

The consecration of a Bhutanese Drukpa Kagyu temple in Nepal

SHIRIIN BARAKZAI¹

Abstract: A historical event occurred over three sunny days in November 2022, namely the consecration by senior Bhutanese officials at Kathmandu valley's most sacred Buddhist site, Swayambhu, of a temple rebuilt after a once-in-a-hundred-year earthquake. The first part of this article provides a brief history of a Bhutanese Drukpa Kagyu temple at Swayambhu. Although the legend of Bhutan's acquisition of this temple may be familiar to some readers, this article digs deeper into the popular oral account and shares some lesser-known material relating to the temple's loss by Bhutan in the 19th century, a fire in 1907 which led to the change in its physical form, and its subsequent recovery by Bhutan in the late 1970's. The second part of this article shares documentary photos of the 2022 consecration led by the current Dorje Lupon, Sonam Gyamtsho, supported by the incarnation of Kusho Tsechu Rinpoche, Jigme Choying Norbu. Zhung Dratshang monks were assisted by monks from Sangye Choling, the largest Bhutanese gumpa in Nepal.

Keywords: Nepal, Bhutan, Swayambhu, 'phags pa shing kun, Gorkha, relations, consecration, earthquake

Introduction

On Saturday 25 April 2015, just before noon, a magnitude 7.8 earthquake shook the Kathmandu valley. A temple on the west side of the famed Swayambhu *mahacaitya* (འཕགས་པ་པོ་ལྷ་ཁྱེད་ཀྱི་ལྷ་ཁྱེད་) was among the many buildings on the hill which was heavily damaged (UNESCO, 2015, p. 71). The resulting reconstruction was implemented by the caretaker appointed from the Bhutanese-lineage Sangye Choling monastery and funded by the Royal Government of Bhutan. Although the historical narrative of Bhutan's acquisition of this temple may be familiar to some readers, the exact origins

¹ Shiriin Barakzai is an independent researcher based in Kathmandu, Nepal. She can be contacted at: shiriinb2@yahoo.co.uk

of Bhutan's management of this temple are unclear. This article explores variations of the popular oral account and shares some lesser-known material relating to the temple's history.

The practice of Tantric Buddhism as well as trade are said to be the basis for a centuries-old relationship between Bhutan and the Malla rulers of the Kathmandu Valley (Shrestha, 2008, p. 53). Some claim that Bhutan's relations with the Gorkha have existed since Dravya Shah (White, 1909, p.102; Pant et al, 1958, pp. 620-623; Hasrat, 1980, p. 47; Dorji, 1996, p. 13), but no primary sources are found to confirm this. There are also claims that Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal visited Nepal (Sharma, 1990, p.158) that he even studied at Swayambhu or was awarded both Swayambhu and Boudha (Rose, 1977, p. 69; Dorji, 1995, p. 191). Though there is no mention of this in his biographies, evidence for such a visit is said to be the migration of Nepali craftsmen to Bhutan in the seventeenth century (Dhungel B, 1976, pp. 131-132; Tamang, 1998, p. 23).

The popular origin story of the Swayambhu temple states that a Gorkha king lacked an heir. His queen dreamt of being blessed by a lama of Deva Dharma, a name used in Nepal for Bhutan until the last century, resulting in the birth of a son. A royal invitation was thus sent to Bhutan and a lama was dispatched, whose blessings did indeed lead to a son. In return, the king offered a reward, and thus Bhutan acquired management of the Swayambhu temple (Yonten Phuntshogs, 2013, p. 268). The lama who blessed the royal couple is generally identified as Damcho Pekar (b.1639 - d.1708), later to become the fourth Je Khenpo. The Gorkha king he blessed is named as either Ram Shah (b.1550 c.1606 – d.1636) (Yonten Phuntshogs, 2013, pp. 268-269) or Nara Bhupal Shah (b.1697 c.1716 – d.1743), father of Prithvi Narayan Shah² (Yogiraj, 1957, pp. 25-26; Shakya, 2004, pp. 259-260; Pradhan, 1975, pp. 28-29). However the dates of these individuals seemingly contradict the historicity of both versions of the legend. Ram Shah died before Damcho Pekar was born, and Damcho Pekar was dead long before Prithvi Narayan's birth in 1723, thus he cannot have caused the birth of Prithvi Narayan.³

² Prithvi Narayan Shah is credited with the unification of Nepal, but specifically with the conquest of the Kathmandu Valley.

