The Origin and Description of The National Flag and National Anthem of The Kingdom of Bhutan

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Some parts of flag
1 Foreword

There is no record on the origin and history of the National Flag and National Anthem of the country. However, some of the people who were directly involved in their development are still alive. We are grateful to them, particularly Dasho Shingkhar Lam, Dasho Sangay Dorji and Aku Tongmi for enabling us record important facts of these two important national symbols.

The availability of only a few documents that have not been compiled resulted in many inconsistencies and variations in the descriptions of these important national symbols. For instance, there are many versions of English translations of the National Anthem. Therefore, there was the need for authentic records of descriptions, and accurate translations. This booklet is a small contribution of the Centre of Bhutan Studies to disseminate information on these two national symbols.
PART I - The National Flag

2 Introduction

Bhutan is historically known by many names. However, the Bhutanese call the country Druk or dragon. The choice of Druk among other names for the country has a historical basis dating back to 1189.

The Drukpa Kagyud School of Buddhism is a popular school of Buddhism followed in Bhutan. Tsangpa Gyare Yeshe Dorji, the founder of the School, was at Phoankar, Ü, Tibet, when he once saw the Namgyiphu valley hallowed with rainbow and light. Considering the sight to be auspicious for constructing a monastery, he went there to choose a site. It was then that a dragon thundered, resonating thrice in the clear winter sky. Tsangpa Gyare predicted that his teachings would flourish to the extent the thunder was heard. The monastery he built in 1189 was named Druk Sewa Jangchubling, popularly known as Druk Ralung. His teachings and the school came to be known as Druk. This school later developed into three branches known as the Toed Druk, Med Druk and Bar Druk. The first two were founded by Tsangpa Gyare's closest disciples,
and the third one by his nephew and spiritual heir, Önrey Dharma Sengye. The first two branches were later merged into the Bar Druk¹. This school became popular in Bhutan after the arrival of Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal in 1616 although other Kagyu lama preceded him. He unified and founded the modern Bhutanese state. The country thus came to be known as Druk or 'Dragon'. The dragon forms the main symbol in the national flag.

3 The First Version of the National Flag
The national flag was first made during the signing of the Indo-Bhutan Treaty of 1949². The second king, His Majesty Jigme Wangchuck initiated its design. It was a bicolour square flag with fimbriation running from the lower hoist to the upper fly end. The yellow field extended from the hoist to the upper fly end, and the red from the fly end to lower hoist. It has a green dragon at the centre of the yellow-red fields, parallel to the fly, facing the fly end. It was embroidered by Lharip Taw

² Interview, Dasho Shingkhar Lam, June 26, 2002
Taw from Pesiling, Bumthang. He was one of the very few lharip (painter) available in the court at that time. The dragon was painted green in accordance with the traditional and religious reference to dragon as *yu druk ngonm* - turquoise dragon. A sample of this flag is put up behind the throne in the National Assembly Hall in Thimphu although the green dragon is embroidered along the fimbriation, not parallel to the fly\(^3\). It was the first flag of such design used only for this occasion, and nothing has been heard or known about it since then.

4 The Second Version

The second instance of using the national flag occurred during the visit of the Late Majesty, Jigme Dorji Wangchuck to eastern Bhutan in 1956. Some officials working in the Late His Majesty’s Secretariat initiated the use of the flag during the journey\(^4\). They designed the flag based on the photograph of the first flag

\(^3\) A similar national flag was put up behind the throne in the National Assembly Hall of Paro Rinpung Dzong in 1959. Unlike the flag in the present National Assembly hall, the dragon cuts across the yellow-red fields parallel to the fly.

\(^4\) Dasho Shingkhar Lam, Interview, June 26, 2002
available in documents of the Indo-Bhutan Treaty of 1949. It was then that the colour of the dragon was changed to white. There was a convoy of over a hundred riding and pack ponies. A small flag was fixed onto the saddle of every tenth horse of the convoy. The flag hoisted in the camp was a larger one, which reportedly measured about six square feet.

