

A TRIBUTE TO GURU PADMASAMBHAVA



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THE HOLY STATUE OF THE LOTUS BORN
SAMDRUPTSE, SOUTH SIKKIM



INFORMATION AND PUBLIC RELATIONS DEPARTMENT
GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM

Photographs: PARVIN SINGH

A Tribute to Guru Padmasambhava

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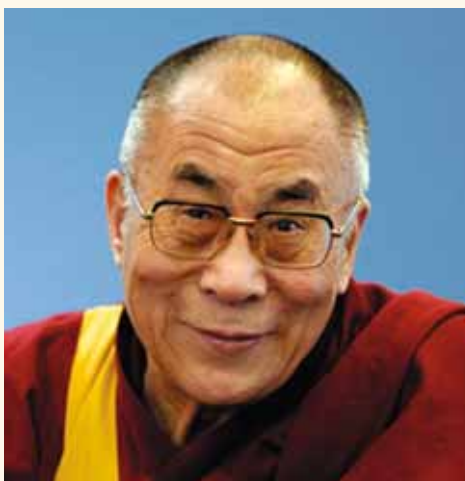
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MESSAGE

I was honoured to have been invited to lay the foundation stone for a grand statue of Padmasambhava, Guru Rinpoche in 1997. I am delighted to know that the project is now complete and the image is about to be unveiled.

Guru Rinpoche's role in establishing the Buddhadharma in the Himalayan region is well-known, but what distinguishes him in addition is his explicit concern for the welfare of the people of the region. I offer my heartfelt prayers that as a result of the shower of blessings invoked by the creation of this statue, all sentient beings, and especially the people of Sikkim and its neighbours, will experience great peace and happiness.

February 10, 2004

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Lama' followed by a flourish.

(The Dalai Lama)



Deorali Chorten Gonpa

P.O. Tadong 737102
Gangtok, Sikkim

། འབྲས་ལྗོངས་མངའ་སྡེའི་སྤྱི་ཁྱབ་སློབ་ཚེན་མི་དབང་པ་ལམ་གྱི་མར་ཅམ་གླིང་ཁོང་ཉིད་
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སེམས་དཔའི་རྒྱུད་དུ་གཏོགས་པ་ཞིག་མིན་པེད་སྟེ། རྒྱ་མཚན་དེར་བརྟེན་ཚེ་འདིར་ཁོང་གིས་གཞན་ན་
མེད་པ་འདི་འདྲའི་འཆར་གཞི་བཟང་པོ་ཞིག་དང་། འཆར་གཞི་དེ་རྒྱུ་བཞིན་མཛོལ་དུ་གྱུར་འཇུག་པའི་
གོ་གནས་ཡོད་མཁན་ཞིག་དུ་གྱུར་པ་པོ་དང་། ད་པོའི་སྐྱེ་འདྲའི་ལ་བརྟེན་ནས་ལུལ་ཁམས་འདི་གཅིག་ཕུར་
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འགྲུར་ཐབས་བྱ་དགོས།


(དོ་སྐྱབ་ཚེན་བཞི་པས་)



APPRECIATION

The Chief Minister (Pawan Chamling) even though he is not Buddhist by faith in this lifetime must surely belong to the lineage of Bodhisattvas from the previous lives. That is how he is able to think of such a project and also be in a position to make it happen. I strongly believe that this statue will not only help this nation but will bring peace and harmony to the whole world. It is an occasion of joy to know that one man came up with such courage and vision. Now, it is through our cooperation and true intention that we have to make the vision of our Chief Minister come true and materialize this project.

The Fourth Dodrupchen

Kyabje Dodrupchen Rinpoche's commendation on Chief Minister Pawan Chamling's vision in constructing the Guru Padmasambhava statue at Samdruptse, South Sikkim, in Tibetan (**left**) and translated into English (**above**).

The Holy Statue of Guru Padmasambhava: Pawan Chamling's Grand Vision

below: His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Chief Minister Pawan Chamling, Mrs Tika Maya Chamling and others offer prayers in front of the Guru Padmasambhava statue at Samdruptse; **facing page:** The 135 feet statue of Guru Padmasambhava at Samdruptse, South Sikkim.

Year: 1996.

Occasion: Pang-Lhabsol celebrations in Gangtok.

Guest of honour: Chief Minister Pawan Chamling.

A large audience, including many religious leaders, watched the colourful pageant. And were delighted when the Chief Minister announced that his government would

construct and install a statue of Guru Padmasambhava on Samdruptse hill in South Sikkim. Never had anyone embarked on such an ambitious philanthropic project in Sikkim. Guru Padmasambhava, most reverentially called Guru Rinpoche or "Precious Teacher", is worshipped as Sikkim's patron saint. A hundred and thirty-five foot statue was a fitting tribute to him, as also for the benefit of all sentient beings.









The task seemed incomprehensible, the fantasy of an idealist. The road to Samdruptse, approximately 10 kilometres uphill from Namchi town, was at the time unmotorable and there was not a drop of water in the vicinity. Many dismissed the announcement of the colossal project as a political gimmick. No one connected this announcement to the Chief Minister's concept of developing pilgrimage tourism in Sikkim. A creative thinker, Chamling had foreseen that once the statue was completed, Samdruptse would gain the potential of becoming an international pilgrimage centre, elevating it from an unknown hill to a major tourist destination.

Pawan Chamling is a spiritual man, one who respects the secular fabric of the State and this country. In his biography, Pawan Chamling: Daring to be Different, he has acknowledged the presence of a supernatural being guiding him. Guided by his destiny and faith, he remained undeterred in his commitment; the project would see the light of day.

What prompted him to embark on such an immense task, one may wonder. This is his answer: "The day my government assumed power in 1994, I decided to take some concrete steps to pay a fitting tribute to a great saint who blessed Sikkim several centuries ago and whose teachings permeate not only Sikkim's ethos, but has also had a profound effect on generations of people throughout the world. Through this project I also hoped to strengthen the religious foundation of Sikkim for the benefit of the State and its people."

Initially, the Chief Minister had thought of installing a statue of Lord Buddha at Samdruptse. Taking advice from learned monks and Rinpoches, he later finalized on a statue of Guru Rinpoche, given the relevance of this great teacher to Sikkim and as a mark of respect to someone who introduced Buddha to the Sikkimese. He then willed the statue to be built as an open structure so that it would offer unencumbered viewing and guarantee a powerful impact. The people would behold it with the awe and respect that Guru Rinpoche deserves.

A couple of weeks later after he made the historic announcement, Chief Minister Chamling visited Chorten Gonpa in Deorali, near Gangtok, to persuade one of Sikkim's highest Nyingmapa Lamas, His Eminence Kyabje Dodrupchen Rinpoche, to supervise the religious aspects of the construction of Guru Padmasambhava's statue. Initially, the Rinpoche was not inclined to take up the responsibility. On his second trip to Chorten Gonpa a few weeks later, the Chief Minister found the Rinpoche still reluctant. It was on his third visit that the Rinpoche agreed to take on the task.

In 1998, the State Government under the aegis of Chief Minister Pawan Chamling accorded Guru Rinpoche's Thrunskar Tsechu or Guru Padmasambhava's birth anniversary – which falls on the tenth day of the sixth Buddhist month, coinciding on July-August – as a gazetted holiday.

KYABJE DODRUPCHEN RINPOCHE ON CHIEF MINISTER CHAMLING'S VISION

During an important meeting held at Samdruptse on December 16, 2001, here is what Kyabje Dodrupchen Rinpoche had said of the Chief Minister: "Forty-six years ago I came to this land crossing mountains running away from war and strife. Here the king and the people gave me shelter and protection. When I crossed over to Sikkim, even

though I had nothing with me, I was happy to be safe and be in the hidden land of Guru Rinpoche. I had read about this land in the scriptures described by many Tertons. We used to pray to be able to visit and also to be born in this land. There was prediction made by one Terton that I have to live in the hidden land. Now, I have been here for more than forty-six years, during that time I have tried in my simple way to contribute to the people and the society through whatever Dharma I know.



