The term ‘museum’ is used to cover a very wide range of institutions with many different kinds of purposes—audiences, collections—so it is really difficult for me to generalise about it. You know, there are science museums, there are folk life museums and there are fine arts museums and there are museums that have huge collections and they only show only 1% of it and others that have no collections at all but simply borrow works to display. In America, there are tiny historical societies—that’s just in some village there is a fine old house that the people, the community decides they want to preserve and they put things that relate to the history of that community in it, so it might be no bigger than this room. And there are museums like the National Museum in Delhi or the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York—they are huge and have all kinds of things. There are museums that focus on the past and there are museums that attempt to focus on life as it is now. So one place where I would differ with you slightly is to consider that museums only do history, that they are only talking about those objects totally in a different temporal space and time? What is fascinating about museums is that they create a kind of new way of seeing and speaking about artefacts, religious icons, and living cultures?

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Venu: What kind of a tension do museums create in the minds of people who would like to see and speak about those objects totally in a different temporal space and time? What is fascinating about museums is that they create a kind of new way of seeing and speaking about artefacts, religious icons, and living cultures?

I think it is a very interesting view with a lot of merit to it. I think that the term ‘museum’ is used to cover a very wide range of institutions with many different kinds of purposes—audiences, collections—so it is really difficult for me to generalise about it. You know, there are science museums, there are folk life museums and there are fine arts museums and there are museums that have huge collections and they only show only 1% of it and others that have no collections at all but simply borrow works to display. In America, there are tiny historical societies—that’s just in some village there is a fine old house that the people, the community decides they want to preserve and they put things that relate to the history of that community in it, so it might be no bigger than this room. And there are museums like the National Museum in Delhi or the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York—they are huge and have all kinds of things. There are museums that focus on the past and there are museums that attempt to focus on life as it is now. So one place where I would differ with you slightly is to consider that museums only do history, that they are only talking about those objects totally in a different temporal space and time? What is fascinating about museums is that they create a kind of new way of seeing and speaking about artefacts, religious icons, and living cultures?

At my museum, the problems are even greater. We have collections from all over the world—we have a collection from India, from China, from Japan, from Korea; we have American collections as well. So we have the major challenge of trying to present things from India or China to people, many of whom have never been to those places and know nothing about them; and we want to use those things to convey something about Indian or Chinese culture, but it’s not easy to do. Most visitors to Dakshinachitra are from India, so they already know a lot and they can add what they know to what they see there and it is easier for them to interpret. If we take one of those houses in Dakshinachitra and put it in my museum—in fact we are bringing a house from China, a merchant’s house, a whole house and erecting it in the museum grounds and people will be able to go in to see it, so this actually happening—99% of the people who go in to the Chinese house have never been to China, know nothing about Chinese village life is like and so how do we convey to them some appreciation of Chinese architecture, Chinese decorative arts and Chinese culture that’s not too much of a distortion.

It’s an important job to do—I think its very important for museums in America or any other country to show the art and culture of foreign places because we live in a world that’s getting smaller and smaller and as it gets smaller, it is more important for us all to know each other better and to know the worlds we all come from better. So you need to be
able to do this, present Indian culture in America and present American culture in India—although you are bombarded by it in many ways; you just turn on your television sets these days and you have one kind of American culture—anyway, it is very important to do this but I also recognise it is very difficult and there are tremendous limitations on what can be done.

Venu: Do museums help us to have deeper encounter between cultures across the globe?

It could just as well be an exhibit of Kutch textiles in an American museum—you know, it doesn’t have to be great artists where people to appreciate these things. I guess I think the truth is that when you do something like that, say it is an exhibition of textiles from Kutch, people come to museums of their own free will. It’s not like going to school or anything else that’s required. In America, most museum visitors are pretty well educated. We keep trying to get people to come who are less educated but still our audiences are people who are well educated. They come for all different kinds of reasons—they are looking for something interesting to do on a Sunday afternoon and they want to go out with a friend; they decide may be a Kutch textile exhibition, may be they saw a picture of a quilt from Kutch, may be these are two women and they are interested in quilts. So they go and they are fascinated by what they see and they stand in front of some quilts from Kutch and they look at the stitches, at the colours, at the shapes of the patterns and they are really soaking it up. You could have another family that comes into the museum—same exhibition—a mother, a father, two kids; they walk into this room where the Kutch exhibit is, they look around and they walk out again. Because somehow it just doesn’t… you know, the kids are too young and they are not interested in textiles from anywhere; most American men are not interested in textiles either and might not look at an exhibit like that.

