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## **Stella Kramrisch and the Unknown India**

**A study of her writings, art collection and display in the US (1950-1993)**

by

**Rituparna Basu**

on

15 March 2013 at 5.00 p.m.

in the Lecture Hall,

11, Mansingh Road, New Delhi – 110 001



### **Stella Kramrisch and the Unknown India: A study of her writings, art collection and display in the US (1950-1993)**

**Stella Kramrisch**, the Austrian-born art historian, who was awarded the Padma Bhusan for her contribution to Indian art, can be seen as one of the prime exponents of Indian art in the US in the twentieth century. After her early training in Western art history at the Vienna school under Professor Josef Strygowsky and Max Dvorak, her interest in Indian art began with her doctoral project on classical Indian Buddhist sculpture in 1919. Her brief stint at teaching Western art at Kala Bhavan, the art school in Santiniketan in 1921, at the invitation of Rabindranath Tagore, followed by her tenure as Professor in the department of Ancient Indian History, Calcutta University (1924-1950) at the invitation of Asutosh Mukhopadhyay, the then Vice Chancellor and as joint editor of the *Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art* with Abanindranath Tagore (1933-50), had drawn her into the evolving Orientalist and nationalist discourse, generating alongside an interest in collecting Indian fine and folk art. As an influential and inspiring teacher she could infuse a rigorous approach to the study of classical Indian art in her students some of the better-known among whom are Nihar Ranjan Ray and S. K. Saraswati. She had also been mentor to Devaprasad Ghosh, the founder-curator of Ashutosh Museum, who was her colleague. Her notable publications include *Indian Sculpture* (1933), *The Hindu Temple* (1946), *Art of India through the Ages* (1954), to name a few. In 1950 she moved to the US at the invitation of Prof. Norman Brown to teach at the University of Pennsylvania and Institute of Fine Arts, New York and became Curator and Emeritus Curator of Philadelphia Museum of Art. (1954-1993). The lecture will attempt to

explore her lesser known contribution to folk arts during the latter half of her life when she worked tirelessly to showcase the Indian regional art treasures, ranging from the classical to the folk and tribal art of India through her research, art collection and the first ever hosted folk art exhibition in the US, “Unknown India: Ritual Art in Tribe and Village” (1968). The paper will focus on the nuances of her research and writing, art collection and the landmark exhibition of Indian folk and tribal art in the US.

**Rituparna Basu** is Associate Professor in History at Bijoy Krishna Girls College affiliated to the University of Calcutta. Her PhD was on the “Rediscovery of Folk Arts and Crafts of India: A Reappraisal of a Twentieth century Endeavour”. She did her post-doctoral research as a Fullbright-Nehru Fellow at Philadelphia Museum of Art working on the Stella Kramrisch Archives and has been a visiting scholar at South Asia Centre at the University of Pennsylvania in 2011 – 12. She has articles published in various books and international journals, contributed to *Marg* and several exhibition catalogues published by CIMA, Kolkata. Her forthcoming book *Stitching Dreams, Weaving Livelihood: A Study of the Kantha Art of Bengali Women* (Aryan Publishers), is the outcome of a project by Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, New Delhi. Dr. Basu has recently presented a paper at the prestigious Courtauld Institute of Art, London in the seminar *Divine Artefacts: Stella Kramrisch and 20<sup>th</sup> century Art History*.