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Nata Sankirtana: A Cultural Heritage of Manipur- India

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Abstract: With the advent of Hinduism, the devotional singing like NataSankirtana was introduced in Manipur. a sloka from the fourth sakandh of Srimad Bhagavad Mahapurana describes that Sankhya, Tarya, Mridanga, Dunduvi etc. are used for devotional purposes. Drum beats, songs and dance presented before the gods have been known as Gandhvarma from the Vedic period onwards. Therefore, Sankirtana is a perfect representation of Vedic culture and it has been used differently in many stages of religious transformations. Despite some differences, most of the religious occasions related to the four Vedas such as, Rig, Sam, Yajur and Atharvan were associated with Sankirtana. In this continuous process, Sankirtana became more influential as the so-called devotional movement flourished with in India Bhagavad religi. It is a known fact that the singing styles of Sankirtana were derived from Kirtan. We may analyze the original sources of Sankirtana and Kirtan in two different regions in India. The form of Sankirtana performed in the South and the North India. The Manipuri singing style of Sankirtana is called Nata Sankirtana. When the word "Nata" is placed before the word "Sankirtana", it becomes more meaningful. The term Nata is a Sanskrit word meaning "to act" or "to dance". In the classical definition a "Nata" is the actor or performer who has the capability to express or act.

Keywords: Nata, Sankirtana, Raasleela, rituals, Krishna-Radha

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Introduction

Manipur is a small ethnic group situated on the borders of India and Myanmar. The state of Manipur comprises an area of some 8500 square miles. The heartland of which is a fertile valley roughly 36 miles north to south and 18 miles across. Politically Manipur is bounded by Myanmar to the east and the Indian states of Nagaland, Assam and Mizoram to the north, West and South respectively. The Meiteis on whom the study is focused, largely inhabit the valley of Manipur and comprise roughly two – thirds

of the state population of just below to million in both language and in the high development of their culture.¹ They are distinguished from the Naga and Kuki neighbors, who are classed as 'scheduled tribes by the Indian constitution'. Manipur has a Meitei tradition. Meitei traditions themselves trace the settlement of the land back to the first century. The Manipuri state chronicle, the Cheitharol Kumbaba, dates the reign of the first King Pakhangba, at 33 A.D.² while the early parts of the chronicle are legendary in style. There seems to be no good reason to doubt that some groups of the Meitei at least occupied the valley early on in the Christian era.

So certainly, there was a bulk of Vedic people from the north-west of India had entered into Manipur Valley in the pre – Christian era. If we talk of the story in respect of the Aryan population, their migration, settlements and cultural penetration and the development of the political institutions in Manipur valley, there is a little source of information about this. Ancient temples like the Vishnu temple of Bishnupur, Govindaji temple in Imphal, the Kohima stone, old palaces and other related buildings and structures provide us little more historical information. Mr. G.E. Geraini in his work, researches on Ptolemy's Geography indicated the establishment of an Indo-Vedic state by the Bishnupriya Manipuris in the remote period in Manipur.³ He states, "From the Brahmaputra and Manipuri to the Tonkin gulf we can trace a continuous string of petty states ruled by those scions of the Ksatrya race, using the Sanskrit or Pali language in official documents and inscriptions, buildings, temples and monuments of old Hindu style and employing Brahmin priests at the propitiatory ceremonies connected with the court, and the state."

State of Manipur has through the ages evolved and preserved its own distinct traditions of art and culture. Including a variety of dances and related rituals, which collectively go under the name of Manipuri Dance. Dance and music verily run in the blood of the Manipuri people and it is rare, indeed, to find a Manipuri who cannot dance or sing. The Manipuri have always been a simple and an intensely people content to live in a world of their own. They have a rich lore of legend and mythology and this includes a number of stories which reflect the people's love for dance and music. Songs and dance are, in fact so inextricably woven in to the pattern of their life that the Manipuri's regard themselves as having descended from the Gandharvas, the celestial musicians and dancers. The Manipuri Dance and music of international repute basically center round Krishna Bhakti and is indeed a great contribution of the Gandharva's and the Vedic immigrants to Manipur as per expressions found in Asoka's Pillar inscriptions.⁴ There is no written history of Nata Sankirtana, except some stories and events which are fit to be a Sangeet/ song by text of a Natya. The story of Nata Sankirtana is based on performance context. By tradition, Sankirtana is performed up to three to four hours. Different episodes from the story of Radha-Krishna can be added to it.⁵ The story of Nata Sankirtana is wide ranging and basically related to Vaishnav culture. Sankirtana songs describe stories, events relating to the life of Sri Chaitanya, Nitya Leela of Radha-Krishna, Vrindavan Varnan, Gouranga Rup and Avishar.

