

# Visions, Prophecies and Leadership: Oral Accounts of the Life and Death of Tertön Drukdra Dorji

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## **Background: The Treasure Tradition and its Controversy**

This section of the paper is based mainly on a review of literature of the subjects under consideration particularly with regard to three existing source materials which present firstly the general theory of Treasure tradition and the visionary masters and then a corroborative account of Tertön Drukdra Dorji (*gter ston 'brug sgra rdo rje*, the main subject of this paper) and his entanglement with the Bhutanese powers in existing texts.

The first modern publication that we refer to is the *Tibetan Treasure Literature*<sup>1</sup> in which the author, Andreas Doctor firstly puts the 'Treasure tradition' (*gter lugs*) in the context of the Nyingma school of Tibetan Buddhism to which it belong. He writes, "This tradition propagates the reverence of religious material known as 'Treasure' (*gter ma*), blessed words and objects said to originate in the enlightened intent of the Buddhas and Boddhisattvas. Broadly, the Treasures belong to a tripartite system of scriptural and oral transmission defined by the Nyingma School as the 'three great transmissions' consisting of (a) the long lineage of

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<sup>1</sup> Doctor, A. (2005), *Tibetan Treasure Literature. Revelation, Tradition and Accomplishment in Visionary Buddhism*, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers (First Indian Edition 2009), Delhi. Hereafter abbreviated as TTL.

Transmitted Precepts, (b) the short lineage of Treasure, and (c) the profound Pure Vision Teachings.<sup>2</sup> He further mentions that “Central to this process is the figure of the Treasure revealer (*gter ston*) – the person who acts as a medium for the re-emergence of this inspired material into the human world. Accordingly, beginning in the eleventh century and continuing into the present, the Nyingma School identifies a large number of Treasure revealers and grants authoritative status to their discoveries” (p. 17). Generally, the Tertön(s) are categorized under the following even though sometimes such classifications can be untenable or superfluous; three regional master incarnations (*mchog gi sprul sku gsum*), the five Kingly Tertön-s (*gter bston gyi rgyal po lngal*), the thirteen Lingpa(s) (*gling pa 13*), and the thousand Terthren(s) (*gter phran stong*).

Despite its unconditional acceptance in most cases today, there were times when this tradition was treated critically by the more conventional and conservative elements in the Buddhist community. Doctor (2005, p.33) says through an analysis of many critical works says that “The main objection of the early polemics seems to have been a concern that the Treasures were false Tibetan compositions devoid of spiritual continuity with Buddhist India.”

The earliest know critique of Treasure revelation is by the scholar and polemicist Chak Lotsawa Choje Pal (*chag lo tsa ba chos rje dpal* 1197-1265), who advanced his criticism of the Treasures as part of a general complaint against practices and scriptures circulating in Tibet that he perceived to be spurious in nature. There were other thinkers of this period, such as Jigten Gonpo (*jig rten mgon po* 1143-1217), Sakya Pandita (*sa skya pandita* 1182-1251) and possibly even Buton (*bu ston* 1290-1364) who, like Chak Lotsawa, saw it fit to issue warnings against the Treasures. Some detractors

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<sup>2</sup> *Babs so chen po gsum*: (a) *ring brgyud bka' ma*, (b) *nye brgyud gter ma* (c) *zab mo dag snang*.

took the criticisms to the extremes and doubted if these so-called Terton(s) were actually men possessed by evil spirits.<sup>3</sup>

In acknowledgement of the presence of negative elements within the tradition, and in an effort weed them out, Mipham (*ju mi pham*), an insider of the tradition in his work *Gem that Clears the Waters: An Investigation of the Treasure Revealers*<sup>4</sup> says that the schemes of the false revealers are practices such as inserting the names of wealthy people into the preceding prophetic inventory (*byang bu*) of the Treasure, lobbying spiritual authorities for recognition, declaring beautiful women as religious emanations especially suited for partnership, and the common Tibetan (and perhaps universal?) practice of denouncing all adversaries as deceitful demons.<sup>5</sup> In the end, as with all schools, some members are more keen on extracting material gains at the cost of spiritual righteousness. An aspiring Treasure revealer would often ascend to fame only through active endorsements by the established regional powers.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, manipulation of Treasures to suit particular financial, social and political ends were not uncommon.

