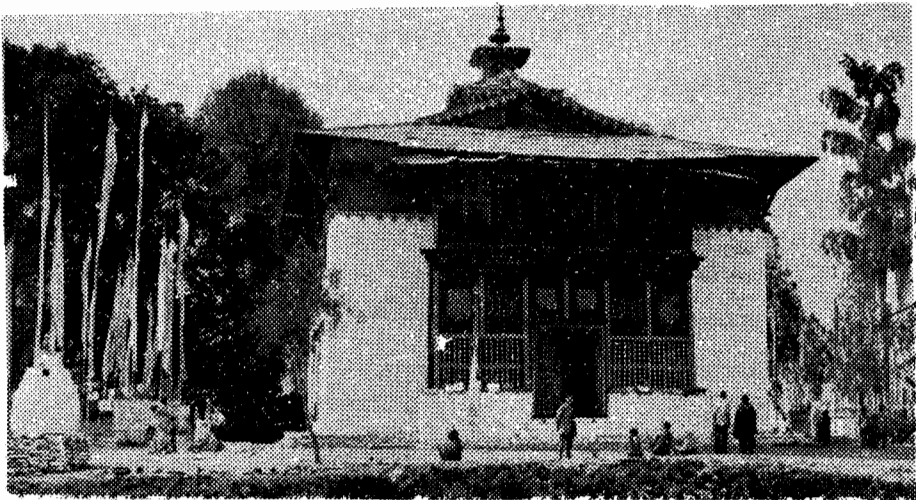


ORIGIN OF THE BUMCHU OF DAKKAR TASHIDING

• *Rigzin Ngodub Dokhampa*

According to Sikkimese cultural and religious history as available in old anecdotal accounts, Buddhism was introduced in Sikkim around eighth century A.D. The land was blessed by Maha Guru Padmasambhava (Guru Padma Jungne) who consecrated himself many of our established holy shrines. Among these the most sacred is Dakkar Tashiding.



Main chapel of the Tashiding shrine

The present article seeks to provide a brief historical and legendary account of 'Bumchu' festival and its holy significance to the believer.

Before we discuss about Bumchu it is necessary to give a short background of this holy land. According to the Neyig (Guide Book to the Holy Places) Beyul Demojong* (Hidden Valley of Rice) had five great provinces and six hidden spots which protected all living beings. The Omniscient Maha Guru Padamsambhava concealed innumerable scriptures (Chos), Wealth (Nor) and sacred objects (Wangten) in those holy places and performed many inexpressible benedictory prayers for the benefit of sentient beings thereby entrust-

* According to Lhatsun Jigme Pawo (second Lhatsun), Beyul means hidden land and Demojong means vally of all kinds of fruits.

ing all the treasures to the protectors and tutelary deities for their preservation. He blessed and consecrated this land as sacred as Urgyen Zangdogpalri and Kanchopalgiriwo, the realms of unlimited happiness and abode and assemblage of female divinities (Mamo Khandos) like clouds in space.

Likewise the innumerable Buddhas and Bhodisattavas of ten directions also blessed the land. It is believed that one who visits these sacred lands, the doors of hell would be closed for him i.e. they become immortals. Tashiding which is one of the most sacred places of Sikkim has four wonderful holy caves in four different directions. They are Sharchog Bephug in the east, Khandozangphu in the south, Dechenphug in the west and Lhari Nyingphug in the north. The centre of the holy place is known as Dakkar Tashiding.

During the first dissemination of Buddhism in Tibet in the 8th century A.D the illustrious Acharya Padmasambhava and twenty five disciples (Je-bang nyer-nga) had blessed the land (Beyul Demojong). Thereafter they tamed all malevolent spirits and evil forces which infested this country. They also erected a number of places of worship, such as monasteries and stupas and the land was thus transformed into a great sacred and holy place.