Dasho Shingkhar Lam⁵ recalls this incident. "On the first day of the journey, the entourage got only as far as Simtokha from Dechenchholing. As soon the camp was settled, the national flag was hoisted and a bugle sounded. This was done at every camp in the evening. The flag was square and the dragon, instead of being diagonally placed, was straight. I was later commanded to redesign the flag as it is today."⁶

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⁵ Former Secretary to His Majesty, and the Sixth Speaker of National Assembly (1971-74)
5 Description and Explanation of the Second Flag

This manuscript was obtained from the archives of His Majesty’s Secretariat.
2.1 *The English Translation*\textsuperscript{8}

Every country has a national flag as a symbol of its identity. Hence, the explanation of our national flag is narrated comprehensively.

1. The national flag is half yellow and half red. The yellow spreads from the summit to the base while the red extends from the base and forms the fluttering end.

2. His Majesty, the Dharma King is the summit and root of the Drukpa Kagyu of Palden Drukpa. As he wears the yellow robe\textsuperscript{9}, the yellow represents the being of His Majesty.

\textsuperscript{8} Authors’ translation.
\textsuperscript{9} The robe refers to the yellow scarf worn by His Majesty.
3. The significance of red is that the Kingdom of Kagyud Palden Drukpa is governed from the foot of the Dharma King His Majesty consistent with dual monastic and civil systems, and therefore, the country’s entire borders and centre is consistent with the teachings (Dharma).

4. The red and yellow fields are adjoined. The dragon spreads equally over them. This signifies that .... the people are united in oneness of speech and mind in upholding the Kingdom’s interest. The dragon symbolizes that in the eyes of Palden Drukpa, there is no discrimination against people of any disposition, and that they are being governed towards peace and prosperity.
4 The Present National Flag

The flag in its present shape, dimension and design was made during one of the visits of the Gangtok-based Political Officer of India to Bhutan in the late 1950s. It was noticed that a square flag did not flutter like the rectangular Indian national flag hoisted above the camp of the Political Officer near Dechencholing Palace. The national flag was redesigned by taking the measurement of the Indian flag, which was nine by six feet.

In the design of the present flag, four significant changes were made. First, the colour of the dragon was changed to white. Second, the dragon, which was formerly parallel to the fly was embroidered diagonally along the fimbriation. This was because the flag always slumped when hoisted whereby the dragon faced the earth\textsuperscript{10}. Third, the lower half was changed to orange upon the command of the Late His Majesty sometime in 1968 or 69. Fourth, the shape was changed to a rectangle measuring nine by six feet.

\textsuperscript{10} The dragon on the new flag was first painted by Kilkhor Lopen Jada from Lingmukha, Punakha.
The tradition of hoisting the flag every day in front of government offices did not exist earlier. It was regularized by Late His Majesty after the Secretariat was shifted for the second time from Taba to Tashichho Dzong in 1968.\footnote{The Secretariat was first shifted from Dechhencholing Palace to Taba.}

The national flag today is a bicolour standard, diagonally divided into equal yellow and orange fields. The yellow-orange fimbriation runs from the lower hoist to the upper fly end. The yellow half stretches from the hoist to the upper fly end, and the orange half from the fly end to the lower hoist. It has a white dragon along the fimbriation, flying towards the upper fly end. The honour point of the flag is the fimbriation along which a dragon is located, stretching equally on the yellow and orange fields. The staff ornament or finial is a norbu (jewel).

5 Code of Conduct of the National Flag

The code of conduct was passed by the National Assembly on June 8, 1972. Resolution No. 28 of the session reads, "As the national flag is a symbol of the
country’s independence, and in the absence of proper procedures for hoisting it, the Assembly approved for enforcement of the National Flag Rules drafted by Cabinet.”

The Rules have eight provisions beginning with the description and explanation of the flag’s colour, fields and coat of arms. Others pertain to the flag’s size and dimension, and code of according respects and hoisting it. It also specifies the places, and occasions for hoisting the flag, and delineates the entitlements of flags on cars.

