



Humming the Natural: Nurturing of Nature in Selected Lepcha Folksongs

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ABSTRACT

The "Lepcha" or the Rongfolk form the indigenous race of the Darjeeling district, Sikkim and the surrounding Himalayas. Lyangsong Tamsang, the Compiler, Translator and Editor of Lepcha Folklore and Folksongs, in his Introduction to the compilation, writes that the Lepchas refer to themselves as *Mutanchi Rong Kup Rum Kup* which means the 'Beloved Children of Mother Nature and God'. The Lepchas are nature lovers and worshippers of Mother Nature. By analyzing selected Lepcha Folksongs, this paper aims at highlighting the ecological concerns of the Lepchas.

Keywords : Lepcha, Folksong, Ecology

Humming the Natural: Nurturing of Nature in Selected Lepcha Folksongs

The "Lepchas" or the Rongfolk are the indigenous race of the Darjeeling district, Sikkim and the Illam Himalayas. The Lepchas believe that their tribe originated from a place called *Ney Mayel*, a utopian land of plenty, a paradise, a garden of Eden situated somewhere near Mount Kanchenjunga, their guardian deity. They believe that this utopian homeland was created for them by their Mother-Creator *Itbu-moo*.

▪ Nature worship:

Lyangsong Tamsang, the Compiler, Translator and Editor of *Lepcha Folklore and Folksongs*, in his Introduction to the compilation, writes that the Lepchas refer to themselves as *Mutanchi Rong Kup Rum Kup* which means the 'Beloved Children of Mother Nature and God'. The Lepchas are nature lovers and worshippers of Mother Nature. They possess an in-depth knowledge of all the flora and fauna found in Darjeeling, Sikkim and Illam Hills. The Lepchas display immense love and reverence for Mother Nature. In their prayers they invoke the names of the mountains, peaks, rivers, two medieval trees (*Sungli-Sunglaok*) and the other components of Nature. They remember their *Rum* (God) through various *Rum Fat* prayers and offerings like:

- *Chu Rum Fat*: Prayers and offerings to the Himalayas
- *Lyang Rum Fat*: Prayers and offerings to Mother Earth
- *Muk Zeng Ding Rum Fat*: Prayers and offerings to Mother Earth in all her forms
- *Sakyoo Rum Fat*: Prayers and offerings to the seven immortal Lepchas of *Mayel Lyang*, their Utopia
- *Tungrong Hlo Rum Fat*: Prayers and offerings to Tendong Hlo mountains

The Lepchas see Mother Nature as a medium which brings them closer to their *Rum*. Tamsang remarks that the Lepchas are probably the only indigenous race, east of Israel, who profess to be 'Children of God' and Mother Nature.

• *Aprya Vom*/ Lepcha Classical folksongs

Aprya Vom is considered to be "the oldest and richest form of Classical Folk song" [Lyangsong Tamsang]. It is also a form of prayer offered by the Lepchas to their Mother Creator *Itbu moo*, their guardian deity *Kingtsumzaongboo*, their progenitors *Tukbothing* and *Nazong Nyu*. Also, during *Soogi Lyaot-Tek* the Lepcha priests *Mun* and *Boongthing* sing *Aprya Vom* as forms of prayers and thanksgiving to *Tamsangthing*, *Nyo-*

loik Nyosong mun, *azaor Boongthing* and their respective *Gurus*. There are two parties of singers- the first party represents the *Dangmoo Rum* (God of low land) who sing using *Dangpit Nyo* bird's tone and the second party represents the *Sangnyo Rum* (God of mountains) sing in the *Chyak Doon* and *Kakoo* bird's tone.

Patriotic Folksongs/ *Dungeet Aprya Vom* start with the term *Achuley* which means "Hail to the Himalayas". These songs encourage The Lepchas to be strong and formidable like the mighty Kanchenjunga and to be united like the sacred confluence of Teesta and Ranganget in their efforts to serve the Lepcha culture with love and dedication.

".....**Achuley**.....!"

