

## 1.2. ORAL TRADITIONS WITH MELODIES

### 1.2.1. Oral Poetry

Generally, it is considered a virtue if one pleases the mind of the root teacher or an elderly person or the leader of the land. This can be done by making eight types of offerings, one of which is the offering of music accompanied by melodious *lu* or songs in praise of the respected ones. This is often called the offering of praising the body with melodious verses, music and dancing. *Lu* is simply converting the verses to vocal sounds accompanied by music and sung without the movement of body or any parts of the body.

*Lugar drosom* means folk dance, which is a display of vocal music along with the movements of arms and feet depicting six types of awareness of melodies. These are: 1. transformation of high pitch to low; 2. rapid movement from high to low pitch; 3. raising the pitch; 4. lowering the pitch; 5. singing in a very deep voice, and 6. singing in a very high-pitched voice. This way of singing with vocal tunes is called *lu*. Both *lu* and *gurma* (devotional songs) are mostly written in *choekey* (classical religious language) and inflated with symbols and metaphors to convey messages.

Internally, songs can be classified into *gurma* (devotional song), *mani lu* (the mantra of Chenrezig vocalised in song), *tsangmo* (poetry) and *lozey* (ballad or verses

used in verbal exchanges). Songs which cannot be accompanied by the movement of hands and feet are also included in *lu*.

There are different types of *mani* songs, as follows: 1. *Mani dang chigma*, 2. *Mani dang nyima*, 3. *Mani dang summa*, 4. *Mani thuje chenmo*, 5. *Bardo Mani* 6. *Tsho dhana kosha*, 7. *Salbo nub*, 8. *Lhonub ngayab*, 9. *Shomo yarsho*, and 10. *Tashi dang*. Amongst these, some are only sung for the purification of a deceased person's soul and others are sung just in order to accumulate merit.

#### 1.2.1.1. Devotional Songs

*Gurma* comprise a mixture of verses and prose composed by persons who visualize the essence of truth as a result of their devotions in order to inspire others by both the meaning and the melody. Other terms used for this genre are *gurma*, *sung gur* and *nyam gur*.

Although *gurma*s are not properly classified, there are also spiritual songs like *thol-lu* (songs dedicated to dharma) which arise naturally from the inborn talents of sublime beings. Such songs are mainly composed on the spot depending upon the situation and the mood of the composer. Great lamas and saints compose lyrics



and songs, bearing in mind that their compositions ultimately contribute to human happiness and increase faith in the Dharma. The songs can be in praise of the root *guru* (teacher), a description of a sacred retreat cave, an aid to development of realisation, advice to followers and a motivation to the lay people. Amongst numerous spiritual songs, those composed by the Great Yogi Jetsun Milarepa (1052-1135) are very popular for their melodies and attractive lyrics, whereas those of Lama Drukpa Kuenley are satiric of the social and religious customs of his time.

A *gurma* sung by Milarepa to the benefactor and the proprietors of Ragmo in Tibet is given below (Ruepai Gyaltshen 1999, translated from the Chockey):

The sacred place of Jangchub Dzong;  
Lofty white coloured Mountain of *Lha tsen* (local deity)  
above;  
Magnanimous devotees dwell in the lower valley;  
The snow clad mountain blocks from behind;  
The front is filled with wish fulfilling forests;  
Meadows wide and spacious;  
From the odorous charming *Pema* (Lotus);  
Come buzzing sound from the six legged *bung wa* (bees);

From the temporarily formed ponds;  
Emerge water birds watching with stretched neck;  
On the expanded branches of trees;  
Beautiful birds produce melodious songs;  
While touched by the passing breeze;  
At the boughs display their dances;  
On the taller trees opening out;  
Monkeys exhibit different acrobatic skills;  
In the wide open meadows;  
Four legged beings graze everywhere;  
The herders, who look after them;  
Their melodious songs and flutes transform;  
Workers of the samsaric existence;  
Spread everywhere with their chaotic activities;  
I *Yogi* (hermit), who watches over these;  
On the all clear precious cliff;  
Guided by the transient aspect (of the world);  
Meditating on the river like illusory pleasure;  
Seeing the present life as a magical illusion;  
Feeling sorry for those who do not realise;  
As food, [I] consume the emptiness;  
Contemplating without distraction,  
Anything can rise to a diverse mood;  
Alas! The phenomena of this cyclic existence;  
To imagine the non-existence is amazing.



