



## Report on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Druk Journal Conversation and Release of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Issue of the Journal

The third issue of the Druk Journal, carrying the theme *Bhutan and Modernity: Responding to Change*, was released on 14<sup>th</sup> September 2016 at the third in the series of the Druk Journal Conversations in Thimphu. The event brought together 42 participants from the media, civil society, academia, political parties, contributing authors, and other interested individuals to discuss ideas and issues brought up by this and previous editions, and to discuss the journal in general.



The purpose of the conversation, as an objective of the Journal itself, is to encourage critical thinking among all sections of Bhutanese society. The idea is to build a community of thinkers through frank and open Conversations, in an informal atmosphere, which will continue to discuss and debate the ideas and issues raised by the Journal.

The Journal editor, Dasho Kinley Dorji, said that the Druk Journal aimed to be a platform or space for citizens to engage in discussion on various topics of interest and importance to Bhutan. Bhutan has gone through several stages of development, from infrastructure to social services, and had reached the Age of Information. Given the rapid political transition our society has seen, it is time for Bhutanese citizens to share the responsibility of governance.

Imagine a society with only politicians and business people. It is critical that Bhutan develops the creative sector as a sub-sect of culture, culture being a sub-sect of the humanities and social sciences. GNH (or Gross National Happiness) means a balanced society.

It was in this spirit that the Druk Journal---through such conversations as well as analytical and constructively-critical articles---sought to provoke serious thought and discussion among citizens on



wide ranging subjects that go beyond the usual domains of politics and business, to also include those from the social sciences, humanities, culture, and other fields.

Following a run through of the various topics covered by the past and current issues of the Journal i.e. “National Identity”, “The Bhutanese State and Its Institutions” and “Bhutan and Modernity”, the discussion picked up on the subject of Bhutan’s transitioning democracy, and traversed between the need for creativity and support for the arts, youth views on jobs and societal outlook, the economy, politics, and the various challenges that Bhutanese society is facing in these areas.

### ***Bhutan’s transitioning democracy***

One participant recalled his own experience of the wave of democracy in Europe in the 1970s, which then spread to other parts of the world including Asia and Africa, pointing out that Bhutan is the only country where it was not something demanded by the people. By its own definition, Bhutan is a country in transition, i.e. in transition to democracy.

It was pointed out that almost all the issues that the Druk Journal is trying to pursue are issues common to the rest of the world that are in a sense brought up by globalization and therefore requires people working together. For example, as in Bhutan, Africa too is dealing with issues of identity; climate change is another shared global concern. The point is that globally there are so many common issues that need to be discussed and debated, as the DJ conversations aim to do. There was a discussion on whether modernization is equated to westernization... or is it more to do with globalization. A question posed was: how does a Danish citizen maintain a relationship and solidarity with the State when he has to pay fifty percent of his income as taxes while employees of Apple (an American multinational company) pay only 0.05% of their income in taxes to the Danish State?

There was some agreement that global governance is important, but that it is a bit weak (as in the UN) and perhaps it is the short-sighted vision of governance that leads to global governance not being taken seriously. One of the views expressed was that democracy in general is not the best or most conducive system for long term thinking and well-thought out decision making processes to take place. As governments are voted in for a fixed term, they are pre-occupied with the next election, and in this sense authoritarian systems prove to be better suited in terms of fostering long-term thinking and visioning.

A participant also pointed out that in the West, political parties were created based on existing social and philosophical differences in those societies. So the question is, are political parties appropriate for Bhutan, where society was relatively united and harmonious? What else are we importing from elsewhere when we adopt a system of political parties?

Another participant argued that democracy varied from country to country. The ideas of democracy that came up in the West has changed drastically from what it was meant to be. While Asian countries such as India, Pakistan and now Bhutan have tried to emulate these systems, not all the ideas and features necessarily fit into our respective societies. For instance, as one person asked:



“How do we ‘Bhutanize’ democracy?” Or is Bhutan being democratized? It is necessary to give deep thought to what is and is not applicable.

Some of the questions that came up: to what extent are the principles of democracy really applicable to Bhutan? Yes, we are in a state of transition, but how long is this state of transition, and who evaluates what is happening so that we propose changes where and when required?

Thus there is a need for thinkers as well as initiatives such as this (the DJ and conversations) because political parties in general prioritize other things like winning elections. At the same time, maybe we also need to focus on “shaping” better politicians through forums such as this instead of comparing our politicians with those in the region all the time.

