

His Majesty The Druk Gyalpo

By Kinley Dorji / Kuenselonline 29 October, 2008



It is the end - and the beginning - of history. On the morning of November 1, the third day of the ninth Bhutanese month, His Majesty the King will be empowered as the Druk Gyalpo in a unique and sacred empowerment ceremony, which symbolises his transcendence of the ordinary and the temporal and the personification of divine wisdom.

His Majesty will receive the Dar Na-Nga, a special arrangement of the primary colours that signify the five elements. The ceremony will take place in the Machhen Lhakhang, and the Dar Na-Nga will be symbolically conferred by Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, in the presence of the fourth Druk Gyalpo, with the empowerment prayer chanted by His Holiness the Je Khenpo.

The white, yellow, red, green, and blue silk scarves represent the elements - water, earth, fire, wind, and space – the basis of physical existence, that His Majesty personifies, as well as the underlying energies from which the physical world arises.

In Buddhist belief, the empowerment of the Druk Gyalpo mandates that he assumes the strategies of the Gewa Rigna (five Buddha families) – that of

pacification, increase, magnification, power, and a combination of all.

In Bhutan the Druk Gyalpo personifies Jaro Dongchhen, the supreme warrior manifestation of Yeshey Goembo (Mahakala), who is the supreme protector deity. Jaro Dongchhen, with his wrathful raven head, is presented as a totally black figure, in the belief that all colours are absorbed and dissolved into black, just as all names and forms are absorbed into Mahakala. Black also signifies the total absence of colour, meaning ultimate or absolute reality, surpassing all quality and form.

The Coronation ceremony symbolises the expression of the will of the people in the person of the King. This common will, reposed in the Druk Gyalpo, is often called the Bhutanese system and the essence of the Bhutanese identity.

The Raven Crown renders the Druk Gyalpo a personification of the supreme warrior. Apart from being the protector of the people and meaning harmony within society, the Druk Gyalpo, by interpretation of the Constitution, is the Head of State, the Fountain of Justice, Fountain of Honour, and the Protector of Religions.

The King of Bhutan is a Dharma King. Dharma, in this context, is interpreted as divine law and the King is a protector of the Dharma. That is why the King cannot be above the law.

This Buddhist concept of Kingship is, therefore, different from the notion of the divine power of Kings. In some countries, both in the west and the east, it was believed that the power of God was vested in the King. So the King was above law and that allowed the emergence of “divine” autocrats.

Today, Bhutan’s move towards democratisation reflects a profoundly important nature of a Buddhist society. In fact, according to Buddhist and Hindu scriptures, the first King, Mangpoi Kurwa, was elected because he was an upright man full of wisdom and knowledge at a time when man became obsessed by greed and society failed to function. The people elected the King to maintain order in society, to prevent them from destroying each other, and from consuming everything around them. The election of the King, therefore, represented the people’s desire to have a restraining authority against undesirable aspects of human behaviour. This is a reflection of the values of Gross National Happiness. It is also an attempt to realise the full potential of a Buddhist society, or the total happiness of enlightenment. Gross National Happiness stems from Buddhist ideology - of what the purpose of human life is.

The King of Bhutan assumes the responsibility of translating the teachings of the Dharma into social ethics. The world has already drawn some inspiration from Gross National Happiness, because it represents a value system and not a religion. But Bhutan is not preaching GNH. Bhutan is trying to make GNH work at home. And His Majesty the King also personifies Gross National Happiness.

The Coronation of the Druk Gyalpo is far more than a ceremony. It is a uniquely Bhutanese experience. And it is a blessing.