

*Description of a Mystic Play, as performed in Ladak, Zaskar, &c.—*  
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These Mystic Plays of which I am about to give an account, are performed on certain feast days in all the principal monasteries of Ladak, about twice in the year, in spring and autumn. They are also, I have been informed, enacted at Lhassa and Bhootan, but I did not see one when in the latter country. I can give no information as to their origin, and must here state that not being a Tibetan scholar, I cannot vouch for the true orthography of proper names written down at the time *vivá voce*, and which are very difficult to catch. The Play hereafter described, I saw performed in the fine old Gonpa or Monastery of Himis, which is situated in a lateral ravine that joins the river Indus a day's journey above Leh on the left bank of that river. From its secluded position, this was one of the few religious houses that escaped destruction on the invasion of the country by the Dogra army under Wazier Jerawur. At that time much curious and interesting property and valuable religious writings were ruthlessly destroyed. The theatrical property, consisting of silk dresses, masks, &c., are therefore seen in greater perfection at Himis than at any other monastery in the country. On entering the court-yard on the day of performance, we found the head Lhama with all the gylongs (monks) of the establishment were assembled, the musical instruments were arranged ready under the little verandah to the proper right of the large Prayer Cylinder which stands under the centre of it, and every thing betokened the coming scene.

Before commencing an account of the strange performance, it will be as well to roughly describe that portion of the building where it is enacted. The principal entrance to the monastery is through a massive door, from which runs a gently sloping and paved covered way leading into a court-yard about 30 × 40 yards square, having on the left hand a narrow verandah, in the centre of which stands the large Prayer Cylinder above mentioned. The larger picturesque doorway

the entrance of one of the principal idol rooms, is in the extreme right hand corner, massive brass rings affixed to large *bosses* of brass are affixed on either door, the posts of which are of carved and coloured wood work. The walls of the main building with its bay windows of lattice work, enclose the court-yard along the right hand side, the roof is adorned with curious cylindrical pendant devices made of cloth called "Thook;" each surmounted with the Trisool or trident, painted black and red. On the side facing the main entrance, the court-yard is open, leading away to the doorways of other idol rooms. In the centre space stand two high poles "Turpochè," from which hang yaks' tails and white cotton streamers printed in the Thibetan character. Innumerable small prayer wheels are fitted into a hitch that runs round the sides of the court-yard. A few large trees throw their shade on the building, and above them tower the rugged cliffs of the little valley, topped here and there by *Lhatos*, small square built altars, surmounted by bundles of brushwood and wild sheep horns, the thin sticks of the brushwood being covered with offerings of coloured flags printed with some *muntra* or other. All preliminaries over and the actors ready inside the building, the musicians,\* wearing curious head-dresses and robes, red being the predominant color, took up their position in the verandah facing the monastery. Their instruments consisted of enormous long trumpets, that draw out like a telescope to 8 or 9 feet; these issue a low, mellow, bass sound, the mouth-piece is of peculiar form being a large flat disc against which the lips are pressed; a narrower trumpet globe-shaped at lower end; flageolets, drums and cymbals completed the set. The drums are peculiar, being fixed to a long handle, the end resting on the ground, they are struck with a bent piece of thin iron, the point of which is covered with a leather button. The musicians commenced a wailing sort of air accompanied by a low chant, to which the drums and cymbals beat a regular tune, but very subdued. Then came, trooping out of the idol room, a set of maskers in the most extraordinary dress it is possible to conceive; they were called TSAM-

\* See Captain Melville's photographs, No. 10. This same costume is worn by the musicians of the Deb and Dhurm Raja at Punakha in Bhootan, and it is as well to mention here that the monks of Himis, as well as a few other monasteries in Ladakh, are of the same sect as the Buddhists of Bhootan, viz. the "Dukpah" of whom the spiritual head is the Dhurm Raja.

CHUT,\* and in single file led round the flag-poles in the centre of the yard, with a sort of quiet and most laughable dance, slowly turning round and round themselves, and coming to a sudden halt at the end of each bar of the music, which the drummers notified by a louder stroke. Thus the circle moved round the poles while they tossed their arms about and waved the coloured flags they held in their hands. The dresses were all of China silk and Kimkab, the apron embroidered with the face of a hideous demon, the head-dress was a large conical hat with a very broad brim, edged with black wool; from the hat several wide ribbons of different gay coloured silks hung down the back, extending nearly to the heels, but the most extraordinary and striking part of their costume, was the device of a death's head, the eye-sockets, teeth, &c. worked in silk on a white ground. This was suspended from the neck and hung down to just below the breast.

