

Situated high in the Western Himalaya, Ladakh is one of the great cultural crossroads of Asia. For centuries, it sat at the hub of ancient trade routes that connected the Silk Road to India, Tibet, and Kashmir. Each year, once the winter snows had melted from the high passes surrounding Ladakh, its markets would buzz with merchants from throughout Central Asia. They brought spices, wool, salt, and silk. They also brought their instruments and their folk songs. Over time, these diverse musical influences laid the foundation of Ladakh's unique folk traditions. Folk music became central to the daily life of the Ladakhis with song serving as an essential form of communication, documentation, and entertainment.

This collection of songs is intended to offer a sampling of the range of Ladakh's folk music. These songs also celebrate one of the great folk artists of Ladakh, Morup Namgyal.



Morup Namgyal (center) performing with the Lamdon Dramatic Club, c.1970. Photographer unknown.

I met Morup in 2009 when I began chronicling his life for a feature length documentary, *The Song Collector*. I was taken with Morup as an artist but was even more captivated by his lifelong preservation efforts. No single figure has had a greater impact on the preservation of Ladakhi folk music than Morup. Most significantly, in the early 1970s, as Ladakh was beginning to rapidly modernize, he founded the Lamdon School. This school has grown to become the region's most vital force for the preservation of Ladakhi language and music.

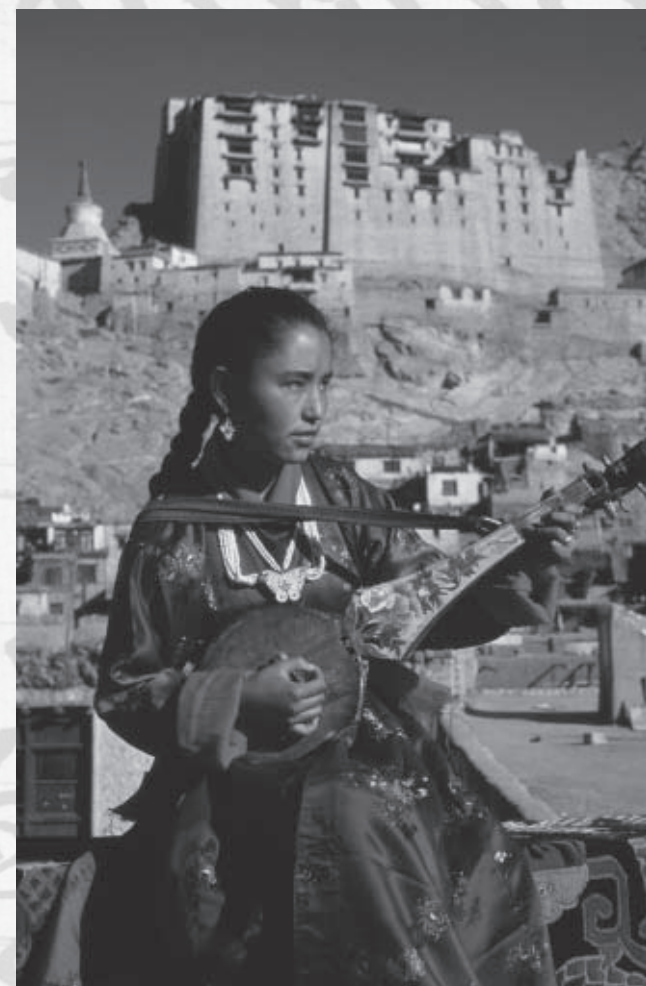
Morup is an avid preservationist and during his 30-year career working at Ladakh's only radio station (All India Radio, Leh) he recorded a vast archive of Ladakhi folk songs. This collection of over 1,000 recordings was unlike anything else in Ladakh and formed a crucial link to a dying folk tradition. Tragically, it burned to the ground in 2002 when a fire raged through the old wooden radio station building. The loss was devastating, but Morup immediately set about recreating the archive. Five of the songs on this album, recorded in 1992, are among the handful of tracks to have been spared by the fire.

