

ETHNIC FOLKWAYS RECORDS FE 4030



Music of the **Bhutan**

Compiled and Annotated
by Dr. J. S. Szuszkiewicz



COVER DESIGN BY RONALD CLYNE

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SIDE 1

- Band 1 Introduction of orchestra 0:35
Band 2 Demonstration of individual instruments 2:30
a) Yan jin
b) Dram yen
c) Chee wang
d) Bamboo flute
Band 3 Ging Taholing dance 1:40
(2-dong chen and rohm)
Band 4 Damitshi Ngachham, dance 1:05
Band 5 Guni tashi yangchha, dance 1:15
Band 6 Temple sounds 3:10
Band 7 A festive crowd 1:37
Band 8 SOUNDS FROM THE SOUTH
a) Maruni dance 2:05
b) Chhapani ley chhan chhan, song 2:50
c) Song of the mountains 1:12
d) Circus comes to the village 2:45

SIDE 2

- Band 1 More instrumental music
a) Dram yen (lute) 1:09
b) Bamboo flute 1:10
c) Orchestra 1:00
Band 2 Four traditional songs
(male & female voices & orchestra)
a) Tribute to the King 3:15
b) Mountain of God 2:50
c) Golden birds of the forest 4:05
f) Song to the mountain forests 2:35
Band 3 3 dances
a) Ganchen yumi lobdah 1:08
b) Yu gi gangte theom bi gi schola 1:15
c) Samten ling 1:42

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DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

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BHUTAN

Dr. J.S. Szuszkiewicz

THE COUNTRY

In their own language the Bhutanese call their country "Druk Yül" -- Land of the Dragon --, and they were justified until a few years ago in considering theirs the last of the Forbidden Kingdoms. It was only in 1974 that Bhutan opened its doors to a selected number of visitors, less than one thousand a year. Even the British who were in neighbouring India for 300 years and who traded with Tibet and China through Bhutan, were never allowed to establish in the Forbidden Kingdom an outpost of the Honourable East India Company and had to concede in writing "that no English or European merchant shall enter the Deb Raja's dominion."

Nestling in the Eastern Himalaya and covering about 18,000 square miles the kingdom is surrounded by India in the west, south and east, while bordering on the Tibetan plateau in the north. From the Bengal Plains to the Tibetan border the mountains rise rapidly from 500 ft. to 22,800 ft. It was not until 1962 that a motor road -- leading to an altitude of up to 10,000 ft. -- was built from the border town of Phuntsholing to the capital Thimphu. The capital can now be reached inside of six hours. Before the road was built it was a journey of five weeks on foot and horseback.

This picturesque country -- with its snow-capped peaks and its steep valleys in which rice is grown in altitudes up to 5,000 ft. -- was under Tibetan domination for 800 years until 1616 A.D. when a Tibetan Chief, ousted by his rival, fled to Bhutan and established himself as the theocratic ruler. The lamas following him from Tibet, introduced the Tibetan version of Buddhism, and it is thus not sur-

prising that also the art and craft of Bhutan have been influenced in the first place by China and only to a lesser extent by India. After all, 75 p.c. of the population are of Mongolian stock.

The "dzong" (monestary) remains the centre of the spiritual life as well as the site of the administrative authorities of a district. The lamas provided the only education until Western education was introduced in the late sixties and early seventies of this century. Till this day more young people go to monastic schools than to one of the country's 110 public schools in which English is the medium of instruction. Bhutan's official language is Dzongkha. It is based on Tibetan but the Tibetan influence is more evident in the script than in the spoken language. While Dzongkha belongs to northern and western Bhutan the language of central Bhutan is Bumthangkha, and Sarchapkha is spoken in the East. Many people also know Tibetan -- apart from the 3000-odd Tibetan refugees who have been living in Bhutan since 1959.

The South however is distinctly different. The language spoken here is Nepali. Since the Bhutanese were reluctant to move to the hot and malaria-infested lower hills in the South the government, around the turn of the century, encouraged Nepalese settlers to populate the exposed and not undisputed border areas. (After the war of 1864 Bhutan had to yield to the British the rich tea plantations in the lower land.) The Nepali brought with them their Hindu religion, their customs, costumes, music and dances. Approximately 25 p.c. of Bhutan's total population of 1.2 million are Nepali. Two features make their music easily discernable from that of the rest of the country: scale and instruments. Bhutanese music is based on the pentatonic scale whilst Nepalese music is not. On the other hand, the Nepalese include in their orchestra the harmonica which is very common all over North India and Pakistan but not in other parts of Bhutan.

