

Landlocked Countries: Bhutan

by Geir Sør-Reime

The Himalayan Kingdom of Bhutan has an area of 14,824 square miles and a population of around 730,000, most of these are Buddhists.

Bhutan was forced to sign a treaty with the British in 1774 after Bhutan had invaded Koch Bihar, an Indian princely state with a treaty with the British. Conflicts between Bhutan and the British continued however, and only ended after another war between them 1864-65, when a new treaty was signed.



2015 Map of Bhutan

After a civil war 1882-85, the Wangchuk dynasty succeeded in uniting the kingdom, and Ugyen Wangchuk was recognized as the hereditary king in 1907. This was recognized also by the British and with a new treaty the British treated Bhutan as an Indian princely state. Upon India's independence in 1947, Bhutan recognized the independence of India and in 1949, a new treaty was signed between India and Bhutan.



2010 Ugyen—first Dragon King 1907-26

In 1971, Bhutan became a member of the United Nations and has gradually extended its relations with foreign countries.

A major issue for Bhutan for many years was the growing number of people the government classed as non-Bhutanese, especially the Lhotshampa or Lhotshampa, people of Nepalese descent which in 1950 counted around one third of the total population. The Bhutanese government feared that they eventually would become a majority, and as in Sikkim would outnumber the Buddhist population and seek union with India. In 1990, between 80,000 and 100,000 Lhotshampas were forcibly evicted from Bhutan and ended up in refugee camps in Nepal, which refused to give them permanent residence. These refugees have gradually been resettled in other countries around the world.



1971 UN membership (Sc. 130-33)

Since 1907, there have been five kings, entitled Druk Gyalpo—Dragon King, of Bhutan, Ugyen 1907-26, Jigme 1926-52, Jigme Dorji 1952-72, Jigme Singye



2010 Jigme—1926-52



2010 Jigme Dorji—1952-72



2010 Jigme Singye—1972-2006



2010 Jigme Khesar Namgyel—from 2006 1972-2006, and Jigme Khesar Namgyel from December 2006. A 2010 souvenir sheet depicted them all, and another 2010 souvenir sheet depicted their spouses, the Queens.

Below, 2010 queens—the spouses of the Dragon Kings



1966 King Jigme—40th accession anniversary of Jigme (Sc. 83G)

In 1966, circular metal foil stamps celebrating the 40th accession anniversary of Jigme showed his portrait. He died in 1952.



1973 King Jigme Dorji—memorial issue (Sc. 153)

In 1973, a memorial series was issued for King Jigme Dorji who died in 1972.

The coronation of King Jigme Singye was celebrated on five 1974 stamps and two souvenir sheets (page 1). In 1975, a set of



1974 coronation—coronation of Jigme Singye (Sc. 153C-D)



1975 King Jigme Singye
20 years—(Sc. 198)



1992 King Jigme Singye 20th accession—20th accession anniversary (Sc. 1063)

were issued for the 20th birthday of King Jigme Singye, and in 1992 his 20th accession anniversary was celebrated on four stamps.

Two stamps and a souvenir sheet from 1997 celebrated the friendly relations between India and Bhutan, and one stamp showed King Jigme Dorji with Indian premier Pandit Nehru, whereas the other stamps showed King Jigme Singhye with Indian premier Rajiv Gandhi. The souvenir sheet showed King Jigme Singye with Indian President Vankataraman.



1997 friendship with India: King Jigme Dorji with Indian premier Pandit Nehru, King Jigme Singhye with Indian premier Rajiv Gandhi, and King Jigme Singye with Indian President Vankataraman (Sc. 1180-82)



In 1999, the 25th accession anniversary of King Jigme Singye was celebrated with a souvenir sheet with four stamps with his portrait and a souvenir sheet with one stamp with his portrait. He was also honored on two 2011 souvenir sheets. He abdicated in favor of his son Jigme Khesar Namgyel in 2006.



Top. 1999 King Jigme Singye accession 25 years—the 25th accession anniversary (Sc. 1200)

In 2008, the centenary of the Bhutanese monarchy was commemorated with a souvenir sheet and a stamp containing a CD-disc showing the portraits of the five kings.

