

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

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Scene from "Ras Lila", a folk theatre performance based on the epic story of Radha Krishna (Photo by IGNCA)

The Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA) was set up to fulfil late Smt. Indira Gandhi's (former Prime Minister of India) idea of restoring the integral quality of a human being, fragmented by his diverse roles in cities, classes, ethnic groups, religions, traditions and nationalities, to reconcile one's material and spiritual needs, and cognitive and instinctive experience, and enable one to be at peace with oneself and with society. The centre was visualised as encompassing the study and experience of all the arts – each form with its own integrity, yet within a dimension of mutual interdependence, interrelated with nature, social structure and cosmology.

IGNCA was set up in 1987 with Shri Rajiv Gandhi, the Prime Minister of India at the time, as its first president. Ms Sonia Gandhi became the next president, and the current president is Mr Chinmaya R. Gharekhan, the former Under-Secretary General to the United Nations Organisation.

IGNCA is based in New Delhi, situated on 12 hectares of prime land while the centre itself houses one of the finest libraries in the country, a media production division, a cultural information centre, an exhibition division, conference halls and 24 guest rooms. Regional centres are located in Bangalore (South India), Varanasi (North India), and Guwahati (the Northeast India). The centre has collaborative programmes with numerous national and international institutions and universities and its faculty is internationally trained.

IGNCA adopts a broad based definition of arts to include in its purview every aspect of

creativity from architecture, sculpture, pottery, puppetry, weaving, painting, and graphics, to general material culture such as literature, photography and film as well as the performing arts of music, dance and theatre and anything else found in life with an artistic dimension. The centre's agenda is to explore, study and revive dialogue between India and her neighbours within South and Southeast Asia in the context of the arts.

The uniqueness of IGNCAs approach to the arts lies in the fact that it does not segregate between types of forms, whether folk and classic, oral and aural, written and spoken, or old and modern. Here the emphasis is on the connectivity and the continuity between the various fields that ultimately relate human to human, and human to nature. The IGNCA manifests its academic and research work in its publications, national and international seminars, conferences, exhibitions and lecture series. The schools and other education institutions fall under the umbrella of IGNCAs outreach programme. IGNCA is also a nodal body for the ICH programme of the Government of India. It has been responsible for preparing nomination dossiers for Masterpieces of Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity such as Ramlila and Vedic Chanting. It was responsible for the nomination of Ramman to the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity for the 2008-2009 cycle

Janapada Sampada, one of the main research divisions of the centre is fully devoted to the study, documentation and dissemination of India's rich and variegated cultural heritage. It focuses on the aesthetic manifestations embedded in the very life processes and praxis of small scale communities and societies. It studies both the intangible and tangible aspects of culture as interconnected and intertwined parts of a unified whole. Some of the important studies under the division have been in the area of rock art, ethnomusicology, lifestyle studies, oral narratives, rituals, myths, fairs and festivals, traditional knowledge systems and resource management, expressions in arts and crafts traditions, oral history and sacred centres and landscapes.

Apart from the Janapada Sampada, the centre has four more divisions. Each of these divisions is autonomous in structure but linked through programming. The Kala Nidhi

division comprises a conservation laboratory, a multimedia unit, cultural archive and a multimedia reference library which includes printed books, slides, microfilm, photographs and audio-visual material. The Kala Kosha division is focused on research and investigates intellectual traditions in their multi-layered and multi-disciplinary dimensions. The Kala Darshana division provides a forum for inter-disciplinary seminars, exhibitions and performances on unified themes and concepts.

The centre has a well developed Cultural Informatics Laboratory, which acts as a focal point for digitisation of rare manuscripts, books, photographs, slides and audio-video collection not only for IGNCA but also for the other organisations working with the Department of Culture.

IGNCA also houses the National Manuscripts Mission, a project that seeks to preserve, document and disseminate knowledge about the vast manuscript wealth of India.

The Sutradhara division provides administrative, managerial and organisational support and services to all the other divisions.

IGNCA has 26,000 hours of audio-video material, 28,000 hours of audio recordings, 200,000 still images, and 4,000 ethnographic objects from all over the world in its rare archival collection of cultural, religious and ritual performances, arts and crafts, and culturally rooted oral traditions of human and natural resource management.

It has organised more than 100 exhibitions and 150 national and international events. It has published over 200 publications on a wide range of subjects ranging from visual and performing arts to cultural and ethnographic studies. In addition, IGNCA also provides a valuable resource through its website (ignca.nic.in) which receives 1.5 million hits a month.



Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (Photo by IGNCA)