So I guess what I am saying is that there is tremendous variation in the way people behave in museums and what they do there. Sometimes I think of it as a sort of a magazine—you know if you pick up a copy of India Today and you are sitting in an aeroplane or a train and you are going somewhere and you are turning pages—sometimes you turn 10 pages and you may glance at the pictures but you don’t read anything and then you get to something that really catches your eye and you read the whole article. I think that if you took 80 people and gave them each a copy of India Today, there would be a lot of variation in what they did depending on their own backgrounds, what work they do, whether it is a man or a woman or a teenager, you know, all different things… that’s what happens when people go to museums.

Now I think the museum experience in India is very different. You have very few important museums—the whole institution of museum is not developed here as it is in America. You have museums like the Indian Museum in Calcutta and the National Museum in Delhi with really important collections; you have places like Dakshinachitra and the Crafts Museum in Delhi that do a very good job conveying some of the richness of rural traditional arts to people who are mostly urban-based now. And then you have all kinds of museums in India like the—And then you have all kinds of museums in India, some have examples of the finest sculptures the world has ever known, but these are in cases with no lighting and covered with dust. But in the context of India, that is understandable because India put almost all of its museums under the government whereas in America almost all museums are private philanthropic organisations and not government. And if you take a government and look at all the things it has to do and you prioritise them, museums are somewhere way at the bottom, right? There are more important things like national security and food supply and the postal system and a million other things that are much more important than museums.

I think eventually what will happen in India is there will be more of a growth of some kind of partnerships between the government and private concerns—I mean, I can imagine some day for it to be possible for some very successful company in South India to be able to make an arrangement whereby they sponsor the renovation and upkeep of a museum like the Tanjore museum so that that stuff looks good. We do more of those kinds of partnerships between government and the private sector in America and eventually you will get around to it here too. I think that’s the only way those situations will improve.

Venu: How does a museum help the process of preservation and transmission of cultures through the different ways of ploughing back into the community what was lost?

That has happened. There are numerous instances—for example, we have a major collection from Hawaii, native things from Hawaii and there was a time in the first part of the 20th century when, for a variety of reasons, native Hawaiians were not doing much of their old crafts and a lot of knowledge was lost. We have people coming regularly from Hawaii to look at our collection of burk cloth, you know, tapa cloth; to look at many other things in the collection and to study how they were made and to use that to revive the knowledge of these traditions back home. So museum collections are used that way all the time. They are quite important as document of things that have changed beyond recognition and when people want to know what they were like and how they were done, then they can do research in a museum the way you might do research in a library.
I mean museums, to the best of my knowledge, are a sort of a western invention and yet they proliferated around the world; a lot of them started in other parts of the world under colonial auspices as they did in India. But then in most of those cases, after independence, in post-colonial times, the museums have been taken over by the governments of those countries and many of them have been transformed into something that is not western any more, that is not strictly speaking indigenous but is something of its own; all of our societies around the world are changing, so I think you are absolutely right. If you were to go back 200 years ago and try to introduce a museum in some far-off from the western world, people might not have a clue what you were doing or why you would do it; it might be completely foreign to it but the world we live is different from then; the world we live in is this global communication now and so these kinds of institutions travel everywhere and have been since colonial times and they get reinvented in the places where they are located.

Venu: What exactly happens when it is reinvented? What kind of bewilderment it creates when museum objects travel to another culture?

What I think is if you have an exhibit on the colonial period in India you would present it very differently for a Japanese audience because you can’t assume that they have learnt about this in school; you have to give them information that an Indian audience doesn’t need. And you also have to think about where they are coming from because they were a colonial power in Asia.

