FOLK SONGS AND DANCES OF SIKKIM

- Kripal Singh

We cannot but accept Washington Irving'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, tries 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) Various 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 times andinculcated 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 in 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 women folk 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 tunes & rhythmic patterns wipe away their fatigue, hunger & worries.

In order to analyze 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”, “Arha”, “Baya” and “Kalkader” are performed according to the rules of the ritual books. Humorous, witty dance forms from this state are “Kudram’s headache”, “collection of berries” “burning tobacco”. “Bhugo dance” is performed to invoke the God Indra. Another dance is called “Mandal Puja”. The important dance of West Bengal is the “Kirtan Nykta”. This dance is performed in honour of Lord Vishnu. However, the present dance has evolved from efforts made by the great saint. Chaitanya Mahaprabhu.

The “Nangchlam dance” of Meghalaya is very famous. The “Khatri dance” from Assam is very vibrant. The “Sola dance” of Madhya Pradesh also very important. The Sattriya dance from Bihar and Orissa are also very popular. It is a pleasure to watch the dance of Santals “Collection of Indigo”. Gujarat is famous for the “Garba dance”. This dance is performed by
both men and women are related to Krishna and Radha.

The South India folk dance is replete with spiritual connotations. The norms perform a pot dance named "Kurukkura" very popular. Tradition has it that this dance was performed after Lord Krishna defeated Banaras, the demon. Another dance called "Vikkum Nitravu" 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 Bhaktas of Sikkimese Nalak community.

"Nauanki" and "Nal Nitravu" are popular dance forms of Uttar Pradesh. These dances depict the life of Lord Krishna and Radha. Usually in "Nauanki", 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, "Maami dance" boys dress up like girls.

Another popular dance form among the village women of Uttar Pradesh is known as "Baat Nitravu". This is done in order to appease the powers which drive away contagious diseases. Before any occasion, the women of this state perform "Shasri Puja". After that they sing songs and dance to its rhythm. Holi is the festival of colours and 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"**

The age-old folk dance of Lepcha is performed in honor of the Mt. Kangchendzonga and its four associate peaks: Mt. Kabru, Mt. Pandey, Mt. Sorhuma, and Mt. Narang. These five snowy peaks are believed to be the repository of five hidden treasures such as salt, medicine, minerals, sacred scriptures, and food grains.

Carrying butter lamps and green bamboo leaves, the dancers perform this ritual dance "Cha-Faat" with the devotional song.

**Tecz Chui Pu Run Run Pong**

**Tecz Chong Cha Zu Run Pong He Yo Yol**

**Mum Halt Lok**

It is ritual Lepcha folk dance performed by both men and women to the accompaniment of devotional tunes. 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 Mum performing the age-old ritual dance.

**Haa Ho Ho Ho He Ho Ho**

**Ho Saik Mu doh he som nu doki**

**Mun-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
The dance depicts the hunting style carrying bows and arrows as their weapons. When any animal is killed, the hunter cuts certain portion of the flesh and offer it to the Pung Rong "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.

Oqaya  Oqaya  Oqaya
Mon [bah ka no o chang gyam ka kai]

Tendong Faat

It is a famous Lepcha folklore which is often narrated to the new generation in the form of lyrical poems. This folklore 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. Insane panic was unleashed everywhere when men, women, children and animals were swept away by the powerful waves of the two rivers. Steady water level kept rising and small hills soon vanished from sight.

Seeing this, the Lepcha of the 'Tendong Hill' in South Sikkim began offering prayers to the God. Through 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 "Kohomdo" 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 MALIOK, DHARIMAJOI and TANURSA ALOK.

BHUTIA FOLK DANCE "CHI-RIMO"

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 sams and lamas. The Sikkimeses 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-and-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.

Dha-Rimu wa ne pe-ne zangpo dita raj
Kungang thigd gonpha shap gyea phel
Khudu lori gonomel tang shap gyea phel

106
This is a typical Bhutia folk dance performed in praise of the multi-purpose majestic bamboo. Since the dawn of civilization when human beings slowly deserted the caves and started building houses, man used bamboo extensively for countless purposes. As such, Bhutias being skilled craftsmen, have also utilised bamboo in eat many things. This dance and accompanying song describe the use of bamboo.

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-sagi kunlson chhosu
thidula goyang chagpil

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.

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

Sikkimese Nepali Dance - Dihan 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 on the fields. Yet they never stop their work. To break the monotony of routine fieldwork, men and women find time to break into merry making songs and dances to overcome fatigue. Thus Dihan Nach or paddy dance has become since time immemorial, a realistic dance performed by young and old folk alike in their traditional costumes, especially, it is very popular with the Limboo of this state.

Dihan hai ropun chhoora chupoo
aesari maharma dagai

Chalrung
It is Limboo traditional musical instrument. This typical musica instrument is like dholak in shape but much bigger in size. The dancer hang the chalrungs 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
the other side. This produces two different sound which echoes very loudly in valleys and mountains.

In this fashion, groups of tamboo young men dance executing delicate and complicated footwork on the hypnotic beats of the chastrung. Chastrung is a songless dance which is only the rhythmic music. But often young girls join the merry making with the sorrowful 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 is colourful costumes and rich ornament on the occasion of tsohar of deepsali. Sometime a serious theme can spoil the gay festival mood. Therefore, there is always a man called "DHAUTU-WARAY" who acts the court jester wearing funny masks, awkward clothes in order to make people especially children laugh.

Tamang Selo or Damphu Dance

This dance is also known as Damphu dance. Damphu is the traditional musical instrument. This dance is performed on occasions like birth, marriage ceremony, village fairs, etc.

Appake choroo maachanglai, yeo maa yina dina hunchaki
appako choroo canghalal, maa maa dina rajee cha, pirattu laun rajee cha.

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