The official coronation of King Jigme Khesar Namgyel was also the subject for a stamp with a CD-disc issued in 2009.

2008 centenary of monarchy—stamp sheet and CD-stamp with portraits of all five Dragon Kings (Sc. 1429-30)



2009 coronation—of King Jigme Khesar Namgyel (CD-stamp)

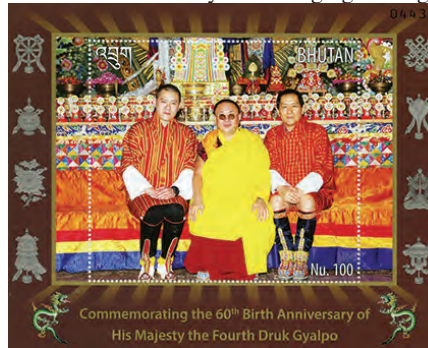
The second anniversary of the coronation was the theme of three souvenir sheets issued 2010 (not shown).

In 2011 the marriage of King Jigme Khesar Namgyel to Jetsun Pema was celebrated with six 2011 souvenir sheets. Six souvenir sheets were issued for the first anniversary of the marriage.



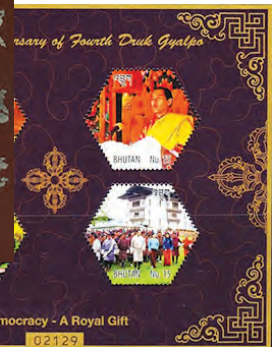
2011 royal wedding King Jigme Khesar Namgyel and Jetsun Pema

The 60th birthday of ex-King Jigme Singye was celebrated 2015 on six



2015 ex-King Jigme Singye 60 years—60th birthday

sets of hexagonal stamps, a set of circular stamps and three souvenir sheets.



In 2015 there was also a stamp set for King Jigme Khesar Namgyel and Queen Jetsun Pema's visits to Merak and Sakteng, two highland villages inhabited by semi-nomad yak herders.



The birth of prince Jigme Namgyel was celebrated on five 2016 stamps. The 30th anniversary of diplomatic

relations between Bhutan and Japan was also commemorated on 2016 stamps, one of which showed the Bhutanese royal couple together with the Japanese empress; another stamp showed the royal couple



2016 birth of Prince Jigme Namgyel

together with Japanese students.

Bhutan had no postal service of its own until the 1950s and relied on the few Indian post-offices in the country. An internal mail service was established, and a set of four



2016 30 years diplomatic relations with Japan



1954 postal fiscal (Sc. AR1)

fiscal stamps showing Dorje (thunderbolt) was authorized for postage on internal mail in 1954.



1906 British India Post card from Bhutan to a Belgium with Great Britain postage

In 1962, Bhutan signed a treaty with India which made Bhutan stamps valid internationally, and the first issue of proper stamps was made in April 1962 and valid internationally from October 10, 1962.



1962—first issue of stamps valid for international mail (Sc. 1-7)

This initial issue consisted of seven stamps with local motifs, including an archer, a postal runner, a yak, and a map of the country with the portrait of the first Dragon King.

Definitive stamps featuring Bhutanese dancers were issued in 1964.



1964 dancers (Sc. 15, 17, 21)

In 1966-72, stamps showing Buddhist monasteries were issued. The numerous monasteries have been featured on further stamp issues in 1981, 1984 (issued with surcharges 2001), 2000, 2006, and 2015 (two sets). (See next column.)



1966 monasteries (Dzongs) (Sc. 78)



1968 monastery (Sc. 77)



1984 monasteries (Sc. 495-500)

1968 monastery (Sc. 80)

In 2017, a set of four stamps depicted traditional Tashigomang, portable multi-deity temples. Another set of nine showed pilgrimage sites.



2006 monastery and archer (Sc. 1421-22)



2017 Tashigomang—portable temples (Sc. 1567)



2017 Pilgrimage Sites (Sc. 1571)

In 1966, a set of 15 triangular stamps showed images of the Yeti, the Abominable Snowman.