Now, one might discount the impact that an outlandish mystic can have on a society. But in a highly spiritual and conservative society like Bhutan, such characters and anything they say could not be taken lightly. According to John Ardussi (2004), “Biography, poetry and religious history were literary genres which [the greater Tibetan world] used to expound views on government, often linking important events and leaders of the present with archetypes, both good and evil, from canonical antiquity and the early monarchy. Prophecy (including recovered *gter-ma* works and dream encounters with deceased saints) was an especially potent Tibetan cultural medium in which political criticism of contemporary rulers could be articulated as an authoritative

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<sup>3</sup> TTL, p.31.

<sup>4</sup> *gter ston btag pa chu dangs nor bu zhes bya ba bzugs so//*

<sup>5</sup> TTL, p.47.

<sup>6</sup> TTL, p.49.

voice from the past. In the extreme were certain itinerant prophets who, like their Biblical counterparts, sometimes described their visions in voices deemed too politically strident, becoming thereby the targets of imprisonment or assassination.”

He substantiates the claim with a “prominent example [that] is the Tibetan prophet-cum-‘treasure finder’ Rong-pa *gter-ston* U-rgyan bDud-‘dul Gling-pa, who was captured and imprisoned by the Tibetan authorities’ c. 1717 after a twelve-year exile in Bhutan, for his promulgation of prophecies from Padma Sambhava critical of the Tibetan Qosot overlord Lajan Khan.<sup>7</sup>”

The second case that Ardussi presents is the famous *gTer-ston* and political critic from Khams named ‘*Brug-sgra rDo-rje*, who is believed to have been assassinated in Bhutan c. 1728 following his revelations of Padma Sambhava critical of the 8<sup>th</sup> Bhutanese *sDe-srid* named ‘Brug Rab-rgyas (1707-1719).<sup>8</sup> The first lay Desi (head of civil administration), he was universally infamous in the writings of the monk scholars whose works are today our sources of history. But even in popular mythology, he was blamed for the death of Lama Zhang, an eminent master from Kheng Gonphu and reincarnation of Shakya Ozer of Beyul (pp: 306).<sup>9</sup> However, at least one personality was more favourably disposed towards him. The otherwise outspoken Dudul Lingpa predicted the rise of the Desi and the doom of his enemy, which unfortunately even the monk scholars had to concede to a large extent. In reward, the Druk Desi did his utmost for the

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<sup>7</sup> Ardussi, John (2004), Formation of the State of Bhutan (‘Brug gzhung) in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century and its Tibetan Antecedents, *Journal of Bhutan Studies*, Volume 11.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Phuntsho, Karma (2013), *The History of Bhutan*, Random House India. Noida, UP. Hereafter abbreviated as THB.

exiled master, and even risked a war with the mighty Tibetan government which he was to win.<sup>10</sup>

Despite his valour and pious deeds, the Druk Desi irrecoverably fell from the esteem of important personalities of the time. His running feud with Kuenga Gyeltshen (1689-1713), the supreme head of the country which ended in the death of the latter is a fact which turned all popular opinion against him. In his own time, much to his displeasure, Terton Drukdra Dorji demonized him by identifying him with an anti-Buddhist minister during Padmasambhava's time. For this bold claim, Drukdra Dorji lost his life. Kuenga Gyaltshen, according to Drukdra Dorji, was Kawa Paltseg, an eminent translator of Buddhist texts during the Early Diffusion and Druk Rabgay was Lhazang Lüpal, an evil minister supporting Bon religion in Tri Songdetsen's court. He argued that Kuenga Gyaltshen's fate would have been different if the hierarch succeeded in building a strong connection with *tertön* Dorji Drolöd, a representative of Padmasambhava. Failing this, Kuenga Gyaltshen was left open to abuse by Druk Rabgay, the incarnation of anti-Buddhist minister. Thus, their antagonism was traced back to their former lives in eighth-century Tibet.<sup>11</sup>

Drukdra Dorji predicted that Druk Rabgay will 'in the beginning honour Kuenga Gyaltshen like a hat, in middle use him like clothes and in the end take him off like shoes'. The similes appropriately described Druk Rabgay's changing relationship with Kuenga Gyaltshen. The ancient Karmic enmity between them revealed by Drukdra Dorji was further reinforced by the identification of Druk Rabgay with another enemy figure, namely Nenyng Jetsun, the Nenyngpa lama who opposed Zhabdrung and was imprisoned until 1657. Nenyng Jetsun is said to have died with a fervent prayer to

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<sup>10</sup> THB, p.312. Even though the biography of Terton Drukdra Dorji could not be traced, important references about some of his most controversial claims can be found in THB from where entire passages are reproduced here with due acknowledgement.

