



NATASANKIRTANA AS APURVARANGA

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Whenever any *Subha Karma* is carried out, in order to please the gods and goddesses, dance and music accompanied by *Pung* (Mrdanga) and *Kartals* (Cymbals) are offered to pray to them. This mode of prayer for initiating a *Subha Karma* is called *Purvaranga*. Such prologue precedes not only *Leela Kirtana* but also every other *Subha Karma*. *Purvaranga* precedes the auspicious karma such as inauguration of houses, temples, ponds, marriage ceremonies, coronation of the kings etc. This tradition has been existing since historical times in the Meitei society which follows the *Sanatana Dharma*. In short, *Purvaranga*, the series of rituals is also known as *Nata Sankirtana*. In the seventh sloka of the fifth chapter of Bharata's *Natya Sashtra*, *Purvarangais* explained as follows:

Yasmadrangaprayogohyang Purbameba Prayujyate.

Tasmadayang Purvarango Bigyeyo Dwijotma:

The slokas in brief say that all *Subha Karmas* are performed with the accompaniment of *Pung* (Mrdanga), *Eshei* (song) and *Jagoi* (dance). And such a ceremony is known as *Purvaranga*. *Nata Sankirtana* which is like a *Mahayajna* is offered in order to gratify the Devas and Devis so that human beings may get an opportunity for purging their *Jiva Atma*; to have *Darshana* of the

glory of the lord and acquiring a long-life. It is written in Bharata's *Natya Sashtra* (fifty five sloka, five chapter) as:

*Sarbadeibata Pujarhang Sarbadeibata Pujanamo.
Dharmyang Yashasyamayujhang Purvaranga Prabartanam.*

The slokas concisely say that a man gets long-life, purgation of Jiva Atma and experiences the splendor of the Lord when the Devas and Devis are appeased by offering *Sankirtana* which is equivalent to a *Mahayajna*. While performing a *Purvaranga*, the rituals may be extended as much as desired or may be shortened. But the essential sequences of the *Purvaranga* cannot be shortened or skipped or omitted. It must be always remembered that the sequences of *Purvaranga* should not in any case be broken. Pung, (mrdanga), Eshei (song) and Jagoi (dance) are known as *Sapta Rupa Dhruva* since ancient days. With the help of these *Sapta Rupa Dhruva*, Mahayajnas are offered to gods. Out of the seven phases of the sequence of *Purvaranga*, five are meant for *Pujas*. This is clearly expressed in the one hundred eighty fourth and one hundred eighty fifth of the fifth chapter in Bharata's *Natya Sashtra* as follows:

*Adabutthapani Karya Paribartastatha Bhavet.
Abakritaditta Cheiba Bikshiptacheiba Panchami.
Aebang Pancha Dhruva Geya Upohansamanabita:
Kartabyastu Prayatena Purarange Prayoktribhi:*

The slokas briefly say that the first performance is *Uthapani*; the second is *Parivartani Dhruva*, the third is *Avakrista*, the fourth *Addita* and the last is *Vikshipta*. The performers should carefully perform these five *Dhruvas* collectively known as *Upohan*. The *Nata Sankirtana Parampara* (the tradition of Sankirtana) classifies these five Dhruvas as Raga Houba, Raga Taba, Ragamel, Raga Tanchap, and Raga Menkup. Therefore, the Gurus and the experienced teachers opine that these five are the most important parts of a Sankirtana. However, Sankirtana becomes complete by adding Swadhina and Vijaya, the last two parts in addition to these five parts. The part of Raga Swadhina includes Leela Kirtana, Marriage ceremonies, Inauguration of Ponds, Houses, Coronation in the Dasa Samskaras. Then it concluded as Mahayajna by performing a Vijaya.

Sankirtana, being a Mahayajna, precedes the Subha Karma. Chanting of Shri Hari's Nama Guna and singing Leela Kirtan precede Subha Karma. Such Purvaranga has two kinds of Kirtanas. They are (a) kirtana without a song script and (b) with song script. These two forms amalgamate and become sankirtana and this style has been used since the very beginning. **Purvaranga** of kirtana without song script performed by using only Swara, Laya, Tala with Badya Yantras is known as Nirgit and Bahirgit whereas the Purvaranga Kirtana with Pada song script is known as Geet Vidhi rules laid down for singing and the Purvaranga Kirtana without song script coined by Devarishi Narada is performed accompanied by musical instruments to please all Datya and Danava. The forty third sloka of the fifth chapter in Bharat's Natya Shastras as follows.

Nirgeetang Geeyte Yasmatpadang Varnayojanat
Ayusya Cha Devanang Bahirgeetmidang Smritam.

