

A Preliminary study on Kanglung Thubten Choekhorling Shedra and its impact on the community

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ABSTRACT: This paper attempts to explain a brief history of Kanglung Thubten Choekhorling Shedra and its impact on the local community. The result of a study shows that the monastery was established in 1978 and it prominently contributed to Gross National Happiness (GNH) by creating harmony in the society through religious discourses and by conducting religious ceremonies on auspicious days. There are three deities found in this temple.

KEYWORDS: monastery, relics, significance, impacts

Date of Submission: 25-10-2019

Date of acceptance: 06-11-2019

I. INTRODUCTION

Kunglung Thubten Choekhorling Shedra is widely known as public Zangdopelri to the local people. It is located adjacent to Sherubtse College and a minute walk from Kanglung lower market.



Figure 1.1 shows the sign board of Kanglung *Shedra*.

The history of the Zangdopelri can be traced back to the reign of Third King Jigme Dorji Wangchuck. It is believed that His Holiness Dudjom Jigdrel Yeshey Dorji Rinpoche prophesied the unending need of construction of four religious institutions in the twentieth-century to secure the blessing of liberty, tranquility and to enhance the unity, happiness and wellbeing of the people. As a result, the Royal Government of Bhutan had planned to establish a Zangdo Pelri in Samdrup Jongkhar but, most of the people in eastern Bhutan preferred to build it at the centre of all six Dzongkhags, and Kanglung, was selected to be the site during the reign of Home Minister, Tamshing Jakar. It is also believed that Yonphula Lam Rinpoche Tshewang Peljor has done a Sa Lang for Construction site on 8th Month of Bhutanese calendar, 1978. After the construction, the consecration ceremony was done by Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche alias Trashi Paljor Jigme Rabsal Dawa, Do-Kham Shechen Rabjam Rinpoche and Trashigang Lam Neten Sherub Gyaltshen, on 10th month of Bhutanese calendar in the same year. Since its institution as a Shedra it was named Kunglung Thubten Choekhorling Shedra. “Thubten” in Buddhist point of view means “sole reference to Buddha and his liberation from this world”; “Choekhor” means “wide-spread of his doctrine Buddhism to whole sentient being”; while “Ling” refers to the “land Buddhism is instituted in and to others it is meant to be spread”(In personal conversation with Lopen Tenzin Dorji).

The construction of Zangdopelri was made feasible because of the industrious labor of the people of Sharcho Khorlo Tshhebgay, under Tamshing Jakar in 1978. The Zangdopelri is three storied and has numerous relics. Today it is considered as one of the most sacred and oldest in the areas. The main nangtens (see figure 1.2 and 1.3 that shows the relics inside Zangdo Pelri) consist of wog bar and tey thogs. The ground floor consists of Sampa Lhendup Lhatshog, middle floor Chenrizig Nam Sum and in the upper floor, Yapanmi Sog Khor Sum are the relics. The others relics consist of a set of Kanjur (the translated words of Buddha) and Tanjur

(the commentaries of Buddha), two horns of elephant, thangkhas (large scroll of painting), bum (hundred thousand words of Prajnaparamitra), Cymbals (ril-mo), dug and masks. The two statues of local deities (Gonkhang of sakharpa and Namshingpa) are also installed in the sanctum sanctorum of the Zangdo Pelri. However, the statues of the local deities are not displayed to women for religious reason.



Fig. 1.2 Shows Yapami Nam Sum, Kanjur & Tenjur and two elephant horn

The chief factor for up gradation of Shedra took place under the command of his holiness the present Je Khenpo, Trulku Jigme Choedra, to introduce the centre for higher monastic Study for seven eastern Dzongkhags. According to Kanglung Gup Ugyen Dorji “Many places in the east remained still dark despite Bhutan being one of the lands visited by many great lamas”. Therefore, Khenpo has looked for the place to institute and fortunately, his eminent Gyalsey Tenzin Rabgay’s yab-yum (parents) donated the land to construct the Institute. Venerable Khenpo Karma Rangdrol, after having assumed as the head of Shedra, he initiated many developmental works such as gold painting of stupas, Sertog (pinnacle, which are Bhutanese, the entire Goempa is an imitation of the Tibetan form of architecture), construction of hundreds and eight chortens around Zangdopelri, hostel and kitchens for monks, building of two local deity goenkhang (see figure 1.3) and a separated small goenkhang for Ap Gengen Japa Meloen guardian deity of Bhutan. The hundreds and eight small mani dungkor around Zangdopelri was later renovated in 2006 under the patronage of Ngawang Pelzang, who was from Trashigang.

