

SUNGKONG CALL OF THE LOG DRUM

An Exhibition of Milada Ganguli's Collection of Naga Art Objects

7th Oct.1997 - 26th Oct.1997

Matighar, IGNCA



The Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA) seeks to place the arts within the context of the natural and human environment, lifestyle and cultural regions, through its diverse programmes of research, publication, training, multimedia, creative activities, performances and exhibitions. One of its primary aims is to serve as major resource and research centre. In its **cultural archive** the IGNC A acquires and preserves artefacts, audio-video and still materials on the various art-forms. These are further enhanced in their value by the compilation of additional data on the collection.

The Milada Ganguli collection of Naga art objects, slides and photographs is one such collection. This collection has been acquired directly from Milada Ganguli.



The collection of Milada Ganguli acquired by the IGNC A is extraordinary, comprehensive and as such significant. It depicts Naga lifestyle of fourteen groups and subgroups in various facets: Naga dwellings, men and women at work, dresses, ornaments and jewellery, different types of tools, etc. The rarity and uniqueness of the collection lies in the fact that it represents a precious cultural heritage which is getting almost extinct. Not only the objects are rare, but its importance also lies in being one person's life-time collection, which makes it all the more valuable.

The 'Sungkong' (call of the Log drum) is an exhibition of the Milada Ganguli collection of Naga art objects and photographs. It reflects Naga culture based on intrinsic value of image and identity reinforced by the

myths and legends developed over the years on their material foundation of power and potency.

Naga way of life is always full of struggle even in contemporary time. Their struggle for existence is not only reflected in their social and political organisation but also amply expressed in the multi-faceted art manifestations be it dance form or folksong or visual art.

In this exposition the entire flow of the cultural milieu of the Naga in time-and-space is presented in a sectionalized but integrated format. The basic approach is to highlight the very essence of the Naga spirit by weaving the five micro-themes which are inter-related into a cohesive holistic story.

Myths and the Megaliths

This section gives an idea of the Naga origin. As per the myth, the Nagas (unlike the other groups of the region) came from the rock - a symbolic metaphor for the sturdy people as they are. The megalithic practice of burial, which was in vogue among them in the early 20th century, is shown by stone urn burial and megalithic menhirs.



Image and Identity

In this section a Naga society governed by the strict patriarchal norms, values, power potency and social hierarchy is shown. What is the position of a chieftain, or a wealthy person who has given feast of merit? How these special persons and their family members are identified in the society? What is the method of communication or language for this act. All these symbolic interface are integrated in a pragmatic exhibit-design.

Morung in Peace Time

The significance of Morung as a centre for social interaction and institution for handing down tradition to the younger generation is highlighted in this section.



Here the peace time activity connected with the art of wood carving, basketry, bead-work, dance, music, etc. is exhibited. Fairs, festivals, annual agriculture cycle, rites, ritual etc., are integrated in the exhibition to show the inter-relatedness and



inter-connectedness of art, ritual and subsistence activities.

Fertility and the Fetish

Among the Naga society there is a belief in the supernatural power which is imbibed in the human body. The power could be acquired by undergoing through a variety of rituals, taboos (*gena*) and sacrifices. This belief results in the fertility cult. Human body, is therefore centre of various types of activities, including manifestation of the art. This is done for the increase of crops, animals, children, wealth etc. The human skulls, are still kept in Morung. In this section an attempt is made to show the human head as a kind of fetish object representing the fertility cult, power and potency.



The call of the Log-drum

In the contemporary changing situation symbolic retention of old values and ideals is a very interesting aspect of tribal way of life. The Nagas try to revive their past glory and preserve their heritage through fairs, festivals, performing arts, dress and apparels etc. The playing of the Log-drum once again in festival time such as 'Moatsu' reveal the rhythm of a new beginning.





The exhibition represents tribal-life-style based on the belief in fertility and acquisition of power by means of a kind of "Sympathetic magic" governed by the transmigration of the power and potency of one person to another after death. This acquisition process is a source of power enshrined in the code of conduct of the institution of Morung. Another aspect is the historical emergence of strong chieftainship having sacred aura coupled with the system of acquired hierarchy in the society which could be bought by throwing feast to the co-villagers-the very belief of the power and potency in man indirectly. The exhibition takes the cue from the core concept of "Power" and weaves the life-style of Naga society showing the inter-connectedness and inter-relatedness of the five seminal aspects.

Milada Ganguli was born in Czechoslovakia and studied at the University of Prague and the University of London. There she married the Bengali writer Mohonlal Ganguli, a close relative of the great poet Rabindranath Tagore. Soon after coming to India in 1939 she became interested in indigenous people of northeast India, particularly the Nagas. In the autumn of 1963, she travelled to Imphal and was fascinated by the Nagas from the surrounding hills. During this trip she managed an official permit for a week's stay in Kohima. Thereafter, she took every possible opportunity to visit the various Naga areas during the following twenty five years. She has studied in depth the life and culture of Nagas and recorded their past events and the recent changes. Her remarkable books *A Pilgrimage to the Nagas* (1984) and *Naga Art* (1993) are indeed an authentic account of a 'pilgrim' looking into life-style, arts and crafts of the Nagas. She also made a comprehensive photo-documentation and a large collection of objects. The IGNCA is fortunate enough to acquire the major part of her collection.