

Festival of Ramkatha - 12th - 15th March, 2008

Report

Ram Katha in Performative Traditions: Ankan Manchan aur Vaachan Workshop /Seminar/ Exhibition/ Performances

Ram Katha in Oral Narrative and Folk Performative Traditions of India: This is part of the Janapada Sampada Division and falls under the 11th Five Year Plan Scheme: Religious Identities and Confluence of Tradition. Workshop, Seminar, Exhibition, Performances were held under this programme.

Ram Katha in Performing Arts- Documentation Workshops

Audio-visual documentation of performative traditions and artist-workshops belonging to the different folk and tribal groups from all over the country was part of this documentation workshop. There were 8 workshops held in IGNCA.

1. Ram Sitamani Varta by Dungari Bhils, Gujarat: The first in the series of these workshops were held from 27th November to 6th December 2007, which comprised of Dungri Bhils from Gujarat in coordination with renowned Folklorist Dr Bhagwan Das Patel. They performed Ram Sitamani Varta. The performance of Ram Katha among the Dungari Bhils is closely linked with harvesting and seeds. It is performed twice a year in the months of Magh and Bhadron. The performances last for the entire one month period. The workshop yielded approximately 35 hours of Documentation.
2. Ramayana in Ankiya Bhavana style, Assam: The second group was from Majuli, Assam which was in IGNCA from 10th to 20th December, 2007 in collaboration with Srimanta Shankardeva Kalakshetra, Guwahati. It belongs to the 'Sattra' tradition founded by Shankardeva the medieval saint poet who wrote many dramas among which Ram Vijay is very popular and is based on Madhav Kandali's Ramayan. The plays are performed in Ankiya Bhaona style. These are musical dramas with active participation of gayan (singers) and bayans (musicians). We invited artists from Kamlabari ...besides Ram Vijay plays based on Ramayana and performed in Ankiya Bhavana style were documented. The workshop yielded approximately 25 hours of Documentation.
3. Ram Katha in Dang Putul style, West Bengal: From 21st to the 31st of December in collaboration with Folk & Tribal Cultural Society, Kolkata, two groups from West Bengal comprising of puppeteers- rod puppet (Dang Putul) and scroll painting (Patua) artists were documented. It was not just the puppets on stage, but also the puppeteers back stage who gave rhythm to the puppets by performing passionately. Puppeteers write their own plays, which are heavily influenced by the Jatra tradition; the musical compositions are influenced by folk tunes, popular songs and film music. The workshop yielded approximately 25 hours of Documentation.
4. Ramkatha in Scroll Patuas (Patua from West Bengal): The artist of the Patuas (scroll paintings) are Muslims, They have two names one Muslim and one Hindu. They sing and paint simultaneously. Scroll (pautas) created by them are unique in style and composition. The workshop yielded approximately 5 hours of Documentation.
5. Ram Katha from Himachal Pradesh: The next group came from Himachal Pradesh and performed from the 3rd Jan'08 till 10th Jan' 08 in collaboration with Himachal Academy of Arts. This group comprised of six sub-groups: Gaddi (Chamba Bharmaur), Sanskar Geet (Kangra), Barlaj (Shimla), Chhari (Phagu), Ramayani (Kullu). An 82 year old lady bard from Kangra sang songs of Ram and Sita, which are sung at the time of various rites and rituals associated with birth, marriage and any other auspicious occasion. The Ramkatha performance in Himachal is accompanied by songs, dance, ritual and communal feasting. The workshop yielded approximately 40 hours of Documentation
6. Ram Katha by Muslim Jogis from Mewat, Rajasthan: From the 10th to 18th January, the fifth group came from Rajasthan in collaboration with Rupayan Sansthan, Jodhpur. It comprised of

Muslim Jogi community from Mewat and Mangniars who are also Muslims from the deserts of Rajasthan. The Jogis sang 'Lanka Chadai' a composition of Poet Nizamat Meb, who died around 360 years ago. These songs are not written and have been transmitted orally from generation to generation. The workshop yielded approximately 15 hours of Documentation

