

CHAPTER 3
REALMS OF SPIRITUAL ECOLOGY
IN UPPER RANGIT BASIN

SECTION 1

NATURE, RELIGION, SPIRITUALITY AND HUMAN ECOLOGY

Introduction

Religion is a part of culture. It involves a set of beliefs and practices, a social system through which people seek mental and physical harmony with the powers of the universe, through which we attempt to influence the forces of nature, life and death. As such, religion has been an essential attribute of culture, which cannot be left out from the realms of human ecology. (Jordan and Rowntree, 1990) (1). Durkheim (1964) (2) describes God as society divinized. The rule of religion thus are the rules of society, and the object of worship is the society itself.

Some of the principal religions realms as described by Swanson (1960) (3) are :-

- (a) Montheism is positively related to the presence of a hierarchy of three or more sovereign (decision-making) groups in a society.
- (b) Polytheism (belief in multiple superior gods) is correlated with social classes.
- (c) Belief in active ancestral spirits is correlated with importance of kinship groups.
- (d) Belief in reincarnation is correlated with small and nomadic settlement patterns (inspite of its high frequency in India, a highly evolved group of societies with many large settlements).
- (e) Belief in witchcraft is most common in societies with few or no other kinds of social controls.
- (f) Supernatural sanctions for interpersonal relations are most frequent in societies with interpersonal differences in wealth.

Nature in Spiritual Traditions

Throughout the centuries humans have had a love-hate relationship with the natural environment. This inter- relationship generally corresponds to (Egri, 1999) (4):-

- (a) We depend on nature for the air, water, food, clothing and shelter.
- (b) From the natural environment we obtain the resources to be transformed to meet our material needs.

- (c) The natural environment serves as the repository for our waste products.
- (d) The aesthetic beauty of nature in all its forms is a source of spiritual and cultural inspiration as well as emotional sustenance.
- (e) The powerful forces of nature are also the harbingers of destruction and death.

A less benevolent nature brings the droughts, floods, fires, hurricanes, and earthquakes against which humanity is virtually powerless. There are aspects of nature, living and non-living, with which contact is dangerous for humans. Nature reminds us in innumerable ways of our mortality, that individual lives are but preciously brief journeys in time.

The human's dependence on nature, its use and misuse of nature, its fear of nature and its expectations from nature found its way into religion and spiritual realms in almost all human societies. Because human feared nature, it became an accepted necessity to appease the natural forces, some of which took the demonical form. Shamans and '*jhakris*' came into being. Nature in all its forms entered the passages within the religious texts. Religious prayers and hymns were composed and sung in reverence to nature. Alongside however, the misuse of nature, and exploitation of all non-human resources on the planet earth continued. Biotic life and abiotic environment were both tragetted for exploitation.

The primary concern of this chapter is on spiritual discourse (with special reference to Upper Rangit Basin of Sikkim) as a means of constructing and reconstructing humankind's relationship with the natural environment. The ways in which spiritual communities, monasteries and clergy have worked for sustenance of environment is presented in succeeding sections of the chapter. How these lessons have been accessed by individuals and collectives to effect transformational change in ecological consciousness and action will be discussed.

Animism : The Nature Centred Spiritual Tradition

Many different peoples of the world believed and some still do-that behind the immediate physical reality of things lie spirits, that even seemingly dead objects, rocks or earth have a living force within them (Toffler, 1980) (5). Nature centred spiritualities have existed since before the advent of modern human civilizations. For over 20,000 years animistic spiritual traditions have guided indigenous peoples throughout the world.

In this holistic and integrative tradition, “spirituality is not a religion with a fixed set of dogmas, but rather, spirituality pervades and infuses all forms of existence-human, animate and inanimate” (Frost and Egri, 1994 (6). It informs the view that all that exists in nature is living and sacred, therefore deserving of respect and care (Halifax, 1990) (7). The original spiritual traditions of Limbus (Risley, 1894 (8); (Subba, 1999) (9) and Lepchas (Foning, 1987) (10) fall under this category. Even though these two tribal entities have embraced Hinduism and Buddhism during later periods between 17th to 20th centuries, they have maintained most of their original traditions.

Egri (1999) (11) describes three assumptions which underlie the animist belief system :-

- (a) The existence of numerous coexisting and interpenetrating worlds of experience.
- (b) The need for holistic balance amongst these worlds.
- (c) That change is a continuous transformational process.

The nature-centred spiritual traditions emphasize human beings’ physical and spiritual connections with an animate and sacred for respect of all that exists in the natural environment, as well as the need for transformational change to regain holistic balance and harmony in the cosmos. This in a nutshell, is also the concept of deep ecology.

Spirituality and Deep Ecological Consciousness : Buddhist and Hindu philosophies on interrelationship.

“Deep Ecology” says Macy (1994) (12) is a term coined by Norwegian Philosopher Arne Naess to contrast with “shallow environmentalism”, a Band-Aid approach applying piecemeal technological fixes for short term goals. Deep Ecology teaches us that we humans are neither the rulers nor the centre of universe, but are embedded in a vast living matrix and subject to its laws of reciprocity. Deep Ecology represents basic shift in ways of seeing and valuing, a shift beyond anthropocentrism.

Macy further consider the Tibetan and Sikkimese ‘wheel of life’, that mythically depicts all the realms of being. At the centre of that wheel of suffering are three figures: the pig, the rooster, and the snake – they represent delusion, greed and hatred – and they just chase one another around and around. The linchpin of all the pain is the notion of

ourself, the notion that we have to protect that self or conquer on its behalf- or do something with it. This point of Buddhism, Macy thinks, is Deep Ecology too, in that we do not need to be doomed to the perpetual rat race. The vicious circle can be broken through wisdom, meditation and morality as practiced within realms of Mahayana Buddhism.

Hindu and Mahayana Buddhist philosophies followed within the study area, offer much to ponder on the spiritual and metaphysical connections between human and nature. The Hindu religion teaches that earth is the Universal Mother with the rivers and earth being personified as goddesses and the winds and fire as male deities (Chapple, 1993) (13). Nature is the spiritual guide and teacher in a religion, which has codified environmentally beneficial practices in its rituals, proverbs and stories (Gadgil and Guha, 1992) (14). For example respect and even reverence for other species is based on Hindu beliefs that the Supreme Being is incarnated in various species, and that human themselves can be reincarnated as animals and birds. In Hindu religion trees and plants are seen as possessing divine powers, and thus are to be protected from destruction.

Buddhism proposes that '*nirvana*' is a higher ultimate spiritual reality and truth which transcends all else. The 'Middle Way' of Buddhism teaches the importance of simplicity in living, that attachment and craving for material wealth and goods, stands in the way of liberation (Badiner 1990) (15). The Buddhist principle of the truth of personal experience emphasizes the importance of experiential learning, practicing the 'art of mindfulness' (described further in section on chortens and monasteries) to resensitize oneself to abstract ideas of reality. The Buddhist principle of reciprocity and interdependence is based on the belief that all events and beings are interdependent and interrelated in a universe which is 'a mutually causal web of relationship' (Kaza 1993) (16).

Buddhist relational ethics teach that moral actions are those, which are informed, sensitive to and respectful of all beings (sentient or not) within interdependent relationships. In both, Buddhism and Hinduism, violence to other beings within the biotic community is immoral, and given the percept of interdependence and self-destructive. The principal of non-violence is also central to both traditions' concept of '*Dharma*' which has been interpreted to mean 'moral duty', 'right action' and 'the truth

about right living' (Bhatt 1989) (17). The Buddhist and Hindu doctrine of '*Karma*' (fate or destiny) also teaches the importance of taking responsibility for moral action in all of one's relationships.

Religious monastic orders have also served as models for radical environmentalist proposals for ecologically sustainable communities. In a spiritual extension of 'Deep Ecology' concept, Devall (1990) (18) proposes that Buddhists develop ecocentric '*Sangha*' communities within bioregions. The wildlife in such regions is not only protected, but also fed and groomed towards being a climax biotic community- both botanic and zoological life.

The Case of Upper Rangit Basin : Sikkim

As enumerated earlier, Hinduism and Buddhism, both interlaced with animist spiritualism are the main religious traditions in the Upper Rangit Basin. Since the impact of popular urban culture has not been fully felt in the region, the old traditions and customs continue to dominate the life cycles of the inhabitants. There has been however a diffusion of cultural and religious rituals from within the inhabitants.

The Bhutias who immigrated from Tibet, follow the Lamaist Mahayana Buddhism diffused with the Bon animist spiritualistic traits. The Lepchas embraced Buddhism on coming in contact with the Bhutias, but retained their animist '*bon-thin*' and '*mun*' traditions. The Kiratas (Limbu, Rai and Gurung) embraced Hinduism through continuous interrelationship with the other Hindu Nepali castes. The traditional spiritual elements of Buddhism and animism can still be noticed amongst the Kirata communities. The other Nepali communities are mainly Hindus ; Tamangs and Sherpas being Buddhists. The Tamang community generally follow the Mahayana Buddhist religion, but their cultural traditions are of the kind of Nepali Hindu style. Both the religious groups have borrowed from each other to such an extent, that sometimes it is not easy to distinguish one from the other.

Sikkim was under the rule of Chogyals till the year 1975. The state religion during the Chogyal period was Mahayana Lamaist Buddhism. Although the followers of Hindu faith were numerically larger, the culture had greater impact of Buddhism and monastic life. The state character was therefore mainly Buddhist, which is evident from the architecture, laws, education, and the power centres – the monasteries.

The Lama's word has been taken as the law by the laymen. Almost every action and routine, including the rites during birth, marriage, death, agricultural harvest, and festival celebrations are carried out by the Lamas.

In the sections of this chapter, the spiritual aspects of the *gompas*, monasteries and *chortens* will be discussed with amplified emphasis on the aspects of human ecology, spiritual ecology and deep ecology.

SECTION –II

ARCHITECTURE AND SPIRITUAL ECOLOGY OF MONASTERIES

Introduction

According to Risley (1891) (19) monasteries in Sikkim are of three kinds, namely: -

- (a) *Tak-phu (brag-phug)* or cave-hermitage.
- (b) *Gompa*, literally 'a solitary place', or monastery proper.
- (c) The smaller '*gompas*' without the educational infrastructure found in larger monasteries. The '*gompas*' as a rule, are merely temples (*hlakhang*) with one or more *lamas* engaged in ministering to the religious wants of the villagers.

The Upper Rangit Basin is unique for the fact, that it contains monasteries from the three major sects of Lamaist Buddhism viz *Nyingma, Karma Kagyu and Gelug*. The Gelug monastery of the reformed school (of which the Dalai Lama is the functional head) is located on the Eastern end of the basin at Ravangla in the Kunphenling Settlement of Tibetan refugee camp. Ralang, the oldest monastery of Karma Kagyu sect in Sikkim is located at a 13 km distance from Ravangla, in full view of the *Nyingma* sect monasteries of Pemayangtse and Tashiding. Dubdi, the oldest monastery of Sikkim is located on top of Eastern banks of Rathongchu near Yuksom. A monastery belonging to the Bon practitioners (the religion of Tibet during pre Buddhist period) has also been constructed at a distance of 6 km from Ravangla on its Western slopes, on road to Kewzing-Tashiding. Hindu temples also exist in all villages and towns.

The Basin finds itself as a spiritual centre of Buddhism, Bon and Hinduism. It is probably the smallest geographical area housing monasteries from all sects except Sakyapa making the place spiritually unique.

Architecture of the Monasteries

The Buddhist '*gompas*' and *monasteries* in the Basin are characteristic of building tradition which came from Tibet together with the religion. However, at least three factors (GRIT library Gangtok Wall display) (20) have given rise to alteration that determine a style typical of Sikkim: -

(a) Sikkim, especially the Rangit Basin was upto recent times very sparsely populated and relatively poor. Large buildings were not affordable, and the building enterprises had to be adapted to the economy of the state. The monasteries were therefore initially more modest in size and decorations.

(b) Secondly the differences in altitude and wet climatic conditions of Sikkim necessitated a change in the types of roofs. The flat roofs of Tibet were replaced by slant ones, originally thatched from split bamboo, and later from corrugated iron galvanized sheets.

(c) Lastly, the sect of Buddhism that gained the firmest foothold was Nyingma- that is the unreformed school within Tibetan Buddhism – and these gave rise to a type of monasteries that was radically different to that of Tibet, where the prevailing school was of the Gelugpa sect.

Site Selection Methodology for Monasteries

The monasteries in the Basin usually consist of one or several '*gompas*' (hlakhangs) depending on their size. They are surrounded by other smaller houses for accommodation of the monks during short stays. Meditation halls, kitchen and store rooms are constructed separately. The Ralang monastery has a large central courtyard, and a large dining hall.

The building site for such monasteries is selected with great care, with due considerations to auguries and omens. The courses of streams, the shape of mountains, the ground configuration and the colour of soil- all come into consideration and deep study prior to erection of the structures. All preliminary investigations are carried out not only for reasons of rituals, but also take into account the centuries old experience of generations, so as to avoid areas prone to earthquakes, landslides; floods, avalanches and wind hazards. Simple geo-technical tests are also carried out, such as digging holes in the soil and refilling them. This test reveals the density of soil and ensures that monasteries are not constructed over ground containing hollow space beneath the top layers. Likewise, if a hole in ground is filled with water, which sinks slowly, it is taken as a positively good sign.

