

# Druk Nyamrup Tshogpa

## The Birth of Druk Nyamrup Tshogpa

When democracy came to Bhutan in 2008, it began on a hopeful note. It came as a gift from the Golden Throne to the people of Bhutan. As was articulated by His Majesty The King to the newly elected members of the National Council in 2013, the Royal Vision was that of a democracy that served as a means towards achieving national goals – of enhancing the peace, harmony, and sovereignty of the country, and of fulfilling the aspirations of the people.

Over the last one-decade, we have seen the good of democracy – the power of people to elect the government of their choice, and to change the government if it fails to serve them well. We have also seen the ills of democracy – the division it wrought in our small society, and the risks of losing sight of the country’s long-term interests in the light of short-term partisan interests. Experiences from around the globe in the recent years – Trump phenomenon, and Brexit, for example – have reminded us of the perils of a democratic system.

As principal actors in a democratic process, political parties have a key role in shaping the kind of democracy we want. Druk Nyamrup Tshogpa (DNT) was born out of the hope that, as a political entity, it can harness the power of democracy better to benefit our country and the people; out of the fear that some of the ills of democracy that we have witnessed, if not remedied early on, could put the future of our country and the people at stake; and out of the realisation that for our people to counter the ills, and harness the good, they need the choice of a better political party.

## Our Context and Our System – The Fundamentals

Given their dominant role in shaping our democratic process, it is crucial that our political parties see our democracy in the right perspective. While the basic ideals and principles apply across the spectrum, democracies around the world differ from one another in both form and design. By the same token, Bhutan’s democracy is also uniquely designed, and operates in an environment unique to a small country like Bhutan.

Should our political parties and citizens attempt to function without taking adequate stock of our system, and the unique circumstances under which it operates, our democracy will neither serve to strengthen our sovereignty nor help to fulfil the aspirations of our people. In Druk Nyamrup Tshogpa's view, two facts about our situation deserve special emphasis and attention.

Firstly, ours is a small, landlocked, least developed state struggling to breathe life in a geopolitically difficult terrain. The primary preoccupation or an end goal of a small state in the international political game is to survive. To survive, the rules of international politics would normally prescribe that we acquire what it takes – military, economic, demographic, among others – to defend ourselves against the external threats. Bhutan had neither the military power nor the demographic or economic strength. Given these facts, it is amazing how Bhutan managed to survive when similar small states in the region have long disappeared into history. In this regard, history tells us that we were able to unite our forces together and act as one, despite centuries of internal strife and civil war, whenever and wherever the external threats arose – whether it was from the British Empire in the south or Tibetans and Mongols in the north. Our strength to survive as a nation came from unity and harmony within the country.

Secondly, we must know that ours is a Democratic Constitutional Monarchy which is different from the systems of democratic governance elsewhere. It combines the best of both Democracy and Monarchy – indeed, Bhutan's democracy was conceived and grew out of the womb of Monarchy. Under our Constitution, His Majesty The Druk Gyalpo is the Head of State, and the symbol of unity of the Kingdom and People of Bhutan (Section 1, Article 2). It is a system designed to get the best out of democracy, and to prevent the pitfalls of democracy, which has become evermore evident in democracies around the world including in the United States of America and the United Kingdom. Our visionary Kings foresaw the downsides of democracy long before they manifested in those countries although many might have seen the wisdom behind the design of our system only in recent years.

It would appear that these fundamentals of our nation and our system do not need to be explained. But many a times, over the last one decade of our journey as a democracy, Druk Nyamrup Tshogpa has felt like these fundamentals were being challenged either consciously or unconsciously. This is evident in the deep polarisation of our society along the party lines. If we allow the political divide of the kind we have seen in the last ten years, to linger and become more entrenched, it will destroy the unity, harmony, and stability – the bedrocks of our nation.

Similarly, the tendency to pursue short-term political goals at the cost of long-term national goals, the approach of personality-based politics, and the undue influence of money in politics have been equally worrying.

Druk Nyamrup Tshogpa believes that such political tendencies will not only fail to serve the aspirations of our people, but also put the very future of our country at stake. We believe that now is the time to right these wrongs. In this election, we must stop further polarisation of our society along the lines of the two old parties. We must focus once again on making democracy relevant to the common people and pursuing long-term goals of our country to make our future secure.

### **Bridging the Gap – The *Nyamrup* Spirit**

One of the primary concerns that preoccupied Druk Nyamrup Tshogpa right from the beginning was that of the widening gap between the rich and poor. Divides are also occurring between the rural and urban population. The divides are further exacerbated by the tendency towards crony-capitalism that is slowly creeping into our system. If the economic disparities in our society are not addressed urgently they will lead to adverse consequences like the ones we have seen in countries around the world in recent years.

For democracy to be real and effective, it must benefit and empower all citizens including the poor and the marginalised equally. The pursuit of freedom, justice, and happiness are the basic aspirations of all people. Every citizen should be able to pursue these aspirations within a peaceful and secure space allowed by our political system.

Given these realities and facts, narrowing the gap between the rich and poor is one agenda that is very close to the heart of Druk Nyamrup Tshogpa. In fact, the idea of bridging the gap between the rich and poor is the lens through which the party looks at its social, political, and economic agenda. We believe this idea will lead to a more harmonious society, a stronger nation, and happier citizens.

Therefore, if there is one thing that distinguishes Druk Nyamrup Tshogpa from other parties, it is the party's singular focus on narrowing the gap between the rich and the poor.

### **Conclusion**

This year, this election, we are at a crossroads. The choice we make in this election will shape the very nature of our democracy and the future of our country. DNT believes that, together, with the people of Bhutan, we can make our democracy work. Together, we can secure our future.