

Buddhism and Buddhist Sites in Lahaul

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Introduction

Lahaul is situated in the northern region of Indian Himalaya. It is a sub-district of Lahaul-Spiti in the state of Himachal Pradesh and shares its border with Tibet. Lahaul and Spiti is in fact, a separate geographical unit which is divided by Greater Himalayan range. To its south is located the stunning valley of Kullu across the Rohtang Pass. Lahaul is also known by various names such as Garsha, Karja, and Swangla by its local inhabitants. Although Garsha and karja are the same words, the pronunciation seems to be slightly different due to variation and its meaning is also different. While swangla is used for a specific area and specific caste, but this caste does not come in the four caste system.

Advent of Buddhism in Lahaul:

It is very hard to say when Buddhism first came to Lahaul. From the evidence available here it appears that Buddhism entered here in two phases. Firstly straight from India and for the second time it entered from the Tibet. It is known from Indian Buddhist history that in 248 BC Buddhism was being spread in the Himalayan region.¹ After the third Buddhist council, Mauryan king Ashoka sent Buddhist monks to propagate Buddhism in the Himalayas and in adjoining areas. He sent Majjhantika Thera to Kashmir and Gandhara (now Afghanistan) and Majjhima Thera towards the snow covered regions.

Buddhism came into Lahaul from central India and Kashmir, many of which have survived to this day. The another fact in this context is an ancient bronze vase found at Gandhola Vihar, on which picture of Bodh Jatakas were carved, presently it is safe in the British Museum of London. Some archaeologists consider it to be the first century BC and some accept it between

¹ Dr. Banarsi Lal Lahaul and Gyalwa Gotsangpa.

200 and 300 AD.² Thus, it can be estimated that the movement of Buddhist monks in Lahaul also started in the middle of 1st-3rd BC. After the collapsed of Mauryan power, Kushana emperor, Kanishka extended his empire upto China. He supported Buddhism and during his reign, Buddhism was flourished very well in Lahaul and it even became a part of his kingdom for a short duration. The Kanishka stupa (chorten) was established by him near Keylong reveals that he wanted to intact his citizen with Buddhism through the religious symbol of the stupa.³

During the 5th century, Gupta Empire grew and extended upto Kashmir and its neighboring areas. Yasodharman flourished his kingdom and extended upto the Himalayas in the north and probably Lahaul and Spiti may have been the part of this empire. During this period, Buddhism neither got any prosperity nor it was damaged, it remained intact as it was during the period of Kanishka. Therefore all the Buddhist relics built by Kanishka were in their own existence.

Early in the 7th century Harsha came to power and ruled India for next four decades. At that time, Lahaul & Spiti was under Ladakh region which was then part of Harsha Empire. Harsha was undoubtedly the second great emperor of India, who had a good diplomatic relations with China. During his period, in the seventh century, a famous Chinese traveller Hiuen Tsang travelled to Kullu around 634 AD. He mentioned Lahaul in his travel details, although he himself does not reach to Lahaul. He writes about Lahaul that there is a country called La-Ho-Lo ahead and beyond this, there is Ladakh. He describes the status of Buddhism in Kullu. He also mentioned the stupa built by King Ashoka. So naturally, it can be estimated that Lahaul being closed to Kullu there must have been an admission of Buddhism and Buddhist monks in Lahaul too. Whatever it may be, it can be certainly said that in the first century BC, propagation of Buddhism in Lahaul was started and this order continued till eight-ninth century.

