

TOUR REPORT

An Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA) delegation constituting Dr. Sachchidanand Joshi (Member Secretary), Pratapanand Jha, (Director-Cultural Informatics) and Dr. Bachchan Kumar (Assistant Professor) visited Cambodia during 6-10 March 2017, under the leadership of the Member Secretary, to explore the bilateral collaboration with the APSARA National Authority, Siem Reap, Cambodia.

India and South East Asian Nations shared culture since remote past. Earliest historical contact was established with the Kambuja desa now known as Royal Kingdom of Cambodia with the foundation of the kingdom of Funan in the beginning of the Christian era. The legend of Nagi Soma and Brahmin Kaundinaya is well known. Both, Brahmanism and Buddhism flourished in this country side by side. Ramayana, Mahabharata and Buddhist treatises such as Tripititaka and Jataka stories are well preserved here.

Cambodia is one of the important tourist destination in South East Asia. Income from the tourism is the major part of their economy. As per the latest statistics 48 lakh tourists visited Cambodia in 2016. Last year only about 37,000 Indians visited Cambodia. It is pertinent to mention here that the population of Indians in Cambodia is only about 1500, irrespective of our cultural relations for more than two millennium. There is no direct flight from India to Cambodia (Phnom Penh or Siem Ream).

Most of the tourist destinations are the temples from 9th Century to 18th Century. Majority of temples conceived as Hindu temples and later converted into Buddhist one. Angkor Wat, the largest religious complex in the world, is one among them. The temples are full of sculptures, reliefs, inscriptions depicting stories from Indian mythology. However, academic interaction between India and Cambodia remained at low pitch.

Many French Scholars played a major role and contributed for conservation, research, documentation and publication on these temples. However, there interpretations are based on their knowledge on Indian art and culture. To have the Indian viewpoint, on these sculptures, reliefs, inscriptions etc., collaborative research is required to present the Khmer culture, in totality, since its inception. This will also help in establishing the degree of cultural affiliation between Indian and Khmer culture. Understanding the importance of this aspect, a delegation from IGNCA was invited by the APSARA National Authority to discuss and initiate collaborative research projects.

To study the common threads of art and culture with South East Asian countries, the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, New Delhi established South East Asian Studies under its area study programme. We have built a vast resources of study materials in the form of books, monographs, visuals etc. for further research. So far, we have published over dozen books pertain to South East Asia like “Borobudur”, “Rama Legends and Rama Reliefs in Indonesia”, “Glimpses of Early Indonesian Culture”, “Art and Archaeology of South East Asia” etc. In addition, we have organised various Exhibitions on Indonesia, Laos, Vietnam and Cambodia, to showcase our common heritage. We have also organised International Conferences on Cambodian art, Myanmar art, Laotian art as well as Indonesian art. Proceedings of these conferences have been published by IGNCA.

The Authority for the Protection of the Site and the Management of the Region of Angkor (APSARA Authority) is a National Government Institution. Created in 1995, its mission is to develop and implement conservation and development policy for the Angkor Site, which has been given World Heritage status by UNESCO. It also cares for the cleaning and maintenance of the part and for the facilities put in for the comfort of tourists. The APSARA Authority receives most of its income from the sale of entrance tickets to the Site.

Most of the sites are well preserved and fully protected by the APSARA National Authority, under the guidance of ICC on Angkor. The ICC-Angkor is an international coordinating mechanism for the assistance provided by different countries and organisations for the safeguarding and development of the historic site of Angkor. In order to fulfil its role, the ICC-Angkor is kept informed about scientific projects or development operations undertaken on the site and in the Siem Reap-Angkor region. It sees to the consistency of the various projects and defines the technical and financial standards required when necessary. It highlights, when needed, any points requiring the attention of concerned parties.

Through this visit, aim is to undertake collaborative research projects to establish the two millennium old cultural relations and enrich each other with the best cultural practices for the better livelihood of the people of both the countries. Ministry of Culture can play a major catalytic role in whole of South East Asia. Outcomes of such researches will help Indians to know the cultural heritage of Cambodia and other countries of the South East Asia, which in-turn increase the tourism, cultural expedition, academic interactions and business etc. A detailed Tour Report with draft MOU proposed to be signed with the APSARA National Authority has been sent to the Ministry of Culture for approval.