

Some Traditional Folk Songs and Dances of Sikkim Himalayas

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Abstract

The several folk culture of Sikkim Himalayas is a unique diverse of ethnic communities. Sikkim is akin to the prosperity and gratitude that of the people of Northeastern state of India and possesses the modest and humble culture. Sikkimese people have dances and songs that are full of life and its importance. The communities of this region is mainly of three groups viz, Bhutia, Lepcha and Nepali having their own dance forms, songs which they used to perform on different occasions like religious festivals, harvest, marriage ceremonies and other sacred functions. There are more than 20 folk songs, dance and musical instruments performed by ethnic communities in different cultural festivals in Sikkim. Though, songs and dances gives a flavor to the life of human being, Tamang Selo, Chyabrun dance, Sangini, Yak Chham, Sili, Zo-Mal-Lok, Dohori etc, has its own charm among communities of Sikkim.

Key Words: Ethnic Communities, Folk song, Lepcha, Sikkim Himalayas and Sangini.

Introduction

The Folk Culture is a unique and has a great significance for the people of Sikkim. It has a rich cultural linkage in different communities of Sikkim. Conservation and promote of Sikkim became rich folk history and tradition. The people of Sikkim have a deep spiritual and supernatural to their land or nature (nature lover).

The Nepalese communities appeared on the Sikkim view much after the Lepchas and Bhutias communities. The large number this community migrated to the region and soon became the dominant community of Sikkim. The Nepalese now constitute more than 80% of the total population. The Nepalese

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are orthodox Hindus with the usual cast system except the community of Sherpas and Tamangs who are Buddhists (Jha, *et al.*, 2016; Sharma and Chettri, 2020).

Lepcha are original inhabitants of Sikkim and it is believed that the existence of this community is much older than the Bhutias and Nepalese who were migrated to the state (Sharma and Sharma, 2016). The earliest Lepcha settlers were believers in the bone faith, before adopting Buddhism or Christianity as their religions. They were based on spirits, which are believed to be good and bad. They worshipped spirits of mountains, rivers and forests which was but natural for a tribe that co-existed so harmoniously with the rich natural surroundings (nature lover).

The Lepcha folklore is full of stories and the population is concentrated in the northern part of the Sikkim. This is the area that includes as a part of something broader the merging of Lachen and Lachung in North Sikkim (Lepcha, 2013).

Bhutias are the people of Tibetan origin who were perhaps migrated to Sikkim from somewhere after the fifteenth century through the state of Sikkim. In North Sikkim, where they are the major inhabitants, they are known as the Lachenpas and Lachungpas. The language spoken by the Bhutias is Sikkimese. The villages of Bhutia are large in comparison of Lepchas. The house of usually in rectangular shape called as “Khin” (Gyamtsso, 2011).

Methodology

The study was based on our Primary and secondary data (published and unpublished literature). Literature was collected from various sources like the libraries of several Universities and Colleges within and outside the state, public libraries, personal collections and through internet. The data was analysed and calculated through the helps of ms-excel and interpretation of different communities and its folk songs, dance and musical instruments.

Folk Songs, Dances and Instruments

In the communities of Sikkim there are several folk songs and dances comprise their own faith. Each tribe or community has its own songs and dances based on religious and social customs. Some of these songs and dances are seasonal and others are sung and danced throughout the year.

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Table 1. List of folk dances and songs of Sikkim in different communities

Sl. No.	Folk dances and songs	Communities
1	Baramasay	Chettri/Bahun (Sharma)
2	Chutka	Chettri/Bahun (Sharma)/Bhujel
3	Chyabrung Dance	Subba
4	Denjong Chha-Lu	Bhutia
5	Deusi and Bhaili	Nepali
6	Dhan Nach	Subba
7	Juwari	Chettri/Bahun (Sharma)
8	<i>Khukuri</i> Dance	Nepali
9	Kinchum-Chu-Bomsa	Lepcha
10	Manger Music	Manger
11	Maruni Dance	Nepali
12	Ratteuli - marriage song	Chettri/Bahun (Sharma)
13	Sangini	Chettri/Bahun (Sharma)
14	Sili Dance	Rai
15	Silok (<i>Sloka</i>)-marriage song	Chettri/Bahun (Sharma)
16	Singhi Dance	Tebetan/ Bhutia
17	Sorathi	Gurung/Manger
18	Tamang Selo	Tamang
19	Yak Dance	Bhutia
20	Zo-mal-lok	Lepcha