<sup>11</sup> THB, p.313.

take rebirth as someone who could take revenge on Zhabdrung. Druk Rabgay fitted this role and was considered to be the immediate rebirth of Nenyng Jetsun. Thus, Kuenga Gyaltsen, in his last word before he was poisoned to death, explained to one of his disciples that his ordeal was a karmic retribution for the damages done to the Nenyng school by Zhabdrung and the fulfillment of malicious prayers made by Nenyng Jetsun.<sup>12</sup>

With the advantage of this background study, we will now proceed to the oral accounts of the life and death of Terton Drukdra Dorji. It may be mentioned here that this is particularly useful because in the oral accounts recounted hereafter, critical information are often missing or they are deliberately kept in the dark by the faithful people of the places where the Terton was universally respected as a saint and hence the people did not wish to relive the supposed preposterousness that are unmentionable for them.

### **The Prophecy and Persecution: Version One of the Life and Death of Terton Drukdra Dorji**

Even though Terton Drukdra Dorji has been associated with some critical visions concerning modern Bhutan<sup>13</sup>, his biography today remains hard to locate if it was there at all. However, in many places of Chukha District where the Terton spent many years conducting religious services, oral accounts of the Terton's life is recounted to these days. According to one of these versions, while the Terton was residing at Lungchu-tse, Tsalu-na and other sacred sites (*sbas gnas*) conducting beneficial activities for the sentient beings, a vicious rumour spread that he was destined to retrieve a Treasure from Paro Chumophug called *gnam lcags 'o ma'i ral gri*.

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<sup>12</sup> THB, pp. 313-314.

<sup>13</sup> Prophecy regarding the birth of Fourth King at Kazhi 'omai Drong, present day Dechencholing.

Getting wind of the persistent rumour, the reigning 8<sup>th</sup> Desi, Druk Rabgye (1707-1719)<sup>14</sup> called the Terton and asked if it was true that such a Treasure was destined for him to which he answered that it was indeed the case. The Desi then consulted his omniscient in-house priest who said that should the Treasure be retrieved, then the days are numbered for the two of them<sup>15</sup> to see the white clouds and drink the chilled water.<sup>16</sup> He reasoned that in their previous lives, they were not on good terms with Zhabrung Rinpoche and so resorted to malignant dedication against him because of which when they were reborn, they were well placed to do harm to his state.

The Sungkhorb further submitted that since the Treasure had the potential to naturally eliminate malignant beings, they should contrive against the possible retrieval of the Treasure. He pointed to the fact that in the Nyingma tradition, for a being to fully realize his potential partner, he needs an appropriate consort. The most appropriate consort in this regard was a lady with beard called Khasa Bjeru Zhoem from Paro Nap Khasa. However, in place of this lady, the Desi by force made the Terton to establish relation with his own maid who had signs of all nine evils from Wang Khasa and the two of them to retrieve the Treasure. Upon arrival at Chumophug, the inauspicious union led to all the Treasures vanishing into thin air. But hidden from the perception of all people present, three relics (*'phel gdung*) of the Buddha presented themselves into the palms of the Terton.

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<sup>14</sup> According to *The History of Bhutan* by Dr. Karma Phuntsho, Terton Drukdra Dorji demonized Druk Rabgye by identifying him as Lhazang Lupal, an evil minister in Thri Songdetsen's court and also predicted that Druk Rabgye will 'in the beginning honour Kuenga Gyaltshen like hat, in middle use him like clothes and in the end take him off like shoes'. For this bold claim, Drukdra Dorji lost his life.

<sup>15</sup> *blam dpon gyog gyis//*

<sup>16</sup> *sprin dkar po blta ni dang chu 'kholm 'thung ni//*

On his return, the Tertön reached Paro Dhop Shari where he instructed the leading family<sup>17</sup> there to mould the image of either a Buddha or Guru Rinpoche in which the relics should be enshrined in the offering bowl. At some future time, the relics will proliferate and emerge via the nose. Upon hearing that such a statue had been made, some evil minded people vandalized it in the hope of extracting the relics. They were unsuccessful in their design and claimed that this was false. Upon inspection later, it was found that the relics had in fact moved till the neck of the statue.