The Bhutanese, living in the isolation of inaccessible mountains and valleys, have preserved their old dialects as much as their ancient dances. And there seems always to be a reason for a gay festival with colourful mask dances in a village or in the court of a dzong. Most, if not all, of the mask dances have a religious theme, i.e. demonstrating religious and moral lessons or to frighten away evil spirits.

The Nepalese dances of the South depict scenes from Lord Krishna's life (e.g. N° 8 i) or praise the heroism of Nepalese warriors, the world-famous Gurkhas in particular. However, their songs also tell of the sweet relaxation after a peg or two of the local brew.

Religion plays a very important role in the lives of the people of Bhutan. Quite common is the sight of elderly people with a small praying drum in their hands, and from most houses flutter prayer flags with the magic words: "Om mani padme hum."



The instruments: (l.to r.) Dram jen, yang jin which is struck with two fine bamboo sticks, limbe (bamboo flute) and the fiddle chee wang which uses a piece of yak horn as resonator. The girl is the singer in the recorded duets.

THE MUSIC (recordings)

- 1) Introducing the orchestra with a piece of traditional music. This is followed by
- 2) a demonstration of the individual instruments:
 - i) Yan jin, a zither which is struck with two thin bamboo sticks. It has at least five double or triple strings representing the five tones of the pentatonic scales.
 - ii) Dram yen, a richly decorated lute with an S-shaped neck and three double strings.
 - iii) Chee wang, a rather primitive fiddle. Holding it in an upright position the player, squatting on the floor or on a bench, props it against his thigh. A piece of yak horn is used as a resonator. The chee wang has a double string, and the hair of the bow move IN BETWEEN the strings.
 - iv) A bamboo flute, held horizontally.
- 3) Two dong chen and the rohm (cymbal), accompanying the Ging Tsholing dance. Dong chen is a mono-tone horn or trumpet, adorned with silver work. Occasionally also the dancer's faint cries can be heard as well as the sound of the small hand drums which the dancers beat with an S-shaped stick. The dancers wear masks with an angry expression. They depict the poses of heavenly deities who are alarmed and saddened by the deeds of the sinners. Thus, they are trying to frighten away the evil forces which oppose the teachings of the Lord Buddha. This dance as well as the following two, has been recorded in open air with an audience.
- 4) A dance called "Damitshi Ngachham". The type of Buddhism that was introduced in Bhutan by Guru Padmasambhava in the 7th century A.D. is of the Mahayana school which recognizes what in Western terms would be considered saints. One of

these saints -- Gyaltshen who hailed from Damitsi in Eastern Bhutan -- had been sent to Earth by the Guru and revisited him in Heaven. This dance was performed on that occasion in his honour. The dance depicts the twelve lunar years (named after twelve animals) and twenty-one holy poses. Accompanying instruments are cymbals and handdrums only. (There appears to exist an inconsistency in that Buddhism does not recognize heaven where the Guru was supposed to have been visited. It only knows Nirwana, the blissful and final nothingness. Yet, since Buddhism is a most tolerant religion, such "inconsistencies" are not infrequent.)

- 5) Guni tashi yangchha. This is not a religious dance. Consequently, no masks are worn and also girls participate. Men and women dance in two rows, facing each other. They wear national costumes -- a sarong-type skirt, a blouse and a



All mask dances have distinct educational value. They demonstrate religious and moral lessons, illustrate old legends and emphasize the short duration of material values. Most mask dances are performed in dzongs (Monasteries) where masks and instruments are stored at the temple of the Protective Deities. Dong chens, cymbals and hand drums usually suffice as accompanying instruments. - The layman dances are performed to the tunes of old folk songs many of which have their origins in the great epics of Central Asia.



Villagers watching the dances. The man in the centre holds a prayer drum which contains paper stripes with the famous holy words OM MANI PADME HUM.

long-sleeved jacket with white cuffs and a white shawl for women; a kimono-type knee-long gown with a belt, white cuffs and a white shawl for men. The dance pays tribute to the king of Bhutan.

(The shawl is worn by men from the right shoulder to the left hip. It is considered a sign of formal attire. Every man entering the king's palace and the site of the government offices dons a shawl in the above-described fashion. As well, a high official is presented with a shawl by his visitors as a sign of respect.)

