

Name of the Element: Lama Dances of Sikkim: Buddhist Monastic Dances, Sikkim, India.

Community/ies: Buddhist monks of Sikkim

Region: Sikkim

Brief Description: Lama dances are masked dances performed by the Buddhist monks of Sikkim as part of their religious practices. The practices are codified in the religious texts of Sikkim in accordance with the teachings of Guru Padmashambhava, the legendary saint of the Mahayana school of Buddhism. Based on these, Lamas conduct prayers for the benefit of Buddhism and the state of Sikkim.

Most of the Lama dances are the external representations of these prayers conducted inside the monastery for making them accessible to the masses. The basic theme of all such prayers is conquering evil to protect the land and its religion. But each prayer and its dance are distinct from the others as they are derived from different texts dealing with different problems faced by a person during the cycle of birth and death. Unlike the original Tibetan Buddhist dances, Mount Khangchendzonga is central to any Sikkimese Buddhist dance. In the Lama dances, very gorgeous attire and colourful masks made according to the scriptures are used with traditional musical instruments like cymbals and big horns rendering the codified religious music and chanting.