Construction and Design

Wall Designing. Outer walls of the 'gompas' are constructed from rough hewn stones laid in courses of alternate thick and thin sizes. The thick ones are called 'males' and the thin ones 'females' of human species. Cracks between the stones are filled with clay-mortar. In some 'gompas' the entire wall surface may be plastered. The walls may be as much as one metre thick at the base, tapering as one reaches the top, the inner side being vertical all the while. All inner sides of the walls are plastered with clay.

Doors and Windows. The doors, windows, balconies and other similar wooden structures have a number of structural details protruding from the façade. These are emphasized by painting relief carvings, giving the wood work an elevating effect, almost jolly, in contrast to the substantially slanting walls, which reflect an attitude of tranquility (SRIT staff interview, 2000).

Wall Painting. Colour of the masonry is pale greyish yellow, which may sometimes be white washed. All 'gompas' have a broad horizontal band painted brick-red around the top of the walls, bounded on both sides by a plank painted with a carved motif of white pearls.

Roofs. As already mentioned, the roofs are hipped with small triangular gables placed vertically just under the ridge. The overhang may project upto two or three metres, protecting the wall, and at the same time covering the prayer wheels, that usually circumference the temple at the base. As new roofing materials were introduced, the shape of the roofs (as in the case of remodeled Pemayangtse and Tashiding monasteries) has gradually changed. The chubby profile of the thatches became more rigid when it was replaced by corrugated iron, and it was possible to make concave upward-swinging roofs as witnessed in Burma, Japan and China with flanged galvanized sheet iron. Many of the old 'gompa' buildings were, in a way, disfigured, taking away with it, the rusty but soothing ethnic look.

The Directional Aspects. The entrance to the 'gompa' (*hlakhang*) faces East, and the altar is built up against the West wall. The 'gompas' entrances thus receive the first rays of the rising sun. Access to the loft is from an outdoor stair case on the North side of the building, or via a ladder indoors.

The Interior. The larger 'gompas' contain sizeable prayer halls down stairs, with four or six columns, and usually an entrance hall to the East. Some rooms are constructed in Northern and Southern directions for larger sized prayer wheel drums or for storage, and a stair case leading to the first floor. At the first floor again, the central hall has an altar at the Western end, and is generally arranged systematically. One of the side rooms on first floor is sometimes used for spiritual and *tantric* rites. The doors to the '*tantric rites*' are painted with demon heads.

First and Upper Floors. The wooden structures supporting the first or upper floors are rather complicated. The corbelled pillars support a beam, upon which rest, first smaller, then larger cross beams. Since new materials have replaced the older ones, beams and floors are now cast in concrete. The top floor at Pemayangtse continues to support woodwork however.

Gompa features in Other Buildings. The older government buildings and some living houses of the 'Kazis' adopted many features from the monasteries. The embellishment on the doors and windows was often the same, and also the construction of the beams and pillars. This is more common with the Bhutia houses and houses of some richer Lepchas,. Economically less fortunate Lepchas however retained their original building traditions, usually simple huts made mainly from bamboo.

The Artisans.

There are some artisans who are trained in the various skills of building, but they must often do other works besides this to support the family, usually farming. The more delicate decoration work in the temples is performed by specially trained monks.

Certain Designing Aspects.

The sun and the moon designs mark the centre over the doors, windows or portals. These prevent evil from penetrating into the building. The row of white circles represents pearls as shown in Figure 3.1 .

The traditional carving and decoration of the cantilevered capitals, symbolize the seven items necessary for the lord of the universe. Figure 3.2 depicts the design.

DESIGNS OVER DOORS AND WINDOWS

The sun and moon design marks the centre over a door, window or a portal. It prevents evil from penetrating into the building. The row of white circles represents pearls.

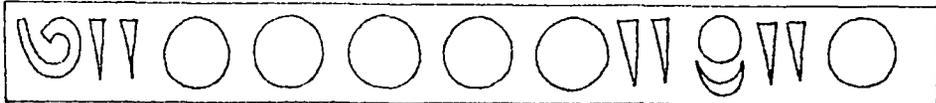


Figure 3.1

TRADITIONAL CARVING OVER CANTILEVER CAPITALS

The traditional carving and decoration of the cantilevered capitals, symbolize the seven items necessary for the lord of the universe.

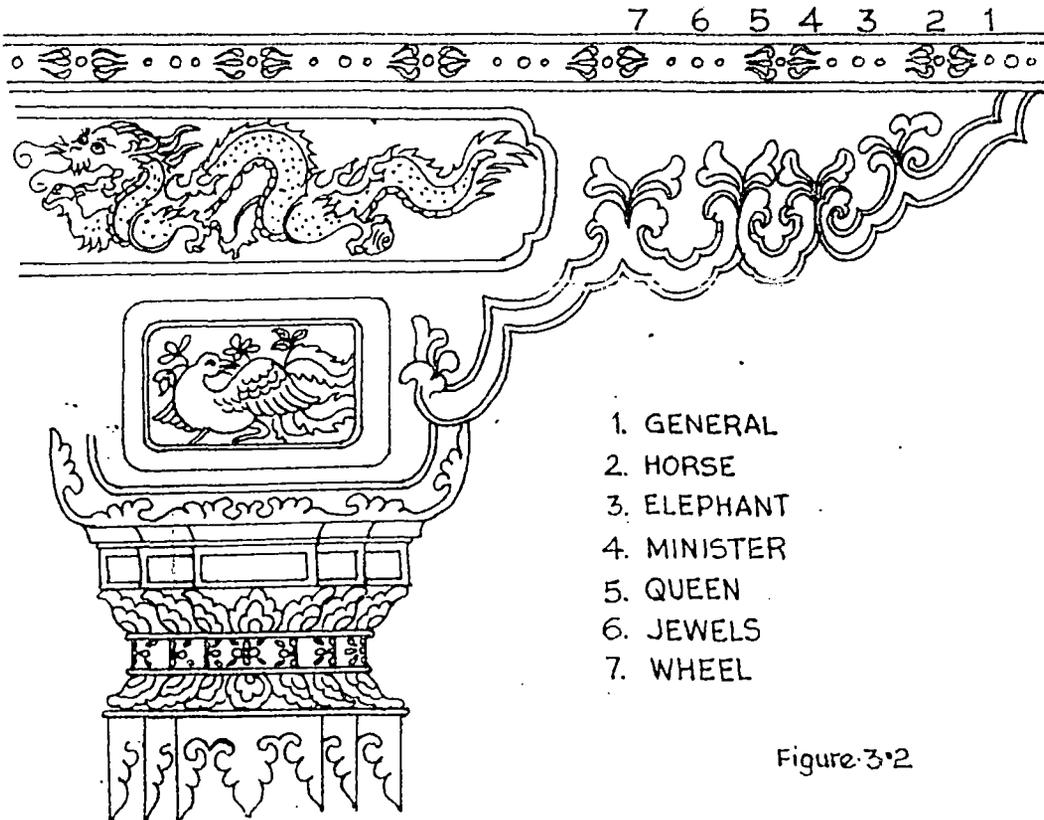


Figure 3.2

Prayerwheels

The prayerwheels and drums contain strips of paper or cloth with prayers written on them, all of which are said to be sent up with each rotation. One does not pray for one's own sake, but prays for all other beings as well.

Prayerwheels may function through the force of water, and are placed at man-made or natural water falls, where foot tracks or roads cross a rivulet or a fast flowing stream. Their blessings reach out to the travellers. Some prayer wheels function on wind energy as well. One such set of prayerwheels, functioning on wind energy is placed at the entrance of the Tashiding monastery.

Prayerwheels inside the '*gompas*' and some houses work on the principle of heat waves provided through lighted lamps or electric bulbs. A low pressure is built inside the wheel covering, which rotates due to gush of air from outside.

Four kinds of prayer wheels are shown in Figure 3.3.

Prayer Flags

The prayer flags are erected outside the monasteries during various religious ceremonies. These flags are also erected outside houses and at the outer boundaries of villages, towns, localities and even the government buildings. The flags are differentiated on the basis of their colour pattern. The colours represent various elements found in nature, which are the following types: -

- (a) Blue - Sky.
- (b) White - Iron.
- (c) Red - Fire.
- (d) Yellow - Earth.
- (e) Green - Wood (tree or Forest).

Aim of hoisting prayer flags is to bring good luck, peace, harmony and to spread the holy messages. It is believed that the holy messages inscribed on these flags spread to distant places with the flow of wind, thereby purifying the whole environment.

A single prayer flag can consist of all the colours or different flags of single colour can be erected. These colours are arranged in a pattern with blue being on top, followed by white, red, yellow and green at the bottom. Same pattern is followed from left to right if uni-coloured flags are erected.

Certain mythological figures are printed on the flags, which may be of following types. (Also see Figure 3.4): -

- (a) Divine horse (*Lungta*) symbolizing good luck.
- (b) Buddha (*Gyantse-tsenmo*) design, mainly for bringing good luck to warriors. It also epitomizes law of the land.
- (c) Guru Rinpoche (*Benza- Guru*) for curing ailments and for speedy recovery of health.
- (d) Mani, which is a form of Lord Vishnu for washing away any sin, which might have been committed while performing duties.
- (e) *Dolma*, which is form of Goddess *Tara* symbolizing good luck.
- (f) *Dorjee-Choepa*, which is one of the forms of Lord Buddha.

Type of flag to be hoisted is decided by the *Lama*, taking into consideration the occasion for which the flag is being erected, and also in some cases the horoscope of the individuals.

'Archeology-Symbolism -Nature' Interrelationship.

Nature and animal world form an integral part of the 'gompas', including the symbols of prayers wheels and flags: -

- (a) The monastery gates are decorated with deer paintings at the top. The wheel of life compares human spirituality and actions through the actions of animal life.
- (b) Monastery construction itself commences after all aspects of natural order, and building sustainability are taken into account.
- (c) The nature's power of wind and water energy find their uses in rotation of the prayer wheels.
- (d) The prayer flags depict all elements of nature through the colour combinations.

As such, natural forces are given full reverence, and the respect due to them in all prayer rituals. It is for followers to understand, and apply these lessons into their daily routine while interacting with the environment and the biotic life around them.

PRAYER WHEEL



HAND ROTATION MOULD



WIND ROTATION MOULD



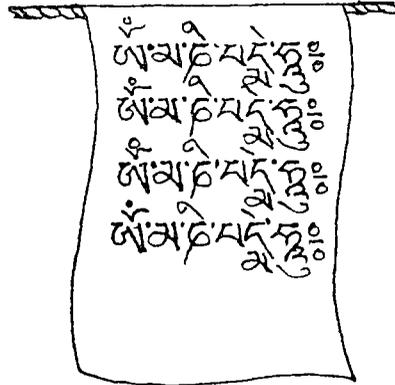
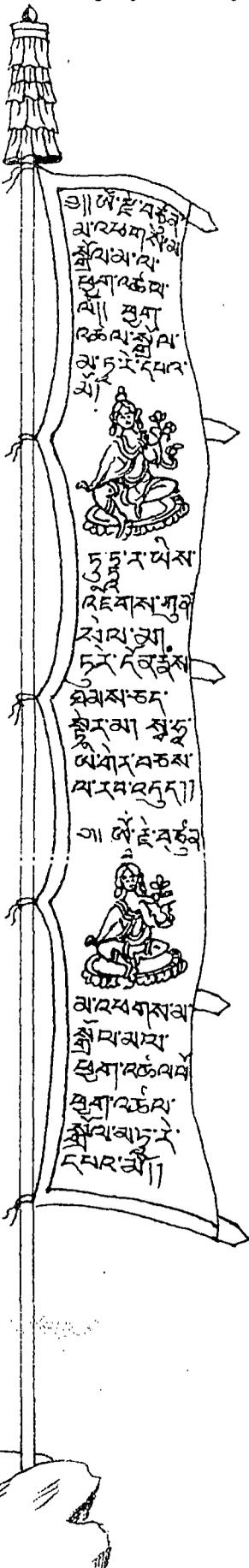
WATER ROTATION MOULD



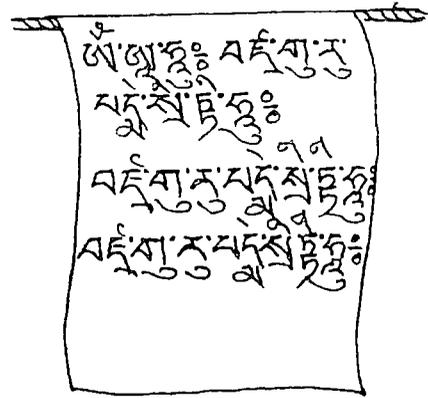
HEAT ROTATION MOULD

PRAYER FLAGS: SYMBOLIC DESIGNS

(MANTRAS INCLUDED HERE)



