A Brief Report on the visit of Prof. Oivind Fuglerud and Dr. Anne Karin Habu,
Museum of Cultural History, University of Oslo, Norway

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Background: Prof. Oivind Fuglerud, Director of the Museum of Cultural History (MCH), University of Oslo, Norway, and Dr. Anne Karin Habu, conservator of the Museum was on official tour to India from 27th September to 5th October 2017. MCH has preserved more than three thousand Santal ethnographic items since over a hundred years. These items were collected by Rev. P.O. Bodding and his Santal companions in the 1890s in Santal Parganas while he was working as a missionary at Benagaria and Mohulpahari. One of the main purposes of Prof. Oivind’s visit was to get a firsthand impression of the places from where Bodding collected these items and to meet the various areas of the community to understand the present development initiatives taken by them in the field of education and preservation of their literary and cultural heritage.

The tour is also the fruit of the Bodding Symposium 2015 that was organized by Prof Tone Bleie, University of Tromsø and Prof. Oivind Fuglerud, MCH, to celebrate the 150th Birth Anniversary of Rev. P. O. Bodding. A group of Santals of India and Bangladesh from various discipline participated in the symposium. Besides a discussion on various issues related to the Santal-Scandinavian legacy, the recommendations resulting from the exchange of ideas through mutual visits and practical collaborations among the scholars on the Santal-Scandinavian legacy were also taken at the symposium.

Our community museum, ‘The Museum of Santal Culture’ at Bishnubati was one of the indigenous partners of the symposium and I as the Head of the Museum attended the symposium and presented a paper. Since then I had regular contact with the organizers of the symposium. In February when Prof. Oivind informed me about his idea to visit India and asked if we can help him to execute his tour, we from our museum were happy with the news and agreed to organize the tour. On behalf of our organization, the ‘Ghosaldanga Bishnubati Adibasi Trust’, I was entrusted to organize the tour.

Planning: We identified three base places, Kolkata, Santiniketan and Dumka from where we could move around to meet the people and see the places of interest. In each place we had a local support group to help us. Besides interacting with the people concerned in each place we displayed the photographs of Santal life and culture captured during P. O. Bodding’s era and the present century. The photos of the Bodding era were donated to our Museum by Prof. Oivind last year.

Kolkata: Prof. Oivind and Dr. Anne arrived in Kolkata in the early morning of 27th September and checked in at the Peerless Inn Hotel in central Kolkata. In the afternoon Ruby Hembrom, Founder and Director of ‘Adivaani’, Boro Baski and his family went to the hotel to welcome them. Later in the evening Ruby Hembrom showed them around the festive life of Kolkata because Bengal’s biggest festival, Durga Puja, was in full swing at that time.
On 28th September, there was an interactive session between our guests and the Santal intellectuals of Kolkata at SCEPTRE, Shrachi Centre. The session started with a brief introduction of the guests followed by a reception in Santal tradition with 'Lota dah'. The inaugural song was sung with Banam by Ms. Iti Murmu. She is a radio and television singer of Doordarshan (television) and Akashbani (radio) Kolkata. Later all the participants gave a brief introduction about themselves and their respective field of work. Ruby Hembrom explained how the whole idea of this tour came about. Mr. Sarada Prasad Kisku, Eminent writer in Santali and who was also the chairman of the session gave a brief introduction about the lives of Santals in Kolkata city and the various development initiatives taking place with regard to education, literary and cultural preservation. He also mentioned the micro film that was brought from the National Library of Norway (NLN) and the literary work done on that film so far. Prof. Oivind talked about the purpose of their visit to India and elaborately discussed about the Santal collection preserved in their museum and showed some items through a power point presentation. Everybody got excited seeing Santal items of daily use, which were a hundred years old and immediately the discussion cropped up about the usage of the items and why many of them are not in use nowadays. Dr. Amit Kisku from the Dept. of Anthropology of Vidyasagar University asked about the academic collaboration with the MCH and NLN. Prof. Oivind gave a detailed response on the issue. Dr. Anne gave a brief speech on her role as a conservator in the museum. Others who actively took part in the conversation were Mr. Baidyanath Hansda, Secretary, Santali Writers’ Association, West Bengal Unit; Dr. Surendranath Mandi, editor, Khanrand; Mr. Sibu Soren, editor of Bagjulu. Mr. Subhamay Kisku, Dept. of Anthropology, University of Calcutta; Ms. Krishna Mardi, Joint Secretary, Department of Health and Women Welfare, Govt. of West Bengal thanked the guests for visiting India and taking special interest in Santal culture and heritage. Dr. Maroona Murmu, Dept. of History, University of Jadavpur translated the whole session from the vernacular languages to English and vice-versa. Asha Baski delivered the Vote of Thanks and the session ended with a meaningful song by Ms. Murmu and her companion.