Say, if this were the Victoria Memorial in Calcutta—it is full of colonial period things. Suppose they were invited by the Japanese government to do an exhibition of their collection in Tokyo at the National Museum. The people who curated that would have to think really hard about what it was that they wanted to project about that period in Indian history. Because they would be taking all these things from the colonial era to a place where people don’t know about it. I can’t speak for what the Indian curators would do in a situation like that—I think it would be a very difficult exhibition to do—for the reasons I think you were getting at that because Japanese people know so little about that era and because it is such an important era in India, to Indians and has such big meanings that you would want to somehow convey some of that too.

I had a very interesting experience at the Victoria Memorial a couple of years ago. Vivan Sundaram did an exhibition there—it was an installation where they took out all the things in one of the halls and he did a very left-leaning interpretation of the history of Bengal and the freedom movement in Bengal—it was very interesting. On the day I went, there was also a communist party rally happening in Calcutta. Victoria Memorial had this huge line of people in front of it—these were all the communist party people who had come in from the countryside for the rally and taking an afternoon to go to the Victoria Memorial. Of course, Vivian Sundaram’s work was politically in support of these people but that doesn’t mean that his work was meaningful to them because the visual language that he was using was completely unfamiliar to them.

What I saw—I was only in there for half-an-hour—first of all, it was a hot day, so what many people did when they finally got through this long line inside the Victoria Memorial where its marble walls and it is kind of cool and dark, they took a nap—they went down on the floor and took a nap because they were exhausted from being out in the sun and it was comfortable there. So a museum’s space was used for resting and relaxing.

The other things that I saw was their amazement at this building because you know what it is like inside—huge impressive rooms like a palace—and people from the countryside who perhaps hadn’t experienced something like that seemed to really enjoy it for the architecture of the place, for being in this marvellous place unlike anything they had seen before. I had the feeling—and again it is my feeling—that these people weren’t thinking about the colonial era and what it meant to India; they weren’t thinking so much about that or thinking about Vivian Sundaram’s interpretation of that period but they were enjoying this building because it is a marvellous building and that was the main thing for them, the excitement of being there.

Now I am sure that there were, in that group, some people who were able to fathom the language in Vivian Sundaram’s art somewhat and get into what he was doing in that installation. And I am sure there were some people who looked around at the oil paintings of various governors-general of India and thought about the colonial era and what it meant. But I think that for a lot of people it was just a wonderful experience, without political overtones particularly.

Venu: Is it just a wonderful experience or is there an articulation about how cultures view emotions, feelings, organise their spatio-temporal cordinates, interweave art and life?

Yes, I think that’s what museum exhibits can be good for, like the example I used of the Kutch textile exhibit and the ladies who were interested in American quilts, who come in and discover another tradition of needlework that they didn’t know about and they admire it. When people come and admire something from another culture and they understand a little bit about it, appreciate a little bit about it, that’s a very positive thing and for me that is one of the most important roles that museums play in the world today.
**Venu: What kind of work you are engaged in at present?**

In my museum, we have a collection from India that I will be working with to create two new exhibitions that we didn’t have before. One of them will be on contemporary Indian art because we have been gifted with major collection built by chester and Davida Herwitz, and therefore I think we have an opportunity to convey India as it is today. People in America can come and see what artists are doing in India. That’s an important experience for them because Americans have this kind of view of contemporary art – they know it is in New York and Los Angeles and may be London, but beyond that they don’t know very much about what’s going on in Bombay or Delhi or Tokyo or Beijing – and it is good for people to know that – so we’ll be doing exhibits of contemporary art.

The other thing that we’ll do is show our collection of visual arts of the modern era of India, from colonial times to the present. Well, if you go to a major British art museum, Victoria and Albert, and you go into the Indian gallery, you won’t see anything made after 1830 or 1840 – there are a whole bunch of reasons for that – but you won’t see anything made after that. That’s slowly beginning to change; we want to help change it faster through the kinds of exhibits that we do so that we are showing later Indian visual culture up to right now. The selection process realistically happens in a couple of ways; we had been gifted a large collection of 850 works of Indian contemporary art, so there’s the selection right off the bat, to start with that’s what we have to work with. It was the collection of one man, so it has a lot to do with his taste and interests in the artists he got to know and what he chose to collect. Then when I work with that collection, I think about an audience that’s going to come to see it, which is 90% unfamiliar with India and contemporary Indian art. So how do I build a bridge between this collection and the people who know so little; how do I help them; how do I select so that they will be interested in what they are looking at and if they go through the exhibition they will come out with some understanding and appreciation that they didn’t have when they started. So that’s how I made that selection.