7. Ram Katha by Manganiyars Rajasthan: The Manganiyars sing the Ramayan in the form of Ram Bhajans, owing their inspiration to the works of Kabir, Surdas, Mirabai and Tulsidas. The workshop yielded approximately 15 hours of Documentation
8. Ramakatha in Warileeba style in Manipur: The next was the Wari Leeba tradition of Manipur. It is a narrative form of story telling and is performed in Meiteilon (Manipuri). This narrative art form of Manipur, which was once popular among the Meities and performed on various religious, social, or festival occasions in the presence of the king, is gradually losing its importance due to the passage of time. However, among the few spirited youngsters who are keen to preserve the tradition of their age-old gurus, Wari Leeba still enjoys popularity. This was performed by Mr Sadananda Singh. The workshop yielded approximately 2 hours of Documentation.
9. Ramkatha from Pauri, Garhwal: The seventh group that was documented was from Pauri Garhwal from 6th to 13th of February. Three district traditions were documented: Ramlila in drama form; Ramvarta – singing of Ramvarta accompanied by Drums, Dhol-damau and folksongs revolving around Ram that are sung accompanied by dance on different occasions. The repertoire that was documented is known by the name of thadya chaufla which is performed on Basant Panchami, when the plough is put to oxen marking the beginning of new agricultural cycle. The workshop yielded approximately 25 hours of Documentation.
10. Painting Workshops: Apart from artists workshop on performative styles from different regions two workshops were organized of Mithila and Gond painters, both were first of its kind.
 - Ram Katha by Mithila painters: Workshop was held from 20th February to 12th of March in which the painters brought out the entire Ram Katha on canvas depicting the perspective of women painters of Mithila, 10 scrolls were painted during the workshop.
 - Workshop of Gond painters in Madhya Pradesh: 34 frames were painted in Gondi style depicting the Gondi Ramayan
11. Films on Ramayana Tradition: Two films have been produced under this project, namely Ramayan Traditon in North-East and Sita Mela in Garhwal. A 105 year old Ramlila performer from Pauri Gharwal was documented by the IGCA team
12. DVD's: 33 DVD's each lasting for an hour to two have been readied for mass distribution and for broadcasting on Doordarshan.
13. Translation and Publication: The entire Gondi Ramayan was translated in Hindi and the monograph is ready to be sent to the press.
14. Children's Workshop: workshops for School children's with folk artists from 27th Nov to 13th February. In these workshops the children interacted with the artists and even joined them on the stage. They learnt about their costumes, makeup language and culture.
15. Story Telling Workshop for School children: A one day Story telling Workshop was organized for School children. An internationally renowned scholar Prof. Paula Richman and story teller Ms Indira Mukherjee narrated various folk tales based on Rama Tradition. The workshop was proactive in nature where children freely interacted and talked about their favorite characters.

National Seminar

A four day seminar on Ramkatha in Performative Traditions: Ankan, Manchan Aur Vachan was held from 12th to 15th March which deliberated upon the following themes, Ram Katha and Ritual Spaces, Ram Katha and Social Spaces, Ram Katha: Texts and Contexts, Ram Katha: Performative and Pictorial Spaces, Ram Katha: Confluences and Influences, Ram Katha: Socio-Cultural and Geographical Landscapes and Modes of Transmission and Patronage Systems. Eminent scholars including Prof Paula Richman from USA, Prof. Malini Bhattacharya, Prof. Radha Vallabh Tripathi, Prof Kapil Tiwari, Shri Bhagwan Das Patel, Prof D.P. Pattnyak, Prof. Jyotinder Jain, Prof. K. Nacchimuthu, Prof. H. Shiva

Prakash and Prof. Ghulam Sarwar Yousuf from Malaysia among many others participated in the seminar. Dr. Kapila Vatsyayan inaugurated the Seminar and delivered the Keynote Address.

Exhibitions

A 9 day long exhibition in collaboration with Adivasi Lok Kala evam Tulsi Sahitya Academy, Bhopal was organized. Masks, Puppets, Costumes, Paintings, Scrolls, Headgears, and Backdrop from different regions of India including the North–East; and South East Asia were displayed in the exhibition. The exhibition attracted a large crowd including the students from schools and college. The exhibition attracted huge media attentions and was well covered in both print and electronic media

Performances

Six cultural performances were organized, while Bhili artists were present through out the Bundeli Ramkatha was performed at the inaugural ceremony. Evening performances included Kumoani Ramlila from Kumaon, Warileeaba and Ramlila from Manipur, Sunderkatha from Mathura and Ramman from Garhwal.

This attracted a large number of scholars and spectators. The evening performances were attended by about 2000 people.

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Acquisitions

Under this project a rich cultural archive is slowly being built up. So far the following material has been acquired

- Masks from Garhwal Arunanchal Pradesh and Orissa
- Puppets from West Bengal and Kerala,
- Costumes from Tamil Nadu and Orissa
- Paintings and Scrolls: 34 Gond Paintings, 10 Madhubani Paintings and scroll Paintings from West Bengal ;
- Headgears from Garhwal
- Backdrop from Garhwal.
- 1200 Photographs of documentation
- 187 hours of Audio video Documentation
- Audio Documentation 500 songs from Madhya Pradesh

The documentation work will continue in the year 2008 as well. Groups that would perform at IGNCA during the year are from Kerala, Andhra, Karnataka, Bundelkhand, Mathura, Chhatisgarh, Jharkhand, Orissa, Maharashtra, Goa, etc

At the end of this, IGNCA will have one of the Richest archives on folk and tribal Ram Katha Traditions in the country. It would reflect the plurality and diversity of traditions and mobility of the text across a vast geographical span. Scholars, performers and lay public all can make use of these rich archives.