

Book-Review

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INDIAN ART TREASURES : SURESH NEOTIA COLLECTION,
Editors : R.C.Sharma, Kamal Giri and Anjan Chakraverty, Chief Coordinator :
Bimla Poddar, Publishers : Mosaic Books for *Jñāna-Pravāha*, Varanasi, 2006, pp.
263, illustrations 261, Entry objects 173. Price Rs. 3500/- \$99.

It was a matter of great pleasure to go through the pages of *Indian Art Treasures : Suresh Neotia Collection*, which is a comprehensive catalogue of its own type. It deals with varied collection of Indian art forms vibrant with stimulation and enthusiasm about our cultural heritage. Enchanted with grace and beauty and inner sentiments of art objects, Sri Suresh Neotia tirelessly exerted to collect the sculptures, terracottas, paintings, coins and other antique material during the last forty years, most of which now form the integral part of *Jñāna-Pravāha* Art Museum, providing source material for the study of our cultural heritage. Part of this valuable collection is brought out in the present excellent volume for the benefit of researchers, art lovers and connoisseurs in India and abroad.

The multi-authored book is in the form of a catalogue but it is much more than that. A conventional catalogue simply provides description of the displayed art objects, but the present one also gives the origin, development, regional variations of style and critical comments on each art object by eminent scholars of India and abroad. Before the beginning of the Entries of each section or category, a general background is given for the whole section penned down in short by well known scholars having deep appreciation for Indian art objects in general and those of the Neotia collection in particular. In this way, the volume opens almost the total periodical history of various mediums of Indian art.

Art objects displayed through very clear and attractive photographs with description and comments are divided into five sections : 1. Sculpture, 2. Terracotta, 3. Painting, 4. Copper plate, Coins, Metal ware and 5. Textiles. The section on sculpture includes 24 stone sculptures, 1 gold plaque, 5 bronzes and 1 ivory figure. Created between 2nd century BCE and 17th century CE, these sculptures representing various art styles and iconography belong to the major part of the country including Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. Some of them are the best ones in delineation, preservation and in iconographic details;

to name a few - Śiva's head with a typical bead in the centre of his *jaṭājūṭa* (No. 5), Kubera (7), Apsarā (11) and Nṛ-Varāha (15).

The terracotta section has 24 pieces (pre-Mauryan, 5th century BCE-19th century CE) which hail from Uttar Pradesh (Mathura, Kaushambi, Bhitargaon, Ramnagar and Rajghat), Bihar (Buxar and Nalanda), West Bengal (Chadraketugarh) and also from Nepal. A couple of them throw ample light on some rare styles, such as the archaic Mother Goddess (Entry No. 32) and Ekamukhaliṅgam (No. 50). As regards Entry No. 39, similar winged terracotta male figures belonging to Śuṅga period have also been found from Kaushambi. Entry No. 40 shows a Śuṅga lady figure with five stylized projections on the right part of her headdress. These projections should be taken as auspicious symbols on the tops of hair-pins, and not as *āyudhas* or weapons. However weapons (*praharaṇa*) have also been described as auspicious symbols in literature. This fashion of hair-pins was very popular among females during Śuṅga period both in West Bengal (Chandraketugarh, Tamluk, etc.) and Uttar Pradesh (Kaushambi, Ahicchatra, etc.). One similar and richly ornamented female terracotta (figure originally discovered from Tamluk at the end of the 19th century CE, misplaced and then later found in the Indian Institute, Oxford) exhibits the best creation of this type. Five projections in the form of *aṅkuśa* (goad), *paraśu* (battle-axe), *vajra* (thunderbolt), *bāṇa* (arrow) and *dhvaja* (banner) have been found on some female figurines of Kaushambi, Ahicchatra and Angaikhera (Distt. Hardoi), all in Uttar Pradesh.

Painting section contains the largest number of entries being 86. Almost all styles of Indian miniature paintings (73) and those of Nepal (9) and Tibet (4) have been represented in this volume. Various styles among Indian paintings include Jaina (3), Sub-Mughal (2), Mewar (15), Bundi-Kota (5), Bikaner (17), Amber-Jaipur-Sekhavati (6), Kishangarh (1), Jodhpur (3), Malwa and Datia (6), Nathadvāra Pichavai (1), Pahari (8), Deccani (4), Tanjore (1) and Banaras (1). The subject of the paintings is mostly based on religious themes related to - Buddhist, Jaina and Brāhmaṇical pantheons (Vaiṣṇava, Śaiva and Śākta) and also royal and legendary scenes. Most of the Indian paintings from the illustrated manuscripts of the classics draw their subjects from Kṛṣṇa-*līlās* and his love-lores with Rādhā; legends belonging to Rāma and the *Rāmāyaṇa*; court-scenes and portraits. Besides the thematic portraiture, the background of the scenes are very enchanting, which represent different types of buildings, animals, trees, plants, flowers, flying birds, open sky, sometimes with clouds and moon. The arrangements, colour-combinations, facial

expressions and natural surroundings are marvellous and befitting the subjects being portrayed.

The entries of Nepalese and Tibetan paintings either of some manuscripts or cotton pieces are mostly based on Buddhist subjects, except the three Nepalese examples; one wooden panel representing the scene from *Abhijñānaśākuntalam* (Entry No. 60), second on cotton piece showing the androgynous form of Viṣṇu and Lakṣmī (No. 62) and the third, the three illustrated folios of *Devīmāhātmya* (No. 65).

The other two sections contain one copper plate (No. 143), ten coins (Nos. 144-153), three metal wares (154-156) and seventeen textiles (157-173). Photographs of the copper plate and coins display the natural colour of the objects and so is the case with textiles, its fabrics and paintings on them. Indeed, the photo-production of this volume is of high quality.

Indian Art Treasures : Suresh Neotia Collection exhibits a superb production in its elegant lay out, best quality art paper, correct and neat printing especially of the photo plates and the binding. Small objects like the *Śālabhañjikā* (No. 25), a terracotta seal (No. 45) and coins (Nos. 144, 147) have been reproduced in this volume in larger photographs. In some cases, particularly in paintings, a part of the object has been reproduced in an enlarged close-up that has made the subject more clear and substantial. In short, it is a pleasing publication of captivating Indian art objects providing feast to both eyes and mind.

Sri Suresh Neotia must be congratulated for his ambitious longing to collect antique art objects, which he accomplished through his undeterred physical, mental and monetary efforts (*tana-mana-dhana*). The establishment of *Jñāna-Pravāha*, an Institute for Cultural Studies & Research and donation of his art treasures to its *Kalāmaṇḍapa* (Museum) are certainly his philanthropic deeds, which must be applauded. Behind this magnificent production of the catalogue there was the trio of Sri Suresh Neotia, Smt. Bimla Poddar and Late Prof. R.C.Sharma who conceived and translated it into concrete shape. The solemn determination of Sri Neotia delivered its good results through the clear vision of Prof. Sharma and deep dedication and zeal of Smt. Bimla Poddar. All of them deserve our hearty congratulations. Credit for such an excellent publication also goes to its editors, contributors, Mosaic Books and all others who have been closely associated with this prestigious project.

