

Minutes
**The Threadbare discussion on Spirit of North-East India held on 27-28 August,
2008 in Guwahati (Assam)**

by
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In order to streamline the activities for a mega event in New Delhi on “Spirit of North East”, from 19-28, November 2008, a 2-day meet of resource persons from the North-East was organized on 7-8 August, 2008 at IGNCA, New Delhi. In the meet Dr. K. K. Chakravarty, Member Secretary, IGNCA instructed Secretary of Srimanta Sankaradeva Kalakshetra to organize a meeting of those resource persons from Assam, Mizoram, Tripura, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh who could not attend the meeting in Delhi to discuss and finalize the activities, themese, etc. under the chairmanship of Prof. A. C. Bhagabati, Honorary Coordinator, IGNCA North-East Regional Centre, Guwahati.

As a follow up of the Meet of North-East India Resource Persons held in New Delhi on August 7-8, 2008, a 2-day Threadbare Discussion on the Spirit of North-East India was organized at Srimanta Sankaradeva Kalakshetra, Guwahati, Assam on August 27-28, 2008. This threadbare meet was organized in collaboration with Srimanta Sankaradeva Kalakshetra, Guwahati. The thrust of the meet was to consolidate the activities and programmes of the mega event, “Spirit of Unity of North-East India: Confluence and Convergence” scheduled to be held in Delhi from November 19-28, 2008. More than fifty representatives from the North-Eastern States of Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura and Assam participated actively to give a shape to this event, however, a total absence was felt from Arunachal Pradesh as no one turned up for the meeting.

The meeting began with a welcome address by Sri Goutom Sharma, Secretary, Srimanta Sankaradeva Kalakshetra, Guwahati (Assam). Sri Sharma also gave a brief presentation of activities that the IGNCA has done in Assam in past 10 months in

collaboration with Srimanta Sankaradeva Kalakshetra and other state Government departments.

Prof. A. C. Bhagabati, Sri Goutom Sharma, Dr. Kailash Kumar Mishra and Dr. Richa Negi collectively presented details of the proceedings of the meet of August 7-8, 2008. In his introductory remarks Prof. A. C. Bhagabati said that Dr. K. K. Chakravarty is willing to portray a very united picture of North East India during the Spirit of North East. “It is going to be an extraordinary opportunity for us to capture because it will give a new opportunity to understand North-East”, said Prof. Bhagabati.

Nomenclature of Event

Talking about the nomenclature of the event, Prof. Birendranath Dutta, a well-known folklorist said, “What do you mean by the Spirit? Spirit of diversity or Spirit of Unity? Everybody talks about the diversity in terms of dress materials, food habits, cultural practices, languages, etc. but the purpose of the event should be the binding force or unity. The term 'spirit' should signify the 'spirit of unity' i.e. the inner spirit of oneness among various socio-cultural groups. So, it should be Spirit of Unity.” Again Prof. Birendranath Dutta said, “North-East is an integral part of India. Why anybody tells us to come to the mainstream of the nation! We are already in the mainstream”. Talking about the contribution of Srimanta Sankaradeva, a sixteenth century Vaisnav saint-reformer, he said: “Sankaradeva is the father of Assamese culture as well as the nation who spread the Bhakti movement through the innovative institution of Sattras. He composed and sang several songs of the unity of India and motivated the people of undivided Assam for the unity and harmony. If the Ganga as a big river is the uniting factor for India, we have Bramhaputra, which is the biggest river of India. Shankaradeva is the cultural icon. Spirit of fusion has first brought by Srimanta Shankaradeva. Shankaradeva had set an ideal not only for the people of North-East but to the rest of India. Therefore Shankaradeva must be highlighted in the event. Much before Mahatma, Srimanta Shankaradeva eliminated the untouchability from the society. So the nomenclature should be Spirit of unity of North-East India instead of Spirit of North-East”. Prof. Dutta emphatically stressed.

Accepting the view of Prof Dutta about nomenclature, Prof. A. C. Bhagabati suggested, “As we are trying to highlight the unity of harmony and confluence and convergence, the topic of the event should be ‘*Spirit of North-East India: Confluence and Convergence*’. This will make it more meaningful”. Prof. Bhagabati concluded. The representatives of all states accepted the suggestion of nomenclature of the event of Prof. Birendranath Dutta and Prof. A. C. Bhagabati.