There are many stories in Bharata's Natya Sashtra that reminds 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 long process to invoke the Ista Devata through puja and stuti which are performed in order. The two episodes of Nirgitpung 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 Ishta 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. The following slokas quoted from Bharata's Natya Sashtra sloka 9th and 10th in chapter five support the remarks given above as follows:

*Pratyaharoh Btarangam Tathahyarambha Abacha.
Aashrabana Baktrapanistatha Parighatana.
Sanghotna Tata Karsya Margasaritani Cha.
Geiyastha Madhya Kanisthya Tattheibasaritani Cha.*

The gist of the above slokas is that Pratyahara, Avataram, Arambha, Ashrabana Baktaparni, Parighatana and Samghatana are followed by Margasrita (Pungraga)-the small, medium and big Asarita. The puja of Pung and Kartals (the Vadya Yantras) before the commencement of the Raga Hauba is known as Pratyahara according to Sashtra. The occupying of their respective seats by the PungYeiba, palas and singers is known as Avataram. Leichandan Changba, the sanctification process by using sandalwood paste, flowers and lamps is known as Arambha. The testing of the musical instruments by drumming and playing is called Ashraba. The matching of the tunes of the Yantras is called Baktrapani. The checking and adjustment of strings of Yantras is called Prigatana. The checking and correction of the sound of the pung is known as Sambotana. After completing all these seven procedures of Purvanga, Pung Raga and Eshei Raga begin and all the other remaining procedures are performed upto Nadi Patha and this is known as Udapani Dhruva.

The second part of the Purvaranga is known as Raga Taba in the Nata Sankirtana tradition. This part also known as Parivartani Dhurva and offering process to the Devatas with the aid of Nirgit and Geetvidhi such as Pung and Eshei. This programme is known as Parivartnai Dhurva and the performers move clockwise in four directions around the Brahma Mandal and bow to all Lokpals

It is recorded in Bharata's Natya Sashtra twenty-third sloka of the fifth chapter. In Raga Taba i.e. parivartani Dhruva, Ista Devata is invoked and Puja is offered. The Sashtra calls the tala used in the part as Layantarita. In Manipuri Nata Sankirtana this Tala is known as Tintal Macha. This tala is brought in five different Layas and with an extremely artful creation the Maigei Ngakpa Laishing (Gods in charge of the four directions) are bowed. In fact, Layantarita is a skillfully created Tala derived by blending Tala starting from the Mihul (pulse) of the three types of Mishra upto Menkup and Tannchap Mihul. In the outset of the Raga Taba, the Pung player bows to the Brahma Mandal playing a Tala in the Laya of nine Talmit Ghat and then playing the same tala in the laya of seven talmit ghat bows to Indra deva, the God in charge of the East direction. Again playing the same Tala in the Laya of the five Talmit Ghat bows to Yama deva, the in charge of the south. Next playing the same Tala in the Laya of the three Talmi Ghat, bows to Varundeva, the incharge of the West. Then Kubera, the in charge of the North is bowed by playing the same Tala in the Laya of two Talmit Ghat. Then coming back to the starting Tala in the nine Talmit Ghat, the Raga Taba or Parivartani Dhruva is completed after bowing to the Brahma Mandal. Such bowing of all the charge four Devatas who takes of the four directions is stated in Bharata's Natya Sashtra 82nd & 83th slokas in chapter five as follows:

Bandeta Prathamang Purbat Dishang Shatrathideibatam.

Dwitiyang Dakshinamashang Bandeta Yam Devataram

Bandeta Prashimamashang Tato Baruna Devatam.

Chaturthimutarmasang Bandheta Dhanda Shrayam.

As the third part of Purvaranga, which is the Ragamel (Rajmel), the process of Nirgeet, which is mainly composed of Pung and Kartala cholom (dance of drummers and singers with Kartala), pleases the Prigana by offering Puja. Such practice is known as Shuskabkrista. Dhruva Ragamel It is detailed in Bharata's Natya Sashtra that the drummers play a specially created Tala Lambi Ghat, Bedi Ghat and Setu Ghat in the Rajmmel and bows to Jarjar who substitutes the four Ashramas viz., Brahman, Kshetriya, Vaisya and Sudra. In this part of the ritual, the Palas (singers) moves slowly in circular steps, perform Kartala cholom gracefully and gently matching the beat of the drums houting Stova instead of singing songs to offer Puja. The Ragamel is a Tala

