

Indira Gandhi Rashtriya Manav Sangrahalaya: A New Paradigm to Preserve our Cultural Heritage

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Abstract: IGRMS is an ethnographic museum depicting the story of mankind by preserving and conserving of various cultures of ethnic communities of India. The indoor and outdoor exhibitions of Indira Gandhi Rashtriya Manav Sangrahalaya are complementary to each other. Ethnographical museum, as we understand today, is an institution for collection, preservation, study and exhibition of man's own works which is important for education as well as for cultural growth (IGRMS, Souvenir, 2005). In IGRMS, we can find tangible culture in two types of exhibition namely – (a) The Indoor Museum (Veethi Sankul) and (b) Open –Air exhibition. These exhibitions aim to present the cohesive life styles and culture of various ethnic communities living in different parts of our country. In the following, an attempt has been made to document the tangible and intangible culture preserved in the museum with its context.

I. INTRODUCTION

A museum is defined as “a non - profit making permanent institution, in the service of the society and its development and open to the public, which acquires, conserves, communicates and exhibits, researches for the purpose of study, education and enjoyment, material evidence of men and his environment”.

The word ethnography is derived from the Greek (ethnos), meaning a company, later a people, nation and graphy meaning field of study. Ethnography as the presentation of empirical data on human societies and cultures was pioneered in the biological, social, and cultural branches of anthropology, but it has become popular in social sciences like - sociology, communication studies, and history, wherever people study ethnic groups, formations, compositions, resettlements, social welfare characteristics, materiality spirituality, and a peoples ethnogenesis. The word ethnographic museum can be defined as, a type of museum that focus on studying, collecting, preserving and displaying artifacts and objects concerning ethnology and anthropology.

IGRMS is an ethnographic museum. Its main aim is to depict the story of humankind in time and space. It collects various cultural, traditional and contemporary objects related to plains and hills area of India. It has introduced a new museum movement in our country to protect the tangible and intangible culture of the Indian communities. The primary objective of the museum is to portray the cultural diversity in India. This museum has initiated new and many more meaningful ways of ‘representing’ the creativity and cultural expression of the rural people of Indian society. It seeks to preserve, protect and present the valuable elements of living culture of India.

History of Indira Gandhi Rashtriya Manav Sangrahalaya

The origin of Indira Gandhi *Rashtriya Manav Sangrahalaya* was a result of many developments. In 1970 C.E., the Indian Science Congress was held in Calcutta. Sachin Roy, the then President of Anthropology and Archaeology section, in his presidential address emphasized on the need of a ‘Museum of Man’ in our country. The main idea behind the establishment of the ‘Museum of Man’ was to present an incorporate vision of human life. IGRMS was started on 21st March, 1977 C.E., at Bhalwalpur house, New Delhi. The State Govt. of Madhya Pradesh offered 200 acres of land in Bhopal. On 21st April, 1979 C.E., the foundation stone of the museum was laid by the then Union Minister Dr. P C Chunder. In the year 1985 C.E., the organization was named ‘*Rashtriya Manav Sangrahalaya*’ (National Museum of Mankind). In the year 1993 C.E., the name of late Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was prefixed considering her contribution in the establishment of the museum.

Presentation of Cultural Heritage

Heritage

Heritage refers to something inherited from the past. The word has several different connotations, including cultural heritage which comprises of both the legacy of physical artifacts (tangible heritage) and intangible attributes (intangible heritage) of a group or society.

Tangible Cultural Heritage

The tangible heritage is a man-made heritage which can be stored and physically touched. In very general term, “heritage of mankind” can be conceived as a precious but fragile gift that comes with heavy conditions for its care. The gift is from previous generations to our present society (whose obligations in caring

for that gift) and future generations (who, one would hope, receive that gift undamaged). It is also important to note that “heritage” is not given by the fact that places or buildings have existed for a long time but rather by definitions on the basis of contemporary criteria that keep changing (Kammeier, 2008).

