

ETHNIC FOLKWAYS RECORDS FE 4320



MUSIC OF A SHERPA VILLAGE

Recorded by John Melville Bishop in Melemchigaon, Helambu, Nepal



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DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

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MELEMCHIGAON

Nepal, nestled between Tibet and India, is a country of great diversity. The southern border is a lowland jungle and the northern border the highest mountain range in the world. Equally varied are the people, their cultures and languages. This record presents the music of a Sherpa village in the Himalaya of central Nepal.

Melemchigaon sits on an 8500 foot shelf at the end of the Helambu valley near the Tibetan border. Three to five days walk from Kathmandu on the way to nowhere, few people pass through the village and it is quite isolated. There is only one radio in Melemchi and no batteries to run it so the local musical tradition escapes the threat of being drowned out by electronic noise, a fate that lurks wherever the media throw their alluring waves.

A householder in Melemchi has three possible life styles open to him. He can grow wheat and potatoes in the village fields, or he can have a herd of dzhum (a cow/yak hybrid which produces rich milk). Keeping dzhum entails moving from pasture to pasture over a yearly cycle. The dairy products are bartered for grain and potatoes in the village. Young people in

recent years have found a third alternative: going to India to work on road building projects. This enables them to return to the village with enough money to buy a herd of dzhum.

Kirkiyap and Dawa Sonam, the two instrumentalists on this record, have at different times followed all three life styles. Both went to India when their families were small; the men worked on the roads and the women sold beer and tea. They returned when their families became ill; mountain people having poor resistance to the diseases of the lowlands. Now they won't return because their families are too large, but as they get old enough, their children go. The men now farm in the village although they say that herding brings more money. Dzhum are too much work and hardship, and their children in India can send back some money.

Both men and women participate in music making. Usually the men sing a verse first and the women repeat it. The only instrument is the damian, a small stringed instrument of the lute family with a skin head and four strings. It is tuned 1-4-4-7 and picked with a small bamboo plectrum. While traditionally a man's instrument, there is no sanction against women playing it. In fact, the best damian player in the valley before her death, was a woman reputed to be able to play holding the instrument above her head or behind her back.

The songs can be sung with or without accompaniment. Although many men carved damians, very few could play. Kirkiyap is acknowledged by all to be the best damian player in the village. He plays every evening after supper in his one room house while his four daughters dance and sing. His damian was given him by his father and he won't sell it for any price. When we recorded he requested his friend Dawa Sonam play with him. They switched instruments at Kirkiyap's insistence - the best damian player should have the lesser instrument and that way their talents will be equal. Dawa Sonam told us that the best combination is two women singing with two damians; since that could not be arranged, he hummed the tunes in falsetto.



KIRKIYAP

In actual practice, damians are rarely played at festivals which is when most singing is done. The singing accompanies line dances with the dancers singing a capella. These dances begin spontaneously with the men at the head of the line, followed by the boys, then the women and finally the young girls. The line circles and (if large enough) encloses those women and children who are not dancing.

The songs are in the Helambu language (a Sherpa-Tibetan dialect). Many words and phrases are not under-

stood by the people who sing them. It could be that these are in a different dialect, or that the songs come originally from Tibetan texts which often contain passages of Sanskrit.

Some of the songs do seem to come directly from Tibetan books and describe specific gods or religious events. Two themes predominate. One is a wishfulness for wealth as indicated by reference to gold, coral and turquoise. The other is a sense of an ordered world in contrast to the nomadic pattern of many peoples' lives. (It would be nice if our friends could always be with us.)

Considering the overall style of Melanchi music, though the villagers performed with high rhythmic precision - a group cohesive thing to do - they seemed disinterested in achieving any degree of tonal blend in their singing. The favored vocal effect was unison singing in small groups using loud, somewhat raspy and rather tight voices which displayed little ornamentation (trills, glissandos, and the like). Songs were invariably in three or four strophes, short word filled packages of text.

