Künzang Khorlo: A Graphic Poem

These graphs are often painted on the walls at the entrance of the temples and dzongs. Beside their decorative purposes, the poetic graphs are also considered as a sign of auspiciousness and blessing. Temple walls often have paintings which symbolize auspicious and good things life such as the six signs of longevity ($\Im = \Im = \Im$) and the four friends ($\Im = \Im = \Im$), astrological and cosmological representations ($\Im = \Im = \Im = \Im$) such as the cosmic mandala and the four celestial kings of the cardinal directions ($\Im = \Im = \Im = \Im$). The Künzang Khorlo graph is often drawn alongside these paintings.

This tradition of poetry in the Himalayas is based on a type of Indian $k\bar{a}vya$ or poetics, more specifically a difficult $k\bar{a}vya$ style which the famous Indian poet Dandin promulgated in his book called $K\bar{a}vy\bar{a}darsa$ or *Mirror of Poetics*. Dandin presents the circular or wheel poetry as one of the difficult poetic styles. There are two types: the semi-circular or half wheel and the circular or the full wheel. The first one is easier style having a stanza of poem, which can be read left to right or top to bottom and yet makes good sense and has poetic beauty. In the full circle or wheel poetry, the poem can be read both left to right and right to left, and both downward and upward. As such a combination of syllables and words are difficult to achieve, the style is considered as difficult form of poetry. The following stanza in Sanskrit, which can be read in all four ways and still works as a poem, is Dandin's example.

₹7	ಕ್ಷ	ವ್ನ	ಕ್ಕ	R	ವ್ನ	ಕ್ಕ	Ę
ಕ್ಷ	H ^r	هر	ಸ್ನ	ವ್ನ	هر	۲¢	R
ಚ್ಚ	لارز	<i>Hu</i> c	۲ŕ	۲¢	<i>Huc</i>	هر	ಕ್ಷ
सू	ಕ್ಷ	Kr	R	R	۲¢	ಕ್ಷ	R

sā	mā	yā	m ā	mā	yā	m ā	sā
m ā	rā	nā	yā	yā	nā	rā	m ā
yā	nā	vā	rā	rā	vā	nā	yā
m ā	yā	rā	m ā	m ā	rā	yā	m ā

Daṇḍin's *Kāvyādarśa* has been for centuries the locus classics of poetic studies in Tibet and the Himalayas. Thus, the full wheel or circular $(\sqrt{2}\sqrt{2}\sqrt{2}\sqrt{2}\sqrt{2}\sqrt{2}\sqrt{2}})$ poetry found at Bhutanese temple and *dzong* entrances is also an adoption of Daṇḍin's poetic style. The lamas compose poems which are often eulogies of other lamas in circular style so that the poem can be read left to right, right to left, upward, downward and even diagonally.

First, the graph with square boxes is drawn. The number of boxes are determined by the number of syllable in a line. The boxes are then filled by the poetic composition, one syllable in each box. The syllables and words are picked and arranged in such a way that the outcome should be a good poem while reading it left to right, right to left, upward, downward and even diagonally. Thus, like in a scrabble game, one should be able to form sensible poetic sentences in two to five directions with good sense.

It is common to see full wheel poems on the temple walls in many part of the Himalayan Buddhist countries. While some temples reproduced circular poems composed by renowned masters in the past, other temples have new and unique circular poems composed for the site. The boxes are painted in different colours and the letter also written in colour. The number of boxes depend on the number of syllable and lines of the poem. In Bhutan, the circular or full wheel style of artistic poetry is found on the walls of many temples and *dzong*s as one enters the premises. They are generally compositions by very erudite religious figures.

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