³ This date discrepancy has already been noted by Dhungel (1989, p170).

From Damcho Pekar's biography (ལྷོ་ཐེ་ཐེ་ལ་) we know he was sent to Nepal by 3rd Desi Migyur Tenpa (Ardussi, 1977, pp. 318-320; Kunga Gyaltsen, 1970, pp. 37-45; Kunga Gyaltsen, 1985, pp70-81). However, a unified Nepal had not yet come into existence, and thus, while it is possible that he met the Kathmandu or Lalitpur kings, he is unlikely to have met the ruler of Gorkha, and no such meeting is mentioned, nor any blessing of a son (Ardussi, 1977, pp. 318-320; Aris, 1994, f. 118). While Damcho Pekar's biography mentions reconstruction of a gompa and the establishment of others, it also states that two years later he fled Kathmandu to Jumla and then to Ghatika⁴ before returning to Bhutan (Kunga Gyaltsen, 1970, p. 41; Ardussi, 1977, pp. 319-320; Kunga Gyaltsen, 1985, p. 76; Aris, 1994, p. 110).

Despite this, popular accounts claim that Damcho Pekar remained in Nepal for decades managing the estates Bhutan had been granted. This is inferred by a list of lamas apparently appointed to the Gorkha court in the centuries following Prithvi Narayan's conquest of the Kathmandu valley in 1769. Bhutan's continued relationship with Nepal is presumed from various official documents including land grants which mention Simbhu and Kintol⁵ (Pema Tshewang, 1994, pp. 233-234).⁶

⁴ Present day Cooch Bihar, West Bengal. (Dorje & Ura, 2017, p. 497 fn 27) (Dorji, 1996, p. 13).

⁵ i.e. Swayambhu and Kimdole, the hill to the south, known to Tibetans and in Dzongkha as ལྷོ་ཐེ་ཐེ་ལ་, the second Vulture Peak. Note that until Prithvi Narayan's conquest of the Kathmandu valley, Swayambhu was not under Gorkha control and could not have been awarded by them.

⁶ Lopon Pema Tshewang's 1994 “འབྲེང་གི་རྒྱལ་འབྲེང་། འབྲེང་གི་རྒྱལ་འབྲེང་།” is the earliest publication of the list of Lama's posted to the Gorkha court. Unfortunately he did not cite his sources, but the content of Lopon's Chapter 53 mirrors a set of documents also held by the National Library of Bhutan. The document appears to be based on a handwritten “history” and a selection of transcribed copperplates from Nagathali gompa, Rasuwa. This transcription has no date or author, but the paper format and the lamas named suggest it was written in the Rana period, i.e. mid-19 to mid-20th century. These documents were shared with Dhungel by Kusho Tsechu Rinpoche in the 1980's (Dhungel, 1989 and 2012). Thus it seems that Lopon Pema's Chapter 53 is based on the Nagathali material.

Michael Aris undertook an early translation of some of these materials prior to Lopon Pemala's publication. Aris ascribes his text to བས་པོ་ལྷོ་ཐེ་ལ་ Sangye Norbu but provides no explanation for this attribution (Aris, 1994, ff. 96-106).

Thus, though the information appears to originate from Nepal, Lopon Pemala's is the only published version of the “history”.

However the sources do not confirm Bhutan's control of a temple at Swayambhu at this time.

A variation on the legend states that a different Bhutanese lama came to Nepal during Rana Bahadur Shah's (b. 1775 c.1777-1799) reign and claimed the promised reward for the earlier blessing of the royal heir (Rodseth, 1993, p. 141), or that the temple was built with the income from previously awarded *guthi* lands (Shakya, 2004, p. 309), and named Dharmakirti (Dhungel, 1989, p. 171; Manandhar, 2011, p. 35). However the name of this lama is not mentioned, he is only referred to as the Deva Dharma lama. Lopon Pema Tshewang records a lesser known event to which the Swayambhu temple award is also ascribed, together with land in Haku⁸ (Jest, 1985, pp. 14-15).

