CHAPTER 3
The Symbology of the Norbu Gyamtsho Mandala/ Khilkhor and its Various Elements

In the previous chapter we defined the mandala/ khilkhor. This chapter will seek to examine the mandala/ khilkhor from the point of view of cataloguing the various elements that compose it and will look at the symbolism of the Norbu Gyamtsho Mandala/ khilkhor in the light of Tucci’s observations on the mandala in the Theory and Practice of the Mandala. Having performed a study of the symbolism of the Norbu Gyamtsho Mandala/ Khilkhor, we shall then look at the significance of the visualisation of the deities within the Norbu Gyamtsho Mandala/ khilkhor. But it needs to be pointed out and kept in mind that it is a recommended practice that before we undertake such a study we should make appropriate obeisance to the lama/ spiritual guru. In short what this chapter attempts to do is as follows: one, look at the Norbu Gyamtsho Mandala/ Khilkhor as a two-dimensional drawing and catalogue its various elements. Two, it will look at this mandala/ khilkhor as a loilang khilkhorl three-dimensional mandala/ khilkhor and three, as a mnemonic aid.

The word mandala is a Sanskrit word meaning a circle, or a polygon or even a community, and it signifies connectivity. In Choekhi/ Tibetan/ Language of the Scriptures, the word is khilkhor. The Norbu Gyamtsho Mandala/ khilkhor – the mandala under study in this thesis belongs to the Vajrayana tradition in general and the Peling tradition in particular. A mandala/ khilkhor could be looked upon as symbolic of man and woman in the world, but in Vajrayana Buddhism, it is usually represented as a four-sided square palace with four elaborate gates, surrounded by three or four concentric circles. In the center of the Norbu Gyamtsho Mandala/ Khilkhor is a lotus flower/ metho Pema with eight petals. This lotus rests on a bed of jewels. Then there are the walls of the Norbu Gyamtsho Mandala Palace/ Khilkhor with gates built in the direction of the four points of the compass - East, West, North and South. As mentioned earlier in Chapter 2, a mandala/ khilkhor is also the abode of celestial beings. The deity/ demi-god to whom the mandala/ khilkhor is dedicated, resides in the heart of the palace. So, when a person meditates on the mandala/ khilkhor, s/he must pass through the three
or four outer concentric circles, before s/he arrives at the gates of the mandala/ khilkhor palace. However, it also needs to be kept in mind that when the initiate is visualising the mandala/ khilkhor, s/he must move from the outside to the inside and then from the inside towards the outside, meaning the movement has to be from the periphery to the center, and later from the center to the periphery. Or in other words in the initial stages of meditation the movement of thought/consciousness awareness should be from the One to the Many emanations or from the microcosm to the macrocosm and then towards the final stages of the visualisation from the Many emanations to the One Original Consciousness/ Supreme Consciousness or from the macrocosm to the microcosm. It may also be looked upon as the path of channelising the thought processes and mental images from the point of view of the initiate as the Being and the deity/the cosmos as the Other and finally from the initiate in correspondence with the deity/ Cosmos as the Being and the individual/initiate /the self as the Other.

A mandala/ khilkhor is a work of art, and it fulfills a certain purpose. It is drawn to guide practitioners of the Buddha Dhamma, (particularly those of the Vajrayana School of thought), from the sufferings of the world of existence/ samsara, to the sublimity of liberation/ nirvana. The mandala/ khilkhor therefore, serves, a spiritual purpose, and the form and the colour it has taken is the result of the inspiration provided by the mystics of an older era. A mandala/ khilkhor may also be looked upon as a series of concentric circles that are mystic in nature. How did the mandala/ khilkhor acquire such a connotation? It is because in most cultures a circles symbolises completeness, unity, wholeness, and a mandala/ khilkhor signifies all these aspects of the circle. However, mandala/ khilkhor are also to be found, “depicted in the form of a semi-circle, or a triangle, a temple, and as the human body,” as observed by Marie-Therese de Mallmann in An Introduction to the Mandala, (Etude Iconographique sur Manjusri, Paris: Ecole Francaise d' Extreme-Orient), 1961, p. 259. For instance, the Hevajra Mandala/ Khilkhor, depicted on the next page is not a mandala drawing/ khilkhor that we are familiar with. It does not have the familiar square structure, nor does it have the three concentric circles- the circle of flames, the girdle of vajras/ dorjes and the circle of lotuses. Neither does it follow the traditional square palace architectural model.
The mandala/khilkhor as may be discerned, is usually drawn on canvas, paper or flat consecrated ground as the two-dimensional form of a four-sided palace surrounded by a decorated circular border. Generally all mandalas/khilkhors have the same outer structure, while the deities to whom the mandala/khilkhor is dedicated may be different. Hence, even the secret syllables/mantras to be uttered are different. However, the triangular mandala/khilkhor is a quite different from circular mandalas/khilkhors that we are familiar with as these, (triangular mandalas/khilkhors) are dedicated entirely to black magic. This discussion however, is related to the four-gated palace architecture circular mandala/khilkhor.

The mandalas/khilkhors that we may be most familiar with are the ones that are depicted and interpreted as beginning with the outer circle first. So very often we may find the following interpretation of the structure of the mandala/khilkhor: a circle of fire, frequently depicted as a stylised scroll-work, followed by a ring of thunderbolts/vajras/dorjees. In mandalas/khilkhors dedicated to wrathful forms of deities such as Hayagriva or Mahakali a circle consisting of the eight cremation grounds will invariably be present. For instance, the Norbu Gyamtsho Mandala/Khilkhor though dedicated to Guru Norbu Gyamtsho/ Guru Rinpoche/Guru Padma Sambhava, is also for the worship of Mahakali/Penden Lhamo and Tandrin/Hayagriva (patron deities of the monastery and both wrathful forms), so the Norbu Gyamtsho Mandala/khilkhor has
the circle of the eight cremation grounds around it as well. The circle of cremation grounds is followed by another concentric circle, the circle of lotuses which in turn, is followed by the four gated mandala palace/ khilkhor within which are housed the main deity, the retinue of deities and their consorts amongst others.

In chapter two, we talked about the mandala/ khilkhor being not “just a consecrated area that must be kept pure for ritual and liturgical ends”, (but, rather) “a map of the cosmos. It is the whole universe in its essential plan, in its process of emanation and of reabsorption”¹. Tucci also goes on to define the mandala/ khilkhor a little later on as, “a geometric projection of the world reduced to an essential pattern...[and as] a paradigm of cosmic involution and evolution.” Tucci is of the opinion that mandalas/ khilkhors are drawn on consecrated grounds deriving their origin from old Eastern theories and notions of sacred space. He adds, that a mandala/ khilkhor is usually drawn on sacred/purified/sanctified ground with coloured powders used for tracing the lines and drawing the figures on the mandala drawing/ khilkhor. A mandala/ khilkhor is therefore very often, composed of “an outer enclosure and one or more concentric circles which, in turn, enclose the figure of a square cut by transversal lines. These start from the center and reach out to the four corners so that the surface is divided up into four triangles. In the center of and in the middle of each triangle five circles contain emblems or figures of divinities”².

**ANALYSING THE NORBU GYAMTSHO MANDALA/ KHILKHOR**

The Norbu Gyamtsho Mandala/ khilkhor as the name suggests is dedicated to the deity Guru Norbu Gyamtsho who is in fact, none other than Guru Rinpoche/ Guru Padma Sambhava himself. Hence, the chief deity in the very heart of the mandala/ khilkhor is Guru Rinpoche/ Guru Padma Sambhava himself. While analysing this mandala/ khilkhor for deeper study it would be appropriate if we begin by describing the mandala drawing/ khilkhor as a two- dimensional form and then visualising/ imagining it as a Loilang khilkhor/ a three-dimensional mandala (through the description of the two dimensional form) before we look at the meditation/ visualisation techniques.
The **Norbu Gyamtsho Mandala/khilkhor** is actually drawn from the center moving outwards/centripetally towards the periphery, implying that the central deity/deities/circle is drawn first and then we move outwards to the **mandala palace/khilkhor** and finally towards the four gates. In our discussion, we shall begin describing the various elements of the **Norbu Gyamtsho Mandala/khilkhor** from the center and move outwards gradually towards the four outer concentric circles. However, when we begin describing the visualisation process/technique then, we shall begin from the outermost circle or the Girdle of Flames/Mei Rin. We shall then move inwards and examine the four gates of the **mandala palace/khilkhor/Lha ghe zim chu/Phodrang/Khilkhor**. Then, we shall enter into the **mandala palace/khilkhor/Lha ghe zim chu/phodrang** and look at the **mandala palace** itself and the placement of the main deity, the surrounding deities and their retinues till, we arrive at the sacred *inner sanctum*. Then the deity/deities, their retinues and consorts that reside there will be examined in some detail.

*The Norbu Gyamtsho Mandala/Khilkhor painted on the ceiling of the Guru Tshen Ghey Lhakhang at Gangtey Goenpa, Gangtey*
The square enclosure on the inside of the outer four concentric circles (of the flames, vajras, the cremation grounds and the lotus petals) is the Norbu Gyamtsho Mandala Palace/ Khilkhor/ Lha gey zim chu/ phodrang. At the very heart of this square mandala palace/ khilkhor is the sacred inner sanctuary or the location of the sacred spot designated for the central deity and his/her retinues. It needs to be reiterated that no matter what, the mandala/ khilkhor is always drawn (both the mandala/ khilkhor drawn on the walls, on thangkhas, or with sand) from the center and progresses outwards. The mandala palace/ khilkhor is drawn according to extremely strict dictates. The monks who train under the Khilkhor Lobay/ Mandala Master have to memorise each and every detail of the mandala/ khilkhor before they are allowed to draw them. Everything related to the measurements, placement of deities, choice of colour, etc are all dictated to by the Scriptures and no creativity on the part of the monk who is drawing the mandala/ khilkhor is permitted. The only manner in which he may express his creativity would be by perhaps perfecting the skill of drawing the mandala/ khilkhor. Extreme care is taken to prevent any mishaps during the drawing, the monks recite prayers before beginning their work each day and after the day’s work is done they do not forget to dedicate the spiritual merit they might have received as a result of their having participated in the act of drawing the mandala/ khilkhor, for the sake of all sentient beings in the true spirit of Mahayana Buddhism of which Vajrayana Buddhism and the meditation on the mandala/ khilkhor is but a part. The reason the monks are so meticulous and careful in their work is because, they are actually propagating the teachings of the Buddha. Moreover, since, the mandala/ khilkhor is actually the instructions/teachings of the Buddha himself for the attainment of nirvana, the manner in which the monks entrusted with the task of drawing the mandala/ khilkhor perform their work becomes all the more important, for their work and the spiritual merit they gain, has to be offered for all sentient beings and it is said that their labour provides maximum benefit even to those who view it. Tucci has explained the unit of measurement as “an eighth of the brahmarekha, that is of the line which bisects the mandala from north to south and symbolizes the axis mundi, Sumeru, the spinal column of man, assimilated to the macrocosm” He also adds that the measurement for the minor figures placed inside the mandala palace/ khilkhor as “the fourth part of this segment”3.
At the very heart of the Norbu Gyamtsho Khilkhor/ Mandala Palace/ Phodrang/ Lhagey zim chu are three symbols. In the center is Guru Eu Pema Junay/ Guru Norbu Gyamtsho/ Guru Rinpoche/ Guru Padma Sambhava. He is depicted as an eight-year-old boy in the yab yum posture/ posture of tight embrace with his consort Yeshey Tshogyel who is depicted as a 16-year-old girl. To his left is Tandrin/ Hayagriva with his consort and on the right is Penden Lhamo/ Mahakali with her consort. The next circle is a girdle of 4 large (at the cardinal points) and 4 smaller lotus petals. The Eight Manifestations of the Guru/ Guru Rinpoche/ Guru Padma Sambhava/ Guru Tshen Ghey are seated on these petals. The following manifestations of Guru Rinpoche/ Guru Padma Sambhava comprise the Guru Tshen Ghey.

The circle of the Guru Tshen Ghey/ Eight Manifestations of Guru Rinpoche/ Guru Padma Sambhava follows the inner circle described above. The deities comprising the Guru Tshen Ghey/ Eight Manifestations of Guru Rinpoche/ Guru Padma Sambhava are as follows:

- Guru Eu Pema Junay*/ Immortal Lotus Born Guru*
- Guru Urgyan Dorje Chang/ Dharmakaya
- Guru Lhoden Chusay/ the Supreme Knowledge Holder/ Proclaimer of Wisdom
- Guru Nima Yoezer/ Ray of Sun
- Guru Senge Dradok/ Singha Nadi/ the Lion’s Roar
- Guru Pema Sambhava/ Lotus Essence
- Guru Pema Gyalpo/ Lotus King
- Guru Shakya Senge/ Undefeatable or Courageous
- Dorje Drolod/ Crazy Wisdom

The placement of the Guru Tshen Ghey/ Eight Manifestations of Guru Rinpoche/ Guru Padma Sambhava as well as their descriptions will also need to be kept in mind when visualising the Norbu Gyamtsho Mandala/ khilkhor.

Eu Pema Junay/ Born from a Lotus may be found in the center of the Lotus that actually symbolises Guru Rinpoche/ Guru Padma Sambhava, is the seat of Eu Pema
Eu Pema Jugnay is the ninth deity who is also the principal aspect of all the Eight Manifestations of Guru Rinpoche/ Guru Tshen Gey. He is the single manifestation of all the Eight Manifestations of the Guru and may be found in the very heart of the Lotus as well as seated on the outer petals of the giant lotus. The Eight Manifestations of Guru Rinpoche/ Guru Tshen Gey are to be found circling Eu Pema Jugnay position is in the center of the entire Norbu Gyamtsho Mandala/ khilkhor.

Eu Pema Junay is associated with the practice of meditation and is believed to confer special capabilities in people to achieve both the visualisation and the perfection stages of meditation. He is the remover of ignorance and a very powerful symbol of the union of both wisdom and skillful means, following whose path one can achieve enlightenment/ nirvana very quickly. He has one face, two arms and two legs and he holds a Vajra/ Dorjee in his right hand and in his left he holds a skull bowl with a small vase in it. As mentioned earlier, he is the embodiment of all the Eight Manifestations of the Guru and is “associated with the four actions of pacifying, increasing, magnetising and subjugating. He is also a long-life Buddha and can help balance the elements of our physiology.”

