

“Cadence and counterpoint: documenting Santal musical traditions”
Opening at the National Museum, New Delhi, 15 April 2015

Speech by Ambassador of Switzerland Dr. Linus von Castelmur

Good afternoon to all of you! Thanks for your interest in Santal musical traditions and in an amazing Indo-Swiss cooperation project between two leading cultural institutions, the National Museum in Delhi, and the Rietberg Museum in Zürich.

It's an honor and a pleasure for the **Swiss Embassy** to be associated with this project. For a diplomat, it is always great to be called in as a facilitator and a patron. Yes, I am glad, that we could - in a small way - facilitate and assist the organization of this exhibition. It's good, that despite being a bureaucrat - an enlightened one I would certainly claim - third parties think of you as a facilitator and patron and not as a hindrance (or even worse a troublemaker)!

Let me shortly share with you some thoughts that came to my mind while reflecting on Indo-Swiss relations in the cultural field.

1. First, a general remark: This exhibition is yet another example of many **international cooperation** projects between Switzerland and India, which proves that there is a mutual interest and a mutual understanding between our two nations. The friendship between Switzerland and India is still vibrant - after all Switzerland was the first country independent India signed a friendship treaty with way back in 1948.

2. The two countries, although different, are more than ever relevant to each other. Switzerland stands for **innovation and high-tech excellence** in many fields, also in the domain of conservation and presentation of art works. Switzerland has state of the art museums which attract many visitors from inside and outside the country. On the other side, India is not only **a huge market and talent pool**, it is also an old civilization which given a lot in terms of philosophy, mathematics and art to mankind's heritage. The National Museum in Delhi is certainly the best place to acknowledge this important contribution.

3. Switzerland being a small landlocked country could never have survived economically and culturally without **exchanges with other countries**. Its main markets are located in neighbouring states and overseas, Switzerland has to import raw materials from abroad and export manufactured goods and services to other countries. Switzerland was and still is good at attracting foreign talents from all over the world by offering an excellent business environment and good living conditions. Today, 25% of our resident population hold a foreign passport. In culture, this outward looking perspective and this taste for exploring uncharted ground led to a **great pool of knowledge and great art collections** from all over the world. To name only few, the collections of the Museum of Civilizations in Basel, the Ethnographic museums in Geneva or in Neuchâtel and precisely the Rietberg Museum bear witness to this fact. These Museums harbor important ensembles of non-European i.a. also Indian and other Asian art.

4. Last but not least, Swiss museums and art institutions opened not only their doors to artefacts from far away cultures, they also began early on to **open to vernacular daily life objects**. Ethnic art – characterized by some as “primitive art” – was accepted as an expression of belief systems outside the mainstream religions and cultures. The distinction between “high art” versus “low art” became blurred, conferring upon ethnic and tribal art recognition and dignity. This ennoblement of vernacular humble art objects is **a positive collateral to a democratic society**. The understanding that ethnic and vernacular art is as worthy to be collected, conserved and exhibited as artefacts from high cultures still very much continues in Swiss museums and art spaces.

Dear friends, in conclusion, I should like to **congratulate the organizers** of this exhibition for this exemplary show of Santal musical traditions. I wish that this small but exquisite exhibition be visited by many. I should also like to **thank the protagonists from the National Museum, the National Crafts Museum and from the Rietberg**, first and foremost Director Dr. Venu Vasudhevan and Dr. Johannes Beltz, curator for Indian and South-Asian art at the Rietberg, Dr. Ruchira Ghose, former Director of the Crafts Museum, and art historian Dr. Marie-Eve Celio for making this inspiring show possible. Thank you so much indeed!