Intangible Cultural Heritage

Intangible cultural Heritage is usually associated with traditional knowledge systems. Sometimes called living cultural heritage, this is manifested in oral traditions, expression and languages, performing arts, social practice, rituals and festive events, knowledge and practices about nature and the Universe and traditional craftsmanship. The idea of ‘intangible heritage’ introduced in the UNESCO 2003 convention for the safeguarding of the Intangible cultural Heritage effectively extended the concept of cultural heritage to include “practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills”, e.g., spiritual practices, folklore, song, dance, cuisine, etc. “as well as the instruments, objects, artifacts and cultural spaces associated therewith” (Article II.1) (Samuels, K. L. & Rico, Trinidad. 2015).

As an ethnographical museum, IGRMS has collect, preserve, study and exhibited man’s own works which is important for education as well as for cultural growth. In IGRMS, we can find tangible culture in two types of exhibition – (a) The Indoor Museum (*Veethi Sankul*) and (b) Open –Air exhibition. These exhibitions aim to present the cohesive life styles and culture of various ethnic communities living in different parts of our country.

The Indoor Museum (*Veethi Sankul*) – IGRMS is the largest ethnographical museum in India. The *Veethi Sankul* comprises of 12 galleries. The galleries are presented with rich and diversified cultures.

Gallery no. 1 – Human Bio-Cultural Evolution:

The aim of this gallery is to depict the evolution of man and human variation. It depicts the bio-cultural evolution of man starting with 4.5 billion year old earth. Evidences put forwarded by paleontologists and archaeologists have tried to provide the link from the hominoid to modern human being.

Gallery no. 2 – Human Odyssey

This gallery provides an idea of Human odyssey, manifested in multiple forms of culture. Depending upon the economic mode of adaptation, various communities have adopted different livelihood patterns. This gallery displays exhibition on hunter gatherer of Birhors, Pastoral, Nomadic and Transhumant communities, Shifting and Terrace cultivators, Peasant communities of Central India, Artisan communities, Migrant labourers etc. This exhibition illustrates the life style, traditional dwelling and daily used items etc. of various ethnic groups like Birhors, Toda, Rabri, Gaddi Saora, Hill Bonda and others.

Gallery no.3 – Lingo Yatra (Festival of the Koitor)

This festival (*Yatra*) is considered as an important event among the Koitor and sometimes celebrated in a gap of 100 years or so (Elwin, Verrier. 1947, Walter. 1960). It symbolises the ceremonial death of one form and rebirth of another form of the *Anga* of *Lingo-Pen*, the god of *Ghotul*, the youth dormitory of the Gond in Bastar region of Chhattisgarh. This gallery is totally devoted to *Lingo Yatra* festival.

Gallery no. 4 – Mandwa Gohri (Bhil-Rathwa Ritual exhibits)

The gallery presents a holistic presentation on the Bhils, inhabiting in Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Rajasthan, and Maharashtra (Birkett, 1914). Despite of exposure to modernization, Bhils of Gujarat are well known for their skillful agricultural practices, fairs and festivals, wood carvings and traditions of painting. It also houses interesting exhibits on ritual aspects of the community such as clay-relief work, paintings and themes like *Gohri puja*, Bhil and Rathwa marriages (*Mandava*), *Pabuji*’s shrine, *Ind puja* etc.

Gallery no. 5 – Ethnic Art

The gallery provides a glimpse of ethnic art forms, a collection of works of sculpture, intricate wood carving, decorative marriage lamps, clay and lattice works, painting and tattoo art of Gonds. An interesting exhibit is a giant size painting of an elephant by a Gond artist using indigenous style of painting . The centre of the gallery has an important piece of art, represented by a huge panel of lattice work by artisans from the Rajwar community.

Gallery no. 6 – Belief-system, Cosmology and Rituals Arts

As discussed in Wikipedia (the free encyclopedia), a belief system is a set of mutually supportive beliefs. The beliefs of any such system can be classified as religious, philosophical, ideological, or a combination of these. Since, the belief system is an integral part of the people and culture of India, the museum has attempted to exhibit it for public in its exhibition. The important exhibits on this belief system includes, Himalayan Buddhism, Spiritual Belief of the Car-Nicobarees, Beliefs associated with sacrificing Pillar, *Ahoi Ashtami* etc.