Guru Urgyan Dorje Chang/ Dharmakaya he may be found seated in the East/ Shar on the petal of the Lotus and is symbolic of all pervasive pure wisdom. He is sky blue in colour and emanates diamond like radiance. He expresses the realisation of Dzongchen or the Great Perfection.
Guru Urgyan Dorje Chang

He is also known as the Padma Vajra/ Vajra of the Lotus, or as the One who severed the roots of the Five Poisons. He is “empowered as the azure Vajra Holder of Udiyana, Lord of Pristine Awareness who acts on behalf of Samtabhadra. In his right hand he holds a vajra/ dorjee with five prongs and his left hand is in the Jnana mudra/ Vajra/ Bodhasri mudra, (three fingers up, the thumb touching the second finger). He is naked and in the yab-yum/ vajrasana/ virasana position (in which the deity embraces his consort or sakti in ritual intercourse. In this seated position, the yum’s legs are wrapped around her yab’s waist and frequently her arms encircle his neck, An Encyclopaedia of Buddhist Deities, Demi- Gods, Godlings, Saints and Demons, Bunce, p. 1017).

Guru Lhoden Chusay/the Supreme Knowledge Holder may be found seated on a lotus petal towards the south/ Lhoro. He holds a small damaru/ a small hand drum, in his right hand that symbolises the sound of the Dhamma pervading the Universe and in the left, a bowl designed like a lotus. This manifestation of the Guru expresses the fulfillment of knowledge and wisdom and is revered by scholars. He is also known as Dhimanvasuchit/ the Supremely Wise Love, who showered the teachings of the Sutra and the Mantra. Guru Lhoden Chusay is depicted with one face, two arms and two legs, seated upon a lotus with sun and moon discs.
His skin is a very peaceful, rich white colour. He wears a silk turban and has ribbons wrapped around his head. On the front of the turban, he wears a crown made of precious gems. His hair is decorated with a blue-green lotus that is known as an *utpala* flower. He is without a consort/ accompanying female celestial being/ *dakini/khandoma*.

**Guru Nima Yoezer/ Ray of Sun** is to be found seated on a lotus petal towards the West/ *Nub*. He is depicted as a wild yogi, symbolising his accomplishments of many yogic practices. He has one face, two arms and two legs. His skin colour is golden-red/ yellow and his facial expression is semi-wrathful, with both eyes opened wide and bulging a little.

He has long hair, some of which is tied up above a tiara of five skulls, while most of his hair is hanging loose over his shoulders. He has a moustache, beard and wears six necklaces made of bones. He is bare-chest and wears a tiger-skin skirt. His left hand is making the subjugation *mudra* gesture and he seems to be bringing sunlight down on to the tip of his finger, holding the rays of the sun with a lasso, signifying being beyond time. His right hand holds a three-pointed staff, called a *khatvanga* and he sits on a lotus with sun and moon discs, his left leg is partially extended and his right leg is drawn in. He is also known as the *Surya Prabha* or the One who taught the Essence of the Secret Mantra.

**Guru Senge Dradok/ Singha Nadi/ the Lion’s Roar** may be found seated on the petal of the giant lotus towards the North/ *Jhangto*. He manifests as a dark blue wrathful figure with one face, two arms and two legs, wearing a lion and elephant skin tunic on his upper torso and surrounded by the fire/ flames of wisdom. He stands upon a demon that embodies negative energy and black magic.
Like the other Gurus he too is standing on a lotus with sun and moon discs. He wears a crown of five skulls and his long reddish-yellow hair seems to be bellowing upwards towards the sky. He has three huge, glaring eyes that are upturned towards the heavens and four huge fangs protruding from his mouth. In his right hand he holds a flaming torch and a five pointed Vajra/Dorjee (made of iron) high in the air and with his left hand he makes the subjugation mudra towards the earth. Lightning bolts seem to fly from the tips of his fingers. In this emanation he is said to have destroyed the obstacles of ignorance and negativity. As Simhanada, he is believed to have defeated outside aggression of non-Buddhists. He is the first of the two wrathful manifestations of Guru Rinpoche the other being Guru Dorjee Drolod. He like Guru Lhoden Chusay is also without a consort.

Guru Pema Sambhava/Lotus Essence may be found seated on the lotus petal towards the South-East/Lhoro- Shar. He is dressed as a monk and represents the accomplishments of the Mahayana teachings of unbiased compassion for all beings. He is also known as Padma Sambhava, the Blessed Being endowed with faith.
His complexion is a rich white colour and his demeanour is very peaceful and he is wearing a red monk's hat that is tall and pointed. He too is seated on a lotus surmounted by sun and moon discs. His left hand is making the protection mudra /gesture, while in his right hand is a lotus cup/ *pema ghi phorb* filled with *amrita*/the nectar of long life.

**Guru Pema Gyalpo**/ Lotus King may be found seated on the lotus petal in the South-West/ *Lhoro- Nub*. He holds a small mirror or a *melong* in his left hand that symbolises wisdom and also suggests unceasing manifestations, free of clinging and attachment to concrete objects.

![Guru Pema Gyalpo](image)

He carries a *damarul* small hand drum in his right hand. He is an expression of the magnetising quality of a monarch. There are many other visualisations of **Guru Padma Gyalpo** and some depict him as carrying a bell and a hook in his left hand, while others visualise him as carrying a ritual arrow. He is also known as *Padmaraja*, King of the Lotus, who provided mundane and ultimate benefits to sentient beings. **Guru Padma Gyalpo** symbolises the splendour and magnificence of the *Padma* family wisdom and is usually surrounded by a glorious retinue of *dakas* and *dakinis* who receive his teachings. His skin is pink or reddish, while his robes are of an orange tinge and he is to be visualised seated on a lotus, upon sun and moon discs, relaxing in the royal posture with one face, two arms and two legs. He is semi-wrathful so he may be visualised by some as having four arms. His long hair is pulled up in a knot and wrapped in a white cloth. He also wears a tiara of five jewels.

**Guru Shakya Sengel Undefeatable or Courageous** may be found seated towards the North West/ *Jhangto - Nub* on the lotus petal. He is **Guru Padma Sambhava**'s
accomplishment of the Hinayana teachings. He is golden in colour, and looks a lot like the Shakyamuni Buddha in a monk’s red robes with one face, two arms and two legs and a top knot/ unishaka on his crown/ chakra. He holds a begging bowl in the palm of his left hand while sitting on a lotus with sun and moon discs.

The only difference between the Shakyamuni Buddha and Guru Shakya Senge is the gesture of the right hand. The Shakyamuni Buddha stretches his left hand in the earth touching/ Bhumi Sparsh Mudra while Shakya Senge holds a five-pointed Vajra/ Dorjee in his right hand. Like all the other emanations, his body too is luminous and transparent, being completely of the nature of a wisdom- rainbow body. He is also known as the Sakyasimha or the One who Guided beings towards the path of Liberation.

Guru Dorje Drolo/ Crazy Wisdom may be found seated on the lotus petal towards the North East/ Jhangto - Shar. He is the fierce aspect that represents complete victory over negative forces, which prevents practitioners from realising their intrinsic capacity for wisdom and compassion. He is red in colour and rides a tigress. He expresses complete fearlessness. He tamed the Yakshas and haughty beings. Guru Rinpoche assumes this wrathful form in Paro, Taktsang in Bhutan, and brings under his control all the local deities and guardians of Taktsang making them the protectors of the Terma (Hidden Treasure) teachings, he entrusts them with Secret Oral Instructions, to be given only to the Tértoms who shall discover them.
He is known as Guru Dorje Drolo - Guru Vajra Wrath. He is the second wrathful manifestation of Guru Rinpoche and is red in colour with one face, two arms and two legs. He holds a nine-pointed Vajra/Dorje in his right hand and a ritualistic three-pronged dagger/phurba in his left hand. He has three eyes and huge fangs protruding from his mouth. He wears Tibetan boots and a monk’s robes. His earring is made of two conch shells and he wears a garland of severed heads around his neck. His hair is bright red and curly and he dances on the back of a tigress that also seems to be dancing along with him. The tigress is actually one of the five wisdom dakinis called Tashi Kyedin and also a student of Guru Rinpoche and his consort Yeshe Ts’ogyal.

Guru Rinpoche/Guru Padma Sambhava is extremely important to this study, as he is the principal deity to whom the mandala/khilkhor is dedicated. Moreover, Terton Pema Lingpa from whom this lineage has been derived and monastery established as his seat and the seat of the Gangtey Trulku is also an incarnation of Guru Rinpoche/Guru Padma Sambhava. Not only this, but Guru Rinpoche/Guru Padma Sambhava is said to be the personification of both the union as well as the essence of all the Buddhas
(meaning the Buddha who has come and gone, the Buddha who is here and the Buddha who is yet to come). He is also made of the indestructible vajra/diamond signifying eternity. When Guru Rinpoche and his Eight Manifestations/ Guru Tshen Ghey are to be visualised as is the case with the visualisation of the Norbu Gyamtsho Mandala/ Khilkhor he is depicted as an eight year old boy in the full promise of youth as will be discerned when the visualisation of the Norbu Gyamtsho Mandala/ Khilkhor is studied. This depiction also signifies his attainment of immortality. So when we count the eight manifestations as well as the principal aspect of the Guru (Guru Rinpoche is also referred to as the Guru) we have nine Gurus in all. But we need to keep in mind the principle of the mandala/ khilkhor i.e., (the nine signify one or the Many leading to One and the One leading to the Many principle). Guru Rinpoche may also be visualised as wearing nine robes signifying not only the many manifestations but also his mastery over the nine yanas of the Buddhist Schools of thought. The robes he wears include three monastic gowns, and a white garment beneath the blue robe. The colours and numbers of these robes too have special significance. For instance, the blue robe indicates his supreme command over all the teachings and doctrines of Mahayana Buddhism, and the white garment signifies the path of the bodhisattvas while the three monastic robes indicate knowledge and supreme command over all the teachings of the Hinayana school of Buddhism. He also wears a brocade cap and this cap is indicative of the command he has over the esoteric tradition of Vajrayana Buddhism. In short, his very garments and attire is symbolic of the supreme command and mastery he has over the three main tenets of Buddhism. He is also seen wearing a lotus crown, the five petals of which represent the five Buddha families/ the Dhyani Buddhas as they are often called. These five Buddhas include the following: Buddha, vajra, ratna, padma and karma as mentioned earlier.

The 4 larger petals (at the cardinal points) also seat the four deities who constitute the Norbu Gyamtsho Khilkhor's / Mandala's Khilkhor ghe sarpin/ thri/ scanto sanctum namely Barcha Thuten, Rena Thuten, Karma Thuten and Pema Thuten. On the periphery of the 4 larger petals are the consorts of these deities namely, Dorjee Phagmo, Rinchen Phagmo, Karma Phagmo, and Pema Phagmo. Then there are the 16 deities
surrounding the Guru Tshen Ghey/ 8 Manifestations of Guru Rinpoche/ Guru Padma Sambhava. These 16 include the following: 8 deities of the Rinzing ghey ghi Lhatsho/ 8 Protective Wisdom Deities such as, Sowdhi Nang Pho, Shempa Nang Mo, Heychen Dayne, Ne Ghi Mana, Dhamtshe Chembo, Kaychen Dhorlay, Meta Bhamchen, and Penden Lhamo and the 8 deities of the Narjung ghey ghi Lhatsho comprising the following deities: Zhachen, Kayen Dayzhi, Pekhar Dharla, Kanyang Therda, Gyachen Dayzhi, Lhasin Degay, Yula Zhi Dha, and Thuba Bomday. Thereafter is a ring of another 16 lotus petals that seat the 16 - vajra bodhisattvas\(^6\) namely: vajrasattva, vajraraja, vajraraga, vajrasadhu, vajratejas, vajraketu, vajrarahasa, vajradharma, vajratisna, vajrahatu, vajrabhasa, vajrakamara, vajrakasa, vajrayaksa, and vajrasandhi. The final outer circle of 24 lotus petals is inhabited by the 16 bodhisattvas of the Bhadrakalpa (14 Aeons)\(^7\) including: Maitreya, Manjusri, Gandhahasti, Jnanaketu, Bhadrapala, Amoghadarsi, Akasagarbha, Aksaymati, Pratibhanakuta, Mahasthamaparapta, Sarvapayanjaha, Sarvasokatamonirghatamati, Jaliniprabha, Candraprabha, Amrtaprabha, and Samantabhadra; four dakinis/ female celestial beings/ khandomas, and 4 Pows/ Heroes with their retinue, totally nude but covered with six beautiful ornaments made of bones reside here constituting a total of 24 deities.
The palace of the celestial being or the deity, as suggested by Alex Wayman, should be built on sacred ground. Religious texts claim “a spot of earth made of diamond; across, a diamond enclosure; above a tent; in the middle a dreadful burning ground” to be the sacred space for the construction of the mandala/ khilkhor. The Norbu Gyamtsho Mandala/ Khilkhor is to be built on top of the point that is the intersection between four dorjees / vajras. Implying that four dorjees/ vajras are to be placed diagonally opposite each other and each of the four- dorjees/ vajras, should intersect and at the point of intersection/the crisscross of four dorjees/ vajras the mandala is to be placed. This crisscross of four dorjees/ vajras placed diagonally opposite each other is known as the Naktsho Dorjee says Lopon Tashi Penjore when talking about the Norbu Gyamtsho Mandala/ Khilkhor. Robert A F Thurman, when explaining the formation of the intersection of four dorjees/ vajras opines, “In this realm of the void, wind stirs, fire explodes, water shimmers, earth crystallizes, and the four elements thus emerged fuse into a vajra - cross of the five wisdom colors, blue (centre), white (east), yellow (south), red (west), and green (north). It radiates tiny vajra- thunderbolts like laser.bullets, which form an impenetrable enclosure hanging in this void.”

