

TIBETAN FANTASIES



Paintings, poems and music by
Li Gotami Govinda

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Introduction

When I was in Tibet from 1947 to 1949, during the "Tsaparang-Expedition" to Southern, Central and Western Tibet (that is, before the Chinese invasion) Tibetan customs and traditions were quite different from what they were in the rest of the world. They were also very different from the customs of its neighboring countries. I, therefore, think it necessary to explain some of the customs and expressions which were current at that time, and which appear in my songs and stories, so that they can be recognized and understood by my readers of today.

SHAMKUSHOK DUCK

Kushog (very often pronounced '*kusbok*') is the equivalent of 'gentleman', and *Shamkushok* is the equivalent of 'Lady', or the wife of an honorable gentleman. In Tibet, in those days, it was customary for the children to skate on upturned baskets, since skates were unknown in the country.

The *Chupa* or long-coat, blouse and shoes which Shamkushok Duck is wearing in my picture are just like those worn by the ladies of Tibet in those days. They were gaily designed with flowers and other motifs, and quite often made with expensive materials of dark, single shades.

Tsampa is roasted barley-flour, which is the staple food of Tibet. It is eaten together with Tibetan-tea, which is made of Chinese brick-tea, soda, salt and yak-butter. The flour is mixed with the tea, and rolled into small balls, which are popped into the mouth and washed down with the tea. Aristocratic people ate their *tsampa* with decorative, silver spoons.

THE LUGDSI-TSILLING QUEEN

The *Lugdsi-Tsilling* is a bird, very similar to our Bob-tail. It is very common to the Tibetan highlands, and was seen quite often in those regions.

Rungpas were semi-Tibetan border-traders who lived in the Himalayas and came up during the summer season to the Tibetan highlands to sell their wares. Generally, they sold cheap Indian household goods like pins, needles, ribbons, rings, buttons, combs, brooches, and bead-chains, as well as other sorts of small trinkets not found anywhere in Tibet. They also brought with them woven materials and colorful felt cloths for making Tibetan boots. These *rungpas* were very much welcomed by the Tibetan housewives, and

their appearance each year was an occasion of much excitement and joy in all the villages they passed through.

THE WEATHER-MAKER OF NENYING HILL

The *Weather-makers* of Tibet were magicians who were employed by the State to protect crops from drought and hail and to inform the people when to sow and reap. And any failure on their part to predict the weather correctly or protect crops from being destroyed was severely punished by relieving them of their office. In Tibet all life was regulated by prediction-calendars in which favorable and unfavorable dates and hours were predicted for each day of every year. These calendars were found to be astonishingly correct, and they were based on the ancient Chinese book known as the *I-Ching*. Besides predicting the weather, these calendars also predicted the right days and times for ordinary activities, such as cutting a new dress or travelling from one place to another.

Another very interesting thing about a Tibetan calendar was that if a day happened to be an unlucky one (say, for instance, it was the third of March), they would simply call it *chad* (cancelled) and completely skip over it (and call the next one after the second of March, the fourth of March instead)! On the other hand, whenever a day was particularly lucky, they would prolong it for one day more by making the same date last for two whole days instead of one, thereby also retaining the month's balance of the former struck out days! (A very happy method indeed!)

Nagpos were the 'Black-Hat Sect' magicians, who could throw out good or destructive spells, according to their wishes. *Gombos* are the fierce protectors of the religion.

THE TRAGEDY

Rimpoché means 'Precious Jewel', and is an honorific title given to learned lamas, and to their reincarnations known as *Tulkus*.

THE KUSHOLA OF KALA-TSO

Kushog means honorable gentleman, and 'la' is an honorific syllable added to the end of a title as in the words *Lamala*, *Anila*, *Kushola*. Sometimes the honorific title of 'Rimpoché' is also combined with the word 'Kushok', thus making it 'Kushok-Rimpoché' (Honorable gentleman, Precious jewel).