**Deborah: You are a Curator of South Asian and Korean Art and Culture at the Peabody Essex Museum. Could you speak about your experience as a curator?**

The Peabody Essex is the oldest museum in America. One could argue with that in sort of formalities but it is basically the oldest museum in America. It was founded at the end of the 18th century before the museum era by a group of sea captains who were pioneers of the American trade with Asia. There were visiting all these strange places around the world in their sailing ships and they felt that they were not just pioneers of trade but also kind of explorers; they brought back all kinds of things and they wanted to show not just their families but also the community what the rest of the world was like. So they established a museum – that was 200 years ago. The museum has grown and changed; it has had several incarnations, may be four or five over the years and the latest was born not quite about a decade ago when the museum merged with a historical society also in the town with very strong Americana collections. As a consequence of the growth and change in the museum in the beginning of the 21st century, we are a museum of art, architecture and culture from around the world – we have very broad collections, as I said before, from a number of places in Asia and other places too.

These are collections that are, for the most part, very deeply culturally embedded in the sense that it’s not a fine arts museum with a lot of painting hanging on the wall. It is a museum that has objects, for example, an image of Balarama, which was the first object we got from India in 1800 – it is unbaked clay from Calcutta. That’s something that you cannot or should not, in my opinion, look at only as art. You have to look at partly as a work of art and partly you have to understand something about Hinduism and partly you have to understand something about festival practices in Bengal in order to know what this thing is. In that way, most things in our collection are very deeply embedded in the cultures they came from, whether it is an American thing, an Indian thing or a Chinese thing. And that makes us, I think, a very unusual museum in that in order to project our collections well we have to do with an understanding and appreciation of art and of culture and of history. People do write reviews of exhibitions all the time, just like they write book reviews – we have them in America in newspapers and magazines. So they get evaluated in that way. But a museum exhibition is an experience; what makes it different in some way from reading a book or looking at pictures in a magazine is that you’re walking into a physical space and moving around objects and you’re relating to them physically as you do this, not just your eyes but your whole body is moving through this space; your senses are picking things up as they encounter objects; you read and you look and you move – sometimes you listen, there are more and more exhibitions that have music in them – so it can be a multi-sensory thing. More and more exhibits today are adding in computer-based technologies that add a visual dimension and an information exchange dimension that was not possible in the past. So there are more multidimensional exhibits than a lot of other information gathering experiences.
Colonialism and the shifting identity of Indian objects: random thoughts

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“Objects were not what they were made to be but what they have become. This is to contradict of pervasive identification in Museum research and material culture studies which stabilises the identity of a thing in its fixed and founded material form.” - Nicholas Thomas

Indian collections: tradition, authenticity and the evolving context

The institution of museum in India, aimed at housing objects of antiquity and curiosity is a colonial and orientalist project. Indians themselves did not have a tradition of setting up museums of fragmented sculptures, rusted swords and out of context paintings. Broken images were immersed in water, worn out metal objects were melted down to cast new ones, and terracotta votive objects were left to decay and merge with the very earth from which they were created. It is due to this continual process of abandonment of the old and reproduction of the new that artistic traditions have formidably survived in India. The West possessed the power to represent the Orient. Classificatory mechanisms, systematising languages, religions, peoples, and so on were employed to continue and reinforce the otherness of the Orient. The Orient was depicted as a timeless space, without history, unaffected by industrialisation and modernity and thereby was represented as ‘traditional space’. In the colonial Indian context, tradition represented an amorphous, passive collectivity; its authenticity rooted in the past and its merit in anonymity, not having a contemporary face.

