SIKKIM -
The Hidden Holy Land
And
Its Sacred Lakes

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Various religious textual sources ascertain the fact that Sikkim is one of the asycronous hidden Buddhist zones recognized by Guru Padmasambhava, the fountainhead of Tantrayana Buddhist.

Drungang Nye-pa (The Pilgrim's Guide to the Hidden Land of Sikkim), by Lharam Jamzed Pamo, based on Lamo Gangdza Grinde revealed by Terton Sangay Lingpa (1346-1396) has the following description of Sikkim:

"The auspicious Hidden Land of Sikkim, having a square topographical appearance, is situated in the southwest of Saraye Monastery, Lhasa, Tibet, and is
close to the southwest face of Mt. Kjim-shing. Its eastern border touches Mr. Sidis of India; the western border touches the mountain of Zia district of U-Tiang, Tibet, and the Northern border touches Lake Estor Dri Chiu.

The upper range of the country, the northeasterly side, touches up to Gangchen Zod-nag and the lower southwesterly range touches Banga (India). It is a fertile land which grows a large variety of fruit, crops and medicinal herbs etc., and its valleys are stretched openly and are quite spacious. Hence, it is called Demo-shong (the original name of Sikkim), i.e. "The Hidden Land".

This prophecy and instruction was given by Guru Padma Samjhora on the request of Chogyal Trisong Deutsen and the Guru’s twenty-five disciples. Guru Rinpoche also imparted oral instructions on how to enter this Holy Land and the disciplines to be followed while entering. He further described the topographical appearance of this Hidden Valley, its edible plants, fruits and mineral resources necessary for the survival of the human race and also gave directions mentioning the suitable season for entering this land from the gates in four directions.

As per the Hidden Treasures or Terron Rigan Jigmé Lippa (1738-1798),

Guru Rinpoche identified six countries and five valleys as sacred Hidden Lands of Buddhism. Lha-man Demo-shong (Sikkim) is one of the five valleys. The other four are Tsa-ri Gangyi Kawa, Ngori Korum, U-Tiang Bohi and Dekham Gantor, all in Tibet.

Given below is the translation of another description found in Chogyal Trisong Deutsen’s Secret Prophecy (7th Century):

"At the time when there is no peace in Tibet, or it is facing a tense situation, all these Dharma practitioners can flee and take refuge in the Hidden Land; she glorious Hidden Land of Sikkim is a blissful haven. I prophesied this for the sake of Tibet."

Given all these references, Sikkim’s special status as invaluable and sacro-
sanc Buddhist zone cannot be overemphasized. Further, the term “Hidden Land” is interpreted in the following way by various religious texts:

Externally, Hidden Land means the land so encircled or locked by mountain chains and cliffs that it keeps the malevolent elements away.

Internally, a Hidden Land signifies the people born on its soil who possess the virtue of kindness, are God fearing and generally refrain from indulging in negative activities which displeases the guardian deities of the land. Undesirable activities like burning of unwanted things in fire, meat etc., slaughtering of animals and sprinkling blood on objects of worship, cutting trees which are the home of various spirits, polluting lakes and rivers and blaring of hills and rocks etc are said to be disastrous to the inhabitants of this land. (These descriptions can be found at page 31 of Denjong Nye-Sel).

The secret meaning of ‘Hidden Land’ is that Sikim is accorded a place and importance similar to the abode of Guru Rinpoche’s Zindok Palri. The people of this land are treated as Pawos and Pamos, meaning highly enlightened and pure beings. The land was declared by the Guru as the most suitable place for meditation and practising of Buddhism, whose practitioners can attain real Buddhahood (enlightenment) within their life time itself.

The tradition of worshipping supernatural beings such as various deities, dakinis and local demigods has existed in Sikim since ancient times. The practice of making offerings to the local guardians, demons, spirits residing in lakes, passes, rocky hills, trees, valleys and waterfalls has been a feature of monasteries of this land for an equally long period. These practices have been established for maintaining peace and harmony in this land and are cited in the special prayer text called Denjong Nye-Sel.

