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Sinha, B.M.

New Indira Gandhi National Center for Arts Envisions itself the Smithsonian of the East

Much of India's knowledge, accrued over three millennia, lies mummified overseas - in France, Germany and Britain - locked in manuscript crypts, opened too infrequently by too few scholars. Some writings get published, others just get older. India now has a scheme to get them back - at last in copy form - and has built a grand home to receive them - the Indira Gandhi National Center for Arts in New Delhi (IGNCA). Established in 1985 in memory of former prime minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi, the striking, new 20-acre international center is dedicated to study and research in the field of arts related to nature, social structure and cosmology. India's present Prime Minister, P.V. Narasimha Rao, is the executive chairman or the managing board of the center. A public trust has been set up to run it for which the Ministry for Human Resource and Development has released a generous fund of US\$500,000.

About 150 persons have already begun materializing the IGNCA dream. Most of them are paid only an honorarium. It is the dynamic presence of the centre's secretary Dr. Kapila Vatsyayan, a well known art historian and scholar, that has put the project on the road to success. She is clearly recognized as the center's impetus.

Like a giant banyan, IGNCA's broad umbrella of interest extends to include virtually all the arts: oral, visual (architecture sculpture, painting and graphics), photography and film and performing arts (music dance and theatre as well is folk crafts). Performances dialogue workshops, exhibitions and multimedia projects are

all on the agenda.

A Five-fold Structure Presently, IGNCAs has - with no short measure of pride collected one million manuscripts on microfilms and microfiches drawing on both private and public collections. These include the rare manuscripts of poet Jaydeva's Govinda, Kalidas' Maghadutam and Bharata's classic on dance, the Natyashastra. The center also has its own desktop publishing operation to print its research works and produce in-house publications.

IGNCA is made up of five divisions, each of them autonomous but interrelated through programming: Kala Nidhi, Kala Kosa, Janapada Sampada, Kala Darshan and Sutradhara. Kala Nidhi is a national information center and data bank about arts, humanities, and cultural heritage. It has a fully supported reference library of multimedia collections. It will serve as a major resource center for research in disciplines of archaeology, anthropology, history, philosophy, literature, language, crafts, etc.

The library is already a reservoir receiving streams of invaluable personal collections Dr. Suniti Kumar Chatterjee gave 20,000 books. Thakur Jaidev Singh gifted 1,500 philosophy and music books. Krishna Kripalani offered original paintings and Acharya Hazari Prasad Dwivedi donated 1,500 volumes on Sanskrit and modern Indian languages. Kala Kosa, the research and publication division of the IGNCAs, will publish texts relating to Indian arts, glossaries thesauruses of technical terms, reprints of critical writings and a multi volume arts encyclopedia. Their first publication Kalatattavakosa will be several volumes. The first volume contains eight fundamental Hindu philosophical areas that underpin Indian art: Brahman, Purusha, Atman, Sarira, Prana, Bija, Laksana and Silpa. Another publication series, Kalamulasastra, will bring out systematically edited texts in the original with translation. In the first phase, 24 texts have been taken for publication. They range from: Basic (Vedic) Sangita Vastu, Agama, Purana to Persian texts.

The Janapada Sampad division will be devoted to folk and tribal arts, crafts and their documentation. It will also launch lifestyle studies of India's tribal communities. Many hope that the center will award study grants to those who will sympathetically investigate tribals' needs with a primary purpose to aid them rather than give grant money to researchers whose end goal is merely academic.

IGNCA has sponsored three seminars - all knotty, philosophic affairs. The first tackled the fiercely controversial topic "space," accompanied by an interesting exhibition. Employing Sanskrit words, "khama" and "akasa," participants struggled to give form to space. Form itself was the puzzling subject of the next seminar, called "Akara," and probed how inaudible mind thoughts, verbalized words and written words relate. A beautiful exhibit focused on how script - drawing from many cultures - was more than a communication tool; it was art, serving to perpetuate the aesthetic consciousness of a people. The third seminar tried to tame time, "kala." A smaller workshop plunged into creation itself, "srusti," staying with it as far their intellects could take them without resorting to silent meditation and direct cognition.

IGNCA also intends to trace, document and better publicize India's ancient good neighboring policies when it extensively and freely traded its resources - from lofty Upanishadic vision of an all-pervasive formless God to spices, rubies and emeralds - with many great civilizations including the Mediterranean empires, Indonesia, Tibet, China and Japan. The center has garnered the richest support and encouragement from distinguished personalities around the world, who see IGNCA dedicating itself ultimately to global peace through greater understanding and respect of the earth's many diverse cultures.

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