Like the strong, solid, powerful and commanding Kanchanjunga,

Like the sacred confluence of Teests and Ranganget,

Constantly flowing together, hand in hand, in love and harmony,

Towards the plains of India,

Let us be strong,

Let us work and serve

Our Lepcha culture with love and dedication.....

Blessings to a Bride/Bri Munlaom Aprya Vom consists of good wishes directed to the bride and groom. The singers wish them a long life like that of the Himalayas and a love as sacred and eternal as the one existing between Teesta and Ranganget.

"Ha aey.....!"

Let the bride and groom live long

Like the Himalayas standing strong,

Let them flower and fruit

With bright sunshine in them,

Like the love of Teesta and Rangeet

Let them flow together forever, and let their love endure for all time.....”

The Lepcha New Year Song/Nam Ai Aprya Vom rejoices in the commencement of New Year which is compared to the ever bright and beautiful mount Kanchanjunga and the brightly coloured hills and dales at the foothills of the Himalayas. The beloved children of Nature (*Mutanchi Rong Kup Rum Kup*) are likened to the first bamboo shoots and broom grasses which originated first in the world.

“Like the ever bright and beautiful Mt Kanchanjunga,

Like the brightly coloured hills and dales,

At the base of the Himalayas,

It is an auspicious sign of prosperous future,

We pray and welcome the Lepcha New year,

We, the Beloved Children of Mother Nature and God.....”

Song of Death/Amak Aprya vom provides comfort to the dead person as the song talks about the ever changing aspect of Nature. The transience of Nature is seen in the destruction of hills and mountains by landslides, in the transformation of clear sunny days into dark nights and in the withering away of beautiful flowers. Even the sun and the moon were nearly killed by *Dar Sathaong*. The dead are urged to go peacefully to *Poomju*, their original abode in the Himalayas where their ancestors are waiting for their arrival

“Ha aey.....!

You are not the only person to die;

The sun, moon in the sky,

Were almost eaten away

by *Dar Sathaong* in the days of yore.

Landslides occur on the mountains and hills,

The forests and trees are also destroyed,

The clear sunny day

Also turn into dark night;

Beautiful flowers in the gardens

Only survive for a few days.....

Taking these words in your heart and mind

Search and find your path

To go to *Poomju*, your home in the Himalayas,

Where your ancestors are waiting for you,

With their arms open.”

The Beautiful Takna Land/Takna Lyang is a song which praises the beautiful and blessed *Takna* Land. The Lepcha culture, customs and traditions are described as *Puntyen*, a creeper winding its way through the thick forest and living in harmony among the evergreen trees and the New Year festival is compared to a beautifully decorated *Poyaong*, a bamboo straw which is a source of joy and delight. This land is a sanctuary of traditional Lepcha houses built in the month of April (*Sam lavo*) when wheat (*Kacher*) is plentiful. Birds fly

and play in this happy and prosperous land.

“Like *Puntyen*

Winding and living in harmony

Among the dominating evergreen trees in the jungle,

The Lepchas' culture, tradition and customs are alive and well.....

Like a beautifully decorated *Poyaong*

The Lepchas' New Year is a festival of joy and delight.....

A place for birds to play and fly,

Takna is a happy and prosperous land.”

• Old Lepcha Folksongs/Rong Jyoong Vom

Farewell to the Himalayas/Mao-Mae Vom is a duet folk song written by Lapon Sonam Tshering Lepcha which speaks of the love between *Rangyoo* and *Rangeet* rivers who promise eternal love to each other as they bid farewell to Himalayas and promise to meet each other at *Panzaok*. They hope that the story of their union will be told to posterity by *Fodaong*, *Tukryook* birds from Himalayas carrying *Kursaong* and *Punten* flowers.

“*Rangyoo*, the female:

Oh! *Rangeet*, my love.....

Let us go together with love, *Sa ra ra..Sa ra ra....*

Rangeet, the male:

Rangyoo, *Rangeet*,

You and I,

Our union at *Panzaok*,

A place to remember by, *Sa ra ra..Sa ra ra....*

Fadaong, *Tukryook* birds from the Himalayas

Carrying *Kursaong* and *Punten* flowers,

Will tell the tale of our union.....”