Thus, fearing the exposure of more critical facts which could threaten their position as Desi and priest, they made an arbitrary decision to exile the Tertön who subsequently was made to go to the southern borderlands where it was believed his impact would be negated by the sheer remoteness of the place. On route to his destination, he first reached the place that is nowadays called Damchu where the people from Chapcha and Lobneykha were raising their horses in a serene meadow. The people could not however reside in the place as there was no clean water source. To this predicament, the Tertön informed to the delight of the people that there was a Karmic relation between him and the people there from their past lives. So, he will create a sacred water source while they should arrange for ration. This arrangement was subsequently fulfilled by both parties thus heralding an auspicious relation which was to last to this day.

Following the traditional route, the Tertön next arrived at Tsimasham where he practiced Abidharma (*mngon pa*) for three months leaving behind his bodily imprints. Moreover, in a nearby place, he left his footprints as well as that of his mount and created sacred water source because of which the

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<sup>17</sup> From the group of five Lama-s (*blam kha lnga*) who revolted against Zhabdrung Rinpoche. The decedents of the leader of the Lhomon Kathogpa, Yeshey Bumpa (1254-1311) is called Paro Dhop Shari Choje (*spa ro rdop chos rje*) and Shala Drangkhu Khoche (*sha la sbrang khu kho che*).



place became auspicious and today the Dzong of Chukha is located in this place.

Subsequently, the Terton arrived at the place where now the dam of the Chukha Hydro Power Project is located. Even though the people say that the stone-pile the height of a three-storied building is called Dho Jangchub (*Awakening Stone*), it is actually the Bumpai Ney (*Hundred Thousand Secret Site*) where it is prophesized that a hundred-thousand monks will assemble in the future. The Terton then visited the waterfall resembling water offering that is just opposite the site of Bumpai Ney and retrieved Treasures thus turning the site into a sacred grove for the faithful. He also left imprints of his foot as well as that of his horse apart from creating sacred water source. Then just before he reached Gedu, he left the imprint of his mount in a place called Lachugang. To the pleasant surprise of the construction workers who tried fruitlessly to dislodge the boulder bearing the imprint during the laying of the national highway along that stretch, the boulder stood firm despite the use of rock explosives. Therefore, the road was made around the boulder and today travelers can see the unscathed imprints for themselves.

After performing these miraculous feats in various places along the highway, the Terton reached a place called Labarma in Bongo Gewog where he meditated in a cave on the Troetroema cliff where he again founded a natural sacred spring source. Following the traditional path, he then reached the border area in a place called Passakha.

According to the accounts of the people, the reason why the Terton had to go to this place was because this was an outlying area away from the purview of the government at the centre and thus it was a safe haven for those who escaped the heavy tax burden of the state or fugitive figures like the Terton himself. It was the auspicious fruition of Karma which led the Terton to the sacred site of Lhamo Ekajati called Aum

Kangchigmai Ney where he spent years on end practicing and propagating the Dharma.

Later the Terton made the determination to return to the Centre to which Aum Kangchim raised objection saying that obstacles to his life could result from this adventure. However, the Terton was adamant at which point, Aum Kangchim said that even she was a tenth bhumi Bodhisattva<sup>18</sup> and her objections cannot be dismissed thus. She took many wrathful forms to get the Terton to consent, but instead the Terton miraculously created ritual object (*dmar gtor*) in negation of her powers. The sacred stone which we can still see is believed to be the remnant of this object.

In fulfillment of his destiny, the Terton made the fatal return journey during which Lhamo Ekajati accompanied him till the village of Agay Lakha in the guise of his riding horse. The footprints of the Terton and the Mount along with the marks made by his staff can be clearly seen on the sacred stone in this village. As predicted by Lhamo Ekajati, misfortunes accrued to the Terton's life force as he was confronted with two assassins from the village of Bjabchu at the cliff of Troetroema. However, all known weapons to mankind could not inflict harm on the Terton, and while the assassins were pondering, the Terton who through his visions knew that his time was now at its end, instructed the assailants to try the famous method of bloodless death in the Himalayas by way of choking. Saying thus, the Terton gave his belt to the two men who used it to stifle the Terton and then stuff silk scarves down his throat thus assassinating the saint in water pig year of 1713. Thus the cliff which was formerly called Troetroema was in grief called Trongtrongma (*bkrongs, an honorific word for assassination*).