The structural parts of Nata Sankirtana are very simple such as the beginning of Raga, Sabha Khurumba (salutation to audience), Gourchandrika, Gourangabhabhi, Nirtya Leelas, Darshan, Radha Govinda Aarti, Prarthana, Lalsa, Mansikhya, Soy Goshai, Nityaipad. The beginning and final parts are not a part of the story. The story of the Nata Sankirtana is the stories of different Uparasas of Radha-Krishna's Nirtya Leela and tale of Sri Chaitanya. They are sung in wedding ceremonies is somewhat different from the former. The differences are in Raga Houba, Sabhakhurumba, Gourachandrika, NabadwipVarnan, Gouranga Bhabhi, Vrindavan Varnan, Krishnarup, Radharup, Prarthana, Nityaipad singing. In Manipur, during the reign of King Kiyamba in 1467-1508 Vishnu temple was set up and people started paying obeisance to Vishnu by offering Sankirtana. After him, his successors, King Charairongba and most of his people in 1697 A.D. took Bhagavata Dikshya and began worshipping

Shri Krishna (Madan Mohan) through Hari Sankirtana. In 1709, Maharaj Garibaniwaz founded Drupad Hari Sankirtana which was known as Ariba Sankirtana (Bangdesh Pala) in the rituals of dead ceremonies like Asti Sanjay, Shradha, Samasor etc. Then in 1763-1798 A.D. under the rule of Maharaj Bhagyachandra, Drupad Hari Sankirtana accompanying Gourchandrika and Goura Bhavi became famous in Manipur. Maharaj Bhagyachandra was awarded the name Rajarshi and was believed to be the incarnation of Nortom Thakur Mahasoi, an intelligent Shiksha (student) of Loknath Goswami of Braja Brindavan. It was during his period that the temple of Sri Govindajee was installed and started to be worshipped by offering Rasa Kirtan of Lord Krishna.

Drupad Hari Sankirtana was known by the name of Dhrumel Hari Sankirtana to the Manipuris from the very beginning. However, the Maharaj Bhagyachandra made it so popular that Manipuris knew it as a unique Maha Dhrumel for a long time. Then with the passage of time, following the footsteps of their predecessors, Maharaj Gambhir Singh offered Goura Dhrumel, Maharaj Narasingh offered Nityai Dhrumel is shown in Fig. No.1 and Maharaj Chandrakriti offered Devi Dhrumel. Then the previous Dhrumel Hari Sankirtana ultimately came to be known as Nata Sankirtana keeping in mind the idea of prayer through Sankirtana. And this was how Drupad Sankirtana was divided into two types in Manipur, viz. Ariba Pala (Bangdesh Pala) and Nata Sankirtana (Nata Pala).



Fig. 1: Nityai Dhrumel

In Nata Sankirtana five aspects namely pung (rhythm/talas), songs, dance, story and rituals are performed at the time of worshipping the lord. The different aspects used in these talas are all not that simple; they are all very ancient, it will be very hard to trace them anywhere in the whole of India. It is clearly understandable with a thorough research into the ways of punglons (drum-beats) as are used in the Sankirtana since long ago. It would be hard to trace any clue even if we scan under the eyes of Desi Tala Shastra as is found nowadays elsewhere in India, perhaps it would never be possible through this Shastra. Most Pandits (scholars) are of the opinion that such aspects of the Margi tala have long been ceased to exist from the Indian soil; except a few mentions in the Shastra. It is the pride and practice of India that such types of Vedic talas found nowhere in India today have long been kept nourished and flourished within the folds of a tiny state like Manipur. Nata Sankirtana is a form of worship, considered as a Maha yajna. Nata-Sankirtana is the cultural soul of Manipuri society from birth to death. All the merits of Satyayuga, Tretayuga and Dwapuryuga are attained in Kali yuga through Hari Sankirtana. These are all merged in the form of Hari Sankirtana in Kali Yuga. Sri Chatyanya preached the value