The Norbu Gyamtsho Mandala/ Khilkhor is similarly built on top of the inter-section of four dorjees/ vajras/ diamond scepters called the Nangtsho Dorjee and is divided into five parts, four quadrants and a center. The Norbu Gyamtsho Mandala/ Khilkhor has four sides around the central deity/symbol and at each of the four cardinal points and at the intermediate points are eight/ sixteen other symbols. These divisions are there for a purpose and that is to help the initiate in visualising the deity/deities while meditating and also symbolic of the four cardinal points as revolving around an axis/ Mt Meru. In Tucci’s words:

A mandala is, indeed, the All as reflected in the ego. The five points marked on it correspond to the five structural elements of the human personality, centred on the conscious principle, the kernel of the individual, the cause of samsara and also of the bliss...
The mandala palace/ Lha gey zim chu/ phodrang itself will be located at the center of the ground located within the criss cross of four vajras/ dorjees/ diamond scepters called the Nangtsho Dorjee. The palace has a single courtyard, made of glittering jewels and semi-precious stones such as diamonds, rubies, gold, emeralds and sapphires, and has four corners, four gates, decorated with four arches, and four altars, and radiant with decorative nets. Jewelled pendants hang from the eaves of the roofs, the Wheel of Dhamam/ the Rhinda Choe- khor is placed on top of the arches of the gates/ toranas and there is a “second story pagoda in the center of the roof, surmounted by a lighthouse like giant jewel and an upright five pronged vajra” says practitioners of the faith such as Thurman. Then there are the various ‘offering goddesses’, deities, and yogis who are seen dancing on the balcony and hovering in the sky around the mandala palace/ khilkhor/ Lha gey zim chu/ phodrang. The offering goddesses are usually four in number and mark the intermediate points of the compass, however, sometimes, all eight of them are represented as: Vajramala in the south west corner along with Vajrapusa symbolising the offering of garlands, and flowers, Vajragita and Vajradipa in the north west symbolic of the offering of religious songs and ritual lamp, Vajranrtya resides in the north east corner along with Vajragandha and the two of them represent the offering of religious dances, and perfume, Vajralasya and Vajradhupa sit in the south east direction and offer amorous dances and incense.

As we look outwards from the center of the mandala/ khilkhor towards the periphery we encounter the four gates that open to the four cardinal points of the compass. Each of the four gates “opens in the form of a T, flanked with seven bands of five colours which are prolonged along the four sides, thus joining gate to gate and constituting the walls of this sacred city” (Tucci, p. 43). These four gates are symbolic of two things: one, they could be looked at as the four doors to the same room, symbolising the four schools of thought of Buddhism, and two, it could be looked upon as Tucci says, ‘the gates facing towards all that lies outside our consciousness, that consciousness which is beyond our control, always rioting about in a dark, confused struggle.’ Four fierce gate- keepers along with their consorts/ female counter parts are at the gates of the Norbu Gyamtsho Mandala Palace/ Khilkhor/ Phodrang. These four- gatekeepers and their counterparts
are also to be found at the entrance of generally all monasteries / goenpas. Tucci says that these gatekeepers are known as 'vighnataka' / 'those who put an end to vighna' or impediments. These four-gatekeepers represent the evil forces that make impure sacred grounds or disturb mental peace and harmony of human minds and lead them away from the right path. They are under the control of the God of Death / Yamal Shinje, who rides a buffalo and symbolises the real, the tangible and the world of Samsara. 

The quadrants of the mandala palace are typically divided into isosceles triangles in different colours such as white, yellow, red, green, and blue. Each colour is associated with one of the five- families / kula and is governed by a celestial Buddha / the Tathagata. The jewel trees that are to be seen as parts of the decoration of the mandala / khilkhor under study represents good fortune and is often also symbolised by the horn of the rhino, the Wheel of Law / Rhinda Choe- Khor, and two coins amongst other symbols of wealth and prosperity. The umbrella that is often seen decorating the roof / torana of the arched gateway is as may have been mentioned earlier on as well, symbolic of royalty. The symbols in the four corners of the mandala / khilkhor represent the five senses and are there primarily to remind us of the illusory nature of what we perceive and understand as reality / of our world view. We think we understand the meaning of life, we think we are capable of comprehending our world view but what we are actually doing or trying to do is merely gaining information from our senses and getting mere glimpses of the world of samsara and not real knowledge / gnosis / nirvana. The perfume elixir bubbling from the conch shell is symbolic of the sense of smell. The peach is a representative of the sense of taste. The lute stands for the sense of hearing. The silk scarves present in all four symbols represent the sense of touch. The mask at each gate protects the opening to the palace. A pair of deer, combined with the Wheel of Law / Rhinda Choe- Khor represents the Buddha's first sermon at Deer Park and marks the beginning of his Law.

The atmosphere inside the khilkhor / mandala palace too should be different. The term used by Lopen Tashi Penjore in an exclusive interview is ninda / nima da dawal the sun and the moon. The concept behind it being explained in such a manner – when the sun
shines through a slight fog, the sun shines in an oblique subdued manner. Similarly, when the full moon shines through a foggy night, the moon’s mellow glow is still visible. This should be the atmosphere inside the mandala palace/khilkhor. Along with the concept of nima da dawa is the other concept of chi-nang mebar yochum which translates into the following: ‘che’ meaning ‘outside’, ‘nang’ meaning ‘inside’, ‘mebar’ meaning ‘in between’, ‘yochum’ meaning ‘shinning’. The atmosphere inside the mandala palace/khilkhor is described as that which bestows its brilliant blessings like the radiance of the sun and the moon together, with just the right combination of the sun’s bright and startling brilliance and the moon’s soft and mellow glow.

Inside the mandala palace/khilkhor, the floors and ceilings are the same colours as the four original vajra- cross and there are several seats for the deities to sit on. The whole mandala palace/khilkhor is made up of the five wisdoms/Indriya. The mandala/khilkhor is to be constructed of the namdra dho-chu/silver water. The silver water serves to protect the mandala palace by binding and preventing evil spirits from entering inside the khilkhor/mandala palace. The walls of the mandala palace are coloured in five hues, and are decorated with jewels of all kinds as well as a jeweled fringe. These five strips of different colours according to Tucci are the, “‘base’, ‘border’, ‘bean’, ‘necklace’, and ‘half necklace.’ These are all "surmounted by a balcony decorated with lotus flowers and on it Trees of Paradise rise up from vases containing the Water of Immortality/bum pa bzang po/bhadrakalasa”. Tucci adds further:

*There are also seven gems, symbols of the Universal Monarch, a Cakravaratin, that is the wheel with eight spokes, an elephant with six tusks, a green horse, a sixteen year old girl, a gem from which shine forth six rays, a red-coloured minister who holds a treasure in his hands and a black general with breastplate, shield and lance.*

Tucci, p. 43

Then there are four rooms/compartments on the upper part of the doors of the mandala palace/khilkhor/Lha ghe zim chu/phodrang that stand for the four types of absorption such as, ‘interest, diligence, thoughtfulness and reason.’ The inner khilkhor/mandala
palace/ Lha gey zim chu has a combination of both peaceful and wrathful deities even though the Norbu Gyamtsho Mandala/ khilkhor itself is dedicated to a wrathful form. Inside the mandala palace/ Lha gey zim chu are eight pillars/ Kaawa Ghey. These eight pillars represent the Noble Eight Fold Path. These eight pillars/ kaawa ghey have ornamental supporting structures between the pillars and the beams. These ornamental supporting structures are called the zhu. These eight zhus/ ornamental structures symbolise the eight aspects of liberation. While on the one hand, these details describe very minutely how, the three- dimensional loi-lang khilkhor/ mandala is to be built, on the other these physical structures stand for different levels of attainment and methods of meditation and visualisation. The structure below the pillars called the Thu ghey stand for the Eight Nagas/ Subterranean Beings. The eight master beams that runs across the center of the beams taking the weight off them are known as the dhung. These dhung ghey/ eight beams are representative of the eight -gods/ devas/ lha ghey.
The Jokhar Neirghay/ the 28 stars represent the beams and the planks resting on the dhungs. The planks are known as the dhey. These eight master beams also symbolise the state of being fearless/ the four fearlessness whereby, one abandons concern for oneself but thinks only of other sentient beings. The 28 stars or Jokhar Neirghay are the twenty- eight supporting beams that stand for the eighteen kinds of voidness such as: (1) the internal Void, (2) the external Void, (3) the internal-external Void, (4) the Void of the created, (5) the Void of the non-created, (6) the Void of beginninglessness, (7) the Void of nature, (8) the Void of segregation, (9) the Void of dispersion, (10) the Void of the characteristics of self, (11) the Void of formlessness, (12) the Void of the skandhas, (13) the Void of the spheres, (14) the Void of the realms, (15) the Void of good, (16) the Void of non-good, (17) the Void of indefinables, (18) the Void of Bodhi 13 and the ten transcendent perfections such as generosity, ethical discipline, patience, effort, concentration, insight, means, aspiration-prayer, strength, and primordial wisdom.
The roof of the mandala palace/ Lha gey zim chu is symbolic of the meaning and nature of enlightenment and the umbrella on top of it/ the pinnacle actually suggests that all the mandalas/ khilkhors of the various buddhas are in fact all present in the conscious mind of the initiate.

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If we look at the photograph of the Norbu Gyamtsho Mandala/ Khilkhor, inside the four concentric circles are the various good luck signs and other decoration such as the perfume elixir, the conch with the silk scarves, the peach, etc that hang in the offering garden. A white outer border surrounds the mandala palace/ Lha ghi zimchu/ phodrang. This area is called the dah-yab and is the supporting structure below the roof. Beyond this is the decorative border of half lotus petals symbolic of the protection that these half lotus petals provide from troublesome and disruptive emotions. This element of the Norbu Gyamtsho Mandala/ Khilkor is the down spouts also called jhan dhab in Dzongkha that helps drain out the rain-water that collects on the roof of the mandala palace/ Lha ghi zimchu. There is also a border of hanging garlands and half-garlands of beautiful white pearls called the Dhawa- Dhachen (in Dzongkha) surrounding the Asta Mangala/ Trashi Dha Ghey/ Eight Auspicious/ Good Luck Signs. Inside this border is the border of double vajras/ dorjees that may be correlated to each of the four directions of the compass.

When interpreting the text of the Norbu Gyamtsho Khilkhor/ Mandala, Lopon Tashi Penjore, pointed out that Lha Cham/ Chogay - Lham/ is the area where the dakinis/ khandomas/ celestial beings reside and where the footprints of the dakinis/ khandomas/ celestial beings and their retinues may be found, outside the central circle of the main deity and inside the walls of the mandala palace/ Lha ghe zimchu/ phodrang. This area cannot have any drawings of the deities hence this area in the mandala/ khilkhor under study has only a patterned red border. Then there are five lines drawn in five colours. These lines represent the five Rinpoche/ precious essences/ elements that the main wall of the mandala/ khilkhor is made of. The five precious elements are gold, silver, coral, lapis lazuli and turquoise. It is believed that if we cut open the walls of the mandala palace/ Lha ghe zimchu/phodrang then, we will be able to see the five elements that compose it. These five elements signify the five wisdoms, identified by Ricard as, wisdom of the absolute nature, wisdom of perfect equality, mirror-like wisdom, all-distinguishing wisdom, and all accomplishing wisdom which, he says, are the purified forms of the five poisons of ignorance, hatred, jealousy, desire and pride. According to Ricard, these five wisdoms could also symbolise the five purifying factors of faith,
endeavour, mindfulness, concentration and insight. Then there are the five-levelled structure between the walls and the roof of the *mandala palace/ Lha gey zim chu*. This could be said to stand for the five strengths that will prevent the five purifying factors from disintegrating or going into decline. Then there are seven other elements in the *mandala palace/ Lha gey zim chu* that are believed to represent what Ricard describes as the seven limbs of awakening.

These seven articles are:

(i) Ornaments made of jeweled lattice-work
(ii) Filigree ornaments
(iii) Flowers
(iv) Silken pendants
(v) Mirrors
(vi) Moon crescents
(vii) Yak-tail whisks

The *Jinas/ fierce gate-keepers* guard the four quadrants of the *Norbu Gyamtsho Mandala/ Khilkhor*, located in the cardinal points of the compass. These four quadrants symbolise the realm of form without desire. The four *Jinas/ fierce gate-keepers* are:

(a) East/ Shar Gate: The Eastern Gate is Green in colour and the seat of *Yulkhorsung* the guardian of the East Gate. The colour Green is symbolic of abundant activity.

(b) West/ Nubtu Gate: The West Gate is Red in colour and the *Chen Mizang* the guardian of the West Gate resides here. The colour Red symbolises equanimity of grace.

(c) North/ Jhangto Gate: The Northern Gate is Blue in colour and *Namthoese* the guardian of the Northern corner of the *mandala/ khilkhor* guards this gate. The colour Blue is also the symbolic of the *Great Emptiness/ Sunyata/ Moksha/ Nirvana*. 

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(d) South/ Lhoro Gate: The South Gate is Yellow in colour and the Phagskepo the guardian of the South Gate lives here. The colour Yellow symbolises the development of quality and attribute.

The intermediate points also seat the four consorts of the Pows/ Jinas/ fierce gatekeepers:

(a) Locacana/ Jigten Nangdze in the South- East/ Lhoro - Shar
(b) Mamaki/ Lhamo Mamaki in the South -West/ Lhoro - Nub
(c) Tara/ Drolma in the North- East/ Jhangto- Shar
(d) Pandaravasina in the North- West/ Jhangto- Nub

Each of the four gateways has the same structure. The four pillars of the portico are significant in that they stand for what Ricard calls 'the four bases of mastering evil and developing goodness'. These four bases are:

(i) Non virtue that is not yet born should not be born,
(ii) Non virtue already born should be controlled,
(iii) Virtue not yet born should be generated, and
(iv) Virtue already born should be increased. 

The toranas/ arches above each of the four gateways rests on two or more vertical pillars. These arches are made up of eleven little roofs, placed one on top of the other and level of roof being smaller/shorter than the former. On top of these eleven little roofs is a flat disc on which is placed a twelve-spokes wheel symbolising the Wheel of Law/ Rhinda Choe- Khor. On either sides of the Wheel of Law/ Rhinda Choe- Khor are two deer facing each other and symbolising the first sermon of the Buddha at the deer park in Sarnath. On top of the wheel is also placed an umbrella/ tshe khor, made of gold symbolising royalty as well as auspiciousness. There are various streamers hanging at the sides of the umbrella. These level roofs are also symbolic of the eleven states leading to enlightenment.
The Norbu Gyamtsho Mandala/Khilkhor's four-walled palace or temple is oriented towards the east, its elaborate gates/toranas marking once again the four cardinal points of the compass. The mandala palace/khilkhor is described as beautiful and 'like a paradise' of sorts. Apart from describing the drawings of the various concentric circles, the mandala palace and the placement of the deities, the Norbu Gyamtsho Petcha/Text also mentions that the thiksey/measurements for the central square of the mandala/khilkhor should be exact and precise. The Khilkhor Lobay/Master of the Khilkhor/ the One who draws the khilkhor should be very meticulous in observing the various measurements prescribed by the texts. The mandala palace has four - gates/gho-zhi in the four cardinal points of the compass, once again drawn according to specified measurements of the thiksey. Just as a house for ordinary people is constructed keeping in mind the manner in which the columns, brackets and ceiling should be made, similarly the mandala palace is made of dorjees/vajras/diamond scepters.

