

# Introduction

The Druk Journal contributes to Bhutan's growth as a democracy and as a modern nation. It is a vibrant public space in which we encourage our contributors to expand our national discourse by introducing new ideas and concepts into the Bhutanese conversation.

Through regular publications, an interactive website, and open discussions after each edition, we engage Bhutanese society in conversation so that all citizens can exchange open and frank views on national policies and issues relevant to Bhutan.

The Druk Journal hopes, not only to inform citizens, but to build a community of people who will take an active role, as individuals and as a community, in the development of analytical attitudes toward national policies. It is our hope that participation in such a community will encourage individuals to engage in policy research that can be made available to the government and larger Bhutanese society.

The Druk Journal thus serves as a vehicle for the development of a society which is concerned about national issues and wants to participate in the development of policy by thinking publicly and through conversation. Such a community of thinkers will also draw on the experience of other countries in those areas of political, social, economic and cultural experimentation that are relevant to our own concerns.

The Druk Journal is a nonpartisan publication. Our purpose is to serve the national interest through the development of serious conversation on issues from every possible constructive point of view. We have no editorial position of our own. We believe that our stated objectives and the means we will use to achieve them are the best way in which we can serve our country and His Majesty The King.

We invite all interested citizens and friends of Bhutan to join us. We wish you Good Reading, Good Thinking, and Good Conversation.

## Preface

### Democracy Today

The transformation of the Bhutanese political system, from a Monarchy to a democracy, is widely acknowledged as a unique phenomenon, having been initiated and nurtured by the Monarchy, grounded on a Constitution. Compared with democracies around the world, the transition was a near impeccable process, with laws and institutions put in place for the change, following the international model with three arms of government and the separation of religion and politics.

It was early during the transition that His Majesty The King placed this era of Bhutanese history into context:

"Now, if we want our democratic system to work, if we want a democracy that will fulfill the aspirations of our people, then we must take the next step – we must adopt the ideals and principles of democracy. We must build a democratic culture. This period when democracy takes root is a slow process. It takes time. But this process is crucial for the ultimate success of democracy in our country."

What is democratic culture? The global experience in democratic governance shows that democracy, generally appreciated for its respect for human dignity, continues to evolve, with its vicissitudes. Bhutan's approach has been to adopt the positive aspects of global democratic systems and to learn from the downsides as a Bhutanese democracy is crafted.

Fifteen years and three governments later, The Druk Journal takes a look at Bhutan's democracy. Democratic discourse has picked up, partly because of the politics of elections and partly because of the extended space of both media and social media. The functioning of government has come into focus and it is debatable whether change has been for the better. It is with valuable experiences that we are growing out of our infancy in democratic governance.

In the overall perspective, achieving democracy is not the goal. Democracy is the path to happiness and well-being of the Bhutanese people.

His Majesty once said that what Gross National Happiness is will never change but how we achieve GNH will.

This issue looks at Bhutan's political parties and the clarity or absence of ideologies, priorities of the Bhutanese voter, trends in the electoral processes, the situation of civil society, media, parliament, constitutional bodies, local government, and other elements of democratic governance. The issue is composed in three sections to understand Bhutan's experience as a small developing country experimenting with a historic transformation of its government system.

The "Culture of Democracy" looks at the evolution of democratic discourse, values, and principles as enshrined in the Constitution. The articles range from the absence of political ideology to the teaching of civics in the Bhutanese education system to how democratisation has affected different sections of society. Writers and thinkers discuss how the spirit of Bhutanese democracy aligns with political values that identify democratic culture and how they relate to the values of Gross National Happiness.

"The Electoral Process" is a study of the behaviour of Bhutanese voters and how they differ in the rural and urban parts of the country. The articles discuss how the electorate views the two-tier election system and the relationship between political candidates and the voters, given the sensitive nuances of a small society.

In the third section, veteran politicians draw on their experiences in democratic governance, active politicians share their views, and observers comment on "The Experience of Democracy". The articles convey the experiences and perspectives of politicians, voters, and media. They are representative of how Bhutan is responding to the forces and evolution of democratic governance.