An interesting feature which showed up both in the singing and dancing was the use of complex rhythm. Almost all the melodies could be counted out in groups of four beats; however, both in dance and song, the villagers introduced occasional measures of three or five beats by the use of shifting accents. The playful effect of these unexpected quick rhythmic shifts seemed moments of great pleasure to the participants and clearly formed an important part of their overall musical aesthetic.

In many respects Sherpa musical style reminds us of some of the village choruses of central Russia and the Balkans, and may possibly speak of some of the same life-support styles in which both individual independence and group unity are fostered.

Side One #1

Introduction

Kirkiyap and Dawa Sonam, the instrumentalists are named.

Side One #2

MANE RILA

Side One #3

KANGRI KAPI KAWA

The first and last lines of this song are deleted from the tape. The lyric can be sung to several tunes. There is an interesting drop of voice at the end of each verse.

men: Kangri kapi kawa dhuji mimba mijhu orang
nyintsin zumbu
Tuzi mimba minzum
Kwenzhok kenno tuzi mimba minzum.

women: Kwenzhok kenno semba jendu jendu lubu gendu
gendu tarong gendu mimba
Jendu yongsa mindu
Lama la kwenzhok kenno jendu yongsa mindu.

men: Yerka sherri mendok gunka shukiu chungna
orang nyintsin zumbu
Tsekand shukiu chungna
Mi-i lumbi phula tsakang shukiu chungna.

One type of lama medicine is made from melted snow. We would like to see our friends but because of time we cannot meet. The gods know this.

People's thoughts get younger and younger, but their bodies get older and older; still we get no younger, only older. Even the lama gets no younger; the gods know this. In summer the flowers open, and we wish they would stay open in winter.

We wish we could be with our good friends our whole lives. We wish we could stay in high places our whole lives.

Side One #4

SIRBU SIRKI TENGLA
On Yellow Gold

1. Sirbu sirki tengla sirbu, sirki tengla tsawbe
lama shu ylla sinna la
Sangla tashi la (sinna la ylla sira le) 2x

2. Shuta yindo yindo shuta, yindo yindo tabzen
zumbi cora ylla sinna le
Sangla tashi la (sinna la ylla sira le) 2x

3. Ngummu yui tengla ngummu, yui tengla gunde
pembu shu ylla sinna
Sangla tashi la (sinna la ylla sira le) 2x

4. Shuta yindo yindo shuta, yindo yindo missu
zumbi cora ylla sinna
Sangla tashi la (sinna la ylla sira le) 2x

5. Carpu tungi tengla carpu, tungi tengla
pema yab yum shu ylla sinna
Sangla tashi la (sinna la ylla sira le) 2x

6. Shuta yindo yindo shuta, yindo puneer zunbi
cora ylla sinna
Sangla tashi la (sinna la ylla sira le) 2x

7. Tora tubshe tengla tora, tubshe tengla jowa
juma shu ylla sinna la
Sangla tashi la (sinna la ylla sira le) 2x

1. On a yellow gold chair a specific lama stays,
they say...
2. On a chair, maybe, monks come together, they say...
3. On a turquoise chair, a headman stays, they say...
4. On a chair, maybe, people come together, they say...
5. On a white conch shell chair, parents stay, they say...
6. On a chair, maybe, sons and daughters come together,
they say...
7. In a circle of line dancers, young men and women are,
they say...

(The second phrase was not translatable)

Side One #5

KANGTE LA SHUBI Instrumental
On the Snow Part of the Mountain



WEAVING APRONS

Side One #6

KANGRI KAPI KAWA Instrumental
Snow White Mountain

Side One #7
DAMA TONGBU TSESUNG, PEMA DABGE MENDHOK SHARSUNG
Instrumental
In January Comes the Lotus

Side One #8

GYAMZU TENGLA TUNGBI Instrumental
Under the Ocean Comes the Lucky Moon

Side Two #1

SIRBU SIRKI RILA Instrumental
Gold Mountain

Side Two #2

KANGTE LA SHUBI
On the Snow Part of the Mountain

This song is widely known in Tibet and Nepal and is sung with many different tunes. We heard two melodies for it in Melemchi and were told there were others. Another verse, forgotten in the performance we taped, is usually inserted as verse three and deals with the third stage of the mountain. It

begins "Zedete la shubi...", rock scree, and the animal there is dongjung, the wild yak. This completes the four stages of a mountain from the top down: snow, rock, rock scree, and alpine. Phrases of the song are not translatable because their meaning was not known in Melemchi.

