Chapter-IV
CONTRIBUTION OF FOLK DANCES TO THE THADOU-KUKI SOCIETY

The Thadou-Kuki folk dance creates or promotes a sense of community. Even when other recreational functions have ceased to be viable (as when immigrants brought an agricultural dance to the city), folk dance can continued to made dancers feel part of a national or regional group and helped them establish ties with their heritage. Folk dance sometimes develops around work activities of their community. Rhythmical movement, as in the “Iholhun lam”, can make the work more pleasant. Some recreational dances are based on the movements of certain tasks.

During my interviewed with Otkhokhai Haokip, President Gangpijang Kuki Cultural Troupe, on 27th June 2011, asserted that folk dances once have had, ritual purposes linked to the agricultural year or the stages of a person’s life, such dances today are usually performed for secular purposes such as recreation, courtship, self-expression, and competition in
their society. The events of an individual’s life, such as childbirth, initiation, marriage, succession to office, and death, constitute the other major category of events celebrated by their dances. Weddings are one of the most common occasions for dancing and these dances may have some religious function as well as recreational dances. Funeral dances are solemn among the Thadou-Kuki society as they have great faith in life after death and soul. They believe on the subject of life after and the land of death called Mithikho; while the body no longer exists and no visible traces of its remain, the soul continues to live and leads an autonomous existence in another world. So, they bury the dead along with articles such as Champong (dough), weaving equipments and foodstuff packets for his or her use in the land of the dead which gives an idea that there is life after death.

Their folk dance in the past has much more- besides, it’s entertaining, recreational and its magical role had important social functions too. The dances itself were a public tribune on which numerous events in the life of a village. The love, the
father, the mother, the son/daughter, the priest, the chief, the
councilors and the political conditions were talked about in
couplets of the song accompanying dance. Moreover, the
initiation fests comprised the training of dances necessary for
ceremony and for propitiation uses. The women folk teach their
children the sowing and harvesting movement through the
dance. Their folk dance gives opportunity to giving vent to some
fundamental and inborn human characteristics. The dancer can
improvise on the basic rhythmical scheme, they can display
their individual skill, but his dancing ought to harmonize with
the collective. In the past, people from different village found in
it a simple means of expression, in which they all could jointly
participate. This collective expression could supply a simple
melody, a verse first told by an individual and then repeated
easily by all, who listened to the voice, important and equal in
the collective.

The social role of the dance manifests itself in a
series of other modularity’s like; it accomplishes important
wedding tasks, it educates and soothes the social, religious,
tribes and differences in ages, it transfers in its civic couple form the urban civilization in the village. The social role of their dance has today a particular importance. The dance with its simple beauty and immediateness is a medium for drawing near different clans for their better mutual acquaintance. Initiation and succession to office dances, the person receiving the new status may perform a solo dance of power or humility, or sometimes the community may dance in honor of the individual. As long as folk dances exist as an integral part of community life, they are sometimes linked to specific occasions, and may be associated with specific groups of people. Most of their folk dances are open to everyone in the community. In some dances, however, participation is limited by age, sex, skill, or status. Certain dances, for example, “Suhta lam” etc. are meant only for the youth. Dances of this category may overlap with games, like Selkal Kitet, Kibot, Khouloi Kitet, Kangkap, TengKho, Songse, Kungkel, Bondel, Chop, SuhKho, Tangpel Suh, Lhei Kitet etc. Other dances may be reserved for older members of the community or for specific groups, such as
unmarried girls. Some dances may be limited to people who have attained given levels of social or ritual status.

Annual festivals as well as the events of person’s life cycle were marked by dancing. Their Folk dance may also accompany the celebrations of special organizations such as religious or social societies, family groups, and societies based on sex or age roles. Their Folk dance is sacred or secular and it may be difficult to distinguish as religion pervades all the society’s activities. Almost all ritual dances, however, have a social element, and many dances formerly performed for ritual reasons are today danced simply for recreation. Dances celebrating the cyclical events of the year are usually related to the economic life of the community, marking, for example, the stage of the agricultural year or the hunting and fishing seasons.

The society as an agricultural and hunting community have a yearly cycle related to seasons, the phases of the moon, political and religious holidays, and to animals and their seasonal habits.