The hold of Buddhism on the general population of Lahaul turned out to be more grounded when in the tenth century, Skyil-Lde-Nyimagong (Nyima-gong), a Tibetan prince, who had taken shelter at Purang and married to the two daughters of the local chief and established the Guge Kingdom in 922 AD. Before his death, in 930 AD or 970 AD, he divided his kingdom amongst his three sons. The eldest son Palgyi-gong received Ladakh, the second son Tashi-gong received the Purang and Guge and the youngest son Lde-tsug-gong received the southern part of the

² Garsha Young Drukpa Association, (2011) *Garsha Heart Land of the Dakinis a mirror into Lahaul Sacred Time and Space*. Keylong: Drukpa Publicatin. P.29

³ Prem Sing Jina, (2010). *Buddhism in the Land of the Gods Lahul –Western Himalayas*. Delhi: Sri Satguru Publication. P. 42.

kingdom which includes Zanskar, Lahaul, Spiti, and Kinnaur. In this way, three kingdoms came into being. Nyima-gon paid his maximum attention in the prosperity of Buddhism in these areas. At that time, Mahayana Buddhism became stronger in Lahaul. In the eleventh century, Buddhism got an incredible flip as a result of the efforts of Lotsawa Rinchen Zangpo (958-1055), he was contemporary of the Guge king Khor-Re, who later become a monk and adopted the name Yeshe-od (Prajna Prabha). Rinchen Zangpo (Ratnabhadra) was born in Kinnaur and was the great scholar and translator produced by Kinnaur, who not just only preached and spread the dharma in Guge but also in Tibet as well. He established countless Buddhist monasteries all over the region and is still intact. Thereafter, Tibetan practitioners and scholars continued to visit Lahaul, as a result of which the roots of Buddhism became deeper here. Among them are some special seekers and religious preachers such as Gyalwa Gotsangpa (1189-1258), Siddha (Drubthop) Orgyenpa (1230-1309), Don Gyud Palden, Orgyen Taktsang Repa (1573-1651) etc. Lahaul is a sacred land particularly identified with the Vajrayana Buddhism. Among the Buddhist Tantric Siddhas, it is considered as an extremely undiluted land for practicing the dharma. Many sublime beings have wandered in this place for the sake of supreme knowledge.

Buddhist Sites Lahaul is the supreme pilgrimage land which is blessed with many holy places and divine shrines which are discussed below.

Drilbu Ri is a name of the sacred mountain in Lahaul, a well-known pilgrimage site. “Drilbu” means bell and “Ri” means mountain. The whole Himalayan range is often viewed as pure, enriched with special spiritual energy. This may be associated with the presence of remarkable nature and great highlands. These sacred places were revealed by Buddha when he conveyed the Vajrayana Tantric teachings to the world. One of the most highly revered among these sacred places is probably Mount Kailash, in western Tibet. This is equally worshiped by Buddhist, Hindu, Jaina, and Bonpos. In Lahaul, Drilbu Ri and Maru are both the parts of the network of Chakrasamvara. Despite the fact that Drilbu Ri was possibly not mentioned in early scriptures, but many Siddhas have meditated here including the great Indian master Nagarjuna, the Mahasiddha Gantapa (Drillbu Pa), Gaylwa Gotsangpa, Drubthop Orgyenpa, Taktsang Repa, Ragrik Repa etc. Therefore, Drilbu Ri is a major Tantric site which lies on a pilgrimage route to the other supreme site of Chakrasamvara such as Oddiyana, Jalandhar etc.

Sila Caves lies on the southern side of Drilbu RI, above the Dalang Village, which was once inhabited by Gotsangpa. Then there was no shrine and the place was known as Sila Phuk (Sila Caves) by locals and as well as Tibetans. The largest cave has the many stupas, which can be seen from the road. Other caves are on the hillside which is difficult to reach. Among them is Vajra Phuk where the Mahasiddha Ghantapa was said to have meditated. One cave has the imprint of Gotsanpa's head. Ruins of meditation cell can be seen all around. Certainly, many ancient stupas contain the relics of some of these Siddhas.