Returning to the hotel, Dr. Martin Kämpchen, a German writer and the Advisor of Ghosaldanga Bishunubati Adibasi Trust (GBAT), joined us for lunch and had a short discussion about the possibility of future collaboration between the museum at Bishnubati and MCH.

On 4th October, Ruby Hembrom accompanied the guests to the Indian Museum of Kolkata. Dr. Mita Chakraborty, Curator of the museum was kind enough to show them around the various sections of the museum especially the Anthropological sections.

**Santiniketan:** Prof. Oivind and Dr. Anne stayed at the Park Guest House at Santiniketan. On 29th morning we went to Ghosaldanga and Bishnubati villages which is situated ten kilometres away from Santiniketan, and saw the Rolf Schoembs Vidyashram, a Non-formal Santal School, and the Bio-technology programmes of the organization. At Ghosaldanga, we visited Santal families who greeted us with the traditional Santal rice beer ‘Handi’. It was the first time that Prof. Oivind and Dr Anne entered a Santal village. They were amazed to see that the material items that were preserved in their Norwegian Santal collection since a hundred years are still in daily use here, like brooms, baskets, sickles, straw ropes, earthen bowls, palm mats, fish traps. At Bishnubati the guests went the Museum of Santal Culture and spent long time seeing the items and murals of the village. On the way back to the Guest House we stopped at the craft centre
‘Amar Kuthir’ situated inside Ballavpur reserve forest. All the products in the centre are prepared by the local villagers who are mostly women and tribals.

On 30th September, after breakfast we went to see the campus of the Visva-Bharati University founded by Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore. Later we went to see the work of Som Murmu and Sonatan Murmu, two “Banam” (single stringed Santal fiddle) makers in their village Bikajol. Seeing the craft work of Sonatan Murmu Dr. Anne placed an ordered for a ‘Rote Banam’ (Frog fiddle) which she received before leaving Santiniketan. This fiddle was made of bamboo, coconut shell covered with lizard skin and the string was made of horse hair. In the afternoon we went to Ballavpur village to see some wall paintings and murals and later we saw the idol of goddess Durga, and observed Santal and Kora dances and the village craft fair at Shona Jhuri jungle near Santiniketan.

On 4th October evening, the villagers of Bishnubati and Ghosaldanga performed Santali music and dance in honour of the guests at the museum campus. The musical instruments like Hudur Banam, Bhentor banam and flute were played separately accompanied by dumdah, tamak and jhunko to express the melody and rhythm of the instruments. Six Santal dance forms Baha, Sorhai, Lagre, Dong, Dasai and Dom don were performed at the end of the programme. Two paintings by Santal children and a catalogue of our museum were presented to the guests as a souvenir. Prof. Oivind too presented a book published by their museum and a painted Viking ship on the ceramic plate to our museum.

**Dumka:** We arrived at Dumka on 1st November in the afternoon from Santiniketan and stayed at the Human Resources Development Centre (HRD), Johar. Fr. D. Solomon is the director of Johar and since he is acquainted with the area and the people we planned to visit he was with us till the end of the tour in Dumka.

In the evening we had a very fruitful interactive session with the Santal intellectuals of Dumka. The various issues related to Santal development like education, socio-culture, health and economic schemes, women empowerment, land and human rights were elaborately presented by the experts working in the area. Mr. Stephen Marandi, the deputy Chief Minister of Jharkhand; Ms. Joyce Besra, Chairperson, Dumka Zilla Parisad; Dr. Sushil Marandi and Mr. Vijay Tudu, were some of the prominent personalities present during the discussion.