MANI
for propitious



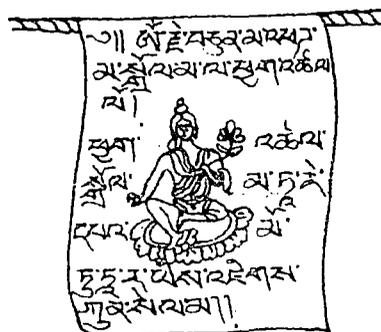
BENZA-GURU
to reduce the sin of body, speech & mind:



GYANZEN TSENMO
for better Omens



LUNGTA
for Luck



DOLMA (TARA)
for quick success



DHUKHAR
to protect from harm



PRAYER FLAGS: TASHIDING



WIND ROTATION PRAYER WHEELS: TASHIDING

SECTION III

TASHIDING MONASTERY: ITS HISTORY, AND STRUCTURAL LAYOUT -A CASE STUDY

History and Location

Tashiding monastery is considered to be the holiest of all the monasteries in Sikkim. It stands on a helmet shaped feature atop the confluence of Rathong chu and Rangit chu. Tashiding can be reached by road from Legship along a 17 km gravel road after crossing the majestic hanging bridge two km upstream from the Rangit hydel project. Legship itself is a trijunction of roads connecting it to Jorethang, Gyalshing and Ravangla. Though at a comparatively low altitude of about 4000 ft a.s.l, the feature stands like a majestic barge above the Rathong-Rangit confluence, which itself is marked by virtue of a serene *chorten* and a cave in vicinity. The location itself is spiritual. There is the Dubdi monastery 25 kms to the North, the wishfulfilling Khecheopalri lake to the North-West, the Pemayangtse monastery to the West, the Legship Shiva temple to the South, the Mongbrue *gompa* and Ravangla Bon monastery to the South-East, the Ravangla Gelug monastery to the East and the Karma Kagyud Ralang monastery to the North-East, making Tashiding virtually the spiritual centre atop the base, wherefrom geographically the Upper Rangit Basin takes off towards the Kanchandzonga massif and the two water sheds of Singalila and Mainam-Tendong ranges. Barring Dubdi and Khecheopalri, all other features named above are visible from Tashiding.

Layout of Tashiding Market, Monastery and Chortens

During the course of field work in addition to historical and spiritual research, a ground relief survey was also carried out. Commencing from the Tashiding (Sinek) market place and moving Southwards, the ground configuration was divided into five parts. All five parts have been depicted on five different plates in Figure 3.5 as under: -

- (a) **Plate I** shows the Sinek market place. It is essentially a linear settlement, almost self sufficient in terms of daily needs. The settlement is located on a dip over the ridge between Rathong chu and Rangit chu. On its North at a distance of

3 km stands the Sinolochu 'gompa'; and the Southern extension leads to Tashiding monastery. Yoksom is 23 km to the North-North West.

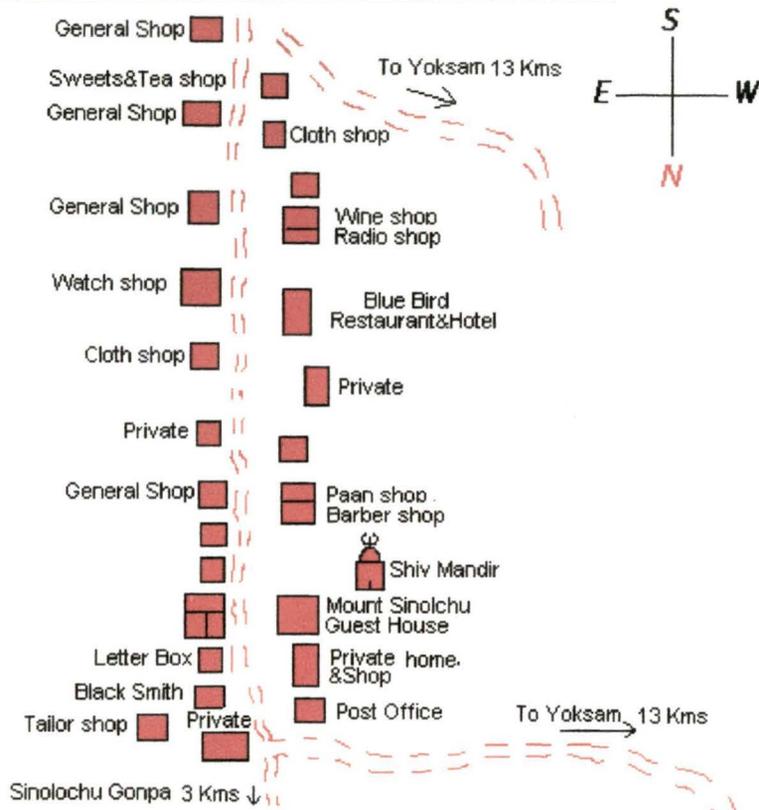
(b) **Plate II** depicts the outskirts of Tashiding (Sinek) market on its South. The large 'Mani' inscribed on a huge boulder dominates the entrance to the settlement.

(c) **Plate III** is the depiction of the area from the market place upto the monastery entrance gate. One can approach the monastery by a light vehicle on a narrow gravel road as shown on the plate, or move on the foot track, which is on a gradual slope rising Southwards. Near the 'Mani' at track junction, one foot track branches off, which by outskirting the Tashiding feature leads to a cave in the South. Just short of the entrance, on the right hand side of the foot track the 'prayer wind wheels' whisper their prayers into the ears of the perspiring visitors, rejuvenating them physically as well as spiritually.

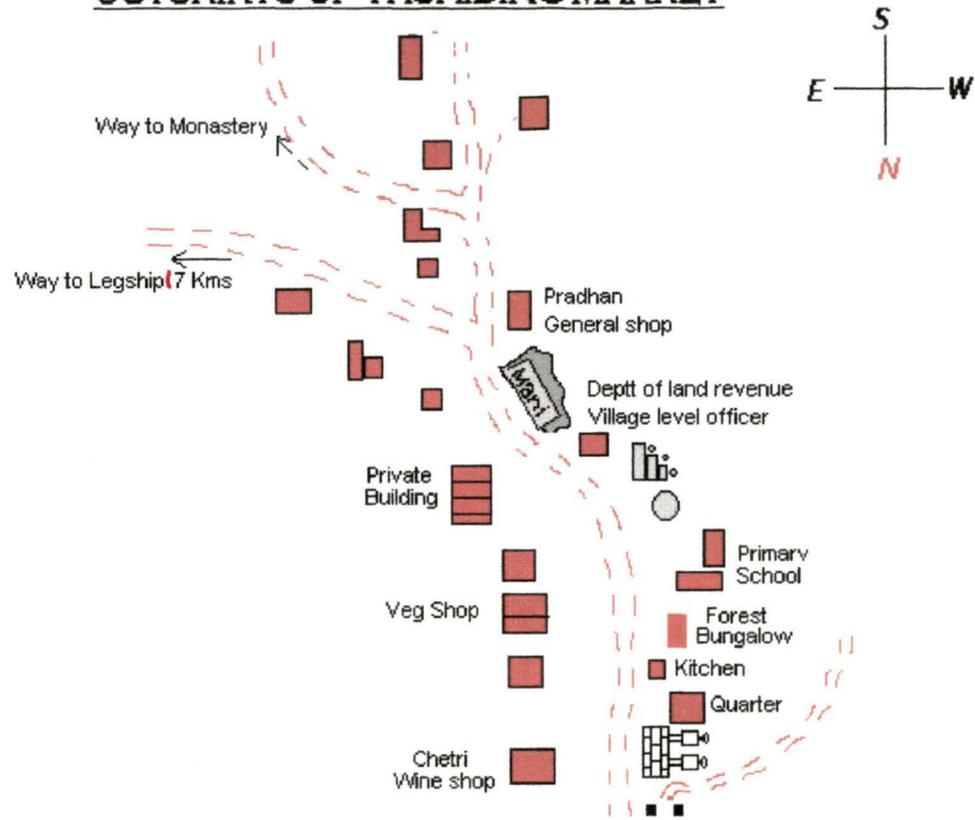
(d) **Plate IV** depicts the main monastery area, a part description of which has been given at the beginning of this section. The main entrance is marked by 'Mani Lhakang', followed by a cluster of prayer flags. Further to the right, the guest rooms are laid out. These are followed up successively, by the monumental 'Tashiding Gompa', the 'butter lamp' house, four chortens, Tsenkhang, a new 'butter lamp' house, and finally the 'Guru Lhakang' the temple of Guru Rinpoche. Kitchen, school and private quarters lie on the left side of the track. The constructional details and 'architecture' corresponds to the details given under the preceding section dealing with 'Architecture and Spiritual Ecology'.

(e) **Plate V** shows the *Chorten* area, which are 41 in number. Three kinds of *Chotens*, i.e. enlightenment, reconciliation and great miracle are noticed. A detailed note on the *Chorten* is given in the another section of this Chapter. The 'rinpoches' and 'tathagatas' to whom some of the 'Chortens' correspond to, is given at page succeeding Plate V.

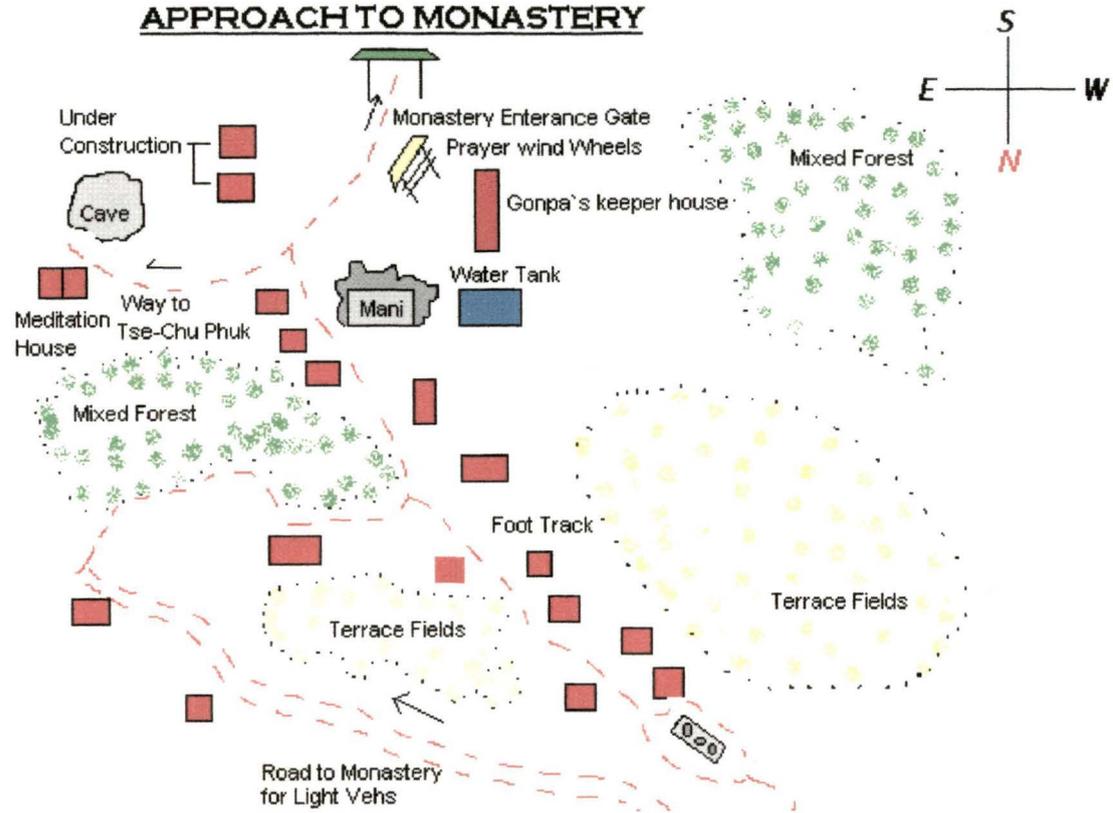
TASHIDING MARKET PLACE (SINEK)