1. verse: Kangte la shubi tursang zo, tursang di la midhe (cho la do) 2x
refrain: Cho la tamtsi puni la menna. nga la chu ki muchung (pha menna) 2x

2. Takte la shubi tchatkia zo, tchatkia di la midhe (cho la do) 2x
(refrain)

3. Pangte la shubi shaba zo, shaba di la midhe (cho la do) 2x
(refrain)

4. Tse tengle shubi nya jungdzo, nya jung di la midhe (cho la do) 2x
(refrain)

5. Tera la shubi choma cho, choma di la midhe (cho la do) 2x
(refrain)

1. verse: On the snow part of the mountain the frost stays; the frost does not stay here, it is in religious retreat.
(refrain) Religious retreat is celibate...

2. On the rock part of the mountain the birds stay; the birds do not stay here, they are in religious retreat.
(refrain)

3. On the grass part of the mountain the deer stay; the deer do not stay here, they are in religious retreat.
(refrain)

4. In the lake the fish stay; the fish do not stay here, they are in religious retreat.
(refrain)

5. The dancing people are in retreat; they do not stay here, they are in religious retreat.



MELEMCHI PEOPLE

Side Two #3

UNTITLED DAMIAN DUET

Side Two #4

PASANG LA BULTI
Pasang la Bulti

Melemchi people do not know where this song comes from but think Pasang La Bulti is a god, and the song a description of him from a religious text. An interesting feature of this song is in the repetition; the last syllable of each line is used for the transition to the repetition but is dropped in the line when it is repeated in spite of being part of a word and not a nonsense syllable. The first verse is repeated as a chorus after every verse. It is sung twice between verses six and seven in this performance.



MELEMCHI PEOPLE

chorus: Pasang la Bulti majung
Pasang Bulti shong-ye
Pasang Bulti shong.

1. Pasang la Bulti oo la
oo la urgen pe-sho
oo la urgen pe.

(chorus)

2. Pasang la Bulti nye la
nye la sor kangibutti
nye la sor kangibu.

(chorus)

3. Pasang la Bulti te la
te la gya te mu-tik
te la gya te mu.

(chorus)

4. Pasang la Bulti gu la
gu la yutang ki chu-ru
gu la yutang ki chu.

(chorus)

5. Pasang la Bulti ke la
ke la kabui ser-sha
ke la kabui ser.

(chorus)

6. Pasang la Bulti me la
me la thorma mar-shi
me la thorma mar.

(chorus)

7. Pasang la Bulti shab la
shab la shingsi somba
shab la shingsi som.

(chorus)

8. Pasang la Bulti kang la
kang la hlamjung chep-tak
kang la hlamjung chep.

(chorus)

chorus: Pasang Bulti wasn't here before; now Pasang
Bulti has come.

1. On Pasang Bulti's head, he has a god's hat.
2. On Pasang Bulti's ears, he has gold earrings.
3. On Pasang Bulti above the waist, he has pearls.
4. On Pasang Bulti's neck, he has a turquoise and coral necklace.
5. On Pasang Bulti's waist, he has a gold buckle.
6. Pasang Bulti's pants, are made from red cloth.
7. Pasang Bulti's shoes are cotton cloth boots.
8. On Pasang Bulti's legs, he has boot ties.

Materials on this record were recorded by John M.
Bishop on May 26, 1972 and August 29, 1972.

Tapes were transcribed by Mingma Tenzing Sherps and
Naomi Hawes Bishop with the help of Lama Pruba.

Translations from the transcriptions were done by
Naomi Hawes Bishop with the help of Mingma Tenzing
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A Cantometric profile was done by Bess Lomax Hawes.