Prithvi Narayan is said to have given the temple to Bhutan in exchange for the 16th Desi, Sonam Lhundrub (aka Zhidar) relinquishing claims over Vijaypur⁹ (Pema Tshewang, 1994, pp. 235-236). However, Zhidar was ousted in 1773 and Prithvi Narayan died in January 1775. European sources suggest Vijaypur was under Gorkha control in mid-1774 (Bogle & Manning, 1879, pp. 141, 149; Stiller, 1973, pp. 109-110), while Lopon Pema notes that the Vijaypur leadership situation remained unresolved at the time of Desi Pema Chodag (1807-1808) (Pema Tshewang, 1994, p. 238). Thus it seems unlikely that if a deal regarding Vijaypur and Swayambhu had been agreed between Prithvi Narayan and Zhidar, it was ever concluded. However, Kinga and Penjore consider this to be the moment of Swayambhu's acquisition by Bhutan (Kinga, 2019, p. 1; Penjore, 2021, p. 18); no other source yet verifies this.

⁷ There are many forms of *guthi* in Nepal. In this context it refers to committees which maintain tangible and intangible heritage, financed by income from land gifted for that specific purpose. The land is not owned by the institution, and cannot be sold, but may be exchanged, renewed or confiscated by the king, and later the Rana Prime ministers. The word *guthi* originated in the Kathmandu valley but came to be used for similar arrangements throughout Nepal. The government nationalised all *guthi* property in 1964, and set up the Guthi Sansthan to manage them all. However this caused the collapse of many *guthis* (for more see Regmi, 1976).

⁸ In Rasuwa district.

⁹ Vijaypur is near modern Dharan, Nepal. Bhutanese popular histories record a Cooch Bihar uprising at this time which needed to be quelled, however award of Swayambhu is not mentioned (for details see Das, 1973, pp. 21-22; Hasrat, 1980, pp. 80-81; Rahul, 1983, pp. 10-11; Dorji, 1995, pp. 52-55, 70-71).

Finally, Lupon Pema also states that the year after Zhidar became Desi, he commissioned a *thongdrol* of Zhabdrung and more than 25 other small *thangkas*. Due to the blessing of those *thangkas* the Nepali king gave Swayambhu to Bhutan in 1769¹⁰ (Pema Tshewang, 1994, p. 369). This is the same year that Prithvi Narayan completed his conquest of the Kathmandu valley. Was Swayambhu a reward for military or spiritual support that Zhidar had provided for Gorkha's success?

In any event, we see here a core legend with a number of sub-plots, which legitimise Bhutan's acquisition of the temple at this powerful location, that broadly signify the tantric prowess of Drukpa lamas and support to Gorkha rulers. The temple becomes known both as Deva Dharma gompa and Marme Lhakhang, but the exact date and circumstances of its acquisition remain unclear.

Loss and return

The Nepal-Tibet war of 1855¹¹ led to a misunderstanding between the two countries and the confiscation of Bhutan's lands and monasteries in Nepal, including Swayambhu (Manandhar, 1989, pp. 72-73; Dhungel, 2012, pp. 3, 112-113). However the situation was eventually clarified, and some of the estates, including the Swayambhu temple, referred to as Marme Lhakhang (Yonten Phuntshogs, 2013, p. 268; Rinchen Chozang, 2014, p. 43), were returned to Bhutan some time before 1862 (Dhungel, 1986, p. 12-13; 1989).

From the late 1700s the arrival of the British East India Company led to tensions in the region (Steinmann, 2003-4, pp. 147-152, 157-158; White, 1909, p. 253; Martin, 2012, pp. 8-9), and made it difficult to send monks, funds or supplies from Bhutan to Nepal (Manandhar, 1990, p. 19; 1992, pp. 14-48). One particular event highlights the

¹⁰ This event is not included in the transcription of the Nagathali texts, therefore Lupon Pema must have relied on a different, unidentified, source.