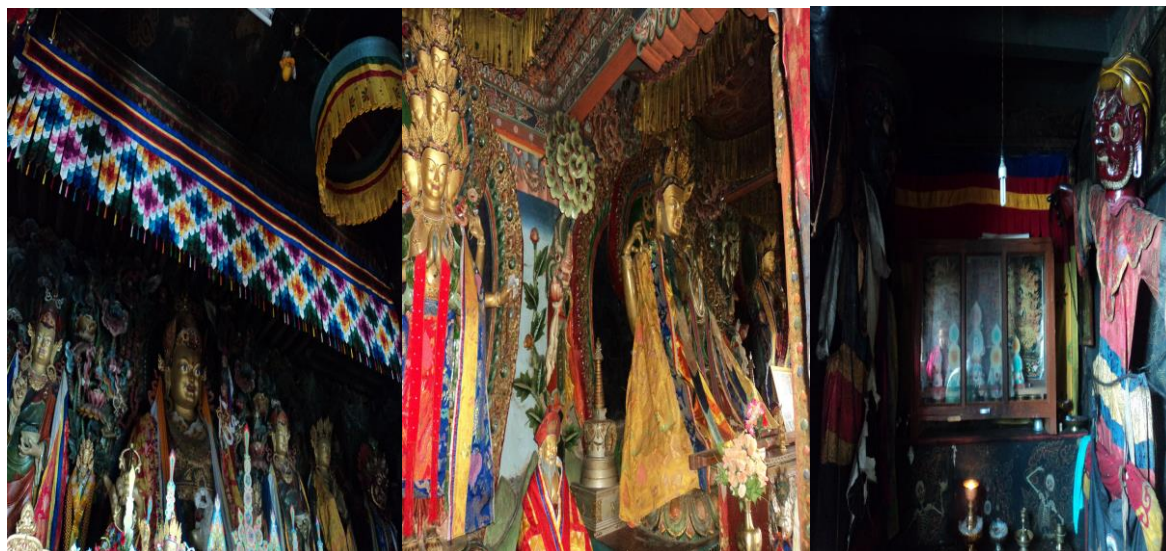


Fig. 1.3 shows Sampa Lhendup Lhatsho, Chenrizig Nam Sum and two Local Deity

Until the upgradation of Shedra (the monastic school) in 2003, it was looked after by Yonphula dratshang. Later on under the command of the fourth King Jigme Singye Wangchuck, Zangdo Pelri was handed over to Tashigang Rabday. With the establishment of Shedra the Royal Government of Bhutan funded and supported Shedra by appointing Khenpo. The higher monastic study centre was built on the hill top near Sherubtse college campus. It was named as Choekhortse by His Holiness, the 70th Je Khenpo Trulku Jigme Choedra. It was mainly established under the guidance and patronage of the Royal Government of Bhutan and Venerable Khenpo Karma Rongdrol. The monks after completing their studies from the Shedra are sent to Tango Shedra for higher study.

II. RELIGIOUS CEREMONIES

As such there were no mask dances being performed in the Zangdopelri in its inception. Kama Drubchen was first initiated by Yonphula Dratshang in Zangdopelri, but was replaced by Phurbpai Dupchen. However, oral sources claim that annual Phurbpai Dupchen was initiated by Geshey Tenzin Dorji ex lecturer of Sherubtse College. He requested the secretary of Dratshang Lhentshog, Dasho Sangay Tenzin, to endow with the fund to conduct the Phurbpai Dupchen in Zangdopelri, for which he received around one Lakh amount.

