

Drukpa Puna Dechen: A Song for Punakha Dzong



In one of his treasure texts, the Buddhist master Dorjé Lingpa (1346-1405) is said to have prophesied the main fort of the Drukpas will be built between two rivers

(ཆུ་གཉིས་བར་དུ་འབྲུག་པའི་སྐོག་རྫོང་ཆགས།).

Punakha, the first capital of Bhutan, lies between two rivers: Pho Chu (Male River) and Mo Chu (Female River), both of which have spiritual significance. They represent the perfect balance of wisdom and compassion for the achievement of ultimate enlightenment. In another prophecy, the great guru, Guru Rinpoché, is said to have prophesied the construction of Punakha Dzong with the following lines:

At the base of a mountain that resembles the trunk of an elephant
A noble person by the name of Ngakwang would appear.

(རི་པོ་སྐང་ཆེན་འགྱུང་འདྲའི་སྐྱ་སྒྲིང་ན། ལྷིས་བུ་རྣམ་རྒྱལ་བུ་བའི་མཚན་ཅན་བྱོན། །)

Punakha Dzong is commonly known as Pungtang Dewachenpö Podrang (ལྷུང་ཐང་བདེ་བ་ཆེན་པོའི་པོ་བྲང་) meaning ‘the Fortress of the Heap of Great Happiness’. Today, most people simply call it Punakha. The area where the dzong stands was initially blessed by Indian master Druptop Ngakgi Rinchen who built a small temple there in 1328. The temple can still be seen today on the opposite side of the Punakha Dzong and is called Dzongchung, or Little Dzong.

As the second oldest dzong in the country, Punakha Dzong holds great significance for the people of Bhutan. Construction on Punakha Dzong began in 1637 and was completed a year later, at which time the Zhapdrung Ngakwang Namgyel (1594-1651) was the first religious political leader of Bhutan. Punakha Dzong was the seat of government until 1955 when the capital was moved to Thimphu, and it remains the winter home of the state monk body. The dzong has also been the venue for the coronation of every Bhutanese king.

“Drukpai Puna Dechen,” is a *zhungdra* (གཞུང་རྒྱུ) song that recounts the glorious Punakha Dzong. One of the most popular folk songs from Punakha region, the song is classified as a *zhungdra* due to its long and slow tune. Typically this song is performed in tandem with a line dance classified as *dangrim* (གདངས་རིང་མ), which means the song of a longer tune or line dance. The lyrics are comprised of a series of melodious five-line stanzas, each of which praise the architectural complex.

“Drukpai Puna Dechen” is considered to be one of the most popular and oldest *zhungdra*, and oral tradition traces its first performance to the consecration of the dzong itself, when local women sung it in the presence of Zhapdrung Ngakwang Namgyel himself. The song has also been performed to commemorate victories over invading Tibetan armies and it also as a gesture of appreciation to the protective deities Yeshé Gönpö (ཡེ་ཤེས་མགོན་པོ) and Penden Lhamo (དཔལ་ལྷན་ལྷ་མོ). The structural and architectural features of Punakha Dzong are explained by the song’s lyrics.

འབྲུག་པའི་ལྷངས་ཐང་བདེ་ཆེན། །བཀྲིས་སྒོ་མང་འདྲ་དོ། །སྟོ་ཡ། མ་བྱ་ལྷ་རིས་ལེགས་པའི་ཆགས་པ་ལ་ཅིག་འདྲ་སོང་། །

Pungthang Dechen of Druk Yul,
Resembles an Auspicious Many-doored Stupa (བཀྲིས་སྒོ་མང་),
Like a beautiful peacock resting on the ground

མཚོ་བ་གསེར་རྟོག་བཀལ་ས། །དམའ་བ་འབྲུམ་གཞི་བལྟགས་ས། །སྟོ་ཡ། མ་བྱ་ལྷ་རིས་ལེགས་པའི་ཆགས་པ་ལ་ཅིག་འདྲ་སོང་། །

The dzong with its gold-plated pinnacle on the top,
The dzong with its strong foundation at the bottom.
It looks like a beautiful peacock resting on the ground.

འབྲུག་པའི་ཐང་བཟོ་སྒོ་ལྷང་། །དུལ་དཀར་མེ་ལོང་འདྲ་དོ། །སྟོ་ཡ། མ་བྱ་ལྷ་རིས་ལེགས་པའི་ཆགས་པ་ལ་ཅིག་འདྲ་སོང་། །

The window of Tangdzong,
Shines like a silver mirror.
It looks like a beautiful peacock resting on the ground.

འབྲུག་པའི་ལྷངས་ཐང་ཟམ་ལྷགས། །གསེར་ཟམ་དུལ་ཟམ་འདྲ་དོ། །སྟོ་ཡ། མ་བྱ་ལྷ་རིས་ལེགས་པའི་ཆགས་པ་ལ་ཅིག་འདྲ་སོང་། །

The bridge of Punakha Dzong,
Is like a gold and silver bridge.
It looks like a beautiful peacock resting on the ground

འབྲུག་པའི་དར་འཕྲར་ལམ་འདི། །དར་ལམ་དཀར་ལྷང་འདྲ་དོ། །སྟོ་ཡ། མ་བྱ་ལྷ་རིས་ལེགས་པའི་ཆགས་པ་ལ་ཅིག་འདྲ་སོང་། །

The footpath lined with flags on both sides,
Is like a path of white silken scarf leading to heaven.
It looks like a beautiful peacock resting on the ground.

This *zhungdra* song became popular in the time of Second King Jigmé Wangchuck (1905-1952), but at the time was only allowed to be performed during the Punakha Dromchö (ལྷ་རྒྱུ་བཀོད་མཚོན). However, during the Third King’s time, the rules were relaxed and *zhungdra* was performed during other occasions as well. Today this song may be heard throughout Bhutan. The song is popular in Bhutan and sung on many occasions across

the country during the consecration of new dzongs, temples, and monasteries as an offering to the gods and goddesses. It is mostly performed by women.

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