According to Dr. Sobha Brahma, veteran artist and Vice-Chairman of Srimanta Sankaradeva Kalakshetra, *Harappa* culture is also the culture of North-East. He stressed on focusing the tribal culture of the region and said: “Emphasis should be given on diversity of North-East India that leads to the unity among people.”

Prof. A. C. Bhagabati said, “Purpose of this discussion is to continue the dialogue with IGNCA. He says that IGNCA has been involving in revitalizing the diverse culture of North-East. Diversity is so extensive here that it cannot be captured in short span of time”. He also appreciated the efforts of Sri Goutom Sharma, Dr. Richa Negi and Dr. Kailash Kumar Mishra and congratulated them for their achievement. “Time has come now”, he said, “to evaluate the activities done by IGNCA, the ground realities of its coverage to showcase North-East. North-East is a paradise of cultural diversity. The mega event is going to showcase the North-East, specifically focusing on the activities of IGNCA”. He also stressed that the ideas how best the North-East may be projected, should be made clear by 10th of September, 2008.

Prof. Bhagabati suggested that the entire activities of the event would be roughly divided into following 6 heads:

SN.	Head
A.	Inauguration
B.	Exhibition
C.	Performance

D.	Film show
E.	Workshop
F.	Miscellaneous Activities

In order to ensure the proportionate time to each state of North-East India, it was decided to give one complete day to each state. Accordingly a 10-day tentative state-wise programme as mentioned below was drawn:

Day	Date	Activity
1.	November 19, 2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Inaugural Function: Release of books, CDs, etc. b. Inauguration of Exhibition c. Presentation of orchestration based on North-East India's music, presentation with traditional musical instruments (40 Minutes) d. Presentation of one consolidate presentation based on folk dances of North-East India (45 Minutes)
2.	November 20, 2008	Manipur
3.	November 21, 2008	Sikkim
4.	November 22, 2008	Meghalaya
5.	November 23, 2008	Nagaland
6.	November 24, 2008	Mizoram
7.	November 25, 2008	Arunachal Pradesh
8.	November 26, 2008	Tripura
9.	November 27, 2008	Assam
10.	November 28, 2008	Closing Ceremony

Themes for the Exhibition

The participants unanimously decided to divide the exhibition on the themes mentioned below:

SN.	Theme
1.	A multi-media presentation and exhibition of the rare and illustrated manuscripts and books
2.	Textile of North East India and its live presentation
3.	Ethnic and Indigenous cuisines
4.	Traditional musical instruments (wind, percussion, string etc) of North-East India
5.	Ritual objects, utensils, paintings, ritual flags, etc. associated with the practitioners of the various sects of believers of Buddhism in the North-East India
6.	Bamboo-based heritage and culture of the North-East India
7.	Banana-based heritage and culture of the North-East India
8.	Masks, puppets, etc.
9.	Contemporary paintings and artwork
10.	Traditional jewelries
11.	Old photographs depicting the history and change in the region

Themes for Performance

The under mentioned themes were decided for the performance during the 10-day event on the Spirit of Unity of North-East India:

SN.	Theme
1.	Dying Indigenous games and sports of the North-East India
2.	Vanishing priestly chanting and folk narratives
3.	Folk theatres of North-East India
4.	Performance of songs and dance forms of multiple communities of the North-East India
5.	Presentation of Ankia Bhavna of Assam

Themes for Workshop

It was decided to identify at least three main speakers, 4-5 discussants followed by open discussion for each theme of the workshop. “The themes of workshop may be termed, if all agree, as talk sessions”, said Prof. A. C. Bhagabati. It was also decided to see that in the selected themes representatives of all the eight states of North-East India are included. Following themes for workshop were decided:

SN.	Theme
1.	Interface between indigenous faiths and major religious traditions of India
2.	Performing art traditions of North-East India
3.	Revisiting History of North-East India
4.	Shankaradeva and Bhakti movement
5.	Status and role of women as the makers of modern North-East India
6.	Enduring craft traditions of North-East India
7.	Customary laws and oral traditions of North-East India

Representatives of all the states were requested to identify the scholars and discussants for the above themes of workshop so that the Member Secretary, IGNCA could write letter to them for contributing papers and getting prepared for the respective themes as speakers or discussants. Some representatives asked whether IGNCA would pay TA, DA for the paper presenters or not. Dr. Kailash Kumr Mishra confirmed that the TA and DA for the paper presenters, discussants and artists would be borne by the IGNCA but for the honorarium this matter will be discussed with the senior officers of IGNCA.