1966 Yeti—the Abominable Snowman (Sc. 84)

During the mid-1960s and mid-1970s, Bhutan became known for its unconventional stamps, stretching the limits for materials that stamps could be made of, like metal foil stamps, lenticular stamps, stamps printed on steel foil, silk, series of stamps plastic heat molded into three dimensions, stamps showing famous paintings with embossed canvas structure, and a series of stamps that in fact were gramophone records that could be played on a record player. Also later, occasionally unconventional stamps were issued: 1994 stamps printed on credit card sizes 'sheets', and in 2008, stamps containing compact discs in the sealed envelope that is the stamp proper.

Here are some such issues worth showing:



1969 steel production printed on steel foil and illustrating the history of steel making (Sc. 103)



1969 set printed on silk cloth and showing Buddhist prayer banners (Sc. 105)



1973 phonographic record stamps (Sc. 152-152F)



1994 credit card size (front and back) (Sc. 1099-1200)



2021 set printed on silk and showing images of Tara, the female goddess or Buddha.

Here are some other issues printed on stamp paper that also are worth showing:



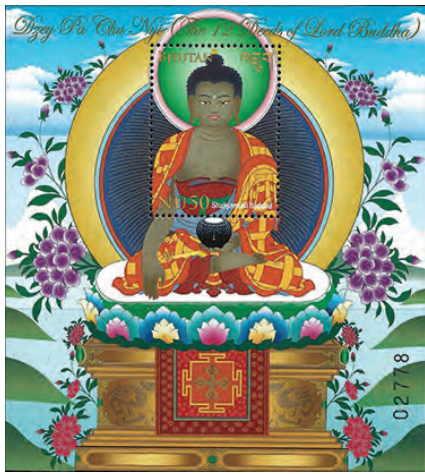
1983 set showing Buddhist symbols (Sc. 391-96)



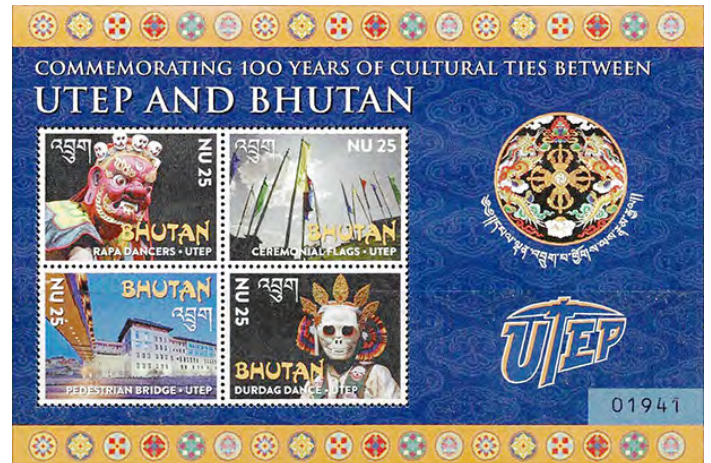
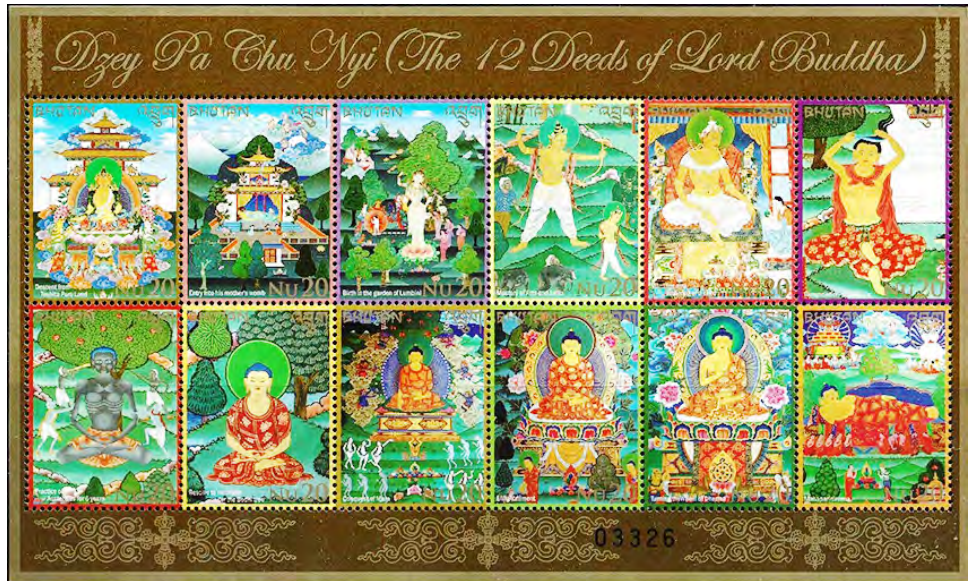
1969 set for Bhutan's membership of the Universal Postal Union (Sc. 102)