The doors of the gateways have a ya them/upper height and a ma them/lower height, 2 kaaws on either side/two pillars on each side and a zhu/supporting structure on the top of the pillars/kaaws. The four corners of the roofs are decorated with canopies, umbrellas, and victory banners. These elements too have their own religious and social significance. They symbolise the purity of the Absolute Consciousness, the all-encompassing sense of responsibility that protects the followers of the Dhamma/all sentient beings, extreme compassion/mahakaruna and full control over ignorance, indicating that ignorance has been dispelled and has made way for complete gnosis. The bells that are hung from the portico tinkle in the soft breeze and ring in the sound of the Buddha Dhamma as well as of emptiness. The whole mandala palace/khilkhor/phodrang/Lha gey zim chu radiates with brilliant light that bears testimony to the enlightenment of the Buddha and also the manifestations of the Buddha in the form of the Ku-sung thuk/Trikaya Buddha or the Body, Speech and Mind/Nirmanakaya, Sambhogakaya and Dharmakaya Emanations.

Thereafter, is the girdle of 32-lotus petals/Pema Ghi Rawa signifying the fact that the subsequent pure realms exist not in the phenomenal world, but deep within the human
heart. The lotus petals are of different colours- red, pink, yellow etc. The variations in colours depict the different deities of the Buddhist pantheon, of which there are more than six hundred deities. The circle of 8 - cremation grounds/ dhuthay ghey follows this circle of lotus petals/ Pema ghe Rawa. The very presence of this band signifies the fact that the Norbu Gyamtsho Mandala/ khilkhor is dedicated to a wrathful deity (ies). Then we encounter the Dorjee Rawa/ Girdle of Vajras/ Diamond Sceptres/ Dorjees. The word 'rawa' means fencing and this girdle of thunderbolts are also known as the kusung/ Bodyguards. It may also be called the fence of the Dorjees and has an important role to play in the mandala / khilkhor palace, as it is provides the base of khilkhor/ mandala. This circle demarcates the realm of compassion and is a protective ring built around the khilkhor/ mandala palace. There are a total of 16 vajras/ dorjees in this Heyshey ghi Dorjee Rawa as depicted in the photograph of the Norbu Gyamtsho Mandala/ khilkhor. The outermost circle is the Circle of Fire/ Mei Rin also known as the Heyshey ghe Mei Rin. This circle of fire is a great protective circle that burns away ignorance and enhances gnosis. Just as a person’s house would have a protective fence surrounding it, similarly, the abode of celestial beings/ lha ghi zhimchu would also require a protective fence. This fence serves a dual purpose. It protects the inhabitants of the Norbu Gyamtsho Mandala Palace/ Khilkhor as well as serves as the eternal flames that burn away ignorance, awakens consciousness, and protects against those evil forces that hamper the dissemination of the Buddha Dhamma. Just as the boundary wall and gates of our homes ward off trespassers, similarly, this Ring of Fire also prevents evil and malignant forces/ Gha-da-Jhungloo from entering into the Norbu Gyamtsho Khilkhor/ Mandala Palace/ Lha gey zim chu/ phodrang.

Having examined the symbology of the various elements of the Norbu Gyamtsho Mandala/ Khilkhor we will now look at the visualisation process and its symbology. As mentioned earlier when we deal with the visualisation process we shall look at the Norbu Gyamtsho Mandala/ Khilkhor as would an initiate on his/her way into the mandala palace/ Lha ghe zim chu / phodrang. Hence, we shall begin with the four outermost circles/ fences guarding the mandala palace/ khilkhor and then move inwards till the initiate is finally inside the mandala palace/ khilkhor. Once the initiate is inside
the mandala palace, s/he will then begin meditating on the *Norbu Gyamtsho Mandala/Khilkhor* by visualising the generation of the word *bhrum/phrey* in his/her heart.

**SYMBOLOGY OF THE VISUALISATION OF THE NORBU GYAMTSHO MANDALA/KHILKHOR**

**THE FOUR CONCENTRIC OUTER CIRCLES**

There are four circles through which an initiate has to traverse before s/he reaches the *mandala palace/khilkhor* and these are as follows:

1) *Mei-rin* / Circle of Fire  
2) *Dorje-Rawa* / Girdle of Vajras  
3) *Dhuthay Ghey* / Eight Cremation Grounds  
4) *Pema Ghi Rawa* / Girdle of Lotuses

The very first circle that we see when we look at a two-dimensional *mandala/khilkhor* or at a *mandala/khilkhor* drawn on a canvas/thangkha or, on the wall of a monastery, is the circle of fire/*Mei rin*, represented by a stylised scroll in four colours with the colour white for highlighting purposes. In an exclusive interview with Lopen Tashi Penjore, who has been initiated into the practice of the *Norbu Gyamtsho Petcha* (the Scripture/Text that contains the details of the *Norbu Gyamtsho Mandala/Khilkhor*) and was, hence, empowered (in a limited sense) to explain some of the details of the mandala under study to the researcher, indicated that these four colours in the *Mei-rin/Circle of Fire* of the *Norbu Gyamtsho Mandala/Khilkhor* stand for the four -elements/*kham* of wood, fire, earth, and water. The green coloured scroll represents the wood element/*shing kham*; red represents the fire element/*mei kham*; yellow represents the earth element/*sa kham*; and blue depicts the water element/*chu kham*. Some *mandalas/khilkhors* have 32 alternating sections of four-colours: the red and yellow colours represent flames while the blue and green sections symbolise leaves. The *Norbu Gyamtsho Mandala/Khilkhor* under study however, has only 20 sections of alternate colours such as blue, red, green and yellow with white highlights. The *Norbu Gyamtsho Mandala/Khilkhor* probably has 20 alternate sections of colours rather than the usual 32 for stylistic reasons. Moreover, the basic structure/drawing of the *mandala/khilkhor*
is usually divisible by four or multiples of four. For instance there are the four quadrants, then there are the four points of the compass and the four intermediate points. Then again, when drawing a circular form, the divisions of different segments of the circle would have to be divisible by 4 in keeping with the rules of geometry and symmetry. These four colours and the white highlight symbolise what Barry Bryant in an essay titled "The Kalachakra Sand Mandala (Excerpt from the Wheel of Time Sand Mandala)" in Thurman's Mandala The Architecture of Enlightenment, identifies as, "the rays of the Buddha's five wisdoms in the form of a rainbow."

This circle of fire is a great protective circle that burns away ignorance and enhances gnosis. Just as a person's house would have a protective fence surrounding it, similarly, the abode of celestial beings/ lha ghi zhimchu would also require a protective fence. But, this fence serves a dual purpose. Not only does it protect the inhabitants of the Norbu Gyamtsho Mandala Palace/ Khilkhor but also serves as the eternal flames that burn away ignorance and awakens consciousness and protects against those evil forces that hamper the dissemination of the Buddha Dhamma. In the Norbu Gyamtsho Petcha/ Text, this circle of fire is known as Heyshey ghi Mei-Rin or Heyshey's circle of fire. Heyshey is synonymous with Guru Padmasambhava (in this case) and God (in general). Thereby, translating into God's circle of Fire. Just as the boundary wall and gates of our homes ward off trespassers, similarly, this Ring of Fire also prevents evil and malignant forces/ Gha-da-Jhungloo from entering into the Norbu Gyamtsho Khilkhor/ Mandala Palace/ Lha gey zim chw/ phodrang. The Heyshey ghi Mei –Rin/ the Girdle of Fire has 20 flames in all. Tucci explains the circle of fire in a mandala/ khilkhor as:

*A mandala, then, is surrounded and circumscribed by a circle on which is displayed an uninterrupted line of scroll work. This is the Mountain of Fire (me ri), a flaming barrier.*

The Heyshey Ghi Mei-Rin/ Circle of Fire also bestows the blessings of the Eight Manifestations of Guru Rinpoche/ Guru Padmasambhava/ Guru Tshen Ghey, on the initiate who is to begin his/her meditation on the khilkhor/ mandala. This circle of fire is also symbolic of the circumambulation of the monastery/ kora as it is popularly called.
in Dzongkha. Lopen Tashi Penjore emphasises the fact that this Heyshey ghi Mei-Rin/ Circle of Fire is the purifying fire that dispels ignorance and the fear that springs from it as well as prevents evil forces and bad spirits/ Gha-da-Jhung loo, from entering inside the mandala palace. Heyshey ghi Mei-ri drives away evils spirits as evil spirits and dark forces that obstruct dhamma cannot bear facing the scorching flames that dispel ignorance. Since the mandala/ khilkhor drawing is two-dimensional and it is the blue print of the abode of the celestial beings, it may also be looked upon as the blue print of a house.

The next circle that we encounter on our inward journey is the Vajra circle/ circle of dorjees/ thunderbolts. Lopen Tashi Penjore says that this circle too is known as the Heyshey ghi Dorjee Rawa/ The Girdle of Vajras/ Dorjees/ Diamond Scepters. The word 'rawa' means fencing and this girdle of thunderbolts are also known as the ku-sung/ Bodyguards. It may also be called the fence of the Dorjees and has an important role to play in the mandala / khilkhor palace, as it is also provides the base of khilkhor/ mandala. This circle of dorjees/ vajras/ diamond scepters symbolises the strength and fearlessness of the initiate's intent on meditation on the one hand and on strength and fearlessness generally on the other. This circle demarcates the realm of compassion and is a protective ring built around the mandala palace/ khilkhor. There are a total of 16 vajras/ dorjees in this Heyshey ghi Dorjee Rawa as depicted in the photograph of the Norbu Gyamtsho Mandala/ Khilkhor, but this circle is generally drawn with 32 vajras/dorjees, just as the outer circle of fire is actually drawn depicting 32 flames. Once again, in adherence to the earlier stylistic device and the logic of geometry and symmetry, (in the case of the twenty segments of alternate colours of flames instead of the usual 32), the circle of dorjees/ vajras/ diamond scepters too has only 16 dorjees/ vajras/ diamond scepters in all. However, it may also be conjectured that these 16 dorjees could represent or symbolise the Noble Eight Fold Path and the Eight Aspects of Liberation. It could also stand for the 16 Bodhisattvas of the Bhadrakalpa (14 Aeons). These are but hypothesis that have however, not been ascertained. In all probability it could be a stylistic device. These vajras/dorjees in the Heyshey ghi Dorjee Rawa as shown in the photograph have five points and are joined by a golden decorative
border/design. This circle also has the duty of protecting (i) the Temple of the Eight Manifestations of Guru Rinpoche/ the Guru Tshen Ghey, (ii) The Rinzing Ghey and (iii) the Naryjing Ghey. Alex Wayman in “Symbolism of the Mandala Palace” interprets the circle of Dorjees/ Vajras as the diamond line depicting the recollection praxis of dhamma, while complete liberation is symbolised by the knowledge line. The dorjees/ vajras are golden, because dorjees/ vajras are made of gold/ ser.

The third concentric circle around the Norbu Gyamtsho Mandala/ Khilkhor depicts the circle of eight-cremation grounds/ dhuthay ghey. According to some sources, the band of eight-cremation grounds on mandalas/ khilkhors represent/symbolise the eight states of consciousness, which a person must move beyond. These eight states of consciousness have been classified as the consciousness of seeing, consciousness of hearing, consciousness of tasting, consciousness of smelling, consciousness of body, consciousness of thinking, consciousness of the I, and basic consciousness. Since, the Norbu Gyamtsho Manadala/ Khilkhor has this band of eight cremation grounds around it, it signifies that this particular mandala/ khilkhor is dedicated to a wrathful deity, as mandala/ khilkhors dedicated to peaceful deities do not have this band of eight cremation grounds around it. These eight cremation grounds are “disposed in a cross, like the diagram of the mandala, four on the principal and four on the intermediate points... They are peripheral, disposed on the outside limits of the mandala’s cross- pieces or of the eight-petalled lotus which corresponds to the plane of spiritual essences. The central point is lacking because, esoterically, these graveyards do not correspond to definite places but symbolize the eight aspects of the individual and individuating cognition which has been lost.16

These cremation grounds may also be linked to the eight great Indian sites where wandering ascetics would convene to meditate for long periods of time. They are in other words eight forms of consciousness classified further by Tucci as five being the five senses, while the remaining three stand for: “intellective consciousness (manovijnana), the thinking faculty of the individual (vijnana), and lastly, the store-consciousness (alayavijnana)17. These cremation grounds says Tucci, are the causes of
samsara and “as long as they are active we are dragged along on the round of births and deaths.” Implying that we cannot be free of the cycle of birth-death and re-birth. He elaborates further, by suggesting that each cremation ground has its own elaborate iconographic outlay and each of them have their own stupas, mountains, rivers trees and ascetics sitting there in contemplation. The dakinis/ female celestial beings/ khandomas in the Norbu Gyamtsho Mandala/ Khilkhor, the mandala/ khilkhor under study, may also be found seated on lotus petals embraced by male naga deities/ lhu/ subterranean beings. Since each of these dakinis/ female celestial beings/ khandomas along with the lhu/ naga/ subterranean beings reside within the eight- cremation grounds/ dhuthay ghey, they are depicted in their wrathful forms.

