

The Accounts of Choje Drak and Babron Tharpaling, Bumthang

*Translated by Thinley Jamtsho**

In the 8th century, Guru Rinpoche visited all mountains, cliffs and lakes of Tibet, Bhutan and other places, both physically and miraculously, without even leaving a place as small as hoof of a horse, and concealed and blessed innumerable treasures of dharma and wealth.

Choje Drak (cho rje drag) is one such land blessed Land. It is one of the cliffs of four directions. On a cliff similar to a stacked of Buddhist scriptures is a throne (bzhugs khri) on which Guru Rinpoche sat physically. There a self-emanated conch (gdung dkar) and an abode of a Nyingma deity (zhing skyong gi dbang mo rdo rje gyu sgron mo)¹ can be seen clearly.

Atop a mirror-like cliff, a cubit long (khru gang) footprint of Guru Rinpoche left when flying towards the land of demon (srin yul). There is also a pugmarks left by a tiger on a Vajra Throne (rdo rje bzhugs khri) when Guru Rinpoche arrived from Paro Taktshang (stag tshang) in the form of Guru Dorje Drolo (rdo rje gro lod).

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¹ One of the twelve Tenmas. 1) Dorje Kundrakma; 2) Dorje Ya ma chong; 3) Dorje Kunzang; 4) Dorje Geg kyi tso; The four which are female yakrhini: 5) Dorje Chan chig ma; 6)Karak Khyung tsun dorje pal gyi yum"; 7) Dorje Lumo"; 8) Mari rabjams dorje dragmo gyal; and the four which are menmos: 9) Kong tsun demo doje bod khams chong"; 10)Tsan laloro dorje manchig ma; 11) Man tsun dorje yamo sil; 12) Dorje Yudronma.

Onrey Darma Singye (dbon ras dar ma seng ge) alias Lorey Dragpa Wangchuk (lo ras grags pa dbang phyug), who was the chief disciple of Tsangpa Jaray Yeshe Dorji (gtsang pa rgyas ras ye she rdo rje), the founder of Palden Drukpa, came to Bumthang in the 12th Century and (resided) at the sacred site of Choje Drak blessed by Guru Rinpoche with a heap of relics in [forms of] cliffs and mountains. Tsangpa Jarey and a group of twenty thousand accomplished meditators meditated in Choje Drak, thus making the site as meditation place of the Drukpa Kagyud School. Thus it was named Choje Drak.

The monastery (gdonpa) of Tharpaling is similar to Choje Drak Goenpa. In the 14th century, Longchen Rabjam (Klong chen rab 'byams) (1308-1364/1369) came to Bhutan, and established Tharpaling, [Bumthang], as the centre for spreading the teachings of Radiant Vajra Heart ('od gsal rdo rje snying po) [of the Great Perfection (rdzogs chen)]. Tharpaling is named after the countless followers of the heart essence (snying thig) of the Luminosity Vehicle ('od gsal theg pa), who achieved liberation (thar pa'i go 'phang) in lifetime.

In Tharpaling, towards its north-east and south of Sengye Drak, the Great Lineage Holder (rig 'dzin chen po) Pema Lingpa (1450-1521) revealed [treasure of] a statue of wrathful Guru (bla ma gu ru drag po). He also opened many other sacred sites (gnas) on its door to meditation cave (sgrub sgo).

From the ruins of Assembly hall in Tharpaling, Pema Lingpa also discovered the Assemblage of Realization (dgons 'dus chos) concealed by Kuenkhen Longchen. Besides being the sacred place of treasures, many holy caves where saints meditated in the past can be seen in and around Tharpaling.

In the past, Central Monastic Body, Punakha took care of Choje Drak monastery, and Choje Drak Lama was considered one of the four great lamas. Later, it was passed to Tongsa

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Dratshang, which appointed Choje Drak Lama to take care of the sacred site.

Tharpaling Monastery was prosperous during the time of Longchen Rabjam, but later only its name remained. In the 19th century, first king Ugyen Wangchuck and Drupwang Togden Shakya Shri (rtogs Idan Shakya Shri) (1853-1919) established retreat centre with thirteen monks and built a temple. Later, Geshe Kuentob (Kun stobs) started Monastic Institution (bshab grva) for Buddhist Philosophy. Geshe Tenpa Rinchen (bstan pa rin chen) followed and established monk body and Monastic Institution for studying thirteen types of Buddhist philosophies (Zhung chen bcu gsum). Since then Tharpaling became the source of both Kagyud and Nyingma teachings. Under the request of lama and lopon of the monk body, eminent scholar Ugyen Tenzin Wozer (ao rgy bstan 'dzin 'od zer), alias Nado, was appointed as the principal. In 1983 Fourth King Jigme Singye Wangchuck provided free welfare services like any other dratshang in the districts. The monastery is still prospering.