

## Foreword

Many Bhutanese believe that every inch of Bhutan's landscape was blessed by Guru Rinpoche. Guru Rinpoche is said to have travelled extensively and meditated in all parts of the country, either in person or in divine emanations, so much so that most of Bhutan's natural sites including beautiful valleys, mountains, lakes, springs and rocks are associated with him. The Bhutanese world is imbued with Guru Rinpoche's presence and blessings. Bhutan is said to be the field of Guru Rinpoche's pacifying activities.

To the Bhutanese, Guru Rinpoche is not just 'a precious teacher' and historical figure who brought Buddhism to Bhutan in the 8th century but he is a quintessential divinity. From the first prayers toddlers mumble to the grand state festivals, from fleeting dreams of hermits to formidable public monuments, Guru Rinpoche forms the focus of Bhutanese spirituality and religious culture. Bhutanese pray to him for health, wealth, long life, safety, happy rebirth, success in business, war, exams and virtually in all affairs of life. Above all, he is considered to be the unsurpassed guide to enlightenment for the people of hidden lands such as Bhutan. He is the epitome of Bhutan's religious ideals and can be rightly considered the spiritual father or patron saint of Bhutan.

Bhutanese elders believe that Guru Rinpoche listens to his devotees with his clairvoyant ears, sees their situations with his omniscient eyes and feels their impulses with his compassionate heart. He is believed to miraculously come to those who call him, riding on the rays of the morning sun, particularly on the tenth days of the lunar month. The tenth day of the Monkey month (Treda) is a special occasion when Guru Rinpoche is said to miraculously visit all homes and shrines. This celebration of Guru Rinpoche's sublime visit is called Preu Chod and is one of the oldest festivals of central Bhutan.

Even today, people observe it with the full conviction that Guru Rinpoche is coming and with a fervent sense of faith and giving, as captured by Ashi Kunzang Choden in this thrilling book. The Preu Chod is still a vibrant tradition in her native Tang valley and is an exemplary case of Bhutan's spiritual culture. Guru Rinpoche still looms large in the consciousness of every Yeshe, Dolma, Tashi and Dechen in such pious rural communities but these spiritual acts of faith and celebration are dying elsewhere with the onslaught of globalization and its attendant trappings of materialism, secularism and scientism. Ashi Kunzang Choden brings out in this story the excitement and fervour of people's imagination, devotion and festivity during Preu Chod. In this capacity, this book will not only stimulate young minds to think beyond the ordinary but also help transmit the knowledge and practice of Preu Chod and the worship of Guru Rinpoche to our young children and thereby preserve and promote the inner values of spiritual wellbeing, non-violence, compassion, wisdom and enlightenment, which Guru Rinpoche so completely embodies.