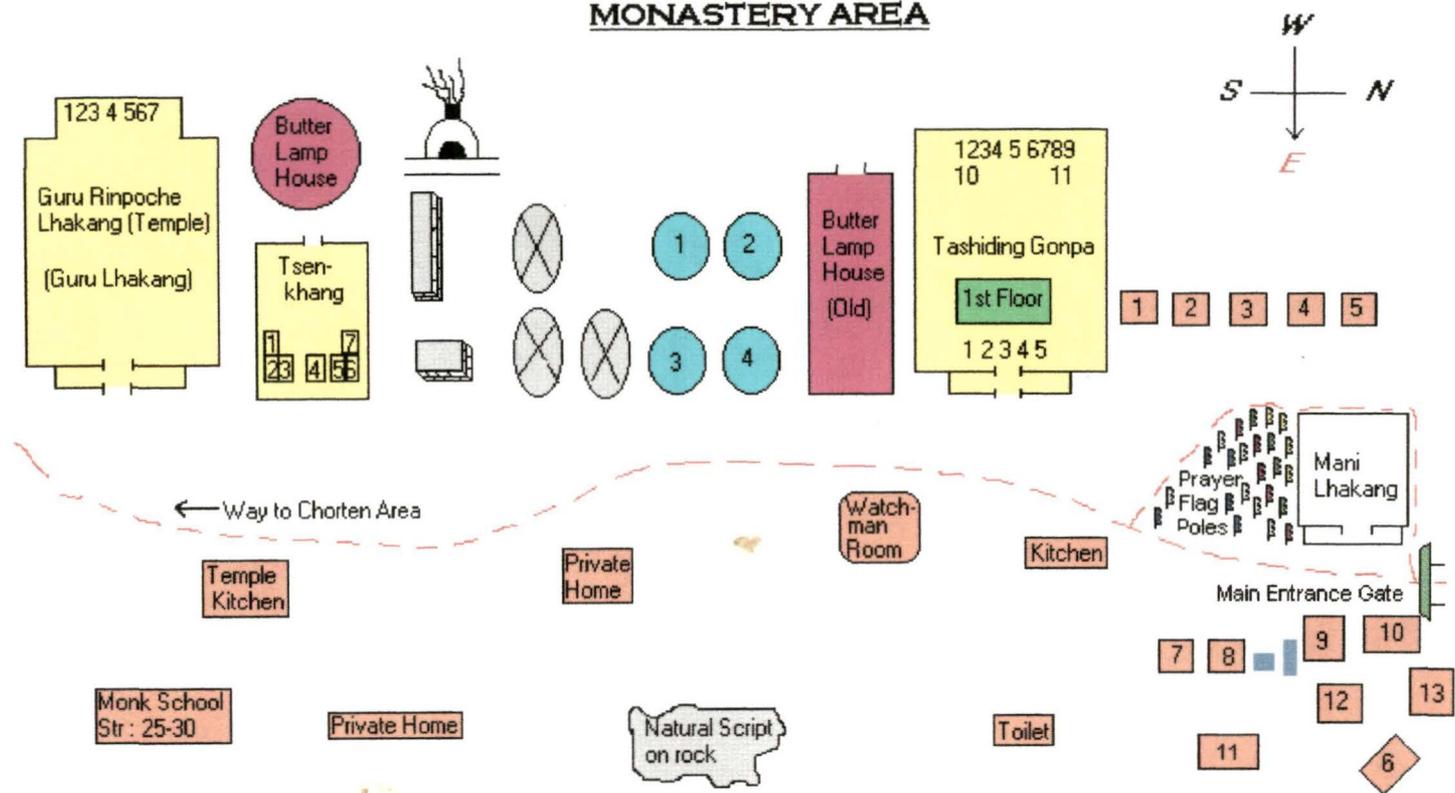
OUTSKIRTS OF TASHIDING MARKET



III APPROACH TO MONASTERY



IV MONASTERY AREA



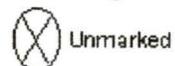
Note :-

GURU LHAKHANG

- 1 First King Chogyal
Phuntsok Namgyal
- 2 Lhapte Chenpo
- 3 Buddha
- 4 Guru Rinpoche
- 5 Phuntsok Rinzin
- 6 Kadok Rinzin Chenpo
- 7 His Holiness
The Dalai Lama (Photo)

CHORTENS

- 1&2-Unknown
- 3&4-Enlightenment



TSEN-KHANG

- 1 Dham-chen
- 2 Tsen-maar
- 3 Tsen-maar
- 4 Guru Rinpoche
- 5 Gyalpo Ku-nga
- 6 Pehar Gyalpo
- 7 Dam-chen

TASHIDING GONPA

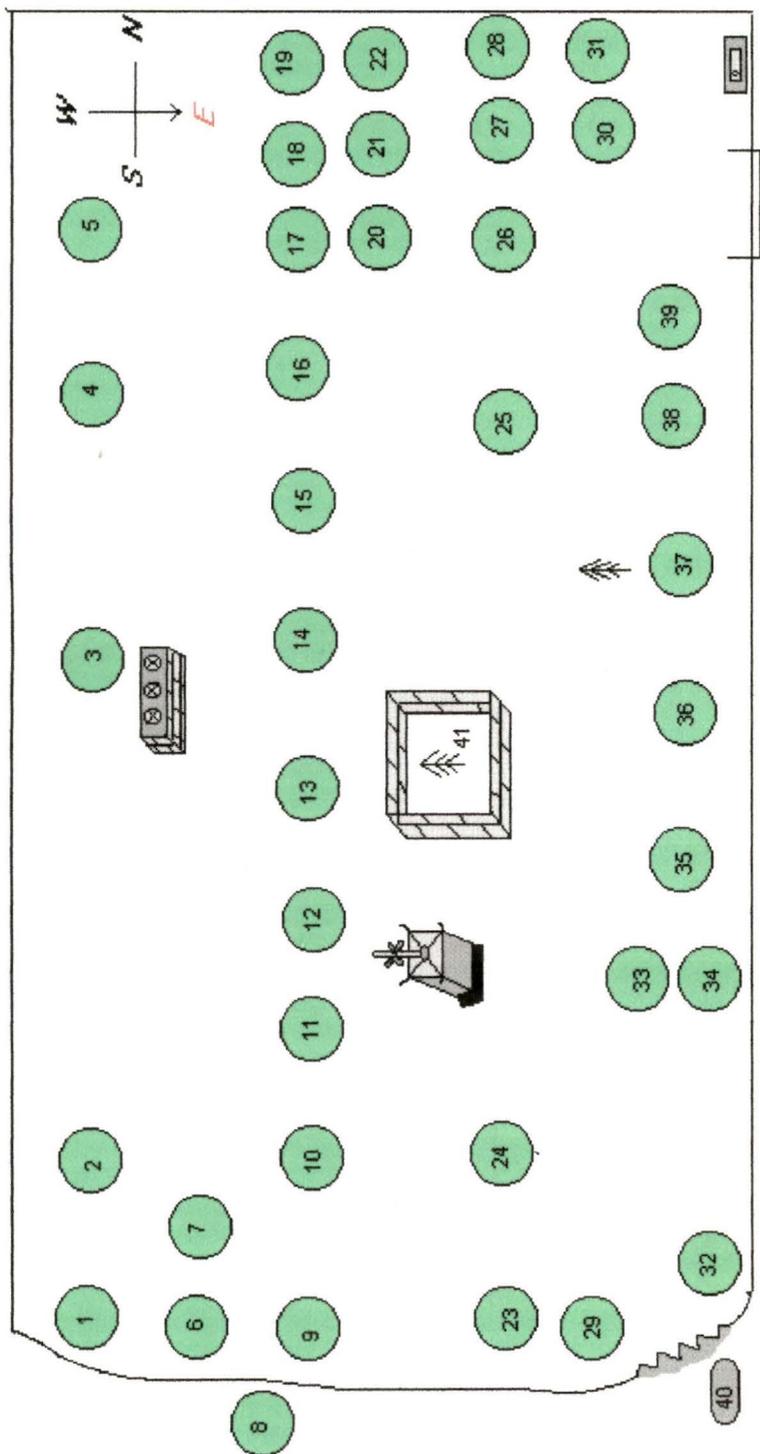
- 1-4 Ser-Chengyed
- 5 Buddha Statue
- 6-9 Ser-Chengyed
- 10 Ngadhak Phuntsok
Rinzing
- 11 Ngadhak Rinchen Gon
(First Floor).
- 1 Rinchen
- 2 Guru
- 3 Hod-pa-med
- 4 Chenren-sig
- 5 Guru

MANI LHAKHANG

- (i) Chenren-sig Statue
- (ii) 23 Prayer wheels
inside the lhakhang
- 1, 7, 9 & 10 Gonpa's house
- 2 Khenpo House
- 3 Six Rooms for Guest
- 4 Nun Guest House
- 5 Private
- 6 Teacher House
- 8 Sponsors' House
- 11, 12 & 13 Private

V

MAIN CHORTEN AREA



Types of Chorten

Chorten of Enlightenment:-
1-4, 6, 8-17, 19-32, 34-36, 38 & 39

Chorten of Reconciliation :-
5 & 20

Chorten of Great Miracle:-
7, 18 & 33

Note:-

8 Dhudal Chorten. (To protect Gonpa)	32 Jamyang Khentse Wongpo (Choe-ki-Lodoe from Tibet)
24 Lhabab Chorten	37 Guru Rang-jong
25 Woe-suung Ku-dhung. (Oldest/Largest)	40 Dhakar (White Rock) Tashi Dhing (Main pilgrim)
31 Kagyu Lama Chorten.	41 Khatwanga, Arrow corresponding to Guru Rinpoche

Spiritual Beliefs

A number of legends are associated with the site, where the present monastery stands. Guru Rinpoche 'Padmasambhava' is believed to have stayed here for meditation. Legend has it that he shot an arrow, vowing to meditate at the place where it fell. It dropped on the place where the present monastery is located. It is also believed that the site at Tashiding was accepted as the most sacred in Sikkim by the first three monks following the observance of occurrence of the divine phenomenon. A bright streak of light issuing from the top of Mount Khangchendzonga is believed to have shone right upon a spot at Tashiding. Simultaneously a most delicious fragrance of incense and notes of melodious music filled the atmosphere. The monks accompanied by King Phuntshog Namgyal visited the spot, and built the *chroten* named 'Thongwa- Rang- Grol', the sight of which confers self-emancipation. (Namgyal and Dolma, 1908) (21)

The Ngadak Lama built the monastery of 'Tashi-ga-legs' and also a Maitreya Temple at the site. The Chogyal Lhakhang was built by Pema Wangmo, elder sister of king Chagdor Namgyal during first half of 18th century. In 1715 Jigme Pao and King Chagdor Namgyal constructed Guru Lhakhang, and also supervised the internal furnishing. Jigme Pao himself performed the consecration ceremony of all Lhakhangs and *chortens* at Tashiding. (Dhamala, 1993) (22).

Legend and Anecdotal Accounts

A conversation with the monks at Tashiding, and a study of literature at Sikkim Research Institute of Tibetology, Gangtok revealed the history, legends, and anecdotal accounts attached with the spirituality of Tashiding monastery. True or not, the messages emanating out of the accounts reveal the Sikkimese peoples high esteem and faith in spirituality, leading to *karma*, which is central to balance of nature or 'Deep Ecology'.

According to the Neyig (Guide Book to the Holy Places) Beyul Demojong (Hidden Valley of Rice) had five great provinces and six hidden spots which protected all living beings. Guru Rinpoche concealed innumerable scriptures (Vhos), Wealth (Nor) and sacred objects (Wangten) in those holy places and performed many inexpressible benedictory prayers for the benefit of sentient beings thereby entrusting all the treasures to the protectors and tutelary deities for their preservation. He blessed and consecrated this land as sacred as Uryen Zangdogpalri and Kanchopalgiwo, the realms of unlimited

happiness and abode and assemblage of female divinities (Mamo Khandos) like clouds in space.

Likewise the innumerable Buddhas and Bhodisattavas of ten directions also blessed the land. It is believed that one who visits these sacred lands, the doors of hell would be closed for him i.e. they become immortals. Tashiding which is one of the most sacred places of Sikkim has four holy caves in four different directions. They are Sharchog Bep hug in the East, Khandozangphu in the South, Dechenphug in the West and Lhari Nyingphug in the North. The centre of the holy place is known as Dakkar Tashiding, which is also the main deity of Tashiding.

During the first dissemination of Buddhism in Tibet in the 8th century A.D the illustrious Guru Padmasambhava and twenty five disciples (Je-bang nyer-nga) had blessed the land (Beyul Demojong). Thereafter they tamed all malevolent spirits and evil forces which infested this country. They also erected a number of places of worship, such as monasteries and *chortens* and the land was thus transformed into a great sacred and holy place.

In course of this process of propagation of Buddhism into Sikkim two great Siddhas (Tertons-revealers of Tantra) Rinzin Godemchen (1340-1396) and Kathog U, o'd Yeshe Bumpa came to Sikkim and established monasteries and meditation centres at sacred places of 'Pawo Hungri' and Tashiding. The reincarnation of Rigzin Godemchen, Terton Ngari Ringin Chenpo Lagdendorjee discovered the sublime tantra called Khadoi Khalangma from the cave of Lhari Nyingpo.

The seventeenth century was the turning point in the history of Sikkim as the first Chogyal Phuntshog Namgyal was enthroned at Yuksom by three great Lamas of Tibet namely Lhatsun Namkha Jigme (the embodiment of compassion was known to be the incarnation of Indian Maha Pandita Vimalamitra and Tibetan omniscient Kunghen Longchenpa Dema Hozer), Ngadag Sempachenpo Phuntshog Rigzin and Kathog Rigzin Chenpo. Under the Patronage of King Phuntshog Namgyal, monasteries, hermitages for meditation and *chortens* were built. Chogyal Phuntshog Namgyal proclaimed Buddhism as the state religion.

Through the revelation of Zogchen system of meditation and Sadhana, Sikkim became the main centre of Zogchen teaching. Its followers came to be called, Denzong Zogchenpa.

The two great scholars Ngadag Sempachenpo and Ngadag Rinchen Gon established the holy shrine at Dakkar Tashiding and consecrated it to be the principal seat of the followers of Nyingma sect in Sikkim.

