

MILADA GANGULE COLLECTION [OBJECTS FROM NAGALAND]



Born in Czechoslovakia, educated in Prague and London, Milada's destiny brought her to India and took her to the land of the Nagas. IGNCA was intertwined in this enchanting story. The result is the rich collection of Naga Art in the Archives of IGNCA. Milada Ganguly came to India as the wife of Bengali writer Mohanlal Ganguli, who was a close relative of Rabindranath Tagore. She reached India in 1939 and got interested in learning about the rural customs and traditions. Before long, she found herself attracted to the Adivasis. Her earliest opportunity to visit the areas inhabited by the Nagas came in 1963. She was escorted by a convoy of 120 military trucks during a stay of one week. Such was the level of political disturbance. A year later, when a political settlement had been reached, and a new state of Nagaland had been created, she visited the state for a month's stay.

Her eager and frank interaction with the Adivasis endeared her to them all. They opened their homes to her and revealed many of their sacred objects and customs to her. Between the years 1963 and 1988, she visited the state 18 times and systematically documented her collections from every visit. She also accumulated information about them for documentation.

IGNCA, as part of the programme on lifestyle studies, was keen on acquiring the collection. It bought a bulk of the collections for a fair amount in 1994 and 1996. The collection includes Naga artifacts, photographs, transparencies, textiles, various aspects of Naga dress like head gear, arm band etc. and their traditional weapons. The different tribes that are covered in the collection are 1. Angami, 2. Ao, 3. Chakesang, 4. Chang, 5. Lower Konyak, 6. Upper Konyak, 7. Pochury, 8. Western Rengma, 9. Central Sangtam, 10. Lotha, 11. Sema, 12. Phom, 13. Mao, 14. Maran, 15. Khimnangax, 16. Yimchunger, 17. Rongmei and 18. Tangkhul.

The Milada Ganguly collection acquired by IGNCA is extraordinary and comprehensive. It depicts the various aspects of Naga lifestyle such as their dwelling, men and women at work, dresses, ornaments and jewellery, various tools, their ritual attire and objects. The rare objects include Khimnang, a Naga crossbow. This is a personal belonging and not easily parted with. There are the carved wooden mugs, decorated wooden combs (usually given as gifts to girls), cane head gear, decorated belts with cowries, the hand woven shawls and other dress parts. Among the Nagas the weaving indicates the status and stature of the person. The several household utensils in traditional Naga kitchen also form part of the collection. Of equal importance are the photographs taken by Mrs. Milada Ganguly. The photographs depict the Naga lifestyle, highlighting various aspects of their rich socio-cultural traditions. There is a photograph of a Naga with 135 enemy skulls, men and women in their ceremonial costumes, and typical Naga scenes to pick only a few at random. There is a shot of the 'magic stone.' It has a story behind it. According to the local myth, two brothers worked in the field and they put their yield on the spot where the stone stands and the yield used to double. Once the brothers got fighting and their mother burnt the place so as to finish its magical power. The stone still stands. The entire collection is an important document that narrates and recreates a cultural heritage that is fast disappearing.