Today, Ladakh's marketplaces bear little resemblance to the buzzing markets of old. Gone are the camel trains and merchants, replaced instead by Indian trucks belching smoke. Seemingly vanished too are the folk musicians, pushed aside by the synthetic beats of the latest Bollywood hit. But the folk artists have not vanished entirely, and if you wander beyond the blare of the latest pop song, you'll discover a folk tradition that, thanks to the efforts of Morup Namgyal and others like him, is alive, evolving, and poised to endure the challenges of modernization. I hope you enjoy this small glimpse into the sounds and lyrics of this Himalayan crossroads.

Erik Koto
Director - *The Song Collector*
www.thesongcollector.com



Morup performing in the Brokpa region of Ladakh, c.1968. Photographer unknown.



Tsering Chorol, Morup's daughter, performing in Leh, Ladakh c.1990. Photographer: Bill Kite

SIDE A

Flute Melody 1 (traditional)
Flute - Angchuk Ralam
Tabla - Phuntso Angchuk Kidar

Chaspay Lhu (Tashi Rabgyas)
Singer - Morup Namgyal
Flute - Angchuk Ralam
Tabla - Phuntso Angchuk Kidar

The wind is blowing in the spring
The wind is blowing in the spring
It's like my beloved lover is whistling
It's like my beloved lover is whistling
Thinking it's my beloved
Thinking it's my beloved
Again and again I gaze to the fields
Again and again I gaze to the fields

In autumn the full wheat is swaying
In autumn the full wheat is swaying
It's like my beloved lover is dancing
It's like my beloved lover is dancing
Thinking it's my beloved
Thinking it's my beloved
Again and again I gaze to the fields
Again and again I gaze to the fields

In winter snow is falling falling on the mountain tops
In winter snow is falling falling on the mountain tops
It's like putting a white scarf on my beloved lover
It's like putting a white scarf on my beloved lover
Again and again I gaze to the hills
Again and again I gaze to the hills

Rgunam Snonmo (traditional)
Singers - Morup Namgyal, Tsering Yangchen
Damian - Skalzang Tundup, Tsering Namgyal, Tsering Wangchok
Daman - Jigmed Phuntsog, Stanzin Odzer

Where the mountains meet the sky
This is like an impassable border
Inside the sun and moon is our jewel

This land like a lotus flower
We happily return to this land
We happily return to this land of plenty

Where there are glaciers
This is like an impassable border
The snow lion's turquoise mane is our jewel

This land like a lotus flower
We happily return to this land
We happily return to this land of plenty

The top of the rocky mountains
This is like an impassable border
The eagle is our jewel

This land like a lotus flower
We happily return to this land
We happily return to this land of plenty

The great lake
This is like an impassable border
The golden fish is our jewel

This land like a lotus flower
We happily return to this land
We happily return to this land of plenty

Rgung Namkhy Skilna
(Stanzin Wangchok, Angchok Ralam)
Singer - Tsering Chorol
Damian - Tsering Chorol

Oh hot and bright sun
Rising above the mountains
My love could be anywhere
Please look to him, is he ok?

Oh melodious Queen Mangeshkar
Born with your melodious voice
My love is very far from me
Please send him to me with your beautiful song

Oh ocean giving birth to the clouds
My love is very far from me
Please send him to me with your rains
Like pouring down blessings on me

Hemis Sanag Chosling (traditional)
Singer - Morup Namgyal

Hemis is a very auspicious (tantric) gumpa
There is a religious throne, which is like a god
Jamyang Thistok Dorje is like my eyes

Stok is a very auspicious palace
There is a queen's throne, which is like a god
Putieth Wangmo is like my heart

Leh is a very auspicious palace
There is a king's throne, which is like a god
Deskyoung Namgyal is like my soul

Larna (traditional)
Suma - Tsering Angdos
Daman - Dorje Mortup
(a *Larna* is a religious offering)