Various texts have named these circle of cremation grounds as: Candogral/ Terrible and Frightening; Gahvara/ Impenetrable Abyss; Jvalakula Karanka/ Blazing Skull; Vibhisana/ Terrifying; Laksmyarama/ Lakshmi’s Garden/Frightening Darkness; Kilakilarava/ Shrieks of Joy; Altatthasla/ Boisterous Laughter. Some texts also provide psychological interpretations for these cremation grounds suggesting that these represent the eight aggregates of human consciousness/ asta viJnana kaya that ties human beings to the phenomenal world and to the cycle of birth and re-birth. Other studies and scriptures further divide the eight cremation grounds into eight hot hells and eight cold hells. These cremation grounds are there for a purpose – they symbolise death and our fear of it. So when we actually confront this fear and then surpass this fear, we are freed from this one major hindrance and are free to move into the subtle regions of the human psyche. Sometimes the cremation grounds also depict bones strewn on the grounds and bleached white by the sun’s rays. These white, bleached bones signify ‘the world seen and overcome, the terrestrial plane eliminated, seen from above as dead and dormant’, as cited by Tucci. He also says that apart from the eight cremation grounds, there are also eight paradises in mandalas. The graveyards it is said “cover the space in the eight quarters” while the paradises are placed “in the various cardinal points.” These paradises too have their own trees, and stupas, the only difference being the trees in the cremation are dreary in keeping with their somber ambience, while the trees in the paradises are bright and glittering with gems and
precious jewels. These paradises have their rivers as well as lakes with clear, cool, fragranced water.

The next circle that we see is that of the lotus/ Pemas. 32 Lotuses form a wide band around the Norbu Gyatsho Khilkhor/ Mandala. Those 32 external petals of the lotus signify the 32 holy sites of Buddhism such as the Godavari in Nepal. This circle of lotus is symbolic of the fact that the subsequent pure realms exist not in the phenomenal world, but deep within the human heart. The lotus petals are of different colours- red, pink, yellow etc. The variations in colours depict the different deities of the Buddhist pantheon, of which there are more than six hundred deities. According to Rossi and Rossi, the lotus circle “expresses the open state of devotion, that is necessary to enter the palace.” The lotus according to Philip Rawson in his Sacred Tibet (1991) signifies “unity unfolding into multiple manifestations, across the borders of common reality.” It also signifies “uncontaminated compassion.” But, before one actually reaches the circle of lotuses, one meets the mukhi/ the ring inside which is to be found at the mouth of the lotus. This circle of lotus buds also signifies spiritual re-birth.

The lotus buds open outwards, while the deities in the inner sanctum of the mandala palace, are always seated on closed lotuses. The diagram shows the outer lotus petals as open and the petals of the lotus in the heart of the mandala palace/ khilkhor as closed. Tucci has an explanation for this, he says it is so, because in the case of the girdle of lotus buds, the plane of reality they represent is not an end by itself, it is still stretching out towards the initiate who is meditating on it, and who has deciphered the secrets of the mandala/ khilkhor and has also re-lived them in his/her soul. Whereas, in the case of the deities, they are seated on closed lotus petals because they “manifest themselves only upon the other plane whose essence they represent.” He also goes on to say that the petals of the lotus buds in the circle open outwards as they signify the “entrance into the life of palingenesis” while the central lotus flower with its closed buds on which are seated the central deities symbolise “the Original Synthesis. 19”

Having looked at the four outer concentric circles it would be appropriate for us to move inwards towards the walls of the four- sided mandala palace/ khilkhor. But before
we actually discuss the deities located within the heart of the lotus bloom at the center of the Norbu Gyamtsho Mandala/ Khilkhor, we may need to examine the construction of the Norbu Gyamtsho Mandala/ Khilkhor itself first.

Once all the arrangements are in place, it is then time for the initiate to start his/her meditation/ visualisation. When an initiate starts meditating, his/her officiating lama/ guru recites the secret formula. Then the initiate and the guru are required to imagine the central location of the lotus flower from the connotation of the letter/syllable Bhrum (in Sanskrit)/ phrey, the image of the central deity to whom the mandala/ khilkhor is dedicated is supposed to emerge along with his consort. In the case of the mandala/ khilkhor under study, the central deity is Tandrin/ Hayagriva as well as Guru Rinpoche/ Guru Padma Sambhava himself. These words are the means of invoking the divine being that resides in the mandala palace/ khilkhor. The four gates signify excellence by way of mindfulness/ smrti and faculty/ indriya. Mindfulness includes the four stations of mindfulness, the four right elimination-exertions, and the four bases of magical power. Faculty means the set beginning with faith.²°

When we see a mandala/ khilkhor drawn on the walls of monasteries or even as thangkga paintings, we find that on the inside of the three/ four concentric circles is usually a flower and that too a lotus flower. The lotus bloom could have four or eight petals as the case may be. For instance, the mandala/ khilkhor under study, the Norbu Gyamtsho Mandala/ Khilkhor has five concentric circles of lotus petal seats within the mandala palace/ khilkhor. Counting the innermost circle or the very heart of the lotus as one, the next circle has eight lotus petals, the third circle has sixteen lotus petals and the fourth and outermost lotus petals (all enclosed within the square mandala palace/ khilkhor) has twenty- four lotus petals in all. So, there are a total of fifty- six lotus petals in all. And these lotus petals are as was mentioned earlier, are closed lotus petals signifying what Tucci calls, the ‘Original Synthesis’. These petals are placed in perfect symmetry around the corolla of the lotus bloom. These petals, according to Tucci, symbolise what he calls, “spatial emanation of the One to the many”. This lotus flower may also be taken as symbolic of both exotericism as well as esotericism. It is
suggestive of exotericism as it symbolises creation in a very wide sense, and it denotes esotericism, as it symbolises the other plane of existence/nirvana/spiritual re-birth and freedom from the chains of birth, death and re-birth. It is this space in the bosom of the lotus that is transfigured into cosmic space and it is in that space that, we may actually re-discover ourselves, our consciousness and reintegrate with the Absolute Consciousness. As mentioned earlier, it is in the heart of the lotus that not only the Absolute Consciousness but also our own auto consciousness rests and it is up to the initiate to generate a unity of his/her own fragmented self, (fragmented because s/he is still caught up in the chaotic sea of samsara) with the Cosmic or Supreme or Absolute Consciousness which may be achieved after moving through various stages of progression. The various deities or images of deities in mandalas/ khilkhors represent symbolically the various stages that an initiate encounters on his/her way to auto consciousness and Absolute Consciousness. On the one hand, while these deities or the images or even symbols of these deities represent symbolically the various stages of progression, on the other, they represent the placement of the various deities and gods within the mandala palace/ khilkhor which is also the abode of celestial beings and representative of their individual sacred spaces.

In the inner most circle counting from the heart of the Norbu Gyamtscho Mandala/ Khilkhor are three symbols, representing Tandrin/ Hayagriva with his consort on the left, Guru Eu Pema Junay/ Guru Rinpoche/ Guru Padma Sambhava/ Guru Norbu Gyamtscho with his consort in the center and Penden Lhamo/ Mahakali along with her consort on the left. The next concentric circle includes 4 large petals at the cardinal points and 4 smaller petals at the intermediate points. These 8 petals constitute the Guru Tshen Ghey/ the Eight Manifestations of Guru Rinpoche/ Guru Padma Sambhava. On the inner portion of the larger petals at the cardinal points are the four deities and their consorts that comprise the Norbu Gyamtscho Khilkhor/ Mandala’s khilkhor ghi sapin/thri/ sancto sanctum/ sacred inner. These four deities are Barcha Thuten, Pema Thuten, Rena Thuten and Karma Thuten along with their consorts Dorjee Phagmo/Vajravarahi, Pema Phagmo, Rinchen Phagmo and Karma Phagmo who are seated on the outer edge/periphery of the same large lotus petals as the four Thutens. Outside this circle is
another circle of 16 half-lotus petals occupied by the 8 Protective Wisdom Deities/ *Rinzing Ghey*; and the 8 deities of the *Narjing Ghey*. The 8 Protective Wisdom deities are: *Sowdhi Nang Po, Shempa Nang Mo, Heychen Dayne, Ne Ghi Mana, Dhamtshe Chembo, Kaychen Dhorlay, Meta Bhamchen,* and *Peden Lhamo* while the 8 deities of the *Narjing/ Narjing ghey ghi Lhatso* are: *Zhachen, Kayen Dayzhi, Pekhar Dharla, Kanyak Therda, Gyachen Dayzhi, Lhasin Degay, Yula Zhi Dha,* and *Thuba Bomday*. The third circle of 16 lotus petals contains the seat of the *vajra bodhisattvas* such as: *Vajrasattva, Vajraraja, Vajraraga, Vajrasadhu, Vajraratna, Vajratejas, Vajraketu, Vajrahasa, Vajradharma, Vajratiksna, Vajraketu, Vajrakamara, Vajraksa, Vajrayaksa,* and *Vajrasandhi*. The circle after this has twenty-four lotus petals in all. These 24 lotus petals house the following: the 16 *Bodhisattvas of the Bhadrakalpa (14 Aeons)* including: *Maitreya, Manjusri, Gandhahasti, Jnanaketu, Bhadrapala, Amoghadarsi, Akasagarbha, Aksayamati, Pratibhanakuta, Mahasthamaprapta, Sarvapayanjaha, Sarvasokatamonirghatamati, Jaliniprabha, Candraprabha, Amrtaprabha, Samantabhadra; 4 dakinis/ khandomas/ celestial beings and 4 Pows/ Heroes.*

“The mandala is often explained as the sublime mental *mandala*, whereas the palace is symbolic of knowledge/*Jnana* and the erection of the edifice as that of creating consciousness. The four outer corners are said to establish equality of measures”. The ornaments represent the holy collection of morality. The *four liberations/ vimoksa/* the four gates and the four right eliminations — exertions/ somyakprahana are, represented by the four arches. The four courtyards symbolise the four stations of mindfulness/*smrtypasthana* while the four bases of magical power/*radhi-pada* are the four-gate projections/*niryuha*. The seven ancillaries of enlightenment/*bodhyanga* are the adornment with garlands and flower bundles. The *Eight Fold Noble Path* is, the eight posts”.

The *mandala/ khilkhor* is not just a “cosmoplan” or a visual aid to meditation or a *mnemonic aid*. It may also be looked upon as the means by which microcosmic man can be brought into harmony with the macrocosmic universe through visualization of the
divine pattern. It has, therefore, been described as a "psychocosmogram", a means towards the re-integration of the human personality", says G N Mehra in his, Bhutan – Land of the Peaceful Dragon, (1974). While Tucci, calls the mandala a ‘geometric projection of the world reduced to an essential pattern’. He says that it later becomes a psychocosmogram or a scheme whereby there is a “disintegration from the One to the many and of re-integration from the many to the One, to that Absolute Consciousness, entire and luminous, which Yoga causes to shine once more in the depth of our being." 22"

So far, we have only tried to reconstruct the outline/ the skeleton of the Norbu Gyamtscho Mandala/ khilkhor. The next step in our analysis would be to look at what is actually drawn on the surface and the symbolism behind it. Through the course of this examination of symbolism and the details of the placement of deities/ gods, we shall also try and look at how an initiate is supposed to comprehend the meaning of this world order/ cosmos and not only interpret its meaning but also maintain it. We know that the mandala/ khilkhor is divided into five sections so to speak. There are five sections because it blends with the notion of a center around which four cardinal points revolve indicating a continuum of both time and space. Moreover, these five sections also correlate to the “five structural elements of the human personality, centred on the conscious principle, the kernel of the individual, the cause of samsara and also of the Return”. It must be remembered that in Vajrayana Buddhism, the original consciousness is “symbolized by Mahavairocana, Vajradhara, Vajrasattva or Aksobhya, is radiated into the Five Buddhas. 23 These five Buddha families are not remote gods/deities. They are there for a purpose and that purpose is that they descend into the initiate who is visualising/meditating on the mandala/ khilkhor. These five Buddha families also correspond to the five elements that make up the human body and the person’s psyche. These five elements are as follows according to Tucci: rupa/ form, vedana/ sensations, samjna/ notion, sanskara/ force/ coefficient of karma and viJnana/ particular and individual knowledge. Sometimes they are also linked to the five passions or as Tucci calls fundamental obscurations, such as, moha/ mental darkness,
abhinana/ pride, irsa/ jealousy, krodha/ irascibility, and lobha/ cupidity. Sometimes he says, they may also be related to the five senses of sight, sound, smell, taste and touch.

The next set of instructions is related directly to the interior of the mandala palace/ khilkhor. The four lotus petals at the center of the Norbu Gyamtsho Mandala/ Khilkhor are known as the Pema dhaba Zhi/ the Pedab Zhi. This area inhabited by these four deities is also known as the khilkhor gi sapin/thri/ sancto sanctum of the Norbu Gyamtsho Mandala/ Khilkhor. The Shar/ East is the seat of Barcha Thuten who is white in colour and holds the vajra/ dorjee in his right hand and the drilbu/ ritual bell in the left. His consort is Dorjee Phagmo/ Vajravarahi who holds the ritual dagger/ phurba in her right hand and the skull filled with blood in her left hand. She also wears ornaments made of bones. In the west/ Nub resides Pema Thuten who is green in colour. He holds a lotus in his right hand and in left the ritual bell/ drilbu. His consort is Pema Phagmo. In the south/ Lhoro sits Rena Thuten who is blue in colour and holds jewels/ ratna is his right hand and a ritual bell/ drilbu in his left hand. His consort is the Rinchen Phagmo. She holds a ritual dagger/ phurba in her right hand and a skull filled with blood in the left. On the North/ Jhangto petal sits Karma Thuten who is red in colour, and holds a vajra/ dorjee cross in his right hand, while the left hand holds the ritual bell/ drilbu. His consort is Karma Phagmo holding a skull filled with blood in her left hand and the ritual dagger/ phurba in her right hand. The dakinis/ four-consorts/ female celestial beings/ khandomas wear clothes and ornaments made of bones. From hereon, there is the extension of eight dakinis/ khandomas/ celestial beings in eight directions. The initiate would need to visualise an eight-angled jewels of the zhe khang/ phodrang, Lha gey zim chu/ mandala palace/ khilkhor. It is comprised of the four cardinal points/ Chog Zhi and the four intermediate divisions/ Cham Zhi.

The Guru (Guru Rinpoche/ Guru Padma Sambhava) is sometimes visualised with one face symbolic of the Absolute Truth that the Buddha preached. His two arms are indicative of the yab-yum/ mother- father posture or the union or combination of wisdom and compassion. It needs to be pointed out that in Vajrayana Buddhism, the father figure/ male figure represents compassion while the mother figure/ female figure
represents the wisdom aspect. His two legs are symbolic of the two planes of existence—samsara and nirvana as ultimately the same or as the Venerable Chogyem Trungpa Rinpoche says, “the double edged sword.” His eyes usually visualised wide open indicate his sense of awareness as the essence of the absolute nature. He holds a five-pronged vajra/ dorjee that was also indicated when we discussed the Heyshey ghe Dorjeé Rawal the girdle of dorjees/ vajras, signifying the manner in which he accomplished the transformation of the five deadly poisons of desire, hatred, ignorance, jealousy, and pride into the five wisdoms that we referred to in an earlier section.

