SOME LANGUAGE TRAITS IN THE LADWAGS VERSION OF THE GESAR EPIC

- Smt. Anandamayee Ghosh

Asia is a land of traditions belonging to different ethnic groups. Each ethnic group holds the identity of their own. The traditional identity is determined by various items of the culture. Among them, Language and literature become important. Literature depicts the life of an individual and that of a group, a community or a society in that respect the Gesar is an epic which refers to the heroic deeds of the eminent Asian legendary personalities.

Historians may decide whether Gesar was a historical person or not, but the peoples belonging to multiple ethnic groups in Asia, particularly those of China, Mongolia, Manchuria, Uighur, Tibet and those of the Himalayan belt accept Gesar as their national hero.

The performance of Gesar becomes a source of inspiration for the persons of all ages, beginning from their childhood. An anthropologist or a folklorist may find these versions of folk elements belonging to the above mentioned countries in Asia.

As a specimen of the folk literature, Gesar songs had many recensions. The Gesar academy, the Institute of the Gesar Epic Studies is already engaged in excavating and preserving various recensions of Gesar epic.

In the north-western Himalayas some tales of the Gesar epic are frequently heard. Among them a Ladwags version which had been edited by A. H. Francke (1941) was published by Asiatic Society, Calcutta with a foreword by the eminent international renowned linguist S. K. Chatterji (1941).

The Ladwags (Ladakh) version of the Gesar epic may be thematically divided into seven broad divisions.

(i) Prologue to the Gesar Songs (pp. 1-29)
(ii) The advent of Gesar (p. 64-72)
(iii) His marriage with Dugumu (*a Brugumu* p. 122-129)
(iv) His second marriage with Yul Kung Cho’g Ma of China (p.154-159)
(v) Gesar’s journey to the North and his challenge with the giant (p. 189-194)
(vi) Hor king captured Dugmu (p. 243-249)
(vii) Victory of Gesar over the abductor, king of Hor (p. 306-313).

The above distributions are however made by A. H. Francke which are not mentioned in the songs as published here.

The narrations of the account however based on several tales floating from one hillock to other hillock. A general proverb goes that every hill has got its own speech, similarly every hill may have tales of its own A. H. Francke collected different versions of the Gesar and referred to them. Such five tales are:

(i) Mon beloved to Gesar
(ii) Skya ba rgod po
(iii) Shel li bu Zhun
(iv) Gong ma bu thsa's boy and Rgyal sa dkar po.

Another nine tales were published in Indian Antiquary Vol XXXI 1902.

(i) The tales of Agu.
(ii) dBang po rgyab bzhin's three sons.
(iii) Don grub's fitting out for the land of gling.
(iv) Don grub's birth on earth.
(v) Khro mo who sought to harm Gesar.
(vi) The maiden 'aBru gu ma.
(vii) 'aBru gu ma who became Gesar's bride.
(viii) Gesar who teases 'aBru gu ma.
(ix) The wedding.

Moreover several Gling glu belonging to Sheh, Khalatse and songs of Bon tradition have been available.

In the hill tracts of north western Himalayas, in the olden days, the movement of the people was scarce due to climatic strangeness. Snow and the strong wind in winter through the gorges and ravines of the hills used to keep them captive within their four walls. The Spring and the summer appear to them for collection of food articles by hunting and cultivation in the valleys where the nature was congenial. The life style of the people has been elsewhere. The present study devotes to the language of the songs which appear to be peculiar.

II

The language used in the printed version of Gesar songs had some distinct uses. The tale preserved the old tradition of speech which was easily communicable to the listeners. Their grammatical formulation therefore play the least importance. The emphasis was laid more on usages and idioms than morphology and phonetics. Some language peculiarities which are not always determined by rules of (Sum rtags) ascribed to Thonmi Sambhota (7th Century A.D.) have been noted here.

Probably the tales of Gesar came prior to systematization of the Tibetan grammar by Thonmi Sambhota. The archaic and proto-Tibetan usages disappeared later on due to orthodoxy of the Tibetan lotsawas who preferred to follow the Mahavyutpatti (8th - 9th Century A.D.).