and importance of Sankirtana to liberate the mortal and attain moksha with the help of rhythm, the lord is invoked, and using rhythm, is worshipped. While worshipping one surrenders himself to the lord. This is the inevitable aspect of Nata Sankirtana. By singing the transcendental story of Radha Govinda in different rhythms, the devotees serve the lord. Worshipping the lord in tune with Vedic norms forms the Nata Sankirtana of Manipur. In theme and spirit, it is the embodiment of bhakti, depiction of the 'madhur premrasa' of Radha Krishna. It is performance-based ritual where the leelas of lord Krishna are enacted, a sacred performance and symbol of love.

A person understands the true essence of Nata Sankirtana only if he is liberated and attains salvation. This enables the performers and participants to experience Radha Krishna union and transcendental love. For centuries, Nata Sankirtana has been performing as an important practice, Gandharva Bidya and a Maha Yajna in the society of Manipuri Gouriya Vaishnavites. Nata Sankirtana became a part and partial of Manipuri Vaishnava community's socio-religious activities and prosperity. The form of prayer accompanied by music, song and dance has been known as Gandharbam since the time of Vedas. From the time immemorial, the invocation of Gods and Goddesses; worshipping their statues and offering Aaratika, Arhan, Pujan, Parichay have been done traditionally. This culture has been passed down from generation to generation. Nata Sankirtana has two main social functions - it brings people together on festive occasions throughout the year by acting as a cohesive force and reinforces relationship between the individual and the community through life-cycle ceremonies. Nata Sankirtana to the followers of Goudiya Vaishnavism is a form of worship. It is considered as a Mahayajna (complete sacrifice). The Vaishnava architects trace its origin to the aesthetics and philosophy of Shrimad Bhagavata. In Shrimad Bhagavata the only merit in Kaliyuga is Hari Sankirtana (chanting the name of the lord) and through Sankirtana a person can reach his ends and attain moksha. A person in Satyayuga attains mukti through dhyan, in Treta Yuga by yajnas and Dwarpur Yuga through puja and in Kali yuga through Hari Sankirtana. The above Dhyan, Puja, Yajana, etc., are all combined or merged in the form of Hari Sankirtana in Kali Yuga to attain salvation. Sri Chatyanya or Lord Gouranga preached the value and importance of Sankirtana to liberate the mortal and attain moksha.

The true picture of Manipuri Nata Sankirtana is serving the lord Krishna. Nata Sankirtana was introduced by devotees and priests into the state of Manipur under the aegis of the kings. With the help of rhythm, the lord is invoked, and using rhythm the lord is worshipped. While worshipping one surrenders himself to the lord and asks for his wishes and this is the inevitable aspect of Nata Sankirtana. By singing the love story of Radha Govinda in different rhythms, the devotees have been serving the lord following the Vedic tradition. In such a manner, worshipping the lord in tune with Vedic norms forms the Nata Sankirtana of Manipur. In theme and spirit of the Nata Sankirtana it is the embodiment of bhakti at purest. The essence of Nata Sankirtana is bhakti (devotion). The whole performance is bhakti oriented. It is the depiction of the 'madhur premrasa' (transcendental love) of Radha Krishna. Nata Sankirtana is performance-based ritual in which the leelas or plays of lord Krishna are enacted non-realistically. The performance is enacted with subdued acting, dance, music and songs. This abstract performance symbolically represents the merging of both the actors and participants (audience) in the process of ritual performance to another realm where each one of them can identify themselves with the lord. Thus, Nata Sankirtana is a sacred ritualistic performance. A person can only understand the true essence of Nata Sankirtana only if he is also liberated and attains salvation. The devotion and love enable both the performers and participants to experience Radha Krishna union and transcendental love. In later developments, Nata Sankirtana as one of the performing art forms became the foremost reason to achieve spiritual goal.

