

COMPREHENSIVE STUDY OF LADAKHI ART,CULTURE AND MUSIC .

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the place of traditional songs in the Tibetan Buddhist culture of the former Himalayan kingdom of Ladakh. I look at how Buddhism and pre-Buddhist religion informed the texts and performance contexts of traditional songs, and how Ladakhi songs represent cultural self-images through associated musical, textual, and visual tropes. Many songs of the past, both from the old royal house and the rural Buddhist populations, reflect the socio-political structure of Ladakhi society. Some songs reflect a pan-Tibetan identity, connecting the former Namgyal dynasty to both the legendary King Gesar and Nyatri Tsangpo, the historical founder of the Tibetan Yarlung dynasty. Nevertheless, a distinct Ladakhi identity is consistently asserted. A number of songs contain texts that evoke a mandala or symbolic representation of the world according to Vajrayana Buddhist iconography, ritual and meditative visualization practices. These mandala descriptions depict the social order of the kingdom, descending from the heavens, to the Buddhist clergy, to the king and nobles, to the common folk. As the region has become more integrated into modern India, Ladakhi music has moved into modern media space, being variously portrayed through scholarly works, concerts, mass media, and the internet. An examination of contemporary representations of “tradition” and ethnic identity in traditional music shows how Ladakhis from various walks of life view the music and song texts, both as producers and consumers.

Situated as it was on the caravan routes between India, Tibet, China, and Central Asia, Ladakhi culture developed distinctive hybrid characteristics, including in its musical styles. Analysis of the performance practices, musical structures, form, and textual content of songs clearly indicates a fusion of characteristics of Middle Eastern, Balti, Central Asian, and Tibetan origin. Looking at songs associated with the Namgyal dynasty court, I have found them to be part of a continuum of Tibetan high literary culture, combined with complex instrumental music practices. As such, I make the argument that these genres should be considered to be art music.

Geographical Introduction

Ladakh is a land abounding in awesome physical features, set in an enormous and spectacular environment. Bounded by two of the world’s mightiest mountain ranges, the Karakoram in the north and the Great Himalaya in the south, it is traversed by two other parallel chains, the Ladakh Range and the Zaskar Range.

In geological terms, this is a young land, formed a few million years ago. Its basic contours, uplifted by tectonic movements, have been modified over the millennia by the process of erosion due to wind and water, sculpted into the form that we see today.

Today a high-altitude desert, sheltered from the rain-bearing clouds of the Indian monsoon by the barrier of the Great Himalaya, Ladakh was once covered by an extensive lake system, the vestiges of which still

exist on its south-east 3494ymboli of Rupshu and Chushul, in the drainage basins or lakes of Tso-moriri, Tso-kar and Pangong-tso. But the main source of water is winter snowfall.

Dras, Zaskar and the Suru Valley on the Himalaya's northern flanks receive heavy snow in winter, this feeds the glaciers from which melt water, carried down by streams, irrigates the fields in summer. For the rest of the region, the snow on the peaks is virtually the only source of water. As the crops grow, the villagers pray not for rain, but for sun to melt the glaciers and liberate their water.

Ladakh lies at altitudes ranging from about 9,000 ft (2,750 m) at Kargil to 25,170 ft (7,672m) at Saser Kangri, in the Karakoram Range. Summer temperatures rarely exceed 27C in the shade, while in winter they may at times plummet to minus 20C even in Leh. Surprisingly though, the thin air makes the heat of the sun even more intense than at lower altitudes. It is said that only in Ladakh can a man sitting in the sun with his feet in the shade suffer from sunstroke and frostbite at the same time!

Ladakh – Lifestyle & Culture:-

People & Lifestyle

Like the land itself, the people of Ladakh are generally quite different from those of the rest of India. The faces and physique of the Ladakhis, and the clothes they wear, are more akin to those of Tibet and Central Asia than of India. The original population may have been Dards, an Indo-Aryan race down from the Indus and the Gilgit area.

But immigration from Tibet, perhaps a millennium or so ago, largely overwhelmed the culture of the Dards and obliterated their racial characteristics. In eastern and central Ladakh, today's population seems to be mostly of Tibetan origin. Further west, in and around Kargil, the people's appearance suggests a mixed origin.

The exception to this symbolizing is the Arghons, a community of Muslims in Leh, originated as a result of marriages between local women and Kashmiri or Central Asian merchants. They exhibit a marked dominance of the Indo-Aryan trait in their physique and appearance, though culturally they are not different from the rest of the Ladakhis.

