

By Dr. Rabin Man Shakya
Edited by Kuon Hunt

Saturday, June 5, 2021

'Harisiddhi Ritual Dance Drama of Jaladesh' Presentation

Dr. Linda Iltis, an International Studies academic advisor at the University of Washington Henry M Jackson School of International Studies, presented a brilliant and thought-provoking presentation on the 'Harisiddhi Ritual Dance Drama of Jaladesh' during a virtual program organized by the World Newah Organization, USA.



Likely the first masked dance of Nepal, "Jala Pyakhan is reputedly the oldest and most famous dance drama of Nepal. It is performed in a small town of Harisiddhi located about one mile south of Patan.

"Forty years ago, I became interested in the classical Newar dance drama traditions in Nepal, because I wanted to know the meaning of the specific ritual dance drama called Jala Pyakhan", Linda said during the virtual conversation, indicating that

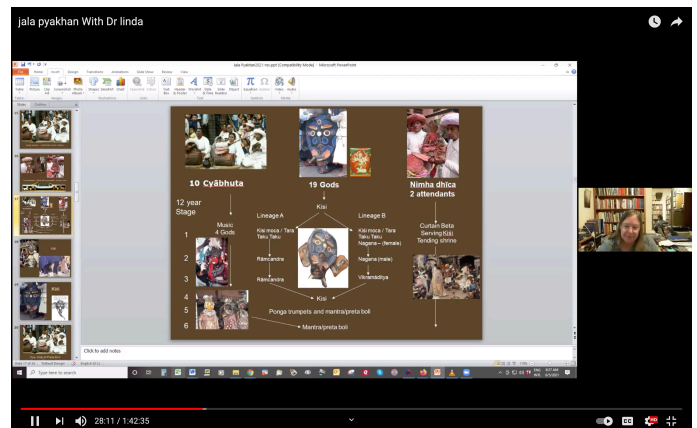


Jala Pyākḥā

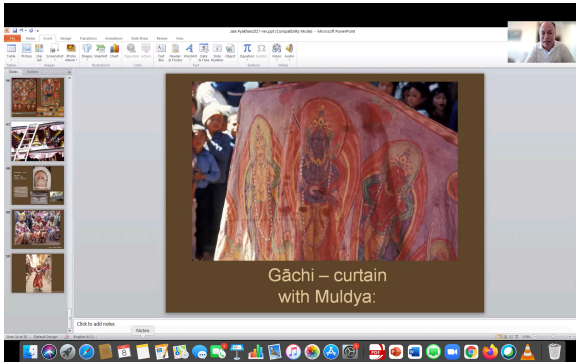
the dance group performing this drama has the largest royal (now state) land endowments of any of the Newar ritual dance groups, and its private community sponsorship is widespread throughout the Kathmandu valley and beyond.

Linda said, "When I first saw the Jala Pyakhan, I was filled with a mixture of admiration, curiosity and awe. Now there are only two full 18 hour performances of the drama. Although this is a Newar tradition, songs and dialogue are sung not in Newar, but in dya-bhay, the "language of the Gods", which is a kind of mantra language, the meaning of which is understood only by individual performers. These sung dialogues are interspersed with stylized Chari songs, which to an outside observer seem to be related to the Charya giti, but the Jala dyaju priests themselves insist it is not song but rather deva bhasa (god language) accompanied by preta boli (spirit musical syllables)."

Guruju Prajwal confirmed that the dance is not Charya and the songs are not, in fact, Charya giti. At the end of the program, Dr Linda Iltis answered to questions of the distinguished participants. The virtual program was conducted by Pramesh Shrestha of WNO-USA chapter, and moderated by Prajwal Vajracharya, co-founder of Nritya Mandala Mahavihara.



Linda Iltis has had twenty-nine years of teaching and award winning academic service in higher education. She is also a university researcher and professional editor and publisher, with international experience teaching and training in three countries (USA, Nepal, Ghana), in the fields of cultural anthropology, comparative religion, textual studies, and applied international development.