When the Chief Minister asked me to take on the spiritual aspect of a project of building the Guru's statue, I told him that I do not have any worldly education. He insisted that I should take on the project because worldly people will not know how to go about such an important project in true spirit. That made me think. When he as the leader of our society is making such an effort to build a statue of Guru Rinpoche in this sacred hidden land then I being a lama should help realize his prayer come true. I decided to take on the project.

According to Dharma, nothing happens by accident. It is our karma and prayers that well have gotten together in one place to work on such a sacred project. The Chief Minister even though he is not Buddhist by faith in this lifetime must surely belong to the lineage of Bodhisattvas from the previous lives. That is how he is able to think of such a project and also be in a position to make it happen. I strongly believe that this statue will not only help this nation but will bring peace and harmony to the whole world.

We, who are here, are all connected from our previous lives and because of our positive karma we are joined together to do this project. In order to complete this project I need your support and full cooperation. I am a simple monk not trained in any of the modern subjects. You all are educated and experienced in the field of construction so we should work at this project like that of our own. Imagine how much care we put in building our own house. We should care for this project more than that. One person can help another person on individual basis but the statue like this will help countless sentient beings. Not only human but also all the insects and animals will find seed of enlightenment through the blessing of this statue.

I still repeat, that I am a simple monk unaware of any modern technology, so I ask for help from all of you who are present here to help make the vision of our Chief Minister come true. I understand that he wants to bring peace, harmony and prosperity to this land and people through the blessing of this eminent statue. This



facing page: Kyabje Dodrupchen Rinpoche; **above:** An image of Guru Padmasambhava enshrined inside the shrine of the pedestal of the holy statue.

is a great opportunity for all of us to make good merit for our future lives. We should do this project with the best intention, which is the basis of our Dharma. When you plant an apple you get an apple and you plant rice you get rice. In the same manner the fruit of this project will depend on the original intention of all those who are involved. It is an occasion of joy to know that one man came up with such courage and vision. Now, it is through our cooperation and true intention that we have to make the vision of our Chief Minister come true and materialize this project.

I thank you all for coming here and taking time off from your work. I shall pray for your health and happiness.

(This sermon was delivered in Tibetan by the Rinpoche and was translated into English by Sonam Paljor for those who were present there).

SECULAR SIKKIM

Notwithstanding its size, Sikkim, horse-shoed in the Eastern Himalayas, bordered by Tibet on the north, Bhutan on the east, Nepal on the west and West Bengal in the south, is a holy land dotted with monasteries, temples, and other religious centres besides several sacred lakes, mountains and caves.

Multi-racial and multi-religious, there is complete religious freedom in Sikkim and it can easily be called a model State of communal harmony. Living in a land so soaked in spiritualism, the people of Sikkim are making all-round progress as god-fearing, peace-loving and law-abiding citizens. To get an idea of how faith is all pervading in Sikkim, sample these figures: Presently Sikkim has

approximately 360 Hindu Mandirs including Manav Utthan Sewa Ashram and Sarva Dharma Sai Mandirs, 19 Manghims (temple of the Limboo community) and Mangkhims (temple of the Rai community); 342 Buddhist monasteries, which comprises Gompa, (full-fledged monastery), Mani Lhakhang (sub monastery), Lhakhang/ Gyalkhang or smaller shrines, and Tshamkhang/Dubkhang (retreat or meditation centres); 35 chortens or stupas, nine hot springs with curative powers, 30 sacred caves and 29 sacred lakes. It is this ubiquitous presence of religion that makes Sikkim the only State in the country with an exclusive Ecclesiastical Affairs Department that caters to the spiritual needs of the people besides looking after the construction, maintenance and management of these religious centres.



The total number of religious institutions that were recorded by the Ecclesiastical Affairs Department at 489 in 1994 has increased to over 700 by the year 2016.

The common strain of devotion that binds the Sikkimese people was cemented almost as if God had willed it so, with the elevation of the person like Pawan Chamling at the helm of affairs as the Chief Minister in 1994. Steeped in religion and possessing a genuinely caring nature and generous heart, Pawan Chamling is an acknowledged messiah of poor and savior of Dharma is best culled from what His Eminence Kyabje Dodrupchen Rinpoche said while describing him: "The Chief Minister even though he

is not Buddhist by faith in this lifetime must surely belong to the lineage of Bodhisattvas from the previous lives. That is how he is able to think of such a project and also be in a position to make it happen. I strongly believe that this statue will not only help this nation but will bring peace and harmony to the whole world."

Similar sentiments have been expressed by numerous religious leaders of different faiths who have all acknowledged the sincere services being rendered by the Chief Minister for the welfare of the people and contributions made by him towards the promotion of the dharma, irrespective of caste, creed and faith.



THE LIFE OF GURU PADMASAMBHAVA AND HIS SIKKIM SOJOURN

Guru Padmasambhava popularly known in Sikkim as Guru Rinpoche or the “Precious Teacher” is one of the greatest adepts of India, who founded Vajrayana Buddhism in Tibet in the eighth century.

Guru Rinpoche’s birth comes with a great number of variants as befitting a high soul.

Among the different versions of his birth as penned by scholars, one that is popular is the one affiliated to the description in the *terma* treasures which says that he was miraculously born as an eight-year-old boy on a lotus blossom floating on Lake Dhanokosha, in the north western part of the kingdom of Oddiyana, now identified with the Swat Valley in Pakistan.

It is said that his birth took place in the year of either the Earth Monkey or the Wood Monkey, at sunrise on the tenth day of the waxing moon – a time which could be calculated eight years after the passing away of the Buddha.

At that time, Indrabhuti aka Indrabodi, then generous king of Oddiyana while on his voyage encountered the boy in a lotus blossom, and brought him to his palace. Wonderstruck by the boy’s allure, the king, who had no heir, made him the crown prince.

Eventually, Padmasambhava married the dakini Prabhavati and ruled the kingdom according to the Dharma. He was then known as King Tortokchen or ‘The Turbaned King’. But he was not happy being in a palace and ruling the kingdom. He wanted to lead a life of an ascetic.

One day, Padmasambhava told the king that he would leave the kingdom and lead a life of an ascetic. The king refused forcing Padmasambhava to adopt a skilful means. He killed the son of an evil minister when he perceived that the boy was due to die because of the effects of his past karma. In accordance with the law Padmasambhava was then banished to a cemetery, where he finally was able to receive the esoteric teachings he had been wishing for and practiced them.

Padmasambhava was then ordained as a monk by Acharya Prabhasthi and learnt Vinaya from Ananda and tantras including Mahasandhi from Prahevapa, Srisinha, Nagarjuna, Vimalamitra, etc., all of who were accomplished masters. Through the practice of these teachings he manifested as a fully accomplished sage and earned the name ‘Shantarakshita’ or preserver of peace.

At Zahor, he received the teachings of Yoga Tantra from Prabhasthi eighteen times. When he took the royal

A rare image of Guru Padmasambhava enshrined inside the sanctum sanctorum of Dubdi Monastery, the oldest monastery in Sikkim.



Offering butter lamps is an important Buddhist practice that helps to focus mind and aid in meditation. Butter lamps are also lighted in memory of the departed souls or to earn merit.





princess, Mandarava as his consort, the king of Zahor and his ministers arrested Padmasambhava and ordered that he be burnt to death as punishment. But the Guru transformed the pyre into a lake with himself seated in a lotus blossom at the centre. This lake is believed to be the Rewalsar Lake or Tso Pema in Himachal Pradesh. In homage, the king offered Padmasambhava his entire kingdom including his garments and his five royal robes. Which is why, Padmasambhava is often seen portrayed in paintings and statues donning the garments of the king of Zahor.

For several years Padmasambhava taught the king and his subjects of Zahor and many attained realization.

Along with Mandarava, Padmasambhava then moved to Maratika cave, in Nepal, where for three months they practised the sadhana of longevity. At Yanglesho, also in Nepal, he practised the sadhana of Yangdak Heruka with the consort Shakyadevi, daughter of a king of Nepal.

~

Buddhism as a school of philosophy went to Tibet through Guru Padmasambhava, when in the eighth century Trisong Duetsen, the religiously upright king of Tibet, on the advice of Shantarakshita (Khenpo Bodhisattva) requested him to visit his land and quell the anti-religious forces (demons), and help complete the Samye monastery, the first Tibetan monastery.