6 Size of the National Flag

The National Assembly resolved that the dimension of the national flag should measure 3:2. However, a few accepted sizes of this ratio are 21 by 14 ft, 12 by 8 ft, 6 by 4 ft, 3 by 2 ft, and 9 by 6 inch. The smallest size is used for flag cars.

13 The code (hand-written manuscript) in Dzongkha signed by the then Speaker of National Assembly, Dasho Shingkhar Lam was found in the archives of the Ministry of Home Affairs.
14 See appendix for the code in original Dzongkha text and English translation.
Part II - The National Anthem

7 Introduction to the National Anthem

Sometime in 1953, the Late His Majesty Jigme Dorji Wangchuck issued an order to compose a national anthem. The lyrics, choreography and tune were then composed by taking the national anthems of India and England as references.\textsuperscript{15}

8 Music

Aku Tongmi was trained in Shillong, India and became the country's first bandmaster. Four months after his return from India, Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru visited the country. Aku Tongmi composed the music of the National Anthem for the event. This music is still played by the brassband of the Royal Bhutan Armed Forces although Aku Tongmi’s original notation has not been retained.\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{15} Dorji, alias Aku Tongmi who was the then a Magtsi in the Royal Bhutan Army composed the tune and choreography. The lyrics was composed by Gyaldon Thinley, the Guest Master of the State. National Anthems of the World (1985) published by the Blanford Press, UK has acknowledged their contributions.

\textsuperscript{16} The original notation was perhaps composed around 1958 during Nehru’s visit. It was slightly changed in 1962 by Mr. Bajan Singh, the Indian Army officer who served as bandmaster for the Bhutanese
9 Lyrics

The original 12-line lyrics of the national anthem composed by Dasho Gyaldon Thinley, and its translation are as follows\textsuperscript{17}.

\begin{verbatim}
ིབད་ི་ི་ི་ི་ི་ི་ི་ི་ི་ི་ི་ི་ི་ི་ི་ི་ི་ི་ི་ི་ི་ི་ི་ི་ི་ི་ི་ི་ི་ི་ི་ི་ི་ི་ི་ི་ི

17 Translated by authors.
The National Anthem

In the southern Kingdom where cypresses grow,
Protector of the Dharma of dual traditions,
The King of Druk, precious sovereign,
May his being remain unchanged, his lotus foot stable.
The wisdom of His heart increases,
Deeds of monastic and civil traditions flourish,
While the glorious power equals the skies,
May the people flourish and prosper.
In the Drukpa Kingdom of Dharma sovereign
The teachings of enlightenment flourish.
Suffering, famine and conflicts disappear
May the sun of peace and happiness shine forth!

When this was sung, the right hands were raised in a gesture of salute. However, this 12-line lyrics was found quite long, and especially difficult while arranging notations for the brassband. The lyrics were shortened to six lines around 1964 and submitted to the late king who approved it for adoption\(^\text{\footnote{It was shortened by Dasho Shingkhar Lam, the then Secretary to Late His Majesty, and Dasho Sangay Dorji, his Personal Assistant.}}\). A noticeable change was
the replacement of first word *lho* ཏོ with *druk* དྲུག. The lyrics of the present National Anthem, and its translation are as follows.

**The National Anthem**

In the Kingdom of Druk, where cypresses grow,
Refuge of the glorious monastic and civil traditions,
The King of Druk, precious sovereign.
His being is eternal, his reign prosperous,
The enlightenment teachings thrive and flourish,
May the people shine like the sun of peace and happiness!
10 National Song and National Anthem

Earlier the national anthem known as *gyelpoi tenzhu* ग्येल्पोि तेंजु has also been interchangeably called *gyel lu*, ग्येलः लुः the national song. However, a song composed around 1996 has now been officially accepted as the national song. Hence, the anthem continues to be called *gyelpoi tenzhu*.

11 Tune

The original tune of the anthem was based on the folk song *thri nyampa med pa pemai thri* ठ्री न्याञ्पा मेड पा पेमाई ठ्री 'The Unchanging Lotus Throne'. However, there are minor but significant variations in the same tune when sung.

