

Bkra-Shi-IDings (TASHIDING)*

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Bkra-Shi IDings (Tashiding), a heart shaped hill, situated in the midst of sloping mountains dominated by the Majestic Gangs-Chhen mZod-INga, the great snowy mountain of five treasures, in West Sikkim, is considered one of the holiest places in Sikkim. It is a small hill surrounded by two rivers called Rothok Chu and Ringnak Chu at its base, and is beautifully located in front of the Pemayangtse hill. Looking at the hill one cannot escape an impression that the hill must have majestically arisen on a specific divine command. According to Buddhist mythology, it is the very spot where Maha Guru Padmasambhava, along with his 25 disciples, blessed this land of Sikkim for future discovery by human inhabitants and is also believed as the centre of the sacred land of Sikkim. We find many references of this in ancient scriptures describing this place as 'gNeys-Ki-ITewa (Neyki Tewa) which means the centre of the place.

In the early 17th century, when Sikkim was formally discovered or opened for human habitation by three Lamas in accordance with Maha Guru Padmasambhava's blessing and prophecy, mNagh-bDak Sems-pa Chhenpo, one of the three Lamas, moved to bkra-Shi IDings and began the propagation of his doctrine of Buddhist Dharma called 'mNgah-bDagpai-Lugs' with the founding of a small Gompa (monastery), which later on served as the nucleus of the present complex.

On this important place of the glorious past, we now find three important places for worship. They are (i) the famous Tashiding monastery, which is one of the six principal monasteries in Sikkim, (ii) Chorten Thongwa Rangdrol, the oldest, holiest and one of the biggest chortens (Stupa) in Sikkim and (iii) 'Bhum Chhu', the supernatural sacred Pot with Holy Water on Golden Alter in the main monastery building.

Among the buildings, the original or the main monastery building is called Chogyal Lhakang. Chogyal Lhakang was built during reign of the third king of Sikkim, Chogyal Chakdor Namgyal, in the form of extension and renovation of the original monastery built by the founder mNgah bdag Sempa Chenpo. It has now become very old and is in dilapidated condition. However, a scheme is under way for renovation or reconstruction of this building by the Government.

This Monastery, with about 100 Lamas is autonomous in all respects and meets its expenses out of the monastery's own revenue and public contributions, under the general control and supervision of the Department of Ecclesiastical Affairs of Sikkim Government. It also receives substantial aid from the Government from time to time. The main function of the year in this monastery is the 'Bhumchhu' ceremony which is celebrated for all practical purposes, as a 'Mela', on the 15th day of the first Tibetan month every year.

Bumchu the super-natural sacred pot with holy water is officially sealed for safety by the Government and kept on a Golden Alter in the main hall of monastery (Chogyal Lhakang). This super-natural pot is believed to have originally flown to this place from an unknown

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direction and the holy water in it is more than 100 years old. This sacred object of worship is opened only once in a year on the occasion mentioned above for public audience and worship. While opening, a little quantity of holy water is taken out, duly refilling the same quantity with fresh water from Rothok river, on this occasion for, distribution to devotees every year. This occasion therefore is considered a very important one, and devotees even from far distance like Bhutan, Nepal, Ladhak etc. comes to Tashiding every year for this purpose. The 'Bhumchu Mela' is observed for 3 days from the 13th to 15th morning of the first Tibetan month which usually corresponds to March. During the period of these 3 days, devotees go round the monastery building, and chortens (Stupas), especially Chorten Thongwa Rangdrol, clock-wise, chanting prayers.

Among Chortens, Chorten Thongwa Rangdrol is the most important one, and is located in the centre of all other Chortens. It was originally built by Gyalwa Lhatsun Chhenpo, the founder of Sikkim, in the 17th Century and it is therefore, as old as the original monastery at Bkra-Shi-Ldings. In the recent years it was thoroughly repaired and renovated by the Government and H.H. Dingo Khentse Rinpoche of Bhutan performed the reblessing ceremony on its completion in 1975. The importance of this Chorten is described by its name. It is called Thongwa Rangdrol which means : the one which has power to get every one who sees it automatically freed from ignorance.

For tourists we may mention that this scenic beauty spot with its welcoming prayer flags in countless number can be clearly viewed from Kewzing, near Rabangla Tea Estate 40 Km. from Singtam. But, the thought of trekking upto bkra-Shil Dings (TASHIDING) would interest many tourists.