

Buddhism was first introduced to Bhutan in the 7th century AD when Tibetan king Songtsän Gampo ordered the construction of two Buddhist temples, at Bumthang in central Bhutan and at Kyichu in the Paro Valley. Buddhism replaced but did not eliminate the Bon religious practices that had also been prevalent in Tibet until the late sixth century. Instead, Buddhism absorbed Bon and its believers. As the country developed in its many fertile valleys, Buddhism matured and became a unifying element. It was Buddhist literature and chronicles that began the recorded history of Bhutan.

In 747 a Buddhist saint who had the ability to appear in eight different forms, one of them being Guru Rinpoche, visited Bhutan on a flying tiger and left the imprint of his body and his hat on rocks. School texts describe demons that threatened villages and destroyed temples until captured through magic and converted to Buddhism. Tales abound of ghosts who destroyed temples, and angels who rebuilt them. In 1865, Britain and Bhutan signed the Treaty of Sinchulu, under which Bhutan would receive an annual subsidy in exchange for ceding some border land. Under British influence, a monarchy was set up in 1907; three years later, a treaty was signed whereby the British agreed not to interfere in Bhutanese internal affairs and Bhutan allowed Britain to direct its foreign affairs. This role was assumed by independent India after 1947. Two years later, a formal Indo-Bhutanese accord returned the areas of Bhutan annexed by the British, formalized the annual subsidies the country received, and defined India's responsibilities in defense and foreign relations.

Bhutan's medieval and modern history is better documented than its ancient history, but is no less exotic. This is a time of warlords, feuds, giant fortresses and castles, with intrigue, treachery, fierce battles and extraordinary pageantry all playing feature roles. The country's recent history begins with a hereditary monarchy that was founded in the 20th century and continued the country's policy of isolationism. It was not until the leadership of the third king that Bhutan emerged from its medieval heritage of serfdom and seclusion. Until the 1960's the country had no national currency, no telephones, no schools, no hospitals, no postal service and certainly no tourists. Development efforts have now produced all these – plus a national assembly, airport, roads and a national system of health care. Despite the speed of modernization, Bhutan has maintained a policy of careful, controlled growth in an effort to preserve its national identity. The government has cautiously accepted tourism, TV and the internet and is set to embark on perhaps its biggest challenge – democracy.

National Emblem



The national emblem is a circle that projects a double diamond thunderbolt placed above the lotus. There is a jewel on all sides with two dragons on vertical sides. The thunder bolt represent the harmony between secular and religious power while the lotus symbolizes purity. The jewel signifies the sovereign power while the dragons (male and female) stand for the name of the country, Druk Yul or the Land of Thunder Dragon.

National Flag

The National flag is rectangle in shape and is divided into two parts diagonally. The upper yellow half signifies the secular power and authority of the king while the lower saffron-orange symbolizes the practice of religion and power of Buddhism, as manifested in the tradition of the Drukpa Kagyu sect of Buddhism. The dragon signifies the name and purity of the country while the jewels in its claws stand for the wealth and perfection of the country.

National Tree



The National tree is Cypress (Cupressus torolusa). Cypress are found in abundance and one may notice big cypress near temples and monasteries. Cypress is found in the temperate climate zone, between 1,800 and 3,500 meters above the sea level. Its capacity to survive on rugged harsh terrain is compared to bravery and simplicity.

National Flower



Wangchuck, the first King of Bhutan (1907-1952), is credited with the unification of the country. He established the monarchy and introduced the concept of Gross National Happiness (GNH) as the guiding principle of the nation. His reign (1907-1952) is associated with religious history and



the country's history. The monarchy has since been passed down to his descendants, with the current King, Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck, being the 14th in the line. The monarchy has played a significant role in the country's development and is a symbol of national unity.