Sikkim is inhabited by the Bhutia (Bed), Rong (dzong) and the Mon. Besides them the Mongol, the Marwaris, 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 Kanchanjanga. Kanchanjanga is regarded as the guardian deity of the land. Tista and Rangit make Sikkim the land of rice that is dzong (bra drainage). 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 Jelepla 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 (Bed pa) then felt Sikkim as a holy land blessed by Kanchanjanga. 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 Bhutia who migrated to Sikkim in 17 th 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 Brahmaputra river approaching to the Arakan hills in Burma. It requires further probing through 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 form 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 gyu etc. The Gc lu pa Lepcha Buddhists are scarce.

As regards the performing arts of the Buddha the Lepcha monks though manifested 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 offshoot of the Karsha 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 Yarlung valley and subsequently spread all over Tibet. In the 12th century, the Buddhist fold of Tibet was carried Mongolia and Chinese Court when Kublai Khan was on the throne of the Yuan dynasty (1206 A.D.) in China. Buddhism therefore got a new dimension and that tempted to develop various interpretations of the saying of Buddha. As a result of that various sects grew in Tibet and the Karsha lineage originated (the 1st Karsha teacher the 12th century, A.D.) Among them the Karsha Gakar or Paksi became an eminent personality to formulate the distinct monastic order in an and outside Tibet. Karsha use black hat to signify their identity and claim their lien with the Nyingmapa (India) probably 8th century A.D. tradition of India. Black hat suggests the mystical rituals in the high esoteric sphere. In contrast, Namapa monks prefer red hat and Gelpa, yellow hat. Here distinction of colour is symbolic and related to their respective mode of practice towards spiritual attainment. In Sikkim Nyagmapa also became popular and the Pema Yangste Monastery was established. Tashiding and Yensung are the other two important monasteries.

The first Karsha was honoured with the designation of Baki or Paksi in Mongolian which meant Guru or high priest. The successor of Karsha Baki was Karsha Zangyang rdroje who was invited to Yoking by the emperor Tuvur Bada. The fourth Karsha Rol pasgrdoje was a friend of the last king of the Mongol dynasty. The fifth Karsha De-bshes gYudzhu Pabje was invited to China during the reign of Ming emperor Yong Lo (duration of Ming dynasty 1368-1628 A.D. but the time of Yong Lo was 1403 A.D.) It means that the Karsha had close relation with the Mongol as well as the Ming rulers in China. In Sikkim Karsha Kangspa was established when the first monastery was built at Staluk in 1730 A.D. by Gyarmi Narjigal the 4th Choigyal in Sikkim. The King Choigyal Palden Thondup Namgyal is regarded as an incarnation of Karsha Kangspa Lhuta. Rumtek and Phodong also belong to Kangspa.

Rumtek Monastery, a seat of Karsha has been vigorously organized after the advent of the 16th incarnation of the Karsha hierarchy in India by the Sixties of the century from Tenchur pukh Monastery. Rumtek thus preserves the legacy as one of the Karsha reinstallation 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 (nacta guo vadda hriukha dessana version) in pali trispata, while the Buddhists belong to Tantrik fold especially those belonging to Siddha lineage participate in the performing dance, music and orchestra. Those are regarded as mode of esoteric practices. A monastic dance is sacred and mystic in expression with symbolic gestures (mudra). In Tibetan it is called “Cham”.
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Champa literally meant mi thumpa 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 performance performed to exhibit the agreement between the mundane and the supramundane harmony. In the Buddhist esoteric practices, there are six worlds of animate beings in the wide universe in which stars and constellations are immutable. Above that there are several spheres of light of different colours as in the Tattvik texts like Ghyasamama Tantra, or Tathagataguhyaika and the Lâchi-Kalashikra Tantra are mentioned. The Khro ‘Cham’ suggests dance with frightful mask and is symbolic in contrast to mde’s ‘cham’ or Lha ‘Chaz’ 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 Rumpo, there had been an occasion to witness an excellent performance of ‘Cham dance’ by the monks of Rumpo 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 daytime 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 cellulogy but also is elevated 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 of harmonious music ‘Rol mo’, the sound or ‘Rol mo da’ also differs in respect to ‘cham’ and that in Lha mo dance.

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

i. Sgra cha phra ba ka-la li (Ka ka li)
ii. Mi gsal snan pa dhana (dhara)
iii. Sin tu tho ba to ra’i (tara)
iv. Sa ma bha ni cha lam gcig (sauradhvani)
v. Fe (g) dan pi Lhan (?) yan ba li gi (vallaka) and six instruments are:
   i. can tehu (the damaru)
   ii. ma-du
   iii. sik-khol
   iv. dandi (drum)
   v. lha ma (Nepaleses drum)
   vi. rikhu 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 Sanye (tsam yas) monasteries as esoteric rituals in the 8th century A.D.
It is to add that the monastic music and dance developed in the Trans-Himalayan Tibet 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 Nebosky 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 mikhars
ii. bro
i. ma bo cha
iv. rdza ra
v. ma phran
vi. rdza ma chen mo
vii. mikhars
viii. Pi yan nyig yud geig pa
ix. rdza ma khua geig pa
x. lhags kyi s threl
xi. khar bai s threl
xii. Pi yan nyig yud sam pa
xiii. rna nu kun da
xiv. sild zan lu chan sa tun pa
xv. rag do pa
xvi. rd ma dra
xvii. Pi yan
xviii. Lhing bu

The lhapo-aumdan spiritual perspective of 'cham is always presented by the gait, movements, careful stepping and gesticulation with awareness. In every minute action of the 'cham pos of dancers, the awareness of movement is primary and esoteric. The circumambulation on the stage (gar 'cham s'e) is also symbolic with reference to right or evil and reverse order (znulden and pratiletes). 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 is 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.