Kala-Tso is the name of a lake which lies on the route to Gyantsé (the second largest town in Tibet). 'Kala' means 'black' (probably taken from the Indian language) and *tso* is the Tibetan word for 'lake'. Hence *Kala Tso* means 'Black-Lake'.

Kanjur is a sacred scripture of Tibetan Buddhism, which comprises the talks and sermons of the Buddha.

KUCHI-KUCHI-KUCHI-LA

Thom is the Tibetan word for 'market', and *chowkidar* is an Indian word for 'guard'.

In Tibet many customs had exactly the opposite meanings to those known to us in Western countries. For instance, putting out the tongue with up-stretched thumbs, and breathing in, was a sign of great respect, *not* a sign of derision or insult as it would be in all Western countries. Also, in the Western world we clap our hands when we applaud, while the same gesture in Tibet was used to drive away evil spirits. Thus clapping was a sign of derision.

Very well-dressed persons were regarded by the poor country-folk to be very important people and were shown great reverence and respect. Hence, "*Kuchi-Kuchi-Kuchi-la, sorer nangro, nang*" meant "Honored sir, honored sir, give me alms please."

WANGDU'S SONG OR THE DZONGPON'S LULLABY

Music in Tibet was regarded as highly beneficial. Therefore, the presence of a State official in a monastery or a village was always shown by playing tunes on a bugle night and day, for his entertainment.

A *Dzongpon* is a governor (literally, the commander of a fortress controlling a province), and a *yak* is the Tibetan long-haired buffalo. *Tsampa*, as already explained, is roasted barley-flour, the staple food of Tibet.

LOBZANG NORBU AND HIS FIVE FINE SONS

A *Nyerpa* is an accountant or financial manager of a monastery. He was always a very influential person and all financial matters in a monastery were in his hands. Quite often these *nyerpas* misused their powers for their own personal profit. They were generally very shrewd and clever business-men.

Gombos are the fierce protectors of the faith.

MRS. DO OF DOCHEN

Do means 'stone' and *Chen* means 'Big'. Thus "Mrs. Do of Dochen" literally means "Mrs. Stone of Big-Stone." *Dochén* is the name of a place in Tibet which stands at about a 16,000 foot altitude, facing the "Grand Himalayan Range," and *Shasima* was the original Tibetan name of Yatung, where a British Trade-Agent was posted in those days. It stands not too far from the pass which leads into Sikkim (India).

Nathu-La means the "Nathu-Pass." To go into Tibet from Sikkim (India), or from Sikkim into Tibet, one had to go over this high pass which stands at about a 14,000 foot altitude. And if you stood on the very top (the summit or limit of these two countries) you would see Tibet on one side and Sikkim on the other.

OSUNG THE OYSTER

Gompa is a monastery and *Chang-Tang* is the "Northern-Plain" (*Chang* means 'north' and 'tang' means 'plain' in Tibetan). The greater part of Tibet lies in this undulating, uninhabited plain, where no one lives except a few herdsmen and their animals.

THE THIEF

A "konya" is a watchman and the 'la' is added on as an honorific syllable, to make it sound more respectful and to flatter the watchmen's vanity a bit!

THE TRAVESTY

Tsaparang, now abandoned, is the former capital of the Gugé dynasty in Western Tibet, where stand wonderful temples, highly decorated with colorful frescoes and beautiful golden images. Many of the frescoes (10th to 11th century A.D. wall-paintings), depict scenes from the "Life of the Buddha" in which *Queen Maya* (the Buddha's mother) appears dressed in magnificent costumes.

The bear in my picture, due to complete lack of common-sense, judgment, and humility, tries to imitate her as she is painted in those wall-paintings, by fixing a tea-tray for a halo (!) and other ridiculous things which shock and surprise the bird sitting on the stone. It, though small in size, seems to possess far more common-sense than the big silly old bear who is making frantic efforts to appear like Queen Maya of the Tsaparang-frescoes.

Shamkushok Duck

Shamkushok Duck, when the ponds turned to ice,
Said "How delightfully cosy and nice,"
She put on her 'chupa' her shoes and her hat,
And tied her hair up in a long shiny plait.

