SOME LANGUAGE TRAITS IN THE LADWAGS
VERSION OF THE GESAR EPIC

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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, Jighur, 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 buqumu) p. 122-129)
(iv) His second marriage with Yul Kung Choq Ma (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
Moreover several Gling glu belonging to Sheh, Khiaiutse 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 the grammar (Sum rtag) 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 lotsavas who preferred to follow the Mahayuttpatti (8th - 9th Century A.D.).

The Tibetan materials of Tun Huang and those of Chinese Turkeistan 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) ṣe ti ha ri ṣe ti ha'i (my) skyes gling woda. It presupposes that ri was an archaic particle skyes bzu tshig phrad. (b) phari a bi phar gyi ring po dan a bi gnis ka (both grandfather and grandmother). (c) phari ren bzu mo. (d) a bi = a phyi ṣe ti and a phi were the alternate forms. a bi ṣe ti for phyi mo ṣe ti compare a phyin ṣe ti (an old woman) (Jaschke 604).

(d) de la yel nus ren. (e) ṣe ti dang drung (Francke 12.1) ṣe ti phrin las bzhin dang phyag khyed kyi phrug gu skye ces can tshen ma la (to your all children who would be born) ṣe ti bzhin dang phyag khyed kyi de jang lai de hai zi men. (f) ‘es is generally used as ṣe ti dang (tshig phrad) as such as the sum rtags ṣe ti bzhin describes. Here it is for the future particle as the verb skye ces bzhin will give birth to. Compare ṣe ti bzhin btag ces, ṣe ti dang gyog ces. Francke 11.26.75.2.

It is to note that sbe cas is used in the Burig speech for ṣe ti ces (Jaschke 139, 142).

sbe rtsal ces (will) seek sbe jang zhao: sbe tshang skar ces (will) put on jang chuan; sbe phyob gyog ces (will) cover sbe jang gai. sbe bzu losu ces (will) assemble sbe jang ju. sbe rtsal bin ces (will) cook sbe jang zhig sbyor ces (will) transfer sbe jang zhuan sbe zin ces (will) surround
Some instances of vowel harmony are occasionally observed, such as 

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:

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

(Francke 202, 6-9)
mi ’dug/’bar thod cig bī’ ‘dug zem/ A bi kho raf gi khāi pala gōn/
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 had as the
mo suggested. It remained in middle.’ A bi then went her home.

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

See also गुङा अपना (tsaṅ mkhan) (Francke p. 95.4) as explained below.
Onomatopoetic formation of the first dentalised palatal is (masculine) with the
(feminine) of tsaṅ sde is not admissible. Here, tsaṅ appears to be an instance of
archaic use. 墀་墀་ jo jo or 墀་墀་ 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
prosodical composition. In many cases they can hardly read or write but they
spontaneously articulate in composing poetical with no rehearsal or practise. Some
peculiarities observed in the text are jotted below.

्रྒྱལ་ ཐེག་པ་ཅིག་ཅིག་ ུ་ི་ ལྷེགས་ ཐེག་པ་ཅིག་ཅིག་
དཔའི་ ཁིམས་ དུས་པ་ ཐེག་པ་ཅིག་ཅིག་ ཐིི་ ཐིི་

Francke 205. 5-6

sfn ma mkhar brtsan pa’i miṅ la gīṅ g mar rtse dgu zer cen/dag sa mkhar brtsan
pa’i miṅ la Idem Idem ma Idem mkhar zer cen/

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 rhythms
which makes the song attractive.

Similarly:

མཁྲིལ་ གཉེན་ སྐལ་ ཛྷི་ སྐྱེས་ གྲེན་ དིང་ དུན།
མཁྲིལ་ གཉེན་ སྐལ་ ཛྷི་ སྐྱེས་ གྲེན་ དིང་ དུན།
མཁྲིལ་ གཉེན་ སྐལ་ ཛྷི་ སྐྱེས་ གྲེན་ དིང་ དུན།

5
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mda'nses btan na na tan gis btan yig loi
mdul ri'as btan na na tsh gi gis btan yid loi
sa sni la dga' na glii mkhar la soñ loi
mar sni la dga' na glii mkhar la soñ loi
jo jo 'bru gu ma la dga' na glii mkhar la soñ loi

When the Agus with his followers in the cold valley and the army of khr-'s went to the gling castle 'aifrugu ma ma and Agus khr-'s mnu 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 'aifrugu ma ma. There after proceed to Gling mkhar.'

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

gser khr-'i 'then te yol ba yai 'then te/cha li nag po'i yol ba zhi gbtar'stson chos po zhi gphr log la bti st bors te nas mo 'tan gis snoi phrug de 'ltsan mkhan tshu'i ma'i sags gi kha'i pa'i kyi'khor te yob btan pa da'yi yum snon mo'i khan par khyers /

But because a street chad 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 zhi gphr log la bti' st blos. Such construction appears to be archaic. It suggests that the street boy ('tan 'ltsan) who had come forth was of unidentified origin. For 'ltsan 'gns 'tsan 'gns. (S. Das p. 100B. Also Jaschke enters 'gns = 'gns 'tsan ba p.438).

It is presumed that 'ltsan mikan is equivalent to 'tan mkhan, a grass cutter (boy).
Here it was used as an indignified expression in a society.