The Guru had attained the deathless accomplishment through his esoteric practices; and in the eighth century, when he was supposed to be more than one thousand years old still appearing to be in his youth visited Tibet. He suppressed the demons that attacked and obstructed him on his way and transformed them into protecting deities obedient to him.

Many saints came before Guru Padmasambhava but none could quell the demons that demolished Samye. People then began to adore and follow his teachings, albeit the existence of animism. Hence, Tibetan Buddhism is a blend of Guru's tantric Buddhism and other forms of animistic Buddhism that existed in Tibet. This later further transformed itself and finally reached Sikkim.

Gurudongmar lake in North Sikkim, where Guru Padmasambhava is believed to have tested an omen in the lake water before entering Sikkim.





His Holiness the Dalai Lama has in the introduction to the book, *A Great Treasure of Blessings*, described Guru Padmasambhava like this: “The precious Guru Padmasambhava was not only endowed with all the true qualities of a great spiritual guide – knowledge, compassion and infinite capacity – but he was also a great master who commanded extraordinary power.

“The King Trisong Detsen served as the great benefactor of the Dharma in Tibet, while the abbot Shantarakshita was a vinaya holder who had reached the pinnacle of intellectual understanding and possessed all the qualities of an outstanding scholar. As for Guru Rinpoche, the precious master, although he left behind a vast number of profound terma teachings, he composed only a few writings such as the *Mengak Tawe Trengwa*, the ‘Garland of Views Pith Instruction’, and was not known for having written many lengthy treatises. Yet it was because of his overarching power and strength that the Buddhadharmas were really established in Tibet, and then developed so that all the teachings of Buddha, including the Mantrayana, were preserved as a living tradition, and have continued down to the present day.

“This is the reason why most of the great historical figures of Tibet, both spiritual and secular, have placed themselves under the compassionate protection of the great master Padmasambhava and received his blessings.

“The Great Fifth Dalai Lama, for example, clearly had a very special link with Guru Rinpoche, and the Thirteenth Dalai Lama too quite evidently enjoyed a unique connection with the precious master.”

For fifty-five and half years, Guru Padmasambhava travelled the length and breadth of Tibet teaching and practising, taming the forces that were opposed to Buddhism, and infusing his blessing into the whole

landscape. With his spiritual consort Yishey Tshogyal, he gave transmission to more than one thousand disciples, including twenty-five kings and their subjects, and concealed thousands of termas for the benefit of future followers.

Before Padmasambhava’s departure from Tibet, he had predicted that great misfortune would strike all across Tibet and Mongolia with the desertion of the doctrine of Buddha. Yet, on the request of his twenty-five disciples and the king, he ordained that the devout shall find their way to the four hidden lands and five valleys in the four directions of Tibet, of which he had mentioned Beyul Demojong i.e. Sikkim as the holiest of the holy, the final refuge of Buddhism. He had left a prophecy with instructions on how to enter this holy land. This prophecy, which was later revealed by Tertön Sangay Lingpa and written by Lhabtsun Jigmed Pawo, called the *Denjong Nye-Yig* (Guide to the Hidden Land) had the following clue: “This auspicious hidden land, having a square topographical appearance, is situated in the southwest of Samye monastery, Lhasa, Tibet and is close to the southwest face of Mt. Kyin-thing. Its eastern border touches Mt. Sidhi of India; the western border touches the mountain of Zar district of U-Tsang, Tibet, and the northern border touches Lake Tsomo Dri-Chu. The upper range of the country, the northeastern side, reaches up to Khangchendzonga and the lower southwesterly ranges touches India. It is a fertile land with wide valleys and grows varieties of fruits, crops, medicinal herbs. Hence it is called Demojong i.e. The Hidden Fruitful Valley”.

Buddhist texts say that Guru Padmasambhava and his twenty-five disciples visited Sikkim on his return from Tibet. He is believed to have made his first visit to present Gurudongmar lake in North Sikkim to test an omen in the lake water. After finding a favourable sign in

the lake, he miraculously landed on Tashiding hill in West Sikkim, along with his disciples and thereby sanctified the entire landscape while marking this hill as a navel point of the sacred land.

During this period many local deities became assimilated into the Sikkimese Buddhist pantheon, usually as the protecting deities of a particular village, mountain or a hill.

Padmasambhava though left no converts and erected no buildings is said to have concealed many sacred relics and treasure texts in safe places and appointed keepers, which would be revealed by the great Tertons (revealers of sacred treasures) from time to time. This act was to inspire faith in future generations

Texts also reveal that from Tashiding, the Guru blessed the sites of some of Sikkim's future monasteries and stupas besides identifying seven medicinal springs, 27 sacred caves, four main sacred lakes and 404 lesser lakes. He also buried salt, gold, turquoise, religious texts, gems, weapons, seeds and medicines on Mt. Khangchendzonga thus entrusting the land to the protective deities to grace the land with good harvest, timely rainfall and to prevent from all types of natural calamities. People in turn pay obeisance to the deities every year via the observance of Pang Lhabsol.

Rigdzin Sogrub, an important prayer text used in key Sikkimese monasteries, which was received by Lhabtsun Namkha Jigmed in a vision while meditating in the cave of Lhari Nyingphug has a huge description on the spiritual as well as the physical environment of Tashiding. The text says that Tashiding is a 'palace of deities' and that in the centre of Tashiding is the mandala of Guru Padmasambhava. The centre of the holy place is known as Drakar Tashiding as such when looked down from the sky; it resembles the centre of a shining wheel with eight spokes and looks

like a blooming lotus flower with eight petals when seen from the earth below. When looked towards the river from the middle, one sees the merging point of the four great rivers flowing through a large valley. In its four directions are the four sacred caves, Sharchog Bephug in the east, Khandozangphug in the south, Dechenphug in the west and Lhari Nyingphug in the north.

There are a number of marks and symbols throughout Sikkim which corroborates Padmasambhava's visit to Sikkim. Padmasambhava's foot and body imprints in the four sacred caves around Tashiding, foot imprints on a sacred boulder at Chungthang in North Sikkim, and the impression of volumes of Holy Scriptures on a sacred rock at Tholung, North Sikkim are some of the strongest evidences of the Guru's stay in Sikkim.

That Sikkim's major Buddhist followers are affiliated with the Nyingmapa School of Tibetan Buddhism traces its roots to Guru Padmasambhava. The Nyingmapa only formed a real order in the eleventh and twelfth centuries as a reaction to and buffer against the promoters of the second wave of Buddhism and a large part of texts is made up of those believed to have been hidden by Guru Padmasambhava, his mystical consort and contemporary grand masters. The hidden texts were found and later revealed at certain times by the tertons and passed on to Nyingmapa followers.

Buddhists in Sikkim believe that every year on Guru Thungkar Tsechu or the birth anniversary of Guru Rinpoche, which falls on the tenth day of the sixth Buddhist month, the Guru visits Sikkim and Tibet as promised to King Trisong Duetsen when the latter had requested him not to abandon the kingdom. To mark the day, devotees take part in a huge procession on the streets amidst chanting of 'Om Ah Hung Vajra Guru Padma Siddhi Hung Rhi'.

The Making of the Holy Statue

SITE SELECTION

Chief Minister Chamling has a close relationship with Samdruptse. In the years before he became Chief Minister of the State, Chamling reminisces walking up Samdruptse hill, often lost in thought. He wished to install a statue here, where people could find solace. He hand-picked Samdruptse primarily because of its history. Records show that in the eighteenth century, Princess Pedit Wangmo conspired with the royal physician and murdered her half brother, Chogyal Chagdor Namgyal, who was the third king of Sikkim. The executors were asked to send smoke signals from the peak of Samdruptse when the deed was done. Today, with the construction of the holy statue, Samdruptse spreads the message of love, compassion and peace.

Others believe that a highly regarded Buddhist monk and one of the three monks who met at Yuksam, Ngadag Sempa Chenpo, on entering Sikkim from Tibet in 1642 AD, spent time near the present Namchi Ngadag monastery. He climbed this hill, spending a few days there in meditation, making a spiritual wish to take forward the Buddha's teachings in this region. Years later, the hill got its name – Samdruptse, which translates as the 'wish fulfilling hill' in local Bhutia dialect.





