VISUAL & MEDIA HISTORIES

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no touching, no spitting, no praying

THE MUSEUM IN SOUTH ASIA

EDITORS

SALONI MATHUR AND KAVITA SINGH

ROUTLEDGE

no touchi

no touching, no spitting, no praying

Visual & Media Histories

Series Editor: Monica Juneja, University of Heidelberg

This Series takes as its starting point notions of the visual, and of vision, as central in producing meanings, maintaining aesthetic values and relations of power. Through individual studies, it hopes to chart the trajectories of the visual as an activating principle of history. An important premise here is the conviction that the making, theorising and historicising of images do not exist in exclusive distinction of one another.

Opening up the field of vision as an arena in which meanings get constituted simultaneously anchors vision to other media such as audio, spatial and the dynamics of spectatorship. It calls for closer attention to inter-textual and inter-pictorial relationships through which ever-accruing layers of readings and responses are brought alive.

Through its regional focus on South Asia the Series locates itself within a prolific field of writing on non-Western cultures which have opened the way to pluralise iconographies, and to perceive temporalities as scrambled and palimpsestic. These studies, it is hoped, will continue to reframe debates and conceptual categories in visual histories. The importance attached here to investigating the historical dimensions of visual practice implies close attention to specific local contexts which intersect and negotiate with the global, and can re-constitute it. Examining the ways in which different media are to be read onto and through one another would extend the thematic range of the subjects to be addressed by the Series to include those which cross the boundaries that once separated the privileged subjects of art historical scholarship — sculpture, painting and monumental architecture — from other media: studies of film, photography and prints on the one hand, advertising, television, posters, calendars, comics, buildings, and cityscapes on the other.

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editors Saloni Mathur and Kavita Singh

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acknowledgements

this volume is the result of an extended, ongoing exchange between its co-editors that began approximately 10 years ago. In 2005, we received a multi-year collaborative grant from the Getty Grant Foundation for a project titled *Museology and the Colony: The Case of India*. The goal was to historicise and bring theoretical understanding to the unique 200-year trajectory of the museum in South Asia. Together, we supervised a team of seven South Asian studies scholars, and 13 graduate students from India and the United States who set out to compile an extensive empirical record of specific museological sites in the subcontinent as the basis for developing and theorising a new framework for the museum in postcolonial society. Suffice it to say that our activities and efforts have been vast and multiple, and have included over the years conferences, workshops, fieldwork, case-studies, and residencies, all directly and indirectly related to the development of this book.

The nature and scope of this process means that that there are a great many people to acknowledge. We are grateful to the scholars, critics and curators — spanning the fields of art history, literature, museology, history, anthropology, and architecture — who participated in the intellectual process in one way or another. They are Naazish Ataullah, Timothy Barringer, Rustom Bharucha, Deborah Cherry, Annapurna Garimella, B. N. Goswamy, Tapati Guha-Thakurta, Salima Hashmi, Jyotindra Jain, Kajri Jain, Partha Mitter, Aamir Mufti, Ruth Phillips, Gyan Prakash, Gayatri Sinha, and Savia Viegas. Thanks also to several people and institutions who hosted and supported our collaboration and served as interlocutors, in particular, Thomas Gaehtgens, Nancy Micklewright and Joan Weinstein at the Getty Research Institute and Getty Grant Program in Los Angeles; Gerhard Wolf and Hannah Baader at the Kunsthistorisches/Max Planck Institute in Florence; Michael Ann Holly and Mark Ledbury at the Clark Art Institute in Williamstown; and the leadership and staff of our home institutions, Jawaharlal Nehru University and the University of California, Los Angeles. Thanks also to Andrew MacClellan, Clare Harris, Deborah Swallow, Richard Davis, Geeta Kapur, Ashok Kumar Das, and Roma Chatterji for their intellectual support and stimulating ideas.

We are especially grateful to Monica Juneja, editor of the Routledge *Visual & Media Histories* Series, for her substantive engagements with the project, and for understanding and defending the title of our book when the press felt, perhaps rightly, that it was too long and unfriendly for database searches.

It is a source of some pride that the final section of this volume contains excerpts from the work undertaken by a team of student field researchers we assembled in 2005. A quick glance at their author bios reveals the many exciting directions these young people have taken since then. They are now curators, doctoral candidates, postdoctoral scholars, assistant professors, and medical school candidates, working at various places in India, Pakistan, Britain, Canada, and the United States. We wish to acknowledge their research and important roles in our work. Thank you: Tulay Atak, Rituparna

Basu, Shaila Bhatti, Hope Childers, Monaz Gandevia, Neelima Jeychandran, Brinda Kumar, Ramesh Kumar, Sraman Mukherjee, Suryanandini Narain, Ameet Parameswaran, Siddarth Puri, and Akshaya Tankha. Thanks also to Vidya Shivadas, Kristy Phillips and Keelan Overton, for their engagements, and to Kajri Jain for her assistance in supervising the team.

Finally, it is a rare and deeply sustaining experience to have an intellectual partnership grow into a friendship after a decade of working together. We wish to thank each other, and our spouses and children — Aamir, Jalal, Arunava, Aditya — for their love, patience and support.

preface

Monica Juneja

The unbounded space enjoyed by the notion of art in today's world brings with it an equally open definition of the sites that could function as a museum. Indeed, as lively discussions of planned museum projects such as the Louvre and Guggenheim on Abu Dhabi's Saadiyat Island, or the Kolkata Museum of Modern Art, rage through the media, it would appear that the site or architectural plan or imagined vision of a future museum suffices to stand for the museum itself. Or, that an individual collection and fictional story can grow in tandem to create a dreamscape of objects whose material realisation is Istanbul's Museum of Innocence, opened in April 2012. The myriad and seemingly infinite reincarnations of an institution once viewed primarily as a state-supported fixture in a nation's cultural landscape, intended to document the nation's history, constitute its heritage and fashion its citizens, pose a formidable challenge to art history, a discipline whose formation was closely intertwined with that of the museum. In this collection of essays that forms the third volume of *Visual & Media Histories*, Saloni Mathur and Kavita Singh have engaged with these issues while investigating the history and varied modalities of the museum in South Asia. The studies brought together in this book not only fill a noticeable regional gap in the otherwise densely-productive field of writings on the museum and its practices, their import and insights rebound on existing narratives of the museum, urging them to pause in a moment of self-reflection over their explanatory paradigms.

Is the museum a quintessential institution of Western Enlightenment modernity — to paraphrase Donald Preziosi — which then sits uneasily in the societies to which it has travelled? The essays presented here point to an institution that no longer remains attached to its parochial origins, instead takes on new forms animated by local and regional experiences, both subliminally present and freshly shaped through the encounter with cultural alterity. As they trace the trajectory of the museum in South Asia, the editors of this rich volume make a historiographical move to transcend the 'getting-there' mode that has characterised canonical narratives of modernity. The accounts we read here do not assume or propose a single or normative model of the museum, whose variants in the colony they proceed to describe. The museum in South Asia emerges neither as an example nor an exception: we discover it within a field of specific negotiations, conceptual tensions, improvisations, and unpredictable affective resonances, which make it a site that brings forth novel potentialities and the promise of a future yet to be envisioned. As the individual contributions set into motion standard concepts of rational order and enlightened learning associated with the museum, they point not towards disenchantment as the dominant affect that comes in the wake of the modern, but invite us instead to view the museum as a space where new forms of wonder and enchantment (*ajaib ghar*) reconfigure rational knowledge, where the classification and function of objects can generate curiosity and even magical (*jadu*) enjoyment.

At the same time, the wealth of empirical material brought forth by the studies in this collection come as a corrective to those almost formulaic models that place museums at the heart of an inexorable power-knowledge machine. It is refreshing indeed to grapple, together with the authors of individual articles, with a host of contingencies and factors that emerge within the interstices of imperial intent (itself never really a well-orchestrated design), practical execution and quotidian considerations that make the 'museum in the colony' a set of improvisations and surprises. The accounts we read here eschew the poles of imperial pedagogy and subaltern resistance, viewed as absolutes, and show instead the incertitude and messiness of both imperial governance and postcolonial projects of nation-building, whose categories and epistemologies freely feed on each other, once the crassest of colonial stereotypes have been set aside. For all its success in drawing crowds of visitors, the museum has remained an institution that can never be fully conflated with the popular, though it has throughout its history drawn upon such sites as the department store, the world exhibition, the library, shrine or theme park and borrowed habits of looking and displaying. The tension between significations and settled representations that accompanies us through the pages of this book calls for fresh questions about the ways of knowledge production and circulation which, as the book's evocative title suggests, are not delinked from the senses, bodies and beliefs.

The three sections, in which the essays are grouped, are held together by narrative threads as they trace the vicissitudes of the museum in South Asia — among these the exercise of 'pedagogical' and 'performative' citizenship (Dipesh Chakrabarty) serves as an effective organising and explanatory principle. Cumulatively the articles demonstrate the unruly domain and marvellous expressive variety contained within the notion of the 'museum' and shake up existing models of explanation in the process. Walter Benjamin's much quoted distinction between the 'cult' and 'exhibition' value of an object and the transformation of one into the other ushered by modernity, when transposed to South Asia shows up as a rough, non-linear process, one compelled to constantly negotiate multiple and slippery temporalities within a single space. The changing fortunes of the museum today, it would seem, have worked towards even undermining the category of an 'art museum' constituted by modernism's valorisation of a transparent and unmediated aesthetic experience of the displayed object. The Maitreya Bodhisattva discussed in Chapter Nine of this volume, for instance, registers the dismantling of the canonical idea of an art museum as a repository of the nation's heritage, to be replaced by a new formation that stands for the identity of a supranational community of believers-cum-visitors; its attributes are those of a shrine, exhibition, storehouse of relics and technological marvel, allowing it to incorporate existing taxonomies that had once distinguished museums as art, ethnological or industrial.

Since its inception the discipline of art history has defined its function as that of placing an individual work within historical time and a stylistic corpus of related works, thereby creating a narrative of an evolutionary order of objects and styles, from which the truth of 'cultures' could be read and fixed, though such narrative principles often bore an uncanny resemblance to biological laws. In tandem with this process, the museum — be it the art, ethnological or craft museum — became a crucial pedagogical site to fix these histories in a nexus of synchronic and diachronic relationships, carried out through various modes of framing and sequential juxtaposition. The museum's refusal to be contained within this mould, its unlimited and unpredictable capacity to travel, proliferate and morph into new forms, both in the locations where it was born as well as the sites to which it has voyaged, means that it is now for art history to recast its fr ameworks and practices. The present volume furnishes an important impulse in this direction.

introd

introduction

Saloni Mathur & Kavita Singh

As we prepared this volume for publication, the ambitious plans for the new Kolkota Museum of Modern Art (KMoMA) to be housed in the West Bengal city of the same name, were announced and presented to the public with great flourish. The expansive vision of this museum is to

> acquire, preserve and exhibit a national and global collection of fine art from the late 18th century to the 21st century, to provide a vibrant social and intellectual forum in the region through the arena of modern and contemporary art, and to elevate the urban center of Kolkata into a "major cultural hub of global reach".[1]

The Swiss architectural firm of Herzog and de Meuron, whose credentials include the spectacular 'Bird's Nest' from the 2008 Beijing Olympics, and the gigantic Tate Modern in London — the largest museum of modern art on earth — secured the commission for the building following an international competition. Their plans boast an architectural complex with 55 galleries, a large amphitheatre, a lecture auditorium, a separate research and academic wing, and extensive commercial and dining spaces, all to be constructed on a 10-acre plot in the fast-growing township of Rajarhat/New Town, on the north-east fringes of the city of Kolkata (Plate 1). At this point it is difficult to know how this project will unfold, let alone predict what its role in South Asian society might be, or even what its collections may hold. Nonetheless, KMoMA expresses a number of aspirations towards that which is distinctly recognisable as a global museological form: the project is simultaneously a spectacular bid for international visibility, a powerful enactment of collective identity, memory and history, and a bold exercise in 21st century branding — a gesture that seems to be, increasingly and definitively, a sign of our uncertain times.

In contrast to the ambitious plans for KMoMA, however, are a plethora of home-grown repositories in India that seem to occupy the other end of the spectrum of museums. Consider, for instance, the Hanuman Museum in Lucknow: India's only museum dedicated to the widely-worshipped monkey-god and ally of the epic hero Rama. Located in a small house in a narrow residential street, and filled with plaster-cast and fiberglass reproductions of Hanuman sculptures from temples all over the country — along with colour photocopies and postcards of paintings of Hanuman, calendar art prints of the deity, newspaper clippings of stories about Hanuman, and cassettes of devotional songs sung in his honour (Plate 2) — this museum filled with commonplace objects, replicas and commercially-produced goods is marked by its eclecticism and distance from standard museological priorities and practices. In its scope, aims and methods it could not be more different from the KMoMA. This extraordinary museum is in fact the *home* of a Hanuman devotee, who has amassed his collection out of religious sentiment

[1] See http://kmomamuseum.org/, accessed on 24 January 2014.

PLATE 1 • *Projected architectural plans for the Kolkata Museum of Modern Art, Kolkata.* *SOURCE*: COURTESY OF KMoMA, KOLKATA.

and personal obsession. When a newspaper report referred to the house as a veritable museum, the owner was so inundated with inquiries from the public that he felt obliged to designate specific hours each week when he takes visitors through his living room and study, and eventually he even posted a board to acknowledge that his home is, indeed, the 'Hanuman Museum'.

While the KMoMA, or the similarly ambitious Khalsa Heritage Complex in Anandpur Sahib, Punjab (discussed in Mathur and Singh's essay in this volume), can be immediately understood as projects calculated to insert India into an evolving geography of globally visible mega-museums, the Hanuman Museum is one of the vast number of small and unsung repositories scattered across the subcontinent. Housed in community centres, administrative offices, police stations, monasteries or temples, and private homes, most of these modest institutions were created to give shelter to accidental archaeological finds, to relocate objects and monuments that came in the path of development projects, to answer a community's identity needs, to salvage 'dying' cultures, or to house a collection of family heirlooms, cultural relics or devotional objects. These small museums are the result of local and often individual initiatives and are seldom acknowledged within a reckoning of museums in the subcontinent. Yet, as this volume suggests, vernacular appropriations of the idea of 'the museum', and the considerably more eccentric establishments they represent, are as crucial to understanding the landscape of museums in India as the impulse towards internationally recognised museological models. The very use of the term 'museum' to designate seemingly disparate collections of things testifies to the way the idea of the museum has percolated, widely and at many levels in India: when public access is granted to rare and interesting things; when precious objects are sought to be preserved; when a set of narratives wish to present themselves as authoritative and true; then, it seems, the 'museum' is repeatedly mobilised by groups and individuals to give their efforts a name.

The presence of museological phenomena as wide-ranging as KMoMA and the Hanuman Museum in the pantheon of museums in contemporary India appears to counter, at the very least, the perceptions of inertia and stasis that have long dominated writing about museums in the subcontinent, particularly from the period following India's Independence.[2] Although the institution of the modern museum was born in the European metropolis, today it clearly asserts itself as an infinitely varied global form through which the performative politics of late democracies have been enacted in forceful, if unpredictable, ways.[3]

The variegated phenomena of museums in India thus ought to be understood alongside the increased prominence of art museums in general around the world, as manifested on the one hand through the spectacular growth of museums in the bourgeoning centres of global capital, such as China and the Arab Gulf states, and on the other hand, as part of the increasingly urgent role played by museums in asserting or making visible the rights of minorities, Aboriginal or First Nations groups, or other constituencies on the margins of society. The museum's capacity to shapeshift and reinvent itself in ways that mirror the local processes of identity politics and the ebbs and flows of global capital, suggests a pressing need for more comparative approaches to the study of museums, and a rethinking of the available analytical tools within art history, anthropology and cultural studies, to name a few of the fields of inquiry relevant to a cross-cultural account of museums and their histories.[4]

PLATE 2 • *Entrance to the Hanuman Museum at Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh.* *SOURCE:* COURTESY OF SURYANANDINI NARAIN.

No Touching, No Spitting, No Praying: The Museum in South Asia brings together a range of

[2] See, for instance, Stephen Inglis, 'Post-Colonial Museums: Dead or Alive?,' *Public Culture*, vol. 1, no. 2, Spring 1989, pp. 84–85; and Rustom Bharucha, 'Beyond the Box: Problematising The "New Asian Museum" in the Age of Globalization', *Third Text*, vol. 14, no. 52, 2000, pp. 11–19.

[3] Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'Museums in Late Democracies', *Humanities Research*, vol. 9, no. 1, 2002, pp. 5–12.

[4] Some important studies in this vein include Arjun Appadurai and Ivan Kopytoff (eds), *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1986; Tim Barringer and Tom Flynn (eds), *Colonialism and the Object: Empire, Material Culture and the Museum*, London: Routledge, 1998; Annie Coombes, *Reinventing Africa: Museums, Material Culture and the Popular Imagination*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994; Tapati Guha-Thakurta, *Monuments, Objects, Histories: Institutions of Art in Colonial and Postcolonial India*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2003; Nicholas Thomas, *Entangled Objects: Exchange, Material Culture and Colonialism in the Pacific*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991.

essays, some previously published and some new, to offer for the first time a wide-angle view on the dynamic history of the museum as a cultural institution and object of study in South Asia. The three major sections of this book are intended to follow the museum in the region: as it originated as a tool of colonialism, was adopted as a vehicle of sovereignty in the nationalist period, and as it emerges in its present incarnations, reflecting the fissured identities and neoliberal economy of India in the 21st century. Instead of judging the efficacy of Indian museums by the standards of Victorian pedagogy that brought them into existence, the authors in this volume effectively deconstruct such a master-narrative through a rigorous investigation of a vast range of museum discourses and practices in the subcontinent. Their accounts no longer lead to the frustrations and paralyzing perceptions of *lack* that dominated the writings of an earlier generation; rather they point, with a critical eye, to the vibrancy and unconventionality of museums in the subcontinent, their tenacity and drive towards legitimacy and societal relevance, their paradoxical relationships with a diverse range of constituencies, and their complex histories of participation in colonialist, nationalist, regionalist, and global–capitalist projects.

Under the banner of 'new museology', a diverse body of scholarship that has proliferated in the past two-and-a-half decades has presented a valuable intellectual critique of museums as institutions that reflect and serve the dominant culture.[5] Its authors have generally located the 'birth' of the modern museum in London in 1753, with the founding of the British Museum, or in Paris in 1793, during the French Revolution, when the doors of the Royal Palace collections of the Louvre were thrown open to the public for the first time. The institution in its modern democratic form then continued to evolve and proliferate in the metropolitan centres of Europe throughout the 19th century, supported by the rise of the disciplinary knowledges of art history and the sciences and the interlinked phenomena of the 'exhibitionary complex', to serve, in increasingly sophisticated ways, the formation of the new national and imperial identities of Euro-Western nation-states.[6]

The 'birth' of the museum in the former colony, by contrast, was not driven by the same historical processes and democratising impulses that threw open the doors of the Louvre to the citizenry, or offered a triumphalist universal survey of a world of antiquities to the British metropolitan viewer. The museum's emergence in the colony was undoubtedly bound up in this European story, but it was also viewed as a lesser counterpart to the exemplary metropolitan institutional paradigm, defined as it was by the politics of colonial patronage and the materialist–acquisitionist needs of the great imperial knowledge-production project. The museum in the colony was, in fact, a museum *of* the

[5] Michael Ames, *Cannibal Tours and Glass Boxes: The Anthropology of Museums*, Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1992; Douglas Crimp, *On the Museum's Ruins*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993; Carol Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums*, London: Routledge, 1995; Reesa Greenberg, Bruce Ferguson and Sandy Nairne (eds), *Thinking About Exhibitions*, New York: Routledge, 1995; Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge*, London: Routledge, 1992; Ivan Karp and Steven Lavine (eds), *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991; Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museum, and Heritage*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998; Andrew McCLellan, *Inventing the Louvre: Art, Politics, and the Origins of the Modern Museum in Eighteenth-century Paris*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994; Donald Preziosi and Claire Farago (eds), *Grasping the World: The Idea of the Museum*, London: Ashgate, 2004; Donald Preziosi, *Brain of the Earth's Body: Art, Museums, and the Phantasms of Modernity*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003; Daniel Sherman and Irit Rogoff (eds), *Museum Cultures: Histories, Discourses, Spectacles*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994; Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*, Durham: Duke University Press, 1993; Peter Vergo (ed.), *The New Museology*, London: Reaktion Books, 1989; Stephen Weil, *Rethinking the Museum and Other Meditations*, Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1990.

[6] Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics*, London: Routledge, 1995.

colony, addressing not just Indian visitors but also imperial authorities, such as Orientalist scholars, scientists of diverse descriptions, administrators, and agents of commerce.[7] Moreover, the appearance of Indians within the museum as objects themselves, in the form of ethnographic specimens, ethnic types or nameless artisans, dramatizes the paradoxical origins of the museum as an institutional form: the apparatus that allowed for a ritualised public enactment of democracy in the metropolis simultaneously functioned in the colony to position (in highly *undemocratic* ways) the public as a subject society outside the domain of citizenship and rights.

And yet, as several authors in this volume will demonstrate, the characterisation of the museum as a deracinated transplant scarred by its origins within the 'civilizing mission' denies the reality of a more complicated history through which the museum and its associated disciplines of archaeology, art history and Indology were seized for more unpredictable ends by a range of Indian actors and agents. This involves not only the stories of Indian scholars who struggled for recognition amidst their European peers,[8] but also the less well-known stories of the Indian patrons — in particular, the rulers of several princely states[9] — who established exemplary museums, funded archaeological excavations and provided for the conservation of monuments during the latter part of the colonial period. These Indian initiatives, some remarkably ambitious in scope, often received munificent support, and at times their collections and advanced display methods exceeded the achievements of the museums of colonial India.[10] Perhaps the best known example of this counter-colonial museological spirit can be found in the museum established by Sayaji Rao III Gaekwad, the Maharaja of Baroda. As Julie Codell has argued in her study of the latter, the 'strange arrangements' and collecting activities of Sayaji Rao III were inseparable from his many reformist projects and the context of the heated politics of nationalism in early 20th-century India.[11]

The somewhat eccentric title of this volume — *No Touching, No Spitting, No Praying* — was in part derived from an actual sign at the entrance to an Indian museum announcing the rules of behaviour to its visitors. However, the title also recalls the 'fingered glass, betel-nut spit and dirty marks on the walls' that Sydney Frank Markham and Harold Hargreaves identified — in their 1936 survey of museums in British India — as symptoms of a widespread problem for museology in the colony.[12] For these colonial government bureaucrats, the museums of India served as indicators of 'the cultural level that country has reached'.[13] Behaviours such as wall-touching, case-fingering and the spitting of betel-nut juice reflected not merely the ill-mannered nature of India's uneducated masses, but something much worse: it signalled the country's status as 'lamentably low'.[14] The challenge, they argued, was to 'awaken, inspire and teach' the illiterate Indian masses — who nonetheless flocked to museums in record-breaking numbers and stood apart from the English-educated Indian elite — who they feared 'do not really care for museums or believe in them'.[15] For our purposes, the title *No Touching, No*

[7] See, for instance, Kavita Singh, 'Material Fantasy: The Museum in Colonial India', in Gayatri Sinha (ed.), *Art and Visual Culture in India, 1857–2007*, Mumbai: Marg Publications, 2009, pp. 40–57.

[8] See for instance, Guha-Thakurta, *Monuments, Objects, Histories*, Chapter 3, 'Interlocuting Texts and Monuments: The Coming of Age of the "Native Scholar"'; and Bernard Cohn, this volume.

[9] The 'princes' were the colonial-period descendants of traditional ruling families of India who were allowed to rule their territories under the supervision of the British. They exercised a circumscribed but not insignificant degree of power.

[10] Singh, 'Material Fantasy', pp. 50–51.

[11] Julie Codell, 'Ironies of Mimicry: The Art Collection of Sayaji Rao III Gaekwad, Maharaja of Baroda, and the Cultural Politics of Early Modern India', *Journal of the History of Collections,* vol. 15, no. 1, 2003, pp. 127–46.

[12] Sydney Frank Markham and Harold Hargreaves, *The Museums of India*, London: The Museums Association, 1936, p. 61.

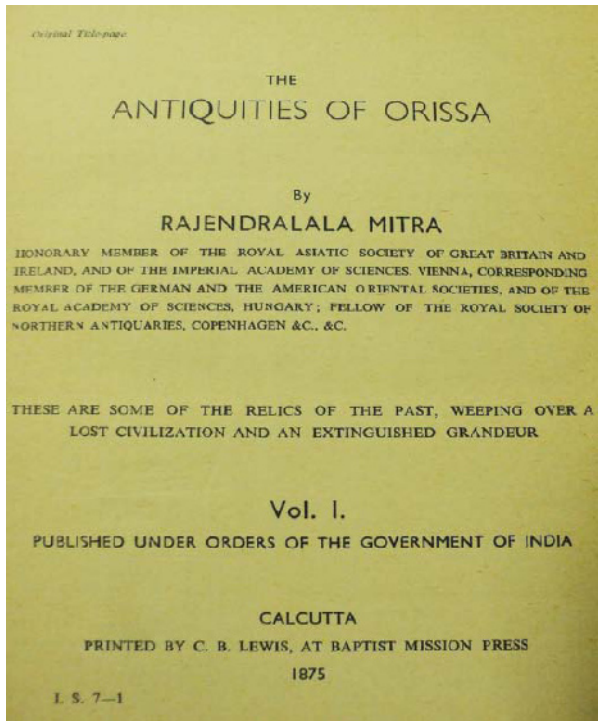
[13] *Ibid*., p. 3.

[14] *Ibid*., p. 4.

Spitting, No Praying also confronts the idea of the *cultural difference* of the museum as it has evolved in the context of modern South Asia, viewed not through the pedagogic imperative of Markham and Hargreaves' evolutionary frame, but through the conceptual prism and theoretical lenses of new kinds of questions and concerns. For instance: What are the forms of difference, dissonance and alterity that have shaped the formation of museums in India? What are the culturally specific behaviours and understandings — the social and historical modes of viewing — that Indians have brought to the display of art and artefacts in the subcontinent? What kinds of modernising impulses, institutional identities and metropolitan landscapes have museums embodied and helped to define? And finally, if museums exist as 'ritualized spaces',[16] then what is the nature and character of the ritual setting in the museum outside of Euro-Western space?

If in its early years, the museum in India was marked as a tool of colonial control, in the post-colonial period it increasingly became the locus of an official national culture. The museum in the colony had been limited in its scope: being the museum *of* the colony, its collections were confined to objects produced or found within the territory of the subcontinent. This had made the museum incommensurate with the grand, universal-survey museums in the European metropolis. With the arrival of Independence in 1947, however, the narrow focus of the museum's collections was to turn from a limitation into an advantage, for it would allow for the celebration of an exclusively national heritage through a narrative that traced 'Indian civilization' as a primordial, enduring and materially manifest characteristic of the land through the ages. Here through systematic appropriations and erasures of various regional and temporal phenomena, a civilisational history was produced for India — one that foregrounded the Nehruvian dictum of 'Unity in Diversity' so critically needed in a troubled and fragmented post-Partition India.[17]

PLATE 3 • *Pioneering 'native' art history: Title page of Rajendralal Mitra's* Antiquities of Orissa, *vol. I.*[18] *SOURCE:* COURTESY OF SHILPA VIJAYAKRISHNAN.


Original Title-page

THE

ANTIQUITIES OF ORISSA

By

RAJENDRALALA MITRA

HONORARY MEMBER OF THE ROYAL ASIATIC SOCIETY OF GREAT BRITAIN AND IRELAND, AND OF THE IMPERIAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES, VIENNA, CORRESPONDING MEMBER OF THE GERMAN AND THE AMERICAN ORIENTAL SOCIETIES, AND OF THE ROYAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES, HUNGARY; FELLOW OF THE ROYAL SOCIETY OF NORTHERN ANTIQUARIES, COPENHAGEN &C., &C.

THESE ARE SOME OF THE RELICS OF THE PAST, WEEPING OVER A LOST CIVILIZATION AND AN EXTINGUISHED GRANDEUR

Vol. I.

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This appropriation of the museum to nationalist ends was not easily achieved. In the colonial

[15] Markham and Hargreaves, *The Museums of India*, p. 95.

[16] Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals*.

[17] The role of the museum in propping up an official culture can also be seen in the regularity with which museums have been founded in India in tandem with the reorganisation of its political–administrative units. Thus, if one wave of museum-making swept over India in the 1960s in the wake of the redrawing of internal boundaries in 1955, with a State Museum being instituted for each State, then a second wave washed over the North-Eastern states in the 1980s, shortly after the division of greater Assam into smaller states in the 1970s; and a third wave is underway, with new museums in the works for the states of Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh, which gained autonomy in 2000.

[18] Rajendralal Mitra, *Antiquities of Orissa*, vol. I, reprint, Calcutta: Government of India, 1961.

period, the emergence of a cadre of native scholars had already begun to disturb the scholarly and administrative establishment of the era. For example, Bernard Cohn (in a pioneering essay republished as Chapter 1 of this volume) traces the unfortunate case of Cavelly Venkata Luchmiah, the brilliant South Indian assistant of Colin Mackenzie, the first Surveyor-General of India. In the 1830s Luchmiah's career was dismissed out of hand by colonial authorities because a 'native could hardly be pronounced equal to the task'. Half a century on, in the 1880s, the Bengali polymath, Babu Rajendralal Mitra, an archaeologist, Sanskritist, Indologist, and photographer — and the first Indian member of the Asiatic Society in Calcutta — was to become the subject of blistering critique by British Orientalists when he would begin to publish writings that argued that the best qualities of Indian architecture issued from indigenous rather than Western sources (Plate 3).[19] Yet, 40 years later, the tables would be turned: by the second quarter of the 20th century (i.e., a few decades *before* Independence), the field of Oriental scholarship would come to be so fully dominated and fiercely guarded by Indians that in the 1920s the Hungarian-Jewish scholar Stella Kramrisch, who was appointed the first professor of Indian art history at Calcutta University in 1921, was to complain of discrimination at the hands of her Indian colleagues. Only when she published her monumental study, *The Hindu Temple*,[20] did her Vice-Chancellor commend her by saying: 'Of the two of us, you are the better Hindu'[21] (See Plate 4). While the colonial period and its iniquities have been examined in considerable detail, the subsequent period in which the field came to be dominated by Indian scholars and began to serve the needs of nationalism (not occasionally shading off into Hindu majoritarianism) remains an area for further research. Nonetheless, by the middle of the 20th century, a generation of Indian scholars — figures such as C. Sivaramamurti, V. S. Agrawala, Moti Chandra, and Rai Krishnadasa, to name a few — would become leading museum-makers in post-Independence India. They were, without exception, men who had trained as scholars of ancient Indian history and literature; their education equipped them to understand the historical and cultic significance of objects in their care, and they saw the task of Indian museums as the condensation of their growing collections into a narrative useful to an emergent India's needs.

The museum thus helped to catalyse and crystallise an official culture for post-Independence India, one which suggested that diverse artefacts from different regions and epochs shared an underlying unity and harmony, and thus constituted a shared glorious past. The dissemination of this cultural message among the people became a central preoccupation of India's so-called 'Museum Movement' in the decades following Independence in 1947. The challenge for these individuals, who inherited — as the novelist Mulk Raj Anand once complained — a 'bunch of half-dead warehouses from the British', was to 'confront the stranglehold of an obsolete system' and to re-assess, and then re-invent, the museum's responsibilities to its new national public.[22] The ideas of this generation of museum-builders were debated at length at national and regional seminars organised by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and International Council of Museums (ICOM), and in the *Journal of Indian Museums*, which was published by the Museums Association

[19] See Guha-Thakurta, *Monuments, Objects, Histories*; Peter Hoffenberg, *An Empire on Display: English, Indian and Australian Exhibitions from the Crystal Palace to the Great War*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001; Thomas Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

[20] Stella Kramrisch, *The Hindu Temple* (2 vols), Calcutta: University of Calcutta Press, 1946.

[21] Barbara Stoler Miller, 'Stella Kramrisch: A Biographical Essay', in *Exploring India's Sacred Art: Selected Writings by Stella Kramrisch*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983, p. 11. The Vice-chancellor in question was Shyama Prasad Mookerji, who was himself the President of the Mahasabha and the founder of Bharatiya Jana Sangha, a right-wing Hindu party.

[22] Mulk Raj Anand, 'Museum: House of the Muses', *Marg*, vol. 19, no. 1, December 1965, pp. 2–3.

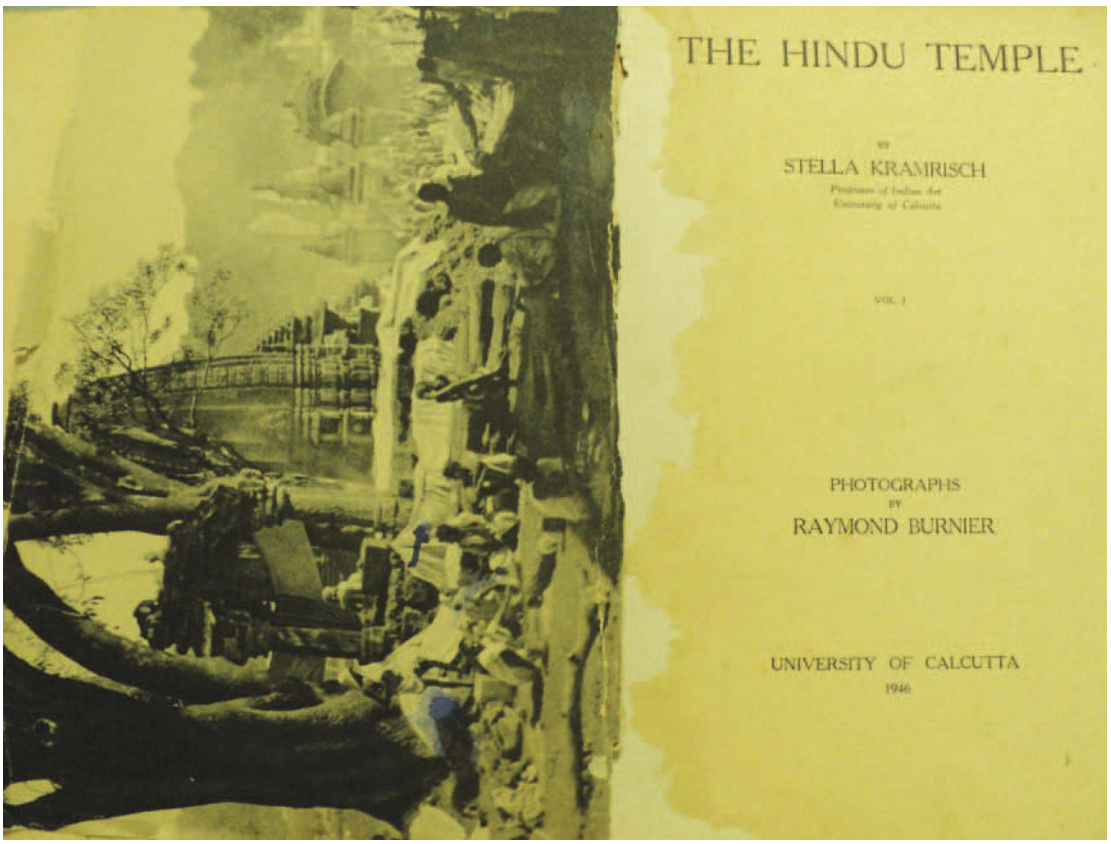

PLATE 4 • *Title page of Stella Kramrisch's* The Hindu Temple. *SOURCE:* COURTESY OF SHILPA VIJAYAKRISHNAN.

of India from 1945 to 1984. Together, these activities chronicle the shifts in emphasis and multifarious directions of museums during this sometimes-haphazard-sometimes-systematic period of their evolution. These records also reveal a persistent concern with 'adult literate and semi-literate viewers', or the 'village folk'; for India's large illiterate masses, the museum was seen as 'the most powerful media to create awareness and disseminate knowledge'.[23] To take their collections to the most 'downtrodden section of our society which needs to be strengthened and enlightened',[24] these museologists also sponsored 'mobile museums', whether in the form of specially adapted buses or exhibit panels that could be carried from place to place. While the museum's regular galleries might continue to show 'high arts' of sculpture and painting, exhibits specifically developed for rural audiences usually focused on 'health, hygiene, population growth, prevalence of superstition', and so on. The imperfect yet principled initiatives of this first generation of museum-makers in the new nation-state to reach the widest cross-section of the Indian masses thus reflect both an extraordinary

[23] For instance, Satya Prakash, 'Museums for an Illiterate Public: Experience in Indian Museums', Proceedings of the UNESCO Regional Seminar on the Development of Museums, 31 January–28 February 1966, New Delhi; M. L. Nigam, 'Indian Museums and Their Public', *Journal of Indian Museums*, vol. 39, 1983, pp. 43–47; G. N. Pant, 'Museums and Mass Education', *idem*., vol. 38, 1982, pp. 92–97.

[24] Nigam, 'Indian Museums and Their Public', p. 45.

commitment to the secular ideals of modern social democracy and a developmentalist pedagogy (not unlike the generation that preceded them) that framed India's uneducated populace as a problem for the museum in need of reform (Plate 5).

The notorious unwillingness on the part of India's subaltern masses to follow the museum's cultural script (to touch, spit and pray in its collections, as it were), has been partly attributed to the idea of *darśan*, the exchange of vision between a devotee and a deity that lies at the heart of Hindu forms of worship. *Darśan* has been defined as a devotional grammar that privileges the act of seeing as a form of contact, so that 'seeing is a kind of touching' and vice-versa: the two gestures of reverence towards the sacred thus become interrelated in a multi-sensory apprehension of the divine.[25] Christopher Pinney has used the concept to explicate, for example, a more 'sensory, corporeal aesthetics' in South Asia, a 'corpothetics', in which seeing and touching are

[25] Diana Eck, *Darśan: Seeing the Divine Image in India*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1998, p. 9.

PLATE 5 • *After Independence: A Museum of their Own. Crowds poring over displays of the newly formed National Museum of India, in its early temporary quarters in the former Viceregal Palace, New Delhi.* *SOURCE:* COURTESY OF THE NATIONAL MUSEUM, NEW DELHI.

embodied and interrelated, in order to construct a 'countertheory of Western visuality', one that is 'less than universal and more than local'.[26]

The concept of *darśan* has thus increasingly emerged at the centre of recent attempts by scholars of South Asia engaged in the 'visual turn' to apprehend the unique embodiments of spectatorship in India, and to comprehend the popularity and riotous nature of certain forms of visual culture in the subcontinent — riotous not only because of their vibrancy and dynamism, but also due to their political power, and their role in the rise of Hindu fundamentalism in the region. Scholars of visual culture in India have thus begun to trace *darśan*'s semantic operations in a variety of 20th-century cultural forms. The protocols of this spectatorial regime have been detected, for instance, in Bollywood cinema, in calendar art, political posters, photography, billboards, indeed, the entire 'interocular' arena of urban and rural visual forms. The proliferation of this '*darśan* discourse' has led Ajay Sinha to caution against the tendency of such analyses to result in an essentialised and reductive difference between Western and Indian aesthetic practices: the concept, when deployed over-zealously, has tended to over-determine all that is 'Indian' about Indian visual culture.[27] For our purposes, it seems important to ask: To what extent can the museum be seen to belong to this logic of popular visual culture in India? And how might these broader discussions about the specific scopic regimes of the subcontinent be relevant for our understanding of the museum and its conditions of spectatorship in its colonial and postcolonial career?

It is apt that a term with religious overtones has come to characterise the field of *seeing* in India. This is so not because it is correct to diagnose religiosity as an inherent civilisational characteristic of Indian publics; rather it is because it makes visible the longstanding predisposition within scholarship to interpret Indian behaviour as tied to sacrality. In reality, as we have seen, it was the museum's distance from the realm of the 'popular' — not its parallels or logical similarities — that became the central concern of an entire generation of museum-builders in India, such as Pramod Chandra, Grace McCann Morley, Hermann Goetz, and L. P. Sihare, to name but a few. Thus, the field of activity of the museum in India cannot be said to belong in any historical sense to the logic of the 'vernacular culture industry' or the popular space of the 'bazaar' that generated the ubiquitous mass print culture known as calendar art.[28] Nor do the modes of spectatorship of popular Indian cinema, where stunning song-and-dance routines intermingle with the penetrating gazes of *darśan* and *nazar* (in the Persian tradition) to cue and harness sexual desire,[29] appear relevant to understanding the visual pleasures of the museum — the pleasure of 'attentive looking', in Svetlana Alpers' terms.[30] Indeed, the museum might be viewed as a 'hard' cultural form, one that seems to 'encapsulate the core moral values of the society' in which it was born.[31] Arjun Appadurai has argued that hard cultural forms are generally not susceptible to radical reinterpretation as they cross social

[26] Christopher Pinney, *Photos of the Gods: The Printed Image and Political Struggle in India*, London: Reaktion Books, 2004, p. 193. The notion of a 'countertheory of Western visuality' is elaborated in his 'Indian Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction: Or, What Happens When Peasants "Get Hold" of Images', in Faye Ginsburg, Lila Abu-Lughod and Brian Larkin (eds), *Media Worlds: Anthropology on New Terrain*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002, p. 356.

[27] Ajay Sinha, 'Visual Culture and the Politics of Locality in Modern India: A Review Essay', *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 41, no. 1, January 2007, pp. 187–220.

[28] Kajri Jain, *Gods in the Bazaar: The Economies of Indian Calendar Art*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007.

[29] Woodman Taylor, 'Penetrating Gazes: The Poetics of Sight and Visual Display in Popular Indian Cinema', in Sumathi Ramaswamy (ed.), *Beyond Appearances? Visual Practices and Ideologies in Modern India*, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2003, pp. 297–322.

[30] Svetlana Alpers, 'The Museum as a Way of Seeing', in I. Karp and S. Lavine (eds), *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991, pp. 25–32.

[31] Arjun Appadurai, 'Playing with Modernity: The Decolonization of Indian Cricket', in Carol Breckenridge (ed.), *Consuming Modernity: Public Culture in a South Asian World*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995, p. 24.

boundaries because the values they represent are 'at their heart puritan ones' in which rigid adherence to a moral code is the point: 'Form closely follows (moral) function here', he has observed.[32] And yet, the example of cricket, a sport that once embodied the elite Victorian ideals of masculinity and which has been superbly possessed and decolonised by the former colonies, points to the power of a process of radical appropriation and 'indigenization' in the colonial context. Such phenomena, therefore, represent, for Appadurai, 'collective and spectacular experiments with modernity'.[33]

We would be hard-pressed to report that the museum was 'indigenised' with quite the same flair as cricket in India, or with a comparable degree of populism and zeal. The makers of Indian museums did not appear, in other words, to fully erode the Victorian moral and didactic structure of the museum, or completely hijack its 'Westernness' to make it entirely their own. Nonetheless, the instability of sacred and secular values accorded to objects in the South Asian context, and the centrality of the museum's recreational function laid bare by subaltern views of the museum as a house of *ajaib*s (or wonders), do suggest a 'collective and spectacular experiment' of sorts, and appear to challenge the premise of a stable, universal 'museum-effect', the notion at the heart of Alpers' influential thesis that museums consolidate *a* specific 'way of seeing'.[34] What allure, we might ask, did the museum have for the vast subaltern audiences who were unable to read its labels and taxonomies and yet still crowded (and presumably sought enjoyment in) its halls throughout the colonial period?

Alas, it is now difficult to recover what the museum visit may have meant to these large audiences taking unaccustomed pleasure in the marbled halls: descriptions of the phenomenon of subaltern visitorship from the period tend to be overwritten by the desires, anxieties, aspirations, and projections of bourgeois museum-makers, bureaucrats and officials. However, a recent study by Savia Viegas offers a rare glimpse into some aspects of the relationship of contemporary subaltern groups to a museum in Mumbai.[35] Viegas demonstrates how segments of an audience remake the museum's meanings according to their political orientations, beliefs and caste. Thus in the arms and armour gallery of the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalay (formerly the Prince of Wales Museum), Viegas found crowds jostling to be photographed next to life-size figures that they took to be local (Hindu) kings Shivaji and Sambhaji despite the museum's labels identifying them as (Muslim) Mughal lords. For a group of rural visitors the museum visit had a ritual significance: these visitors were Dalits, members of the lowest, 'untouchable' castes who have recently rejected Hinduism to embrace the more egalitarian faith of Buddhism instead. On a special festival day, these visitors came to see the ancient Buddhist sculptures that they consider 'their' heritage, and many were upset to see that the Hindu sculptures were accommodated in grand galleries while Buddhist ones were relegated to the corridors. In the floor plan of the museum, in other words, these viewers could see a map of their own marginality.[36]

In the manner of Viegas' suggestive study, the essays that follow do not point to a single, alternative spectatorial contract emerging from the space of display in the non-West; nor do they reveal a wholesale reinvention of the museum's post-Enlightenment stage. The contributions in this volume do, however, articulate and make visible a variety of contingent museum-effects, which are culturally and historically grounded in the paradoxical formations of colonial and postcolonial societal relations. Indeed, the story that emerges from the writers in this volume is a highly ambiguous narrative of the museum's formation in India; it is a story of reception and spectatorship in tension with

[32] *Ibid*.

[33] *Ibid*.

[34] Alpers, 'The Museum as a Way of Seeing'.

[35] Savia Savia Viegas, 'Rich Men's Collections, A Nation's Heritage, and Poor Men's Perceptions: Visitors at the Prince of Wales Museum of Western India', *Teaching South Asia*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2001.

[36] *Ibid*., see particularly fn 5.

alterity: of hits-and-misses at the level of practice and ideas, of ambition and innovation constrained by historical limitations, and of instability and a lack of consensus across societal upheaval and radical social change. The essays make visible, in some cases for the first time, a host of individual and professional activities in India — the practices of curators, directors, artists, critics, and cultural thinkers — who pioneered new paradigms for the museum and debated the institution's utopian ideals. Indeed, the very idea of the museum as static, moribund, irrelevant, and anachronistic, is resituated in the work collected here, by way of archival research and critical reflection, as itself an anachronism to be productively engaged.

Section I of the volume, 'Inaugural Formations', gathers together some of the most penetrating observations on the colonial history of the museum in India and represents the work of scholars in historical anthropology, art history and history. It begins with anthropologist Bernard Cohn's pioneering account of how British conceptions of value were gradually imposed onto India as part of the larger European project to claim authority over the history of the subcontinent. 'Each phase of the European effort to unlock the secret of the Indian past', Cohn has argued, 'called for more and more collecting, more and more systems of classification, more and more building of repositories for the study of the past and the representation of the European history of India to Indians as well as themselves'. Significantly, Cohn's account of Colin Mackenzie's 'almost demonic urge' to collect the history of South India for the imperial survey at the beginning of the century emphasised the role of his Indian staff — the 'native men' who were enlisted to assist Mackenzie as writers, translators and interpreters, some of whom accompanied him across the country for decades — which dramatised the discrepant subjectivities at stake in this increasingly bureaucratic, yet intimate, historical encounter. Similarly, Cohn's account of the journey of a single collection, which started with Colin Mackenzie in South India, showed how many individual interests, false starts, personalities, political agendas, and scholarly reputations were invested over the course of decades to produce what James Fergusson definitively claimed to be a scientific history of India.

Cohn's work, which has been seminal to the anthropology of colonial knowledge, was developed prior to the foundational insights into the workings of power and knowledge formulated by Michel Foucault and Edward Said, as Nicholas Dirks has observed.[37] For our purposes, Cohn's conceptualisation of early museology in the colony as an 'investigative modality',[38] linked to the European view of the country itself as a vast museum, is similarly foundational, and it led him to articulate colonial collecting practices in relation to other modalities of investigation, such as historiography, enumeration, statistical survey, and textual translation. The project that Cohn understood as the 'objectification' of India was thus enmeshed in all manner of processes of interpretation that brought value and meaning to a given object; objectification was not merely instrumental but also unintended, and its results were always historically specific. As Dirks has noted, one of the accomplishments of Cohn's far-reaching analysis was the manner in which he moved from 'limb to limb of the colonial elephant', without arriving at closure or seeking the last word.[39]

A degree of indebtedness to the work of Bernard Cohn is discernible in the two essays that follow, by Tapati Guha-Thakurta and Gyan Prakash, which further historicise the vast conceptual and institutional schema that brought the museum into its fold. These authors, like Cohn, trace the origins of the museum in India to the early collecting impulses of William Jones' Asiatic Society (founded in 1784), where a small constituency of learned Orientalists began to institutionalise their knowledge through India's material culture.

[37] Nicholas Dirks, 'Foreword', in Bernard Cohn, *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996, pp. ix–xvii.

[38] Bernard Cohn, *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996, p. 9.

[39] Dirks, 'Foreword', p. xvii.

Guha-Thakurta demonstrates how these early collecting activities became the basis for India's first museum, the Indian Museum in Calcutta (established in 1814), and she skilfully maps how the latter converged with the parallel history of archaeology in the region. However, Guha-Thakurta's essay is not merely concerned with articulating the role of the museum in these wider apparatuses of colonial knowledge. Instead, she investigates 'the ways this project of producing and disseminating knowledge would be fractured in the course of its enactment in Indian history', and emphasises the field of 'deviations and dissonance' at work in the museum's transplantation from metropole to colony. Notably, for Guha-Thakurta, the tension 'lodged at the heart of the museum's self-conception', between the museum as a domain for scholars and specialists and its status as an *ajaib ghar* (or 'wonder-house') for the Indian masses, emerges as a space of 'hybridity and difference' in which the official, intended role of the museum is fractured by its many unintended meanings during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Thus, the profile that emerges of the colonial museum is not that of a stable foundation with a single coherent direction: it is rather marred by various fault lines and flaws, ambivalences and dissensions, anxieties and insecurities, and the 'contrary compulsions' of science and magic, truth and myth, all of which left their mark in one way or another on the museum's institutional frame.

Gyan Prakash similarly emphasises the instability and indeterminacy of the museum, which is itself foregrounded, he suggests, by Rudyard Kipling in the opening scene of his famous novel, *Kim*.[40] That museums and exhibitions in the colony functioned as signs of Western power is, by now, an 'often-told tale', Prakash admits. His interest, by contrast, is in the 'distorted life of the dominant discourse', namely, the 'subterfuges, paradoxes, distortions, and failures' that punctuated this exercise of power. Prakash thus turns, by the end of his essay, to the rumours circulating about the Madras Museum at the turn of the previous century that were reported with a degree of discomfort by Edgar Thurston, who served as its Superintendent from 1885 to 1910. Significantly, Prakash — a member of the influential collective of Subaltern Studies historians — reads Thurston's account of these rumours within the local population not as testimony of 'the native's point of view', an approach that regards history itself as something to be peeled back in order to reveal the truth, but as constitutive of 'a moment of crisis in the representation of difference', one that can lead to the opening rather than closing of possibilities. As Prakash has argued provocatively elsewhere, encased objects from the colonial world exert pressure on the frames that contain them; neglected and fossilised displays (like those of the Madras Museum) can today be read as 'meta-museums'; and curators can develop institutional strategies 'to make appropriated objects tell "inappropriate" stories'.[41] Not only, therefore, do 'museums matter', but they appear to matter more than ever before given the changed conditions of spectatorship and display in which museums operate in the world today.

Prakash's assertion that the museums of a bygone era represent, in some sense, the 'anachronisms of humanism', is an insightful point of entry into Section II of the volume, titled 'National Re-orientations'.[42] For the profound symbolism of the museum to the 'new nations' of the 20th century in Asia, Africa and Latin America, which led them to construct, in Kavita Singh's terms, 'shrines to the national culture', would seem to produce equally anachronistic effects. Singh's essay reads the narrative of the National Museum in Delhi, inaugurated in 1949, as a reification of the nationalist art history defined in the decades prior to Independence, and also connects the institution to an earlier plan for museums developed during the British Raj. Singh demonstrates how the displays

[40] Rudyard Kipling, *Kim*, London: Wordworth Editions, Ltd., 1993.

[41] Gyan Prakash, 'Museums Matter', in Bettina Massias Carbonell (ed.), *Museum Studies: An Anthology of Contexts*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004, pp. 208–15.

[42] *Ibid*., p. 213.

in the museum's new galleries highlighted and privileged the masterworks and periods promoted by such nationalist thinkers as E. B. Havell and A. K. Coomaraswamy. But she also argues that the museum answered to the specific needs of the post-Independence period by delineating a continuous and unified high culture throughout Indian history, one that privileged stone sculpture as a primordial medium for the re-enactment of India's greatness while relegating other materials — textiles, woodwork, jewellery, decorative arts, and painting — to less central spaces. One consequence of this shift in the mode of display from 'chronology' to 'material', Singh suggests, was the dispersal of Islamic material across many galleries, effectively lifting India's Islamic art from the chronological circuits of its cultural history. As Singh observes, the result — both startling and entirely normalised — 'is and was that one can walk right through the National Museum and be only dimly aware of the fact the Mughals had been in India'.

Kristy Phillips' account of the National Museum offers another chapter in the history of this institution, one that emerges in the 1960s with the arrival of Grace McCann Morley, the American woman appointed first director of the new National Museum in 1960. Morley came to India after three decades of work in American museums; she was a student of Paul Sach's Museum Course at Harvard University (along with the likes of Alfred Barr, the first director of the Museum of Modern Art or MoMA in New York), and was recognised for her pioneering exhibitions in America of modern artists such as Klee, Miro and Kandinsky, and later, Pollock, Rothko and Motherwell. Phillips explains how Morley's remarkable, yet under-examined, personal trajectory came to converge with the modernising projects of Nehruvian nationalism, and she demonstrates how her self-conscious efforts to reshape an enduring Victorian model of museum pedagogy into a distinctly American one emphasised, above all, the primacy of an 'aesthetic experience' and the formalist values of modern art. If the successful acquisition of a pre-Columbian collection of art and artefacts from Mexico, Central and South America represented, for Morley, the 'ultimate national achievement' for the museum, this ambition — as Phillips shows — was apparently not shared by her successors. The pre-Columbian gallery at the National Museum remains virtually unchanged today: strange, dissonant and incongruent, the space represents, according to Phillips, a 'messy product of tensions' between nationalist expectations, political experimentation and the uncertainties of India's drive towards the modern.

The aspirations of another national institution in Delhi, the National Gallery of Modern Art (NGMA) established in 1954 with German art historian Hermann Goetz as its first director, is the subject of the final essay in this section by Vidya Shivadas. By turning briefly to the collections built by E. B. Havell in Calcutta, Sayaji Rao in Baroda and Ravi Varma in Travancore during the first half of the century, Shivadas constructs a mini-genealogy of the public art gallery in 20th-century India. She also locates the early bid for a national-level institution within a community of modern artists in the 1930s, and shows how the vision for a public institution articulated by the artist-brothers, Barada and Sarada Ukil (and their artist-based organisation All India Fine Arts & Crafts Society or AIFACS), would take a rather different course by the 1950s as it entered the hands of the Nehruvian state. Shivadas then turns her critical eye on NGMA's acquisition of 96 paintings by Amrita Sher-Gil, which was celebrated by the British modern art critic, W. G. Archer, as the 'solid core of greatness' of the gallery. Although this collection would shape the institution in powerful ways, it was formed, as Shivadas notes with caution, 'as much by design as by default'. Her account of how the NGMA embraced the shift towards abstraction by the 1970s under the directorship of L. P. Sihare (who served during 1971–84), and promoted the so-called Neo-Tantric art movement, offers a similarly sceptical narrative in light of the aggrandisement of this movement within the international art market. As Shivadas argues, Neo-Tantric art presented a perfect fit between an Indian visual vocabulary and international trends in abstraction, even as it echoed Havell's emphasis on the authentic spirituality and transcendentalism of Indian art, and was thus exported by the NGMA

in increasingly instrumental ways by the time of the Festival of India in the early 1980s.

The latter phenomenon — the Festival of India — is central to the emerging landscape for museums in the essay co-authored by Arjun Appadurai and Carol Breckenridge, which opens the third and final section of the volume, 'Contemporary Engagements'. In this widely cited essay, 'Museums are Good to Think', first published in 1992, Appadurai and Breckenridge laid the gauntlet for an inventive, new approach to museums as 'plugged into the circuits of travel, tourism, pilgrimage and leisure', and as relevant, more broadly, to the profound cultural shifts occurring in Indian public life at the end of the 20th century. For Appadurai and Breckenridge, the museum was part of a constellation of emergent phenomena — including the exhibition-cum-sale, the national festival format, the explosion of television and cinema, and the increasingly commercial orientations for display — that signalled the beginnings of a new politics of heritage within the neo-liberal processes of a globalising world. If their attempt to construct the 'interocular field' within which museums operate led to an emphasis on the 'extra-museological' over the discursive structure of a specific museum site, their broad sociological approach, and their call for further examination of how museums were situated in Indian society, nonetheless presented a set of debatable directions for the underdeveloped field of postcolonial museology at the time. Moreover, Appadurai and Breckenridge's insistence on the evolving nature of the cultural processes at stake offers an opportunity to re-assess some two decades later, with the benefit of hindsight and a degree of discrimination, the different kinds of investments that have come to converge on the proposition that museums are 'good to think'.

Mary Hancock's investigation of Dakshina-Chitra, an open-air museum and cultural centre on the outskirts of Chennai that is committed to sustaining the pre-modern artisanal traditions of South India, is an excellent example of such an investment. In her essay, Hancock traces DakshinaChitra's origins in 1997 to the same economic forces — deregulation, privatisation and decentralisation — that have transformed the Chennai–Mamallapuram corridor where this museum-cum-heritage-complex is located. Hancock further reveals how the museum's administrative and managerial staff — and its affluent base of donors and visitors — largely comprise the urban elites who have benefited from these forces of liberalisation, and she identifies a distinctive 'affective register' this creates in the museum's cultural programmes and physical space. One result, for Hancock, is the performance of '*swadeshi* chic', whereby craft is recast as dynamic and innovative, in contrast to the clichés of a timeless tradition; another is the idiom of 'rural real', which resonates with heritage projects in other parts of the world that are similarly defined by gentrification. And still, the profound paradox that Hancock reveals at the heart of DakshinaChitra remains striking. As she argues, DakshinaChitra's mission to sustaining the 'rural, artisanal lifeworlds' of South India is thus premised on consumerist expectations that a thriving free-market economy and the museum's commercial success (epitomised by the development of its own product brand, *DaCh*) will serve to revitalise local artisanal production and enable the conservation of indigenous architecture and design. In other words, DakshinaChitra's mode of response to the destructive forces of industrialisation are rooted in the same conditions — privatisation and deregulation — that have begun to irreversibly transform the area into India's so-called 'BioTech Valley'.[43] Indeed, the museological operation that her essay describes — in its benevolent logic and apparent ubiquity — is something like a 'salvage paradigm' updated for our neoliberal times.

The subsequent essay, written by the volume's co-editors Saloni Mathur and Kavita Singh, addresses another difficult subject in contemporary India: namely, the museum's relationship to the vexed phenomenon of religious revivalism in contemporary South Asia. Drawing from their

[43] This is elaborated in her book: Mary Hancock, *The Politics of Heritage from Madras to Chennai*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008.

collaboration, Mathur and Singh identify three institutions, recently completed or still under construction, in which the identity politics of Buddhist, Hindu and Sikh groups are played out respectively. Whether defining themselves as museums, temples or memorial-shrines, these three very different examples, according to the authors, represent self-conscious appropriations of the muséal mode, its scopic technologies and its secular authority, to facilitate and legitimate the aspirations of the ethnic-religious constituencies that support them. Mathur and Singh thus argue that the museum is emerging in 21st-century India as one of the key cultural forms through which religious revivalism and cultural nationalism are attempting to consolidate both their statements and their constituencies. They call for an analysis that situates the museum between the pushes and pulls of a unified, state-mandated national culture on the one hand, and the differential claims to politics and citizenship made by a range of social communities loosely identified as 'post-national', on the other hand.

The volume concludes with a set of short descriptive extracts from a team of graduate student fieldworkers who participated in the research collaboration titled 'Museology and the Colony: The Case of India', funded by the Getty Grant Program (2005–08). These student researchers (13 in all) conducted ethnographic case-studies of about 80 contemporary museological sites in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. By presenting a sampling of first-person narratives of these fieldworkers as they encountered a large swathe of museological phenomena in far-flung locales, in often unexpected and surprising ways, this final chapter of the book, titled 'Museum Watching', animates the variety and often-quirky distinctiveness of South Asia's museum landscape through the multiple perspectives of first-hand accounts. The field of museums that emerges through the portraits of these researchers is thus unpredictable, open-ended, partial and contingent, and constructed, above all, as a space of encounter.

It seems fitting to conclude this Introduction by returning to the museum example with which we began: the KMoMA in West Bengal. This is because KMoMA remains, at the time of this writing, a museum that has not yet been made: it is a beginning, an opening, a work-in-progress, not an end. Although it is impossible to say how this project will unfold, KMoMA is symptomatic of the field of experimentation that has come to characterise the arena of modern and contemporary art in South Asia, an energised and seemingly unstoppable sphere of activity from which new museum spaces and dialogues have emerged in recent years, often initiated by artists themselves. These evolving museological modalities have been driven in part by the failure of older institutional paradigms to respond to the global orientations of contemporary art, and in part by the need for alternatives to the market-saturated spaces of the commercial gallery system. Notable examples in Delhi include two non-profit, collector-based venues: the Devi Art Foundation, whose sequence of exhibitions drawn from the Lekha and Anupam Poddar collection encourages the practices of younger artists and curators, and the Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, which presents an impressive survey of contemporary Indian art through its permanent exhibition, and which seeks to catalyse discourse and discussion. These relatively recent initiatives, supported by the success of the Indian Art Fair in Delhi (formerly the India Art Summit), an annual commercial platform for modern and contemporary art in the region, contrast sharply in their philanthropic missions with the mega-museum paradigm embodied by KMoMA. We draw attention to these evolving models, in spite of their unknowable futures, because they function — like this volume itself — to pry open the question of the museum in South Asia, rather than to settle the subject in any definitive way.

The contributions that follow do not reflect a single intellectual agenda, nor do they assert a specific methodological plan. Instead, they bring, in one way or another, historical analysis, scholarly rigour and the insights of colonial and postcolonial understanding, to invigorate contemporary approaches to the field of the museum in South Asia. The various themes that emerge in these studies — alterity, spectatorship, curatorship, display — invariably open on to

much larger issues such as democracy, citizenship, religion, nationalism, and the unfolding of culture in late capitalist modernity. If the historical lessons articulated here point to the necessity of caution and intellectual scepticism in the face of the museum's more audacious experiments, we hope that they also lead the reader towards more informed, confident and impassioned engagements with the powerful seductions of its 21st-century forms.

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the transformation of objects into artefacts, antiquities and art in 19th-century India

Bernard Cohn

This chapter explores how things are fabricated and how they are transformed into objects that have value and meaning. The context is India and Great Britain in the 19th century.

An object, be it a fired piece of clay, a bone, paper with colours applied to it, a lump of metal shaped into a sharp point, a shiny stone which is polished, a feather, everything that we think of as existing in nature, can be transformed through human labour into a product which has a meaning, use and value.

A pot shard dug up and placed in a museum with a label identifying and dating it becomes a specimen along with thousands of others, which establish, for the archaeologist, a history. A bone found in a particular geological formation becomes a fossil for a paleontologist to read as part of an evolutionary sequence. For someone else this bone ground up becomes an aphrodisiac. The paper covered by paint is a god; in another time and place, it is a work of art. A piece of cloth fabricated for presentation marking the alliance between two families through marriage becomes a bedspread. A piece of metal shaped and sharpened and used as a weapon by a great warrior becomes for his descendants an emblem of his power, and is carefully stored away in an armoury, to be brought out in times of trouble to rally a failing army. In the hands of his enemies, it becomes a trophy. A piece of cloth worn by a religious leader at his moment of death has magical powers and for generations is revered as a relic.

The nominal subject of this volume (patronage in Indian culture)[1] raises another set of questions about the production and meaning of objects, by shifting the focus from the fabricators of objects to those who commission, pay for, protect, support, and utilise the results of the labour and thought of the producers. In the language of the Oxford English Dictionary (OED), a patron is 'one who supports or protects, an institution, a cause, art or undertaking', and patronage, it goes on to define in its 'commercial or colloquial usage', is 'financial support given by the customers in making use of anything established, opened or offered for the use of the public'.[2]

The examples of this usage given in the OED all date from the 19th century. In this chapter I will explore patronage in an extended sense, as a relationship located in a political context, in which the British increasingly impose on Indians their own conception of value. The objects through which this relationship was constructed were found, discovered, collected, and classified as part of a larger European project to decipher *the* history of India.

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[1] This essay was first published in Barbara Stoler Miller (ed.), *The Powers of Art: Patronage in Indian Culture*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1992, pp. 301–29.

[2] *The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary*, vol. II, New York: Oxford University Press, 1971, p. 2100.

It was the British who, in the 19th century, defined in an authoritative and effective fashion how the value and meaning of the objects produced or found in India were determined. It was the patrons who created a system of classification which determined what was valuable, that which would be preserved as monuments of the past, that which was collected and placed in museums, that which could be bought and sold, that which would be taken from India as mementoes and souvenirs of their own relationship to India and Indians. The foreigners increasingly established markets which set the price of objects. By and large, until the early 20th century, Indians were bystanders to the discussions and polemics which established meaning and value for the Europeans. Even when increasing numbers of Indians entered into the discussion, the terms of the discourse and the agenda were set by European purposes and intentions.[3]

From the inceptions of direct trading relations between Great Britain and India in the early 17th century, India was looked upon as the source of commodities, the sale of which in Europe and Asia would produce profits for the owners and employees of the East India Company. Textiles in bulk and value came to be the primary Indian product imported and sold by the Company in Europe. Hence it was through these textiles that India was primarily known to the consuming classes in Britain and Western Europe. The impact of Indian cloth was to play a major role in creating what Chandra Mukherji terms 'modern materialism', and the development of industrial capitalism, in the efforts of 18th-century British entrepreneurs to find technological means by which British labour could organise to compete with Indian-made textiles. One gets a sense of how deeply embedded Indian goods are in Anglo-American culture through our language, in which so many terms relating to cloth have their origin in India.[4] In addition to those Indian products that were essentially seen as utilitarian goods, there was scattered interest in the 16th and 17th centuries in items thought of as curios and preciosities, or what today might be thought of as 'collectibles'. These include odd paintings, both by Indians and Lusho-Indians, inlaid ivory chests and other items of furniture, jewellery and precious stones, swords and weapons to be used as decorative items.[5]

European interpretative strategies for 'knowing' India: 1600–1750

The major interpretative strategy by which India was to become known to Europeans in the 17th and 18th centuries was through a construction of a history for India. India was seen by Europeans not only as exotic and bizarre but as a kind of living museum of the European past. In India could be found 'all the characters who are found in the Bible' and the 'books which tell of the Jews and other ancient nations'.[6] The religion of the Gentoos was described as having been established at the time of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, and preserved by Noah; or the religion of 'the seed of those who revolted against Moses' and the worshippers of the 'molten calf'.[7] The Brahmans were Levites or Nazarites; Jains, Rehabites. Indians were, for some

[3] In writing this paper I have relied heavily on the works of Mildred Archer, Pramod Chandra and Partha Mitter, who have made accessible through their researches to an outsider, such as myself, the history of European interpretations of Indian art, architecture and antiquities in the 19th century.

[4] Chandra Mukherji, *From Graven Images: Patterns of Modern Materialism*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1983, pp. 166–209; John Irwin, *Studies in Indo-European Textile History*, Ahmedabad: Calico Museum of Textiles, 1966; John Irwin and Margaret Hall, *Indian Painted and Printed Fabrics*, Ahmedabad: Calico Museum of Textiles, 1971.

[5] Donald F. Lach, *Asia in the Making of Europe*, vol. 2, book 1: *The Visual Arts*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970, pp. 7–55.

[6] De La Crequinière, *The Agreement of the Customs of the East-Indians with those of the Jews, and other Ancient People*, London: Printed for W. Davis, 1705, p. 216.

[7] Jean de Thevenot, *Travels into the Levant*, London: Printed by H. Clark, for H. Faithorne, J. Adamson, C. Skegnes, and T. Newborough, 1687, p. 65; Thomas Bowrey, *A Geographical Account of the Countries around the Bay of Bengal*, Cambridge: Printed for the Hakluyt Society, 1905, p. 25.

Europeans, the direct descendants of one of the lost 10 tribes, for others manners and customs of Indians derived from the ancient Egyptians who were the descendants of Ham, the son of Noah.

The Bible and the medieval patristic literature offered another interpretation of the culture and religions of India for the European travellers: this was the home of the traditional enemies of Christianity, Satan and his devils. One of the earliest of the British travellers in India knew what the religion of the Gentoos was all about.

> But above all, their horrid Idolatry to Pagods (or Images of deformed devils) is most observable: Placed in Chappels most commonly built under the Bannyan Trees. A tree of such repute amongst 'em, that they hold it impiety to abuse it, either in breaking a branch or otherwise, but contrarily adorne it with Streamers of silk and ribbons of all colours. The Pagods are sundry sorts and resemblances, in such shape as Satan visibly appears unto them: ugly faced, long blackhaire, gogl'd eyes, wide mouth, a forked beard, hornes and stradling, mishapen and horrible, after the old filthy forme of Pan and Priapus.[8]

To have found the devil and Satan in India was not strange and unusual to the Europeans, as they knew they were there all along. Recent scholarship had tended to stress that European accounts of the peoples of the New World, Africa and Asia, dwelt less on the strangeness of the 'other' but rather on their familiarity. The 'exotic', writes Michael Ryan, could be fitted into a familiar web of discourse, as they were after all heathens and pagans, and 'no matter how bizarre and offbeat he appeared the unbaptised exotic was just that — a heathen'.[9] When travelling in a strange land, even meeting an old enemy, the devil, is something of a comfort.

Europeans knew the world through its signs and correspondences to things known. The exploration of the terrestrial world was being carried out at the same time that Europeans were exploring their own origins in the pagan past of Greece and Rome. Hence another way of knowing Indians arose through looking for conformities between the living exotics of India and their ancient counterparts in Egypt, Greece and Rome. The exotic and the antique were one and the same.[10] Brahmans, yogis and sadhus were 'gymnosophists', followers of creators of the Pythagorian ideas about the transmigration of souls. These holy men in their benign mode were naked philosophers who in some medieval European traditions were the symbols of natural goodness 'who embodies the possibility of salvation without revelation … outside the established Church'.[11] The Brahmans and yogis as 'good' were to eventually lose out to another reading, and become the perpetrators of superstitions, which they created and manipulated to mystify and keep subordinated the rest of the Hindu population of India. The yogi, the sannyasi, the fakir, the sadhu had by the 18th century been converted into living devils and the followers of all that was lascivious and degenerate in Greek and Roman religion, the worship of Pan and Priapus.

The literature on India of the 17th and early 18th centuries varies in its content but it established an enduring structural relationship between India and the West: Europe was progressive and changing, India static. Here could be found a kind of living fossil bed of the European past, a museum which was to provide Europeans for the next two hundred years a vast field on which to impose their own visions of history. India was found to be the land of oriental despotism, with its cycles of strong but lawless rules, whose inability to create a political order based on anything but unbridled power led inevitably to its own destruction in a war of all against all, leading to anarchy and chaos.

The British, in their construction of the history of India, came into the Indic world at one of its

[8] Thomas Herbert, *Some Years Travels into Africa and Asia Major*, London: Printed by R. Bishop for Jacob Blome and Richard Bishop, 1638, p. 443, illust. 1.

[9] Michael Ryan, 'Assimilating New Worlds in the 18th and 17th Centuries', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 1981, p. 525.

[10] *Ibid*., p. 527.

[11] Thomas Hahn, 'The Indian Tradition in Western Medieval Intellectual History', *Viator 9*, 1978, p. 214.

periods of inevitable decay and degeneration into chaos. Through the development of their version of rational despotism, they were able to find and maintain a stable basis for ordering Indian society. Fortunately it turned out that there were enduring and unchanging institutions in India at the local level. The traditional Indian state was epiphenominal and it was found to have no political order, rather India turned out to be a land of unchanging institutions based on family, caste and the village community. The 'discovery' of the relationship between the classical languages of Europe, Latin and Greek, and Indian Sanskrit, led to refinement of comparative method. This enabled the Europeans to provide India with a macrohistory organised into developmental stages. Certain universal features were constructed as markers of progress; the presence or absence of communal or private property, of the centralised state and kingship, of pastoralism or settled agriculture, became markers of progress or the lack thereof.

The British found that some parts of India were still at the feudal stage of development. Indian modes of production were at a pre-industrial stage, whose products could be taken to represent what Europe had lost through industrialisation.