Materials and Methods

There are two forms of Manipuri Sankirtana since the period of Maharaj Garibniwas which are as follows:

1. **Ariba Sankirtana:** It is on record that Sankirtana singing took place in Manipur in 15th century A.D. during the reign of king Kiyamba of Manipur. Maharaj Garibniwaj ruled Manipur from 1709-1748 A.D. and in religion he was a follower of Ramandi i.e. worshipping of Lord Rama. During his reign, many kirtanias who were migrants to Manipur from the ‘Nongchup Haram’ (i.e. India) began to join in the service of Shree Ramji Prabhu with their kirtan. As the Maharaj was keen in the Ramandi religion, he supported this religion to such extent that it came to be a part in all social & religious activities in Manipur. Later, this performance having been initiated by the kirtanias from Bangladesh came to be known as Bangdesh Pala. In Manipur, Sankirtana performance has been classified in various forms with performing groups in different names (Pala). Among them, Bangdesh Pala is considered the oldest or the first chronologically. After the emergence of Nata Sankirtana (Nata Pala), Bangdesh Pala has been understood as Ariba Pala (Old Pala). For Bangdesh Pala, glorifying Lord Ram through singing and kirtana was the prime feature as believed. It was agreed by all that Bangdesh Pala was introduced by Konthoujam Oja. Konthoujam is a surname and not the exact name. In Manipur calling the guru by his surname was popularly in tradition and taking the real name was considered indecent on the part of the addresser. In the book “Ram Nongaba” written by Shri Konthoujam Labanga during the reign of Shree Shree jukta Jai Singh Maharaj the introduction says Ram Nongaba- a scene in the epic Ramayana used to be sung in kirtana when Ramandi was state religion. Therefore, it was assumed that the one which we referred above as Konthoujam Ojha who introduced Bangadesh Pala may be this Konthoujam Labanga or his close relatives. The most important point here is that the term Bangesh Pala itself was not found used before the reign of Maharaj Bhagyachandra though the practice of this kirtana and had already been there ever since the reign of Maharaj Garibniwaj after he was, initiated into Ramandi sect.

Kinds of Ariba Pala

Under the patronage of the king and also with the support and interest of the public, the Meiteis started. Specially to provide better service to the Vindavanchandra, Shree Ramji Prabhu and Shree Shree Govindaji. So, Bangdesh Pala was divided into two Pala groups: i). Leibakchaba Pala and ii) Sevak Pala.

i) **Leibakchaba Pala:** Since then these pala has been serving Shree Govindaji in its Astakaalaseva (eight-time service in a day) through rotation of 10 days by each group. Shree Surchand Sharma has stated a point in the title of “Leibakchaba” in the Meitei Jagoi Marishuba Sharuk, Shree Surchand Sharma, 1970, p.3.as below:

“Leibak chaba Haaibadi Leibak asibu makhoina (Bangdesh Pala) Jajaman tourambadagi haaibani! Masisu lounaba yai maramdi paatloibabu paatchaaba Jajmanloibabu jajman chaaba haainei!”

It sounds appropriate that leibakchaba was named after the one who protects the state. Because in the ‘Ariba Manipurigelongei’ (Ancient Manipuri Vocabulary) edited by Pandit Ningthoukhongjam Khelchandra Singh, leibakchaba has been referred to the one who protects the kingdom or the state of the Affairs of a kingdom. This word is found used during the reign of Maharaj Bhagyachandra in the book ‘Cheitharol Kumbaba’, Lairenmayum Ibungohal Singh and Ningthoukhongjam Khelchandra Singh, 2005, p.157. as below:

Kakching keithelgi Kumdi shak 1712 Lada thaa thangjana hal-e...18 ni
Yumshakeishada meidingu chingthangkhomba Moraan naaba –thungla-e/

Lamjinglakpa waa thaaba krishnadasthoklak-e/ Ibungshija shagolshenba hanjaba ramaanchingba Leibakchaabamee 700 thamlam-e!