Food of ladakh

Leh and Ladakh feature on the travel bucket list of people around the globe. With its snow-capped peaks and sprawling landscape, Ladakh has been an object of awe for years infinite. The local customs, traditions and rituals of Leh and Ladakh are greatly influenced from the Tibetan culture, making it distinct from the rest of the nation. Another major entity that makes Ladakh different from the rest is the

local cuisine. The Ladakhi cuisine has some hidden gems, which need your attention right now. Some of them being:

Thukpa

This lip-smacking delicacy mainly contains pieces of flour or noodles, in a soup which mostly contains vegetables, but may sometime also have pieces of chicken added to it. This piping hot soup is eaten by our Ladakhi folks mainly to cut out the extremely cold temperatures experienced in Leh and Ladakh.

Chang

This indigenous brew of Ladakh, is prepared by fermenting miller with yeast in a cylindrical porcelain pot. The preparation is topped with warm water, till the miller loses its strength. The liquid thus obtained is called Chang.

Butter Tea

This signature tea of Ladakh is mainly prepared by adding and stirring butter and salt to boiling milk.

Skyu

A traditional dish of Ladakh, this food preparation is made of kneaded thumb sized wheat flour dough. Cooked mainly with water, it is served with meat or vegetables.

Khambir

The traditional bread of Ladakh is known as Khambir. Shaped like a pan, this bread is served mostly with the traditional butter tea.

Ladakh Culture

The people of Ladakh, by and large, exhibit a natural joie-de-vivre, which is given free rein by the region's ancient traditions.

Socio-religious festivals, including the annual festivals held in the monasteries, provide the excuse for convivial gatherings. Archery is a pastime for all in summer. Among the Buddhists this sport often takes the form of open-air parties accompanied by dance and song. The game of Polo is yet another proud element of the popular culture.

Archery and Polo

Archery is an ancestral sport of Ladakh, which is part of the culture. In Leh and its surrounding villages, archery festivals are held during the summer months, with a lot of fun and fanfare. They are competitive events, to which all the surrounding villages send their teams.

The sport itself is conducted with strict etiquette, to the accompaniment of the music of surna and daman (oboe and drum). As important as the sport itself are the interludes of dancing and other entertainment. Chang, the local barley beer, flows freely, but there is rarely any rowdiness. The crowds attend in their Sunday best, the men invariably in traditional dress and the women wearing their brightest brocade mantles and their heaviest jewellery. Archery may be the pretext for the gathering, but partying is the thing. In Kargil area, on the other hand, the archery competitions are more serious and bereft of the dancing and music, and these are held in early spring, at the time of the thawing of the winter snow and frost.

Polo, the other traditional sport of Ladakh is indigenous to the western Himalayas, especially to Baltistan and Gilgit. It was probably introduced into Ladakh in the mid-17th century by King Singge Namgyal, whose mother was a Balti princess. The game played here differs in many respects from the international game, which is adapted from what British 3496ymbolizi saw in the western Himalayas and Manipur in the 19th century. Each team consists of six players, and the game lasts for an hour with a ten-minute break. Altitude notwithstanding, the hardy local ponies – the best of which come from Zanskar – scarcely seem to suffer, though play can be fast and furious. Each goal is greeted by a burst of music from surna and daman, and the players often show extraordinary skill. Unlike the international game, polo in Ladakh is not exclusively for the rich.

Traditionally, almost every major village had its polo-ground, and even today it is played with verve in many places besides Leh, especially in Dras and Chushot near Leh. In Leh town itself, it has been partly 3496ymbolizing3496lized with regular tournaments and occasional exhibition matches being played on the polo-ground. The local crowd takes a keen interest, especially in those matches in which a civilian team takes on that of the army. Altogether, polo adds a unique kind of colour and excitement to the summer in Leh.

Arts and Crafts

The tradition of artistic craftsmanship in Ladakh is not as well developed as in neighbouring Kashmir, and most of the luxury articles are obtained through imports.

The exception is the village of Chiling, about 19 km up the Zanskar River from Nimo, where a community of metal workers carry on their ancestral profession, working with silver, brass and copper. These are said to be the descendants of artisans brought from Nepal during the mid-17th century to build one of the gigantic Buddha – images at Shey. They produce exquisite items for domestic and religious use, such as tea and chang pots, teacup-stands and lids, hookah-bases, ladles, bowls and occasionally, silver chortens for temples and domestic shrines.

Items of everyday use such as cooking pots and bowls, as well as agricultural implements are supplied by local blacksmiths (gara). They also make the large and ornate iron stoves seen in kitchens of the Ladakhi

homes. Craftsmanship in general has not developed beyond the production of everyday items for domestic use. Pattu, the rough, warm, 3497ymbol material used for clothing is made from locally produced wool, spun by women on drop-spindles, and woven by traditional weavers on portable looms that are set up in the winter sunshine or under the shade of a tree in summer. Baskets, for the transport of any kind of burden, are woven out of willow twigs or a particular variety of grass. Woodwork is confined largely to the production of pillars and carved lintels for the houses and the low carved tables or Chog-tse that are a feature of every Ladakhi living room.