WORK EXECUTION

Soon, work to execute the Chief Minister's idea began. On May 2, 1997 the State Government constituted a committee consisting of secretaries of six departments (Tourism, Buildings and Housing, Roads and Bridges, Ecclesiastical, Forest and Finance) to plan and implement the Samdruptse project giving due care to environmental as well as religious aspects. The Forest Department initiated environmental clearance for the project and began developing the area as an eco-park. The Buildings and Housing Department prepared a comprehensive contour map and conducted soil and load bearing tests. The Roads and Bridges Department began aligning the road leading to Samdruptse and provided a footpath.

On the Chief Minister's suggestion, an Advisory Board with Dodrupchen Rinpoche and other prominent monks was constituted to advise on the religious aspects of implementing the project. The Dodrupchen Chorten Trust, Deorali, headed by Dodrupchen Rinpoche, was entrusted with the responsibility of collecting and preparing *dzung* (sacred relics) to be placed inside the statue. They were also given the responsibility of locating skilled artisans, sculptors and architects to design the layout and landscaping of the complex in harmony with natural surroundings.

On May 5, 1997, the Rinpoche paid his first visit to the site along with a team. On reaching the site, he knew





above & facing page: Various processes of the sheer scale of the statue under construction. **page 27:** A smaller statue of Guru Padmasambhava that has been built in front of the 135-foot statue at Samdruptse.

no site was more ideally located. He strongly felt that the Chief Minister's choice and intent to build a statue of Guru Rinpoche at Samdruptse was brilliant, extremely timely and significant, especially when the world was full of negative aspirations.

Chief Minister Chamling's devotion to the proper execution of the project was a prime factor in its success. He would often make visits to the construction site. This enhanced the morale of those involved in the project. He inaugurated a Smriti Van programme at Samdruptse on June 5, 2000.

Locating professional artisans and sculptors having good knowledge of making both copper and bronze statues was crucial. The Tourism Secretary accompanied by Secretary and Chief Engineer (Buildings Department) visited Kathmandu, Nepal from 14 to 17 December 1997. They saw a number of statues, including the 18-

feet statue of Guru Padmasambhava installed inside a Sherpa monastery at Bodhnath. The team also met many well-known and skilled artisans and sculptors and held discussions with them.

Meanwhile, work on providing budgetary support, monitoring manpower and materials, and completion of official formalities progressed simultaneously in consultation with the Dodrupchen Chorten Trust. The Chief Minister, who was the nerve-centre and the motivating force behind the project, was kept regularly posted on every detail – the progress of the work, problems that needed to be resolved and sought advice on further developments.

The total cost of the project at Samdrupste was Rs .6.76 crores, making it a fully government funded religious structure. The statue itself cost little more than Rs. 4.55 crore.

THE FOUNDATION

After several rounds of meetings at various levels, the momentous day finally arrived when His Holiness, the Dalai Lama reached Namchi, South Sikkim on 21 October 1997 to lay the foundation stone of the statue of Guru Padmasambhava at Samdruptse the next day i.e. on 22 October 1997.

below & facing page: The Dalai Lama, Chief Minister Chamling and Mrs. Chamling unfurling a *thangka* depicting an image of Guru Padmasambhava at Samdruptse.

Since Samdruptse was unmotorable, the Dalai Lama had to take a pony ride from the highway to the site.

Astoundingly, the significance of the day of laying

the foundation stone was not lost on the weather – although it rained throughout the night at Namchi, the foundation stone laying morning saw the entire hill swathed in glorious sunlight.

Upon completion of the foundation ceremony, the Dalai Lama accompanied by Chief Minister Chamling and other Cabinet Ministers offered prayers to Guru Rinpoche and conducted prayers for the peace and prosperity of the State.

On the occasion, the Dalai Lama also lauded the Chief Minister on his vision of installing the highest





statue of Guru Padmasambhava in Sikkim. He wished that the “young State of Sikkim, where multi-religious communities thrive and live in complete harmony, sets a good example to the rest of India and in the eyes of humanity.”

The Dalai Lama has always been a spiritual benefactor for Sikkim and her citizens. His ties with Sikkim can be traced back to his fifth incarnation (1617-1682) who formally recognised Phuntsog Namgyal as the first Chogyal – king who ruled with righteousness – of Sikkim and sent a decree stamped with his official seal and accompanied by a ceremonial scarf (khada). The fifth Dalai Lama had also sent gifts to the Chogyal which comprised of a hat that was a discovered hidden treasure – a crown of Guru Rinpoche, and Guru Rinpoche’s highly blessed flaming dagger.

Sikkim’s spiritual relationship with the Dalai Lama has become ever stronger with Chief Minister Chamling’s

intervention. The fourteenth Dalai Lama has been graciously visiting Sikkim on formal invitations of the Chief Minister on many occasions strengthening this relationship further.

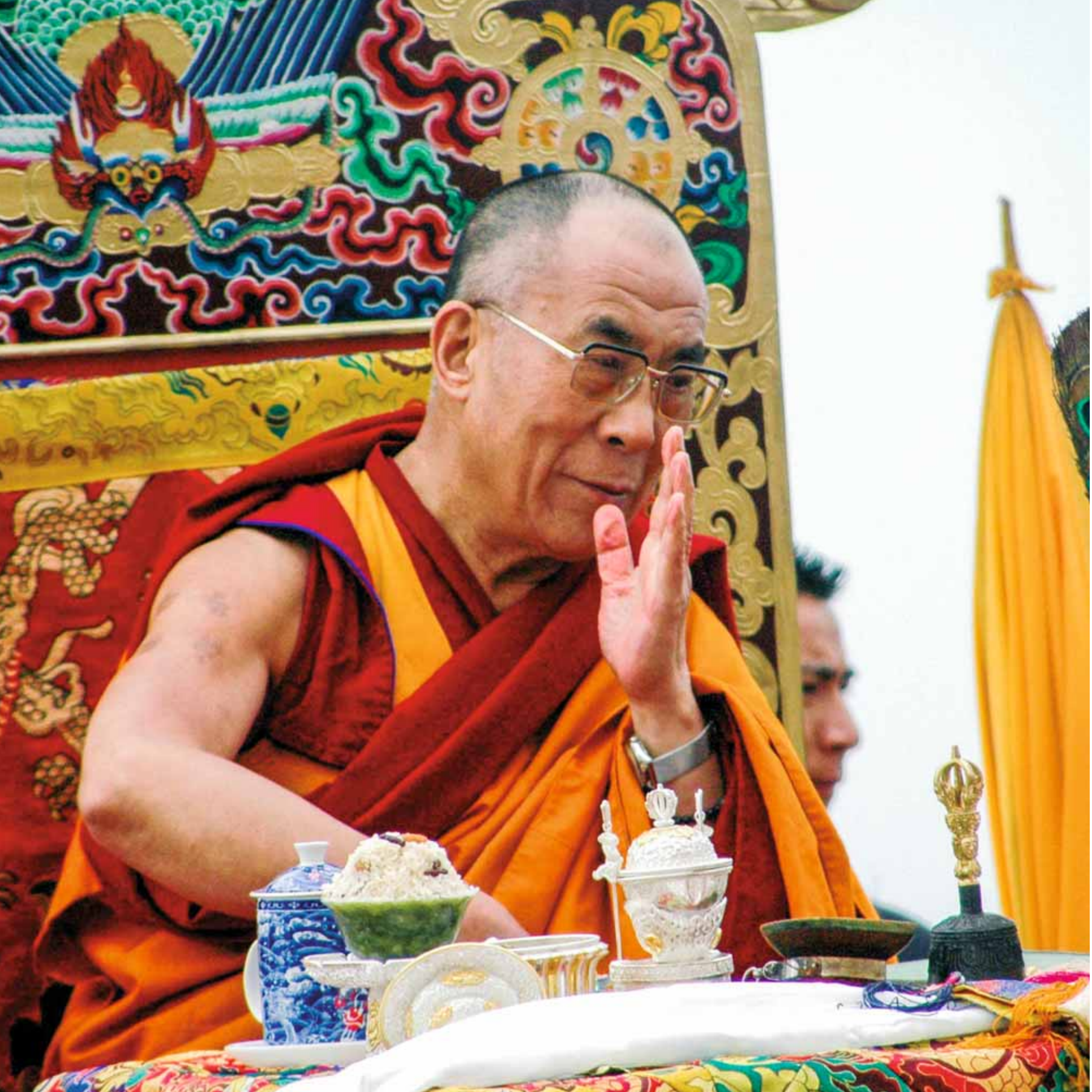
“I have had the opportunity of meeting His Holiness on a number of occasions. In the last few years, I had the opportunity to welcome him to Sikkim on more than one occasion. During his visits to the State, he has preached our people and showered onto them his blessing. Peace and harmony are the hallmarks of Sikkimese society. I firmly believe that it is due to his guidance and blessing that we have been able to lead Sikkim on the path of steady progress and prosperity. All my meetings with His Holiness have strengthened my belief in the greatness of human heart and the sincerity of mind,” Chief Minister Chamling had expressed this in Gangtok on 4 December 2000, the day which marked the fiftieth anniversary of His Holiness assuming State responsibility on 4 December 1950.