Baramasay

Baramasay song for all twelve months is sung throughout the year by the common people of the village during their day to day work i.e. cutting fodder for the animals, tilling the soil and collecting firewood in the forest. The song describes the significance of each month painting the natural scene and feelings of devotion (Gurung and Lama, 2004; Doma and Singh, 2018).

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Chutka

Chutka is associated with Nepali community (Chettri, Bahun and Bhujel) it is a dance enactments begin from *Maghe Sankranti* (Mid-January) to continue to till *Asar Purnima* (Mid-July). This dance are also performed at night which involves a group of boys going to the houses of unmarried girls in the evening, sitting outside their houses and singing the *Chutka* which is laced with love and promises. After the boys sing three or four rhymes, the girl come out from inside the house and the entire neighborhood begins to dance to the beat of the drums (*Takyu*) played by the boys. It is interesting, the girls do not sing. Before leaving the next morning, the boys play for the fest organized by the dancing girl's parents (Gurung and Lama, 2004; Doma and Singh, 2018).

Chyabrung Dance

Chyabrung is a Limboos (Subba) traditional musical instrument. This typical musical instrument is like *dholak* in shape but much bigger in size. The dancer hangs the *Chyabrung* 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 sounds which echo which very loudly in valleys and mountains (Subba, 1999, 2008).

In these fashion groups of limbo youngman dance executing delicate and complicated footwork on the hypnotic beats of the *Chyabrung*. *Chyabrung* is a songless dance which is only the rhythmic music. But often young girls join the merry making with the soulful songs which are typically of their own (Liwang, 1995).

In Sikkim, the Limboo tribe living has their own folk dances to celebrate their life and also to entertain the audience. The performing arts like folk dances of Sikkim, combine all the components of folk culture, viz; folk songs, musical instruments, traditional dresses, customs, rituals, beliefs and make up, thus exists both in time and in space. Limboo communities of Sikkim know the mortal life of man, yet they sing ritual songs (*Mundhums*), dance with their shaman instruments, predict the cause of illness and try to cure illness of their tribe people through trance and worship rituals; and thus drive away the death temporarily (Subba, 2005). Festivals are also held to celebrate the incoming or outgoing seasons. Through some folk dances can be performed at any time of the year or in any occasion, in a creative way according to the

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tradition they are performed on particular occasions or festivals (Subba, 1999, 2008, Limboo and Dubey, 2018).

Denjong Chha-Lu

Bhutia have a rich folk culture. Men and women sing folk songs and perform folk dance. It is one of the popular National songs of an older Sikkim, *Beyul Demojong*- a secreted land endowed not only with natural beauty but also with spiritual contentment. They are devotedly Buddhist and the *Denjong Chha-Lu* highlights the significance of the sacred land (Sikkim).

Deusi and Bhaili

Tihar or Depawali is the five days festival of Nepali communities, on this occasion folk songs such as Deusi and Bhaili used to play to rejoice. In this festival Deusi is sung on the next day after the Bhaili performance, women in the community get together and start singing Tihar songs or Bhaili. Deusi is a group performance where there is a lead performer who introduces the story and the other participants join in the performance with a short refrain which goes: ‘*Deusire Ram*’ on the day calls ‘*hali tihar*’. Just like Bhaili, which is a female folk form, the male performers of Deusi go from door to door in the village and sing and bless the households (Gurung and Lama, 2004; Tiwari, 2013, 2014; Doma and Singh, 2018; Chettri, 2018).