Cosmology is derived from two Greek words, *kosmos* (world) and *-logia* (study of), which means the scientific study of the universe, its origin and development. It is used to study the origin, evolution, and eventual fate of the universe.

Ritual is the patterned or repetitive performance that symbolically communicates values and ideas to both participants and observers. Art, is often projected to appeal to and connect with human emotion as well as

arouse aesthetic or moral feelings, and can be understood as a way of communicating these feelings, is very much related to ritual.

Gallery no. 7 – Ethno- Musical Gallery

The gallery of Ethnic Music and Performing Traditions is renovated and renamed as Ethno-Musical Gallery and opened for public on 16th March 2016 C.E.. Ethnic Music and Performing Traditions gallery exhibits an archival collection of valuable musical instruments used in performing arts of India. The collection includes instruments of various kinds of wind, percussion, plucking, clapping and string etc.

Gallery no. 8 – Masks

The tradition of mask is an important cultural practice. It is associated with religious, ritualistic and shamanistic cult of the people. This tradition is associated with belief in super natural power. It has various functions and reflects significant mode of creative expression of culture. It is used as a ritual object. Various masks of different communities of India are located in the gallery.

Gallery no.9 – Ethnic Cuisine and Folk Art Traditions

The gallery presents the aromatic culinary culture of South India with beautiful display of kitchen traditions of the Chettiyar family and Nambudri Brahmins of Tamilnadu and Kerala. Diversified traditional kitchen wares ranging from metal utensils to the massive wooden containers, ladles, pots and stone wares are exhibited. The other corners of the gallery houses creative expressions of a diverse range of human activities, including wood carving, bead work and traditional embroidery items from different regions of India like-traditional Bead works of Katthi community.

Gallery no. 10 – Visual Storage and Research Gallery

Visual storage means the place of keeping the extra or reserved specimens of the displayed specimens, having similar features, for the exhibition and research. The interested visitors or researchers, on permission, can visit this gallery. The museum is having such kind of visual storage which contains more than 4000 objects, arranged according to their functional categories.

Gallery no.11 – Culture of the North-East India

There is a special gallery to present tangible heritage associated with the culture of North-East India. The central theme of the presentation is on spiritual belief system and their inter relationship with immediate environment and society.

Gallery no. 12 – Island treasures of India

The Indian subcontinent is blessed with beautiful river island, enchanting lakes and coastal lagoons where human habitations thrive with cultures and traditions. Life in the islands, be it oceanic, lagoon, river, delta or lake, exhibits special modes of subsistence that distinguish them from the mainland habitations. In these exhibits, one can explore the cultural life of the islanders of Andaman and Nicobar, Lakshadweep, the Krishna, Godavari and Kaveri river islands in South India, the Brahmaputra river island of Assam and the coastal lagoon of Odisha. The different islands are pictographically representing land, water-bodies, flora, traditional occupation, etc.

Open Air Exhibition

Tribal Habitat

In 1988 C.E., the ‘Tribal Habitat’ exhibition was opened up for the public. The exhibition is not merely a collection of traditional houses or storehouse of household objects it is a component which depicts the human survival and adaptation under different ecological environment. The exhibition displays the social, cultural, religious, economical activities of the ethnic groups. The most remarkable feature of this exhibition is that all these exhibits are original dwellings not models. Tribal Habitat open air exhibition creates an environment of rural life to the visitors which pleases them and relaxes from the monotonous busy urban life.

The tribal habitat exhibition presently comprises of the dwelling types of Jatapu from Andhra Pradesh, Bhumij from West Bengal, Agaria and Bhil tribes of Madhya Pradesh, Rajwar and Kamar people of Chhattisgarh, Tharu tribe of Uttaranchal, Warli people of Maharashtra, Toda and Kota tribes from Tamilnadu, Gadaba, Saora and Kutia Kondh tribe from Odisha, Bodo Kachari, Mishing and Karbi tribes of Assam, Choudhry and Rathwa tribes of Gujarat, Santhal tribe from Jharkhand, Tangkhul Naga, Maram Naga and Kabui Naga tribe from Manipur, Reang tribe of Tripura, Lepcha tribe from Sikkim, Galo tribe from Arunachal and Chakhesang Naga tribe from Nagaland.

