

ACCTIL 14A1 Tibetan Literature

Week 5:

Poetry in Tibet II:

Snyan ngag (nyän-ngak) and Tibetan love poetry

Recap of ‘Poetry’ in Tibet

- *mgur* (*gur*) – songs of realization/poetical songs
- *glu* (*lu*) – songs
- *snyan ngag* (*nyän-ngak*) – ornate poetry

Recap:

What are some of the features you noticed from the excerpts from Kelden Gyatso's and Zhabkar's poems?

How would you differentiate these from the mgur (songs of realization) of Milarepa?

What, if anything, strikes you as Indic in origin about these poems?

What is *snyan ngag* (*nyän-ngak*)?

- Ornate poetry composed in imitation of Sanskrit poetry (*kāvya*)
- Follows the guidelines of Tibetan commentaries on Sanskrit poetician Dandin's *Mirror of Poetry*
- Content can be 'Buddhist' or 'secular'

Nyän ngak Melong

(snyan ngag me long, Mirror of Poetry)

- First translated into Tibetan in part by Sakya Paṇḍita (late 12th century) as part of his Gateway to Scholarship. Translated in full one century later (13th century)
- Divided into three chapters:
 - **First Chapter: Faults of Poetry**
 - **Second Chapter: *don rgyan* (*arthālaṃkāra*) ornaments of sense/meaning**, which includes various types of simile, metaphor, and numerous other devices including poetic ‘mood’
 - **Third Chapter: *sgra rgyan* (*śabdālaṃkāra*) - ornaments of sound** The category of *sgra rgyan* refers to any poetical ornament or device that uses sound or words to create pleasure such as onomotopeia, alliteration, repetition of vowel sounds, etc

Ornaments of Sound

- Either repetition, or exclusive use of certain sound-related features of the language.
- Can be repetition of vowel sounds, consonant sounds (rare in Tibetan), partial words or full words.
- While Sanskrit also has ornaments of sound, since the language sounds differ, so do the conventions for sound-ornamentation

Discussion question: Is this like alliteration and rhyme in Western poetry?

**Excerpt from a poem composed by
Nordang Ogyan (20th century)**

*yang dag lam rab gsal mdzad pa/
bla ma 'jam dpal dbyangs can lha/
yang yang dad pas bsam gang la/
snyan ngag smra la zla bral 'tshal/
(bya dka' ba dbyangs a la nges pa)*

*'di ni srid zhi ji bzhin gzigs/
phul byung gzhung lugs kun 'byung khungs/
bde gshegs ye shes skyed byed rkyen/
dkon mchog mchod bstod yongs rdzogs sgo/
(bya dka' ba dbyangs bzhir nges pa)*

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ཡང་དག་ལམ་རབ་གསལ་མཛད་པ། །

སྤྲུལ་འཇམ་དཔལ་དབྱངས་ཅན་ལྟ། །

ཡང་ཡང་དད་པས་བསམ་གང་ལ། །

སྟན་ངག་སྤྲུལ་སྤྲུལ་འཇམ་ལ། །

(བྱ་དཀར་བ་དབྱངས་ཨ་ལ་ངེས་པ།)

འདི་ནི་སྤྲུལ་ཞི་ངེ་བཞིན་གཟིགས། །

ཕུལ་བྱང་གཞུང་ལྷགས་ཀྱན་འབྱང་ཁྱངས། །

བདེ་གཤེགས་ཡེ་ཤེས་སྤྲུལ་བྱང་རྒྱུ། །

དཀོན་མཆོག་མཆོད་བསྟོད་ཡངས་ཚྲོགས་སྤྲུལ། །

(བྱ་དཀར་བ་དབྱངས་བཞིན་ངེས་པ།)

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(བྱ་དཀར་བ་དབྱངས་བཞིར་ངེས་པ།)

(Selected Translation)

The supreme path is illuminated;
[By] Lama Manjushri and Sarasvati;
Whatever I reflect upon repeatedly, through faith,
I search for the matchless utterance of poetry.
(Display of the Vowel ‘a’)

This [poem], is perceived like samsara and nirvana;
Atisha is the source of the textual traditions;
The Buddha is the condition which produces wisdom;
The perfected gate is the [three] Jewels, offerings, and praises;
(Display of the four vowels)

...