Around the Eight Manifestations of Guru Rinpoche/ Guru Padma Sambhava according to Lopon Tashi Penjore, we have to visualise a ring of 16 lotus petals of different colours. The 8 Wisdom Protective deities/ Rinzing Ghey ghi Lhatso, and the 8 deities of the Narjing Ghey ghi Lhatso inhabit this area. The 16-vajra bodhisattvas inhabit the next circle of 16 lotus petals. The final outer circle of 24 lotus petals is inhabited by the 16 bodhisattvas of the Bhadrakalpa (14 Aeons) four dakinis/ khandomas/ celestial beings, and 4 heroes/ pows with their retinue, totally nude but covered with six beautiful ornaments made of bones reside here and need to be visualised as well. All these deities are in the boon giving posture. They are in a very festive mood as they make merry beating cymbals/ ritualistic musical instruments. They appear to be enjoying all the precious food, and the precious offerings.

There are three sources to the Norbu Gyamtsho Mandala/ khilkhor in the form of a translation, a commentary and an offshoot text known respectively as the Wang Thsok, Yang Thsok, and Khil Tshok in Tshokey/ the language of the Scriptures. We would now need to begin with the visualisation technique. Traditionally, the origin of the mandala/ khilkhor goes back to more ancient times to even before the appearance of the Buddha/ the Adhi Buddha as he is called. It goes back to the notion of the universe being created out of five elements such as, space, wind, water, earth and fire or Ah, Loongh, Chu, Sa and Mei as it is called in Tshokey/ the language of the Scriptures. The Norbu Gyamtsho Mandala/ khilkhor too is believed to be composed of the five elements collectively and just as every living being has an essence, the mandala/ khilkhor under study too has an
essence, a consciousness. This collective consciousness is known as phrey. After this visualisation, taking the phrey as the consciousness/essence, we have to visualise Emptiness, Sunyata/ Void, represented by the sky or Namkhar as the Infinite Void. Out of that emptiness, the meditator has to visualise the birth/generation of seven alphabets that are- Ah, Yham, Ram, Khan, Sur, Ra and Kem.

(1) Ah: represents space itself which is boundless, endless and centreless; the source/jhung of the centreless and endless space and one that performs the function of covering the sky over the mandala/khilkhor, while the khilkhor/mandala itself signifies a realm or a sacred space where all are equal.

(2) Yham: is the source/jhung of the wind/loongh. It is the source of the seed from which wind is germinated.

(3) Ram: is the source/jhung of fire/meibar.

(4) Kham: is the source/jhung of water/chu.

(5) Sum: is the source/jhung of the earth or ground/sha zhi/sa.

(6) Ra: is the source/jhung of the ocean/rata gyamtsho/Ocean of blood.

(7) Khem: is also referred to Re Rab Karbo/Mt Meru, signifying the emergence of Mt Meru surrounded by the various continents and islands.

The alphabet bhrum/phrey symbolises the actual fortress/phodrang/khilkhor/mandala/the universe/the cosmos. This alphabet is also the essence of the khilkhor/mandala from which the gnosys of the enlightened beings/ the Buddhas springs forth and covers the entire universe/cosmos. Lopon Tashi Penjore explains ‘gnosis’ as something that is the essence or very soul of the Dhamma and that, which is intrinsically intangible. Similarly, the heyshey/gnosis of the Buddhas is infinite and covers the whole universe, represented by the alphabet brum and is something that is priceless and exquisite in the mandala/khilkhor. These seven alphabets actually signify the creation of the whole universe from the five elements of space, wind, water, earth and fire, the ocean of blood and sur which also symbolises anything that can be held, that is tangible, that can be grasped and not just earth per se. These seven alphabets signify the representation of the celestial abode of the deities/ the mandala/ the
The mandala palace/ the phodrang/ Lha gey zim chu resembles the Dewa chen po/ the palace of limitless light/ the phodrang/ celestial abode of the Yu- Pad Me/ Amitabha. This mandala palace / Lha gey zim chu has limitless light and is covered entirely with magnificent rainbows of seven colours. Outside the mandala palace/ phodrang/ celestial abode is the outer ring of petals of the lotus that encircles the phodrang/ mandala palace. The inner petals of the same lotus are to be found inside the mandala palace/ phodrang/ celestial abode.

At the very heart of the lotus/ sindhri are three symbols. The first and at the center is Guru Eu Pema Junay who is to be visualised as an eight year old boy in the yab yum/ locked in a tight embrace depicting the union of wisdom and compassion, the former signified by the female and compassion signified by the male figure) position with his consort Yeshey Tshogyel who is to be visualised as a sixteen years old. On his left is Trandrin/ Hayagriva with his consort and to Guru Eu Pema Junay’s right is Penden Lhamo/ Maha Kali with her consort. On the 4 larger lotus petals in the inner most circle are the four deities that comprise the Norbu Gyamtso Mandala/ khilkhor’s sarpin/ thri/ sancto sanctum. These deities are Barcha Thuten, Pema Thuten, Karma Thuten and Rena Thuten accompanied by their respective consorts Dorjee Phagmo, Pema Phagmo, Rinchen Phagmo and Karma Phagmo. The four Buddhas are followed by the Guru Tshen Ghey/ Eight Manifestations of Guru Padma Sambhava/ Guru Rinpoche.

The inner square/ Dho- Zhi (that which has four angles) structure of the mandala palace/ khilkhor/ Lha gey zim chu, is followed by the gho- zhi/ four entrance gates/ doorways. Each door way has a four-tiered structure called the cham zhi. The cham zhi/ four leveled porticos/ roofs above the gateways represent the four qualities of a bodhisattva that attracts. These four attractive or ‘attracting qualities’ as Matthieu Ricard calls them are: to please beings with presents, to please them by saying gentle things suited to their minds, to teach them in accordance with their needs and capacities, and finally, to behave and practice in accordance with what one teaches. The tabab zhi are the four pillars that support the portico, above the tabab zhi is the Ridha Choe Khor or the two deer with the Wheel of Law in the center and above the Ridha Choe Khor is the Sergi- Dho/ the golden Umbrella. The Tabab Zhi according to Lopon Tashi
Penjore’s interpretation of the Norbu Gyamtsho Mandala/ khilkhor signifies the meditation of four Tshaymay/ Infinites. He identified the four tshaymay/ four Infinites as: (1) Jhamba/ love, (2) Ninghi/ Compassion, (3) Gawa/ Happiness/ Satisfaction, and (4) Tang Numg/ Indifferentness/ Equality to all. The Rhidha Choe Khor may be represented as the Choekhor Chushu / the 13 cylindrical rings placed one on top of the other signifying the 13 stages to Buddhahood, or by the 8 spokes of the Wheel of Dhamma. The Sergi- Dho/ Golden Umbrella represents the protection from the heat of the sun, the wetness of the rain, and also signifies the protection from all natures of evil. The concepts of dawa-nima and karma/ the moon – sun and stars arises form the fact that the light of these heavenly bodies is to banish the darkness of delusion from inside the initiate till everything appears transparent and clear, till there are no differences between the inside and the outside; and the mandala palace/ khilkhor/ Lha gey zim chu/ phodrang is fully illuminated by celestial light and crossed by rainbows. The whole mandala/ khilkhor needs to be understood or visualised as something that has come into being on its own and has not been created by anybody /anything. It is beautiful and awe-inspiring. This khilkhor/ mandala is to be visualised by the initiate as a wonderful drawing that has come into existence and through which the wishes and aspirations of the Buddha for the benefit of all sentient beings are expressed. This khilkhor/ mandala is not an opaque structure. It is transparent from both the inside as well as the outside but at the same time is something that is intangible. We have looked at the structure of the mandala/ khilkhor from the outside as well as from the inside. Now begins the meditation for the initiate and it is this meditation that describes the position of the deities in the different parts of the mandala/ khilkhor.

Phodrang is the zhekhang/ palace/ abode of the celestial beings or the mandala palace/ khilkhor. One also has to visualise the mandala/ khilkhor being surrounded by the retinues, lamas, and yidams/ tutelary deity. The mandala/ khilkhor has a core essence but it does not stand above, and is always surrounded by retinues, etc., at this stage the initiate has now begun meditating. In the center of his/heart heart s/he has to assume that there is a golden dorjee/ vajra/ diamond sceptre. S/he then has to assume that from that dorjee/ vajra/ diamond sceptre there is a flashing of a brilliant ray of light in the
ten-directions/ cho chu. The flash of light is offered to the Buddha fields of the 10 directions and by doing so, the elements of delusion in sentient beings gets washed away automatically. The Bodhisattvas we need to remember are beyond the clutches of samsara but have not entered into nirvana in order to help save other sentient beings. Prior to their attaining nirvana, they inhabit worlds known as pure lands or Buddha fields. For instance, the Buddha field/ pure land of the Bodhisattva Amitabha is Sukhawati/ Land of Bliss.

The rays of brilliant light that emerge from the mantra- phrey moves towards the Buddha fields of the ten directions with a sudden force and movement. This ray of light is known as the Heyshey ghe Dorjee/ the vajra of gnosis or even as the essence of the vajra. These rays that move towards the direction of the ten Buddha fields actually goes and strikes the Ku sung thuk/ Trikaya Buddha of each of the ten Buddha fields. Meaning to say that this one ray of brilliant light emanates from the One seed syllable/ bija/ mantra and strikes the Many (Buddhas in this case). Having struck the Ku sung thuk/ Trikaya Buddha of each of the ten Buddhas the condensed form of the rays of light intersect at a point and are reflected to the source of origin/ the heart of the initiate and the rays of light come back in the form of a vajra/ dorjee/ diamond sceptre and dissolves into the seed syllable/ bija/ mantra khrey once again.

The initiate is to then visualise him/herself as sitting inside the centre of the phodrang/ mandala palace/ Lha gey zim chu and imagine him/ herself as the essence of the khilhor/ mandala. S/he will then have to move a step further and visualise the four-demons/ evils/ Dhey Zhi. The four evils being classified as: (1) Lha Dhey! Evil of the Gods (symbolised by the colour white), (2) Phumbo Dhey! Evil of the Body (symbolised by the yellow), (3) Nimo Dhey! Evil of Delusion (symbolised by the colour red), (4) Chitha Dhey! Evil of Death (symbolised by the colour smoky grey). These four evils have to be subdued by the initiate before one can move further. The initiate has to imagine him/herself as sitting over a lotus throne signifying his/her victory over these four evils that are underneath the lotus throne. The lotus throne itself sits on a cushion of the nima da dawa/ sun and the moon. The initiate has to visualise him/herself as
seated on the cushion of the *dawa da nima/* sun and moon as the *Onchay Yab- Yub/* in the tantric mother- father embrace posture. The initiate has to visualise him/herself in the *Onchay Yab-Yum* (tantric posture of the embrace of the wisdom and the compassion element) as red-faced, and with two arms. On the top of his/her head s/he has to visualise the formation of the head of a horse and the head of a pig. On his/her right hand, the initiate holds a *dhighum/* spiritual dagger and in the left hand, s/he has to hold a human skull filled with blood. The deity/god with the head of the horse is none other than *Tandrin*/* Hevagriva* and the deity with the head of the pig is *Dorjee Phagma*/* Vajravarahi*, a *dakini/* celestial being/* Khandorna*.

The initiate has to visualise him/herself as sitting with the left leg stretching forwards and holding the *dakini Vajravarahi*/* Dorjee Phagmo* with the right leg and that they are locked in a tight embrace in the posture of the *Yab- Yum/* posture of conjugal bliss or the posture of the union of the elements of wisdom and compassion. They are surrounded by *rnei lung/* a blaze of fire, and dressed in clothes and ornaments made of bones and skulls/* rhi bhi ghento*. When the initiate is able to imagine/ visualise the *yab da yum/* the *yidam*/* titular deity*, s/he has to be able to visualise his/her guru as well. Above the head of the horse and the pig (the image the initiate had visualised earlier), the initiate has to now imagine a protusion on which is to be found a lotus bloom. On the lotus bloom on a cushion made of the sun and the moon/* nima da dawa* may be found seated *Eu Pema Junay* manifested as an eight- year old boy.

*Guru Eu Pema Junay* has to be visualised as an eight-year old boy holding a *bendha/* skull in his left hand and a *vajra*/* dorjee* in his right. He wears the *Pesham*/* the Lotus hat/* the hat that *Guru Rinpoche*/* Guru Padma Sambhava* is seen wearing in most iconographic representations. In the center of the lotus shaped hat that *Guru Rinpoche*/* Guru Padma Sambhava* wears is a white vulture- feather that stands for the realisation of the Ultimate Reality/* the Original Consciousness*. The lotus hat has two flaps hanging downwards below the ears and there are the five coloured scarves hanging from the two flaps. He wears long hanging ear- rings, necklaces and various other ornaments. Under the crook of his left arm is a *kathvanga/* a three-pronged trident symbolising the empty
nature of all appearances, its expression as entirely luminous, and the all- encompassing compassion. He has an aura around him that surrounds great beings. Guru Pema Junay has to be visualised in the Trulku/ Sambhogakaya position. It is said that the Lord of Sahor (Sahor is believed to be on the India Pakistan border) offered the ornaments and clothes to Guru Pema Junay. All these ornaments have to be visualised in order to empower the dakinis/ female celestial beings/ khandomas. In the center of Guru Pema Junay’s heart, the initiate has to visualise a cushion of the sun and the moon/ nirma da dawa on which is seated Guru Eu Pema Junay. He is in the yab yum posture/ posture of tight embrace with Khadoma Yeshey Tshogyel who is pale white in colour and depicted with the countenance of a 16 -year old girl. In her right hand she holds the ritual dagger/ phurba and her right hand is around Guru Rinpoche’s back and in her left hand she holds a skull filled with the nectar of blood. Her breasts encircle Guru Rinpoche. All these Gurus that the initiate needs to visualise are actually mere manifestations of Guru Padma Sambhava/ Guru Rinpoche. All of this that has been recorded so far needs to be visualised very clearly by the initiate who is meditating with a religious aura/charisma.