Dhan Nach

Dhan Nach is belongs to Limbu community which means *Dhan-Paddy* and *Nach-Dance*, which is a popular harvesting song and dance folk form among the Limbus but is prevalent among other groups as well among the Nepalese. In this form, after threshing paddy, the young unmarried males and females of the community gather in the evening and by holding hands, dance to the tune of the folk song throughout the night. The song is in a question-and-answer form. One interesting feature of the *Palam* (Dhan Nach) is that within the song itself it is asked whether the girl who is holding the hand of the boy belongs to the same clan. When it is ascertained that they are not from the same clan, they continue dancing, often falling in love with each others (Subba, 2013). If the two dancers happen to be relatives from the same clan, then they say “*Namaste*” to each other and part their way looking for a right partner in the group of dancers (Gurung and Lama, 2004; Doma and Singh, 2018).

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Juwari

The *Juwari* songs are an important part of the traditional culture of Nepali communities. This type of songs is also called 'Dohori'. It is kind of question and answer song among people of the opposite sex. This must have begun since the time when men and women wandered together from one place to another in quest of better living. These types of songs are mainly related to love and romance among men and women (Tiwari, 2013, 2014).

The *Juwari* songs became popular among the folk poets which they sang automatically during their gathering on festival occasions. These songs were sung during agricultural season, marriage and fairs when the boys and girls meet. Some *Juwari* songs are *Assarey*, *Mangsirey*, *Palam* and *Rusia* are sung between men and women who are sung while doing all kinds of work like planting, weeding, thrashing of agricultural crops and harvesting etc. In *Manghay Sankranti*, the common folks of the village gather near the bank of river to offer Pujas. *Juwari* songs competitions are held on such occasion when the village bards or the young men show their skills of creating instant poetry (song) depicting love, laughter and humor. During the paddy dance (*Dhan Naach*) the *Limbu* and *Rais* dance singing the *Juwari* in their own dialect but later it began to be sung in Nepali the common language of all the farmers. During the planting of paddy seedlings, the men and women sing the song *Assarey* to the rhythmic movements of hands and feet (Pradhan, 1997; Tiwari, 2014; Gurung and Lama, 2004).

Khukuri Dance

Khukuri dance performed by the *Gorkhas* flashing *khukuris* to showcase power and pride. This also represents the Nepalese communities better known as the *Gorkhas* in the battle field are known all over the world for their bravery. The *khukuri* is the most handy and suitable weapon in the hand to hand combat in the battle field. It is a religious cum national weapon of the *Gorkhas*, just like *Kirpan* of the Sikhs. This is a traditional of offering puja to this weapon during the *Dasain* and other religious festivals (Pradhan, 1997; Gurung and Lama, 2004).

Kinchum-Chu-Bomsa

It is also a famous dance of Lepcha, which describes the natural beauty of Sikkim or *Ney-Mayel-Lyang* (A heavenly, hidden paradise) called so by the Lepchas. The snow covered mountain peaks, green captivating meadows, enchanting valleys, thick vegetation, rivers and waterfalls, holly lakes and serene

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monasteries sanctify this land. While performing the dance in their colorful traditional attires, the young Lepcha boys and girls shows their attachment with the land.

Manger Music

The Mangers communities are found in the state of Sikkim, Bhutan and in various part of India. It is said that one branch of the Mangers came from the north and other from the south Nepal.

The Mangers are music loving jolly people like the other tribal people of Sikkim. The Manger dance and sing to be rapid rhythmic beating of the *Madal*. The bigger *Madal* is generally played in a slow tempo. *Madal* and *Kahal* (Drum) are favorite musical instruments of Mangers. The favorite dances and the song of the Mangers are *Kawra*, *Ghantu*, *Chutka* and *Sorothi* (Thapa, 1999).

Maruni

Maruni is the most significant dance of Nepali communities and is very popular to each and every Nepali no matter to which caste, creed or tribe one belongs to. The song is sung from the month of August-September i.e. *Bhadaw* (Nepali month) but it is also performed on important festivals like the *Dasein* or *Tihar* (Tiwari, 2013, 2014).