The Tibetan materials of Tun huang and those of Chinese Turkshtan could also avoid such grammatical liturgy.
The analysis is attempted in the following lines.

(i) Vocabularies and their agglutinative forms.
(ii) Rare usages other than the grammatical formulae.
(iii) Expressions referring to the local environment.
(iv) Peculiarities in the syntax and the sentence construction.

(i) In scrutiny of the vocabularies in printed edition by A. H. Francke, it is found that he occasionally mended the word formation and sentence construction with annotation where necessary. No grammatical derivation and structural formulation of the words were entered. However the vocabularies and their agglutinative form used in the songs hold linguistic importance which may not be normally observed in the subsequently Tibetan literature. For instance:

(a) 

(b) 

(c) 

(d) 

(e) 

It is to note that 

It is to note that  

rags describes. Here it is for the future particle as the verb skye will give birth to. Compare  

Francke 11.20, 75.2.

It is to note that  is used in the Burig speech for  (Jaschke 139, 142).
Some instances of vowel harmony are occasionally observed, such as placeholders nor bu nur bu/Jewel bao shi: srung po srong po/protection bao hu zhe: don grub dund grub/successful 成功 cheg gong bu mo bo mo/po mo/to mo (Woman, daughter) 女人 nu ren, nu 'er; nu mo deng no mo daughter, nu bo deng no bo (same as bu mo).

(ii) Some indigenous versions of the Gesar tales floated among the ethnic groups of the north western Himalayas preserved peculiarities in expression. Whether the genius was of external origin may be difficult to determine. On examination of the vocabularies of the songs many words are found rare, loanwords from other speeches or of unknown origin. Such as:

(1) kyal kyil (a well) 许多井/jing:ting / khyil / pan zun = pan chun 豆腐 (junior pandit) 许多井/jing:ting / jiao nian you de xue jia zhe: groshangse kra phus se (rat) 鼠 tu bag (tu pag) (gun or rifle) 子鼠 jia or快剑/kuai jiao: sus mi (a courier) 春使 xin shi gyo cas (will cook) ji jii ci.

(iii) Many local expressions and usages are occasionally found in the prose and metrical composition such as.

(The text is not clearly visible, but it appears to continue with similar examples.)

(Francke 202. 6-9)
Then A bi (the witch) played the mo (oracle). Then the lady asked 'what is the meaning of the dream of the mistress?' A bi said 'The dream was neither good nor bad as the mo suggested. It remained in middle.' A bi then went her home.

Here ma bzan po (good) and ma nan pa (bad) are the local usages.

See also दुर्ग/म्युर्ग (tsan mkhan) (Francke p. 95.4) as explained below. Onomatopoetic formation of the first dentalised palatal is (masculine) with the (feminine) of tsa sde is not admissible. Here, Itsan appears to be an instance of archaic use. दुर्ग/म्युर्ग jo jo or दुर्ग/म्युर्ग jo mo for governess of a house which is used for occasional vocation with endearing respect to a senior lady.

(iv) As mentioned above the version of the Great collected from Lower Ladwags presented several peculiar usages. Besides, their morphological indigenousness, the structure of sentences are not always grammatical. It shows the folk usage in expressions, the spontaneity of the Language is an outburst of emotion and sentiment of the ballad singers. In the Indian tradition the ballad singers possess generally gift of the gab who usually flourish in their instantaneous rhetoric knowledge and prosidical composition. In many cases they can hardly read or write but they spontaneously articulate in composing metrical with no rehearsal or practise. Some peculiarities observed in the text are jotted below.

\[
\text{स्नॊन मा म्युर्ग ब्र्त्सन पा'ि मिन ला ग्लिन म्युर्ग र्त्से द्गु जर्सेन/}
\text{झ्लांग मा म्युर्ग ब्र्त्सन पा'ि मिन ला इदेम इदेम मि इदेम म्युर्ग जर्सेन/}
\]

(Francke 205. 5-6)

Formerly the strong castle was ling mkhar now it is called Idem Idem. Here the naming may not be historical but it shows the alliteration and sonorous rythen which makes the song attractive.