In course of this process of propagation of Buddhism into Sikkim two great Siddhas (Tertons-revealers of Tantra) Rinzin Godemchen (1340-1396) and Kathog U, o'd Yeshe Bumpa came to Sikkim and established monasteries and meditation centres at sacred places of 'Pawo Hungri' and Tashiding. The reincarnation of Rigzin Godemchen, Terton Ngari Ringin Chenpo Lagdendorjee discovered the sublime tantra called Khadoi Khalangma from the cave of Lhari Nyingpo. The newly discovered tantra contains the sadhanas of Amitayus and many important teachings.

The seventeenth century was the turning point in the history of Sikkim as the first Chogyal Phuntshog Namgyal was enthroned at Yuksum by three great Lamas of Tibet namely Lhatsun Namkha Jigme (the embodiment of compassion was known to be the incarnation of Indian Maha Pandita Vimalamitra and Tibetan omniscient Kunkhen Longchenpa Dema Hozer), Ngadag Sempachenpo Phuntshog Rigzin and Kathog Rigzin Chenpo. Under the Patronage of king Phuntshog Namgyal, monasteries, hermitages for meditation

and stupas were built. Chogyal Phuntshog Namgyal proclaimed Buddhism as the state religion.

Through the revelation of Zogchen system of meditation and Sadhana, Sikkim became the main centre of Zogchen teaching on the earth. Its followers came to be called, Denzong Zogchenpa.

The two great scholars Ngadag Sempachenpo and Ngadag Rinchen Gon established the holy shrine at Dakkar Tashiding and consecrated it to be the principal seat of the followers of Nyingma sect in Sikkim.

The fact as to how the celebration of 'Holy Water Vase' festival originated is briefly narrated hereunder. During the reign of the religious king Trisong Deutsen in Tibet, Guru Padmasambhava, while bestowing the unparalleled tantric system of tutelary deity Mahakarunika Avalokitesvara Sadhana and initiation on emancipation from the cycle of mundane existence to king Trisong Deutsen, prince Murub Tsenpo, Yeshe Tsogyal and Verotsana, consecrated the same Holy Vase which is preserved in the Tashiding monastery till today.

According to the works of Zhigpo Lingpa, the Holy Vase is made of various kinds of sacred soil, water and five kinds of precious jewels (Rinchen Na-nga) collected from the holy places of India, Odiyana and Zahor by Guru Padmasambhava. It is said that the Vase is made by Damchen Gar-ngag, wrathful Dharmapala and consecrated by Guru Padmasambhava by conducting Sadhana of Yidam Chuchig Zhal (tutelary deity of eleven heads). When he performed the sadhana, the entire retinue of the deity and deity himself appeared in the sky and inseparably merged into the Holy Water contained in the Vase. Thereupon the holy water overflowed and spread in all directions in the form of rays. That very moment, as a sign of good omen, there was earthquake, the four guardian deities (Gyalchen Dezhi/Cutur-Maharajika) of Dharma and the gods of thirtythree heavens (Sumchu Tsasumgyi Lhanam) showered flowers from the sky. This event was witnessed by the people assembled there. All the people were overjoyed at this spectacular event and Holy Water was distributed to the devotees from the Vase. Yet it was found that the holy water of the Vase never decreased. Inspired by this, the sinners became virtuous, the pious people

realised the lofty divine qualities and all were spiritually benefited. Finally, Guru Padmasambhava concealed the 'Holy Water Vase' into the sublime hidden treasure and entrusted it to the protective deities.

