

MONASTIC DANCE IN RUMTEK MONASTERY

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Sikkim is inhabited by Bhotia (Bod), Rong (dazong) and the Mon. Besides them the Bengalee, the Marawari, the Bihari and the Nepalese live there. As a result of that the cultural scope of Sikkim throws a multi-coloured view and speaks about the sumtotal of a community both physical and mental. The performing art is dance, music, song, visual art and architecture that show the external aspects of mind of a people belonging to a particular locality. So the communicative culture may be either uni-ethnic or multi-ethnic according to the people residing in a particular place.

As regard the people(s) of Sikkim they hold a legacy of many hundred year grown and nurtured in the lap of the mount Kanchanjangha. Kanchanjangha is regarded as the guardian deity of the land. Tista and Rangit make Sikkim the land of rice that is dazong (bra dzons). It suggests that the Sikkimese culture stands on economic prosperity since the olden days.

The location of Sikkim is strategically important to connect Tibet, presently Tibet Autonomous Region (That is TAR) of China on the North and Bengal on the South and Nathula and Jelep mountain passes to south Tibet (Lhoka).

According to the tradition popular in Sikkim, Padmasambhava is said to have stepped in Sikkim. That makes the land purified. The Bhutias (Bod pa) then feel Sikkim as a holy land blessed by Kanchanjangha. Similarly the Rong pa, the Lepcha find Sikkim as a seat of their sacred deity.

The Mon is said to be the ancient people of Sikkim. The word Mon literally means in Tibetan persons belonging to the slope downwards a mountain. In course of time they have changed their segregated life in secluded places and have developed a culture, cohesion and harmony with the others inhabitants of Sikkim as da zong pa or Sikkimese.

J. Claude white in his book 'Sikkim and Bhutan' points out the Sikkim was inhabited by the Lepcha or Rong and a few Mon people who mostly remain in the vicinity of woods. The Lepchas have a distinct culture from that of the Bhotia who migrated to Sikkim in 17th century (?) and established a kingdom. Thus Sikkim culture is multi-ethnic. As regards the Lepchas, their original home is still undetermined. Fr. Hermann has discussed about their present life in Sikkim with their traditional style which is distinct from that of the Bhutia in Sikkim and dug pa and were in the upper course of Brahamaputra river approaching to the Arakan hills in Burma. It requires further probing though ethnic assimilation already occurred in many cases.

The Lepchas are few in number amounting not more than 22,391 in many clans. As they prefer a quiet life in contrast to that of the other inhabitants in Sikkim, the cluster of Lepcha community is a bit away from the cities. The agriculture based Lepcha community however avails the privilege of the present day economy with profession like government service and white colour-jobs. Lepcha business men are not many in number. In the present context the Lepchas generally profess Buddhism. It may not be always akin to the rituals observed by the Bhutias belonging to the Tantrik sects like Nyimapa, Karmapa, Dug pa ka gu etc. The Ge lu pa Lepcha Buddhists are scarce.

As regards the performing arts of the Buddhist the Lepcha monks though meagre in

number take part in the occasional monastic dances. In the social performances, the Lepcha women take part along with the Bhotias. The present study is concerned with the monastic dances only.

RUMTEK MONASTERY

The Rumtek Monastery is an off shoot of the Karmapa sect which originated by the 12th century A.D.

Buddhism entered in Tibet in the 7th century A.D. It was enthusiastically accepted by the inhabitants of Yar lung valley and subsequently spread all over Tibet. In the 12th century the Buddhist fold of Tibet was carried Mongolia and Chinese Court when Kublaikhan was on the throne of the Yuan dynasty (1206 A.D.) in China. Buddhism therefore got a new dimension and that tended to develop various interpretations of the saying of Buddha. As a result of that various sects grew in Tibet and the Karma lineage originated. (the 1st Karmapa teacher the 12th century A.D.). Among them the Karmapa Baksi or Paksi became an eminent personality to formulate the distinct monastic order in an and outside Tibet. Karmapa use black hat to signify their identity and claim their lien with the Nagarjuna (pada) (probably 8th century A.D.) tradition of India. Black hat suggests the mystic rituals in the high esoteric sphere. In contrast, Nimapa monks prefer red hat and Gelupa yellow hat. Here distinction of colour is symbolic and related to their respective mode of practice towards spiritual attainment. In Sikkim Nyingmapa also became popular and the Pemayangtse Monastery was established. Tasiding and Phensang are the other two important monasteries.

The first Karmapa was honoured with the designation of Baksi or Paksi in Mongolian which means Guru or high priest. The successor of Karmapa Baksi was Karma Rang byung rdo rje who was invited to Peking by the emperor Temur Taokwan. The fourth Karmapa Rol pahi rdo rje was a friend of the last king of the Mongal dynasty. The fifth Karmapa De- bshin gdegs-Pa was invited to China during the reign of Ming emperor Yung Lo (duration of Ming dynasty 1368-1628 A.D. but the time of yung Lo was 1403 A.D.). It means that the Karmapa had close relation with the Mongal as well as the Ming ruler in China. In Sikkim Karma Kangupa was established when the first monastery was built at Ralong in 1730 A.D. by Gyurmed Namgyal the 4th Chogyal in Sikkim. The King Chogyal Palden Thondup Namgyal is regarded as an incarnation of Karmakagu Lama. Rumtek and Phodong also belongs to Kagu.