The Dalai Lama poses for a photograph with Chief Minister Chamling and Mrs. Tika Maya Chamling.







The Initiation

THUSOL RABNEY (THE CONSECRATION CEREMONY)

On 28 November 2003 Dodrupchen Rinpoche performed the consecration ceremony of the statue with *dzung* or the sacred relics including rolled mantras of scriptures.

The Guru statue has been embellished with statues, *thangkas*, and other precious and semi-precious stones presented by devotees from both Sikkim and other Himalayan regions such as Nepal and Bhutan.

In the Buddhist tradition, a statue, *thangka* or a portrait of highly realised masters are considered an object for

facing page: His Holiness the Dalai Lama performing consecration prayers at Samdruptse; **below:** The Dalai Lama seen during the prayers with Chief Minister Pawan Chamling and Mrs. Tika Maya Chamling.







facing page, above & following page: His Holiness the Dalai Lama being escorted by Chief Minister Chamling and Mrs. Tika Maya Chamling at Samdruptse during His Holiness' visit to Sikkim.

worship or meditation only after completion of its consecration prayers, a process that serves to “give life” or awaken the object.

On the day, the Rinpoche also thanked the Chief Minister for entrusting such an important project to a humble lama like him and assured that he had completed the statue with the best of intentions to

fulfill the Chief Minister's dream and aspiration to benefit the people of Sikkim and all sentient beings. The Rinpoche while reiterating that he had executed the project as per the wishes of the Chief Minister said he was now handing over the completed statue to the Chief Minister personally so that he could chart the future course for this great beginning.

The completion of the statue of Guru Padmasambhava, the Rinpoche added, will usher in a most wonderful and amazing era.

The Rinpoche also lavished praises for the Chief Minister's vision and leadership in completing such a splendid tribute to Guru Padmasambhava in this “hidden land”.

THE OFFICIAL INAUGURATION

Chief Minister Chamling unveiled the holy statue on 18 February 2004 amid devotees from near and far. Almost six years ago, he had promised to pay the biggest ever tribute to Guru Padmasambhava. As he inaugurated his dream project, the Chief Minister expressed his profound gratitude to Kyabje Dodrupchen Rinpoche not only in overseeing and successfully undertaking the spiritual feature of the construction of the holy Guru statue but also for his advice and prayers. He exalted the commitment and hard work of dedicated government officials, civil society members, volunteers, well-wishers and people from different walks of life whose faith, encouragement and active support has made this project a possible. He also thanked hundreds of labourers who braved the chill of Samdruptse hill during the construction stage of the holy statue.

“This is a historical day for Sikkim as the largest statue of Guru Padmasambhava has been officially unveiled in the land blessed by him. A tribute of such magnitude to the Patron Saint was long overdue. It somehow never occurred to any in Sikkim,” the Chief Minister had said.

Mr. Chamling had then reminded the gathering that recognising Guru Rinpoche also meant recognising Sikkim since the land has been associated with the saint even in religious scriptures.





The Inner Treasure

THE STATUE

Entry to the Guru statue is via a boulevard of prayers flags, and an entrance gate made in stone and ornamented in traditional Buddhist motifs. On the top of the gate are images of a pair of deer. A symbol of renunciation, the deer represents the natural harmony and the fearlessness of the deity's pure realm and the Buddha's first teachings at the Deer Park in Samath.

In Tibetan art deer usually appear as a paired male and female, representing harmony, happiness and fidelity.

Painted in shimmering copper, pink and bronze, the 135 feet high statue of Guru Padmasambhava seated on a lotus pedestal, lording over the forested Samdruptse ridge and visible from as far as Darjeeling, is known to be the tallest of its kind in the world.

More than 48,000 bags of cement and about 400 metric tons of steel were used for the making of the statue.

The statue has been designed according to traditional Buddhist ideals of statutory proportion and moulded as per the measurement and other details explained in the Thekcha, a text composed by the great Vajrayana teacher Je Mephram Rinpoche. The precise measurement of every segment of the statue of Guru Rinpoche has been meticulously extracted from the original scripture.







Warding-off-evil mudra (gesture): Guru Padmasambhava seen holding on the right hand a five-pronged *vajra*, facing the ground and portrays dominance over the evil forces.





Everyone associated with the project was made aware that when an image drawn by an artist on a smaller scale was transformed to the proportions laid out for the Samdruptse project, the errors multiply and the image proportionately loses its originality. To check against such amplifications of errors, the team from the Dodrupchen Chorten Trust monitored each stage of the construction and ensured that the gigantic statue of Guru Padmasambhava was proportionately and faithfully replicated from the measurement given in the Thekcha.

While the civil works progressed, frequent consultations were held with Dodrupchen Rinpoche, who gave a miniature copper statue of Guru Rinpoche to be photographed along with a graphic drawing of the statue. The Rinpoche instructed the sculptors and artisans that the proposed statue of Guru Rinpoche should be in the same position, have same pose and hand gestures.

Padmasambhava is believed to have thousands of manifestations, and the one at Samdruptse appears in the form of *Nang-Sid Zilnon* – Nang-Sid translates as 'Universe in its entirety' and Silnon means under dominance. This statue according to Dodrupchen Rinpoche has depiction of Padmasambhava as a seventeen year old, which substantiates the sage's enormous vajra mastery at that age. This aspect, as per belief would strengthen the prominence of the statue.

In this form, Padmasambhava is seen holding on the right hand a five-pronged vajra, facing the ground and this portrays dominance over the evil forces.

The vajra has the appearance of a "diamond sceptre" and there are two symmetrical sets of five prongs which arc out from either side of the central sphere. One set of prongs represents the phenomenal world (samsara) and the other the noumenal (that which is perceived) world (nirvana). The five prongs on the phenomenal world represent the five poisons – desire, anger, delusion, greed and envy – and five on the noumenal side represents the five wisdoms – wisdom of individuality, mirror like wisdom, reality wisdom, wisdom of equanimity, all accomplishing wisdom.

On the left hand, which rests in the gesture of equanimity, Padmasambhava is seen holding Tshe-Bhum or skull-cup in

the centre of which is a vase of longevity filled with nectar of immortal wisdom and ornamented in top by a wish fulfilling tree. Cradled in his left arm is the three-pointed khatvanga (trident), a divine attribute of Guru Padmasambhava, and is intrinsic to his iconographic representation. Its three points represent the essence, nature and compassionate energy. Below these three prongs are three severed heads – dry, fresh and rotten, symbolizing the three kayas (the three bodies of Buddha). The three kayas are dharmakaya or truth body, sambhogakaya or body of mutual enjoyment, and Nirmanakaya or created body which manifests in time and space.

The nine iron rings adorning the prongs represent the nine yantras. The trident is also adorned with locks of hair from dead and living mamos and dakinis, as a sign that Guru Padmasambhava subjugated them all when he practiced austerities in the Eight Great Charnel Grounds.

On his crown he wears a five-petalled lotus hat, which has three points symbolising the three kayas, a sun and moon to symbolise unshakable Samadhi and a vulture's feather to represent the realisation of the highest view.

Just below the throne of the statue is a water reservoir, where stupas are being built now. On the front portion of the reservoir are steps from where devotees are required to climb up to the top floor of the base structure building, to place flowers at the foot of the statue.