### 1.2.1.2. Songs

As mentioned above, a lu (song) transforms words into melody. A song is sometimes sung in a way which is very like the way gurma is sung. Lu are often composed in order to present the mood of a particular situation and sung without movement of the body. While generally rather longer than a four-line stanza, there is no standard length in the lu.

Lu are classified as *Choe drel gi lu* (religious songs) and *Jigten phelpai lu* (common folk song)

While singing religious songs, the singer kneels down on the floor with both palms folded against the chest showing gestures of respect, worship and paying tribute to one's root guru or those of noble birth. Besides songs composed by Jetsun Milarepa, some of the religious songs are those found in the biographies of Khadro Drowa Zangmo, Azhi Nangsa Oebum, King Norzang and Queen Yethro Lham, Gelongma Pelmo, Prince Dri-med Kunden, Phajo Drugom Zhigpo, Drukpa Kuenley, Gesar of Ling, Kheu Pema Oebar, Daelog Karma Wangzin, and Daelog Sangay Chodzom etc.. The songs presented during the performance of *raksha mangcham* (mask dance showing the consequences of one's deeds after death).

Common folk songs usually reveal the romantic mood between a lover and his beloved. The singer may keep his or her palms cupping the chin while singing. Examples of common folk songs are displayed by dance performers during the *tshechus* (mask dance festivals) by singing love songs between the pholay and molay as they meet. There are tragic lovers such as Alu Penjor from Wang Dalung and his beloved Goensa Lham, Gasa Lamai Sengge and his beloved Galem from Chang village (in Punakha), Bada Chenmai Rigzin and her lover Namgye Phuntsho from Upper Ruebaisa and the sad songs of Yudring Zangmo when she was forcefully betrothed to a man she never loved. There are songs derived from stories of a cow called Ba Gachu Lhamo. *Alao* and *Khoray* from the eastern part of Bhutan, *Ausa* of Paro, Wawa of Haa district and *Katsom* (alphabetical songs) also fall into this category.

#### 1.2.1.2.1. Spiritual Songs

A song based on alphabetical order sung by Khadro Drowa Zangmo to King Kala Wangpo from the mythical biography of **Khadro Drowa Zangmo**:

The King sings to Drowa Zangmo:

The charming lotus of the gods;  
Oh! Graceful Queen, please take heed to me;  
There is no essence in it looking from every direction;  
I have deep faith towards the sacred doctrine;  
In the serene temple of refuge;  
Let me meditate just like a hermit;  
In the palatial residence prosperous in all desires;  
Raising two innocent and healthy prince and princess;  
You, Drowa Zangmo the embodiment of White Tara;  
Came forth to meet the mother and child;  
Give a break to the practice of Dharma;  
My youthful elegant lady, please bear this in mind.

#### Drowa Zangmo's response to the King:

Please! Listen to me, my heroic King;  
I had no authority to stay with my parents;  
Like a cow, tied with rope on its head;  
Like a ewe taken out of its flock;  
The eight fearsome heat and cold as in Tsa-ri (sacred place);  
The heat radiation of the demoness having arrived in this place;  
If Your Majesty practices Dharma leaving the family behind;  
Only this will lead you to the path of enlightenment;  
There is no meaning in being a profound King;  
Even if you have plenty of food and drinks;  
If Dharma is not practised in good time;  
Sinful people when in the Court of Yama;  
Like nanny goats and sheep together dragged;  
Across mountains and valleys when arrived at slaughter house;  
Even in the presence of affectionate spouse;  
On this earth mother and child will be heartbroken;  
On the day when Ha-chang the demon consumes mother and children;  
[thus] Mother will not stay but leave for the celestial realm.