It has been deduced that the word 'Leibakchaba' comes from 'Leibakchaba' protector of the State. This title was given to the kritaniyas as they also involved in the daily affairs of the State. In short, the performers of this kirtana were almost among the high officials of the State.

ii) Sevak Pala: The second group of Ariba Pala (Bangdesch Pala) is called 'Sevak Pala', which has since been in the service to the Shree Shree Govindaji without break. How was this group (pala) formed is also stated Meitei Jagoi Marishuba Sharuk, Shree Surchand Sharma, in 1970,

Meitei Nata Sankirtana Neina Ahanba Sharuk edited by L. Lakpati Singh, 2002, p.19 stated the sequences prepared by Shri Atkokpam Parijat Singh for Bangdesch Pala singing are given below:

- a) Pung raga houba
- b) Eshei raga houba
- c) Abahan
- d) Gourchandra
- e) Duital Ghat
- f) Rajmel
- g) Tanchap
- h) Tala ama yeiba (to play any prominent tala)
- i) Nityai pada
- j) Shoi gosai
- k) Jai Bhai

As commented by many gurus, Abahan and Tanchap were not used in the singing of Bangdesch Pala in the past. But nowadays in Nitileela singing (regular ritual singing) Abahan has been added. As regards Tanchap, Ojha Athokpam Mera Singh (Hanjaba), Keisham Yaima (Eshei hanba) commented that the inclusion of Tanchap in Bangdesch was a very recent development to enhance the beauty of the kirtan. Ariba Sankirtana (Bangdesch Pala) is still preserved and practiced at the royal palace and some other centers of Manipur.

2. Nata Sankirtana: Nata Sankirtana is an old type of music and it has the look of **Margi** music based on Vedic tradition because of the following reasons. Firstly, the taals used in Nata Sangkirtana namely raaga, raagataba, rajmel, sanchar, dhruvmel and the words used in describing these rhythms are not found in books describing **Desi taal Byabastha**. Secondly, the beats of these taals if looked properly are all dhruva pada. Within it there are chatuspada i.e. three taals of one pada combine with one dhruva totaling four pada and this is more prominent in the nata sankirtana.

This particular taal is used for praising and worshipping gods because it has the look of pranav is shown in fig. No.2 Rajarshi Bhagyachandra introduced this style of kirtana singing known as Nata Sankirtana which found its supreme expression during the reign of king Chandrakirti of Manipur (1850-1886) when the sixty four rasa were presented for the first time in sixty four sessions spreading over thirty two days. The Manipuri musician singing kirtana as called **Nata**- a classical term Sanskrit, meaning the person who knows the four abhinayas and different types of Natya, gets himself merged in the rasa which he is trying to portray and who appears physically on the stage: a dancer with songs on the lips.



Fig. 2: Nata Sankirtana

Results

As per the norms of **Smriti Sastra**, even though in social functions conducted by Vaishnavites such as churakaran, karnaved, funeral rites etc. the entire preparation for elaborate rituals are being done, the Mahayajna of nata sankirtana would lead all the other rituals. The ragas of the drum would invoke the lord and other prayers and rituals would follow. The function will get over with the sankirtana singing bijay. Even though in other parts of the country, as per Hindu tradition, daughters are married off before a fire hearth where a Maha yajna is performed after elaborate rituals and praying to fire god. In case of place like Manipur for Meitei Hindu Vaishnavites, a nata sankirtana maha yajna would be conducted by invoking the god. Daughters are given kanyadan by the father and wish them a happy married life. Some important functions and duties are given below:

1. Nata Sankirtana is a very important aspect in the lives of the people in Manipur. It is because when our end is near, people listen to Hari-Naam to relieve us from all the wrong doings that we have done before, so that we die peacefully. After death the family members would take the dead body for the last rites.
2. In the shraddha ceremony, the Nata Sankirtana will start with raga. Before the invocation of the god and prayers start, Pinda- dan cannot be offered.
3. After offering the Pinda-dan, the owner of the ceremony will have a bath and wear washed clothes. He will then come and offer his respects towards the end of the Sankirtan when Raga Bijay is being performed. The Shradha ceremony comes to an end with the guardian of the Mandap sending the departed soul to beikuntha dham.
4. In case of any death in a house, Naam Sankirtana plays an important role. In the ten days of mourning or Dashahan, the ritual will start with Nam Sankirtana and other rituals like reading Shrimad Bhagavat Gita will follow.
5. The particular person who mourns, known as the Girathangba, will only offer Pindadan after the Sankirtana starts.
6. Even in astisanchay or the ritual of picking up the remains from the grave, Sankirtana is performed along with Parikrama around the Hari mandir.

7. Manipuri have started performing many rites and rituals which they believed are good for them. For instance, rites related with planting a tulsi or basil plant, rites performed for ponds, temples, houses, death anniversary etc. are all performed along with Sankirtana. Depending on the concerned persons, some have it on a small scale and some do it on a largescale.
8. On the special day of lord Krishna which is held every year, Nata Sankirtana maha yajna is performed in all the temples within the Shri Shri Govindaji shrine and in the Bijoy Govinda temple.
9. After the Sankirtana, other performances follow and it closes with Sankirtana bijay. The birthday is celebrated with other performances by men, women and children belonging to different panas thereby serving the lord Krishna and Radha. Even in the temples in different localities such special days are performed with Sankirtana.
10. During holi, men, women and children organized holi kirtana groups and performed in the temples and even in the courtyards of different houses.
11. During the Ratha yatra festival, young boys and young girls along with older people organize kirtans and perform in temples.
12. Even during Jalakeli and Jhulon festivals, young boys and girls along with married women organized kirtana groups and offer to the lord.
13. Within the kirtana many other performances like Krishna leela, Rasaleela and Gouura leela are also performed following Sankirtana.

Manipuri Nata Sankirtana has recognized by UNESCO in 2013. Sankirtana- the ritual singing, drumming and dancing of Manipur- has been selected for inscription on the Representative List of the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. The decision was taken on December 4 at the eighth session of the UNESCO Intergovernmental Committee in Baku, Azerbaijan. Following the recognition, the art form will be able to enjoy greater popularity across the world, attract scholars and performing artistes from far and wide, and thus help in conserving it for the posterity.



Fig. 3: Nata Sankirtana in Raasa Leela

Manipuri Classical Dance is closely related to Manipuri Nata Sankirtana as it starts and ends with Nata Sankirtana while being performed. For example, in the performance of Rasleela, Nata Sankirtana is performed in the form of Purbaranga, and then Rasleela would follow is shown Fig. No 3. The same happens with Gouraleela and Udukhool leela etc. therefore, so long as Manipuri Classical Dance like the Rasleela survives, Nata Sankirtana will also survive. Nowadays Manipuri Nata Sankirtana has become popular in entertainment programmes. For example, Pung Cholom (Drum Dance) of Manipur, which is a part of Nata Sankirtana, frequently, features in the big festivals even at the international level. This kind of exposure and nurturing will help in the survival and enrichment of this art form.

There are many stories in Bharata's Natya Sashtra that remind us Purvaranga being performed by the Nirgit, Bahirgit and Geet Vidhi. The three types of songs included in Nata Sankirtana can please all the Devas and Devis. The Gurus knew this and confidently believed in the potentiality of these songs to please the Devas and Devis. The various ritualistic procedures included in Nata Sankirtana clearly prove that it was performed according to the prescribed laws of Sashtra. The rules are followed till today without any disruption or changes according to Sashtra, Raga Hauba, the first part of Nata Sankirtana is known as Utthapani Dhruva. So, Utthapani Dhruva is the starting point of the Sankirtana associated with Upohana. Here, Nirgit and Bahirgit are offered in the form of a puja to the Devatas in the Tala Prabandha known as Vardhamanak. Again the Raga Hauba is further divided into seven parts viz., pung raga, guru ghat, eshei raga, sanchar, abahana, vaishnav sanchar and raga ghor which is a long process to invoke the Ista Devata through puja and stuti which are performed in order. The two episodes of Nirgit pung raga and guru ghat project the image of the Ista Devata Dhyana and put soul in to the idol so projected. Bahirgit, the Eshei Raga clads the idol of the Isha Devata and in Upohana Sanchar Nirgit is then served as Upachara. The Bahon Geetvidhi is served as Vandana and Vaisnava Sanchar nirgit as Arati. In this way, the Lord's puja is performed.