India was to be provided with a linear history following a 19th-century positivist historiography as well. Ruins could be dated, inscriptions made to reveal king lists, texts could be converted into sources for the study of the past. Each phase of the European effort to unlock the secret of the Indian past called for more and more collecting, more and more systems of classification, more and more building of repositories for the study of the past and the representation of the European history of India to Indians as well as themselves.

the state and the surveying of the Indian past

The capture of Seringapatam in 1799, and the final defeat of Tipu Sultan, begins the direct involvement of the Company's government in a systematic effort to explore and document India's past. The Company now controlled most of India south of the Vindhya mountains, completing a military and diplomatic conquest begun 50 years earlier. This victory, combined with Lord Lakes' entry into Delhi in 1803, ended whatever doubts there were that the British were now the conquerors of India and had fulfilled Alexander's historical ambitions. The death of Tipu, the arch villain in the emergent British hagiography of India, provided the necessary counterpoint to construction of the British as valourous, virtuous, and above all, triumphant conquerors.

The Company had a governor-general, Lord Wellesley, who matched the times. Unlike the owners and managers of the Company, who rarely looked beyond the ledger sheets, Wellesley had an imperial vision of the future of India. His first move was to establish a college in Calcutta, where the young employees of the Company who were no longer just 'agents of a commercial concern' were to be trained 'as ministers and officers of a powerful sovereign'.[12] In addition, Wellesley recognised the need for systematic collection of information about the natural resources, the arts and manufacturers and the social and economic conditions of the inhabitants of the newly acquired territories of south India. To this end Wellesley established several surveys, the model of which can be seen in Sir John Sinclair's statistical surveys of the highlands of Scotland.[13]

In the late 18th and early 19th centuries the term 'statistical' did not imply as it does today the collection, aggregation and presentation of numerical data, rather it implied collection of information thought necessary and useful to the state. Since the time of William Camden (1551–1623) information had been collected and published about current conditions, history and antiquities of various localities in Great Britain. Central to

[12] Montgomery Martin (ed.), *The Despatches, Minutes, and Correspondence, of the Marquess of Wellesley, K.G., during his administration in India*, London: J. Murray, 1836, vol. 2, pp. 329–30.

[13] 'Sir John Sinclair's statistical surveys of the highlands of Scotland' were completed between 1791–99 and represent the first attempt to compile social and economic statistics for Scottish parishes. It was published as *The Statistical Account of Scotland*, Edinburgh: Creech, 1791–99.

this endeavour was the location and description of old buildings, ruins, sites of ancient settlements, collection of family histories, and genealogies, as well as the description of local customs and laws, thought to be antique or unusual.

Wellesley established three separate surveys of the Mysore territories, one under the direction of Colonel Colin Mackenzie, which was to embrace 'two leading objects, Mathematical and Physical'.[14] Another was under the direction of Francis Buchanan (Hamilton), who was instructed by Wellesley that the primary object of his enquiries 'should be the agriculture of the country', and Benjamin Heyne, who under Mackenzie's direction was to collect botanical and geological specimens.[15]

Little is known of the first 28 years of Mackenzie's life. He was born and grew up in Stornoway on the Island of Lewis in the Hebrides, his father a merchant, and the family had connections with the owners of the island, the Seaforths. He had, early on, shown great talent in mathematics, and assisted Lord Napier of Merchiston in the writing of a biography of his ancestor John Napier, the inventor of English logarithms. It would appear it was in connection with an interest Merchiston had in Hindu mathematics that an appointment in the Madras Engineers was obtained for Mackenzie in 1783.[16]

For a short while after his arrival in India in 1782, Mackenzie worked with Lord Merchiston's daughter in Madurai, along with several brahmans employed to collect materials on Hindu mathematics. Soon, however, his official duties prevented his pursuing his interests in 'collecting observations and notices of Hindoo manners geography and history'. Mackenzie's military duties took him to most of the provinces south of the Kistna river, but frequent transfers, and the demands of his military profession, prevented him from learning any of the 'native languages'. Any opportunity for the systematic study of 'objects' and 'traits of customs and institutions that could have been explained, had time and means admitted of the inquery' was lost.[17]

Mackenzie credited his meeting and subsequent association with Cavelli Venkata Boria, a Telugu brahman, in 1796 with enabling him to enter into 'the portal of Indian knowledge'.[18] Boria was 20 when he was employed by Mackenzie to act as his interpreter and more importantly to direct a growing staff of Indians, who were to be employed for the next 21 years by Mackenzie in travelling throughout south India, collecting texts, inscriptions, artefacts, and all kinds of historical and sociological information. Some of this vast amount of work was done with official patronage as an adjunct to Mackenzie's topological surveying and mapmaking. Mackenzie was eventually to become the surveyor general of India. Boria at 20 had studied Sanskrit, Persian, Hindustani, and English, in addition to knowing Tamil and Telugu. At the age of 16 he held his first job with the British as a writer and interpreter.[19] Until his death at the age of 26 in 1803 he accompanied Mackenzie, recording

[14] R. H. Phillmore, *Historical Records of the Survey of India*, vol. 2, Dehra Dun: Survey of India, Geodetic Branch, 1950, p. 91.

[15] Francis Hamilton, *A Journey from Madras through the Countries of Mysore, Canara and Malabar, performed under the orders of the most noble the Marquis Wellesley, governor general of India, for the express purpose of investigating the state of agriculture, arts, and commerce; the religion, manners, and customs; the history natural and civil, and antiquities, in the dominions of the rajah of Mysore, and the countries acquired by the Honourable East Inida company*, vol. 1, London: T. Cadell and W. Davis, 1807, p. vii; Benjamin Heyne, *Tracts, Historical and Statistical on India*, London: Printed for Robert Baldwin, and Black, Parry, and Co. booksellers to the Hon. East India Co., 1814; Phillmore, *Historical Records*, pp. 405–6.

[16] William Cook Mackenzie, *Colonel Colin Mackenzie: First Surveyor General of India*, Edinburgh: W. & R. Chambers, 1952, pp. 1–10; H. H. Wilson, *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Mackenzie Collection*, 2nd ed., Calcutta: Asiatic Press, 1828; reprinted Madras: Higgenbotham and Co., 1882.

[17] Colin Mackenzie, 'Biographical Sketch … Contained in a Letter Addressed by Him to the Right Honourable Sir Alexander Johnson', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society 1*, 1834, p. 335.

[18] *Ibid*.

[19] Cavelly Venkata Ramaswami, 'Biographical Sketches of Dekkan Poets', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society 1*, 1834, pp. 140–44.

temple inscriptions, deciphering obsolete scripts and translating books, manuscripts and documents. In addition, Boria, according to his brother Cavelly Venkata Ramaswami, wrote poems in Sanskrit and Telugu, including a poetical account of the fall of Seringapatam.

Mackenzie's ambition was to compile the source material necessary to write a history of south India. The Mysore Survey continued for almost 10 years. Mackenzie summarised the results of this work:

(a) The discovery of the *Jaina* religion and philosophy, and its distinction from that of Buddha.
(b) The different ancient sects of religion in this country, and their subdivisions — the *Lingavanta*, the *Saivam* and *Pandaram Matts*, etc.
(c) The nature and use of the *Sassanam*s, and inscriptions on stone and copper, and their utility in throwing light on the important subject of Hindu tenures; confirmed by upwards of 3,000 authentic inscriptions collected since 1800, hitherto always overlooked.
(d) The design and nature of the monumental stones and trophies found in various parts of the country from Cape Comorin to Delhi, called *Virakal* and *Maastikal*, which illustrate the ancient customs of the early inhabitants, and, perhaps, of the early Western nations.
(e) The sepulchral tumeli, mounds and barrows of the early tribes, similar to those found throughout the continent of Asia and of Europe, illustrated by drawings, and various other notices of antiquities and institutions.[20]

The most active period of the Survey was from 1800 to 1810, when Mackenzie became chief engineer for the expedition sent to Java. Here had remained until 1813, where along with his military duties he initiated a survey similar to that being carried out in south India.[21] Mackenzie then returned to his post as surveyor of Madras, and in 1815, somewhat against his wishes, he was transferred to Calcutta and appointed surveyor general of India. Mackenzie brought with him to Calcutta much of the staff who had worked with him in Madras, who were to be engaged in trying to organise the vast amount of materials which they had collected during the previous 20 years. Subsequent to Mackenzie's death in 1821, this staff was to come under the charge of H. H. Wilson, who had been successful in having the Company establish an antiquarian department in Calcutta. This office was staffed by four translators, four pandits, a maulavi, and several copyists and peons. Wilson's primary interests were in the Sanskrit language and Persian, which he viewed as 'the chief vehicle of the modern history of India'. He had no knowledge of and little interest in the languages and history of south India.[22] Wilson had little interest in maintaining Mackenzie's staff, except as they were concerned with Sanskrit and Persian. The directors of the Company were long interested in Mackenzie's effort to collect the materials to write a true history of south India. In 1810 they strongly expressed their admiration for the zeal with which he had carried out his statistical work and his 'enquiries into the history, the religion and antiquities of the country'.[23] They congratulated Mackenzie for providing the basis on which a real history and chronology of south India could be written, dispelling the idea that the 'Hindoos possess few authentic records'. They encouraged him to 'digest and improve the materials' he had collected and urged him to forward them for deposit in

[20] Mackenzie, 'Biographical Sketch', pp. 339–40.

[21] T. V. Mahalingam (ed.), *Mackenzie Manuscripts: Summaries of the Historical Manuscripts in the Mackenzie Collection*, vol. 1, Madras: Madras University Historical Series, 1972, pp. xiv–xv; India Office Library and Records, Catalogue, European Manuscripts, vol. 1, no. 1, London, 1916.

[22] India Office Library and Records, Board's Collection, vol. 761, #20670, p. 15.

[23] Extract, Public Letter to Fort St. George, 9 February 1810, ibid., vol. 867, #22924, p. 29.

the Company's museum.[24] They also asked for an accounting of his own funds, which he had expended so that he might be recompensed. It appears that Mackenzie never supplied the accounting.

In 1823 Palmer & Company, the executors of Mackenzie's estate, submitted a detailed accounting of his expenditures in assembling his collection, amounting to ₹61,452. Palmer & Company pointed out that the accounting was based on scattered records and that the figure was undoubtedly underestimated. They requested that the estate be paid ₹100,000, a figure which the governor-general agreed to, but the Court of Directors rejected.[25] Eventually, though, the Court of Directors did agree to purchase the whole of the collection from Mackenzie's widow for £10,000.[26] Wilson, although he had little knowledge of the languages involved, and who seems to have dismissed most of Mackenzie's staff, undertook the task of organising and publishing a catalogue of the papers, with excerpts, which appeared in two volumes of over eight hundred pages in Calcutta in 1828.

Wilson basically followed Mackenzie's own classification of the materials, which included 1,568 manuscripts in 13 languages in 19 scripts, which he describes as dealing with 'Literature'. There were 264 volumes of what Mackenzie labelled 'Local Tracts'; these were primarily based on oral accounts which Mackenzie's assistants had collected, and which related to the history of particular temples, kingdoms, families, and castes. There were 77 volumes of copies of inscriptions recorded from the temples, copper plates, and various grants, 75 volumes of translations, 79 plans, 2,630 drawings, 6,218 coins, 106 images, and 40 antiquities.[27]

Mackenzie, after Boria's death, established Boria's younger brother Cavelly Venkata Luchmiah as his chief assistant who trained and supervised the work of obtaining and collecting the vast array of materials in the collection. Luchmiah's original monthly reports for 1804 provide an excellent account of how the varied materials were obtained.[28] The reports are in Luchmiah's handwriting, in English, which although somewhat ungrammatical — he had difficulties with tenses — are quite clear and understandable. In the reports, he describes where he and the other collectors have gone, and who they talked with. Sometimes he provides brief summaries of the content of the conversations. There are frequent references to books bought and their prices. He also forwards to Mackenzie translations which were being done in various languages. He comments on sources of information which he is developing. He has heard about a history of a particular zamindari; he writes to the vakil who has the account, expressing his desire to meet him. Luchmiah reports that he is received with great respect by the vakil, who knows one of his relations. At his first meeting, which lasts three to four hours, the vakil learnedly discusses astrology, and Luchmiah does not raise the question of obtaining a copy of the history but assures Mackenzie that during his next visit he will undoubtedly obtain the copy which they are seeking. Luchmiah then follows up the discussion of astrology with a visit to the astrologer in Madras that the vakil thinks is such an expert. Luchmiah, having heard from his informant that the astrologer has a large collection of texts that have accounts of the lives of his clients, decides to go see him 'and try his skill'.[29] Luchmiah day by day recounts for Mackenzie the letters received and sent to the various correspondents and assistants.

H. H. Wilson, as a means of illustrating the process by which the materials were collected, printed the 'Report of Baboo Rao', Mackenzie's Maratha translator, of a trip along the Coromandel Coast to collect historical information and coins. Day by day he reports where he has gone and who

[24] *Ibid*., p. 33.

[25] *Ibid*., p. 8.

[26] William Taylor, *Catalogue Raisonnée of Oriental Manuscripts in the Library of the (Late) College, Fort Saint George*, 3 vols, Madras: Printed by H. Smith, 1857–62, vol. 1, p. x.

[27] Wilson, *Descriptive Catalogue,* pp. 14–15.

[28] India Office Library and Records, Mackenzie Collection, Unbound Translations, Class XII, Letters and Reports #9: 39–99.

[29] *Ibid*.

he has seen. Rao is asked by several English officials to take them to see a recently discovered temple at Mahabalipuram, and acts as their guide. He reports that he declines to accept four star pagodas for his trouble, 'for fear of looseing my character with my master'.[30] Wherever Rao goes he first checks in with the local British official and presents letters of introduction from Mackenzie. Most of Rao's efforts were devoted to collecting 'ancient books', which he would either buy or copy. Failing to obtain texts and documents, he would question elderly people, *pujari*s, local chiefs, learned men, particularly about the Cholas and anything which dealt with 'Bouddhas' and their conflicts with the Jains.

Rao tracked down various stories about the discovery of hidden treasures, old pottery, ruins and statuary. Rao was told that four months before, a cultivator while ploughing a field struck a gilded image of the Buddha. He informed the managers of the nearby temple, who secretly took it into the temple thinking it was all gold, but it turned out to be a brass image which was gilded. After rubbing off eight or 10 pagodas worth of gold, the manager of the temple was preparing to melt the image down and make brass pots out of it, 'to save their character and to prevent its coming to knowledge of the Circar people'.[31] On hearing this Rao went immediately to the managers, who at first denied any knowledge of the statue, but after more questioning they produced it. Rao offered to buy it for 16 or 20 star pagodas. The head manager of the temple, having heard what has transpired, refused to go through with bargain, saying he would never agree to sell the image even for thousands. A frustrated Rao 'resolved to wait for my master's orders before I should apply to the Collector'.[32] Rao then went to the site where the image was found with four coolies, where they dug, but after finding only 'a stone image of *Bouddha* and two covered wells', he suspended further search and returned to his house.

In Kumbhakonam, Rao visited the chief priest of the 'Sankar Archari Math', and after spending four rupees on 'fruit etc.' he asked the priest for a copy of the copper inscription that was in the Math. The priest was willing, but the managers of the Math (*Kyasthalu*) vociferously denied that there were any inscriptions to be found. They were afraid of 'looseing their original documents', which, Rao suggests, had saved them from 'the destruction of different wars'.[33] Rao reassured them that he only wished to make a copy, to which the managers agreed on the condition that Rao recommend to Mackenzie that a *jagir* (feudal land grant) that they once possessed be restored to them. Rao agreed to this. The chief priest was so pleased by this that he promised to get Rao a particular account of the '*Cholen*, *Cheran*, and *Pandian*' together with the rajas of Bijanagur, as he was the 'Guru of all the Rajas'. He also promised to give him an account of all the 'Rajas who had ruled since the commencement of the *Kaliyugam*'. Rao was then taken in to the chief priest's *agraram* (or quarters) and shown 125 copper *sasanam*s (or injunctions). Rao was dismissed by the priest with a promise that he would give him these accounts along with several coins, if there was any assistance forthcoming in getting the return of the lost villages.[34]

Although the bulk of the Mackenzie collection was in Calcutta in 1823, when Wilson began to work on it, some of it already was known to be lost or missing. In 1808 Mackenzie had sent seven volumes described as 'Memoirs of the Survey of Mysore to London' as well as two volumes of maps.[35] In 1827 Charles Wilkins, the librarian of the India Office, could not locate these. Wilson, as he finished sections of the catalogue, dispatched, in 1823 and 1825, portions of the collection to London. At the completion of his work in 1827, he sent all the works in Persian, Sanskrit and Burmese, along with the plans, drawings, coins, and 106 images of Indian gods in silver, copper and brass, to London.

[30] Wilson, *Descriptive Catalogue*, p. 600.

[31] *Ibid*., p. 602.

[32] *Ibid*., p. 615.

[33] *Ibid*., p. 617.

[34] India Office Library and Records, Board's Collection, vol. 867, #22924.

[35] Wilson, *Descriptive Catalogue*, pp. 594–99.

Some of these were displayed in the small museum which the Company had at its headquarters in Leadenhall Street. Also dispatched were five 'large pieces of sculpture on the stones from Amaravati', four smaller pieces and one 'inscription on stone' from Amaracartu.[36] I will discuss what happened to these pieces subsequently.

Wilson also sent the materials classified as 'local tracts', the accounts of the histories, stories and descriptions taken down by Mackenzie's collectors from local priests, chiefs and local scholars, to Madras, where they were placed under the charge of the Madras Literacy Society. With their arrival in Madras, C. V. Luchmiah asked that he be placed at the head of an establishment which would complete Mackenzie's work. This fell on deaf ears. Luchmiah persisted in lobbying for his plan, and the governor of Madras was sufficiently impressed that he forwarded the plan to the governor-general, who in turn sent it to the Asiatic Society of Bengal, for evaluation and to make recommendations on what should be done about Luchmiah's plan. Luchmiah wanted in effect to reestablish Mackenzie's programme for collecting, under his direction. For a start he wanted permission to be able to correspond with 'gentlemen' of 'literary endowments' to enable him to procure information on the subject of the history and the antiquities on India.[37] In addition, he wanted to hire in each district in south India two 'intelligent scholars', one versed in Sanskrit and the other in 'Oriental Literature', who would continue to collect materials for the project. The plan was referred to the Committee on Papers of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, headed by James Prinsep — who took a dim view of Luchmiah's qualifications and his plan:

> Such an extensive scheme would need the control of a master head, accustomed to generalization, and capable of estimating the value and drift of inscription and legendary evidence. The qualification of Cavelly Venkata for such an office, judging of them by his 'abstract', or indeed of any native, could hardly be pronounced equal to such a task, however, useful they may prove as auxiliaries in such a train of research.[38]

Prinsep and the committee did however make a strong argument for making knowledge of the collection more widely known and that efforts be made to preserve it, and make it available to scholars. To this end they recommended to the government that William Taylor, a missionary in Madras who had published some 'oriental historical manuscripts', undertake the publishing of translations from the Mackenzie manuscripts. Taylor was more than willing to do this, and quickly submitted a budget to the Madras government of ₹7,000 for 18 months' work. He hired six pandits and *munshi*s (clerks), as well as two 'native writers'. Over the next few years some excerpts appeared in the *Madras Literacy Magazine*, and finally in 1857 the first three volumes of the excerpts appeared in Madras as *A Catalogue Raisonnée of the Oriental Manuscripts in the Library of the (Late) College, Fort St George*. The corpus not only included the manuscripts sent by Wilson to Madras, but also some found in the library of East India Company by C. P. Brown in 1838. Brown also added some material in Telugu and Tamil which he had himself collected. The Brown collection was shipped to Madras sometime after 1840. Taylor, who reprinted many of the excerpts already published in Wilson's catalogue, used the occasion to write an exegesis of his own theories about Hindu thought, religion and what the true history of India had been. The materials in the collection on India architecture, wrote Taylor, were of little value as they contained too much on astrology. From the beginning of the work the reader is introduced to Taylor's overriding theory, that Indian culture is derived from Chaldean or Egyptian origins. There is in fact little or nothing in India which could be counted as their own; the Indians are merely poor

[36] Taylor, *Catalogue Raisonnée*, 1, p. xvi.

[37] India Office Library and Records, Board's Collection, vol. 1766, #72386, pp. 3–5.

[38] James Prinsep, 'Report of the Committee on Papers on Cavelly Venkata Lachmia's Proposed Renewal of Coloniel Mackenzie's Investigations', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 5, 1836, p. 512.

imitators of an authentic antediluvian culture that existed in the Middle East. There is little to wonder at in the Indian mind, degenerate and debased. This is accounted for by the fact that '[t]he Hindu skull is of a lower order than that of [even] the Celtic, and very inferior [to the] broad Saxon skull'. The cerebellum of the Hindu brain is highly developed which accounts for the fact that their poetry runs rampant with 'sexualities'. The Indians have even outdone the licentiousness of Ovid in the way they 'treat systematically on the *ars amoriis*'.[39]

Taylor rejects the interpretation that the Indians have a theory of 'moral action'. This is easily seen to be wrong through his study of the *Bhagavad Gita*, in which Krishna advises Arjuna to kill without compunction or fear or moral retribution. He advises his readers that the proof of this assertion is to put the message of the *Gita* 'into the mouth of any leading mutineer at Meerut'. Then 'the true character of the *Gita* will become instantly viseable'. Because of the despotic nature of the Indian state, there is no chance for manly virtues to develop among Indians, as they are brought up to 'cringe, fawn and flatter their rulers'. Hence they have no sublime aspirations to pursue and under such circumstances the human mind becomes 'naturally sordid, and wastes its time in puerile disputation'.[40] The introduction to the materials in Volume Two is used as a platform to reiterate the major theme of the unoriginality of the Indian, this time with more attention to their romance–historical literature, which seems to be copied either from the ancient Jews or the Greeks.

The historical explanation put forward by Taylor is an account of the wanderings of the ancient Aryans, who brought this mishmash of 'Hebrew Theology and Chaldean Sabism into India'. There is a profound irony in the Mackenzie collection falling into the hands of an interpreter seemingly more familiar with the spurious and mystical Orientalism of the 18th century than with the post-Jones scholarship of the first half of the 19th century. The scholar to whom Taylor most frequently refers is Jacob Bryant, the 18th-century compiler and antiquarian. The members of the Asiatic Society doubted Cavelly Venkata Luchmiah's scholarly credentials, and instead they selected a crackpot to edit Mackenzie's papers.

Colonel Mackenzie's collection has not fared much better in the 20th century. N. D. Sundatravivelu, Vice Chancellor of the University of Madras, states in the Foreword of Volume I of the Mackenzie manuscripts, edited by T. V. Mahalingam, Professor of Ancient History and Archaeology (retired) at the University of Madras, published in 1972: 'The keen interest evinced by Western Orientalists and Indian scholars testify to the importance of these documents'. He seems, however, to be at some odds with the editor of the volume, who states:

> Scholars, who have hitherto attempted a critical study of the Mackenzie Manuscripts, have been sceptical of their historical value. 'The attempt to extract history from the confused chronicles in the Taylor Manuscripts seems a hopeless task', says K. A. Nilakanta Sastri, while discussing the views of S. K. Aiyangar on Malik Kafur's invasion of the Pandya country. Mackenzie has often been admired as a pioneer in the field of oriental research and his collections have found their way into several footnotes. Still, the authenticity of the information contained in them has been doubted, however not without reason. For his collections are generally based on secondhand traditions and unverified reports. But they have their own place in the field of historical research India. Their testimony may be used as circumstantial evidence calculated to supplement the results arrived at from other sources and to furnish details on the subject.[41]

Colonel Mackenzie and the Amaravati marbles

I have not yet finished with the results of Mackenzie's dedication and almost demonic urge to reveal to the West the history of south India. In 1797 Mackenzie was carrying out a topographic survey in Guntur district when he heard about the discovery

[39] Taylor, *Catalogue Raisonnée*,1, pp. iv, x.

[40] *Ibid*., 1, pp. xii, xx.

[41] Mahalingam, *Mackenzie Manuscripts*, vol. 1, p. xxiv.

of some antiquities in a small town, Amresvarem, on the Kistna river. He sent ahead his trusty guide Venkata Boria along with some brahmans and two sepoys. They were to make inquiries into the history of the place and to conciliate the inhabitants, particularly the Brahmans, 'who are apt', wrote Mackenzie, 'to be alarmed on these occasions'.[42] On Mackenzie's arrival Boria reported that there was some apprehension at the approach of the British and their sepoys, but Mackenzie reassured the inhabitants that they had only come to look at the recently discovered ruins, which were being excavated by the local raja, who was using some of the materials in building a temple and his house. Mackenzie found a long circular trench 10 feet wide and 12 feet deep, which exposed a mass of masonry, and some slabs, some with bas reliefs on them. It was reported that some statuary had been uncovered and taken into the newly built temple.

One of Mackenzie's delineators, Mr Sydenham, drew a number of the figures which were readily accessible. Mackenzie described seeing a number of lingams on the bas reliefs. In the mud wall of the temple he found a sculpture of 'an attack or an escalade of a fortified place'. The residents of the town believed that the remains were built by Jains. Mackenzie was generally mystified by the appearance of figures in the fragments that he saw: 'The legs of all the figures are more slender and gracefully disposed than I have observed in any other Hindu buildings. It would be rash to draw any conclusions until an opportunity offers of observing more sculptures.'[43] It was not until almost 20 years later, in 1816, that Mackenzie returned to investigate the Amaravati tope. This time he had a full team, including four or five specially trained delineators, presumably the 'country born' graduates of the Madras Observatory and Surveying School established by Michael Topping in Madras in 1794.[44] Mackenzie spent four or five months at the site and his assistants worked through 1817, producing 'careful plans of the buildings and maps of the surrounding country, together with eighty very carefully finished drawings of the sculptures'. James Fergusson stated that these drawings were unsurpassed 'for accuracy and beauty of finish'.[45] Mackenzie was never to write up a full description of the site as he found it in 1816, integrating the plans and maps and drawings done by his assistants. After his death an article based on two letters to Mr Buckingham appeared, first in the *Calcutta Journal* of 1822 and reprinted in the *Asiatic Journal* of 1823 under the title of 'Ruins of Amravutty, Depauldina, and Durnacotta'.[46]

In the 20 years between visits, the site was further destroyed, in the search for treasure (always assumed to be buried in ancient mounds), for building materials, and through firing of the marble for lime. In addition, the raja had decided to dig a large tank in the centre of the mound. Nonetheless large numbers of fragments of sculpture remained, to be described and drawn. Mackenzie was impressed with the skill of the mysterious artists, who carved with taste and elegance. The human figures depicted 'were well executed' and the proportions 'correct'.[47] The site, he believed, was dedicated to religious worship, but of what kind he did not know, except that it was clearly different from the brahmanical worship of the 'present day' as none of the Hindu mythological figures was depicted.

Mackenzie speculated that, because of the circular nature of the larger outline of the enclosure, it perhaps was the same religion as the Druids and that the temple was devoted to sun worship. He was further mystified by the discovery on the sculptured slabs of inscriptions in characters 'entirely foreign to these countries', characters of a type that Mackenzie had never seen before.[48] Mackenzie appears to have sent

[42] Mackenzie, 1803, p. 273.

[43] *Ibid*., p. 278.

[44] Phillmore, *Historical Records*, 2, pp. 340–52.

[45] James Fergusson, *Tree and Serpent Worship*, London: India Museum, W. H. Allen and Co., publishers to the India Office, 1873; reprinted Delhi: Oriental Publishers, 1971, p. 150.

[46] Colin Mackenzie, 'Ruins of Amravutty, Depauldina, and Durnacotta', *Asiatic Journal*, 1823, pp. 464–78.

[47] *Ibid*., p. 469.

[48] *Ibid*., pp. 469, 471.

copies of the drawings and plans to London, Calcutta and Madras. In addition, and to the frustration of subsequent scholars, pieces of sculpture were sent to Musalapatam, Calcutta, Madras, and London, but how many there were, and their provenance, continues to be a mystery to this day.[49]

In 1830, Mr Roberston, collector of Musalapatam, found some of the sculptures, and obtained others from the site, which he set up in the square of the new market-place he had built in the town. These were seen five years later by the governor of Madras who was on tour, and he ordered them to be shipped to Madras, so that they could be better cared for by the Madras Literary Society. Some of these wound up in the garden of the master attendant.[50]

The first effort at deciphering the script found at the site was done by James Prinsep in collaboration with Pandit Madhoray, the aged librarian at the Sanskrit College who had been one of Mackenzie's associates. Prinsep identified the script as being the same type found in the cave inscriptions from Mahabalipuram, and similar to the alphabets of Chhattisgarh. He denominated the characters as Nadhra, and he decided they were transformations of the north India Devanagari. Prinsep declared that the inscription 'refers in all probability to the foundation and endowment of some Buddhistic institution by the monarch of his day'. However, he was disappointed as the monarch was not named, hence the date could not be established; 'history will have gained nothing by the document', he declared.[51]

The largest collection of sculptures and fragments, 90 in all, from the Amaravati site were made by Sir Walter Eliott, commissioner of Guntur, in 1840. These he shipped to Madras, where for 14 years they were stored, unexamined and undescribed until 1854, when Dr Balfour, who was in charge of the Central Museum, made a list of them. The description and analysis of these fragments was left to William Taylor, who again, as with the Mackenzie manuscripts, used the occasion to spin more hypothetical histories.

In 1857, the Madras collection, now dubbed the Eliott Marbles, was shipped to England, presumably to display in the Company's museum. They arrived in the winter of 1858, just at the moment when the Company's rule was being transformed into Crown rule. The marbles lay through the winter in open crates on a dock in Southwark. One of the better pieces was later affixed to an outer wall of the India Museum in Fife House on Whitehall, while the others dropped out of sight. In 1866, Henry Cole, who was organising part of the British display to be shown the following year at the Paris International Exhibition, asked Fergusson to organise a display of archaeological and architectural photographs from India. Fergusson thought it would be a good idea to have some actual statuary on display as well. He remembered the Amaravati marbles, which he thought were 'the principal ornaments of the Old Museum on Leadenhall Street'. He tracked them down under piles of rubbish in the coach house of Fife House. Fergusson had a complete set of photographs, made by William Griggs of the India office, and by studying these he sought to reconstruct the buildings of which they once were a part.[52]

As Fergusson studied the photographs he 'perceived that they might be classified in three great groups'. One, based on the analogy of Sanchi, formed an outer rail as an ornament, and belonged by the main building, as was seen in Mackenzie's drawings. Another set, smaller and finer, Fergusson

[49] Robert Sewell, *Report on the Amaravati Tope: and Excavations on its Site in 1877*, London: G. E. Eyre and W. Spottiswoode, 1880; reprinted Varanasi: Bhartiya Publishing House, 1973, p. 19; James Burgess, *The Buddhist Stupas of Amaravati and Jaggayapeta*, London: Trübner & Col, Ludgate Hill, 1887, p. 117; Douglas Barrett, *Sculpture from Amaravati in the British Museum*, London: Trustees of the British Museum, 1954, p. 23; Ray Desmond, *The India Museum, 1801–1879*, London: H.M.S.O., 1982, p. 93.

[50] Burgess, *Buddhist Stupas*, p. 17.

[51] James Prinsep, 'Translation of an Inscription on a Stone in the Asiatic Society's Museum, Marked No. 2', *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, vol. 6, no. 1, 1837, pp. 88–97, 218–23, 278–80.

[52] Fergusson, *Tree and Serpent Worship*, p. 2; Desmond, *The India Museum,* pp. 115–16; Barrett, *Sculptures from Amaravati,* pp. 23–24.

believed belonged to the inner rail. What remained he declared 'were to no architectural value' and could be placed anywhere.[53] Fergusson's interest in the Amaravati site and its fragments was to grow in the next few years into a major scholarly and intellectual project. He was determined to make the fragments tell part of the history of India. The representations of people, their clothes and ornaments, the animals, buildings and symbols, were to become for Fergusson a projective test.

Even before the Exhibition began, Fergusson was utilising the photographs at a meeting of the Society of Arts, on 21 December 1866. With Sir Thomas Philips, under-secretary of state for India in the chair, and with a distinguished audience including Sir Henry Cole, the impresario of the Great Exhibition of 1851, he delivered a lecture 'On the Study of Indian Architecture'.[54] Rather than giving a scholarly and detailed exegesis of the principles and history of Indian architecture, he made an argument about the utility of the study of Indian architecture for an understanding of the ethnology and religions of India, and about the value of Indian architecture as a source of ideas for the improvement of architecture in England. He began his lecture by describing what he thought was the racial and ethnological history of India. He posited a distant past. Here was an aboriginal race in the Ganges valley, whose descendants were the hill tribes such as Bhils, Gonds and Coles who had dominated north India. These people were conquered about 2,000 BC by the Aryans, a Sanskrit-speaking people to whom India owes its literary traditions, but they were not great builders, and like all outsiders to India, soon fell prey to the enervating climate and the degeneration which naturally followed, by their 'intermingling with the aboriginal races'. The Aryans' demise as effective rulers cleared the way for the rise of the great religious leader Buddha, who taught the people a new, pure religion, which following the iron law of decay in India, 'gradually became idolatrous and corrupt' and perished beneath its own overgrown hierarchy. Simultaneously with the rise of Buddhism, there was yet another invasion of India, this time by the Dravidian peoples, who also came from the north, and had crossed into India in the lower Indus valley. They travelled through Gujarat, and then spread southward through the Deccan. The Dravidians were a race of great builders, but 'totally distinct from those in the North'. A century or two before Christ, there was yet another invasion, the invaders unnamed by Fergusson, but settled in Rajputana and Gujarat. Some went as far south as Mysore and others went into the Agra–Delhi region in the north. The fourth invasion was that of the Muhammedan peoples. The fifth civilisation to take over India 'is our own'.[55]

Architecture and its associated sculpture were for Fergusson the only reliable documents on which to build a 'scientific history of India', a land where there 'are no written annals which can be trusted'. It is only when the annals of a king

> can be authenticated by inscriptions and coins that we can feel sure of the existence of any king, and it is only when we can find his buildings that we can measure his greatness or ascertain ... what the degrees of civilization to which either he or his people had attained.[56]

Fergusson summed up his brief arguments in the following terms:

> I consider the study of Indian architecture important because it affords the readiest and most direct means of ascertaining the ethnological relations of the different races inhabiting India. It points out more clearly than can be done by other means how they succeeded each other, where they settled, how they mixed, or when they were absorbed.
>
> In the next place, I consider it important, because it affords the best picture of the religious faiths of the country, showing how and when they arose, how they became corrupted, and when and by what steps they sank to their present level.

[53] Fergusson, *Tree and Serpent Worship*, p. 165.

[54] James Fergusson, 'On the Study of Indian Architecture', *Journal of the Society of Arts*, 15, 1866, pp. 71–76.

[55] *Ibid*., pp. 72–73.

[56] *Ibid*., p. 73.

> It is also, I believe, important because in a country which has no written histories it affords almost the only means that exist for steadying any conclusion we may arrive at, and is a measure of the greatness or decay of the dynasties that ruled that country in ancient times.
>
> These considerations refer wholly to India, and to the importance of the study as bearing on Indian questions only; but I consider it as important also, because of its bearings on architectural art in our own country. First, because by widening the base of our observations and extending our views to a style wholly different from our own, we are able to look at architecture from a new and outside point of view, and by doing this to master principles which are wholly hidden from those whose study is confined to some style so mixed up with adventitious associations as our local styles inevitably are.
>
> It is also important because architecture in India is still a living art. We can see there, at the present day, buildings as important in size as our mediaeval cathedrals erected by master masons on precisely the same principle and in the same manner that guided our mediaeval masons to such glorious results.
>
> It also is, I conceive, important as offering many suggestions which, if adopted in a modified form, might tend considerably to the improvement of our own architectural designs.
>
> Lastly, I consider the study worthy of attention from the light it may be expected to throw on some of our own archaeological problems.

Implicitly and explicitly, Fergusson in his 1866 lecture was enunciating a theory compounded out of 70 years of British Orientalist discourse. The primary components of this discourse revolved around India's double lack of a history. Since it has no documents, dateable records, chronicles, the kinds of materials out of which the West constructed a history of itself, the British were called upon to provide India with a history. In a second sense India has no history as it has not progressed. All the civilisations that had entered India, except the fifth one, displayed the same history, by succumbing to the inevitable effects of the climate, and their intermingling with the inhabitants, which in turn lead to enervation and the falling into the hands of overdeveloped hierarchies.

The European past can be seen in India as in a museum. Builders in India have been doing the same thing since time immemorial, which enables the British to understand how their own great religious buildings of the Middle Ages were constructed. Finally there are policy considerations the British should learn from the experiences of the other invaders. The only way to survive and flourish in India is to remain totally separated from the degenerate races whoinhabit the country, and they should live in such a fashion as to minimise the effects of the climate.

Fergusson followed his pragmatic lecture with an analysis of the Amaravati Tope in Guntur,[57] which in turn led to the publication of Fergusson's magnum opus of his later years, *Tree and Serpent Worship: or Illustrations of Mythology and Art in India in the First and Fourth Centuries After Christ. From the Sculptures of the Buddhist Topes at Sanchi and Amaravati*. The work proclaims itself on the title page as being prepared under the authority of Secretary of State for India in Council.

In his 1868 paper, which was well illustrated with drawings based on the photographic collection, we find him reading an ethnology and a history into the sculptures, in which he finds three races; the Nagas, whose emblems associate them with snakes, are a handsome race, but are not the rulers of Amaravati. The Nagas were from Taxila 'which seems to be the headquarters of snake worship in the early centuries of the Christian era'. Also represented were Jats, and third, there are the autochthonous — 'Gonds or some cognate Tamil race'.[58] The paper ends with an announcement of his next project, the publication and explication of how the arts of Europe influenced those of the East, along with an essay on tree and serpent worship. As promised, the essay appeared five years later; in 75 folio pages the reader is taken on a world historical tour, demonstrating that there was a worldwide Ur-religion based on the worship of trees and snakes.

In Fergusson's history of religions, bits and pieces of this earlier nature worship get woven together along with the speculative thought of a

[57] James Fergusson, 'Description of the Amaravati Tope in Guntur', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* NS 3, 1868, pp. 132–65.

[58] *Ibid*., p. 163.

great religious leader into one of the progressive religions. Once again the Indians turn out to be losers. They had their chance to be with the winners in the religious sweepstakes, but they turned their backs on the Buddha, and kept up the old snake and tree worship. Not only had the poor Indians, as represented by the Naga people and their snake worship, blown their chance for real salvation, but they also had in their grasp the beginnings of Western monumental architecture as worked out by the Greeks and Romans.

The buildings and their decorative motifs owed their fineness to 'Greeks or rather Bactrian art'.[59] Fergusson faces a problem with this theory of Bactrian and Roman influence on the Amaravati site. He has to date it within 200 to 400 CE. This he does, through developing a series of inferences, based on stylistic analogies found in the western Indian cave temples. This was counter to the inscriptional evidence, which made the site more recent than his argument for Greek and Roman influence would have sustained. Fergusson reserved his strongest argument for the relation of Amaravati to Rome to a footnote.

> My impression, however, is that a few who are familiar with the arts of Rome in Constantine's time, and who will take the trouble to master these Amaravati sculptures, can fail to perceive many points of affinity between them. The circular medallions of the arch of Constantine — such as belong to this time — and the general tone of the art of his age so closely resemble what we find here, that the coincidence can hardly be accidental. The conviction that the study of these sculptures has forced in my mind is, that there was much more intercommunication between the east and west during the whole period from Alexander to Justinian than is generally supposed, and that the intercourse was especially frequent and influential in the middle period, between Augustus and Constantine.[60]

Rajendralal Mitra, the first of India's Sanskritists and student of early Indian history who utilised European-based scholarship, took exception to Fergusson's theories on the origins of Indian architecture. In papers given before the Asiatic Society of Bengal, and then *The Antiquities of Orissa*, a two-volume work published in 1875 and 1880, and *Buddha Gaya: The Hermitage of Sakya Muni*, he mounted a full-scale attack on European assumptions, particularly those of Fergusson, of India's lack of originality and inventiveness in art and architecture, particularly the idea that there had been a strong influence of the Greeks and Romans in the development of monumental stone construction in India.[61] Mitra approached the discussion of Indian antiquities and buildings from a historical standpoint, relating texts and inscriptions to his interpretation of the form and function and meaning of building, and the development of Indian artistic productions.[62]

Fergusson replied to what he thought was a cheeky and ill-trained Indian with a full-blooded defense of his own work, and by calling into question the capacity of any Indian to be able to master the methods which the understanding of Indian architecture required.[63] He began his defense by a statement of his love of India, recounting the delight 'in visiting the various cities of Hindustan, so picturesque in their decay, or so beautiful in their modern garb'. He averred that all his 'relations with the natives of India were of the most gratifying and satisfactory nature'. He had enjoyed the hospitality of the rajas of central India, and he would never forget the 'servants who served me so faithfully, so honestly, from the time I first landed till I left its shores'.[64]

[59] Fergusson, *Tree and Serpent Worship*, p. 157.

[60] *Ibid*., p. 161.

[61] Rajedralal Mitra, *The Antiquities of Orissa Vol 1*, Calcutta: Wyman, 1875; Rajedralal Mitra, *The Antiquities of Orissa Vol 2*, Calcutta: Newman, 1880; Rajedralal Mitra, *Buddha Gaya: The Hermitage of Sakya Muni*, Calcutta: Printed at the Bengal Secretariat Press, 1878.

[62] Warren Gunderson, 'The World of Rajendralal Mitra and Social and Cultural Change in Nineteenth Century Calcutta', PhD Dissertation, University of Chicago, 1966, pp. 249–57.

[63] James Fergusson, *Archaeology in India with Especial Reference to the Works of Babu Rajendralal Mitra*, London: Trübner and Co., Ludgate Hill, 1884; reprinted New Delhi: K. B., 1974.

[64] *Ibid*., pp. 1, 3.

Fergusson had been in India from 1835 to 1842, a period he now looked back upon as a kind of golden age, before some of the natives were spoiled by contact with European civilisation.[65] The agency of this change was the idea that Indians could become the equals of the British through education in the European fashion, which Fergusson stated they could not assimilate.

Bengalis — and for Fergusson, Babu Rajendralal Mitra was the typical case — had a marvellous facility for acquiring 'our language, but only a superficial familiarity with the principal features of our arts and sciences'.[66] The great skill of Indians was the capacity for memorising vast amounts of materials and amassing a great many scientific facts. This was not the same thing as acquiring by 'long study and careful reasoning, ... the great truths of scientific knowledge'. The Babu was accused of using a German technique to establish a reputation, something an Englishman would never stoop to, by attacking Fergusson only to enhance his own reputation. In addition, he posed as a 'patriot' by 'defending the cause of India against the slanders of an ignorant and prejudiced foreigner'.[67] Fergusson argued that in his refutation of the Babu there was more than just differences between two scholars about the history of Indian art and architecture. He related it to the then current attack by Europeans in India on the Ilbert Bill, which would have made them subject in criminal matters to Indian judges. It is easy to understand, wrote Fergusson,

> why Europeans resident in the country, and knowing the character of the people among whom they are living, should have shrunk instinctively, with purely patriotic motives, from the fatuity of the Ilbert Bill. It may, however, be useful to those who reside at a distance, and who have no local experience, to have it explained to them by a striking living example, wherein the strength and weakness of the cause resides, and for that purpose I do not know any example that can be more appropriate than that of Babu Rajendralal Mitra. If, after reading the following pages, any European feels that he would like to be subjected to his jurisdiction, in criminal cases, he must have a courage possessed by few; or if he thinks he could depend on his knowledge, or impartiality, to do him justice, as he could on one of his own countrymen, he must be strangely constituted in mind, body, and estate.[68]

Fergusson was certainly correct about the context in which what started as a scholarly debate about the effort to construct a history of India became centrally about politics, not just the issue of equality before the law but in all the questions entailed in the effort to represent to Indians their own traditions and pasts.

Thus far in this chapter I have been exploring one collection, that started by Colonel Colin Mackenzie and of the efforts at interpreting one archaeological site. It was not until 1942 that the Amaravati sculptures got the catalogue they deserved, when C. Sivaramamurti published his detailed descriptions of each piece along with a thorough iconographic and textually based commentary.[69] This was followed in 1954 by Douglas Barrett's discussion of the British Museum collection. Basil Grey, keeper of Oriental Antiquities there, commented that 'the Amaravati sculptures are ranked with the Elgin Marbles and the Assyrian reliefs among the Great Possessions of the Museum'.[70] Given the history of the collection, one might wonder what happens to those things in the British Museum which are not so ranked. The final irony, of course, is that the Amaravati sculptures are no longer on display.

Under the Company, official concern with the art, artefacts and antiquities of India was haphazard, and filled with false starts. Efforts began through individual initiatives, but halted when the book

[65] Fergusson, *Archaeology in India*, p. iv.

[66] *Ibid*., p. 5.

[67] *Ibid*., p. 7.

[68] *Ibid*., p. vii.

[69] C. Sivaramamurti, 'Amaravati Sculptures in the Madras Government Museum', *Bulletin of the Madras Government Museum, NS, General Section* 4, 1942.

[70] Basil Grey, 'Introduction' to Douglas E. Barrett, *Sculptures from Amaravati in the British Museum*, London: British Museum Dept. of Oriental Antiquities and Ethnography, 1954, p. vii.

keepers in Leadenhall Street became aware of the potential costs, and their ill effects on the balance sheet.

The most ambitious efforts at providing a locus for the systematic study of Indian literature and history was the brainchild of Lord Wellesley, the first of the governors-general with an imperial vision, who founded, without the permission of the Court of Directors, the College at Fort William. This college had the purpose of providing a liberal education in Western and Indian forms of knowledge to the young civilian appointees of the Company. Implicit in this was the necessity of the systematic study of Indian languages and literatures, by an accomplished body of Indian and British scholars.[71] Throughout the existence of the college there was to be constant friction about the costs of maintaining a faculty who were frequently more interested in scholarship than in producing useful textbooks and the daily grind of teaching young Englishmen.

The same conflicts plagued the East India Company's training college at Haileybury, established in 1805 as part of the effort to reduce the costs and significance of the College at Fort William.[72]

The most consistently important scholarly organisation which concerned itself with the acquisition and dissemination of knowledge concerning India was the Asiatic Society of Bengal, founded in 1785. The society was a private body, with close official ties. Its membership always included the governor-general, who also frequently was the honorary president of the society. From time to time it received direct grants from the government, and had constantly referred to it matters that affected the study of Indian antiquities, and the development of the study of natural history in India.

In the 18th and early 19th centuries most of the significant collections of texts, painting, sculptures, artefacts, and even botanical and zoological specimens, which were later to show up in museums in Great Britain and India, were the result of individual and personal efforts, which were later sold or presented to the government. James Fraser, a Company merchant in Surat in the 1730s and 1740s, and the author of a history of Nadir Shah, made what is probably the first extensive collection of Sanskrit manuscripts, which he brought back to Europe partially as a means of transferring some of his money from India.[73] After his death his collection was sold by his widow to the Radcliffe Library in Oxford, and then in the latter part of the 19th century was transferred to the Bodleian, and is the basis of that library's Sanskrit collection.

Some of the British in India were attracted to Indian painting more, it would seem, for its documentary value than its intrinsic aesthetic qualities, and a number of important collections were made during the second half of the 18th century. Sir Elijah Impey and his wife collected Indian paintings and 'commissioned Indian artists to paint natural history specimens'.[74] The largest and most important collection made in the later part of the 18th century still extant is the Richard Johnson collection of the India Office Library. Johnson collected, as well as commissioned, a wide range of albums from the time of Akbar to the end of the 18th century. He had made a large collection of Oriental manuscripts as well, totaling 1,100 volumes. Charles Wilkins, the Sanskrit scholar and the Company's librarian, examined the collection

[71] Bernard S. Cohn, 'The Command of Language and the Language of Command', *Subaltern Studies*, iv, 1985, pp. 276–329. Reprinted in Bernard S. Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996, pp. 16–56. Sisir Kumar Das, *Sahibs and Munshis: An Account of the College at Fort William*, New Delhi: Orion Publications, 1978.

[72] Bernard S. Cohn, Recruitment and Training of British Civil Servants in India 1600–1860', in Ralph Braibanti (ed.), *Asian Bureaucratic Systems Emergent from the British Imperial Tradition*, Durham: Published for the Duke University Commonwealth-Studies Center by Duke University Press, 1966, pp. 116–40.

[73] James Fraser, *The History of Nadir Shah*, 2nd ed., London: Printed for A. Millar, at Buchanan's head, over against Saint Clement's Church, in the Strand, 1742.

[74] Toby Falk and Mildred Archer, *Indian Miniatures in the India Office Library*, London: Sotheby Parke Bernet, 1981, p. 15.

in 1807, when Johnson had offered to sell it in its entirety to the Company, and in recommending its purchase for 3,000 guineas, wrote to the chairman and deputy chairman of the Court of Directors:

> The books, as to the writing, illuminations, perfectness, preservation and binding are upon a par with any other collection which has come under my view. There are of course many in an indifferent state of preservation, a few works deficient in the number of vols and otherwise defective, and the binding, as is always the case, naturally bad and in a bad condition. On the contrary there is a great number of books of the first rank as to the beauty of the writing, and splendour of the decorations; and not a few exquisitely fine.
>
> As to the subjects, there is a good proportion of the best Histories, many very valuable Dictionaries of the Arabic and Persian languages, several useful treatises on Grammar, etc., with a great many specimens of fine penmanship in various oriental hands by the most celebrated masters. There are also a great many distinct treatises on Mathematics, Astronomy, Music, Medicine and other sciences and arts; a very ample and curious collection of Arabic and Persian tales, perhaps unique, with the works of all the most celebrated Poets. There are many works on Law, Religion and ethics, some of them splendid copies; many valuable translations from the Sanskrit into Persian; some works in the original Sanskrit and Hindi — a few rare; with a miscellaneous division upon a great variety of useful and interesting subjects; particularly a choice collection of statistical works consisting of particular tables and statements of the lands and revenues of several of the provinces of India.[75]

Shortly after this Dr John Flemming, who had been in the Company's medical service, presented the library with 'eight miscellaneous paintings of religious subjects', but his massive collection of botanical drawings wound up in the collection a Belgian nobleman. Francis Buchanan also presented his collection of official papers which included a large number of drawings done by Indian artists who had been employed by Hamilton during his Bihar Surveys.[76] These acquisitions marked the end of any purposeful acquisition of collections of Indian paintings by the India Office until the beginning of the 20th century. Falk and Archer explain this lack of interest in Indian paintings in terms of the dominance of utilitarian and evangelical view of India, which saw its art as degraded, even obscene. What collecting was done for the India Office stressed the utility of books of reference and aids to language study, and increasingly from the middle of the 19th century, Indian handicrafts and textiles.

During the 19th century in England there were several important collections of paintings and at least one massive collection of Indian sculpture in private hands. In 1774, William Watson, a Company official, acquired a set of paintings during the Rohilla campaign, which in recent times has come to be known as *Manley Ragamala*, an album of illustrated musical modes. Robert Cran dates these as early 17th century. In 1815 Watson gave the album to his daughter, and wrote at the time that the album 'gives you a perfect idea of the customs, manners and dress of the men and women in Bengal, Persia and most parts of the East Indies ... also of their birds, trees and plants'.[77] He annotated the individual folios for his daughter.

In a series of publications, Mildred Archer has abundantly documented the patronage of the British, from the second half of the 18th century until the middle of the 19th century, of albums and sets of drawings and paintings by Indian artists illustrating the appearance, dress, customs, and occupations of the Indians. These sets seem to have been one of the major items which the British collected in India, either commissioning Indian artists or buying them in the open market.[78]

[75] Falk and Archer, *Indian Miniatures*, p. 27.

[76] *Ibid*., p. 31.

[77] Robert Cran, 'The Manley Ragamala: An Album of Indian Illustrated Musical Modes', *The British Museum Yearbook 4: Music and Civilization*, London: The British Museum, 1980, pp. 187*ff*.

[78] Mildred Archer, *Patna Painting*, London: David Marlowe for the Royal India Society, 1947, and especially idem., *Company Drawings in the India Office Library*, London: H. M. Stationery Office, 1972; and M. and W. G. Archer, *Indian Painting for the British, 1770-1880*, London: Oxford University Press, 1955.

The people of India most accessible to the Europeans were their domestic servants. Most newcomers to India commented on the large number of servants which even a modest European household contained. Captain Thomas Williamson, author of the first British guide book for India, *The East India Vade Mecum*, London, 1810, explained the large number of servants was largely due to "the division of Indians into sects, called by us casts." Williamson lists 31 kinds of servants that a gentleman would need for his home and office, depending on his occupation and status. The servants as described by Williamson were divisible into an upper and lower category. The upper servants, *naukeron*, held positions of trust or supervision and would not be expected to do menial work. The lower order of servants, or *chaukeron*, had their own hierarchy and were divided into those largely doing inside work, waiting on the table, cooking, acting as the wine cooler, the huka bearer, and the furniture keepers. The outside servants included a gardener, the palankeen bearers, a syce, a dhobi, peons, and the watchman and door keeper.

The household in many respects became the model which the British created for Indian society. The specificity of duties was assumed to be based on the caste system in which a member of one caste could not or would not do the work assigned to another caste. Functional positions appeared to reflect the hierarchy of the caste system, with the confidential servants being drawn from the upper castes of Indian society. A Muslim of some status was employed as a teacher and scribe. The table waiters were generally Muslim who had less scruples about handling foreign food. The cooks were generally low caste, untouchables or Portugese, as it was generally believed that upper caste Hindus would not touch beef. The *Khansman*, the butler, was usually Brahman or a higher status Muslim; in some wealthy households he might be Portuguese or Anglo-Indian. Ayahs were usually low caste, tailors Muslim; gardeners, washermen, and water carriers came from castes usually associated with these occupations. Those working in the stables as grooms and who also would take care of dogs and other household pets, were generally untouchable Chamars. Each occupational specialty with its assumed caste base, lived separately, usually in huts in back of the great house where their families lived and where they prepared and ate their food.

Throughout much of the nineteenth century of the representation of servants and their duties was a major subject matter of paintings and drawings which were organised in sets, done by British and Indian artists, and sold as souvenirs to be brought back as one of the icons of the exile in India. Along with the servants, the depiction of the occupations, castes, and the varied dress of the Indians became extremely popular in India and in Great Britain.[79]

Typically in the paintings and drawing of the castes, trades and occupations of India there is a total decontextualisation of the subject. They are drawn without any background, and with an individual and perhaps his wife depicted with the tools of his or her trade or the products or goods produced for consumption and use by Europeans and Indians. Other popular forms of art that the British collected were paintings of buildings, sometimes on ivory, religious ceremonies, usually the more bizarre the better, such as a hook swinging or the dragging of temple carts, and holy men. There was a counterpart in clay of the depictions of the typical household servants and the Indian craftsmen.

Given the difficulties of shipping, and the generally low evaluation by the British of the aesthetic qualities of Indian sculpture, it would appear that few major collections of Indian sculpture were made during the late 18th and the 19th centuries. Partha Mitter has extensively discussed the collections which Charles Townly and Richard Payne Knight had made, both these collectors being interested in the significance of the works for their studies and interest in the relationship between the erotic and ancient religions.[80]

Perhaps the most interesting of the collections made was that of Charles Stuart, generally known as 'Hindoo' Stuart, who was in India from 1777 until his death in 1830. Stuart is best known for his tomb in Park Street Cemetery in Calcutta, which is in the form of a small temple which was decorated with representations of Indian gods and two miniature carvings of 'Indo-Aryan temples', and has a doorway

[79] Bernard S. Cohn, 'The Census, Social Structure and Objectification in South Asia', *Folk* 26, 1984. The quotation is from Thomas Williamson, *The East-India Vade-Mecum; or, Complete guide for gentlemen intended for the civil, military, or naval service of the honorable East India Company*, 2 vols, London: Printed for Black, Parry, and Kingsbury, 1810, 1, p. 181.

[80] Partha Mitter, *Much Maligned Monsters: History of European Reactions of Indian Art*, Oxford: Clarendon University Press, 1977, pp. 84–106.

that 'originally belonged to an ancient Brahmanic temple'.[81] At his death in 1830 the bulk of Stuart's collection was shipped to London, where it was sold by Christie's and bought by James Bridge, who in turn offered the collection for sale in 1872, when it was bought for a 'song' by Sir Woolston Franks of the British Museum. In all, the collection contained 115 specimens.[82]

Some idea of how Stuart made his collection was discussed by James Prinsep, who was trying to translate the inscription on a stone slab that was in the Asiatic Society of Bengal's collection, and about whose origin little was known. The script appeared the same as one known to have come from Orissa. Lt Kittoe was at the time in Bhubaneswar copying inscriptions on the temples there. He found himself 'impeded and foiled by the Brahmans of the spot'. When he enquired about their opposition or as Prinsep put it, 'the cause of so unusual a want of courtesy', Kittoe was informed by the priests that 'their images and relics were carried off by former antiquaries' and mentioned in particular a 'late Colonel Sahib'. On checking the records of acquisitions of the society, Prinsep found that General Stuart was the donor of 'two slabs with inscriptions in Orissa'. Prinsep hoped that the society would return the slabs to the temple from which they were cut.[83] The following year this had been done, but Kittoe was not greeted with cordiality and goodwill he had expected that the return of the slabs would have elicited. Rather the priests presented him with 'a long list of purloined idols and impetuously urged him to procure their return as he had done with the Inscriptions'.[84]

We have seen how surveys and exploration, conceived by individuals and by the Company for the amassing of practical knowledge as part of the agency of rule, led to the formation of important collections. In addition, objects obtained through direct commission and the patronage of artists led to extensive assemblages of text and albums. Many objects of everyday use or produced for a luxury market in India could be bought in the market place. Bribery, extortion and outright theft also played a role in the amassing of significant collections.

Perhaps what was seen in Great Britain, and by the British in India, as the most significant objects, which eventually found their way into public repositories of valued objects, were the result of warfare. Individual and state-managed looting were the source of what, for the first half of the 19th century, were the most valuable and popular objects brought back from India. Pride of place in the establishment of the popular interest of the British relationship to India were objects looted from Tipu Sultan's palace in 1899 at the fall of Seringapatam.[85] Included in this loot were Tipu's tiger, his helmet and cuirass, a golden tiger's head from his throne, a howdah, and one of his 'royal carpets'. These had been presented to the Court of Directors and members of the royal family, and within a few years were to go on display in a room set aside for a museum in the Company's headquarters on Leadenhall Street.

There was a great interest in the prints and drawings of the events connected with the British victory at Seringapatam. General Sir David Baird's 'Discovering the Body of Tipu', 'The Death of Tipu', and the surrender of 'Two of Tipu's Sons' all circulated widely.[86] There were shows, popular plays, ballads, and broadsides, all of which presented aspects of events: the defeat of Tipu and the triumph of British arms over the arch villain and embodiment of evil, Tipu the Tiger.[87]

[81] Ramprasad Chanda, *Medieval Indian Sculpture in the British Museum*, London: K. Paul, Trench, Trubner and Co., 1936, p. iv; Evan Cotton, "'Hindoo" Stuart', *Bengal Past and Present*, vol. 46, no. 1, 1927, pp. 31–33.

[82] Chanda, *Medieval Indian Sculpture*, p. xii.

[83] Prinsep, 'Translation of … No. 2', pp. 278–80.

[84] James Prinsep, 'Translation of Inscription in Societies' Museum: Brahmeswar Inscription from Cuttack', *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, vol. 7, no. 1, 1938, p. 558.

[85] Mildred Archer, *Tipoo's Tiger*, London: H. M. Stationery Office, 1959.

[86] *Ibid*., Plates 15, 16, 17.

[87] Denys Forrest, *The Tiger of Mysore: The Life and Death of Tipu Sultan*, London: Chatto and Windus, 1970; Richard Altick, *Shows of London*, Cambridge, Mass: Belknap press, 1978.

Popular guidebooks and books about the architecture of London, published between 1820 and 1860, all included discussion of the East India House as well as the contents of its small museum. Admission was by ticket and the museum was only open a few days a week; a tip to the doorman would guarantee the visitor being able to see as much as possible. Although Fergusson recalled seeing the Amaravati marbles in the museum, none of the contemporary descriptions mentioned the sculpture. All mentioned Tipu's tiger and the other memorabilia of the fall of Seringapatam.[88]

The following list drawn up by Britton and Pugin in 1838 gives some idea of the miscellaneous quality of the Company's collection.

> The Javanese Tapir, a quadruped with a hide like that of the Hog, having a lengthened proboscis, and its hoofs divided into three parts; exceeding greatly in size the South American Tapir. The newly discovered animal is described in Horsfield's Researches in Java.
>
> A collection of quadrupeds, chiefly of the Cat and Monkey tribes, from Java.
>
> Collections of birds from Java, distinguished by the beauty of their plumage; of aquatic birds, from the same island; of birds from India, Siam, and Cochin China; and a small collection of birds from the Cape of Good Hope.
>
> A Lion's skin brought from India, where this animal is so seldom seen, that doubts have been raised as to its existence in the Asiatic quarter of the globe.
>
> A collection of Javanese insects, principally of the Butterfly kind.
>
> A marine production, called the Cup of Neptune; curious coral, & c., from the vicinity of Singapore.
>
> Beautiful models of Chinese scenery, consisting of rock-work, executed in hard wood, bronzed; temples of ivory, with human figures, birds, trees, & c., formed of silver, embossed, and mother of pearl.
>
> Chinese drawings, one of which, representing a Chinese festival, is executed with more attention to perspective than the artists of China usually display.
>
> A complete Chinese Printing Press.
>
> The Foot-stool for the Throne of Tippoo Saib, formed of solid gold, in the shape of a tiger's head, with the eyes and teeth of crystal. A magnificent throne, to which this appertained, was constructed by order of Tippoo, soon after he succeeded to the sovereignty of Mysore. It was composed of massy gold, the seat raised about three feet from the ground, under a canopy supported by pillars of gold, and adorned with jewellery and pendant crystals of great size and beauty. This throne was broken up and sold piecemeal, for the benefit of the captors, to whom the produce was distributed as prize-money.
>
> A musical Tiger, found in the palace of Tippoo, at Seringapatam. It is a kind of hand-organ, enclosed in the body of the tiger; the whole represents a man lying prostrate in the power of that animal, of which the roar, together with the groans of the victim, are heard.
>
> The armour of Tippoo Saib, consisting of a corselet and helmets, made of quilted cotton covered with green silk; of a texture sufficiently firm to resist a blow of a sabre.
>
> Bricks brought from Hills, on the banks of the Euphrates, supposed to be the site of ancient Babylon. They have inscriptions indented in what has been termed the *nail-headed*, or Persepolitan character, forming lines or columns; for it is a subject of dispute among the learned, whether these characters are to be read perpendicularly, like those of the Chinese, or longitudinally, like those of European nations. Some of these bricks seem to have been baked on a matting of rushes, the impression left by which is still visible on the underside; as is also some of the bituminous cement, by which they were apparently united.[89]

Each of the major British wars and victories in the first half of the 19th century was brought home in the form of relics and trophies to be displayed by the Company in its museum or by the Crown in its armouries in the Tower: a cannon cast like a dragon from Rangoon, swords, shields, daggers, and other weapons from the Maratha wars. Of more peaceful nature were Robert Gill's magnificent drawings of the frescoes of the caves at Ajanta. Most significant were those trophies marking the final triumph of the British over their most stubborn but respected enemy, the Sikhs. The most impressive of these trophies were on display in the Company's museum in 1853: the golden throne of Ranjit Singh,

[88] Anonymous, *The Pictures of London*, London, 1820, pp. 164–65; Augustus Charles Pugin and John Britton, *Illustrations of the Public Buildings of London*, 2 vols, 2nd ed., London: J. Weale, 1838, 2, pp. 35–41; Thomas Miller, *Picturesque Sketches of London*, London: Office of the National Illustrated Library, 1852; for a full discussion of the history of the museum see Desmond, *The India Museum*.

[89] Pugin and Britton, *Public Buildings*, 2: 40–41.

the unifier of the Sikh nation; the Koh-i-Noor diamond, which became one of the great jewels of the British crown. A spear and arms belonging to Guru Gobind Singh, and thought by the governor-general 'impolitic to allow any Sikh institution to obtain possession', went to the Tower. The weapons captured from the Sikhs and shipped to England were the embodiment of the martial traditions of the Sikhs; they all had 'genealogies' and marked the state-building successes of Ranjit Singh. The British were anxious to obtain not only the Sikh symbols of secular power, but also a 'true copy of the Gurunth or Sacred Book of the Sikhs', so that it might be translated into English.[90] The establishment of British hegemony over India was also a conquest of knowledge.

The end of the Third Mysore War in 1799 marked the establishment of the collecting of what were to become the popular relics of the British conquest of India. It ended with an event which had an even greater impact on the public consciousness, the 'Mutiny'. This war generated an enormous public interest, fuelled by mass literacy and an illustrated press, who could define a host of heroes and villains: the 'Pandeys', the rebellious and mysterious Brahmans, who along with other militarised peasantry were the backbone of the Bengal Army, who had traitorously murdered their officers and spilled the blood of innocent Christian women and children; the rebel leaders, a decrepit but nonetheless dangerous Mughal emperor, and the debauched half-Europeanised Maratha Brahman, Nana Sahib. The heroes were staunch Christian avengers and martyrs like Nicholson, the men of action like General Neil and Major Hodson, the careful but effective generals, Outram and Havelock. There was even an Anglo-Indian hero, an employee of the Post and Telegraph Department, Kavinaugh, the first civilian to be awarded a Victoria Cross, and then there was Jenny, the daughter of a common soldier whose dream of the relief of Lucknow was to be memorialised by a highly successful poem by Tennyson, and in paintings, drawings and ceramics.

Once again loot poured into England to be treasured as memorabilia of families, symbolising the privation and the sense of triumph generated by the war. Eventually these objects or relics found their way into public repositories. Some objects in the National Army Museum's catalogue of 'Memorabilia of the Mutiny' include a dagger belonging to Bahadur Shah II, shamshirs and tulwars surrendered by the king of Delhi to Major W. S. R. Hodson on 21 September 1857; a brass betel nut box owned by Nana Sahib, taken by Lt Claude Auchinleck; a wooden spatula found in the massacre well at Cawnpore by Sgt C. Brooks, 9th Lancers; a table made from a section of a tree near which Major W. S. R. Hodson shot the Mughal princes and was fatally wounded; a porcelain bucket from the service of the king of Oudh; a fragment of a dinner plate from the service used by Sir Henry Lawrence at the siege of Lucknow; a silver-mounted brick from Lucknow; a kurta worn by TantiaTopee; a snuffbox containing a lock of TantiaTopee's hair; a silver ring taken from a dead sepoy; a child's shoe found in the massacre well at Cawnpore; and a manicure set found in the massacre well at Cawnpore. This last item is currently on display at the National Army Museum.

Let an Indian have the final say on this period of collecting. Rakhal Das Halder, a student in London in 1862, recorded his reactions to reviewing the collections at Fife House:

> It was painful to see the State chair of gold of late lion of the Punjab ... with a mere picture upon it; shawls without babes, musical instruments without a Hindu player; jezails and swords without sipahis and sowars; and above all hookahs without the fume of fantastic shapes.[91]

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[90] Pugin and Britton, *Public Buildings*, p. 33.

[91] Quoted in Desmond, *The India Museum*, p. 91.

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2

museu

the museum in the colony

collecting, conserving, classifying

Tapati Guha-Thakurta

> In *Kim* the crystallised image of the comprehensive knowledge upon which English hegemony rests is the museum, and the 'Wonder House' frames the beginning and end of Kipling's narrative in a variety of ways. From the outset the Lama's expressed wish is that Kim become a museum curator, and the novel ends by placing the Lama squarely within the confines of the museum, for in his enlightened state he reminds Kipling of 'the stone Bodhishat ... of the Lahore museum' ... But the Lahore museum must not be mistaken for its metropole, the British Museum. Though certainly a member of the loose confederation of knowledge-producing state apparatuses that has been called *the imperial archive*, the Lahore museum contains only local knowledge pertaining to a limited zone of empire.[1]

This chapter unravels an inceptionary moment: the making of the institution of the museum in colonial India. If Kipling's *Kim* stands as the archetype of Indian 'imperial fiction', the 'Wonder House' of Lahore has come to embody the quintessential image of the colonial museum. This chapter is about another such *Ajaib Ghar* in Calcutta (still known locally as the *Jadu Ghar*),[2] the first to be instituted in India in the seat of colonial power, conceived over time as an Imperial Museum that would hold a representative 'Indian' collection (Plate 2.1). It is also about the differences in form, functioning and location that separated such a body from its metropolitan counterpart — never to be mistaken 'for its metropole, the British Museum', so as to foreground the issue of 'local knowledge' that was specific to the need and context of the Indian empire. The idea is to see the museum in India not just as a part of the extensive knowledge-producing apparatus that was so central to the experience and the 'fantasy of empire'.[3] It is also to study the ways this project of the production and dissemination of knowledge would be fractured in the course of its enactment in Indian history.

The story here builds itself around the formation and self-definition of one particular discipline — archaeology — around the space of this museum. The history it recounts has two quite separate points of beginning — one which goes back to the founding of the first 'museum' in India within the premises of the Asiatic Society of Bengal; the other which emerges out of the first systematised British initiatives towards the survey and documentation of Indian antiquities. Both the museum and archaeology arrive in the colony already well-formed as practices and disciplines, their objects

[1] Thomas Richards, *The Imperial Archive: Knowledge and the Fantasy of Empire*, London: Verso, 1993, p. 29.

[2] Notions of wonder, spectacle and magic are closely intertwined in the appellation, *Jadu Ghar*, as in Kipling's term *Ajaib Ghar*.

[3] It is Richards' argument that, while the 19th-century British Empire was more productive of knowledge than any previous empire in history, the idea of a composite, comprehensive imperial archive was, in essence, a fantasy (Richards, *The Imperial Archive*, pp. 1–9). The narratives of the control and command of knowledge — of a world unified by information — became integral to the fiction and fantasy of the Empire.

PLATE 2.1 • *The New Imperial Museum, Calcutta*. *SOURCE*: COURTESY OF THE INDIAN MUSEUM, KOLKATA.

and functions clearly set out. Their inception in India is clearly signposted in institutional dates and beginnings. Yet a critical issue is how India as a locus of knowledge — how the exotic and bewildering corpus of material she offered for the various sciences — would act upon the forms to be assumed by such disciplines and institutions in their colonial setting.

In addressing the issue, the chapter explores the points and modes of convergence in the twin histories of museums and archaeology in 19th-century India. Their apparent separateness — the official harping about the lack of a close link between the Archaeological Survey and the Imperial Museum — was underwritten by the close approximation of each other's functioning. A framing theme here, clearly, is the elaborate axis of colonial power and knowledge. We see it in the museum's system of assemblage and ordering, and in its invocation of the field around the collected, displayed and labelled objects. We see it equally in archaeology's driving urge to name, describe and document as it swept through India's virgin terrain of ruins and relics. Viceroy Curzon at the turn of the century provided colonial Indian archaeology with its crowning statement of purpose. 'It is ... our duty', he proclaimed, 'to dig and discover, to classify, reproduce and describe, to copy and decipher, and to cherish and conserve'.[4] 'Foucault', Benedict Anderson writes, 'could not have said it better'.[5] The point, however, is not merely to add the case of colonial Indian archaeology and museums to a Foucauldian theory of modern knowledge systems and its technologies of power. For that leaves unexplored the question of the variant genealogies of the disciplines in the colony — the different processes of the transplantation of Western

[4] Archaeological Survey of India, *Annual Report of the Archaeological Survey of India, 1902–3*, Calcutta: Superintendent, Government Printing, 1903.

[5] Tracing the genealogies of non-Western nationalism to the institutions of the colonial state, Benedict Anderson adds this in parentheses to his quote of Curzon's statement in *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London: Verso, 1991, p. 179.

knowledge in the particular sites of operation.[6] My study of the first museum of colonial India is intended to touch precisely these areas of deviations and dissonance.

A central case can be made around the failure of museums in India to effectively transform themselves from 'Wonder Houses' to new centres of disciplinary specialisation, despite a concerted drive in this direction since the 1870s. This problem would remain at the core of archaeology's attempts to carve out a specialised niche for itself within the Calcutta museum's main spread of 'natural history', 'ethnography' and 'industrial art exhibits'. It would especially loom large in the self-positioning of the museum and its objects vis-à-vis the public for whom they existed (a public ranging from the 'ignorant native' to the new 'knowing subject'). It is in this unbridged gap between its actual and its intended public that one can perceive the pith of the tensions that marked the colonial birth and location of the museum in India. The issue of 'failure' or 'incompleteness' can then be reconceptualised as one of 'hybridity' and 'difference', and placed in the hiatus between the intended role of the museum in India and its many unintended meanings throughout the late 19th and early 20th centuries.[7]

the first museum of colonial India

When museums first began to be planned in British India during the mid-19th century, a European model of museums as state institutions for the collection of historical, scientific or artistic artefacts was already well established. The British Museum, founded in 1753, had emerged by the early 19th century as the exemplary metropolitan institution: a magnificent repository of antiquities of all civilisations of the ancient world. Foremost of the knowledge-producing institutions of the Empire, it exemplified the idea of 'the imperial archive', an entire epistemological complex for representing comprehensive knowledge whose reach extended across the globe.[8] As its main rival, the Museum Francais, that the French Revolution had brought into being in 1792 in the galleries of the old royal palace of the Louvre, had evolved as a holder of both the nation's antiquities and of antiquities scoured from all over Europe and the Near East.[9] By the 1830s, various other monastic and private collections of French antiquities were also being reorganised into disciplinary and period museums.