Gotsanpa Cave and Lama Gompa another site where Gotsangpa used to meditate lies above the village Gotsang, where his embedded footprints are also worshiped. According to the local tradition, the village was named after him. He meditated while facing the Drillbu Ri. It is said he used to meditate here during summer time because the cave is on the northern side of Drilbu Ri and it is too windy and cold in winters. The cave is also regarded favorite site of Gotsangpa and since then been used by others Siddhas including the famous Siddha DRubthop Orgyenpa. However, it was only after 1930 when Kunga Rinpoche used the site for meditation and gradually other practitioners set up their own meditation cell around him. The enlarged and furnished Gotsangpa Cave with its surrounding huts became known as Lama Gompa (Hermitage of Guru). However, following his Guru's instructions, Kunga Rinpoche never built any shrine but much later in the 1990s, his followers built there a shrine which came to be known as Lama Gonpa.

Triloknath Temple (Phakpa) is situated at the left corner of Chandra Bhaga River in Triloknath (Tundeh) village. It is one amongst the very rare places of the world which is equally worshiped by two distinct religions. This shrine is very popular among Buddhist and Hindus. It is one of the holiest places in India, which attracts a large number of Saddhus (Hindu hermits) who came to visit this place once a year. In the meantime, Buddhist pilgrims likewise visit here from Tibet, Ladakh, Zanskar and other parts of India. Unlike most Buddhist monasteries and a few Hindu temples, this place consists of only one statue called Arya Avalokiteshvara (Phakpa Chenrezik). The statue is made of white marble and seated in the Ardhpadmasan (half lotus position). It has six arms, another small statue (Amitabha) is consolidated into the head of the main idol. Outside the main temple, there are two stone pillars on each side of the door and the gap between the wall and these pillars are too narrow. These pillars are considered as the pillar of Dharma and Paap

(Virtue and Sin). It is believed that sinner gets stuck when they try to pass the narrow gap, while the virtues pass through easily. The shrine has miraculously survived the infamous 1863 and 1979 avalanches which destroyed nearly the whole village.

There is a contradiction among the believers of Hindu and Buddhist. Hindu considers Triloknath as a 'Shiva temple' and the main idol there is revered as a Shiva. It is said, in earlier times many Hindu Sadhus from Chamba state used to visit this place for meditation, they saw the idol and got confused and later called it Trolknath. And there are few reasons behind their confusion, the very first reason was the Head of the idol, a small statue of Amitabha Buddha is consolidated into the head of the main idol, which might be looked to them as Ganga as Lord Shiva holds the Ganga over his head in the knotted locks of hair and another reason might be the white color of the idol and the asana. On the other hand, all the available evidence proves that it is a Buddhist shrine, outside the main temple there are two beautifully carved Buddha figures on the stone pillars on each side of the door. It reveals that the shrine must be Buddhist as Hindu Shiva temple does not have Buddha carving inside and outside of the temple. An inscription discovered by the historians, which is engraved in a wall slab on the entrance of the main shrine and written in the ancient Sharda script clearly shows that it was dedicated to Avalokiteshvara from the beginning and was built around late 9th or the early 10th century. It reads:

"Homage to you, Glorious Avalokiteshwara.

With altruistic intent, Dvamgra Rana, a man of incomparable and stainless diligence,

*Who has given up the slightest passion while being rich with hundreds of powerful virtues, has built for you an excellent towering temple, as high as Lahaul is important."*⁴

Local traditions say the holy image appeared by itself from the encounter of a shepherd with Avalokiteshvara on the mountain uphill. The Rana of Triloknath (Tundeh) had a shepherd, who used to graze the cattle. There he saw seven white-faced angels came out of the lake and started drinking milk from the cattle, he watched them hiding near a rock. And thought, he should tell the Rana about it. When he got home in the evening somehow he forgot to tell the Rana. After few days, one day he tied a stone to the horns of a choori (a yak breed cow) as a reminder. Unfortunately, he even forgot this reminder. In the evening Rana's wife went to milk