One participant observed that political parties are “a necessary evil”, a system that came about in 2008 from the splitting of “one big elite group” that now serves the purpose of one balancing the other. The main point made was that political parties need to keep the national long-term objective in mind and that even if one is in the opposition, we should be cognizant of the political science concept of being a “loyal opposition”. Meaning to say all political parties, whatever their other differences, must ultimately function in the greater national interest. This makes sense once we recognize Bhutan’s vulnerabilities and the effort and dedicated leadership demonstrated by our monarchs in steering the country thus far.

### ***Creativity and support for the arts***

The conversation also saw some observations and reflections on the state of Bhutanese arts, crafts and creativity in a “modern” Bhutan. VAST (Voluntary Artists Studio, Thimphu) has for a long time now been working with and encouraging young artists in this area but of late, as it’s founder Asha Kama said, artists are also in the process of trying to figure out their direction and their responsibilities.

What is contemporization of art in Bhutan? Do we bring in some of our traditional elements into contemporary art so that it is not simply reduced to an individualistic form of expression? One participant mentioned that other communities elsewhere, such as in Brazil, have been using art, poetry, music, etc. to change social behavior, effectively.

Traditional Bhutanese art carries important social functions, even acting as a spiritual aid for meditation. The sad thing is that even these are heading in a direction where creativity is being lost to the power of money. And along with this, we are also losing our identity. As a concrete example, many of the so-called Bhutanese arts and crafts sold in the Craft Bazaar in Thimphu town are not even made in Bhutan, but either







imported from Nepal or made to order and produced by Indian manufacturers in the bordering towns. So selling these items as our own authentic arts and crafts is a crime!

It was also observed that the numbers of skilled artisans are on the decline. Up until the last decade, huge emphasis and support was given to promoting *zorig chusum* (13 traditional arts and crafts), but government emphasis and support is now seen to be on the decline after the institution of democracy.

So the question again of how interested political parties are in these other states of affairs in the country? It was also pointed out that it should not just be the government and civil society, but also the Bhutanese private sector that needs to take more responsibility in contributing to skills development including in the arts and crafts.

### ***Youth views on jobs and societal attitude***

Leading from the discussion on this topic, one of the youth participants brought up the question of whether we place any value on the skills of our artists and craftsmen. Sharing her personal experience of apprenticeship in one of the leading woodwork/carpentry training institutes in the country, she was struck by the prevalence of a deep-seated attitude that this is “just a blue collar job”. Societal attitude towards so-called blue-collar jobs contribute to the workers themselves internalizing such attitudes.

This triggered discussion on the growth of consumerism in Bhutan, how we all need to see the part we play in this, and how in the end we all want a good income and job security as a basic condition. So where does that leave people genuinely interested in the arts and crafts as a profession? In our discussion on Bhutan and modernity, can we give more thought to the kinds of (meaningful and decent-paying) jobs that the newer/younger generations of Bhutanese can take up?

An important point that came up in response to this was that first and foremost, as an artist or craftsman, one must take pride in what one does, and not be forced to do it just to please others. It was also pointed out that Bhutan should be more aware of how we process information and influences from other societies. There was a time when Bhutanese were proud to be working with their hands in the fields, but now the emphasis is on more colleges and more masters degrees. Why? Is it our “modern” education system that has changed our perspective? And the term “blue collar”, why are we using it? Bhutanese do not even wear collars!

The question of how we treat our young people, and more generally the value we accord our fellow Bhutanese came through quite strongly. One observation was that students are often brought into certain events, such as the annual Mountain Echoes event in Thimphu, just to fill up the space and not really because they want to be there. Most of our “grown ups” just don’t show up for important education events, such as the recent event marking the re-introduction of Shakespeare in the school curriculum. Symbolically and practically, do we sometimes place more value on VIPS and tourists, than our youth and ordinary citizens?





### ***Suggestions in general for DJ***

Over the course of the conversation, one subject that came through quite strongly as a possible theme for the next issue of the journal was on the Bhutanese youth, including how our parents also need guidance in bringing up our children in this “modern” age of information and communication technologies. Other topics mentioned were education in the broader sense of learning and knowledge and sustainability in broad terms to include discussion on the idea of self-reliance, environmental, cultural, economic and other areas of sustainability.