SIDE B

Lar Garlo (traditional)
Singer - Morup Namgyal
Damian - Tsering Chorol

Hurray Gods! Hurray Gods!
Saying Hurray Gods is auspicious
The stars and the moon and the sun shine in the sky
The rainbow offers a canopy for all, this is auspicious
Lotus flowers are raining down onto the benevolent earth
No rain and no hail at the right time is auspicious
Falling rain and flowing water at the time are auspicious
The Chinese astrologers auspicious
The Kazakh kings are auspicious
The Mongolian lands are auspicious
The religious land of India is auspicious
The brave Ladakhis are auspicious
The religious kings are auspicious
Long live the Lama, it is auspicious
May they live for eons, it is auspicious

Emorie Zonga (traditional)
Singer - Morup Namgyal
Damian - Skalzang Tundup, Tsering Namgyal, Tsering Wangchok
Daman - Jigmed Phuntsog, Stanzin Odzer

Mt Emorie is in Zonga village, its peak is very high
Mt Emorie on the high pass we put the prayer flags
Mt Emorie the prayer flags are offerings to the sun and moon
Mt Emorie the prayer flags are offerings to the stars and heavens

Mt Emorie is in Zonga village, its peak is very high
Mt Emorie the birds adorn its waist
Mt Emorie the eagles adorn its waist
Mt Emorie the golden fish adorn its foot
Mt Emorie at its foot is Zonga village, it is beautiful

Stendel Sumpa (traditional)
Singer - Morup Namgyal
Suma - Ali Mohammad, Rigzin Sangdup,
Daman - Jigmed Phuntsog, Stanzin Odzer

The sky is full of stars
Above the stars the sun and moon are shining bright
This is the first auspicious sign for us
Now we have received the first auspicious sign

The four regions of the world are full of people
The king and lamas are above them all
King Sengge and Lama Stagsang are above them all
This is the second auspicious sign for us
Now we have received the second auspicious sign

The Leh palace is like an empowering vessel
It is like a pond of milk
It is like a bountiful harvest of rice
This is the third auspicious sign for us
Now we have received the third auspicious sign

Harvest Song (traditional)
Lead singer - Morup Namgyal

Easily we will do this work
Easily we will do this work

Greetings my sickle
So sharp it's like cutting through water
You have been pounded 100 times by the blacksmith
When you were in the fire,
the blacksmith's wife pumped the bellows 1,000 times

Easily we will do this work
Easily we will do this work
Easily we will do this work
Easily we will do this work

Threshing Song (traditional)
Lead singer - Morup Namgyal

Please go around and around the center
Slowly slowly around and around and thresh
Come in my bag
From China come [in a big way] in my bag
From India come in my bag
From Mongolia come in my bag
From Kazakstan come in my bag

Flute Melody 2 (traditional)
Flute - Angchuk Ralam
Tabla - Phuntso Angchuk Kidar



Masked dancer, Hemis monastery Ladakh c.1945
16mm film still, cinematographer unknown

Instruments:

Daman - A set of two kettledrums that produce a deep resonant sound, played with sticks called *damshing*.
Surna - A double reed instrument that belongs to the ancient 'shehnai' family of instruments from India.
Damian - A six stringed lute of Tibetan origin, common to the nomadic region of the Chang Tang in Ladakh.



Leh Palace from main market, Ladakh, 1947
Photo: Loren Tutell.

Recorded by Erik Koto September, 2011
except 1, 2, 6 and 12 recorded by Bill Kite February 1992

Produced by Erik Koto and Robert Millis
Mastered by Mark Gergis Layout by Robert Millis
Lyric translations by Morup Namgyal

Front cover: Surna player, Leh, Ladakh c.1945. 16mm film still, cinematographer unknown. Image courtesy of Jigmed Namgyal.
Back cover: Masked dancer, Hemis monastery Ladakh, 1947, photo: Loren Tutell.
Liner notes background images are pages from Morup's handwritten song diaries, collected over many years.

Thanks: Morup Namgyal and family, Bill Kite, Eshey Thudup, The Lamdon School, Stanzin Chonjor

For more information visit www.thesongcollector.com