⁴ Garsha Young Drukpa Association, (2011) Garsha Heart Land of the Dakinis a mirror into Lahaul Sacred Time and Space. Keylong: Drukpa Publicatin. P.43

the cows. The choori kicked and the stone fell into the milking pot which was made of clay and broke the pot into pieces. The Rani was very angry and complaint the Rana about the shepherd's stupid act. He called the shepherd and asked about his stupid act. Then he told him about the whole incident of angels drinking the milk which Rana did not believe and ordered him to catch one of the angles. Next day, when the angels again appeared he jumped from his hiding place and caught the youngest angel and ran towards the village. The other angels gave chase. The youngest angel warned him not to look back, or he would become a statue of stone. The Shepherd obeyed the angel until he reached the village, but he could not control and at last turned back and both shepherded and angle turned into stone at that very moment. The local tradition also believes that it was enshrined overnight with the help of local spirits. The lake was miraculously emptied leaving behind just spot of the lake and this is regarded as the original home of Avalokiteshvara.

Markula (Dorje Phagmo) A few miles away from Triloknath, there is a village on the right bank of Chandrabhaga. The place is called Udaipur named after Udai Singh, who was the king of Chamba in the 17th century when he occupied this area to Chamba.⁵ The local name of the hamlet is Margul. In ancient Chakrasamvara Tantra, this place is mentioned as Maru. At the point when transmission of Tantras or Vajrayana started to spread around the 8th century, Maru was mostly covered by dense forest. Between 8th and 11th centuries many Siddhas among the 84 Mahasiddhas meditated at Maru, as recorded in their biographies. After that from the 13th century onwards accomplished Himalayan yogis also practiced advanced Tantric Yoga at this site. Their astonishing experience at Maru is very inspiring. A monastery was soon built and it probably flourished for few centuries although nothing however scattered stones remain today.⁶

Maru is the house of Chakrasamvara. It is a site where the negative or evil forces of wicked are subjugated. According to local belief, a holy place dedicated to the Vajravarahi had been constructed at Maru in ancient time, and once there was six armed image of her.⁷ However, the core of Maru is not just its temple, but the whole area is blessed by the presence of Vajravarahi. The religious history of the temple is pretty complex as one can see Hindu art inside the temple.

⁵ Ram Nath Sahni, (1994). *Lahoul-A Mystery Land in the Himalayas*. New Delhi: Indus Publication. P.253

⁶ Garsha Young Drukpa Association, (2011) *Garsha Heart Land of the Dakinis a mirror into Lahaul Sacred Time and Space*. Keylong: Drukpa Publicatin. P.37

⁷ Garsha Young Drukpa Association, (2011) *Garsha Heart Land of the Dakinis a mirror into Lahaul Sacred Time and Space*. Keylong: Drukpa Publicatin. P.37

Around the 11th century, the temple was then famously dedicated to Vajravarahi. But in 1570, the effect of nearby kingdom Chamba prevailed, an idol of Mahishasurmardini was installed here. Today, the temple is known by the name of Markula or Mrikula Devi which is named after the name of its hamlet called Margul. Although she belongs to the Hindu belief, she is highly respected by both Buddhist and Hindus. Usually, their views are different in many aspects.

The Buddhist and Hindu tantric practices have apparently been often intertwined in the Indian Himalayas of the middle ages. Some Indian Siddhas said, for example, they have practiced Hindu Tantras as a stepping-stone to the more profound Buddhist way, religious iconographic program perhaps was also uncertain in Himachal Pradesh and this may have contributed to the complexity of Margul temple. The temple was constructed in the 11th century. It is made out of wood and stone. According to the legend, it was built overnight from a single block of wood by Pandavas, during their exile period. The temple looks simple from the outside but inside is covered with beautiful, detailed wood carving from the 11th to 16th centuries including scenes from the Hindu epic such as Mahabharata, Ramayana, and several Puranas. Those who are familiar with these stories can easily recognize each event. The wall panels depict scenes from the Mahabharata, Ramayana, Sunderkand, Yuddhakand, grant of the ground by Raja Bali to Vaaman, three-headed incarnation of Lord Vishnu, Churning (Samudra Manthan) of the ocean.

