

A tribute to His Majesty the Fourth Druk Gyalpo Jigme Singye Wangchuck in commemoration of his 60TH birth anniversary

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His Majesty the Fourth Druk Gyalpo

The quiet and slumberous afternoon suddenly sprang to life as children poured out of their hostels drumming the barren earth between the dormitory and the dining hall. Their little bare feet soiled and hardened shared the excitement of the body, mind and soul. It was sometime in the late 1970s in Shemgang Junior High School. His Majesty King Jigme Singye Wangchuck was paying a brief visit en route to Gaylegphug. The commotion came to an abrupt end as His Majesty's entourage entered the school compound. Accompanied by the school headmaster, Mr. Tyagi, His Majesty walked towards us and asked, "Are you all happy in school?" This is the earliest recollection of my

visual perception of His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck the Fourth King of Bhutan.

The King of Destiny

It is perhaps divine intervention and a blessing for Bhutan to have His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck as our sovereign, a king of unparalleled wisdom, benevolence and vision. His Majesty, undoubtedly, has been the very source of happiness, hope and prosperity for the people of Bhutan. From the prime of his youth to the defining moments, His Majesty devoted everything to serve the nation,

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reaching out to the remotest corners of Bhutan. Generations to come will stand witness to His Majesty's selfless duty, care and compassion for the wellbeing of his people.

The world's youngest monarch

His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck, the Fourth King of Bhutan, was the youngest monarch in the world when he ascended the golden throne in 1974 at the age of 17. The youthful life woven with fun and adventure got eclipsed when the duty of a king fell on the young Crown Prince. It was also during the time when Bhutan opened its door to the outside world and a maiden step towards modern development was taken. Amidst the exciting time juxtaposed with challenges and opportunities, temptations and restraints, His Majesty had a clear and profound environmental vision the fruits of which we enjoy today and commit to pass on to generations to come.

Conservation leadership—for Bhutan and the world

Even as the world witnesses the alarming rate of tropical deforestation, estimated to be about 100,000 square kilometers every year, Bhutan is fortunate to have a vast proportion of its natural forests intact. The credit wholly rests upon His Majesty's farsighted leadership in establishing a series of policies and laws that have had a positive impact on conservation and environmental sustainability in Bhutan. The most notable being the commitment enshrined in the constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan to maintain sixty percent of the country's total area under forest cover for all time.

The biological diversity that adorns the mountains and valleys of Bhutan—where the silvery streams and fast flowing rivers orchestrate with the rhythms of fluttering prayer flags, where the cool mountain breeze mingles with icy mist recharging the freshness of the air—defines Bhutan and its natural splendor. Choosing nature conservation against rapid economic development at the cost of the environment, His Majesty's development policies have sown the seeds of

future wellbeing and have shaped the vision of Bhutan's environmental stewardship, uniquely embedded within the overall development philosophy of Gross National Happiness.

Global recognition

Bhutan's role in global conservation is no less than achievements at home. The pro-conservation policies and laws that have shaped Bhutan's environmental status have gained global recognition and today the world acknowledges Bhutan as a conservation leader. His Majesty's role in building this global image of Bhutan is testified by prestigious international conservation awards bestowed upon His Majesty.

UNEP 'Champions of the Earth' Award

In 2005, His Majesty the King and the People of Bhutan were presented the first-ever United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) 'Champions of the Earth' award along with six other environmental leaders. The award was in recognition of the commitment to placing the environment at the centre of the country's constitution and all its development plans. This has been augmented by Bhutan's impressive track record, with more than 74 percent of its land under forest cover, and 26 percent of this cover designated as protected areas. The country's long-standing legislation and policies that ensure the sustainable use of resources, promote community involvement in environmental activities, improve land use planning, and integrate traditional with modern natural resource use practices, is another notable initiative.

J. Paul Getty Award for Conservation Leadership

Administered by World Wildlife Fund (WWF), this annual prize is one of the world's most prestigious awards devoted to conservation. His Majesty was conferred the 2006 J. Paul Getty Award for Conservation Leadership for his three decades of work to conserve the environment of the Himalayan kingdom that is home to tigers, snow leopards and

red pandas. In his letter accepting the award on behalf of the Government and the People of Bhutan, His Majesty stated: "This Award belongs to the Government and the People of Bhutan and not to any one individual for we all worked together to conserve our environment. Bhutan's environmental ethics stem from the dedication of our people to maintaining harmony with our natural environment and diligently following and implementing the sound policies of the Royal Government on environmental protection and conservation. We have sacrificed present gains of harvesting the country's natural resources for future sustainability of the environment and have enshrined in our laws that sixty percent of the total land area shall always be maintained under forest cover."

The Earth Hall of Fame Kyoto

The Earth Hall of Fame Kyoto is awarded to honour in perpetuity the achievements of those who have contributed to the conservation of the global environment. On 13 February 2011, His Majesty the Fourth King of Bhutan was inducted into the Earth Hall of Fame Kyoto for his outstanding contribution to the protection of the global environment. Her Royal Highness Princess Ashi Kesang Choden Wangchuck received the Hall of Fame award on behalf of His Majesty the Fourth King.

In the acceptance speech that was read out by Her Royal Highness, His Majesty said that he looked upon the award as recognition accorded to his people and country for their efforts to live and progress in harmony with the natural habitat, and that he dedicated it to the people of

Bhutan and to all those who have been steadfast in their support and commitment to preserve the natural environment and the world.

The legacy continues

In 2006, His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck stunned the entire nation when he announced abdication in favour of the crown prince His Royal Highness Jigme Khesar Namgyal Wangchuck. It was a moment that struck the chord of change unthought-of and yet a moment to rejoice. A new chapter had unfolded in the history of Bhutan and it was time to look forward to a future under the leadership of His Majesty Jigme Khesar Namgyal Wangchuck the Fifth King of Bhutan. In 2008, Bhutan transitioned from a century-old absolute monarchy to a democratic form of government. Today, the democratically elected government of Bhutan continues to follow and implement the wise and noble policies ensued from the farsighted leadership of His Majesty the Fourth Druk Gyalpo.

About the author



Tandin Wangdi joined the erstwhile Forest Research Centre under the Ministry of Agriculture in 1994. He was head of the National Herbarium before joining WWF Bhutan in 2010. Tandin has a Masters Degree

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