The museum in Europe, as has been extensively studied, had its precursors in the large royal collections, the Renaissance galleries of paintings of Italian princes and the thriving antiquarian tradition of 'cabinets of curiosities' of the 17th and 18th centuries.[10] As visual invocations of a historical past, the museum in the early 19th century began to share the space of the great scenographic spectacles

[6] For a study of the kind of historical contingencies and local discursive practices through which the modern disciplines were negotiated in Bengal, see the essays in Partha Chatterjee (ed.), *Texts of Power: Emerging Disciplines in Colonial Bengal*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995.

[7] I draw here on the arguments of Homi Bhaba about 'hybridisation' as the key operative element in the production, dissemination and translation of colonial knowledges — see, for instance, his article, 'Signs taken for Wonder: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority under a tree outside Delhi, May 1817', in Francis Baker (ed.), *Europe and its Others*, Vol. 1, Colchester: University of Essex, 1985. The 'hybrid' offers a way of naming the new variant formations, not through negative qualifiers like semi-, quasi-, non- or pre-, but through the different discrete conditions that brought them into being. Bhaba's argument gets effectively elaborated in Gyan Prakash's study of the displacements that attend the 'enactment' of Western science in the Indian colonial setting in 'Science "Gone Native" in Colonial India', *Representations*, vol. 40, Fall 1992.

[8] Richards, *The Imperial Archive*, pp. 14–15. For a concise, popular history of the museum, see Marjorie Caygill, *The Story of the British Museum*, London: British Museum, 1981 (second edition, 1992).

[9] A definitive study on the early history of this museum is Andrew Mc Clellan's *Inventing the Louvre: Art, Politics and the Origins of the Modern Museum in Eighteenth Century Paris*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

[10] On the pre-history of the museum in the West and the shift in museum epistemes from the medieval Medici Palace to the modern 'disciplinary museum', two comprehensive studies are — O. Impey and A. Macgregor (ed.), *The Origins of Museums*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1985; E. Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge*, London: Routledge, 1992.

and illusions that the century introduced as a main technical surprise and wonder.[11] It was a richly reverberating world of visual representations — of history paintings, prints of ruins and architectural remains, dioramas, panoramas, exhibition pavilions, and museum displays — where each image, artefact and spectacle of the past found meaning within a novel sense of 'history' and 'antiquity'.[12] The world generated its own hierarchies of genres and representations in what could pass as the most 'authentic' simulation of sites and scenes. This is where the museums assumed their premier role as the most ordered and complete replications of the past, as they transformed old treasure troves and curio-cabinets into scientifically classified displays of the art and antiquities, history and ethnography of nations. By the middle years of the century, composite collections had given way to separate disciplinary museums of 'art', 'antiquities', 'ethnography', and 'natural history', each worked out as distinct fields of knowledge and opened to further divisions and sub-divisions.

It was in marked contrast to this scenario that the first museums in colonial India were conceived of in the earlier 17th and 18th centuries' sense of assembling a complete and unified corpus of knowledge under one roof. The early ideal of a museum had been that of a collection and a display that 'should represent the universe by means of a systematic classification of all subject matter'.[13] Thus, India's exotic universe, in its entirety, in its past and present, in its natural and human wealth, scientific and civilisational resources, offered itself to the space of the museum. To the Western antiquarian, India could figure as a single unified site where her flora and fauna, her fossils and minerals, her cultures and customs, her diverse people and, no less, her arts and antiquities could all feature within the same collective constellation, even as each had their own classificatory labels.

Tracing the genealogy of the museum in India does not lead us back to any princely collection of the Native States, nor to private colonial collections of relics and curiosities (although both existed in large numbers, and the latter, in particular, would filter into the museums once they came up). The beginnings are to be found, instead, in the most prestigious organ of Western Orientalist scholarship, in Sir William Jones' Asiatic Society, founded in Calcutta in 1784. The proposals to form a museum within the Asiatic Society in 1814 were part of a broader attempt at the time to place the Society on a solid institutional footing.[14] From being a loose federation of scholars as Sir William Jones had planned it, the Asiatic Society had been transformed under H. T. Colebrooke into a more concrete organisation, with its own premises, housing its own library and museum. The construction of a building for the Society was occasioned mainly by the need to set up a museum within it. Amateurish and antiquarian passions for collecting were to be processed into a systematic cultivation of knowledges. The idea was to order and organise the vast material India offered the Western scholar for the advancement of the different natural and human sciences.

[11] Louis Daguerre's dioramas of medieval architectural sites and history scenes were what most enthralled the London and Parisian audiences of the mid-19th century, in their unique 'reality effects' and ability to physically transport the viewer to that imagined past setting. Closer to our context was the impact of the London panoramas of scenes from colonial India, like 'The Taking of Seringapatnam' or 'The Fall of Delhi', set up as a parallel to the world exhibitions — discussed in Carol A. Breckenridge, 'The Aesthetics and Politics of Colonial Collecting: India at World Fairs', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 32, no. 2, 1989, pp. 197–99.

[12] Stephen Bann, *The Clothing of Clio: A Study of the Representation of History in Nineteenth-century Britain and France*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984, pp. 54–92.

[13] This is stated in an influential early treatise of 1565 that was widely read through the 17th and 18th centuries and used by John Tradescant in cataloguing his collection of scientific objects, which in turn formed the basis of the Ashmolean museum in Oxford. *Encyclopaedea Brittanica*, London: William Benton, vol. 15, 1964, p. 968.

[14] O. P. Kejariwal, *The Asiatic Society of Bengal and the Discovery of India's Past*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988, pp. 115–16.

The absence of such a learned material archive was seen to be a major deficiency within the Asiatic Society, for all its path-breaking work with Sanskrit texts. It was to remedy this deficiency that the Asiatic Society was now 'called upon to adopt active measures for … collecting from the abundant matter, which India offers, a Museum that shall be serviceable to history and science'.[15] The museum that was to be 'collected' was to consist of 'all articles that may tend to illustrate Oriental manners and history or to elucidate the peculiarities of art and nature in the east'.[16] The central constitutive urge was that of collecting, not of displaying. The collection was to exist only for that small initiated circle (then, an exclusively Western one) who perceived its need and appreciated its value; its display before a larger public was yet to feature on the agenda. Throughout its early history, the museum in India would remain locked in the specialist gaze of the scholar and collector, never adequately opening itself to the wondrous gaze of the lay spectator. A learned, scholarly domain was bounded off as the space of the museum, and its 'public' utility constituted within it.

In its quest for knowledge, the first museum had its twin concerns both with 'objects of science' as well as with 'reliques which illustrate ancient times and manners'. Accordingly, it solicited contributions that ranged from ancient monuments, sculptures, coins, and inscriptions to utensils, tools, weapons, and musical instruments to animals (dead or alive), plants, minerals, and metals.[17] One can presage the fields of 'archaeology', 'ethnography' and 'natural history' already forming themselves around this intended gathering of objects. But there was, as yet, no separating out of distinct, discrete fields or any prioritisation of one group of artefacts over others. The defining paradigm for the entire collection was all that was 'unique' and 'peculiar' to India, whether it belonged to her ancient past, her human society or her natural environment.

a storehouse of 'natural history' and the 'industrial arts'

It was India's 'natural history' which was to predominantly engage the attention of the country's first museums. While her ancient past remained an alluring mystery, waiting to be deciphered from texts, coins, inscriptions, and material remains, the peculiarities and varieties of her botanical and zoological specimens more easily absorbed the amateur scholar. From the late 18th century onwards, we have several examples of small menageries and botanical collections built up by the East India Company's civilians, with native artists employed in the visual documentation of these 'natural history' specimens. The interests of 'Ethnology' and 'Natural History' — on the one hand, India's strange medley of tribes, trades and castes; on the other hand, her equally exotic non-human array of plants, flowers, fruits, birds, insects, and animals — produced the whole new genre of 'Company paintings' of this period.[18] (See Plate 2.2.) Pictorial representation went hand in hand with systematic collection and schematisation. Well before archaeology marked out its sprawling field in India, India's 'natural history' had begun to emerge as

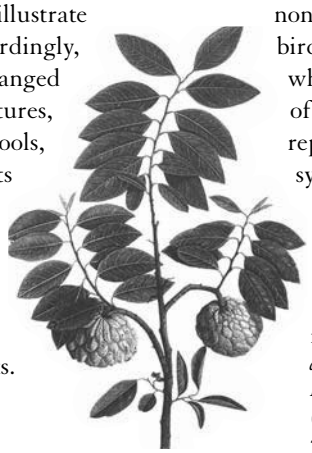


PLATE 2.2 • *Company painting of a 'custard-apple plant' commissioned by Sir Elijah and Lady Impey from a native artist of Calcutta (watercolour, ca. 1770s).* SOURCE: COURTESY OF THE VICTORIA & ALBERT MUSEUM, LONDON.

[15] *Ibid*., p. 116.

[16] 'Resolution of the Asiatic Society of Bengal regarding the formation of a museum in Calcutta, 2nd February, 1914', in the centenary volume, *The Indian Museum, 1814-1914*, Calcutta: Indian Museum, 1914.

[17] *Ibid.*

[18] Mildred Archer, *Natural History Drawings in the India Office Library: Company Paintings in the India Office Library*, London: HMO, 1972.

a prime subject of scientific knowledge within the institutional sites of museums.

Even within the Asiatic Society, a stronghold of philological and textual scholarship, the move for a museum had been initiated by an amateur botanist, Dr Nathaniel Wallich, with his own private collection of botanical specimens. Wallich became the first Honorary Curator of the Society's museum, to which came his own and a few other individual collections. The museum was divided into two main sections — the archaeological and ethnological, and the geological and zoological. The contribution of a vast collection of geological specimens had necessitated the first separation and specialisation: the setting up of a Museum of Economic Geology in 1856 under a separate curatorship, which henceforth received all samples of minerals and fossils.[19] With time, the botanical specimens acquired by the museum began to be farmed out to the Botanical Gardens for a separate conservatory that was planned there. And the steady death and depletion of the museum's holding of live animals called for their transference to other menageries where the animals could be better kept alive — with the museums retaining a claim to their skins on their death for its Taxidermy department.[20] Yet the museum in Calcutta, through the 1860s and 1870s, remained largely the domain of Naturalists and Zoologists, with much of its expenses and expertise invested in the science of taxidermy. And the bulk of its collection and new acquisitions continued to consist of different species of mammals, birds, reptiles, fishes, insects, and molluscs, examined and preserved by the Taxidermy laboratory.[21]

The same focus on the 'natural sciences' determined the structure of similar institutions as they first emerged in the other presidencies of British India. So, for instance, the next government museum that came up in Madras in 1851 resulted from a prior campaign to organise mainly a scientific collection of 'Economic Geology' and a 'Museum of Natural History' in the region.[22] Under its first superintendents, Edward Green Balfour, Jesse Mitchell and George Bidie (all medical surgeons), the collections of the Madras Museum remained confined almost entirely to Geology and Natural History, the latter section including a zoological garden. On much the same pattern, the museum that was established in Bombay in 1855 began largely as a museum of what was classified as 'Economic Products', designed for specimens of Natural History, Economy, Geology, Industry, and Arts.[23]

Parallel to the abiding interest in 'natural history', we can see a growing interest in the products and manufactures of the empire spreading into the same space of the museums. Out of this interest, now, another major category of objects was targeted for collection and display: objects that were variously termed the 'industrial' or 'decorative arts' or the 'art manufactures' of India. On the one hand, a concerted drive to improve the quality of English industrial design, and on the other hand, a nostalgic impetus to revive the dying pre-industrial traditions of craftsmanship, had made the 'decorative arts' a focal point of commercial and aesthetic interest in England. The interest found its ideal locus in India. The empire offered itself as a great untapped source of riches and redemption for English industry and design, a locale for both commerce and art ('art' implying the newly-valued genre of the 'decorative arts'). It was the discovery of the country's 'living traditions' of craftsmanship and decorative design which had assigned India her pride of place in the circuit of world fairs and international exhibitions.[24]

[19] *The Indian Museum*, 1814–1914.

[20] *Annual Report of the Superintendent and Minutes of the Trustees of the Indian Museum, Calcutta* (henceforth referred to as *Annual Report, Indian Museum*), 1868–69.

[21] This is clear from the *Annual Reports* of the museum from the year 1868–69 through the 1870s and 1880s.

[22] A. Aiyappan, 'Hundred Years of the Madras Government Museum', *Centenary Souvenir of the Government Museum, Madras*, Madras: Government Museum, 1951, p. 6.

[23] C. Sivaramamurti, 'The Victoria and Albert Museum, Bombay', in *Directory of Museums in India*, New Delhi: National Museum, 1959, p. 6.

[24] The enthused response to the first exposure to Indian 'industrial arts' in the Great Exhibition of 1851 and the

In its spread of crafts, designs and exotic regalia, the Indian Court had been among the most sumptuous displays in London's first Crystal Palace Exhibition of 1851, The Great Exhibition of the Industry of All Nations. India was laid out, here, as an exotic pre-industrial entity, against which the modern industrial nations defined their inadequacies and their advances. At the Crystal Palace, for the first time, a carefully choreographed ensemble of Indian artefacts transcended their 'curiosity' value to stand as superior examples of 'industrial arts' and 'decorative design' on an international arena. Like the botanical specimens acquired in museums, the craft objects too would now be subjected to the same orders of identification, organisation and classification according to a variety of schemes (according to period, place of origin, nature of the raw material, production process or style of design).[25] The Great Exhibition inaugurated a pervasive trend of displays, collections and publications in England and India, centred around the 'decorative arts' of the empire.

These exhibitions, we find, directly opened out into the domain of the museums, establishing close co-relations and synonymities. While museum collections were occasionally tapped on for exhibitions, more often, the exhibition items, searched out, gathered and grouped for the event, found a permanent place in the museums. In the 1850s, it was under the direct impetus of the Great Exhibition and the interest and concerns it aroused that Museum Committees were constituted in Madras and Bombay to draw into the museums representative samples of all the art-manufactures of the Presidency.[26] At the same time, the museum project also found a place within the first Schools of Art in India during the 1860s and 1870s, as they too made the existing art-industries of each region a central target of tutelage. The schools functioned primarily as Schools of Industrial Arts, as centres for the promotion of various artisanal skills of design and craftsmanship.[27] And museums were intended to function as close adjuncts of the Schools of Art in fulfilling the main objectives of British art education in India — 'in storing up the best examples of Oriental design and processes, in instructing the working artisan in these, and in restraining them against the facile imitation of European designs and methods'. In short, museums were to stand as 'a register of progress and improvement as well as a repertoire of traditional forms and designs'.[28] It is in this choice field of the 'decorative arts' that the museum first evolved its dual identity — as a storehouse of tradition and as forum of visual instruction — and came to be situated within an extensive institutional network of conservation and collection. It is in this capacity, now, that the museum in India moved from being repositories of 'history', and 'science' to being, in addition, a repository of the nation's 'art'.

We can see this in the case of the Indian Museum in Calcutta, which was directly roped into the wider schemes of promotion of the industrial arts from the 1880s. The hosting of the Calcutta International Exhibition in the premises of the museum during the winter of 1883–84 (Plate 2.3) led to the creation of a new Economic and Art Section within the museum,

discourse on the lessons offered by Indian decorative design can best be charted in the pages of *The Art Journal* of London of these years. See, especially, George Virtue, *The Art Journal Illustrated Catalogue of the Great Exhibition of the Industry of All Nations*, London: Bradbury and Evans, 1851, pp. 378–458.

[25] Breckenridge, in analysing the spectacle of the Indian Court at the Crystal Palace Exhibition, refers to this taxonomic exercise of ordering, whereby the singular displayed object was related to a series as 'design' and 'art-ware', and 'art' like 'science' demarcated as a separate field of knowledge ('Aesthetics and Politics of Colonial Collecting', pp. 202–6).

[26] Aiyappan, 'Hundred Years of the Madras Government Museum', p. 6; Sivaramamurti, 'The Victoria and Albert Museum', p. 30.

[27] A detailed picture emerges from the Superintendent of the Madras School of Industrial Arts, Alexander Hunter's *Correspondence on the Subject of the Extension of Art Education in Different Parts of India*, Madras, 1867.

[28] 'Resolution of the Government of India and Draft scheme regarding Museums, Exhibitions and Art Journals', 14 January 1883, *Journal of Indian Art and Industry*, vol. 1, no. 1, January 1884, pp. 3–4.

under the curatorship of T. N. Mukharji. This consisted of the entire complex of Art-Ware Courts of the exhibition (see, for example, Plate 2.4), in which a large collection of crafts and manufactures were transferred from the old Economic Museum of the Bengal Government to the Indian Museum.[29] Around the same time, proposals were submitted for amalgamating the museum, with its newly-acquired art-ware section, with the Calcutta School of Art and its adjoining Art Gallery. The intention was to establish in Calcutta an integrated Department of Science and Art on the model of South Kensington, London, where the museum and art school would work together in a comprehensive project of technical and art education.[30]

This proposed merger would have brought under a single instructive domain the collection of European 'fine arts' of the Art Gallery, the specimens of old architecture and sculpture and the large array of arts and crafts gathered at the museum, balancing the 'science' section with an adjacent 'art' section. The proposal remained a matter of debate: its implementation was stalled by fears of sacrificing the 'individuality' and 'scientific character' of the museum and reducing it to 'a curiosity shop'.[31] Nevertheless, the Economic and Art Section that came about within the museum, with its 'pure art specimens' (i.e., artistic crafts as distinct from economic products), would form the basis of the later Art Gallery and Art Section of the Indian Museum. Into this section came, then, the new Indianised collection of design, 'decorative'

[29] *The Indian Museum*, 1814–1914.

[30] Proposals submitted by the Government of Bengal and correspondence between the Government of India, the Trustees of the Indian Museum, and Dr John Anderson (Superintendent, Indian Museum) — *Education Department Proceedings*, April 1887, nos B 21–22.

[31] *Ibid.* Letter from Major J. Waterhouse (Honorary Secretary to the Trustees of the Indian Museum) to the Government of India, 23 June 1884.

PLATE 2.3 • *Bird's eye view of the exhibition grounds of the Calcutta International Exhibition of 1883–84, held at the precincts of the Indian Museum.* SOURCE: ALBUM ON CALCUTTA INTERNATIONAL EXHIBITION OF 1883–84. AUTHOR'S COLLECTION.

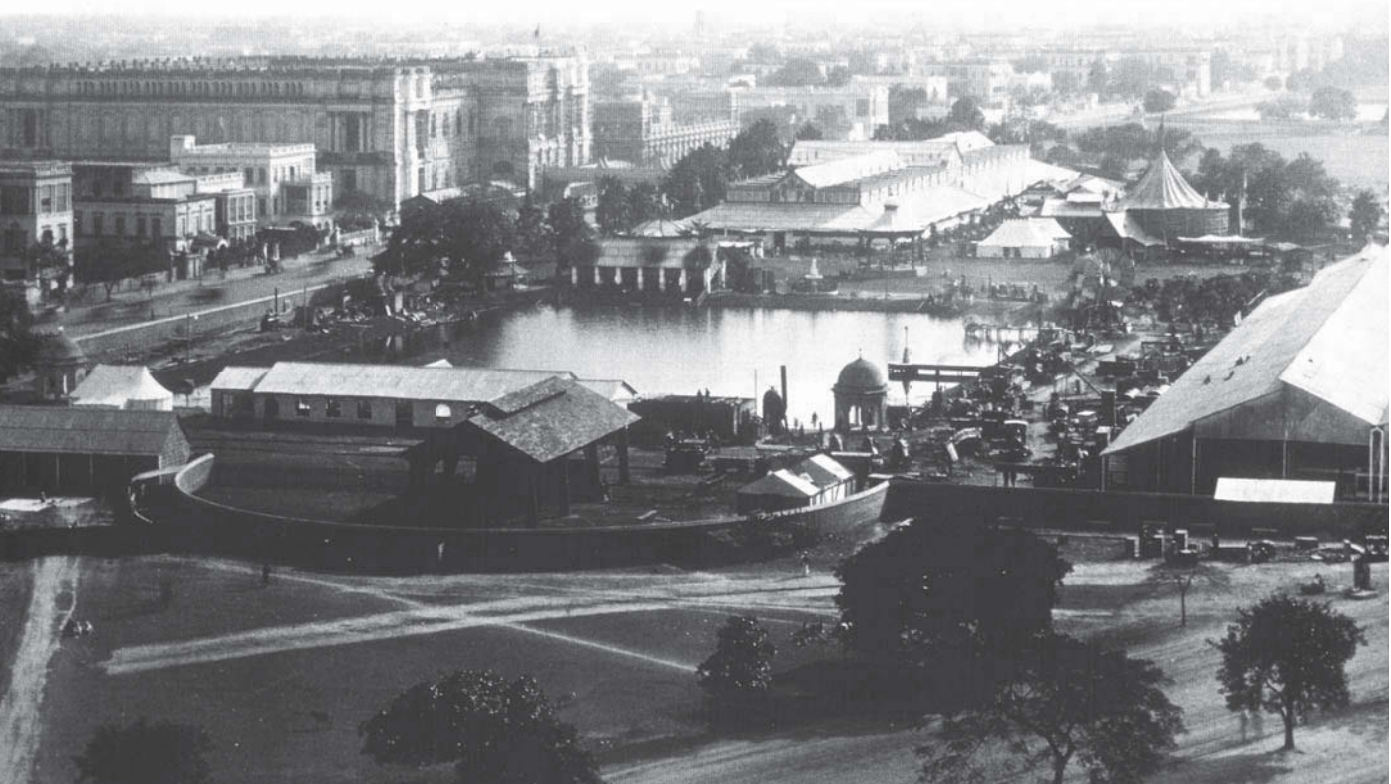


PLATE 2.4 • *One of the regional courts ('The Punjab Court') within the Art-Ware Court of the Calcutta International Exhibition, 1883–84. SOURCE*: ALBUM ON CALCUTTA INTERNATIONAL EXHIBITION OF 1883–1884. AUTHOR'S COLLECTION.

and 'fine arts' which the reformist art teacher, E. B. Havell, had collected to replace the earlier collection of European casts and copies in the Art School. In 1914, when the Indian Museum completed its centenary, it considered as one of its highlights this Art Gallery, that included by then a special wing of Indian painting, devoted mainly to Mughal miniatures and the works of Abanindranath Tagore and his school, surrounded now by the new 'aesthetic' aura that the nationalist art movement had generated.[32]

the need and lack of archaeology

Over a century of its existence, a museum filled with scientific specimens and historical relics had acquired, in a small specialised niche, an additional status as an 'art' museum. What is instructive is the way the museum, in the organisation and gradation of its collection, had itself fostered a particular definition of 'art' in the Indian context. Throughout the 19th century, while it assigned to Indian art an exclusively 'decorative' and 'craft' value, placing it in the realm of the 'industrial arts', the museum had continuously sifted out of the field of 'art' another category of objects, which it classified as 'antiquities' and allocated to the different discipline of archaeology. Between 'natural history' and the 'decorative arts', archaeology emerged over the mid-19th century as the other major constituent field of

[32] *The Indian Museum, 1814-1914*, Art Section. For an extended discussion on Abanindranath Tagore and the nationalist art movement in Bengal, see my book, *The Making of a 'New' Indian Art: Artists, Aesthetics and Nationalism in Bengal*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

knowledge within the museum. It became central in the new thrust towards disciplinary specialisation and scientific ordering of collections within the institution, as it attempted to expand its scope from the 'natural' to the 'human sciences' of history and ethnology.

Right from the beginning, historical 'reliques' (specified as ancient monuments, sculptures, inscriptions, and coins) had been a main group of objects to be solicited by the Asiatic Society's museum. Collections like that of Colin Mackenzie (particularly, his holdings of temple inscriptions, sculptures and stone remains) or the findings from sites of the first creed of 'travelling antiquarians', had been presented on and off to the museum. Yet, both in quantity and status, such historical antiquities remained secondary to the geological or natural history collections of the museum. And even when received, such items frequently escaped the requirements of 'safe-keeping', proper registration and classification that were their due. Thus, for instance, a stone box recovered from the mounds of a *stupa* at Sarnath, which had been handed over to the Orientalist scholar, Jonathan Duncan, in the 1790s and passed on by him to the Asiatic Society's museum, was no longer to be found there when Cunningham searched for it half a century later. And Cunningham noted with equal consternation that objects which he himself had excavated from Sarnath in 1834 and presented to this museum stood falsely labelled as belonging to the Manikyala 'tope' in Punjab.[33] We also know of the case of two massive ancient statues which Francis Buchanan had 'rescued' from the vicinities of Patna in 1812, which came soon afterwards to be deposited in the Asiatic Society's Museum, but which lay unknown and abandoned in the backyards for five decades, before Cunningham 'rediscovered' them and had them installed in the new premises of the Indian Museum in 1870.[34] (Plates 2.5a, b.)

As the archaeological project took on its new institutional guise from the 1860s, a similar need for 'system' and 'care' began to press itself on the body of the museum. It was a part of the museum's increasing concern with augmenting its 'scientific character' that it now aspired to invest all its historical objects with the same methods and orders of the natural sciences. It was also a part of the Indian Museum's new self-image as an imperial institution.[35] Delinked from the Asiatic Society and transformed in 1866 into a separate imperial body, the museum in Calcutta saw itself committed to a new cause of public education and enlightenment. The steady accumulation and classification of scientific specimens required balancing by a parallel corpus of organised knowledge on the history and culture of the land.

There were two disciplines which the Indian Museum picked out as potentially rich target areas, where it saw itself to be particularly deficient and lagging. One discipline was ethnology, for which India offered herself as a prime locus. Yet the subject was said to have been barely touched upon at home, compared to the exhaustive manner in which science was being handled by the museums of Europe and the South Kensington Museum, London, all of which could 'boast of more complete collections of the Ethnology of India than the Calcutta Museum itself'. The South Kensington example of a thorough collection of Indian arts and crafts and all kindred objects was recommended to fill this vital gap in the Indian Museum.[36] The other science, closely allied to and complementary to ethnology, was archaeology, for which again India provided a wealth of material. The past in India lay open as the terrain of the archaeologist, waiting to be revealed from every monumental or material remain. But the museum, it was regretted, lay outside the orbit of the researches and discoveries of the Archaeological

[33] *ASI, Four Reports*, vol. 1, pp. 116–17.

[34] The story of these statues is taken up in Tapati Guha-Thakurta, '"For the Greater Glory of Indian Art:" Travels and Travails of a Yakshi', in *Monuments Objects, Histories: Institutions of Art in Colonial and Postcolonial India*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2004.

[35] In 1866, it is reported, the Government of India was able to fulfil a long-recognised duty of transferring the collections out of the Asiatic Society and setting up an Imperial Museum in Calcutta 'worthy of the new interest and commitment it felt for the heritage of the subject people'. *The Indian Museum*, 1814–1914.

[36] *Annual Report, Indian Museum*, 1881–82, p. 18.

PLATE 2.5A AND 2.5B • *The two Patna Yakshas (buff sandstone, ca. 2nd century BCE) in the Indian Museum, Kolkata. Photograph taken around 1909–11. SOURCE*: COURTESY OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY OF INDIA, NEW DELHI.

Survey of India. Its excavated treasures seldom found place and preservation within the museums. And archaeological items, so far as they randomly made their way into museums, remained distinctly lacking in order and completeness. By the early 1880s, the museum authorities were pressing hard for making the ethnology and archaeology collections in Calcutta 'worthy of a Museum which claims to be Imperial'.[37] In particular, they urged a closer link and co-operation between the Indian Museum and the Archaeological Survey of India, requesting that the former be made a necessary depository of all objects excavated, preserved and studied by the latter.[38]

against ravage and plunder: The new charge of conservation and reproduction

Let me turn, at this point, to the parallel story of the maturing and expansion of the colonial archaeological project in the same years. Let me focus attention, in particular, on what emerges as a distinct shift in orientation in the archaeological programme in the period that immediately followed Cunningham's retirement from the Archaeological Survey. The extensiveness of Cunningham's tours and the thoroughness of his survey reports had laid out a comprehensive pool of archaeological knowledge, 'comprehensive enough to include every site that was of promise, every antiquity that was of interest'.[39] In 1885, Cunningham was succeeded, in the post of Director General, for a brief period by James Burgess, known for his equally exhaustive survey work in Western India. The post-Cunningham phase, however, would be marked by a folding up of the apparatus of archaeological research.[40] The official focus in archaeology shifted grounds from fresh excavations to the task of conservation and documentation of what was already known, surveyed and classified. The latter was upheld as the more urgent need of the time, the pre-requisite for any further research. And it is in this change in priorities that we can trace, over time, a new space of convergence and collaboration between the two establishments of archaeology and museums in late 19th-century India.

What is important to note is the way the imperatives of conservation now figured as a new domain of state intervention and legislation. There were, it seems, two main preventive thrusts that determined the nature of official custody over monuments and relics. One concerned the decay and destruction of India's ancient monuments, their susceptibility not only to the ravages of time, but also to human pillage and vandalism. The other concerned a category of objects, which archaeologists classified as 'movable antiquities' (prime among them being loose sculpted figures and panels): objects which formed a large haul of every excavated site, but whose indiscriminate removal, theft or sale within and outside the country was seen to rob the empire of its great historical and artistic 'treasures'. In the one case, what called out for protection were standing structures, which needed as far as possible to be preserved and refurbished in their original locations. In the other case, what demanded attention were items whose future lay inevitably in their removal and preservation off site, over which the government now needed to assert its institutional rights vis-à-vis all other claimants. If in the first case the 'natives' could be targeted as chief culprits in foraging for stones and bricks, in the latter case, the finger of accusation turned equally

[37] *Annual Report, Indian Museum*, 1881–82, pp. 18–19.

[38] *Ibid.*, pp. 9, 19–20. This point would be repeatedly made by the Indian Museum authorities in later *Annual Reports*, and would be a main theme in the Museums Conference held in Madras in January 1912.

[39] Cunningham, *Memorandum on the Archaeological Remains in India*, 30 July 1871. Quoted in Sourindranath Roy, 'Indian Archaeology from Jones to Marshall, 1784–1902', *Ancient India*, 9, 1953, p. 18.

[40] Following Burgess' retirement in 1889, the Director General's appointment failed to be renewed; regional survey departments, reduced and decentralised, were relegated to local governments; and even in this much truncated form, survey establishments were sanctioned for no more than five years, in anticipation that, by then, the survey work, so far as the government was concerned, would be completed.

to British officers and civilians, who randomly lifted off sculptures for decorating public places and private homes, who also frequently carried them out of India's borders to be sold abroad.

Correspondence of the archaeological department of the time are replete with references to the rampant 'appropriation of the remains of Indian antiquities for sale in Europe' — to instances of the despatch from Calcutta of 'a monthly instalment of sculpted heads to Europe', or of the Graeco-Buddhist sites of border districts like Yusufzai in the north-west being rapidly denuded of its architectural panels and sculptures.[41] Such private acquisitions and international traffic in Indian antiquities spelt two kinds of deprivation: a loss 'to science', and a loss to Indian territory and its local populace of what were rightfully theirs. By the 1880s, the only check was seen to lie in 'a comprehensive legislative enactment': only then could 'conservation which is the best step towards ... educating the public taste, be placed on a durable foundation in India ..., checking vandalism and offences against treasure trove'.[42] The framing of the Treasure Trove Act in 1888 was clearly the most important of such legislative enactments. It invested in the Government of India and the provincial and local governments 'indefeasible rights' to the acquisition of all objects of archaeological interest, providing a detailed definition of what classified as 'treasure' and what constituted its 'value'.[43]

But even earlier, we can see the urgency of conservation giving birth to a new administrative domain, marking out the specificities of its interests and objectives within the archaeological field. We see this in the setting up in 1880 of a new department of the Curatorship of Ancient Monuments under Major H. H. Cole, who was entrusted with the duty of visiting all the ancient monuments to draw up schemes for their preservation. Between 1880 and 1884, Cole would tour the length and breadth of the country, much the same way as Fergusson, Cunningham or Burgess, identifying for each season a territorial belt and all the architectural monuments in that zone to be examined, described and documented. Cunningham's surveys and reports would find a worthy parallel in the reports, drawings and photographic albums generated by this new department over the brief tenure of its existence. What was particularly impressive was the scale and range of photographic documentation of buildings that this department undertook.[44] (Plate 2.6 and 2.7.)

Although this new conservation establishment turned out to be a short-lived one, the separateness and importance of its field of activity was sharply etched out. Survey for the primary purpose of conservation was differentiated from survey for archaeological research. For H. H. Cole, pitting his authority against James Burgess, the difference would be staked in terms of alternative expertise.

> The elucidation of history by means of monumental records and inscriptions is a subject he [Burgess] is most competent to deal with; but *the systematic delineation of beautiful architecture* is not a work ordinarily confined to an Archaeologist ... [The latter, Cole claimed, was] his specialised field of work as professional advisor to the Government of India in respect of repairs and restorations.[45]

[41] See, for instance, the detailed correspondence on the theme by Major J. B. Keith, sometime Archaeological Surveyor, North Western Provinces and Central India, and Dr J. Burgess, 'Director-General to the Archaeological Survey of India', in *Government of India, Proceedings of the Revenue and Agricultural Department, Archaeology Branch*, April 1889, nos 1–5.

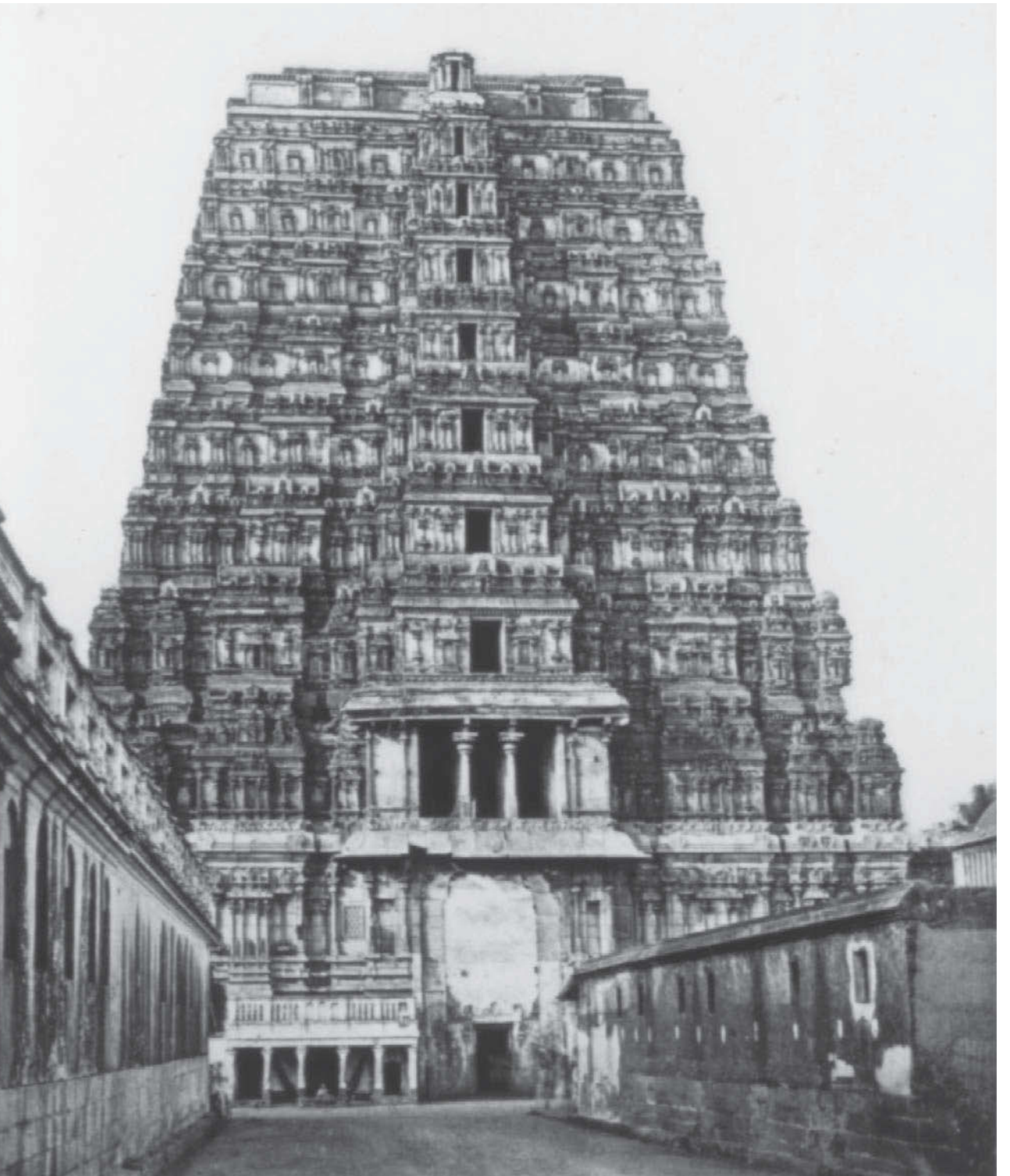
[42] *Ibid.*, p. 7 — Circular by Major J. B. Keith on 'Conservation of Indian Monuments and Art Industries', London, 1 October 1888.

[43] *Ibid.*, pp. 11–14 — Resolution on the Acquisition by Government under the Treasure Trove Act of Articles of Archaeological Interest.

[44] *Preservation of National Monuments: Reports of the Curator of Ancient Monuments in India*, parts I–III, 1881–84 — 1st report, 26 December 1882; *Preservation of National Monuments in India: Albums of Drawings and Photographs*, by Major H. H. Cole, vols I, II, Calcutta, 1884–85.

[45] Letter from Captain H. H. Cole, Curator of Ancient Monuments in India, to the Government of India, 27 March 1882 on the 'Architectural Survey of the Srirangam Temples at Trichinopoly' — *Government of India, Home Department Proceedings, Archaeology Branch*, April 1882, nos 17–22.

PLATE 2.6 • Gopuram *of the Great Temple to Shiva and his consort at Madurai, an architectural monument targeted for conservation by H. H. Cole. Photograph by Nicholas & Co., Madras. SOURCE:* MAJOR H. H. COLE, *PRESERVATION OF NATIONAL MONUMENTS: ALBUMS OF DRAWINGS AND PHOTOGRAPHS*, VOL. 2, SIMLA: GOVERNMENT CENTRAL BRANCH PRESS, 1884–85.



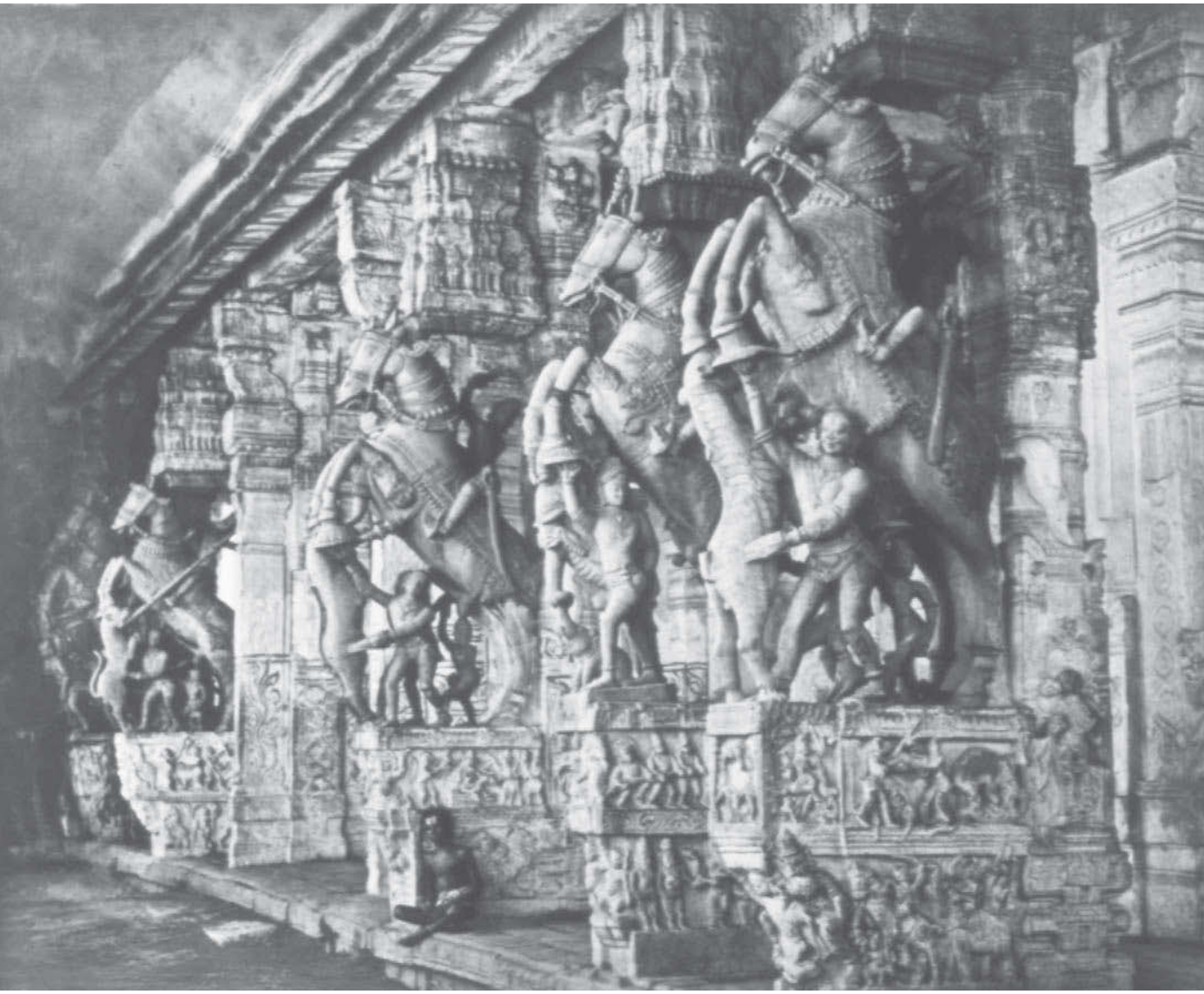


PLATE 2.7 • *Carved pillars in the Sheshagiri Rao* mandapam *in the Great Temple to Vishnu at Srirangam, another monument targeted for conservation by H. H. Cole. Photograph by Nicholas & Co., Madras. SOURCE*: MAJOR H. H. COLE, *PRESERVATION OF NATIONAL MONUMENTS: ALBUMS OF DRAWINGS AND PHOTOGRAPHS*, VOL. 2, SIMLA: GOVERNMENT CENTRAL BRANCH PRESS, 1884–85.

The separation of spheres again brought to the fore the issue that had been increasingly highlighted by the likes of Fergusson: the need for the accurate delineation and documentation of ancient Indian architecture. We have seen how the project of the preparation of drawings, photographs and casts of all the country's ancient architectural specimens had been gaining momentum since the 1860s. The scheme of 1868–69 on 'the illustration of the Archaic Architecture of India' stood out as a foundational venture, scanning as it had the entire field of architectural and archaeological remains, laying out as it did a detailed agenda of the precise means and ends of visual replication. Over the 1870s, we can see this mother-project feeding into a number of others, involving the students of the Schools of Art in the preparation of drawings and casts from monuments on site. There was, for instance, the arduous long-drawn programme of copying the cave paintings of Ajanta by students of Sir J. J. School of Art under Principal John Griffiths, and the illustration of the Hindu temple architecture and sculpture of Orissa by students of the Calcutta School of Art, for Rajendralal Mitra's book, *The Antiquities of Orissa*. Both projects resulted in sumptuously illustrated publications, the text providing the historical and descriptive backdrop to the visual feast of large detailed plates.[46] It is this agenda — of the production and publication of images of Indian architecture — which we also see occupying centre-stage in the conservation and preservation schemes initiated by H. H. Cole.

Every image (drawn, engraved, moulded, or photographed) was intended to be a perfected copy of the original, in part or in whole. And, individually and collectively, they were meant to serve a series of inter-related functions. To begin with, the copy was to stand as a record (durable and preservable) of original structures and designs that were being fast arrested by decay. It was in this capacity that it was to also function as a prescription for restoration and conservation. It was H. H. Cole's special charge to make each drawing, plan or plate a register of the current physical state of the monument under survey, and a pointer to the kind of repairs and renovations to be undertaken on each. Most important of all, the image acquired its prime value as a collectible and reproducible resource — something that could be possessed and disseminated at large, and distributed among art schools and museums in India and abroad, while maintaining the monuments on site. In their faithfulness and accuracy, the copy had to stand in as a substitute (as they had for Fergusson in England) for the actual monument, seen and studied on location. Thus we notice a great premium being placed in all these projects not just on visual documentation but also on the publication of a selection and series of these images: on presenting an assemblage that could encapsulate the whole subject of India's architectural history.

The trend was set, since the 1880s, by a new kind of photographic album on India's ancient monuments and remains that would be published by the firm of William Griggs of London, a man who led the way in the spectacular reproduction of Indian objects through new print technologies.[47] We see an example in the select one-volume compendium of 100 photographs and drawings of India's 'historical buildings' which Griggs published in 1896 out of the voluminous corpus of material that H. H. Cole had assembled during his tenure as Curator of Ancient Monuments in India.[48] An equally spectacular publication the following year was a large album on *The Ancient Monuments, Temples and Sculptures*

[46] Rajendralal Mitra, *The Antiquities of Orissa*, vols I and II, Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press, 1875, 1880; John Griffiths, *The Paintings of the Buddhist Caves of Ajanta*, London: W. Griggs, 1896.

[47] On Griggs, his picture folios and his advanced printing technologies, see Ray Desmond, *The India Museum, 1801–1879*, London: India Office Library and Records, 1982. With the arrival of photography in India, the country's ancient monuments and ruins presented themselves as the choicest subject for the lens. The theme of the photo-documentation of Indian architecture and antiquities merits a separate in-depth study.

[48] *India: Photographs and Drawings of Historical Buildings* — 100 Plates Reproduced by W. Griggs from the collection in the late Office of the Curator of Ancient Monuments in India, London, 1896.

of India, compiled by James Burgess.[49] Aided by a minimum of textual annotation, the photographs in themselves (in their selection and grouping) were 'intended to illustrate the history and development of Indian architecture and art from the earliest times of which we have remains'.[50]

Directly or indirectly, the museum remained at the centre of these exercises of illustration and reproduction. Since the 1860s, a chief aim behind the commissioning of copies and casts had been to create the material for large museum collections of Indian art and antiquities of all schools, periods and regions. Museums, like the new art historical discipline, were to stand as 'heterotopias of indefinitely accumulating time, accumulating everything, resonating with the will, as Michel Foucault once put it, to "enclose in one place all times, all epochs, all forms, all tastes"'.[51] Like the archive of images which sustained them, they were to serve as a panoptic theatre: a space for seeing and commanding the subject at large. All along we see the museums in India and London featuring either as the suppliers or the receivers of the bulk of the drawings, photographs, models, and casts that were brought into play. In the 1860s, the India Museum in London was the recipient of the collection which Fergusson had amassed of over a thousand photographs of structures ranging over the whole continent, from which he had picked out 500 representative samples and serially arranged them for the Paris International Exposition of 1867.[52] In 1870s, all the casts and drawings produced by the art school students on the Orissa temples and Ajanta caves were deposited and distributed between museums in Calcutta, Bombay and London. And, in the 1890s, the photographic albums produced by Griggs drew amply on these photographic resources housed in the main museums of the metropolis and the colony: the India Office at Whitehall, London, and the Indian Museum in Calcutta. Behind all such selections for displays and publications, the museum was emerging then as the master-source — as a potential permanent site where all of India's archaeological heritage could be simulated through reproduction.

from sites to museums: The imperatives of acquisition

Yet, the whole existence and identity of museums would revolve around the collection and preservation of 'original' artefacts. The growing availability and accumulation of copies could never displace the sanctity of the actual object, whenever the need and opportunity arose for its placement within a museum. It is around this definition of need and opportunity, its urgency and its consequences, that the claims of conservation and collection would often find themselves at odds with each other. In the very years that museums began to seek out a systematised collection of historical objects, we see the archaeological establishment placing a mounting priority on *in situ* conservation. Museums would often find themselves in an ambivalent position vis-à-vis this new cardinal principle of Indian archaeology: its avowed reluctance of removing monuments off site and 'robbing a neighbourhood of its historical landmark'.[53]

Right from the start, the demand for faithful reproductions of Indian architecture had rested on a parallel urge to retain and preserve the original structures on site. This was certainly the case with the long-drawn project of copying the Ajanta paintings, carried out through the 1870s. Questioning the advisability of removing the paintings from the walls of the caves, as had been done with some old Italian frescoes, the authorities argued that the reproductions (both the photographs and the oil

[49] J. A. S. Burgess, *The Ancient Monuments, Temples and Sculptures of India*, London: W. Griggs, 1897.

[50] *Ibid.*

[51] Donald Preziosi, *Rethinking Art History: Meditations on a Coy Science*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991, p. xvi.

[52] John Forbes Watson, James Fergusson, Sir Alexander Cunningham, and Meadows Taylor, *Report on the Illustration of the Archaic Architecture of India*, London: India Museum, 1869, p. 7.

[53] *Home Department Proceedings, Archaeology and the Conservation of Ancient Monuments Branch*, November 1885, nos 11–13, p. 6.

paintings made by the Bombay art school students), distributed to various museums and art schools, could fulfil the need of a public, permanent record of Ajanta paintings, as awesome as the original.[54] To be effective, the copies needed to be as close and complete an approximation of the original, as possible — all the more so, as they had to stand in for monuments and sites that were inaccessible, distant and scattered around the country. In this process of 'standing in', the copies, in their very existence and proliferation, came to provide the strongest endorsement of the *in situ* principle. Officials were aware that the demands of *in situ* conservation appeared to go against the needs of archaeological research and museum collections. Archaeological research, it was said, always carried the temptation of carrying off excavated material (whenever they seemed movable) as 'proof of an unravelled mystery', and situating them in the learned premises of a museum for 'the elucidation of history'. But the availability of photographs, casts and copies, that could faithfully reproduce archaeological evidence and adequately meet the wants of museums in India and Europe, left little justification for the removal of 'original stones'.[55] The site was endowed with a unique aura that the museum could not substitute.

The Department of the Conservation of Ancient Monuments came to, thus, conceive of the whole territory under their purview as an open air museum. India was conceived a landscape of ancient sites, each identified, described, classified and conserved. The archaeological map that had laid out by Cunnigham's explorations grew vastly in detail and territorial range under H. H. Cole. A map Cole prepared in 1883 of 'India, shewing some of the localities rich in ancient monuments', had each site classified as B (Buddhist), H (Hindu), J (Jain), or M (Muhamaddan), marking out those which had been visited and studied from those still to be covered.[56] It laid out both the achievements and the agenda for archaeology in India. The compulsions of excavation and research, that had made possible the conception of the map, stood face to face here with the priorities of conservation, that made the map its prescription for maintaining all of India as a 'museum' of her ancient and medieval past. The imagining of the country, at large, as an archaeological museum did throttle the possibility of comprehensive museum collections of the nation's art and antiquities. The promise of a representative display through photographs, drawings and casts never quite materialised in the existing museums. Nor did the acquisition of archaeological artefacts by museums follow any orderly pattern — chronological, regional or stylistic.[57] The absence of a close, formalised link between the Archaeological Survey and the museums in India would remain a continuous complaint within the museum administration well into the 20th century.

One could pause at this point to argue that, even as archaeology and museums posed as critical 'absences' in each other's spheres, they nonetheless remained interlocked in each other's episteme. The archaeological project was, in essence, framed by the ideology of a museum collection. Rendering monuments into sites — photographing them, classifying and conserving them, attaching histories to them, providing them with copious textual descriptions and annotations — amounted to their effective museumisation. So, even as pressures built up to conserve all old structures on site, the very intervention of archaeology meant their transformation into objects of official custody,

[54] Concluding report on the work of copying the paintings in the Ajanta caves, 1884–85, by Principal John Griffiths in *Home Department Proceedings, Archaeology Branch*, May 1886, nos 35–41, pp. 99–120.

[55] *Reports of the Curator of Ancient Monuments in India*, 1st Report, 1881–82, pp. 11–12.

[56] *Ibid.*, 2nd Report, 1882–83.

[57] This was the case even with the premier institution of the Indian Museum in Calcutta, where the plan of a comprehensive photographic display of monuments from various schools, periods and regions never materialised, nor the plan of making the museum the chief depository of the artefacts recovered by the Archaeological Survey all over India to enable the building of a representative collection in one unit.

specialist knowledge and public display, as within a museum. Remaining outside the physical space of a museum, they nonetheless came to inhabit its wider cultural ambit.

But, there would also be other more direct ways in which the interests and importance of museum acquisitions came to configure within the schemes of archaeological conservation. All along, the *in situ* principle itself would be open to a series of clauses and reservations, which allowed, even demanded, the removal of objects and structures to the 'safer' premises of museums. There was the most obvious problem of loose and isolated objects, which already lay detached from the monuments to which they were linked, which confronted officials and scholars in every nook and cranny of the country. Their definition as 'movable antiquities' had made their mobility (i.e., their removability) a fundamental condition of the preservation of their physical being and historical identity. It is over this vast mass of objects that the Treasure Trove Act sought to mark out the precise legislative claims and rights of the government, to stem their many 'inappropriate' uses and appropriations, to enable their quick and effective removal to museums.

Museums, it seems, had to negotiate a conundrum of conflicting conditions and needs — of religious usage, local value and archaeological interests — to justify their acquisition of loose and stray objects. We see evidences of these in a government resolution of 1882 that spelt out a strong claim to the acquisition of the vast repository of

> isolated figures, not *in situ*, especially if they are the remains of an extinct religion, such as Buddhist figures, which are not infrequently mutilated by the people, unless they happen to have been adopted by the Brahmans as belonging to Hindoo cults.[58] In regard to such isolated figures and to others, which although not mutilated, are lying neglected about the country, … these might with propriety be removed to some safe places of deposit, such as the Indian Museum, where they could be seen and studied by all persons who take an interest in Indian Art.[59]

Such was the case, for instance, with the large numbers of sculptures that were found scattered among the Buddhist ruins of the ancient Gandhara region in the north-west (Plate 2.8). We find an immense consternation being voiced by the authorities against a series of threats that these sculptures faced — their mutilation by the local community of Yusufzai Afghans; their free appropriation by officers, civil and military, for private use and sales; their attraction also for native pilferers as their demand and prices mounted in the open market. And it was to counteract all of these that museums were seen as the only proper destination for these sculptures — for only there could they be 'of real importance' and 'gratify all artistic and historical curiosities'.[60] However, what remained open to debate were issues of which museums were entitled to which selection of sculptures. It is from these years that the claims of local and site museums came to pitched against those of a central body like the Imperial Museum, Calcutta, even as the rights of the latter would be constantly asserted over those of the British Museum or the Louvre. If 'safe-keeping' was a priority, an equal concern was not to deprive a locality or a community of its 'property' — not to remove the objects from a site to museums 'where not a fraction of the Native public can ever see it'. At the same time, objections were raised against the scattering of a collection of sculptures over a number of museums (as had happened with the Gandhara pieces, which Major Cole had distributed between five museums stretching from Lahore to Madras) — for such divisions, it was alleged, led to

[58] It is instructive to note the way the colonial state could make native vandalism an immediate occasion for intervention, but remained in a fix when it encountered (as it did on innumerable occasions) Hindu appropriation of old Buddhist and Jain statuaries. For all attempts, in such areas, to establish archaeological custody over those sites and reaffirm their 'original' religious provenances moved on the dangerous grounds of offending current religious faiths and sentiments.

[59] Acquisition by the Government under the Treasure Trove Act of Articles of Archaeological Interest — *Proceedings of the Revenue and Agricultural Department, Archaeology Branch*, April 1889, nos 1–5, Appendix II.

[60] *Ibid.*, pp. 9–10.

PLATE 2.8 • *Gandharan sculptures from Lorian Tangai, accumulated on-site, before removal to a museum. Photograph taken around the 1870s.* SOURCE: REPRODUCED WITH THE PERMISSION OF THE BRITISH LIBRARY, LONDON (PHOTO 1002, NO. 1043).

a breaking of the series, thus emptying them of all 'scientific value'.[61]

bringing monuments to museums

All these considerations had come into play, openly or obliquely, in two of the earliest cases which had seen the large-scale transference of sculptures from sites into museums in the urgent interests of 'safe custody'. The cases were singular in that they underlined a major exception to the *in situ* principle — involving the removal not just of loose/isolated objects but whole standing structures and their reassembling within the premises of a museum. They lead us back to the fate of the two Buddhist *stupa*s of Amaravati and Bharhut, one which had been discovered as early as 1797 by Colonel Colin Mackenzie on the banks of the Krishna River in Guntur district, the other which had been more recently excavated by Alexander Cunningham near Nagod in the Satna district. During the 1870s and 1880s both monuments would be entirely cleared off the site and removed to museums — the former in part to the Government Museum, Madras, and the latter entirely to the Indian Museum, Calcutta. The coming of the Amaravati and Bharhut sculptures not only augurs the arrival of archaeology within these two oldest museums in India. The process of their assemblage and display also show the way archaeology, as a system of knowledge on ruins and relics, was staged within its premises.

Let us take the case, first, of the Amaravati sculptures. Of the two, these had a much longer history of excavation, study, collection, and dispersal from the site: a dispersal that took a large portion of the monument away to the India Museum in London before the rest was lodged in the Madras Government Museum (Plate 2.9). The history of the archaeological discovery of

[61] *Proceedings of the Revenue and Agricultural Department*, p. 9.

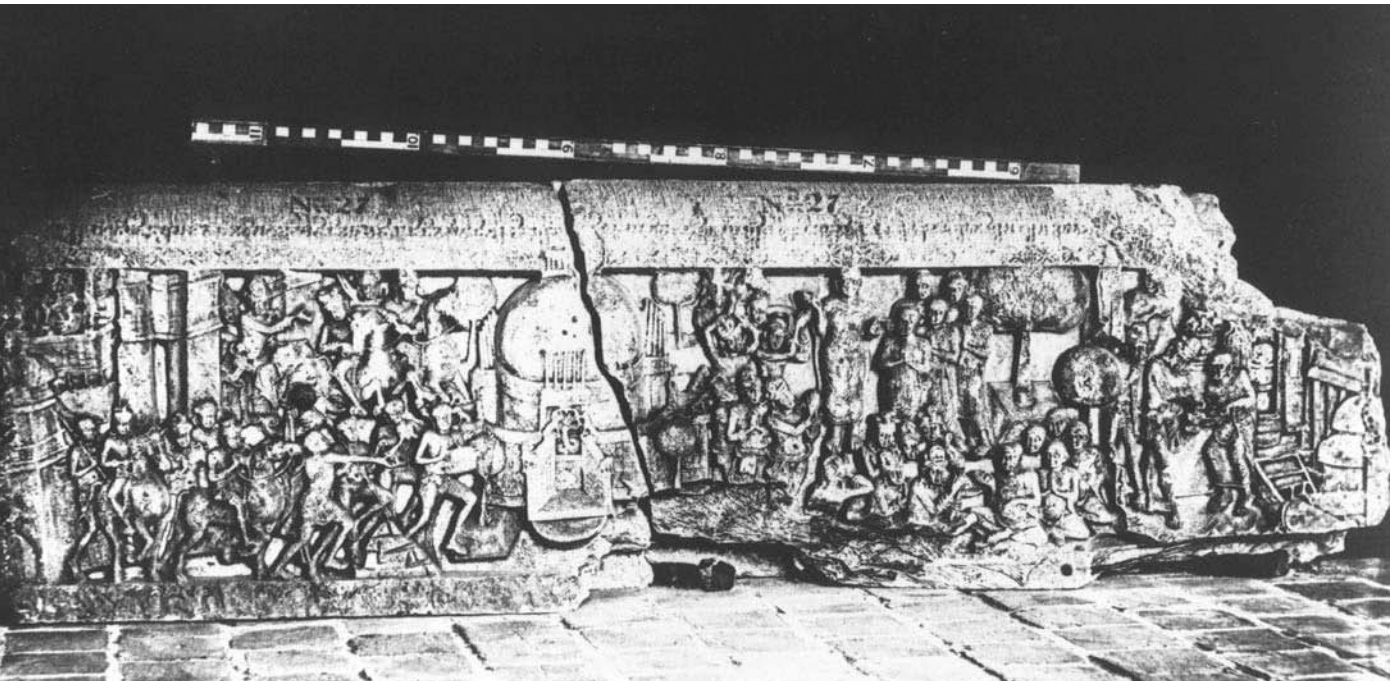
Amaravati would repeatedly contrast Western care and connoisseurship with 'native' ravage and indifference.[62] Colin Mackenzie's first investigations and studies stood juxtaposed against the random digging of the local Raja in search of 'treasures' and building material. Thereafter, each phase of British intervention confronted further pillaging of the site, and defacing of the stones by locals. What had been unearthed as a marvel of early Buddhist architecture, positioned in an ascending artistic sequence running from Bharhut to Sanchi to Amaravati, remained, it was regretted, 'useless stones' in native eyes. The question of 'safe custody', thus, constantly legitimised the removal of the stones from the site.[63]

The process of removal, however, was piecemeal and haphazard. It involved, also, some glaring instances of the callousness of authorities regarding their proper installation in museums. A first lot of sculptures had been removed by Mackenzie to Masulipatam, from where a few were sent to the Asiatic Society's museum in Calcutta; another lot was brought away in 1830 by the collector of Masulipatam to beautify the market-place of the town, and later handed over to the Madras Museum in 1856; meanwhile, the single largest haul of sculptures, excavated by Walter Elliot, Commissioner of Guntur, in 1840 and shipped to Madras, had been lying unattended and unexamined there for over 14 years (in the premises of the Madras Literary Society's museum), before the whole Madras collection was shipped to England for display in the India Museum. In England too, the Amaravati sculptures created archaeological history through their sheer negligence. Lying abandoned for years in open crates in the dock and in backyards, they were discovered by Fergusson in 1866, extensively photographed by William Griggs and made the core of a display of photographs of

[62] Most later studies of the Amaravati sculptures recount this tortuous history of its discovery, vandalisation and dispersal from the site. See, for example, C. Sivaramamurti, *Amaravati Sculptures in the Madras Government Museum*, Bulletin of the Madras Government Museum, New Series, vol. 4, Madras, 1977, pp. 1–3.

[63] Preservation of the Amaravati Sculptures — *Home Department Proceedings, Archaeology Branch*, July 1882, nos 1–5.

PLATE 2.9 • *Linnaeus Tripe, photograph of a panel of the Amravati sculptures in the Central Museum, Madras, 1857. The sculptures were then called the 'Elliot Marbles', after Walter Elliot, commissioner, Guntur district, Madras Presidency, who was responsible for the transference of many of those from the site to the Madras Museum.* SOURCE: REPRODUCED WITH PERMISSION OF THE BRITISH LIBRARY, LONDON (PHOTO 958, P. 13).



Indian architecture which Fergusson organised for the Paris International Exhibition of 1867.[64]

Amaravati, we find, featured as a crucial site for the maturing of colonial archaeology. While its neglect and mutilation provided the cathartic point for the project to articulate itself, the monument itself would be subjected to the kind of detailed visual documentation and photographic coverage that became germane to the discipline (Plate 2.10).

[64] This is described by Fergusson in his book on the Amaravati and Sanchi sculptures, *Tree and Serpent Worship or Illustrations of Mythology and Art in India in the first and fourth centuries after Christ from the Sculptures of the Buddhist topes at Sanchi and Amaravati*, London: India Museum, 1869, pp. iii–iv, 149–52.

PLATE 2.10A AND B • *Two panels of the Amaravati sculptures (limestone, ca. 2nd century CE). SOURCE:* J. A. S. BURGESS, *THE BUDDHIST STATUES OF AMRAVATI AND JAGAYYAPETTA*, LONDON: TRUBNER AND CO., 1888.

These drawings and photographs, along with the actual remains, provided Fergusson with his main material for the reconstruction of Amaravati's history. Such a reconstruction operated at many levels. It ascribed a period (2nd–3rd centuries CE), style (later Buddhist), regional, and dynastic classification (the Satavahanas of Andhradesa) to the fragments. It attempted to conjure, from the sculpted representations, the structure of the whole *stupa* of which the fragments were a part.[65] Most important of all, it made the sculpted fragments 'evidence' for a racial and ethnological history of India — the sculptures assumed their chief relevance as 'sources' on the clothes and appearance, mythology and rituals, art and faith of the people of the region.[66] From Fergusson's ethnological reading

[65] *Ibid.*, pp. 150–51.

[66] The title of Fergusson's book and its broader trajectory of the comparative mythology and ritual practices of ancient civilisations of the world make amply evident his ethnological approach to the study of these sculptures.

of Amaravati in 1867 (and his placement of it within an artistic cycle of excellence and decadence), James Burgess moved in the 1880s to a more painstaking archaeological study of the monument, offering a detailed plan of the site, a layout of the structural features and measurements of the monument as it must have stood, a location of the site in ancient sources, a survey of attendant epigraphic and numismatic evidences, and, of course, a decoding of the vast body of sculptural iconography).[67] As it came to stand authoritative reference on the subject, such a work also laid the grounds for the museumisation of Amaravati.

Much to the regrets of H. H. Cole (Curator of Ancient Monuments), years of dismemberment and dispersal had convinced the authorities that the *stupa* was beyond all scope of *in situ* conservation.[68] The museum was therefore seen as the only viable site for an effective reassembling of the scattered fragments. The Government Museum, Madras, was made the main repository of the sculptures: it was to be the single point in the country for the return of all the dispersed stones (barring those that were in London) and for their systematic ordering and display. A casing slab with the representation of the whole *stupa* in miniature (one reproduced in the frontispiece of Burgess' book and in most other works on Amaravati since) provided the clue for the visualisation of the absent structure, and for the identification of the different parts within it (Plate 2.11). The reconstruction, however, was soon recognised as inaccurate. Done without the knowledge and advice of Burgess, it set up the sculptures either in a solid wall or as separate slabs, failing thus to produce the effect of an interwoven sculpted rail, as was meant to have originally existed around the *stupa*.[69] Authentic knowledge, here, remained in the realm of the conjectural; yet, archaeological expertise had firmly laid out the lines of 'truth' and 'plausibility' around the stones, guarding the lines against any slippages or contortions. The same expertise, that had rendered each stone slab at Amaravati a potential museum object, determined the way that object needed to be read and viewed within a museum. By its criteria, the display set up in the Madras museum was a transgression: its historical inaccuracy, evident to the scholar, seemed to go against the very ethos of the discipline and institution in which it was situated.[70]

The point about inaccuracy drove home a fine but crucial distinction between the museum's 'scholarly' and 'popular' domain. Museums in India found themselves wedged between the two domains, their functioning racked by the tensions and oppositions between the two. The Amaravati sculptures, lodged in one hall of the museum, existing at random amid a medley of botanical, zoological, geological, and ethnological exhibits, became symptomatic of the tension and the unease. Their presence signalled a wider absence: the absence of a representative and organised archaeological section in the museum, within which these sculptures could elaborate their scholarly value. The absence of such a section — the lack of space, order or completeness in whatever archaeological collection did exist — continued to trouble the museum administration for years to come.[71] Archaeology, more than any other field, served as a record of the museum's inability to transform itself from a 'Wonder House' to a centre of disciplinary specialisation.

[67] J. A. S. Burgess, *The Buddhist Stupas of Amaravati and Jaggayapeta*, London: Trubner and Co., 1887; reprint, Delhi, Varanasi: Indological Book House, 1970.

[68] Letter from J. Burgess to the Government of India, Amaravati, 27 January, 1882; letter from H. H. Cole to the Government of India, Madras, 27 March 1882 — *Home Department Proceedings, Archaeology Branch*, April 1882, nos 17–22, July 1882, nos 1–5.

[69] Sivaramamurti, *Amaravati Sculptures*, p. 2.

[70] The erroneous nature of the Amaravati display, and the lack of a separate properly designed archaeological gallery, was repeatedly stressed by archaeologists and museum authorities in Madras throughout this period. See *Report of the Museums Conference held in Madras*, 15–17 January, Calcutta, 1912, pp. 20–21.

[71] Way down in 1996, the display arrangements of the Amaravati sculptures were still to change, and plans of a new archaeological section and buildings still to materialise.

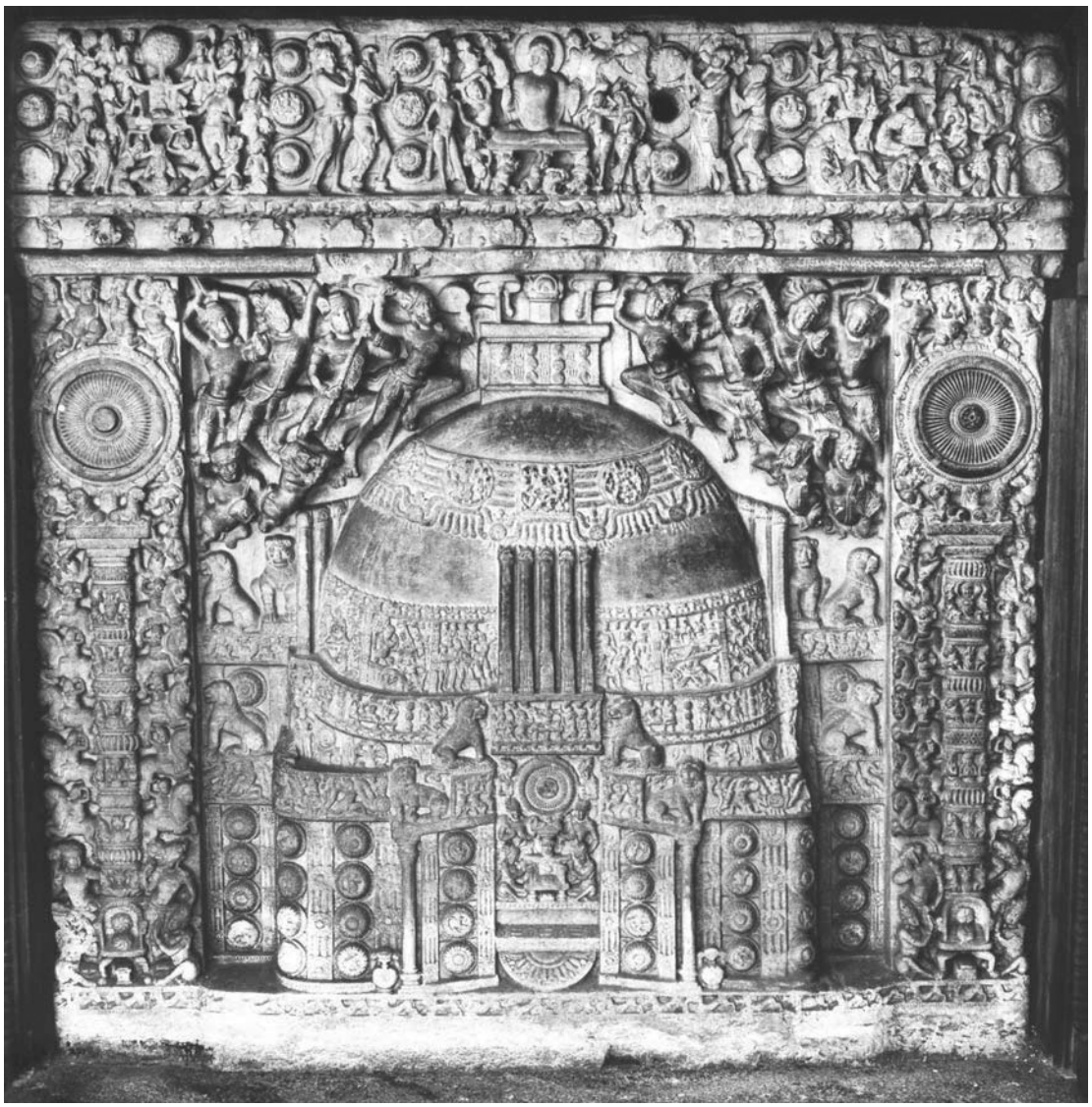


PLATE 2.11 • *The miniature stupa in the Amaravati sculptures (limestone, ca. 2nd century CE). SOURCE:* COURTESY OF THE AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF INDIAN STUDIES, NEW DELHI, AND THE MADRAS MUSEUM.

