

# Experience as a Media Professional and a Politician

*Dawa*

It was a privilege to be part of a very fast-evolving system. When I started my career with the Bhutan Broadcasting Service Corporation, one would even hesitate to claim to be a journalist. The so-called professionals working there were mostly entertainers rather than journalists or true social critics. Being a media person during such fast-changing times put me through some serious tests, but the results were gratifying. We talk about impermanence. Nothing lasts for eternity, no matter how good or bad it is; so it was with my career.

It was bound to change, and it did change in a manner I am yet to come to terms with. From being a journalist to a nobody for some years, and then a politician within a short span of time is, in all humility, a big deal for a small man like me. Even today, I can never really say which one is a better career. In both cases, I was never into it out of interest and passion for the job, but more to earn a living.

With the introduction of democracy, the role of media professionals changed from being entertainers of a sort, to that of educators. Many said the success of democracy would hinge on a strong and vibrant media. People's expectations were growing. Some even called the media the "fourth arm of the State", but some knowingly or unknowingly called it the "fourth arm of the government". If the latter turns out to be true, the media would be more of a pet dog than a watchdog.

Having been in the media industry for more than a decade, I saw both the highs and lows of its operations. It was then that I realised that the profession really required a lot of passion, dedication and commitment, along with a fair deal of confidence and fearlessness.

Being a journalist in a democratic set-up called for a very steady, firm and unbiased attitude. It required a very high degree of mental strength. Covering some of the more politically controversial and sensitive issues required a lot of strength and sacrifice.

For a farmer's son, without much exposure to journalism, it was not easy to sit across the table with the powerful, rich and influential, asking some of the most annoying, irritating and critical questions.

It is a general belief that politics is dirty and politicians are corrupt. Some say it is not politics that is dirty but politicians who make it so. I do not speak for others but at least for me, knowing a bit of political nuances, having been in the media industry, a political career was never an option. This was the last thing that I really would have wished for.

After leaving the media profession, I was getting used to a private life which gave me so much freedom to do things for myself. I enjoyed being someone with no real identity. It did not draw public scrutiny or judgement for what I did as an individual, which had no bearing on any institution or organisation. I was a so-called "free bird".

Just as I was settling down with my private life, in a surprise turn of fate, I was asked to take up a career that I was not really wishing for. I was literally not ready for it. From being a journalist, which required one to be truthful, unbiased, fair and accurate, to being a politician, cast a lot of doubts in my mind.

Despite all the misgivings, I could not really shy away from politics but confronted the challenges, as many would claim it as upholding the interests of the nation. It was not an easy decision at all, since I was to contest a very formidable and established opponent. Worst of all, it was indeed a hard decision to be part of a process in which the result was a foregone conclusion. With all sincere prayers and best of intentions, I threw myself into this very uncertain field.

Being a politician teaches you many valuable lessons in life. It requires you to show up at the right place at the right time, or else somebody would already have shown up in your place. Be as humble as possible, since you are the servant and not the master. Your arrogance is only going to hurt you. Walk around with smiles even if you are wounded within.

Your primary responsibility as a Member of Parliament (MP) is to enact the best of laws. You also have the responsibility to ensure that your pledges are fulfilled. Your role also requires you to provide checks and balances to

other agencies. Monitoring and reviewing works and services of different public offices must be initiated. These are the official responsibilities one must shoulder as an MP.

But the unofficial responsibility of an MP is far more overwhelming. It requires time and resources to get the job done. You need to have a great deal of personal relations with individuals as well as agencies.

The unofficial responsibilities include helping the sick with hospitalisation and subsequent treatments, to seeking appointments and expediting tests. Just as any Bhutanese would do, given the nature of our culture and social norms, we would frequently visit the sick and bereaved families.

Seeking school admissions for children is also a seasonal responsibility for MPs, as well as helping people to obtain bank loans and business licences. One of the major unavoidable roles for an MP is donating money to many religious and social causes. People think you can afford it and, therefore, you must act like one even if you cannot. The list goes on. At the end of the day, if one could shoulder these responsibilities as expected, it definitely gives you a sound sleep and peace of mind. It becomes stressful at times, but nothing gives you a sense of achievement more than this.

The most difficult responsibility that yields no outcome but only breeds frustration is helping people who are in conflict with the law. They expect you to help them since you pledged to help them as their servant. If not, you get served subtle reminders as to why a servant must listen to the master.

An MP's primary role is to make laws. Breaking laws trying to help someone would mean doing a big disservice to the nation and law-abiding fellow Bhutanese. So, the best option is to refuse to be drawn into such matters.

Having said this, just as the life of being a journalist was challenging, the life of a politician is not free of challenges either. Despite putting in the best efforts, you are unable to please everyone all the time. Sometimes, when you are fortunate, even your inaction is appreciated. But, of course, appreciation mostly comes from your supporters. At other times, your actions, with potential benefits for the community and constituency, can be mocked for political reasons.

Now, if people still feel that politics is dirty and that politicians are corrupt, I would say this is not true in our context. I am not saying this because all the good and honest people have joined but because I have not really found any avenues for the politicians to be corrupt. The MPs, for example, do not have financial or executive powers and a direct hand in policy decisions. And with proper checks and balances securely put in place, there is no room for anyone to be corrupt for personal gains. This political system of ours must be highly appreciated and acknowledged.

Sometimes, you wonder why only politicians are considered to be corrupt when you keep hearing news of corruption in different agencies and individuals outside of the political sphere. One could only wish that our case is unique and that it remains so in the interests of the nation.

Journeying through the two professions tells you that life can be really hard and challenging in both professions but most rewarding due to the nature of the jobs. The principles of journalism can be applied to politics. We can have honest and sincere politicians too.

While I try to balance the goodness of both professions, I sincerely wish that the media strives to be as critical as it should be about politics and politicians. They should hold each politician accountable for their actions and inactions and be highly critical of the government and make it accountable to the public.

Seeing some politically sensitive and controversial issues not getting the kind of media attention they deserve worries me at times, because I still believe in the power and goodness of journalism. Inability and unwillingness of the media to cover certain issues is seen by some as the government of the day exercising control over the media. As I understand the regard the government of the day has for the media, I only wish and pray for more and better coverage of political issues and politicians. This is indeed for the growth of both politics and media.

*The views expressed in the article are personal and do not reflect the views of any institutions, party or individuals.*