After the regretful passing away of the Terton was conveyed to the Tsamdra Trulku Je Ngawang Drub, he sent his disciples to receive the earthly remains (*sku gdung*) of the Terton from

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<sup>18</sup> *sa bchu thob pa'i byang chub sems pa//*

the cliff. On the first day of the journey, the body was received at Tsimasham where the BOC station is located today. The spot is said to be strangely barren as if burnt but due to development activities, this cannot be attested any longer. On the second leg of the journey, the bodily remains were received at a stone slab near the Chabcha Dzong.

The next day, preparations were made to receive the remains in Tshamdrag. However, this could not be done as the body showed sign that its final resting point was at that particular place. Therefore, presided over by the Tsamdrag Trulku, it was decided that the Tertön was to be cremated near the Chabcha Dzong. It was then that the body lent itself easily to be laid for the final rites. After the cremation, a strong gust of wind took all the ashes (*spur thal*) upwards to the heaven at which point the Tsamdrag Trulku begged for some residue to be left for the benefit of the sentient beings and managed to secure a handful. With the relics thus secured and the Tertön's own saintly clothes (*bla chas*), a reliquary stupa was built at the location as an object of faith which is believed to fulfill all enlightened wishes. This account of the passing away of the Tertön to the realm of no bounds is the first of two versions of the life and death of Tertön Drukdra Dorji as narrated by the elders.

### **An Outlandish Master, Exile and Death: Version Two of the Life and Death of Tertön Drukdra Dorji**

According to the second version of the oral account of Tertön Drukdra Dorji, in the medieval days, Bhutan was divided by the factional self-interests of the Desi and regional Penlop-s (*dpon slob*). Around that time, Tertön Drukdra Dorji was residing at Lungchutse above the Dochula mountain pass. As the pass roughly forms a geographical division between the west and east of the country, warlords residing on one side of the pass harboured suspicions that the Tertön was aiding the warlords of the other side and vice versa. This tense situation came to a head when in a heated altercation; the Tertön stabbed the Changangkha Lam on his ribs with his hand-held ceremonial dagger. For this assault, the Tertön was

incarcerated and sent to Chabcha Dzong where the Penlop who was from Dokhachu Goenpa was a deeply pious man.

Even though the Terton was technically a prisoner, the Penlop treated him with great reverence, offering him a place of honour in his personal altar and entertaining him with special foods and drinks at night even though during the day time, the Terton had to be lodged in a cell below the central tower (*dbu tse*) of the Dzong. This secret arrangement was soon leaked to some evil-minded people who reported the whole affair to the government which immediately transferred the Penlop to the remote borderland with a demotion as some sort of border minder (*sa srung pa*). The Terton was recalled to Paro where he was unceremoniously bundled in a leather rucksack and cast away in the river. Upon the exposure of the lapses on the part of the Penlop who served the Terton disregarding the higher order, the Terton assured the Penlop that he should feel secure even in his new posting as Aum Kangchim who was his secret consort would look after his welfare.

As the Terton was destined to live longer for the benefit of sentient beings, fortune favoured him. An elderly fisherman and his younger friend were at this time setting fish traps in a ravine river called Changchang Yarlokma when the rucksack got struck in the trap of the younger man to his utter dismay. He cursed his luck for landing a useless catch and was about to set it afloat again when the elder man offered to exchange his fishes for the sack. However, when they opened load, a corpse appeared inside because of which they were about to cast it away again. However, to their relief, the Terton introduced himself and instructed the two men not to do him harm. In appreciation of the instant change in the behaviour of the two men, the Terton said that all the negative merits they earned so far from their debased occupation will be absolved with his rescue in their hand. The two men thus returned home as changed men while the Terton roamed the jungle in search of food and shelter. The place was named Beyul Kinzang (*Auspicious Secret Place*). As summer

approached, the heat became overwhelming and the Terton moved upwards till he reached the confluence of Thimphu chu (river) which swirled from the right and the Tshechu Lum chu moved from the left and came upon a beautiful mini-island like the location of the Punakha which he named Gawaithang (*Happy Plain*). Then the Terton continued to move till he reached the Kekema village from Arugang where he asked the people what the name of the place was. The people answered that the village was called Kekema on which the Terton said that a more suitable name should be given to the place and thus named it Phatshuma.

