

# CARYĀ OF BUDDHA NĀṬAKA RITUAL OF DANCE DRAMA IN AHORĀTRAPADASĀDHANAVIDHĪ

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## Abstract

Ahorātrapadasādhanavidhī is a method prescribed in vajrayāna religious system to be followed to achieve the goal visualized. In the course of its practice or caryā yoga is adopted as a process of the system built. Caryāgīti listed in ahorātrapadasādhanavidhī in a given sequence equates with the group of letters in alphabetical order carrying a rationalized logic for divine communication. These bunch of caryāgītis are vajrayāna literary work for the benefit of vajrayāna religious practice. Under vajrayāna system, padasādhana is a method which specified stepped process to reach the goal of advaya or non-duality envisaged in the embrace of śūnya and karuṇā, a state of yuganaddha, so conceptualized with the element of drama or nāṭaka. It is a path to śūnya and ultimate nirvāṇa for a bodhisattva. It is a caryā of Buddha nāṭaka - mystical till realized.

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Let me begin with an element of drama or 'nāṭaka' in exposition of vajrayāna caryā in Buddhist vajrayāna literature like guhyasamājantra and mañjuśrīmulakalpa.

When asked to explain the enlightenment (niravāṇa), Gautam, The Buddha, replied in silence. In guhyasamājantra when Lord declared in the Assembly that emancipation through the tāntric path perceived in this Tantra is possible of attainment for all men however vicious, cruel or immoral they may be. Nay, even incestuous persons are best fitted for obtaining emancipation through mahāyāna / vajrayāna. Immediately after these words were uttered, all the bodhisattvas in the Assembly became frightened confused and fell down senseless. (Excerpt from guhyasamājantra)

In mañjuśrīmulakalpa, when śākyamuni proclaimed to mañjuśrī his intentions to expound on rituals, he smiled emitting brilliant, colorful and cosmically cataclysmic rays of light from his mouth. The bodhisattva vajrapāṇi perplexed about the significance of this display, asks the Buddha to explain. Śākyamuni answers that the reason for his smile is that people will appear in the world that will practice the caryā and honor the mañjuśrīmulakalpa: (Excerpt from mañjuśrīmulakalpa)

The same element of nāṭaka or drama has been transferred to the practice or caryā of ahorātrapadasādhanavidhī in the later phase of vajrayāna practice. To be specific, caryā is a practice of the vajrayāna religion. Caryā preaches the esoteric or mystic doctrines of vajrayāna Buddhism.



**Prajjwol Bajracharya**, eminent Caryā Guru performing Caryā Nāṭaka

In its practice of the religion it resorts to singing of caryāgīti accompanied by dancing in tune of the music. In its picturesque presentation of the Buddhist mystical doctrine, it creates a dramatic scenario engrossed in divine and sublime experience of spiritual depth.

Ahorātrapadasādhanavidhī is a religious ceremonial consisting of rituals enriched by caryāgītis and accompanying dance. Caryāgītissung and many of them danced to in a sequential form, and order, present a complete picture of the vajrayāna religious thought process and their belief pattern. Beginning with caryāgīti hādābharaṇa śūnye it ends in caryāgīti cakrikuṇḍala.

Besides the rituals in the beginning and in between the gītis and the nṛtyas, caryāgīti hādābharaṇa śūnye becomes instrumental in the calling of divinities sambara and vajravārāhi in the place of worship. The deities are always shown wearing five kinds of ornaments, all of bone. A bone signifies death or rather death of the senses. And that is what the supreme spirits are decorated with; in retrospect a symbol of the state where one is untouched by worldly sensibilities – beyond life and death, lost in time and space, śūnya.

The preceptor teaches the consecration of yoga religion.

