

The political background of bhutan politics essay



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The country of Bhutan, or also known by the Land of the Thunder Dragon is in southern Asia and it is found in the middle of China and India (Central Intelligence Agency, 2012). Their two major religions are Buddhist and Hinduism, Buddhist being their major one (Central Intelligence Agency, 2012). As of July, 2012 the estimate of their population was 716, 896 and their capital is Thimphu (Central Intelligence Agency, 2012). Bhutan's official language is Dzongkha Bhutan but there are also other dialects and languages spoken, their currency is the Ngultrum and is equivalent to the Indian Rupee (Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 2012). Prosperity and happiness is very important in Bhutan and because of this they are the first country to come up with the Gross National Happiness to measure it (Technology D. o., 2012, p. para 1).

Political System

Bhutan political has evolved an absolute monarchy to recently becoming a constitutional monarch. King Jigme Singye Wangchuck gave the throne to his son Jigme Khesar Namgyal Wangchuk on December 2006, making him the new king of Bhutan (World Bank Group, 2011, p. para 2). King Jigme Khesar Namgyal Wangchuk became the youngest monarch and the first to take over the new democracy (Net, 2012, p. para 2). The constitution committee started drafting the constitution of Bhutan in 2001 and in 2005 a draft was given to the people and a public consultation about the constitution was followed to involve the Bhutanese population (Communication, 2012, p. para 2). The drafting committee was made up of 39 members with Lyonpo Sonam Tobgye as the chairman and chief of justice (Technology D. o., 2012, p. para

1). After many years of absolute monarchy in 2008 the first general elections were held and Bhutan took a step towards democracy (Net, 2012, p. para1)

Political Ideology

Bhutan's political ideology is not as strong as their religious ideology. They do have ties with other countries like India helping them have a strong foreign policy. By tracing back in the Bhutan history, you are able to see their very strong ties with religion, especially Buddhism even in politics. It is just recently that they have expanded their monarchy to a constitutional one, but even so they still follow their religious belief and put it into their politics. They are a very cultural and traditional country making them a modern conservative country. For many years they have been isolated from the world and are just recently changing their political views. Little by little they are adding to their politics by taking what they consider the good from what other countries have done with their governments. They are adopting democracy into their country but being very careful to not change their culture and beliefs.

Electoral System

Bhutan has a bicameral legislature made of the upper house and the lower house. The upper house called the National Council had its first elections on December 31, 2007 (Net, 2012, p. para 3). The chief of state is King Jigme Khesar Namgyel, and the monarchy is acquired hereditary. Even though the monarchy is hereditary, since the reform in 1998; the national assembly has the power to remove the monarch when acquiring two thirds of the votes (Central Intelligence Agency, 2012). The king is responsible for electing five
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members of the National Council and the remainder twenty are elected by the people (Freedom house organization, 2012, p. para 7). The lower house also called the National Assembly is made up of 47 members that are elected by the people. The head of the party with the majority of votes becomes the prime minister and is nominated by the king. Both the National Council and the National Assembly serve a five year term (Freedom house organization, 2012, p. para 7).

Government intervention in the economy

Religion is very important to the Bhutanese people, and this has been part of the reason for their being one of the smallest economies in the world and one of the least developed countries. The economy in Bhutan is supported by forestry, agriculture, hydroelectric power and tourism (act, 2012, p. para 1). Bhutan and India have very strong ties, and much of the trade and financial help come from India. Bhutan leans upon India for assistance in construction of roads, and any other constructions because they don't have much knowledge on technology. Bhutanese people are not very technology prone, due to the fact that they recently just started having some technology like television, this will get them more involved in their government and what is going on in their county. India and Bhutan have a hydroelectricity project developing that is called The Tala Hydroelectricity project. With this Bhutan generates power to India (international, 2012, p. para 1). This project has helped Bhutan's economic growth, and with this also helped the government build new roads, schools and hospitals. Over the years Bhutan has decentralized their government and this economic growth has helped give back to the people (international, 2012, p. para 7)

Political Opinion and Public Opinion

Both political culture and public opinion have to do with government. When comparing the both, we are able to see that both give a way of thinking about government. The difference is that political culture looks for basic, general values on politics and government; while public opinion looks for views about specific leaders and policies (Michael G. Roskin, 2010, 2008, 2003). The country of Bhutan is fairly new to the type of government they have which is a constitutional monarchy. The political culture in Bhutan is very religious; Buddhism is one of the major religions in Bhutan and the people's religious beliefs and the politics are both connected. Since the 17th century, Bhutan has followed a dual system of governance, known as the Chhoe-sid-nyi, which splits the government powers into a religious branch headed by a chief abbot (known as Je Khenpo), and an administrative branch headed by the king (now headed by the prime minister) (Beliefnet, 2012). Bhutan's political culture has been based on their religion for many years and is now recently that people are getting use to having a form of government where everyone goes by the same laws. Public opinion in Bhutan is becoming stronger in the sense that the government has changed to a democratic one. Their government is based on making the Bhutanese population happy by measuring the Gross National Happiness but the ultimate judicial power is still held by the king. The Bhutanese population is just getting educated on their rights and new laws and because of this throughout the years the public opinion should become stronger.