She jumped on a basket, without any sound,
And hired a Magpie to whirl her around,
And on Gyantse ponds, if you go there, you'll see
Shamkushok Duck skating so happily.

She whirled and she twirled till the winter was done
And the ice was all melted away by the sun,

Repeat when singing: Then stepping off quickly, "I'll go now," said she,
"And make for my husband his 'tsampa' and tea."

1. Sham Ku Shok Duck, when the pond's turned to ice, Said, "How de-light-ful-ly co - zy and nice." She

The first system of musical notation consists of a vocal line in treble clef and a piano accompaniment in bass clef. The key signature has one flat (B-flat) and the time signature is 6/8. The vocal line begins with a quarter rest followed by a series of eighth notes. The piano accompaniment features a steady eighth-note bass line with chords in the right hand.

put on her chu - pa, her shoes and her hat, And tied her hair up in a long shi - ny plait.

The second system of musical notation continues the vocal line and piano accompaniment. The vocal line has a similar rhythmic pattern to the first system. The piano accompaniment maintains the same eighth-note bass line and chordal accompaniment.



Song of the Lugdsi-Tsilling Queen



Chorus:

I'm the Lugdsi-Tsilling Queen,
I'm the Lugdsi-Tsilling Queen,
You'll hardly ever see me
For I'm hardly ever seen,
I come out once or twice a year
When Rungpas bring their wares and cheer,
I'm loved by one and all
For I'm the Lugdsi-Tsilling Queen.

I love their rice and flour
And I love their sugar cones,
For servants I buy clothing,
For the doggies rusks and bones, and
For myself I buy their knitted caps
And combs of pink and green,
They call me Holy Majesty
Their Lugdsi-Tsilling Queen.

I have an army bold
O thirty thousand Tsilling-Birds,
Who fight unto their bones
Just like the Gurkhas and the Kurds,

And their song and dance and sword-play's
Something worthy to be seen,
For they fight for me, their Majesty,
The Lugdsi-Tsilling Queen.

Chorus -----

In my palace down the river
'Neath it's scintillating beams,
Lie twenty thousand crystal pools
And rainbow-colored streams,
And rubies, pearls and diamonds
The largest ever seen,
Belong to me, Her Majesty
The Lugdsi-Tsilling Queen.

And I and all my Lugdsi-Birds
Live happy as can be,
In the kingdom of Tibet
That's far away as you can see
From all the atom-bombs and nonsense
Which is obviously seen
To be the curse of modern monarchs
Other than the Lugdsi-Queen.

Chorus -----

The Weather-Maker of Nenyng Hill

The weath - er - mak - er of Nen - ying Hill is danc - ing high and low: For

he can make it hot or cold, Or he can make it snow.

He can make the heav - ens weep, Or pull the clouds down low: For

he's the Nag - po - Nag - pa chief, As gods and Gom - bos know.



The weather-maker of Nenyng Hill
Is dancing high and low,
For he can make it hot or cold,
Or he can make it snow.
He can make the heavens weep,
Or pull the clouds down low,
For he is the 'Nagpo-Nagpa' chief
As Gods and Gombos know.

With a wave of his scarf he can weave a charm—
A 'Nagpo-Nagpa' spell—
To get the demons of Blizzard and Gale
To blow you down to Hell.
So if on his hill you ever spy
Him dancing in his gown,
Don't dare to look or he will blow you
Straight to Gyantse town.

The Tragedy

"Oh dear, oh dear," the old man cried,
"I feel so very ill.
Pray, hurry to the Rimpoché
And fetch me quick a pill."

"I'll go, I'll go," said his dear son,
"But whilst I'm running there,
It's no good sitting on the floor
And chewing up your hair."

Said he, "That's definitely bad,"
Said he, "It's no good THAT,
For don't you realize that this
Will loosen down your hat?"

This rankled in the old man's brain,
Said he "It's no good *that*—
To save this great calamity
I'll also eat my hat!"