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19 Both the lyrics and music of the national anthem are available on different websites. Although there are a few different versions in transliteration as well as translation of the lyrics, there is one uniform version of the music on all the websites. One particular music lasting for 34 seconds has been distorted by composer. This particular keyboard-played Bhutanese anthem is used as the standard one by most websites. The identity of the composer is not known.

20 Since it was based on this folk song, it has a choreography. However, not many Bhutanese are aware of it since the anthem is sung, and seldom danced. Today, it is only the artists of Tashi Nencha, a private music firm in Thimphu who know this choreography. Aku Tongmi, the founder of the firm taught them the choreography.
12 Appendix

12.1 Some Vexillological Terminologies

**Bicolour** A flag of two colours, usually in equal fields. Bicolours are generally horizontal (Ukraine), vertical (Malta) or diagonal (Bhutan).

**Charge** An emblem, object, device or design superimposed on the field(s) of a flag.

**Field** It is the background (predominant colour) of a flag.

**Fimbriation** It is a narrow line separating two other colours in a flag.

**Finial** The ornament on the end of a flagstaff or flagpole.

**Fly** It is a free end of a flag, farthest from the staff. The term is also used for the horizontal length of the flag.

**Ground** It is the background of a flag.

**Halyard** It is the rope used to hoist and lower a flag.

**Hoist** It is the part of the flag closest to the staff. The term is also used for the vertical width of a flag.

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21 [http://www.fotw.ca/flags/flagterm.html](http://www.fotw.ca/flags/flagterm.html)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Honour point</strong></th>
<th>The place on a flag where the colour or charge with the greatest or highest symbolism is placed.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Length</strong></td>
<td>The maximum length of a flag, measured straight from hoist to fly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Staff</strong></td>
<td>It is a pole a flag hangs on.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Truck</strong></td>
<td>It is the wooden or metal block at the top of a flagpole below the filial (staff ornament). It may include a pulley or holes for halyard.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Width</strong></td>
<td>It is the height of a flag along the hoist.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
12.2 The National Flag Rules
12.3 The National Flag Rules (Translation)22

The Legal Provisions of the National Flag of the Kingdom of Palden Drukpa as Endorsed in Resolution 28 of the 36th Session of the National Assembly held on June 8, 1972

The national flag is the symbol of the Kingdom's independence and sovereignty. It is also the main symbol of honour, and complete victory of the state in all directions. It will be hoisted where the heads of states visit, and during different state celebrations. The details of the system and procedures are as follows.

1. Description of the National Flag
   1. The yellow half holds the base from the top. It signifies civil tradition, and embodies His Majesty’s being who enhances the limits of his reign. Therefore, it signifies the basis of both monastic and civil traditions.
   2. The orange half extends from bottom and forms the fluttering end. It signifies monastic tradition of Buddha’s teachings. Moreover, it signifies that the traditions of Kagyud and Nyingma flourish in harmony.

22 Translated by the authors.
 fireEvent ི་མ་རྩ་

fireEvent ི་མ་རྩ་
3. The dragon equally spreads over the borderline. This signifies the name of the Kingdom of Druk, having monastic and civil traditions.

4. The colour of dragon is white. It signifies that although there are many peoples in the Kingdom whose conduct of body and speech are not similar, their inner thought and deeds are pure. They highly cherish patriotism, and therefore, the sacred bond between the sovereign and the people are untainted.

2. **Types of National Flag**

Whatever be the length of a large or small national flag, two third of it must be kept as the width. For example, dimension such as 9 by 6. The colours of the flag and symbols on it must be consistent with the clauses of codes of national flag. They should be proportionate to different sizes.

