

CONCEPT NOTE:

Abstract: Pre-modern Indian art history till recently has remained largely representation -centric, bereft of institutional contexts, with little in it about artists/craftsmen (shilpi-s), who in their 'fanciful play' (shilpi kridati tatraiva guror-ajna-nusaratah) manifested, transformed and modified such representations in time. This entire process in art, with the artist centrally located in it, still remains obscure and requires unraveling, especially in terms of understanding how artists, as a community, were institutionally organized; how they operated individually or collectively defining their work culture, hierarchy, discipline and honour, which often delivered status, gains and rewards to them. Thanks to both conventional and non-conventional sources, evidence such as inscriptions, graffiti and masons' marks is now accumulating in fragments from different parts of India. It is thus time to reconstruct the profile of ancient and medieval artists and also their organizational set up from the various sources now becoming available to us. This presentation attempts to briefly sketch out such a profile within the chronological range from the Mauryan times down to the Middle Ages. Of particular interest are instances from epigraphs relating to the artists that indicate their self-image. Two such examples, one that refers to Udega, the 'chief architect' (ruvari) of the Saraswati temple at Gadag, Central Karnataka, and another that refers to Chhitaku, the chief architect (sutradhara) of the Mahamaya temple at Ratanpur (Distt. Bilaspur, Chhattisgarh) offer us deeper insight into this important and under explored area of study.

Bionote: Professor R.N.Misra (M.A. BHU 1959, Ph.D. Saugor 1968) is a distinguished scholar and deeply respected teacher, who has served at the Universities of Saugar, Gwalior and Allahabad, and was a Visiting Professor at Allahabad University and Jawaharlal Nehru University. He has been the recipient of many prestigious fellowships, including the Tagore National Fellowship and others by the Ministry of Culture as well as the Indian Institute of Advanced Study. He has edited and written several books of scholarly depth and interest on Indian Art. He has delivered important Presidential Addresses, Memorial Lectures and been the Keynote Speaker at several key conferences and seminars in the area. He has also attended several seminars in India and abroad in relation to his work. Since his retirement in 2001, he is based in Lucknow.