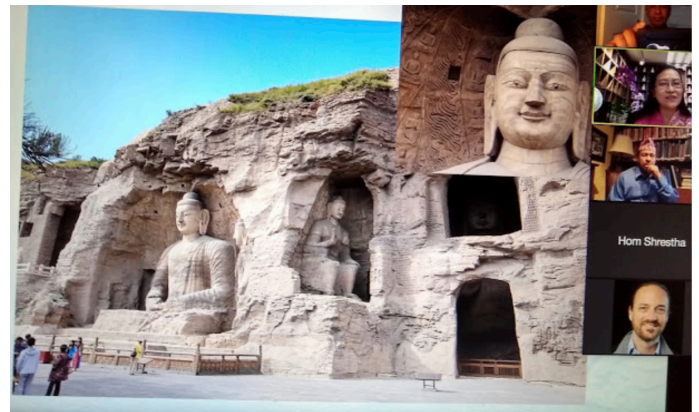


Saturday, June 12, 2021

Zoom Talk on 'Buddhist Art in China and Nepal'

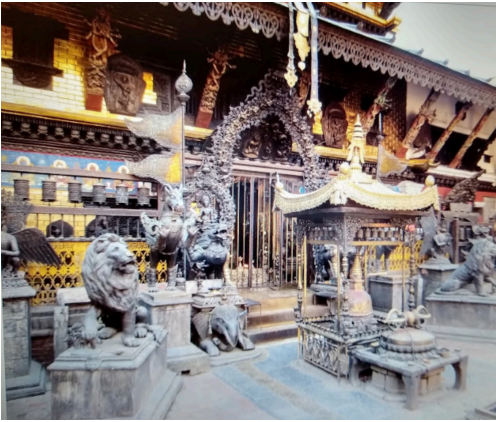
The Hong Kong Buddhist Studies Association organized a virtual talk on 'Buddhist Art/ Buddha and Bodhisattvas in China and Nepal' with Dr. Tina Ho of the Hong Kong sangha and Guruju Prajwal of Nritya Mandala Mahavihara presenting.

Dr. Tina Ho's talk dealt comprehensively with the ancient history of Buddhist art in China. She indicated that this chronicles date back to very ancient times, stretching for nearly



two thousand years from the later Han dynasty well into the Qing dynasty.

Guru Prajwal Vajracharya presented an even broader view of arts history. "Art started before any writing and alphabets. What



the ancient people visualized were reflected in drawings and art."

Vajracharya underlined the need for protecting and preserving the ancient and medieval arts of Nepal. "Arts and culture are the important sources of identity of a nation," he said. He also stressed the pedagogical importance of arts education

for awareness and preservation purposes.

A lot of examples of ancient Buddhist arts in China and Nepal were presented in the program by both Dr. Ho and Guru Prajwal. Session participants were from different states of the US, Canada, Hong Kong and China.

Sunday, June 10, 2018

Sithi Nakha Festival: Newar Environmental Day



Sithi Nakha, is a large cultural festival for the Newar people, celebrated right before the start of Monsoon season in Nepal. During the Dharani recitation on Zoom today, Guru Prajwal Vajracharya delivered a short talk on the

culture and traditions of Sithi Nakha. There is no doubt that Sithi Nakha is the Newar version of World Environment Day (WED). Except, Sithi Nakha has been celebrated by the Newars in Nepal for centuries while celebration of WED is totally a recent phenomenon.

Sithi Nakha for Newar people is very important because it is on this day the Newars not only clean and sweep their homes, and nearby surroundings, Nanis and Bahals, but they also clean and purify wells, ponds, stone spouts, springs and other water sources in the neighborhood and periphery. The day is dedicated to acknowledging and cleaning all water sources, wherever they may be found.



Although focused almost exclusively on water, the festival is a profound expression of devotion and commitment to the Earth. The traditional significance of Sithi Nakha lies in the fact that it inculcates in the people the value of conserving water sources and keeping them clean. Lately, the Nepal government has expanded the concept, carrying out different cleanliness and other environmental awareness programs to mark the day.