A panel shows the victory of Lord Buddha over Mara, the lord of desire. In the center, Buddha is shown sitting on the Vajrasana and surrounded by the army of the Mara. Inside the temple, there is over six feet tall statue of two gatekeepers, which are comparatively roughly carved. They face the front of the shrine. A few years back while doing some repair work people find two small statues underneath the feet of big ones. Local people believed that if one utters a word “*Let’s Go*” while leaving the temple these two gatekeepers also come along. That is why people just signal each other with their eyes or hands and walk backward until they are out of the door. There is another belief regarding these two gatekeepers, local says that on the night of Fagli⁸ they make their way from the river and go to see their consorts in the Guru Ghantal monastery. Maru, Margul, Mirkula, Markula or Udaipur whatever names may be but this place is highly revered among the both Hindus and Buddhists.

⁸ Fagli, locally known as “Kus” is an important festival in the Pattan valley Lahaul. It is celebrated on the new moon after Khogla. And it is the mark of the beginning of the New Year.

Guru Ghantal Monastery is one of the ancient monasteries of Lahaul. It is located on the sacred ground of Gandhola which stands on the steep slopes of Drilbu Ri above the confluence of Chandra and Bhaga rivers. According to the tradition, Mahasiddha Ghantapa attained the highest siddhi by meditating on Drilbu Ri. That is why it was later named Guru Ghanttar. It is one of the oldest and most blessed meditation sites of Lahaul. In some ancient texts, Gandhola refers to the whole Drilbu Ri Mountain including the monastery itself. From the past decades, the ground of Gandhola has been extremely blessed by the presence of the great Siddhas of India and Tibet. Over the centuries a large number of pilgrims and Yogis used to visit and meditate here. Archaeology reveals that Buddhist monks lived here as early as the 1st century. The sacredness of this place is highly praised by Gyalwa Gotsanpa, Drupthop Orgyenpa, Rangrik Repa and many others. The Siddha Orgyenpa meditated here for 6 months on his famous pilgrimage to Oddiyana around 1254 AD. He met many Yogis including saint Nagarjuna, a famous Buddhist philosopher, who had been staying here centuries earlier.⁹ Guru Ghantal was highly revered as a meditation center as well as a pilgrimage site by the Siddhas who practiced Vajrayana. The monastery was established in the 8th century, and the original or main idol of the monastery is a head of antique crowned Avalokiteshvara image from the 8th century, which was discovered about 70 years ago below the Gandhola where the Chandra and Bhaga joins, which is now safe at its new Thubcholing gumpa. Local tradition says a head began to grow out of sandy river bank at the confluence but it was chopped off by a person who witnessed it first with a sword before the whole body could appear. Historian says that it came from an ancient monastery at Gandhola, which was possibly washed away in an avalanche or destroyed by the earthquake. It has a beautiful ceiling and wall painting which was painted by Lama Tashi Temphele.

Kardang Monastery is located above the Kardang village on the left of Bhaga River. It was established some 900 years back in the 11th or 12th century. The monastery belongs to Drugpa sect of Mahayana Buddhism. It is one of the most famous centers of Tibetan Buddhism all over the world for its religious significance. It has a remarkable collection of murals, fine thangka paintings, old weapons and Buddhist instruments like horns, flutes, drums etc. It has a huge library of Buddhist literature containing the Kangyur and Tangyur written in Bhoti and Sherpa language. The monastery was in ruins until 1912, when Lama Norbu (died 1952) renovated it

⁹ Garsha Young Drukpa Association, (2011) Garsha Heart Land of the Dakinis a mirror into Lahaul Sacred Time and Space. Keylong: Drukpa Publicatin. P.22

and with Lama Kunga transformed it into a proper learning center. It has a stupa (chorten) in its first room which preserves skull and ashes of founder Lama Norbu. Along with the stupa statue of Padmasambhava, Tara (Devi), Tagden Shakyashree is there. The prayer room has an eleven-headed statue of Avalokiteshvara. Dozens of monks and nuns live here, a few nuns from the west also have studied in the monastery. The monks and nuns have equal rights and a unique fact about the monastery is that it allows monks to marry. The monks spend summer time with their family working in the fields and during winter they return to the monastery. The old monastery was totally destroyed by rain in 1998 and the new one rebuilt in 1999-2009.