¹¹ Das ascribes the loss to 1788, the first Nepal-Tibet war, but provides no sources (Das, 1973, p. 29). Presumably he took this date from White, who writes that Migyur Tenpa was friends with Ram Shah, and at one time Bhutan held eighteen monasteries in Nepal, but lost all but two on account of supporting Sikkim against Tibet (White, 1909, p. 291). However there is no correspondence between Bhutan and Nepal which suggests a loss at that time.

difficulties of the time. The British had already caused the Sikkimese Chogyal, Thutob Namgyal and his Rani¹² to temporarily flee Sikkim in the 1880's only to be detained (Shakabpa, 1967, pp. 200-203, 217) and subsequently stripped of any real power in 1906 (Coelho, 1967, p. 21; Thutob Namgyal & Yeshe Dolma, 1908). In early 1908,¹³ the Sikkimese royals came on pilgrimage to Nepal and offered 100,000 butterlamps at the Swayambhu temple, which apparently burned for three days. Contemporary documents suggest that the temple caught fire due to this offering (Manandhar, 2011, pp. 34, 37, 42), though the Chogyal writes that the fire had occurred some years earlier¹⁴ (Shakya, 2004, pp. 309, 492; (Thutob Namgyal & Yeshe Dolma, 2003, pp. 383-384; 2021, pp. 501-502). Nepali records show that the caretaker (དགོན་གཞེས་) was blamed for the fire, but Bhutan was unable to send a replacement. Thus the Bhutanese and Nepali authorities agreed to appoint a local lama, the second Chiniya Lama of Boudha¹⁵ (Dhungel, 1989, p. 184; Manandhar, 1990, p. 19; 1992, pp. 14-15).

¹² Grandparents of Ashi Kesang Choden Wangchuck.

¹³ Before the end of the fire sheep year, 2034.

¹⁴ The Sikkimese royals' account was written in 1908. So close to the event of interest to us, we would expect their account to be reliable, or did the political sensitivities of the time contribute to their different allocation of blame for the fire? Considering that the reason cited for coming on pilgrimage was to ward off evil for the coming year and hope of recouping some of their power, such a fire cannot have augured well for the Chogyal. The Tibetan version states that fire had damaged the temple, but does not appear to mention how long earlier. It is only the English translations which say, "Some years before".

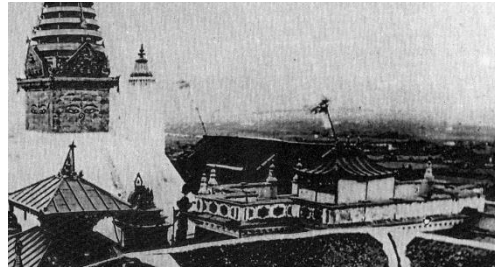
¹⁵ Remembering that this was soon after Ugyen Wangchuk's coronation, he probably was too busy to be concerned with a temple in Nepal inherited from Bhutan's previous relations.



Figure 1: 1901 Herzog and Higgins (Photo looking south west) Source : item 4305223 By permission of the British Library

The previously Newar two storey *sattal*¹⁶ (Fig. 1) was rebuilt with a flat roof, “Himalayan” style, sponsored by the Sikkimese royals. New statues and a mani wheel were donated by Newars with trading connections with Tibet (Shakya 2004, pp. 309, 492, 611). The ground floor was retained as a public space while the temple on the first floor retained the central triple bay Newar window (Fig. 2), an unusual architectural combination even in the Kathmandu valley.¹⁷

*Figure 2
Est ~1910,
unknown
photographer
(Photo looking
south east,
Himalayan
rooftop visible to
right of
mahacaitya)¹⁸*



¹⁶ Nepali, public rest-house.

¹⁷ Documents suggest that the caretaker began reconstructing the temple but complaints were made about his work. A new construction was undertaken but the caretaker was not refunded expenses he had incurred. (Manandhar, 2011, p. 42) Could it be that the caretaker rebuilt the temple in the previous Newar style?

¹⁸ See also from 1920 and 1926, <https://www.gettyimages.ae/detail/news-photo/shrines-and-tombs-at-the-swayambhunath-temple-original-news-photo/964875330> and

Although temple management was given to the Chiniya Lama of Boudha (Manandhar, 2011, pp. 41-43), documents suggest that failure to pay taxes, and the embezzlement of property and funds meant his descendants also lost control of Swayambhu for some years before losing it completely (Regmi, 1977, p. 70; Dhungel, 1989, p. 184; Rodseth, 1998, pp. 59-60). As a result, Swayambhu's day-to-day management fell to the local Tamangs of Kimdole, in the roles of *pujari*¹⁹ and *dwarehouse*²⁰. It is for this reason that, today, many Kimdole Tamangs refer to the temple as the Tamang gompa.