To sum up the ritual of Ahorātrapadasādhanavidhī with caryāgīti cakrikuṇḍala, in the ultimate stage of enlightenment, sambara dances in many and various roundabout way of expressing, embracing vajravārāhi. Vāchhali

(vāgadevi) plays in the hermitage with hevajra. Transcendental blood is discharged in the excellent union. State of sahaja is accomplished says Karṇapā, the siddha, the creator of the caryāgīti. Embracing (alingana) wisdom (prajñā), Heruvaplays (kriḍanti) in amorous pastime (vilāsai) with the Void (śūnya) and compassion (karuṇā). Thus, the ultimate goal is achieved.

Between the opening and closing of the dramatic act with performance of hādābharaṇa and cakrikuṇḍala, the stage is energized by scenes of varied form and color.

In the sequence of ahorātrapadasādhanavidhi caryāgīti, hādābharaṇa is positioned in the beginning. It depicts the Sambara being placed in the sky and vajravārāhi on earth and their meeting place is called the merumaṇḍala. Attainment of śūnya is the way to remove darkness of the vision symbolized by yuganaddha (or advaya or non-duality) of the two deities in the state of samayānandaexpressed in twilight language of balam (semen virile) and karpūra (camphor), including śārim (wind or air), hinting at the yoga process to follow. Sky, earth and air are three of the pañcamahābhuta (or pañcatattva) beside fire and water.

In dharadhara, second of the caryāgīti or the second act of ahorātrapadasādhanavidhi, fire and water, two of the remaining pañcamahābhuta (or pañcatattva) is hinted at and vajradhara, a priest of priest, is introduced in the scenario with doctrine (samaya) of vajradhṛka, ratnādhika, janajika and

pragyādhṛka, representative of four of the pañcabuddha and its conceptual vajrayāna format. We are introduced to ear and throat, two of the points in the body earmarked in the yoga process and cakra, and ornaments like kuṇḍala (earring) and mekhala (waistband) is mentioned which plays a symbolic role in explanation of the process of the ritual, along with foremost concepts of vajrayāna of vajra, kamala, sahaja and citta with twilight expression in kunduru and esoteric elements like kariṣṭa (skull).

With nandimamaskāra, the third act, obeisance is paid to sambara for happiness to the individual soul and the learned man, by emancipation from web of illusion with adoption of yoga or meditation, as a tool in the process of the ritual, which destroys impurities of the mind or sin.

Subsequently, in the fourth act rāgamālā, enters padmanṛteśvara cakrasvara manjukumāra (mañjuśrī) who is dharmadhātu (Buddha) personified.

With the fifth act of viśvarorūha, depiction of mañjuśrī addressed as vāgiśvara, lord of the speech, pañcajina or pañcabuddha is brought in the forefront with symbolic kuliśa (thunderbolt) and ghaṇṭha (bell) along with dharmacakramudrā and pragyā (wisdom). Colours and syllables (mañkāra), which plays a prominent role in the picturesque formation in the explanation of vajrayāna doctrine, is brought to light and the world is sketched as a shadow of a drop (bindu bimba).

Now appears the guru vajrasattva, the supreme lord, who is the pillar of

the lotus age or age of vajrayāna, in haraśira, the sixth act.

The seventh act of tribhuvanajvalita vibrates and invigorates the center stage with the entrance of vajrasattva, the supreme lord, dancing, three world (tribhuvana) brightens up and the Sun and the Moon (raviśasī) are in their essence.

Introduction of akārasanjāta caryāgīti as the eighth act of the ritual opens up the door to complex process of path to vajrayānanirvāṇa or nirvāṇa nāṭaka. Play of syllables takes a shape with placement of aṣṭamāṭṛkā deities, male deities, bhairava and nāga (snakes) in the firmament of the maṇḍala (merumaṇḍala or gurumaṇḍala). We are introduced to pañcamakaāra, śūnya (void), cemetery as a place of worship for the veda of vajrayāna to be uttered from the mouth of śrī heruka.

