

Biratori Ainu Culture Preservation Society

Sarugawa River is the longest river running through a town in Biratoricho, Hokkaido. Ainu people who live in the Sarugawa River basin are called Sarunkuru (meaning people of saru). Among other Ainu ethnic groups in Hokkaido, they formed one of the most colorful cultural regions. This region is known to have high concentration of remains, historical sites, and legendary places associated with Ainu culture. This region is also famous for existence of many Ainukotans (or Ainu colony) whose residents are actively attempting to maintain ancient customs of Ainu that many Ainu researchers from inside and outside Japan visited. Residents here have strong intention to pass on their ethnic tradition.

Nibutani District has become the center of such activities that residents are actively attempting to utilize Ainu culture in modern life, while preserving craftwork, folk art, folk dance and language of Ainu. Ancient Ainu folkdance has been designated as Japan's important intangible cultural asset and 19 folkdance groups have been recognized as preserving organizations. Biratori Ainu Culture Preserving Society, headquartered in Nibutani District is one of such organizations. The society is actively participating in various cultural exchange programs domestically and internationally. They participated in Namaste India held in Japan and other cultural events in foreign countries, such as Canada, Philippines and Australia.

About NPO Society to Promote Indo-Japan Cultural Relations

NPO Society to Promote Indo-Japan Cultural Relations "SPIJCR" is placed in The Mithila Museum, which is in the beautiful forest at Tokmachi City, Niigata Prefecture in Japan. The Mithila Museum, the only Indian Folklore Art Museum in Japan, was established in 1982. Tokio Hasegawa, the Director of The Mithila Museum, has chosen as the deputy executive manager of the "India Festival 1988". The event was held by The Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs as it had very important diplomatic value between India-Japan relationships. Since then, Hasegawa directed many events introducing Indian culture from northern Hokkaido to southern Okinawa. He established SPIJCR in 2002, and taking an active role of bilateral relation in the field of Culture.

SPIJCR hosts Namaste India Festival every year co-sponsored by the Embassy of India. More than 200,000 people participated in the 21th Namaste India Festival held at Yoyogi Park, one of the most popular event venues in Japan, in 2013.

SPIJCR held hundreds of performances and workshops of 25 music/dance troupes that Indian Government dispatched to Japan as activities of Japan-India Friendship Year 2007-2008. To compliment for their achievement, Indian Government gave Japan - India Friendship Year Award and Indian Cultural Center Award to SPIJCR.

The Mithila Museum has been working on the collection, research and publicity of Mithila and Warli paintings for many years. The collection is considered as having incomparable quality and quantity in the world. The Museum invited more than hundred of Folk Artists from India and provided its space as the Art Creative Studio. The Museum has received a local international exchange promotion award from the Japan Foundation in 1999.

Cooperated with Sarbjit Singh Chadha, popular Enka singer and businessman in Delhi, SPIJCR supported his consolation performances for victims of the Tohoku Earthquake in 2011 in Miyagi and Fukushima Prefecture. SPIJCR successfully hosted India's first Enka concert Delhi, Gurgaon and Chennai with Mr. Chadha and Japanese accompanists assisted by the Japan Foundation. For these backgrounds, it plays a major part of India-Japan Cultural Relations projects. During the 60th Anniversary of Japan-India Diplomatic Relation celebration last year, SPIJCR organized Oddissi dance at Chumon Gate and Dhruvad performances in front of Great Buddha Statue of Nara at Todaiji Temple in Nara in the memory of Bodhisena, the first Indian monk to Japan. (Hasegawa, Representative of SPIJCR says these historical events were organized and offered to the Great Buddha of Nara by Indian Government on behalf of Bodhisena, 1275 years after his arrival to Japan). SPIJCR organized Buddhist photo exhibition, "the Greatest Journey of Ideas" by Benoy Behl at the same time. SPIJCR organized same events at Todaiji Temple this year as well. He hopes to continue the same events for next ten years. He wishes ministers in charge of cultural affairs from Japan and India may attend his event next year.

Hasegawa says "the Great Buddha of Nara was completed in 752. The Emperor who ordered the construction of the statue was Emperor Jomu. He already retired from the post of emperor and his daughter took it over. As he was bed-ridden, he requested Bodhisenna to conduct eye-opening ceremony of the Great Buddha. He even sent a letter to Bodhisenna pleading him "not to reject my request". When Bodhisenna was to draw eyes of Great Buddha, the large brush he held had about a thousand thin ropes called rui attached and attendees to the ceremony, including Emperor Shomu, held the other end, hoping to get blessing from the Great Buddha. It is said that about 10,000 monks, musicians and government officials attended the ceremony and the list of monks is still kept at Todaiji Temple. This ceremony could have been said important tens of times higher than Olympics games. Bodhisenna reached Japan from China at second attempt. In the first attempt, he drifted the ocean for sometimes. After reaching Japan, he settled at Daienji Temple near Todaiji Temple and taught Buddhism to Japanese monks. The fact that he conducted this grand national event should be indicated in textbooks of both Japan and India".

Also, as a commemorative event for the 60th Anniversary of Japan-India Diplomatic Relations, Noh performance by the 26th Generation of Kanze School of Noh, representing other Noh schools of Japan, was organized in Delhi and Bangalore. Noh is Japan's traditional dance theater which became the first Japanese performing art to be recognized as UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Assets.



Traditional Ainu dance India tour

by Biratori Ainu Culture Preservation Society Japan



Organized by NPO Society to Promote Indo-Japan Cultural Relations, Japan, in coordination with Banglanatak dot com, Eastern Zonal Cultural Centre (EZCC), Ministry of Culture Govt. of India (at Kolkata performance), Rockstah Media (at Mumbai performance), Chadha Foundation and Acharya Chhau Nrutya Bichitra (at Delhi performance)

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■ Thursday, November 28, 2013, at 19:00pm
Purvashree Auditorium
Kolkata

■ Saturday, November 30, 2013, at 19:00pm
Sophia Bhabha Auditorium
Mumbai

■ Monday, December 2, 2013, at 19:00pm
ICCR Auditorium
New Delhi