If one was to sketch a picture of the indigenous owners of the colonial ethnography in museums, they would appear to be a single, timeless community whose women always go bare-breasted, whose men smoke tobacco-pipes and roam around in ceremonial attire, who are extremely fond of tattoos and ornaments, who possess a tremendous urge for age-old artistic expression, whose arts, crafts, manners and customs invariably have a magico-religious content and whose homes, like their women, are always beautiful (photographer’s delight). They would not just come from somewhere but always ‘stem’ or ‘hail’ from it, their contact with their neighbours would be described as exposure to the outside world; their objects of everyday life would be classified as ‘utilitarian’, ‘decorative’ or ‘ritualistic’; everything they do would be ‘authentic’. Today they would be seen in the midst of an identity crisis, their way of life disintegrating with the inroads of modern, materialistic culture. Our job of course then would be to protect them from this menace. If a tribal artist would be seen responding to his contemporary environment in his art, to that extent it would be a departure from authenticity.

If I were to give a guided tour of one such colonial ethnographic gallery in a western metropolis, my introductory words would be somewhat like this: ‘Ladies and gentlemen, hurry up and watch the colourful peep-show of Indian tribals put together in this gallery. This is your last chance, after which you will be condemned to see tribals wearing wrist watches, commuting on motorbikes, sporting European clothes, taking non-herbal medicine, worshipping the...”
village money-lender's gods, contesting elections and painting modern art.’

Tradition cannot be devoid of its contemporary manifestation. It cannot be conceived as something unalloyed, sterile, monolithic, unilinear, stillborn and terminable. Any museum concerning itself with Asian cultures cannot confine to ceaselessly reconstructing its imaginary ‘golden ages’ in different permutations and combinations. It must take into account their evolving contexts and metaphors, their changing visual vocabulary which echoes their struggles and conflicts, their market-driven and politically oriented means of expression, their crumbling notions of aesthetics being replaced by new ones, filled with ironies – often accentuated by the very act of them being displayed in glass cases.

Colonialism and the transformation of the visual character and functions of Indian objects

For George Birdwood, a bureaucrat-scholar in the India Office of the British Empire, ‘painting and sculpture as fine art did not exist in India.’ However, he believed that the spirit of fine art is indeed everywhere latent in India, and it could be quickened through the art schools. The aim was to develop ‘applied’ art and to improve artisanry with a view to encouraging trade in Indian handicrafts. In the British Indian context, all working in the fields of painting, sculpting, woodcarving, weaving, or gold-smithy were dubbed as artisans or craftsmen and since ‘fine arts did not exist in India’, they were all seen as people in need of scientific training in drawing, geometry, perspective, chiaroscuro, anatomy, ornamentation, etc. This brand of ‘scientific’ approach, among other things, encouraged the production of colonial novelties – miniature models of monuments carved in wood or ivory, latticework screens, ivory replicas of ceremonial boats, paisley shawls, decorative shields, and sheathes for swords and daggers. With this development, a sterile culture of the narrow precincts of its sacred space and turned it into an immensely malleable artefact. Ever since, it has remained orthodox in terms of its materials of construction, its objects and methods of veneration and sites of its installation.

The new scientific training brought a sea change in the character of the products. They are in tune with the taste of their European clientele. Eventually, the artisans, who were used to working in their own family-bound, hereditary environment, could not cope with the economic and other stresses of urban life shunned the art schools. ‘The classes were, therefore, attended principally by boys and young men, who had taken advantage of the literary education supplied by the government.’ In this scheme of things, the notion of art with the artist as hero, got exclusively connected with the art school trained artists whereas the hereditary practitioners of the ‘arts’ who got dubbed as artisans or craftsmen got left out of this hallowed category. At policy level, in independent India, this divide bracketed ‘art’ with ‘culture’ and ‘craft’ with ‘commerce’.

The power of the mechanically reproduced image in colonial and post-colonial India

Walter Benjamin speaks of the ‘cult value’ and ‘exhibition value’ of art in relation to ceremonial objects and comments that ‘with the different methods of technical reproductions of a work of art, its fitness for exhibition increased’ that ‘mechanical reproduction emancipates a work of art from its parasitical dependence on ritual’, and that ‘instead of being based on ritual, it begins to be based on another practice – politics’.

