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Sub.: Submission of the final project report of 'Taking Traditions to Schools' under Sangeet Natak Akademi's Scheme for Safeguarding the Intangible Cultural Heritage and Diverse Cultural Traditions of India

(Individual category).

Respected Sir,

First of all I want to convey my heart-felt gratitude for giving me an opportunity to work on a project which is very close to my heart and now while working on it, it has become even closer. While working on it, I could realize that I am not catering to just art of my region but I am spreading awareness about the rich cultural heritage and age-old tradition which has a larger social relevance. The folk artists who are the torch bearers of this legacy are to be identified, honoured and patronized else these vanishing traditions will soon disappear. I feel lucky to undertake this project which has many dimensions and all reflect betterment of the society.

Secondly, my sincere apologies for sending the report not according to the prescribed time-line. But this has happened because of the unavoidable reasons and the nature of my project. As my project is 'Taking Traditions to Schools', so schools are an important component of my project. By the time I had done all the coordination with the folk artists and experts and also had finished the selection of the school as per the relevance of my project, schools' calendars became much occupied. I had two available options, one was to finish the project hurriedly as per the available dates of schools so that I could meet the deadline of sending the report and the other was to hold my activities so that I could do it in the desired and required manner so that the efforts don't go futile and enough utility is generated and larger numbers of students could be motivated. In order to get the maximum impact of the project, I decided to hold the activities as my purpose was not just to conduct performances, I wanted to make orientation and explanation of the traditional folk art forms to the children an important segment of this project.

Thanking you.

Yours sincerely,

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‘Taking Traditions to Schools’

A project under Sangeet Natak Akademi's scheme for "**Safeguarding the Intangible Cultural Heritage and Diverse Cultural Traditions of India**"

Letter No. 28-6/ICH-Scheme/32/2014-15/11231.

Final Report *submitted by Sumeet Sharma.*

With immense gratitude towards Sangeet Natak Akademi for providing me an opportunity to work on such a project of high cultural/traditional value, I hereby submit the final report of the project **‘Taking Traditions to Schools’**. As the name suggests, different traditions were taken to schools for the ready reference of the students under this project. These were demonstrated by the folk artists and elaborated by literary experts in a very comprehensive

manner so that children, who are otherwise least connected with these rich art forms could absorb most of what they see. Traditional folk art forms like 'Karkan', 'Geetru', 'Kudd' were presented before approximately 4000 students from different schools of Jammu in seven shows. The performances were organised at the prestigious schools of Jammu such as:

Jodhamal Public School

Heritage School

Model Academy

J.P. World School

Govt. Girls High School, Gandhi Nagar.

The last performance of the series was witnessed by Director School Education J&K, Ms. Babila Rakwal besides other dignitaries who not only appreciated the concept of the project but also praised for its meaningful executions as those students were being benefitted by this project who otherwise have no access to such traditional art forms.

As this project was meant for the school children, I had to schedule and reschedule the shows many times as per the academic calendar of the schools. (vacations, examination etc. were also to be considered for the meaningful execution and proper absorption of the shows by children). Even after synchronizing the above mentioned criteria, the availability of the same dates of the folk artists and the literary experts was a managerial challenge which resulted in the unavoidable delay in the execution of this project. I am hopeful that the worthy authority of Sangeet Natak Akademi would understand this practical consideration in this particular project and would take it compassionately.

‘Taking Traditions to Schools’, the project pertains to sensitizing the children about the Rich Cultural Heritage of Jammu through performance cum demonstration of some of the selected folk song/dance forms by ethnic folk artists followed by detailed information about the art form by expert resource persons. around 4000 students from different schools have been sensitized under this project. They got the opportunity to witness the vibrant folk performances of ‘Karkan’, ‘Geetru’, ‘Kudd’, ‘Bhaakh’ etc. by different folk artists including Girdhari Lal, Harbans Lal,

Ram Ditta and Group, Krishan Singh and Group. Prof. Lalit Magotra and Sh. Balwant Thakur have been the key resource persons and mentors of this initiative.