In the left hand they held a sort of spoon having for the bowl a piece of human skull, cut out of the forehead portion, and round the edge of which were attached narrow streamers of silk and some plaited ends of hair. This ghostly ladle is called "BUNDAH." In these spoons, the portions into which the enemy is cut up, are carried away and thrown up into the air as an offering to the gods: of this enemy I shall speak further on. These maskers hold in the right hand a short little stick with red and blue streamers of silk; these and the spoons majestically waived about as they go round in their solemn dance, had the most curious effect I ever saw. Pantomimes and extravaganzas floated round one during the whole performance, yet this was a real mystical religious pageant having some curious and bygone origin, which none of the party knew or could get explained. This dance came to an end at last, and as the troop ascended the steps to the large doorway, the same number, but in a different disguise, came out. The tune was now changed and seemed to be the repeating of a number of stanzas of the same length, the maskers held in the right hand little drums and in the left, bells. To the first, the drums were attached a short string with a small ball at the end, so that when moved quickly backwards and forwards it may strike both ends of the drum. At the end of each stanza they gave a rattle and a ring at the same time, moving round in the same way as did the first set, only stopping to make an obeisance to the

\* See Photographs, No. 1.

centre when they used their drums at the end of the intonation. These were also dressed in gaudy China silks, both wore gilt masks with apertures for eyes and mouth, the top of the hat was conical with silk streamers on the sides and a large loose scarf behind. These masks were named "CHIN-BEP" or from their copper coloured masks, "ZANG-BUKH, lit. copper mask.\* These had no death-like insignia as the first maskers wore. After these had retired, a short delay, and another more imposing group marched with great dignity out of the monastery. These all wore very large masks of different forms and colours, still all of the same type as the heads of deities, their great peculiarity being the third eye in the centre of the forehead. The principal of these deities was "THLOGAN PUDMA JUNGNAS" or "he born of the lotus" over whom was carried a large umbrella. Among the other attendant maskers of consequence was † SINGE' DRANDROK, DORJE' TROLONG, SANGSPA KURPO (Brahma), ZHIN-SKIONG or Eswara. These are, I believe, intended to represent emblematically the six classes of beings subject to transmigration, viz. 1, gods; 2, demi-gods; 3, men; 4, animals; 5, ghosts; 6, the inhabitants of hell; for although we did not then see the mask of the bull's head, it should have been among the maskers,—perhaps the monks did not take the trouble, and thought us none the wiser,—now this would well represent No. 4 of the above classes; and in another monastery I afterwards saw masks made to represent stags. Attending on this principal group were another set of maskers, who carried the long handled drums and the bent striker. Their dresses were of the same type, long petticoats of rich China silk, but the head-dress a kind of crown with six points, gilt, rising to a high point in the centre, while streamers of silk hung down from the ears to the waist.‡ On each of the six points were the following syllables in the Lantsa character, viz. <sup>1</sup> OM, <sup>2</sup> AH, <sup>3</sup> SHI, <sup>4</sup> HUNG, <sup>5</sup> TRANG.§

\* See fig. 2.

† See Photographs, Nos. 4, 5 and 8.

‡ See No 6 of Captain M.'s photographs.

§ Each of these syllables have some mystical connection with the centre and cardinal points of the compass, thus—

74A



1



2

74B



3



4

74C



5



6

74D



7



8



34E

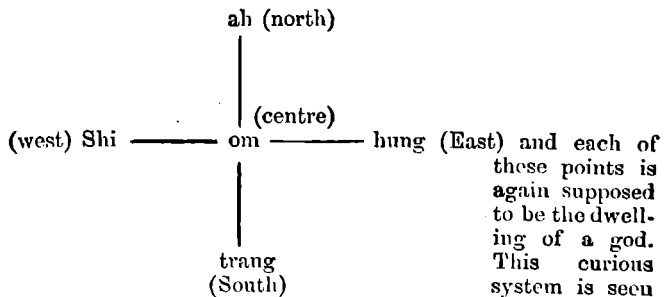


9



10

The whole of these last named Maskers marched round the Flag Poles in solemn procession, the band still playing; they then sat down in a line on the ground; THLOGAN PUDMA JUNGNAS in the centre. Then with shrill whistling, made by putting the fingers in the mouth, several boys came rushing out of the monastery, and running up made obeisance to the chief in the centre, and danced wildly about round the Poles. They were called "S'PAO," warriors, and wore short skirts, and streamers of silk hung from the waist, round which was a belt carrying small round bells (Gungaroo, Hind.); the same were also attached to the ancles. Their masks were green with a broad face on them, and from the centre of the crown rose a stick with a triangular red flag; they held a bell in the left hand, and a large handled drum in the right. With these also careered about two jesters, one of whom had two small kettle-drums tied on his back, on which the other would occasionally thump, and play other practical jokes for the amusement of the crowd, salaming also in mock respect to Pudma Jungnas and his attendants. There were also another set who made up this court of Indra, of which it may be a representation; these were called KATINCHUN,\* wearing a red mitre-shaped hat, silk capes