Let us move now from the Amaravati to the Bharhut sculptures. For the problem confronts us as acutely in the case of the Imperial Museum in Calcutta, and of the fledgling department of archaeology that emerged here with the arrival of the Bharhut stones. Unlike the Amaravati relics, the transference of the Bharhut remains to the Indian Museum was quick and complete. The monument that existed at Bharhut from the 2nd century BCE (the *stupa*, of which no traces remained, the sculpted pillars, railing, architrave, and the four gateways, of which fragments survived) was surmised to have been considerably smaller than its counterpart at Amaravati: the yield of sculpted and architectural remains at the site was also more limited. The remains were first discovered by

Alexander Cunningham during his survey of the region in November 1873; full-fledged excavation began at the site by Cunningham and his assistant, J. D. Beglar during March–April 1874; by the summer of 1876, Cunningham had completed his lengthy description and study of the monument, unravelling Buddhist legend and history from the sculptures (Plate 2.12). Simultaneously, the archaeologists arrived at the decision for the government's acquisition of all the excavated stones and their despatch for safe-keeping to the Indian Museum, Calcutta.[72]

That the Bharhut sculptures came to the museum in Calcutta was the first sign of the kind of 'national' role and status that was being conceived for this imperial institution. It had been hoped by some that the sculptures would come to London 'instead of being confined to the peaceful oblivion of an Indian museum'. Cunningham's counter-fear was that, in travelling to London, 'they might be consigned to the still more oblivious vaults of the British Museum, where some ten years ago [he had] … discovered no less than seven Indian inscriptions in the full enjoyment of undisturbed repose, unseen, uncared for and unknown'.[73] The Indian Museum was being prioritised as the most legitimate repository of the country's antiquities, delegitimising the claims of metropolitan museums in the West to a superior custody of such relics. If excavated structures could not be safely retained on site, the argument was that they should at least remain within the territorial bounds of India, to be accessible to those who needed to be educated through these about their own heritage and history.

PLATE 2.12 • *The Bharhut railing pillars on-site. Photograph by J. D. Beglar, ca. 1873–74. SOURCE:* ALEXANDER CUNNINGHAM, *THE STUPA OF BHARHUT: A BUDDHIST MONUMENT ORNAMENTED WITH VARIOUS SCULPTURES ILLUSTRATIVE OF BUDDHIST HISTORY AND LEGEND*, LONDON: ALLEN, 1879.

Carried away by local people for building purposes, the stones of Bharhut had to be identified and retrieved from a wide surrounding area to reassemble as far as possible the presumed original

[72] This story of its excavation and removal forms the Preface to Cunningham's authoritative monograph on the monument, *The Stupa of Bharhut*. See Alexander Cunningham, *The Stupa of Bharhut: A Buddhist Monument Ornamented with Numerous Sculptures Illustrative of Buddhist Legend and History in the Third Century B.C.*, London: W. H. Allen and Co., 1879.

[73] *Ibid.*, p. vii.

structure.[74] The physical processes of clearing, identifying and piecing together fragments would be replicated in Cunningham's monograph on the monument — in the way it reconstructed the architectural plan of the *stupa* as it must have stood, its ground plan and elevation, its height and width, the location of each gateway, beam, pillar and railing around it. Cunningham's text, in turn, acted as the blue-print for the reconstruction of the monument within the museum, serving also as the authoritative guide to the display.[75] (Plate 2.13)

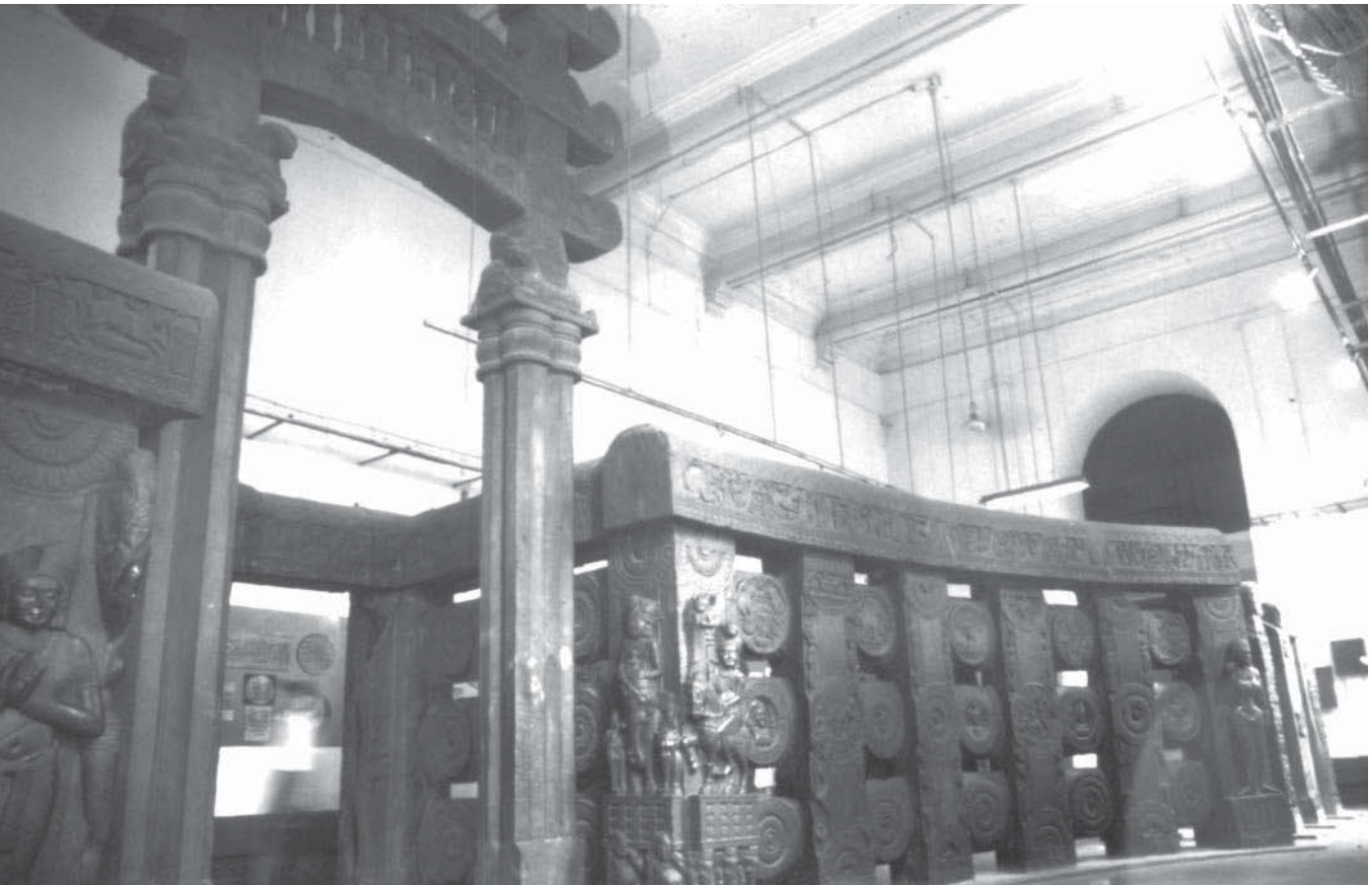
Unlike the Amaravati sculptures, the conjectural reconstruction of the Bharhut *stupa* met all the scholarly standards of authenticity and accuracy, left as it was to the expert hands of J. D. Beglar, with Cunningham's book acting as his reference. What was reconstructable from the fragments was only one of the gateways, and a large section of the architrave pieced together from the sculpted pillars, cross-bars and medallions. But the part itself formed a magnificent ensemble, filling a whole hall, allowing the complete structure to be imagined around it.

In the case of the Indian Museum, too, the arrival and reconstruction of the Bharhut

[74] Cunningham, *The Stupa of Bharhut*, pp. v–vii, 4–5.

[75] In fact, a copy of Cunningham's *The Stupa of Bharhut* came to be kept in the gallery for the reference of viewers. In John Anderson, *Catalogue and Handbook of the Archaeological Collections in the Indian Museum*, Calcutta: Indian Museum, 1883 (henceforth referred to as *Catalogue and Handbook*), the lengthy description of the Bharhut sculptures, covering the bulk of the first volume (part I, pp. 2–120) was drawn entirely from Cunningham's book.

PLATE 2.13 • *The reconstructed Bharhut* stupa *in the opening hall of the Archaeological Galleries of the Indian Museum, Calcutta. Source:* Courtesy of the Indian Museum, Kolkata.



sculptures occasioned the desire to build a larger archaeological collection. With both the 'decorative arts' and the archaeological relics, plans were afloat to make the Indian Museum a mother-institution, which would receive items from all the provincial governments and museums, with the intention of developing, here, under one roof, a representative 'Indian' collection. An Archaeological Gallery was opened in the museum for the first time in April 1878 to display the Bharhut remains. Soon after, it was temporarily closed off to the public to allow the installation of stone platforms and the arrangement of the sculptures on these to simulate the standing monument. Once this arrangement was complete, and stands and cases installed for the museum's other scattered holdings of sculptures (mainly from Bodh Gaya and Gandhara), a proper 'archaeological series' was seen as ready to be thrown open to the public.

from 'natural history' to archaeology: Framing meaning around exhibits

The Archaeological Gallery, however, remained no more than a small unit among the Indian Museum's main spread of 'natural history' exhibits — one among its Ornithological, Reptilian and Mammalian galleries, its gallery for stuffed birds and the new Alcoholic Gallery, with specimens arranged in glass bottles using alcohol as preservative. Only a fraction of the total number of objects acquired by the museum in a year would still belong to the category of 'archaeological relics'.[76] It is important, I feel, to address this continued preponderance of 'natural history' within the Indian Museum, as in most of the other museums of colonial India of the time. For, in many ways, it is 'natural history' that can be seen as establishing the analogous methods and orders for the assembling of archaeological artefacts as museum exhibits, as the first archaeological collections struggled to emerge within these spaces.

An imaginative parallel has been drawn between the two 19th-century 'sciences' of taxidermy and history.[77] The common end to which both aspired was that of 'life-like reproduction', that of the reconstitution of the material remnant into a semblance of its original state. The whole restorative exercise in either case rested on the prior fact of death and loss. There was a prior state that had to be recognised as lost for the restoration to be effected. Therefore, the taxidermist had as his material the dead beast or bird; the historian/archaeologist, the decayed object from which all original meaning and value had been drained. The challenge for the science of taxidermy was to reconstitute the creature 'as it really was', not by faking an exact copy with alien substances, but by using the actual skin of the dead being. In the simulation of life, the dead itself had to be rendered life-like. In becoming more 'scientific' over the early 19th century, taxidermy evolved newer possibilities of preservation and simulation of the dead being — a method, for instance, of soaking the skin in a solution of chemicals and alcohol, which preserved it against shrinkage and deterioration and left it ready for the taxidermist's operation.[78]

The stone fragment from the past, it could be argued, became similar malleable material in the hands of the archaeologist. If it could not be physically remade like the carcass, it could nonetheless be mentally elasticised and cast within a larger conjectured whole, whether a monument, a series or an epoch. The detailed anatomical knowledge of the taxidermist had its parallel, here, in the archaeologist's historical expertise on script, style, substance, period, and region. This expertise

[76] To take an instance from the year 1878–79, the year the Archaeological Gallery was inaugurated within the Indian Museum, out of a total number of 1,348 additions to the museum's collection only 64 were archaeological pieces, the rest belonging to the category of Mammals, Aves, Reptilia, Pisces, Invertebrata or Ethnology. Two decades later, in 1898–99, even as 1,804 new archaeological items were added to the museum, they continued to be vastly outnumbered by the 4,333 new acquisitions in the Zoology and Natural History Sections.

[77] Bann, *The Clothing of Clio*, Chapter 2, 'The Historian as Taxidermist: Ranke, Barante, Waterton'.

[78] *Ibid.*, pp. 16–17.

is what gave him his recreative powers over 'the dissected carcass of the historic past'. Like the beast or the bird, the past needed to be brought alive from the surviving material remnant. Hence, the aura and wonder that surrounded the 'original' artefact, which disempowered the cast or the copy, except as an extension and elaboration of the original.

To treat the mounted specimens of natural history and archaeology as comparative cases is to pose in more insistent terms the issue of the textual and institutional boundaries within which each was inserted.[79] Over the mid-19th century, the museum of natural history defined the field in which the taxidermist's creation fulfilled the demands for 'life-like reproduction' and occupied its slot as a scientific specimen. In an analogous sphere, the archaeologist's find assumed its status and meaning as a historical relic in galleries arranged according to centuries or themes, periods or schools. Studies of some of the 19th-century European history museums have shown two alternative principles at work in the museumisation of historical artefacts.[80] In one, the distribution of objects was according to centuries; in the other, the assemblage reconstructed entire period rooms with furniture, paintings and other artefacts around the cluster of relics from that period. The shift from the 'century' room mode to that of the 'thematic' room involved, it is argued, a movement from the trope of metonymy to that of synecdoche. The reductive relationship of the part to the whole in one (where in each 'century' set, the fragment would metonymically represent the whole, not through any associative link between each displayed piece, but through the simple fact of contiguity and juxtaposition) was contrasted with an integrative and organic part–whole linkage in the second mode of display (where each object from the past in a room were assimilated to each other to create an integrative notion of a homogenous historical period). The 'poetics' of the modern museum in the West is shown to rest on a merger of these two modes — on alternating metonymic sequences of schools and centuries in galleries with reconstructed 'period' rooms and salons, or with reconstructed interiors of temples and cloisters.

Let me return the discussion here to the small archaeological collection that asserted its presence within the Indian Museum's stronghold of 'natural history', and the modes of historical representation that began to be conceived around it. Beginning with the acquisition of the Bharhut sculptures, the museum had become the occasional depository of architectural and sculptural remains excavated by the Archaeological Survey. Some of its antiquities (among them, for instance, the large series of Gandhara sculptures) had been transferred from the Asiatic Society's museum; others began to trickle in from work carried out largely in the eastern region, primarily from Alexander Cunningham's excavations at Sarnath and Rajendralal Mitra's surveys of Orissa and Bodh Gaya. By the early 1880s, the museum was claiming to possess a larger archaeological collection, 'so far as art in stone is concerned', than any other museum.[81] There are different ways in which historical meaning accrued around such relics. First, they were located within a sequence and a series, a religious denomination prefiguring a stylistic unit: this was particularly evident in the way monuments were configured within a Buddhist 'great art' cycle, whereby Bharhut, Sanchi and Amaravati were all linked to each other in an imaginary historical chain and

[79] Bann, *The Clothing of Clio*, pp. 23–24.

[80] Taking up the cases of two museums of the medieval period from mid-19th century France — the collection of Alexandre Lenoir that became the Musee des Petits-Augustins, and that of Alexandre du Sommerard that became the Musee de Cluny — Stephen Bann (*Ibid.*, Chapter 4, 'Poetics of the Museum') draws imaginatively on Hayden White's tropological analysis of discourse and his 'emplotment' of various historical narratives in terms of four 'master-tropes', metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche and irony. See, Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism*, Baltimore: John Hopkins, 1978.

[81] *Annual Report, Indian Museum, 1883–84*, Superintendent, Calcutta: Government Printing, 1884, p, 10.

[82] This idea of a Buddhist 'great art' cycle finds one of its earliest elaborations in James Fergusson's *History of Indian*

placed on an ascending or descending scale.[82] Second, they were made to stand as historical 'evidence', their opacities dissolved, their references made transparent to glean from them details of India's ethnography, her religion and mythology, her social and cultural history. Thus, we find that the significance of the Bharhut stones was projected, partly as a prime point in the 'chain of excellence' of India's Buddhist art, partly as source of revelation on Buddhist legend and history.[83] Their meaning, so to say, was constituted both as 'art' and as 'history'.

The kind of display that came about for this archaeological collection was a serial arrangement according to imperial 'great epochs' and regional 'schools' within them. So, the reconstructed Bharhut monument became the centre-piece of what was termed the 'Asoka' gallery, which also featured the monumental figures of Yakshas and Yakshis, architectural items from Bodh Gaya, and casts from the Sanchi *stupa* and the Orissa cave temples (Plate 2.14). Attributed to the post-Mauryan Sunga dynasty (dated around 200–150 BCE), the Bharhut relics could nonetheless be made the symbolic centre of India's Buddhist past, using the name of Asoka as its reigning trope. Through their contiguous placement within the same gallery, other relics from Sanchi, Bodh Gaya, Udayagiri, and Khandagiri could co-inhabit the same imagined historical space and be placed within one continuous line of 'a Buddhist classical tradition'.[84] Two alternative traditions of the 'Gandhara' and 'Mathura' schools of Buddhist sculpture filled the second 'Indo-Scythian' gallery (Plate 2.15). Then came the 'Gupta' gallery, with the largest collection of architectural and sculptural items, with the Buddhist sculptures from Sarnath made the focal pieces of the Gupta 'classical'

PLATE 2.14 • *The Besnagar* Yakshi *and friezes from Orissa and Bodhgaya in the Asoka Gallery of the Indian Museum. Photograph taken around 1901–11. Source:* Courtesy of the Archaeological Survey of India, New Delhi.

and Eastern Architecture, Volume I, Buddhist Architecture, London: Murray, 1876; reprint, New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1972.

[83] Fergusson's *Tree and Serpent Worship* and Cunningham's *The Stupa of Bharhut* provide prime examples of this 'evidential' treatment of sculptures.

[84] *Catalogue and Handbook*, Part I, pp. 123–24, 134–35.

PLATE 2.15 • *Detail view of sculptures in the Gandharan Gallery of the Indian Museum, Calcutta. Photograph taken around 1901–11. SOURCE:* COURTESY OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY OF INDIA, NEW DELHI.

tradition over and above the 'Brahmanical' (Hindu) items (Plate 2.16). The fourth and final gallery was the most loosely conceived. Jointly termed the 'Mahomedan' and 'Inscriptions' gallery, it housed along with inscribed stone slabs a scattered medley of architectural fragments from the medieval monuments of Murshidabad, Gaur, Pandua, of other parts of East Bengal, and of north India.[85]

Imperial/dynastic labels, like 'Asoka' or 'Gupta', were being deployed as short-hands for a broad chronological periodisation of the exhibits. Thus, the 'Asoka' gallery was to contain all remains 'of greater antiquity than the beginning of the Christian era'; the 'Indo-Scythian' gallery, all those dating from the 1st to the 3rd centuries CE; the 'Gupta' gallery, those dating from the 4th century CE; and the last, all architectural remains that post-dated the 'Buddhist', 'Hindu' and 'Jain' phase to belong to a catch-all 'Mahomedan' period. Once again, we confront India's Buddhist art as the pinnacle of India's monumental heritage, elaborating itself from the early achievements of the Mauryan and post-Mauryan era, through its supposed fusion with Greek art in the Gandhara and Mathura schools, upto its highpoint in the 'Gupta golden age'. From the Gupta period onwards, we are introduced to the

[85] Our main source on the conception and arrangements of the archaeological galleries of that period is Anderson's *Catalogue and Handbook*, with Part I covering the 'Asoka and Indo-Scythian Galleries' and Part II the 'Gupta and Inscription Galleries'.

parallel and subsequent genres of 'Brahmanical', 'Jain' and 'Mahomedan' antiquities, not just in a chronological frame, but in a distinctly receding order of importance.[86] Such a display could not but be metonymic in the way each fragment was linked to the others and to a greater whole. Even if it was seen to be the largest to exist in any Indian museum, the archaeological holding here could hardly make claims to be representative of any entire dynastic period or regional school. The notion of an imperial epoch was invoked more as an imaginary designation, an abstracted unit to which a single or a periodised cluster of relics were seen to belong.[87] Yet, in all its intangibility, the notion functioned as the primary point of access to the exhibits, providing the main frame for their viewing within the museum.

The Bharhut sculptures were the only case where the fragments were assembled to simulate the 'original' standing structure (Plate 2.13). The pride of the archaeological section, it majestically filled

[86] The detail of description and annotations of the items in the Asoka and Indo-Scythian galleries (with the Bharhut sculptures alone commanding the first 120 pages) stand contrasted by the quick listing of items in the subsequent galleries, even as the number of fragmentary artefacts in the Gupta gallery would be much higher.

[87] It could be argued that even in more apparently 'complete' collections, museums inevitably operate through a process of metonymic substitution, substituting part for the whole and at the same time substituting the position of the object in a classificatory scheme for its point of origin. The unities and coherences suggested around the bricolage of objects in a museum are always imaginary ones.

PLATE 2.16 • *View of Buddhist statues in the Gupta Gallery of the Indian Museum, Calcutta. Photograph taken around 1901–11.*
SOURCE: COURTESY OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY OF INDIA, NEW DELHI.

the whole of the first hall, with a detailed *Catalogue* providing the plan and key of the display. Moving from Bharhut to the other relics, we meet a mass of singular fragments, unassembled, delinked from larger structures, but always suggestive of a broader 'period' or 'school'. Each stray piece was fixed to a cluster, and the cluster aligned to a monument, an epoch and a historical series. For instance, a small model of a *stupa*, of the particular elongated style that was developed in the north-west, was placed in the centre of the display of Gandhara sculptures, as the room (termed the 'Gandhara court') came to be expanded and 'artistically' remodelled.[88] On a grander scale, the Superintendent of the Indian Museum conceived of a comprehensive photographic display of the ancient monuments of India on the wall space of the archaeological galleries, laying out a representative sequence of styles and genres in which to locate and link each individual exhibit. The Archaeological Survey, the Department of the Conservation of Ancient Monuments and the Indian Museum jointly participated in the preparation and acquisition of full sets of photographic negatives.[89]

The idea of the photographic display would never materialise. Its promise and possibility came to be partially replicated, instead, by the overlay of textual knowledges that was offered by a *Catalogue and Handbook*. From now on, the detailed catalogue, like the correct label, became an integral feature of museum practice — an indispensable guide to the 'right' ways of seeing and knowing that its learned premises were meant to generate. The *Catalogue and Handbook of the Archaeological Collection in the Indian Museum*, prepared over 1882–83, not only provides us with our main source on the collection and display as they existed at the time. It also stood as the main means of initiation into the display for the viewers of the period. It is interesting to note the kinds of narratives that the *Catalogue* or the gallery labels would create around exhibits. Technical information, like the materials and medium used or the height and width of the artefact, so far as they were offered, remained marginal to the viewing of the object. What was clearly more effective was the way entire panels of sculptures could be labelled to represent the life of the Buddha (Plate 2.17), or the way the *Catalogue* strove to locate each item within a sequence of historical styles, chains and epochs.

The *Catalogue* served in particular to underline the value of the wider collection that the museum possessed, beyond the small selection that could be exhibited — where even that which was not seen, through the sheer suggestion of its existence within the same institutional site, was inserted in the semantics of the display. This is where the aura of the museum collection also stretched well beyond its immediate viewing public to a larger scholarly community. The accuracy and fullness of descriptions of sculptures in the Indian Museum's *Catalogue*, it was said, had enabled scholars in Europe to identify the subjects without ever seeing the originals.[90] In integrating the seen with the unseen, the present with an absent audience, the *Catalogue* marked the expansive boundaries of the new 'disciplinary museum'. In it, we also see how the scholarly discipline of archaeology, with its laboriously cultivated network of epigraphic, numismatic, palaeographic, and historical expertise, played itself out within its compressed space, to make the whole collection (that which was unseen as much as that which was seen) intelligible to a viewing public. Thus, a broken remain of a stone staff would become meaningful by being linked to a set of absent entities: to an umbrella that stood above an inscribed ancient statue of a Bodhisattva. Its value was further explicated by discovering in it duplicate portions of the inscription from the lost pedestal of the statue, from which parts of a king's name could be retrieved and the object ascribed to the reign of the Kushana king, Kanishka or Huvishka.[91] Archaeology, through the elaboration of the catalogue and the short-hand of the label,

[88] *Annual Report, Indian Museum*, 1898–99, p. 18.

[89] *Ibid.*, 1883–84, pp. 11–12.

[90] *Reports of the Museums Conference held in Madras*, proceedings of the third day, p. 17.

[91] *Annual Report, Indian Museum*, 1908–9, pp. 22–23.

PLATE 2.17 • *The system of labelling sculptures: Sculpted frieze from Sarnath showing scenes in the life of Buddha in the Gupta Gallery of the Indian Museum, Calcutta. Photograph taken around 1901–11.* SOURCE: COURTESY OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY OF INDIA, NEW DELHI.

positioned the artefacts within this intricate web of expert knowledges. The visual aura of the museum object thus became inextricably layered with these textual accretions.

It was a sign of the continued predominance of 'natural history' within the Indian Museum that even this *Catalogue* of the archaeological collection was prepared by a zoologist, the Superintendent, John Anderson — as one of a series of catalogues covering the different botanical and zoological specimens of the museum.[92] To the regret of the museum authorities, a separate area of archaeological expertise was yet to be carved out within the institution. By the time the *Catalogue* was updated in 1911, such a disciplinary nucleus had clearly formed itself and marked out the separateness of its professional domain. The work, then, was undertaken by Theodor Bloch, Archaeological Superintendent of the Eastern Circle and head of the museum's archaeology section, with the assistance of Rakhaldas Banerjee, the most prominent of the new breed of Indian archaeologists to find a place within this exclusive professional niche.[93] The writing and updating of such catalogues, in fact, stood as the most tangible sign of the coming of age of the museum's scholarly domain. It embodied the whole sphere of expertise and cognition through which the museum's collection and display engaged with the 'ideal' viewer. We can see the catalogue itself producing the figure of the 'ideal' viewer, just as it conjured all of the museum as an exclusive enclave of knowledge and research.

between wonder and knowledge: The museum and its public

This figure of the informed viewer had, however, a marked opposite in that of the uneducated layman who thronged the same space of the museum. The museum, as a centre of scientific specialised knowledges, had to continuously face up to its parallel status of a 'house of wonder' for the masses. Its functioning remained racked by a set of construed binaries — where knowledge stood pitted against wonder, where the scientific gaze battled to find a place amidst a sea of curious eyes, and where the project of education saw itself subverted by the demands of mere amusement and recreation. Such binaries were lodged at the heart of the museum's self-conception. If the museum saw itself as the domain of scholars, it had an equally urgent commitment to the cause of popular education. It is in situating itself vis-à-vis its 'public' that museums confronted the obvious limits and boundaries of these objectives. For it is this 'public' (in its actuality and in its absence), which would persistently trouble the career of the museum in India. Its uncontrolled presence within a controlled space would become the clearest marker of the travesties and excesses that made up the life of the museum in the colony.

By the first decade of the 20th century, archaeology was foremost among the fields to have secured its discrete professional sphere within the Indian Museum of Calcutta. At the Museums Conference held in Madras in January 1912, this archaeology section was seen to meet the main criteria for 'rendering a collection of antiquities truly educational' — a 'scientific arrangement' of sculptures in separate galleries, correct labelling of the exhibits, a detailed catalogue with an updated supplement, and, most important of all, 'the charge of fully competent archaeologists'.[94] The last had come to include Bengali students and trainees, men like Rakhaldas Banerjee and Nilmani Chakravarti who joined the museum in 1907 as Archaeological Assistants under Theodor Bloch.[95] Rakhaldas

[92] For the writing of this, Anderson culled his knowledge from the reports and researches of the Archaeological Survey.

[93] Late Theodor Bloch, *Supplementary Catalogue of the Archaeological Collection of the Indian Museum, Calcutta*, Calcutta: Indian Museum, 1911.

[94] Paper presented by Dr Vogel, Officiating Director General of Archaeology in India, on 'Museums as Educational Institutions', *Report of the Museums Conference held in Madras*, pp. 16–17.

[95] *Annual Report, Indian Museum*, 1907–8, pp. 4–5, 16–17, records not just the appointment of Rakhaldas Banerjee

Banerjee came to exemplify the ideal 'knowing subject' of the new disciplinary and institutional field: one who would most successfully internalise all its scientific and professional tenets of knowledge.[96] But the appearance on the scene of figures like him could only underline the contrast between the museum's 'appropriate' and 'inappropriate' subjects, between the growing expertise of the one and the pervasive ignorance of the other.

The same conference, which applauded the achievements of the archaeological section of the Indian Museum, also bemoaned the museum's continued popular image as a 'Wonder House'. The Archaeological Survey's representative at the conference, Dr J. Ph. Vogel, reflected at length on the popular meaning of museums in India:

> The Hindusthani term '*Ajaib ghar*' or '*Ajaib Khana*' (Kipling translates it by 'Wonder House') by which museums are indicated in this country has always appeared to me to be significant of the attitude of the Indian public towards such institutions. Museums, in the popular idea, are indeed places of recreation where one can *see and wonder*. That they are appreciated as such is proved by the very large attendance on which Curators are in the habit of priding themselves in their Annual Progress Reports. The Indian Museum at Calcutta has a larger annual attendance than any other museum in the world. *From the recreative point of view*, there cannot be the slightest doubt that our museums answer the purpose of eminently popular institutions … however, I need hardly add that this point of view is not a high one and that *a museum serves a more dignified object than the temporary amusement of the crowd*.[97]

Vogel's comments pointed to the crux of the problem: a problem revolving around the nature of the 'popular'. Their very identity as popular institutions appeared to contradict the intended educational role of the museums. The number of visitors drawn daily to the Indian Museum, Calcutta, or the Madras Museum was phenomenal. On local festive occasions, the numbers swelled further, giving the museum the appearance of a fair ground. In the same refrain as Vogel, Edgar Thurston, Superintendent of the Madras Museum, referred to 'the great mass of visitors, who come under the heading of sight-seers, … who regard museums as *tamasha* (show) houses'.[98] But, numbers clearly were no measure of success of the museum's pedagogical project. The quantity of the public, it was widely recognised, ran contrary to the quality of their viewing.[99] No doubt, museums were meant to be 'places of recreation where one can see and wonder'. But, wonder, emptied of the right curiosity and interest, was rendered illegitimate within the premises of the museum — just as the spectre of popular recreation, unhooked from the urge to know and learn, pushed at the seams of the institution's public self-image. In the context of the museums in India, 'wonder' and 'spectacle', it seems, could only be construed as the polar opposites of 'knowledge' and 'science'.[100] The popular appeared to constitutively exclude, even discredit, the educational and useful meanings of the museum.

and Nilmani Chakravarty, but also mentions the range of work they were engaged in within the museum — such as the rearrangement of the old coin collection, the deciphering of several inscriptions, the identification of some Buddhist relics from Malay, the preparation of labels, the preparation of a descriptive list of additions made to stone sculptures, and the drawing of an 'archaeological' map of India showing the main sites.

[96] See Tapati Guha-Thakurta, 'Between the Nation and the Region: Locations of a Bengali Archaeologist', *Monuments Objects, Histories: Institutions of Art in Colonial and Postcolonial India*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2004.

[97] Vogel, 'Museums as Educational Institutions', p. 15.

[98] *Administrative Report of the Government Central Museum, Madras for the year 1896-97*, Madras, 1897, pp. 1–2.

[99] This problem of numbers and of the 'improper' appropriation of museums by the mass of illiterate Indians forms a main plank of the argument of Gyan Prakash's essay, 'Science "Gone Native" in Colonial India'.

[100] This deviant identity of colonial Indian museums as 'Wonder Houses' flies in the face of recent writing, which reintroduces 'wonder' as the prime element of viewing in museums and exhibitions, and sees the wondrous gaze as 'one of the most distinctive achievements' of Western culture, in keeping with the innate visual demands of the 'aesthetic masterpiece', which is a product of the same culture. See, Stephen Greenblatt, 'Resonance and Wonder', in Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine (eds), *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1991, p. 53.

This opened up the central paradox of its position. It could never be adequate for museums to exist purely as specialised cells of scholarly knowledge; they also had to conceive of themselves as popular educational bodies. This was particularly true for the museum in Calcutta: its 'imperial' status specially foregrounded its obligation to 'the education of the natives'. It made it its duty to function, first, as an adjunct to the classroom, second, as a bureau of information, and third, as an institution for the culture of the people. But this is where the museum acknowledged its main shortcoming. Even as it congratulated itself on the worthy fulfilment of its other objectives — namely 'the accumulation and preservation of specimens such as form the material basis of knowledge in the Arts and Sciences' and 'the elucidation and investigation of the specimens so collected' — it saw itself floundering in the task of the public diffusion of that knowledge.[101]

Given the illiteracy of the vast majority of the population, museums in India had been looked upon as the best means of an alternative visual education. A visual display, it was said, was critical for 'the natives who cannot understand a new thing unless it is held up before their eyes … The first time they may wonder; the second time they may understand; the third time, they may observe with a view to practice'.[102] Visuality was made an indispensable condition of colonial spectatorship. Yet the spectacle in itself could not really effect the transition from the 'first' to the 'third' stage of viewing. Just the display, essential though it was for the 'natives', was inadequate in transforming the wondrous into the knowing, scientific gaze. It has been argued that, as the native gaze stubbornly resisted the desired transformation, science itself was transformed in the process of its visual enactment in museums and exhibitions in colonial India.

> What began as representations of science staged to conquer ignorance and superstition became enmeshed in the very effects that were targeted for elimination. We encounter this intermixture in the museum's evocation of the awe of the visitors, in the exhibition's utilization of a sense of marvels … In these representations of science staged in museums and exhibitions, the cold scrutiny of scientific knowledge confronted the magic of spectacles as part of its own process of signification, as difference within itself.[103]

It is tempting to carry this argument through into our sphere of the archaeological display in this premier institution of the Indian Museum — to throw open this carefully classified and reassembled melange of stone artefacts before the untutored eyes of the masses who spilled helter-skelter into its space, who brought to bear on it the same sense of enthralment carried over from the sight of the skeleton of the whale or the stuffed exotic birds in the adjoining rooms. But it becomes impossible to track the mutations that archaeology undergoes in the process of its staging before this mass audience. The intangibility of the mutation, nonetheless, leaves with a more cutting problem in hand: the problem of the vast gap that prevailed between 'seeing' and 'knowing' within the body of the display. Science displays — of 'natural history' specimens or of agricultural produce — may have contained a greater promise of converting wonder into curiosity and practical knowledge.[104] The challenge was both different and greater for archaeology — where wonder had to be retained as an integral component yet reprocessed into a sense of a great historic and artistic past, where the knowledge of chains and epochs remained elusively abstracted and distanced from the materiality of the seen

[101] *The Indian Museum, 1814–1914*.

[102] *Report of the Nagpore Exhibition of Arts, Manufactures and Produce, December 1865*, Nagpore, n.d. — quoted in Prakash, 'Science "Gone Native" in Colonial India', p. 161.

[103] Prakash, 'Science "Gone Native" in Colonial India', p. 163.

[104] The argument stands about the eye serving as the privileged means of acquiring practical scientific knowledge in museums and exhibitions in India. As Foucault had observed, the whole field of natural history can be seen as 'nothing more than the nomination of the visible' (*The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, New York: Vintage Books, 1973, p. 132). Working out this point, visual displays have been foregrounded in the process of generation of various scientific knowledges in the West. See, for example, David Jenkins, 'Object Lessons and Ethnographic Displays: Museum Exhibitions and the Making of American Anthropology', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 36, no. 2, April 1994.

object. We have noted the highly textualised nature of the archaeological display in the Indian Museum. The thick overlay of textual information over the exhibits made mere visuality an insufficient means of access to their 'right' meaning and value. The staging of archaeology in the museum, thus, staged the wide gulf between 'knowing' and 'seeing', the gulf that separated a small core of its 'ideal' viewers from the vast mass of its 'inappropriate' ones.

This gulf was symptomatic of a critical absence: the absence of a general educated public who could occupy the interstitial space between ignorance and erudition and smoothen the museum's passage from a 'Wonder House' to an 'institution of the culture of the people'. Such a public was central to the museum's pedagogical project. Towards the end of the 19th century, almost all museums attempted to organise visits of school students and teachers to their galleries; some like the Lahore Museum arranged occasional 'Magic Lantern' lectures for the public.[105] Nonetheless, the 'lack' of a general educated public would linger, constituting the main mark of difference of the museum in its colonial setting. It would perpetuate the sharp duality in the museum's status, stretched out at two ends as an *Ajaib Ghar* for the natives at large, and as an enclosed scholarly domain for a select few.

This dichotomy remained at the heart of the functioning of an institution like the Indian Museum. There was a restricted arena within which the archaeological collection here began to increasingly engage an expanding community of educated subjects. Within these circles, the value of the museum lay in its assemblage of rare and ancient artefacts, whose connections, comparisons and orchestrated value as 'history' and 'art' was evident exclusively to the scholarly gaze. Over the late 19th and early 20th century, the field of archaeology evolved its indigenous regional locations and sites of activity in Bengal. The urge to collect and conserve spread outwards from the Indian Museum to produce its small local replicas in the archaeological holdings amassed in the museums set up in bodies like the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad in Calcutta and the Varendra Research Society in Rajshahi. Each of these constituted itself in the image of the imperial body, in its entrenched scholarly mould. Outside this circuit, the museum wrested continuously with the problem of swelling visitors and inapposite interests. Caught in the unresolved tensions between the 'scholarly' and the 'popular', the museum as an institution fumbled, floundered, and turned increasingly inwards.

[105] Such visits and public lectures began to be reported in the annual reports of most museums since the 1890s, for example, *Annual Reports of the Working of the Lahore Central Museum, 1895–96 to 1904–5.*

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3

staging science

Gyan Prakash

> Despotism is a legitimate mode of government in dealing with barbarians, provided the end be their improvement, and the means justified by actually effecting that end.[1]

Rudyard Kipling's novel *Kim* opens with young Kim O'Hara 'astride the gun Zam-Zammah, on her brick platform opposite the old Ajaib-Gher — the Wonder House, as the natives call the Lahore Museum'.[2] The Zam-Zammah, an 18th-century cannon, once deployed to great effect by the Afghan ruler Ahmad Shah Durrani in his military campaigns, had lost its military use by this time, but not its symbolic value: 'Who hold Zam-Zammah, that "fire-breathing dragon", hold the Punjab; for the great green-bronze piece is always first of the conqueror's loot'. (Plate 3.1) As Kim sat atop the cannon, kicking an Indian boy off it, he did so as a conqueror for, as Kipling writes, 'the English held Punjab and Kim was English'. But how is Kim's identity established? Kipling tells us that Kim's mother, whose racial identity remains unmarked, had been a nursemaid in a colonel's family, and had died of cholera when Kim was three, leaving him in the care of his father, Kimball O'Hara. A sergeant in the Irish regiment of the British army in India, the father took to drinking, drifted into friendship with a 'half-caste woman' from whom he learned the joys of smoking opium, and 'died as poor whites do in India'. It was from this 'half-caste' woman who raised him that Kim discovered that he was English, as she, confusedly remembering the sergeant's prophecies in his 'glorious opium hours', told Kim that everything would come out all right for him: 'there will come for you a great Red Bull on a green field, and the Colonel riding on his tall horse, yes, and — "dropping into English"— nine hundred devils'.

Such was the fabulous tale of Kim's origins and the indeterminate process by which an English identity came to determine him. Kipling at once avows and disavows these ambivalent and hybrid sources of identity and authority when he asserts: 'Though he was burned black as any native; though he spoke the vernacular by preference, and his mother-tongue in a clipped uncertain sing-song; though he consorted on terms of perfect equality with small boys of the bazaar; Kim was white.' Obvious and easy though it is to see how *Kim* asserts racial polarities, we should not lose sight of the shadowy background against which they come into view. Kim's whiteness, for example, does not stand separate from his blackness but is bleached from his 'burned black' skin. So immersed is the formation of Kim's racial identity and authority in difference — whiteness formed on the borderlines of black and white, fact and fable, English and the

[1] John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, London, 1959; rpt. Northbrook, Illinois: AHM Publishing, 1947, p. 10.

[2] All quotations cited in this essay appear in Rudyard Kipling, *Kim*, London, 1901; rpt. Harmondsworth, Puffin Classics, 1987, pp. 7–9. For a history of the Zam-Zammah and a description of the Lahore Museum, see T. H. Thornton and J. L. Kipling, *Lahore*, Lahore: Government Civil Secretariat Press, 1876, pp. 59–60, 62–77.

PLATE 3.1 • *'Kim's Gun': Canon (the Zam-Zammah) outside the Lahore Museum, c. 1920s.* SOURCE: COURTESY OF THE BRITISH LIBRARY, LONDON, PHOTO 66/8(96).

vernacular — that liminality becomes the fertile ground for the production of a powerful coloniser–colonised hierarchy. If the colonial hierarchy draws force from the rearrangement of cultural difference into cultural opposition, it also opens itself up to the effects of its uncertain construction; the spectre of ambivalence and loss provokes the assertion of racial mastery and haunts its existence.[3] White dominance does not diminish but acquires a different balance when its authority is forged from the imbrication with the black. Kipling's avowal of racial polarity takes on a different meaning when he produces the white from the black; the relationship between black and white is re-shuffled as he displaces their status as self-contained, originary identities.

It is telling that Kipling chose a museum as the opening setting for the tangled drama of imperial identity and power he stages. By the end of the 19th century, the collection and display of artefacts and human specimens in museums and exhibitions had become the most visible modes of marking Western dominance of the world. Beginning with the 1851 Crystal Palace international exhibition in London, imperial nation-states in Europe and North America engaged in an intense competition to flaunt their possessions, to inscribe their respective signatures on objects and humans across the globe.[4]

[3] On ambivalence and hybridity as a source and site of colonial power, see Homi K. Bhabha's essays 'Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse', and 'Signs Taken For Wonders', in his *The Location of Culture*, London and New York: Routledge, 1994, pp. 85–92, 102–22, respectively.

[4] For the centrality of colonies in 19th-century exhibitions, see Carol Breckenridge, 'The Aesthetics and Politics of Colonial Collecting: India at World Fairs', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 32, no. 2, 1989, pp. 195–215; R. W. Rydell, *All the World's a Fair*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988; and Paul Greenhalgh, *Ephemeral Vistas: The Expositions Universelles, Great Exhibitions and World's Fairs, 1851-1939*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988.

They classified, named, mapped, and ordered non-Western peoples and things to realise their desires for domination. In this project, no less important than establishing standards of art, aesthetics, history, and identity was the staging of Western science as universal knowledge. This was all the more prominent within colonial territories where museums and exhibitions functioned as instruments of the 19th-century 'civilizing mission'. These not only defined what constituted art, culture and history, but also showcased scientific knowledge and instruments as technologies of governance and improvement. As Britain's largest and most important colonial possession, India felt the full force of such a 'civilizing' project. Thus, different regions of British India witnessed the proliferation of museums and exhibitions towards the late 19th century. Collecting, cataloguing, classifying and displaying objects, these institutions sought to establish the universality of their classificatory enterprise, to position science as a sign of modernity and as a means of colonial rule.[5]

The identification of colonial power in the functioning of museums and exhibitions should cause no surprise; the staging of Western science in the interests of Western dominance, after all, is a recognisably familiar story. What escapes the attention in this often told tale of Western power, however, is the distorted life of the dominant discourse. So pervasive and enduring is colonialism's triumphant self-description of its own career that we frequently fail to identify the subterfuges, paradoxes, distortions, and failures that punctuated its exercise of power. At issue here is the history of those practices that arose in the field of colonial power but also reordered its terms that anchored and sustained British rule but also altered its conditions of existence. The failure to explore this history runs the risk of portraying colonial India as a place scorched by the power/knowledge axis, leaving nothing of its past except the remains of that which was either appropriated (consumed and normalised, made appropriate) or stood resistant to the incendiary combine of modern science and colonialism. To fall prey to this view is to suggest that the exercise of colonial power produced only mastery, that British India's history is nothing but a record of submission (or opposition) to trajectories charted by this mastery.

My interest is to explore the history lodged in the discordant life of dominance, to outline the interstitial zone of images and practices that took shape as an effect of the contradictory exercise of British power. While I focus on museums and exhibitions in British India during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the general object of my inquiry is the staging of science as a sign of colonial knowledge/power. My aim is to trace the enactment of other performances in such dramaturgy, to identify colonial power's dislocations at the point of its deployment. John Stuart Mill neatly captured the founding logic of these dislocations when he proposed that despotism was a legitimate means of achieving the 'improvement' of 'barbarians'. A deep rift fractured the exercise of colonial power. On the one hand, the British desired to teach the 'natives' that Western science was universal, and instruct them to apply the new order of universal knowledge to their objects and practices. On the other hand, they were compelled to represent the universality of science in the particularity of the imperial mirror: the 'civilizing' mission was the means of instituting science as a general form of knowledge. Such was the split between the subject of representation (universal science) and the process (colonial, particular) by which it was signified. With the claim for science's universality underwritten by its particular history, scientific knowledge and institutions emerged pursued by the stigma of their colonial birth. Science's functioning as a technology of colonial governance and as an ideology of improvement overshadowed its representation as a body of the universal laws of nature. There is a parallel here with Kipling's dilemma. Just as colonial conditions obliged Kipling to produce white

[5] For a recent general account of science's use as an instrument of Western dominance, see Michael Adas, *Machines as the Measure of Men: Science, Technology, and Ideologies of Western Dominance*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1989.

identity and authority in Kim's 'burned black' skin, they compelled the British rulers to hatch science's universality from its particular, colonial double.

To dwell in doubleness was to dislocate the polarities — scientific/unscientific, universal/particular, European/non-European, and coloniser/colonised — through which colonialism functioned. My aim is to not only trace such dislocations but to also identify the new space of power that comes into existence from the undoing of polarities. How did the contradictory functioning of British rule produce a new arena of colonial dominance and indigenous agency? What took shape under the shadow of colonialism's double life?

the discourse of colonial science: Classification and function

To the British, India was an ideal *locus* for science: it provided a rich diversity that could be mined for knowledge and, as a colony, offered the infamous 'elbow room' for an unhindered pursuit of science.[6] By the late 19th century, this sense of an unbounded opportunity drove the establishment and expansion of museums and exhibitions.[7] Equally important in the rise of these institutions was the conviction that India needed a new form of knowledge. The matter was stated plainly in 1874:

> Local officers must be able to recognize with precision the various grains and other products of their districts, to enable them to deal with agricultural statistics in an intelligent manner. At present it is almost ludicrous to observe … how often the same things are called by different names, and different things by same names.[8]

To know was to name, identify and compare — this was the frame in which the question of understanding India entered the discourse of colonial science. Museums were valuable because they provided an order of things by naming, classifying and displaying Indian artefacts.[9] In this respect, museological practice differed from cabinets of curiosities: unlike these cabinets, museums organised objects to make them speak a language, reveal an order. From this point of view, the Oriental Museum of the Asiatic Society, founded in Calcutta in 1814, which was little more than a warehouse of rare objects, was no longer adequate by the 1850s.[10] Persuaded by the Society's argument that the existing separation of collections into detached parts

[6] Speaking of the opportunity that India offered for scientific inquiry, George Campbell, the Governor of Bengal and a noted colonial ethnologist, remarked in 1866: 'In fact, it is now evident, that as this country, in a far greater degree than any other in the world, offers an unlimited field for ethnological observation and enquiry, and presents an infinity of varieties of almost every one of the great divisions of the human race, so also there is no lack of able and qualified men to reap this abundant harvest'; *Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, January to December, 1866*, Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1867, p. 46.

[7] As one British official put it, museums in India could be better organised to perform these scientific functions, it was believed, than in Europe 'where museums had grown up by accretion of legacies and bequests generally tied up with special conditions'. *Report on the Conference as regards Museums in India held at Calcutta on Dec. 27th to 31st, 1907*, Calcutta: Superintendent, Government Printing, 1908, p. 16.

[8] India Office Library and Records, London (IOLR): P/186, Government of Bengal, Financial Department (Industry and Science) Proceedings No. 2–1, May 1874.

[9] Foucault writes in *The Order of Things*, New York: Vintage, 1973, p. 158: 'Natural history in the Classical age is not merely the discovery of a new object of curiosity; it covers a series of complex operations that introduce the possibility of a constant order into a totality of representations. It constitutes a whole domain of empiricity as at the same time *describable* and *orderable*.' He attributes this possibility for an order, a language, to a gap that opened up between things and words when things seemed to be things in themselves. It was in this gap, arranged in the juxtaposition of objects, that a language murmured, the taxonomic order of natural history made its appearance (pp. 129–32). Ken Arnold, *Cabinet for the Curious: Practicing Science in Early Modern English Museums*, Princeton: Department of History, Princeton University, 1991, particularly chapters 6 and 7 chart this shift.

[10] *The Indian Museum 1814–1914*, Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1914, pp. 1–9; *passim.*; see also S. F. Markham and H. Hargreaves, *The Museums of India*, London: The Museums Association, 1936, p. 123. See O. P. Kejriwal, *The Asiatic Society of Bengal and the Discovery of India's Past 1784–1838*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988, pp. 85, 102–123, *passim.*, for an account of struggles to establish and improve the museum.

robbed them of their scientific value insofar as it did not make visible 'that series of links which actually exists in Nature', the government established colonial India's largest and most important museum, the Indian Museum, which, housed in a new building, opened in 1878 to the public in Calcutta.[11] The foundation of the Madras Central Museum has a similar history. Originating in a storehouse of curious objects, it was established as a museum in 1851 and began to function systematically after 1885 when Edgar Thurston was appointed as its first full-time superintendent. Thurston remained in charge until 1910, expanded the museum greatly, and became a major colonial ethnologist who pursued his special interest in anthropometry rather unusually; he kept his callipers and other measuring instruments handy, using them on native visitors to the museum — sometimes paying them, sometimes not.[12] A number of other significant museums were established during the second half of the 19th century, making them ubiquitous in urban India by the end of the century.[13]

As museums spread and expanded their collections, the stress on natural history, classification and re-presenting the order of nature persisted.[14] This natural-history vision proved to be enduring because geological and natural history collections were the predominant concerns of the older and larger museums from their inception. But more important in this respect was the colonial conception that India was close to nature: its inhabitants lived close to the soil; it was home to numerous 'tribes and races'; and the state of knowledge was chaotic — 'same things are called by different names, and different things by same names' — requiring persistent classification.

If colonialism amplified the importance of classification and natural history in the organisation of museums, the imperial connection was visible also in the significant role given to order and naming in provincial and local exhibitions throughout India during the same period. The link between classification and colonialism had also marked the organisation of objects at the 1851 Crystal Palace in London.[15] Local exhibitions in India originated in the 1840s to prepare for this event, but acquired a momentum of their own in subsequent decades. As instruments for promoting commerce and advancing a scientific knowledge of economic resources, they brought artefacts into the colonial discourse as classified objects. The emergence of these artefacts as objects of discourse, however, entailed the authorisation of colonial officials as experts responsible for collecting information from 'native informants'.[16]

> A *general list* of Sections was made in advance, and in every district visited, at a meeting of cultivators,

[11] National Archives of India (NAI): Government of India, Home (Public), 7 October, 1859, no. 49, Letter from the Secretary, Asiatic Society, dated 8 October 1858.

[12] The results of his anthropometric research and ethnographic tours are contained in the monumental *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*, 7 vols, Madras: Government Press, 1909, a classic of its genre in Victorian anthropology.

[13] *Ibid.*, pp. 13–18. By 1911, there were 39 museums spread all over India. For a list of these, see *The Conference of Orientalists including Museums and Archaeology Conference held at Simla, July 1911*, Simla: Government Central Branch Press, 1911, pp. 99–115. This figure rose to 105 by 1936, Markham and Hargreaves, *The Museums of India*, p. 13.

[14] The stress on natural history and classification emerges clearly in records. See Government of Madras, Educational Department, *Administration Report of the Government Central Museum for the year 1895–96*, Madras, 1896, Appendix E, p. 15. See also IOLR: P/687, Government of India, Department of Agriculture, Revenue and Commerce, Industrial Arts, Museums, Exhibitions, Proceedings No. 6, April 1872, Précis of the history of the Government Central Museum, Bombay.

[15] See Breckenridge, 'The Aesthetics and Politics of Colonial Collecting: India at World Fairs'.

[16] *Indian Industrial and Agricultural Exhibition, 1906–07. Catalogue of Exhibits of the Bengal Agricultural Department*, Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press, 1907, p. iii. On the role of Indian officials and landed gentry in organising exhibitions, see Government of Madras, *Report on the Agricultural Exhibition in the Provinces in the Year 1856*, Madras: Asylum Press, 1856, p. 41; Moulvi Arshad Ali (ed.), *A Report on Pagla Mian's Mela with Agricultural and Industrial Exhibition*, Feni, Noakhali, 1915, p. 2; and IOLR: P/186, Government of Bengal, statistical Department (Industry and Science) Proceedings No. 17–1, May 1873.

> called whether by the District Officer or an important zamindar [landlord]; a *special list* was prepared in accordance with the general list of agricultural articles of special value for that district. In some districts, as in Burdwan, Bankura and Murshidabad, *Kabirajes* [indigenous herbalists and healers] were also consulted. The list so made out was made over to the District officer or to the zamindar concerned, and things were collected by actual cultivators and others, and sent to the Exhibition.

If one aim of colonial pedagogy was to instruct peasants by exhibiting their products and knowledge, organised and authorised by the science of classification, its other aim was to render manifest the principle of function so that it could be applied to improve production. Indeed, the organisers of the Allahabad Exhibition of 1910–11 stated that the exhibition's purpose was to instruct viewers in different methods of production and in the functioning and benefits of machines.[17] For example, on entering the Court of Engineering, one found water-lifts and irrigation pumps of Indian and European manufacture at work. To demonstrate the working and power of water-lifts, a series of small measured fields was laid out demonstrating the actual area of land irrigated. Across from this Court was a working dairy exhibiting everything from cows to butter, modern dairy machinery, the best breeds of Indian milch cattle, a dairy farm for commercial use, a modern village dairy, and an Indian dairy using indigenous implements. To the north was the Agricultural Court (Plate 3.2) where machinery from all over the world was displayed; the number of exhibits was limited so as to emphasise objects in actual use. With the aim to instruct and educate, an official was placed in the Court to answer questions and put agriculturists in touch with demonstration staff and experts. The object of these arrangements was to advance popular education and commerce by demonstrating the 'science of the concrete', practical and self-evident.

Exhibitions did not exclude classification — the distribution of space into distinct 'Courts' meant that there was a classificatory order also at work — but they emphasised the principle of function.[18] Function as a category of knowledge grew rapidly in importance after exhibitions made their appearance in the mid-19th century. Agricultural exhibitions, in particular, became a regular feature of the rural landscape.[19] In Madras province, for example, agricultural exhibitions were held in every district in 1855 and re-appeared annually during several subsequent years.[20] Some of the agricultural exhibitions were initiated locally and grafted on to traditional fairs.[21] In addition to such local events, provincial and international spectacles were also staged, such as the 1883 Calcutta international exhibition.[22] So important had these spectacles become by the end of the 19th century that even the Indian National Congress joined in by organising, starting in 1901, an industrial exhibition to coincide with its annual meeting.

[17] A complete description of the exhibition and the statement of its aims, rendering the stress on function manifest, is provided in Satya Chandra Mukerji, *Allahabad in Pictures*, Allahabad: The Indian Press, 1910, pp. 44–50.

[18] For the difference between classification and function, see Foucault, *The Order of Things*, pp. 217–21, 226–32.

[19] Accounts and references to these appear in Government of Madras, *Report on the Agricultural Exhibitions in the Provinces in the Year 1856*; Abdool Luteef Khan Bahadoor, *Discourse on the Nature, Objects, and Advantages of a Periodical Census*, Calcutta: Printed by Jules A. Monnier, pp. vi–vii; and *Report of the Nagpore Exhibition of Arts,Manufactures and Produce, December 1865*, Nagpore: Central Provinces' Printing Press, n.d.

[20] Letter from G. S. Forbes, Secretary, Board of Revenue, dated 10 July 1856 in *Report on the Agricultural Exhibitions in the Provinces in the Year 1856*, mentioning exhibitions held in previous years, p. 1.

[21] IOLR: Government of Bengal, Statistical Department (Industry and Science), Proceeding No. 17–1, May 1873. In Bengal, an annual local fair named after a Muslim saint and miracle worker (the *Pagla Mian mela* or the Mad Saint's fair) and established by the famous Bengali poet and an official in British administration, Nabin Chandra Sen, was turned into an agricultural and industrial exhibition. See *A Report on Pagla Mian's Mela with Agricultural and Industrial Exhibition*, pp. 1–2. See also Nabin Chandra Sen, *Amar-Jiban* (Bengali), vol. 4, Calcutta, 1912, rpt in Sajanikant Das (ed.), *Nabin Chandra Rachnabali*, vol. 2, Calcutta: Bangiya Sahitya Parishad, 1959, pp. 428–37.

[22] *The Hindoo Patriot*, 10 December 1883, 'The Calcutta International Exhibition'.

PLATE 3.2 • *'Exhibiting Science': Steam pump machinery in action at the Alipur Agricultural Exhibition, Calcutta, 1864.* *SOURCE:* COURTESY OF THE BRITISH LIBRARY, LONDON, PHOTO 1000 (4812).

Organised with a great deal of pomp and show, exhibitions encapsulated the colonial staging of science as technology, as knowledge and techniques for improvement. Ordering and distributing objects to highlight function and use, they were successful in drawing a large number of visitors.[23] For example, the Nagpur exhibition in 1865 reported 30,000 visitors over eight days; 50,000–60,000 visited the Fureedpur exhibition in Bengal over eight days in 1873, and a million visitors went to see the 1883 Calcutta International Exhibition.[24] Museums, though sober and sombre, were also successful in this respect. Between 1904 and 1914, the Indian Museum in Calcutta drew at least 503,000 visitors and as many

[23] We can gauge some sense of the success that even a local exhibition could enjoy from the following report on the agricultural exhibition in South Arcot in 1856. It states that, after the registration of exhibited articles, at mid-day on 20 February, 'the Exhibition was formally thrown open to the public, the signal for doing so being the firing of a salute, on the Collector and the Committee taking their places on a platform raised for the purpose. Upon this the crowds who had been waiting outside for some hours streamed in such numbers that it was no easy matter for the Peons assisted by a Guard of Sepoys to preserve order. The visitors continued to pour through the building until shortly after 4 p.m., when further admissions were ordered to cease. It had been announced publicly that the place would be lighted up in the evening and thrown open to Native females only. A considerable number availed themselves of this opportunity, as the immense crowds during the day had for the most part deterred all but those who had the courage to fight their way in. These evening visitors were not numbered, but those during the day amounted to upwards of 30,000.' See *Selections from the Records of the Madras Government, No. XXXIIA, Report on the Agricultural Exhibitions in the Provinces in the Year 1856*, Madras: Asylum Press, 1856, pp. 41–42.

[24] IOLR:P/186, Government of Bengal, Statistical Department (Industry and Science) Proceedings No: 17-1, May 1873. For attendance at the Calcutta exhibition, see *The Bengalee*, 15 March 1884.

as 829,000 annually.[25] The Madras Central Museum was equally successful, prompting Edgar Thurston to favourably compare the number of visitors to the Madras Museum to that of the British Museum.[26] These numbers indicate the measure of success that colonial science had achieved in its pedagogical project. But what happened when Western science, embodied in native material, was staged before an overwhelmingly native audience?

the liminal man

As the colonial discourse assembled and staged India as an object of the sciences of naming and function, it also created a place for that which it sought to appropriate; indigenous artefacts and 'tribes and races' emerged in their 'native' particularity as objects of scientific discourse. Forcing scientific knowledge to inhabit and emerge from the subordinated 'native' objects, this was a process rife with ambivalence.

The liminality enacted in the performance of the colonial discourse can be seen in 'the science of man' that occupied the attention of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal. In 1866, the Society informed its members that the curator of the Indian Museum had issued a circular soliciting the assistance of the colonial administration in the collection of human crania for the museum's ethnological section, and that his request had met with a favourable response. The Society had received some contributions from private donors, and several sources had promised further aid.[27] But the collection of skulls presented problems. One could buy skulls, as one ethnologist did when he persuaded an Andamanese widow to sell for one rupee the skull of her dead 'aboriginal' husband that she had been wearing 'as a sort of a locket'; but individuals could have a 'not unnatural prejudice' against parting with their crania, and the 'possessors of interesting skulls might not be willing to let us examine them, while still on their shoulders'.[28] An alternative, superior on both practical and scientific grounds, was suggested by Dr Frayer, professor of surgery at the Medical College, Calcutta. In a letter to the Asiatic Society, he argued that while the display of crania was valuable, it 'fell short of the advantages to be derived by anthropological science from a study of races themselves in life'.[29] Thus arose the idea of assembling for display 'races' found in and around Bengal and other provinces at various local exhibitions, leading up to an ethnological congress of all the races of India.

Endorsing this proposal, George Campbell, the ethnologist and the later Governor of Bengal (1871–74), recounted being

> much struck by seeing men of most interesting and curious races carrying things down to the Punjab Exhibition two or three years ago; the men, who were *not* to be exhibited, seemed to me much more curious than the things they were taking to the exhibit.[30]

Persuaded by Campbell, the Asiatic Society proposed to the government that an ethnological congress be held as a 'fitting adjunct to the proposed General Industrial Exhibition of 1869–70'.[31] Discussions at the Society's meetings now centred on practical aspects of the proposed exhibition. Campbell thought that an 'exhibition of the Aborigines would be the easiest thing in the world', and that 'as they are such excellent labourers, they might be utilised as Coolies to put in order the Exhibition grounds at certain times, while at others

[25] *The Indian Museum 1814–1914*, pp. xliii–xlviii. By 1936, the annual number of visitors to the Indian Museum, Calcutta, and the Victoria and Albert Museum, Bombay was reported to be a million each. Markham and Hargreaves, *Museums of India*, p. 69.

[26] Government of Madras, Revenue Department, *Administration Report of the Government Central Museum for the year 1894–95*, p. 2. For equally impressive numbers at smaller museums, see *Report on the Working of the Lahore Museum by J. L. Kipling, Curator, for 1892–93*, p. 1; and *Letter from the President, Provincial Museum Committee, Lucknow, dated 5th June, 1886*, p. 4.

[27] *Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, January to December, 1866, p. 5.

[28] *Ibid.*, p. 71.

[29] *Ibid.*, p. 82.

[30] *Ibid.*, p. 71.

[31] *Ibid.*, pp. 83–85.

they take their seats for the instruction of the Public'. Accordingly, he proposed that:

> an Ethnological branch should be added to the next Agricultural Exhibition, in which, without in any way degrading men and brethren to the position of animals, opportunity should be given for studying man at least to the same extent to which animals are studied; a study, which, in the case of humans, should extend to language and mental qualities, as well as to physical qualities. I would engage a suitable number of individuals of pronounced type, as Exhibitors on a suitable remuneration. I would erect a sufficient number of booths or stalls divided into compartments, like the boxes in a theatre or the shops in a bazar; I would arrange, that at certain hours, on certain days, the Exhibitors, classified according to races and tribes, should sit each in his own stall, should receive and converse with the Public, and submit to be photographed, printed, taken off in casts, and otherwise reasonably, dealt with, in the interests of science.[32]

Unlike exhibits in museums, living exhibits, suitably framed in classified stalls, could talk to visitors; they could be observed in motion, as functioning objects. Insofar as such an exhibit offered an understanding of life itself, a better breeding of 'man' became realisable:

> I hope, I need scarcely argue, that a movement of this kind is no mere *dilettantism*. Of all sciences, the neglected study of man is now recognised as the most important. The breeding of horses is a science; the breeding of cattle is a science; I believe that the breeding of short-horns is one of the most exciting of English occupations, but the breed of man has hitherto been allowed to multiply at hap-hazard.[33]

This 'hap-hazard' multiplication was evident, according to Campbell, in miscegenation. 'The world is becoming more and more one great country; race meets race, black with white, the Arian with Turanian and the Negro; and questions of miscegenation or separation are very pressing'.[34] By providing the means for observing and understanding separate and mixed races, living exhibits held out the possibility of envisioning a more scientific breeding of man to replace and reorder the chaos of miscegenation — such was the heady lure offered by the science of life. Given such high stakes, nothing was too much to offer at the altar of science. When asked how much clothing was to cover these exhibited 'wild creatures', Campbell replied:

> With respect to clothing, I would only suggest that I think we should prefer to have them in their native and characteristic shape … As cleanliness comes after godliness, so I think that decency must come after science; at any rate I would only satisfy the most inevitable demands of decency.[35]

The Exhibition Committee of the Central Provinces formulated the plan to seize a family of specimens rather than individual samples of 'wild tribes', and to feed and photograph their 'biped specimens'. An official from the Andaman islands, in preparation for the ethnological congress, sent two Andamanese boys with new names — Joe and Tom — to Calcutta, where they sang and danced at a meeting of the Asiatic Society.[36] A great deal of ethnological inquiry was carried out by district officers in different provinces, and a sizable number of reports on 'races and tribes' accumulated. But by 1868, the plan for a grand exhibition of all the races had been scaled down, and in the end, due to the lack of funds, such an exhibition was held in the Central Provinces only.[37]

Notwithstanding the whittling down of overly ambitious plans, the case of the ethnological congress of races shows that the science of man was inevitably 'contaminated' by the objects in which it inhered and the mode of its staging. How could the science of man be separated from its representation in the

[32] *Ibid.*, p. 90.

[33] *Ibid*.

[34] *Ibid.*, p. 91.

[35] *Ibid.*, pp. 188–89.

[36] *Ibid.*, p. 190; *Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal for November, 1867*, Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1868, pp. 157–62.

[37] *Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, January to December, 1868*, Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1869, pp. 29–31.

'Aboriginals' placed in theatre-like stalls? The ambivalence of the colonial science of man lay in the fact that it was produced on the borderlines of black and white, the Aryan, Turanian and the Negro; indeed, on the margins between man and short-horns! Could man produced by fears of miscegenation be anything but a disturbed, liminal category? The traces of such a disturbed category of man are to be found in Campbell's plea that the human exhibits be 'otherwise reasonably, dealt with, in the interests of science', and the embarrassment with which he concludes that 'decency must come after science'. Racism, to be sure, is overwhelming in this and other colonial texts; it empowered the colonialist to place the 'native' in stalls, interrogate and photograph him, and refer to him as a 'biped specimen'. But the predicament of the colonial science of race was that it could not escape the liminality produced in its own performance. As the coloniser staged the colonised as man, he disavowed the racist polarity — the European versus the 'native' — that enabled his discourse. The subordinated 'aborigine' emerged as the kindred of the dominant European, the 'biped specimen' came to stand for 'man'.

spectatorship: Science taken for wonder

The question of viewership dramatised the ambivalence of the colonial staging of science. The problem for museums and exhibitions was how to make objects rise above their concreteness and their 'native' particularity to reveal something more abstract and universal. How was a pure order of knowledge to emerge from the objects of 'native' provenance and strike the viewer as science? This problem could not be addressed at the level of the re-presentation of objects alone; it required the conception of a viewership that was capable of separating the pure science of classification from the impurity of 'same things called by different names', one that was competent to isolate the science of 'man' from the body of 'biped specimens'. Thus the eye became responsible for obtaining the scientific knowledge lodged in objects of India's natural history, and the production and the authority of science became dependent on its visual demonstration.

The eye as the privileged means of acquiring and demonstrating scientific knowledge was particularly important for museums in India because most Indians could not read. For illiterate visitors, captions on exhibits were of little use, least of all those written in English, which the museums used. Given these conditions, labelling was a neglected feature of museums; labels were poorly conceived, often wrong, and unimaginative, rendering the techniques of display all the more important.[38] The superior standards of display enhanced the importance of visuality in museums as an instrument of education. In the absence of a reading public, the museum could substitute for a book, and the observing eye could stand for the reading eye. So thought Dr Bhau Daji, a Western-trained doctor and a Sanskrit scholar, who, in addressing a public meeting of 'Native and European inhabitants' held in 1858 to establish the Victoria Museum and Gardens, stated that

> to the unlearned especially — and in that class we must include a very great majority of our countrymen — a Museum is a book with broad pages and large print, which is *seen* at least; and by mere inspection *teaches* somewhat, even if it be not *read*.[39]

According to Dr Daji, seeing was a poor surrogate for reading — it was not reading but inspection, capable only of 'teach[ing] somewhat'. But poor substitute though it may have been, the presence of a vast number of the 'unlearned' left no alternative. Indeed, visuality became all the more critical:

> The Natives cannot understand a new thing unless it is held up before their eyes with something of a

[38] On labelling and exhibiting, see Markham and Hargreaves, *The Museums of India*, pp. 62–66.

[39] *Selections from the Records of the Bombay Government No. LXXXIII-New Series: Report on the Government Central Museum and on the Agricultural and Horticultural Society of Western India for 1863. With Appendices, being the History of the Establishment of the Victoria and Albert Museum and of the Victoria Gardens, Bombay*, Bombay: Education Society's Press, 1864 — hereafter referred to as *Report on the Government Central Museum, Bombay* — Appendix A, 17.

> continuous perseverance. The first time they may wonder; the second time they may understand; the third time they may observe with a view to practice.[40]

The project of colonial pedagogy required the 'unlearned' Indian whose education could be accomplished only by repeated visual confrontations with scientific knowledge embodied in objects. But addressing and reforming the eyes of such viewers demanded that science express itself as magic, that it dazzle 'superstition' into understanding. Such a restaging defined the introduction of mesmerism as a science in British India during the 1840s. The chief proponent of mesmerism in India was a surgeon in the colonial medical service, Dr James Esdaile, who was allowed to set up a Mesmeric Hospital in Calcutta as an experiment in 1846, subject to regular inspections by other medical officers to determine the scientific value of mesmerism. The inspecting medical officers concluded that Dr Esdaile's claims on behalf of mesmeric science were untenable, but they noted that the hospital was popular with the 'natives' of Bengal because of the existence of 'superstition in its widest sense and in its most absurd forms'. Those who had 'the most implicit faith in witchcraft, magic, the power of spirits and demons, and the efficacy of charms and incantations' believed that Dr Esdaile had supernatural powers, and the officers reported that 'the common name under which the Mesmeric Hospital is known among the lower classes is that of *house of magic*, or *jadoo hospital*'.[41] But how did Dr Esdaile's hospital acquire its name as a house of magic? And why did the 'natives' believe that mesmerism was magic? Is it not possible that the reason was that Dr Esdaile himself used the term *belatee Muntur*, 'the European charm', to explain mesmerism to his Indian medical assistants?[42]

Magic also marked mesmerism's public staging performed to establish its status as science. These public demonstrations were crucial, as Dr Esdaile acknowledged, if mesmerism was to press its claim as a science before both Europeans and Indians.[43] At first, he was sceptical of the utility of 'public exhibitions for effecting a general conversion to the truth of Mesmerism' and believed that 'performers in public are not unnaturally suspected to take insurances from Art, in the event of Nature failing them'. In spite of his 'natural distrust of public displays', however, he consented when senior officials pressured him to stage a show. The performance, held before Europeans and Indians on 29 July 1845, was reported in the newspapers the next day: 'The party was very numerous, two steamers having brought the curious from Barrackpore and Calcutta; and there was a large assemblage of the European and Native residents of Hoogly and Chinsurah'.[44] Before the day ended, Esdaile had impressed the viewers with his many feats: two women who were mesmerised separately in two different rooms displayed identical symptoms of twinkling eyelids, swaying side to side, entranced; mesmeric trance at 'long range' was demonstrated on a man, who in his insensible state, evident in his cataleptic limbs, obeyed Esdaile's instructions, singing 'Ye Mariners of England', 'God Save the King', and 'Hey Diddle Diddle'; 'sleeping water' was administered (after two clergymen and doctors had observed water 'charmed' by Esdaile) to men who turned cataleptic or became somnambulists. Undoubtedly, this European account treated the whole spectacle as an amusing magic show, but it also saw the show as a demonstration of the scientificity of mesmerism. Indeed it was in the public display of its magical effect that mesmerism emerged as science, perched precariously in between cold scientific scrutiny and superstition in its 'widest' and 'most absurd forms'.

[40] *Report on the Nagpore Exhibition of Arts, Manufactures and Produce*, p. 27.

[41] *Record of Cases Treated in the Mesmeric Hospital, From June to December 1847: With Reports of the Official Visitors*, Calcutta: Military Orphan Press, 1847, pp. xxi-xxxii *passim*.

[42] James Esdaile, *Mesmerism in India and its Practical Application in Surgery and Medicine*, London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1846, p. 49.

[43] The following quotations and account are taken from *ibid.*, pp. 251–52.

[44] Letter to *The Englishman*, 30 July 1845, reprinted in Esdaile, *Mesmerism in India*, p. 253. The following account is taken from pp. 253–62 *passim*.