Maruni dance is origin and development of Nepali dramas, one has to go to the ancient tradition, hence an attempt has been made here for a comparison of the ancient hindu dance and the *Maruni* dance of the Nepalese (Gurung and Lama, 2004).

Ratteuli - marriage song

Ratteuli is a similar to the *Juwari* but Ratteuli is not just a genre of songs but a whole new institution integral to a marriage ceremony. After the groom's party leaves for the bride's place, the women of the family, friends and villagers gather for the night for an all women wild party. They assemble on the wedding night at the groom's place and indulge in marry making among themselves. In this song male members are strictly barred from entering the venue of the Ratteuli performance. Women dressed up as man, wear moustaches and obtain break into songs which border on the lewd and the ludicrous (Tiwari, 2013; Gurung and Lama, 2004).

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Sangini

Among the dances and songs of Nepalese, *Sangini* is a simple, beautiful and graceful dance. This dance is performed at the courtyard of the house amid the green sylvan surroundings by the women folk of the village.

Teej and *Tihar* are the holy festivals of Nepali Communities in which the particular type of song ‘*Sangini*’ is performed by the Nepali folk women during these occasions. This is also performed in other occasions for entertainment but not in a scale. The folk women of the village perform *Sangini* at a courtyard of the house or the temples. This song belongs to the high caste of Nepali community among the Sharma and Chettris (Datta 1988). This song form which sung by friends among women hence, *Sangini* (literally friends). *Sangini* is a fluid folk form which incorporates various them self related to a women’s life from her spiritual orientation in the oral text of the *Ramaya* and *Mahabharata*. It also involves in the festival and rites and ritual which are observed round the year, from her emotional health giving way to expressions of happiness and sadness. It is also interrelationship between with her in-laws and folks from her *Maiti* (mother’s side) and so on (Gurung and Lama, 2004; Tiwari, 2014; Doma and Singh, 2018).

Sili Dance

Sili is the main festival of Rai communities which is celebrated twice a year and is distinguished by two names *Ubhauri* (full moon day in the Nepali month of *Vaisakh* i.e April-May) and *Udhauri* (during the full moon day in the Nepali month of *Mangsir* i.e. November-December). The main characteristic of this festival is a ritual dance called *sakewa* dance performed by large groups of *kirats* (Rai communities) wearing their traditional attire. Peoples from all ages dance together in a large circle. There are male and female leaders in each circle known as *Sillimangpa* and *Sillimangma*. The Sili dance is speculate and manifest the different aspects of human life and their relationship with nature (Chettri, 1995; Bain, 2018; Doma and Singh, 2018).

Silok (*Sloka*) - marriage song

Silok is a verbal form in which questions and answers are exchanged between the groom’s and the bride’s party during the marriage ceremony. The *Silok* performance begins once the groom’s party is hosted by the bride’s side with dinner and is allowed to rest for the night. The first part of the *Silok* in the form of a question is thrown to the groom’s side. After the answer is provided, the groom’s party is bombarded with

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tougher questions. The prestige of the groom depends on the correct set of answers provided by his companies (Pradhan, 1997; Tiwari, 2014; Gurung and Lama, 2004).

Singhi Chham (Dance)

Singhi Chham is a popular folk dance of Bhutia community of Sikkim where the dancers perform in a costume of lion which represents the snow lion. In the performance of this dance, there must be two to four snow lions, in which each snow lion consists of two men in a lion costume, which is white in colour with a bluish curls. The dance is companion with a single drummer. It has religious importance and connected with the Himalayas of Sikkim (Kanchenjunga), which is sacred to the people of the region and are believed to be similar to the legendary snow lion (Gurung and Lama, 2004; Doma and Singh, 2018).

Generally, the snow lion is considered to be a lucky mascot in Sikkim. Though there are different perceptions on considering the snow lion as supernatural animal, but still the people do believe that there could be an existence of this animal. The snow clad lion finds its significant place in the traditional dance of Sikkim as every dance reflects the principles and the practices of the place which the *Singhi Chham* justifies the same. The lion of snow and the *Singhi Chham* dance is now very identical with the culture of Sikkim today and is quite a common and mandatory event of everything that reflects this culture (Doma and Singh, 2018).