In the East/ Shar is the abode of Guru Urgyan Dorje Chang, who is sky blue in colour, in his right hand he holds a vajra/ dorjee with 5 prongs, and his left hand is in the Jnana mudra/ vajra/ bodhasri mudra (three fingers up, middle finger and thumb touching gesture). He is naked and in the yab-yum/ vajrasana/ virasana position with his consort symbolising the union between wisdom and compassion. The yum/ female consort signifies the wisdom aspect while the compassion aspect is signified by the male form/ yab.

In the South/ Lhoro is Guru Lhoden Chosay who is white in colour. He holds a damaru/ hand drum with skulls on it, in his right hand and a lotus cup in his left. He is clothed in his white silken robes and is in the cross-legged position/ Khiltun. His head is covered with a turban made of silk and in the front of the turban he wears is a crown made of precious gems. He is consort less.
In the West/ Nub is Guru Nima Yoezer and he is yellow in colour. In his right hand is a trident, and the left hand is in the same Jnana/ vajra/ bodhasri mudra (three fingers up, middle finger and thumb touching gesture). He wears a kilt made up of tiger's skin. He wears a sun crown and ornaments made of bones. He wears six necklaces made of bones.

In the North/ Jhang is Guru Senge Dradok and he is dark blue in colour. He carries a dorjee/ vajra made of iron, in his left, and his right hand is in the same mudra. He too has no consort. On the upper torso he wears a tunic made of elephant and lion skin. He also wears five coloured scarves and a skirt made of tiger's skin. He is in the standing position as if ready to take a step forward.

In the South - Eastern section/ Lhoro Shar is Guru Pema Sambhava who is white in colour. In his right hand he holds a lotus cup/ Pema ghi phorb; his left hand is in the protection offering mudra. His lower garment is comprised of red robes and he wears a yellow religious robe. He is dressed in the robes of a young monk.

In the South - Western section/ Lhor-Nub is Guru Pema Gyalpo who is red in colour. In the right hand he holds a damaru/ ritual hand drum, and in the left he holds a mirror, he is to be visualised like a very charismatic king.

In the North - Western section/ Nub-Jhang is seated Guru Shakya Senge who is yellow in colour and is in the earth-touching mudra/ bhoomi- sparsh mudra but in a standing position. In his left hand he holds a begging bowl. And he is in red robes of a monk. He is to be visualised as Shacha Thogba in Sambhogakaya form.

In the North - Eastern section/ Jhang-Shar sits Guru Dorje Drolod who is maroon in colour. In his right hand he holds a dorjee/ vajra, and in his left hand is a phurpa/ three-pronged ritual dagger. He has three eyes, and is riding on a tiger with his hands raised. His left hand is stretched forward, while the right hand is folded towards his shoulder. He is ferocious, charismatic and very empowering.
If we look at the photograph of the *mandala/ khilkhor* inside the four concentric circles are the various good luck signs and other decoration such as the perfume elixir, the conch with the silk scarves, the peach, etc that hang in the offering garden. A white outer border surrounds the *mandala palace/ Lha ghi zimchu/ phodrang* this area is called the *dah-yab* and is the supporting structure below the roof. Beyond this is the decorative border of half lotus petals symbolic of the protection that these half lotus petals provide from troublesome and disruptive emotions. This element of the *Norbu Gyamtso Mandala/ Khilkor* is the down spouts also called *jhan dhab* in *Dzongkha* that helps drain out the rain-water that collects on the roof of the *mandala palace/ Lha ghi zimchu*. There is also a border of hanging garlands and half-garlands of beautiful white pearls called the *Dhawa- Dhachen* (in *Dzongkha*) surrounding the *Asta Mangala/ Trashi Dha Ghey* / Eight Auspicious/ Good Luck Signs. The *Trashi Dhaghay/ Eight Good Luck signs/ Asta-Mangala* are placed above the four, gates of the *Norbu Gyamtso Mandala/ Khilkhor*, two good luck signs on each gate. A brief description of each of the *Trashi Dhaghay/ Eight Good Luck Signs/ Asta- Mangala* follows next:

1) *Dun-ma/ Dungkar/ Sankha/ Right-coiled white conch*

This auspicious sign is placed on the right side of the east/ *shar* gate to the *mandala palace/ Lha ghe zimchu/ phodrang/ khilkhor*. It must be remembered that the conch is the symbol of the reverberating sound of the *Buddha Dhamma*. It also signifies the awakening of the dormant consciousness of sentient beings. The sound of the conch is believed to persuade people to move towards the *Noble Eight-Fold* path and to lead better spiritual lives for the sake of all sentient beings.

*The White Conch*
The conch, it is said, was blow by the Buddha when he decided to spread the Dhamma. Hence, it is also looked upon as commemorating that historical event. It persuades them to move on the path of noble deeds that can benefit all. The conch shell is blown in commemoration of this event whenever there is a special sermon by a high lama.

2) Gdugs-ma/ Chattr/a / Golden Parasol/ The Precious Umbrella. The precious umbrella symbolises the authority of the Buddha. Umbrellas protect us from the heat of the sun symbolically they protect the mind from the scorching nature of passion.

The precious umbrella is to be found on the right side of the southern lhoro gate of the mandala palace/ khilkhor.

3) Bum-pa-ma/ Kalasi/ Vase of Treasure This Vase of Treasure is symbolic of boundless material wealth, good health and longevity.
This good luck sign is placed on top of the left side of the south/ lhorö gate of the mandala palace/ khilkhor.

4) Rgyal-mtshan-ma/ Dhvaja Pennat/ The Victory Banner
The Victory Banner is used during religious processions and is symbolic of the triumph of good over the evil that obstructs the success of noble goals. It is to be found on the left of the western/ nubtu gate of the mandala palace/ phodrang/ khilkhor.

5) Gser-na-ma/ Suvarna-matsya/ The Golden Fish
The golden fish are always in a pair. The golden fish sit on the left side of the eastern /shar gate of the Norbu Gyamtsho Mandala/ Khilkhör.

The two fish symbolise the liberation from the cycle of birth- death and re-birth, the indispensability of both the genders and mutual aid towards one another.
6) Pema/ Padma/ The Lotus Flower
The Lotus is the symbol of enlightenment, of spiritual re-birth, awakening.
The lotus may be found on top of the right side of the western/ nubtu gate of the Norbu Gyamtsho Mandala palace/ Khilkhor.

![The Lotus Flower](image)

7) Dpal-belu-ma/ Srivatsa/ The Endless Knot
The Endless Knot symbolises both eternity and Brahmaajala, or the Hindu representation of all the theories and philosophies of the universe.

![The Endless Knot](image)

The Endless knot is to be found on the right side of the northern/ jhangtu gate of the Norbu Gyamtsho Mandala palace/ Khilkhor.

8) Cheoki Hkhor-lo-ma/ Cakra Discus/ The Wheel of Law
The Wheel of Life/ Serpa Khorlo has eight spokes and is symbolic of the Noble Eight Fold as well as the propagation of the Buddha’s teachings.

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The Wheel of Law

This good luck sign is placed on the left side of the north/ jhangtu gate of the Norbu Gyamtso Mandala palace/ Khilkhor/ Phodrang.

The placement of the eight auspicious signs/ Asta Mangala/ Trashi Dha Ghey is according to the photograph of the Norbu Gyamtso Mandala/ Khilkhor from the Gangtey Goenpa in Bhutan. It needs to be pointed out that this mandala/ khilkhor, Norbu Gyamtso Mandala/ Khilkhor is to be found on the ceiling of the Guru Tshen Ghey Lhakhang/ Temple of the Eight Manifestations of Guru Rinpoche/ Guru Pedma Sambhava of the Gangtey Goenpa/ Monastery in Bhutan.

Within the border that is around the Trashi Dha Ghey/ Asta Mangala/ 8 Auspicious Signs is the border of double vajras/ dorjees that may be correlated to each of the four directions of the compass. Beyond this is what the Norbu Gyamtso Petchal Text classifies as the Lha Cham/ Chogay- Lham/ the area where the dakinis/ khandomas/ celestial beings reside and where the footprints of the dakinis/ khandomas/ celestial beings and their retinues may be found, outside the central circle of the main deity and inside the walls of the mandala palace/ Lha ghe zimchu/ phodrang. This area cannot have any drawings of the deities hence this area in the mandala/ khilkhor under study has only a patterned red border. Then there are five lines drawn in five colours. These lines represent the five Rinpoche/ precious essences/ elements that the main wall of the mandala/ khilkhor is made of. The five precious elements are gold, silver, coral, lapis lazuli and turquoise. It is believed that if we cut open the walls of the mandala palace/ Lha ghe zimchu/ phodrang then, we will be able to see the five elements that compose it. These five elements signify the five wisdoms, identified by Ricard as, wisdom of the
absolute nature, wisdom of perfect equality, mirror-like wisdom, all- distinguishing wisdom, and all accomplishing wisdom which he says are the purified forms of the five poisons of ignorance, hatred, jealousy, desire and pride. The details related to the five colours have been discussed earlier on as well hence we will not go into details here again. There are thirty- two lotus petals outside the phodrang/ Lha gey zim chu/ mandala palace but inside the dhuthay ghey/ Eight Cremation grounds.

The word khilkhor itself is constituted of two syllables: Khil meaning central/center and khor meaning Lhatsho/Palace of Worship. Khor also means family/group. Hence, the word signifies the central palace of worship of a family of Gods/deities. Another meaning of the khilkhor is the abodes of the deities/gods and may be interpreted as Lha Ghi Phodrang. Lha meaning Gods/Deities, Phodrang meaning Palace/Abode, it may also be called the Zhe- Khang or the garden of Guru Rinpoche/ Paradise. It translates into Tshe- Nah, Tshe meaning outside and Nah meaning inside. What then is the khilkhor made of? It is made of substances called the Doh Sheri. Doh meaning stone and Sheri meaning stones like glass, mica that are powered and then painted. It is also made of Sangh/ Sah- wah/ confidentiality. This confidentiality is the secret, esoteric tradition/explanation of the khilkhor that is a very closely guarded secret.

Guru Norbu Gyamtsho, it maybe pointed out is none other than Guru Rinpoche/ Guru Padma Sambhava himself. The Gangtey Goenpa/ monastery as we know is the seat of Terton Pema Lingpa the greatest treasure reaveler/ Terton of Bhutan. Legend has it that Guru Rinpoche hid several of his teachings, as the world of his time was not really prepared spiritually to receive all his teachings in the form of Termas/ Treasures of a spiritual nature, to be found in the future by designated Tertons/ Treasure Revealers. Terton Pema Lingpa it is said was chosen by Guru Rinpoche himself to discover these hidden treasures/ Termas. Since then the descendants and emanations of Terton Pema Lingpa have been in Gangtey Goenpa, one of the seats of the Terton. It was Terton Pema Lingpa’s descendant Gyalse Pema Thinlay, the first Trulku of Pema Lingpas who established the Goenpa at Gangtey in 1613.
Thurman in *Mandala The Architecture of Enlightenment* states that there is a difference in style, iconography, and composition between the *mandalas/khilkhors* of different schools of thought. In order to test his hypotheses, we shall take a look at another *mandala/khilkhor* - the Jnanadakini Mandala/Khilkhor/the Mandala of the Intuitive Wisdom Angel for a brief comparative analysis. In the *Norbu Gyamtsho Mandala/Khilkhor*, the Circle of Flames/Mei- rin/Heyshey ghe mei-rin is the outermost concentric circle. In this mandala (Jnanadakini Mandala/khilkhor), the outermost concentric circle is the Dhuthay Ghey/8 Cremation Grounds. The presence of the Dhuthay Ghey/8 Cremation Grounds testifies to the fact that this *mandala/khilkhor* is once again dedicated to a wrathful deity. However, Thurman, points out that the Dhuthay Ghey/8 Cremation Grounds are "depicted in Nepali style in great detail outside the ring of flames" (Thurman, p. 94). In this *mandala/khilkhor* (Jnanadakini Mandala/Khilkhor), we find the chief deity Jnanadakini/Intuitive Wisdom Angel in the center, seated on her "two-lion throne". She is surrounded by "eight goddesses of her inner circle, with four female guardians seated in the doorways." The main points to be noted here are: one, the change in the central deity and his/her central retinue and entourage, and two, the difference in the paintings of the four concentric circles that surround most *mandalas/khilkhors*. In the case of the *Norbu Gyamtsho Mandala/Khilkhor*, there are three figures/symbols in the centre - that of Eu Pema Junay/Guru Rinpoche/Guru Padma Sambhava, Trandin/Hayagriva and Penden Lhamu/Mahakali.

Moreover, unlike the *Norbu Gyamtsho Mandala/khilkhor* that belongs to the Nyingmapa sect and the Peling tradition of Bhutan, this *mandala/khilkhor* belongs to the Shakyapa school of thought and has been dated by Thurman as belonging to the late 14th and early 15th century. This *mandala/khilkhor* is from Tibet. The *Norbu Gyamtsho Mandala/khilkhor* is actually a much older *mandala/khilkhor* in the sense that it was a *terma* treasure revealed by Terton Pema Lingpa in 1484. However, since the Gangtey Goenpa/Monastery was built only in 1613 hypothetically speaking the *Norbu Gyamthso Mandala/Khilkhor* was painted around the early 17th century and as is obvious, the *Norbu Gyamtsho Mandala/Khilkhor* belongs to Bhutan.
This *mandala/ khilikhor* (the *Jnanadakini Mandala*) also has very interesting features that may be pointed out at the very first glance of the *mandala/ khilkhor*. There are two rows of figures to the top and bottom of the *mandala palace/ khilkhor* that is not to be found in the *Norbu Gyamtsho Mandala/ Khilkhor*. Thurman has not only identified the figures in the two rows but he has described them briefly as well. The top row of the *Jnanadakini Mandala/ Khilkhor* has thirteen figures identified by Thurman as: “13 lamas”, of whom, the “Shakya Pandit is in the center”, while, “the Kagyu lineage from Vajradhara through Gampopa [is] on the left, and a kadam lineage from the translator Ngog [is] on the right.” The *Norbu Gyamtsho Mandala/ khilkhor* does not trace any lineage, predecessors or history, at least not on the physical painting itself. The figures on the bottom row of the *Jnanadakini Mandala/ Khilkhor* are even more interesting, in the sense that, there are ‘two niches on the left’ which “have the donor with a Nepali style red hat but a Tibetan style robe – making offerings.” This figure of the donor dressed in both Nepali as well as Tibetan attire is another feature that adds to the stylistic charm of this *mandala/ khilkhor*. The other five niches contain the “wealth deities and protectors”, while the six other niches contain the “fierce guardian *dakinis*”. 