After Phatshuma, the Terton headed towards Bongo in the guise of a lay priest, but on the way, he suffered extreme fatigue and hunger. However, a group of cow herders saw his plight and offered boiled milk and nourishment because of which the Terton rejuvenated and again asked for the name of the place to which the herders replied that it was Patalakhu. The Terton said that a more suitable name for the place would be Sonamthang (Meritorious Plain) as the people there accrued great merit by hosting him. Today it is believed that even the poorest household in this place has a few head of cattle because of the Terton's blessings. Just before the Terton reached the village of Bongo, he turned to have a last glance at Pasakha. The spot from where he did so is today called Semdang-gang as he experienced a feeling of clarity there. Then upon reaching the village that is today Bongo, the Terton said that the village is located on the head of the treasure trove of Namsey (*Vaishravana*) and thus named it Bongo (*bang mgo*). From Bongo, the Terton reached the place that is called Jungley today. The name is an onomatopoeic corruption of the name given by the Terton to the place which he called Joen-ley after the deities there welcomed him with greetings. While the Terton was in meditation at this place and contemplating building a bridge to connect the two deep valleys of Bongo and Miritsemo, some people who harboured ill-feelings for the Terton relayed reports of the Terton's escape and his sojourn in this place.

Upon getting this intelligence, the Desi issued edict that were relayed from one village to another by designated errands in these places.<sup>19</sup> The message was that whichever person was successful in eliminating the Terton will not only see his tax obligations<sup>20</sup> to the government pardoned, but by virtue, his whole village will be written off as well. When this incentive-laden message reached Jabchu Mepisa, two misguided men thought that now their whole village can get rid of taxes owed to the government for generations to come and thus decided to take on the challenge. They departed from their village with this evil plot and upon reaching Miritsemo, another accomplice called Ap Takchung joined them who said that he knew where the Terton was and thus, the partners-in-crime reached Joenley. Upon reaching the village, they feared an encounter with the famed strongman of this village called Drodrew who might foil their plot. So, they deviously went to his mother in a bid to deceive her. They pretended to ask for her son, but the old woman who was roasting rice told Ap Takchung to give his hand which she then put inside her armpit and held it there. Ap Takchung was unable to free himself from this hold and so, the old woman told Ap Takchung to return for if he was no match to an old woman, he might well be grievously injured by her son should an encounter occur.

However, the three men would not concede and so they hatched a plan to secretly carry off the Terton together with his meditation hut. Ap Drodrew heard the commotion while they were attempting to do so, and with the strongman in their pursuit, they had to abort their plan and flee to safety which they did by crossing the river which acted as the village boundary from where trespassing was not allowed. So, Ap Drodrew had to give up his pursuit at this point but he took a boulder from there as a representative of the Terton which the elders of the village attest to but which is no longer there for us to see.

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<sup>19</sup> *'bka shog sa rim//*

<sup>20</sup> *rgya dos, spa tsar 'dam ru gi dos, spa thag dang nor thag gi dos//*

Upon reaching the cliff previously known as Troetroema, but which nowadays is called Trongtrongma, Ap Takchung returned home to Miritsemo, thus not becoming a part of the heinous act. The two men from Jabchu would not back down and they tried to execute the Terton in vain as all their weapons failed. Seeing their persistence and knowing that his time was now up, the Terton instructed two men to use his own scarf and stuff it down his throat. The two men accordingly wrapped the scarf around their sword and stuffed in down the throat of the Terton thus suffocating the Master to death.

The earthly remains of the Terton was then carried to where the Chukha Hydro Power Project is today located on the first day. The next day, the body of the Terton was received above where the present-day BOC station of Tsimasham is located at a spot called Lam Seou Drangsa where preparations were made to offer the customary meals to the ethereal remain of the Terton when it blurted that the person who will offer the meal is on his way referring to the Tsamdrag Trulku who was then actually coming to receive the Terton.

A preparation for the night was made at a place near the Chabcha Dzong. The next day, it proved humanly impossible to lift the body and a report was sent to the Desi to that effect. The Deb (*sdep*, an alternative word for Desi) then sent words that should that be the case, preparation for the ceremonial cremation should be made immediately at the same location. The cremation was conducted the same day. As with the first version, when a windstorm struck and blew away all the ashes, only a handful could be saved which the Tsamdra Trulku entreated the Terton to leave behind for the benefit of the sentient beings. A reliquary stupa was then built with this relic as the main content. And thus end the second version of the oral accounts of the life and death of Terton Drukdra Dorji.