Rumtek Monastery, a seat a Karmapa has been vigorously organised after the advent of the 16th incarnation of the Karmapa hierarch in India by the Sixties of the century from Tshur phu Monastery. Rumtek thus preserves the legacy as one of the Karmapa installation in India with its lien to the Tibetan monastic order.

MONASTIC DANCE

According to the Theravada tradition a Buddhist monk is not supposed to attend or participate in a dance or music (nacca gita vadita bisukha dassana veramoni) in pali tripitaka, while the Buddhist belonging to Tantrik fold especially those belonging to Siddha lineage participate in the performing dance, music and orchestra. These are regarded as mode of esoteric practices. A monastic dance is sacred and mystic in expression with symbolic gesticulation (mudra). In Tibetan it is called "Cham".

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'Champa' literally means mthumpa which corresponds to harmony and concord. Gar 'cham' suggests an agreeing performance in which harmony and concord prevail. A monastic dance is therefore a psycho-physical management performed to exhibit the agreement between the mundane and the super-mundane harmony. In the Buddhist esoteric practice, there are six worlds of animate beings in the wide universe in which stars and constellations are innumerable. Above that there are several spheres of light of different colours as the Tantrik texts like Guhyasamaja Tantra, or Tathagataguhyuka and the Laghu-Kalachakra Tantra are mentioned. The Khro 'Cham suggests dance with frightful mask and is symbolic in contrast to mdzes 'cham or Lha 'Cham' divine dance with mask. The nature manifests in a sober, grand and handsome forms as well as it appears dreadful, fright and cruel. A monastic dance shows both the aspects of the nature with symbolic exhibition.

A PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

In course of personal visit to Rumtek there had been an occasion to witness an excellent performance of 'Cham dance' by the monks of Rumtek a few years back. It was probably a day of holy observance by the end of October when the monks were out to express their esoteric confinement. The performance was in day time which appeared to me to be novel. It reminded me of the olden days of our country when the dramatic presentation happened to be performed in the daytime. The inner significance of such occurrence is to appreciate true harmony between the nature and the human beings.

There has been a leader of the dance who is 'champ pon'. A 'cham pon' is not only efficient in performing artistic celibacy but also is elevate in esoteric field. 'Cham' or monastic dance may be distinguished from the 'Lha mo' dance of the house holders. Usually 'Cham' is an exposition of esoteric silence through symbolic gesticulation, whereas Lha mo dance is performed with music.

In the orchestra or harmonious music 'Rol mo', the sound or 'Rol moi da' also differs in respect to 'cham' and that in Lha mo dance.

As regards the rol moi da (rol mo sgra) there are different kinds of musical notes such as:

- i. Sgra cha phra ba ka-ka li (Ka ka li)
- ii. mi gsal snan pa dhana (dhana)
- iii. sin tu tho ba to ra`i (tara)
- iv. sa ma dha ni cha lan gcig (samadhvani)
- v. fe (g) dan pi Lban (?) wan ba lla gi (vallaki) and six instruments are :-
- i. can tehu (the damaru)
- ii. ma-du
- iii. sil-khrol
- iv. dandi rna (drum)
- v. bal ma (Nepales drum)
- vi. mkhar ma (kettle drum, fort drum)

It is evident that the above names suggest a high order in implementation of music and musical notes which had been probably originated out of Indian musical tradition. Padma Sambhava is said to have the innovator of the monastic dance in the Samye (bsam yas) monastery as esoteric rituals in the 8th century A.D.

It is to add that the monastic music and dance developed in the Trans-Himalayan Tibetan plateau with the assimilation of the trends belonging to the music of the neighbouring countries like China, Mongolia, and those of the Gurpa and Dog pa. It may require a separate study on which Nebesky has already focused some light.

In this connection about eighteen musical instruments are accompanied to make the music harmonious (sgro mthun po) these are :

- i. gar mkhar
- ii. bro
- iii. ma bo cha
- iv. rdza rna
- v. ma phran
- vi. rdza rna chen mo
- vii. mkhar rna
- viii. Pi wan rgyud gcig pa
- ix. rdza rna kha gcig pa
- x. Lcags kyi sil khrol
- xi. Khar bai sil drol
- xii. Pi wan rgyud sum pa
- xiii. ma mu kun da
- xiv. sil snan Lu chan sa tun pa
- xv. fag do pa.
- xvi. rol moi dra
- xvii. Pi wan
- xviii. Ling bu

The supra-mundane spiritual perspective of 'cham is always presented by the gaits, movements, careful stepping and gesticulation with awareness.. In every minute action of a 'cham pou or dancer, the awareness of movement is primary and esoteric. The circumambulation on the stage (gar 'cham sa') is also symbolic with reference to right over and reverse order (anuloma and pratiloma). The spiritual upgradation is presented through careful stepping and directed circumambulation as mentioned in the 'cham yig', the book of dance. In this respect each monastery has developed its own tradition and that is important in the growth of the culture.

RESUME

Keeping in view the limited time in presenting the paper, here it is sum up that the monastic dance presented in the Rumtek monastery preserves the heritage of the ancient performing art which had a composite culture complex in unifying India, Tibet, China and Mongolia.