Drukpa Rinpoche, Sherab Dorje

In 1917 a lama from Mongar, arrived from Bhutan with donations for the renovation of Swayambhu *mahacaitya* led by Togden Sakya Shri. In addition to donations from his own followers, Sherab Dorje (aka Geshe Ngawang Palzang b. 1871/2 - d.1945) brought Ugyen Wangchuk's contributions (Shakya, 2004, pp. 311-315, 320-322; Rospatt, 2011, pp. 201-205; Kinga, 2019, p. 2). According to Bhutanese accounts, Sherab Dorje had some responsibility during the Swayambhu reconstruction, but he is not mentioned in any such capacity in Nepali or Tibetan accounts (Shakya, 2004, pp. 311 fn2, 320-321; Rospatt, 2011, pp. 197-205, 233; Jangchub Sangye & Yeshe Samdrub, 2021, pp. 17, 36-36).

After the reconstruction, Sherab Dorje left for Bhutan and stopped to visit the Ayra Wati Zangpo of Kyirong (Sherab Dorje, 2007, p. 9; Jangchub Sangye & Yeshe Samdrub, 2021, p. 61). The deity told him not to return home, but to spread the dharma in the Himalayan hill and mountain regions of Nepal. Therefore Sherab Dorje established nunneries and monasteries in Kyirong, Tsum, Gorkha, Nuwakot, Sindhupalchowk, and Dolokha amongst others and is better known in Nepal today as the first Drukpa Rinpoche (von Fürer-Haimendorf, 1976; Sharma et al, 1981-1983, p. 14; Sherab Dorje, 2007, pp. 6-20). He gathered a following as a *nyunge* (ལྷུང་གཞན་པོ་)

[https://www.gettyimages.ae/detail/news-photo/buddhist-temple-at-swayambhunath-nepal-1926-news-photo/964875128?](https://www.gettyimages.ae/detail/news-photo/buddhist-temple-at-swayambhunath-nepal-1926-news-photo/964875128?from_view=detail&from_opening_search=true)

¹⁹ Who undertakes daily rituals.

²⁰ Guthi tax collector.

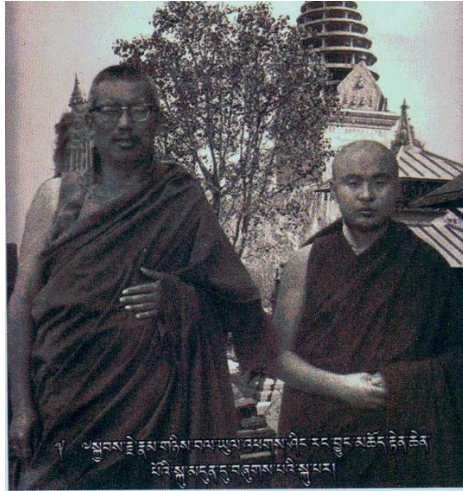
practitioner, particularly in the Kathmandu valley (Regmi, 1977, pp. 33-35; Ede, 1999, p. 140; Shakya, 2004, pp. 334-335). His nephew came to Nepal aged 13, with his elder brothers (Furer-Haimendorf, 1976, p. 125). Studying both under Drukpa Rinpoche and in Bhutan, Sherab Dorjet later appointed them to manage his Himalayan monasteries.²¹ By the 1980's the youngest nephew was better known as Lopon Kusho Tsechu Rinpoche (b.1918 - d.2003) (Zigar Khenchen Thinley Dorje, 2013, p. 532; Jangchub Sangye & Yeshe Samdrub, 2021, pp. 91-92). He was considered by Nepalis as almost Nepali, having spent most of his life in the Nepal Himalaya.

Reclaiming the Temple for Bhutan

Kusho Tsechu Rinpoche established contacts with other prominent lamas of the time, including Tibetan refugees Tulku Ugyen Rinpoche and Chogye Trichen, as well as the Nepali kings (Zigar Khenchen Thinley Dorje, 2013, p. 534; Jackson, 2019a, p. 153; 2019b, pp. 331, 386, 448-449, 451, 619 n 484). He was related to the Bhutanese royal family and facilitated the visits of Ashi Phuntshog Choden, the second Dudjom Rinpoche Jigdel Yeshe Dorje and the 68th Je Khenpo to Nepal (Yonten Phuntshogs, 2013, pp. 268-270).