3. **Respect for the National Flag**

Wherever the national flag is hoisted, it must be accorded the same respect that is due to the Druk Gyalpo and the Bhutanese state.
"སྐད་ལོ་དཐོིན་འིས་དཀར་པོ་ནི་ཤུར་བརྱིས་བདུན་བུ་མ་དབང་རྒྱུས་ཀྱི་ངོ་མོར་རིང་ལྷ་བོར་
དོན་པ་ཤིང་ཅེས་ཀྱིསིས་""

"བོད་ལྷ་དགའ་བོད་དང་བོད་ཐོང་""

"སྐད་ལོ་སློིང་ན་ཤུར་བེའི་ཚུལ་བྱ་བོན་ཐོད་""

"སྐད་ལོ་བོད་དཀར་པོ་དུ་དགུ་བོད་བྱེད་""

"སྐད་ལོ་བོད་དཀར་པོ་དུ་དགུ་བོད་བྱེད་""

"སྐད་ལོ་བོད་དཀར་པོ་དུ་དགུ་བོད་བྱེད་""

"སྐད་ལོ་བོད་དཀར་པོ་དུ་དགུ་བོད་བྱེད་""

"སྐད་ལོ་བོད་དཀར་པོ་དུ་དགུ་བོད་བྱེད་""
a) It is not permissible to use the national flag as wrappers, covers or substitutes for other cloth materials.

b) It is not proper to hoist it lower than other flags.

c) No objects should be placed over the national flag.

d) The national flag shall never be hoisted upside down.

e) While carrying the national flag, it is not permissible to drag it on the ground or drench it with water.

f) While hoisting and lowering the national flag, due respect and attention must be paid consciously.
4. **General Code of Hoisting the National Flag**

a) The national flag should always be hoisted in the capital, His Majesty’s palace, office premises of the civil service and armed forces, from sunrise to sunset.

b) Small flags can be hoisted on vehicles. The national flag of different sizes can be hoisted during auspicious celebrations according to the significance of the functions. However, a large national flag alone can be hoisted in the capital and at places where His Majesty and senior heads\(^{23}\) of the Kingdom reside.

c) While due respects must be accorded when the national flag is hoisted or lowered, it must be handled appropriately if a military bugle is sounded.

d) The national flag with different sizes can be hoisted during sports day and other important events in schools, according it due respects.

\(^{23}\) Refers to ministers.
e) It will remain hoisted from the beginning until the conclusion of the National Day celebrations.

f) The national flag must be hoisted in any place during the National Day.

g) It will also be hoisted while commemorating civilian and military heroes who had rendered great services to the state.

h) The national flag shall be hoisted at half-mast during mourning at particular times dedicated by the state.

5. Admissibility of Hoisting the National Flag

a) Starting from the capital, every dzongkhag will hoist the national flag.

b) Where there are no dzongkhag\textsuperscript{24}, the national flag will be hoisted in front of the office of the main government officer.

\textsuperscript{24} Refers to dzongkhag headquarters.
སངས་རNG་མཐོང་པོའི་ཤེས་དང་ཐོབ་དཔེ་ནི་ལུས་པ་དུ་བཤད་བྱེད་

དེ་བཤེས་པར་ཐུབ་པའི་ཐོབ་དཔེ།

དེ་རོ་འཕེན་བུ་མི་དེ་ལེགས་ཤུད་དགེ་བཅོས་སོ། །

དཔལ་བར་བུ་ཐོབ་དཔེ།

དེ་ཕན་ཡིན་བུ་མི་དེ་ལེགས་ཤུད་དགེ་བཅོས་སོ། །

དཔལ་བར་བུ་ཐོབ་དཔེ།

དེ་ཕན་ཡིན་བུ་མི་དེ་ལེགས་ཤུད་དགེ་བཅོས་སོ། །
c) If officials above the rank of ministers do not reside near the capital, they can hoist the national flag in front of their residence.

d) In relation to the hoisting of the national flag by Bhutanese and foreign embassies, the ambassadors can hoist the flag according to their legal tradition25.

6. Custom of Hoisting the National Flag for Different Occasions

a) His Majesty the King, and all officials who have received ministerial scarves can hoist the national flag in front of their residences both within and outside the country.

b) The representatives of His Majesty the King, and ambassadors of the state who are either traveling abroad on state missions or has special state commands are entitled for the national flag.