Folk dancing, defined as the dancing passed from generation to generation that provided an “overt expression of
the activities and experiences of a nation’s past,”¹ had gained popularity during the first decade of the twentieth century. Folk dancing as a popular recreation has recently expressed the spirit and character of the people of the country. Because it did so in such a “vivid, human and universally comprehensible” way, the dances possessed an “educative value for the general public especially the younger generation whose knowledge of folk dance is woefully meager. Their folk dance provided an excellent opportunity to expand their horizons by contact with people and activities of other cultures. “Folk dancing as a “democratic socializing agent” and as an “agent of citizenship,”² which is an assets in welcoming diverse clans in making them, one and a unified society. Democracy involved not the “elimination of differences but rather the perfection and conservation of differences. “It aimed, through union, not at conformity but at variety involving give and take, mutual respect and mutual cooperation based on mutual understanding”³. Due to the actual process of folk dancing, participation required total involvement and it did not isolate
the various heritages; rather the mingling fostered by the dance broadened the participants’. Their folk dance allowed all to receive a more intimate knowledge of the thoughts, customs, traditions and histories of their own. “Folk dance constituted a positive social force by “wielding a unified whole out of a nation of diverse elements”. The teamwork of the dances fostered a sense of interrelationship as a group interests superseded individual interests and all parts became too merged together into a social whole”4. Their folk dance provided controlled situations in which differences were recognized while at the same time integrated into a smoothly running interdependent whole. “As far as the folk dance proponents were concerned, as people dance together they grew less aware of their differences and more conscious of their similarities as individual efforts were subordinated to those of the group”5.

Initiation of festivals and cultural fairs designed to serve as “epitomes of traditional courses,” offered spectators an exhibition of the typical activities that comprised an organized traditional program. Festivals hold various
demonstrations of folk games, folk dance and athletic events. “Of all these activities, dances attracted the most attention and it revives the souls of the contemporary young generation who lacked an understanding of their own past, to understand the beauty of their own popular traditions”⁶. In addition, the dance brought all tribes together and promoted the spirit of unity. In so doing, the dances illustrated the unity of all the different elements of the North East most cosmopolitan nation. Their annual festivals proved not only to be spectacle but also, a “laboratory in cultural history.” “The dances brought together all classes and tribes, exposed them to cultural backgrounds other than their own and represented the virtual, “wielding together the national elements in the North East”⁷ (where the Thadou-Kuki settles). Folk dance contributes to their society as a “community social solvent.” The various folk dances represented manifestation of the “experiences, spirit and passions.” Participation in any such “life-sustaining activity, it promoted group cohesion and helped to develop patriotism and pride in one’s country. The annual festivals and cultural fairs in
which folk dance are demonstrated, inspired numerous local folk dance programs and cultural events. Throughout this period, folk dances continued to be seen as an efficient way to combine physical activity with opportunities for integrating their society.

“They live in a large area of hilly country bounded by the Angami Nagas of the Naga Hills District in the North, the province of Burma in the East, the Chin Hills and the Lushais Hills in the south, and the District of Cachar in the West. Mainly, it may be said, they occupy the hills of the state of Manipur on all side of the Imphal Valley”. This diversified settlement is a potential disruptive force in uniting their Society. And it appeared difficult for the nation to absorb diversity in such a way as to create seemingly and effortlessly a unified society. So, reformers such as the folk dance enthusiasts searched for new strategies to fashion more directly unity out of diversity. As folk cultures became legitimatized and part of an expanded sense of a holistic culture, they lost their potential to serve as alternative culture capable of disrupting the dominant structures of their
social and cultural life. Thus, folk dance constituted a positive moral force, a social agency. That is destined to have in the future a great function in wielding together a unified whole from those whose conditions, settlement and occupations are exceedingly diverse.

The last hundred years have been characterized by the revival of their folk dance, thus national pride and group identity continued to be asserted and displayed in their folk dances. Their folk dance contributed in integrating their society as a unit cultural community. In ancient Thadou-Kuki society dances are performed in celebration of seasonal cycle and events of one’s life, thus till this day it became a bonding tide for their society. Their folk dance goes beyond the functional purposes of the movements used in work or athletics in order to express emotions, moods, or ideas; tell a story; serve religious, political, economic, or social needs; or simply be an experience that is pleasurable, exciting, or aesthetically valuable. The physical and psychological effects of dance enable it to serve many functions. It may be a form of worship, a
means of honoring ancestors, a way of propitiating the gods, or a method to effect magic. Dance often occurs at rites of passage, or ceremonies performed when an individual passes from one role to other. Thus, birth, initiation, graduation, marriage, succession to political office, and death may be marked by dancing. Dance may also be part of courtship. Dances may be the only events at which young people of different sexes can meet. In contemporary society, dances also provide important occasions for young people to socialize. Work too may be in the form of dance. Rhythmic movements may make the work go more quickly and efficiently. Besides giving physical pleasure, dancing can have psychological effects. Feelings and ideas can be expressed and communicated; sharing rhythms and movements can make a group feel unified and it developed as a means to help people express themselves and related to others. Their folk dance is considered an important method of communication, and the art is practiced in various styles throughout the region. The folk dancers express traditions, cultural and historical influences through their dress
and different patterns of movement. The movement on the dance floor narrated their tradition and culture, which has been passed down through generation. The steps and patterns of such dances tended to reflect the values and attitudes of society during the given period, and dances tended to reflect secular values. Their remarkable dance tradition which flourished and evolved after 1000 years is deeply linked to communal and spiritual life. There, ritual often consists of dance, and spirit possession is believed to occur in ceremonies such as the ‘kilhalho’. Their folk dance is considered as the harbinger of their tradition and culture, as their ancestor does not know the art of writing and there are a few historical records, often written by European officers and travelers. Whereas, their dances are the only feasible record of their traditional, cultural and religious rites.