Thus it happened that in the 1970s or 80s the Queen Grandmother and Kusho Tsechu Rinpoche approached the Kimdole Tamang caretaker at the Swayambhu temple, which was in poor condition at that time, and offered to manage it (Yonten Phuntshogs, 2013, p. 271; Rinchen Chozang, 2014, p. 43).

²¹ Note that the Himalayan areas where Drukpa Rinpoche established gompas includes some communities who today also identify as Tamang or Yolmo (Hyolmo), but in the past were labelled as Sherpa by Nepal's caste-conscious bureaucracy (for example see Furer-Haimendorf, 1976). They should not to be confused with the Tamangs of Kimdole.



*Figure 3
68th and 70th Je
Khenpos
visiting
Swayambhu
n.d.
(Rinchen
Chozang,
2014, p. 43)*

They undertook a restoration of unclear extent, but possibly including an extension at the rear. The 68th Je Khenpo conducted the consecration, bringing statues from Bhutan and *tormas* to establish a protector temple (དགོན་ཁང་), and renamed it Dongag Choling (མདོ་སྐྱུག་མོ་མོ་མོ་མོ་) (Yonten Phuntshogs, 2013, pp. 271-273; Rinchen Chozang, 2014, pp. 40-43). Although some renovation works are known to have been undertaken since then, it is assumed that this is essentially the structure that was damaged in the 2015 Gorka earthquake.

In addition to managing the monasteries and nunneries established by his uncle in the Himalayas, Kusho Tsechu Rinpoche established his own monastery in Kimdole in 1997, Sangye Choling, also known as Buddha Dharma Maha Vihar. It was initially populated by students from Sherab Dorje's Himalayan monasteries, some of whom were sent to Bhutan for further studies.

Reconstruction After the 2015 Gorkha Earthquake and Consecration

The Swayambhu hill was inscribed as one of the Monument Zones of the Kathmandu Valley World Heritage Site in 1979. The impact of the 2015 earthquake on tangible heritage across Nepal was significant. The establishment of a National Reconstruction Authority did not relieve the workload on the Department of Archaeology, which is legally responsible for all structures over 100 years old.

Figure 4: Chief Advisor of the Interim Government of Bhutan, Lyonpo Tshering Wangchuk visits the ongoing work in August 2018 (FSMC, 2019, p. 64)



Dongag Choling is the only building at Swayambhu which was rebuilt using traditional materials and methods as required by international heritage principles. The Royal Government of Bhutan funded the majority of the structural works, supplemented by contributions from Sangye Choling and those raised by the *konyer* and private donors, plus donations for the repair of various objects as well as direct offerings including a new Manjusri statue.

A combination of bureaucratic delays and the COVID pandemic meant that the temple was only completed in 2020, and the statues and other sacred objects were reinstalled. A small consecration was conducted by the head of the Sangye Choling, Lama Kalzang, on 28 January 2021 to enable religious activities to continue, since COVID travel restrictions prevented Bhutan from sending any officials.



Figure 5: Lama Kalzang conducts the consecration in January 2021
(Photo: Ngedup Hyolmo)

It was not until November 2022 that Zhung Dratshang representatives were able to come to Nepal and conduct a full consecration over three days. The ritual was led by Dorje Lupon, Sonam Gyamtsho, supported by Tsechu Rinpoche’s incarnation, tulku Jigme Choying Norbu. Zhung Dratshang monks were supported by Sangye Choling monks, and tulku’s family participated in the process. On the evening of the 5th of November, Dorje Lupon led a cleansing of the temple and the area around the *mahacaitya* with fire *cham*. He was supported by the *zhudapa* (ལྷ་དགེ་ལེན་) and Dongag Choling’s *konyer*.²²

Figure 6 Day 1



Dorje Lupon supported by *zhudapa* and Dongag Choling’s *konyer*.



Fire cham by Sangye Choling monks



Fire cham



Cleansing the area around Swayambhu *mahacaitya*

²² All photos by author unless noted otherwise.

The second day, 6th November, involved a full day of purification and offerings, including a further fire *cham* and fire offerings (ཐྱུན་ཐོགས་).

