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### “Manipuri Sankirtana”

The Manipuri Nat-Sankirtana is an art form, conceived by the famous Manipur king Bhagyachandra Singh in the 18th century. It is a vibrant practice promoting an organic relationship with people: the whole society is involved in its safeguarding, with the specific knowledge and skills traditionally transmitted from mentor to disciple. Sankirtana works in harmony with the natural world, whose presence is acknowledged through its many rituals.

Sankirtana encompasses an array of arts performed to mark religious occasions and various stages in the life of the Vaishnava people of the Manipur plains. It is practised at the centre of temples, where performers narrate the lives and deeds of Lord Krishna (Hindu God) through songs and dances. In a typical performance, two drummers and about 10 singer-dancers perform in a hall or domestic courtyard encircled by seated devotees. The dignity and flow of aesthetic and religious energy is unparalleled, moving audience to tears and frequently to prostrate themselves before the performers.

Sankirtana has two main social functions: it brings people together on festive occasions

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throughout the year, acting as a cohesive force within Manipur's Vaishnava community, and it establishes and reinforces relationships between the individual and the community through life-cycle ceremonies. It is thus regarded as the visible manifestation of God.

The viability of the art form is ensured by social support that has kept the art alive through centuries. Every Manipuri Vaishnavite is involved with the form, either as a performer or patron.

It has been selected for inscription on the Representative List of the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. UNESCO stated in its decision that the element Sankirtana satisfied all the criteria for the inscription on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity and further acknowledged that Sankirtana music and dance which is transmitted from generation to generation through formal and traditional education reinforce the social and spiritual cohesion among the Vaishnava communities of Manipur.

***"We are what our thoughts have made us; so take care about what you think. Words are secondary. Thoughts live; they travel far...."***

- Swami Vivekananda, Indian Hindu Monk (1863 – 1902)

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