So sitting on the floor he chewed
And ate his hair and hat,

Then rolling up his eyeballs murmured,
"*That's* the cure for *that*."

But soon the old man felt quite bad,
"Oh dear, of dear," wept he,
"Please someone come and help me pull
My hat, from inside me."

"It's turning in my stomach and
It's mixing with my tea,
Please someone quickly go and tell
My son to come to me."

But ere the son could run back home
With pill and Rimpoché
The old man lay all stiff and cold
As dead as dead could be.

So dear reader learn from this—
Don't *ever* eat your hat,
And if you *must* chew, chew your hair
But let it end with that!

"Oh dear, oh dear," the old man cried, "I feel so ver - y ill. Pray, hur - ry to the Rim-po-ché and fetch me quick a pill." "I'll

go, I'll go," said his dear son. "But whilst I'm run - ning there, It's no good sit - ting on the floor and chew - ing up your hair."





The Kushola of Kala-Tso

A 'Kushola' of Kala-Tso,
Being quite sure—and even more—
There lay a grave and serious flaw
On page one of the 'Kanjur',
Took quick his volume underarm,
And mounting yak, called 'Dolma's Charm'
Said "I must go at once and see
The Rimpoché of Phari."

But whilst along his way down there,
Being far from home, and far from care,
And thinking over that and this,
He saw the serious 'flaw' was *his*.
He wept and cried—and even more—
Said, "I'm a sinner, I'm a boar."
And so *much* wept he, and he cried,
That on that very spot he died.

Kuchi-Kuchi-Kuchi-La

One day whilst going to the 'Thom'
The chowdikar of Gyantse town,
Espied an insect dressed so smart
In hat and boots and gown.

Respectfully he bent down low
With outstuck thumb and tongue,
And whispered "Kuchi-Kuchi-La
Sorer nangro nang."



Wangdu's Song or the Dzongpon's Lullaby

"No more 'tsampa' no more tea,"
That's my plaintive melody,
May the Dzongpon dream of me
And my starving family.

May he dream that I am he,
He the servant that is me,
Living here in misery,
Cold and hungry as can be.

Now I'll have to pipe till three
Or four or five or six may be,
That's the custom that there be,
In this land of yak and tea.

"No more 'tsampa' no more tea,"
Is my plaintive melody,
May all beings happy be,
From Dzongpons down to men like me.



"No more tsam-pa, no more tea," that's my plain-tive mel-o - dy. May the Dzong-pon dream of me and my starv-ing fam-i-ly.



May he dream that I am he, he the ser-vant that is me, Liv-ing here in mis-er - y. cold and hun-gry as can be.



Lobzang Norbu and His Five Fine Sons

Lobzang Norbu and his five fine sons
Went to Toling Town,
To buy some milk and barley from
The 'Nyerpa' of the town.

The Nyerpa was a crook at large,
Who seeing his good chance,
Took all their cash and chased them out
The main gate, with his lance.

But Lobzang and his five fine sons
Were shrewd and clever men,
They waited for some time, and then
They walked right in again.

They went into the Nyerpa's yard
And straight into his pen,
And took his pet calf by the nose,
And walked right out again.

They sang and danced along the way,
"Ha-ba," laughed they, "the *crook*,
He *thinks* he is the winner,
But he knows not what *we've* took!"

And thus they danced and jumped and sang,
Whilst "ba-ba" cried the calf,
"I want, I want my mammie dear,
I see no fun to laugh."

But ere the night could turn to day,
The Nyerpa on his horse,
Was seen to ride to Tsaparang,
All full of gray remorse.

"Look, take thy cash, give back my calf,"
Said he to Lobzang Norbu,
But Lobzang and his five fine sons
Snored deep like logs of 'corbu'.

And "Baba-Baba-Baba-Ba-
I-want-my-mammie-please,"
Is all the crooked Nyerpa heard
From *inside* each of these!