Contributions of Folk Dance to the Thadou-Kuki Society are:

1). Folk Dance enhances local communities in which human relationships can flourish.
2). Folk dance make massive contribution to the common good of all society through festivals and fair and social action.

3). Folk Dance endows society with beauty.

“Cultural Dance (Folk Dance) is the living process of the functioning of values in the context of the existence of the individual and society. It is the process; reproduction and use in historical changing ways. Folk Dance arose and is developing together with society creating and enormous tradition. Folk dance always survives those who have created it and that which it originally served.”

Folk Dance can stimulated literacy development by interactions of a gross physical nature with one environment and others, these experiences are then converted into internal or external verbal language and finally the concepts developed are reinforced and recorded through the more abstract mediums of reading and writing. Play is a valuable introduction for the child into the world of learning. “Dance and Drama can be a part of this play. It is through play that children begin to explore their world. And while they explore this world they
begin to interact with others whilst they talk about their playing. Dressing up is a wonderful introduction into dancing and drama. It is enhanced when music is combined. All of these art forms have an aspect of literacy that can exist alone (e.g., musical notation) or they can interact with the other styles of communication so that the forms of expression can interact and influence each other.”

The Thadou-Kuki society with different clans and many other different social groups share a distinctive culture, and dance was an integral part of this structure. Like many ancient cultures, their religion was polytheistic and based on worshiping multiple deities, myths and rituals were used to define a large part of their way of life. Their dance sequences were imbued with different meaning according to the secular or religious festival being celebrated and it was not unusual to find patterns of steps offered to natural elements and phenomena, as well as to concepts of duality, fertility, good and evil, life and death. “In the early 19th century all forms of arts were promoted by the new elite group. It was at this stage that a
large number of dancers and dance teachers as well as musicians, along with several other professionals in other diverse art forms, fought to forge a new identity incorporating its diverse ethnic dance traditions. They worked hard to recover and maintain existing traditional dance forms from all around the country; at the same time, they were helping to established new styles of folk dance. This all helped to give status to the national cultural and to increase a sense of their own identity.”

Folk dance has played an important role in their lives. Singing; dancing and playing musical instrument; enlivened festivals and ceremonies, they passed down stories and legends; which tells of their history and beliefs. These oral histories took place during celebration and festivals. The oral stories which were passed down from generation to generation within the families and clans; have now been collected and written in books.
The wealth and complexity of Folk dance has social content and is conditioned by the diversity of its links with the social whole, the degree to which the various spheres of the life of society have been assimilated and refracted in each consciousness and activity. This is why the level of development folk dance is an indicator of the level of development in the society and vice versa. Folk dances have its own unique and independent quality and make it contribution to their society.

Society is shaped by the ideas and thoughts of everyone in it. This includes, dance, music, art. Dance is doing though; it is someone’s ideas shaped into the language of our mind. Folk dance is important in our society; it is an example or our creative nature; which in its self is responsible for most things. We see and use today; without it culture, society and history would be very different. Dance form is interesting, It gives people in common ground and express new ideas and opinions.

Folk dance plays a central role in fostering creativity, developing imagination; enable them to envision alternative
possibilities. The Folk dance creates the capacity for experiencing the sense of moment shaking up the consciousness and inspiring innovation. The following illustrate how various forms of thinking are evoked, developed, and refined through Folk dance.

i). Folk dance teach them to make good judgments about qualitative relationships.

ii). Folk dance celebrate multiple perspectives.

iii). Folk dance enable them to have experience that they have from no other source.

iv). Folk dance is closely associated with important ideas and events in history and contemporary life.

v). Folk dance builds a social climate of high expectation; discipline and social rigor that attracts business relocating to their community.

“Folk dance contribute to their society in achieving many “core competence” for the work place, which include allocating resources, collaborating, acquiring and evaluation
information and understanding social system. Folk dance is cited as important for certain foundation skills which include thinking creatively,”¹² problem solving, and exercising sociability – peaceful co-existence.
Notes and References


2. Elizabeth Burchenal, *Folk Dancing as a Popular Recreation* Published by: G. Schimer, New York, 1922, p. 10.