Other reflections and suggestions made during the conversation were that:

- The journal is still urban-centric in its reach and coverage and needs to be more inclusive of perspectives from rural and other parts of the country, where there is a lot of local wisdom to tap into. We can still learn a thing or two of how the elders used to deal effectively with issues in the communities;
- We don't seem to value the wisdom of our older generations, when in fact we should be “harvesting” the knowledge and information that is there in different parts of our society. Related to this, institutional memory is important and can help us move forward, and the long-term trajectory needs to be looked at;
- Participation in the Journal conversations needs to be more inclusive i.e. to have representation from a wider cross section of society including from the government (to which it was mentioned that many more had been invited but couldn't or wouldn't attend). Also it was felt that there is neither adequate time nor opportunity given for prior preparation, to enable deeper discussion of all the issues being raised by the journal and these conversations.



## Annexures

### Annex I: Invitation to the conversation and release of the third issue of the Druk Journal

#### *Suja, Dzow and Druk Journal* **Bhutan and Modernity: Responding to Change**



The *Druk Journal's* staff and BCMD are pleased to invite you to the launch of the third issue of the *Druk Journal* and the third conversation about *The Journal*.

Writers who contributed to the second and third issues of the *Druk Journal* will be present to discuss their articles and share their thoughts with you .

The theme of the second issue was *The State and Its Institutions*. The Theme of the third issue is *Bhutan and Modernity: Responding to Change*.

We invite your ideas and comments on past and future issues of the *Journal* or on anything else of interest and concern to us all.

The Conversation will last about two hours, and it will be followed by lunch and more conversation.

We look forward to your joining us.

**Date** : 14th September 2016

**Time** : 10 a.m registration

**Venue** : Phuntsho Pelri

Please R.S.V.P (Regrets only)  
Contact no. 327903 (o)



## **Annex II: List of participants at the conversation and release of the third issue of the Druk Journal**

<b>S.No.</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Organization</b>
<b>BCMD Board Members</b>		
1	Nancy Strickland	Executive Director, Bhutan Canada Foundation
2	Tashi Choden	Independent, Ziji Consultancy
<b>Media Houses</b>		
3	Choki Tshomo	Kuzuu
4	Rinzin Wangchuk	Dzongkha Editor, Kuensel
5	Cheki	Radio, Bhutan Broadcasting Service
6	Tenzing Lamsang	Editor, The Bhutanese
7	Rabi Dahal	Bhutan Observer
8	Ashok Tiwar	Bhutan Broadcasting Service
9	Karma Tenzin	Bhutan Broadcasting Service
<b>Political Parties</b>		
10	Sonam Jatsho	Secretary General, People's Democratic Party
<b>Universities/Schools/Institutions</b>		
11	Thakur S Powdyel	Director, Royal Thimphu College
12	Dr. Shivraj Bhattarai	Dean, Royal Thimphu College
13	Tshering Phuntsho	Thimphu Public Library
14		
<b>Civil Society Organizations</b>		
15	Dawa Penjor	Executive Director, Bhutan Media Foundation
16	Kelly Tshering	Journalists Association of Bhutan
17	Dr. Meenakshi	RENEW
18	Zuki Nima	VAST
19	Jangchuk Dorji	MBRC
20	Phuntsho Namgay	Bhutan Foundation
21	Tenzin Dorji	Bhutan Foundation
22	Sonam Yangden	Bhutan Foundation
23	Aum Phuntsho	BNEW
24	Asha Karma	VAST
25	Nima	GNH Centre
26	Choki	GNH Centre





<b>Youth</b>		
27	Ngawang Gyeltshen	Youth Initiative member
28	Tshedrup Dorji	Youth Initiative member
29	Sangay Thinley	Youth Initiative member
30	Jigme Namgyal	Youth Initiative Speaker
31	Sonam Yangden	
32	Phurba Sonam Waiba	Youth Initiative president
33	Meera Ghalley	Youth Summit
34	Chholay	Student
<b>Individuals</b>		
35	Pek Dorji	BCMD
36	Dasho Kinley Dorji	Editor, Druk Journal
37	Phuntsho Choden	BCMD
38	Phuntsho Choden	BCMD
39	Tshewang Lhamo	BCMD
40	Chencho Lhamo	BCMD
41	Lyonpo Om Pradhan	Former cabinet minister and diplomat
42	Michael Rutland	British Honorary Consulate, Bhutan