1990 stamp showing the General Post Office in Thimphu (Sc. 893A)



1995 set featuring traditional crafts (set and ss)–(Sc. 1115-20, 1121)



2014 set for the centenary of the cultural co-operation between the University of Texas and Bhutan, illustrating dancers and symbols of the co-operation



1995 set featuring traditional crafts (set and ss) (Sc. 1115-20, 1121)

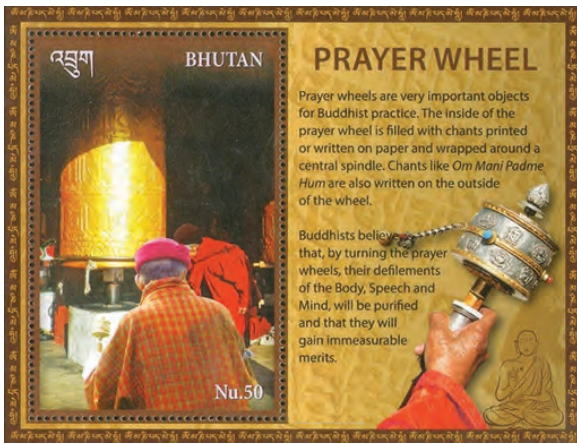


2016 set depicting prayer flags and another showing scenes of the Dragon Festival



2015 set showing gastronomy of Bhutan

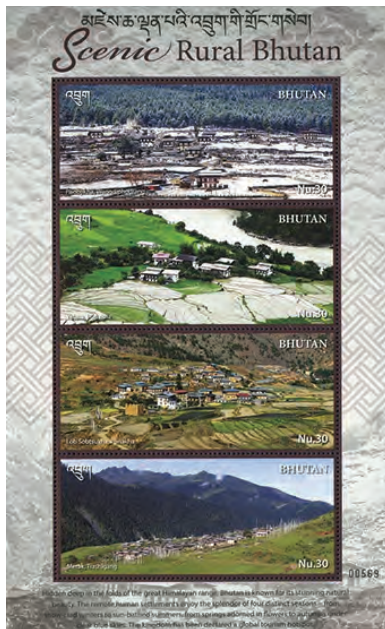
More illustrations page 6



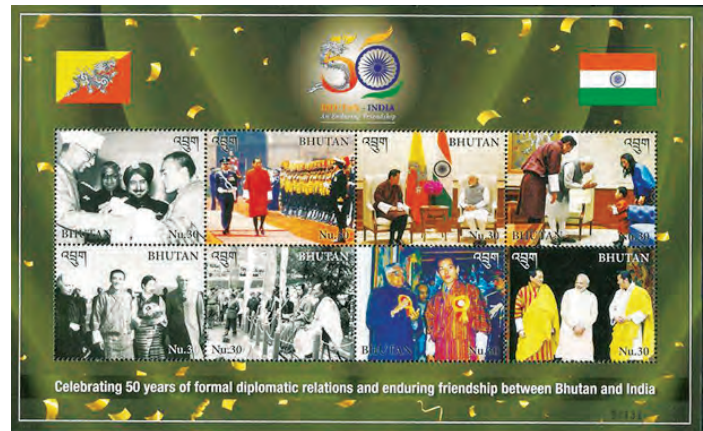
2017 souvenir sheet showing traditional prayer wheel



2017 set showing mountain peaks



2017 set showing panoramic views of rural villages



2018 set celebrating the 50th anniversary of formal diplomatic relations between India and Bhutan and depicting meetings between the leaders of both countries.