

The ballet
of the

COBRAS WOMEN

LADAKH



Nestled in the far north of India, in the Indian state of Jammu & Kashmir, the ancient kingdom of Ladakh is a region of the Himalayas, isolated in winter by high passes. Despite the inexorable rise of modernity, the customs and traditions of clothing are still alive. Worn on feast days by women, one of the most remarkable is certainly the perak, a Ladakhi headdress that does not lack originality.

Its general shape, reminiscent of the cobra in combat posture, evokes the "lhus", serpentine deities, spirits of waters that populate Tibetan tales and are considered protectors.

Half-parure, half-cap, the perak is composed of a long piece of leather covered with a red fabric on which are sewn turquoises, arranged in rows or arranged above on the front tip, for the most beautiful. Besides turquoise, other stones can be part of the composition of perak: coral, mother of pearl or amber polished. On the central part, is sewn the "ga'u", a reliquary box in silver or gold. According to tradition, the number and quality of the gems decorating it indicate the social status of the woman, who then offers her eldest daughter and thus over several generations.

In September 2018, at the monastery of Hemis located 45 km from Leh, the Naropa festival, which takes place every 12 years, was the scene of the famous dance of "Shondol".

Accompanied by the rhythm of drums and oboes, nearly a hundred women from Ladakh villages enter the scene. Step by step, with slow movements, they gracefully perform the dance and sing a chant that literally mesmerizes the audience. The head covered with their perak, the shoulders of a silk brocade, they compose a fascinating ballet of rare elegance. Joined later by other women in traditional outfits, and thus composing a round of 299 women, winning the title of "Ladakhi's Largest Dance", recorded at Guinness World.

(Translation of English / French text by Google translation)

Full text on request (7,662 characters, 1250 words)



The Ladakh mountain range stretches between 3 500 and 7000 m above sea level and offers grandiose landscapes of gigantic dimensions, flooded with the setting sun, of a marvelous light.



In the region of Zaskar, the village of Photoksar (4120m) nestled at the foot of huge rock faces.



Dolma, in the kitchen of her house in the village of Photoksar in Zanskar, presents her perak adorned with large turquoises, polished coral and ga'u, a small silver or gold box inlaid with turquoises that houses precious talismans .





The Hemis Monastery and the village nestle at the foot of a gigantic rocky cliff.



The statue of Shakyamuni Buddha erected above the Hemis gompa dominates the Indus Valley.



The village of Hemis with in the background the Indus Valley and the esplanade of the Naropa Festival.



Dressing session behind the scenes, before the dance of "Shondol"



The dancers wait in a long line in front of the Naro Photang temple.



The dancers wait on the steps of the stairs leading to the Naropa Festival stage.





The dancers wait in a long Indian file to perform the dance of "Schondol".



A dancer from the Stok area is patient while consulting her mobile phone before going on stage in front of the audience. New technologies are now part of the daily lives of local people.





Under the captivated eyes of the audience, the women perform a slow dance filled with a deep serenity.



Covered with a perak, the women wear a fur shawl and silk brocade around their shoulders and wear the traditional "pabus", an embroidered felt shoe or woven wool.



The dancers line up and perform a slow step dance.





During the Naropa Festival, women from Leh and neighboring villages join in the dance of women cobras in a large circular ballet. Shondol's dance performance, mixed with the songs of nearly 300 women, exerts a spell over the audience with a powerful spiritual charge.



In addition to the traditional perak, women wear a turquoise necklace and polished red coral rings and pearl pendants.











The turquoises headdress is completed by two large black lambstraps, worn on each side of the head and adorned with silver plates and rows of red coral beads.



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