Entry of śrī heruka candra śekhara in the ninth act, addressed as samvara, karuṇāmaya, piṭheśvara, chatrisamvira vireśvaram and padmanṛtyeśvara, is described in varied garments and ornaments like pañcavastra (five garments), ṣaṇmudra (six ornaments), divine instrument ḍamaru and five divine weapons, and esoteric naraśira (head of the supreme spirit) and brahmaśira. He is depicted in advayasamādhi, in ālīdha leg posture embracing āli and kāli.

In close proximity, enters hevajra in embrace (of his female counterpart) who is in possession of deep meditation (yoga), liberated from existence (bhava) and of superior virtue, with recitation of caryāgīti

hum hum dehadharu, tenth act of virtuous manifestation.

A mysteriously sublime doctrine is presented for the adherents of vajrayāna religious practice in the path to become a bodhisattva in the form of a gīti kolāi — drastic change of scenario in the eleventh act by introducing the doctrine of vajrayāna instead of divine manifestations.

In furtherance of the inherent doctrine amalgamated in caryāgīti, deductive logic is applied to explain so called life of existence or non-existence and its emotive and materialistic contents contrasted with aim of śūnya (void), sahaja (innate nature) and siddhi (accomplishment) so put forward for practice of the religion (dharma) in paramarato, the twelfth act.

To not to get lost in the presence of varied divine characters of the act in multiple scenario, deities in embrace are explained as personification of māyādeha (illusory body) resembling the moon in the autumn at the desert oozing karuṇā or compassion in abundance for the emancipation of the sentient beings, as it is said in the thirteenth act of namo hūm.

Explanation of the doctrine reaches its crescendo in the gīti supratimaṇḍita and accompanying dance to protect what has been placed for adherence of the practice in vajrayāna.

Caryāgīti is placed on the high pedestal — mahāsukha is said to contain inśrāvākayāna (a vehicle of Buddhist thought) adhering to bhikṣoh (service) and arousal of the true nature (tattva) is to awaken Buddha by the destruction of spiritual ignorance or delusion. Know that

the pañcabuddha, who are the manifestation of pañcaskandha, are brutes (paśo), un-lustrous (kurāḍa), bad intended (kucitta) and un-divine (kudivyam). Rise above and be Brahman (svayambhu), proclaims the fourteenth act, contrasting the reverence bestowed to pañcabuddha, the manifestation of pañcaskandha. One is incited to kill pañcaskandha, source of suffering or dukhah arising from ignorance, symbolized in pañcabuddha. A dramatic turning point to what is ahead in path to salvation – sūnyaniranjana and ultimate nirvana.

Know that the spotless and pure śūnya without blemishes resides in the heart, which outpours in sounds of akṣara or syllables or letters ya, ra, la and va. Embracing śūnya, Buddha supreme spirit emit wisdom. Thus says sūnyaniranjana, the fifteenth act:

In a symbolic way represented by trio of kamala, kuliśa, ghaṇṭha; duo of sun and moon; a yoga path leading to oḍiyāna riding onmaṇikula is indicated at. Possessing a state of yuganaddha or advaya in the embrace of masculine and feminine nature is the expression represented in the word kunduru. Explanation of the yoga process begins here in the sixteenth act of trihaṇḍā.

In the seventeenth act of bhāsvarakhaṇḍa, ādibuddha and his placement in śaśadharamaṇḍala open the process of reachingmahāmudrā siddhi. An instruction (dikṣita) of vajracitta, dharmadhātu and dharmodaya and focus on hṛdayakamala is hinted at for practice of what is instructed.

Merumaṇḍala installed in the beginning of the ritual process finds its structure and explanation here, in madhyameru, eighteenth of the act. Among mount meru, videha, jambudvīpa, godāini and kurubhuvana is placed pañcajina or pañcabuddha. Aṣṭadvīpānāl is equated to a river flowing in the minds of the triumphant ones, upadvīpa as divine assemblage of thunderbolt, maṇikula cakra as the ultimate in the world and sacred syllable is all praise. What is instructed here is equated to a veda.