Tashi Shukling, Shashur Monastery situated on the Macchu slopes above the Keylong, is said to have founded by Dewa Gyatso in the 17th century. He was a great Siddha of Zanskar. He came in Lahaul at the end of 16th CE. Back then, it was a small Buddhist monastery which he later possibly expanded. Till the end of his life, he stayed in this monastery spreading Buddhism throughout in Lahaul. According to the local tradition, he passed away at Shashur during the winter and his Zanskari followers could not cross the Shingpo pass because of the heavy snow. When they arrived, the heart and relics had already been preserved in the stupa. The stupa still stands on the ground floor of the shrine. The literal meaning of the monastery 'Tashi Shugling' means 'Tashi' indicates an auspicious, 'Shuk' means Juniper and 'Ling' mean Place. Shashur is highly surrounded by these Juniper shrubs, which grows all over the Lahaul. The monastery has many idols including Dewa Gyatso and the great Siddhas like Gyalwa Gitsangpa and Shadrung Nawang Namgyal etc. Statue of Dewa Gyatso is respected for its extraordinary hat. Sometimes it happened when in the morning when monks entered they found the hat lying on the floor, meters far from the idol. This would indicate the trouble to come. In Tibet, similar miracles used to be taken as a warning of famine, epidemics etc. In Lahaul it was taken as a warning to the villagers for their misbehavior, urging them to be more disciplined. It has some fine thangkhas and among them, one is more than 15 feet tall.

Shashur Tsechu every year, in the month of June/July (5th lunar month), Lahauli monks and tantric practitioners gather at Shashur for 3 days to complete the rituals that conclude in holy dance, the Cham. Monks in colorful costumes put on a mask and they dance on music played by monks using Buddhist instruments. The dancers have to be well trained. From the outside, it looks

ordinary but Cham conveys divine reality and incredible waves of sacred energy. In Lahaul, Chams are also performed at Gemur and Gondhla.

Gemur Gompa was founded by Tenzin Palden a realized practitioner from the same village sometime between 17th and the 18th century. Because of harm caused by snow, the monastery experienced many renovations which make its history slightly complex. It is also associated with Siddha Taktsang Repa who was patron Lama of Hemis Gompa in Ladakh. The Gompa has images of Tenzin Paldan, Taktsang Repa, Vajradhara, Avalokiteshvara, and Guru Padmasambhava and a humanly sized statue of Vajravarahi. It owns a holy library with the complete collection of Kangyur. In the 19th Century, Tashi Tamphel, one of the ancestors of Tagna Rinpoche of Ladakh completely renovated the building, did the woodwork and installed the large idol of Vajradhara around 1870. The monastery having its connection with Taktsang Repa, Gemur has been blessed by support from the Hemis monastery as well. He constantly provided knowledgeable lamas to stay and guide the local monks. The successors of Taktsang Repa themselves visited from time to time to the Gemur. It still maintains a close relationship with Ladakh. The old shrine suffered a great damage by the infamous avalanche and has been relocated and restored. The monastery is quite famous for its Cham which is held yearly on each 19th day of the 5th lunar month (June/July).

Tayul Gompa above the village Satingri there stands the beautiful Tayul Gompa. An interesting story is linked with the construction and naming of this monastery. It is said that in the 17th century, Lama Serzang Rinchen who came from Drukpa monastery in eastern Tibet (Kham), while performing his circumambulation of Drilbu Ri, noticed a special glade on the slope of the mountain which was surrounded by juniper forest that faces Drlbu Ri. He pointed out this to his fellow pilgrims and concluded that the site was blessed for the construction of a monastery. The shrine he built there is now known as Tayul Gompa which means “Chosen Place.” In the 19th century, Gompa was renovated by Lama Tashi Tamphel and also decorated the Gompa with paintings. His paintings have been restored and covered recently. He also brought the complete collection of Narthang Kangyur which is preserved there with other holy texts.¹⁰ It has a 12 feet statue of Guru Padmasambhava which surrounded by the Dakini Singha Mukha and the Vajravarahi.

