

# **Final Report of the Tagore Research Fellowship, 2013-15:**

**(Research and Documentation of Ethnographic Collection of North East India in the Janpada Sampada Archives of the IGNC, New Delhi)**

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## **Introduction:**

The IGNC since its inception has initiated multiple research programmes in terms of assembling, documenting and interpreting arts and cultural materials both within the realm of text and the context. The academic structure of the IGNC has been critically designed and framed to pursue multi-disciplinary and integrated approach in assembling of knowledge in the respective field and its dissemination in an effective manner.

Over the last 25 years IGNC has systematically explored Indian artistic and cultural tradition in a structured frame-work. The outcome of this initiative could be seen in multiple dissemination modules in terms of interactive dialogues, conferences, lectures, exhibitions, audio-visual & multimedia presentations, cross-cultural interaction and publications.

IGNC had launched several major field based programmes since its inception under the auspices of Loka Prampara and Khestra Sampada modules of the Janapada Sampada Division. The ethnographic studies, a field based research and documentation programme of the Lokaparampara module, had given rise to a repertoire of valuable collection of arts and crafts objects. These cultural materials were systematically preserved in the Janapada Sampada Archives since 2007. The cultural significance of these ethnographic objects in contemporary time need be gauged in the light of the tremendous changes that have taken place over the time in the North East India.

Janapada Sampada Division had taken a policy decision to re-organize these materials at a critical time and to make these cultural materials available to

scholars, students, teachers, artists and others for study and research by way of – a computerized data-base, publication of catalogues and thematic exhibitions.

In this context it may be mentioned that the publication of a series of catalogues have been duly planned by the IGNCA to facilitate study and research by individuals and institutions specifically in the realm of tribal and folk arts in India keeping in view the fact that hardly any substantial published works are available in these craft traditions of the North East India. The present research and documentation project entrusted to me under the Tagore Research Fellowship has facilitated preparation and publication of relevant catalogues on the ethnographic collection of North East India. This is in fact one of the IGNCA'S endeavours to address the academic need in the field of traditional arts and craft and to augment research and study of the endangered folk and tribal tradition. There is no doubt that this humble work of mine on the ethnographic collection of the North East India will enrich IGNCA'S publication programme.

Accordingly, I had planned methodical documentation of the ethnographic collection of the IGNCA consisting of 1500 assorted objects from North East India in the first instance leading to a computerized data-base (please see research proposal). Preparation of descriptive catalogues was the final option of this project. After due research and ethnographic classification of the objects it was decided that the following catalogues namely- 1) Basketry and Bamboo objects, 2) Traditional textiles and 3) Milada Ganguli Collection of Naga Art objects could be worked upon. Accordingly work-schedule was framed and executed during the period 2013-15.

The research schedule for this project was prepared in such a manner as to give full attention on basketry in the first phase resulting in publication of the catalogue. This was followed by in-depth work on traditional textiles of the North East India. Both the crafts are intimately connected with each other in this region. At the last stage of cataloguing Milada Ganguli collection of Naga Art objects has been integrated into the project so as to give a holistic view of arts and crafts tradition of North East India. So the research schedule under the fellowship programme incorporated three specific catalogues as mentioned above.

The ultimate objective of publication of these catalogues is aimed at reviving the endangered crafts tradition in this part of the country so as to boost the rich treasure of folk tradition of the region.

The completion of documentation of the ethnographic collection of North East India in the archives Janapada Sampada Division as per schedule is due to the co-operation and help of the research scholars and staffs of the IGNCAs especially the Janapada Sampada Division. The digitization, computerization and creation of the online data base of the entire collection with the assistance of the Cultural Informatics Laboratory (CIL), IGNCAs have formed required base for retrieval of the primary information. This data-base now facilitates cataloguing of the various other materials.

### **The collection:**

It has already been stated that, IGNCAs under the Loka Prampara module, had collected a large number of ethnographic objects from North East India during the period 2007-2011. This was a part of the North East India action plan. Prior to this two significant collections- Milada Gnguli collections of Naga Art and , Sabita Ranjan collection of tribal Masks were acquired some times in 1994-95. Mrs Kapila Vatsayayan collection, received as donation, was added to the Cultural Archives of the Kala Nidhi Division. Some of these objects were displayed in a number of thematic exhibitions held in the IGNCAs as a part of planned dissemination programmes during the period.

There are in all 1500 ethnographic objects in the collection, of which 435 objects belongs traditional textiles, 120 basketry items and 185 Naga art objects. There are other assorted objects such as masks, wood carving, ornaments, manuscript, paintings, household articles, objects of personal adornment and photographs. The object represents various facets of life of some 30 ethnic groups of all the eight states of North East India. Some of the materials are very rare.