If performance mixed science with magical spectacle, it also enhanced the importance of visuality. Thus, the museums confronted observers with an orderly organisation of fossils, rocks, minerals, bones, vegetation, coins, sculptures, and manuscripts. Exhibitions, on the other hand, offered a feast to the Indian eye. Depending on their scale, they spared no effort to produce an attractive spectacle; ceremonial arches, palatial structures, military bands, lakes, fountains bathed in coloured lights, food stalls, wrestling competitions and pony races, and regional theatre — all combined to impress the public eye and draw it to agricultural products, manufactured goods, machines, scientific inventions, and new methods of working and living. So central was the idea of the dramatic success to exhibitions that when it fell short, public commentary was sharp. This occurred when the Calcutta International Exhibition opened after an evening of pouring rain — a damp beginning compounded by the darkness that the opening ceremony was plunged into when 'owing to the wickedness of some wretch the electric wire was cut'.[45] *The Englishman*, a newspaper always enthusiastic about colonial projects, could not refrain from commenting that the scene was 'very sad, the great ceremony was torn to ribbons, the superb ruby velvet canopy was dripping like a drill cloth … Every Court leaked more or less — Victoria a good deal'.[46] By contrast, the opening of the Allahabad Exhibition of 1910–11 drew ecstatic public praise. *Saraswati*, a premier Hindi literary journal, was moved to describe the layout and exhibits picturesquely, declaring the event a spectacular success.[47] The *Pioneer*, an English daily, gushed that 'sons and daughters of the East and West' greeted the opening of the exhibition with cries of 'Kolossal!, Kya ajib! [how amazing], Bápre báp! [Oh my God], Wah! [splendid], this beats Chicago!'[48]

What began as representations of science staged to conquer ignorance and superstition became enmeshed in the very effects that were targeted for elimination. We encounter this intermixture in the museum's evocation of the awe of its visitors, in the exhibition's utilisation of a sense of marvels, in mesmeric science's attempt to show magical efficacy, and in the miraculous powers evoked by public demonstrations of scientific instruments. In these stagings of science, the cold scrutiny of scientific knowledge confronted the magic of spectacles as part of its own process of signification, as difference within itself. Within this structure of difference, science aroused curiosity and wonder, not 'superstition': the 'Wonder House' was not museum's polar opposite but an interstitial space that accommodated a half-awake state of comprehension and incomprehension. In the cries of 'Kya Ajib!' and 'Wah!', we do not confront blind faith but the wondrous curiosity of 'this beats Chicago' that science's authorisation in magic had brought about.

the second sight

As colonial conditions turned the staging of science into a wondrous spectacle, a space opened for the subjectivity and agency of the Western-educated élite. Trained in Western schools and colleges, and employed in colonial bureaucracy and modern professions, this élite had acquired a visible presence in principal Indian cities and towns by the late 19th century. In a sense, its emergence was attributable to the colonial project of re-forming Indian subjects. The exhibitionary institutions contributed to this process by acting as pedagogical instruments, by inviting Indians to identify and learn universal principles of classification and function in objects encased in colonial power and exhibited as a spectacle. The élite emerged from its encounter with exhibits by claiming that this experience had reoriented its vision, or, as one text states, endowed it with 'second sight'. It is significant that this sight appeared on the cusp between the exhibition of the imperial power to name and order artefacts and the representation of this display as the spectacle of science. Placed between the two, the power of understanding signified by the 'second sight' was

[45] *The Hindoo Patriot*, 10 December 1883.

[46] *The Englishman*, 6 December 1883.

[47] 'Prayag ki Pradurshini', *Saraswati* (Hindi), January, 1911, vol. 1, no. 12, pp. 33–36.

[48] *Pioneer*, 3 December 1910.

rooted in curiosity and wonder. Signifying neither a superstitious eye, nor a scientific gaze, it was a vision re-formed by its encounter with science's representation as wondrous and useful Western knowledge. Equipped with such a vision, Western-educated Indians surfaced as modern subjects who could claim to represent and act upon the subaltern masses from whom they distinguished themselves.

The emergence of the curious eye of 'second sight' is observable in R. B. Sanyal's *Hours with Nature* which includes a chapter titled 'Round the Indian Museum', a fictional account of a visit by schoolteachers to the Indian Museum.[49] Mr W (West?), inspector of schools in Bengal, instructs Pandit Vidyabhushan, a Sanskrit grammarian, in a dialogue that opens with the teachers expressing amazement at the sight of zoological specimens.

> 'What a variety of forms!'
>
> 'From all parts of the world!'
>
> 'The vastness of the collection is perfectly bewildering!'
>
> 'Not so much as those strange weed-like things', said Vidyabhushan, pointing towards some really very plant-like objects kept in cases against the western wall of the hall . . . Mr. W. who was attentively listening to the conversation and had noticed Vidyabhushan's embarrassment, explained that though weed-like in appearance they were in reality *animals*.
>
> 'Truth *is*, as they say, stranger than fiction', exclaimed Vidyabhushan.
>
> 'Let us hear something about these strange forms', cried many almost in chorus.
>
> 'Well then', resumed Mr. W., 'those weed-like objects are "Zoophytes or Plant-animals"', so called owing to their superficial resemblance to plants.[50]

The text continues in this manner for several pages, bewilderment and amazement followed by explanation and understanding. The method of comparison and classification is demonstrated, leading to the following:

> 'I have been connected', said Vidyabhushan, 'in one capacity or another with the education of children and young men for the last thirty years, and have read and taught a great many things about animals and their ways as related in story and reading books. I know, as every school-boy knows, that lions and tigers are formidable animals; that ostriches are very large birds that live in the deserts of Africa, and are remarkable for their speed; that elephants are very sensible and amusing to children, and have their uses. But then, this is learning things without method, and is, therefore, of no value. I am so glad that Mr. W. has hit upon this plan of teaching the teachers to value system. In fact, he has given us a *second sight* [emphasis mine]. When I first entered this great hall, I was perfectly bewildered at the vastness of the collection, and had not the least idea in what order and plan they were arranged. I have got at least some notion now of their arrangement, thanks to the interesting demonstrations of Mr. W.'[51]

After describing several other occasions of puzzlement followed by Mr W.'s explanations, the text concludes with Mr W. stating that understanding nature requires the simplicity and the purity of a child's heart, and an 'ear of faith'. This rejects colonial power's self-identification with universality and scales down its knowledge to a set of Western values and attitudes. Vidyabhushan acknowledges the importance of these values but adds that 'according to our old Hindu idea "Reverence" is another essential quality for the training of the mind'. With this invocation of the 'Hindu idea', Vidyabhushan does not dilute difference but affirms it as the basis for negotiating a relationship with the Western emphasis on 'an ear of faith'.

As the text sketches and negotiates the relationship of wonder with science, and of childlike simplicity and the Hindu idea of 'reverence' with the Western 'value system', it outlines a space for an educated élite, now possessed of the 'second sight' and able to absorb Western knowledge. The 'second sight' emerges in the process of encountering the objects in the museum, out of the bewilderment experienced when confronted with alien knowledge. The emergence of this

[49] R. B. Sanyal, *Hours with Nature*, Calcutta: S. K. Lahiri and Co., 1896, pp. 84–121. He was the Superintendent of the Zoological Garden, Calcutta, when he published this book.

[50] *Ibid.*, pp. 86–88.

[51] *Ibid.*, p. 98.

amazement and wonder through the performative process is evident from the fact that the text does not attribute them to a prior scientific training — the museum goers are described as 'school-masters and Pandits', and the principal character is described as 'Pandit Jadavchandra Vidyabhushan', a scholar of grammar.[52] As a grammarian, he presumably brought logic and classification to his understanding of the museum, but this was not the same as the 'value system' taught by the museum. In fact, the text invokes the 'Hindu idea of "Reverence"'. Significantly, this 'Hindu idea' emerges in the act of learning, and, though part of Vidyabhushan's heritage, it surfaces in the process of viewing objects in the museum. Outlined here is the notion of a Hindu conceptual system, or 'Hindu science', that is not derived from or opposed to Western science. The 'Hindu idea' arises as a different form of knowledge, divergent and autonomous from Western science, but not its polar opposite.

It is significant that the text identifies the emergence of the 'second sight' in a museum, for historical records suggest that museums took seriously their educational function. Almost all museums organised visits of groups of students and teachers to their galleries;[53] in addition, many museums organised regular public lectures. In this regard, the Lahore Central Museum stands as a representative example.[54] Besides housing the Science Institute and allowing the Society for Promoting Scientific Knowledge to use its lecture hall, the museum also instituted a series of 'Magic Lantern Lectures' in 1892–93 when John Lockwood Kipling, Rudyard's father, reported the purchase and apparently hugely successful use of a magic lantern in a lecture. The topics of these lectures, delivered in both English and Urdu and by both Englishmen and Indians, varied — they ranged from history to science. The best attended lectures were apparently the 'Zenana Lectures', reserved for purdah-clad women, delivered frequently in the 1910s and the 1920s by Manorama Bose, a Bengali Christian woman who taught at the Victoria School, eventually becoming its headmistress.[55] She belonged to a family devoted to missionary work. Her father had converted to Christianity when, after graduating from the Calcutta Medical College and joining the medical service in Punjab, he came across American missionaries in Ludhiana. One of his four daughters, Manorama Bose was sent to London to train as a teacher in 1884. There she began to keep a diary which records her visits to Kew Gardens, the Natural History Museum, the Crystal Palace, and a demonstration of the magic lantern.[56] On her return to India in 1886, she learned Urdu, Persian and Bengali, joined the Victoria School as a teacher, and lectured frequently in the series at the Lahore Museum. Her lectures were not on science, but on such general topics as travel and the education of women. The museum appears to have included these subjects in order to enlarge the appeal of its series of lectures.[57]

The desire to find and include activities that would draw the uneducated was a continuing feature of museums and exhibitions, and it provided the means for marking and separating the élite from the subaltern. We notice this process of marking emerge in Dr Bhau Daji's conception of the museum as a 'book with broad pages and large print' that taught through seeing, by 'mere inspection', the 'very great majority of our countrymen' — 'the unlearned'. We catch a glimpse of it again in the

[52] Sanyal, *Hours with Nature*, pp. 84, 87.

[53] The annual reports of most museums report these visits. See, for example, Government of Madras, Education Department, *Administration Report of the Government Central Museum for the year 1896-97*, p. 2.

[54] The following account is taken from the annual series entitled *Report on the Working of the Lahore Museum*, 1892–93.

[55] IOLR: Mss. Eur.178/72, Monorama Bose, 'Notes on Various Subjects'.

[56] IOLR: Mss.Eur.178/69, 'Diary of Monorama Bose, 1884–1905', entries for 18 April, 26 May 1884, 25 July, 30 December 1884 and 23 May 1885.

[57] In the 1930s, the Lahore Museum began screening such films as 'Automobile (Making a Motor Car)' and 'Surfing, the Famous Sport of Waikiki' to attract the uneducated. Central Museum, Lahore, *Annual Report* for years 1922–23 to 1936–37.

response of Bhoobun Mohun Raha and Jadub Chandra Goswami, the two Joint-Secretaries of the Fureedpur Agricultural Exhibition, to criticisms of amusements in the exhibition: 'If bands of music and other attraction are found necessary in England, how much more so is something of this sort necessary in this country'.[58] That this referred not to Indians as a whole but to the lower orders becomes clear when they state that the performances of *jatra* (Bengali traditional theatre) and 'nautches' (dances) during the 1873 exhibition were organised 'chiefly for the amusement of the lower classes, who have still a great taste for these things'. The lower classes were not only marked by their taste for *jatra*s and 'nautches' but were also defined by their poor understanding of scientific agriculture. Thus these amusements were considered justified for the sake of 'the improvement of the agriculturists of this Sub-division, who were so much in need of instructions and practical demonstration on scientific mode of cultivation and manuring'.[59]

The awareness that the subalterns are in need of scientific instruction runs through the writings of the educated élite. It appears, for example, in an article on the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific exhibition of 1910, published in the Hindi journal *Saraswati*. The author, after being struck by the Agricultural Court and describing the demonstration of scientific methods of production, writes of his conversation with a friend:

> 'Does not the sight of these things teach a great deal?' Munshiram said in amazement.
>
> 'Undoubtedly, why not. This knowledge is relevant to farmers. They have gained much by coming into this building.'
>
> 'And then, there is our country where people are living in darkness. The same old ploughs and bullocks. These unfortunate souls believe that fate determines the poor productivity of their soil. They do not realize that their miserable condition is due to their own ignorance. The same land can grow hundred times more if scientific methods were to be employed.'
>
> 'But who will teach them?'
>
> 'Just as governments here spend crores of rupees to teach peasants, so should our governments do'.
>
> I smiled. Munshiram understood the meaning of my smile. He took a deep breath and joined me as we came out of the building.[60]

The admiration for scientific agriculture, the bitter recognition of the Indian peasant's ignorance, and the smile and the deep breath — these were the gestures and expressions of the discourse in which the élite formed its identity, enlightened unlike the subaltern but colonised like it. This identity can also be seen to come to the fore earlier, in reactions to the 1883 Calcutta International Exhibition. The *Bengalee* welcomed the idea of an exhibition, acknowledged that it could instruct particularly when held on a small scale in districts. But a grand one such as the Calcutta exhibition ignored the fact that one had to keep in mind the character of the people it was aimed at and the resources they possessed:

> If an Exhibition were held among the remote barbarians of the Sandwich Islands, the spectacle would create astonishment, the projector would probably be worshipped as a god — an honour that would perhaps be extended to some of his commodities — but nothing solid or substantial would follow. These barbarians have no capital, and even if their curiosity were deeply stirred, and their inclinations moved, there would be wanting the capital to manufacture.[61]

A similar problem existed in India. Here, too, 'artisans and agriculturists will come from the moffasil to see the great Bazar', and though they

[58] IOLR: P/186, Government of Bengal, Statistical Department (Industry and Science) Proceedings No. 17-1, May 1873. This reply was reinvoked later, see P/894, Government of Bengal, Financial Department (Industry and Science) Proceedings No. 3-3/5, March 1876.

[59] *A Report on Pagla Mian's Mela with Agricultural and Industrial Exhibition*, p. 2. The report also notes that 'circus and bioscope performances were given under the denomination of scientific instructive amusement' (p. 12).

[60] *Saraswati*, vol. 11, no. 1, January, 1910, pp. 26–27 (my translation).

[61] *Bengalee*, 17 November 1883.

would be moved by things they see, nothing could come of it as they were deeply in debt and had no capital. Once again, this commentary registers the educated élite's effort to distinguish itself from artisans and peasants (who were seen as similar to 'the remote barbarians of the Sandwich Islands') whose welfare and reform it claimed as its responsibility. Eighteen years after this commentary, when the Indian National Congress began to hold industrial exhibitions to coincide with its annual meeting in 1901, this élite emerged, organised in a powerful institution, as a class apart from the subaltern masses and determined to change them.

science and the subaltern

If museums and exhibitions made a space for the emergence of the educated élite from which they could act and speak, what of the subalterns? They did not write books or letters to editors. They are spoken to and spoken for. We encounter them in the discourse of colonial and Indian élites as icons of ignorance and darkness the élites wished to remove. But this was an impossible goal because the colonial project hinged on the presumed and permanent existence of the 'superstitious' as a subaltern object to be transformed by modern reason; the ignorant and irrational could never be fully understood or completely appropriated, for that would end the 'civilizing mission'. Thus, if the subaltern was silenced or made to speak only through 'superstition', it was also assured an intractable presence in the discourse of colonial science. At once completely known — stubbornly irrational — and entirely unknowable — who can understand the ways of unreason? — the figure of the subaltern occupies a disturbing presence in dominant discourses; it represents their limit, a marginal position against which they defined themselves.

What did it mean to identify the self under the pressure of this unknowable, subaltern other? Let us turn to George Campbell's rueful acknowledgment of the subaltern as that ineluctable difference in which colonial knowledge sought its identification.

> I often stop and look at them ['tribes and races'], and I have tried to make something of them, but they don't understand me; I don't understand them; and they don't seem to realise the interest of ethnological inquiries, so I have not progressed much.[62]

As Campbell regretfully notes the unbridgeable gap between colonial élites and 'tribes and races', he also makes clear that the progress of 'ethnological inquiries' hinged on closing this gulf. This was an impossible project, not only because the discourse required the unassimilable subaltern, but also because the spectacle of science could not shake off its imperial connection. To subalterns, the staging of science appeared either as an expression of the government's intent, which was always suspect, or as Western novelties. Museums and exhibitions, therefore, often generated rumours and were read as curious, miraculous shows.

In the destabilising momentum of rumours, the intractable subaltern became a threat. The rulers were thrown into a panic when, wishing to dazzle peasants into improvement and progress with agricultural exhibitions, they were met with rumours sweeping the countryside. In some Madras districts it was said that the British were plotting a new tax scheme; while the landed gentry and traders cooperated in organising exhibitions, others, due to their 'unconquerable feelings' had such 'strange notions' that the government wanted to identify the best agricultural land and produce so that it could assess higher taxes.[63] Even more disturbing was the word going around in the south Indian countryside during the 1850s that agricultural exhibitions were British plots to convert Hindus to Christianity:

> Superstition also lent its aid to fill the cup to the brim, and the most wild and laughably fanciful notions, were in some instances, I am inclined to think, designedly spread and seized by the people,

[62] *Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, January to December, 1866*, pp. 88–89.

[63] *Selections from the Records of the Madras Government, No: XXXIIA, Report on the Agricultural Exhibitions in the Provinces in the Year 1856*, pp. 41, 59; and *Selections from the Records of the Madras Government, No: XLV, Report on the Agricultural Exhibitions in the Provinces in the Year 1856*, 2, Madras: Fort St George Gazette Press, 1858, pp. 29, 63.

> one of which was so original that it deserves mention, *viz.*, that one of the great ends of the Exhibition was to convert the heathen to Christianity, that for this reason prizes were offered by the Government for the best paddy, that the *whole* in the District might be brought up and the natives compelled to eat boiled rice and become Christians, and that to celebrate the event, prizes were offered by Government for the best beef in the shape of cattle of all sorts, on which the Europeans were to regale at Christmas in token of thanks giving.[64]

We can read the strategy of normalisation in references to 'superstition' and 'laughably fanciful notions'. But this very strategy of showing the far-fetched nature of stories also opened a place for the subaltern, for its agency — rumours 'designedly spread and seized'. This contradictory process of acknowledging and denying the subaltern a place in discourse can be observed in Edgar Thurston's description of his ethnological tours:

> The Paraiyan women of Wynaad, when I appeared in their midst, ran away, believing that I was going to have the finest specimens among them stuffed for the museum. Oh, that this were possible! The difficult problem of obtaining models from living subject would be disposed of. The Muppas of Malabar mistook me for a recruiting sergeant, bent on enlisting the strongest of them to fight against the Moplahs. An Irula of the Nilgiris, who was 'wanted' for some ancient offence relating to a forest elephant, refused to be measured on the plea that the height-measuring standard was the gallows. A mischievous rumour found credence among the Irulas that I had in my train a wizard Kurumba, who would bewitch their women and compel me to abduct them. The Malaialis of Shevaroys got it into their heads that I was about to annex their lands on behalf of the Crown, and transport them to the penal settlement in the Andaman islands.[65]

While the wry humour of 'Oh, that this was possible' and the amused description in Thurston's prose presents rumours as wild stories of wild people, his retelling of these stories — indeed, the general tendency of colonial officials to retail what they regarded as fanciful — is significant. The very strategy of defining and appropriating the Other in rumours compels the colonial officials to give life to rumours, to make a place for 'absurd' tales. In accommodating them, the élites opened their discourse to the wild contagion of indeterminacy characteristic of rumours, to the menace of their shadowy origins, and to their reckless reverberations once set forth in motion. Registering the threat posed by such escalating indeterminacy, one official wrote that 'the most absurd reports were in circulation, no one pretending to know or with whom originating, still they were greedily credited, and the more grossly absurd the report, the more certain was it of belief'.[66] The panic felt was real enough. Thus, the exhibition in Cuddapah opened with considerable apprehension because the British were unable to read people's intentions. On the one hand, they expected considerable apathy though not an 'intention to defy the authorities', prompting the British to consider postponing the opening of the exhibition. On the other hand, since defiance was 'also stated to be the intention of those inimical to the Exhibition, all thoughts therefore of postponement were abandoned'. Unable to determine whether the 'natives' were apathetic or intent on defying the authorities, and choosing to make a stand, the authorities opened the exhibition on 26 May 1856. In the event, however, the officials noted that 'nothing was forthcoming save a few cattle'.[67]

Anticipating a similar outbreak of rumours due to the impending census operations, Abdool Luteef Khan, a Western-educated Bengali Muslim, recalled the atmosphere created by rumours at the time of the Alipur Agricultural Exhibition in 1864 (Plate 3.2). Among many 'absurd and ridiculous stories' there was one according to which the real reason why

[64] *Ibid.*, p. 151.

[65] Edgar Thurston, 'Anthropology in Madras', *Nature*, 26 May 1898, reprinted in Government of Madras, Educational Department, *Administration Report of the Government Central Museum for the Year 1898–99*, Appendix F.

[66] *Selections from the Records of the Madras Government, No: XLV, Report on the Agricultural Exhibitions in the Provinces in the Year 1856*, pp. 2, 121.

[67] *Ibid.*, p. 121.

cattle and horses were required by the exhibition was the outbreak of a war somewhere, for which the cattle and horses would be slaughtered for food or used to transport military stores. These rumours prompted Khan to launch a campaign of education. He issued a pamphlet in Urdu which, along with its Bengali translation, was widely distributed by the government. As a result, he wishfully concluded, the 'bugbear called into existence by popular ignorance has vanished, and that which was once dreaded is now invited and welcomed'.[68] It is true that later exhibitions did not record similar outbreaks of rumours, but the subaltern continued to occupy an unmanageable position in colonial and Indian élite conceptions. If the lower classes did not threaten the project of disseminating science by spreading rumours, they undermined its gravity by demanding frivolous amusements as the price of their participation.

The subaltern's 'inappropriate' attitude compromised the functioning of museums. Colonial officials feared that the popularity of museums with lower classes had driven out the élite: 'The Indian aristocracy look on a museum as something pleasing to the vulgar with which they are not concerned'. Frequented by the lower classes and the 'vulgar', the museum in India could not be 'an institution of education and research'. Officials worried that illiterate Indians, who formed the overwhelming majority of visitors to museums, undermined their intentions; in Lahore, for example, they had made a visit to the museum a regular feature of wedding ceremonies.[69] In Madras, as also other places, days of the most important Hindu festivals drew the largest numbers of visitors. But contrary to what we may suppose, these visitors did not go to museums to pay obeisance to the statues of deities; at least no such mention is made by any document. Instead, Hindu festivals appeared to have only provided an occasion for festive recreation which might include a visit to the museum. Describing the day of the feast of Pongal, 15 January 1895, when 36,500 visitors flocked to the Madras Museum, Edgar Thurston wrote:

> The museum grounds presented the appearance of a fair, occupied as they were by a swarm of natives in gay holiday attire, vendors of sweetmeats, fruit, toys and ballads, jugglers, mendicants and others.[70]

Interestingly enough, when describing what visitors did inside the museum, Thurston does not mention any religious purpose:

> For the great mass of visitors to the museums in India, who come under the heading of sight-seers, and who regard museums as *tamásha* [show] houses, it matters but little what exhibits are displayed, or how they are displayed, provided only that they are attractive. I am myself repeatedly amused by seeing visitors to the Madras museum pass hurriedly and silently through arranged galleries, and linger long and noisily over a heterogenous collection of native figures, toys, painted models of fruit, &c.[71]

Thurston adds that for these uneducated visitors, who called the museum a 'stuffing college' and *jadu ghar* (Magic or Wonder House), the main delight offered by the museum was 'in the recognition of familiar objects, which they shriek out by name, *e.g.*, káká (the crow), pachi pámbu (the green tree-snake), áni (the elephant), periya min (big fish-the whale!), etc'.[72] When Thurston pulled out his anthropometrical instruments every evening, a crowd would gather to watch him:

> Quite recently, when I was engaged in an enquiry into the Eurasian half-breed community, the booking for places was almost as keen as on the occasion of a first night at the Lyceum, and the sepoys of

[68] Bahadoor, *Discourse on the Nature*, pp. vi–vii.

[69] *Conference of Orientalists including Museums and Archaeology Conference held at Simla, July 1911*, pp. 117–18.

[70] Government of Madras, Revenue Department, *Administration Report of the Government Central Museum for the Year 1894–95*, p. 1.

[71] *Ibid.*

[72] Government of Madras, Educational Department, *Administration Report of the Government Central Museum for the year 1895–96*, Appendix E, 14. A very similar description appears in Markham and Hargreaves, *The Museums of India*, p. 61.

> a native infantry regiment quartered in Madras, entered heartily into the spirit of what they called the 'Mujeum gymnashtik shparts' [Museum Gymnastics Sports] cheering the possessor of the biggest hand-grip, and chaffing those who came to grief over the spirometer.[73]

the signification of science: An enigmatic articulation

The history of museums and exhibitions is inseparable from their functioning as signs of Western power. This holds true not only for the colonies, but also for the West. There too, these institutions named, classified, and displayed non-Western objects and peoples to showcase the power and knowledge of Western nations, to reform and discipline the working classes, who were often compared with the exhibited 'savages' elsewhere.[74] But it was one thing to compare class and race, quite another to conflate them in placing 'natives' for display in theatre-like stalls. Colonies, after all, provided the infamous 'elbow room' unavailable in Europe. For this reason, museums and exhibitions in British India remained singularly concerned with science and natural history. This also meant, however, that it was precisely in the virgin, colonial space of India that museums and exhibitions as European institutions were forced to confront their intimacy with the 'native'. There, the colonial 'supplement' emerged powerfully and disturbingly. As the British staged Western science in Indian material, as they signified universal knowledge with particular, colonial methods, the 'native' supplement, hidden in Europe, made a forceful entry in colonial discourse.

It is tempting to see the 'Mujeum gymnashtik shparts' as the price European science had to pay for its implantation in non-European soil. Indeed, this perspective frames Thurston's narrative, implying that European discourses, originary and normal in the metropolis, were perverted in the process of their 'tropicalization' in the colonies.[75] Such a view overlooks the crucial fact that the representation of Europe's originality hinged on the 'native' copy. It also elides the scandalous history of the fashioning of Western knowledge's identity, initially in the foreign and exotic material accumulated in the Renaissance cabinets of curiosities and later in the burgeoning colonial spoils displayed by metropolitan museums and exhibitions.[76] My point here is neither that there was no difference between Europe and India, nor that the two were locked in an implacable dialectic, now to be reversed in favour of the repressed Other to explain the 'origin' of Europe. Instead, what I wish to highlight is the historical undoing of the self–other binarism, the unravelling of the narrative which posits that Western knowledge, fully formed in the centre, was 'tropicalized' as it was diffused in the periphery.[77] The paradox of the 'civilizing mission' was that it was forced to undo the very opposition upon which it was founded. To achieve 'improvement' with despotism, as John Stuart Mill proposed so baldly, was a Faustian bargain whose effects bedevilled colonialism; it dislodged the very civilised-savage opposition upon which colonial power depended. As the British used barabarism to deal with the 'barbarians', as they used science to mark the 'burned black' Indian skin with white

[73] Edgar Thurston, 'Anthropology in Madras', p. 26.

[74] For the politics of disciplinary regimes and class politics, see Tony Bennett, 'The Exhibitionary Complex', *New Formations*, 4, Spring 1988, pp. 73–102; and Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge*, London: Routledge, 1992, pp. 167–90. Though these studies do not describe them, it is reasonable to suppose that twists and turns must have also characterised the functioning of European museums as instruments of class and disciplinary power.

[75] Colonial science, from this point of view, emerges as a bad imitation of science born and developed in Europe. See George Basalla, 'The Spread of Western Science', *Science*, 156, 1967, pp. 611–22.

[76] For the importance of foreign exotic objects in renaissance England and for its place in the development of museums, see Arnold, *Cabinet for the Curious*. Also relevant is Steven Mullaney, 'Strange Things, Gross Terms, Curious Customs: The Rehearsal of Cultures in the Late Renaissance', in Stephen Greenblatt (ed.), *Representing the English Renaissance*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988, pp. 65–92.

[77] For persuasive arguments against such binarisms, see Sara Suleri, *The Rhetoric of English India*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.

authority, they undercut the very ideals of civilisation and progress that legitimised their power. Such was the compulsion of empire: colonial dominance in British India had to operate through the undoing of its founding oppositions.

It was at the point of colonialism's unresolvable dilemma that an ambivalent zone of power and agency took shape. In this zone, the universality of Western power and knowledge appeared in the mirror of magic and spectacle, and the sciences of classification and function instituted themselves in curiosity and wonder. From this arose the agency of the Western-educated élite, located in its 'second sight' and expressed in its portrayal of science as a marvellous 'value system' and useful technology, which could be combined and enriched with indigenous traditions. Science's uncertain and other life can be also identified in the mixture of amusement and fear with which subaltern groups viewed the exhibition of artefacts, reading it as a collection of pleasing novelties and as a sign of malevolent designs upon their lives. If the British regarded both élite and subaltern responses as less than appropriate, as proofs of the dictum that natives will always be natives, they could not ignore these altogether. Seeking from Indians the recognition of Western knowledge's authority, but unwilling to acknowledge them as knowing subjects, the British had to regard Indians as always less than adequate, always lacking some key attribute. This justified colonial dominance, but it also conceded that the colonial project would never achieve complete success, that Indians would remain unconquerable in the last instance. It was precisely at the site of colonialism's necessary failure to resolve its paradoxes and prevent its knowledge from 'going native' that the career of science charted another course in British India.

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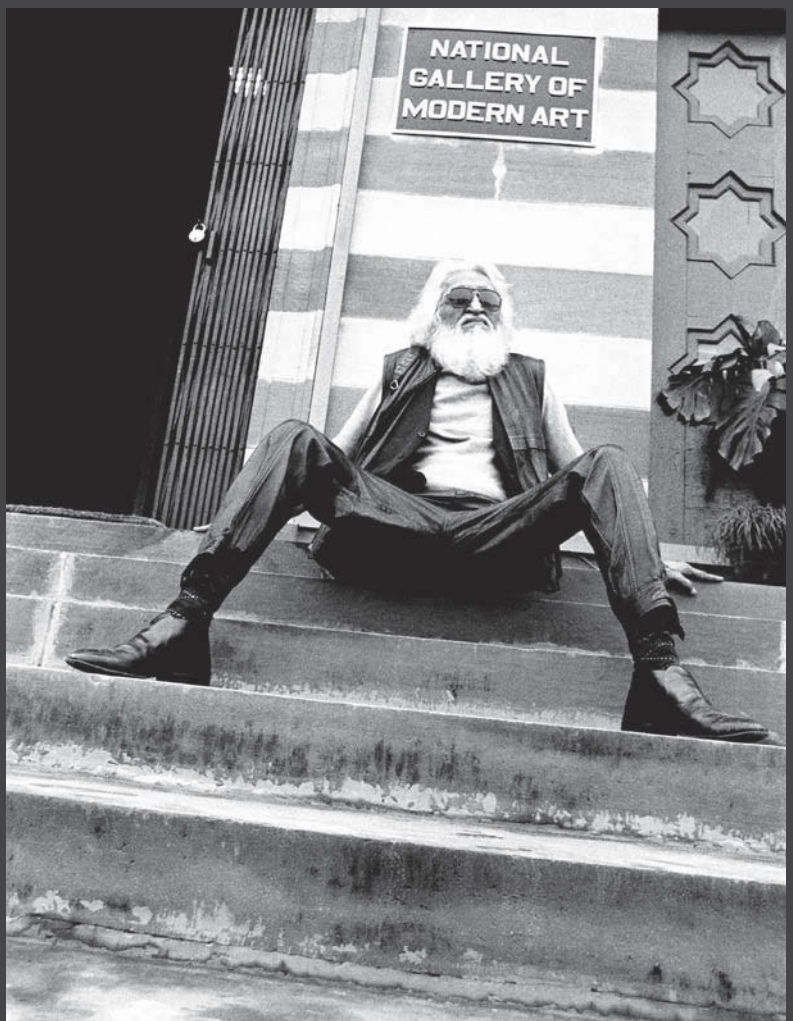
part 2
national re-orientations



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4

museu

the museum is national

Kavita Singh

the idea of a national museum

Along with the national anthem, the national emblem, the national festival, a nation needs its national library, its national archive, and its national museum. For poor indeed would be the country that could not lay claim to enough history to fill an archive, enough scholarship to fill a library, and enough artefacts to fill a museum! Shortly after Indian Independence, thus, the project of a National Museum for the country was begun. Here, as in most Asian, African and Latin American nations at the moment of decolonisation, the erection of a grand national museum became an act of great symbolic importance, for it was a visible assertion of newly-gained sovereignty.[1] (Plate 4.1)

By making national museums these new nation-states were able to demonstrate their ability to define and to care for their patrimony. The newly-formed museums became sites for the retrieval of their own past: within their halls, the new nations could collect, protect and assign value to their own heritage independent of the scrutiny and judgements of their erstwhile colonial masters. And by throwing open the doors to the public, the nations could share these masterpieces with their citizens in a symbolic affirmation of their rights. These gestures, of gathering and giving, were sufficiently urgent to overcome the conditions of financial stringency faced by most decolonised nations in their difficult early years. For to make a national museum of one's own was to step onto the world stage and establish a cultural and political equivalence with Spain, France or Britain whose grand national museums in Madrid, Paris and London had held and shared their nation's patrimony with its citizens for 100, 200 or 300 years.

However, while the desire to have a national museum was inspired by examples of museums in the European metropolises, the museums of new states needed to do something markedly different from what had been done in Europe. The old European 'national' museums related a supra- or trans-national tale of the history of Western civilisation. Claiming as their own heritage the art of ancient Egypt, progressing to ancient Greece and Rome, and then directly to Renaissance Europe, the great European museums developed a 'universal survey'[2] of the history of art, incorporating all that

[1] In many instances, a pre-existing colonial museum is made 'national' through a change in its emphases and interpretation of colonial collections. For the case of 'Indochina', see, for instance, Gwendolyn Wright, 'National Culture under Colonial Auspices', in *The Formation of National Collections of Art and Archaeology*, Washington D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1996, pp. 127–42; and for the island states of the Pacific, see Adrienne L. Kaeppler's 'Paradise Regained: The Role of Pacific Museums in Forging National Identity', in Flora E. S. Kaplan (ed.), *Museums and the Making of 'Ourselves': The Role of Objects in National Identity,* Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1994, pp. 19–44.

[2] Carol Duncan and Allan Wallach coined the term and pointed out pervasive patterns in art history survey books and museums in their classic essay, 'The Universal Survey Museum', *Art History*, vol. 3, December 1980, pp. 447–69.

PLATE 4.1 • *Façade of the newly constructed National Museum, New Delhi, 1961. SOURCE*: ALL PHOTOGRAPHS IN THIS CHAPTER ARE COURTESY OF THE NATIONAL MUSEUM, NEW DELHI.

it admired into its own past.[3] (Adjunct galleries might house material from other world cultures that had no place in this evolutionary sequence, but they served to expand the territory of connaissance.) Transcending nationality, the narrative retold by the museums in Europe was one of transnational dominance.

Among the new nations, the purpose was different: national museums were required as shrines of the *national* culture, extending their scope to civilisations produced through the ages but confining them to those produced within the boundaries of the modern state. This museological form, in which a national heritage is gathered and disseminated, is a specifically postcolonial phenomenon. Arrogating to the modern nation all the cultural productions of the past, these museums turn civilisation into heritage and predecessors into ancestors, binding the populace into a citizenry through their shared pride in 'their' past. By transforming all of the past into a pre-history of the present, the national museum displays the new nation as something that had always existed in a spiritual or cultural sense, even if historical exigencies had prevented the attainment of nationhood in the political sphere. This was the project that was desired and assiduously developed

[3] These issues are discussed in several essays in Wright, *The Formation of National Collections*. See particularly the essays by Andrew McClellan, 'Nationalism and the Origins of the Museum in France', pp. 29–40, and Thomas W. Gaehtgens, 'The Museum Island in Berlin', pp. 53–78, in Gwendolyn Wright (ed.), *The Formation of National Collections of Art and Archaeology*, Washington D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1996.

by the newly de-colonised non-Western nations in the great wave of museum-building across Asia and Africa, in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s.

In its formulation and celebration of Indian national culture, the National Museum of India had two tasks: to show that India was eternal, and to show that the country had eternally been great. By arranging objects taken from diverse periods of history and made for many different contexts in one evolutionary sequence, the museum was able to show that something akin to 'India' had always existed. The historic periods, when the land was not yet a nation but was divided or subjected, could then be presented as interruptions in the nation's natural destiny, something felt by the 'people' even if denied by their rulers.

That the nation is, and always was, great could be demonstrated through its possession of a high culture over a long period. But high culture does not simply exist: it must be produced through intellectual labour that sifts through the available objects to form a canon. In formulating a high national culture, one strand or a few interrelated strands are chosen as the dominant, representative or mainstream culture from among the proliferation of local cultures. Typical candidates for the 'mainstream' culture are associated with an ethnic group that is dominant in the present period (the past thus legitimates the present), is possessed of a textual tradition (which provides historical evidence as well as an expression of intentionality), is relatively widely diffused (so that it can claim to be proto-national), and offers in its history at least a few figures (patrons, artists) who can function as national heroes.

If the National Museum was to demonstrate that India was eternal, and further that India was eternally great, it was inevitable that the main burden of the narrative would fall upon one category of objects: stone sculpture. These alone had survived so plentifully through the centuries that it was possible to trace a deep and continuous history through their evidence. However the value of stone sculpture lay not just in their antiquity but also in their resemblance — at least superficially — to the stone sculpture of Greek and Roman antiquity. By foregrounding the fact that India too had an antique and long-lasting tradition of monumental stone sculpture, enthusiasts of Indian art could testify to a civilisation that in some respects resembled European civilisation, and which might also be considered its equivalent.[4] (Plate 4.2)

Yet it did not fall on the National Museum to 'discover' India's stone sculpture and present it to the public for the first time. On the contrary, such sculptures, whether loose or attached to structural buildings or carved into the living rock of hills and caves, had always been the most visible of Indian artefacts and had been the litmus against which outsider responses to Indian art and religion were tested. If in the 17th century European travellers believed the many-armed and many-headed sculptures they saw were evidence of devil-worship in India, in the 18th and 19th centuries the antiquarian and Orientalist scholars mined these sculptures for information about the distant Indian past.[5] However, these colonial-period researchers disdained these objects even as they amassed vast collections of them for the repositories of their learned societies. For these early scholars, the value of these objects lay in the evidence they might provide about history, but as carvings they were considered un-aesthetic: their symbolic language and anatomical inaccuracy were alien to

[4] The assertion of this similarity had to be made at the cost of suppressing dissimilarities between ancient Indian sculpture and ancient Greek. Unlike independent sculptures of Greece and Rome, ancient Indian 'marbles' were primarily architectural fragments, which was why they are almost all reliefs; and they were meant to be seen as part of an ensemble, which surely affected their form. Presenting them as an 'equivalent' sculptural tradition, early Indian art history then had to devise theories that explained these qualities as an intentional spurning of the intention and effect of realistic representation. I discuss in some detail the process by which a canon of 'fine art' was constructed for India in the first half of the 20th century in 'Museums and the Making of an Indian Art Historical Canon' in Shivaji K. Panikkar, Parul Dave Mukherji and Deeptha Achar (eds), *Towards a New Art History: Studies in Indian Art*, New Delhi: D. K. Printworld.

[5] The classic study of the European encounter with Indian art from the 17th to the 20th centuries is Partha Mitter's *Much Maligned Monsters: A History of European Reactions to Indian Art*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977.

PLATE 4.2 • *Sculptures selected for the National Museum stored in the open air while the galleries were readied before the new building opened in 1961.*

European tastes and were seen as symptomatic of the irrationality of the Indian mind.

How then, in the National Museum, were stone sculptures to be presented to the public anew: as an aesthetic triumph and as proof of India's civilisational richness, when these artefacts had been known for so long and so often damned with faint praise? By the time the National Museum was instituted, nationalist critics, artists and intellectuals had already developed a framework through which these objects could be seen in a different light. Since the start of the 20th century, a growing cadre of Indian and Indophile artists, intellectuals and critics had begun a recuperative project for Indian art in which interpretive strategies refuted, point-by-point, colonial criticisms that were levelled against it. Rather than trying to prove that Indian art was equivalent to, or as good as, the art of the West, nationalist historians developed a discourse of difference. Here the aims of Indian art were shown to be contrary to those of Western art; what was formerly criticised as shortcoming was turned into intention. Thus, the deviations from naturalism seen so often in Indian art were described as the higher and purer sightings of an 'inner eye' that was fixed upon 'spiritual vision and not the visible objects perceived by the external sense'.[6] By this token, the accuracy of musculature in Greek statues, or perspective views in Renaissance painting, were

[6] E. B. Havell, *Indian Sculpture and Painting*, Delhi: Cosmo Books, 1980 [1908], p. 23.

seen as evidence of a mentality that was enslaved by dross materialism. The pioneering critics who produced this discourse in the first decades of the 20th century — E. B. Havell, Ananda Coomaraswamy and Stella Kramrisch — were followed by a generation of Indian scholars such as V. S. Agrawala and C. Sivaramamurti who elaborated upon these arguments by drawing upon Sanskrit texts. And at the cusp of Independence, it was this latter generation who were poised to formulate a narrative for the National Museum.

a new ancestor

Today, as much as at its inception, a visit to the National Museum is dominated by its sequence of sculpture galleries, which occupy almost the entire ground floor. As we shall see, this is the only set of galleries in the museum that form a coherent, interlinked and chronological sequence that tells an unfolding tale. The visit to the sculpture galleries, however, is prefaced by a walk through the galleries dedicated to the Indus Valley Civilisation. As the earliest known civilisation in South Asia that established a network of cities across a broad belt of the subcontinent in the 3rd millennium BCE, the Indus Valley Civilisation is an obvious starting point for any overview of Indian history through art. Yet, behind the unexceptionable presence of this gallery in the museum are tales of seething rivalries, fissures and anxieties that racked, and continue to rack the subcontinent.

In 1921, archaeological investigations at Harappa in Punjab, now in Pakistan, revealed an entire city from a hitherto unknown civilisation. Up till this point, Buddhist relics from the 3rd century BCE had been the most ancient traces of Indian civilisation, but now there was evidence for a sophisticated and complex civilisation in India several millennia before. Soon, two other major sites — Mohenjo Daro and Chanhu Daro — were excavated in Sindh, and the growing knowledge of the cities, artefacts and technologies of the Indus Valley people contributed an entirely new chapter to Indian history.

Unfortunately for India, at Partition all of these sites fell on the Pakistani side of the border. Pakistani historians framed the Indus Valley Civilisation as a proto-historical precursor of Pakistan, as it 'occupied almost exactly the same area as West Pakistan occupies today. It could thus be thought of as sort prehistoric prototype of the new State.'[7] Indian archaeologists were dismayed to lose jurisdiction over these important sites. Moreover, if the civilisation had flourished within the boundaries of Pakistan, the suitability of claiming it as India's heritage became questionable; yet it was too important to let go. Thus, almost immediately after Partition, Indian archaeologists pressed for funds to explore promising sites on the Indian side of the border. Within a year, some 70 sites of the Indus Valley Civilisation were found within India. Now confirmed as the heritage of both India and Pakistan, the Indus Valley Civilisation could legitimately supply the opening flourish of any survey of Indian art, as well as of India's National Museum.

However, through a curious twist of fate, the stellar objects from the Indus Valley Collection in India's National Museum came not from the newly-discovered sites on Indian soil, but from Mohenjo Daro in Pakistan. When Mohenjo Daro was excavated in the 1920s, archaeologists deposited its important finds first in the Lahore Museum, and then moved these to Delhi in anticipation of the construction of a Central Imperial Museum there. At the time of Partition some 12,000 objects from Mohenjo Daro were with the Archaeological Survey of India in Delhi. The Pakistan Government asked for these to be turned over to them. The issue of ownership was complicated; neither country was willing to give up the objects, and no museum had clear title to them. Eventually the two countries agreed to share the collections equally, although this was sometimes interpreted all too literally: several necklaces and girdles were taken apart with half the

[7] Fazlur Rahman, 'Preface', in *National Museum of Pakistan: General Guide*, Karachi: Civil & Military Press & Frere Hall, 1950, pp. 5–6. Cited in Andrew Amstutz, 'Buddhist History & Heritage in Pakistani National Discourse: Museums, Textbooks, & Cultural Policy', *European History Colloquium Series*, Cornell University, 4 March 2010.

beads sent to Pakistan, and half retained in India.[8] Of the two most celebrated sculpted figures found in Mohenjo Daro, Pakistan asked for and received the steatite figure of a bearded male, dubbed the 'Priest King', while India retained the bronze statuette of the 'Dancing Girl', a nude bejewelled female. Both choices aligned well with the kind of heritage that each country was to choose to foreground.[9]

In the decades that have followed, both India and Pakistan have produced divergent interpretations of the Indus Valley Civilisation, in ways that align with their respective cultural currents. If Pakistani studies have stressed the highly planned and surprisingly egalitarian nature of the Indus cities, or the technological achievements of their people, Indian scholars have dwelt on tiny figural representations found on Indus Valley seals, and the puzzling and undeciphered script that they bear. If the Pakistani approach avoids speculation about Indus Valley religion and beliefs, then Indian interest focuses precisely on these topics, hoping to find a precursor of the gods and beliefs that are current in India today. In the National Museum in Delhi, these divergences came to a head in 2000 when a newly-mounted arrangement of the gallery identified the Indus Valley language as Sanskrit, and the religion as an early Vedic Hinduism. Here the Museum was materialising a right-wing Hindu interpretation of the Indus Valley as an early manifestation of Hinduism, turning it more fully into an ancestor of current-day India. However, this interpretation is not tenable in the current state of knowledge and is vehemently contested by left-wing historians in India. In the ensuing controversy, a number of prominent historians mounted a protest, forcing the museum to remove the text panels that made these assertions.

But when the National Museum first opened its doors, this controversial re-making of the Indus Valley gallery lay many decades ahead. For now, it is sufficient to remember how India came to inherit the Indus Valley legacy and its actual objects, at the cusp of Independence, as we proceed further along the path that was laid out for visitors when the National Museum installed its galleries in the present building in 1961.

the garden of sculpture ...

Just as historical research has not been able to establish firm connections between the enigmatic Indus Valley Civilisation and the later history of India, the National Museum too offers no bridge between this gallery and the next, which leaps across some 1,500 years to pick up a narrative that will thenceforth be continuous.

The galleries that trace an evolutionary sequence through sculpture were installed when the Museum first opened in these premises, and remain substantially unaltered till today.[10] The first of these galleries is dedicated to Maurya and Sunga art, and shows sculptures produced for Buddhist monuments between the 3rd century BCE and 1st century CE. Signally important for the history of Indian art, both these dynasties produced monumental sculptures that adorned royal structures (such as the famous Ashokan pillars) and Buddhist stupas. However, the Museum's gallery can do no more than gesture towards the art of the Mauryas and the Sungas: important objects from this period belong to other

[8] See Nayanjot Lahiri, 'Partioning the Past', in *Marshalling the Past: Ancient India and its Modern Histories*, Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2012.

[9] Although inaccurate in its details, Hafeez Tunio's article 'With King Priest "in hiding", Dancing Girl yet to take the road back home', *The Express Tribune*, Karachi, 17 June 2012, expresses some of these sentiments. The figure of the dancing girl can supply a lineage for the thousands of figures of alluring females — *apsara*s, *alasakanya*s — seen in medieval Indian sculpture. The priest king, by comparison, is a chaste and even austere patriarch.

[10] The next several paragraphs analyse the display of the National Museum, based on a description of the galleries published in Grace Morley, *A Brief Guide to the National Museum*, Delhi: National Museum, 1962, and supplemented by my own visits to the Museum from the 1980s to the present day. Comparing Morley's description with the sculpture galleries' current display, one can see that there have been few alterations in the intervening decades.

collections,[11] and the National Museum has only some small fragments at its disposal. The fact that a good-sized gallery is given to a relatively nondescript set of objects suggests that in the installation of the Museum, ideas were more important than objects. The walk through the Museum was intended as an informative overview of Indian history, rather than an aesthetic encounter with masterpieces that the Museum happened to have.

At the threshold between this room and the next stands a Bodhisattva from Kushana-period Ahichchhatra (Plate 4.3). This figure inserts into the galleries, art historical debates on the evolution of the Buddha image. Since the earliest Buddhist sculptures had shown the Buddha aniconically through symbols, scholars had sought to understand the shift — sudden and thoroughgoing — to iconic depictions of the Buddha in about 2nd century CE. In the early decades of the 20th century, the issue of the origin of the Buddha image had been one of the most hotly-contested debates in Indian art history. European scholars had asserted that the Buddha image was modelled on the figure of the Greek god Apollo, and that it developed due to impulses brought by Hellenistic artists to the Gandharan School. For the nationalist scholars, a 'foreign' origin for a figure as important as the Buddha was unacceptable, and they maintained that the iconisation of the Buddha developed indigenously from chthonic cults dedicated to local guardian spirits or *yaksha*s.[12] Towards the end of the 1st century CE, yaksha figures began to be

PLATE 4.3 • *Bodhisattva Maitreya from Ahichchhatra, Kushana period, displayed at the threshold between the Maurya–Sunga and Kushana galleries of the National Museum.*

[11] The most significant collection of Mauryan material belongs to the Indian Museum, Kolkata, which received the lion's share of all early archaeological finds since it was the central museum in the early colonial period when Calcutta was the capital of British India. Other important Mauryan objects are in the Patna Museum, the provincial museum closest to the ancient Mauryan capital. Of Sunga material, again, the Indian Museum has the most significant collection from early find-spots.

[12] The classic work that summarises the 'Apollo' Buddha position and refutes it, is Ananda Coomaraswamy, *The Origin of the Buddha Image and Elements of Buddhist Iconography*, New York: College Art Association, 1927.

carved in stone, and many of these closely resemble this Bodhisattva. The strategic presence of this yaksha-like Bodhisattva, located just before visitors encounter their first Gandhara Buddha in the next gallery, aligns the museum's narrative firmly with the nationalists.

The Kushana room that we enter now presents material from the 1st–3rd centuries CE. This was a period of important empires, widespread urbanisation and flourishing Buddhism in India. The gallery presents three schools of sculpture that flourished simultaneously in three different parts of the subcontinent; through its display, the gallery becomes an abbreviated 'map' allowing the visitor to scan simultaneous developments in the Gandhara region, in peninsular India and on the Indo-Gangetic plain. Ranged along the left wall of this gallery are sculptures from the Gandhara School, developed under Hellenistic influences in the Indo-Greek kingdoms in areas that are in Afghanistan and Pakistan today. These include large standing Buddha and Bodhisattva figures, and small stucco figures salvaged from narrative panels. Placed along the right wall of this gallery are a number of relief panels from the stupa in Nagarjunakonda in the Ikshavaku kingdom in central Andhra Pradesh, showing scenes from the life of the Buddha. These belong to the beautiful Roman-influenced school that produced the masterpieces of Amaravati. The centre of the gallery is given to images from Kushana sculpture workshops in Mathura. These include a large Bodhisattva, the potbellied yaksha guardian of wealth, Kubera, as well as large narrative panel that has been interpreted as the illustration of a Sanskrit play (Plate 4.4).

As in the gallery dedicated to the Maurya and Shunga period, the arrangement of this gallery is governed by the ideological drive to deliver a particular message rather than an aesthetically-driven intention to display important artefacts in the best light. The museum gives its few sculptures from Mathura pride of place in the centre of this room, while it relegates the more substantial Gandharan holdings to the margin. This is in tune with nationalist assessments of the 'Greco-Buddhist' sculptures of the Gandharan School. Colonial scholars had placed Gandharan sculpture at the apogee of Indian art, valuing its familiar Hellenistic aesthetic and sympathising with what they saw as the rationality and restraint of the Buddhist faith. In response, nationalist critics and writers had derided this school, which they dismissed as hybrid and 'listless' in comparison to the 'affirmative force' of the truly Indian art of Mathura.[13] In line with this interpretation, Gandharan art is literally marginalised in this gallery, and the Mathura sculptures, placed in the centre of the room, are posited as the 'mainstream' tradition.

Mathura sculpture was valued because it was seen as the purely local precursor to the art of the Gupta period (5th–6th centuries CE), the period that nationalist historians had identified as India's Golden Age. Not only did the Guptas rule over a large empire that 'unified' much of India, but they were an indigenous dynasty and under their rule Brahmanical and Jain icons proliferated along with Buddhist ones. In this, the Gupta period prefigured religiously diverse India of the present day.

Gupta art was hailed by nationalist art historians as the 'classical' period of Indian art. Here, they said, Indian art arrived at a magical moment when balance, finesse, elegance, and restraint all met — before skill turned to virtuosity, engendering the florid excess of medieval schools.[14] Accordingly, in the Museum, we come upon the sculptures of the Gupta period next, in a special gallery that houses a series of fine images of the Bodhisattva, Buddha,

[13] *Ibid.*, p. 314.

[14] Gupta sculptures from Mathura and Sarnath are highly skilled and refined, but their exaltation as the finest moment in the history of Indian plastic art was to some degree motivated by a desire to locate one, suitably early period as the 'classical' one in which a purely 'Indian' aesthetic is achieved. The definitive statement of Gupta sculpture as India's classical art came in Stella Kramrisch's *Indian Sculpture*, first published in 1933. As Romila Thapar has shown, the Guptas became the centrepiece of Indian history (not just art history) because they provided a desirable ancestor for the modern Indian nation. The Gupta Empire was prosperous and extensive, but it was also the period in which Buddhism declined and Brahmanism gained ground. See her *The Past and Prejudice*, Delhi: National Book Trust, 1975.

PLATE 4.4 • *View of the Kushana period gallery. Sculptures from Mathura are placed in the centre of the room, and relief carvings from the Ikshvaku kingdom in Andhra Pradesh are arranged along the wall on the right. Gandhara sculptures are not visible in this photograph, but they were arranged along the wall on the left.*

Vishnu, and Shiva from the most important Gupta sites at Mathura, Sarnath and Gwalior. This shrine-like room is the only gallery exclusively dedicated to one period and school. In it, Buddhist figures are carefully juxtaposed with sculptures of Vaishnava, Shaiva and Shakta themes. Their religious contexts may differ, but the formal qualities of these figures — their graceful elongation, the subtle three-dimensional curves, the contrasting areas of dense ornamentation and unadorned volumes — manifest a common aesthetic tendency.

If Indian sculpture had the unitary aim of evolving into Gupta sculpture, then Gupta sculpture had the unitary aim of perfecting a single theme: of the human, and particularly the male, body. Everywhere in Indian sculpture there is the inescapable presence of the full-bodied female form. But in the National Museum, the achievements of the Gupta period are predicated upon the *male* body, seen again and again in the figures of the Buddha, the Bodhisattva, Vishnu, Rama, or Shiva. Subtly rising and falling flesh beneath the ascetic's robes, the in-held breath of the yogic body, the eyes turned inward upon themselves — these become the corporeal signs of spiritual attainment. Not only does the yogic male body allow escape from the embarrassing presence of the female form that is all too common in Indian sculpture, the single theme of the iconic male shifts attention away from the cultic differences between Brahmanical and Hindu, Vaisnava, and Saiva images, further unifying the purpose of Gupta sculpture. With the body of the divine male presented as the real theme of Gupta sculpture, the period becomes an icon of nationalism, integrating diverse people towards a common and spiritual goal (Plates 4.5 and 4.6).

The history of Indian sculpture, as told by the Museum, is that of progressive development

PLATE 4.5 • *Bodhisattva Padmapani from Sarnath, Gupta period, 5th century CE. On display in the Gupta gallery, National Museum.*

PLATE 4.6 • *Vishnu from Mathura, Gupta period, 5th century CE. On display in the Gupta gallery, National Museum.*

in which naïve and eclectic styles struggle towards a sophisticated but 'pure' expression. From the 'foreign' influence in the Mauryan period (which was shrugged off), to the naïve and charming art of the early Buddhist stupas, to the Indo-Greek byways and the earthy Kushana–Mathura, and finally to the 'classic' phase of the Gupta period — it seems as though Indian sculpture was striving for something that finally was achieved in Gupta art. In this retelling, Buddhist sculpture also becomes a prelude to the authentic, Indian tradition of Hindu art, which came robustly into its own at this point.

After the Gupta gallery, the chronological narrative of the National Museum breaks down. The two rooms that follow are vast galleries for 'early' and 'later'

medieval sculpture (7th to 10th and 11th to 13th centuries respectively). These rooms are jumbled, and sculptures from different regions and periods are placed side by side without an easily discernible plan. If some corners seem to assemble objects from a particular region, other clusters seem to collate sculptures from different regions that address the same iconographic theme.

The confusion of these rooms might be a reflection on the state of the field at the time of installation. Early studies of Indian sculpture had concentrated upon the ancient period, and later medieval monuments were not fully interiorised into the art historical narrative at the time. Understandable in the colonial period or even at the time of Independence, the medieval medley which now persists within the National Museum is inexplicable, for in the intervening decades this phase of Indian art has been the subject of much study.

The medieval period was the era after the Gupta Empire, when Buddhism waned and small kingdoms all over the subcontinent embraced either Hinduism or Jainism. Invoking the support of their tutelary deities, these kingdoms embarked on vigorous and competitive temple-building projects, giving rise to an extraordinary efflorescence of the architectural and sculptural arts, in the entire subcontinent. However, the display in the gallery does not explicate the complex richness of this period.

The underdeveloped narrative in this gallery seems to simply lump diverse objects together. Yet this arrangement has an interesting, and perhaps intentional, effect. In preceding galleries, early developments in Indian sculpture were traced mostly through objects from north and central India. These could be placed within a single and unified process of development. The medieval and later medieval phases were times of tremendous regional achievements seen in the enormous projects, distinctive styles, localised cults, and iconographic innovations. But dealing with the particular qualities of north, south, east, and west would have divided the river of Indian history into many distinct streams; regional identities would have become stressed over the national, and the strong centre would be subjected to the forces of the centrifuge. When the medieval sculpture galleries eschew regional and dynastic categorisation, as they do here, they present an undifferentiated and therefore unified mass for our regard. The Museum is then able to present Indian art as a single homogenous tradition — regardless of the facts.

... and the weeds in the path

Once the ancient sculpture has been dealt with, the Museum's chronological narrative comes to an end and the remainder of the galleries are devoted to Manuscripts, Painting, Central Asia, Textiles, Carved Wood, Arms and Armour, Coins and Jewellery, and Anthropology and Ethnography. If on the ground floor the Museum is arranged roughly chronologically with the intention of following the river of history, upstairs it is turned into a series of still pools, in which we might reflect upon the technical finesse of different kinds of artists and artisans as they work on metal, wood or cloth.

One consequence of the shift in this mode of display from 'chronology' to 'material' — whether it was intended or not — is that artefacts produced after the phases of Buddhist and Hindu ascendancy are placed *outside* the realm of history. This applies to all objects that derive from an Islamic context. When the Museum displays an object produced for the Sultanates or the Mughal court, it is absorbed into a display not of a particular cultural or historical period, but of a particular material: as, say, textiles or metalwork. Thus the sword of a Mughal prince becomes an example of damascening; a sash worn by a Nawab becomes an illustration of a brocading technique. The result was, and is, that one can walk right through the National Museum and be only dimly aware of the fact that the Mughals had been in India.

In the early fervour of Independence, the formulation of a national culture was undoubtedly powered by a desire to recover India's indigenous traditions, untainted by 'external' influences of the European or the Islamic world. Engaged in a project of recovery of the ancient past, scholars in the field may not have spared a thought for the more recent

past which, it would have seemed at the time, had not suffered from the same degree of neglect as the 'much maligned monsters'[15] in the further reaches of India's history. In today's context however, the National Museum's omissions are startling and its narrative partisan.

Let us be aware that we should exercise some caution here. In critiquing the Museum's methods of classification and display, we should make a distinction between the way it appears to us today, and the intentions that probably guided it at its formation. If we see the National Museum in the context of its predecessor-museums it becomes possible to take a less than sinister view of the inclusions, exclusions, trajectories, and deviations in the tale of the National Museum. Instead of reading a theory of conspiracy in the exclusion of India's late-medieval and Islamic past from the Museum's historical narrative, one might see it instead as an unintended victim of the Museum's attempt to accommodate two colonial epistemologies within its walls. But for this, one would need to glance backward at the early history of museums in India, the purposes for which they were established, and the kinds of order they imposed upon the collections in their charge.

a concise synopsis of India

The institution of the museum came to India as part of the vast knowledge-creating project of the Raj. The intention of early British museums that took India as their subject was to 'present to the eye a typical collection of facts, illustrations and examples which … will give a concise synopsis of India — of the country and its material products — of the people and their moral condition'.[16] The museum collections were to be a metonym for the land, presenting all the pertinent information about India through an inventory of her products, materials and human resources. Moreover, objects in the museum would bear witness to the degree to which India had achieved or fallen short of civilisation, fixing the 'moral status' of the subject race.

Accordingly, the first museums that took India as their subject (whether in India or in Britain) were encyclopaedic in scope. Gathering science and art under one roof, these museums included scientific,[17] economic,[18] industrial,[19] and archaeological[20] collections. A satisfactory museum needed to possess sections for Natural History, Ethnology, Geology, Archaeology, and the Industrial Arts. The museum-as-microcosm was part of the imperial fantasy of being able to create a complete and comprehensive archive of the Empire, in which a correctly classified and labelled array of samples could adequately represent the imperial domain.[21]

The two earliest colonial museums dedicated to India were the India Museum in London and the Indian Museum in Calcutta. The India Museum in

[15] I cite here Partha Mitter's classic study of European encounters with Indian art, *Much Maligned Monsters*.

[16] These are the words used by Monier-Williams to describe the encyclopaedic Indian museum that he attempted but failed to establish in Oxford. Quoted in 'History of the Indian Collections', in J. C. Harle and Andrew Topsfield (eds), *Indian Art in the Ashmolean Museum*, Oxford: Ashmolean Museum, 1987, p. x.

[17] Scientific collections primarily dealt with natural history and geology.

[18] Economic collections displayed raw materials that could be obtained in India, whether these were crops that could be grown or minerals that could be mined.

[19] Industrial collections demonstrated the craft skills that were available in India for the making of exportable produce.

[20] Archaeological collections included antiquities of various kinds — sculptures, architectural fragments, stone or copper plate inscriptions, coins, relics, potsherds, and other archaeological finds. As none of these objects was infused with the aura of 'art', reproductions mingled freely with the originals, and copies of paintings, or plaster casts of sculpture or architecture were greatly valued parts of such collections. It was part of the museum's duty to make plaster casts of antiquities in its collection, or in its neighbourhood, and distribute these among other museums in the Empire.

[21] See Tapati Guha-Thakurta, 'The Museumised Relic: Archaeology and the first Museum of Colonial India', *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, vol. 34, no. 1, 1977, pp. 21–51. Guha-Thakurta prefaces her discussion of the Indian Museum's Archaeological galleries with a succinct overview of colonial museum-making.

London was established in 1801 by the East India Company to house the collections being brought from India to England by officers of the Company. No branch of knowledge was outside its purview: its collections included specimens of insects and molluscs, minerals and clays, manuscripts and textiles, as well as jewels and arms taken from the treasuries of defeated Indian princes. This museum had a chequered history, reflecting the rises and falls of 'India' within the British economy as well as the public imagination. With the demise of the Company in 1858, the collections were transferred to the Crown, which dispersed them among various London institutions.[22]

While the fortunes of 'Indian' museums in Britain waxed and waned through the 19th century, the museum movement within India gathered strength as colonial scholars explored the territory and gathered samples in the course of their researches. The Indian Museum in Calcutta, that other great encyclopaedic museum of India, began its life in 1814 as the Museum of the Asiatic Society that housed collections made by its member–scholars. As the first museum instituted on Indian soil, it was, like the India Museum of London, dedicated to the study of 'art and nature in the East'. It included specimens of natural history, geology, zoology, and antiquities and currently available craft skills or 'industrial arts'. Both museums saw their mission as primarily scientific and their collections and the staff were dominated by scientists and natural historians.[23] In 1866, the Asiatic Society Museum in Calcutta was taken over by the colonial government and transmuted into the Indian Museum.[24] As the prime museum in the capital of British India, it was nurtured as India's central, indeed as India's Imperial Museum. It occupied pride of place among the evolving hierarchy of central, provincial and local museums; and for some time it was the official policy that all truly important collections be centralised in this one museum, while museums in the provinces could retain copies and duplicates.[25]

Today, the institutional form of the Indian Museum of Calcutta is as much a curiosity as any of its exhibits; it preserves for us a particular moment in the early history of museum-making. Even a mere 20 years further on into the Raj, specialist fields of knowledge had grown to such a point that the *encyclopedia indica* became too unwieldy for the one museum, one scholar or one government department to manage. The days of encyclopaedic museums were over, and museums that were set up henceforth limited themselves to a particular discipline or field of knowledge. Thus there were specialist museums for natural history, for medicine, for forestry, or for art. What today constitutes the field of 'art' was itself split into two categories — of antiquities: the monuments, sculptures, inscriptions, coins and relics that could yield information about India's historical past; and of 'industrial arts': the

[22] The continuous history of this museum is well known; it is the subject of Ray Desmond, *The India Museum, 1801-1879*, London: HMSO, 1982. The dispersed collections of this museum formed the kernel of the Indian collections in the British Museum (which derived its great Amaravati sculptures from this source), the Victoria and Albert Museum, the Natural History Museum and the Kew Gardens.

[23] The keepership at the India Museum in London was held by a succession of naturalists; and one can judge the situation at the Indian Museum in Calcutta by the fact that even after the museum had acquired the Bharhut stupa railings and sizeable quantities of Gandharan, Kushana-Mathura and Gupta period sculptures, the handbook of the museum's archaeological collections was prepared by a zoologist. This was John Anderson, Superintendent of the Indian Museum and author of its *Catalogue and Handbook of the Archaeological Collections in the Indian Museum*, Calcutta: Indian Museum, 1883. See Guha-Thakurta, 'The Museumised Relic'.

[24] See Guha-Thakurta, 'The Museumised Relic'.

[25] In a note dated 18 October 1882, E. C. Buck, Secretary to the Government of India, Home Department writes: 'Local governments may be asked to use their influence to concentrate all archaeological collections in the Indian Museum unless there are special reasons for preferring to deposit them at a Provincial Museum. Small local museums ... simply interfere without any adequate object with the completeness of the archaeological series at the Imperial Museum', National Archive of India, Archaeology 'A', nos 3–7, December 1882.

living craft skills that were so admired in Europe, and were seen to present economic opportunities for both India and Britain.

From 1851 onwards, the Government of India had begun vigorous participation in international exhibitions in which Indian materials, crops and products were displayed and advertised to an international market. These exhibitions were highly successful as a marketing device that expanded the demand for Indian products in many parts of the world. As trade in India's art-wares grew, the economic and industrial museums (which collected samples and information about raw materials, crops and craft skills) became increasingly useful to the Government's Revenue and Agriculture Department. Several 'industrial art' museums were established all over the country, in which examples of native skills were gathered as a ready reference or as an exportable collection that could efficiently be sent to the next exhibition. The logical system of arrangement for the 'industrial art' museums was by 'industry': showing the many different processes and skills available within India for, say, textiles, or woodworking, or metalworking.

Meanwhile, growing numbers of antiquarians were pressing for governmental care for monuments decaying all over the country. In response to their pleas, the Archaeological Survey was established in 1861. The task of archaeological museums was to collect, decipher and date antiquities. These museums collected sculptures and fragments of monuments, coins, inscriptions, and other relics from the distant past. The field of early archaeology, however, remained dominated by an antiquarian attitude, which valued the most ancient over the medieval.[26] By and large, when archaeological collections were displayed they were arranged in a broadly chronological order, keeping together groups of objects from one site or with a shared iconography.

In recognition of the divergent interests that occupied the field of 'art', in 1882 the Government of India split the field between two government departments. Henceforth, archaeology and fine arts would remain with the Home Department, which would arrange for the excavation, survey and protection of antiquities — a moral duty for the government that offered no financial returns. Practical Arts, exhibitions and museums would go to the Department of Revenue and Agriculture, which would link art schools and museums for the furtherance of industry. The official who oversaw this division of labour observed:

> The main object of the exhibition of Indian products is not the gratification of occidental curiosity, or the satisfaction of aesthetic longings among foreign nations, but the development of a trade in these products, whether raw or manufactured, rough or artistic.[27]

✠

It should be clear by now that the two typologies of display seen within the National Museum bring together the intentionalities of the two principal kinds of colonial museums. Downstairs, the National Museum is an archaeological museum. Upstairs it becomes an industrial museum. These two taxonomic systems, which were united in the earliest, encyclopaedic museums of the colonial period, and then split apart in the later 19th century in the face of growing specialist knowledge, were once again brought together to fill the halls of the new National Museum. Why? It would seem that in the desire to create an institution vast enough and grand enough to be the National Museum, the

[26] For instance, colonial-period archaeology showed a marked preference for Buddhist over Hindu art; it held that Indian art had been in decline since about the 2nd century CE. For discussions of this issue, see Pramod Chandra, 'Sculpture', in *On the Study of Indian Art*, Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983. Also, Tapati Guha-Thakurta, *The Making of A New 'Indian' Art*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992, pp. 178–79.

[27] A. Mackenzie (Secretary [Home Deptt] to the GOI), 'Note on Arrangements for Exhibitions', National Archive of India, Home Department Public Branch 'A' File no. 157, July 1882.

founders could only think to aggregate the different kinds of museums that existed then.

There is surely a failure of imagination here, in the inability to give shape to a new form of a museum, and to make new values and *new meanings* for the art within. In the face of a new task in a new era, the creators of the National Museum, instead of devising a new epistemology for a new situation, fell back on one that was more than 150 years old.[28] If there is any consolation, it lies only in the concession that we may now make, that perhaps later-medieval and Islamic art are excluded from the Museum's national narrative unintentionally, in an unthinking application of two incompatible systems of taxonomy.

three quadrants full

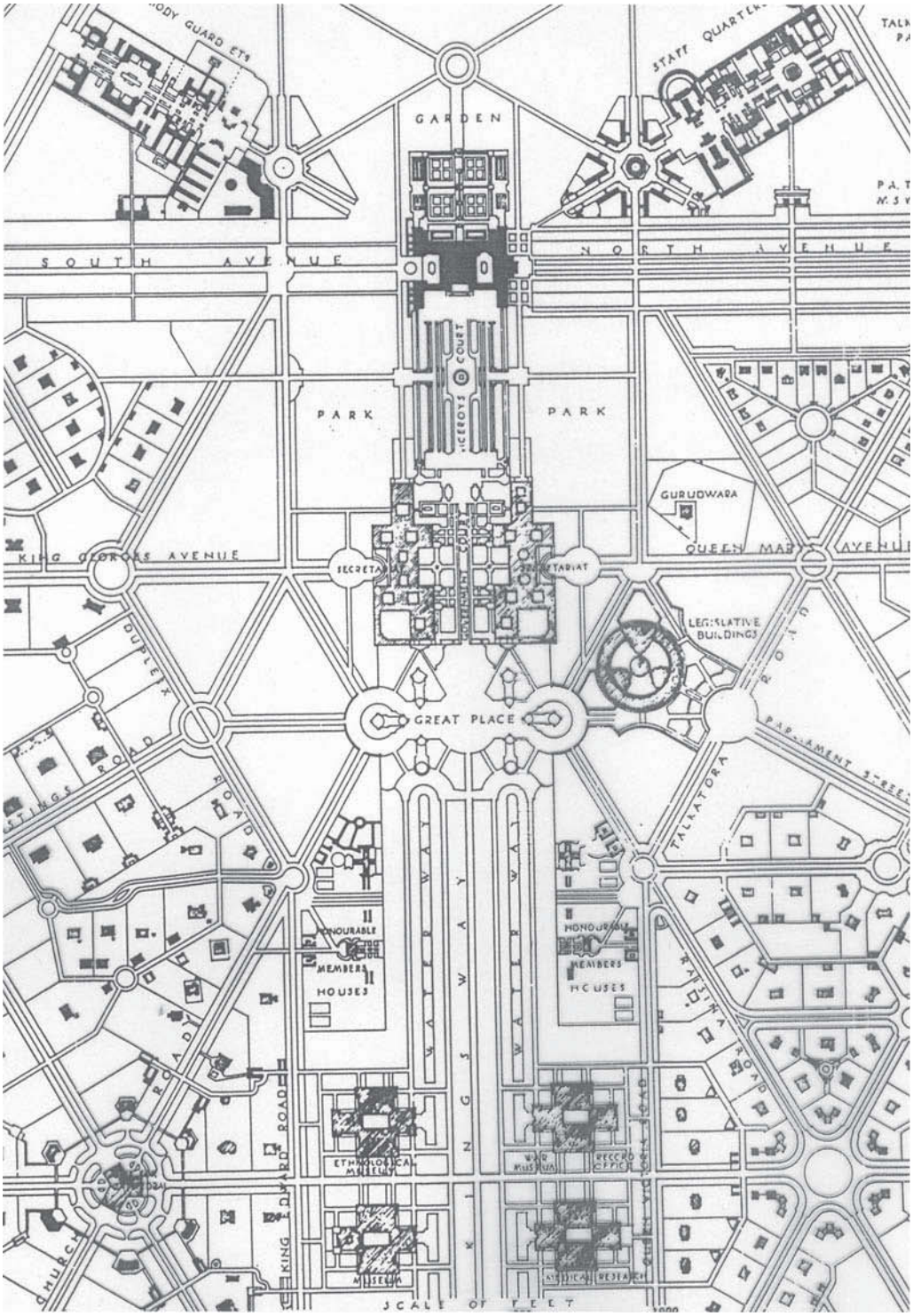
If the National Museum is stalked by the ghosts of the colonial museum, it is perhaps because it lives in a haunted house. A perusal of the history of the National Museum reveals that it is not just the Museum's sense of order that derives from epistemology of the colonial period. The idea of this Museum, its very location, and the exercise of research and collecting on which it was founded, all derive from colonial projects. Even the Museum's presence in the ceremonial centre of New Delhi is not so much the assertion of a new national confidence as much as the completion of an old colonial plan.