Many such items, including newly introduced varieties, are available in the Government Handicrafts Centre at Leh. There you can find, in addition to traditional objects, a few special items like pure pashmina shawls, rough compared with those produced in Srinagar, and carpets with Tibetan designs. Similar carpets can also be purchased at the Tibetan Refugee Centre, Choglamsar. The Handicrafts Centre also has a department of thanka painting. These icons on cloth are executed in accordance with strict traditional guidelines handed down the generations.

In the same tradition are the mural paintings in the monasteries, where semi-professionals, both monks and laymen, toil to keep the walls decorated with images 3497ymbolizing various aspects of Buddhism. The skill of building religious statues is also not extinct. The gigantic image of Maitreya Buddha was installed in Thiksey Gumpa as recently as the early 1980s.

LADAKHI Music & Dance

Ladakh has a rich heritage of folk dance. The dances are elaborate, colourful, and majestic, with mostly slow and gentle movements matched by the richly adorned peraks (head dress), and music.

Among the folk dances are :

The Jabro Dance of the Changthang people performed during festive occasions. It is an integral part of Losar (Tibetan New Year), and the Jabro songs are sung to the accompaniment of the Damian, a guitar-like instrument, and the flute.

The Tukhstanmo dance of Zanskar and Bakhamul area.

The Spao dance, which is a warrior dance associated with the legendary figure Gesar.

The Loshon Dance performed on the eve of the harvest festival at Shey village.

The Shoudol dance, the only dance that involves backward steps.

The Mentoq Stanmo dance, a flower dance and recitation of songs, of Deskit and Dha Hanu.

The Shon dance, a legacy of the royalty of Ladakh. Originally a dance presented in honour of the kings of Ladakh, now without restriction.

The Koshan dance of Leh, which is preceded by a horse race. One of the most important aspects of Ladakhi culture is the rich oral literature of songs and poems for each occasion.

The religious dance performed by the lamas (monks) is called Chhams and is related to monastic

festivals, where it is performed to the music of the Monastic orchestra. Each monastery has its own orchestra. The dancers wear elaborate masks ranging from the fearsome and grotesque to the pleasing, and fine silk costumes representing various divinities from the Buddhist pantheon. Chhams are not meant for amusement but are spiritual, invoking blessings in order to ward off evil

The music accompanying the Chhams is generally slow and haunting, and the musical instruments involved are the Dungchen (long horn), Gyaling (oboe), Nga (drums), Silnyen/bubjal (cymbals), kangling (shinbone trumpets), dung (conch shells), Damaru (skull drums) and Drilbu (bells). The masked dancers move around very slowly; the vital part of the dance being the mask, not the dance. All dances end with good triumphing over evil. The dances are performed not only to symbolize destruction of evil but as offerings to the monastery deity.

Conclusion

As the region has become more integrated into modern India, Ladakhi music has moved into modern media space, being variously portrayed through scholarly works, concerts, mass media, and the internet. An examination of contemporary representations of "tradition" and ethnic identity in traditional music shows how Ladakhis from various walks of life view the music and song texts, both as producers and consumers.

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The Students' Educational and Cultural Movement of Ladakh (SECMOL) 98. Performance Venues. 99. Prior Research To date there has not been a comprehensive study of Ladakhi folk music, comparable to Bartók and Kodály's studies of Hungarian and Romanian folk music. In recent decades a number of collections have been published in Ladakh and Tibet of varying scope and emphasis: some focusing on the poetry of the song texts, some of songs with musical notation. Both Tibetan and Ladakhi culture face threats: the Tibetan from Chinese domination and cultural hegemony inside Tibet, and from Indian and Western influences in the Tibetan diaspora. Ladakh's culture reflects this cosmopolitanism, intermixing indigenous ideas with all kinds of external elements that reflect on this part of the Himalayan world. We also propose to have workshops, art exhibitions, music performances and film screenings under strict compliance of COVID-19 protocols. Who's Speaking? Guest Speakers. A case study of Ladakhi version of Ling rGyalam Kesar. Before that Disket has an MA in East Asian Studies with specialization in Chinese Studies from Delhi University and an MPhil in Chinese Studies where her discussion focused on A study of protest and uprising in Tibet from 1959 till present, which was published in The Tibet Journal. See more of International Association for Ladakh Studies IALS on Facebook. Log In. or. Create New Account. See more of International Association for Ladakh Studies IALS on Facebook. Log In. Forgotten account? Announced conference is again planned to be a sequent summit gathering art historians, anthropologists, ethnologists, historians and linguists, engineers, biologists, zoologists, photographers, filmmakers, scholars and researchers in related and not related disciplines, all commonly interested in the culture and innumerable aspects of the Himalayas.