



Touring in Spiti.

The following are extracts from MANOHAR SINGH GILL'S forthcoming book "Himalayan Wonderland — Travels in Lahaul-Spiti" (Vikas Publishing House). Another instalment from the book which gives a first-hand account of life in Lahaul-Spiti when the author was posted there as D.C. in 1962, will appear next Sunday.

ROLANCE, the rising of corpses, is a phenomenon which is widely believed in, in Lahaul. I may, therefore, relate here some cases of *rolance* which have occurred in the past.

The first case relates to Upper Kyelang, and occurred about a hundred years back. There lived a woman in the village, who had a red mole above her right breast. From this and other signs a lama had predicted that there was grave danger of her becoming a *rolance* after death and therefore her body should be burnt on the very day of death. Even in life there was something about her which scared people.

Now it so happened that in the month of February the people were observing the festival of *nye nye nyung ne*. This is similar to the Christian retreat. For two days the people keep a vow of silence and fast spending their time in listening to religious discourses by lamas. The woman died during this retreat. Most of the men, being under a vow of silence, were unable to help in the funeral. The body had to be kept for the night. There was an agnostic couple in the village who had not kept the retreat. They promised to keep vigil by the body with some *lohars*. They tied the body strongly with ropes, and after trussing it to the seat, also tied it to the ceiling beam. For any emergency, they kept an axe.

Fiery Glow

Some time during the night there was a rumbling in the body. The couple woke up, and watched, fascinated. Soon the body began to fill with gas, and as it expanded, it burst all the ropes, like a circus strong man. Its tongue hung out until it was almost down to the navel. The eyes took on a fiery glow, became big, and started bulging out of their sockets.

The *rolance* stood up and walked to the door. All the *lohars* ran away. Now, the door happened to be a small one (before the Moravian mission came the doors were small and windows non-existent). It is well known that the *rolance* cannot bend. While it was struggling with the door, the couple snapped out of their hypnotic trance. The woman was brave.

She grabbed the *rolance* around the waist. The *rolance* band cut at it furiously with his axe, but the cuts healed instantly. Thus they continued for a long time.

By now it was dawn and the lamas knowing the prophesy rushed to the house. Most people ran away on seeing the appearance of the *rolance*, but Yeshe Meme, the head Lama and *umzad* of Sha-

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RISING OF THE DEAD

Shur monastery, stood his ground and stuck his *phurpa* into the *rolance*. It collapsed. The villagers soon collected, and the body was immediately carried out for burning. When the bier was being carried out, a fox suddenly came out of it, and ran to the cremation ground. As it reached the ground, a huge flame shot into the sky. The lamas alleged that the evil spirit had been driven out.

The story is well known in Kyelang and the woman was an ancestress of Angrup, who lives in Upper Kyelang.

Corpse Sat Up

The second story is about Karding across the river. This also is about a woman who lived with a young female companion. It so happened that when that woman died most of the men were away. Only a few cowardly men and the woman were left in the village. The young woman came running at night to inform the people that her older companion was dead. The men went to the house and found the body lying on the ground under a sheet. They were discussing the funeral arrangements when the sheet began to move slowly. The head came up. The people sat glued to their seats. Life seemed to flow out of their limbs. The corpse sat up, opened its eyes, and asked for food. Quickly a bowl was produced, which it ate greedily.

The young woman said that in the past the old woman seemed to die a number of times, but got up after some time in each case. She had therefore not informed any one. This time being sure, she had told the people. Since the woman once again seemed alive the people went home. Late at night the girl found signs of a *rolance*. Blood flowed out of the nostrils, and was licked in by the tongue, which was beginning to hang out. The eyes began to bulge. The young woman quickly got out of the house and locked it. She spent the night with friends. No one dared venture near the house to investigate. In the morning when they opened the house, they found the body terribly bloated, and with the tongue hanging out. The people lost no time in burning the body.

This story was related by Dorje's maternal grandmother who belonged to Karding and claimed to have seen everything. She was over eighty, when she died about ten years back.

Searching Fingers

The third story is about Kham in Eastern Tibet, and Dorje heard it at Guge during his sojourn in Western Tibet.

There was a small monastery at a place called Umdog in Kham. It was really the subsidiary of a very large monastery about 15 miles away, and was used by old monks who wished to meditate in quite surroundings. A monk died at Umdog. The abbot of the main monastery was immediately informed, and soon about one hundred monks arrived to perform the funeral rites. The body was washed, dressed, and tied in a sitting posture in the main room. A cloth screen was draped around it, and an al-

ter was prepared on a low wooden table — the kind found quite common in homes in Tibet, Lahaul and Ladakh. A butter lamp was lit. Prayers were started, and it was decided to keep the body for the full seven days that are ordained. For three days the lamas droned away at their prayers. On the third night the lamas, tired with keeping awake, fell asleep. Some were in the main room, while the rest were in an adjoining room.