'Holy Water Vase' and Bum chu Origination

The belief as to how the celebration of 'Holy Water Vase' festival originated is briefly narrated hereunder. During the reign of the religious king Trisong Deutsen in Tibet, Guru Padmasambhava, while bestowing the unparalleled tantric system of tutelary deity Mahakarunika Avalokitesvara Sadhana and initiation on emancipation from the cycle of mundane existence to king Trisong Deutsen, prince Murub Tsenpo, Yeshe Tsogyal and Verotsana, consecrated the same Holy Vase which is preserved in the Tashiding monastery till today.

According to the works of Zhigpo Lingpa, the Holy Vase is made of various kinds of sacred soil, water and five kinds of precious jewels (Rinchen Na-nga) collected from the holy places of India, Odiyana and Zahar by Guru Padmasambhava. It is said that the Vase is made by Damchen Gar-bgag, wrathful Dharmapala and consecrated by Guru Padmasambhava by conducting Sadhana of Yidam Chuchig Zhal (tutelary deity of eleven heads). When he performed the sadhana, the entire retinue of the deity and deity himself are said to have appeared in the sky and inseparably merged into the Holy Water contained in the Vase. Thereupon the holy water overflowed and spread in all directions in the form of rays. That very moment, as a sign of good omen, there was earthquake, the four guardian deities (Gyalchen Dezhi/Cutur-Maharajika) of Dharma and the gods of thirtythree heavens (Sumchu Tsasumgyi Lhanam) showered flowers from the sky. This event was witnessed by the people assembled there. All the people were overjoyed at this spectacular event and Holy Water was distributed to the devotees from the Vase. Yet it was found that the holy water of the Vase never decreased. Inspired by this, the sinners became virtuous, the pious people realised the lofty divine qualities and all were spiritually benefited. Finally, Guru Padmasambhava concealed the 'Holy Water Vase' into the sublime hidden treasure and entrusted it to the protective deities.

In the later period, the great Terton (revealer of hidden treasures), Chokyi Gyalpo Garwang Rigzin Zhipolingpa, the reincarnation of prince Murub Tsenpo of Tibet, unearthed the Vase of Holy Water for the sake of sentient beings. After the discovery of the Vase, Terton Zhipolingpa maintained it as his Thugdam Ten and in the later part of his life, he offered it to Terton Tagshamchen with special instruction. Terton Tagshamchen then handed over the 'Holy Vase' to Ngadag Sempachenpo Phuntshog Rigzin to be kept and installed at Dakkar Tashiding, the holiest and most blessed hidden land of Guru Padmasambhava. So, Terton Ngadag Sempachenpo brought the Vase to Tashiding and installed it in the Tshuglagkhang. He is known to have conducted special recitation of 1,300 million syllables 'OM MANI PADME HUM', through Thugjechenpo Khorwalegrol Sadhna under the royal patronage of the first Chogyal Phuntshog Namgyal. At that time many unprecedented and auspicious signs had appeared in the country.

Bumchu celebration is one of the most important and holiest events in Sikkim and thousands of devotees from all over the state and its neighbouring countries come on pilgrimage and participate in the holy occasion. The Vase, containing holy water, was kept in a miniature mansion (cho-sham) under lock and seal of the Chogyal of Sikkim. Every year special recitation is conducted and the seal is checked by the high officials and Lamas before the Vase is taken out of the mansion. The Vase is opened on the night of the 14th day of the first month of the Tibetan Almanac. From the Vase three cups of the water is first taken out. The first cup is meant for the royal family, the second cup for the Lamas and the third is distributed among the devotees on the full moon day. Fresh water is brought from Rathong Chu, which is also considered as a blessed river, as replacement.

In some years the Holy Water in the Vase increases by 21 cups and other times it decreases. In some cases the water of the Vase remains at the same level but other times it is found dusty. These are believed to be the predictions of auspicious and inauspicious occurrences in the country. When the water level increases, it is a sign of prosperity and when it decreases it is an indication of bad year of drought and diseases. The dusty water indicated conflicts and unrest.

Summary

For Tashiding, one can say 'Seeing is believing'. The monastery is historically illustrious, geographically well located, aesthetically beautiful, spiritually divine - a place where nature and spirituality dwell together, urging the human race to be ecologically upright.

SECTION-IV
CHORTENS: ARCHITECTURE, SPIRITUAL AND ECOLOGICAL
SIGNIFICANCE.

Introduction

The mysteries of life and death were always the greatest agents of religious ritual and speculation. Through the experience of death man becomes conscious of life. Thus the cult of the dead stimulated primitive man to build the first great monuments (tumuli), while the other side of religious activity, which was concerned with the living and the mundane aspects of life, found expression in the simpler forms of tree and fire-worship. The tumuli originating from the burial mound, were massive structures of stone, taking the forms of hemispheres, cones, pyramids and similar plain stereometrical bodies, containing small cells which preserved the bodily remains and other relics of heroes, saints, kings and similar great personalities. In India, as in many other parts of Asia, the hemispheric form seems to have been the prevalent type of such monuments. According to the oldest tradition they were erected for great rulers and sages. (Govinda 1970) (23).

While the tumuli and the cult of the dead had their place outside the village, the sanctuary of the life-giving and life-preserving forces (personified in the sun-god) had its place in the centre of the village. It consisted of a simple altar (a sanctified form of the domestic hearth, the fire of which was always regarded sacred as a symbol of family life) or a small shrine (an idealized form of the village hut) which stood in the shadow of the sacred tree (the Tree of Life) and was surrounded by a fence as a demarcation of the sacred place.

The Buddhist *stupa* combined the elements of the village sanctuary with the monumental dome of the ancient tumulus (*caitya*), thus uniting the two oldest traditions of humanity, as expressed in the lunar and solar cult, fusing them into one universal symbol which recognized formally for the first time that life and death are only two sides of the same reality, complementing and conditioning each other. To think of them as separate is illusion, and only as long as the veil of Maya has not been lifted, the worship of these two forces proceeds separately, sometimes even as two separate forms of religion. But once it has been understood that there is no life without transformation, and

that the power of transformation is the essence of life- then the great synthesis takes place and the foundation of a world-religion is established. (Yeshe and Zopa Rinpoche 1982)(24).

Harmika

The Buddhist *stupa* originally consisted of an almost hemispherical tumulus and an altar-like structure (*harmika*) on its top, surmounted by one or several superimposed honorific umbrellas. The flattened hemisphere was compared to an egg and therefore called '*anda*', a terms which did not only allude to the shape (which was also compared to a water-bubble) but to its deeper significance as well, namely, as a symbol of latent creative power, while the quadrangular *harmika* on the summit of the cupola symbolized the sanctuary enthroned above the world (*anda* was also a synonym of the universe in the oldest Indian mythology) beyond death and rebirth. A similar parallelism exists between the *harmika* in the shade of the sacred tree, because the Holy One, whose ashes were enshrined in the altar like sanctuary of the *harmika*, instead of sacrificing other beings, had sacrificed himself for the welfare of all living beings. According to the Buddha there is only one sacrifice which is of real value, the sacrifice of our own desires, our own 'self'. The ultimate form of such a sacrifice is that of a Bodhisattva, who renounces even the ultimate peace of final *nirvana* (*Parinirvana*) until he has helped his fellow-being to find the path of liberation.

The Monorific Umbrella

It is an abstract representation of the shade-giving tree in this case representing the sacred Tree of Life - is one of the chief solar symbols, and in Buddhism that of Enlightenment (*samyak-sambodhi*). The importance of this symbol becomes clear from the Buddhist Scriptures, describing the struggle of the Buddha and Mara, the Evil One, for the place under the Bodhi Tree, the holiest spot in the world, later known as the Diamond Throne (*vajrasana*, *Tib. rDo-rje gdan*).

It must have been an old custom that the head of the community had his seat of honour under the sacred tree in the centre of the settlement where public meetings used to take place on religious and other important occasions. Consequently the umbrella, which replaced the tree when the head of the community moved about or presided over similar functions in other places, later on became one of the insignia of royalty. In order to mark

the distinctions in rank the ceremonial umbrella was doubled or trebled, or increased by even greater number of umbrellas, which were fixed one above the other, thus transforming the umbrella back again to the original tree-shape with its numerous layers of branches spreading around the stem and gradually getting shorter towards the top. These layered umbrellas are the thirteen rings or wheels along the entire length of the cone placed on top of '*harmika*' and '*pema*'

Historical Backdrop

In order to understand the transformation of the ancient customary tumulus into the universal conception of the *Caitya*, from which later the Tibetan *Chorten* developed, we must have a look at the earliest known Buddhist Stupa Sanchi. The great Sanchi Stupa was crowned by a threefold honorific umbrella and the altar-shrine on top of the hemispherical main structure was surrounded by a railing (*vedika*), exactly as in the case of the village sanctuary. Similar railings were repeated at the foot of the *stupa* and on the low circular-terrace upon which the flattened hemisphere rested. The lowest railing was provided with four gateways (*torana*) which opened towards the East, the South, the West & the North, emphasizing the universal character of Buddhism which is open to all the four quarters of the universe and invites all humankind with the call "Come and see!", and which exhorts its followers to open their hearts to all that lives, while radiating love, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity towards the whole world. The inner space between the stone railing and the *stupa*, as well as the circular terrace (*medhi*) at the base of the cupola were used as *pradaksina patha* for ritual circumambulation in the direction of the sun's course. The orientation of the gates equally corresponds to the sun's course: to sunrise, zenith, sunset and nadir. Just as the sun illuminates the physical world, so does the Buddha, the Enlightened One, illuminate the spiritual world. The Eastern gateway represents his birth, the Southern (which was regarded as the most important and therefore built first) his enlightenment, the Western his "setting in motion the Wheel of the Law" (*dharmacakra pravartana*) : the proclamation of his doctrine, and the Northern his final liberation (*pariniravana*).

This universal attitude and orientation remained one of the characteristics of the *stupa*, especially in the Northern countries of Buddhism, like Tibet, even after railings and gateways had disappeared. In the course of time all these details were fused into a

quadrangular substructure, which finally took the form of four terraces (sometimes furnished with four staircases, if the size of the monument permitted or required them) upon which the hemisphere was raised.

As the layers of superimposed umbrellas became more numerous they were transformed into the more architectural shape of a solid cone with a corresponding number of horizontal notches, which finally amounted to thirteen. With this transformation the original idea of the Tree of Life and Enlightenment was visibly restored and steadily gained in importance. That the conical spire was no more regarded as a set of umbrellas, can be seen from the fact that later on an honorific umbrella was again fixed on top of the cone. The succeeding section furnishes the details.

The different strata of the cone (separated by horizontal notches) were now explained to correspond to certain psychic faculties or stages of consciousness on the way to enlightenment and to their respective world-planes. Thus the spiritual rebirth of the world starts in the mind of man, and the Tree of Life grows out of his own heart, the centre of his world, and spreads into ever new infinities, into ever higher and purer realms, until it has turned into a Tree of Enlightenment.

Stupa and Individual Spirituality

Nepalese *stupas*, which in many respects have preserved archaic features, decorate the *harmika* (the cubic structure above the cupola) with painted human eyes, thus suggesting a human figure in the posture of meditation hidden in the *stupa*: the crossed legs in the base, the body up to the shoulders in the hemisphere, the head in the *harmika*. This also corresponds to the psycho-physical doctrine of the centres of psychic force (*cakra*) which are located one above the other in the human body, and through which consciousness develops in an ascending order: from the experience of material sense-objects through that of the immaterial worlds of pure mental objects, up to the supramundane consciousness of enlightenment, which has its base in the crown-*cakra* of the head (*sahasrara*). This *cakra* is symbolized by a dome-shaped or flame-like protuberance on the head of the Buddha, and by the cone-shaped Tree of Enlightenment which forms the spire of the *stupa* or the *Chorten*, or its various equivalents; like the *dogobas* (*dhatu-garbha*) of Sri Lanka or *pagodas* (a reversal of the word *dogoba*) in Burma, Thailand and Indo-China.

The *cakra* itself is a sun symbol. It was one of the attributes of the sun-god, either in the form of a discus or in the form of the wheel, representing the rolling sun-chariot. The solar origin is testified by the description of the flaming and radiating wheel which appears in the sky with its thousand spokes (rays) when a virtuous ruler has established a reign of righteousness and has attained the spiritual power which entitles and enables him to extend the Good Law (*dharma*) over the whole world and to become a world-ruler (*cakravartin*). Similarly, the "turning of the Wheel of the Good Law" has become a synonym for the Buddha's first proclamation of his doctrine (*dharma-chakra-pravartana-sutra*), by which the thousand-spoked sun-wheel of the universal law was set in motion, radiating its light throughout the world. (Govinda 1960)(25).

Psychic Forces and Spirituality

The *cakras* as radiating centres of psychic force gave a new impetus to the interpretation of the human body as a cosmic manifestation. Not only was the spinal column compared to Mount Meru, the axis of the universe, and therefore called '*meru-danda*' but the whole psycho-physical organism was explained in terms of solar and lunar forces, which through fine channels, the so-called veins or nadis, moved up and down between the seven *cakras*, which in their turn represented the elementary qualities of which the universe is built and of which the material elements are only the visible reflexes.