A poem composed by Nordang Ogyan (20th century)

*mang mang snyan ngag bstan bcos dga' tshal du /
brjid brjid tshig gi 'dab stong 'dzum pa'i sbubs /
mdzes mdzes nyams 'gyur sbrang rtsi'i dpal 'dzin pa /
yang yang bsngags 'os pad dkar 'di kho na /
(ma chod pa'i zung ldan bzhi ka'i thog mar yod pa)*

*rab dkar lhag bsam bzang pos dbyangs can ma /
rab mang dka' bas bsgrub la lhag pa'i lha'i /
rab gsal 'dzum pa'i zhal las mchog thob pa /
rab 'byangs snyan ngag smra ba nag mo'i khol /
(chod pa'i zung ldan bzhi ka'i thog mar yod pa)*

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བརྩིད་བརྩིད་ཆེག་གི་འདབ་སྟངས་འཇུག་པའི་སྐབས། །
མཛེས་མཛེས་ཉམས་འགུར་སྤང་ཅིའི་དཔལ་འཛིན་པ། །
ཡང་ཡང་བསྐྱགས་འོས་པད་དཀར་འདི་ཁོ་ན། །
(མ་ཚད་པའི་བྱང་ལྡན་བཞི་ཀའི་ཐོག་མར་ཡོད་པ།)

རབ་དཀར་ལྷག་བསམ་བཟང་པོས་དབྱངས་ཅན་མ། །
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མང་མང་སྟན་ངག་བསྟན་བཅས་དགའ་ཚལ་དུ། ।

བརྩིད་བརྩིད་ཆེག་གི་འདབ་སྟངས་འཇུག་པའི་སྐབས། ।

མཛེས་མཛེས་ཉམས་འགུར་སྤང་ཅིའི་དཔལ་འཛིན་པ། ।

ཡང་ཡང་བསྐྱགས་འོས་པད་དཀར་འདི་ཁོ་ན། ।

(མ་ཚད་པའི་བྱང་ལྡན་བཞི་ཀའི་ཐོག་མར་ཡོད་པ།)

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རབ་མང་དཀར་བས་བསྐྱབ་ལ་ལྷག་པའི་ལྷའི། ।

རབ་གསལ་འཇུག་པའི་ཞལ་ལས་མཆོག་ཐོབ་པ། ।

རབ་འབྱམས་སྟན་ངག་སྤྲོ་བ་ནག་མའི་ཁོལ། ।

(ཚད་པའི་བྱང་ལྡན་བཞི་ཀའི་ཐོག་མར་ཡོད་པ།)

(Selected Translation)

In a forest of countless poetry and commentaries
A thousand-petalled lotus of brilliant words is the birthplace for a
smile;
beautiful expressions Attains the glory of the nectar
This white lotus alone is worthy of praise again and again.
(First of the full four pairs of uncut)

..

Regarding the accomplishing of glittering white purity of intentions
there is Sarasvati;
Regarding accomplishing from the many difficulties there is one's
personal *yidam*;
Excellence is attained through a face with a dazzling white smile;
The speech of poetry is completely purified [by] Kalidasa.
(First of the full four cut pairs)

Ornaments of Sense/Meaning

- Features of poetic language that are related to the ‘meaning’, rather than the sounds of the poem, such as metaphors, puns, etc. (often borrowed from Sanskrit conventions)
- Can be figurative or literal
- Examples of figurative ornaments include the various types and subtypes of metaphor and simile allowable in Tibetan literature
- This category also includes the ‘moods’ used in dance and drama (borrowed from Sanskrit conventions)

From Polhane's Song of Longing

Although in the sky the full moon—the Treasure of Nectar,
the Crystal Lord—departs to the western mountain,
before long, from the shoulder of the eastern peak,
a handsome, smiling face will shine forth, night-blooming lotus.

- **Metaphor**: The full moon metaphorically referred to as the Treasure of Nectar, Crystal Lord
- **Metaphor**: Shoulder of the eastern peak = metaphor for side of the mountain peak
- **Extended metaphor**: Handsome smiling face, like a night-blooming lotus, is actually the moon, which shines through the side of the mountain!

