

LHAMO EKAJATI:
THE SPIRITUAL SYMBOL OF INDO-BHUTAN RELATIONS

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Statue of Ekajati in Tumdra Ney

The eighth century, Buddhist mystic, Guru Padmasambhava created many spiritual treasures and concealed these special ciphers and codes in our country for posterity. Over the centuries, *tertens* or ‘treasure discovers’ have revealed many of these *ters* at the predestined time

under circumstances, which have been shrouded in mystery and miracle.

In the eighteenth century, Terton Drukda Dorji, discovered some of these *ters* including the Guru's *lungten* or 'prophecy,' relating to the relationship between India and Bhutan. The prophesy also contains the *dokthab kurims* or the 'skillful means to ward off obstacles' necessary to cement and enhance the relationship between the two countries.

Folio No. 82 of Terton Drukda Dorji's *Ma 'ong gi lungten*, states that the Tumdra Hill in Pasakha has many *ters* necessary to enhance the bilateral relationship of Bhutan and India. Until the treasures are found, it is crucial to recite the *Kanjur* a hundred times as *dokthab kurim*.

Tumdra Hill

Guru Padmasambhava, hid spiritual treasures in the environs of unusual natural features, and often under supernatural circumstances. The Tumdra Hill (521m) is one such place. It is in Pasakha on the Indo-Bhutan border and more accessible from Buxa in India than from Bhutan. For most of the year, it is inaccessible as the Shachaphu River, cuts off the route during the monsoon season.

The hill has 51 caves, which are all carved out of the steep cliff-face of the hill. The Terton's *zhugthri* or 'seat' is still in one of the caves, which remains intact in present day Chunabati Lhakhang.

The other unusual features of the landscape are the lakes and the stories surrounding it. Amongst the lakes, the *Ami La Tsho* is considered to be the most sacred as it is believed to be the 'soul lake' of Lhamo Ekajati. The lake is located in the outskirts of an Indian village called Jainti.

The spiritual marks on the physical landscape of the Tumdra Hill have no physical significance but in spiritual terms they are seen as the work of the universal mind, the mind of the Guru and nothing less.

Lhamo Ekajati

The chief resident of the power place in Tumdra Hill is Lhamo Ekajati. She is highly revered and feared by both the Hindus and the Buddhists.

In the Nyingma tradition, there are three primary *choesungs* or 'Dharma protectors' and Ekajati is considered one of them in the trinity of *Ma dza dam sum*, comprising Mamo Ekajati, Dza Rahula and Damchen Dorji Legpa. Further, the blue Tara is considered the emanation of Ekajati. It is believed that Guru Rinpoche had subjugated and made her one of the principal protectors of the Dharma.

The Dharma protector is described to be short-tempered and in her wrathful form capable of striking misfortune to anyone who displeases her but also known for her power to fulfill wishes.

Lhamo Ekajati, has a unique look and is depicted with a single breast, one leg and an eye, which is located on her forehead below her hair that is tied up in a single knot. The unitary symbol reflects unified views of all things.

The Hindus worship Ekajati as Mahakali or the supreme mother who is the consort of Lord Shiva; one of the most powerful gods in the Hindu religion. The Hindus believe that when the goddess died, Lord Shiva flew the corpse around the world and somewhere along the journey, the body of Mahakali split into 51 parts, which then descended on earth. According to this legend, the right leg of Mahakali, fell in Tumdra Ney while the heart fell in Kalighat in Kolkata, India.

Some Bhutanese believe, Lhamo Ekajati to be the secret consort of Terton Drukda Dorji. Ap Tsenda, a village elder of Chapcha village, recounts stories of how the Terton visited the *ney* in Geshelum, the ancient name for Pasakha, and can orate the details of how the Treasure Discover revealed a *ter* in a place called Gamana in proximity of Lhamo Ekajati's abode.

Another oral story, narrates of how the Terton meditated in the caves of Tumdra Ney and discovered a statue of Ekajati, which was concealed by Guru Rinpoche.

The locals in Chapcha believe that the Dzongpon or the Governor of Pasakha looked after the *ter* until the 1864 Duar war during which time, it is said that the Governor, fled his domain leaving behind the statue. Subsequently, a monk found the statue and took it to Dokhachu Lhakhang in Chapcha where it is currently housed.

Background

The Tumdra Ney has many names; the most common ones are Tumdra Ami Ney, Aum Kangchema Ney, Lhamo Ekajati Ney, Shiv Mandir, Mahakali Mandir, Mahakal Dham, Jainti and Sachaphu Ney.

Pilgrims visit the *ney* from January till March. The Buddhists believe the *ney* as Phurpai Ney and the Hindus worship it as the abode of Mahakali making it a popular pilgrim spot. Every year, in February, thousands of Hindus from all over India flock to the site in Bhutan to celebrate the festival of Shiv Ratri.¹

¹ There is no Hindu temple at the *nay*. The *pandits* stay in a cave and many of the Hindu pilgrims visit the monastery.

Bhutanese pilgrims, normally from Tala, Gedu and Chapcha, visit this lake and offer prayers to Aum Kangchema every year coinciding with the 15th day of the first month of the Bhutanese calendar. Indian pilgrims also perform rituals every year on Lord Buddha's Parinirvana.

There is one small Bhutanese temple at the *ney*. In 1968, on the behest of Lam Tokdhen Drep and Gelong Neynchen Drep, Her Majesty, Ashi Kesang Choeden Wangchuck sponsored the construction of the present *lhakhang*.

Subsequently, the temple was offered to the State monk-body (Dratshang Lhentshog) who looked after it but during the 1990 anti-Bhutan uprising the *lhakhang* was damaged. Ever since, Lopen Thinley volunteered to look after the sacred temple and has been on the job for over two decades.

Finding spiritual treasures are not evidence based like medicine or archaeology. The miraculous status is important and more relevant than whether or not the *ters* are genuine ancient items. Within the *terma* tradition, empirical proof has a different significance. Bhutanese consider the *terma* tradition important, precious and above all, effective, as spiritual means. The primary purpose of the treasure teaching is to provide followers of the Dharma with fresh or direct source of wisdom and spiritual power.

Like many religions, in Buddhism reality and truth are to a great extent internalized. People who believe in objective reality mostly do not believe in miracles, as it requires faith contradictory to empirical truth. Buddhists view that there is no contradiction since there is ultimately, no dividing line between subjective and objective truths and between physical and spiritual.

Conclusion

There may be *ters* yet to be discovered, in Tumdra Hill, on the Indo-Bhutan border. *Tertons* know that visualization of the sought-for treasure is essential to the process of discovery. Hence, visualizing protective and enhancing rituals is essential to cement the understanding of the interconnectedness of all beings and the discovery of new and mutually beneficial *ters*.

Believing in the prophecies is one thing, but Lhamo Ekajati is a symbol of oneness, reflecting unified views of all things. In Tumdra Hill she is supreme and has unified the hearts of the Hindus and Buddhists and brought together the minds of the Indian and the Bhutanese.