Rejoicing folk performances were presented before the students in this project which were thoroughly enjoyed by all, students expressed curiosity to know more about the singing/dance forms which was comprehensively answered by the literary experts. The project "Taking Traditions to Schools" aimed at the preservation and dissemination of the rich cultural heritage of this part of India as Jammu is blessed with many folk and traditional art forms which have instinctive rich elements of culture and heritage in them and are very musical, dramatic and full of rhythm. This rich cultural heritage has been preserved by the artists since ages. The art forms like 'Karkan' (*Narrative Singing*), 'Bhakhn', 'Kudd', 'Geetru' etc have immense elements of music, singing, dancing and drama in them which has a lot to share with the inhabitants of Jammu in particular and to the whole world in general. But with the passage of time and invasion of western culture through TV, Films, Internet etc. their link with the society is getting frail, particularly with the children who are totally unaware of the rich cultural heritage they inherit. This was a noble initiative to make the link strong and generate awareness amongst children about the cultural legacy they carry.

During this project, I realized that taking traditions to the children is a very noble and very important step but **more important is to make traditions stay there.** Children will be culturally enriched not just by watching one folk performance but they would defiantly be benefitted if they are made a part of it and live through the whole experience, they are told the importance of the rich cultural heritage they have inherited and eventually take pride in that. This is what I tried to achieve during the events I conducted during this programme. The students whom I worked with were those who are rarely exposed to their ethnicity, who are never encouraged to speak their mother tongue and are deliberately uprooted by their parents with a whim that only by doing this, they could adapt so called cosmopolitan attributes and could stand against the competition and challenges of today's fast pace life. The gap between the present generation and the last generation which was culturally literate is not so long but is definitely very deep. I endeavoured to make them realize that Jammu is blessed with many folk and traditional art forms which have instinctive rich elements of culture and heritage in them and are very musical, dramatic and full of rhythm. The folk artists who have preserved the priceless traditions since generations are not just a group of rustic people (*this is what children of bigger schools think about them*) but indeed are **the reservoirs of our tradition, which needs to be preserved further.**

It was very strange and ironical that, because of lack of exposure, for school children and even for their music/dance teachers any song which is in 'Dogri' is a folk song for them and the height is that all the folk songs and dances are similar for them, the only difference is in their beats, steps and costumes. This clouded knowledge is the result of a deliberate ignorance. Cultural, traditional, regional and emotional variations are of no effect to them. **For children, folk is what village folk do** with a common thread that all folk artists wear peculiar costumes and narrate something which is beyond comprehension for them and in most of the cases, their teachers are no exceptions. Folk music/dance which is the potent source of most of the contemporary music/dance, faces uninvited competition from the superficial and synthetic popular music/dance (majority from films) and the generation who prefers pizza over wholesome grains and soft drinks over juices and milk obviously selects the glamour of the later one undermining the simplicity of the former.

Had children been introduced to their age-old traditions at the home or school level by parents, family, teachers etc. they would have definitely developed **an affection and admiration about it** and the title of my project would have been **"Nurturing Traditions in Schools'** rather than **'Taking Traditions to Schools'**.

But the reality is not this and in the situation like this, our lecture-demonstrations of genuine folk music/dance before them was an enlightening experience for them. I had done a new addition to my project, rather than explaining these art forms by the performers only, I had involved the experts of these art forms to explain about the performances, their nuances and historical significance to the children in a much comprehensive and articulate manner. The performances were followed by question-answer series and imitation and reproduction of the respective song/dance by the children. It was my deliberate attempt to make children practice folk art forms undeliberately. When asked to reproduce the programme, children started to sing 'Karkan' (Dogri folk singing form) in its ethnic timbre, using the genuine accent, expressions and gestures and also tried their hands on the peculiar movements of 'Geetru' and 'Kudd'. Though it was not fully comprehended by them in the first attempt but the positive outcome of this effort is that they have got curious and aware about their own traditions. They wondered at it and also showed a keen desire to understand it so that they could sense its real essence.

Events organised in this project:

The first event in this series was conducted in one of the most reputed school of Jammu which has a strength of over 2700 students. The programme was presented before more than 600 students in presence of the Trustee, Principal, Vice-Principal and staff of the school. '**Karkan**' the traditional dogri folk narrative singing art form of Jammu was presented by **Girdhari Lal** (ethnic folk artist) who is carrying this live singing tradition since generations and has acquired this talent from his father and grandfather and has trained his children to carry this tradition further.