drawn out on the walls of some of the monasteries, in a complicated sort of labyrinth, called MISKYODPA DRYILKHAR, the circle of AKSHOBHYA in Sanscrit. I once saw one in process of construction on a square with sides quite four feet in length. The deities assigned to the different parts are numberless, but of the principal I may name, — North, Tonyút thúbba, West, Nam-'wa-ta-yas, East, Dorjè Scempspa. South, R. Zingston Jungldau, Centre, Nang-per-nang-Tsat.

See Hodgson, on the Literature and Religion of the Buddhists, note, foot of page 117. "In niches at the base of the hemisphere are frequently enshrined four of the five Dhiani Buddhas, one opposite to each cardinal point. AKSHOBHYA occupies the Eastern niche; RATNA SAMBUAVA, the Southern; AMITA'BHA, the Western and AMOGHASIDDHA the Northern. VAIROCHANA, the 1st Dhyaní Buddha, is supposed to occupy the centre invisibly. Sometimes, however, he appears visibly, being placed at the right hand of AKSHOBHYA.

\* See No. 3 of Capt. M.'s Photographs.

and petticoats, and carried bells and small hand drums ; they sat in a solemn row opposite the gods, and may have been intended to represent dewans of the court. After the jesters had danced about and played various antics, both with the actors and the lookers-on, they rose and marched back into the monastery. To these succeeded a set of NUMKINGS with red masks and TSAKINGS\* with brown, who both carried the long handled drum, and from their head dress rose a tall stick with a triangular flag, with a narrow brown silk border and a device of three eyes painted on the centre. The two sides named above, faced each other and with a kind of hop dance, advanced towards each other and then retired, striking occasionally in time to the music, not of their own drums, but of those of their *vis a vis* ; altogether it was the oddest and most curious spectacle possible to imagine. What this strange masque was intended to represent is more than I can say, and the priests of the monastery seemed to know as little of the matter, or perhaps could not explain it, mixed as the subject must be with theological Buddhist mysteries, the ridiculous grafted upon it for the amusement of the populace.

I will wind up my account by a description of the masque which last appeared upon the scene and ended the performance. The reader must now bear in mind that these last characters hold a place in another and different day's festival, so that we were merely shown the costume. I saw afterwards, on my return to Leh from the Chang Chenmo, this play acted throughout at the monastery of GAWUN, an account of which I will hereafter give. But to return to the actors, those that we last saw, were got up in the most wonderful way to represent skeletons, their clothes being tight fitting and white, the fingers and toes, loose and long, the mask being a really artistic model of the human skull, the lower jaw being moveable. These men danced a slow weird *pas*, grinning at each other, and knocking together their short staves, which at the top were carved into death's heads. The band played a subdued solemn chant while this ghostly dance went on. These men take a part in the festival, when the supposed enemy, an effigy of whom is modelled in dough, is cut up and carried away by these ghostly bearers who are intended to represent the dwellers of the burial-grounds.

\* See Photograph, No. 9.

*Translation of a MS. obtained in Ladak regarding the Dancing on the 10th day of the 5th month, a great holiday.—By the Rev. H. A. JAESCHKE, of the Moravian Mission, Khyelang, Lahoul.*

“DANCE BOOK OF THE 10TH.”

(After some preambulatory lines which I do not thoroughly understand, it continues as follows):—

The time for the first meeting on the 10th having arrived, the performers put on their attire and a nether garment\* folded in many beautiful plaits. The leader in front, they enter running quicker and quicker, according to the measure, and form a circle for the dancing called....† Mustard seed is distributed among the dancers. Then making the sign of the Trident‡ the following steps are gone through ..... at the words§ .....the right hand, and at the words..... the left is stretched out. (This motion I cannot clearly understand.)

Then the leaders turning to the right, and the last in the line to the left, both advancing towards each other, the circle is again closed or formed. (Steps and dancing). Again making the sign of the Trident they retire.

Now enter the Libators of Chang.|| With bells and fans in their hands, and slowly advancing form a circle (dancing .....) at the words .....they take the offering of Libation to all the beings of the six classes¶ in the whole world. Each one\* prays for whatever wish he desires to be fulfilled. Now, after a signal from the cymbals, the large trumpets, (about 8 or 9 feet long), thin trumpets, globe trumpets, kettle-drums, pipes, &c., and the whistling with the mouth (that extremely shrill kind, which is produced by putting two fingers in the

\* Part of the clerical dress, very like a petticoat.

