

Delegation from Croatia Showcases Kumpanjija Sword Dance at NEHU



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AT News Shillong 24 October 2023 Updated 25 Oct 33268 views

Shillong: A 16-member delegation from the Knight's Association "Kumpanjija" in Blato, Croatia, visited the North-Eastern Hill University (NEHU) on Monday, marking a significant cultural exchange initiative. The delegation's objective was to exchange knowledge and ideas with the faculty and students at NEHU, promoting awareness of the folklore festivals and cultural heritage of Blato, the island of Korčula, and the Republic of Croatia.

The event took place at the U KIANG NONGBAH-NEHU Old Guest House Auditorium Hall at 11:00 AM. It was organized on the auspicious day of Navaratra, a Hindu festival celebrating the triumph of good over evil through fasting, meditation, and prayers. The Indian Council of Cultural Relations (ICCR) and ICSSR-NER, NEHU, jointly took the initiative.

Prof. PS Shukla, the Vice-Chancellor of NEHU, presided over the program and congratulated the foreign delegates for showcasing their artistic marvel, the Kumpanjija sword dance. This traditional ritual dance embodies the warrior spirit of the people who defended the island against invaders from the medieval and modern eras. The sword in the dance represents strength, courage, power, protection, authority, and the piercing force of the mind, symbolizing chivalry and knighthood.

Earlier in the day, Prof. B. Panda, Honorary Director of ICSSR-NER, and Shri. N. Munish Singh, Zonal Director of ICCR, North-East, delivered welcome and introductory speeches.

Mr. Nicola, the Leader of Knight's Association Kumpanjija-Blato from Croatia, expressed his pleasure at NEHU's hospitality and extended an open invitation for NEHU faculties and students to visit Croatia in the future. He shared his extensive knowledge of the Korčula Island Statute, the historical basis for the Kumpanjija sword dance, which dates back to 1214. He explained that Kumpanjija was originally an army that continued into the 19th century before becoming a part of folklore. The Sword Society, founded in 1927 by statute, preserves the chronicles of this medieval army.

The Vice-Chancellor of NEHU and Chairman of the North-East Centre of the Indian Council of Social Sciences Research emphasized the idea of a global family, quoting the G20's slogan, "One Earth, One Family, One Future." He stressed the importance of harmony and urged students to look beyond geographical and cultural differences. He also highlighted two historic weapon dances, "Sawlakin" from Mizoram and "Shad Sukmynsiem" in Meghalaya, that are integral to the northeastern Indian culture.

The highlight of the event was the ceremonial sword dance, known as Kumpanjija, performed by the Croatian representatives from Blato. The performance showcased the soldierly spirit of those who defended the island from invaders. The music accompanying the wordless dance consisted of a drum and piper, with participants following their captain's commands through their movements. A large audience of academic staff and students gathered to witness this historic performance.

Professor Shukla encouraged the NEHU community to take a more significant role in advocating for the cultural goals of the northeastern tribes on a global scale. The visit of the Croatian delegation not only facilitated cultural exchange but also strengthened the bonds of understanding and cooperation between the two nations.





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