Also the peculiarities of the sentence construction may be noted. བི་ལྡན་གྲོལ་གནང་ཟེ་ཞི་གྲོས་ཅི་བཐོས་འདུག (what do you two search?) Here khye zna was an old from of khyed cag ོག་ཅེས་ཀློད་ཏིག རྣོད་ཀྱི་མི་འབྲིས་པ་ཀྱི་རྣོད་ཀྱི་མི་འབྲིས་པ། in honorific form (Francke p. 11.2)

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 Indyo Mongoloid (Tibetan speaking) populations. 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 novel that one could aspire. In this respect the tales of Rama and Sir 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 heroes 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.

Francke p 4. 6-9)

A po na rai la tsha bo zhih thob lo/
bkra sig na rai la bu tsha zhih ’byor lo/
na’i tsha bo la mi’i zhih tshal lo/  
na’i bu tsha la mi’i zhih tshal lo/  

"Oh father, I got a child what would be his name?"

Me ma returned to call the child Dong gsum mla sgon mo.

Also:

Francke p 48. 19.49-1.4)
How do I go to the land of Gling when I have no possession of horse, have no retinue to follow on, I have no weapon, I would go to the land of human beings.

On the birth day of Gesar many other creatures gave birth to their respective children such as to the mare Thsa langs-kyang rgyud byer 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:

(The laubla song was displayed by A ne si bks. dmari mo refers to the prayer to the land of gods, the earth and the land of nagas. This very prayer has been still in vogue as A. H. Francke witnessed at every wedding feast at Khatlasse, 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.

rtag ma'i dsha'i las la/

mdon mo'ru yon/la/

lug dro/mo la/

lug por/ze skyes/

bo/ni bu/nag po/kha dkar/la

bo/ni bu/kham pa/skyes/ (See above in the Tibetan script)

Also,

(Flancke 107. 14-17)
Khyed lha/skyin tshai/ka/s na/n/don/si得到了/myon/
khed klu/skyin tshai/mas bdag/la gtsan/lo/
bro'i chen/ri ri'/lud sa/ga ru/yod lo/
"bro'i chen/kham ba la/ga ru'/lud sa/ga/ri'g yin/lo - -

Please listen to all my deeds. Please listen to all that of mine.
Where is the round (region) Rin? 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 latter lived in a hermitage
in despair. Ane bkur dmam mo appeared before Gesar and inspired him to make
'abrug gu ma free from the clutches of the evil Hev ruler. Ane advised Gesar in
following lines.

| ཤེས་པའི་འཇིག་ཤེས་པའི་སྤྲོད་ལཾཡིག་བོད་ཀྱི་ལོ་།
| འབྲེལ་པོའི་བརྙན་པོའི་སྤོད་ལོ་གནས་ཤེས་པའི་སྤྲོད་ལོ་།
| བོད་ཀྱི་ཐེམ་པའི་ཐོབ་ལོ་གནས་ཤེས་པའི་སྤྲོད་ལོ་།
| བོད་ཀྱི་ཐེམ་པའི་ཐོབ་ལོ་གནས་ཤེས་པའི་སྤྲོད་ལོ་།
| བོད་ཀྱི་ཐེམ་པའི་ཐོབ་ལོ་གནས་ཤེས་པའི་སྤྲོད་ལོ་།
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| བོད་ཀྱི་ཐེམ་པའི་ཐོབ་ལོ་གནས་ཤེས་པའི་སྤྲོད་ལོ་།

Francke p 169. 1-8)

du'i yo sa pi cag sgo la phi'n lo/ sgo lo phi'n ste lan gsum rig sprug lo/ msho mo'i nthil na chu sprug to'i lo/ tsan dan dmar po'i bsai'ng sug boding lo/ mikhal bzo ma k'a gu sgo de la phi'n lo/ go la phi'n sthe lan gsum rig sprug lo/ msho mo'i nthil na chu sprug rig ton lo/ tsan dan dmar po'i bsai'ng sug boding lo/
The dialogue between Gesar as 'abrug ma 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 sandle wood. (dmar po).

Francke noted that pencil ceder wood was often called candan (Sandle wood). The above passage showed the lucidity of the language in repetition 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 sandle created a thrilling atmosphere in which daring valour and avowed redening zeal had been symbolized.

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

Phyang ni phyang sor bcu pa dahi ma t'en pa/
Zhal ni pad m'i me tog dar thug ma bug pa/
Ice mo dar gyi mdud pa dahi ma myan sa/
of sdo ni gser gyi dur pa dahi ma smin pa's/nimm sems byan chub kyi sems dahi len te sa la phob/
cha'i gañ te ton te za gañ te mdun la phob k'i/

(Francke 93. 4-9)
sag gi sag khris steñ na pên chuñ sron po kun 'dug lo/
ber kai bar khris steñ du mo nan ni sron phrug kun 'dug lo/
lag pa se yag can dañ ma len pa mthun lo/
kha de chag ra dañ ma thug pa mthun lo/
lce sag dgar dañ ma myar ba mthun lo/
ol sdon rin mo nas ma mrid pa mthun lo/
'dug sems de dañ an te sa la phob lo/
cañ gani mthun ste ja gan mdun la phob bu/

Compare the two songs by 'abrug gu ma in course of search of companion abru gu ma offered beer for companionship (grols chang གྲོལ་ཞེངས་) to Agu khar yi khras 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 tongue, 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 ladden maiden.

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

Romanised transliteration

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