So back he rode and wept, "This world
Is full of crafty men,
Pray all ye Gods and Gombos,
Help me *never* steal again!"



Mrs. Do of Dochen

Mrs. Do of Dochen
 Had three naughty boys,
 Who would not play at games nor
 Would they play with any toys.

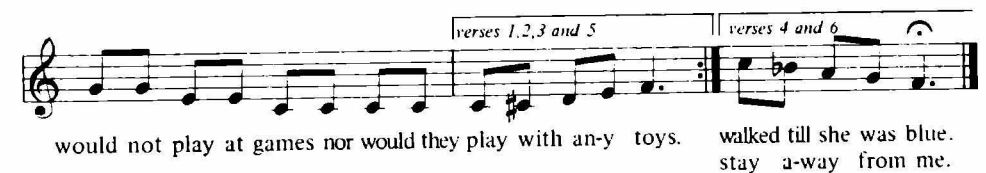
They kicked and screamed and cried all day,
 So poor Mrs. Do,
 Was forced to take the three of them
 Wherever she did go.

Now one fine day whilst walking
 The road to *Shasima*,
 It struck her that there was a
 Lofty 'pass' called Nathu-La.

Said Mrs. Do of Dochen,
 "I know what I'll do!"—
 Then speaking not another word
 She walked till she was blue.

When once upon the summit of
 The well-known Nathu-La,
 She gruffly took each boy and
 Threw him over and afar.

Said she "There is a *limit*,
 To all things that there be,
 So let the nasty three of them
 Now stay away from me!"



Osung the Oyster

Osung the Oyster wallowed in oil,
He hated to labor and hated to toil
So he built a large pool in a sandy place,
And wallowed in oil from his toes to his face.

When he was thirsty he sipped some oil
From his wondrous pool in the sandy soil,
And when he felt cold he slid down his shell
And did not come out till he felt quite well.

He built a fine Gompa of oil and sands,
And piled it up high with his very own hands,
For winter he stuck in a chimney as well,
And painted it crimson which looked very well.

Thus Osung the Oyster with hat and shell,
Happily in the 'Chang-Tang' did dwell,
Far from the world, and far from toil,
Steeped in wondrous olive oil.



The Thief

"Catch him! Catch him, Konya-la!
He's stolen all my wealth,
And set my heart apounding
Which is *very* bad for health.

He took my pot and pan and spoon
And drank up all my tea,
So catch him, catch him, Konya-la
And throw him down for me.

There is a wondrous precipice
Just down the other side.
Pray hold him fast, or he will
Quickly scamper off and hide.



He's one of those absconders
Who's as slippery as an eel,
But if *you* keep your eye on him
He can't do much, I feel.

If he dares his tricks with you
Just shoot him with your gun,
It's really quite an easy thing
And one that's quickly done.

What *e'er* you do, don't let him *go*,
'Twill be the end of *me*—
My health and wealth and happiness,
My pots and pans and tea."



The Travesty

"My word, my word!" said the little bird,
"Oh *what* a fancy-dress,
Of coat and skirt from Tsaparang,
You must be mad I guess.
On Maya Queen of frescoed grace
'Twas quite in place," said he,
"But on a grizzly bear like *you*
'Tis just a comedy."

"A tea-tray for a halo,
And earrings made of gold,
Lotus blooms for sandals,
And bodice rather bold,
But, dear bear, where's your common-sense
Your judgment and restraint?
You neither look like Maya
Nor the mother of a saint!"

SHARMA
\$5.95



These amusing verses and paintings were composed by Li Gotami Govinda during her journey through Tibet in 1947 and 1948 with her husband, Lama Govinda. The poems and illustrations gaily depict the ancient customs and human foibles of the people and the magic of the land. A musical score accompanies several of the poems.

Li Gotami Govinda is an internationally recognized artist and photographer. She holds degrees in art and music from Tagore's International University in Bengal and has had several exhibits and publications of her art and photographs. She and Lama Govinda have made their home in the foothills of the Himalayas, where they head the Arya Maitreya Mandala.