

FOLK SONGS AND DANCES OF SIKKIM

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We cannot but accept Washington Erving's view that the beauty inherent in the folk songs and dances have a great aesthetic value. It was his strong belief that in order to study and know the people of a certain region, it is always better to know about their songs and dances and other forms of their entertainments. Perhaps because when an individual is involved in an aesthetic performance, his mind is cleared of all inhibitions which is a free act by itself.

Folk songs have been defined by different people at different times. The international folk songs council 1954, strove to interpret it as an oral tradition which passes from one generation to another. The reason that the folk traditions still survive are many, viz.:

- (i) Folk traditions bridge the gulf between past and present.
- (ii) varied cultural traditions resulting from cultural interaction between people of a community.
- (iii) society striving to retain folk songs and determining in what ways it should be preserved.

Like folk songs, folk dances are varied and belong to an inherent tradition of the people. The reasons for preservation of folk dances are many such as (i) folk dances have emerged as a result of sustained practice by a community (ii) folk dances that passed from one generation to another adopted their style to the changing time and inculcated new movements. In India, folk dances may be broadly classified into two groups: folk dance performed by the men, and performed by the women. However, this is not applicable in the northern states of India and such states like Madhya Pradesh and Bihar. The folk dances of such places may be classified in three categories, viz: (i) dances reflecting bravery (ii) dances related to different socio-religious festivals and (iii) ritual dances.

Folk songs and folk dances occupy a prominent place in the culture of Sikkim. Men and womenfolk fully participate in dances to mark such important occasions like birth, weddings, rituals or any other festivals. For those belonging to the peasant & labour class the melodious folk songs and dances are indeed life giving ambrosia whose lifting tones & rhythmic pattern wipes away their fatigue, hunger & worries.

In order to analyse folk songs and dances, it is better to analyse some folk songs and dances from neighbouring states of Sikkim. In West Bengal, the dances such as "Stuti", "Arva", "Baya" and "Kalkader" are performed according to the rules of the ritual books. Humorous, witty dance forms from this state are "Kudiram's headache", "collection of berries", "burning tobacco". "Bhajo dance" is performed to invoke the God Indra. Another dance is called "Mandal Puja". The important dance of West Bengal is the "Kirtan Nritya". This dance is performed in honour of Lord Vishnu. However, the present dance form evolved from efforts made by the great saint, Chaitannya Mahaprabhu.

The "Namgkrim dance" of Meghalaya is very famous. The "Khukri dance" from Assam is very vibrant. The "Sola dance" of Madhya Pradesh is also very important. The Santha dance from Bihar and Orissa are also very popular. It is a pleasure to watch the dance of Santhals "Collection of Indigo". Gujarat is famous for the "Garbha dance". This dance is performed by

both men and women and is related to Krishna Lila.

The South India folk dances are replete with spiritual connotations. The nomads perform a pot dance “Kudekutta” is very popular. Tradition has it that this dance was performed after Lord Krishna defeated Banasur or demon. Another dance called “yekkun Nityum” or devil dance is also performed in South India. This dance is performed by men with the intention to drive away evil spirits. This dance is specially performed when somebody falls ill. The dance is akin to the dance performed by the Jhakris of Sikkimese Nepali community.

“Nautanki” and “Ras Nritya” are popular dance forms of Uttar Pradesh. These dances depict the life of Lord Krishna and Radha. Usually in “Nautanki” dance boys dress up like girls, the boys sing on the stage accompanied by drum beats, and at intervals, other join them in chorus. In Sikkim, too, “Maruni dance” boys dress up like girls.

Another popular dance form among the village women of Uttar Pradesh is known as “Bhat Nritya”. This is done in order to appease the powers which drive away contagious diseases. Before any occasion, the women of this state perform “Shitala Puja”. After that they sing songs and dance to its rhythm. Holi or the festival of colours is also the harvesting time so the people are full of joy and gaiety. On this occasion, the men and women make a group and dance together emphasizing the happy note.

LEPCHA FOLK DANCE “CHU-FAAT”

This age old folk dance of Lepchas is performed in honour of the Mt. Kanchenjunga and its four associate peaks Mt. Kabru, Mt. Pandim, Mt. Simbrum and Mt. Narsing. These five snowy peaks are believed to be the repository of five hidden treasures such as salt, medicine, minerals, sacred scriptures and foodgrains.

Carrying butter lamps and green bamboo leaves, the dancers perform this ritual dance “Chu-Faat” with the devotional song:

Tzera-Chu Ve Pum Rum Pong|
Tzer-Kong Chen Zu Rum Pong Ho Yo-Yo||

Mum Hait Lok

It is ritual Lepcha folk dance performed by both men and women to the accompaniment of devotional hymns. The Lepchas believe that the evil spirits are the cause of fatal diseases and only the “Mum” or the Shaman Priest can control the evil forces by dint of his spiritual powers. This dance depicts the Mun performing the age old ritual dance.

Ha-Ho-Ho-ha-Ho-HO|
Ho Sak Mu dok ho som mu dok||

Mon-Dryak-Lok

It is Lepcha hunting dance. The Lepchas are skilled hunters. They never kill wild animals and birds for pleasure, but their approach towards hunting animals for food is highly

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ritualistic and hunt what is required.