When the decision was taken in 1911 to shift the capital of British India from Calcutta to Delhi, there were plans to erect suitably imposing structures in New Delhi to house the great archives of colonial knowledge. The original plan for New Delhi had always envisaged the intersection of Kingsway and Queensway (today renamed Rajpath and Janpath) as the nucleus of four important institutions. This intersection was at the halfway mark of the grand processional pathway stretching between the Viceregal Palace and the Memorial Arch (now called India Gate). Four large lots were blocked out here: on the northwest, for the Records Office and the War Museum; on the northeast for the Medical Museum; on the southwest for the Ethnological Museum; and on the southeast for the Imperial Museum. Mirroring each other across the broad avenues would be the museums dedicated to the sciences of war and peace, death and life, as it were; and of the arts of forest and city, the tribal of today and the civilisation of yesteryears. Around this hub would be concentrated the sum of knowledge and understanding of India that had been gathered in the past century and a half (Plate 4.7).

This grand quartet of repositories and museums was never erected. The project was presumably overtaken by other and larger events. The First World War occurred; and when it was over and most of New Delhi had been built, the conditions within India were sufficiently unsettled to discourage investment in such triumphal gestures. There was even less sense in taking up the project after the Second World War, when the imminent loss of the Indian colony was apparent to all.

While Lutyens' plan for this museological hub at the heart of Central Vista was never realised, some structures did come to occupy three of the four quadrants. The Records Office was built according to plan, and is now the National Archives of India. In the space for the Imperial Museum, the Archaeological Survey gained its offices and added a small structure to house Sir Aurel Stein's collection of Central Asian artefacts. In the place for the Medical Museum, however, temporary military barracks were built. This plot was given over to the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts in the 1980s. The fourth quadrant, intended for the ethnological museum, remained empty for a long time. Although past defence ministers did speak of building a War Museum — very nearly discharging Lutyens' original plans — this site was eventually transferred to the Ministry of External Affairs

[28] The National Museum does limit itself to the category of 'art' and does not try to become an encyclopaedic museum for all branches of knowledge. By this time, 'art' has come to be valued as the embodiment of the spiritual and intellectual qualities of the people. As such, it was a special category of objects and could no longer be ranked with commercial products.


GARDEN
SOUTH AVENUE
NORTH AVENUE
PARK
PARK
VICEROYS COURT
GURUDWARA
KING GEORGES AVENUE
QUEEN MARY AVENUE
SECRETARIAT
SECRETARIAT
LEGISLATIVE BUILDINGS
GREAT PLACE
DUFFERIN ROAD
KINGSWAY
KINGSWAY
HONOURABLE MEMBERS HOUSES
HONOURABLE MEMBERS HOUSES
ETHNOLOGICAL MUSEUM
MUSEUM
RECORD OFFICE
KING EDWARD ROAD
TALKATORA ROAD
SCALE OF FEET

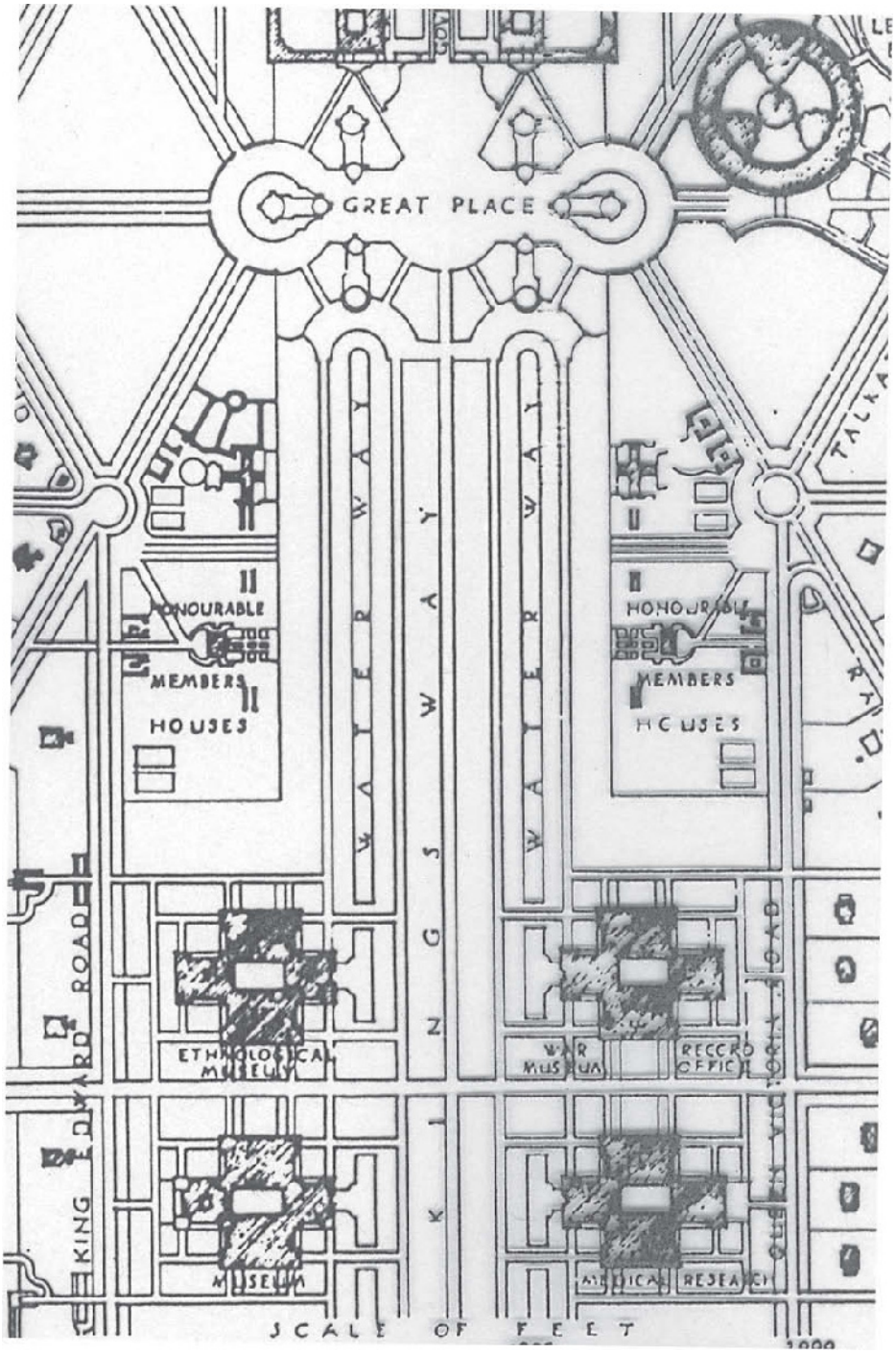


PLATE 4.7 • *Edwin Lutyens' plan for central vista, showing the concentration of museums at Point B, midway between the Viceregal Palace (Rashtrapati Bhavan) and the Memorial Arch (India Gate).* SOURCE: PREPARED BY THE AUTHOR.

which constructed its headquarters there in 2010.

Of all the institutions planned for the quadrant, the only grand project to be taken up in the early years after Independence was the building of the Imperial Museum, now recast as the National Museum. What were the circumstances in which the project of an Imperial Museum was revived after Independence? And in what way was the project transformed, allowing the Imperial Museum to turn 'national'?

Delhi–London–Delhi

To trace the history of Delhi's centrepiece, we must turn our attention now to an event that occurred in London. A scant three months after India's Independence, the Royal Academy of Art in London had mounted an ambitious exhibition titled 'The Arts of India and Pakistan'. Remembered as a significant moment for Indian art history, the show has been spoken of as a timely gesture on the part of the British, a gracious celebration of the independence of India and the creation of Pakistan very soon after the fact. That it was housed in the Royal Academy, a prestigious, conservative and Eurocentric institution, has been construed as an ultimate acknowledgement on the part of the imperial masters of the deep level of civilisation of the region, and indeed of the nation-worthiness of the ancient land. In truth, this exhibition marked the first time that the British art establishment treated Indian artefacts as fine art, speaking of its carved stone as 'sculpture', appreciated for their beauty, rather than as 'antiquities' that were distinguished merely by their age.

Coming, as it did, just three months after Indian independence, it was inevitable that the Royal Academy exhibition would acquire political piquancy. As it happens, the exhibition's exquisitely appropriate timing — and therefore, the inclusion of a number of politically correct gestures — was in fact, an accident.

In the 1930s, the Royal Academy first opened its doors to non-Western art with lavish exhibitions of the art of Eastern lands. In 1931, it hosted an International Exhibition of Persian Art. This was followed in 1935 by the London International Exhibition of Chinese Art. Sponsored by the Shah of Iran and the Republican Government of China respectively, both exhibitions were staggeringly ambitious. The Persian exhibition displayed more than two thousand objects; the Chinese exhibition had almost four thousand artefacts on show. Both exhibitions were critical, popular and diplomatic successes. The Persian exhibition had 259,000 visitors, the Chinese exhibition nearly 450,000. Both exhibitions created interest in the rich cultures of these Asian lands and sympathy for their contemporary regimes. To top it all, the brisk sale of tickets made the exhibitions a profit-making venture for the Royal Academy.

Despite Britain's long colonial entanglement with India, the arts of the subcontinent were little-known and not much appreciated in Britain. Nor did the museums in Britain have representative collections of Indian art that could enlighten British audiences about the major periods of Indian art. After the end of the 19th century, most excavated sculptural material remained in India, either *in situ* in monuments, or in museums there; museums in Britain had collections of the Indian industrial rather than the fine arts. Inspired by the successes of the Persian and Chinese exhibitions, however, a group of Indian art scholars and collectors in London began to press for a similar show for Indian art in 1931. Although the project was proposed by a group of enthusiasts without official positions or favour, they were allotted a date for their exhibition at the Royal Academy; they were informed by the Royal Society that the 'International Exhibition of Greater Indian Art' could be scheduled for January 1940.

Even as the group struggled to find funding and sponsorship to mount this exhibition, the Second World War broke out, scotching all plans for major exhibitions. After the end of the War the project was revived; but by this time the political situation was utterly altered. It was the eve of India's independence and the creation of Pakistan. The exhibition was now a politically sensitive event, now the British establishment had to take note of the project. As the Director of the Victoria and Albert Museum commented, well done, this show could

'make a great contribution in linking up (Britain) and India',[29] but poorly done, it could worsen relations between the two countries.

In order to regulate this important exhibition, the colonial art-establishment took control of its planning and management. The core committee in London now included Basil Gray and Douglas Barrett, respectively Keepers of Oriental and Islamic Antiquities at the British Museum; K. de B. Codrington, Keeper of the India Museum at the V&A; in India the committee was headed by the stateswoman and poetess Sarojini Naidu, assisted by the Sanskritist scholar Vasudeo Sharan Agrawal and the country's leading archaeologists. The individual scholars and collectors who initiated the project were eased out of it, and the exhibition turned into an official performance.

The fact that the exhibition occurred with full support of the government machinery in both Britain and the Indian subcontinent had great impact on its curatorial scope. With the help of the governmental infrastructure, sufficient funds and the authority of two governments, the exhibition was able to gather over 1,500 artefacts from British, European and Indian collections. Especially important was the inclusion of many colossal and ancient sculptures that travelled out of India for the first time.

Visitors to Burlington House, the site of the exhibition, were greeted by the massive more-than-life-size figure of a carved bull on the stairs. This was the capital of an Ashokan pillar from the 4th century BCE. Passing this ancient and stunningly lifelike object, they passed into a display of Indus Valley material. The exhibition proceeded to show large yakshas from the Sunga period, Bodhisattvas from Kushana–Mathura, and the Amaravati reliefs that were already in London in the British Museum. Gupta sculpture was there in profusion, and was presented as India's classical phase. Given full representation also were sculptures from the medieval phase, with voluptuous figures from Orissa and Khajuraho. The survey of sculpture was rounded off with a selection of bronzes from the Tamil region in Chola times.

The sculpture galleries were followed by rooms full of miniature paintings and illustrated manuscripts. These included a selection of Mughal masterpieces, but there were also an unprecedented number of Deccani paintings that are seldom studied or seen. There was also an extensive showing of Rajput paintings 'often clumsy and ignorant copies of the imperial style, but most … amongst the most beautiful pictures in the exhibition'.[30] The survey of Indian painting extended into 19th-century Company painting, as well as the romantic landscape views made by European travellers to India in the 18th and 19th centuries.

It is worth stressing that this show in London was the first major exhibition that dignified Indian antiquities as 'art'. We witness a curious phenomenon here: for the narrative that was developed for Indian art by anti-colonial nationalist figures such as E. B. Havell and Coomaraswamy, which asserted that Indian objects were truly fine art, abounding in masterpieces, found its first exhibitionary incarnation in a show mounted by colonial authorities in the bastion of Western art! Organisers stressed that objects had been chosen for this exhibition based on their aesthetic value. As a member of the organising committee said, '[t]he standard that we held before us was to admit only objects of art and not documents of archaeology, history or ethnology'.[31] Architectural fragments were presented as 'sculptures' and manuscript pages as 'painting'. In fact, organisers asserted that all the Indian objects would 'speak directly by their formal qualities', hoping to allay visitor concerns

[29] V&A Registry: SF 47-45/1420: Indian Section General, part file Exhibitions — UK. Undated note (1946) by Leigh Ashton, Director of the V&A.

[30] Douglas Barrett, 'Indian Art', *The Spectator*, London, 5 December 1947, p. 10.

[31] Basil Gray, 'The Art of India and Pakistan with Special Reference to the Exhibition at the Royal Academy', *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, vol. 96, no. 4758, 19 December 1947, pp. 79–81, 69–72.

that only those who understood Indian religion and philosophy would be able to gain any enjoyment from Indian art.[32] The exhibition also aimed to provide a comprehensive survey of the different schools and periods of the arts, no longer confining its interest to Gandharan Buddhist sculpture or Mughal painting, two phases whose absorption of Western influence had made these objects easily comprehensible to European eyes.

In addition to the sections on sculpture and painting, the exhibition had galleries for textiles and decorative arts, all of which included large numbers of rare objects of very fine quality. More unusual was the exhibition's decision to include a section on contemporary art that displayed paintings made by present-day artists from India. Amrita Sher-Gil, Zainul Abedin, N. S. Bendre, F. N. Souza, Dhanraj Bhagat, and Kanwal Krishna were among the contemporary artists shown. Interestingly, the decision to include this section came not from the critics or organisers of the exhibition (who had intended only to show works prior to 1858), but from government officials who were alive to the political significance of every inclusion and exclusion. A Secretary in the Government of India wrote:

> The Government of India are most anxious … that no impression should be left in the minds of the British public that India is a static community living upon the glories of its past … if modern art is excluded from the exhibition, the Exhibition might be misrepresented as a deliberate attempt to display India in this light.[33]

The exhibition that was installed in Burlington House in London was unprecedented in its scale, and the sheer importance of precious objects on show. Never-seen-before objects from the treasuries of major princely states shared space with museum collections from India and Europe. No exhibition of Indian art mounted since has equalled this exhibition. Yet, despite the best efforts of institutions and scholars, the exhibition failed to attract more than 100,000 people over its three-month run in London (an average of 37 people a day) and met with only mild approval from critics. British interest in India was waning; perhaps there was even a note of bitterness and resentment at the loss of Empire in the public's response to the show, and audiences refused to come. The very authorities that had supported the exhibition now claimed that they had always had reservations about it. Leigh Ashton, the Director of the V&A, noted:

> That the exhibition has been a failure has never been a surprise to me: it is a difficult art (in itself repugnant in many spheres to present-day tastes) and is nothing like so good in the realm of painting and textiles as Persian art, in the realm of sculpture, metalwork, jade, as Chinese.[34]

As the exhibition wound down to a dismal end, the organisers found they would not be able to recoup their expenses.

The exhibition may have had only moderate success in London but it was destined to have a far more significant afterlife in Delhi. When the objects loaned from Indian museums and private collections were returned to India, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru opined that 'it would be a pity to disperse this collection' without allowing the Indian public to see it first.[35] Accordingly, the Government of India decided to mount an exhibition of the nation for the nation, *in* the nation. The appropriate location for this show would be the national capital, New Delhi. However, there was no public museum or gallery present in the city that was suitable for an exhibition as large as this. In a finely calibrated symbolic gesture, the government decided to mount the exhibition in the Palace that the Viceroy had

[32] *Ibid.*, 76.

[33] Letter from G. S. Bozman, Esq., CSI, CIE, ICS, Secretary to the Government of India, Department of Information and Arts, New Delhi, to Sir Water R. M. Lamb, Secretary Royal Academy of Arts. Dated 16 May 1946, New Delhi. V&A Indian Section (IM General) 1945–49, Part XVI NF.

[34] Leigh Ashton, file notings on letter from Walter R. M. Lamb to Sir Stafford Cripps, dated 16 February, 1948, V&A 45/1420.

[35] Jawaharlal Nehru, letter to K. de B. Codrington, dated 28 February 1948, V&A SF 47, 45/1420.

just vacated. Although this edifice now housed the Governor-General (and later the President) of India, a circuit of state rooms were turned over to the exhibition in the winter of 1948. The public was welcomed into these magnificent rooms. What more potent gesture could there be, to signal the end of colonial subjugation and the arrival of democracy, than to turn the Viceroy's Palace — now renamed Government House — into a shrine to the national culture?

The exhibition that was displayed in Government House was titled 'Masterpieces of Indian Art'.[36] Installed by V. S. Agrawal, the prime mover of Indian committee for the London exhibition, along with the curator C. Sivaramamurti and the archaeologists N. P. Chakavarty and K. N. Puri, the Director-General and the Superintendent respectively of the Archaeological Survey of India, some sections of the exhibition deliberately played with the venue, making the evacuation of British authority all the more visible to the visitors. In the grand ceremonial room of the Darbar Hall, a low platform adorned with curtains and swags held the thrones of the Viceroy and Vicerine. Upon this throne platform the exhibition organisers placed a magnificent Gupta-period statue of the Buddha from Sarnath. This gesture, of replacing the throne of the colonial power with an icon of Indian spirituality, has such obvious symbolism that it hardly needs to be dwelt upon (Plate 4.8).

The show in Delhi repeated the London exhibition, albeit with some omissions. As it consisted of objects that were returning to India after the exhibition, one would expect that not all loans from Pakistan, Europe or Britain would be part of the show. Surprisingly, however, some artworks that had travelled from India for the London show were also excluded from the show in Delhi. In particular, the last two sections of the London show were eliminated. The first of these was the room of Indian landscapes by European artist–travellers. The second of these was the section on contemporary art from India. While the authorities in London had been anxious about dwelling exclusively on India's past, lest this be seen as a denigration of India's present, the Indian organisers of the exhibition had no such anxiety, and were content with a show that focused exclusively on past glories.

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The exhibition in New Delhi was thronged with visitors. Its compression of five thousand years of Indian art was seen as a valuable mirror to the national self. The show was visited by high dignitaries. As the exhibition's term drew to a close, even the prime minister felt that it would be a pity if the collection was dispersed. Accordingly, the Ministry of Education chose to retain this exhibition and make it the core of a new National Museum. Letters of 'request' were sent to the lenders to allow their objects to stay in Delhi and form the nucleus of a new museum. Through the simple act of renaming, the temporary exhibition in the Rashtrapati Bhavan became the National Museum of India! (see Plate 5, page 9, in this volume).

Now that the Museum had been conjured into existence, it sought its own appointed place. When the monsoon of 1949 approached, sculptures displayed outdoors on the Rashtrapati Bhavan lawns needed better housing. N. P. Chakravarty, the new Director-General of the National Museum — also the Superintendent of Archaeology — sought to take over the Museum's 'own' plot of land, but the plot earmarked in Lutyens' plan for the Imperial Museum was already occupied by a small Museum of Central Asian Antiquities that housed the important collection of the explorer Sir Aurel Stein. It was agreed that if the National Museum would incorporate the Central Asian collection in its own future building it could demolish the existing building and construct a suitable structure of its own. Thus, fortuitously — or perhaps superfluously — the ambit of the National Museum was expanded beyond the strictly national.

[36] Tapati Guha-Thakurta has discussed the exhibition in the Rashtrapati Bhavan in her 'Marking Independence: the Ritual of a National Art Exhibition', in *Sites of Art History: Canons and Expositions*, *Journal of Arts and Ideas*, special issue, December 1997.

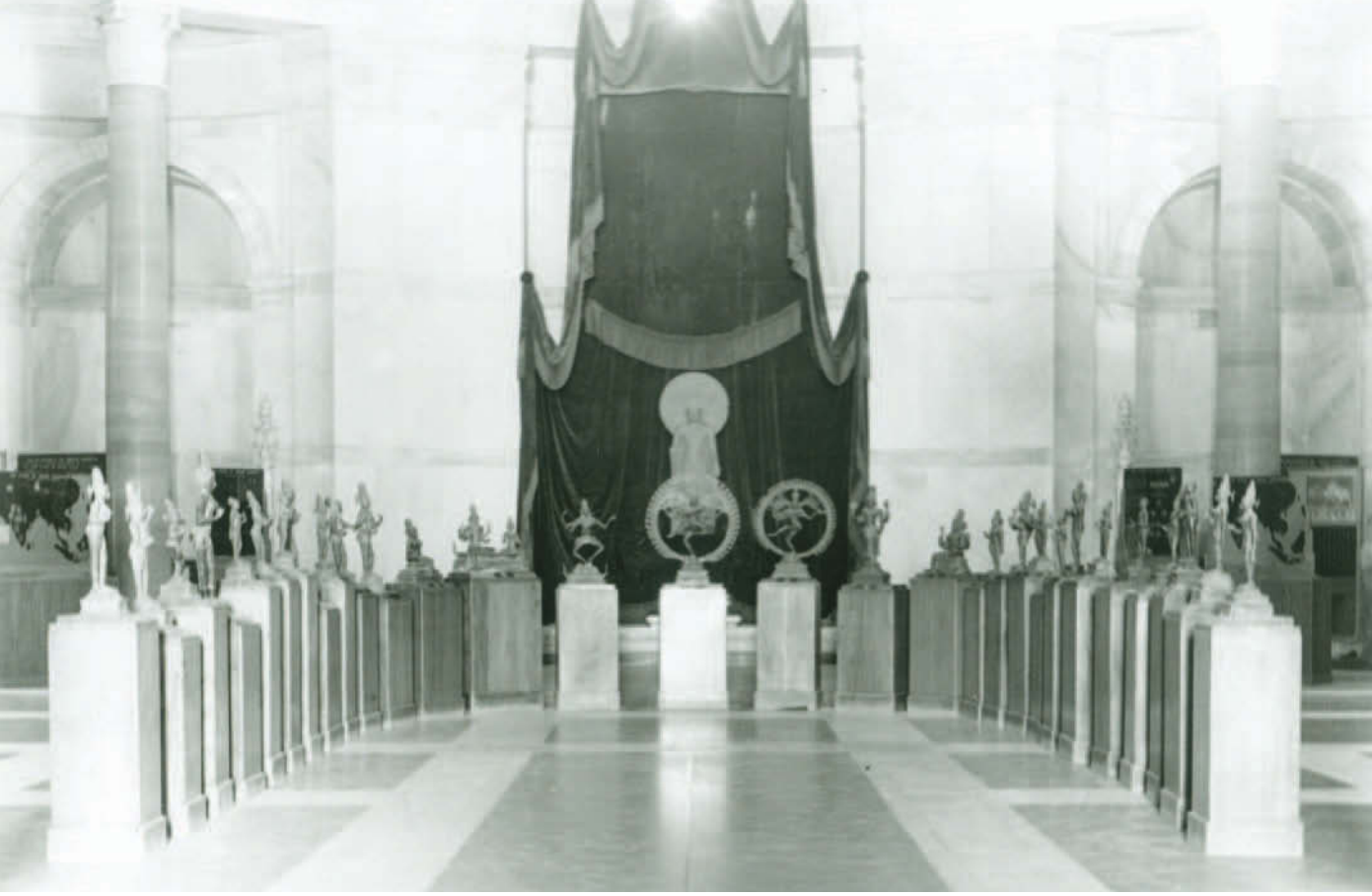

PLATE 4.8 • *View of the exhibition of 'Masterpieces of Indian Art' in Government House. In the Darbar Hall, a Gupta-period Buddha sculpture from Sarnath occupies the throne platform.*

There is no doubting that the expansion of the collection beyond India's boundaries was irrelevant to the priorities that this institution had set itself. It was to be a shrine to an idea of the great and glorious history of the India of today, whose past could be traced through a series of aesthetic high-points, where many communities and cults were confluent, and where the multifarious kingdoms and empires were united in one aesthetic–spiritual quest. But even as an essential and autochthonous India was invoked in the National Museum's displays and their underlying ideology, Nehru's administrators were seeking international expertise to run the museum. What needs impelled Nehru to scour the world to find a foreign director for the National Museum of India? Making the distinction between archaeologists — who would know about the objects in the museum — and museologists — who would know how to run a museum efficiently, and exploit its potential for education, the government began an international search for the director of India's National Museum. Kristy Phillips' paper in this volume, on Grace Morley the American specialist on modern art museums who became the Director-General of India's National Museum and the 'Mataji' of Indian museology, deals with the incongruities and the congruences that emerged when this foreign woman set sail to make a national museum for India (Plates 4.9 and 4.10).

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is the museum national?

These then are the circumstances in which India gained its National Museum: its location determined by the plans for the Imperial capital, its epistemology the conflation of two complexes of colonial knowledge, its core collection determined by the committee of curators of an exhibition in London, its first director an American modernist. By such accidents are institutions made. And the Museum reveals the accidents that gave it shape.

PLATE 4.9 • *The Indus Valley gallery of the National Museum in its initial quarters in Government House (now Rashtrapati Bhavan). This photograph was taken in 1961, just before the exhibits were moved to the new National Museum building.*

PLATE 4.10 • *View of the Central Asian Antiquities Gallery, installed in the modern style introduced by Grace Morley. Photograph taken in the National Museum's new building around 1962.*

This is most visible in its adherence to the dual and outmoded taxonomies of 'archaeology' and 'industry', which allow so many areas of Indian history to remain underrepresented. It is also visible in the Museum's poverty in the precise areas of collection that it foregrounds: the National Museum's collection of ancient sculpture is not of the best. The great collections had already been made in Calcutta, Mathura, Chennai or Lucknow, 50 or a 100 years before the National Museum was established. When the National Museum tried to retain the loan objects that had been borrowed from these august institutions for the London exhibition, most lenders refused to relinquish their things. Faced with their recalcitrance, the Prime Minister regretfully realised that the Museum had no national prerogative over these artefacts, and could not retain them through a fiat. The National Museum had to make do with what it could acquire, and what a Central organisation like the Archaeological Survey was willing to lend. What results is a provisional collection — full of gaps and second-rate material — that still insists on relating an authoritative account of Indian art.

With all these gaps and accidents in its history, we must ask: Is the Museum National? Despite the deficiencies of the Museum, I would contend that the Museum would have been received as 'national' regardless of its narrative or its display. It is not what the museum does, but the fact that it *exists* that makes the museum national. The National Museum acquires symbolic depth through the very shallowness of its history: that it was a new museum made by a new nation; that it would house Indian artefacts, and that it would judge them as aesthetic objects and display them as masterpieces. By the simple fact of its establishment in its particular place, in its particular place in time, the National Museum's symbolic meaning was strong enough to serve as an assertion of India as a sovereign land.

Perhaps the inconsistencies and the deficiencies in the National Museum even lead us to a worthwhile insight. Like the land it represents through culture, the Museum's National-ness is full of gaps and compromises, ideals contradicted by reality, Central desire met with Provincial recalcitrance. Very much like India itself: India's National Museum is national by default and not design.

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5

Grace McCann Morley and the national museum of India

Kristy Phillips

Defying the dominant legacy of imperial museums in India that defined modes of collecting, classifying and storing objects for over 150 years, the National Museum of India tells a vitally different story about India's museum movement that has long been overlooked. It is through the intricacies of the National Museum's most curious galleries and anachronistic displays (some of which remain virtually untouched since the 1960s) that we may best trace this institution's role in the political re-imagining of the nation following Independence. One such gallery is on the second floor, where a collection of clothing and quotidian objects from India's tribal communities is draped against abstract wire mannequins with facial distortions that appear to be inspired by the modernist line drawings of Picasso, Matisse and Miró. Next door, a valuable — yet little known — collection of Pre-Colombian art in Asia shares an uncomfortable space alongside Indian Christian icons, North American arrowheads and European tapestries. Uncovering the layered messages in galleries such as these opens a window into the National Museum as a site for Indian nationalism's experiments with modernity under Jawaharlal Nehru. They also provide an extraordinary introduction to the museum's enigmatic first director who is today widely regarded as the '*mataji* of Indian museology'[1] — an American woman from Northern California named Grace McCann Morley.

In tracing Morley's unexamined history at the National Museum, one sees the institution emerge as a product of tension between colonial memory, national expectation, political experimentation, and the global scope of modernity. This chapter examines Morley's earliest interventions at the museum from 1960 to 1966 her attempts to reshape the existing museal modes at the institution, paralleled her commitment to American modern museology with the aspirations of India's new nationalist government. Morley was implicated in Nehru's urgent project to fashion a global image of the newly independent country while giving shape to a burgeoning national identity at home. Although Morley was only director of the National Museum of India for six years, her interventions at the National Museum set radical new standards in the 'modernisation' movement of Indian museums. The ways in which she interpreted this new political project, while overturning the imperial–cultural agendas of the past significantly redirected the path of museum practice, training and visual education in India in ways that continue to impact India's museum professionals and their institutions.

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In 1959, 59 years old and on the cusp of accepting a job as the director of the most important museum in India, Grace Morley wrote with optimism and

[1] 'Dr. (Mrs.) Grace Morley and Her Contribution in Museum Movement in India', conference transcript, Shillong: Museums Association of India, 2003.

some trepidation to her confidante, Helen Crocker Russell in San Francisco:

> I am very excited about the possibility of turning all my knowledge and skill to presenting the cultural heritage of an ancient tradition in a way to serve the nation of today in taking its place in the modern world of technology without losing any more than is absolutely necessary of the values of the past … It seems fitting that … I should now go eastward and do a job of linking East and West.[2]

> The Indian job would be very hard, very worthwhile, a contribution of value in my terms. It means going from all my friends, all my family roots such as they are, my country, for it will be so hard that I do not expect to survive it in the end … But for the larger, more dangerous, and also more useful challenge of India, I might as well go.[3]

When Morley arrived in New Delhi the following August to assume the post at the National Museum, thereby initiating a 25-year-long engagement with the subcontinent, it was the first time she had visited the country or considered South Asian art histories in any depth. The National Museum had already been founded in 1949 within the Rastrapati Bhavan, the house of the former imperial Viceroy in New Delhi. At this location, it projected the reclaiming of power by India over the subcontinent's colonised visual histories. The museum's core collection of objects stemmed from an imperial exhibition held in London in 1947 and ranged from the 3rd millennium BCE to the early 19th century. The subsequent broadening of this core group of objects was the result of nation-wide collecting by Indian curators and scholars in the 1940s and 1950s.[4] Given this history, it is remarkable that when the museum's permanent building opened at Janpath with much fanfare in December 1960, it was Morley who stood at its threshold beside Nehru beneath garlands of golden marigolds embodying the hope and promise of the new nation. On this day, she directed Nehru through the galleries trailed by young curators who would mature under Morley and go on to lead the country's major museums (Plate 5.1).

As her letters attest, Morley envisioned her role in India as a more valuable contribution and challenge than was offered to her in the United States at near-retirement age.[5] Her anticipated difficulty of being a foreigner in a foreign land was also familiar to Morley as her entire career was staged from the geographic peripheries of her own country in addition to the fringes of her own museum. As director of the San Francisco Museum of Art (SFMA; now the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art) for over 20 years (1935–58), she was lauded as a museum pioneer who had single-handedly turned San Francisco into one of the nation's most important supporters of modern art. But this reputation did not isolate her from personality- and class-based conflicts at SFMA. Despite her successes, several museum trustees and members of the SFMA Women's Board who represented some of the Bay Area's wealthiest and most powerful families remained uncomfortable with her 'abrupt' manner and her oft-debated sexuality. The latter was fuelled by her status as a single woman in a powerful 'man's' job, and her 'mannish' appearance that included serious 'tailored suits, sensible shoes, and … hair straight back in a bun'.[6]

[2] Letter from Grace McCann Morley to Helen Crocker Russell, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley (New York; 26 October 1959).

[3] Letter from Grace McCann Morley to Helen Crocker Russell, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley (unmarked; c. 1959).

[4] Tapati Guha-Thakurta, 'Instituting the Nation in Art', in Partha Chatterjee (ed.), *Wages of Freedom: Fifty Years of the Indian Nation-State*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998; Ministry of Education, Government of India, 'National Museum of Art, Archaeology and Anthropology', National Archives of India, New Delhi (F51-37/50-D III; F51-50/50-D III), 1950; Ministry of Education, Government of India, 'Establishment of National Museum of Art, Archaeology and Anthropology', National Archives of India, New Delhi (51-50/50-DIII), 1950.

[5] Letter from Grace Morley to Helen Crocker Russell, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley (New York; 23 September 1959).

[6] Staff, 'Twenty Years of Grace', *Time*, 28 February 1955, p. 58. Interview with Mary Keesling, former trustee of

PLATE 5.1 • *Grace Morley showing Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru around on his visit to the National Museum, 1960.* SOURCE: ALL PHOTOGRAPHS IN THIS CHAPTER ARE COURTESY OF THE NATIONAL MUSEUM, NEW DELHI.

In 1957, these board members forced Morley into premature retirement following a disagreement about fundraising galas that, in her opinion, threatened to change the museum from a scholarly institution to a centre for wealthy social climbers.[7] To Morley, the betrayal was profound. She severed decades-old ties with most of her contacts in San Francisco and after a short appointment at the Guggenheim Museum in New York City, moved to Paris to work for the International Council of Museums (ICOM), an organisation for which she was a founding member. By 1960, Morley arrived in India looking to be reborn as a museum professional. Although her appointment in the country was originally intended to be temporary, it was clear when she wrote to Russell from India in 1963 that there was nothing to draw her back to the United States, 'I have pretty well succeeded in forgetting [the Bay Area] so that those 24 years seem a rotten and bad dream that I seldom think of now'.[8]

The sting of her departure from San Francisco was particularly painful given that Morley had been part of a profound shift in American museology that defined the parameters of American fine arts culture for much of the 20th century.[9] Following the Second

San Francisco Museum of Art, San Francisco, 2004; Kara Kirk, 'Grace Morley and the American Modern Museum Movement', Unpublished MLA, Palo Alto: Stanford University, 2001.

[7] Porter McCray, 'California Oral History Project: Tape Recorded Interview with Grace L. McCann Morley', *Archives of American Art*, Smithsonian Institution, transcript, 1982, p. 29.

[8] Letter from Grace McCann Morley to Helen Crocker Russell, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley (New Delhi; 28 May 1963).

[9] Sally Ann Duncan, 'Harvard's "Museum Course and the Making of America's Museum Profession"', *Archives of American Art Journal*, vol. 42, nos 1/2, 2002; Lisette Model, 'The Intellectual Climate of San Francisco — Nineteen Personalities', *Harper's Bazaar*, February 1947, pp. 220–23.

World War, the Bay Area was alive with immigrants and GI returnees who were eager to embrace the city as a source of artistic and cultural experimentation. Riding this optimism and new curiosity in the arts as a way to address some of the psychological impact of the war, Morley set out to aggressively promote the work of local contemporary artists, as well as expose the community to cutting-edge art movements from the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) in New York. Among the most notable exhibitions that she developed were shows of artwork by Henri Matisse (1936), Paul Gauguin (1936) and Paul Cezanne (1937).[10] From 1935 to 1958, she worked tirelessly to bring the new tenets of modern museology to the Bay Area, although funding was scarce, her permanent collection was thin and local collectors were rare.[11]

As a disciple of Paul J. Sachs and admirer of his landmark 'Museum Course' programme at Harvard's Fogg Museum in 1929, Morley and her notable mentors such as Alfred H. Barr (Director, MOMA) and Walter P. Siple (Director, Cincinnati Art Museum) were on the front lines of creating the modern museum professional in North America. When Siple offered her the position of general museum curator in 1930, she left her role as a professor of French literature at Goucher College in Baltimore to pursue a life in museums even though women were scarce in the field. Energised by the prospect of breaking new ground and undaunted by its challenges, Morley was convinced museum work was a 'calling' and that museum leaders required utter devotion to education and to the application of modern art for the purposes of social enrichment.[12]

A product of Sachsian thought, Morley believed in the power of museums to evoke pure, formalist responses to art. Such displays required a meticulous approach to details in the museum's arrangement, function and exposition. To put this into effect in San Francisco, Morley set out to cultivate local tastes in modern art and to break the west coast's isolation from the country's great art centres by launching an impressive 80 to a 100 exhibitions every year, featuring the work of California collectors, local artists experimenting with modernist aesthetic, and travelling exhibitions. With a permanent collection that initially had only 98 French prints and little funding for acquisitions, she elevated the prestige and influence of SFMA by reaching out to museums like MOMA in the hopes of setting high local standards for both display and artistic quality.[13] In this manner, Morley presented pioneering exhibitions of artists such as Klee, Miro and Kandinsky; and in later years, Pollock, Rothko and Motherwell. Morley's educational mission was vital to the success of these exhibitions. She established some of the first gallery tours in the country. Nights at SFMA were occupied by packed art appreciation and art history classes. The museum also held 'Carnegie Course' lectures, designed as a three-year series of seminars about the history and techniques of art, with an emphasis on modern art trends.[14] Numerous graduates from these classes became active patrons of Northern California artists and laid the foundation for a modern art market and community of collectors in the Bay Area, fulfilling Morley's ambitions for the museum and its newly enlightened audiences. She thus gained a distinguished reputation in the United States as someone who could nurture and cultivate the modern in one of the country's most infertile locations.[15]

With Morley's American chapter abruptly closed by the end of the 1950s, the 'dangerous'

[10] Jeff Gunderson, 'A Combination of Accidents: The San Francisco Art Scene in the 1940s', in Janet Bishop (ed.), *San Francisco Museum of Modern Art: 75 Years of Looking Forward*, San Francisco: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 2009.

[11] McCray, 'California Oral History Project'; Kirk, 'Grace Morley and the American Modern Museum Movement'.

[12] Kirk, 'Grace Morley and the American Modern Museum Movement'; Interviews with former staff members from the National Museum, Delhi, Kolkata, Mumbai, 2004.

[13] Oral history interview conducted by Suzanne B. Reiss in *Art, Artists, Museums, and the San Francisco Museum of Art*, Berkeley: University of California, Regional Cultural History Project, 1960.

[14] McCray, 'California Oral History Project'.

[15] Kirk, 'Grace Morley and the American Modern Museum Movement', p. 51.

challenge of India was offered to her while she was working part-time in the UNESCO-affiliate offices of the ICOM in Paris. Despite her experience in the museum field, Morley's naiveté is somewhat surprising given the immensity of the task that lay before her. As she wrote to Russell, '[i]t will be a great satisfaction to be an officer in a museum that is considered as a cultural institution operated for the public good and completely independent of extraneous concerns'.[16] That this perception managed unfold, in a nation facing the turmoil of sovereignty and its complication within the project of nation-building, is a testament to the experimental and contested nature of India's own sense of modernity at the time.[17]

Following the very brief appointment of Moti Chandra, then-director of the Prince of Wales Museum of Bombay,[18] as new director of the National Museum, the Ministry of Scientific Research and Cultural Affairs was pressured to turn to a range of contenders outside of the country whose value lay not in their experience with the arts of India, but rather in their capacity to conjure the visual and conceptual attributes of an indisputably 'modern' institution.[19] The choice of Morley was recommended by the Ministry, and subsequently approved by Nehru. It was a calculated move that assured the government of its righteous path towards the simultaneous unmaking and making of institutions that embodied and legitimised the fledgling myth of the nation-state.[20] Her profile as an American pioneer of modern museums resonated in an international climate where the United States was a veritable allegory for modernity in the 1950s.[21]

Morley's relationship to the Indian government and its aims was defined in two ways: one personal, and one geo-political. First, her severing of ties in the United States and subsequent readiness to take up the task of modernising India's museums ensured her long-term commitment to the country. It meant that even after her National Museum post ended, she remained dedicated to Indian museums and was a New Delhi resident until her death in 1985. Under the auspices of ICOM, after 1966, Morley drew on her Indian reforms and used the Delhi institution as a teaching model for the development and modernisation of museums in other Asian countries. Second, the increasing power and prominence of American museology in the post-war era despite India's burgeoning cold-war alliances with the USSR, was one of the many complexities of Nehruvian foreign policy shaped by the non-aligned movement. The relationship between this larger political backdrop, India's aesthetic discourse and cultural institutionalisation in the first decades after Independence, points to an under-examined terrain that lies beyond the scope of this chapter. While Morley is both a product of the age and of Nehru's experiment of internationalism, her position is also uniquely entangled within the specificity of her American-ness, and of America's role in India's 20th-century revision.

mataji and the new museology

Morley's appointment was not an anomaly in the opening decades following Independence. Similar

[16] Letter from Grace McCann Morley to Helen Crocker Russell (New York; 26 October 1959).

[17] I employ the term *modernist* to refer to an aesthetic that Morley embraced in the United States and deployed at the National Museum of India. The terms *modern* and *modernity*, however, refer to a social condition of the 20th century that embodies 'an epistemology of progress, a faith in universals, the primacy of the subject, and a turning away from religion towards reason' (Rebecca M. Brown, *Art for a Modern India 1947–1980*, London: Duke University Press, 2009, p. 4).

[18] Now the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya in Mumbai.

[19] Ministry of Education, Government of India, Letter from Ashfaque Hussain, Minister of Education, to Dr de Rozario, Education Secretary of the Indian High Commision, London, and M. S. Sundaram, Indian Embassy, Washington (20 April 1955), National Archives of India, New Delhi (no. R.33-1/53-H.2), 1955.

[20] Srirupa Roy, *Beyond Belief: India and the Politics of Postcolonial Nationalism*, London: Duke University Press, 2007, p. 13.

[21] Jani Scandura and Michael Thurston, *Modernism Inc.: Body, Memory, Capital*, New York: New York University Press, 2001, p. 4.

pointed moves were attempted by the new Indian government that likewise accommodated Nehru's strategy to modernise India through the selection and control of Western models that would enable India to 'catch up' to the conditions of the developed world.[22] Just two years before Morley's arrival in India, Le Corbusier completed the finishing touches on his new utopian city of Chandigarh, and Charles and Ray Eames proposed the parameters for a modern Indian National Institute of Design. The institutionalisation of 'culture' epitomised in the museum was key to this experiment and the dissemination of modernisation. Delegating the task of cultural modernisation to Western leaders of the modernist movement helped to distinguish India's new voice clearly from the nationalist rhetoric of the previous decades. As in the case of Le Corbusier and Eames, Morley's appointment was crafted as limited to five years at most and subjected to detailed supervision by the Ministry.[23] In any case, this was the internal agenda that worked to justify her appointment within the government; in private, Morley was assured by her Indian contacts that she would have a 'free hand' with the National Museum. Indeed she was able to design the museum's galleries as she wanted, without any justification to the government or to her staff.

The professional freedoms granted to Morley allowed her to circumvent the bureaucratic obstacles for museum initiatives that later hampered her successors.[24] But while Morley was able to negotiate some unique liberties, her profile was simultaneously managed within the backrooms of the museum. She was, for example, omitted from almost all media written about the opening of the National Museum and all public speeches around the event. She was also unidentified in published media photos that depicted her presenting the institution to government officials.[25] As an American and as a woman, Morley was perhaps initially seen by the government as an unsuitable public face for the museum. In time, however, her contribution to the reform of pedagogy, display and art history made her a significant player in the repositioning of art and archaeology post-Independence.

In 1959, the Museums Association of India marked the advances of American museums in 'attractive décor' and 'visual education' as more appropriate models for India than the erudite, label-heavy displays of British museums.[26] These American innovations, which stressed the active participation of audiences, were instrumental approaches to modernise the National Museum. By using this two-fold strategy for developing the modern museum, one that privileged a pure aesthetic sense and another that emphasised public pedagogy, Morley set out to overturn the awkward epistemic pairing of art and archaeology that had

[22] Jawaharlal Nehru, *Jawaharlal Nehru's Speeches*, vol. 2, New Delhi: Publications Division, 1954, p. 93; cited in Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993, p. 202.

[23] Ministry of Education, Government of India, Letter from Ashfaque Hussain, Minister of Education, to Dr de Rozario, Education Secretary of the Indian High Commission, London, and M. S. Sundaram, Indian Embassy, Washington (20/04/55), National Archives of India, New Delhi (no. R.33-1/53-H.2), 1955; Ministry of Culture, Government of India, Humayun Kabir, 'Inaugural Address of the Minister for Scientific Research and Cultural Affairs on the Occasion of the Annual Meeting of the Cultural Advisory Board of Museums on the 4th of November, 1960', New Delhi: National Archives of India, 1960, p. 4.

[24] I am thinking particularly of her first successor, C. Sivaramamurti, who was discouraged from altering Morley's initial designs for the galleries. Interviews with former staff members of the National Museum of India, New Delhi, Kolkata, Mumbai, 2004.

[25] Among several examples: 'Vice President Opens National Museum', *Hindustan Times*, 19 December 1960; 'House of National Treasures', *Hindustan Times*, 19 June 1960; 'New Buildings of National Museum', *The Hindu*, 18 December 1960; 'India's "Antiquity and Continuity" on Show', *The Pioneer*, 19 December 1960.

[26] Museums Association of India, 'Museum Display and Exhibition in Modern India, Symposium Proceedings, New Delhi, 14 February 1959', Bombay: Museums Association of India, n.d.

already surfaced in the early incarnation of the museum at the Rashtrapati Bhavan.[27]

As Tapati Guha-Thakurta has shown, the significance of archaeology in the formation of the British Empire was recast in the post-Independence period as a moral and spiritual necessity for nationslism.[28] Morley's mission was to also make room for the distinction of 'art' as a modern experience using display-design, didactics and educational programming to encourage formal art appreciation. In the overarching narrative of Morley's National Museum, the historic legitimacy of archaeology anchored the conventional curatorial path towards the inevitable destination of modern 'art', which only needed the gaze from visitors to begin to build the tastes of a modern citizenry. In the National Museum's *Bulletin* from 1966 — a newsy publication modelled after her SFMA *Bulletin* — she wrote that museums in India had an obligation to deploy the ancient arts so that they could be used 'as standards for the formation of taste and of creative achievement for contemporary art and living'.[29] In contrast to the Victorian model of museum pedagogy that had historically characterised the career of Indian museums, the American model gave primacy to the idea of the 'aesthetic experience' that elevated the visitor within the total experience of object contemplation.[30] Flattening the hierarchy of sight in the museum and encouraging an essentialised appreciation of form, line, colour, composition, and space for all objects, was key to the museum's democratising goals and fostered connections with the shared global values of modern-art viewing. But the vast collections of imperial 'archaeological' material owned by the National Museum — material that was paradoxically critical to establish the historic roots of India's modern condition — posed an initial challenge to Morley's aesthetic goals. Thus, a systematised journey from 'archaeology' to 'art' is apparent in the early design of the galleries that lingers until today.

Visitors began their tour through the prehistory gallery where, as Morley noted in her 1962 text, the 'history of man in India' unfolded, followed by the 'protohistory' of the Indus Valley, and finally the Sunga and Mauryan periods of 'Ashoka, [where] the historic period of Indian *art* opens' (my italics).[31] The privileged canon of Buddhist terracotta and stone objects was a legacy of early 20th century new Orientalist and nationalist art histories, but the National Museum's designation of Sunga and Mauryan objects as 'art' uniquely delineated them from the 'artefacts', 'archaeology' or 'antiquities' categories of the earlier pre- and proto-history displays. Sculptural objects from the Sunga/Mauryan gallery signalled a foray into the 'fine arts', which exuded 'high technical skills and aesthetic accomplishment'.[32] Bronze sculptures from the Chola dynasty followed alongside stone images from the Kushan and Gupta dynasties, marking India's 'golden ages'. The later sculpture galleries compressed time, location and cultural traditions by grouping stone votives and depictions of Buddhist, Hindu and Jain deities from the 5th–15th centuries. The new state's political depiction of itself as a 'successful manager of diversity', underscored the authority of the display that indiscriminately propped sculptures against walls and pillars and conflated regional and dynastic traditions. This encouraged a visual connection through unspecified

[27] McCray, 'California Oral History Project', p. 4; Tapati Guha-Thakurta, 'Marking Independence: The Ritual of a National Art Exhibition', *Journal of Arts and Ideas*, vol. 30, no. 31, 1997.

[28] Tapati Guha-Thakurta, *Monuments, Objects, Histories: Institutions of Art in Colonial and Postcolonial India*, Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004.

[29] Grace Morley, 'Decorative Arts', *Bulletin National Museum*, vol. 1, no. 1, New Delhi, 1966, p. 11.

[30] Carol Duncan, 'The Art Museum as Ritual', in Donald Preziozi, *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998, p. 482.

[31] Grace Morley in consultation with staff, *A Brief Guide to the National Museum*, New Delhi: National Museum of India, 1962, p. 3.

[32] *Ibid*., p. 7.

'styles' and legitimised the state's claim over a varied, yet united, population.[33]

To Morley, the formal appeal of modernism had enabled her to bring together a diverse and somewhat sceptical population in the Bay Area by persuading them of the power of its universality and its fundamentally democratic nature. Seeing 'the modern' connected people at a pure and primitive level of consciousness. Her subsequent prescription for the conceptual gathering and defining of India's disparate citizenry required an active participation in the detached, autonomous 'gaze' that ignored the contingencies of culture and effectively corrected the way Indian art historians and curators had traditionally viewed Indian art objects. In one of the few essays she wrote on Indian art, Morley called for a revised appreciation of paintings from Malwa and Basohli by formally comparing them to abstract European and American modern art. She argued that the true art appreciation of these paintings was universally attainable as long as the viewer was sensitive enough to sense the works' 'direct intuitive approach', and 'abstract composition and use of color' without the distraction of dates and styles that 'preoccu[pied] the Indian experts'.[34] The sparse and even cryptic 'tombstone' labels that one finds today in the sculpture galleries at the National Museum that ignore the taxonomies of faith, region, style, and culture are remnants of this approach.

The photographs that Morley took of the National Museum's galleries for use in museum education lectures around India identify Morley's real 'masterpieces': minimalist teak pedestals, air-conditioning vents, track-lighting, and large glass cases with staggered risers for visual variety. She instructed carpenters to build display cases and Eamesian-type couches, cabinets and cases that reflected modernist, uncluttered lines (Plate 5.2).[35] Such elements produced the perfect streamlined stage for a performance of the modern by viewing audiences. Harmonious colour schemes, dramatic, dim lighting, cushions of space around eye-level objects, and the occasional leafy plant for a visual pause, all contributed to the modern theatre. Although she was likely unfamiliar with the concept, Morley effectively called for a new secular *darshan* to awaken and encourage the modern pilgrim to perform a ritual of identity erasure and recreation that paralleled the political rhetoric of awakening a populace to the inevitability of a united nation-state, and called for the realignment of India's histories.[36]

Transitioning museum practices, reorganising and redefining presentation techniques resonated with Morley's American career. As she noted in an interview from 1960, her first foray into museums in the US was during 'the break between the storehouse-accumulation era and the new period when museums were reorganising their collections, putting the less important things into storage as study collections or reserve collections'.[37] For Morley, the archaeological galleries at the Delhi museum were 'less important'; and yet the state-affirming mission of the institution required a visual story that legitimised the new nation by the 'roots' of its 'pre-art' beginnings towards a nationalised and historical present. The authenticity offered by the archaeological galleries foregrounded the authority and historicity of the subsequent 'art' galleries.

[33] C. Sivaramamurti, '"Sculpture" in National Museum of India', *A Guide to the Galleries of the National Museum of India*, New Delhi: National Museum, 1956.

[34] Grace Morley, 'Rama Epic and Bharat Kala Bhavan Collection', *Chhavi II Rai Krishnadasa Felicitation Volume*, Benares: Bharat Kala Bhavan, 1981.

[35] Morley's curator of display, Smita Baxi, an architect by training, became an admirer of Morley's preferred aesthetic and mentee. She went on to write and lecture extensively in India and Europe about strategies of display in Indian museums. See Smita J. Baxi and Vinod P. Dwivedi, *Modern Museum: Organisation and Practice in India*, New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1973; Smita J. Baxi and Grace Morley, 'Contributions of Museum Exhibitions to the Dissemination of Knowledge', 10th Museums Camp lecture notes, Visvesvaraya Industrial and Technological Museum, Bangalore: Ministry of Education and Social Welfare, Government of India, 1973.

[36] Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, Calcutta: Oxford Press, 1946.

[37] Reiss, *Art, Artists, Museums*, p. 20.

PLATE 5.2 • *Long view of the Anthropology Gallery. Photograph taken around 1963.*

Morley resolved these two agendas in the creation of 'visual storage' display systems. The pre- and proto-history, and Central Asian antiquities galleries presented a secondary reserve group of 'seals, ceramics, bronzes, and jewelry'[38] arranged as part of the collective archaeological hoard and organised by shape, size, medium, and form.[39] In the Indus Valley gallery, the catalogue encouraged viewers to make active 'scientific' comparisons between the sizes of like objects and the look and shape of pottery shards in the visual storage display. While most of the objects in this gallery were actually from sites in Pakistan, the reserve collection set up a specific national dialogue with objects by including a 'selection of sherds from a site in India … for comparison', highlighting newly imagined distinctions between Pakistani and Indian objects, as if their modern borders naturally extended back through time.[40] Instruction in this sense was designed to reify national distinctions, combining the modern practice of educational display with the pressing need to constitute a unique citizenry.

The Central Asian Antiquities Gallery contained objects amassed by Sir Aurel Stein in the first quarter of the 20th century and was treated by Morley as a space for teaching archaeology in a modern pedagogic performance. Morley designed

[38] Morley, *A Brief Guide to the National Museum*, p. 3.

[39] National Museum of India, *Guide to the Galleries of the National Museum of India*, New Delhi: National Museum, 1956.

[40] *Ibid*., p. 7.

teak visual storage cabinets that had drawers containingte pot shards, clothing, sections of Buddhist texts, textiles and wooden ritual objects under glass that visitors pulled out to examine. Above the drawers hung screens that were also designed to be pulled out individually, to see light-sensitive portions of painted murals and scrolls. Maps and biographic information about Stein offered didactic references for the material, but for the most part, the gallery's educational mission was achieved through this visual storage system that invited viewers to imagine and perform their own acts of archaeological discovery. By physically opening and closing drawers and screens, visitors collaborated in their own knowledge-production and were made conscious of their own dual 'sights' in the museum between those archaeological items designated for modern education, and those in the art galleries laid out for aesthetic contemplation.

Morley also embarked on a systematic programme of training and tutelage for museum employees that anticipated her later mission of modernising museum professionals around the country. Learning and performing the vernacular of art appreciation were institution-wide requirements. Staff members from non-curatorial fields were routinely required to 'tour' Morley through her daily walkthrough of the galleries, and to repeat coached formalist analyses of the objects.[41] Enforcing the tenets of scientific rationality and order over the perceived chaotic processes of the past, she trained staff in the use of photo index cards, new cataloguing systems, and 'scientific' documentation regimens that streamlined the description of objects to brief snapshots of title, date and material, offering an efficient and systematic way of knowing the objects. Former curators V. P. Dwivedi and G. N. Pant wrote of Morley's nurture and discipline of employees in her 80th birthday felicitation volume:

> One of our colleagues was counting the leaves of a manuscript received on loan for the exhibition in the conventional way — by licking his fingers. As soon as she [Morley] noticed it, she scolded the person and said that besides the fact that he was likely to fall ill, he could have damaged the already tattered manuscript. Then she demonstrated as to how to count the leaves of a manuscript gently with the help of both the hands.[42]

Morley enforced a strict 10 to 12-hour working day, oversaw the sanitisation of working conditions and taught employees how to maintain a manicured neatness in their work spaces.[43] Morley's Museum Camps initiative was a broader application of this local agenda. An annual event designed to impart lessons from the National Museum to other Indian museums, the Camp regularly brought together between 20 and 30 museum professionals from across the nation to participate in multi-day workshops and lecture series' about object display, storage, conservation, art history, and museum education.[44] In her later role at ICOM Delhi, Morley facilitated grants for conference travel and study abroad trips for her former staff members and other burgeoning museologists around India.[45] An entire generation of museum professionals in India came of age regarding Morley as their greatest mentor, advocate and teacher. There are few museum leaders in the country today who were not involved in one of Morley's educational, training or ICOM projects in the late 1960s through the 1970s.

the anthropology and pre-columbian galleries

In support of the government's push for cultural anthropology at the National Museum, Morley's

[41] Interviews with former staff members from the National Museum of India, Delhi, Kolkata, Mumbai, 2004.

[42] V. P. Dwivedi, G. N. Pant (eds), *Museums and Museology: New Horizons (Essays in Honour of Dr. Grace Morley on her 80th Birthday)*, Delhi: Agam Kala Prakashan, 1980, p. viii.

[43] Grace Morley, *National Museum Bulletin*, vol. 1, New Delhi: National Museum of India, 1966, p. 3.

[44] Grace Morley, 'Museum Camps', *Cultural Forum*, Special Number on Museology, Ministry of Education, 1966.

[45] Such training forays were funded by a combination of grants from UNESCO, ICOM, the Ford Foundation, and the JDR III fund, and often supplemented by Morley's personal savings. Author interview with Hughes de Varine-Bohen, Paris, 2003; also see several ICOM reports, such as Morley, 'Museums in South, Southeast and East Asia: Survey and Report 1968–1971', New Delhi: ICOM Regional Agency in Asia, 1971.

presentation helped to enable new claims of diversity and inclusiveness on the nationalised Indian body.[46] Recognising the new potential of museumised anthropology that permitted a display of state-sanctioned cultural diversity, Nehru called on state governments to donate examples of regional clothing to the National Museum for the development of its cultural anthropology galleries.[47] These galleries opened in 1961, featuring clothing predominantly from rural regions of the country, including 'tribal and folk jewelries, footwear and headdresses' as well as 'handcrafts, folk masks, puppets, and folk musical instruments', grouped according to typology rather than region or culture and paired with black and white photography that demonstrated the functionality of objects on display.[48] Beyond the purview of this chapter, the anthropology galleries intriguingly presented an image of the 'tribal' as simultaneously 'other' and 'not-other' by enforcing a marked contrast to the modern museum-viewing patron, while also existing as evidence of India's constructed inclusivity and nationalising breadth beyond the major cities.[49] Morley's personal interpretive cues stemmed from American museological excitement in the primitive and ethnic arts in the 1940s and 1950s that recognised the impact of African masks and Tahitian villages on Picasso and Gauguin. Increasingly in American and European modernist circles, the primitive and the avant-garde were considered intertwined and signified a natural relationship for Morley.[50] She needed no convincing that India's modern identity and inherently modernist sensibility lay in the clothing and quotidian objects of its tribal communities; her interventions of photography and wire mannequins continue to frame the collection even today.

Many photographic images in the anthropology gallery demonstrated the physical use of museumised items such as baskets for carrying babies and musical instruments.[51] They were juxtaposed with objects on display, allowing viewers a simultaneous experience of the objects as both ethnographic specimens and art. While the photographs enacted the 'pre-modern' lives of museum objects by demonstrating their use outside of the museum environment, museum visitors were afforded the superior knowledge of their duality as both distinct artistic and anthropological material. Each photo depicted individual figures in full regalia or ceremonial dress standing in a timeless setting of grasslands and foliage that denied a contemporary provenance for the image and highlighted the isolation and exoticism of village India from the context of the museum itself. Thus, a doubling of the museum ritual performance also occurred in the gallery where photographed Indians performed their local ethnic tribalness of difference, and viewing Indians cognisant of this apparent duality, demonstrated their modern association with the universal standards of museum-gazing by admiring the handiwork with a critical, omniscient eye.

[46] For a discussion on how the meanings around anthropological objects shifted in postcolonial Africa, see Annie E. Coombes, *Reinventing Africa: Museums, Material Culture, and Popular Imagination in Late Victorian and Edwardian England*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994; Sachin Roy, *Anthropology Gallery — An Introduction*, New Delhi: National Museum of India, 1964, p. 161.

[47] Ministry of Education, Government of India, 'Report', National Archives of India, New Delhi (F-33-1/53-H.2), 1953; Ministry of Education, Government of India, 'Constitution of the National Art Treasures Fund', National Archives of India, New Delhi (6-5/52-G 2[a]), 1952; Ministry of Education, Jawaharlal Nehru, 'Prime Minister's fortnightly letter to all the Chief Ministers of the States', National Archives of India, New Delhi (no. 52), 16 June 1952.

[48] Roy, *Anthropology Gallery*, p. 3.

[49] Mieke Bal, 'Telling Objects: A Narrative Perspective on Collecting', in Donald Preziosi and Claire Farago (eds), *Grasping the World: The Idea of the Museum*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004, p. 91.

[50] Shelly Errington, *The Death of Authentic Primitive Art and Other Tales of Progress*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998, p. 67; James Clifford, 'Histories of the Tribal and the Modern', in *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature and Art*, Boston: Harvard University Press, 1988.

[51] Roy, *Anthropology Gallery*, p. 13.

PLATE 5.3 • *A representation of Krishna and Radha; one of the exhibits at the Anthropology Gallery. Photograph taken around 1961.*

Objects on display in the anthropology galleries also experienced a doubling of values as Sachin Roy remarked in the accompanying catalogue: 'they [handicrafts] have a double purpose, they are day-to-day necessities and they are artistic'. The wire mannequins designed by Morley were specifically used to display the 'artistic' aspects of the clothing. Their abstract forms — which are still used today in these galleries — echo the line drawings of Western modernist artists 'with stylistic faces so as not to detract from the clothing' (Plate 5.3).[52] Shifting from the ethnographic 'authenticity' offered by photographs to the obscured body of the mannequin in order to admire the formal values of the textiles, simultaneously met the nationalist imperative of embracing the rural body while paradoxically distancing it from the cool, modern sight of the nation and the museum. The featured clothing became part of the meta-narrative of modern progress as visitors were reminded that, 'nicely cut and tailored costumes are only the product of the modern civilization'.[53] Modern citizenship was metaphorically a matter of donning a new garment, and casting aside 'old' adornments.

In the United States, Morley's knowledge of Spanish and French enabled her to forge some of the first American museum relationships with Latin American contemporary artists and their art by holding exhibitions of their work and acquiring what her funds permitted.[54] She even worked for the State Department during the Second World War to consult on cultural ties between the two regions, and to evaluate the influence of German, Japanese and Italian pressures by fostering peaceful art exchanges with Central and Latin American governments.[55] Given Morley's history of interest in the region, the Pre-Columbian collection at the National Museum is perhaps less of an oddity than it first appears. Originally a 1967 gift from New York-based collectors, Nasli and Alice Heeramaneck, their relationship with Morley has yet to be examined, but their extensive South Asian collection was also known at the time and does not seem to have captured Morley's interest in the same way, though she probably had little chance of acquiring it.[56] Rather, the rare stone and wooden sculptures, pottery, metal work, jewellery, and textiles from the pre-colonial periods of Mexico, Central and South America marked a watershed moment for Morley and her ambitions for the National Museum, fulfilling, in her words, 'the ultimate national achievement' for the institution.[57]

For Morley, the Pre-Columbian acquisition represented one of the museum's most successful moves as a cultural institution because it marked a

[52] *Ibid*., p. 3.

[53] *Ibid*., p. 4.

[54] Reiss, *Art, Artists, Museums*, p. 179.

[55] *Ibid.*, p. 52.

[56] The Heeramanecks were also known as art dealers, scholars and connoisseurs. The majority of their South Asian collection was acquired by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art at the end of the 1960s through the mid-1970s. Pratapaditya Pal (ed.), *American Collectors of Asian Art*, Bombay: Marg Publications, 1986.

[57] Grace Morley, *Pre-Columbian Art Collection given by Mrs. Alice and Mr. Nasli Heeramaneck in memory of Munchersha Heeramaneck*, New Delhi: National Museum of India, 1968.

final criterion in the model of the modern nation-state — an evidentiary accumulation of the world that is the founding principle of the European and American modern museum.[58] By expanding the scope of the galleries in New Delhi, to Morley the new Pre-Columbian gallery '[broke] open the isolation from which museum collections and, as a consequence, archaeological and art studies, have suffered in this part of the world, for everywhere here they have been largely limited to national antiquities'.[59] Implicit here is Morley's own frustrated sense of displacement and European and American art trends and museum initiatives. From the west coast of the United States, Morley's experience with isolated audiences was to expose them to new forms of art through exhibitions, educational programming and cultivated support for innovating local artists. In India, she was confident that the Pre-Columbian objects produced an aesthetic, a political stimulus, as well as an international aura for the institution. Bringing this collection to India marked the quintessential accomplishment of a truly modern civilisation — to create the fiction of a collected world and a powerful global presence. While searching for comparative cultures against which to measure their own, Morley hoped that the Indian public would recognise parallels with Pre-Columbian cultures and locate connections in 'the creative power of the human spirit' in regions that '[were] struggling with much the same problems as India, in finding a secure place in contemporary technological society'.[60] The Pre-Columbian acquisition was also the ideal nationalist response to the Indian Government. As Vice-President Dr S. Radhakrishnan remarked at the museum's inauguration, '[i]f you have here art objects, sculptures and paintings of other countries of the world, you will see how fundamentally akin the human mind is'.[61] As Morley devoutly believed that such imagined affinities were key to the development of a modern society, her management of the Pre-Columbian donation was an important parting gift in her last year as director of the National Museum.

Morley's belief that the Pre-Columbian gallery would strengthen the nationalist mission of the National Museum neither shared by her successors nor their curators who did very little with the installation designs, wall texts and labels for nearly 40 years. The latter deviated interestingly from the sparse 'tombstone' descriptions in the sculpture gallery, as Morley felt that this foreign material required more educational and historical information to make it palatable for visitors. But the clear purpose for this gallery grew vaguer with time. It became a repository for classified 'non-Indian' objects — including sculptures gifted by the Indonesian Government, Luristan bronzes, European gothic sculptures, and a Flemish tapestry, along with Christian sculptures from South India without context, chronology or rationale. With Morley's departure from the National Museum in 1966, and the government's new emphasis on the development of the science and technology museums in the 1970s, the modern ambitions for the country's art history and the hopes pinned to the museum's visual power began to diminish as a national priority.

Morley's acceptance and assimilation follows a long history in 20th-century India of foreign women contributing to the social and political landscapes of their time and of embracing the adoption of their new homeland.[62] When Grace Morley died in Delhi in 1985, her belongings were distributed among her Indian friends and colleagues and, in accordance with her wishes, her body was cremated on the banks of the Ganges with curator G. N. Pant, one of

[58] Among many sources, see Donald Preziosi, *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998; Preziosi and Farago, *Grasping the World*.

[59] Morley, *Pre-Columbian Art Collection*, p. 9.

[60] *Ibid*.

[61] Grace L. McCann Morley and Dr K. N. Puri, 'The National Museum, New Delhi', *Museum*, vol. 14, no. 2, 1961, p. 70.

[62] Kumari Jayawardena, *The White Woman's Other Burden*, London: Routledge, 1995.

her self-described 'Indian sons', performing the rites of a biological son.[63] She had truly rebuilt a life and a career in a foreign land after helping to pioneer a new approach to museology and to modern art in the United States and in the world. While her memory has surfaced again in the Bay Area today, those who knew her have memorialised her as an accomplished figure, yet also someone who was 'abrupt', 'brusque' and 'strict' in her approach to museum colleagues and institutional reforms.[64] Yet in India, all of her staff members, from curators to museum guards, fondly refer to Morley as *mataji*. In written and oral accounts of the period, she is characterised as maternally 'nurturing', 'nourishing' and 'loving' by her former employees.[65] Unlike in the United States, where her 'masculine' qualities and her 'man's job' were often derided by her museum trustees and the local media, in India she is revered as a beloved mother. In her life, she seized this status as an opportunity to critique, reform and disseminate the new museum doctrine in India.

Although Morley expressed her gratitude for India and her love for the friendships she had created there, it is the people around her who revealed how her presence was finally rationalised in India so that her legacy became part of the idiom of the nation and its nationalised museology. As scholar Kapila Vatsyayan, a dedicated student of Morley's as well as an important ally in the Ministry of Education, suggested in a publication honouring Morley on her 80th birthday:

> One may not be a believer in rebirth, but in Dr. Morley's case the only explanation can be that perhaps in some previous birth she belonged to this part of the world. Spiritually and emotionally she is Indian and Asian in a manner which can have little rational explanation. She is and will remain so in the minds of many.[66]

Ultimately, it was Morley's 'Indian-ness' that set the stage for the visualisation of India's national self, not her American career, nor her international scope. Her plans to construct a modern museum in India, and her belief in its capacity to conjure a modernised citizenry and shape an official national image for the country, were symptoms of their age and the naiveté of India's opening decades following Independence. But the tensions and ambiguities exposed by these plans are still laid bare in the galleries of the National Museum; they remain testaments to how the colonial memories, national expectations and political ambitions of this era continue to resonate unresolved even today.

[63] O. P. Agrawal, 'Dr. (Mrs.) Grace Morley and Her Contribution in Museum Movement in India', Conference paper, All-India Museums Annual General Conference, Shillong: Museums Association of India, 2003.

[64] Author interview with Hughes de Varine-Bohen, Paris, 2003.

[65] Kapila Vatsyayan, 'Dr. Grace Morley: Some Personal Glimpses', in V. P. Dwivedai and G. N. Pant (eds), *Museums and Museology: New Horizons [Essays in Honor of Dr. Grace Morley on her 80th Birthday]*, New Delhi: Agam Kala Prakashan, 1980, p. 312; C. Sivaramamurti, 'Dr. (Mrs.) Grace Morley As I Know Her', and P. Bannerjee, 'Dr. Grace Morley as the Director of the National Museum, New Delhi (1960–1966)', in *Museums and Museology: New Horizons [Essays in Honor of Dr. Grace Morley on her 80th Birthday]*, New Delhi: Agam Kala Prakashan, 1980; Agrawal, 'Dr. (Mrs.) Grace Morley and Her Contribution in Museum Movement in India'.

[66] Vatsyayan, 'Dr. Grace Morley: Some Personal Glimpses', p. 312.

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6

useum

museumising modern art

national gallery of modern art, the Indian case-study

Vidya Shivadas*

modern art museums all over the world have had to contend with a common problem: how does one museumise the present? The project of representing 'now' while predicting how this might look as a historical 'then', wedges the institution between two temporalities (Plate 6.1). Given the museum's own self-image, developed in the 19th century as an institution that essentially deals with the past and values origins and fixity, how can a museum represent and accommodate the fluid, ever-changing present?

In the above instance the term 'modern' has been used loosely to index the present. If one were to return this term to its historic specificity — 'as distinguishing characteristics of western culture from mid-nineteenth century until at least mid twentieth century: a culture in which processes of industrialization and urbanization are conceived of as the principal mechanisms of transformation in human experience'[1] — then it leaves us with the issue of the forms modernism and modernity have taken in non-Western, postcolonial contexts. What were the assumptions, confusions and challenges around these terms and how did these cohere in the formation of cultural institutions like the art museum?

If one were to list some of the chief characteristics of modernism and modernity in the Indian context, we would begin by noting that it arrived in our part of the world as part and parcel of colonialism, and paradoxically became politicised in conjunction with the anti-imperialist movement. The nation was, thus, an ambivalent site that both acknowledged and disputed modern universal knowledge as its paradigm. Geeta Kapur in her essay *New Internationalism* looks at how the term 'national' points to many things at the same time:

> It refers to nationalist consciousness with its ambivalence towards western-style modernisation of society and state. The extreme example of this position is of course Gandhi whose social reflexion sets modernity and nation at odds with each other … In contrast there is the actual emergence of a nation state and the regime of modernity it favours through institutionalised structure of universal franchise, formal education, courts of justice and democracy.[2]

Apart from this fraught relationship between the modern and the national, there is also the past that must be accounted for, when theorising on the

* The author would like to thank Geeta Kapur and Kavita Singh for their guidance and critical feedback.

[1] Charles Harrison, 'Modernism', in Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff (eds), *Critical Terms for Art History*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003, p. 189.

[2] Geeta Kapur, 'New Internationalism', in *When was Modernism, Essays on Contemporary Cultural Practice in India*, New Delhi: Tulika Books, 2000, p. 332.