Sorathi

Sorathi is a devotional oral genre mainly practiced by the Gurungs among the Nepali communities. It is a branch of *Maruni* dance of the Nepalese. Different scholars have different view on the origin of said dance. Some persons doing research on *Maruni* dance and its branches hold the view that *Sorathi* dance is also the creation of the Mangers community. *Sorathi* is known by the different names at different places where the Mangers reside. It is also said that *Sorathi* comes from the word *Srangdi*. It is also known by the name of *Nachya* or *Karang* at some places (Liwang, 1995; Gurung, 1995, 1999).

In *Sorathi* dance all the participants gather at the courtyard of the house of the leader of the dance to adorn the *Maruni* with attires and ornaments required for the purpose. It is being a long dance drama is performed at the request of the head of the family of the village. In this dance the rhythm, songs and dance are closely interlinked. One has to follow certain rules or principles to perform the dance correctly.

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First the song should correctly portray the life of different characters of the dance drama (Gurung, 1995, 1999; Gurung and Lama, 2004)

Tamang Selo

The Tamang songs/dance are known as *Tamang Selo*. These are light songs as well as songs with philosophical thoughts. These songs express the day today joys and sorrows of life. The songs containing traditional faith are generally sung by the *Tamba* which is called *Tambala Wohoi* (grace offer to god). These are also duet songs which are sung between two parties in the form of questions and answers, one party put some riddles which the other party has to reply in time.

The songs related to agricultural seasons that express universal themes of love, union, desire, pain and suffering in simple but hauntingly lyrical and melodious manner and are indeed the treasure of Tamang folklore. Apart from the folk songs described above, which can be placed on a larger category of workmen songs, there is also a form of folk songs among the Tamang community that reflects the pain and suffering of the labourers (Yonzong, 1999; Gurung and Lama, 2004).

Yak Chham (Dance)

Yak dance (*Mask Dance*) is associated with the Bhutia community and a famous dance of Sikkim. It is a Tibetan dance form and similar to the *Singhi* dance. This group dance performs under the command of a herdsman and the dance begins with slow and measured steps to the clash of cymbals and with the sound of trumpets. The folk dance always makes a powerful impact on the audience and gives a certain impression and mostly attracts the children. Although 'Chhams' are being performed in most of all the monasteries of Sikkim but being a attractive dances form, it draws a large audience in the performance of this dance at Pemayangtse, Rumtek and Enchey. The term '*chaam*' implies some religious form of dance. Yak *Chaam* is performed to give a tribute to Yak, an animal human can relies at whom for the survival at high altitudes (Doma and Singh, 2018).

Zo-mal-lok

The famous folk dance of Lepcha community shows normal activities such as sowing, reaping and harvesting of paddy. Though, it can be performs in marriage ceremonies too, in which from old people to young folks can indulge with hand in hand to sing and dance. With the background of pleasant sounds of

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seasonal birds, the graceful movements of male and female dancers become more noticeable (Sing and Chakraborty, 2014; Doma and Singh, 2018).

Table2. Folk Songs, dance and musical instruments of Sikkim in different communities.