Film Shows

It was decided to collect documentary films video or celluloid made on any cultural dimension of North-East India. Such documentary films can be shown everyday during the event. Some of the fiction films are as good as documentary films on theme and content.

Sri Nipan Goswami and Abdul Mazid, two noted theatre and cine artists of Assam said that films like 'Azan Phakir', 'Bahadur Gaon Burha', and 'Sakhi Radhika' depict culture, life style, and the very spirit of region.

Prof. Birendranath Dutta also supported their argument and said that few feature films such as 'Wasu Bisu' a Karbi film by Gautam Bora; 'Saman' which depicts the life style of Arunachal Pradesh's and Manipuri film 'Ichanou' directed by Aribam Shyam Sharma are worth to be shown during the event. Some other participants suggested that films like "Badan Barphukan" and "Maniram Dewan" of Jugal Das can be shown.

It was, therefore decided to obtain the copies of those films also for show. Prof. A. C. Bhagabati, Dr. Kailash Kumar Mishra and Dr. Richa Negi requested all the representatives to see that these films are obtained immediately, much in advance, for the event.

Miscellaneous Activities

A worthy suggestion to keep one hour, preferably immediately after lunch for discussion among the participants on any issue or curiosity, everyday during 8 days. This suggestion, after a long discussion was accepted unanimously by the representatives present in the meeting.

Sri Mukul Rabha, Cultural Officer of Dudhnoi centre promised to provide the items from Rabha museum in Goalpara to exhibit in the event. The objects of his museum are related to the life style, agricultural instrument, musical instrument, ornaments etc of the Rabha Community.

Sri Mukul Ch. Deka, General Manager, ARTFED, promised to display the traditional Assam silk, dress, and to arrange some demonstration on the making of the items.

Dr. S. K. Roy, Curator of the Museum of the Department of Anthropology, Gauhati University offered his service and said that he would help in displaying the items of the Museum that depict the ethnographic culture of the region in the event.

Tentatively it was decided that the inauguration programme would begin with the presentation of National Anthem by all the participating states wearing their own traditional costumes.

Participants from various states decided to organize state level meeting at earliest possible time preferably before 14th September 2008 to discuss strategy and plan to ensure how best they can project themselves at the national platform. The representatives of IGNCA expressed their willingness to present in those meetings.

In order to obtain ritual objects, ethnographic items, ritual flags, paintings, etc. and to identify the speakers on the Buddhism of North-East India it was decided that Secretary, Srimanta Sankaradeva Kalakshetra will personally visit to various places of North-East and finally a daylong meet will be organized in Guwahati before 20th September 2008. This will prove useful to gather all the materials as well as ideas from various Buddhist tribal communities. It was felt unanimously that as, Dr. Richa Negi has been working in Arunachal Pradesh she should visit the state immediately in order to identify the performers, ritual specialist, speakers, etc.

It was also decided that the entire architecture and getup will be prepared by the artists of North-East India. The representatives from Mizoram, Tripura and Nagaland suggested that as it is not possible to send indigenous or vernacular architects from all states it would be better if Secretary of Srimanta Sankaradeva Kalakshetra in their collaboration decides the outer and inner structure and designs and with his team he may go to Delhi in advance to ensure that entire structure is made and space is selected as per the requirement of the event. Reacting on this Sri Goutom Sharma suggested that traditional thatch houses will be made in consultation with the vernacular architects where the

traditional textiles, bamboo made products etc will be displayed. Items collected from various museums can be displayed in the halls of the centre.

The meeting ended with a note that all preliminary activities including a draft brochure will be prepared and discussed for further addition and deletion, if felt necessary, on 20-21 September, 2008 at Guwahati, before the main event to be held in New Delhi from 19-28 November, 2008.

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