Similarly:

\[
\text{म्लाञ्ज/म्लाञ्ज बर्द/बर्द ग्र/ग्र द्गी/द्गी}
\text{म्लाञ्ज/म्लाञ्ज बर्द/बर्द ग्र/ग्र द्गी/द्गी}
\text{म्लाञ्ज/म्लाञ्ज बर्द/बर्द ग्र/ग्र द्गी/द्गी}
\]

5
When the Agu with his followers in the cold valley and the army of Hor went to the gling castle 'aBru gu ma and Agu 'khri thun were left. The song thus goes on, 'you would enjoy a tournament of the army and enjoy the stores of old meat and enjoy the old butter and be happy with 'aBru gu ma. There after proceed to Gling mkhar.'

Here the contents of the lines are simple but its melody and speech rythms become charming. The line number one and two are almost similar. In the song the order of Syntax becomes minor.

But because a street child had become the bride-groom, they exchanged the silken curtain for one of black goat’s hair, and the golden throne for a ragged carpet which was spread on the floor the wrong way.

Here the construction is peculiar in usage particularly the sentence, stan chad po zhig phir log la btin ste bors/te nas mo ṇan gyi sroṅ phrug de Itsan mkhan tshaṅ mas šag gi kha pa kyilkhrur te yab btan pa daṅ yum sñon mo’i khaṅ par khyers. /
Here it is used as an indignified expression in a society.

When the boy arrived on a litter carried by beggars he sat down on the carpet wrongly with his face towards the wall, for his food he received some flour with chaff.

The construction of small sentences in the above passage appears to be figurative. The awkward action of the bride-groom made other laughter.

Also the peculiaries of the sentence construction may be noted. རྒྱུད་བཞི་སྡེ་བསོད་ནམས་ཀྱིང་བཞི་གཞི་གནོས་ཀྱི་བརྗེེས། དེ་གོང་འདི་ཀྱེད་བཞི་ རྗེས་བཞི་ཀྱེད་པར་ཚེད་པའི་གེས་རྗེ་བཙོད་འཛིན་གུར་ཐུབ་ཡིན། དཔོན་ཕྱོགས་པ་ཐུབ་ཡིན། དོན་ཕྱོགས་པའི་འགོག་ཐུབ་ཡིན།

da nañ la bslab pa/stan phir log la yod pa sañ/kho phir log la dugs/de nas yab brtan pa dañ yum snon mos zers/khyod ltsañ mkhan da yin nog/sroñ po da khyod yin nog/phir log la 'dug de zug zers pa/

Despite that, the aesthetic values of the Gesar songs are predominant as they continue through centuries. The exact time of the introduction of Gesar Saga in the Western Himalayas may be difficult to determine. Moreover the tales of Gesar moved from one part to other in the oral tradition of the common folk in China, Mongolia, Manchuria, Central Asia (Hor yul?) and in the North West and the Eastern Himalayas among the Indo Mongoloid (Tibetan speaking) population. Thematically Gesar songs are heroic.

The account of the heroic deeds of Gesar narrates the struggle of the human history. In the olden days a person of leadership quality endeavoured to exhibit his valiant prowess by his desperate courage to win over the most that one could aspire. In this respect the tales of Rama and Sita and many other episodes in the Mahabharata may be cited for instance. In the history of Europe similar account of Helen and Cinderella and many others may be cited. Whether those tales had occurred or not is not our question. The historians may be assigned to the task. In
every regions of the globe the genesis of the folk tales might have some common source in the hoary past. Minor bifurcations of the common source happened to be local environmental ornamentation according to the liking of the people. It also may be presumed that such tendency of showing of valorous heroism by conquer and capture was probably the inner urge of the powerful one. In that case the tales could grow in different localities though the eventualities were almost the same.

In that respect the Gesar songs may be examined to locate its special traits from those of Rama episode. It may not be irrelevant to mention that the episode of Rama floated outside India particularly in South East Asia, Tibet and Mongolia, China and Japan in East Asia.

The aesthetic aspects of the Gesar songs, as collected by A. H. Francke, may be cited below.