The basic reason of making such offerings is to escape the cruel wrath of the various presiding deities of the land and to ensure all-round peace and progress here. Any negligence on the part of the residents of Sikim is believed to cause severe problems. The annoyance of these deities is often manifested in the form of actions of wild animals. For instance, if the Durten Demon is annoyed, his wrath is manifested in the form of an angry bear creating problems in villages. The guidelines on how to keep the deities happy as per the Guru’s guidance are enunciated in various Denjong Nye-Yigs.
THE SPIRITUAL RECOGNITION OF SACRED LAKES

The Dorjie Nyima Pilgrim Guide of Sikkim by Terton Rigzin Godemchen (1339-1403), records as many as one hundred and nine sacred lakes in Sikkim. Some of these are: Pacho Karpo (the White Lake in the upper valleys), Tsho-te Marpo (the Red Lake of Tian), Dater Nyampo (the Snow Lake in the lower valleys), Tseching (Kloechupali) and many others.

Terton Rigzin Godemchen's list is supported by a similar enumeration given in Dzongjung Nyle-Sol.6

The third Lhatsum Jigmven Powo (19th century) has recorded the number of sacred and sanctified lakes at four hundred and four in his Dzongjung Nyle-Yig and has based his addition on the Dzongjung Long-Yig of Lama Gongdeu Cycle revealed by Terton Sangay Lingtso (1340-1390). He is said to have spent a number of years in Sikkim during which time he founded many monasteries like Thensang and Lingzhens Co-pa. Lhatsum Jigmven Powo is also believed to have visited almost all parts of Sikkim during his stay here. Although his list of 404 sacred lakes is believed to be true, there are no specific names indicated in the text leading Buddhist followers to believe that the lakes mentioned are the sacred abodes of different deities, dakinis and Tsermons (water nymphs). Therefore, they are sanctified and worshipped.

Some of the sacred lakes in West Sikkim are Khchod Palri Lake (Tsangpu), Karthok Lasso, Kaged Lasso and Pacho Karpo in the north western valley of Sikkim. The beautiful Tinugu Lake and Memri Tso Lake lie in the East and Tsigley Lake (Yangang) and Ts Phelung Dun Lake (Dorling) lie in South Sikkim, while the most popular of the sacred lakes, Guru Dondog and Tso Laxa, fall in North Sikkim.

Guru Dondog Lake, in extreme north Sikkim, draws many pilgrims from all areas and is surrounded by many remarkable holy places like Tsending, Ranggon, Namjor Tsho and Chomong Nyima. The lake is worshipped with hopes blessings for long life and creation of an epidemic free existence of the land. Infertile women and couples wishing a male issue seek blessings at the lake. It is also believed that sometimes predictions are also made in the lake. The devotee is said to see the future in the form of letters or scenes on the lake’s water after the required prayers and offerings have been made.

Guru Dondog literally means ’The Red Faced Guru’ and sounds similar to Guru Dragmey, which means ’The Red Coloured Wrathful form of Guru Padmasambhava’. The Guru Dondog Sadhana, which is one of the
most popular hidden Trechos (treasures) of Guru Rinpoche revealed by various Terrons, is widely practised and preserved in premier monasteries of Sikkim headed by Pena Yangsee, Phensang and Enchey with symbolic mystic dances and other rituals. Many lamas and practitioners in retreat and meditation course often choose this unique Guru Dragpas Sadhana. This is the reason why local inhabitants, all ardent devotees of the Guru, have a tradition of performing special annual puja on Tsechu, or the first ten days of the New Year according to the Tibetan calendar, at the mouth of small cavern at the source of the lake. This is thegesture through which the people show their gratitude to Guru Rinpoche's lake and pray for peace and prosperity and general benediction of the inhabitants of Sikkim.

As such there is not a speck of doubt about Guru Dongmar lake being one of the most sacred lakes for all Buddhists. Moreover, the physical imprints of Guru Rinpoche found on rocks and caverns of different localities of Sikkim bear a testimony to the fact that the entire zone of Bayal Demojong was personally and physically blessed by Guru Rinpoche along with his fifteen disciples including king Trisong Deutsan.18

All the texts (Trechos) of Guru Rinpoche's prophecies indisputably prove the same truth and should finally put to rest any doubts on the lake's spiritual importance to Buddhists.

REFERENCES

   b) Denjong Nye-Yig by Jigmed Powo, p. 39-41.
   c) Lama Gyonden Denjong Lam-Yig by Terton Sangay Lingpa, Vol. 6 (CHA) p 528-531.
9. The Eight Wrathful deities of Nyingma Tradition of Tantra. The first five are transworldly deities and the rest worldly deities.