Figure 7 Day 2



Tulku Jigme Choying with his yongzin (ཡོངས་འཛོལ་), Lama Nono of Sangye Choling



Sand mandala prepared for fire offering between the temple and the mahacaitya



Tulku's family offer supplications and aspiration prayers



Fire cham by Sangye Choling monks



Tulku's family circumambulate the mahacaitya with offerings



Fire offerings led by Dorje Lupon in the public space of the temple ground floor



Dratshang monks and tulku's maternal uncle circumambulate the fire in front of Swayambhu mahacaitya



A pot of rice pudding (མོ་ཐུག་) is connected to Dorje Lupon by a string of trumpet flower petals (ཚམ་བ་ཀའི་མེ་དྲོག་)



Dorje Lupon offers rice pudding to the mahacaitya.



Dorje Lupon, tulku, Dongag Choling konyer, and tulku's family circumambulate the mahacaitya.



The Dongag Choling konyer is offered the eight lucky symbols



The shrine is hung with strings of trumpet seed flowers and five coloured khata

The events of the third and final day, 7th November, also began early, and were completed by lunchtime.

Figure 8 Day 3, morning



Entrance to the gonkhang established by the 68th Je Khenpo



Shrine decorated with five coloured khata and strings of trumpet flowers

Since the temple is relatively small, situated to the west of the *mahacaitya* on top of the hill, a larger celebration to the east of the *mahacaitya* enabled official guests to be invited. This included representatives of the Government of Nepal, Guthi Sansthan and other dignitaries.

Figure 9 Day 3, official program in the afternoon



Dorje Lopon reveals the commemorative plaque with Kiran Shakya, of Guthi Sansthan

Khenpo Shedup Tenzin of Shri Gautam Buddha Vihara & Gampopa Library, Swayambhu (Photo Rinzin Yonjan)



Khenpo Kalzang of Sangye Choling, Kimdole (Photo Rinzin Yonjan)



Konyer Lama Tendar with Kiran Shakya, of Guthi Sansthan (Photo Rinzin Yonjan)

These three sunny days in November 2022 were a historical event; the consecration by senior Zhung Dratshang officials at Kathmandu valley's most sacred Buddhist site, of a Bhutanese temple rebuilt after a once-in-a-hundred-year earthquake.

Conclusion

This article has shown that the exact history of the temple remains debated, despite the existence of a popular oral account. What the temple evidences is a centuries-old relationship between Nepal and Bhutan, although the connection was severed by regional politics, changing leadership both in Nepal and Bhutan, and the arrival of

colonial forces. In those intervening years the void left by Bhutan's inability to send monks to Nepal was filled by local communities; the Chiniya Lamas of Boudha and the Kimdole Tamangs.

Today, Dongag Choling and Sangye Choling are strongly connected with Nepali villages where Drukpa Rinpoche established his monasteries and nunneries. The monks of Sangye Choling principally come from these regions and continue to be sent to Bhutan for higher studies. Past and current Dongag Choling *konyers* come from these communities, as well as Tulku Jigme Choying's *yongzin*, Lama Nono. Dongag Choling is still referred to as Marme Lhakhang or Deva Dharma Gumba by Kathmandu Newars and Tamangs. However where history has been forgotten or is unknown, some Kimdole residents refer to it as the Tamang gumpa, believing it to have been recently 'captured' by Kusho Tsechu Rinpoche for Bhutan. Similarly, other misinformed sources claim Sikkimese foundation of the temple (Pruscha, 1975, p. 108). This demonstrates the multiple interpretations of events and claims to ownership.

The COVID pandemic affected activities around the world. The earthquake created a sudden demand for skilled workers, carpenters, masons, painters, metal workers, not easily filled. Nepal's Department of Archaeology struggled to respond in a timely manner to hundreds of applications submitted from affected communities across the country, heritage everywhere is being encroached upon even at sacred sites (FSMC, 2019, p. 59; Suwal, 2020, pp. 70-71). Many issues arose during Dongag Choling's reconstruction process; work only began in 2018, two and a half years after the earthquake, and was finally consecrated in 2022.

The combination of *sattal* and temple is unusual even in the Kathmandu valley, where few two storey rest-houses can still be found. The fact that it is now one of a handful of buildings on the Swayambhu hilltop constructed using traditional materials and methods only adds to its uniqueness in a city now rife with façade-clad concrete structures.

The connection between Nepal and Bhutan was resuscitated by the earthquake with

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