The new generation printed pictures of Hindu deities and mythological characters saw a whole range of amalgamated pictorial elements in the second half of the nineteenth century, especially relating to natural scenery and architecture, conventionalised in the tradition of popular art. These attributes brought on to the picture plane a new visual dimension, which positioned the pictures between the cultic and the exhibitory space. Often set against the background of watered-down Dutch and British landscapes or that of colonial Indian bungalows and villas as painted by the Indian academic realists, emerging from within and outside the colonial art schools, the deities and mythological characters also began to be conceptualised in the costumes of the colonial theatre heroes and heroines, adopting theatrical postures and gestures, and bathing in stage lights that emphasised drapery folds. Undoubtedly, the popularity of these pictures was rooted in the ideal (divine) landscape studded with flowering trees and creepers, mountains, lakes, waterfalls, gardens, fountains, swans and even colonial villas, all in one frame. These developments shifted the Hindu cultic and mythological imagery from exclusively cultic space to exhibitory space. The mass proliferation of the sacred Hindu imagery caused by the colonial techniques of mechanical reproduction emancipated the image from the narrow precincts of its sacred space and turned it into an immensely malleable artefact. Ever since, it has kept crossing borders both ways between the sacred and the profane, the caste-bound and the casteless, the spiritual and the political, the canonical and the invented in terms of its materials of construction, its objects and methods of veneration and sites of its installation.
Eventually, the printed popular imagery became a colonial vehicle for marketing British products, leading to complete commodification of the sacred Hindu imagery by the end of the nineteenth century. The charm of the shiny, multi-chrome religious pictures became so irresistible for Indians at the turn of the nineteenth century and during the first half of the twentieth that several British, German, Swedish, Austrian, Italian and Japanese companies began to produce Hindu religious pictures in various forms for export to India. Several textile mills of Manchester and Glasgow began to supply oleographic pictures with religious themes on bales of cloth exported to India. People often bought British mill-cloth to obtain these pictures free of cost. They framed, displayed and worshipped them all over India. Some of the early twentieth century British multi-nationals, such as Glaxo (soap and baby food), Lever Brothers (Sunlight soap) and Woodward (Gripe Water) reproduced Hindu cultic images on their annual calendars which were so coveted that even some of the most aristocratic families displayed them in their homes and worshipped them. In the first quarter of the twentieth century, European product labels and calendars became Hindu altars. Considering the great Indian market potential, Germany and Italy also began to produce similar pictures, ‘suitable for framing’, in large quantities to export to India. Sweden, Austria and Japan took the lead in multi-chrome reproduction of Hindu mythological pictures on matchbox labels in the first half of the twentieth century.

By the last two decades of the twentieth century, the religious imagination of millions of Indians was fully charged by cheap calendars, mass-produced posters, and plastic cabinets containing crudely made sacred images. It is remarkable that the people whose sacred canon had so much fuss ed over the selection of noblest materials for making a cultic image and had emphasised its placement only in ritually purified spaces, now venerated their unconsecrated gods in the form of flimsy plastic altars over a wayside drain.

Edward Said and others have talked about the Orient as an eroticised space. ‘Women were prominent in Orientalist representation. They were the focus for the Western desire to penetrate their inaccessibility. The vital connections between culture, politics and gender have become fore-grounded through the study of Orientalism as a discourse’. Colonial photography routinely concentrated on ‘nautch girls’ and ethnic ‘beauties’ whose visual conceptualisation considerably influenced the formation of the Hindu cultic and mythological imagery.

Examples of converting a political personality into a cultic icon based on the colonial legacy of popular prints for gaining electoral popularity are not lacking. Instances casting Jayalalitha in the image of Madonna and Child and of iconizing Indira Gandhi as Durga are well known. In December 2000, some Maharashtra-based followers of Sonia Gandhi converted a motor car into a ‘Chariot of Victory’, covering it with her painted picture juxtaposed next to that of a goddess based on a colonial oleograph, riding a chariot pulled by four lions. The goddess looked like a combination of images of Mother India personified and the Hindu goddess Durga, the slayer of demons.

