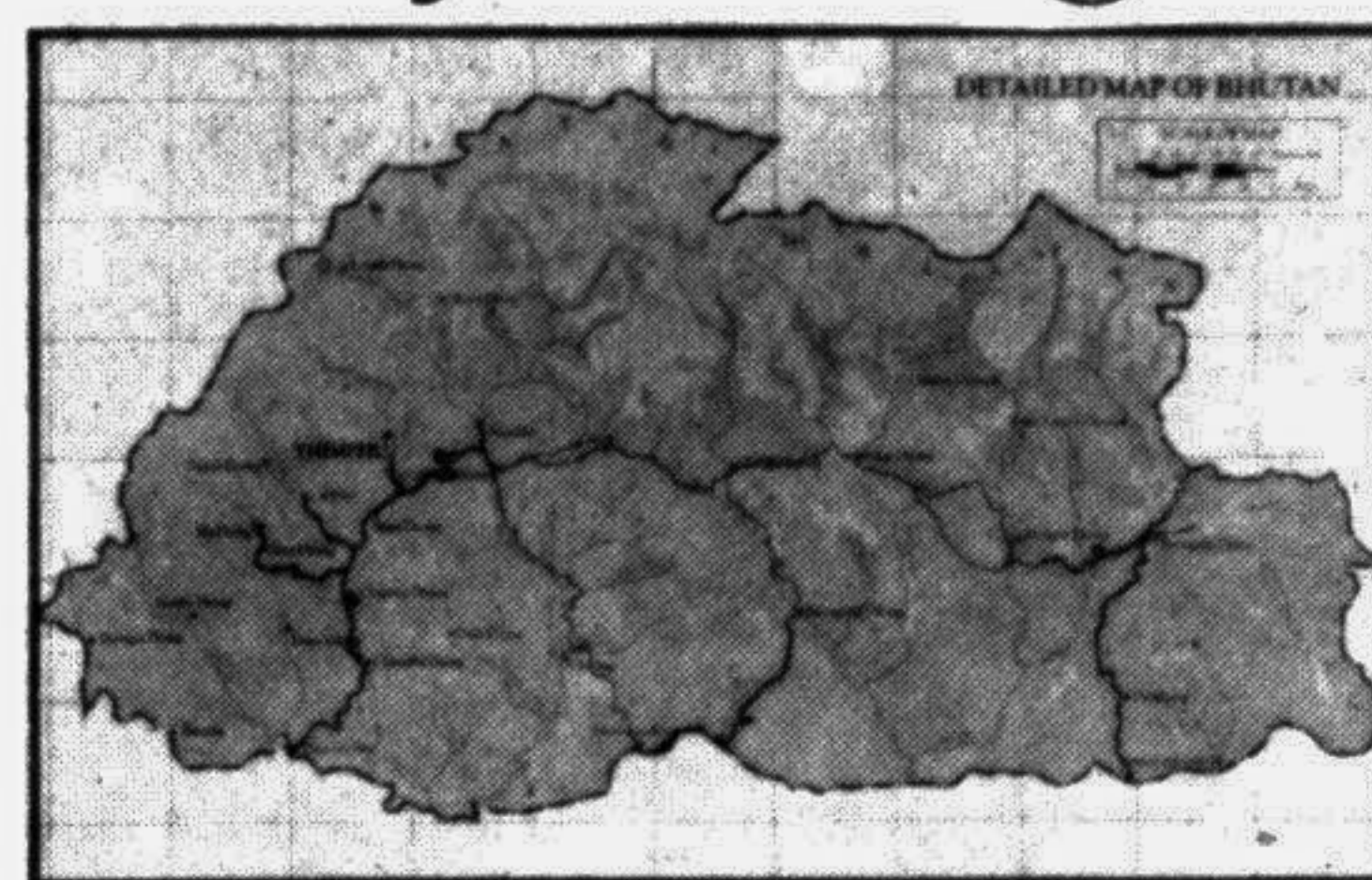
The year 1907 marks the beginning of a new era in the history of Bhutan. On 17 December of that year, the whole body of the clergy, the State Councilors, the Chhalls of all the districts, and the representatives of the people met at Punakha and unanimously elected Tongsa Penlop Ugyen Wangchuk as the first hereditary King of Bhutan. After becoming Tongsa Penlop in 1883, Ugyen Wangchuk had displayed extraordinary qualities as a leader and statesman. He was a deeply devout and religious man and imbued with a genuine desire to improve the condition of his people. He possessed remarkable administrative and diplomatic skills. With his outstanding qualities of leadership and statesmanship he was undoubtedly Bhutan's man of destiny. By uniting the country and establishing a central authority, he brought peace and stability to