From Polhane's Song of Longing

Again and again your mouth touches
my smiling red lips
as if they were your cup—
view pleasure and longing like this.

- **Simile**: Her lips touch his as if *his* lips were a cup.

From Love Songs of the Sixth Dalai Lama

(1)

From top the eastward peak,
arose the clear white moon:
her immaculate face
turned and turned in my mind.

Extended Metaphor:

the moon is actually her face!

From Love Songs of the Sixth Dalai Lama

(4)

On chance's road I met
a perfumed bodied girl.
Like turquoise in my hand
I threw its beauty back.

Simile:

As if it were merely turquoise, he
(figuratively) threw away the beauty of a
[different] woman

Poetic ‘moods’

Tibetan *nyams ldan gyi gyan*

Sanskrit rasa-alamkara

- In Sanskrit context, originally applied to drama/plays and dance only (*natya*)
- Later developments applied to poetry as well
- Among the poetic ornaments highlighted in Sakya Pandita’s 12th century treatise, *Gateway for Learning*
- The number of moods has varied throughout history, but eight are presented in the Tibetan version.
- A mood is created by the intensification of it’s corresponding stable emotion.

The 8 Poetic Moods

Sanskrit: *rasa* Tibetan: *nyams*

| <u>English (and original Sanskrit terms)</u> | <u>Tibetan terms</u> |
|--|---------------------------------|
| Erotic/sensual mood (<i>śṛṅgāra</i>) | <i>sgeg/ sgeg pa</i> |
| comic mood (<i>hāsyā</i>) | <i>dgod / bzhad gang</i> |
| Pitiful/compassionate mood (<i>karuṇa</i>) | <i>snying rje / brtse</i> |
| Furious mood (<i>raudrasya</i>) | <i>drag po</i> |
| heroic mood(<i>vīra</i>) | <i>dpa' ba</i> |
| Fearsome moods(<i>bhāyanaka</i>) | <i>'jigs byed/ 'jigs</i> |
| Disgusting mood(<i>bībhatsa</i>) | <i>mi sdug</i> |
| Amazing mood (<i>ādbhuta</i>) | <i>rmaḍ byung ngam ngam</i> |

Stable emotions

Sanskrit: *sthāyibhāva* Tibetan: *gnas can*

| | |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------|
| Desire (<i>rati</i>): | <i>dga'</i> |
| Humor (<i>hāsa</i>): | <i>dgod bro</i> |
| Grief (<i>śoka</i>): | <i>mya ngan</i> |
| Anger (<i>krodha</i>) | <i>khro</i> |
| Energy (<i>utsāha</i>) | <i>spro ba</i> |
| Fear (<i>bhaya</i>): | <i>'jigs/ 'jigs pa</i> |
| Revulsion (<i>jugupsā</i>): | <i>skyug bro ba</i> |
| Wonder (<i>vismaya</i>): | <i>ngo mtshar</i> |

From Love Songs of the Sixth Dalai Lama

(25)

A bee caught in a web:
body of a Kong youth.
Her bed-mate for three days,
he thinks of holy lands.

**What poetic ‘mood’ do you think
this verse might evoke?**

What struck you about the Songs of the 6th Dalai Lama?

What poetic moods might be invoked here?

Is there anything that reminds you of other Tibetan genres?

What, if anything, strikes you as being Indic about this poem?

In what ways do Polhane's and the 6th Dalai Lama's poem differ? What features do they share?

In your opinion, which poem is more subversive?

A Drinking Song

When the Victor's Son, the Master [Longchenpa] himself, was staying at Lhündrup Ling, several fortunate ones asked, "Everyone drinks beer on the sly, and in particular great meditators drink it exclusively. Yet monks who adhere to Kadampa precepts claim that only great adepts drink. Please explain the good qualities of beer and the reasons everyone drinks in a song." In response to this request, [Longchenpa] recited a Diamond Song entitled "Sweet Nectar Describing the Origins and Qualities of Beer."

....

Homage to the Master. In praise of the good qualities of beer.
Homage to Vajravarahi.

Ancestor of beer, Vajradhara, and
The masters, deities, and muses—homage to you.
I relate the good qualities of beer,
Nectar supreme, drunk by the fortunate. Listen...