Unity of Spirituality and Nature Forces: Chorten and Human Ecology

A parallelism was established with respect to the psychic organism whose vital centres (*cakras*) were found to correspond to the elementary qualities of matter: the basic vital centre or "root support: (*muladhara-cakra*), situated in the perineum at the base of the spinal column, (which latter represents the Tree of Life) and corresponding to the element Earth, the solid state; the navel-centre (*manipura-cakra*) to the element Water, the fluid state; the heart-centre (*anahata-cakra*) to the element Fire, the heating, incandescent or radiating state; the throat-centre (*visuddha-cakra*) to the element Air, the gaseous state; and the centre on the crown of the head (*sahasrara-cakra*) to the element Ether (or in its passive aspect; Space), the state of vibration.

Each of these elements is symbolized by a sound (bija-mantra, a mystic syllable of creative power), a colour and a basic form. The latter two are of special interest to us,

as they have been directly applied to the architecture of the *chorten*. Earth is represented by a yellow cube, Water by a white sphere or a white round pot, Fire by a triangular body of either round or square base; i.e. a cone or, less frequently, a pyramid. Air is represented two dimensionally as a semi-circular bow-shaped form of green colour, three-dimensionally as a hemisphere with the base upward, like a cup. Ether is graphically represented by a small-acuminated circle or blue dot (*bindu*) and appears in three-dimensional form as a multi-coloured flaming jewel, i.e., a small sphere.

If we put all these elements together in due order, namely, the sphere upon the cube, a cone or a pyramid upon the sphere, and upon the cone or pyramid a cup-like hemisphere which carries a flaming drop on its plane surface-then we get the ideal figure or the abstract stereometrical form which represents the basic principles of stupa-architecture, as preserved in the Tibetan *chorten* as well as in the Japanese *Sotoba* into a vase-or pot-shaped vessel (Tib : *bum-pa*) which rests on a cubic substructure and is crowned by a tall cone, ending in a small upturned hemisphere, which carries on its plane surface a crescent, a sundisc and the 'flaming jewel', one upon the other (Dorjee 1996) (26). This represents all elements of universe and human body together, sanctifying the sum total-an idea wholly supporting the concept of 'Deep Ecology', the biocentric spiritual aspect of human ecology. It is further amplified in succeeding paragraph.

The main parts of the *Chorten* are generally given the colours of the 'great elements' (*mahabhuta*): the cubical sub-structure yellow (Earth); the pot-shaped central part white (Water), the conical spire red (Fire), while the fourth element (Air) which should show a green surface, is generally hidden under the honorific umbrella, a symbol which, especially in its Tibetan form, is closely connected with the concept of Air. Without taking into account its tree-origin and its natural relationship to sun, air and sky, it may be mentioned that according to the later Indian and Tibetan tradition honorific umbrellas were supposed to appear in the sky, when a saint had realized certain magic powers. Between the umbrella and the flaming drop (Tib.: *thig-le*), the respective symbols of Air and Ether, there is a white crescent, in whose inner curve rests a red sundisc. They repeat the colours of the two main elements of the *Chorten*, namely that of the moon-related, waterpot-shaped central part and that of the sun-related conical spire. The meaning of this repetition becomes evident if we remember the role of the lunar and solar

forces moving through the main channels or *nadis* of the psycho-physical organism of man. The most important one runs through the spinal column and is called *susumna* (*dhu-ma-rtsa* in Tibetan), while *ida* (Tib.: *rkyang-ma rtsa*) and *pingala* (Tib.: *ro-ma-rtsa*) coil round the central channel in opposite directions, the pale white-coloured *ida* starting from the left (or, according to Tibetan tradition, controlling the left side of the human body), the red coloured *pingala* from the right (or controlling the right side). *Ida* is the conductor of the lunar or 'moon-like' (*candrasvarupa*) forces, which have the regenerative properties and the unity of undifferentiated subconscious life, as represented by the latent creativeness of seed, egg and semen, in which all chronic-telluric cults are centred. *Pingala* is the vehicle of solar forces (*surya-svarupa*), which have the properties of intellectual activity, representing the conscious, differentiated individualized life. Individualization, however, if separating itself, from its origin, is as death-spelling as knowledge severed from the sources of life. This is why wisdom and compassion (*prajna and karuna*) must be united for the attainment of liberation. And for the same reason *pingala*, the solar energy, without the regenerating influence of *ida*, the lunar energy, acts like a poison, while even the elixir of immortality (*amrita*), to which the regenerating lunar energy is compared, has no value without the light of knowledge.

It is for this reason that only when the solar and lunar energies are united in the central channel, the *susumna*, and carried up from the root-centre (*muladhara-cakra*) through all the other centres of psychic power and consciousness until they reach the universal level in the Thousand-Petalled Lotus of the *sahasrār-cakra*. The final integration of these two forces takes place and results in the ultimate state of illumination (*samyak-sambodhi*). In the spherical and conical part of the *Chorten* the two currents of psychic energy are represented by their separate and elementary aspects; in the crescent and the sun-disc they are represented in their sublimated or spiritualized form as knowledge (*prajna*) and compassion (*karuna*), from the union of which the dazzling flame-jewel of perfect enlightenment is born. This symbol of unity and ultimate reality has its latent counterpart in the form of a blue dot (*bindu*; Tib.: *thig-le*) or seed (*bija*), the creative germ or spiritual potentiality, inherent in every sentient being as the potential consciousness of enlightenment (*budhicitta*; Tib.: *hyahng chub-sems*). The unfolding of this latent principle is the aim of the spiritual path, which is achieved when all our

psychic faculties as embodied in the various centres- are permeated by it. When the mystic union between the sun of knowledge and the moon of compassion has reached its zenith and consummation on the highest spiritual plane, the Thousand -Petalled Lotus, then it comes to pass that the dark seed, containing the essence of the universe and the ever-present reality of the *dharmadhatu*, breaks open and bursts forth into the dazzling flame of enlightenment, the crowning symbol of the most universal type of the Tibetan Mahayana Chorten (Govinda 1970) (27).

Conclusion

Combination of universal elements and forces, and uniting them with life system psychic powers and than placing them in the form of a *Chorten* urges the living humans to understand and have 'karuna' for all existence-biotic or abiotic. This is encompassed the following quotation from Chandogya Upanisad :-

*'The essence of all beings is earth,
the essence of earth is water,
the essence of water are the plants,
the essence of the plants is man,
the essence of man is speech,
the essence of speech is the Rgveda,
the essence of the Rgveda is the Samaveda,
the essence of the Samaveda is the Udgita (which is OM)
That Udgita is the best of all essences, the highest,
Deserving the highest place, the eighth.'*

(CHANDOGYA UPANISAD)

It is essentially 'knowledge of ' and 'compassion for ' all universal existence that leads to enlightenment. This message of 'Karuna' and 'gyan' is reflected in the 'chortens'. This is human ecology in its deepest realms. This is the message of Buddha in the 'chortens'.

SECTION -V
CHORTENS OF TASHIDING

Introduction

The *chortens* seen in all parts of Sikkim follow Tibeto-Buddhist rituals and architecture. Mention of various types of chorten architecture is incomplete without making references to the eight *stupas* associated with the eight major events in the life of Lord Buddha as under: -

- (a) The first stupa was constructed in the Lumbini garden of Kapilavastu where the Buddha was born.
- (b) The second stupa was on the banks of the Naranjana River in the kingdom of Magadha, where the Buddha had attained enlightenment.
- (c) The third stupa was constructed in the Varanasi city of Kashi where he turned the great Dharmacakra.
- (d) The fourth stupa was constructed in the Jetavana of Sravasti where he performed the great miracles.
- (e) The fifth stupa was constructed in the Kanyakubja city of Sankasya where the Buddha descended from the Trayastrimsah (the palace of thirty-three gods).
- (f) The sixth stupa was constructed at Rajagrha where he reconciled the schism in Sangha (*sarighabheda*).
- (g) The seventh stupa was constructed in the city of Vaisali where he prolonged his life span (*ayuhpramana*).
- (h) The eighth stupa was constructed in the city of Kusinagara where he entered Nirvana.

Shapes and dimensions of the eight fundamental types of Tibeto-Buddhist *chortens* are transformed types of earlier Indian Buddhist stupas. Despite this transformation, the Tibeto-Buddhist *chortens* have retained all architectural aspects and religious significance as well as spiritual values and symbolical meanings which originated in ancient Indian Buddhist culture, as described in previous section.

Types of Chortens

Chortens are of eight types. Structural distinctions amongst the eight types of *chortens* are shown in Figure 3.6 to Figure 3.13. These are explained below (Pema Dorjee 1996) (28): -

- (a) **Chorten of Enlightenment**. (Figure 3.6) It has a flight of four perfect square steps, which are free from embellishments. There is a tradition of making all the upper edges of the steps bulge out by one-quarter part of their own height to have an attractive look.
- (b) **Chorten of 'Heaped Lotuses' Type**. (Figure 3.7) It is also called the *chorten* of "Auspicious Appearance" and "Appearance of Sugata". It comprises a flight of four circular steps adorned with heaped lotuses. There is also a tradition of making a maximum of seven steps to symbolize the seven paces that the Buddha took immediately after his birth in the Lumbini garden of Kepilvastu.
- (c) **Chorten of 'Multiple Auspicious Doors'**. (Figure 3.8). It is also called the *chorten* of 'Divine Wisdom'. It comprises a flight of four square steps, and each side's centre bulges out by one-third the size of their width. These *chortens* have 108 doors or niches at the maximum, 56 in the medium and 16 in the minimum. Symbolically, four doors on each side symbolize the four Noble-truths, eight doors on each side symbolize the eight doors of liberations, twelve doors on each side symbolize the twelve links of interdependent origination, and sixteen doors on each side symbolize the 16 types of emptiness.
- (d) **Chorten of "Great Miracle"**. (Figure 3.9). This is also called *chorten* of "Conquest of Tirthikas", which is identical to the preceding ones (having a flight of four square steps), although it does not have doors.
- (e) **Chorten of 'Descent from Heaven'**. (Figure 3.10). Alternatively it is called "Offered by Devas". The structural formation is similar to the preceding ones, but it has three ladders in the centre of each side's projected area.
- (f) **Chorten of 'Reconciliation'**. (Figure 3.11). It comprises four octagonal steps formed by cutting off the four corners of the flight of four steps to form eight even sides. They are free from all embellishments. Occasionally, though rarely, there

is a tradition of making all the upper edges of the steps projected out by one third of their own height.

(g) **Chorten of 'Victory'**. (Figure 3.12). It has three circular steps rather than four. Even the base of ten virtues and the vase-base are circular.

(h) **Chorten of 'Nirvana'**. (Figure 3.13). It is rather unique type of a *chorten* because of its 'bell shaped dome', in which mouth rests directly on the 'base of ten virtues' without any steps.

Structural Components of Chortens.

The '*chortens*' in all its styles comprises three main structural bodies (See the Figures on *Chorten* types): -

(a) **The Lion Throne.** This consists of six symbolic structures from the ground plinth upto the frame.

(b) **The Intermediate Section.** This comprises six symbolical structures from the 'base of ten virtues' upto the *harmika*.

(c) **The Upper Section.** The upper section or 'upper extremity' consists of all structures from the 'lotus supporting umbrella' upto the spherical pinnacle, and surround the 'axle pole', which is the vertical at the centre of a *chorten*.