Coastal Village

In the museum, Coastal village represents dwelling from different parts of India like dwelling huts of Coastal Kerala, Odisha, Andhra Pradesh, Tamilnadu and Gujarat. These typical traditional dwellings represent the lifestyles and cultural identities of Indian coastal communities.

Desert village

The desert village exhibition is represented by typical dwelling types from Jaisalmer of Rajasthan and Kutch region of Gujarat. Dwelling complex of Rajputs from the deserts of Jaisalmer, Rajasthan and the complex of traditional *Bhunga* of the Nomadic Rabari people of Kutch are the main exhibits in this exhibition.

Himalayan village

In Himalayan village, stone building of *Kothi* the traditional dwelling complex of Himachal Pradesh, is one of the remarkable and unique items in the open air exhibition. Another five-storied house-type from Uttarkashi district of Uttarakhand provides a royal outlook in the museum campus. The imposing entrance gate known as '*Parol*' or '*Paraud*' has been constructed to protect and lend beauty to the open air exhibition.

Rock Art Heritage

Indira Gandhi *Rashtriya Manav Sangrahalaya* is one of the few museums in the world which in its vicinity has rock cave shelters of Prehistoric Man. There are about 30 odd painted rock caves within its premises which have been transformed into an open air exhibition named Rock Art Heritage.

The *Rashtriya Manav Sangrahalaya* was established with the aim of preserving the disappearing traditions, practices and skills and to revive them. Through its presentations, the *Rashtriya Manav Sangrahalaya* preserves and interprets material evidences of ancestor and intangible values for future. The mythological Trail, traditional Technological Park, River Valley Culture, Sacred Groves of India, Ayyanar Shrine Complex is some of the Open Air exhibition, which portray the intangible cultural heritage.

Mythological Trail

These exhibitions present and preserve the scattered myths and mythological stories from various parts of the country. The exhibition reflects the myths and legends of various ethnic communities viz. Gond origin myth, Potter's myth, Devsthan, Story of Pabuji, Myth of king Sailesh, Manasa myth, Saora origin myth, Santal origin myth, Bhill myth, Deties of Bastar etc.

River Valley Culture (Narbadaji)

The Gond, Pardhan and Baiga *adivasis* (ethnic groups) living along the river Narmada, near the place of its origin, tell numerous stories that reflect the cultural personality of the river that seems to be residing in the minds of the people since ages. They all lovingly call her as '*Narbada Mai*'. Stories presented here in this exhibition are popular and formed a basis of the art works created by the artists who used one or other part of the story as a theme.

Ayyanar Shrine complex

Ayyanar is a God worshipped as a guardian deity in Tamil Nadu and also in many Tamil villages in Sri Lanka, who said to protect the villagers from external threats, *Ayyanar* is a cult of Dravidian's ancestor worship that is linked to nature and fertility worship.

Traditional Technology Park

One of the significant themes at the *Manav Sangrahalaya* is the establishment of a Technological Park. This park provides an understanding of indigenous knowledge of various committees of India related to aspects of science and technology. 'Traditional Technology Park' was opened for public in 19th March 2008 on 32nd foundation day of the *Sangrahalaya*. The exhibition provides idea to the visitors about the traditional knowledge of the forefathers. There are twelve such types of exhibits present in the 'Traditional Technology Park'. Apart from the life size exhibits of various traditional technologies, there is an introductory gallery, which introduces about the exhibition through textual description and photographs of original locations

II. CONCLUSION

The panorama of culture preserved reveals the diversity in Indian culture and at the same time providing an idea of unity of culture among the diversified one. The culture from different eco-zone reveals the socio, economic, cultural and religious traditions in India. It also provides an idea of vanishing cultural heritage, which were used by various ethnic groups in the recent past. Museum also provides an idea of understanding the indigenous knowledge of the ethnic communities from different parts of India.

III. REFERENCES

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