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It also needs to be pointed out that since the Jnanadakini Mandala/ Khilkhor is dedicated to the worship of a dakini/ female celestial being/ khandoma even the guardian deities as well as the gate-keepers are all dakinis/ female celestial beings/ khandomas. The dakinis/ female celestial beings/ khandomas in the Norbu Gyamtsho Mandala/ khilkhor are not central to the mandala/ khilkhor itself but form a part of the retinue of Guru Rinpoche/ Guru Padma Sambhava. Then again, by looking at this mandala/ khilkhor we, will at once note the difference in the composition of the mandala/ khilkhor.

The inner circle at the very heart of the Norbu Gyamtsho Mandala/ Khilkhor is surrounded by another circle of 8 lotus petals – 4 large and 4 small. The 4 large petals are to the 4 cardinal points of the compass and the 4 smaller petals are in the direction of the 4 intermediate points. The deities seated at the center of the 4 large petals are as follows: Bharcha Thuten, Rena Thuten, Karma Thuten, and Pema Thuten. At the periphery of these 4 large petals are the respective consorts of the deities named above: Dorjee Phagmo, Rinchen Phagmo, Karma Phagmo and Pema Phagmo. The 4 large and 4 small petals also seat the Guru Tshen Ghey/ Eight Manifestations of Guru Rinpoche/ Guru Padma Sambhava. The Guru Tshen Ghey/ 8 Manifestations of Guru Rinpoche/ Guru Padma Sambhava being: Guru Urgyan Dorje Chang, Guru Nyima Yoezer, Guru Singye Dradok, Guru Lhoden Chusay, Guru Pema Sambhava, Guru Pema Gyalo, Guru Shakya Senge, and Guru Dorje Drolod. Another ring of 16 lotus petals surrounds this inner circle of the Guru Thsen Ghey/ 8 Manifestations of Guru Rinpoche/ Guru Padma Sambhava. These 16 petals of the lotus seat the following deities comprising the Narjing Ghey/ 8 Narjings and the Rinzing Ghey/ 8 Protective Wisdom Deities: Zhachen, Kayen Dayzhi, Pekhar Dharla, Kanyang Therda, Gyachen Dayzhi, Lhasin Degay, Yula Zhi Dha and Thuba Bomday. Then there is another ring of 16 lotus petals that seat the vajra bodhisattvas. The fourth ring consists of 24 lotus petals that seat the 16 Bodhisattvas of the Bhadrakalpa (14 Aeons), 4 dakinis/ celestial beings/ khandomas and 4 pows/ heroes along with their respective retinues.
In contrast is the Jnanadakini Mandala/ Khilkhor with another very unique style. There are four large circles in the four intermediate corners of this mandala drawing/ khilkhor.

Let us look at these circles one by one, moving in a clock-wise direction. The large circle in the south-east corner/ Lhoro - Shar of the Janandakini Mandala/ khilkhor contains a blue coloured dakini/ female celestial being/ khandoma and two blue coloured attendant dakinis/ female celestial beings/ khandomas as well. The first of the two smaller circles to the right of this large circle is seated a solitary monk. In the second of the two smaller circles are seated two monks. One of the two smaller circles to the left of this larger circle contains, two monks while the other circle contains a solitary dakini/ female celestial being/ khandoma. Then the larger circle in the south-eastern comer of the mandala/ khilkhor too has a dakini/ female celestial being/ khandoma with two attendant dakinis/ female celestial beings/ khandomas.

But this time, the dakini/ female celestial beings/ khandomas and her attendants are red in colour. The small circle that is furtherest to the right of the large circle contains one blue coloured dakini/ female celestial being/ khandoma whereas the other circle contains two dakinis/ female celestial beings/ khandomas, one red and one blue. The two smaller circles on the left contain two dakinis/ female celestial beings/ khandomas, one red and one white while the circle furthest away from the large circle in the middle contains one white dakini/ female celestial being/ khandoma. Similarly the large circle in the north-west corner of the Jnanadakini Mandala/ khilkhor too contains a red coloured dakini/ female celestial being/ khandoma with two red coloured attendant dakinis/ female celestial beings/ khandomas each. The two smaller circles on the right of the larger circle at the north-west corner contains one blue coloured dakini/ female celestial being/ khandoma and two blue coloured dakinis/ female celestial beings/ khandomas respectively, while the two smaller circles to the left of the main circle contain two white dakinis/ female celestial beings/ khandomas and one white dakini/ female celestial being/ khandoma. The large circle in the north-east corner of the Jnanadakini Mandala/ khilkhor contains, a red coloured central dakini female celestial being/ khandoma along with two attendant dakinis/ female celestial beings/ khandomas, one blue and the other yellow. To the right of this large circle are two smaller circles.
containing respectively, two monks/ lamas in one circle nd a red dakini/ female celestial being/ khandoma in the other. While the two smaller circles to the left of the large circle contains contain two lamas/ monks and a single monk respectively.

The distinction that Thurman has made in his observations is that there are four large circles in the corners containing “four dakinis, each with two attendants; each circle [also] has four smaller circles, with lamas in the upper corners and dakinis in the lower corners” (Thurman, 1997, p. 94). However, from the description that the scholar has generated by looking at the picture of the mandala/ khilkhor there appears to be a slight deviation from Thurman’s observations. Apart from these differences in stylistic composition, it may also be noted that unlike in the Norbu Gyamtsho Mandala/ khilkhor that is understudy in this research, this Jnanadakini Mandala/ khilkhor has another interesting aspect. The central figure/ deity is a dakini/ female celestial being/ khandoma so it is but natural that her retinue as well as the guardian deities and the 4 gate - keepers are other dakinis/ female celestial beings/ khandomas. In the center of the mandala palace/ khilkhor is a blue coloured dakini/ female celestial being/ khandoma, she is flanked by eight other dakinis/ female celestial beings/ khandomas. She (the central dakini) is seated in the vajra asana/ cross-legged posture, and has six arms and is probably three faced (the mandala/ khilkhor not being too distinct, one is unable to decide but, it appears so). In her hands she holds several ritual objects such as a bowl made of human skull and probably filled with blood, in one of her left hands, a trident in one of her right hands, a ritual sword in one of the left hands while one left hand is placed on her hip. Similarly, one right hand is placed on the hip and the other right hand holds what appears to be a ritual dagger/ phurba. The eight goddesses around her are placed once again, in the four points of the compass and in the four intermediate points. Whereas, in the case of the Norbu Gyamtsho Mandala/ Khilkhor, the dakinis/ celestial beings/ khandomas form a part of Guru Rinpoche/ Guru Padma Sambhava’s retinue and not the main deities/ central figures of the mandala/ khilkhor.

Going back to the Jnanadakini Mandala/ Khilkhor, to the East/ Shar is a goddess in red probably holding a trident in her right hand and she is also adorned with a tiara made
probably of severed heads. Another goddess, once again red in colour occupies the South - East/ Shar- Lhoro position. While the South/ Lhoro seat is occupied by a goddess who is yellow in colour, and who holds a trident in her right hand. A yellow coloured goddess occupies the South- West/ Lhoro- Nub seat, while the West/ Nub seat contains a white goddess. The North-West/ Jhangto- Nub position seats a blue coloured goddess, and the North/ Jhangto seat has a blue goddess in it. A blue coloured goddess occupies the North- East/ Jhangto- Shar seat. This central retinue is enclosed within a circle of 28 blue vajras/ dorjees/ diamond scepters. A circle of flames/ mei-rin follows this inner circle of vajras/ dorjees/ diamond scepters. This circle of flames contains 16 sections of flames in alternate colours. The colour scheme that is used in the Jnanadakini Mandala/ Khilkhor is as follows: red, green, white, red, blue, yellow, white, red, blue, green, yellow, white, red, blue, and finally yellow.

The four quadrants are in red, (East/ Shar), yellow, (South/ Lhoro), White (West/ Nub), and Blue (North/ Jhangto). There are four female guardians guarding the four doorways and they are coloured according to the colour of the quadrant they are placed in, for instance, the eastern quadrant that is red in colour, has a red coloured guardian. There are four concentric circles surrounding the Jnanadakini’s Mandala palace/ Khilkhor, and these are as follows: In the case of the Jnanadakini Mandala/ khilkhor, the first outer concentric circle is the Dhuthay Ghey/ 8 Cremation Grounds; the second concentric circle is the Mei- Rin/ Circle of Flames in 32 alternate sections of colours such as white, red, blue, and yellow, etc. The third concentric circle is the Dorjee Rawa/ Circle of Dorjees/ Vajras/ Diamond Sceptres, blue in colour, and 64 in number. This is followed by the Pema ghi Rawal/ circle of lotuses. There are 32 half lotuses in all and are coloured once again very interestingly. Only three colours form the colour scheme of the circle of lotuses- the three colours being red, blue and green and they are alternated with red in the center, meaning that there is a red section, then a blue section, a red section once again and then a green section. This Jnanadakini Mandala/ Khilkhor is largely drawn in reds, blues and dark green. In contrast is the mandala/ khilkhor under study – the Norbu Gyamtsho Mandala/ Khilkhor. The Norbu Gyamtsho Mandala/ Khilkhor has four concentric circles enclosing the mandala palace/ khilkhor. The first/
outermost circle is the Mei-Rin/ Circle of Flames, which has 20 alternate sections of coloured flames, following the colour scheme of blue, red, green and yellow with white highlights. The second concentric circle from the outside is the Dorjee Rawal/ Girdle of dorjees/ vajras/ diamond scepters. Firstly, the dorjees/ vajras/ diamond scepters are painted gold, these dorjees/ vajras/ diamond scepters are five pointed and joined by a golden decorative border. It needs to be pointed out that there are, only 16 vajras/ dorjees/ diamond scepters painted in the Norbu Gyamtso Mandala/ Khilkhor in comparsion to the 64 blue vajras/ dorjees/ diamond scepters of the Jnanadakini Mandala/ Khilkhor. The third circle from the periphery is the Dhuthay Ghey/ 8 Cremation Grounds in the Norbu Gyamtso Mandala/ Khilkhor whereas, in the case of the Jnanadakini Mandala/ Khilkhor it, is the circle of vajras/ dorjees/ diamond sceptres. The last and also the innermost of these 4 outer concentric circles is the Perna ghi Rawal/ Circle of Lotus Petals. Both the mandalas/ khilkhors (the Norbu Gyamtso Mandala/ Khilkhor and the Jnanadakini Mandala/ Khilkhor) have the same number of lotuses/ lotus petals – 32 in all.

Though this study has also tried to look at the Jnanadakini Mandala/ Khilkhor for the sake of comparison, but this comparative study has been made by the scholar on the basis of her own understanding of the structure of a mandala/ khilkhor and that too only at the general level of composition, stylistics and iconography simply by looking at the photo of the Jnanadakini Mandala/ Khilkhor. No detailed research has been done in this mandala/ khilkhor and the differences are being highlighted here for drawing a distinction between one mandala/ khilkhor and another and also for placing the uniqueness, the sanctity and the reverence accorded to the Norbu Gyamtso Mandala/ Khilkhor by the followers of the Nyingmapa school of thought in general and the Peling tradition particularly, in place.

From the detailed analysis and the lengthy discussion and descriptions on the Norbu Gyamtso Mandala/ Khilkhor, it is but obvious that a mandala/ khilkhor is not just a ‘cosmic drawing’, nor is it just an aid to visualisation. It appears rather to be a re-looking and a re-discovering of of one’s self and of one’s place in the larger scheme of
things. In a sense it is a way of life or even thinking that makes one realise, see and accept reality as it is. It is not about trying to achieve a dream like state in a dream world/ shangrila. It is about realising the twin concepts of appearances and disappearances/ emptiness. Moreover, being initiated into the practise of a mandala/ khilkhor is not just about individual liberation or nirvana. Practising and meditating on the mandala/ khilkhor is a mnemonic aid that enables both the creation as well as the generation of extreme compassion/ mahakaruna in the initiate for all other sentient beings who do not appear to be aware of their innate bodhicitta/ buddha nature.
1 Tucci., *The Theory and Practice of the Mandala*, (London: Rider & Company), 1969, p. 23,
2 Ibid., p. 39
3 Ibid., pp. 42-43

"The descriptions of the Guru Tshen Ghey/ Eight Manifestations of Guru Rinpoche/ Guru Padma Sambhava have been taken from [http://www.thab.us/misc/eightmanifestations.htm](http://www.thab.us/misc/eightmanifestations.htm) and from [http://www.thab.us_misc/glossary.htm](http://www.thab.us_misc/glossary.htm)

" The English version of the names of the 8 Gurus have been taken from *Eight Manifestations of Guru Padma Sambhava* by the Venerable Khenchen Palden Sherab Rinpoche, translated to English by the Venerable Khempo Tsewang Dongyal Rinpoche, of the Padma Gochen Monastery, Tennessee, May 1992

4 *The Eight Manifestations of Guru Padma Sambhava, By The Venerable Khenchen Palden Sherab Rinpoche*, translated by the Venerable Khempo Dongyal Rinpoche, Padma Gochen Monastery, Tennessee, May 1992

5 Internet Entry [http://www.simhans.org/eight.html](http://www.simhans.org/eight.html)


7 Ibid.,

8 Wayman, Alex, "The Symbolism of the Mandala Palace", p. 82, in *The Buddhist Tantras, Light On Indo-Tibetan Esotericism*, (new York: Samuel Weiser), 1973


11 Tucci., Ibid., p 58


17 Tucci, Ibid., p. 40

18 Ibid., p. 41


20 Tucci., Ibid.,p. 42

21 Wayman, Alex, *The Symbolism of the Mandala Palace*, Ibid., p. 85

22 Wayman, Alex, Ibid., p. 83

23 Tucci., Ibid., p. 25

24 Tucci., Ibid., pp 49-50

* [http://www.sikkim.nic.in/budd_img.htm](http://www.sikkim.nic.in/budd_img.htm) While the description of the 8 Good Luck signs has been referred to, the position of the goodluck signs on the *Norbu Gyamishe Mandala/ Khikhor* are the scholar’s personal observations.