Inside the statue are a large number of *dzung* or sacred relics including rare statues, rare scriptures, rare medicinal and purifying herbs – all meticulously arranged along with tightly rolled strips of paper containing hundreds of holy mantras held strong by the *shokshing* – the wooden heart of the statue. Some of these rare items have been collected and many donated by devotees from across the Himalayan regions.

Any statue could become an object for meditation only after it has been filled up with sacred relics in the right way. This is why all items going inside the statue must be new, clean, rare and blessed. The process of filling up the sacred relics is done in the right way as every mantra and every relic has its specific place in a statue.





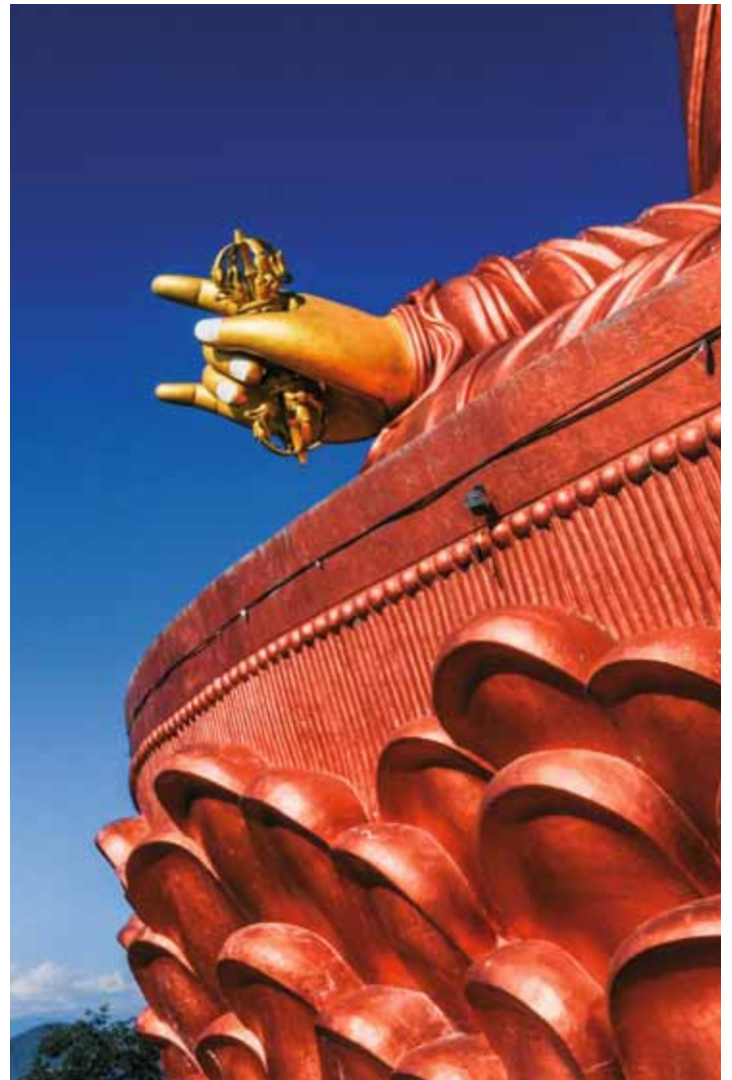


THE LOTUS THRONE

The lotus flower has been a symbol of purity since the time of the Buddha. A full blooming lotus in Buddhist art signifies enlightenment. Buddhas and Buddhist saints, gurus, Bodhisattva and alike always get depicted sitting or standing on a lotus throne.

Padmasambhava is also shown here seated on a lotus throne. Padmasambhava (Sanskrit) or Pemajungne (in Tibetan), which means 'Lotus-born', refers to Guru Rinpoche's birth from a lotus in the land of Oddiyana.

The lotus throne sits on a thi or pedestal, which itself is ornately carved.



facing page: A sculpture of a pair of snow lions on the pedestal that appears to support the lotus throne and the statue; **page 50, 51:** Murals on the ceiling and wall of the main prayer hall.

THE PEDESTAL

The pedestal on which the lotus throne stands is an artistic feat. The exterior of the pedestal is richly embellished with paintings. On the pedestal are mythological snow lions – two on each of the four sides – that support the throne. These eight directional lions represent the eight great Bodhisattvas, or Eight Close Sons of the Buddha.

The lion is an ancient Indian symbol of sovereignty and protection. The three lion heads, taken from the pillars built by King Ashoka at Sarnath, is also India's national symbol. The lion in Tibetan art developed as the mythological snow-lion with a turquoise mane, which is worshipped as the presiding local deity of Tibet's snowy mountain ranges. Simhanada, or the Lion's Roar, is the name given to a form of Avalokiteshvara, where the term refers to the supremacy of the Buddha's teachings over all other heretical doctrines.

Inside the pedestal is a meditation and prayer hall, where monks and devotees gather and offer prayers especially on four important holy days of a month – eighth day, tenth day, fifteenth day and the thirtieth day of each Buddhist month.

Every year in the month of October, devotees from far and wide also undergo retreat here during the annual Vajra Guru Dhungdrup or the recitation of Vajra Guru Mantra one billion times.









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facing page: A thangka painting and statues depicting different manifestations of Guru Padmasambhava adorn the altar of the main prayer hall. **above:** The meditation hall inside the pedestal of the holy statue.



MERITS OF CONSTRUCTING A GURU STATUE

Kyabje Dodrupchen Rinpoche has said that the act of leaving aside one's personal life and work and dedicating their time working on the Guru statue project at Samdruptse with the most pure and clean intentions, and without the slightest hope of gaining any material wealth, was the most powerful act and is in congruence with Dharma.

Here's what he had said from a Buddhist perspective about the positive consequences of making an image of Guru and of praying to that image: "Once after exalting Guru's wonderful qualities, Mendarawa, the daughter of the King of Zahor, asked the Guru: "Who will be the lamp to illuminate the darkness of ignorance for sentient beings when they 'wander aimlessly under the influence of samsara? How will they earn merit? Who will lighten the suffering of samsara for them? Guru Rinpoche replied: "Those of you who do not meet me should build my image and make offerings. You should have faith and deep devotion to this image and recite the essence mantra, Vajra Guru, all the time. Then whatever prayers you make will come true. If you make offerings of things that you, yourself, like and enjoy, you will enjoy peace and prosperity. Pray with devotion."

Then the Guru went on to explain the results of making offerings to this image. "If you offer the five medicines of *taktser*, *kandakari*, white *shutag*, *wanglang* and ocean cream, you will be free from diseases originating from wind, bile, bad *kyen*, and combinations of all of them. Whoever serves as a caretaker with pure intention will never be born in the lower realms. Whoever builds the shrine of Guru will be born in the palace of the gods. Whoever works as the supervisor at the time of building the statue will have the power and knowledge to teach Dharma to others. Whoever offers land for the construction of the statue will be reborn as the one who is learned in all five major kinds of knowledge.

Whoever contributes funds to the construction will have merit increase day by day like seeds growing in a fertile land. Whoever offers clothing to the statue will

obtain different kinds of ornaments without even trying. Whoever offers the lotus seat to the statue will become beautiful and pleasant to touch. Whoever cleans dust and dirt off the statue will have healthy beautiful colouring and a shapely body. Whoever offers lamps to the statue will become brilliant. Whoever offers gold, silver, turquoise coral, *dzi* and other precious objects will be wealthy in this lifetime and in future lifetimes.

Whoever offers white sandal wood, gurkum, ah kura, musk, camphor and the five kinds of incense and perfume will be beautiful-looking and also exude a wonderful scent, themselves. Whoever offers the five kinds of medicine like *taktser*, *kandakari*, white *shutag*, *wanglag* and ocean cream will have less sickness now and will acquire a body free of sickness in their next life. If you offer five essences like molasses, ghee, honey, sesame oil, and salt you will enjoy happiness devoid of suffering now and in your future lives. Whoever offers perfume to the statue will be born in a clean place without the slightest filth. Whoever offers the things they themselves like (Tsog khor) will never go hungry or thirsty now or in their future lives. Whoever offers grains like barley, wheat, rice, dry peas, sesame, and *dro* will be wealthy.