† Here occurs a considerable number of names of different motions, paces, and gestures, often repeated in this little paper, which cannot be translated nor can I properly describe them, as I am not acquainted with the terms used in dancing in the English language.

‡ Viz., with the hands.

§ These refer to the words of the song which accompanies the dance.

|| This word seems to comprehend all sorts of fermented liquors; thus in Lahoul and Kulloo rice-chang is most common; in Ladak barley-chang, a kind of malt liquor without hops; in Koonawur they make a grape-chang or wine.

¶ The six classes of beings subject to transmigration are cha deo (gods); Chamyin (asura demigods); mi (manusha men); dudro (animals); yidaga (peeta ..... ) nyal wapa (or daitya the inhabitants of hell).

\* Viz. of the Lhamas present.

mouth), all these instruments concurring to make one loud noise; the performers one after the other sounding his bell, hand-drum, or other instrument, and blowing the air thrice with his face, mentally\* summons the noxious enemy† as nobody can do so in reality (dancing).

The time having arrived to put down the venomous (enemy), with dancing, a circle is formed and each performer must successively hit him with his instrument;‡ then follow different steps and words of incantation and exorcism.

Three signals with the cymbals having been made two AT SARAS,§ coming out of the large door of the monastery, post themselves on either side of it, with one arm a kimbo, and blow their *hautbois* twice gently, twice vehemently, and then two Gylongs|| and one terrible person, holding a skull, having performed a series of steps, finally make the sign of the Trident and retire again. After them appear the persons of the burial-ground (ghouls), and after performing many gestures with their arms, retire.

This concludes the 10th day's act.

On the 11th day of the same month, in the first act,—here follows what I am unable to explain; in the second act, adoration is paid to the king;¶ in the third act, mustard seed is thrown on the enemy after some singing and dancing, and the ceremony of fixing the nail is performed,\*\* and hitting the arms, legs and heart of the figure. Now

\* Performing things *mentally* when circumstances will not allow of it in reality, is permitted to a great extent in the Buddhist religion, *e. g.* when a person dies without riches, the family may *imagine* themselves to offer gold, precious stones, &c., to any extent to Buddha, who will condescend to take it, as if it were really given. Living Lhamas do not let their flocks off quite so easily.

† Any being, man or demon, adversary to the religion or to the country, &c.

‡ A small figure moulded in dough, representing that enemy, or venomous or noxious person, lies on the ground in a triangular enclosure, and each of the dancers has to hit it, with the sword dagger, or other arms or emblem he may carry.

§ AT SARAS is derived from the Sanscrit áchárya teacher, spiritual guide; but according to what I was told, it is now rather used like Yogi or holy mendicant, a Hindoo faqir. Besides this, it must also denote a sort of demon or spirit, as I have met with the word in this signification in books; I am not quite sure which it is here.

|| Gylong, a degree of the Lhama priesthood.

¶ No name is given in the text, it was said to be some deity. (THLOGAN PUDMA JUNGNAS?)

\*\* A nail or peg, in shape of a dagger and often beautifully ornamented, is a magic instrument, occurring very frequently in books, as an emblem of deities, as well as used in exorcisms, &c. often by a gesture of the hand symbolizing its use. By its use, demons are supposed to be bound and enemies killed.

the rulers of the burial-ground\* proceeding with dancing, take up the corpse,† making the gesture of the trident. Heruka, a god holding in his right hand a lance with a flag, and in the left a man's heart and a snare,‡ enters attended by the Lady mother (HERUKA's wife) having in her right hand a club (KHATOMKA, Sanscrit KHATWÁNGA) and in her left hand, a skull.

Four incantations with bells and faces; four women, who carry a snare, a little child's corpse,§ a heart, and a cymitar; their dress a wide human skin, a potka, and leopard skin petticoat. Dancing and music continue, while the last that enter are four Tiger coats, (warriors with bows and arrows).

In the 4th act, the dancers are four Libators of Chang, and eight other performers ..... (some unintelligible words here follow.) A mask named "Large mouth" with a censer, another with a drum and Hashang with his children|| now come on the scene and the MS. concludes with a number of cyphers indicating the number of the steps in each dance.

\* Viz. two male and two female demons.

† Lying on the triangle-shaped framework.

‡ A magic rope for catching noxious beings.

§ Such things as the little child's corpse and the human skin are not real, the former is a small figure, the latter a loose counterfeit made of silk or other stuff.

|| HASHANG was originally a Chinese priest whom I find mentioned in Tibetan historical books as a preacher of heretical doctrines. Here in this play, Hashang seems represented as a sort of school-master masked as a very old man and attended by a lot of masked children.