The second event in the series was performed in 'Heritage School' Jammu, yet another school of high repute. This time performance of '**Geetru**' was organised for the students which was performed by '**Ram Ditta & Party**' which was witnessed by the houseful audience which included principal, students, teachers and staff of the students. Prof. Lalit Magotra was the Chief Resource Person while Prof. Satnam Kour, Dean Students Welfare, University of Jammu was the Guest of Honour. As the performance of Geetru contained the elements of singing and dance both, it was very captivating for the children to watch the same. Moreover the use of colloquial references and unusual body gestures at times by the lead performer added to the overall impact of the performance.

As it was very well received by the students of the Heritage School, it was further performed in 'Model Academy', an 80 years old educational institution in the heart of the Jammu city and at J.P. World School and the outcome was same, excited, curious and culturally charged children.

In the last event of the series, performance of '**Kudd**' dance was organised by **Krishan Singh and Party** from Reasi, J & K. It carried a different kind of impact on the tender mind of the children. The resounding drum beats and harmonious flute chords instigated the dancing rhythm in their bodies which was apparently seen. Even though deep rooted in the instinct of the land, the dance form appeared alien yet mystical to them which was enough reason for me to gauge the success of having organised such ethnic performances for them.

Folk Art forms featured in this project:

'Karkan'

'Karkan' (Folk Ballad or Lok Gaatha/Katha) is a narrative singing which passes on from generation to generation. This is a folk art form as no one knows about their lyricists or composers but still these are popular among masses. These 'Karkan' generally narrate the stories of the local

folk heroes or folk deities who are close to the hearts of the masses. Even if someone doesn't find a place in history books because of socio-political motives, he would certainly find a place in these Karkan as he has a place in the hearts of the people. The much famous 'Karkan' like Karak of Bawa Jitto (a folk hero of Jammu who sacrificed his life against the atrocities and greed of a landlord, he is considered to be the torch bearer of the revolution to protect the rights of the peasants. Every year a massive fair Jhiri Mela is organized at the place of the sacrifice of Bawa Jitto where thousands of devotees from Jammu, Punjab and other North Indian States visit to perform Darshan, thus this folk tale is very popular among the masses and is preserved in the form of 'Karkan'). Karak of Data Ranpat (who sacrificed his life in the establishment of Justice) Karak of Raja Mandleek (this story is prevalent in Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan also other than Jammu but all the regions narrate its different versions) and Karak of Mata Vaishno Devi (the shrine of Mata Vaishno Devi is the religious identity of Jammu and the story of Mata Vaishno Devi is preserved for long by these Karak singers/narrators). These Karakan were presented before the children and were explained elaborately in the context of their religious and social importance. In those times, in the absence of the other modes of recording/preservation of the stories like books, television, radio, internet etc., these Karkan had played a vital role and the same was acknowledged during the programme. Particularly this folk art form which is passed through generations orally has preserved the Dogra dignity, culture, tradition, valour and

ethos since ages and has to be revered for that. If the future or even present generation remains unaware of it, it would be the foremost dishonor to this art form, which deserves to be a respected cultural identity of Duggar Land

‘Geetru’

It is a traditional narrative song-dance form in which the lead singer also performs some dance steps and at times also uses the theatrical devices as well. Performed by a group of eight to ten artists in which lead performer is followed by the others as chorus with the accompaniment of a Dholk and a ‘Chimta’ and powerful group singing. In usual practice this is performed for hours together, narrating incidents, ballads, local stories and effectively holds the interest of the audience. Noteworthy feature of this tradition of performance is that it belongs purely to the Dogras and their ancestors deserve kudos for creating such a wonderful art form which has the immense potential to vibrate the stage.

‘Kudd’

It is one of the most popular dance form of the hills of Reasi. Kud of this area has established its distinct identity and have excelled at the National level by making it to the most of the National folk dance festivals. Kud is also found in Bhadrwah and Paddar. Primarily performed by men-folk

this ritualistic dance is performed to please the local deities. People have a belief that during village celebrations and rituals which are organized in the honor of local deities whole men-folk perform 'Kud' and missing the same may annoy the local deity which no one can afford to do. For centuries this wonderful tradition of dance survived in the same fashion and later it begin to be performed in other festivities like marriages, child birth, crop cutting etc.