Communities	Folk Song	Folk Dance	Musical Instrument
Lepcha	Sunong Kung Aoraa Sa, Rungyu Rungit tulka.	Zo-mal-lok, Ney-Mayel-Lyang, Kar Gnpk Lok, Chu Faat.	Tungbuk (tugna), flute, cymbal, drum, Sut-sang (sarangi).
Bhutia	Beyul Demojong, Denjong Chha-Lu,	Tashi Sabdo, Singhi Chham, Yak dance (Mask Dance), Talachi, Lu-Khang Thamo, Chi Rimu,	Yarkha, Drum, Flute, Yangjey.
Limboo	Yea Kakma, Damke Akme, Hakpare Samlo, Sakpa Palam, Kamba Palam	Ke-lang, Yeba-lang, Yia-lang, Dhan Nach	Chyabrung, Yethala, Negra, Phakwa, Simikla
Gurung	Dohori, Sorathi	Ghantu, Chutka, Khukuri dance,	Tungna, Madal
Rai	Aalla Inga Samloaa, Sumnimma Emi Muma	Sili Dance (sakewa), Sakela dance,	Jhamta, Dhol, Yallamber Baja, Kakkong (Machunga), Leaf baja (Sumbak Ken)
Tamang	Tamang Selo	Tamang Selo	Tungna, Damphu

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Newar	Ghatu	Lakhey, Ghatu Pyakhan	Dhimey, Sarangi, Bansuri
Sherpa	Kangri Capi Kawa, Sirbu Sirki Tengla	Sebru Naach	
Manger	Salaijo, Kawra song, Sorothe song,	Kawra, Ghantu, Chutka, Sorothe, Khukuri dance	Madal and Kahal (Drum)
Bhujel		Chutka,	
Chettri and Bahun	Juwari, Baramasay, Sangini, Dohori, Silok (<i>Sloka</i>), Ratteuli, Deusi and Bhaili,	Maruni, Chutkey Naach, Khukuri dance,	Basuri, Madal, Sarangi, Nau-Mati Baja

Conclusion

Communities, Traditions, Cultures, customs, rituals, religions, beliefs and faiths are the different shades which are intermingle freely to give a special blend to compose a unique Sikkim. It is a beautiful land living with the manifold tribes and races together and each one have their own cultures, traditional folk songs and dances. Sikkim is akin to the prosperity and gratitude that of the people of Northeastern state of India and possesses the modest and humble culture. Sikkimese people have dances and songs that are full of life and its importance. The inhabitants of this region is mainly of three groups viz, Bhutia, Lepcha and Nepali having their own dance forms, songs which they used to perform on different occasions like religious festivals, harvest, marriage ceremonies and other sacred functions.

This paper tries to explore the different communities and its traditions, culture, folk songs and dances. In this regard, we found more than 20 folk songs, dances and musical instruments of the different communities of Sikkim. Though, songs and dances gives a flavor to the life of human being, Tamang Selo, Chyabrung dance, Sangini, Yak Chham, Sili, Zo-Mal-Lok, Dohori etc, has its own charm among communities of Sikkim.

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Following are the traditional songs, dances and musical instruments which are used to perform in different occasions and festivals in Sikkim.

Folk songs of different communities in Sikkim:

Beyul Demojong, Denjong Chha-Lu, Yea Kakma, Damke Akme, Hakpare Samlo, Sakpa Palam, Kemba Palam, Dohori, Sorathi, Tamang Selo, Ghatu, Kangri Capi Kawa, Sirbu Sirki Tengla, Salaijo, Kawra song, Sorothi song, Juwari, Baramasay, Sangini, Dohori, Silok (*Sloka*), Ratteuli, Deusi and Bhaili.

Folk dances of different communities in Sikkim:

Zo-mal-lok, Ney-Mayel-Lyang, Kar Gnpk Lok, Chu Faat, Ke-lang, Yeba-lang, Yia-lang, Dhan Nach, Khukuri dance, Sili Dance (sakewa), Sakela dance, Tamang Selo, Lakhey, Ghatu Pyakhan, Sebru Naach, Kawra, Chutka, Sorothi, Khukuri dance, Maruni and Chutkey Naach.

Musical instruments used by different communities of Sikkim:

Tungbuk (Tugna), Flute, Cymbal, Drum (Kahal), Sut-Sang (Sarangi), Yarkha, Yangjei, Chyabrun, Yethala, Negra, Phakwa, Simikla, Tugna, Madal, Jhamta, Dhol, Yallamber Baja, Kakkong (Machunga), Leaf baja (Sumbak Ken), Damphu, Dhimey, Bansuri and Nau-Mati Baja.

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