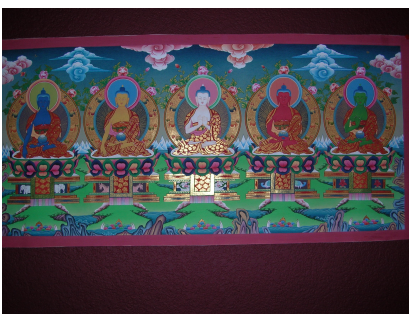
After their work, Nepalis always love to celebrate with food. The planet Earth is round in shape and so wo maris (pancakes made of lentils) - which are also round in shape - are offered to the planet Earth on Sithi Nakha. This day and its wo maris are eagerly awaited by Nepal's children. Because of the effort required to make them in traditional times, they were an infrequent, beloved treat. As Newar people observe Sithi Nakha by eating wo maris, Guru Prajwal said that he had prepared three different kinds for a limited number of participants in the vihara.

Newar people living all over the world celebrate Sithi Nakha by respecting and cleaning water sources and by cooking and eating wo maris.

Saturday, June 19, 2021

Pancha Buddhas are Five Transcendental Buddhas in Vajrayana Buddhism

Guruju Prajwal Vajracharya presented an advanced, second teaching on Pancha Buddha Charya Nritya on Zoom for the Dance Mandal Hong Kong sangha, restating that, "Pancha Buddhas Vairochana (the brilliant one), Amitabha (the infinite light), Ratnasambhava (the matrix of the jewel), Amoghasiddhi (the infallible realization) and Akshobya Buddha (the unshakable) are the five transcendental Buddhas of Newar Vajrayana Buddhism."



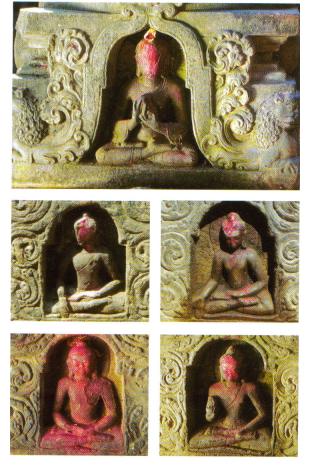
The ubiquity of the Pancha Buddha is exemplified by the drawings and paintings of Pancha

Buddha that can be found on the entrances of the majority of houses dwelt in by the Newar Buddhists in the Kathmandu valley. Vajracharya indicated that the Pancha Buddha



Charya dance is considered one of the main ritual dances by the Vajracharyas and Shakyas of the Kathmandu valley, performed in honor of the Five Buddhas. It is usually performed in the local Buddhist mahaviharas of the Kathmandu Valley during important festivals and more auspicious religious occasions.

"At the time of sacred dancing, the five performers dress in the distinctive colors of the five Buddhas and depict their specific posture, color and direction. These different colorful costumes are additionally symbolic of the sky, earth, water, fire and air elements. The dance performers also wear specific ritual crowns on their heads," veteran Charya guru Vajracharya said.



During the teaching, underlining the importance of Dasaparmita, Gyana Bala or Dasa Bala, the senior priest of the Nritya Mandala Mahavihara also said that Gyana Bala or Dasa Bala refer to the "ten powers" of the Boddhisattvas: (1) Sthanasthana, (2) Karmavipaka, (3) Nanadhatu, (4) Nanadhimukti, (5) Sattvendriyaparapara, (6) Sarvatragaminipratipatti, (7) Dhyana vimokshamadhishamapatti, (8) Purvanivasanusmriti, (9) Cyutyutpatti and (10) Asravaksaya.



Later, senior Charya dance teacher Vajracharya demonstrated the movements of legs, gestures of hands and fingers, expressions of face during the Pancha Buddha

dance teaching. Vajracharya also demonstrated the different steps of the dance and also how various Pancha Buddhas take different directions.

The teaching presented a detailed and comprehensive description of the Pancha Buddha Charya dance. A number of relevant pictures were also shown. At the end of the Zoom session, Guru Prajwal replied to several questions from participants of the Dance Mandal Hong Kong sangha.

Friday, June 25, 2021

Sarod Concert Held at Portland's Nepalese Buddhist Temple



A sarod concert by Daniel Birch, accompanied by tabla player Alan Crammatte, was organized by the Nritya Mandala Mahavihara for a limited number of in-person attendees, as well as participants on Zoom.