(a) Rhetoric expression by using sweet and sonorous phonemes.

(After Francke p 4. 6-9)

A po na ran la tsha bo zhig thob lo/
bkra sis na ran la bu tsha zhig 'byor lo/
na'i tsha bo la min zhig stsal lo/
na'i bu tsha la min zhig stsal lo/

"Oh father, I got a child what would be his name?"
Me ma returned to call the child Dong gsum mila sñon mo.
Also:

(Francke p 48. 19.49-1-4)
How do I go to the land of Gling when I have no passession of horse, have no retinue to follow on, I have no weapon, I would go to the land of human beings.

(b) Orthographic change for exquisite diction.

On the birth day of Gesar many other creatures gave birth to their respective children such as to the mare Thsa langs-rkyang rgod dbyer pa, to the Dzo with crooked horns - the Dzo, 'White foot' to the white goat, - the goat 'Red neck' to the
sheep Dromo - the sheep porze, to the ass 'Black with a white mouth', - a brown ass to the white bitch - the yellow hound: to the black cat - a cat of many colours.

(c) Metrical varieties with contextual diversity.

A ne si sings:

Francke p 56.16-18

The lullaby song was displayed by A ne si bkur dman mo refers to the prayer to the land of gods, the earth and the land of nags. This very prayer has been still in vogue as A. H. Francke witnessed at every wedding feast at khalatse, 'when three pieces of wedding cake will be thrown towards the sky, over the earth and downwards' ritualistically.

In contrast, the meter used in the citation in connection with the birth of Gesar be noted above.

Francke 107. 14-17
Please listen to all my deeds. Please listen to all that of mine. Where is the round (region) Riri? Where is the round apricot (peach)?

(d) Aesthetic sentiment and co-emphatic relation between the performers and the listeners.

After the separation between 'abrug gu ma and Gesar the later lived in a hermitage in despair. Ane bkur dman mo appeared before Gesar and inspired him to make 'abru gu ma free from the clutches of the evil Hor ruler. Ane advised Gesar in following lines.

```
| ཨོ་ཐོ་ལོ་ཞེ་གྲོང་ཐོབ་ཞེ་ཐོར་
| འོ་ཐོ་ལོ་ཞེ་གྲོང་ཐོབ་ཞེ་ཐོར་
| འོ་ཐོ་ལོ་ཞེ་གྲོང་ཐོབ་ཞེ་ཐོར་
| འོ་ཐོ་ལོ་ཞེ་གྲོང་ཐོབ་ཞེ་ཐོར་
| འོ་ཐོ་ལོ་ཞེ་གྲོང་ཐོབ་ཞེ་ཐོར་
| འོ་ཐོ་ལོ་ཞེ་གྲོང་ཐོབ་ཞེ་ཐོར་
| འོ་ཐོ་ལོ་ཞེ་གྲོང་ཐོབ་ཞེ་ཐོར་
| འོ་ཐོ་ལོ་ཞེ་གྲོང་ཐོབ་ཞེ་ཐོར་
| འོ་ཐོ་ལོ་ཞེ་གྲོང་ཐོབ་ཞེ་ཐོར་
| འོ་ཐོ་ལོ་ཞེ་གྲོང་ཐོབ་ཞེ་ཐོར་
| འོ་ཐོ་ལོ་ཞེ་གྲོང་ཐོབ་ཞེ་ཐོར་
| འོ་ཐོ་ལོ་ཞེ་གྲོང་ཐོབ་ཞེ་ཐོར་
| འོ་ཐོ་ལོ་ཞེ་གྲོང་ཐོབ་ཞེ་ཐོར་
| འོ་ཐོ་ལོ་ཞེ་གྲོང་ཐོབ་ཞེ་ཐོར་
| འོ་ཐོ་ལོ་ཞེ་གྲོང་ཐོབ་ཞེ་ཐོར་
| འོ་ཐོ་ལོ་ཞེ་གྲོང་ཐོབ་ཞེ་ཐོར་
| འོ་ཐོ་ལོ་ཞེ་གྲོང་ཐོབ་ཞེ་ཐོར་
| འོ་ཐོ་ལོ་ཞེ་གྲོང་ཐོབ་ཞེ་ཐོར་