the country and laid the foundation for the emergence of modern Bhutan.

ORGANIZATION OF GOVERNMENT: There are four main organizations of the government: National Assembly, Royal Advisory Council, Judiciary and the Council of Ministers and the Central Secretariat.

National Assembly: The National Assembly was established by the third King Jigme Dorji Wangchuk in 1953. The initiative to establish the National Assembly emanated from the throne. King Jigme Dorji Wangchuk wanted to develop political consciousness among his people and give them a greater say in running the country. The main functions of the National Assembly are to enact laws, approve senior appointments in the government and advise on all matters of national importance. It normally meets twice a year and consists of 150 members comprising 105 elected representatives of the government. They all serve for a term of three years. The Speaker and the Deputy Speakers are elected by the National Assembly from among its members. It is significant to note that when the National Assembly was set up in 1953, King Jigme Dorji Wangchuk took the deliberate decision to reserve 70% of the seats for the people, 8% for the clergy and only 22% for the government. This was to ensure that the people would have a decisive say in decision making.

Royal Advisory Council: The Royal Advisory Council which was established in 1965 con-

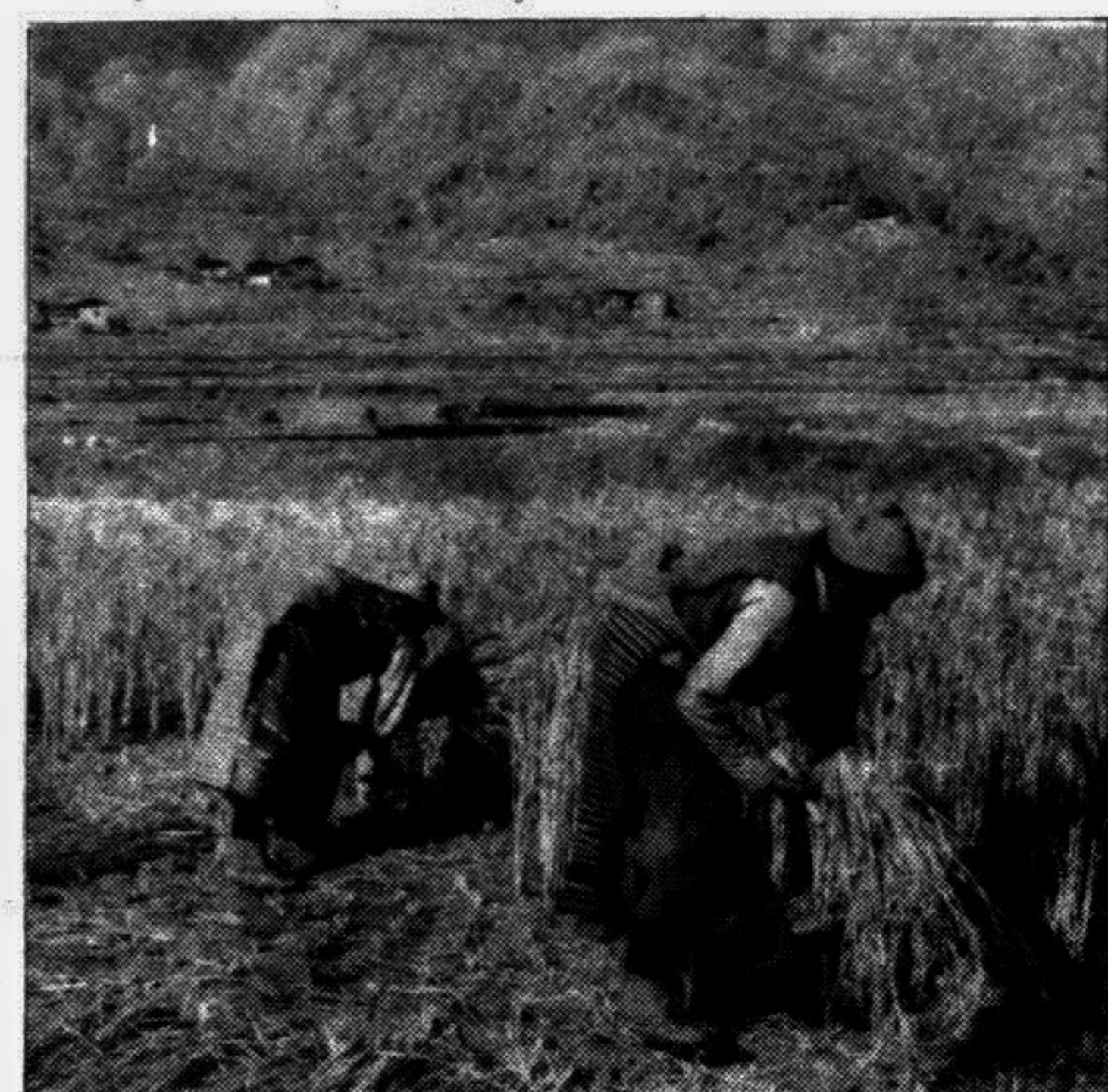


in Western Bhutan is one of the three wintering grounds for the rare black-necked crane. One quarter of the country has been declared as 12 protected reserves/sanctuaries/nature parks. These areas form havens for a number of the world's rare and endangered species, which are not only of national but global importance.

Agriculture

While a large proportion of the country is covered by forest, the area suitable for agricultural production is limited by

the topography and low soil fertility in some areas. The river valleys and the flatlands, in the southern foothills account for most of the fertile cultivatable land whereas the northern alpine belt below the snowline is suitable only for pasture. The most recent estimates suggest that 16% of total land is used for agricultural production, including dryland and irrigated crop production and orchards. Most rural households also own livestock, which are grazed in the forest areas and pastures.