The dance depicts the hunting style carrying bows and arrows as their weapons. When any animal is killed, the hunter cut certain portion of the flesh and offer it to the Pong Rum "Forest Deity" of hunting. They believe that such an act will meet with great success in hunting. After this, the remaining carcass taken home and distributed among members of the family and friends.

Owai Owai Owai|

Mun dyak ka no o chang gyam ka ka||

Tendong Faat

It is a famous Lepcha folk lore which is often narrated to the new generation in the form of lyrical poems. This folk lore corresponds to the divine occurrences as described in the Matsya Puran and in Bible as the great flood.

Folklore of Tendong Faat runs like this.

Long long ago, the mighty Tista and Rangit River became unusually turbulent and their volume increased to such an extent that everything all around, here drowned. Immense panic was unleashed everywhere when men, women, children and animals were swept away by the powerful waves of the two river. Steady water level kept rising and small hills soon vanished form sight.

Seeing this, the Lepcha of the "Tendong Hill" in South Sikkim began offering prayers to the God. Trough a sacred religious ceremony they requested the Almighty to save them from disaster.

As a reply to their prayer, the folklore says that God came as a "Kohomfo" bird and sprinkled sacred millet beer in the raging water, which did the miracle. Within no time, the flooding water receded back and was fully pacified.

Among the other Lepcha folk dances, we may consider the name of ZO MAL LOK, DHARMRA JO-LOK and TANKISA ALOK.

BHUTIA FOLK DANCE "CHI-RIMU"

Chi-Rimu is popular Bhutia folk dance. It is performed in praise of Sikkim - a land of eternal beauty which has been blessed with peace and happiness by great saints and lamas. The Sikkimese are happy, prosperous and peace loving people. Therefore, they always find occasions for get-together to sing and dance in praise of Sikkim which is not only endowed with natural beauty but also with spiritual contentment. This dance is a regular feature at every happy occasion when young and old folks alike participate in it. Through this song-cum-dance, Bhutias express their reverence to great teachers and sacred places by whose grace Sikkim has become a happy land and welcome everybody to join them.

Dhi-Rimu yale pe-ne zangpo dila ru|

Kungsang thido gnemla shap jela phe|

khidu linzi gnonala sing shap jela phe||

GNUNGMALA-GNUNGSHEY

This is a typical Bhutia folk dance performed in praise of the multi-purpose majestic bamboos. Since the dawn of civilization when human beings slowly deserted the caves and started building houses, man used bamboos extensively for countless purposes.

As such, Bhutias being skilled craftsmen, have also utilised bamboo in great many things. This dance and accompanying song describe the use of bamboo.

Gnungmala gnungshey lela pa|
Demula Zongki gnunglama 2||

TASHI ZALDHA

It is a dance depicting the Sikkimese Bhutia custom of offering scarves on auspicious occasions. The white scarf is symbol of purity, peace, good luck and prosperity. Carrying snow white scarves in their hands young boys and girls perform the dance.

So-ho-yagi kungson chhosu|
thidula gyatang chage||

YAK DANCE

High among the mountains, man's friend is yak. It is the sole means of transportation besides providing him with milk meat for sustaining himself during the long winter months.

This dance depicts the yak and projects the simple life style of the herdsmen in the mountains.

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Among the other Bhutia dances we may make the mention of Dina-Depay-Nima, Rechungam, Danzong Norling, Ta-La-Si and Singhi.

Sikkimese Nepali Dance - DHAN NACH

This dance is a symbol of good spirit with which the farmers work hand in hand undeterred by relentless rain and scorching heat of the sun, which cause them tremendous discomfort while working in the fields. Yet they never stop their work. To break the monotony of routine field work, men and women find time to break into merry making songs and dances to overcome fatigue. Thus Dhan Nach or paddy dance has become since time immemorial, a ritualistic dance performed by young and old folk alike in their traditional costume, especially it is very popular with the Limboos of this state.

Dhan hai ropun chpoo ra chupoo|
aasari mahinama dajai||

Chabrung

It is limboos traditional musical instrument. This typical musical instrument is like dholak in shape but much bigger in size. The dancer hang the chabrungs around their necks with the help of a string and beat the drum with an open palm on one side and with a stick on

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the other side. This produces two different sound which echos very loudly in valleys and mountains.

In this fashion, groups of limboo youngmen dance executing delicate and complicated footwork on the hypnotic beats of the chabrung. Chabrung is a songless dance which is only the rythmic music. But often young girls join the merry making with the soulful songs which are typically of their own.

Maruni Dance

Maruni is one of the oldest and most popular dance of Sikkimese Nepali community. This dance is always performed by young girls in colourful costumes and rich ornament on the occasion of tyohar or deepwali. Sometime a serious theme can spoil the gay festival moods. Therefore, there is always a man called "DHATU-WARAY" who acts the court jester wearing funny masks, awkward clothes in order to make people especially children laugh.

Tamang Selo or Damphu Dance

Tamang Selo is yet another Sikkimese Nepali folk dance patronised by the 'Tamangs'. This dance is also known as Damphu dance. Damphu is the traditional musical instrument. This dance is performed on occasions like child birth, marriage ceremony, village fares, etc.

Appaki choree maichanglai, yeo maya dina hunchaki|
appako chora changbalai, mayat dina rajee cha, pirathi laun rajee cha||

Among the other Sikkimese Nepali dances, mention may be made of Asare Nritya, Ratauli lok nritya, Majhi nritya, Sangini Nritya, Balan Nritya and Chudki Nritya.