### **Rebirth of the Master: Account of the Omniscient Master**

After the untimely and ignominious passing away of Tertön Drukdra Dorji who constantly faced obstacles to his practice and life, his reincarnate Lam was born in the border areas of Tibet and China and was popularly called Lam Geyshey by the people of Chukha where he returned following his instinct from his previous life. As Tertön Drukdra Dorji was killed by strangulation, Lam Geshey's speech was stifled but when chanting mantra and performing rituals, his speech was clear.

The circumstances' surrounding the birth of the Lam is rather mysterious. His mother who was mute had a male relative who was a cantor (*dbu mzaḍ*) in a monastery. One night, he had an unusual premonition, and thus went to check on the mute woman who had delivered a child. By the time the monk got home, the people there had already discarded what they thought to be a misformed fetus. Unable to believe, the monk went to look for what was delivered by the woman when he saw two vultures incubating. The birds' heat had kept the new born baby boy alive to the great delight of the monk who took the boy to his monastery and fed him sheep's milk. As the boy grew, he was admitted as a monk and was educated in the various monastic disciplines.

The Lam then turned his stead to the south<sup>21</sup> according to his destiny and after reaching Ralung, the origin of the Drukpa order, along with his shepherd follower named Chagma, he descended down to Bhutan from Paro and then finally reached Chabcha where he revived the old sacred spring sources created by Tertön Drukdra Dorji. He spent three years in meditation during which time, the people of Chabcha generated deep faith and reverence to his person.

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<sup>21</sup> *chibs kha lho lu 'gyur//* this is a popular expression after Zhabdrung Rinpoche's advent to Bhutan.



After his long sojourn in Chabcha, the Lam went to Bongo with nothing except his *khri khur*. As the Lam practiced a sacred chant ritual (*bcos tshogs*) with hand-held drums in the manner of village shamans, the people mistook him for one of them and thus had little regards for the Lam even though he spent a fortnight there. The Lama subsequently returned to his Chabcha. While he was in Bongo, he predicted that the newly conceived child of his host will be a boy. So, after a year, the child was born as predicted and he returned to Bongo amidst greater fanfare and gained considerable patrons. The Lam again made a return to Chabcha and when he came back to Bongo, the people entreated him to stay there as their village priest to which he agreed. The Lam then wanted to construct a meditation hut above the village but the people said that there are no water sources nearby. The Lam said this was not a concern and he will take care of it. As said, after five days, his follower Chagma and another assistant called Drub Tshering discovered that the spot where the Lam laid a stone slab was bubbling with a new spring. This sacred water source can still be seen today.

While residing in Bongo, the Lam not only administered religious service, but since he was also an adept artist with good grasp of all traditional art forms (*bzo rig bcu gsum*), he also produced many amazing artifacts of which his hand made altar and statues can still be seen today. Even though the Lam spent most of his time in Bongo, he was also concurrently the Lam of Gedu where he spent seven years in meditation on its mountain top. He also offered religious services to Miritsemo where of his many extraordinary feats; he revived the sacred water source at the Trong Trongma cliff where Terton Drukdra Dorji passed away. In Gedu, there was a prolonged drought and crop failure because of which the people requested the Lam for a solution. The Lama meditated at the mountain top retreat where he miraculously re-created a water body which dispelled all the afflictions.

Despite spending many years in these remote areas, the Lam did not give into the temptations of the worldly word and led a

pure and inscrutable life. However, as the destiny to propagate his lineage came, the Lama came into contact with the wife of the village headman (*rga po*) called Tandin and a daughter was born. After the lady passed away, he performed all the rites. After that, he took another secret consort at the place called Biri and a son was born.

After his prolonged stay in Bongo, he suffered a severe food poisoning and was subsequently shifted to Miritsemo. Upon reaching Miritsemo, the Lam expressed his wish to pass away there in the house of a wealthy man in the village called Nado. However, fearing impurity from the occurrence of the death in his house, he refused to let the Lam fulfill his wish because of which the Lam had to be stretchered to Biri where he took a wife. It is said that because of this lack of faith, Nado's family lost its wealth within no time.