On 2nd November, we went to Bandorjuri to meet Mr. Ismael Murmu, the Secretary of Northern Evangelical Lutheran Church to express our gratitude for giving us the permission to visit Benagaria and Mohulpahari which we planned to visit in the later part of the day. We had a meeting with the church officials in the magnificent building where Bodding lived and worked for many years. Later they showed us around the building and the historical photos and books of the church collection.

Benagaria is situated about 50 kilometres east of Dumka in a remote area of the District. On arrival Dr. Sanjay Sebastian Murmu greeted and showed and described us the history of the various places and houses of the campus. We had a short interaction with a small group of the church community at the ‘Benagaria Printing Press’ building who told us about the present life of the area. The iconic umbrella-shaped building where Bodding spent most of his time is still
the main attraction of the campus. The house of Benagaria Mission Press, hospital, seminarians’ hostel, the church, the cemetery where Rev. Lars Olsen Skreftsrud, Rev. Hans Peter Boerresen and others are buried all reflect the glories past of the place. My heart became heavy when I asked one of the community members, Mrs. Christina Hembrom, ‘How do you feel when people from Norway come to see this place?’ She replied, ‘By seeing them our hopes soar high thinking that the golden days of Benagaria will return and so the people from foreign land, we are still waiting’. We had lunch at the residence where Rev. Skreftsrud once lived. Dr. Anne said this was the tastiest food that she had taken in India.

The distance from Benagaria to Mohulpahari is 20 kilometres. This is the place where one of the oldest and medically well equipped Mohulpahari Christian Hospitals is situated. Bodding stayed here for many years. Dr. Pradip Soren, the director of the hospital showed us around the area. Some of the departments are still functioning but there is a strong sense that the good old days of the hospital are no more. A group of the Santal Mission of the Northern Churches members was waiting to meet Prof. Oivind and Dr. Anne. We had a brief meeting with them at the church hospital. Returning to Johar in the evening we had a meeting with Mr. Asithsen of ISAF who discussed the idea of putting up a museum at Benagaria.

On 3rd November, in the morning we went to see the church at Dudhani and also met Bishop Julius Marandi and spent some time at Jisu Jaher, the Jesuits’ residence nearby. From there we saw the handicrafts shop of ISAF which impressed us. Around 10 o’clock we left for a remote Santal village, Mohulbona, surrounded by jungle bushes and trees. The villagers were waiting for us and we got a very warm reception with dance and music. We also had a very good interaction with them in the middle of the village under a tree. The villagers shared their daily life in the village and asked various questions to our guests and answered many of our guests’ queries too. They also gave some handmade stone items as gifts to us. After having lunch with the villagers in their courtyard and taking photos of us together we left the village leaving the villagers waving good-bye and asking us to come back.

Acknowledgement:
Many individuals and organizations have been involved for the successful completion of this tour. On behalf of Ghosaldanga Bishnubati Adibasi Trust I thank all of you for your time and effort you rendered in your respective places. However, there are some names which I would like to mention especially without whom the programmes would not have been as successful. Ruby Hembrom, Sarada Prasad Kisku and Dr. Maroona Murmu for organizing the programme in Kolkata. Sundar Manoj Hembrom and Tonol Murmu of ‘Jugsirijol’ with whom I first shared about the plan of this tour and the session at Kolkata, though they could not be present due to some unavoidable circumstances but their moral support and suggestions helped us immensely. Dr. Mita Chakraborty, Curator of Indian Museum of Kolkata for her availability in short notice. Sona Murmu, Gokul Hansda, Snehadri Shekar Chakraborty, Sanyasi Lohar, Ramjit Mardi, Bimol Baski and Dr. Martin Kämpchen of Ghosaldanga Bishnubati Adibasi Trust for shouldering various responsibilities in the villages and at the museum; Gupin Kisku of Banspukur for contacting the Banam artisans; Fr. D. Solomon and his team, Hul Baisi and other organizations for organizing the programmes we needed at Dumka; Mr. Ismael Murmu for the permission to
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