Harvesting in the fertile Paro Valley

Bhutan's Political Institutions and Organization of Government

sists of nine members, six representing the people, two representing the clergy and one nominee of the King. They hold office for five years.

The main functions of the body are to make its advice available to the King and his Council of Ministers on all matters of national importance, to promote the welfare of the people and the national interests of the region, to develop friendly and harmonious relations between the government and the people, and to ensure that the laws and resolutions passed by the National Assembly are faithfully implemented by the government and people.

In 1984, His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuk further strengthened the position of the Royal Advisory Council. Although the Council had the authority to advise the King and to watch over the performance of the government, His Majesty felt that they lacked the necessary clout to carry out their important responsibilities. A revised set of rules and regulations for the functions and responsibilities of the Royal Advisory Council was therefore formulated on the instruction of His Majesty the King. The most notable addition is the inclusion of a clause that states that "if any person, including His Majesty the King, does anything harmful to the interest of the Kingdom and the people, the Royal Advisory Council without suppressing such matters and free of fear from any quarter shall bring it to the attention of His Majesty the King and, if neces-

sary, even report it to the Cabinet and the National Assembly." The National Assembly strongly objected to this clause empowering the Royal Advisory Council to report against the King. The Assembly felt that it was a violation of traditional values and that it undermined the sacred principles of loyalty and devotion to the throne. His Majesty the King however insisted that this clause was of great importance and was very necessary as no one can predict or guarantee the actions and sense of responsibility to the nation of future rulers.

