From Absolute to Constitutional Monarchy (Excerpt Picture Book BHUTAN (3.ed.), H. N. Nestroy.

The paramount tasks of the first Bhutanese Kings were to consolidate the unification of the country, to establish a strong central authority. With the accession to the throne of the third “Dragon King” or Druk Gyalpo, H.M. Jigme Dorji Wangchuck, in March 1952, a new era began in the history of Bhutan. His Priorities were to expand the structure of the state administration and modernize society itself.

Thus the third King abolished serfdom and introduced important land reform measures in 1956. In 1968, H.M. created the Council of Ministers, thereafter the High Court. The existing laws were codified. The Tshogdu, the National Assembly, was established, as precursor of a parliament with rudimentary legislative functions: till the beginning or 2008, it had 154 members, composed of 38 high civil servants including 10 cabinet ministers, 10 representatives of the monastic body, six members of the Royal Advisory Committee, and 100 people’s representatives appointed by the village head men and other local dignitaries.

As to Western standards, the Tshogdu was not yet a democratic parliament, its members were not legitimized through general elections, political parties did not exist. Nevertheless, during the last years, this National Assembly had become quite a strong institution also helping to prepare the road to democracy. On initiative of the fourth Druk Gyalpo, H.M. Jigme Singye Wangchuck, on the throne since 1972, the power to appoint Ministers was transferred to the Tshogdu in 1998; and also, to the horror of many a traditionally minded Bhutanese, to force the king to abdicate. The King also gave up his de facto role as Chief of the Government; the Council of Ministers was significantly strengthened, the post of Prime Minister (Chairman of the Council of Ministers) established. From then on, the Tshogdu elected every other year a new Prime Minister from the ministers. Thus, H.M. the 4th Druk Gyalpo gradually reduced his formerly omnipotent role to that of Head of State similar to that of H.M. the Queen of England.

But the paramount objective of the H.M. the 4th King was the speedy transfer of the Kingdom into a parliamentary democracy in form of a constitutional Monarchy. On his strong initiative, since 2003 a special commission worked to elaborate a modern constitution. Once the draft was finalized in 2005, H.M. the King and H.R.H. the Crown Prince travelled tirelessly through Bhutan, not sparing the
remotest valleys of the country. They prepared the people for democracy and their first general elections, by familiarizing them with the forthcoming constitution. The constitution was adopted by the new Parliament in June and entered into force in July, 2008. The elections on March 24th, 2008 enjoyed a record participation of almost 80%. The “Harmony Party of Bhutan” (Druk Phuensum Tshogpa - DPT) won 45 of 47 parliamentary seats. The second party, “People’s Democratic Party” (PDP), because of the pure majority rule and despite having won 33% of the votes, could send only two MPs into the National Assembly, the Lower House.

The new Government took oath on April 9th, 2008. The first democratically elected Prime Minister, Jigmi Y. Thinley, has declared the integration of the South-Bhutanese, Nepali speaking citizens one of his paramount objectives. Two of his 10 ministers and the Deputy Speaker of the Parliament hail from this part of the population.

As early as 2005, H.M. the 4th King had made known his intention to abdicate in 2008 before the formal transition of Bhutan to democracy. All the more the Bhutanese were caught by surprise when, on the 14th December 2006, H.M. had it announced that he had handed over the Royal duties to H.R.H. the Crown Prince as the new King of Bhutan.

The coronation of H.M. Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck was to follow in 2008, the jubilee of “100 Years of Wangchuck Monarchy”.

This event, the Bhutanese people were looking forward with such anticipation, was divided in two parts: the spiritual-religious coronation and the formal state coronation.

The astrologer-monks had found the 1. and the 6. November, 2008, in Bhutanese calendar the 8th and the 13th day of the ninth month of the Earthen Rat Year, as the most auspicious days. These two paramount coronation ceremonies were celebrated in traditional splendour of Bhutanese cultural; the former in the Punakha Dzong, the latter in the Thimphu Dzong, followed by stunning public events in the Thimphu National Stadium overcrowded each day by 45,000 Bhutanese. The enthusiasm, joy and happiness of thousands and thousands of Bhutanese citizens following the coronation events have proven that H.M. Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck, the 28 years young 5th Druk Gyalpo, has “arrived” in the midst and hearts of the people of Bhutan. His Majesty’s wedding on October 13th, 2011 with his most enchanting bride, now Her Majesty Queen Jetsun Pema, brought Him even nearer to the hearts of His people.