There was a young novice lama of about 12 years in the room with the body. Due to fear he could not sleep and lay awake watching the screen behind which the body lay. At about midnight things began to happen. The flame of the butter lamp would shoot up to the ceiling every now and then. Then the screen fell away. The corpse opened its eyes, slowly, and rolled them, as if testing them. They began to bulge and took on a fiery glow. The tongue came out slowly but surely, till it hung a foot down the chest. Blood began to drip from the nose on to the extended tongue.

State Of Trance

The boy was terrified. He watched speechless. He could not even scream. He crept under the alter table and continued to watch. The body now began to fill with gas, and soon the broken ropes lay in pieces on the ground. It was free. It stood up and slowly rolled its head taking things in. The lamas slept, and the boy watched hypnotized. It then walked to the butter lamp, and dipping its finger in the black, it marked itself on the forehead. Then going around the room, it marked all the sleeping lamas. Going to the next room (unfortunately the door was big enough to allow it to pass through erect), it marked the remaining lamas. Coming back to the main room, it tried to mark the boy also. But it could not bend to get under the table. In vain it tried to stretch and reach. Once or twice the outstretched searching fingers came within inches of the boy's skin, but he literally fused into the wooden side at the far end and escaped.

It then gave up and began to dances. At once the sleeping lamas came to life and took up the rhythm. They danced with a wild jerking motion, and seemed in a state of trance. Their eyes had a fixed unrecognizing stare.

By now the body had collected some of his wits, and had lost some of the initial paralysing fear. He began to think of escape. There was an open chimney on one side. Given a chance he could pull himself up on to the roof. He watched carefully. As soon as the dancing *rolance* moved into the adjoining room, he made a dash, and jump for the chimney. Getting a hold he began to pull up desperately. At that very moment the *rolance* returned. It made a grab for the boy, and caught his right foot. It was left holding the long Tibetan boot; the leg had slipped out and up through the chimney to safety.

Sitting on the roof the boy watched through the opening. The effort had drained all his energy and he lay panting on the roof. The *rolance* put a black mark on the boot, and it also began to dance!

By now the dawn was in the sky. The boy ran to the monastery 15 miles away, and told his story of horror. All listened but no one could do anything. The *rolance* was too powerful. They waited for the senior abbot — an old man with great spiritual power — to break his *samadhi*. In

the meantime fires were lit and fierce Tibetan watch dogs put around the monastery with the *rolance*. It is afraid of both.

After three days the old lama opened his *samadhi*, and all fell at his feet with their tale of woe. After much thinking he consented to face the *rolance*. Stripping himself completely naked, he rubbed red mud all over his body.

Then with a *kangling* in his left hand, and a little drum in his right, he went to the monastery.

Going up to the roof, he blew his *kangling* into the room through the chimney. The dancing stopped. He then came down and playing his *kangling* and drum, entered the monastery, dancing. The other lama danced inside, the *rolance* and the bewitched lamas, began to dance with him. After some time he came out, followed by the *rolance* and the others, all dancing. The pied piper of Kham! He walked for many days with his strange retinue, till he came to a lake. The holy one waded in, followed by the strange retinue. They were all drowned — only the old lama returned.

In Tibet, *rolance* are believed in completely, and Dorje met many people who had seen one.

Small Talk

There is another *rolance* story — about a village in the Pattan valley of Lahaul. Pattan is Hindu but the influence of its neighbour has permeated it, or perhaps they have retained their pre-conversion demon beliefs.

An old man died in a certain Pattan village leaving behind a wife and child. At night, the body which was lying on the ground, began to show the familiar *rolance* signs. The woman became afraid, and left the house after placing a sacred book on the chest of her dead husband. This also is supposed to be a deterrent against *rolance*.

After some time an old friend of the dead man, who was travelling through dropped in. He knocked for a long time, but only heard a moaning sound. Curious, he pushed his way in and found his friend on the ground. He sat down and began small talk, but his friend seemed to be behaving in a queer manner. He groaned about a weight on his chest, and asked the traveller to remove it. The traveller became suspicious and prevaricated. The body then asked him to make gruel. The visitor asked for the butter. At this the man on the ground stretch on his arm — it seemed elastic and became very long — and plucked the butter tin from the shelf. Now the traveller was sure. This was *rolance*. He quickly lighter a fire and getting out put it in front of the door. Fire is a deterrent. As his luggage was inside he could not go away. He hid in a field of mustard. Mustard is a protection against *rolance* and spirit, and is carried by all lamas. The man could hear the *rolance* stamping about inside. After some time the fire in the doorway died down, and the *rolance* came out. It walked round and round the field to get at the man, but it dared not enter the mustard. It gave up and walked around the house looking for the wife and child. Not finding any thing it picked up the pole ladder and walked off down the road.

In the morning it was found lying on the road with the ladder by its side. The common belief is that the sun defeats the *rolance*. It seems a general belief all over India, that spirits do not walk forth in the day. Shakespeare thought the same:

I have heard
The cock, that is the trumpet to the morn,
Doth with his lofty and shrill sounding throat
Awake the God of day;
and at his warning,
Whether in sea or fire,
in earth or air,
Th' extravagant and errant spirit hies
To his confine;
(Horatio in Hamlet)