Religiosity vs. Secularism

Bhutan is a very religious country; they live their lives by their religious beliefs. The Bhutanese culture is mainly focused on their religious beliefs and this has made them take a very slow role in the modernization. Because of their religion and beliefs they have isolated themselves from the world from many years; this has helped them follow their beliefs but has affected their economy. Until the 1960s the country had no national currency, no telephones, no schools, no hospitals, and no postal service and certainly no tourists (wide, 2012) the older generation is mainly educated on their religious beliefs. School with general education was not brought on to Bhutan until the 1950's, and from then the education system started slowly rising and little by little throughout the years offering higher education for the Bhutanese people.

Political Communication

Bhutan is a very slow developing country and it recently started using technology. In 1973 is when Bhutan launched the first radio station which is was privately launched and it is now state owned (Central Intelligence Agency, 2012). In 2006 one private station begun its operations and not until 1999 the first TV station came to life and it is owned by the state (Central Intelligence Agency, 2012). Technology has played a major role in educating the public and it has made information more accessible to the Bhutanese population. The Bhutanese government has just recently changed from an absolute monarchy to a constitutional monarchy and for this political ideology to be successful the Bhutanese people need to get involved, which is something they never really had to do before. Access to technology has helped very much in this transition and in 2008 when the first elections were

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given; technology was a big factor on educating the people and informing them on what was going on. The BIPS which is the information and communication technology policy of Bhutan created in 2003 focuses on three objective, one is to use ICT(information communication technology) for good governance, to create a Bhutanese info-culture; and to create a " high-tech habitat" (communication, 2006). The Bhutan government believes that technology will help Bhutan in many aspects, from education, economy, government etc. The king is very pro technology; he has even established The Bhutan Media Foundation, which focuses on to fostering the growth of a strong, responsible media capable of playing an important role in the social, economic and political growth of the nation (bhutan media foundation, 2011-2012). Gross National Happiness is very important to Bhutan. To be able to achieve this they believe that giving the people the liberty to express themselves and easier access to information are very important factors in achieving this goal.

Interest Groups

There are two political parties in Bhutan the PDP (People's Democratic Party) which focuses on human rights and democracy and the Peace and Prosperity party which is the party that won the election in Bhutan (Net, 2012, p. para 1). These are the two main political groups right now in Bhutan but they also have other interest groups. One interest group that is very important to Bhutan is the RSPN (Royal Society for Protection of Nature), this organization has been working to maintain the environment for 25 years and they also educate the population on how to conserve their nature. This is an important group because Bhutan society is very strong on keeping a sustainable

environment. It is part of their beliefs and culture. Bhutan has four ethnic groups the Ngalong, Sarchop, Kheng and Nepali-speakers and make up 98% of the population (MRG, 2005) the Ngalong are a big influence on the lifestyle that the country has and the way the country is governed. Other ethnic groups in Bhutan that only make up about 10% of the population are Adivasi, Birmi, Brokpa, Doya, Lepcha, Tibetan and Toktop (MRG, 2005). Another interest group found in Bhutan is a farmers group called Daga Shindgra Tshogpa. This farmers come from the district of Dagana and with the help of the minister of agriculture they were given by the government a food processing plant with the aim to increase household income through collective engagement in the food processing industry (capacity is development). Because of this group Bhutan passed the CAB (Cooperative Act of Bhutan) which is an act to provide legal framework for the formation of Co-operatives, in order to facilitate economic development (asianlii. org)

Funding of Elections in Bhutan

The funding of elections for political parties in Bhutan has to follow many rules and regulations. There are many laws that protect the interest of the people when it comes down to donations for politics to avoid giving all the power to specific people or groups that might have more monetary power than others. Bhutan has laws to regulate bans and limits on private income. These laws ban donation from corporations to political parties and candidates except from contributions from register members (IDEA, 2010, pp. para 4, 5). Anonymous donations are also banned because the parties are required to submit a list of names of all the contributions and also the amounts. They have a limit for the amounts being donated per member and

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per year. The limit is 100, 000 Ngultrum (\$6, 400) unless the amount is changed by the Election Commission over time (IDEA, 2010, pp. para 9, 14). Under the Public funding laws every party has to have a public election fund that needs to be paid every year by each registered political party and its candidates and the election commission sets the amount (IDEA, 2010, p. para 19). The media coverage is controlled by the government. The commission gives every political party or candidates for the parliamentary election an equal amount of broadcasting time and space in the print media. Local government is not eligible for help or funding by the commission (IDEA, 2010, p. para25). The commission is also in charge of posters, pamphlets, and public debates between candidates and political parties. The registered members that gave donations are eligible for tax exemption for up to 5% of their adjusted gross income (IDEA, 2010, p. para 25). Political parties are responsible for reporting their finances, giving a detailed report of all expenses. The parties are audited by an external auditor which is the Royal Audit Authority and the Election Fund Division that is within the Election Commission and all information is public (IDEA, 2010, pp. para 35, 36, 38, 40).