Thus, in the first part of Purvaranga, Ragahauba, invocation of the Ista Devata and Nandi are performed and then to the Devas and Devis, then to the King and Brahmins and Vaisnavs are also offered homages. Here it may be noted that some small processes are performed prior to the commencement of the Raga hauba and it has been customary. For example, the preparation of the Vadya Yantras (musical instruments such as pung and kartals). The pung player will check the tune and sound of their pung and the singers check the sound of their Kartals. Then it is followed by the entry of the Palas who sit in the hall and the ritual of Leichandal (the sanctification process) which is served by the Arangbham (arranger). All these are the procedures performed before the beginning of Raga Hauba. And these activities are all prescribed in the Sashtra.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The revolution of Desi Sangeet created a big issue throughout India. This led to the steadily declining of Drupad Hari Sankirtana of Braja Brindavan and Garanhati Kirtan of Bangladesh Nortom Thakur Mahasoi. Except the surviving Sankirtana in Manipur, all the Drupad Hari Sankirtana were totally weeded out from the soil of India. Those Brahmin, Vaishnav, Shaiva, Sakta, Buddhists who fled to different parts of the world during the Muslim invasion reached Manipur. Some settled there taking shelter and receiving protection from the King of Manipur. Many of them travelled through the land to reach the South East Asian Countries like Myanmar. And this was how the names of different Brahmins, who followed the Vedic religion, were recorded in the historical books kept at the Loishangs (departments) of Konung (palace). Those Brahmins set up the temples of Kesha (Devi), Shiva, Ganesh, Mahadeva, Durga, Jagannath, Kali, Sanidev every and corner of Manipur. By singing the love story of Radha Govinda in different rhythms, the devotees have been serving the lord following the

Vedic tradition. In such a manner, worshipping the lord combined with Vedic norms forms the Nata Sankirtana of Manipur. In Nata Sankirtana five aspects namely drum, songs, dance, story and rituals are done at a time to worship the lord. Lastly, it is notable that Nata Sankirtana which an art form transmitted from generation to generation through traditional school of guru-sishya parampara is now institutionalized, along with the traditional school. And it becomes the fourth Indian art form recognized by UNESCO an Intangible Cultural Heritage. So, it is hopeful that this ritualistic art form, associated with the cultural life of the Manipuris from birth to death will thrive to live on as part of Indian cultural Heritage despite the onslaught of mass consumerist culture.

Acknowledgment

We recognized Manipuri region and its development, the political background, sociological and cultural background. Manipuri have a prosperous culture. Many environmental and political factors were affected to develop the majesty of Manipuri's culture. The main feature of the Manipuri is respecting to the nature. Majority of the people in Manipuri state are Mongolians. In today also, we can see a rural environment in Manipuri. Not only ancient time, but also today there can be see their cultural festivals as there is a rural environment in their region. People of Manipuri give prime to the myths and beliefs all the time. They consider deities as their soul. From the birth to death, they begin their all auspicious occasions after worship to deities Radha and Krishna is the main god and goddess in Manipuri. In addition, there are numerous groups of deities in Manipuri. They are named in various names. We can see there are many Shanthikarmas (Ceremonial Dances) perform by the Manipuri people for worship these deities. Among these, Laiharoba festival and Ras-Leela festival are the leading. As well as they connect Shanthikarma festivals also to all the occasions of their lives. Therefore, we discussed these two ceremonial dances as well as the special festival Natya Sankirtana broadly.

Notes and References

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