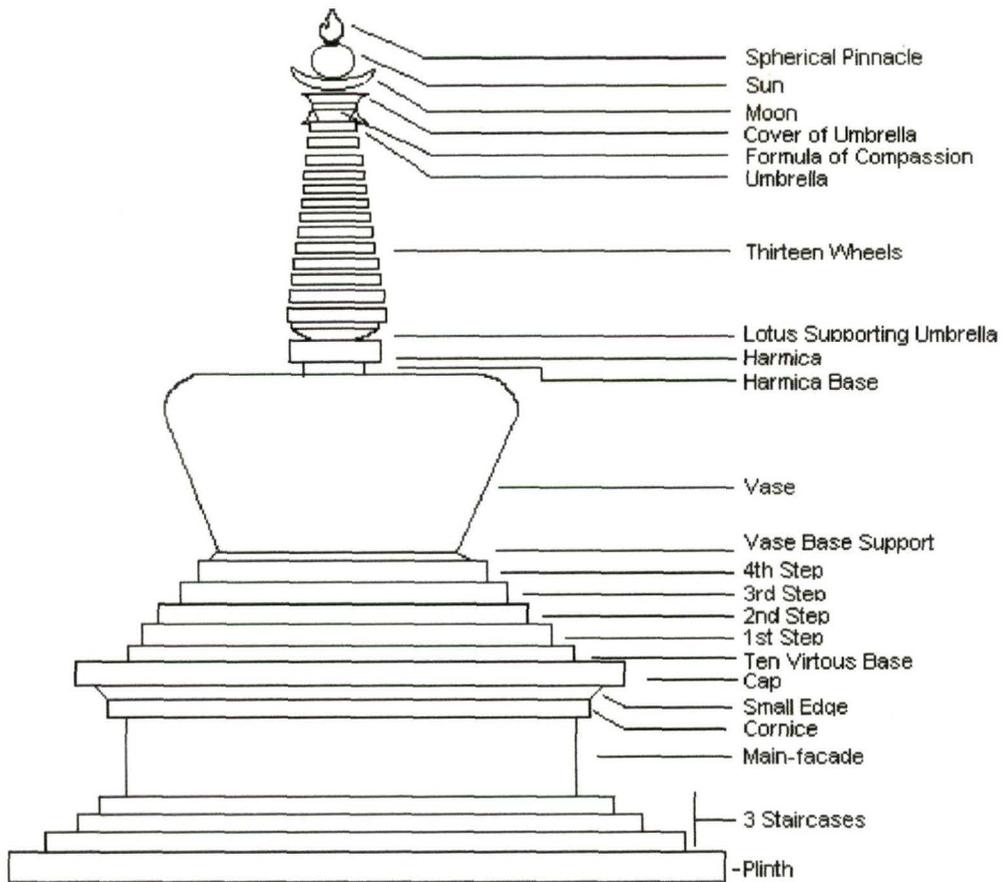
Symbolical Meanings of Chorten Components

The flight of four steps, vase-base, the Vase (dome) *harmika*, axle poles, thirteen wheels and the rain-cloak comprise the physical structure of the *chorten*. 'The accumulation' or 'essence' of *chorten* as explained by Angarika Govinda and Pema Dorjee is explained in succeeding paragraphs.

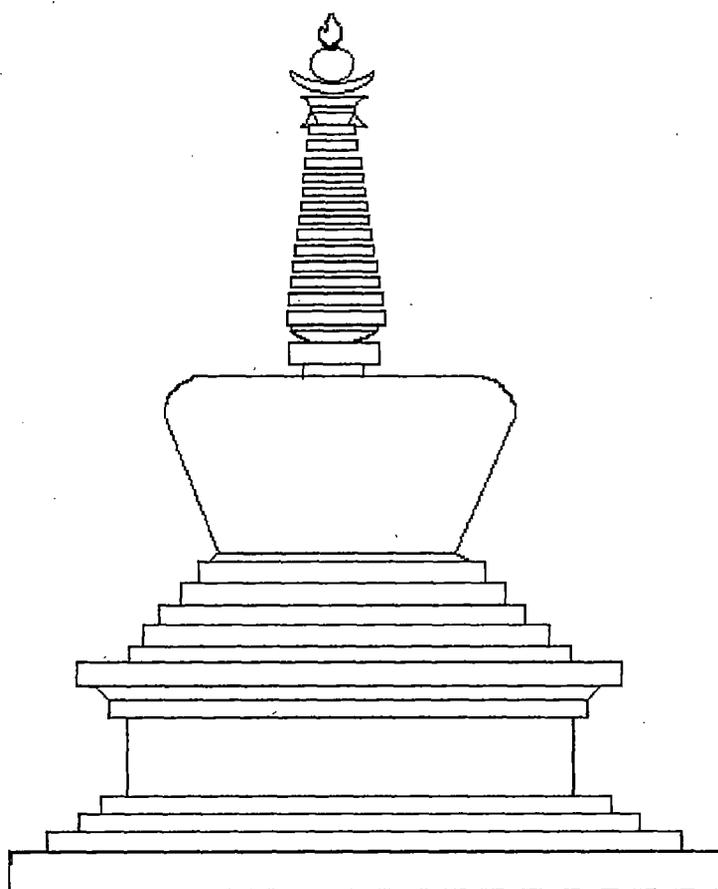
The Steps

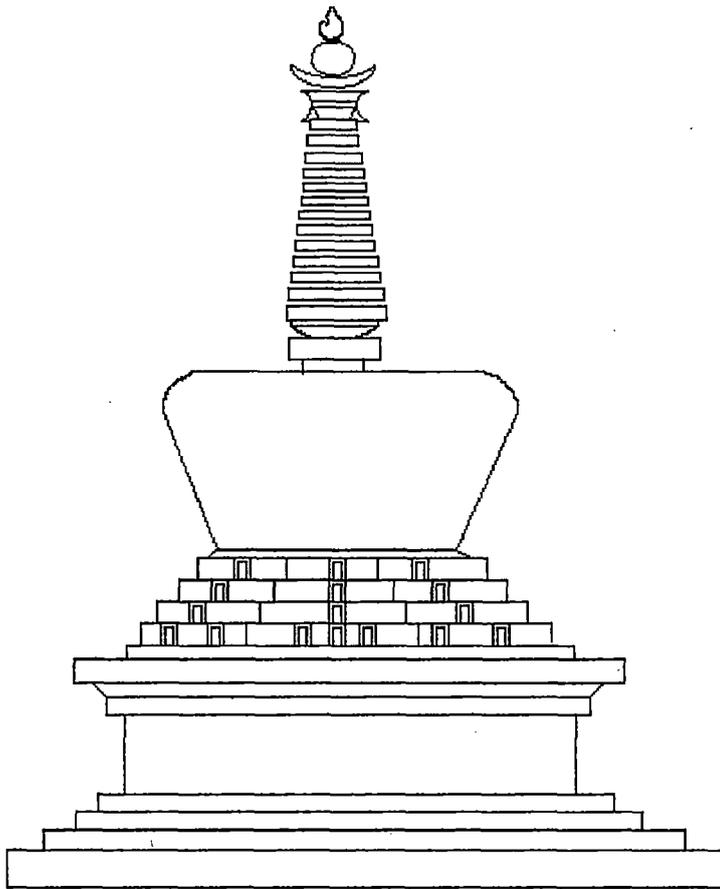
The first step symbolizes the four close mindfulness (*catvari smrtiyupasthana adhara vedi*) viz :-

- (a) The close mindfulness of body.
- (b) The close mindfulness of feeling.
- (c) The close mindfulness of mind.
- (d) The close mindfulness of wisdom.