- 6) Temple sounds: (i) Trumpets (dong chen and the shorter horn jaling) and in the background the constant, deafening sound of cymbals. Only monks are performing; (ii) trumpets and drums in the courtyard of the dzong; (iii) chanting lamas; (iv) a group of pilgrims at prayers.
- 7) A festive crowd. In between dances the audience is chatting and frolicing. A dance play is one of the rare occasions when people from all parts of a valley meet in their fineries and can exchange gossips. Since the masked dances are symbolic and performed to invoke the blessings of Gods and Goddesses, it is considered meritorious to witness them.

8) Sounds from the South

- i) Maruni dance. This is the traditional dance of the Nepalis most of whom settled in Bhutan at the beginning of this century. The Nepalis are Hindu. The dance is believed to have first been performed by Krishna and his companion Raddha. Male (Dhatuaray) and female (Marunis) dancers enact their respective roles.
 - ii) "Chhapani ley chhan chhan". (Strain the sweet wine with the wine strainer) This song, enacted by a village couple, is a narration of the dreams of happiness during the warm intoxication of the country wine.
 - iii) Song to the mountains. It can be said that songs of this kind are typical for mountainous regions since the long notes, when sung in the open air, produce a clear echo.
 - iv) The circus comes to the village. Drums, followed after several minutes by cymbals, accompany the performances of dancers, acrobats and even little monkeys. Not to speak of course of the magician.
- 9) More instrumental music (traditional)
- i) Dram yen (lute)
 - ii) Bamboo flute
 - iii) Orchestra

SIDE II OF THE TAPE

- 10) Four traditional songs, male and female voices, accompanied by orchestra heard in recording N° 1 above.
- i) Tribute to the king of Bhutan, H.M. Jigme Singye Wangchuck.
 - ii) "Mountain of God"
 - iii) "Golden birds of the forest"



Bhutan -- "Druk Yul", land of the dragon -- , the "last of the forbidden" kingdoms. Living in the clouds...

- iv) A song to the mountain forests, describing the care-free life in the mountains.
- 11) Three dances by students of the Central School, Thimphu. The dances are performed on a podium, hence the stamping sound. If the voices of the boys sound older than that of highschool students, this is so because many of the students started their school education later in life, for the simple reason that modern schools did not yet exist when they reached school age.
- i) Ganchen yumi lobdah, the Bhutanese name of the school. The song praises the school and welcomes visitors. (Girl singers)
 - ii) Yu gi gangte theom bi gi chhola (On the other side of the mountain). Dance and song describe the procedures followed by man-folk while going for hunting (boys).

- iii) Samten ling, the name of a mountain. Again a descriptive traditional song praising the beauty of Bhutans many majestic mountain peaks. (boys)

Captain Samuel Turner who visited Bhutan almost two centuries ago, had this to say about the scenic beauty of the country:

"The prospect between abrupt and lofty prominences is inconceivably grand; hills clothed to their very summits with trees, dark and deep glens, and the high tops of mountains lost in the clouds, constitute altogether a scene of extraordinary magnificence and sublimity."

- 5) Tumt Tashi Yangtsho. This is not a religious dance. Consequently, no monks are worn and also girls participate. Men and women dance in two rows, facing each other. They wear national costumes — a sarong-type skirt, a blouse and a

Villagers watching the dances. The men in the centre hold a prayer drum with the famous holy words of BUDDHISM.

long-sleeved jacket with white cuffs and a white shawl for women; a knee-length gown with a belt, white cuffs and a white shawl for men. The dance pays tribute to the king of Bhutan.

(The shawl is worn by men from the right shoulder to the left hip. It is considered a sign of formal dress. Every man entering the king's palace and the office of the government officials wears a shawl in the above-mentioned fashion. As well, a high official is presented with a shawl by his visitors as a sign of respect.)

6) Cham. (Song, dance and the shorter form of Cham). The Cham is a constant, refreshing sound of cymbals. Only monks are performing; (ii) long-pipes and drums in the courtyard of the temple; (iii) chanting monks; (iv) a group of musicians in prayer.

All such dances have distinct educational value. They demonstrate religious and moral lessons. Illustrate all legends and episodes the short duration of national values. Most such dances are performed in Cham (Chamling) where monks and laymen are joined at the temple of the Precious Relics. Long-pipes, drums and cymbals are used in the performance of these dances. Many of them have their origins in the great epics of Central Asia.

- 7) A festive song. In between dances the wedding is chatting and frolics. A dance play is one of the most important when people from all parts of a valley meet. Their Tibetan and Chinese dances. The dances are symmetrical and performed to invoke the blessings of Gods and Goddesses. It is considered meritorious to witness them.

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