

DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

Mark Trewhin: *Rhythms of the Gods: The Musical Symbolics of Power and Authority in the Tibetan Buddhist Kingdom of Ladakh*, City University, London, 1995. 1 Vol, 425 p., 48 illus., 1 map, 4 figs., 8 tables, 15 mus. exx., glossary-index, cassette.

This thesis is a cultural study of music in Ladakh ("Indian Tibet"). Drawing upon interdisciplinary theories in symbolic anthropology and musicology, the study stresses the primacy of symbolic action as a means of defining and controlling social reality, and proceeds to examine the relationship between the activation of musical structures and the social construction of power and authority, in terms of the generation of meaning.

Ladakh music is particularly suited to this kind of study because the instrumental genre of *lha-rnga* (literally "god-drumming") was once closely linked to the structure of Ladakhi society as a feudal monarchy legitimised by Buddhist authority. This music, associated with the personification of deities or the divine aspects of certain mortal beings, constitutes a 'code' which, in the context of public ritual and royal ceremonial, represents and sustains political authority by embodying aspects of the ideal, transcendental order. Building upon Sherry Ortner's concept of cultural schemata, it is shown how music provides the key to 'naturalising' or 'grounding' these more or less predictable programmes of symbolic action in emotional experience, so that through the patronage of performance, those in authority can manipulate the conduct of their subjects or rivals in expected ways.

In supporting cultural schemata, public musical performance also constitutes a mechanism for dealing with conflict and change, as historically demonstrated by the way in which the later dynastic kings used music to negotiate the perceived Islamic threat from Kashmir and Turkestan. Supported by the analysis of rhythmic structures, in conjunction with historical, organological and iconographic evidence, it is proposed that forms of military and chivalrous music of West Asian origin have been accommodated by the indigenous Buddhist tradition: to

the external Mughal authorities, this represented the incorporation of Ladakh into their political framework, but the Ladakhi monarchs presented this phenomenon as the meaningful incorporation of the symbols of Islamic rule into a theoretically immutable Buddhist cosmological order.

The research is intended, in part, to complement existing work in Indian and Tibetan music, which has hitherto mainly concentrated on liturgical or classical traditions, and which has tended to overlook the role of the 'living', regional traditions in Indo-Tibetan culture. On a theoretical level, the study also aims to further understanding of the dynamics of culture change and continuity, and to develop lines of enquiry aimed at bridging the gap between musicological and anthropological context of explanation.