Like any other monastery of Bhutan, Phurbpai Dupchen was one of the most significant rituals performed here. Geshey Tenzin Dorji states that “To conduct this ritual, there must be a profound spiritual master who can perform. Secondly, recitation of words must be continued without any disturbance, and simultaneously, it must be accompanied by different types of dances such as: Lhamoi chham, and Zing-Zing-Pem-Chham”. Today on every 8th month of the Bhutanese calendar, Phurbpai Dupchen is performed and the Royal Government of Bhutan funds around Nu. 300,000/- annually. Drubchen (Phurbpai Drubchen) is conducted mainly for the ignorant and evil doers to get rid-of their delusions and instill awareness of what dharma really is, and to embrace the religious principles

The Preparation for Drubchen commenced a week before but, the actual ceremony starts from the month of July every year (Day is not specific) and it formally ends in October. In every month of Bhutanese calendar they recite and conduct six types of tshechus coinciding auspicious days such as : on the eight, fourteen, tenth and fifteen sojong or Nungney (fasting ritual) and Ninteen Lhamoi Bumdey, ritual in the honor of female deity, Mahakali (Penden Lhamo and dakinis), and twenty-fifth Khandu Tshechus. The other religious activities are also organized such as Tshogbum-ritual of hundred thousand offerings, Tshokhor-the ritual of offering. The establishment of those rituals is still vague. It is performed at the whim of the temple in charge. Duechen Nga Zom Tshechu (festivals of union of five sacred moments or Mahaparinirvana of Lord Buddha) is also celebrated and takes place simultaneously with Yargno Tshechu (rituals performed on waxing moon days) and Margno Tshechu (rituals performed on waning moon days). A ritual in the honor of the protective deity Palden lhamo- Mahakali is also held once in every month. The celebration of Tendra (birth anniversary of Guru Rinpoche), and Menlam Chenmo (the great prayer ceremony) is also organized by the shedra for the benefit of all sentient beings.

III. DETIES ASSOCIATED WITH THE ZANGDOPELRI

Lhakhang's association with the local deity is indispensable. There are three deities in the Goenkhang, (inner sanctum) located just above the main Zangdo Pelri, as the primary protectors of Buddhism. First of all there is so-called Goen Ngoen Jakpa Melan (the guardian deity of Bhutan) which represents the deities of the world and two are of Namshingpa (The king of demon god) and Sakharpa (Before he was a god later on due to his negative deeds, he became demon but, was subdued by Guru Rinpoche and made him as the protective deity of Kunglung, where he promised to protect Dharma). According to Geshey Tenzin Dorji [71], the vehicles of Namshingpa were a goat and cock for sakhar deity. In the recent past, Khenpo has erected both of them on a riding horse in 2006.

IV. MONASTRY AND ITS IMPACT TO THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

It has some impacts in the local communities. It has economic as well as spiritual and cultural benefits. According to Tshewang Choden [41] said, "Especially during the religious ceremonies and auspicious days, many people come and gather, and I could sale the most and make huge profits". On other hand, it helps the farmers to sell their agricultural products at a premium and uplifts their economic status. Most of the people in the locality visit this monastery to prostrate in front of statutes. During auspicious day to offer the butter lumps and pay homage to Kencho-Sum (Triple Gem: Buddha, Dharma, and Monk). Every day, many people visit the Zangdopelri for circumambulation. According to Dorji [74], "I visit this Zangdopelri mainly for circumambulation". People usually visit Shedra to receive blessing and to offer better lamps for the welfare of the people and sentient beings.

Spiritually the local people could easily get a lama to perform any kinds of rituals to remove the evil spirits as well as misfortunes in the communities. Moreover, because of this monastery they not only get an opportunity to get –together with their far-off beloved relatives but, also entertain them with cultural dances and other hilarious caricature of Atasara by holding Lingas in their hands. It reminds them about the uncertain misfortunes, death and to prepare them for the inescapable death by foregoing five poisonous friends and embrace religious principles to help the helpless and work for the wellbeing of the society. The people also had a privilege to receive wan-lung-tri (blessing) from the erudite Khenpo and transform the morality of every individual. Thus, it also works on to contribute for the well being and happiness of individual in particular and Gross National Happiness in general by preserving and promoting our rich inherited spiritual culture.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to express my sincere heartfelt gratitude and appreciation to all the informants for cooperating with me during the interview. I also would like to thank Sherubtse College for supporting in financial aspects. It was a great learning experience and provided an excellent platform for enriching professional and research skills.

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Sonam Wangdi" A Preliminary study on Kanglung Thubten Choekhorling Shedra and its impact on the community" International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention (IJHSSI), vol. 08, no. 10, 2019, pp. 51-54