Judiciary: All the laws of the kingdom are codified. Minor offences are judged by the village headmen. Above them, the District Court have both original and appellate jurisdiction. The next higher court is the High Court in Thimphu. The final appeal is made to the King who then delegates the Royal Advisory Council to investigate and ensure that the courts have dispensed justice in keeping with the laws of the country.

Council of Ministers and the Central Secretariat: Bhutan took a major step in the direction of a modernized administrative system in 1968 when the National Assembly, at the request of the King, approved the formation of a Council of Ministers. The Ministers are responsible to the Cabinet which is an important decision-making body, second only in importance to the National Assembly. The Cabinet is presided over by the King and consists of Ministers, Deputy Ministers and all Royal Advi-

sory Councilors.

District Development Committee: The present King, His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuk, has decentralized the administration and established District Development Committees in all the 18 districts of the kingdom in order to bring about greater participation of the people in nation building activities. The King has repeatedly stressed the fact that the future destiny of Bhutan lies in the hands of the people, and whatever administrative system is established must receive the full and active cooperation and support of the people in order to become effective and lasting. The King has repeatedly exhorted the people to shoulder their responsibilities as loyal and dedicated citizens who are willing to place the interests of the nation before their own. Such an attitude on the part of the government and people is of vital importance to a small country like Bhutan.

Royal Civil Service Commission: In order to set up an administration that is small, dynamic and effective, and which is not only responsive to the needs of the people and can earn their confidence but is also capable of meeting the challenges of development and nation building, the King established the Royal Civil Service Commission in 1982. It is responsible for formulating and ensuring implementation of personnel policies in order to promote efficiency, loyalty and integrity among civil servants and to maintain a high level of morale. It is also responsible for

Jigme Dorji Wangchuk 1952-1972 4. King Jigme Singye Wangchuk 1972

Throughout its history, Bhutan has remained independent, being one of the few countries in Asia never to become a colony. Bhutan was fairly isolated from the outside world until the 1960s when the third King Jigme Dorji Wangchuk (1928-1972) opened links with other countries and initiated the development of a modern economy. His Late Majesty also introduced many social, legal and constitutional reforms, which had far reaching effects.

Religion

Buddhism was introduced in Bhutan in 7th century by Guru Padma Sambhawa. In the centuries that followed, Bhutan was home to many sages and saints including the great saints-scholars such as Longchen Jamjam, also known as Kuenkhen Longchen Ramjam (1308-1863) and Pema Lingpa (1450-1521). Various schools of Buddhism in Bhutan assimilated other earlier practices and beliefs. The aspirations towards enlightenment and the belief in the innate goodness of human beings are widely shared among Buddhists and majority of the Bhutanese are Buddhists. Hinduism is another important religion, particularly in Southern Bhutan. The Hindu religion as practised by Southern Bhutanese has many common saints and divinities with Vajrayana, the school of Buddhism. *Continued on page 9*