PLATE 6.1 • *National Gallery of Modern Art, housed at the erstwhile winter palace of the Maharaja of Jaipur. In front a partial view of Triumph of Labour by D. P. Roy Chowdhury, which was commissioned by the Gallery and installed on the NGMA lawns in 1959. SOURCE:* COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR.

modern in our context. Arjun Appadurai talks about the 'deep and multiple genealogies'[3] that inform and shape multiple modernisms. The modern here, adds Kapur, cannot be subject to the same kind of periodisation as in the West. 'The Indian modern evolves with its own set of cannons — these serve to signal in the direction of the Western modern but encourage living traditions to flourish as well'.[4]

And finally the role of the state in ushering in this modernity in postcolonial countries also needs to be acknowledged. The public art museum in this context is an articulation of the newly independent nation-state's aspiration for Westernisation and modernisation. It is institutionalised as part of a larger effort to set up a state-sponsored cultural apparatus, and given the mandate of representing not just the modern but the 'national-modern'. It needs to reconcile the exclusive category of the modern and the individual experience it privileges, with the idea of shared heritage that suggests an idealised state–citizen relationship. It needs to dislodge the naturalised equations between tradition and nation, and make a bid for the modern's rightful and much-needed presence in the civilisational discourse.

In recent years there is a renewed interest in Indian museums and their relationship to audiences. Appadurai and Breckenridge in their seminal essay *Museums are Good to Think* look at the museum's role in the 'elaboration of the public sphere in non-western nations'.[5] They discuss the peculiarities of

[3] Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large, Cultural Dimensions of Globalisation*, Public Worlds, vol. 1, London: University of Minnesota Press Minneapolis, 1996, p. 2.

[4] Geeta Kapur, 'National/Modern: Preliminaries', in *When was Modernism, Essays on Contemporary Cultural Practice in India*, New Delhi: Tulika Books, 2000, p. 293.

[5] Arjun Appadurai and Carol Breckenridge, 'Museums are Good to Think', in David Boswell and Jessica Evans (eds), *Representing the Nation: A Reader*, London: Routledge, 1999, p. 418.

the Indian context that makes the museum's role ambiguous — where the separations between the sacred and the everyday, the present and the past are not as sharply etched. The museum's primary task, they note, has been the creation of a public to receive its messages. The authors are interested in the transformation of the museum site under global impulses where 'new visual formations link heritage politics to spectacle, tourism and entertainment'.[6] The sub-category of the art museum, however, does not present them with many possibilities when it comes to mapping contemporary public gaze in Indian life. They write,

> [e]xcept for a small minority in India and for a very short period of its history and in very few museums there, art in the current western sense is not a meaningful category … In place of art other categories of objects dominate, such as handicraft, technology, history and heritage.[7]

While not disputing the marginality of the art museum in terms of the general public it draws, in the Indian institutional landscape, this chapter chooses to precisely focus on an institution that centres on the category of 'art', by offering a critical examination of India's National Gallery of Modern Art (NGMA). This emblematic institution, the only of its kind, was set up in 1954 by the Government of India. Charged with the task of building a collection of modern Indian art and displaying historical surveys of the field, the NGMA was an important site for the art world as much as for the newly independent nation-state declaring its commitment to modernity.

Unlike the reception approach advocated by Appadurai and Breckenridge, this chapter uses the more conventional method of 'reading' the institution by tracing a history of its exhibition and collection policies. From 1938 when such an institution was first proposed by an artist-based organisation, the All India Fine Arts and Craft Society (AIFACS), the subsequent artists' conferences that delineated the nature and scope of this institution, its establishment by the government in 1954, the political leadership and the museum directors that determined its contours, and of course the parallel developments in art-practice that it was trying to account for and represent, the NGMA has been subject to different pressures and imaginings. In the course of this unfolding history, it has grappled with ideas of modernism, nationalism, tradition, and internationalism and equally tried to address questions of identity and Indian-ness.

A brochure issued by the NGMA defines the role of the institution as showcasing art from 1857 (a chronological category), ensuring standards of aesthetic excellence and helping people look at works of modern art with joy, understanding and knowledge (a qualitative experience that needs to be conveyed to people).[8] Sixty-five years after the founding of the institution, one could charge the NGMA with failing in its task of achieving these objectives for a larger public; but at the same time one must acknowledge that it has had a certain relevance to the niche public of artists and critics, who in turn have been sharply engaged with it. Could the state project adequately create and address this, more delimited, public? The successes and failures of this equation is what will be determined through the course of this chapter.

museumising Indian art — initial formations/formulations

By the mid-19th century we see the categories of 'high art' and 'artist' emerging in the modern Indian context. Art historians Tapti Guha-Thakurta and Partha Mitter have exhaustively researched this period from its early beginnings when traditional art-practices and practitioners were consigned to the category of 'craft', and Indian artists began to emulate European painters and engravers to make realistic and illusionistic oil paintings. Guha-Thakurta and Mitter have looked at the setting up of art schools by the British Empire — the School

[6] *Ibid*.

[7] *Ibid*., p. 406.

[8] Paraphrased from the NGMA Brochure, National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi, 1983.

of Industrial Arts in Madras, Sir J. J. School of Art in Bombay and the Calcutta School of Art in 1854, followed by the Mayo School of Arts in Lahore in 1857 — which in turn led to the emergence of a new group of artists who distinguished themselves from the other practitioners such as folk artists, bazaar painters and printmakers in the field.

Alongside the art schools, an exhibition circuit developed, mirroring the salons of Europe. The first fine art exhibition was held in Calcutta in 1831 followed by exhibitions organised by Calcutta Art Society (1890) and Indian Society of Oriental Art (1905). By the early 20th century we also see the circulation of art journals such as *Pradip* (1897), *Prabasi* (1901), *Modern Review* (1907), and *Rupam* (1919) that carried art reproductions as well as published writings, and produced a discursive space around art. It was in the pages of these journals that a nationalist discourse on art began to develop. Guha-Thakurta demonstrates how *Prabasi* and *Modern Review* rejected the practice of academic–realist Raja Ravi Varma and made a strong case for the work of artist and pedagogue Abanindranath Tagore.[9]

Modern Indian art also began to figure in the collections of museums from the early part of the 20th century. The Government Art Gallery, Calcutta, which later merged with the Indian Museum art collection, and the Baroda Museum and Picture Gallery, Baroda, offer two interesting instances of the early museumisation of modern Indian art within encyclopaedic museums. Meanwhile, at about the same time, a third impulse for such an institution came from the artist Raja Ravi Varma who urged the State of Travancore to set up an art museum for its immense 'educational and historical importance'[10] — a striking example of the modern artist seeking out new systems of dissemination, distribution and patronage, and seeing the museum as a key institution where all these interests converge.

Upon its establishment in 1854, the Government School of Art, Calcutta, offered Western academic training and the students busied themselves in mastering the technique of oil paintings, making portraits and copying European paintings for local patrons. The Government Art Gallery, established in 1876, was placed under the charge of the School's principal, and in keeping with its curriculum filled with copies of European Old Masters. With E. B. Havell taking over the institution in 1896, the agenda of the School however changed.[11]

Determined to make Indian art the basis of all instruction, Havell called for a special allocation from each year's grant to the Gallery for the purchase of fine specimens of Oriental art industries, which he planned to use as teaching models. He soon became acquainted with Mughal miniatures which he began to acquire for the museum from the late 1880s alongside building a collection of oriental metalwork, textiles and reproductions of Byzantine, early pre-Renaissance Italian paintings, and Ajanta murals.

In 1904, he took the controversial decision to sell off the bulk of the Gallery's Viceregal collection of European academic paintings and to utilise the

[9] Abanindranath Tagore was a leading member of the nationalist movement in painting among the *swadeshi* Bengali artists and he combined forces with reformist teacher E. B. Havell to foreground an Oriental mode of painting. This art-practice, which became known as the 'Bengal School', was institutionalised with the setting up of art school Santiniketan in 1920. For more information on this refer to Tapti Guha-Thakurta, *The Making of New Indian Art, Artists, Aesthetics and Nationalism in Bengal, c. 1850–1920*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992; and Partha Mitter, *Art and Nationalism in Colonial India, 1850–1922*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

[10] Reproduced in Raja Raja Varma, *Raja Ravi Varma: Portrait of an Artist: The Diary of C. Raja Raja Varma*, Erwin Neumayer and Christine Schelberger (eds), Oxford University Press, 2005, p. 209.

[11] Ernest Binfield Havell (1861–1934) was an influential British arts administrator and historian. He came to India as the Superintendent of Madras School of Art between 1884 and 1894. He then became the Principal of the Government School of Art, Calcutta, for another decade. He combined forces with artist Abanindranath Tagore to develop art-practice and art education that looked at Indian sources and art history, and this was the start of the Bengal School of Art.

money to buy original Indian works. A charged public debate followed where he was supported by a strong lobby of committed Orientalists, such as Sister Nivedita and Abanindranath Tagore, even as a section of the art students went on strike against what they perceived to be an effort to cut them off from modernist practice. In 1911, the Artware Collection[12] of the Indian Museum was amalgamated with the collection built by Havell to form a new 'Art Section'. Havell's nationalist art history was institutionalised within the imperial museum even though he resisted this consolidation.[13]

In Gujarat, meanwhile, the monarch Sayaji Rao Gaekwad (1875–1939) set up a host of institutions such as the Kalabhavan Sanskrit Mahavidyalaya, Oriental Institute and the Baroda State Museum to usher in a progressive educational system in the state in the late 19th century. Sayaji Rao was a charismatic and independent ruler who contested British authority. Many Indian nationalists considered his reforms and record of good governance as a justification for the call of *Swaraj* or Indian self-rule. As an extension of this logic, Sayaji Rao proposed to set up an exemplary painting and sculpture gallery in 1906–07, whose collection bettered those of any museum in the Raj. For this, he recruited the services of Marion Harry Speilmann, the Editor of *Magazine of Art*, critic and advisor to two generations of Victorian artists, to build a collection of copies and original works from Europe.[14] This collection arrived in India in 1919–20 and formed the core of the European picture gallery.

When Hermann Goetz took over as director of the Museum in 1943, he began to acquire contemporary Indian works of art. The Museum organised an exhibition of the Progressive Artists Group of Bombay as early as 1949, a year or so after the Group's formation. Works by F. N. Souza, S. H. Raza, N. S. Bendre, K. K. Hebbar, Jamini Roy, B. C. Sanyal, and K. S. Kulkarni, among others, found their way into collection as did paintings of Gujarati artists Rasiklal Parikh, Somalal Shah and Kanu Desai. In 1946, the Roerich Gallery was set up, dedicated to the works of the Russian artist, philosopher and mystic Nicholas Roerich who arrived in India in 1923 and remained here until his death in 1947.[15]

Among early projects to give modern Indian art a home in the museum, we also have the case of Raja Ravi Varma, the first modern Indian artist to embrace the medium of oil whose enviable list of patrons also included the princes of Mysore and Udaipur, apart from the abovementioned Sayaji Rao Gaekwad. Varma was keen for his home state of Travancore to replicate the Gaekwad model of art patronage and institution-building, and he petitioned the ruler for the establishment of a public art gallery in Travancore that would be — 'a repository of historical information, a learning-ground for local artists and equally as a symbol of a progressive state'. In a letter to S. Shungrasoobyer Avergal, Dewan of Travancore, dated 31 August 1895, he wrote:

> To what are the triumphs of art achieved by European countries due, but their art schools and galleries? … A great writer says, 'wherever the arts are cultivated with success, they almost imperceptibly educate the

[12] These collections of economic products and Indian art-ware, made by the revenue and agricultural departments of Government of India, were housed at the Bengal Economic Museum and later formed the Economics and Arts Section of the Indian Museum from 1887 onwards.

[13] See Guha-Thakurta, *The Making of New Indian Art*, p. 154.

[14] Between 1910 and 1917, Speilmann acquired a collection for Sayaji Rao, which consisted of oil paintings by Gustav Courbet, Frederick Leighton, Edwin Landseer, Fran Holl, William Orchardson, and G. F. Watt, among others, as well as plaster-cast copies of works by major Renaissance artists (Donatello, Verrochio, Michaelangelo, Della Robbia, and Settignano), by French sculptors (Houdon, Rude), from Egypt and from classical antiquity.

[15] See Julie F. Codell, 'Ironies of Mimicry: The Art Collections of Sayaji Rao III Gaekwad, Maharajah of Baroda, and the Cultural Politics of Early Modern India', *Journal of the History of Collections*, vol. 15, 2003, pp. 125–44. Kavita Singh, 'Material Fantasy: the Museum in Colonial India', in Gayatri Sinha (ed.), *Art and Visual Culture in India*, Mumbai: Marg Publications, 2009, pp. 50–51; also refer to R. N. Mehta, *Genesis and Activities of the Museum and Picture Gallery, Vadodara*, Museum Bulletin, Special Issue, vol. 30, Department of Museums, Gujarat State, 1995.

> general taste and make politeness of mind keep pace with the refinement of manners'. An art gallery, therefore, for such an advanced state as Travancore is a necessity which can no longer be ignored.[16]

Varma offered to make paintings for the museum on a contract basis, as well as take responsibility for the display, cataloguing and preservation of the paintings. He made a series of paintings between 1896 and 1901 for this purpose, but discontinued when he realised that the museum building was nowhere in sight. Finally in 1935, long after Ravi Varma's death, a painting gallery was established in Trivandrum, in which his paintings are, to this day, the chief attraction.

In Havell's assertion of difference and Sayaji Rao's careful replication of a European gallery, the art museum emerges as a site on which claims for the nationalist struggle and self-rule are made. Ravi Varma, meanwhile, is the third pragmatic party in this equation — the artist who looks upon the museum, and the state, as a patron and is therefore deeply invested in its formation and functioning. In this, as we shall see, he prefigures the generations of artist to come.

proposing a national art gallery — the AIFACS version

Unlike the National Museum, which was a key project for a government body like the Archaeological Survey of India from 1912 onwards, the first proposal for a National Art Gallery was made by a Delhi-based artists' organisation, the AIFACS, in 1938.

AIFACS declared that the time had come to make a systematic, representative collection of the works of Indian artists in various parts of the country. They laid down some requisites — the collection had to be located in the capital and museums such as Royal Academy of Art, London and Grand Salon, Paris were its possible models.[17] In all the early proposals, this institution was called the National Art Gallery. The word 'modern' did not appear in the title of the museum until 1953.

AIFACS, initially registered as Delhi Fine Arts Society in 1929, was founded by artist–brothers Barada and Sarada Ukil who were students of Abanindranath Tagore.[18] Between 1932 and 1940, the Ukil brothers concentrated on organising exhibitions abroad, finding venues and support for Indian artists. They held exhibitions in London and Paris (1931), at Burlington House, London (1934) and also at various places in India. They exhibited the works of Sarada Ukil at these venues, alongside showing selected works of other artists.[19]

In 1938, the society renamed itself as the AIFACS and almost immediately made a bid for the establishment of a National Art Gallery in New Delhi. It set up regional committees in Bengal, Madras Province, Mysore, Hyderabad, etc., in an effort to project its image as a central organisation that had regional representatives. The building for the National Art Gallery was envisaged as a large hall that would not only house a representative collection of works by Indian artists but also serve the purpose of annual art exhibitions. Around the hall it was proposed that provincial galleries would be built to exclusively represent art forms peculiar to each province of India, including the princely states. The Society was also looking to establish mass support for the proposed museum and started a one-anna[21] fund at all its art centres to raise money. It was keen to garner broad-based public support, as much as enlist the sympathies of the princely rulers, who

[16] Reproduced in Varma, *Raja Ravi Varma: Portrait of an Artist*, p. 209.

[17] As mentioned in 'An Appeal for Public Support for a National Art Gallery', *Roop Lekha*, vol. 1, no. 2, January 1940.

[18] As its initial project, AIFACS applied for a grant of Rs 1 lakh that had been announced for the decoration of the Viceregal Palace in Delhi with paintings. Barada Ukil submitted a scheme to the Viceroy and to Chief Commissioner of Delhi, Sir John Thompson, requesting that part of the grant be kept aside for works to be executed by some Indian artists. The scheme was admitted and the Society was also entrusted with the task of collecting the paintings from Indian artists.

[19] 'Editorial, About Ourselves', *Art News* (bi-monthly art bulletin), vol. 3, no. 2–3, AIFACS, New Delhi, March 1949.

[20] An anna was a currency unit used formally in India and was equal to 1/16th of a rupee.

were its more likely patrons at this point.[21] Above all, the museum was seen as a pragmatic institution for the artists themselves — a space of patronage and visibility that would consolidate and legitimise their presence in the current changing scenario.

In 1946, the Society organised the First International Contemporary Art Exhibition that included paintings of modern French and English artists, as well as etchings from American artists. The exhibition coincided with the first All India conference, where a resolution appointing AIFACS as a central art body was passed.[22] In the subsequent years, however, AIFACS' claims were diluted by the factions that arose among the artists, with the newly set up All India Association of Fine Arts, Bombay, putting forth its own agency as a central organisation at the Third All India Art conference in 1948.[23] The All India Academy of Fine Arts, Calcutta, also proposed converting the Arts Section of the Indian Museum into a National Art Gallery with Rathindranath Tagore, Principal of the Government School of Art, Calcutta, making a bid to turn his gallery into the 'premier institution'.[24] Thus, by 1949, the three organisations in Bombay, Delhi and Calcutta were fighting to be made in charge of the representative institution of modern Indian art.

It was left to the 1949 Art Conference at Calcutta, organised by Government of India, to resolve the matter once and for all.[25] The government invited a consortium of artists and critics for this conference on visual arts — Stella Kramrisch, G. Venkatachalam, Nandalal Bose, Jamini Roy, O. C. Ganguly, Atul Bose, James H. Cousins and Percy Brown, among others — and asked for their suggestions on art institutions like the National Museum and the National Gallery of Art, and the educative role of art for the general public. On the issue of the Gallery, the participants at the seminar reacted in different ways. Some such as historian Dr Nihar Ranjan Ray encouraged the government to step in and set up the representative advisory body, while others like artist and founder member of the group in Delhi, Silpi Chakra, B. C. Sanyal, argued that it was wrong for the government to take the initiative away from the artists' hands.[26] In the end, the Conference called for the formation of a Central

[21] 'An Appeal for a National Art Gallery'.

[22] Very little information is available on this conference apart from the fact that AIFACS was voted as the representative body for art policy in the nation. One other such conference was held in Delhi before the next conference organised by AIAFA, Bombay, in 1948.

[23] The All India Association of Fine Arts, Bombay, was set up in 1946 with G. Venkatachalam as president and members like Karl Khandalvala. The Association organised the 3rd All India Conference for Arts in 1948 because it noted that the first two conferences in Delhi had not been able to form a central art organisation that was wholly representative. They received a sum of ₹21 lakh for arts, education and cultural activities from the Government of Bombay. They declared that arts did not depend on official support alone but needed individuals and groups to come together spontaneously. If AIFACS was interested in being an official body, AIAFA was asking for an autonomous artist association.

[24] Letter from Rathindranath Tagore, Principal Govt School of Art, Calcutta, 21 June 1949, cited in 'Resolutions Passed at Art Conference at Calcutta on 29 & 30th August 1949', Constitution of Central Advisory Board of Art, F.6 – 16/49-A-1, National Archives, Government of India, New Delhi, unpublished.

[25] In 1945, the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal put forward a proposal for establishment of a National Culture Trust, which would function as an autonomous and independent body, and would be non-official in its constitution. It would operate through appropriate agencies or the three academies: Academy of Letters to deal with Indian languages, Academy of Arts and Architecture, and Academy of Music, Drama and Drawing. The Government of India was keen to take this proposal forward and asked for recommendations from a specially appointed committee of Central Advisory Board of Education. The committee made the suggestion that the Trust be endowed with ₹4 crore to make independent annual grants. However, due to the financial difficulties the country was facing, the establishment of the Trust was postponed. In his inaugural speech Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Minister of Education, spoke of his decision to use the dedicated amount of ₹1 lakh earmarked in the 1949–50 budget to hold three conferences in the year — the first with visual arts, second with letters and third with music, dance and drama. English Translation of Hindustani Speech delivered by Honourable Maulana Abul Kalam Azad on 29 August 1949, inaugurating All India Conference on Arts at Calcutta, F.6 – 16/49-A-1, National Archives, Government of India, New Delhi, unpublished.

[26] Letters from Dr Nihar Ranjan Ray, Calcutta University, dated 8 June 1949 and B. C. Sanyal dated 13 July 1949,

Advisory Board of Art as a way out of the impasse (formed in 1950). It passed a resolution for the early establishment of the National Art Gallery and the improvement of the National Museum, as well as the formation of the three Akademis as part of a Sub Commission for Culture of the Indian National Commission for Cooperation with UNESCO.

Unwilling to relinquish the stewardship of what was to be the premier institution of modern art, AIFACS made last desperate attempts to carry on with its plan to set up the Gallery. In 1951, the Society was granted a suitable site measuring an acre of land at the crossing of Talkatora Road and Old Mill Road. A three-storey building was planned to house the Gallery and the Society offices. Nearly 75 artists marched in a procession from Parliament Street to take formal possession of the land. They carried two signboards indicating the sites of the Society office and the Gallery.[27] In 1953 the Society organised the Second International Exhibition of Contemporary Art in its new building, which the national daily *The Statesman* described as 'no less than Venice Beinnale'.[28] But it was too late for the Society, and the State-supported NGMA had already come into being by 1954.

The first attempt at setting up the National Art Gallery was made by an artist group whose founders owed their allegiance to the Bengal School and were, in keeping with the School's ideals, keen to institutionalise the category of 'national art'. The Bengal School's move to identify an indigenous form of art with national sovereignty had a specific function in the anti-colonial struggle. But with the passage of time, agendas had shifted, and from imagining itself as a site of resistance, the Indian state was now assuming a new authority as a postcolonial nation. AIFACS tried to address this shift by envisaging an art museum based on mass support, which organised art exhibitions as appendages to official conferences and meetings, and devised pragmatic roles for artists as makers of public commemorative art and assistants in government-driven mass education schemes. But the category of the national modern was being recalibrated by various members of the artist community, and above all by the state, and the museum would now be taken on a different course.

institutionalising the modern

We now enter the next phase: of the state overtaking the project. Already by 1947–48 there were signs of the state's interest in this project, with Jawaharlal Nehru personally intervening in the major purchase of the Amrita Sher-Gil collection (discussed at a later stage in this chapter) and the minor one of a few Brunner paintings.[29] These, among other moves, by the Indian state in general and Nehru in particular, made evident the desire to centralise and nationalise the modern art museum.

mentioned in a meeting held on 31 December 1949 to discuss the constitution of proposed art advisory board, compiled in F.6 – 16/49-A-1, National Archives, Government of India, New Delhi, unpublished.

[27] 'Editorial', *Art News*, vol. 5, no. 2, AIFACS, New Delhi, February–March 1951.

[28] Quoted in 'World Art Comes to India', *Roop Lekha*, vol. 24, no. 1 and 2, AIFACS, New Delhi, 1953.

[29] B. P. Singh, 'Arts, Cultural Pageants and the State: The Nehru–Azad Dialogue', *India's Culture, the State, the Arts and Beyond*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009, pp. 100–111. Singh looks into the purchase of the Brunner paintings by Jawaharlal Nehru. In June 1948, the prime minister visited Nainital and chanced upon paintings of two Hungarian artists Sass Brunner and her daughter Elizabeth Brunner. Touched by their sensitivity, he purchased a few of them, including the one of Mahatma Gandhi in meditation for his own collection. On his return to Delhi, he wrote to Abul Kalam Azad (14 June 1948) recommending the paintings be acquired by Government of India.

Azad referred the matter to the Ministry of Education (MOE) who solicited the help of R. N. Chakravarty, Chief Artist in Publications Division, MOE, and Barada Ukil for their opinions on the paintings. Both stated that the works were mediocre and did not deserve the price being asked. Nehru countered this assessment of the artists. The matter finally ended with the Government of India buying the works but not before the Ministry of Finance emphasised the need for prior clearance before making any financial commitments. It eventually led to the constitution of the art purchase committee for museums under the chairmanship of Vice President of India, with experts like Moti Chandra, Karl Khandalvala, Rai Krishnadas and others.

Meanwhile, another sequence was unfolding at the Burlington House, London, with the ceremonial 1947–48 exhibition titled *The Arts of India and Pakistan*. Organised by the Royal Academy of Art to mark the transfer of power in British India, the exhibition was followed by another version in New Delhi — *Masterpieces of Indian Art* at the Government House — in the winter of 1948. In her extensive essay on these ceremonial exhibitions that eventually led to the formation of the National Museum, Tapati Guha-Thakurta shows how the London exhibition was bracketed by sections on 'British Artists in India' at the start, and 'Modern Paintings, Drawings and Sculptures' at the end.[30] The exhibition catalogue rather apologetically acknowledged a motley section of Bengal school, Amrita Sher-Gil, Zainul Abedin, N. S. Bendre, F. N. Souza, Dhanraj Bhagat, and Kanwal Krishna, which were 'nothing comparable in aesthetic interest with the great achievements of Indian sculptors',[31] but were included nonetheless, to present a complete image of Indian art abroad. However, neither of these sections was carried over to the subsequent exhibition held in New Delhi. Here one sees a definite exclusion of the modern from 'this spectacle of India's art heritage … and we find ourselves fully in the grips of an art historical past'.[32] The modern was bypassed, and the great nation was conjured exclusively through its ancient and medieval art heritage.

While the mandate of the 'national' was being handed to the art objects from India's great past, the state had a different role in mind for modern art, and by extension an institution like the NGMA. It was seen as one among a series of cultural institutions set up in the postcolonial landscape of the 1940s and 1950s, which served to dislodge the modern from the discourse of the national. Geeta Kapur notes how culture becomes an important means to disentangle the modern from the nationalist polemic. (Plate 6.2.)

> The latter had often to speak in the name of tradition even as it covertly strengthened the desire for the modern. While national struggle had attempted to simulate a civilisational quest, the nation state was bound to privilege culture as a means of cohering contemporaniety.[33]

Under Nehru's leadership, a whole set of institutions were founded that carried the overall mandate of the modern. They were part of what Partha Chaterjee terms India's 'statist utopia'.[34] Nehru's opening remarks at the 1959 Seminar on Architecture organised by the Lalit Kala Akademi (LKA) reflected his position: 'The static condition of architecture in India in the last 200–300 years is a reflex of static condition of Indian mind. Even before the British came we were static and they came because we were static'.[35] And on his pet project of Chandigarh, a city designed anew by the great Swiss architect le Corbusier, he added,

> I welcome this one great experiment in India ... Many people argue over it — it is totally immaterial whether you like it or not ... You may squirm at the impact but it makes you think and imbibe new ideas ... What I like above all is not being tied down to what has been done by our forefathers and is thinking out in new terms, of light, air and ground, water and humans.[36]

[30] Tapati Guha-Thakurta, 'The Demands of Independence: From a National Exhibition to a National Museum', *Monuments, Objects, Histories: Institutions of Art in Colonial and Post-Colonial India*, New York: Columbia University Press and New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004, p. 277.

[31] *Ibid*., quoted by Guha-Thakurta from the Royal Academy of Arts catalogue *Exhibition of Art, Chiefly from the Dominions of India and Pakistan*, held at the Government House, London: Royal Academy of Arts, Burlington House, 1947–48, pp. 192–95.

[32] *Ibid*., p. 274.

[33] Geeta Kapur, 'Sovereign Subject: Ray's Appu', *When was Modernism: Essays on Contemporary Cultural Practice in India*, New Delhi: Tulika Books, 2000, p. 202.

[34] *Ibid*., p. 201.

[35] Inaugural speech by Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru at the 1959 Seminar on architecture, organised by LKA, Lalit Kala Akademi Archives, New Delhi.

[36] *Ibid*.

PLATE 6.2 • *A press picture of two women encountering N. S. Bendre's painting. Published in Georgia Lee Kangas, 'National Gallery of Modern Art: Art with a Difference'*, The Century, *9 December 1972. SOURCE:* COURTESY OF THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF MODERN ART, NEW DELHI.

The newly independent nation-state, under the leadership of an avowed moderniser like Nehru was interested in the propagandist role of the art museum in disseminating modernity among its citizens, as well as capitalising on its symbolic potential in 'signaling to the west that one was a reliable political ally imbued with proper respect and adherence to western symbols and values'.[37] (Plate 6.3)

[37] Carol Duncan, 'Art Museums and the Ritual of Citizenship', in Susan M. Pearce (ed.), *Interpreting Objects and Collections*, London: Routledge, 1994, p. 279.

The National Gallery of Modern Art was formally inaugurated by the Vice-President of India, Dr S. Radhakrishnan, on 29 March 1954 in New Delhi. It was located in Jaipur House which had been originally built in the 1930s as the winter palace of the Maharaja of Jaipur. German scholar and museologist Hermann Goetz was brought over from the Baroda Museum, where he had been the director between 1943 and 1954, and given charge of the institution. The Gallery opened with an exhibition of contemporary sculpture, apart from showcasing its initial collection of around 200 works, which consisted of paintings by Amrita Sher-Gil, Rabindranath Tagore, Jamini Roy, Nandalal Bose, and M. A. R. Chugtai, among others. The works displayed at the sculpture exhibition also doubled as the First National Exhibition of Modern Art,[38] and sculptor D. P. Roy Chowdhury's *Triumph of Labour* won the first prize and was commissioned to be made as a public sculpture on the lawns of the museum.

national gallery of modern art: the Sher-Gil collection

The core of the NGMA collection was, without doubt, a suite of 96 paintings by artist Amrita Sher-Gil that came into the hands of the state in 1948 (Plate 6.4). In many ways, it is this cache of paintings that determined the course of the institution. This section explores how the search for a reconfigured national modern that could translate the impulses and the potential of the 'new paradigm' found resolution, as much by design as by default, in the figure of Amrita Sher-Gil.[39]

[38] The competition is referred to in the *Hindustan Standard*, 7 July 1957.

[39] The flamboyant artist of mixed Indo-Hungarian parentage, Amrita Sher-Gil studied at the Ecole des Beaux, Paris, between 1929 and 1934. In 1933 she exhibited at the Grand Salon, where she won a medal for her painting *Young Girls* and was also elected an Associate. She returned to India at the end of 1934, taking on the mantle of an Indian artist, famously proclaiming 'Europe belongs to Picasso, Matisse and Braque and many others. India belongs only to me'. Trained in the aesthetics of post-Impressionism at art

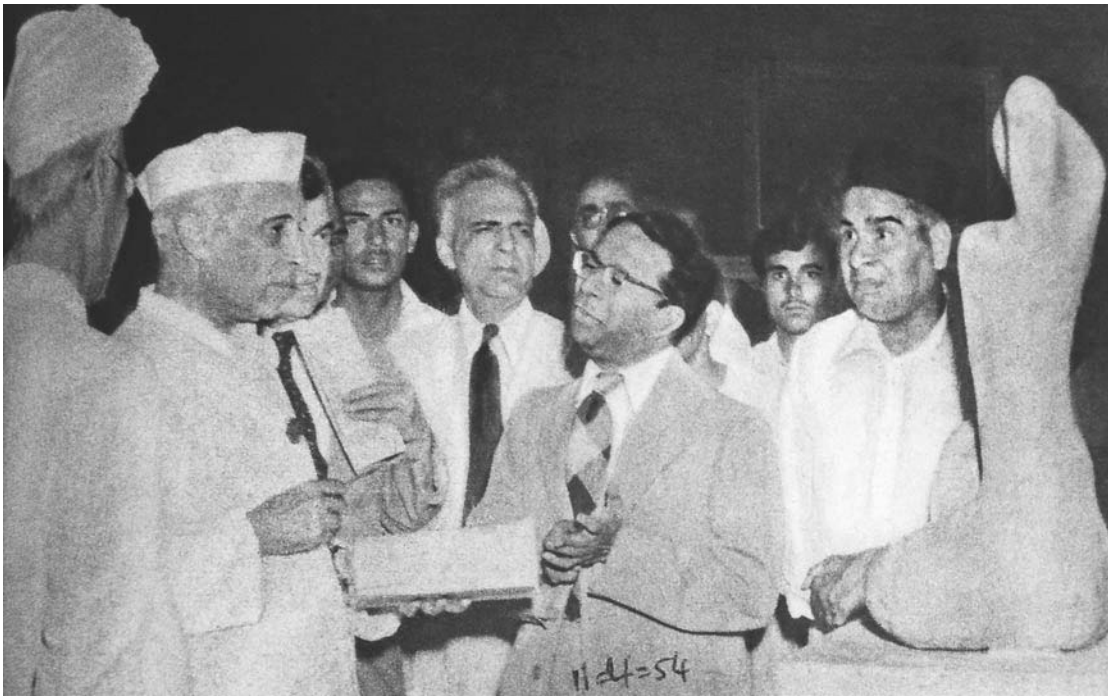

PLATE 6.3 • *Inauguration of NGMA at Jaipur House by President Dr S. Radhakrishnan, where a sculpture exhibition was held to mark the occasion: Dr Humayun Kabir, Secretary of Ministry of Education, explaining the sculpture 'Toilet' by D. P. Roy Chowdhury to Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. To the right, 'Flowers at thy Feet' by V. L. Kudelkar. Undated and without citation press image.* SOURCE: COURTESY OF THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF MODERN ART, NEW DELHI.

In 1947, when Amrita Sher-Gil's husband Dr Victor Eagen offered 33 paintings to the Government of India for sale, John Sargent, Secretary to Government of India, Department of Education, responded:

> It is unfortunate that at this moment we do not have a National Museum or National Gallery and no director to give us expert advice. There is no body equivalent to Royal Academy or British Museum Trustees to whom we could turn for similar advice.[40]

The Government of India solicited the advice of the Gwyer Committee — set up in 1946 under the leadership of Sir Maurice Gwyer, then Vice-Chancellor of University of Delhi — to chalk out guidelines for a Central National Museum of Art, Archaeology and Anthropology. They asked the Committee to evaluate the exhibits, the price they should be purchased at, as well as the conditions of the paintings. The Committee begged off these responsibilities saying it did not have the expertise to consider the field of modern Indian paintings. Meanwhile, the price quoted by Eagen for the paintings was forwarded to the Finance Ministry, which rejected the proposal to procure the collection.[41]

The matter might have ended prematurely but for the insistence of Sher-Gil's father, Umrao Singh Sher-Gil, who was keen to remove the paintings from Eagen's possession. Umrao Singh offered to

school, she moved towards a language of simplified realism to represent rural Indian population. Known for her personal beauty, her bohemian lifestyle and her wide circle of admirers and lovers, she flaunted a larger-than-life artistic persona of extreme passion and individualism. She is said to have had a brief but intense connection with Jawaharlal Nehru, whom she met through Congress leader Dewan Chaman Lal and his wife Helen. She died at the very young age of 29 in December 1941, a few days before her major solo exhibition in Lahore. Her untimely death was mourned at an almost national scale and public figures like Nehru and Gandhi sent condolences to the Sher-Gil family.

[40] Note by John Sargent, Secretary of Government of India, Department of Education, GOI, in file 'Paintings by Sher Gil: Proposal to take for Central National Museum', F.178–16/48–G–2, National Archives, New Delhi, unpublished.

[41] *Ibid*., Letter dated 3 August 1948, Director General Archaeology, Dr N. P. Chakravarti, reports to the Government of India on behalf of the Gwyer Committee that they will not be able to do a proper valuation of the paintings of Amrita Sher-Gil.

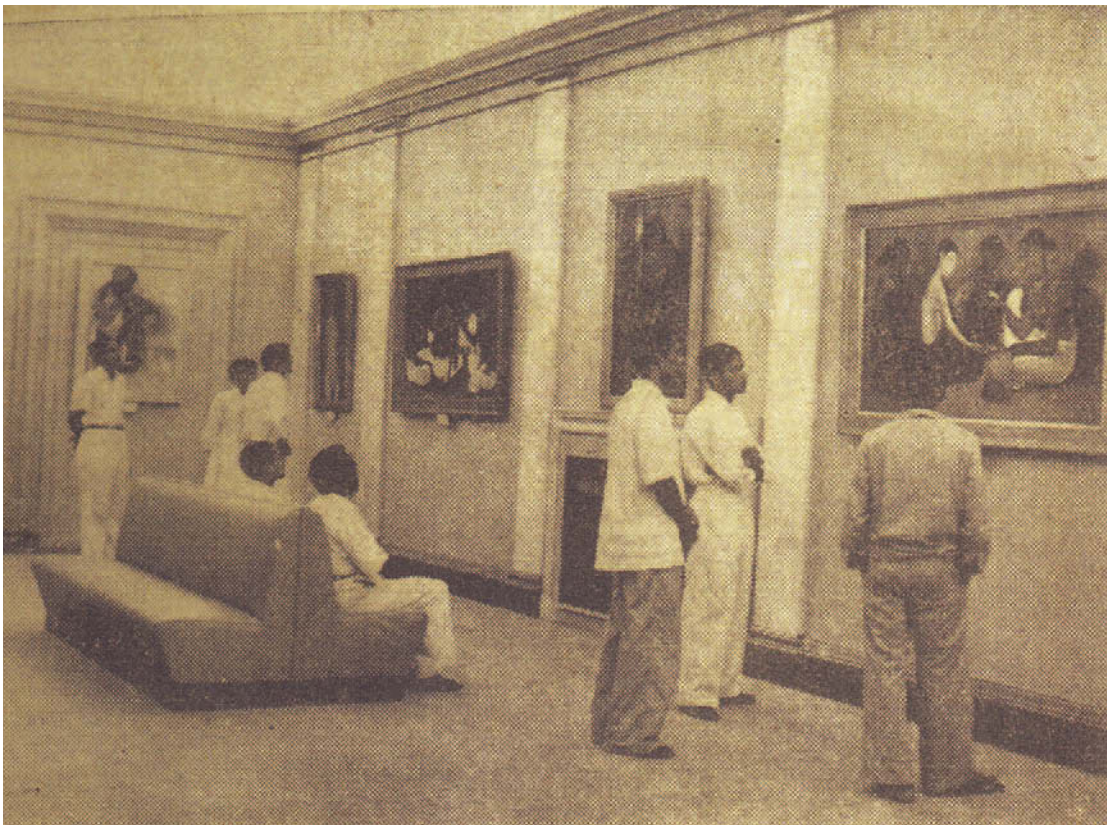

PLATE 6.4 • *A press image of the Sher-Gil room which was described as the pride of the gallery — air-conditioned with a sofa in the middle! Undated and without citation press image.* *SOURCE*: COURTESY OF THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF MODERN ART, NEW DELHI.

gift a large body of Sher-Gil's works to the nation, but on the precondition that the latter was able to obtain the paintings in her husband's collection. In a letter to Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, dated 23 April 1948, Umrao Singh wrote,

> Most of her earlier juvenile work, when she was at School of Art in Paris, is with us. We wish to give them freely to the nation, along with sketches and studies which Amrita had intended to destroy. They serve along with her early works to show the development of her art and talent … But if her later works are not actually acquired by our nation, then what good will the old style work, which she herself did not value, be.[42]

At this point, Nehru intervened to ensure the acquisition of the Sher-Gil paintings. He took up the matter with Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, made apparent by this letter written to Azad on 7 March 1948,

> I think it desirable for government to acquire her paintings as a whole. Just a few chosen ones would not be good enough. It would be possible to get the paintings from Amrita's parents without payment provided we make it clear we are getting the collection from the others also. As for the husband, he is not very well off and can easily sell them separately and may well do so if we delay.[43]

[42] Note by John Sargent, Secretary of Government of India, Department of Education, GOI, in file 'Paintings by Sher Gil: Proposal to take for Central National Museum', F.178–16/48–G–2, National Archives, New Delhi, unpublished; Letter by Umrao Singh Sher-Gil to Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Minister of Education, GOI, dated 23 April 1948.

[43] Note by John Sargent, Secretary of Government of India, Department of Education, GOI, in file 'Paintings by Sher

The collection was thus bought and moved into the hands of the state, much before the state was able to establish any institution that would provide them with a suitable home. In the initial years the paintings were stored at Central Asian Antiquities Museum, a small museum set up in 1929 with the antiquities the Hungarian archaeologist Sir Aurel Stein collected from Central Asia and China. They were brought out from time to time for display at the Parliament House or at important meetings like the inaugural session of the Indian National Commission for Cooperation with UNESCO in April 1949.

In 1953, the Gallery had a nucleus of 163 paintings, predominantly consisting of Amrita Sher-Gil works, apart from significant collections of the other 'three pioneering modernists' — Rabindranath Tagore, Jamini Roy and Gaganendranath Tagore. The press reviews of the opening of NGMA in 1954 lavished praise on the Sher-Gil rooms for their complete chronological display. Art critic Charles Fabri wrote: 'The glory of the collection is Amrita Sher-Gil … Paintings that are from her childhood to her years in Hungary, Budapest and Paris, right up to her last unfinished canvas found on her easel'.[44]

One can see primacy accorded to the Sher-Gil collection in the display and exhibition policies of the Gallery through the 1950s and 1960s. In these initial decades the Gallery concentrated on determining the contours of its permanent collection and did very little else apart from holding periodic solo exhibitions of Amrita Sher-Gil and Rabindranath Tagore. And yet it becomes increasingly clear that the Gallery, despite being the most important repository of Sher-Gil's work, was not able to generate a critical and historically-rooted discourse on the artist. In 1964, the entire collection of Sher-Gil paintings was exhibited and received flak for poor display, lack of information and scholarly intervention.[45]

So if the display was not based on a critical positioning of the works, what motivated their presentation? It was, interestingly enough, the fragile physical condition of the works. Eagen, while handing over the collection to the Gallery placed certain preconditions about it being looked after by an expert and also sending some canvases to London for treatment to prevent them from cracking. This was duly carried out with some works being sent to the National Art Gallery, London.[46] The deteriorating oil paintings were placed in the only air-conditioned room in the NGMA when it opened, and this fact also contributed to it being the most viewed gallery. In a newspaper interview, the Director Prodosh Das Gupta declared:

> The Sher-Gil room is obviously the pride of the Gallery, because it is air-conditioned, it is very comfortably devised. The light is soft and diffused and the pictures well-displayed. There is a sofa in the middle for the visitors to take it in … This is the favourite room with the visiting foreigner. Here he sees eternal India set down beautifully.[47]

Gil: Proposal to take for Central National Museum', F.178–16/48–G–2, National Archives, New Delhi, unpublished; Letter by Jawaharlal Nehru to Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Minister of Education, GOI dated 7 March 1948.

[44] Charles Fabri, 'Review of NGMA opening', *Marg*, vol. 8, no. 3, 2nd Quarter, 1954.

[45] Charles Fabri, 'Art Chronicle', *Delhi Review*, *Lalit Kala Contemporary*, 3, New Delhi: Lalit Kala Akademi, 1957.

Eight years later, in 1972, a larger and more ambitious exhibition of Sher-Gil's works was mounted in Delhi. Accompanied by an important publication — the commemorative issue of *Marg* (*Amrita Sher-gil: Essays*, Bombay: Marg, 1972) — this exhibition offered an important scholarly re-evaluation of her oeuvre. However the exhibition was not organised by NGMA but by an independent group of artists and scholars. The exhibition committee, consisting of Mulk Raj Anand, Geeta Kapur, Krishen Khanna, Vivan Sundaram, Gulammohamed Sheikh, and Manu Desai, borrowed 34 paintings from the NGMA collection, which were shown alongside other works from private collections, at galleries in the NGMA and LKA simultaneously. Photographs, memorabilia, newspaper articles and reproductions from periodicals were also displayed in the exhibition to provide an appropriate scholarly and historical frame.

[46] Prodosh Das Gupta in a newspaper interview published in column titled 'Yesterday in Delhi, at the NGMA', *The Statesman*, 21 July 1957.

[47] *Ibid*.

In 1958 a controversy arose when Indira Sundaram, Amrita's sister, wrote to Nehru complaining that more than three-fourths of the Sher-Gil collection had been locked away and stored in a shabby condition. Prodosh Das Gupta defended the Gallery's limited display of Sher-Gil works. He pointed out that in no museum are all the works of an artist in the collection on display; further, only a few Sher-Gils could be shown as NGMA had air-conditioning in one gallery only. The matter ended with the three air-conditioned rooms showcasing around 50 Sher-Gil paintings as part of the permanent display.[48]

Thus, we see a number of events converging — ranging from Sher-Gil's charismatic artistic persona and untimely death, the subsequent family feud and Nehru's personal intervention in resolving it, the sheer range of the collection, the fragile material conditions of many works and the fact that the acquisition preceded the institution by six years — to place the Sher-Gil collection at the centre of the Gallery. How was this positioning of the collection read, and how did it determine the course of the institution? (Plate 6.5)

Even as the government was moving to acquire the Sher-Gil paintings in 1948, Barada Ukil picked up on a rumour that the Government of India was sourcing paintings of modern artists. He cautioned the government not to allow more than half a dozen paintings of any single artist to be hung in the upcoming museum.[49] Writer and theosophist James H. Cousins also voiced his concern about the possible 'elevation of a particular style' and instead hoped that the national gallery, when established, would 'admit constituents to equal rank'.[50]

This wish for a museum, that was equally representative of the various movements, was in diametric opposition to a school of staunch modernists, best represented by art historian and museologist W. G. Archer. Archer, who had served from 1931 to 1948 as a civil servant in India, returned to England after India's independence to become the Keeper of the Indian collections at the Victoria and Albert Museum. Well respected for his research and scholarship on Indian folk, popular and miniature traditions, as well modern art, he was commissioned between 2 January and 26 March 1954 by the Ministry of Education, Government of India, to conduct a three-month survey of national, state and art galleries and provide suggestions for their better administration. Archer complimented the government on its Sher-Gil collection, which he described as 'a superb achievement, giving the Gallery a solid core of greatness'. At the same time, he candidly stated: 'It has to be remembered that the actual number of living artists whose works really deserve to be represented is probably small and it takes a great deal of courage to recognise originality'.[51]

The Gallery aligned with a more exclusive discourse that had gained ground in the art world, which on one hand dismissed the relevance of the Bengal School and on the other anointed Rabindranath Tagore, Gaganendranath Tagore, Amrita Sher-Gil, and Jamini Roy as the initiators of modern Indian art. Journals such as *Lalit Kala Contemporary* and *Marg* in their early issues discussed the problems of Bengal revivalism — Goetz described the work as 'an expression of mass mentality, … represents not modern Indian art but another step in its direction',[52] and Archer dismissed

[48] 'More of Amrita Sher-Gil', *The Statesman*, 30 July 1959.

[49] Barada Ukil made these suggestions to the Government of India, in the Special Independence Number of *Roop Lekha*, vol. 20, no. 1, AIFACS, New Delhi, 1948.

[50] James Cousins, 'Why Survey is Necessary', among list of papers distributed to the invitees at the Calcutta Conference, All India Conference on Arts at Calcutta, F.6 – 16/49-A-1, National Archives, Government of India, New Delhi, unpublished.

[51] File on W. G. Archer's letter to Ashfaque Husain, F.3-112/54 — A.2, National Archives, Government of India, 1954, unpublished.

[52] Hermann Goetz, 'The Great Crisis from Tradition to Modern Art, *Lalit Kala Contemporary*, The Modern Movement of Art in India, New Delhi: Lalit Kala Akademi, 1954, pp. 13–14.

PLATE 6.5 • *Display of Amrita Sher-Gil paintings from the NGMA archives, undated with no description about the mode of presentation.* SOURCE: COURTESY OF THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF MODERN ART, NEW DELHI.

it saying it did not introduce modern art to India nor were its actual products of artistic moment.[53]

It was also the model of the artist that Santiniketan presented — working within a gurukula system in a self-effacing style — that was rejected. The prerequisite for a modern Indian artist was 'confidence, a determination to cultivate original sensations and responses, and courage to express a personal ideal'.[54] Thus the nationalist cultural discourse in art was set aside for a more metropolitan modernism that Sher-Gil and the subsequent generation of artists from the 1940s and 1950s represented.[55]

encountering abstraction: The identity discourse

If in the first phase of its life the NGMA saw a metropolitan modernist practice positioned at the centre by default, the second phase of the 1970s and 1980s witnessed an over-determined national modern being put in place by its director L. P. Sihare (1971–84). Our account of the NGMA now shifts

[53] W. G. Archer, *India and Modern Art*, London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1959, p. 17.

[54] *Ibid*., p. 35.

[55] Some works of Bengal School artists — A. R. Chugtai and Nandalal Bose, among others — found their way into the collection in these early years. But it was only in the 1970s that the collection was updated and displayed by the then Director of the Gallery, L. P. Sihare. In 1972, Sihare organised an exhibition *Abanindranath Tagore and his Disciples* and wrote that this homage to the artist provided a chance to the public to 'finally see the works from the Bengal school in the collection'.

This updating was made possible by the birth centenaries of artists like Nandalal Bose, Abanindranath Tagore, Jamini Roy, and Ramkinker Baij celebrated in this period which made collections available. For example an enormous body of 11,000 rare items of Nandalal Bose was bought by the Centre in 1983 and 300 works of Baij were sourced in 1976 when the Vishwa Bharati University could not afford to buy it. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi took personal interest in these acquisitions because of her own association with Santiniketan as a student.

forward to the 1970s to look at how the institution responded to questions of abstraction and identity that were being debated in the art world.

Already by 1959, one saw a movement towards abstraction among practitioners with the artist Ambadas organising the first-ever group exhibition of non-representational paintings in Bombay. This was followed by the formation of Group 1890 in 1962 — consisting of artists like Jeram Patel, J. Swaminathan, Gulammohammed Sheikh, Raghav Kaneria, Himmat Shah, Jyoti Bhatt, among others — that was positing an indigenous abstraction.

Indian artists also came in contact with American abstraction expressionism, via Rockfeller scholarships made available to artists' for residencies in New York in the 1960s and 1970s by the J. D. Rockfeller III Fund. In 1967, a large official exhibition of modern American paintings titled *Trends in American Painting* travelled to India. The exhibition was organised by MOMA, and as part of its programming the noted modernist critic Clement Greenberg arrived in Delhi and spoke rather bluntly at a public lecture about the 'lack of exportable art in India'![56]

But even as artists in India were increasingly exposed to international trends in art, they were problematising the internationalism of their earlier generation in the face of a growing third-world consciousness and other political developments; of world-wide students' unrest, the Negritude movement, etc. The 1960s was a time when urgent questions of identity and language were addressed imaginatively by a group of artists. J. Swaminathan was militating against the centrality of Paris and New York, and instead looking at references ranging from Indian miniatures to tantric and tribal images to understand their approach to space and symbolism, K. G. Subramanyan was aligning with the craft traditions of India in terms of techniques, processes, materials and language, and K. C. S. Paniker was turning to calligraphy and the format of traditional manuscript scrolls as possible pictorial references. The movement was given a political urgency in the 1970s with critic Geeta Kapur coining the term 'indigenism', an imperative movement for 'asserting a nation's history, tradition, its surviving culture and its environment' in a post-colonial context.[57]

In this period of artistic ferment the terms 'modern', 'national', 'international' and 'identity', and the relationships between them, were being re-calibrated. It was part of a larger movement of the 1960s where abstract art was finally being acknowledged as shaped by multiple modernities. As Kobena Mercer notes in his Introduction to *Discrepant Abstraction*, at last there was an understanding that abstraction contained the 'material entanglements of race, nationality and ethnicity'.[58]

neo-tantra as solution

With Sihare's assumption of Directorship in 1971, the NGMA entered a phase of intense activity. Armed with art criticism and museology degrees from the Faculty of Fine Arts, MS University, Baroda and a PhD from the Institute of Fine Arts, New York, Sihare arrived at the museum with a specific academic position and distinct ideas on how to apply his theoretical knowledge within the institutional space. His doctoral thesis on *The Oriental Influences on Wassily Kandinsky and Piet Mondrian 1909–17* played a determining influence on his outlook and led him to adopt a classical modernism from early 20th-century Europe as his paradigm, and to seek stylistic affinities and equivalences in the Indian context.

An efficient administrator, who converted the Gallery into an active centre by organising special exhibitions and weekly film screenings, Sihare's curatorial premises were however sometimes contentious (Plates 6.6. and 6.7). His faithful

[56] J. Swaminathan, 'The New Promise', reproduced in *Lalit Kala Contemporary*, no. 40, Special Issue on J. Swaminathan, New Delhi: Lalit Kala Akademi, March 1995, p. 19.

[57] Geeta Kapur, 'In Quest of Identity', *Vrishchik*, Baroda, 1972.

[58] Kobena Mercer, 'Introduction', in *Discrepant Abstraction*, Massachusetts: Institute of Visual Art, The MIT Press, 2006, pp. 6–27.

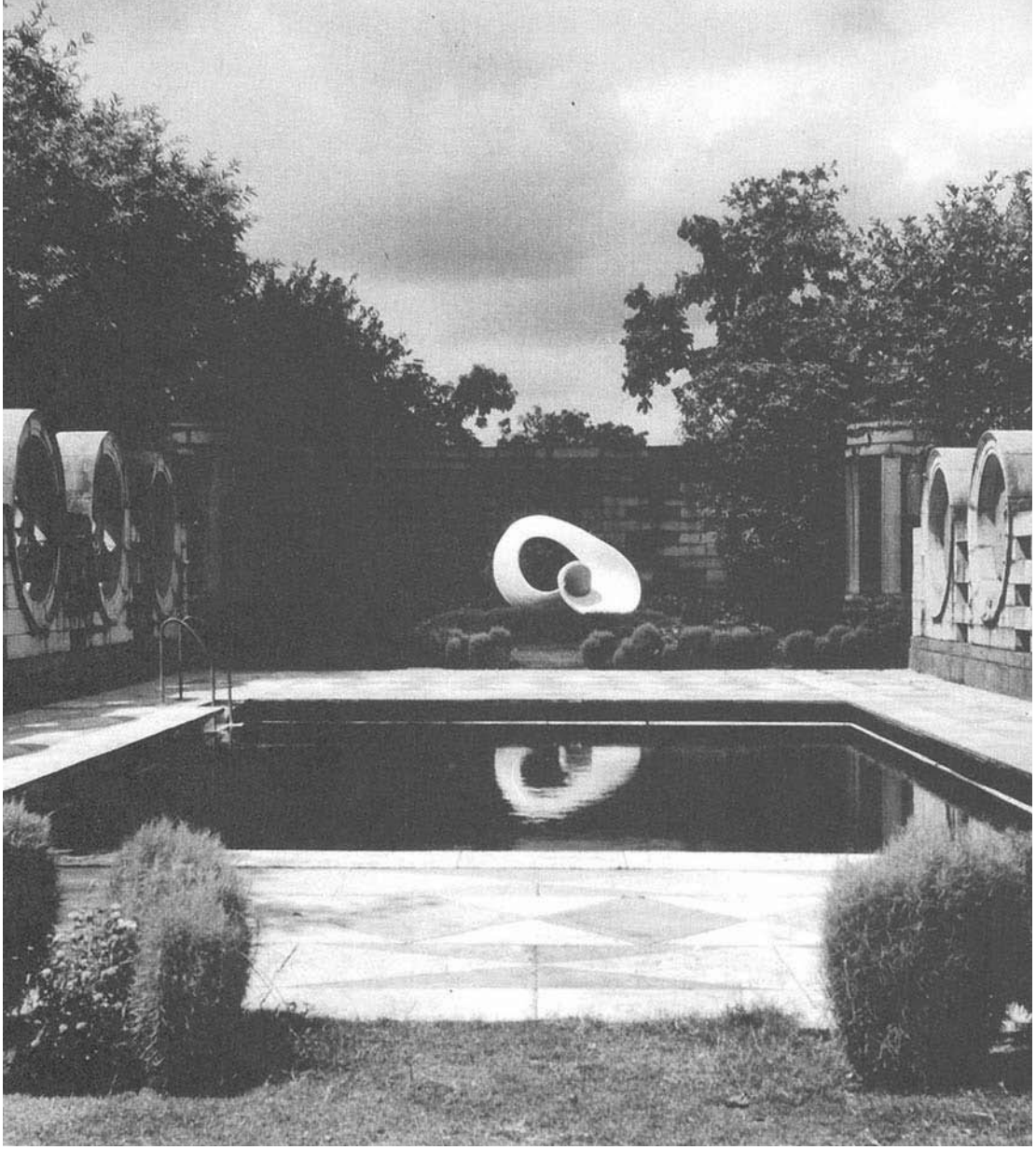

PLATE 6.6 • *An installation shot of Sankho Choudhari's sculpture displayed on the lawns of NGMA. Held in 1971, this was the first exhibition organised at the gallery of a living artist. Thirty-four sculptures were on display.* SOURCE: COURTESY OF THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF MODERN ART, NEW DELHI.

adherence to the canon of modern Western art and its literal application to the Indian art scene led to false moves, such as setting up rooms that classified the collection under heads like surrealism, expressionism and cubism in the early 1970s. Sihare was not interested in historically locating or problematising any of the terms; instead he published handbooks titled *Selected Surrealist Paintings from NGMA Collection* followed by *Selected Expressionist Paintings from NGMA Collection*. He held the view that these were key movements of inspiration for Indian artists, while others like fauvism, dadaism and futurism had not fired the Indian artist's imagination in the same way. He heralded Rabindranath Tagore as the pioneer of both expressionism and surrealism in India and Gaganendranath Tagore as the first Indian cubist (Plate 6.8).

When accused of pigeonholing artists into these imitative 'isms' and categories, Sihare maintained his position as one who was providing a historical framework to the work. 'We are an international

PLATE 6.7 • *Museum goes Public: In 1978, NGMA purchased a bus that could be converted into a mobile exhibition. This programme for popularising modern art at a grassroots level was taken for the first time by NGMA.* SOURCE: COURTESY OF THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF MODERN ART, NEW DELHI.

family. Whenever you come across fantasy, explorations of the mind, you have to put them in surrealism. It would be intellectually dishonest not to do so',[59] he averred.

In a public lecture on 'How to Appreciate Modern Art', Sihare put the onus of the public's ill-informed reverence for modern art on the museums which had 'nothing to offer in the form of first-rate examples of modern paintings by those who made history'.[60] And keeping this in mind he organised a spate of international exhibitions during the 1970s and early 1980s.

For him the concept of exchange, of international exhibitions, was inspired by the highest ideals of the sharing of cultural wealth, but he lamented that things turned out quite differently in practice. Despite making commitments to send high-quality works to India, Sihare learnt that the first-world countries found ways to escape their moral and professional responsibilities by sending works that were not classified as 'Masterpieces'. On the other hand, the Indian government was always pressuring its own museums to send some of their best works in whatever condition as soon as cultural agreements were signed. Sihare's staunch nationalism was displayed in his demanding only the best works from other countries.

In the early years he concentrated on showing print and photography exhibitions (thus enlarging

[59] L. P. Sihare in an interview with Geeti Sen, 'The Winds of Change', *India Today*, 15 August 1976.

[60] Quoted in the article 'How to Appreciate Modern Art', *National Herald*, 9 September 1975.

the scope of the gallery to include these mediums) and by the late 1970s he was able to attract exhibitions of original works. He had high expectations from these shows and was constantly pushing the organisers to send their best quality works as a sign of the importance they gave to the NGMA, and by larger association, the Indian nation-state. He was equally keen to alter the unprofessional image of Indian museums in their managing of art pieces. Between 1977 and 1981, exhibitions of French paintings, works by Paul Klee and Enrst Barlach, and collections from National Gallery of Prague and Philadelphia Museum of Art arrived in quick succession. In 1983, when the exhibition of Rodin came to town under the Indo-French Cultural Exchange, Sihare was vocal about certain 'shortcomings'. He wrote in the catalogue: 'The famous *Gates of Hell*, the publicised true-size monument of *The Burghers of Calais* and over life-size sculpture of Balzac are missing. Except for one comparatively insignificant marble *The Source* some of the famous marble works are not included'.[61]

If contemporary Indian art, in this scheme of things, was a second-rate version of the original from elsewhere, it was traditional art that offered hope for Sihare. It had been a source of influence for the Western artists and would provide Indian artists with similar impetus.

> Traditional art of India has so many elements of modern art. Look at the colours in Indian art — it is free from traditional, natural role … Artists like Rodin, Kandinsky, Klee greatly admired Indian art. There can be a breakthrough in modern art here, a breakthrough.[62]

In 1982, a somewhat hastily put-together exhibition titled *Trends in Modern Indian Art* accompanied Prime Minister Indira Gandhi on her America trip. Five decades of modern Indian paintings were presented at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institute, Washington. Sihare was quoted by the American press saying:

> A few years ago such an exhibition would have been impossible because there was nothing of caliber to send. We have not produced any Picassos, Braques, Mattisses or Legers, but what has been produced in

PLATE 6.8 • *Director L. P. Sihare earnestly explaining Duchamp's urinal, part of the exhibition 'Dada Key Documents: 1916–1960', organised in collaboration with Max Muller Bhavan Goethe-Institut, to an amused Ram Niwas Mirdha, Cabinet Minister, and other dignitaries.* SOURCE: COURTESY OF THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF MODERN ART, NEW DELHI.

[61] L. P. Sihare, catalogue text accompanying exhibition *Rodin*, arranged under Indo-French Cultural Exchange Programme, NGMA, New Delhi, December 1982–January 1983.

[62] Quoted in Bernard Weinraub, 'New Delhi: Quiet Rhythm of Culture', *New York Times*, 5 March 1973.

> the past ten years certainly merits the attention of the international art world.[63]

Sihare was referring to the neo-tantra movement where artists like G. R. Santosh, Biren De and Om Prakash had explored the formal, spiritual and metaphysical qualities of tantra. Neo-tantra as a school had gained momentum from Ajit Mookherjee's publications *Tantra Art* (1967) and *Tantra Asana* (1971),[64] in which he brought to prominence the esoteric religious practices developed by both Hinduism and Buddhism of the medieval period. Tantric religion had developed complex visualisations and meditational aids in the form of *mandala*s and symbolic diagrams whose coded meanings were embodied in combinations of geometric elements. To many modern Indian artists, tantric diagrams offered an 'Indian' visual vocabulary that resonated with international trends of abstraction in art. How quickly the neo-tantric school gained prominence on the Indian art scene can be gauged by the fact that the LKA devoted a whole issue of its contemporary arts journal, *Lalit Kala Contemporary*, to it in 1971. In his editorial in this volume, S. A. Krishna noted that Indian artists no longer journeyed to the West and were instead making an excursion into the spiritual and visionary realm. In the same year the Akademi sent an exhibition of Neo-tantra art to Montreal.

We can see how Sihare furthers the institutional acceptance of this movement. He mentions abstraction as an influential art movement in India in the 1978 catalogue of *Contemporary Indian Art Exhibition* sent to Damascus, but by the early 1980s the category of abstract art is subsumed into the 'Neo-tantric' which becomes the overarching category. It is as though the repeated criticisms that Sihare faced earlier in his career, over his prescriptive imposition of the categories of modern Western art on modern Indian art, pushed him in the opposite direction, where he ended by producing an overly Indianised, traditional interpretation of abstraction. The move was in many ways reminiscent of E. B. Havell's emphasis on the transcendental and spiritual as key markers of Indian identity.

It is somewhat ironical that the NGMA picked neo-tantra as 'exportable art', sending it to Germany, America and Australia as part of the *Festivals of India* in the 1980s when it was already being discredited as a movement within India. But for Sihare, this was the culmination of his search for a nationalist version of abstraction that explored Indian esoteric doctrines, like the masters of abstract art Kandinsky, Mondrian and Klee. By the early 1980s, Neo-tantric art became India's chief export item, part and parcel of the *Festivals of India*.

The fact remains that even though the neo-tantra exhibition that was conceived in order to establish India's status within an international community, it actually dramatised conventional versions of the country's self-image. The stereotyping of differences between the East and West and assertion of past glories were strengthened in the process.

conclusion

The modern art museum is a necessary symbol of a postcolonial nation-state enacting its commitment to the universalising values of modernism. It is an important institution for any emerging nation's self-image in the international world. But having accepted the need for this ritual enactment, we see the nation-state struggling to find an appropriate form for this institution. In a country like India where the constructs of nation and heritage seem irrevocably bound together, the modern is hard-put to find its own space. One only needs to compare the formation of the National Museum and the National Gallery of Modern Art to illustrate this point. The formation of the National Museum was a grand happening, whose history and aspirations ran parallel to that of the newly independent nation-state. The plea to have such a museum was made with great passion from 1912 onwards by archaeologists, political leaders and policy-makers. And soon after Independence, it played the vital symbolic role of performing the centre–state relationship in a new

[63] Quoted in *Rocky Mountain News*, 5 August 1982 and *Baltimore Sun*, 27 July 1982.

[64] Ajit Mookerjee, *Tantra Art: Its Philsophy and Physics*, New Delhi: Kumar Gallery, 1966; Ajit Mookerjee, *Tantra Asana: A Way to Self-Realization,* Basel: Ravi Kumar, 1971.

democratic republic — by regaining control over art objects in private hands and princely collections and casting them as national heritage; and by establishing central control over the institution of the museum, which was more or less passed into the hands of the state in the period of Viceroy Curzon.

The NGMA, on the other hand, is a cautious governmental ritual. Having been willed into existence by the state, its history has been subject to a number of accidental circumstances that in turn determined its course. In the initial years the Sher-Gil collection, which came into its possession much before the formation of the actual institution, made the Gallery align with a modernist practice that was progressive, cosmopolitan and in conversation with an international modernism. It was a practice that was supported by a generation of powerful writers and intellectuals like Mulk Raj Anand and W. G. Archer who were close to the political establishment. But despite this 'solid core of greatness',[65] the emphasis within the Gallery remained on marking the moments of modernism's origin. Accordingly, it enshrined the four initiators of modern art in India — Rabindranath Tagore, Amrita Sher-Gil, Jamini Roy, and Gaganendranath Tagore — even as the new generation of Progressive Artists' Groups sprung up all over the country. The mandate of making sense of the current art movements was handed over to another cultural institution set up in the same year as NGMA — LKA. The Academy was an autonomous body governed by artists, scholars and government nominees but without any government interference in its activities. The NGMA thus absolved itself from needing to respond to the current art scene or needs of the artists, working with a more classical understanding of a museum as a historical and highly insulated institution.

Through the 1950s and 1960s, in the absence of effective leadership or scholarship to steer it, the institution seemed at a loss on how the way to further its project of the historical modern. It was only by the early 1970s, with the coming of L. P. Sihare as director, that this problem was surmounted. Under his dynamic and sometimes controversial leadership, the Gallery updated collections and provided the art audience and larger public with access to modern international art. However, it was Sihare's attempts to institutionalise neo-tantra as the national modern art movement that proved problematic. The Gallery took on imaginative debates around language and identity in the postcolonial context but found a rather banal application for it. The fact that exhibitions of neo-tantra were mainly devised for the *Festivals of India* is also telling — and much has been written about these festivals organised by countries that 'had huge international debt, cheap labour markets, valuable exports managed by multinationals and a gradually privatising state industry under the IMF'.[66]

The Gallery's initiative came at a time when the state's role in framing modern and contemporary art was already being usurped by the market. In the last three decades of liberalised Indian economy, the private sector, art market and global art exhibitions have provided modern and contemporary Indian art with evolving institutional frameworks. That, of course, is another story.

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[65] File on W. G. Archer's letter to Ashfaque Husain, F.3-112/54 — A.2, National Archives, Government of India, 1954.

[66] Brian Wallis, 'Selling Nations, International Exhibitions and Cultural Diplomacy in Museum Cultures', in Daniel J. Sherman and Irit Rogoff (eds), *Histories, Discourses, Spectacles*, London: Routledge, 1994, p. 227.

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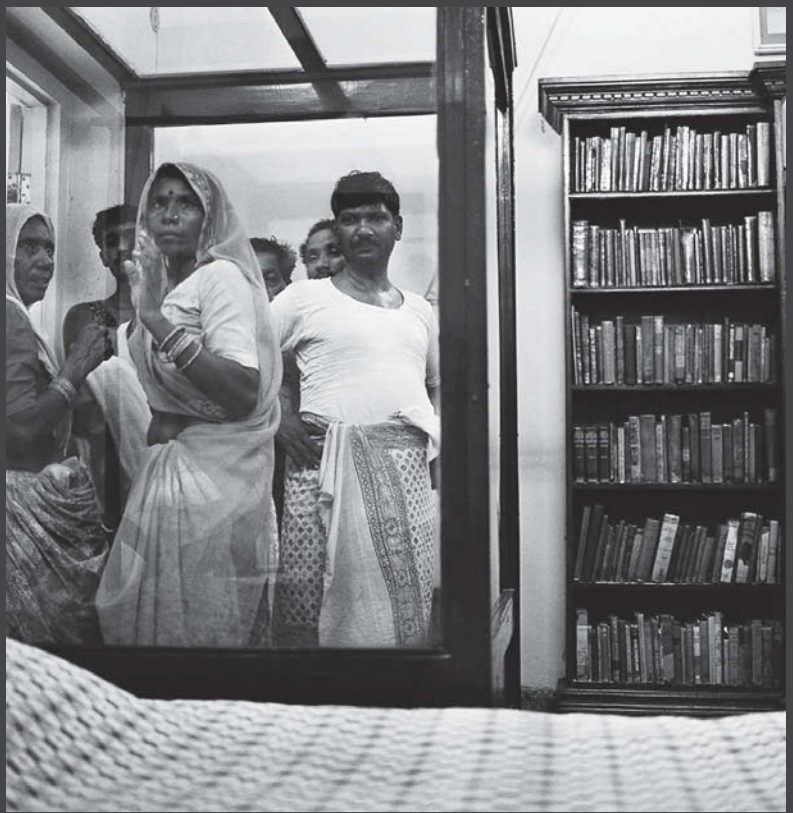

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7

museu

museums are good to think

heritage on view in India

Arjun Appadurai &
Carol A. Breckenridge

One of the striking facts about complex societies such as India is that they have not surrendered learning principally to the formal institutions of schooling. In this type of complex society, urban groups tend to monopolise postsecondary schooling and the upper middle class tends to control the colleges and universities. In such societies, therefore, learning is more often tied to practical apprenticeship and informal socialisation. Also, and not coincidentally, these are societies in which history and heritage are not yet parts of a bygone past that is institutionalised in history books and museums. Rather, heritage is a live component of the human environment and thus a critical part of the learning process. These observations are particularly worth noting since societies such as India are often criticised for having created educational institutions where learning does not thrive and where credentialism has become a mechanical mode for selection in an extremely difficult economic context. Informal means of learning in societies such as India are not, therefore, mere ethnographic curiosities. They are real cultural resources that (properly understood and used) may well relieve the many artificial pressures placed upon the formal educational structure. Museums are an emergent component of this world of informal education, and what we learn about museums in India will tell us much of value about learning, seeing and objects, which in turn should encourage creative and critical approaches to museums (and informal learning arrangements in general) elsewhere.

Museums in India look simultaneously in two directions. They are a part of a transnational order of cultural forms that has emerged in the last two centuries and unites much of the world, especially its urban areas.[1] Museums also belong to the alternative forms of modern life and thought that are emerging in nations and societies throughout the world. These alternative forms tend to be associated with media, leisure and spectacle, are often associated with self-conscious national approaches to heritage, and are tied up with transnational ideologies of development, citizenship and cosmopolitanism. Conducting an investigation of museums, therefore, entails being sensitive to a shared transnational idiom for the handling of heritage while simultaneously being aware that this heritage can take very different national forms.

museums and heritage

Although there is a growing literature (largely by scholars outside the museum world) that

[1] See, for example, Arjun Appadurai, 'The Global Ethnoscape: Notes and Queries for a Transnational Anthropology', in R. G. Fox (ed.), *Recapturing Anthropology: Working in the Present*, Santa Fe, N. M.: School of American Research, 1991.

concentrates on museums, collecting, objects, and heritage, these discussions do not generally extend to museums in India. Our concern is to build on a few recent efforts in this direction as well as some earlier ones,[2] so that comparative evidence from non-Western, postcolonial societies can be brought into the mainstream of theory and method in this area.

In anthropology, there is a renewed interest in objects, consumption and collection more generally.[3] What emerges from the literature on this topic is that objects in collections create a complex dialogue between the classificatory concerns of connoisseurs and the self-reflective politics of communities; that the presence of objects in museums represents one stage in the objects' cultural biographies;[4] and that such classified objects can be critical parts of the 'marketing of heritage'.[5] Here we are reminded that objects' meanings have always reflected a negotiated settlement between longstanding cultural significations and more volatile group interests and objectives.

A related set of discussions explicitly links museums to material culture in a consciously historical way.[6] We are reminded that archaeological and ethnographical collections emerged out of a specific set of political and pedagogical aims in the history of anthropology;[7] that collections and exhibitions cannot be divorced from the larger cultural contexts of philanthropy and ethnic or national identity formation; that anthropologists and 'natives' are increasingly engaged in a dialogue out of which cultural identity emerges; and that museums contribute to the larger process by which popular culture is formed. As far as India is concerned, museums seem less a product of philanthropy and more a product of the conscious agenda of India's British rulers, which led them to excavate, classify, catalogue, and display India's artefactual past to itself. This difference affects the ethos of Indian museums today, and also affects the cultural dynamics of viewing and learning.