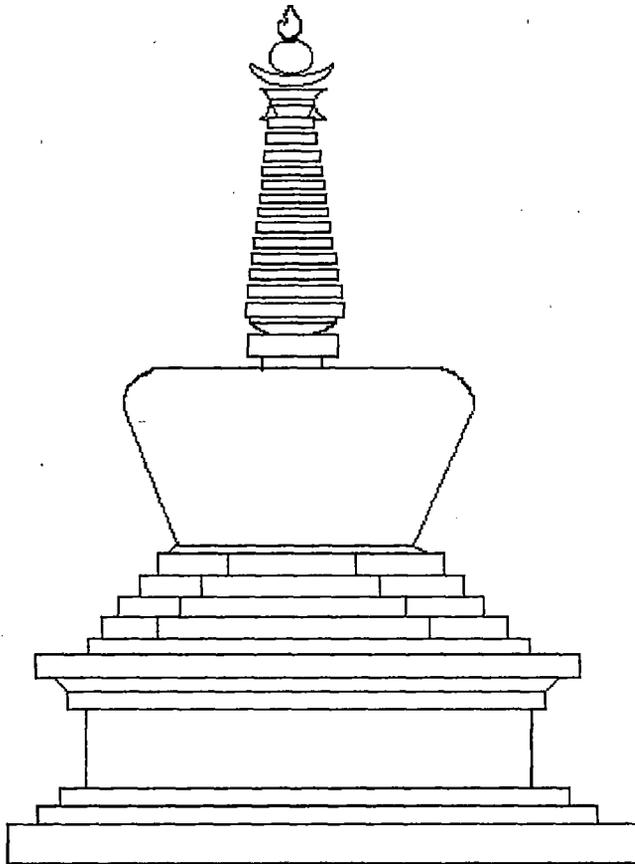
CHORTEN OF ENLIGHTENMENT

CHORTEN OF HEAPED LOTUSES

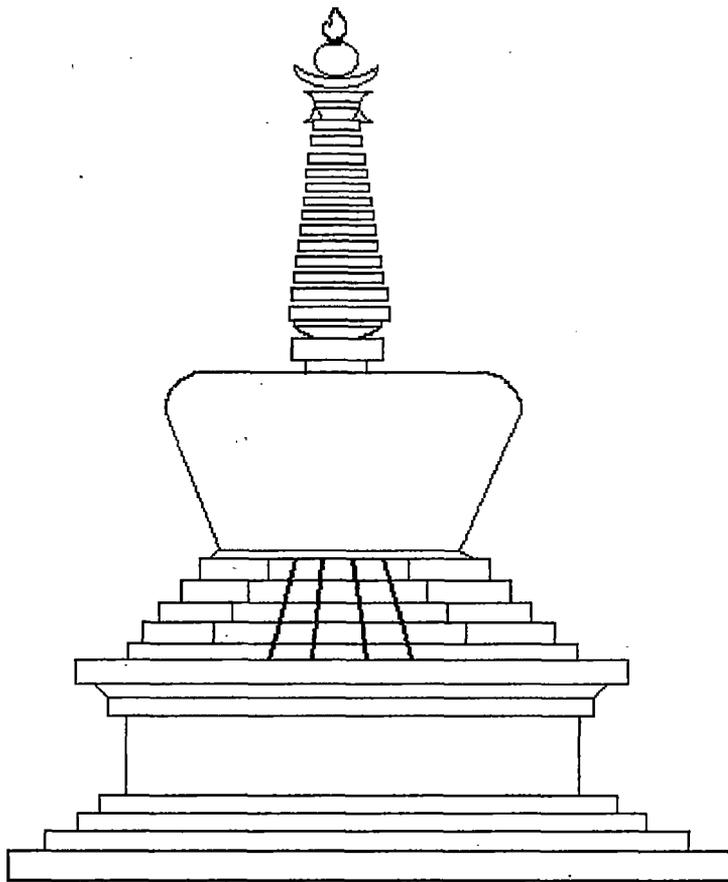


CHORTEN OF AUSPICIOUS DOORS

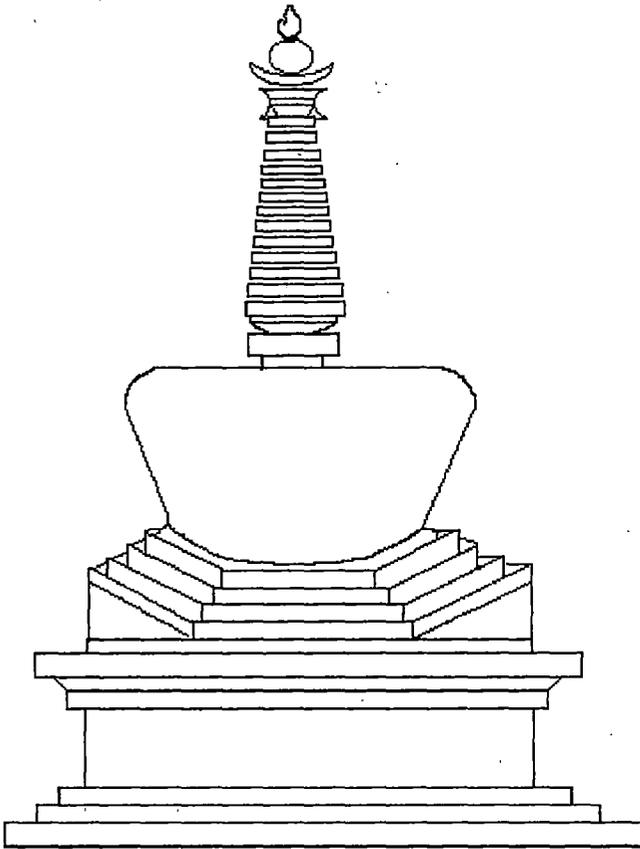
CHORTEN OF GREAT MIRACLE



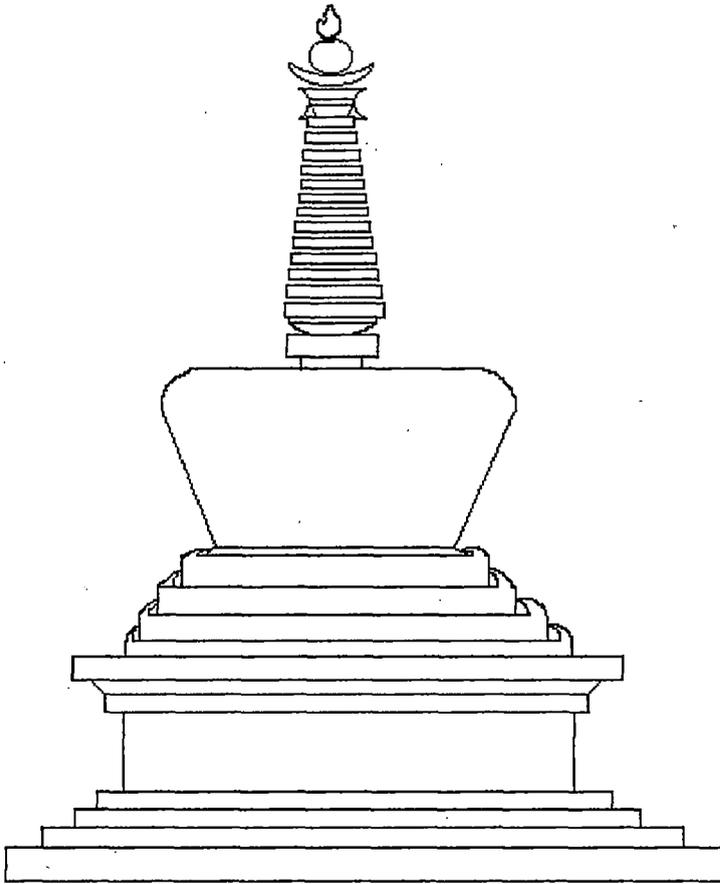
CHORTEN OF DESCENT FROM HEAVEN



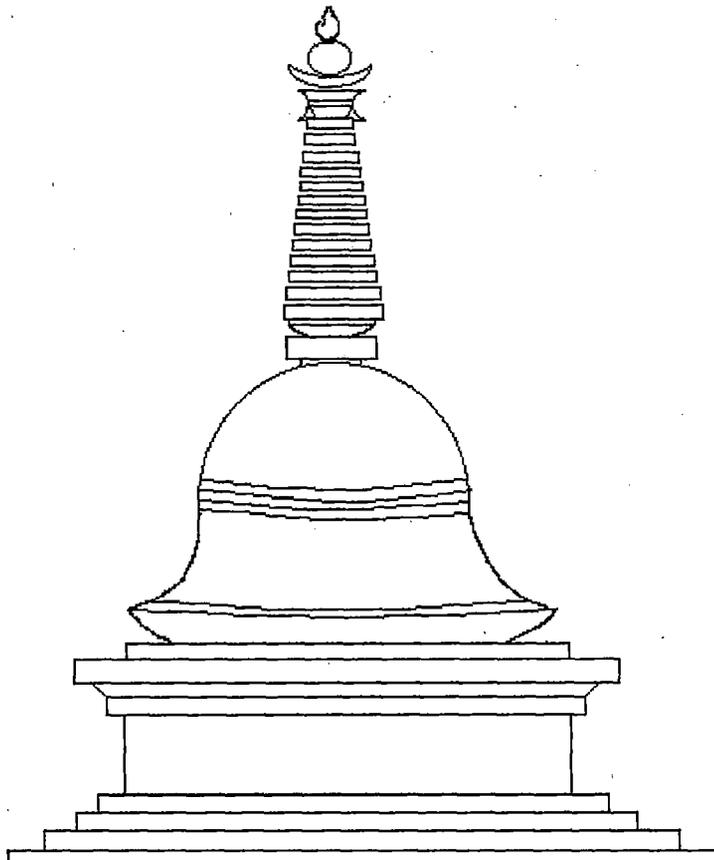
CHORTEN OF RECONCILIATION



CHORTEN OF VICTORY



CHORTEN OF NIRVANA



The second step symbolizes the four perfect abandonments viz :-

- (a) Efforts to abandon the non-virtues that have arisen.
- (b) Efforts of prevents the non-virtues that have not yet arisen.
- (c) Efforts to produce the virtues that have not yet arisen.
- (d) Efforts to retain the virtues that have already arisen.

The third step symbolizes the four stages of miraculous powers (*catvari rddhipadas trtiya vedi*) viz :-

- (a) A miraculous power possessed of compositional factor renouncing an aspiration of meditative concentration or meditative concentration of desire.
- (b) A miraculous power possessed of compositional factor renouncing a meditative concentration of mind.
- (c) A miraculous power possessed of compositional factor renouncing a meditative concentration of effort.
- (d) A miraculous power possessed of compositional factor renouncing a meditative concentration of analysis.

The fourth step symbolizes the five (moral) faculties viz :-

- (a) Moral faculty of faith.
- (b) Moral faculty of effort.
- (c) Moral faculty o mindfulness.
- (d) Moral faculty of meditative concentration.
- (e) Moral faculty of wisdom.

The Vase

The vase-base symbolizes the five (moral) powers viz :-

- (a) The moral power of faith.
- (b) The moral power of effort.
- (c) The moral power of mindfulness.
- (d) The moral power of meditative concentration.
- (e) The moral power of wisdom.

The vase dome of the chorten symbolizes the seven factors of enlightenment

viz :-

- (a) The factor of enlightenment to the perfect mindfulness.

- (b) The factor of enlightenment to the perfect dharma.
- (c) The factor of enlightenment to the perfect joy.
- (d) The factor of enlightenment to the perfect effort.
- (e) The factor of enlightenment to the perfect suppleness.
- (f) The factor of enlightenment to the perfect meditative concentration.
- (g) The factor of enlightenment to the perfect equanimity.

The *harmika* symbolizes the Eightfold Noble paths viz :-

- (a) Right view.
- (b) Right thought.
- (c) Right speech.
- (d) Right action.
- (e) Right livelihood.
- (f) Right endeavour.
- (g) Right mindfulness.
- (h) Right meditative concentration.

The axle-pole symbolizes the ten knowledge's viz :-

- (a) Knowledge of conventional phenomena.
- (b) Knowledge of others' mind.
- (c) Knowledge of dharma.
- (d) Knowledge of realization of subsequent.
- (e) Knowledge of sufferings.
- (f) Knowledge of cessation.
- (g) Knowledge of sources of origination.
- (h) Knowledge of paths.
- (j) Knowledge of exhaustion.
- (k) Knowledge of non-productivity.

Symbolism of the wheels is as explained :-

- (a) The first bottom wheel symbolizes the power of understanding what is appropriate and inappropriate .
- (b) The second wheel symbolizes the power of understanding that one is responsible for one's own deeds or action.

- (c) The third wheel symbolizes the power of understanding, concentration, liberation, meditative stabilization and meditative absorption.
- (d) The fourth wheel symbolizes the power of understanding the superior and inferior faculties.
- (e) The fifth wheel symbolizes the power of understanding the various mental inclinations.
- (f) The sixth wheel symbolizes the power of understanding various mental faculties/constitutions.
- (g) The seventh wheel symbolizes the power of understanding the paths leading to all goals.
- (h) The eighth wheel symbolizes the power of understanding the recollection of former existence.
- (j) The ninth wheel symbolizes the power understanding deaths and births.
- (k) The tenth wheel symbolizes the power of understanding the exhaustion/cessation of contaminations.
- (l) The eleventh wheel symbolizes the first peculiar close mindfulness (of the *Tathagata*), that by which, when the *Tathagata* teaches the dharma to his retinue, he does not get pleased when all his disciples listen with great respect.
- (m) The twelfth wheel symbolizes the second peculiar close mindfulness, that by which, when the *Tathagata* teaches the dharma to his retinue, he does not get angry when all his disciples do not listen with due respect.
- (n) The thirteenth wheel symbolizes the third peculiar close mindfulness, that by which, when the *Tathagata* teaches the dharma to his retinue, he neither becomes joyful nor angry when part of his disciples listen with respect and part do not listen with respect.

The rain-cloak symbolizes the great compassion by which the *Tathagata* examines the mental disposition of his trainees who are mature, immature or maturing. For the benefit of universal people, a perfect apprehension of all the truth bodies (*dharmakaya*) at all the different occasions is the nature of the stupa.

The umbrella represents the *Tathagata* a leader of all sentient beings, because the *Tathagata* became the supreme among the living beings without legs, among those having two legs, many legs, and among those who are corporeal and incorporeal.

The moon represents the brightness of the unsurpassed wisdom by which the *Tathagata* generates the eyes of the unsurpassed knowledges in the darkness of this world. Representation aspects of the sun and ether are given in previous section.

Chortens of Tashiding.

Plate V of Figure 3.5 has been briefly touched upon in the previous section, where the description of Tashiding Monastery has been enumerated.

There are a total of 41 *chortens* at Tashiding. They have been numbered for explanatory notes. Each number in plate V represents the location of the *chortens*. The *chortens* here are of three types: -

- (a) **Chorten of Enlightenment.** Numbers 1 to 4, 8 to 17, 19 to 32, 34 to 36 and 38 and 39. Total –33 *chortens*.
- (b) **Chorten of Reconciliation.** Number 5 and 20.
- (c) **Chorten of Great Miracle.** Numbers 7, 18 and 33.

Chortens mentioned below correspond to the *Tathagatas* and Gurus as mentioned below: -

- (a) **Dhudal Chorten.** 8. This is the protector deity of Tashiding Monastery.
- (b) Lhabab *chorten* is at No 24.
- (c) Woe-Sung Ku-dhung, the oldest and largest *chorten* is at No 25.
- (d) Kagyu Lama *Chorten* is at No 31.
- (e) Lamyang Khentse Wongpo (Choe-ki-Lodoe form Tibet) is at No 23.
- (f) *Chorten* of Guru Rang Jong.
- (g) Dhakar (White Rock) Tashiding, which is the key centre of main Tashiding pilgrimage is at No 40.
- (h) No 41 is the location where Guru Rinpoche's arrow had contacted the ground, and where he sat in meditation.

Conclusion

Here we have reached the limit of what words can express. Beyond the words lies the practical relativity between the psychic, spiritual and natural forces, and this is exactly what the *chortens* of Tashiding, and other places in Himalayas and trans – Himalayas communicate to the living humans.

References

1. Jordan, T.G., and Rowntree, L., The Human Mosaic : A Thematic Introduction to Cultural Geography, Harper Collin Publishers, New York, 1990.
2. Durkheim, E., The Dualism in Human Nature in 'Essays on Sociology and Philosophy', (ed). K.H. Wolff, New York, Harper Torch Books, 1964.
3. Swanson Guy, E., The Birth of the Gods: The Origin of the Primitive Beliefs, Ann Arbor, University of Michigam Press, 1960.
4. Egri, P.C., 'Nature in Spiritual Traditions' in Living with Nature by Fischer, F., and Hajer, A., Oxford University Press, New York, 1999.
5. Toffler, A., The Third Wave, William Collins Sons & Co. Ltd., London, 1980.
6. Frost, P.J., and Egri, C.P., 'The Shamanic Perspective and Organizational Change and Development.' Journal of Organizational Change Management, 7(1):7-23, 1994.
7. Halifax, J., 'The Third Body : Buddhism, Shamanism and Deep Ecology,' in A.H. Badiner (ed), Dharma Gaia : A Harvest of Essays in Buddhism and Ecology, Calif : Parallax Press, Berkley, 1990.
8. Risley, H.H., (ed), The Gazetteer of Sikkim, Bengal Government Secretariat Calcutta, 1894.
9. Subba, T.B., Politics of Culture, Orient Longman Ltd, Chennai, 1999.
10. Foning, A.R., Lepcha : My Vanishing Tribe, Sterling Publishers Private Limited, New Delhi, 1987.
11. Egri, P.C., *ibid*.
12. Macy, J., 'Toward a Healing of Self and World', in Ecology (ed) Merchant, C, Rawat Publications Jaipur, 1996.

13. Chapple, C.K., 'Hindu Environmentalism : Traditional and Contemporary Resources', in M.E. Tucker and J.A. Grim (eds) 'World Views and Ecology,' Bucknell University Press, Lewisburg, 1993.
14. Gadgil, M. and Guha, R., 'This Fissured Land : An Ecological History of India', University of California, Berkley, 1992.
15. Badiner, A.H., (ed), 'Dharma Gaia : A Harvest of Essays in Buddhism and Ecology,' Calif : Parallax Press, Berkley, 1990.
16. Kaza, S., 'Acting with Compassion : Buddhism, Feminism and Environmental Crisis', in C.J. Adams (ed) 'Ecofeminism and the Sacred', Continuum, New York, 1993.
17. Bhatt, R., 'A Gandhian Perspective in the Himalayan Foothills', in J. Plant (ed) 'Healing the Wounds,' New Society Publishers, Santa Cruz, 1989.
18. Devall, B., 'Ecocentric Sangha' in A.H. Badiner (ed) 'Dharma Gaia : A Harvest of Essays in Buddhism and Ecology,' Parallax Press, Berkley, 1990.
19. Risley, H.H., *ibid*.
20. GRIT Library, Wall Display, Gangtok, 2000.
21. Namgyal, Thutob, and Dolma, Y., 'History of Sikkim,' 1908.
22. Dhamala, R.R., 'Monasteries of Sikkim,' Occasional Paper No 8, University of North Bengal, Siliguri, 1993.
23. Govinda, Lama, Angarika., 'The Historical and symbolical Origin of Chorten, in Bulletin of Tibetology, SRIT, Gangtok, Vol VII, No 3., 1970.
24. Yeshe, L., and Rinpoche, Z., 'Wisdom Energy : Basic Buddhist Teachings,' Wisdom Publications, 1976.
25. Govinda, Lama, Angarika, 'Foundations of Tibetan Mysticism,' B.I. Publications, New Delhi, 1960.
26. Dorjee, Pema., 'Stupa and its Technology,' IGNCA with Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, New Delhi, 1996.
27. Govinda, Lama, Angarika., *ibid*.
28. Dorjee, Pema., *Ibid*.