

having the male and female teams face off against one another is symbolic of a sexual act of productivity. This idea is further emphasised when the winning teams chase the losing teams and then rub their buttocks against the bodies of the losing team members. Clearly this action is loaded with sexual connotations.

As the ritualised game of the *teanh prot* and the ensuing punishments for the losing team show, there is a great deal of sexual symbolism in the event. These sexually symbolic acts are calls for the perfect amount of rain for the community as a whole so that everyone can share in a prosperous crop and harvest.

7. Conclusion

This preliminary study shows that the Cambodian *teanh prot* represents a continuity of a centuries-old tradition. Moreover, it demonstrates significant socio-religious symbolisms, which have been masterly manipulated from Indian myths of churning the ocean of milk so that they fit to the local agrarian models and needs. At one point, the game gained national popularity and served Cambodian agrarian communities very well.

Current research, however, shows that the game is fading away yearly to the point that an alert should be made to safeguard this valuable intangible cultural heritage. Other than some television shows commissioned by government institutions such as the MoCFA and the Ministry of Tourism, efforts to safeguard this important ICH element are low. The *teanh prot* has not yet been inscribed as an ICH element, but the MoCFA is just initiating efforts to register ICH elements nationwide and with support from UNESCO.¹⁷ In addition, substituting *teanh prot* with other forms of entertainment, especially dance, many Cambodians are losing interests in playing and protecting the game. One of the main factors is a lack of understanding its significance.

A competent body closely and actively involved with the game in each community is the Buddhist temple committee. The members help organise the event annually. The committee members are typically elderly males who are lay devotees living in the villages around the monastery, and their important roles are to decide on the monastery's projects and sometimes help solve problems of the villagers. They are the key players in safeguarding and transmitting this very important ICH element. Some of them are keen to participate in safeguarding the elements. Engaging the committee members in safeguarding this particular ICH element would be ideal, since they are deeply involved with organising the event annually.

¹⁷ Last year there was a training program supported by UNESCO in order to train the local cultural officials about the ICH registrations.

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