

## CONFERENCE/SEMINAR REPORT

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### **XI Congress of ISFNR**

The XIth Congress of the International Society for Folk Narrative Research was hosted by the Central Institute of Indian Languages at Mysore in January 1995. Experts discussed multiple dimensions of : Oral Narrative and Discourse, Folk Narrative and Gender, Linguistics and Folk Narrative, and Oral and Semiliterary Epics.

The Congress questioned the literary standards and classification imposed on folklore studies, stressed the political implications of items of folklore, and identified poverty and illiteracy as causatives of the predominance of oral over textual tradition in the Indian situation.

IGNCA, was represented by Nita Mathur, Richa Negi, and Rajendra Ranjan Chaturvedi. Richa Negi focused on the Pandava dance theatre within the context of performative text as the living tradition of Garhwal. The epic tradition of Mahabharata finds place in the Pandava dance ritual. Songs and dances are replete with somewhat metamorphosed images of the five Pandava brothers and their consort, Draupadi. The many meanings in these verbal expressions become manifest and known to the people themselves for whom the epic is a repository of their sacred and social history, a receptacle of their identity and cautiously bequeathed heritage. Rajendra Ranjan Chaturvedi delved into the indigenous concepts of earth and seed pervading the thinking processes, aesthetic sensibilities, rituals and practices of the people of Vraja ksetra. The secret of creation lies in the seed in its potential to multiply. Germination and fruition represent only two points in a cyclical scheme with many intermediate stages and intervening factors. The oral tradition draws from these visible configuration to organise the knowledge base. The relationship between the seed, earth and fruit provide the imagery for human action and its consequence, established in the principle of karmaphala. Nita Mathur's 'Constructing a Thesaurus of Indigenous Concepts in Oral Tradition' centered around the holistic perspective and methodology evolved at the IGNCA for understanding the lifestyle of people. The corpus of words on the central theme of the body-womb-seed in conjunction with their fine interconnections and ramifications provide insight into, the Santhal, perception of themselves as also the world around.

The complete body of folklore tradition of a community is an expression of its values, ideals, morals, in essence, its fullness. It provides the people with a pattern of thought and cognition, paradigms, codes and symbols by which they relate with the terrestrial and cosmological beings. The increasing concern for safeguarding folklore needs to encompass the culture and lifestyle of a people.

**Nita Mathur**

### **The Sacred Geometry**

A seminar on 'Pilgrimage Tourism and Conservation of Cultural Heritage : Experiences and Revelations', was held during Ardh Kumbh Mela in January 1995 at Allahabad by the Society of Pilgrimage Studies. The most significant theme that emerged was the cultural astronomy and sacred geometry of Varanasi and Chitrakut, presented by John McKim Malville, Rana P.B. Singh and D.P. Dubey. Global Positioning System and Instrument Garmin - 75 were used to give exact geographical locations, of these two holy cities.

It was observed that the city plan of Varanasi has developed according to a cosmic order, it was observed that the temples and shrines related to sun(Aditya) are placed in the meaningful spatial pattern corresponding to the special geometry and movement of the sun, the association of cosmic-north and Kashi-north, and the celebrating seasonal festivities in the sequential order referring to solstices and equinoxes. The geometry of Adityas combines the northern directionality of both macrocosm (sun) and

mesocosm (the Ganga river). The importance of these two directions within the city is not surprising. The pole of heaven establishes the order of the cosmos, and the direction of the flow of the Ganga establishes the source of the world and the great axis of death and rebirth. The complex network and structure of the spatial pattern of sun shrines and their association with movement of the sun, throws light on the cosmological sense of 'city planning' in ancient period.

The sacred geometry of Chitrakoot is composed of eighty four holy sites of which seven form a sacred geometric pattern, homologous to chakra (sheath) system of Lord's body, that follows a sequential correspondence. The relationship among macro, meso, and micro- cosmic representation is very strong which ultimately results from a visible and experienced form of faithscape, where traditions, myths, spatial patterning and natural setting meets closely. Various sites are seen as a series of triangle, with Hanuman at the base. It shows, Chitrakoot was progressively conceived as a cosmogram with Rama as an immanent principle.

Though sacred geometry is one way to understand holy places, there are also other ways of looking into it. Ramakar Pant's paper, 'Vrindāvanvāsa : A Lifelong Pilgrimage', focussed on the notion of Tirtha as a place for (a) perceiving the macrocosm (Brahmsākshatakār), (b) knowing the macrocosm (Brahma jñāna), and (c) merging with the Absolute (Brahmaleena).

**Ramakar Pant**