What was referred to in the beginning is being put into practice in the merumaṇḍala — play of the wind (anīla), fire (anala) and water (jala) — indicative of the yoga process. Sound of damaru embraces śūnya and karuṇā symbolized by the embrace of samvara and vajravārāhī in aṣṭaśmasāna with ṣoḍaśadevī which outpours divine navarasa or nine sentiments resulting in eclipse of bhava (existence) and bhaya (fear) of birth (janma) and death (maraṇa). This is how the nineteenth act presents itself in the form of caryāgītiānīla, the divine act of dance and drama.

Māmakidevī equated with water element is introduced in the scenario that has a reflection of pañcabuddha and through her a sacred scripture (āgama), a sacred knowledge (veda) of ancient time (puraṇa) is described (bakhāne). Twentieth act of raktavarṇa places the goddess in a prominent role of a deliverer.

Māyādeha (illusory body) resembling the moon in the autumn at the desert oozing karuṇā or compassion in

abundance for the emancipation of the sentient beings is again highlighted by the repeat of the caryāgīti namo the hūm as the twenty-first act.

In uragābharaṇa, the goddess being addressed as ugratārīṇīmātā, full of compassion, capable of destruction of evil (duṣṭa) and obstacles (vighna), is depicted in pratyālīdha leg posture, seized by the corpse (śavākṛāntā). This is the twenty-second act of the ensuing drama.

As the drama of ahorātrapadasādhanavidhī approaches the pan ultimate stage of lakṣya or target, the central characters of the play are being brought to the front. As we witness the twenty-third act of dvambīnī, presented in the form of caryāgīti, sahaja sundarī or dvambīnī or vajravarāhī along with cauyoginī are in amorous pastime (virāsahī) and eminent (uddha) lord (bharāḍo) intermingles (kavāri) with compassion (karun or karuṇa) signified by female deities — a play of śūnya and karuṇā.

Now begins the interplay of two (dvayī or dui) winds (pavana) and holding (dhārī) power of senses (or semen) (indriya or indriyā) on the neck (or throat) (kaṇṭhe), object of senses (viśaya) and thunderbolt (vajra) is burning in flame (jvalai or jvaliya) in mahimaṇḍala (earth circular orb). Twenty-fourth act in ye mahimaṇḍala reminiscences the yoga practice in full play.

Pañcabuddha with their female counterparts form śrīyasamājā symbolized in concepts of rupa śabda gandha rasavajrā rati with 'other players' in bimbamaṇḍalā.

Only four among five pañcabuddha and their female counterparts are represented in the maṇḍala with the remaining one probably residing in the middle in jinajik, the twenty-fifth act approaching finality.

Yogāmbara, epithet for manjuśrī, is depicted in embrace of gyāneśvari oozing identical sentiment (samarasa), signifying advaya. It is an embrace of the deity (sura) and the supreme spirit (nara) embodying prabhāśvara, which signifies ultimate stage of yoga. This is the intercourse (sambhoga) for intense (vi) happiness (sukhanā) says jinavarajanānī, the twenty-sixth caryāgīti on its near to pan ultimate stage of the drama.

Through hūmkārasanjāta caryāgīti in pan ultimate stage of the drama of ahorātrapadasādhanavidhī as act twenty-seventh, entersacala or śrī caṇḍamahāroṣaṇ, protector (nātha) of the world (jagata), in mahākrodha (extreme anger) form, addressed as avanihita vāmajānu. He is a seer who sees mentally (draṣta or danṣtrā) and kills (hanta) the poison (vṛṣa or viṣa) or caumārā.

In an ultimate stage of union, yuganaddha is reached between heruva and vāchali or upāya and pragyā or śūnya and karuṇā.

Thus ends the Buddha nāṭaka with cakrīkuṇḍala – the twenty-eighth act of ahorātrapadasādhanavidhī.

What ensues next is the series of pada or feet forming into a vajra pada and curtain falls in crescendo.



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*Caryā: Dancing Away to Nirvāṇā, a book based on study of 'Ahorātra Pada Sādhana Vidhi' ready for publication.*