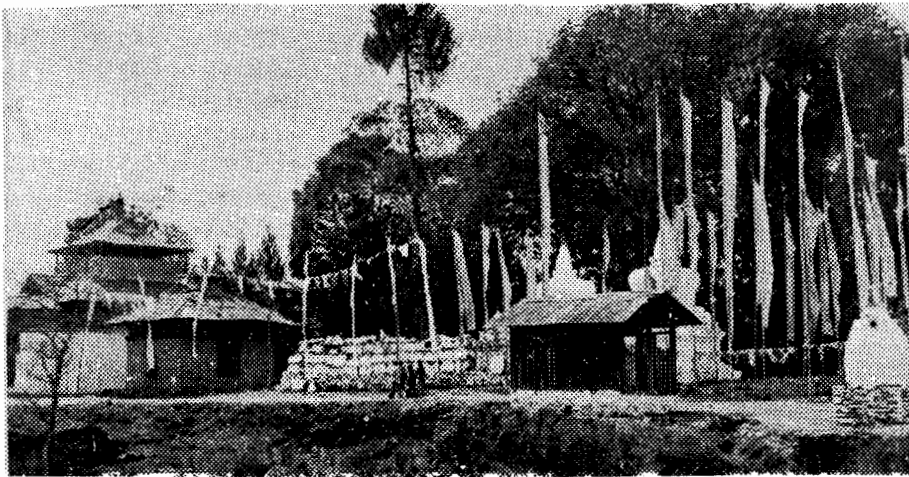
In the later period, the great Tertön (revealer of hidden treasures), Chokyi Gyalpo Garwang Rigzin Zhigpolingpa, the reincarnation of prince Murub Tsenpo of Tibet, unearthed the Vase of Holy Water for the sake of sentient beings. After the discovery of the Vase, Tertön Zhigpolingpa maintained it as his Thugdam Ten and in the later part of his life, he offered it to Tertön Tagshamchen with special instruction. Tertön Tagshamchen then handed over the holy Vase to Ngadag Sempachenpo Phuntshog Rigzin to be kept and installed at Dakkar Tashiding, the holiest and most blessed hidden land of Guru Padmasambhava. So, Tertön Ngadag Sempachenpo brought the Vase to Tashiding and installed it in the Tshuglagkhang. He conducted special recitation of 1,300 million syllables 'OM MANI PADME HUM', through Thugjechenpo Khorwalegrol Sadhna under the royal patronage of the first Chogyal Phuntshog Namgyal. At that time many unprecedented and auspicious signs had appeared in the country.

Bumchu celebration is one of the most important and holiest events in Sikkim and thousands of devotees from all over the state and its neighbouring countries come on pilgrimage and participate in the holy occasion. The Vase, containing holy water, is kept in a miniature mansion (cho-sham) under lock and seal of the Chogyal of Sikkim. Every year special recitation is conducted and the seal is checked by the high officials and Lamas before the Vase is taken out of the mansion. The Vase is opened on the night of the 14th day of the first month of the Tibetan Almanac. From the Vase three cups of the water is first taken out. The first cup is meant for the royal family, the second cup for the Lamas and the third is distributed among the devotees on the full moon day. Fresh water is brought from Rathong Chukha, which is also considered as a blessed river, as replacement.

In some years the Holy Water in the Vase increases by 21 cups and other times it decreases. In some cases the water of the Vase remains at the same level but other time it is found dusty. These are believed to be the predictions of auspicious and inauspicious

occurrences in the country. When the water level increases, it is a sign of prosperity and when it decreases it is an indication of bad year of drought and diseases. The dusty water indicates conflicts and unrest.

In brief, the seed of enlightenment is obtained by taking a drop of this Bumchu water thereby all the distress, evil spirits and untoward happenings are removed. And prosperity and fulfilments are rewarded in this life and one attains Buddhahood or be born in the Riwo Potala or Zangdopalri in the next life.



View of the stupas adjacent to the shrine

SOURCE MATERIAL :

1. Zhig-po gling-pa'i gsung-'bum (collected works of Zhig-po glingpa)
2. Mnga'-bdag sems-pa chen-po phun-tshogs rig-'hzin gyi rnam-thar (Biography of Ngd-dag-Sem-pa chen-po)
3. "Bras-ljongs gnas-yig (Guide Book of Holy Places of Sikkim by Lha-tsun) jigs-med dpa'wo.
4. Bum- chu 'i' byung-ba brjod-pa (The origin of Bumchu shugs-'byung sprul-ming' chi-med tshul-khrims 'gyur-med tshe ring rdo-rje).