



On Indian Soil

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Summary: Buddhism began on Indian soil, travelled across the Himalayas, and came back. After the monastery in western Tibet was lost, India offered refuge: in 1972, through the Government of India and the State Government of Karnataka, Dzongkar Choede was given land at Gurupura near Hunsur, where mud walls and bamboo thatch became a monastery of more than three hundred monks. The kinship runs deeper than hospitality. All five of the great treatises a monk studies here were composed in India, in Sanskrit, by Indian authors — and when the young monks walk the ruins at Nalanda they are visiting the place their books came from. Indian visitors are especially welcome.

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A Tradition That Came Back

Dzongkar Choede's life in India is part of a relationship between India and Tibet that reaches back many centuries. Buddhism began on Indian soil. Its teachings travelled across the Himalayas, where Tibetan scholars and practitioners studied them, translated them and carried them forward. In monasteries such as Dzongkar Choede, those teachings became part of a living tradition of study, meditation, ritual and community life. Today, in Karnataka, that tradition continues in the country where it began.

What Was Lost

Dzongkar Choede flourished in western Tibet for close to seven centuries, [founded in 1270](/en/about/history) near the royal palace of Khunzong Karpo. After the Chinese occupation of Tibet, religious and cultural institutions came under increasing pressure, and monasteries — long the centres of learning and community life — became targets of repression. The monks were forced to flee in the years around 1959; the monastery itself was razed during the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s. Of a community of roughly six hundred, fewer than five percent survived. They carried with them what could not be destroyed: the texts they had memorised, the rituals they could still perform, and the determination to keep the community alive.

India's Response

India's response changed what happened next. In 1959, India welcomed His Holiness the Dalai Lama and offered refuge to Tibetans crossing the Himalayas. That welcome gave Tibetan communities the chance to rebuild lives and institutions that would otherwise have been lost — not as guests briefly accommodated, but as communities given land, time and the freedom to teach their own children.

Karnataka, and a Place to Begin Again

Karnataka played a particularly important part in that effort. Through the generosity of the Government of India and the State Government of Karnataka, Tibetan settlements were established where families could farm, children could learn and monastic communities could begin again. Dzongkar Choede found a home in the Rabgayling settlement at Gurupura, near Hunsur, in 1972. The first buildings were mud walls and bamboo thatch, serving as living quarters, kitchens and prayer halls at once. From those beginnings the monks rebuilt a place for prayer, learning and the passing of their traditions to a new generation. [More than three hundred monks](/en/about/today) live and study here now. The monastery remains grateful to the Indian people, and to those whose help made this possible.

Indian Books, Studied in India

There is a deeper familiarity here than hospitality alone. The [philosophical curriculum](/

en/seven-pillars/study) a monk follows at Dzongkar Choede — nineteen years of it, sometimes twenty-five — rests on five great treatises, and every one of them was composed in India, in Sanskrit, by Indian authors: [Dharmakīrti](/en/seven-pillars/study/pramana) on logic and valid knowing, Nāgārjuna and [Candrakīrti](/en/seven-pillars/study/madhyamaka) on the Middle Way, [Vasubandhu](/en/seven-pillars/study/abhidharma) on mind and matter, [Guṇaprabha](/en/seven-pillars/study/vinaya) on monastic discipline. These texts were written and debated in the Indian monastic universities, and when our young monks travel on pilgrimage to Bodh Gaya, Rajgir and Sarnath, they also walk through [the ruins at Nalanda](/en/living-monastery/daily-rhythms/04-the-pilgrimage), where monks studied for seven hundred years. They are not visiting a foreign country. They are visiting the place their books came from.

Familiar Questions, Unfamiliar Forms

Hindu and Buddhist traditions have their own teachings, their own practices and real differences of view, which neither tradition has ever pretended away. But they grew within a shared cultural landscape and still hold a great deal in common — a vocabulary of *dharma* and *karma*, of mantra and mandala, and a long habit of rigorous argument about the nature of mind and the causes of suffering. An Indian visitor to Dzongkar Choede will meet much that looks unfamiliar in its Tibetan forms: the chanting, [the masked dances](/en/seven-pillars/rituals/cham-dance), the sand mandalas. Underneath them are questions, and often words, that will feel close to home.

If You Are in the Neighbourhood

Today, Dzongkar Choede is a living monastery, shaped by its Tibetan past and by more than fifty years in India. Prayer, study, debate, [the sacred arts](/en/seven-pillars/rituals) and ordinary community life all have a place here. If you live nearby or are travelling through the Hunsur area, you are especially welcome to visit — to sit in the courtyard during a debate, or simply to see how the day here unfolds. The connection between India and Tibet is part of our history. It remains part of our daily life.

You can [get in touch](/en/contact) before you come, though you do not need to.