in which the Dhruvakala is fixed as the same. The Dhruva Kala is enlarged and it is brought towards Lambi Ghat (Dakshina Marga or slow beat/tempo). Then the padas of a new Tala known as Chatuspadi brings it down to LambiGhat, then BeriGhat. The beat of the enlarged Dhruva Kala becomes very long as the Kala takes eight Mihuls. Then by shifting the talas in turn, it is brought towards Beri Ghat and finally to Setu Ghat. Such an exceptional Tala of the Ragamel is known as Abapanika in Sashtra. In the fourth and fifth parts of Purvaranga , a Tandava dance known as Chari and Maha chari is performed by bowing to the Gods, Uma and Bhutagana. This is known as Raga Tanchap and Raga Menkupun the Nata Sankirtana Parampara. Sashtra calls it as Addita Dhruva and Bkshipta Dhruva according to Bharata's Natya Sashtra. Raga is nothing but the speciality of creating talas. In Raga Hauba (Uthapani Dhruva) or Vardamanaka, in Raga Taba Parivartani Dhrva or Laiyantarita and in Ragamel Sukaabkshadhruva are used respectively. Similarly, Raga Tanchapa and Raga Menkup are known as Chaturasa and Trasra Shatpitaputrka prabandha respectively.

The Raga Tanchap is a special Prabandha Tala that is brought one after another starting with Ekpadi Tala. One of the sixty-four Talmit Ghata is changed into Ekapadi Tala of thirty -two talmit ghata known as Tanchap Aphakpi and then into the Tanchapa Arouba of sixteen Talmit; Tanchapa Achouba of eight Talmit; Tanchapa Macha of Talmit four and finally released at the time of the EkapadiTala of two Talmits of Tanchapa Mapi Ghata. Similarly, the Raga Menkup is a special PrabandhaTala of six Menkup Mapi-Macha that is brought starting with the Ekapadi Eka Tala of ninety six talmit ghat which goes on one after another, into forty-eight Talmit; twenty-four talamit; twelve talmit; six talmit and then it is released at the three talamit of Menkup Mapi known as Menkup Mapi Macha.

Chari and Mahachari dance which dance which are to be played at the time of Puja will be offered to the Devatas in the two special talas Chaturasra and Trasra known as Shatpitaputraka in the last two parts of Purvaranga programme namely the Addita and the Vikshipta. It is mentioned in Bharata's Natya Shashtra in the 14th and 15th slokas of the fifth chapter as follows ;

Tatashosthapanang Karyang Paribartanamebo Cha .
Nandi Shuskapkrista Cha Rangadwarang Yatheibacha.
Chari Chei Tata Karya Mahachari Tatheibacha.
Trikang Prarochna Chaapi Purvarange Bhavanti.

At the end of Purvaranga Puja of the Devatas with the five Dhruvas, which are special Prabandhas, Leela Kirtana such as Rupak, dance and other Punya Karmas will be performed as a part of Swadina. The starting of such dance, Leela Kirtana and Punya Karma is known as Rangadvar and it is explained in the thirty-sixth sloka of Purvaranga chapter of Bharata's Natya Sashtra as follows:

Yasmatbhinayastra Prathamanghyabatayate'
Rangadvarmato Jayeyang Vagangvhinayatamakam.

In the ritual which is started from Rangadvar, there is no defined rule that Tala Prabandha is to be used. In fact any kind of Prabandha Tala can be liberally used to perform the part of Purvaranga known as Swadhina. Thus the line of ritual of Swadhina is continued preceded by Prastav. The 6th part of Purvaranga (Raga Swadhina) which starts with Prastav is completed; the episode of Sapta Rupa Dhruva of the seventh part Vijaya is performed. In this stage, meditating on the accomplishment of performing the Punya Karmas and the reason for offering the Pujas: and bowing to the Ishta Devata which was invoked for the Puja, using a special Prabandha Tala, the ritual of the Punya Karmas finally comes to an end. In Bharata's Natya Sashtra such completion of Punya Karma is known as Prarochana. It is expressed in the 30th sloka of the Purvaranga Chapter as follows:

Upakshepena Tu Yukti Samasya.
Sidhenamantrana Yatu Bijyeya Sa Prarochana.

The ritual of Purvaranga may be shortened or enlarged as much as desired, and the same Nata Sankirtana. It can be minimized or maximized according to one's wish. However, it will be always a Harinam Sankirtana. The minimized style is mainly used at the time of Dashahana and Lairiktaba listening to religious which is generally performed in the month of

Mera(October/November in Manipuri calendar). The Sankirtana style is used in “Asthi Sanchay and the complete Sankirtana style is performed in Shradhas and Samasara (death anniversary). The most enlarged Sankirtana is used in Ahoratra in the form of Mahadhrumel Hari Sankirtana.

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