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25 This is a literal translation although it means national policies and regulations.
33
7. Entitlements for Hoisting National Flag on Cars

a) No matter how many officers traveling in a car are entitled to flags or how many flags different departments have, the national flag of only the senior officer must be hoisted, not of junior officers.

b) If the officers entitled to flags are of equal rank, the national flag of the country of visiting dignitary must be hoisted.

c) If there are two officers - one of the host country and the other a junior visiting dignitary- travelling in a car, the national flag of the visiting dignitary shall be hoisted on the car.

d) Irrespective of the ranks of foreign and national leaders, the national flag of the host country shall be hoisted on the right side\(^\text{26}\).

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\(^{26}\) Right side of the car in which they are traveling together.
དོན་འབུག་ནོར་བེད་ལེགས་ནིང་བོད་བཤིས་བཏིང་དོན་བུ་བོད་
བཤིས་གཞི་བདེ་གཞི་བཐུན་དོན་བུ་བོད་བཤིས་བཏིང་དོན་བུ་བོད

དོན་ས་དཔོན་དཔོན་ཆེད་ཕན་ས་པོ་དབེན་དྲུ་

དོན་ས་དཔོན་དཔོན་ཆེད་ཕན་ས་པོ་དབེན་

དོན་ས་དཔོན་དཔོན་ཆེད་ཕན་ས་པོ་དབེན་

དོན་ས་དཔོན་དཔོན་ཆེད་ཕན་ས་པོ་དབེན་

35
e) Except for the permission to hoist the national flag in front of dzongdag and thrimpon offices of a dzongkhag, they are not allowed to hoist on their cars.

f) His Majesty the King, Her Majesty the Queen, parents of the King, Je Khenpo, four lopen, ministers and deputy ministers are entitled to the national flag.

g) The Crown Prince or the eldest prince is not entitled to flag car.

h) Among the royal family, those who undertake responsibilities of the state above ministerial ranks are entitled to flag cars.

i) While His Majesty resides in the capital, no one is entitled to flag cars from the entrance to the interiors of the capital, excepting the Je Khenpo, the Queen, and parents of the King.
"66  ཆ་ཕྲ་ཕྲག་འཕེལ་བོ་ཞིག་བཅོས་གྱིས་

"67  ཆ་ཕྲ་ཕྲག་འཕེལ་བོ་ནས་བཤད་པ་མི་བསྲིས་ལོ་བཟོད་པའི་ཞོ་ནག་ཆེན་བའི་ཉེན་

"68  གླེང་གསུམ་ཉིད་ཤེས་པ་ཕྲན་ཤིང་། དེ་བོད་ཀྱིས་བསྲིན་བོད་ཤིང་། མི་གནང་ཞིབ་

"69  ཆ་ཕྲ་ཕྲག་འཕེལ་བོ་སོགས་ལྷ་མོ་ལྟར་གླེང་གསུམ་ཉིད་ཤེས་པ་སོགས་ལྷ་མོ་

"70  ཆ་ཕྲ་ཕྲག་འཕེལ་བོ་སོགས་ལྷ་མོ་ལྟར་གླེང་གསུམ་ཉིད་ཤེས་པ་སོགས་ལྷ་མོ་

"71  ཆ་ཕྲ་ཕྲག་འཕེལ་བོ་སོགས་ལྷ་མོ་ལྟར་

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8. Different Legal Provisions of Handling the National Flag

a) The national flag must be carefully attended before hoisting it. Torn or defective flags cannot be hoisted.

b) Except for ministers and senior officials of the civil and armed forces, and persons of higher ranks, the national flag cannot be used to drape the remains of others.

c) While taking the national flag or storing it, it must be kept neat, according due respects.

d) Except for burning or storing away neatly, nothing should be done to defective national flag.

e) The signs of the national flag cannot be used as business logo.
f) Last, designs similar to the national flag cannot be imprinted on any other objects\textsuperscript{27}.

\textsuperscript{27} The National Flag Rules was signed by Dasho Shingkhar Lam, the then Speaker of the National Assembly.