Expert/Resource Person:

Prof Lalit Magotra (Dogri Writer/Scholar)

Born in November 1944 in Jammu Prof. Lalit Magotra is a Sahitya Akademi Awardee. He is basically a physicist holding degrees of MSc and Ph D in Physics (High Energy Physics) and retired as professor of Physics from University of Jammu. He wrote his first short story in Dogri in the year 1972 and his first play in 1976. Since then Prof. Magotra has written prolifically in various genres of Dogri including short story, one-act play, stage-play, essays, travelogue, literary criticism etc.

He has been conferred State Award by State Government for his outstanding contribution to Dogri language, literature and culture, and two of his books have been adjudged Best Book, in Dogri by J&K Academy of Art, Culture and Languages. Making use of his expertise in Physics and computer he has actively contributed to the translation and adoption of nine Computer Software tools from English to Dogri language and an online Dogri-English-Dogri dictionary. He has also translated and prepared course on Computer Concepts in Dogri, an IT Literacy program for masses in collaboration with DOEACC, J&K.

Prof. Magotra as president of Dogri Sanstha, has strived hard and ensured a wholesome growth and development of Dogri literature keeping pace with the fast technological

strides. He has emerged as a leading voice speaking for Dogri language, literature and cultural heritage of this region.

It was very fortunate of me that Prof. Lalit Magotra, who is an authority on literature, tradition, art, culture and heritage of Jammu. A prominent writer who has scores of books on Dogri literature to his credit had agreed to become the **resource person** for my project. **An expert story writer & teller, Prof. Lalit Magotra's articulation about the pure folk art forms of Jammu made it very easy for children to know the crux of the things.** Looking at the relevance and the utility for the project for larger social benefit, he was rather more enthusiastic than me to make it reach in the hearts and minds of children in a simplified yet undiluted manner. The children were emotionally engaged in the programme so that they consider the folk art forms (which appear alien to them) their very own. Rather than adopting lecture form, an interaction and that too informal interaction form was preferred by the resource person so that children feel at ease while sharing their thoughts.

Outcome:

Before we started the every event, children were asked to the raise their hands if they know 'Dogri' Language, a few hands were raised, then the question was changed and they were asked, how many of them speak Dogri Language, the number of raised hands got decreased. When they were asked how many of them are aware of the culture and heritage of Jammu, a negligible number of hands could survived to remain raised and finally when they were asked whether they know about 'Karkan' or some other folk art form of Jammu region or have listened a few, all hands were back in the pockets. But soon after the performances of 'Karkan', 'Geetru' or 'Kudd' were over and their relevance was properly told to them, they showed a feeling of pride to be aware about them. Their curiosity to know more about them and even to learn the lines which were sung or dance steps done by the folk artists was easily visible and the same was answered also. They were encouraged to talk to their parents/grandparents about these art forms. The most important outcome was that, we could muster the much deserved respectability for the folk art forms of Jammu and regional language in the minds of children which will go a long way in making them culturally and traditionally aware.

Indeed I must complement the States like Punjab, Gujrat, Maharashtra etc. as the Jammu children, who are

unaware about the folk dances of their own region, some of them are even not introduced to their mother tongue are well aware of 'Bhangra', 'Dandia', 'Laavni' etc., to the extent that they may even tell the names of the States to which these folk dances belong but the folk culture of their own roots is still untold to them and they are ignorantly proud that they are unaware of it. Despite the fact that this endeavour of mine with the benign support from Sangeet Natak Akademi was not sufficient enough to fulfill the huge disconnect between the present generation and the past traditions, but yet it was a humble, noble and meaningful strive to kindle the curiosity in the minds of all the children who could be approached during this project which has created ripples as I have received a very satisfactory and positive feedback from the school administrations and the parents of the students that such initiative was really missing at this level and this was a very welcome step to make children aware of the culture to which they belong and which belongs to them.

With warm regards,

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