After a brief introduction by Prajwal, the enthralling musical performance proved to be the epitome of East Meets West. Musically, Nritya Mandala Mahavihara is not just a rendezvous for Charya nritya and Charya giti lovers, it also has been working to promote different

kinds of music. The latest sarod vadan concert is a testimony to this and to the mastery of the musicians.

Danny Birch lived, studied and worked in Nepal between 1972 and 2001. He was Assistant Professor at the Department of Music of the Kathmandu University from 1995 to 2001. He learned sarod playing and raga from the late Nepal Royal court musician Mohan Sundar Shrestha. Danny also studied with two other court musicians



Shambhu Prasad Mishra and Ganesh Bhandari. He earned the degrees Vadya Nipun and Vadya Visharad from the Bhatkhande Sangit Vidyapeeth in Lucknow, India where he studied with the late Ustad Ilyas Khan of the Lucknow - Shahjahanpur Gharana.



He also composed, directed and performed music for a number of dramas in Nepal with the Studio 7 Troupe at the Hotel Vajra. He performed regularly at the Hotel Vajra's Pagoda Room for over 20 years. He further studied in Calcutta with the late Ustad Bahadur Khan of the Maihar Gharana, and he was director of local music for the movie "The Little Buddha".

Likewise, Alan Crammatte learned tabla from the late Hom Nath Upadhyaya in Nepal and the late Pundit

Choti Lal Mishra in Banaras, India. The western musician duo delighted the Zoom participants as well as the live audience with their mastery of sarod and tabla, respectively.

Tuesday, June 29, 2021

"Sacred Buddhist Dance of Nepal: Vajrayogini"

Throughout the months of June and July Yangchenma Arts & Music are producing an eight week live online course "Sacred Buddhist Dance of Nepal: Vajrayogini" featuring Prajwal Vajracharya as instructor. Yangchenma's online press release said: "We are excited to continue on in our series of



sacred Buddhist dance of Nepal courses with Prajwal Vajracharya. In our course, beginning June 5th, Prajwal will teach the complete dance of Vajrayogini, the beautiful and powerful red dakini. Charya Nritya dance is a unique Newar Buddhist tradition that teaches us how to use the physical body to awaken the

mind through the unification of movement, visualization and awareness.

It indicated that "In this course, Prajwal teaches the foundational movements and

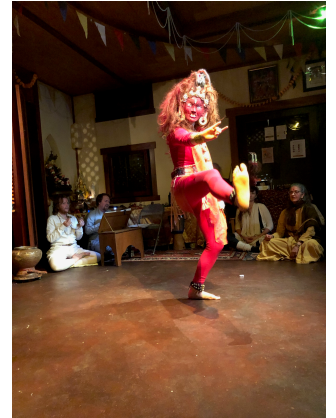


yogini Mandala



exercises to train the body and wake up the subtle channels, as well as the complete dance of Refuge, 16 Offering Goddesses, Avalokiteshvara, and Green Tara. This course lays the groundwork for all future deity dances."

Thirty-five participants from fifteen different countries are taking part in the two-month long course, held each Saturday for one and half hour, said Prajwal. Each class every week kicks off with a short Dharma talk by Guru Vajracharya.



Indicating that the Vajrayogini Charya dance is one of the ancient classical dances of Nepal Mandala, Prajwal described Vajrayogini herself as "a main female Buddha. She is semi-wrathful and bright-red, dancing joyfully, without shame or fear and glorifying in her femaleness. She drinks the nectar that fuels her in the intensity and clarity of an uncompromising motivation to cut through ignorance while embracing all accessible energies."

Vajrayogini is one of the most important Tantric Goddesses of the Kathmandu valley, who is revered as the Goddess of Yogic practices. Vajrayogini is the quintessence of a selfless dakini who always works for the happiness and prosperity of sentient beings, Guru Vajracharya said.



According to Newar Tantric Buddhism, there are several yoginis or Tantric Goddesses in the Kathmandu valley. In ancient times, the Kathmandu Valley was known as Nepal Mandala. Speaking about different forms of Yogini, Prajwal remarked that in Nepal Mandala there are several temples dedicated to powerful Yoginis: Vajravarahi, Vajrayogini, Khadgayogini, Aakashyogini, Nairatma (Guheshori).