From the city of beautiful heavenly gods,
A single supreme nectar drop falls,
From the merit of every being in the world,
Nutritious barley becomes the grist for beer.

With taste and color like honey, and
Perfect fragrance like the nectar of the gods,
Just the sight of it raises the spirits; one cannot be without it.
Sweet beer—its qualities are simply perfect.

Drinking it is bliss, tasting it is delicious.
When it goes down, body and mind are totally blissed out.
Appearances are blissful, loose, as for one who understands
what's real.
Sweet beer—its qualities are simply perfect.

...

Rule-following Kadampa so proud of
their cleverness,
Philosophers and monks alike,
Drink it on the sly, so who is more
covetous?
Sweet beer—its qualities are simply
perfect.

Men use beer for anything at all.
Women use it to master wool.
Distinguished people use it in place of
work.
Sweet beer—its qualities are simply
perfect.

Bönpo sorcerers take it as payment for
drum and tambourine.
Monks take it in place of monastic items.
Adepts use it to master the sun.
Sweet beer—its qualities are simply
perfect.

It is a powerful substance for profound
secret spells,
It is used at the beginning of initiations
and blessings,
It is necessary in creation and perfection
meditations.
Sweet beer—its qualities are simply
perfect

....

All people rely on it for joy,
Demons too are taken by its sweetness,
Gods as well frolic with delight.
Sweet beer—its qualities are simply
perfect.

It increases vitality, so body and mind
are happy.
It produces pleasing warmth, so
concentration increases.
It makes insight more intense, thus
realization dawns.
Sweet beer—its qualities are simply
perfect.

After drinking, in carefree repose,
In an unconscious state, one falls asleep
easily,
Like one who has mastered stabilization,
luminosity, and concentration.
Sweet beer—its qualities are simply
perfect.

No sooner drunk than happy tales and
Lovely melodious songs come aplenty.
Courage and fearlessness toward others
know no depths.
Sweet beer—its qualities are simply
perfect.

...
Drinking it, one quickly becomes healthy
and beautiful,
The ocean of voice bursts forth, speech is
perfect.
Appearances sooth the senses, and mind
finds joy.
Sweet beer—its qualities are simply
perfect.

...
When you meet it, all activity becomes
relaxed.
When you drink, mental anguish ceases.
Days and nights pass by quickly without
notice.
Sweet beer—its qualities are simply
perfect.

It is necessary for all activities,
Great and small, all completely enjoy it.
Near and far, one cannot do without it.
Sweet beer—its qualities are simply
perfect.

It achieves one's ends, it is the source of
conversation,
When friends and family meet, they need
it to foster flattery.
In family meetings it is needed as a
distraction.
Sweet beer—its qualities are simply
perfect.

Such are its inconceivable qualities.
Inexpressible, like the nectar of the gods.
The supreme taste to be found in this human realm:
May you and everyone else delight and play.

Exhibiting this manner, the carefree yogin
Achieves an uninhibited state of mind.
With this bliss may I and all living beings
Rest all day and night in bliss and happiness.

Glu “songs”

- Most secular of the poetic genres
- Most musically oriented of the genres
 - generally performed (rather than read)
 - often accompanied by dance
- Two major subcategories
 - Royal songs (*rgyal po'i glu*)
 - Popular songs (*'bangs kyi glu*): love and marriage, planting and harvest, advice, riddle songs

*je nye ni je nye na
yar pa ni dgung dang nye
dgung skar ni si li li*

Nearer, ah, nearer yet
Yarpa, ah, near the sky
Sky-stars, ah, *si-li-li*.

*Je nye [ni] je nye na
gla skar ni brag dang nye
brag skar ni si li li*

Nearer, ah, nearer yet
Lakar, ah, near the stone
Stone-stars, ah, *si-li-li*.

*sdur ba ni chab dang nye
Gyur sram ni pyo la la'*

Durwa, ah, near the stream
Otter, ah, *pyo-la-la*.

*nyen kar ni dog dang nye
'bras drug ni si li li*

Nyenkar, ah, near the earth
Al fruits, ah, *si-li-li*.

*mal tro ni [klum] dang nye
syi bser ni spu ru ru*

Maltro, ah, near to Lum
Cold winds, ah, *pu-ru-ru!*

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