Objects, like words, are capacious. They are capable of assuming several connotations, depending upon their context of use. Also like words, historically objects continuously mutate, some becoming redundant (words resting in dictionaries and objects in museums, in a dormant state, potentially to resurrect as new entities), others processually undergoing a sequence of changing meanings and functions. (And yes, words too move in and out of commodity state).
The idea of having museums is good. Museums do have educative value. They do preserve some of the most valuable objects and the data collected remains as an asset for the future generations to come. They become an extension of the libraries and the resource centres for the people-countries. But in countries like India and where folklife, the tradition and the revivification is closely integrated to life practices, the situation is different. Let us put aside the word Museum. So what do we want to do then? Care and Share …

Caring - We have to consider that the life is lived. The question of documentation comes. To document a live object and the dead object there is a great difference. Most of the time we are used to document the piece as a dead object, even if it is alive we document it as a dead piece usually. We have created a science where in we have a set of information-questions filled in by the students, professors and the scholars. Whereas in live situation, the piece speaks to you because it forms a part of the family. The piece breathes. So the whole approach of dealing with it will be different. The informant—the father/mother/family lives with it. So they have a say—they are the masters. While making a piece (in process) time in-between two processes in making is never documented. Infact this also forms a part of the whole process. We may neglect it by saying, it was no work, not a part of the process. While making a pot after throwing and before chasing, there is time and that is a part of the process.

Material and the tools - They are very important factors in live situations: Local materials play very important part-role. The ecology and environment are thus respected. The tools play a very important role in live situations. Mostly they are made by the Artist craftsman him/her self or by the fellowman. They are special in many ways. The local grass or twig as brush and jowar or rice paste is used as colour. Both material and tool are here.

A piece in context - Any piece which we see in live situation has a lot to offer in its context. This factor has not been dealt well in documentation at the Museums and the Universities. Their main focus is mostly on piece alone...So when one sees an object, a piece or documents it, nothing much, is gained. There are two occasions when the scholar-the student, gets the knowledge for a piece, in context: 1) When it is lifted from the spot, where it is stored, and 2) The function-usage of it. May be because here in countries like India the things are yet living, We do not see much or we just get the methodology of documentation from outside where the object may not have collected from the live situation. So if one documents context in proper perspective it can provide a lot of insight and become a seed bank for the live culture. My wife has a piece of patola saree which was given by her mother to make kohl, for making a wick for a lamp! So the context is very much necessary and one can very well document it while it is living.

Holistic approach - This is another factor which is not taken into consideration by either the museums or institutes of arts. If one sees in Indian context any piece of arts-crafts, act… is a part of a whole-many more arts mingled together to make that piece! Because we made these compartments we see them separate. This is utterly wrong. How can one see a tribal pithora painting or a votive terracotta without other arts? Music, dance, act all are inseparable parts of the pithora painting or the terracotta. We see them just as a visual piece in a Museum! I have just talked a little about caring, that too documentation

Sharing - While looking at folk life the centre for sharing should have many more components. It should have: preservation, resource, research, and revival. It should become more like an open University of oral culture. The most common man should become a part of it and feel proud of being with it. I feel that the curators, the designers and others can form a part of these kind of folk life cultural centres, but at the centre the artist-craftsman-the creator should be there. All the others will learn out of him/her. I did a Museum show called nati ye tere rup in this fashion and it gave a lot to all different kinds of viewers, curators, designers, artists and other scholars. The potters who were at the core, created the pieces, helped in designing the show, in creating the script-copy, making the catalogue etc. They could give their 60 years of knowledge in three months. Not only the old potter but their children also contributed. This all may look like a dream but when people saw it, even now they do not forget the experience. The visual vocabulary, the reinvention, the display, the theme and the object can get a new incarnation. It can become a life time experience. Myself and other contemporary artists who worked with me learnt a lot from these the great artists.

Shilpalaya

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The Hindu

Kochar Bhai and Mansing Rathwa, Pithora artists at work