These objects were preserved and stored in Janapada Sampada Archives as a reference collection. A large part of the collection was taken over by the Kala Darshan Division (now transferred back to the Janapada Sampada Archives) mainly for exhibition purpose. These, ethnographic objects, especially textiles were stored in an unconventional manner. The existing storage space has been

reorganized following a cross-reference design. The current retrieval system enables scholars to trace an object in a few minutes time by using both the manual as well as computerized methods.

Due to the lack of accurate ethnographic information and authentic source, most of the objects were found to be enigmatic, which needed authentication and proper identification in terms of its socio-cultural significance. The present in-depth research initiated by me at Janapada Sampada Division, IGNCA for identification and preparing a feasible indexing as a part of systematic re-organization of the cultural Archives has fulfilled the academic need. This was necessary for the easy access and enabling scholars to carry on further research on the collection and do the necessary cataloguing theme-wise.

### **The Ethnographic Documentation Planned in this Project:**

The ethnographic objects, numbering 1500 individual items, collected from the eight states of North East India consist of multiple categories of traditional material culture. Some of the objects are rare and culturally significant. A good number of copy specimens also figures in this collection. Most important collections are basketry and textiles. However, mention must be made of the exquisite Naga Art of Head hunting cult. The traditional textiles of the north east India are of two categories- 1) hand-spun loom fabrics and 2) fly shuttle loom spun-silk and cotton fabrics. The traditional textiles consist of day to day apparels such as head-bands, sashes, stoles, waist band, loin cloths, skirt, cross-belts, aprons, shawls and shoulder bags.

Basketry specimens are either of bamboo or cane- woven in multiple techniques. There are some 12 categories of basketry specimens such as carrying baskets, storing baskets, receptacles, house-hold objects, mats, protective items, apparels, personal adornment items, jewellery, musical instrument, fishing traps and sacred images.

Naga art objects are multi-faceted and mainly come from Nagaland and Manipur. It consists of wood-carvings, weaponry, household articles, textiles, basketry, jewellery and some items of self defence. In addition some basic sample materials used in making art objects figures in this collection.

In North East India basketry and textile are two craft that stands for “unity in diversity”. The cultural and artistic significance of these materials are clearly delineated in the catalogues as mentioned above.

### **Work- schedule:**

1. The research work was conducted in three stages.  
The first stage of work was conducted in the Janapada Sampada Archives for preparation of computerized database format.  
In this phase of work 500 objects were identified and indexed along with digitization.
2. In the second phase identification and indexing work spilled over to the Kala Darshan Achieves. Some 450 objects were identified, digitized and indexed. Writing and formatting of the draft catalogue on basketry completed.  
During this phase an exhibition of basketry and bamboo objects was mounted in connection with the Festival of North East India.
3. In the third phase identification, digitization and indexing of 550 objects completed along with draft formatting of traditional textile catalogue.  
In this phase I have delivered one public lecture on – “In Search of Bamboo Flower: A North Eastern Saga” at the IGNCA.
4. Draft cataloguing of the Milada Ganguli collection of Naga Art completed towards the end of the term.

### **Working Method:**

1. Systematic retrieving of the 1500 objects from its location in the archives and subjected to cleaning and disinfection followed by conservation audit.
2. All the objects are then subjected to allotment of a temporary Accession Number and then putting a number slip on the body of the object.
3. 1500 objects were subsequently subjected to identification, classification and categorization. This is followed by indexing.

4. A primary data-base format had been prepared and finalized at the CIL for computerization. This module was linked with Kalasampada Digital Library of the CIL for easy access.
5. Preparation of digital photographs of all the ethnographic objects started simultaneously.

## **Work undertaken and Completed during the period of fellowship:**

### **Photography and digitization:**

1. Physical examination and study of the objects in the Archives to assess the need for the identification and indexing including the categorization into authentic and copy specimen completed in the first phase.
2. Formatting of Jpg image of 1500 objects with identification detail was completed in the first phase.
3. 1500 Images in digitized form were stored in the computer hard disc with minimum information.
4. Back-up of 1500 images in a separate detachable hard disc drive kept for emergency purpose.