#### 1.2.1.2.2. Laity Songs

A melancholic song sung by ba ga chu lham (a cow) to her master Ap Dondup from the legend of **ba gachu lham**:

Dondup, my owner! Please, listen to me;  
Enjoyable winter has come to an end;  
The gloomy spring has spontaneously begun;  
Like burning fire, the heat rises up from the Indian plains;  
Diverse blossoms appear on dry slopes;  
From the tree tops melancholy songs by the birds are sung;

The muddy river spoils the dwellings of the fish;  
 The mouths of blood thirsty flies and leeches are more  
     painful than spears;  
 My daughter Thrinley's feet are softer than silk;  
 The melancholy voice of Pel Dzom singing wa wa song;  
 I find it uneasy to remain on this earth;  
 The heavenly geese of Tibet, the land of great mountains,  
 Unable to bear the chilly breeze of autumn  
 Spreading all over in the plains of India,  
 Now could not stay in the homes they made in the lotus  
     like plains;  
 Leaving behind their chicks with fledgling wings,  
 With my words of assurance to the Mermaid,  
 Flew back towards the mountainous country of Tibet.  
 We humans and cattle, together  
 In this land of medicinal herbs, the celestial realms of  
     Paro,  
 Let's go past the gardens of the colourful palace;  
 Let's go and enjoy the nutritious grass on the highland  
     meadows;  
 Let's go and see His Excellency Kuzho (of Paro).

### 1.2.1.2.3. Alphabetical Songs

There are also alphabetical songs composed by knowledgeable and creative country folks in various languages and dialects. An individual ka-tsom may be about hardships, happiness and love or may give valuable advice, depending on the situation. For example, I present here a ka tsom from Kheng district, which is widely sung by the people of Wamling village, Zhemgang. The “*Kawa namning lingpa*,” Ka-tsom throws light on the nature of taxation during the ancient days.

As eagle glided in the sky;  
 The hen became restless on the earth;  
 Unable to be happy or sad;  
 [Thus] I am made to cry;  
 A hen, left without anything;  
 After the falcon has taken entirely  
 Carried away towards the Indian plains;  
 And eaten voraciously and maliciously;  
 Thinking of going to see it;  
 But, couldn't finish my weaving;  
 This year, a hen has been taken;  
 Next year, the tax will be exempted.

Although there should be 30 lines, but there are hardly any elderly people who can remember the remaining 18 verses. Similarly, there are other Ka-tsoms in Dzongkha and Tshangla kha and maybe other dialects too, but these were composed later by teachers and students

after the modern education system was introduced to Bhutan. They generally have romantic themes.

### 1.2.2. Lyrical Ballad

*Lozey* (lyrical ballad or witty narratives) is a form of oral expression, appropriately described as one of the ornaments of speech. According to the accounts of elderly citizens in the western districts, the origin of lozey goes back to the 12<sup>th</sup> century coinciding with the arrival of Phajo Drugom Zhigpo (1148-1251). Often known as Togden Phajo, he was a Tibetan saint whose life and deeds are closely linked with the initial spread of the Drukpa School of teachings in Bhutan in accordance with the prophesy of Tsangpa Gyare (1161-1211), the founder of the Drukpa Kagyud Lineage. Phajo Drugom Zhigpo was followed by numerous Tibetan scholars who disseminated the teachings of the Buddha. Amongst these realised beings Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal (1594-1651) was the destined leader. He instituted the traditions based on the Buddhist values of *mi-choe tsangma chudrug* (sixteen virtues for mundane practice) and reformed the old traditions, resulting in establishment of the dual system of government in Bhutan, whereby a temporal ruler coexists with the spiritual authority of the nation.

Amongst those indigenous traditions, the songs *parshing mindru gyelmo* and *Zurchen gyi sheypa* are the most popular in Bhutan and are sung especially during the construction of typical Bhutanese house made of rammed earth. These age old songs are solely sung by the people of central and western Bhutan. Parshing Mindru Gyelmo is an honorific name given to the wooden tools used for ramming earth, therefore the tools are respected and revered as an embodiment of Khandro Sonam Peldon, consort of Phajo Drugom Zhigpo. The song has many verses inviting the Parshing Mindru Gyelmo to visit from Tibet and concludes with