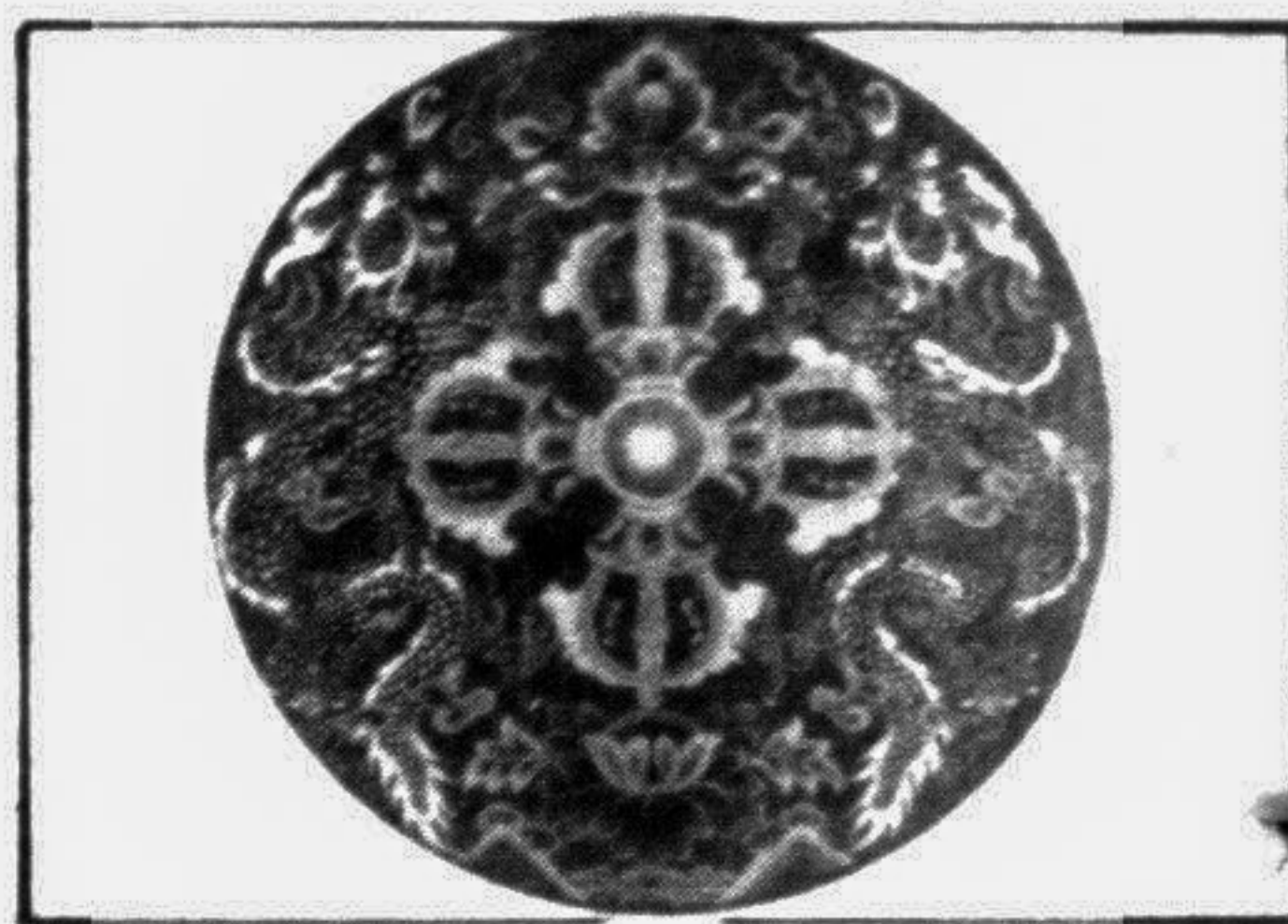


Guru Padma Sambhawa

appointments, transfers, promotions and discipline of all civil servants.

Another institution which does not form part of the political structure of the kingdom but has an important social and cultural role to play in the life of the nation is the clergy. The clergy is headed by the Khenpo (Chief Abbot) who is equivalent in status to the King. He is assisted by four Lopons who are equivalent in rank to Ministers. The status and powers of the clergy has undergone severe erosion over the years and the Je Khenpo has become a mere figurehead. The King has repeatedly stressed the need to delegate sufficient authority to the clergy on religious matters in order to restore it to its former position of respect and influence. Although Buddhism is the State religion, there is complete religious freedom in Bhutan. However, open proselytisation by any religion and criticisms against other religions are not permitted in the country.

The political system and system of government in Bhutan is still undergoing dramatic changes. His Majesty the King is constantly trying to create a system that is best suited to promote country. This important objective is best summed up in His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuk's own words — "A good system of Government is not dependent on any individual or personalities, a system that function efficiently because of its inbuilt merits, that is a legacy we must create for our future generations. Because of our small size and because we are presently at the crossroads of development we have the necessary flexibility and unique opportunity to create a system of administration that will be of the greatest benefit to our country's future interests, security and well-being."



The Daily Star
Special Supplement
December 18, 1994