Teests and Rangeet/Rangyoo Rangeet by Miss Hildamit Lepcha writes about folklore about Teesta and Rangeet and their confluence at *Panzaok* which is called *Pasok* in the present day. The song describes how the rivers were united by *Toot Pho*, the bird and *Paril Bu*, the serpent at *Panzaok* where they embraced each other and flow together towards the plains of India with the Lepcha name *Thi-sa-tha*.

“The confluence of *Teesta* and *Rangeet* at *Panzaok*

Today it is called *Pasok*

Though the original name is *Sa ayum Vom Laok.....*

Toot Pho, the bird,

Paril Bu, the serpent

United the two rivers at *Panzaok.....*”

Time to sow maize/ Kunchong Pat Tachat: This folk-song by Miss Hildamit Lepcha describes the important role played by Nature in the lives of the Lepchas who perform their farming activities according to the cycle of nature. The Lepchas know it is time to sow maize when the peach tree is

in full bloom, when the days start to lengthen, when the owls *Tungpoom* start calling, and when *Mayel* birds *Kakoo Chyakdoon* and *Vim Payaol* start singing and when the plant *Jyoo Kashumbong* flowers and produces fruit.

“The peach tree is now in full bloom.....

Gentle breeze is now blowing,

The days are now expanding.....

Tungpoom, the owls are now calling.....

Kakoo chyakdoon and *vim payaol*,

Calling and singing now.....

Jyoo Kashumbong is now flowering....

Not forgetting the time to flower and fruit

With a message to the Lepchas, ‘It is time’

To sow maize.”

Summer Song/Soom Soryaot Vom: In this folksong Miss Lepcha writes about the advent of summer when *Kanyoo* birds start calling and singing and when the breeze starts blowing. All these occurrences again have an effect on the farmers’ work as they are urged by summer to keep their field in condition.

“...In the summer days,

Kanyoo birds are calling

The wind is striking,

The breeze is blowing.....

Let us keep the field in condition.”

• Lepcha New Folksongs

Mother Nature, I'm Your Worshipper/Varto-amoo Rum go ma boo gum: In this song Norbu Tshering Lepcha writes about Lepchas who profess themselves to be nature worshippers. The Nature worshipper praises his religion, his deity Mother Nature who is benevolent and loving, who loves all creatures irrespective of their religion, caste, creed, race or class. Mother Nature is the Provider of food, tasty fruits to humans, animals, birds and insects alike. The lead role of Nature is said to be that of an agent of Peace and Prosperity which unites the world under one roof. The song begins and ends with the lines “Oh! Mother Nature, I am your Worshipper” which underlines the importance of Nature to the Lepchas.

“I am a nature worshipper,

She is my religion.

I am a server,

And believer in Mother Nature.....

Who is king and who is a beggar?

Who is richer and who is poorer?

She has no laws to separate them,

All are equal in front of her.....”

Salvation/ka sa sakchin This folksong by Norbu Tshering Lepcha is addressed to the utopian land of the Lepchas-*Mayel Lyang* which is described as a beautiful land crowned by the golden peaks of Kanchanjunga and whose beauty is enhanced more by the morning dew playing on the *Kursaong* and *Survo* flowers. Her flowing dress (*dum dem*) is the ever-green forest filled with luxuriant trees and mountains, hills and dales are her riches (*dum pim*). The rivers *Teesta* and *Ranggeet* are her arms which guard her. She is the sacred land where Gods, Goddesses and angels reside. *Poomju* is also situated in this holy land where one meets one’s ancestors after death where one achieves Salvation. Thus, *Mayel Lyang* is the land of ultimate salvation.

“Golden snowy peaks of kanchanjunga

Is your crown,

The shining morning dews

Playing on *Kursaong* and *Survo* flowers,

Your ornaments.

Oh! *Mayel Lyang*.....

In *Mayel Lyang*, the Lepcha land,

In the lap of Mount Kanchanjunga,

To be born, live and to die,

And to be able to meet

My ancestors in Poomju in the Himalayas,

After death,

Through the old and ancient path,

I am happy and glad.

Oh! *Mayel Lyang*.....”

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