

Editorial

I write with a mixture of sorrow, gratitude, and quiet resolve. The Bhutan Journal was founded as an academic research journal—a forum for rigorous scholarship, evidence-based analysis, and sustained inquiry into the social, political, and cultural transformations shaping Bhutan. From our first conversations in 2018, a small team came together around a single conviction: Bhutan needed a dedicated space for research that could inform policy, enrich public debate, and strengthen the country's intellectual infrastructure and connect the diaspora with the land.

Our mission was and remains to publish high-quality, methodologically sound research that illuminates complex issues—governance, development, environment, education, health, and the lived experiences of communities across Bhutan and Bhutanese diaspora. Our vision was to become a trusted repository of knowledge that bridges academic rigour and public relevance; to produce articles, policy briefs, and research notes that policymakers, civil society, and scholars could rely on. From the outset, we committed to transparent methods, careful review, and ethical standards that protect research participants and the integrity of evidence. The Bhutan Journal was conceived as a public good: a platform sustained by contributors, institutional partners, and readers who value depth over immediacy and analysis over headlines.

Those early months were spent on long evenings of planning, modest resources, and an unwavering belief that careful scholarship could make a difference. We focused on comparative analyses and reflective essays that prioritise context, nuance, and reproducibility. We have resisted the pressure to mimic the speed and tone of daily news; our purpose is to slow down, to interrogate assumptions, and to produce work that endures beyond the news cycle.

Last year brought a loss that has shaken us to the core. Our founder, Dr Govinda Rizal, died in a road accident. He was more than the person who launched the Journal. He was its intellectual anchor. A scholar and teacher of rare generosity, Dr Rizal combined academic rigour with a deep commitment to public scholarship. He insisted that research should be accessible without sacrificing complexity, that evidence should inform policy without becoming technocratic, and that scholars have a responsibility to engage respectfully with the communities they study. His editorial guidance—concise, exacting, and humane—shaped our standards and our culture.

The shock of his passing is still raw. For many of us, the accident was not only a personal tragedy but a test of institutional resilience. In the days that followed, colleagues, contributors, and institutional partners reached out with condolences and offers of support, reminding us of the scholarly community Dr Rizal had helped build. That community now bears the responsibility of carrying his work forward. We will honour his memory by continuing the research agenda he championed - upholding methodological rigour, protecting research ethics, and mentoring the next generation of Bhutanese scholars. His absence will be felt in every editorial decision and on every page, but his principles will remain the foundation of our work.

Change has followed loss. After careful reflection, I have decided to step away from my role on the editorial team to take a planned break for academic and professional development. This decision is deliberate - I intend to pursue further study and training that will deepen my research skills and broaden my capacity to contribute to scholarship and public policy. My departure is not an abdication but a transition. Over recent months, I have worked closely with colleagues to ensure a thorough handover of editorial responsibilities, to safeguard ongoing review processes, and to protect the continuity of special issues and research projects. I am proud of what we have built together—an editorial culture that values accuracy, context, and humane storytelling—and I leave knowing that the Journal is in capable hands and that our research standards will be preserved. Stepping away now allows me to recharge, to learn, and to return to public life with renewed energy. It also creates space for new leadership to guide The Bhutan Journal through its next phase. I remain committed to supporting the Journal in an advisory capacity where appropriate.

I am pleased that Ram Karki will take on the role of new editorial lead. Ram has been a seasoned advocate for human rights and democracy for many years. Many

in our readership will recognise him from his involvement with The Bhutan Watch - a civic initiative that monitors public policy, promotes transparency, and translates technical findings into accessible formats for citizens and decision-makers. The Bhutan Watch has been fostered under his leadership. Ram's experience with The Bhutan Watch has given him a practical understanding of how rigorous evidence can shape public life. He has overseen research projects that combine qualitative fieldwork with quantitative analysis.

His leadership style is consultative and inclusive; he values diverse methodological approaches and seeks to create editorial spaces where debate is informed, respectful, and oriented toward improving policy and practice. Ram's appointment is a continuation of the Journal's founding principles rather than a departure. He brings fresh energy and a network of collaborators that will help expand our research capacity, deepen interdisciplinary inquiry, and strengthen our engagement with both academic and policy audiences.

Let me be unequivocal: the future mission of The Bhutan Journal will not change. We will continue to publish research, policy-relevant analyses, and reflective essays that elevate underrepresented perspectives and inform public deliberation. Under Ram's stewardship, we will expand our capacity for interdisciplinary work, invest in training for early-career researchers, and deepen our engagement with policy audiences through evidence briefs and public seminars. We will also adapt to changing needs by exploring new formats for scholarly communication—data repositories, reproducible research supplements, and accessible summaries for non-specialist readers—while preserving our commitment to rigorous review and ethical research practices.

Our commitment to scholarly integrity will remain absolute. We will adhere to transparent methods, protect research participants, and correct the record when errors occur. We will resist the temptation to conflate advocacy with scholarship; our role is to produce evidence that informs debate, not to substitute for democratic deliberation. The Journal's strength has always been its community of researchers, practitioners, and readers who believe that careful inquiry is essential to good policy. The loss of Dr Rizal is a wound that will take time to heal, but his legacy endures in the standards he set and the people he inspired.

As I step away to pursue further study and professional growth, I do so with confidence in the Journal's future. Ram Karki brings experience, integrity, and a deep commitment to public scholarship. The editorial team—past, present, and

incoming—shares a common purpose: to produce research that matters, to hold ideas to the light of evidence, and to contribute constructively to Bhutan’s public life. Thank you to our contributors, institutional partners, and readers for standing with us through grief and change. Your engagement sustains this work. The Bhutan Journal remains in capable hands, and its mission remains unchanged.

Thank you to our readers, contributors, and supporters for standing with us through grief and change. Your engagement sustains this work. We will continue to earn your trust.

I P Adhikari
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