Whoever offers flowers will lessen their attachment, anger, ignorance, egotism, and jealousy and be free of defilements. Whoever offers white, edible substances like milk, curd and butter will own cows and many other domestic animals. Whoever offers three sweets like crystallized sugar, molasses and honey will be born where one always enjoys good-tasting food. Whoever offers pleasant parks to the statue with water, flowers, trees, animals and insects these people will have good fortune and abundant wealth. Whoever offers barley, rice, wheat, peas, sesame, and other grains will find their crops growing abundantly.

Whoever offers ceremonial umbrellas, ornamental ribbons, and victorious banners will wear beautiful ornaments and will carry out activities according to Dharma. Whoever offers music of flat cymbals will have a pleasant voice and sharp eyes and ears. Whoever offers music of round cymbals will be healthy, powerful and will have a body with completely perfect limbs.

Whoever offers circumambulation and prostrations will be freed from the lower realms and attain Buddhahood. Whoever offers gold to the statue will be thoroughly skilled in all the knowledge of Dharma and Samsara. Those people will become the rare and precious kings of the land.

Whoever offers the seven 'Gyal Sid Nad Dun' to the statue will be born in the heaven of Sambogakaya. Whoever opens or repairs the eyes of the statue will have the wisdom eye of omniscience. Whoever gives the place for the statue to be built – all the fights, famine and epidemic will disappear from their land. Whoever encourages others to build Guru's statue will be able to absolve many beings' defilements and make them live a long life. The statue is formed from the emergence of wisdom light from my heart."



Other Prominent Features

BUDDHIST LIBRARY

The Buddhist Library is stacked with rare books on Buddhism and religious philosophy. Books on Sikkim are also available here. The library's policy is to support the free dissemination of digital Buddhist educational material around the world and the systematic development of Dharma based pedagogy in partnership with Buddhist organisations worldwide. So far the Library content is available in English, Hindi, Nepali, Chinese, Thai, and now Spanish and Portuguese, though there are plans to expand the range of languages to include the main European and Asian languages as well. The management also invites Buddhist organisations, whether they are tertiary institutions, monasteries or related organisations to be involved with this project and support the database by providing content from their respective lineage or teacher.

Membership is required if one intends to borrow books. The library remains open on weekdays from 10 am to 4 pm.







The butter lamp shrine.

CHOEMI LHAKHANG

Choemi Lhakhang, also called Marme Lhakhang or the butter lamp shrine is where visitors can light butter lamps in memory of their loved ones, to earn merits or to dispel ignorance. Circular in design and glass-cased, it stands right in front of the colossal statue. Its roof has ventilation for smoke produced by the lamps. Offering lighted butter lamps, a conspicuous feature in Tibetan Buddhist and Hindu temples throughout the Indian Himalayas, represents the illumination of wisdom.

Every monastery has a separate Choemi Lhakhang or Tongche Lhakhang (thousand butter lamp shrine) for devotees to light butter lamps.

There is also a tradition among the Tibetan Buddhists to offer lighted butter lamps every morning along with seven vessels containing pure water before the images of their household shrine. A large number of butter lamps are offered during death ceremonies or while making pilgrimage to sacred sites.

THE EIGHT MEDITATION HUTS

Adding colour to promotion of pilgrimage tourism in Sikkim and to promote spiritual well being, the State Government has developed meditation huts in deep forests in the periphery of the world' s tallest statue of Guru Padmasambhava. Designed after the eight auspicious signs – *tashi tagye* – of Buddhist philosophy, each meditation hut has been developed with all modern amenities to encourage the tourists to meditate and engage in deep contemplation amidst quiet and idyllic surroundings. This concept is in a way combining spirituality with commerce, and trying to make these eight auspicious signs productive.

One of the eight meditation huts, Sernya, named after one of the eight auspicious signs.

The eight auspicious signs are: Dug (parasol), Gyaltzen (victorious banner); Dhungkar (white conch), Bhumpa (vase), Sernya (golden fish), Pema (lotus), Palbheu (endless knot), and Choekyi Khorlo (wheel of Dharma).

THE STATUE AT NIGHT

Guru Padmasambhava's darshan generates religious fervour round the clock. People from far and near throng to pay their respects, offering flowers at the foot of the Master. The residents of Namchi enjoy a visual treat every day. It can also be viewed from as far as the Darjeeling hills. At sunset, the Master is silhouetted against the sky and at night, he is incandescent in the flood lights that shine upon him.



The Reward

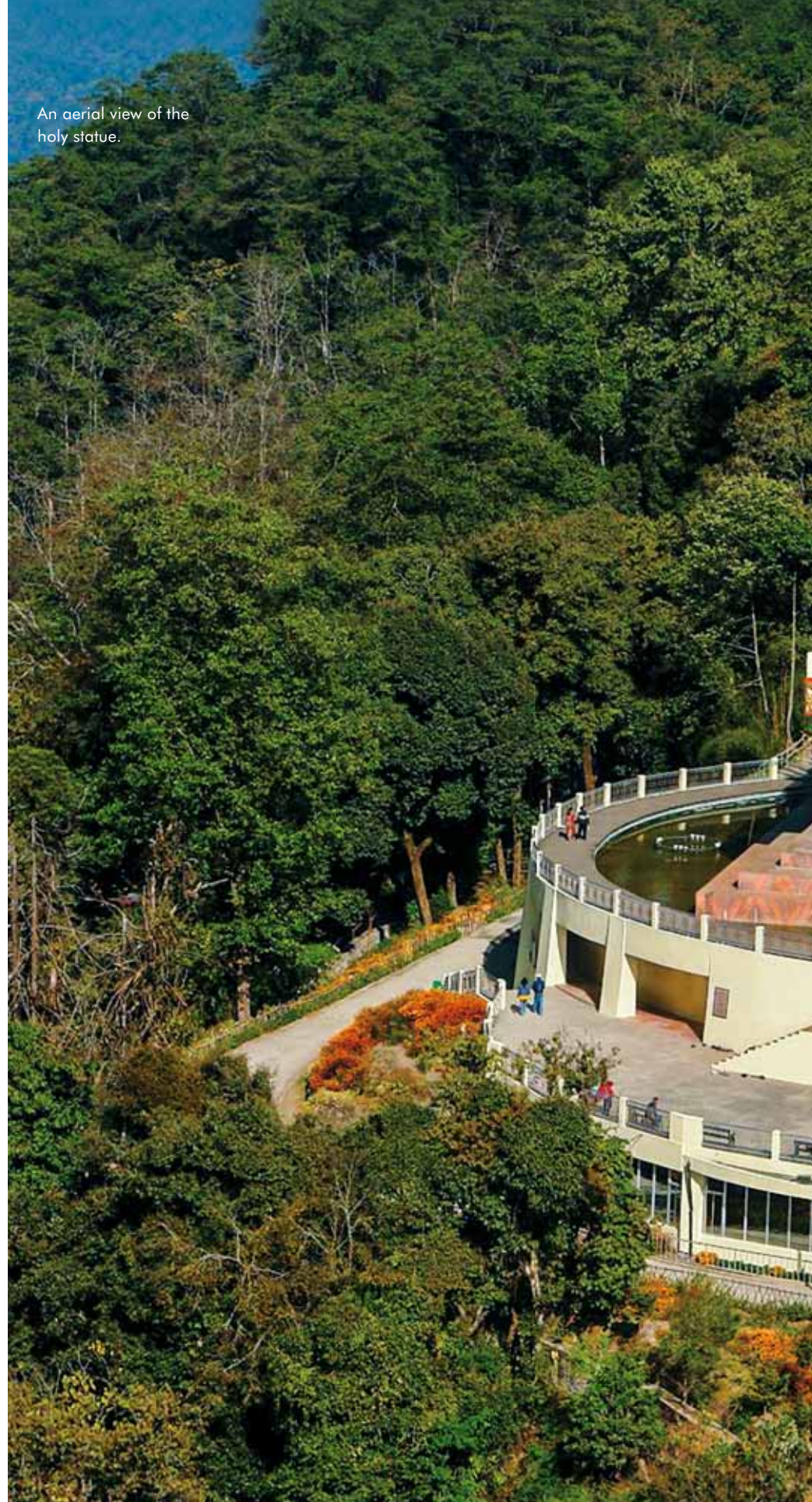
HIGHEST STATUE OF GURU PADMASAMBHAVA IN THE WORLD

It took more than one thousand labourers, scores of experienced engineers and highly skilled architects and sculptors nearly three years to complete this awe-inspiring and towering statue – the tallest statue of Guru Padmasambhava in the world. As per available records, the statue at Samdruptse is much taller than the famous bronze Buddha statue at Kamakura, Japan, which stands 42 feet high and has a circumference of 97 feet. The Kamakura statue was cast in AD 1252. The gigantic statue of Maitreya Buddha installed inside the shrine in Tashilhunpo Monastery, Shigatse is the tallest statue in Tibet. However, even this renowned statue which requires climbing a flight of stairs over several floors to view various parts of the body properly is only 85 feet tall.