¹⁰ Garsha Young Drukpa Association, (2011) Garsha Heart Land of the Dakinis a mirror into Lahaul Sacred Time and Space. Keylong: Drukpa Publicatin. P.87

Joling Gompa is the only Gompa in Lahaul which mentioned in the Lotsawa Richen Zangpo's biography. He has a great contribution in Buddhist art and culture. He visited Lahaul during 11th CE and established the Joling Gompa which is now completely ruined. When the gompa was built, he installed the idol of Buddha and Buddha of longevity (Amitayus), which are now preserved in museums. Now the idol of the Buddha is at the Buri Singh museum Chamba and idol of Amitayus is now at British Museum in London.

Kardang Jabjes is a small monastery by the name of Jabjes in Kardang Village. Inside the monastery, there are rare paintings and murals. According to the folktale, a strange event happened, when Siddha Gotsangpa was meditating at Sila facing towards the Gondhla village (Tinan valley). He saw a lady on the roof of local Thakur's Castle¹¹ who was busy removing the snow from the roof. Observing her, he saw her shovel slipped from her hands and fell on the ground. She looked here and there making sure that no one was watching her and stretched her arms and retrieved it. He realized she was not an ordinary woman but she was a Dakini. He flew from his cave to the castle, but she escaped transforming herself into a bird and flew away. She reached Kardang village and landed on a huge rock. Carefully following her, Gotsangpa also reached Kardang and he tried to approach her but she then dissolved into the rock. As she vanished, he at the same time grasped the rock leaving behind a strong imprint of his knees and as well as his genitals. Later a monastery was built around the rock and image of Gotsangpa was erected. Over the centuries the monastery came to be known as Jabjes which means 'Leg imprints'.

Tonpa Gompa Gumrrang is located in Gumrrang village, said to have founded by Rinchen Zangpo. However, experts date the Gompa around 12th century which was a century later. In Lahaul, it is the best preserved hermitage from the Ngari times, and its idols are still highly revered by the villagers. Historical features of idols are also remarkable. Its design and material evoke not only Kashmiri art but also the art of central Asia. This indicates that Lahaul with its unique methods was a special centre for sacred Buddhist art and may have influenced Guge. In Chandra Valley near Sissu,

Choskhor Gompa may also date back to the Nagri as it has incredibly old images, such as very ancient Buddha and a huge bronze Tara (Drolma) at least one thousand years old.

¹¹ Nine storeys tall Ghondhla Thakur's castle was once largest building of Lahaul.

Mani Gompa at Tinan, Gondhla had great importance in the past. It is the 3rd shrine built since Ngari times. The Gompa was built by local rulers (Thakur/Jo), who belong to the Tibetan dynasty and migrated around 12th century from Guge via Spiti. In the middle of 19th century, another yogi visited Lahaul who was invited to assist the local ruler in the reconstruction of the old Mani Gompa. People used to call him “Dzogchen Rinpoche”. He wisely advised the ruler to build a new monastery on the uphill and use the old stone to build a stupa at the very spot of old Gompa. However, new Gompa itself has been rebuilt again very recently. A few hundred years ago on the southern face of Drillbu Ri, **Sila Gompa** was built by local devotees. Surrounded by stupas, the images inside it were created by a local craftsman. It has two extraordinary stones marked by the footprint of Gotsangpa and a Dakini.

Yordong Caves and Yordong Gompa around 1220 when Gotsangpa stayed in Lahaul for the 2nd time he spent the coldest month in another cave called Yordong. Locals say that one day he threw some half burnt firewood from his Drillbu Ri cave to this cave. The wood got stuck and rooted into the Yordong cliff. The strange remains of which actually appears like it was really a burnt tree and is still exist there. Apart from these monasteries, there exist many small monasteries like Gromphu gompa, Labrang, Tubccholing, Bokor etc.

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