```

(Francke p 169. 1-8)

duṅ yo ba pi cag sgo la phin lo/
sgo lo phin ste lan gsum rig sprug lo/
msho mo'i mthil na chu sprug ton lo/
tsan dan dmar po'i bsaṅ sug bdug lo/
mkhal bzo ma ka gu sgo de la phin lo/
go la phin sthe lan gsum rig sprug lo/
mtsho mo'i mthil na chu sprug rig ton lo/
tsan dan dmar poi bsaṅs sug bdug lo//
The dialogue between Gesar and 'abrugu rna in the song was highly emotional. Gesar said "take the knife with a (conch) shell handle from the house, brush it thrice and wash it thrice in the deep sea and bring an offering of the sandalwood. (_xlabel'

dmar po). Francke noted that pencil ceder wood was often called candan (Sandle wood).

The above passage showed the lucidity of the language in repetation and thematic simplicity. The articles mentioned in 19 verses were not rare but were wondorous. And the purification of those articles in the deep ocean and be smearing them with red sandal created a thrilling atmosphere in which daring valour and avowed reddening zeal had been symbolized.

In respect of the listeners and the atmosphere of joy and thrill were likely to be conjoined.

Phyag ni phyag sor bcu pa dañ ma len pa/ Zhal ni pad mi me tog dañ thug ma bcug pa/ Ice mo dar gyi mdud pa dañ ma myañ ba/ ol sdoñ gser gyi buñ pa dañ ma smin pa/rsmim sens byan chub kyi sens dañ len te sa la phob/ cha'gan te ton te za gañ te mdun la phob lo/

(Francke 93. 4-9)
sag gi sag khri'i steṅ na pen chuṅ sron po kun 'dug lo/
ber ka'i bar khri steṅ du mo nan ni sron phrug kun 'dug lo/
lag pa se yag can daṅ ma len pa mthuṅ lo/
kha de chag ra daṅ ma thug pa mthuṅ lo/
Ice sag dgar daṅ ma myaṅ ba mthuṅ lo/
ol sdon riṅ mo nas ma rmid pa mthuṅ lo/
dug sems de daṅ len te sa la phob lo/
caṅ gani mthuṅ ste ja gan mdun la phob lo/

Compare the two songs by 'abrug gu ma in course of search of companion abru gu
ma offered beer for companionship (glogs chang རུས་གཤེབ) to Agu khar yi khra'i
thun with the warmth of her heart but she warned him not to touch the pot with ten
fingers, not to touch his lotus like mouth, not to taste it with the silken knot of his
lounge, not to swallow it through the golden vessel of his throat. The maiden
requested to take the beer with his soul and to place the pot on the ground ....

The second song is again the maiden came before the street child who showed
her the donkey's ear. The maiden however narrated the destitute look of the beggar
boy before offering the beer. She put the similar warning. The expression of the
destitute look showed warmer disposition of the heart of the love laden maiden.

Evidently the songs of Gesar survives uptill date inspite of the changes of time and
space.

**Romanised transliteration**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Tibetan alphabets</th>
<th>Chinese phonemes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ka</td>
<td>a (a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ca</td>
<td>b (pe)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ta</td>
<td>c (ts'e)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pa</td>
<td>d (te)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tsa</td>
<td>e (a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>zh/hs</td>
<td>f (ef)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ra</td>
<td>g (ke)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ha</td>
<td>h (xa)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>i (i)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>j (ts'e)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>k (k'e)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>l (el)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>m (em)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| (Francke p 94. 1-6) |
SOURCE MATERIALS


(1905) The eighteen songs of the Bonpo-na festival, Indian Antiquary.

(1907) A History of Western Tibet. London.


(1914) Antiquities of Indian Tibet. Part-I, Calcutta.

(1923) Tibetische Hochzeitslieder, Hagen and Darmstadt.


(1979) Ladakhi Grammar. Motilal Banarasidass, Delhi