The making of the highest statue of Guru Rinpoche at Samdruptse witnessed selflessness of the rarest kind that is inherent among the Sikkimese people.

Hundreds of labourers and scores of engineers, sculptors and artisans toiled day and night under the scorching sun, in torrential rain and in biting cold. It is miraculous that none of them fell sick or met with an accident during the three years of work at the site. As the project commenced during the monsoon season, it was expected that rain would occasionally halt work. It was divine intervention that the heavy rain would inexplicably stop during the metal casting works, which otherwise would have delayed progress.

An aerial view of the holy statue.









Winters are very cold in Samdruptse, but apart from some numbness, workers seemed to suffer no prolonged side-effects. All the workers, hailing from different parts of the country and from Nepal and Bhutan, were unanimous in their belief that the services they rendered for this statue was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, memories of which they will cherish forever.

While it would be impossible to list all those who rendered selfless service at the site, two members of the team – Sonam Barphungpa and Sonam Paljor – stand out. The first Sonam, a government engineer and a disciple of Dodrupchen Rinpoche, took leave without pay for two and a half years from government service and camped at Samdruptse, working relentlessly from the day of the foundation stone laying ceremony till completion of the project. Sonam Barphungpa's two reasons for joining the project were these: his loyalty to Dodrupchen Rinpoche whom he was serving in all his spare time as a devotee since his childhood; and secondly impressed with Chief Minister Pawan Chamling's vision of building the Guru statue.

Sonam Paljor, who had been Rinpoche's translator, interpreter and main functionary – rolled into one – handled everything from manpower to materials, food and lodging of labourers to funds and transportation, liaising with government officials and Tourism Department, the nodal department,

and the overall supervision. Working directly under the orders of the Rinpoche, Sonam Paljor handled everything remarkably well and ensured no hitch occurred till the completion of the statue. He had once narrated that when he was ordered by the Rinpoche to look after the project, the latter had told him that the Samdruptse Project has been initiated by a person who had banned climbing on holy mountains including Khangchendzonga, stopped the practice of providing Serbang to laities and believed in doing rather than talking and stressed that everyone associated with the project work to the best of their abilities to ensure that this man's vision was turned into reality.

A number of volunteers from Namchi and others parts of Sikkim, Bhutan and Nepal also offered free services during construction.

Signs of divine intervention were, of course, present throughout the implementation of this colossal project. The first miracle was recorded when a natural spring sprouted a few kilometres above the site, after Dodrupchen Rinpoche offered prayers. The planting of trees in the vicinity through the Smriti Van programme also contributed significantly to the rejuvenation of this spring water. It was water from this spring which was used for construction and is still being used by visitors and also for allied constructions.

A back view of the holy statue of Guru Padmasambhava at Samdruptse from where devotees enter the prayer hall and climb up the pedestal to offer flowers and traditional scarves at the foot of the statue.



DEVELOPMENT OF PILGRIMAGE TOURISM

Until a few years ago, South Sikkim was perhaps the least visited part in Sikkim but in the recent years with the construction of Siddheswara Dham and the highest statue of Guru Padmasambhava, the district has developed in leaps and bounds especially in the field of pilgrimage tourism.

The district also has some of Sikkim's oldest monasteries, the Ngadak monastery, located a few kilometers below the statue of Guru Padmasambhava. The reconstruction of the centuries-old historical Ngadag Chyangter Gonpa at Namchi was also initiated and conceived by Chief Minister Chamling to develop the monastery as a museum and a centre for learning and preservation of Buddhist culture, tradition and heritage. It took over eight years for artisans from Nepal, Bhutan and Sikkim to complete the monastery. The old Ngadag monastery replete with history has also been conserved in its entirety below the new one.

Today tourist footfall in South Sikkim is perhaps the highest in the State, which indicates success of the Sikkim Government's vision on pilgrimage tourism.

With the increase in number of tourists, there came a rise in transportation service. As per official statistics, just after the addition of the Passenger Ropeway to Samdruptse via the Rock Garden on 1 August 2016, around three thousand people visited Samdruptse during August-September while the number of vehicles plying the route was eight hundred and sixty-three.





The path leading to the holy statue

A view of the majestic Khangchendzonga ranges as seen from Samdruptse.







Flowers that adorn the base of the holy statue at Samdruptse. Devotees believe that the beauty and benefits of offering flowers to objects such as statues, stupas, etc. aid in accumulating merit.

Visitors on a pilgrimage trips light butter lamps, meditate while opting to stay in the eight meditation huts or simply soak in the silence of the vicinity. They also take part in the annual Vajra Guru Dhungdrup, the recitation of Vajra Guru Mantra one billion times to invoke the blessings of Guru Padmasambhava for universal peace and welfare of all sentient beings. Every year in October, Samdruptse Management Committee organises Vajra Guru Dhungdrup with help from generous contributors. Monks, nuns and lay practitioners from Sikkim and outside participate in the annual mantra recitation with the belief that the benefits from mere recitation of this mantra are truly inconceivable.

Vajra Guru Mantra – *Om Ah Hung Vajra Guru Padma Siddhi Hung* – is the most important of all mantras of Guru Padmasambhava, the very heart essence of the Guru. *Om Ah Hung* symbolises the three seed syllables of the three *vajras* – body, speech and mind; *Vajra* signifies the dharmakaya (dharma body) perceptible to Buddhas alone; *Guru* that of sambhogakaya (body of enjoyment) perceptible

to great Bodhisattvas, and *Padma* signifies the nirmanakaya or body of manifestation perceptible to ordinary beings. Guru Padmasambhava is, therefore, believed to have the qualities inseparable from the three kayas.

Siddhi means accomplishments that can be gained through the power of this mantra.

It is said that if a devotee recites the Vajra Guru mantra ten million times, he or she will be reborn in a realm of vidyadharas (knowledge holder or a being of high attainment in Vajrayana Buddhism).

On the request of his spiritual consort Yishey Tshogyal, Guru Padmasambhava himself explained the meaning and benefits of reciting the Vajra Guru mantra in troubled times, in which the Great Guru had specifically told Tshogyal to recite the mantra, write it and tell it to sentient beings in the future. Later a commentary on the mantra was made popular by the fourteenth century treasure revealer Tulku Karma Lingpa.

Facilities for Pilgrims

Varied developmental setups are made in the vicinity of the statue of Guru Padmasambhava mainly to enhance the place fit for organizing large scale religious events as well as attract large tourist inflow.

The complex has a cafeteria, car parking space, guesthouse, curio shops, a newly built residential facility or Zimchung for visiting Rinpoches and battery-operated vehicle service for tourists. The area is connected with WiFi.

For the convenience of the pilgrims, there is an eco-friendly, state-of-the-art ropeway which shuttles between Rock Garden and Samdruptse. Soon it will be connected with Namchi, the south district headquarters which is 10-km away from Samdruptse.

This mono-cable fixed grip pulsed ropeway has a total of 12 four-seater cabins imported from Switzerland. It covers a distance of 640 meters and will take five minutes to travel between the two stations.

A complex which serves as a guest house, cafeteria and car parking space at Samdruptse.











previous page: A mono-cable fixed grip pulsatod ropeway which shuttles between Rock Garden and Samdruptse; **facing page:** ticket office and ropeway gate; **above:** A curio shop; **below:** Zimchung or residential facility for visiting Rinpoches.

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