Upon reaching Biri, his long-time attendant Chagma passed away for which he conducted the rites. It was at this time that the Lam said that he was Tertön Drukdra Dorji and that after he passed away, there is no need for any other master to perform his funeral rites. After the Lam passed away, his funeral ceremony was performed during which his skull cap (*dbu thod*) dislodge itself as with other enlightened beings and fell in front of his son Rinzin Dorji after which he took it to his home. However, an ex-monk advised the son not to keep it without cremating as this might cause the next rebirth of the Lam to be born without some faculties of the body. Consequently, the skull was cremated too after which the ashes were encased in a reliquary stupa. It is said that as the son was still young, he could not keep the merit (*gnos grub*) granted by his father.

The reliquary stupa was built near the present day Gedu town in the village of Laptsa-kha by the former representative of the village, Chimi drep Tsendra. Apart from the stupa, a derelict temple founded by the Lam in Miritsemo which was built in an inconvenient location was later restored and built close to a big boulder on which the Lam frequently took rest

during his lifetime. All these deeds were done under the coordination of Tsendra by the people of Miritsemo in memory of Lam Geshey.

Even though no formal recognition was ever conferred on Lam Geshey as the reincarnation of Tertön Drukdra Dorji, the people say that based on his great services to the Buddhist teachings and his peculiar method in doing so, there is no doubt that he was indeed the rebirth of the great Tertön Drukdra Dorji. With these, the oral accounts of both the Tertön and his probable rebirth (*sku tshe gong 'og gnyis*) come to an end.

### **Tumdra Ney<sup>22</sup>**

Guru Padmasambhava hid spiritual treasures in the environs of unusual natural features, and often under supernatural circumstances. The Tumdra Ney is one such place. The Ney has 51 caves, which are all carved out of the steep cliff-face of the Tumdra Hill. The Tertöns zhugthri (seat) is still in one of the caves. Other unusual features of the Ney are the lakes surrounding it. The Ami La Tsho is considered the most sacred, as it is believed to be the 'soul laje' of Lhamo Ekajati. The lake is located on the outskirts of an Indian village called Jainti. Today, Tumdra Ney is also known by Tumdra Ami Ney, Am Kangchimai Ney, Lhamo Ekajati Ney, Palden Lhamoi Ney, Sachaphu Ney and so forth.

### **Lhamo Ekajati/Am Kangchigma<sup>23</sup>**

Lhamo Ekajati is the chief resident of the Tumdra Ney. She is highly revered and feared by both Hindus and Buddhists. In the Nyingma tradition, there are three primary dharma protectors, and Ekajati is one of them in the trinity of Ma Dza Dam Sum-Mamo Ekajati, Dza Rahula and Damchen Dorji Lekpa. 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 dharma protector.

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<sup>22</sup> Tshering Tashi, Kuensel issue of 01.02.2014

<sup>23</sup> Tshering Tashi, Kuensel issue of 01.02.2014

Lhamo Ekajati is described to be short-tempered and, in her wrathful form, capable of striking misfortune on anyone who displeases her, but is also known for her power to fulfill wishes. Lhamo has a unique look and is depicted with a single breast, one leg and an eye. Some Bhutanese believe Lhamo to be the secret consort of Terton Drukdra Dorji.

### **Conclusion**

In compiling this oral accounts of the life and death of Terton Drukdra Dorji, we feel that we are doing whatever little we can to document the life of this famous saint whose great services to the Buddhist teachings extend beyond the realm of the state and its sophisticated traditions to include the little known people and their lives in places so remote that few masters visited them, before or after him. We do not mean this document as a substitute for this visionary master's whole existence as his life is way too significant for us to be able to capture with any degree of sufficiency. Yet, in keeping these records, we are at least sure that we are placing before the general readers and the scholars a preliminary study of an itinerant master's journey to some very remote areas where the people's history and sense of being is intractably linked with the person of this master.

As it is, this paper is also no attempt to dig out old skeletons from the closet. The personal enmity between the master and the ruler is hardly a concern for anybody now. Certainly no one would think of making an issue out of a matter that is so long back in history that it is almost certainly of no immediate interest to anyone today. However, it would indeed be a pity, if such accounts are not preserved, for they carry both the contestations and the reconciliations which took place simultaneously at various level to build the foundation of a strong nation.

### **Informants**

Ap Gongetse: Chabcha  
Son of Lam Geshey, Rinzin Dorji: Darla  
Ap Lhapa: Labarma

Former Chimi Tsendra: Miritsemo

Zeko: Agay Lakha

The incarnation of Yongzin, Lopen Nagphel

Lopen Kencho Tshering: Bongo