### **Manual Indexing of the ethnographic materials:**

1. Thumb nail prints of 1500 objects prepared and attached to 1500 index cards of the individual objects in the first instance.
5. Ac.Nos. (With name and title) were inscribed to 1500 individual objects for first hand identification.
6. 1500 objects were subjected to classification and then individual index cards were prepared recording details of the object as per international norms. Indexing domains were incorporated as per inventory requirement. ( see data schedule)
7. All the index cards were arranged into a set of 50 and were subjected to spiral binding for future reference and record.

8. State of preservation of individual objects was recorded in the respective index cards for future reference.
9. Instructions for conservation procedure in respect of deteriorated objects were duly recorded for immediate curatorial intervention. Segregation of infected objects carried out as per quarantine procedure.
10. List of deteriorated objects was prepared and objects were sent for conservation treatment. Two valuable Tai Khamti Manuscripts were retrieved from the collection, which were in very bad state of conservation. Both the manuscripts were sent to the conservation laboratory for the first aid treatment.

#### **Completion of Work for the computerization of the data-base:**

1. An interactive data- base format for the computerization of the collection has been completed with the help of CIL during the period.
2. A power point presentation on this account was held for the scholars and academic staff of the Janapada Sampada Division. ( see project proposal)
3. Catalogue details of 1500 objects entered duly and stored in the PC. Interactive-data-base of all the objects was prepared during the period.
4. While carrying out cataloguing I had to face academic problem from time to time due to lack of proper authentic information in terms of ethnic identity, socio-cultural significance, appropriate provenance and identification of materials. I had to conduct research from the secondary sources and also museum documentation especially in the National Museum, New Delhi and internet.
5. The collection could now be accessed online in the Kala Sampada module of the IGNCA intra-net connection. It can be accessed at <http://10.24.78.132> (IGNCA Intra-net connectivity). Data base could be accessed using password "ethno-archives".

#### **Cataloguing and publication of descriptive catalogue:**

1. Catalogue data of the basketry collection of North East India completed during this phase of work. The relevant data of the

basketry objects are arranged tribe-wise and provenance-wise for quick identification

2. Introductory write-up for the two catalogues (basketry and textile) has been duly completed followed by editing and formatting.
3. The following catalogues- 1) Basketry: Everyday Art of North East India and 2) Traditional Textiles of North East India, complete in all respect sent to the Co-Publisher in the last quarter of the fellowship period.
4. The following catalogue- “Basketry: Everyday Art of North East India” has been published and released on 10<sup>th</sup> March, 2016 at North Eastern Hill University, Shillong during the Regional Seminar cum Workshop on Socio-Cultural Significance of Bamboo organized by the IGNSA in collaboration with North Eastern Hill University in presence of Member Secretary, IGNSA, V.C. NEHU and other dignitaries

#### **Exhibition work as a part of the North East Festival:**

1. Within the frame-work of the research project and the work schedule I was involved in mounting an exhibition of basketry of North East India during the period under report. This exhibition entitled- *Pasi: Everyday Art of the North East India* was mounted as a part of the North East India festival. The exhibition was duly inaugurated by the Secretary, Ministry for the Development of North Eastern India Region. A large number of visitors including high profile visitors paid visit to the exhibition.
2. An illustrated exhibition brochure was published and distributed during the exhibition (see copy enclosed). This exhibition was part of the research work conducted by me under the auspices of the Tagore Fellowship.

#### **Public lecture:**

A power point presentation entitled- “In Search of Bamboo Flower: North Eastern Saga” was held on 9<sup>th</sup> May 2014. A large number of students, teachers, scholars and others attended the lecture.



### **Out-come of the project in this Phase:**

1. Spiral bound hard copy of the index cards in 9 volumes in respect of the 1500 ethnographic objects were completed kept in the Janapada Sampada Archive for verification, identification and retrieval of required information.
2. Digital image of the 1500 objects along with name and title is preserved in the Janapada Sampada Archives for further archival use.
3. Systematic information about the 1500 objects is now available online for public use in the Kalasampada digital library, IGNCA.
4. The catalogue of basketry and bamboo objects entitled- ***Basketry: Everyday Art of North East India***, has been published during the period of fellowship. This catalogue is now available for reference by scholars, teachers, students and others for their respective research work.( copy enclosed)
5. The catalogue on the textiles of North East India entitled- ***Traditional Textiles of the North East India*** has duly completed and sent to the Co-publisher for printing and publication in the month of September, 2015. This catalogue is expected in three months time. (copy enclosed)
6. The catalogue of the Naga Art objects entitled- ***Saga of Hornbill***, is recently completed and proposed to be sent to the language editor for editing soon. (copy enclosed)

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# **Research Work Completion Report**

**1<sup>st</sup> April, 2014 to 30 September, 2014**



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