Another relevant body of literature emphasises the relationship between museums and their publics as well as their educational mission.[8] For the most

[2] For a more recent work, see Carol A. Breckenridge, 'The Aesthetics and Politics of Colonial Collecting: India at World Fairs', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 31, no. 2, 1989, pp. 195–216. Earlier efforts include Ray Desmond, *The India Museum, 1801–1879*, London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1982; Hermann Goetz, 'The Baroda Museum and Picture Gallery', *Museum*, vol. 7, no. 1, 1954, pp. 15–19; and Grace Morley, 'Museums in India', *Museum*, 18, no. 4, 1965, pp. 220–50.

[3] Arjun Appadurai (ed.), *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986; Burton Benedict (ed.), *The Anthropology of World's Fairs: San Francisco's Panama Pacific International Exposition of 1915*, Berkeley: Scholar, 1983; James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988; Virginia R. Dominguez, 'The Marketing of Heritage', *American Ethnologist*, vol. 13, no. 3, 1986, pp. 546–55; Nelson H. H. Graburn (ed.), *Ethnic and Tourist Arts: Cultural Expressions from the Fourth World*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976.

[4] Igor Kopytoff, 'The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process', in Arjun Appadurai (ed.), *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.

[5] Dominguez, 'The Marketing of Heritage'.

[6] Michael Ames, *Museums, the Public, and Anthropology: A Study in the Anthropology of Anthropology*, Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1986; Douglas Cole, *Captured Heritage: The Scramble for Northwest Coast Artifacts*, Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1985; Neil Harris, 'Museums, Merchandising, and Popular Taste: The Struggle for Influence', in Ian M. G. Quimby (ed.), *Material Culture and the Study of American Life*, New York: Norton, 1978; Masatoshi Konishi, 'The Museum and Japanese Studies', *Current Anthropology*, vol. 28, no. 4, 1987, S96–S101; Mark P. Leone, Parker B. Potter, Jr., and Paul A. Shackel, 'Toward a Critical Archaeology', *Current Anthropology*, vol. 28, no. 3, 1987, pp. 283–302; Ian M. G. Quimby (ed.), *Material Culture and the Study of American Life*, New York: Norton, 1978; George W. Stocking, Jr., *Objects and Others: Essays on Museums and Material Culture*, History of Anthropology, vol. 3, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985.

[7] Leone, Potter, and Shackel, 'Toward a Critical Archaeology'.

[8] W. S. Hendon, F. Costa, and R. A. Rosenberg, 'The General Public and the Art Museum: Case Studies of Visitors to Several Institutions Identify Characteristics of Their Publics', *American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, vol. 48, no. 2, 1989, pp. 231–43; Kenneth Hudson, *Museums of Influence*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987; Leone, Potter,

part, these studies lack a sense of the historical and cultural specificity of the different publics that museums serve. While the public sphere has been most richly discussed in terms of the last 300 years in Europe,[9] there are now a host of non-Western nations that are elaborating their public spheres — not necessarily ones that emerge in relation to civil society, but often ones that are the result of state policies in tandem with consumerist interests. Thus, there is a tendency in these discussions for the idea of 'the public' to become tacitly universalised (though some of these studies are concerned with sociological variations within visitor populations). What is needed is the identification of a specific historical and cultural public, one which does not so much *respond* to museums but is rather *created*, in part, through museums and other related institutions. In India, museums need not worry so much about finding their publics as about making them.

There is, of course, a vast body of literature that is about art in relation to museums. This literature is not very relevant to the Indian situation because, except for a small minority in India and for a very short period of its history, and in very few museums there, art in the current Western sense is not a meaningful category. Art continues to struggle to find a (bourgeois) landscape it can be comfortable in.[10] In place of art, other categories for objects dominate, such as handicraft, technology, history, and heritage. Of these, the one on which we focus is the category of heritage.

History becomes heritage in various ways.[11] Artefacts become appropriated by particular historical agendas, by particular ideologies of preservation, by specific versions of public history, and by particular values about exhibition, design and display. Tony Bennett's concept of 'the exhibitionary complex'[12] and Donna Haraway's argument that the natural history has the effect of naturalising particular histories[13] both remind us that museums are deeply located *in* cultural history, on the one hand, and are therefore also critical places for the politics *of* history, on the other. Ideologies of preservation might frequently conceal implication for transformation.[14] For example, the effort to present vignettes of life from other societies often involves the decontextualisation of objects from their everyday contexts, with the unintended result of creating aesthetic and stylistic effects that do not fit the original context. In other cases, objects that were parts of living dramas of warfare, exchange or marriage become mechanical indicators of culture or custom. In yet other cases, the politics of cultural patrimony and political conquest are concealed in the technical language of ethnographic signage.

and Shackel, 'Toward a Critical Archaeology'; Michael H. Frisch and Dwight Pithcaithley, 'Audience Expectations as Resource and Challenge: Ellis Island as Case Study', in Jo Blatti (ed.), *Past Meets Present: Essays about Historic Interpretation and Public Audiences*, Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1987; Elliot W. Eisner and Stephen M. Dobbs, 'Museum Education in Twenty American Art Museums', *Museum News*, vol. 65, no. 2, 1986, pp. 42–49; Danielle Rice, 'On the Ethics of Museum Education', *Museum News*, vol. 65, no. 5, 1987, pp. 13–19; Sheldon Annis, 'The Museum as Staging Ground for Symbolic Action', *Museum*, vol. 38, no. 3, 1986, pp. 168–71.

[9] Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger with the assistance of Frederick Lawrence, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1989.

[10] Cf. Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984.

[11] Robert Lumley (ed.), *The Museum Time-Machine: Putting Cultures on Display*, New York: Routledge, 1988; Jo Blatti (ed.), *Past Meets Present: Essays about Historic Interpretation and Public Audiences*, Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1987; Robert Hewison, *The Heritage Industry: Britain in a Climate of Decline*, London: Methuen, 1987; Donald Horne, *The Great Museum: The Re-Presentation of History*, London: Pluto, 1984.

[12] Tony Bennett, 'The Exhibitionary Complex', *New Formations*, vol. 4, 1988, pp. 73–102.

[13] Donna Haraway, 'Teddy Bear Patriarchy: Taxidermy in the Garden of Eden, 1908-1936', *Social Text*, vol. 11, Winter 1984–85, pp. 20–64.

[14] See Blatti, *Past Meets Present*, especially the following essays therein: Michael J. Ettema, 'History Museums and the Culture of Materialism'; Jane Greengold, 'What Might Have Been and What Has Been — Fictional Public Art about the Real Past'; and Michael Wallace, 'The Politics of Public History'.

All of these examples reveal a tension between the dynamic contexts from which objects are originally derived and the static tendencies inherent to museum environments. This is a valuable tension to bear in mind as we explore the context of museums in India, where the politics of heritage is often intense, even violent.

Among anthropologists, folklorists and historians, there has recently been a spate of writing about the politics of heritage.[15] Much of this work suggests (in some cases using non-Euro-American examples) that the appropriation of the past by actors in the present is subject to a variety of dynamics. These range from the problems associated with ethnicity and social identity, nostalgia and the search for 'museumised' authenticity, to the tension between the interests states have in fixing local identities and the pressures localities exert in seeking to transform such identities. The result is a number of contradictory pressures, some toward fixing and stabilising group identities through museums (and the potential of their artefacts to be used to emblematise existing or emergent group identities), and others that attempt to free and destabilise these identities through different ways of displaying and viewing objects.

This body of literature is a reminder that heritage is increasingly a profoundly political issue and one in which localities and states are often at odds, and that museums and their collections are in the midst of this particular storm. Focusing on the politics of heritage in India brings out the place of Indian museums in these politics, and problematises the cultural modes of viewing, traveling, experiencing, and learning in which heritage is negotiated.

the cultural and conceptual background

The public sphere in contemporary India, as in the rest of the world, has emerged as part of the political, intellectual and commercial interests of its middle classes. In India in the last century, this public sphere has involved new forms of democratic politics, new modes of communication and transport, and new ways in which class, caste and livelihood are articulated. We are concerned with one dimension of this evolving public sphere, which we call public culture. By public culture we mean a new cosmopolitan arena that is a 'zone of contestation'.[16] In this zone, private and state interests, low and high cultural media, and different classes and groups formulate, represent and debate what culture is (and should be). Public culture is articulated and revealed in an interactive set of cosmopolitan experiences and structures, of which museums and exhibitions are a crucial part.

On the surface, museums as modern institutions have only a short history and appear to emerge largely out of the colonial period:

> The museums started under British rule had been intended mainly for the preservation of the vestiges of a dying past, and only subsidiarily as a preparation for the future. Museums were the last haven of refuge for interesting architectural fragments, sculptures and inscriptions which saved them from the hands of an ignorant and indifferent public or from unscrupulous contractors who would have burned them to lime, sunk them into foundations or melted them down. Into the museums the products of the declining indigenous industries were accumulated, in the vain hope that they might serve as models for the inspiration of artisans and the public. Mineralogical,

[15] Shelly Errington, 'Fragile Traditions and Contested Meaning', *Public Culture*, vol. 1, no. 2, 1989, pp. 49–59; Richard Handler, *Nationalism and the Politics of Culture in Quebec*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988; Michael Herzfeld, *Ours Once More: Folklore, Ideology, and the Making of Modern Greece*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982; Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds), *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983; Richard Johnson, Gregor McLennan, Bill Schwarz, and David Sutton (eds), *Making Histories: Studies in History-Writing and Politics*, London: Hutchinson, 1982; William W. Kelly, 'Rationalization and Nostalgia: Cultural Dynamics of New Middle Class Japan', *American Ethnologist*, vol. 13, no. 4, 1986, pp. 603–18; Jocelyn S. Linnekin, 'Defining Tradition: Variations on Hawaiian Identity', *American Ethnologist*, vol. 10, no. 2, 1983, pp. 241–52; David Whisnant, *All that is Native & Fine: The Politics of Culture in an American Region*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983.

[16] Arjun Appadurai and Carol A. Breckenridge, 'Why Public Culture?', *Public Culture* , vol. 1, no. 1, 1988, pp. 5–9.

> botanical, zoological and ethnological collections were likewise started, though rarely developed systematically: often they did not grow beyond sets of hunting trophies.[17]

As a consequence, until recently most museums in India have been moribund and have not been a vibrant part of the public cultural life of its people. One early analysis of this 'failure' of museums in India comes from Hermann Goetz. The factors he identifies as reasons for this failure include the fragmentary nature of many collections, the failure of industrial art to inspire capitalist production, and the lack of response to natural-history collections by a public 'still living in the world of myths'.[18]

The ambiguous place of museums in India is partly a result of longstanding cultural and historical factors: first, India still has a living past found especially in its sacred places and spaces, so there is little need for 'artificial' conservation of the Indian heritage; second, the separation of sacred objects (whether of art, history or religion) from the objects of everyday life had not really occurred; and third, the separation of human beings from the overall biological, zoological and cosmological environment in which they lead their ordinary lives had barely began.

More recently, museums have begun to play a more vigorous role in Indian public life. In part this is because of a renewed concern with education as one element of social and economic development; in part because private commercial enterprises have begun to use an exhibition format for displaying their wares; and in part because museums have become plugged into a circuit of travel, tourism, pilgrimage, and leisure that has its own distinctive history and value in Indian society.

Here it may be useful to make a historical contrast. Museums in Europe and the United States have been linked to department stores through a common genealogy in the great 19th-century world's fairs. But in the last century, a separation of art and science and of festivity and commerce has taken place in these societies, with the objects and activities in each category fairly sharply distinguished in terms of audience, curatorial expertise and visual ideology. In India, such a specialisation and separation is not a part of either the past or the present.

This is not to say that there are not department and chain stores in contemporary India. There are, and they are clearly distinguishable from public festivities as well as from permanent exhibits in museums. Rather, there is a grey zone where display, retailing and festivity shade into one another. It is precisely because of this grey zone that museums have taken on fresh life: objects in India seem to flow constantly through the membranes that separate commerce, pageantry and display. The two major forms that characterise the public world of special objects in contemporary India are the exhibition-cum-sale and the ethnic-national festival. The exhibition-cum-sale is a major mode of retailing textiles, ready-to-wear clothing, books, and home appliances. These merchandising spectacles (which recall the fairs of medieval Europe) are transient, low-overhead, mobile modes for transporting, displaying and selling a variety of goods. In them, in contrast to department stores, ordinary consumers have a chance to combine gazing, longing and buying. This combination of activities, which is at the core of the informal schooling of the modern Indian consumer, is bracketed between two other, more permanent poles. One pole is the modern museum — whether of art, craft, science, or archaeology — in which the Indian viewer's visual literacy is harnessed to explicitly cultural and nationalist purposes. The other pole is the newly emergent, Western-style department store, where gazing and viewing also go on but buying is the normative goal. In our usage, *gazing* implies an open-ended visual and sensory engagement tied up with fantasy and desire for the objects on display, while *viewing* implies a more narrowly framed, signage-guided visual orientation.

Framing these three display forms and contributing most actively to the regeneration of the museum experience is the festival form, especially as it has been harnessed by the Indian State in its effort to define national, regional and ethnic identity.

[17] Goetz, 'The Baroda Museum and Picture Gallery', p. 15.
[18] *Ibid*.

Such festivals are on the increase throughout the world[19] and everywhere represent ongoing debates concerning emergent group identities and group artefacts.

In India, the museum-oriented Festival of India, first constructed in 1985 as a vehicle for the cultural display of India in foreign nations and cities, quickly became indigenised into a massive internal festival called 'Apna Utsav' (Our Festival), which began in 1986 and now has an elaborate national and regional administrative structure. Part of a vast state-sponsored network for local and interregional displays of art, craft, folklore, and clothing, these spectacles of ethnicity are also influencing the cultural literacy and visual curiosity of ordinary Indians in a manner that gives further support to the reinvigoration of museums, on the one hand, and the vitality of exhibition-cum-sales, on the other. What is thus emerging in India, and seems to be a relatively specialised cultural complex, is a world of objects and experiences that ties together visual pleasure, ethnic and national display, and consumer appetite. Museums, marginal in the eyes of the wider Indian public in the last century, have taken on a new role in the last decade as part of this emergent constellation of phenomena.

This constellation, which may be called the 'exhibition complex' (museum–festival–sale), is further energised by new technologies of leisure, information and movement in contemporary India. Cinema and television (and the landscapes and stars that they display), packaged pilgrimages and tours (which take thousands of ordinary Indians outside their normal locales as part of 'vacation' experiences), and the growing spectacularisation of political and sports events (especially through television) all conduce to a new cosmopolitan receptivity to the museum, which would otherwise have become a dusty relic of colonial rule. It is these new contexts of public culture that are now transforming the Indian museum experience.

Museums in India have to be seen in tandem with exhibitions of several sorts, and as parts of a larger cosmopolitan world of leisure, recreation and self-education for wide sectors of the Indian population. Nothing of this emergent cosmopolitanism can be grasped without also understanding the impact that modern modes of communication have had on Indian public life. Print media, especially newspapers and magazines, have a history going back over a century in India (as in the West) but the last decade has seen an explosion of magazines and newspapers (both in English and in the vernacular languages), which suggests both a quantum leap in Indian readers' thirst for news, views and opinion, and the eagerness of cultural producers to satisfy this thirst profitably. Film (both documentary and commercial) has a history in India that clearly parallels its history in the West, and remains today the dominant medium through which large numbers of Indians expend time and money allotted to entertainment. Television and its sister technology, video recordings, have entered India in a big way and constitute a new threat to the cultural hegemony of cinema, while at the same time they extend the reach of cinematic forms to the smaller towns and poorer citizens of India.

Though Indian television programming is controlled by the state (just as radio programming is), it already has a very large component of privately produced soap operas, docudramas and other forms of televised entertainment. This is, of course, in addition to a fairly large amount of state-sponsored and state-controlled programming, which ranges from news programmes (which are still largely state-controlled) to live sports programmes, 'cultural performances', and informational programmes on everything from birth control to new farming techniques. In general, though a number of the most popular serials on Indian television are variations of the Hindi film formula, many television programmes have a historical, cultural or documentary dimension. In television above all, it is the Indian heritage that is turned into spectacle. The most striking examples of this process are the three most popular television series of the last few years: *Buniyaad*, which concerned

[19] For example, see Handler, *Nationalism and the Politics of Culture in Quebec*.

the trials and tribulations of the partition of India as experienced by a large Punjabi extended family, and the television serialisations of the two great India epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, for the weekly broadcast of which the whole television-watching audience of India apparently dropped everything (note: this essay was first published in 1992). Thus, museums are part of a generalised, mass-media-provoked preoccupation with heritage and with richly visual approach to spectacles.

museums and public culture

In countries such as India, the challenge of training skilled teachers, the rudimentary resources available for primary and secondary education, and the bureaucratisation and politicisation of higher education all mean that education outside formal settings has continued to be crucial to the formation of the modern citizen. Such education — which involves learning the habits, values and skills of the contemporary world — happens through a variety of processes and frameworks, including those of the family, the workplace, friendship networks, leisure activities, and media exposure. Museums and the exhibition complex in general form an increasingly important part of this non-formal educational process, the logic of which has been insufficiently studied, especially outside the West.

Museums are also a very complex part of the story of Western expansion since the 16th century, although they are now part of the cultural apparatus of most emergent nations. Museums have complex roots in such phenomena as cabinets of curiosities, collections of regalia and dioramas of public spectacle.[20] Today, museums reflect complex mixtures of state and private motivation and patronage, and tricky transnational problems of ownership, identity and the politics of heritage. Thus museums, which frequently represent national identities both at home and abroad, are also nodes of transnational representation and repositories for subnational flows of objects and images. Museums, in concert with media and travel, serve as ways in which national international publics learn about themselves and others.

Museums provide an interesting contrast with travel, for in museums people travel short distances in order to experience cultural, geographical and temporal distance, whereas contemporary tourists often travel great distances in short spaces of time to experience 'otherness' in a more intense and dramatic manner. But both are organised ways to explore the worlds and things of the 'other'. In the public cultures of nations such as India, both museums and tourism have an important domestic dimension, since they provide ways in which national populations can conceptualise their own diversity and reflect (in an objectified way) on their diverse cultural practices and histories. Such reflexivity, of course, has its roots in the colonial experience, during which Indians were subject to a thoroughgoing classification, museumificaiton and aestheticisation in the museums, fairs and exhibitions of the 19th and early 20th centuries.[21] Finally, both museums and travel in India today would be hard to imagine apart from a fairly elaborate media infrastructure, as has been suggested already.

The media are relevant to museums and exhibitions in specific ways. For example, verbal literacy affects the ways in which people who come to museums and exhibitions are able to understand the objects (and signage) that are at the centre of them. Thus, the issue of the ability to read is critical. Media are also important in the form of advertising, particularly through billboards, newspaper advertisements and television coverage, which in many cases inform people about exhibitions (especially those associated with national and regional cultural representations). Literacy (both verbal and visual) is also relevant to the ways in which pamphlets, photographs and posters associated with museums are read by various publics as they travel through different regions, visit various sites and

[20] See Richard Altick, *The Shows of London*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1978, for descriptions of these dioramas in the development of museums in England.

[21] Breckenridge, 'The Aesthetics and Politics of Colonial Collecting'.

purchase inexpensive printed publicity materials associated with museums, monuments and religious centres. Exposure to the media affects as well the ways in which particular groups and individuals frame their readings of particular sites and objects, since media exposure often provides the master narratives within which the mini-narratives of particular exhibitions and museums are interpreted. Thus, for example, the National Museum in Delhi and its various counterparts in the other major cities of India offer specific narratives of the colonial, precolonial and postcolonial periods (for example, the classification of the tribal as 'primitive').

Viewers do not come to these museums as cultural blanks. They come as persons who have seen movies with nationalist themes, television serials with nationalist and mythological narratives and images, and newspapers and magazines that also construct and visualise the heroes and grand events of Indian history and mythology.

In addition, it is important to reiterate that the museum experience is part and parcel of learning to be cosmopolitan and 'modern'. This learning process has a consumption (as well as a media) dimension. Whether for city-dwellers or for villagers, the experience of visiting museums is always implicitly connected to the consumption of leisure and pleasure. As regimented as many groups visiting Indian museums may seem, visits to museums and exhibitions are part of the pleasures of seeing, and visual pleasure has a very deep and special logic in the India context. In the annual travelling commercial exhibition known as the Ideal Home Exhibition, for example, the mastery of modern modes of domestic technology and lifestyle is the key to the exhibition experience, even for those who do not actually buy anything.

There is a complex dialectic among the experiences that Indians have in ethnic-national museums (that is, museums where national heritage and ethnic identity are key concerns), in art museums, and in commercial exhibitions. In each case, they are being educated in different forms of cultural literacy: in the first case, they are being educated in the objectified narratives of nationality and ethnicity; in the second case, in the experience of cosmopolitan aesthetics; and in the third case, in the habits and values of the modern, high-tech householder. These three forms of cultural literacy play a central role in the construction of the modern Indian, who is drawn into the visual and auditory narratives of modern citizenship by his or her experiences in museums and exhibitions. The outstanding question is, how does the museum and exhibition experience help create such cultural literacy?

A major theoretical cue comes from what has been called 'reception theory',[22] a body of ideas developed largely out of post-war German neo-Marxism, but now modified by interaction with reader-response theory and associated approaches to problems of audience analysis in mass-media studies. From this rather diffuse and developing body of theory, four hypotheses can be suggested as especially relevant to those postcolonial societies outside the Euro-American axis, such as India, in which nationalism, consumerism and leisure have become simultaneous features of contemporary life for important segments of the population. We see these hypotheses as particularly applicable to societies such as India, since in them the connoisseurship of 'art' as a distinct category is relatively undeveloped, the visiting of museums is not sharply separated from other forms of leisure and learning, and the idea of expert documentation and credentials in the interpretation of objects has not displaced the sense that viewer groups are entitled to formulate their own interpretations.

The first hypothesis is that sacralised objects and spaces generate specialised modes of viewing and interaction, which are likely to be rooted in historically deeper modalities of seeing as a cultural practice. In the Indian case, there is considerable literature showing that the mutual gaze (*darśan*) of sacred persons or objects and their audiences creates bonds of intimacy and allegiance that transcend the specifics of what is displayed or narrativised

[22] For example, Jan Feuer, 'Reading *Dynasty*: Television and Reception Theory', *South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol. 88, no. 2, 1989, pp. 443–60.

in any given context.[23] The faculty of sight creates special bonds between seer and seen. Museum viewing may be expected, therefore, to display some transformation of this longstanding cultural convention.

The second is that the reception of specialised sites and spaces is a profoundly communal experience, and the objects and landscapes of museums are viewed by 'communities of interpretation' in which the isolated viewer or connoisseur is a virtually absent type.[24] Thus, in any museum or exhibition in India (with the possible exception of certain museums devoted to 'modern' art) the lonely and private gaze that we can often observe at places such as the Museum of Modern Art in New York is absent. Viewing and interpretation are profoundly communal acts.

The third hypothesis is that viewers are not likely to be passive and empty receivers of the cultural information contained in exhibitions and museums. Rather, as in all societies, they come with complex ideas of what is likely to be seen, and share this knowledge in highly interactive ways among themselves and with those few 'experts' who are cast in the role of explainers. Thus museums and exhibitions are frequently characterised not by silent observation and internal reflection, but by a good deal of dialogue and interaction among the viewers, as well as between them and whoever is playing the role of guide. Here the museum experience is not only visual and interactional, it is also profoundly dialogic; that is to say, it is an experience in which cultural literacy emerges out of dialogues in which knowledge, taste and response are publicly negotiated among persons with very diverse backgrounds and expertise. In many cases, the near absence in Indian museums of docents and the underdevelopment of the idea that exhibited objects need to be explained (either by signage or by guides or docents) create a much wider space for discourse and negotiation among viewers: viewers are left free to assimilate new objects and arrangements into their own prior repertoires of knowledge, taste and fantasy. Such freedom characterises a great many Indian museums, even those in which there is a strong effort to determine viewer interpretations, but is true only of smaller, less intensively curated, less well-funded museums in the contemporary United States and Europe. There is thus a profound tension between the museum or exhibition as a site of defamiliarisation, where things are made to look strange, and the viewer-dominated process of dialogue and interpretation, which familiarises cosmopolitan forms and narratives into larger master narratives from other arenas of public life, such as travel, sport and cinema. Thus, the museum experience has to be understood as a dialogic moment in a larger process of creating cultural literacy, in which other media-influenced narratives play a massive role.

Four, the responses of viewers, gazers and buyers vary significantly, along at least two axes: (*a*) the type of exhibition or museum to which they are exposed; and (*b*) personal characteristics, such as the class, ethnic group and age group to which they belong. These differences create significant variations within a larger common structure that is predictable from the previous three theoretical assumptions. Since the study of reception is in a general way not highly developed and is especially poorly developed for the study of readerships outside Europe and the United States (and even less so for reception in contexts such as museums), further examination of the exhibition complex could make a significant contribution to more general methodological debates.

Much of the structure, organisation, taxonomy, and signage strategy of Indian museums is colonial in origin. Thus while the *contexts* of current museum viewing may require new applications of reception theory, the *texts* contained in many museums (that is, the collections and their associated signage) require the analysis of colonial modes of knowledge and classification.

[23] For example, Diana L. Eck, *Darśan: Seeing the Divine Image in India*, 2nd edition, Chambersburg, Penn.: Anima, 1985; J. Gonda, *Eye and Gaze in the Veda*, Amsterdam: North Holland, 1969.

[24] Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980.

conclusions

Like many other phenomena of the contemporary world, museums in contemporary India have both internal and external logics. As far as the rest of the world is concerned, there is no denying that museums constitute part of an 'exhibitionary complex'[25] in which spectacle, discipline and state power become interlinked with questions of entertainment, education and control. It is also true that museums everywhere seem to be increasingly caught up with mass-media experiences.[26] Finally, museums everywhere seem to be booming as the 'heritage industry'[27] takes off.

In India, each of these global impulses has crosscut a particular colonial and postcolonial trajectory in which new visual formations link heritage politics to spectacle, tourism and entertainment. In making this link, it seems that older Indian modes of seeing and viewing are being gradually transformed and spectacularised. While the investigation of the museum experience in India is only in its infancy, we would like to suggest that it will need to focus especially on the deep interdependence of various sites and modes of seeing, including those involved in television, cinema, sport, and tourism. Each of these sites and modes offers new settings for the development of a contemporary public gaze in Indian life. The gaze of Indian viewers in museums is certainly caught up in what we would call this interocular field (the allusion here, of course, is to intertextuality, as the concept is used by the Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin). This interocular field is structured so that each site or setting for the disciplining of the public gaze is to some degree affected by viewers' experiences of the other sites. This interweaving of ocular experiences, which also subsumes the substantive transfer of meanings, scripts and symbols from one site to another in surprising ways, is the critical feature of the cultural field within which museum viewing in contemporary India needs to be located. Our effort in this chapter has been to argue for the importance of such an interocular approach to museums in India, and perhaps everywhere else in the contemporary world where museums are enjoying a fresh, postcolonial revival.

[25] Bennett, 'The Exhibitionary Complex'.

[26] Lumley, *The Museum Time-Machine*.

[27] Hewison, *The Heritage Industry*.

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8

hennai

remembering the rural in suburban Chennai

the artisanal pasts of DakshinaChitra

Mary Hancock

an arrival

Nothing but a small sign, tinted in earth tones, announces that you have reached the entry of DakshinaChitra, a cultural centre dedicated to the re-creation of southern India's pre-modern rural lifeways, situated 30 km south of Chennai (formerly Madras). You turn east into the centre's access road and drive toward the ocean, arriving at a lot in which a few other cars, a scooter and the museum's van are parked. Your visit begins in the reception centre that faces the parking area with the purchase of an admission ticket. The young woman who greets you suggests that you begin your visit by viewing the orientation video, 'A Vision of the South', screened hourly in a small theatre adjoining the entry lobby.[1] As you make your way to the theatre, you notice the large, well-stocked gift shop, its shelves laden with bolts of hand-loomed textiles and ready-made clothing, and its display tables covered with handcrafted toys and musical instruments.

The video concluded, you leave the reception area, stepping outside to find yourself in a large, semi-enclosed courtyard. Ahead, you see an amphitheatre and a snack bar. And, in the distance, you glimpse the re-created village spaces that make up the site's outdoor exhibitions — houses of mud, stone and mortar, gardens, a temple (Plate 8.1). Some are newly crafted replicas of traditional buildings, but others were disassembled on their original sites and rebuilt on DakshinaChitra's grounds. The exhibitions may remind you of open-air museums elsewhere in the world and, as is the case at many of those institutions, DakshinaChitra's staff is ambivalent about characterising the site as a 'museum'. Its website banner proclaims it to be an event, a 'celebration of culture'.[2] Its own version of staged authenticity rests on its uneven capture of the rural real. Though lacking the costumed interpreters that serve as both guides and living exhibitions at other outdoor museums, DakshinaChitra's front regions are, nonetheless, filled with persons at work. Some, like the potter who demonstrates his craft, are part of the pre-industrial world — a world of artisanal production, ecological sustainability and tolerance — that the centre aims to recreate. Most, however, are labourers recruited from nearby villages to construct or maintain the exhibitions.

Conjunctures of urban and rural, local and global suffuse DakshinaChitra. Nestled among

[1] 'A Vision of the South' is an English translation of the museum's name.

[2] See http://www.dakshinachitra.net, accessed on 23 April 2014.

PLATE 8.1 • *Pathway leading up to the Crafts Bazaar.* *SOURCE:* COURTESY OF DAKSHINACHITRA, CHENNAI. PHOTOGRAPH BY REKHA VIJAYASHANKAR.

villages now being transformed by the uneven penetration of urban infrastructure and services, the site is a montage composed of residues of other, more distant villages and towns. Insistently local, the site is nonetheless a fixed space of transnational culture. Created by and for the nostalgic gaze of cosmopolitan elites, national and transnational, it is laid out in the style of new, interactive museums across the globe.

Heritage-themed environments like Dakshina-Chitra can now be found throughout the global South.[3] India boasts Disney-style theme parks, craft villages and historic homes and palaces. Such sites exist within a global exhibitionary complex that has expanded from the museums, department stores

[3] See E. Bruner, *Culture on Tour: Ethnographies of Travel*, Chicago: University of Chicago, 2005; E. Chappell, 'Open-Air Museums: Architectural History for the Masses', *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 53, 1999, pp. 334–41; T. Gordon, *Global Villages: The Globalization of Ethnic Display*, Videography, Sand Lake, NY: Tourist Gaze Productions, 2005; C. Henderson and M. Weisgrau (eds), *Raj Rhapsodies: Tourism, Heritage and the Seduction of History*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007; J. Hendry, *The Orient Strikes Back: A Global View of Cultural Display*, Oxford: Berg, 2000; M. Hitchcock and V. King (eds), 'Discourses with the Past: Tourism and Heritage in South-east Asia', Special Issue of *Indonesia and the Malay World*, vol. 31, no. 89, 2003; I. Karp, C. Kratz, L. Szwaja, and T. Ybarra-Frausto (eds), *Museum Frictions: Public Cultures/Global Transformations*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2006; B. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998; T. Oakes and L. Schein (eds), *Translocal China: Linkage, Identities and the Reimagining of Space*, London: Routledge, 2006; A. Raz, *Riding the Black Ship: Japan and Tokyo Disneyland*, Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 1999; H. Ren, 'Economies of Culture: Theme Parks, Museums and Capital Accumulation in China, Hong Kong and Taiwan', Unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Washington, Seattle, 1998; M. Sorkin, *Variations on a Theme Park*, New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1992; N. Stanley, *Being Ourselves for You: The Global Display of Cultures*,

and expositions that mediated cultural projects of nation-state formation in the 19th century to encompass interactive and virtual museums, video arcades, theme parks, malls, and Imax theatres.[4] Using new technologies of memory, these newer sites consciously assert the possibility of a 'local' — tied usually to representations of and affective orientations to the past — in a world of global consumer practice.

This chapter considers this conundrum as it has unfolded in the social space of DakshinaChitra. DakshinaChitra is a material exemplar of the affectively charged fields associated with neoliberal nostalgia, which I define, borrowing from Renato Rosaldo, as a mourning for that which is lost in the processes of neoliberal globalisation.[5] This affective formation infuses not only the ersatz historicity attached to the names and facades of the new industrial landscape, but also the economy of heritage entrepreneurship and the practices of consumer-citizenship that it underwrites. I begin by situating DakshinaChitra within the globalising suburban spaces of Chennai's hinterland and then turn to the specific pasts that DakshinaChitra mediates and the forms of consumer-citizenship that underwrite those pasts. I argue that DakshinaChitra embodies the conflicted intimacy between the nostalgia that restructuring engenders and the roles that new exhibitionary complexes play in the expanding service sectors that have been hallmarks of neoliberal transformation.

London: Middlesex, 1998; R. Teo and B. Yeoh, 'Remaking Local Heritage for Tourism', *Annals of Tourism Research*, 24, 1997, pp. 192–213; S. Willis (ed.), *The World According to Disney*, Special Issue of *South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol. 92, no. 1, 1993; L. Witz, C. Rassool, and G. Minkley, 'Repackaging the Past for South African Tourism', in G. Corsane (ed.), *Heritage, Museums and Galleries: An Introductory Reader*, London: Routledge, 2005; B. Yeoh, 'From Colonial Neglect to Post-Independence Heritage: The Housing Landscape in the Central Area of Singapore', *City and Society*, 12, 2000, pp. 103–24; L. Young, 'Villages that Never Were: The Museum Village as a Heritage Genre', *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 12, 2006, pp. 321–38; S. Zukin, *Landscapes of Power*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992.

[4] Tony Bennett, 'The Exhibitionary Complex', in Nicholas Dirks, Geoff Eley and Sherry Ortner (eds), *Culture/Power/History*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995; Saloni Mathur, *India by Design: Colonial History and Cultural Display*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007.

[5] Renato Rosaldo, *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1991. Following a balance of payments crisis in 1991, the International Monetary Fund mandated the restructuring of India's international loans and the adoption of policies for de-regulating major industrial and financial institutions (including raising or eliminating caps on foreign capital investment) and for de-centralising governance, with authority devolving to individual states and to private agencies. These changes, collectively described as 'neoliberal', did not inaugurate India's participation in economic globalisation, the roots of which can be traced to Europe's colonial incursions and, in some iterations, to earlier transregional economic interactions, but changed its form. My usage of 'neoliberal globalisation' to designate the transformation in the political economy begun in the 1990s follows A. Gupta and A. Sharma, who observe that neoliberalism is 'characterised by a competitive market logic and a focus on a smaller government that operates from a distance. Neoliberalism works by multiplying sites for regulation and domination through the creation of autonomous entities of governance that are not part of the formal state apparatus and are guided by enterprise logic' (A. Gupta, and A. Sharma, 'Globalization in Postcolonial States', *Current Anthropology*, vol. 47, no. 2, 2006, p. 277). These changes in the political economy, which articulated, in complicated ways, with postcolonial India's planned developmentalist state, are manifested in Chennai in new industrial ventures (e.g., information technology, biotechnology, export processing), in service sector expansion (e.g., export processing, tourism, financial, back-office, and retail services), in increased levels of consumption and in the reorganisation of labour. The shifts introduced by the combination of economic globalisation and neoliberal policies have also hastened processes of urban expansion and 'formalisation', the creation of modernised, sanitised enclaves for formal sector activities and the marginalisation of information sector spaces and activities launched earlier in the twentieth century as Chennai, like other urban centres, competes for private investment to support municipal development, both central city redevelopment and peri-urban expansion. See ibid.; Mary Hancock, *The Politics of Heritage from Madras to Chennai*, Indiana University Press, 2008, pp. 9–14, 44–50, 121–46; A. Shaw, 'Emerging Patterns of Urban Growth in India', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 34, 1999, pp. 969–78; S. Subrahmanyam, *The Political Economy of Commerce: Southern India, 1500–1650*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

restructured production and recombinant heritage

global appetites for local pasts

DakshinaChitra's international notoriety has often eclipsed its local profile. Coverage in Chennai's English-language press has expanded since its opening (1997), as has visitation.[6] From its early days, however, it garnered international attention and accolades with a sophisticated website, joint exhibitions at international venues and international seminars.[7] Like venues such as the Edinburgh Festival, Boston's Fanueil Hall and Singapore's Chinatown, DakshinaChitra is hailed as a template for salvaging the material past from the creative destruction wrought by the global capitalism. Such themed spaces present selective accounts of local, regional and national histories through carefully wrought montages of visual images, narratives and built environments.

Like urban arts and heritage districts, interactive museums and festivals, DakshinaChitra was designed in response to the exigencies and challenges of a national economy characterised by increasing levels of consumption, expanding service and manufacturing sectors, and the deregulation of industry and trade. DakshinaChitra, unlike the majority of museums in India, is privately operated and receives limited state support. Relative to open-air museums in Europe and North America, its entry fees are modest.[8] That, coupled with its history of relatively low visitation means that the centre has had to secure funds for its operations, capital expenses and endowment through focused solicitation and grant-writing. Using sophisticated advertising techniques, it targets national and foreign elites as both investors and visitors. The museum's interactive website serves as an important gateway for the museum's translocal audience and potential donors, with virtual tours, handicraft sales, events scheduling, and donation opportunities.

Though DakshinaChitra encourages and facilitates school group visitation, including by public school children, most of the museum's visitors and supporters are part of a foreign or domestic elite and it is to their tastes that DakshinaChitra's exhibitions, sale items and performances correspond. DakshinaChitra quickly became a popular destination within the circuits of leisure travel and consumption that, in and around Chennai, connect the five-star hotels, upscale boutiques and art galleries of the urban tourist bubble with selected heritage sites.[9]

The centre's administration and managerial staff, like its donors and visitors, represent the stratum of urban elites who have been most advantaged by India's liberalisation. Deborah Thiagarajan, the centre's founder, is an American citizen who holds graduate degrees in both South Asian art history and Tamil studies. She has lived in Tamil Nadu since the early 1970s, following her marriage to a member of a prominent local banking family. Most other members of the museum's upper-level, managerial and educational staff hail from southern India and are members of the region's globally connected elite. Like educated, nationalist elites of the past century, and in some cases their actual descendants, many have lived, worked or been educated abroad. They are literate in both English and Tamil, and some speak other languages. Many are tied by kinship, occupation and educational experiences to the museum's affluent base of visitors and donors.

[6] Visitation averaged about 10,000 annually until 2005 when it increased to 94,000; since 2007, annual visitation has exceeded 100,000. Foreign visitation ranges between 8–12 per cent annually, but visitation by persons of Indian origin who are citizens of other countries is undercounted as they usually purchase less expensive, domestic entry tickets.

[7] See http://www.dakshinachitra.net/scripts/whatwedo.asp, accessed on 23 April 2014.

[8] The entry fees in 2007 were ₹50 (adult), ₹15 (child), ₹25 (student), and ₹175 (foreign), with exchange rate of ₹44 for US$1.

[9] Geeta Doctor, 'DakshinaChitra: Living Museum of the South', *Namaste*, vol. 2, no. 19, 1999, pp. 15–19; Dennis Judd, 'Constructing the Tourist Bubble', in Dennis Judd and Susan Fainstein (eds), *The Tourist City*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999; S. Muthiah, 'Enjoying a Vision of the South', *Namaste*, vol. 2, no. 19, 1999, pp. 20–23.

DakshinaChitra's reliance on elite sponsorship and audiences is evident in its exhibitionary modes, which employ templates drawn from metropolitan museums in India and abroad. These forms of representation make its projects legible within global discourses on heritage. It is, for the most part, an English-mediated space, notwithstanding bi-lingual signage and labels and the large number of front-region personnel — craftspersons, housekeepers, gardeners, and drivers — who speak only Tamil. The site's spatial syntax will also be familiar to its cosmopolitan visitors. To reach its open-air exhibition and performance spaces, visitors are routed by a gift shop and theatre, both placed near the main entry, and then past the snack bar that lies in the threshold space between the entry regions and the outdoor exhibitions. As also found in newer museal spaces, there exist continuities between DakshinaChitra's curatorial and commercial components: it has a well-stocked gift shop from which visitors can select handcrafted goods of the sorts displayed in the houses; and the museum grounds can be hired by outside parties for benefits and other events, such as weddings and banquets.

DakshinaChitra's global template has earned both praise and derision, with some conservation architects and cultural tourism proponents calling it a Disneyfied version of southern India's past. Thiagarajan, herself, acknowledges the influences of sites in the United States, Europe, Japan, and Rumania on DakshinaChitra's formation but traces her commitment to the project to deeply felt concerns about the loss of vernacular architectural, performance and craft traditions with the south's rapid industrialisation.[10] She intends DakshinaChitra as a critique of the effects of neoliberal globalisation, a force that she, like many, associates with the homogenisation of place and the collapse of history. Nonetheless, under her direction, the centre approaches conservation as an entrepreneurial activity, governed by competitive norms of private enterprise that neoliberalism seeks to advance. Thiagarajan expects that the mix of leisure, consumption, pedagogy, and performance that DakshinaChitra represents will ensure its financial stability and success and so contribute to the sustenance of the region's distinctive artisanal traditions. The museum, in short, is premised unabashedly on consumerist hopes, sharing with pro-liberalisation businesspersons and analysts the expectation that by enhancing economic growth, a free market economy will revitalise local cultural production and conservation.

a national locality

DakshinaChitra's very existence is indicative of the gentrification that has transformed Chennai's hinterland. It is located along a new industrial corridor that connects Chennai with locations to the south: the UNESCO World Heritage site of Mamallapuram, and the ports, industrial estates, fish farms, and power facilities beyond. Most of these developments date from the early 1970s, when India's central government established the Indira Gandhi Centre for Atomic Research in Kalpakkam, a village about 80 kilometres south of Chennai. The corridor's development accelerated in the mid-1980s with the addition of the Madras Atomic Power Station to Kalpakkam's research centre and a subsequent wave of residential and commercial construction, including information and bio-technology campuses and gated communities.[11] Capitalising on the success of new information technology ventures and on the pool of professional talent associated with the Indian Institute of Technology, the region is now aggressively promoted as India's Biotech Valley. Its name, a deliberate play on San Jose's Silicon Valley, holds out the possibility of globalisation in a nationalist key. With such ventures, Tamil Nadu's government and corporate sector hope to retain those skilled workers who once travelled abroad for high-paying employment and to repatriate the resources, affective and financial, of

[10] Deborah Thiagarajan, 'DakshinaChitra, a Living Heritage Centre for South India', unpublished lecture text, n.d.

[11] Chennai Metropolitan Development Authority, 2007, Madras Metropolitan Development Authority, 1995, Government of Tamil Nadu, 1999, 2004.

India's diaspora, especially affluent Non-Resident Indians (NRIs).[12]

DakshinaChitra's own origins can be traced to the same forces — deregulation, privatisation, decentralisation — that have been responsible for the transformation of the corridor between Chennai and Mamallapuram. Planning for DakshinaChitra commenced in the mid-1980s, contemporaneous with India's cautious turn toward liberalisation. Central and state governments lent token support to DakshinaChitra's development at this point, but the bulk of funding was solicited from private donors and from educational and philanthropic foundations. In 1997, when the site opened, the neoliberal policies inaugurated in 1991 were firmly in place. DakshinaChitra has continued to seek investors among private multinational corporate sector, from international foundations and, increasingly, among India's own mobile, cosmopolitan elites, especially NRIs, who are tapped as underwriters and nostalgic consumers of India's territorial past.

The participation of NRIs in the development of both DakshinaChitra and the industrial corridor on which it is located merits attention. This pattern of urban and suburban development has been tied to the Indian state's recognition of the NRI as a type of offshore citizen and potential investor. NRIs are engaged as political and economic actors by the state through tax holidays, concession packages and the relaxation of investment rules. As Anthony King notes, the real estate boom that followed the deregulation of the early 1990s especially cemented the link between NRI capital, consumer-citizenship and new geographies of neoliberalism.[13] Notable in this context have been the condominium developments that have multiplied in urban hinterlands and which target NRI investors. King refers to these spaces, with their gated communities, resorts and corporate campuses, as 'postcolonial globurbs'.[14] Like the suburbs that preceded them, globurbs are represented by their developers and residents as spaces apart from both the failed modernism of nearby cities and the 'stagnant localism' that pervades surrounding villages and towns.[15]

DakshinaChitra corresponds in form and function to the settlements that typify the postcolonial globurb. It is enclaved and exclusive while still globally connected; its spatial syntax and amenities are tailored to meet international standards of comfort and efficiency. And its combinations of then and now, here and there, enable developers to engage with diasporic cultures and capital flows, to attract investors and clients with promises of both status and nostalgia. On these sites, the global aspirations of both the state and corporate sector are inscribed within a national narrative articulated with neoliberal globalisation. DakshinaChitra, no less than the glass-and-steel campuses of nearby business outsourcing firms, is meant to be a space in which the nation — refurbished, lean, competitive — could be exhibited and celebrated within a wider world of nations. What distinguishes DakshinaChitra from its avowedly modernist neighbours is its evocation of the nation through material signs of (rural) absence, through the performance and discourse of salvage, and its solicitation of affective commitment to the nation through the mournful re-enactment of loss and recovery.

Continuities exist between the national imaginary embodied in DakshinaChitra's material and performative landscapes and that found in other craft-oriented museums in India. Its template and closest precursor is New Delhi's

[12] Non-Resident Indians, a designation coined by India's government, are affluent Indian émigrés residing in the United States, Canada, Australia, and Europe. Although they are citizens of other countries, NRIs may invest in Indian economic ventures and own property in India.

[13] Leela Fernandes, *India's New Middle Class: Democratic Politics in an Era of Economic Reform*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007; Anthony King, *Spaces of Global Culture: Architecture Urbanism Identity*, London: Routledge, 2004, pp. 97–110, 132–36.

[14] King, *Spaces of Global Culture*, p. 103.

[15] Anna Tsing, 'The Global Situation', in Jonathan Inda and Renato Rosaldo (eds), *The Anthropology of Globalization: A Reader*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2002.

National Handicrafts and Handlooms Museum, popularly known as the Crafts Museum, which curates representative craft products, conserves craft techniques and facilitates the marketing of crafts to urban consumers.[16] Its mission is framed by the official nationalism of the postcolonial Indian state; it represents India as a mosaic of distinct regional cultures and languages and treats crafts and performing arts as emblems of India's 'unity-in-diversity'. Both the Crafts Museum and DakshinaChitra serve as material metaphors for the Gandhian keywords — village republic, *swadeshi* (self-sufficiency), *swaraj* (self-rule) — that continue to circulate within India's official nationalism. By encapsulating the diversity and common threads of *southern* India, however, DakshinaChitra claims a place for the south *within* the territorial bounds and official cultural narrative of the nation-state.

DakshinaChitra's account of southern India's past, however, omits reference to the Tamil exceptionalism, rationalism and non-Brahman populism (or Dravidianism) promulgated by the state's ethno-linguistic ruling parties. In contradistinction to Dravidianist political rhetoric and its spaces of public memory — statues, commemorative locality names and neo-traditionalist facades that fuse elements of pre-British palace and temple architecture — DakshinaChitra recreates southern India as a space of artisanal lifeworlds, ethnic pluralism, Hindu religiosity, and self-sustaining consumption. Its account updates the well-worn Gandhian idiom, the village republic, with a dose of cosmopolitanism.

With this, DakshinaChitra constitutes southern India as the subject of a new national narrative. India's turn to neoliberalism is rewritten within DakshinaChitra's immersive specular order not as the latest chapter of a colonially engineered loss of self: it is rather *crafted* as the retrieval of an indigenous trajectory that predated and persisted throughout European imperialism.

technologies of memory

Though ceremonially unveiled in 1996, DakshinaChitra was only opened to visitors in early 1997. By 2007, the museum's outdoor exhibitions comprised 19 buildings — houses, outbuildings and shrines — distributed among areas dedicated to the region's four states, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka, and Andhra Pradesh, although the latter two sections remained incomplete. Each section's spatial organisation, construction materials and design were chosen to represent regional ecology and social organisation and all, with the exception of Karnataka and a projected section of Andhra Pradesh, depicted rural settlement forms. Footpaths meandered within and between the regional exhibitions, with no explicit boundaries marked between 'states'.

The museum's layout is based on a conceptual plan that architect, Laurie Baker, prepared and Baker associate, Benny Kuriakose, implemented (Plate 8.2). Baker was India's foremost proponent of cost-effective architecture, an approach based on local materials, environmental adaptability and affordability, and inspired by a commitment to Gandhian nationalism, with its norms of self-sufficiency and limited consumption.[17] DakshinaChitra's endorsement of cost-effectiveness is evident in the decision to retain and reconstruct existing building stock, in its references to the ecological sustainability of pre-modern lifeways and to artisanal modes of production.

With its eight buildings, Tamil Nadu's is the densest exhibition (Plate 8.3); in addition to a temple, residences of wealthy merchant and agriculturalist families, Brahmans, skilled craftspersons, and labourers are represented. Kerala is sparsely settled in comparison with Tamil Nadu (Plate 8.4). It features three residences — a Syrian Christian house and two Hindu dwellings from northern and southern Kerala — and a separate granary and

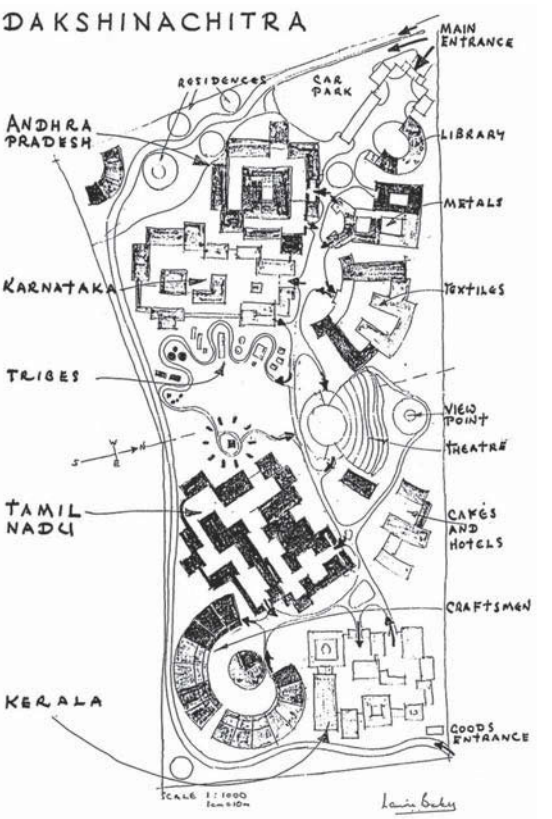
[16] Paul Greenough, 'Nation, Economy and Tradition Displayed', in Carol Breckenridge (ed.), *Consuming Modernity*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995.

[17] Gautam Bhatia, *Laurie Baker: Life, Works and Writings*, New Delhi: Penguin, 1991; Jon Lang, Madhavi Desai and Miki Desai, *Architecture and Independence*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997.

cowshed. Unlike the densely settled village of the Tamil section, Kerala's depicts the rural settlement pattern of its landowning class, with dispersed residential compounds graced by sloping roofs and wide verandahs. The Karnataka section, unfinished as of 2007, consists of two residences (part of a single domestic compound) and a shrine, and depicts the home of an extended family of weavers. To complete that exhibit, four additional structures are sought, including a colonial bungalow. Finally, Andhra Pradesh is represented by a weaver's house and a cluster of two, circular, mud-walled huts typical of the modest homes of coastal fishing communities (Plate 8.5). In 2007, it too remained unfinished, with three more structures, including a Muslim house, sought to complete that exhibition.

Though its administration chafes at DakshinaChitra's designation as a museum, the site shares with other museal spaces a focus on its collection. Its reconstructed buildings form a taxonomically ordered whole that refers, metonymically and mimetically, to southern India. The most inclusive category, the ethnic and linguistic state, comprises households, each defined by cross-cutting socio-demographic characteristics (occupation, community, sect, wealth). The taxonomic logic of the collection is asserted, also, in the references on the museum's grounds and website, to gaps in its offerings. The incompleteness of both the Andhra and Karnataka sections, for example, is acknowledged by detailed descriptions of the structures that should be added, and its website includes appeals for assistance in locating appropriate structures and for financial support for the work of disassembly and reconstruction.[18]

In alerting visitors, virtual and actual, to still-empty spaces, the museum communicates the rationality of its own organisation and planning apparatus; it also enrols its cosmopolitan patrons in memory-work by asking them to adopt houses, crafts and educational programmes. As it builds its collection, then, DakshinaChitra completes the



ORIGINAL SITE PLAN FOR DAKSHINACHITRA
LAURIE BAKER

PLATE 8.2 • *Conceptual Plan for DakshinaChitra by Laurie Baker.* *SOURCE*: DEBORAH THIAGARAJAN, *DAKSHINACHITRA: FROM VILLAGE TO CENTRE*, CHENNAI: MADRAS CRAFT FOUNDATION, 1999, P. 8. REPRODUCED WITH PERMISSION OF MADRAS CRAFT FOUNDATION, CHENNAI.

cycle of creative destruction: gathering the residues of industrial expansion and enrolling its active agents and beneficiaries in the work of imagining and conserving heritage.

authentically postcolonial

With its mix of vernacular structures, exhibition galleries, and demonstration and performance spaces, DakshinaChitra is reminiscent of open-air museums elsewhere in India, as well as in Europe, the United States, Japan, and Southeast Asia. As is the case with these other sites, DakshinaChitra's

[18] See http://www.dakshinachitra.net/scripts/heritagehelp.asp, accessed on 23 April 2014.

PLATE 8.3 • *An overview of the dense Tamil Nadu street.* *SOURCE*: COURTESY OF DAKSHINACHITRA, CHENNAI. PHOTOGRAPH BY REKHA VIJAYASHANKAR.

PLATE 8.4 • *The Syrian Christian house in the Kerala section.* *SOURCE*: COURTESY OF DAKSHINACHITRA, CHENNAI. PHOTOGRAPH BY MIKE ELISEOU.

PLATE 8.5 • *The Coastal Area house in the Andhra Pradesh segment. SOURCE*: COURTESY OF DAKSHINACHITRA, CHENNAI. PHOTOGRAPH BY REKHA VIJAYASHANKAR.

immersive exhibitionary space represents a regional and historical whole by reordering and displaying fragments of that whole.

The real south India to which it lays claim was, in the mid-19th century, an agrarian, artisanal society, albeit one embedded within larger imperial networks of commerce, industry and administration. The museum tracks the effects of colonial modernity on regional life-worlds with a historical narrative built through 'in context' strategies, such as labels, audio-visual guides and catalogues.[19] The merchant house in the Tamil section is one of the spaces used to develop this theme. It was the ancestral home of a Nattukottai Chettiar family and, like other such residences, had been built with earnings acquired by participation in colonial trading networks (Plate 8.6).[20] Such houses, along with patronage extended to temples, choultries and schools, were means by which the wealth acquired by the community was transmuted into status. Texts posted on the website and on the museum grounds elaborate on these relations, using the hybrid material culture of the dwellings — their Burmese teak columns and European tiles, architectural plans that fused colonial bungalow and palace — to comment on the range of transactions, between coloniser and colonised, that the merchant community brokered.[21] In these ways, DakshinaChitra claims a specifically post-colonial genealogy that recognises the spatio-temporal ruptures of colonial modernity even while asserting possibility of a nationalist future built on material continuities with both colonial and pre-colonial pasts.

The linchpins of its enactment of postcoloniality, however, are achieved through 'in situ' conventions, specifically the immersive spaces in which southern Indian pasts are recreated architecturally and somatically. Thiagarajan emphasised, in

[19] Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture*, pp. 388–90.

[20] David Rudner, *Caste and Capitalism in Colonial India*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994.

[21] Anne Hardgrove, 'Merchant Houses as Spectacles of Modernity in Rajasthan and Tamil Nadu', in Sumathi Ramaswamy (ed.), *Beyond Appearances? Visual Practices and Ideologies in Modern India*, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2003.

PLATE 8.6 • *Stringing flowers at the Chettinad house* thinnai *(porch)*. *SOURCE*: COURTESY OF DAKSHINACHITRA, CHENNAI. PHOTOGRAPH BY REKHA VIJAYASHANKAR.

conversation with me and in published texts, that the museum's immersive environment is both a window on the region's pre-industrial, artisanal economy and an incubator for maintaining those bodies of knowledge and practice. Craft, she argued, is not rote reproduction but a body of knowledge and practice based on continuous adaptation and innovation. Like the eco-museum, DakshinaChitra treats cultural knowledge and artefacts as the means to cultivate and assert community identity.[22] It is, nonetheless, craft as object — its production professionalised and its circulation commodified — that fills the centre. And, distinguishing its personnel from costumed interpreters elsewhere who merely perform authenticity, DakshinaChitra asserts that craftspersons, as living signifiers of preindustrial India, prove that while the world of 'before' may have been forgotten by inattentive urban elites, it is not yet past.

embodied pasts, embedded labour

DakshinaChitra's design and its mediation have arisen within a world of global consumer practice. In front regions, visitors see handicrafts, tools and raw materials exhibited in their contexts of production and use; they also witness folk performances and craftspersons at work and purchase handcrafted goods directly from their makers. With calculated expositions of back-region activities, the museum also communicates that crafts are conserved in the work of exhibition construction and maintenance. Back-region operations are also exposed in its efforts to expand the market for craft goods and to shape consumer desire for craft products and knowledge.

[22] Peter Davis, *Ecomuseums: A Sense of Place*, Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1999; Georges Henri Rivière, 'The Ecomuseum: An Evolutive Definition', *Museum*, vol. 37, no. 4: 148, 1985, pp. 182–83.

As part of its professional recruitment and training, DakshinaChitra launched an arts management internship programme in 2004, offering professional certification for future curators, educators and managers. Back-region activities also focus on training for artisans, who are coached in rationalised forms of production. Thus, even as it anticipates the cosmopolitan gaze of the consumer-citizen, it is also a space in which rural subalterns encounter and comment upon the consumer-citizen that the neoliberal Indian state now recognises as an ideal national subject.

craft in the consumer gaze

Since its opening in 1997, DakshinaChitra has catered to urban tastes for handicrafts and for what the global consumer market glosses as 'indigenous' styles of architecture and design with information about craft production and with retail sales of handicrafts. It does this in an organisational context that, under the monitoring and evaluation of international foundations and corporate funders, has become more professionalised. By-laws have been drafted and all employees receive written contracts; salary and benefits scales have been standardised according to function; a general manager has been hired to run day-to-day operations. With this, DakshinaChitra's own corporate identity has gained a sharper profile, including the introduction of the 'DaCh' brand name for some of the goods produced by contracted artisans. Most artisans who participate in public programmes are hired on a temporary basis, in connection with special projects or sales. A few artisans are members of the museum's permanent staff and they are expected to engage in regular on-site craft production. Home-based production and the work of rural cooperatives are also represented in commodities available in the gift shop and at the craft bazaars that the museum sponsors in its capacity as a broker between crafts producers and urban consumers. The museum, however, is not merely a sales venue, but intervenes more actively in the production and marketing phases with staff members occasionally assisting craft cooperatives with financial planning and marketing. This assistance includes advice about designs favoured by the museum's clientele as well as the museum's marketing of some products under its DaCh brand name.

With all of these interventions, DakshinaChitra aims to enlarge rural artisans' participation in a neoliberal economic order, both as producers and consumers. In our conversations, Thiagarajan spoke frequently about professionalising craft production, including the introduction of market-rate pricing, which she felt would ensure the desirability of craft products: 'unless it's costly, they [consumers] won't recognise that it's worth buying — and they definitely won't think it worth conserving as heritage'. The museum's promotional material asserts its goals of improving the living and working conditions of southern India's craft producers by enlarging the markets, in India and abroad, for the goods they produce. Though reaping a share of revenues from the sale of its DaCh products, the museum takes no commission from those craftspersons who sell their work at DakshinaChitra's crafts bazaar and fairs. Donations to the centre can be targeted to developing and sustaining 'a base of resource people and programs associated with crafts and provide for marketing, production, product development, design and packaging'.[23] In matter of fact, at DakshinaChitra as at the Crafts Museum, it has proven more difficult to support craft production than to cultivate urban markets for craft products.

Craft products and techniques figure centrally in the relations that the museum seeks to establish with its urban clientele. Lecture-demonstrations dealing with craft techniques are key sites for cultivating visitors' affective and somatic investments in craft and they are common weekend events at DakshinaChitra. Most lectures and craft sales were free with admission; special educational programming for students from village schools and from Chennai's Corporation schools was also offered free of charge. Other workshop-type events were priced anywhere between ₹500 and ₹2,500,

[23] See http://www.dakshinachitra.net/scripts/support.asp, accessed on 23 April 2014.

depending on the event's duration, materials used and skill levels of presenters.

The number of special events at DakshinaChitra has increased substantially since its 1997 opening, with care taken to develop topical themes around which educational programming, performances and special sales activities could be coordinated. Between September 1998 and August 1999, the museum's public programming included 11 special events, which coincided with Hindu and Christian festival periods. In conjunction with some events, the museum offered overnight 'heritage experience' stays which included sessions on yoga and Ayurveda. In 2007, special events programming had expanded to include 17 festivals (Hindu, Christian and Muslim), and a roster of related workshops and lecture-demonstrations. Folk dance and theatre, as well as artists known for Indo-European 'fusion' styles, were part of the regular performance schedule (Plate 8.7). Upon advance request, the museum arranged private workshops, performances and lectures. These on-site activities were complemented by art exhibitions and museum-led field trips to villages and eco-resorts.

DakshinaChitra, like themed environments and resorts across the globe, also rents its facilities to corporate groups and private individuals for fundraisers and other events. This aspect of its business operation has grown as the corridor on which it is located has developed. And, mindful of the success of nearby resorts, DakshinaChitra markets its guest quarters for overnight stays. The same nostalgic longings that the exhibits invite are solicited on the website. Families are invited to rent the site's facilities to celebrate life-cycle rituals, such as married men's 60th-birthday observances. A similar affective chord is struck in targeted giving opportunities, such as the invitation to adopt houses, crafts and education programmes. In offering visitors and donors a shared space of nostalgia-laced consumption, DakshinaChitra cultivates elite patronage, while shaping consumer tastes and linking handicraft consumption to class status. Though the museum's representation of

PLATE 8.7 • *A 'Huli Vesha' dance performance from Karnataka at the Tulu Festival.* *SOURCE*: COURTESY OF DAKSHINACHITRA, CHENNAI. PHOTOGRAPH BY REKHA VIJAYASHANKAR.

rural life acknowledges the existence of deprivation and poverty, it binds it within a past of village self-sufficiency, a past evocative of Gandhian nationalism. In turn, with its handicraft sales, demonstrations and displays, the museum makes these values and emblems of Gandhism available to urban consumers, as *swadeshi* chic.

craft as performance

DakshinaChitra was initially envisioned as a living craft community, in which knowledge and skills could be developed and taught; there were plans to house families of craftspersons on-site and to exhibit and sell their work. Although the museum's administration could only recruit one family to live on-site, it remains optimistic about the beneficial effects of marketing crafts. Thiagarajan argues that that craft skills can be sustained and revitalised and artisans empowered through professionalisation, especially by adopting rationalised financial planning and more sophisticated marketing techniques. Moreover, in a departure from the visual rhetoric of the exhibition spaces, she recognises that the craftspersons involved in DakshinaChitra's programmes had been producing for a market economy prior to their encounter with the museum. She thus dismisses arguments against professionalisation that appeal to the image of the timeless village, instead maintaining that craft is dynamic and innovative but mainly in need of a deeper and broader market.

In the decades immediately following Independence in 1947, craftspersons' participation in the market economy was organised by various rural development and handicrafts promotion agencies associated with central and state governments. The rural development programmes that characterised the welfare state of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s continue to operate but now under the banner of 'empowerment' and with the mediation of a growing number of NGOs and private distribution and marketing concerns.[24] These programmes include central government projects dedicated to training and employing craftspersons, who constitute a significant segment of India's rural population.

DakshinaChitra's operations have benefited from the state's support for crafts marketing. The central government subvenes the costs that craftspersons incur travelling to the museum's craft fairs and has assisted in some costs of reconstruction and curation. DakshinaChitra's marketing of craft, therefore, has not radically departed from the relations of exchange in which craftspersons were already embedded. It is apparent, though, that the museum, like the Indian state, has sought to gain access to and sustain craft *products* — which can complement and 'Indianise' modernity — but is more ambivalent about sustaining the socially embedded ways of producing those objects.

The craftspersons, themselves, were also eager to participate in some of the economic opportunities that museum work offers. Employment by the museum increases craftspersons' class mobility: as of 2007, artisans on permanent staff were paid monthly salaries upwards of ₹5,000 and received retirement and health benefits as well as paid leave. The job also allowed a range of aesthetic and technical experimentation that village employment did not. At the same time, work at DakshinaChitra complicated their status in other ways, especially as they negotiated the distance, physical and social, between the world of the museum and that of their home communities. These contradictions pervaded the specular order of the exhibition, in which they were not only seen by tourists, but they were also witnesses to and marginalised participants in the consumer-citizenship emblematised by museum's cosmopolitan visitors. Their comments are indicative of their conjunctural positions.

The only resident artisan, a potter named Ramu Velar, had worked at DakshinaChitra since 1996. Like many villagers, his formal education had ended early, at the fifth standard. He was proud, and rightfully so, of his ability to read and write Tamil, as those are skills that fewer and fewer of the state's citizens, rural or urban, can claim. He lived on-site with his son, daughter-in-law and grandchild, but periodically visited his home village

[24] See Gupta and Sharma, 'Globalization in Postcolonial States'.

where his wife, other children and extended family dwelled (Plate 8.8).

Velar's work as a potter, at DakshinaChitra and in previous contexts, mediated both his territorialised identity, his status as village priest, and the deterritorialised identity of a nomadic artisan. Though his status was inherited, having learned to throw pots from his father, he had accepted temporary employment by the state in mid-1980s, when he participated in children's pottery-making workshops. His fame increased in the early 1990s, when he was again engaged by the state government to create the massive terracotta figures that decorated the World Tamil Conference venue. This work brought him to Thiagarajan's attention.

His comments in one of our conversations were symptomatic of the cultural intimacy that his work engendered, revealing his awareness of being an object of the consumer-citizen gaze, but also of being a participant, even if marginal in more globalised practices of consumption. He asserted that he was pleased by the chance to work for DakshinaChitra because of the opportunities for innovation and experimentation it offered. Some of these possibilities arose from the mechanised technology available to him at the centre. There he used an electric wheel, something he noted he could not afford when he was in the village. The reference to mechanisation was one allusion to the modernity that the museum represented for him. More specifically, he spoke also of the 'modern' [Tamil, *navīṉam*] goods that he produced, indexed as such by the greater range of styles and designs than would have been possible in his village. Also marking DakshinaChitra as space of modernity was his reference to the centre as the 'company' [English] — a term suggestive of his back-region experience of it as a bureaucratic organisation. At the centre, he noted, his work garners recognition and admiration

PLATE 8.8 • *Ramu Velar, DakṣhinaChitra's master craftsman at work. SOURCE*: COURTESY OF DAKSHINACHITRA, CHENNAI. PHOTOGRAPH BY REKHA VIJAYASHANKAR.

from a wide spectrum of cosmopolitan consumers, including foreigners and celebrities, who appreciate innovation and artistry.

Though all of the possibilities associated with modernity were appreciated, as was the regularity of income and benefits (which included his and his family's accommodation on-site), he acknowledged that museum work did pose certain risks for the life he continued to lead in his village. Here he returned to the tension between the sense of place that grounded his vocation and the deterritorialising direction that his work had taken him. As a hereditary potter, he was also a priest and was bound to return for festivals in order to reconfirm and maintain that status, for his own sake and for the welfare of his family. He was a rural person who had grown increasingly conversant with deterritorialised practices of consumer-citizenship, but who also retained a strong connection to a regionally defined subjectivity and space.

Another craftsperson, a weaver named Ramaswamy, commuted daily from a village in Chennai's outskirts to his job at DakshinaChitra, which he had held since 1997. His regular travels between the globurban terrain of the museum and his own village were part of an already developed mobility typical of villagers whose settlements have been absorbed into Chennai's peri-urban belt. Like Velar, he was a hereditary craftsman, having learned from his father, who continues to work in the village. Also like Velar, he was literate in Tamil, though his own formal education through secondary school level exceeded Velar's. Until the mid-1990s, he had worked, along with his father and brothers, on home-based cloth production, supplying bolts of handloom, saris and smaller pieces to some of the region's large handloom distribution and retail corporations, mainly Kumaran Silks. He had also taken advantage of state-sponsored training offered in Chennai to expand his technical and stylistic repertoire, and had obtained certification entitling him to referrals and placement services through central government handicraft agency. He said that his skill exceeded the limited demands made by the museum and, unlike the potter, he was frustrated by the limited opportunities for innovation or artistry that museum work afforded. Though trained to weave saris and running fabric for clothing, his output for the museum during most of the time he had worked there had consisted of table linens, handkerchiefs and so forth, which were used at museum functions and in displays. Though paid for the latter, he told me that he felt slighted by the assignments given his ability to take on the more complex and demanding tasks of weaving saris in a variety of regional styles: 'At home, I have made so many styles, combining cotton and silk, cotton and polyester. Why not here?'

The comments of both artisans attested to the complex subjectivities that employees negotiate on-site and to the trade-offs that their employment entailed. While the site's specular order is designed to assist urban visitors in seeing traces of the past, it affords rural labourers glimpses of modernity and the dilemmas of consumer-citizenship in India's neoliberal order, as it attempts to enable them to turn local knowledge into a knowledge of locality that could be circulated and consumed in the global marketplace.

conclusion

The 19th-century exhibitionary complex, encompassing metropolitan museums, galleries, expositions, department stores and arcades, was tied to the spatial, political and economic formation of the modern, territorial state. In similar ways, it can be argued that the new global exhibitionary complex, which includes interactive museums like DakshinaChitra, along with video arcades, cineplexes, malls, and the virtual worlds of cyberspace, is tied to the neoliberal nation-state — to its constitutive spaces, its political economy, its founding narratives and pedagogies. The contradictions of heritage within such contexts are well-known. Its creation and consumption is fuelled by, and solicits, nostalgia for the 'before' that modernity has displaced. Nonetheless, the formation of heritage as a specific type of state project, for instance, national trusts with their registers of historic places, and arena of popular consumption are obvious indicators that heritage arises within, not against, the capitalist modes of consumption and mediation that have been

tied to the rise of the nation-state. This dynamic, consolidated in the 19th century, shows no sign of abatement though it unfolds, now, in the globalising neoliberal order, trafficking in memories that are bound to both local and cosmopolitan imaginaries.

Despite its explicit critique of industrialisation, DakshinaChitra is an integral part of the neoliberal turn that the Indian nation-state has taken. DakshinaChitra's location within the new industrial landscape of Chennai's peri-urban fringe is a crucial index of the terms by which it organises its project of recovery and remembrance. The exhibitionary spaces and practices on DakshinaChitra's grounds point, also, to the conflicted intimacy between the centre's formation and the region's neoliberal restructuring. Its globurban location and its exhibitionary templates herald its transcultural legibility. It is a space of leisure, where international standards of cleanliness, comfort and connectivity are the norm. In more specific terms, it is a recognisable example of the new wave of interactive cultural centres that, since the 1970s, have sought to break away from the previously hegemonic Victorian museal model. With its fusion of education, entertainment and spectacle, it is part of a recognisable genre of leisure destinations now marketed to cosmopolitan audiences. It is, as well, a decidedly nationalist space, offering rural southern India as synecdoche of the nation-state. Its technologies of memory frame the nation-state as a homely space, a remote and only partially translatable rural life-world that invites both detached contemplation and nostalgic attachment.

Its participation in neoliberal globalisation, its embrace of a specifically neoliberal nostalgia, and its espousal of an Indian imaginary make DakshinaChitra readily distinguishable from the heritage templates that have organised the work of preservation and remembrance in the city's colonial core. The city's major museum, the colonial-era Government Museum is a Victorian repository of salvaged architectural features, bronze and stone figures, coins, paintings, and photographs. Other urban public memorials take the form of monuments and commemorative sites; most are dedicated to the region's political leaders and cultural heroes and refer to the Tamil nationalism that the state's ruling parties espouse.[25]

DakshinaChitra, a sanitised simulacrum of southern India's past, aims to convey the past with clarity and force *because* of its separation from the spaces of ongoing urban life. The site's designers emphasise the visual and pragmatic disjunctions between its social space and the sites of popular memory in Chennai. At DakshinaChitra, encounters with the past are unencumbered by the exhaust fumes, litter, beggars, construction debris, and honking buses of Chennai's streets. Equally absent are signs of industrialisation, the factories and power plants that lie just beyond its grounds. Instead, DakshinaChitra comments on the social landscape of the city it adjoins by presenting images of what it once was, and by reminding viewers of the city's rural other.

Despite these assertions of spatio-temporal and moral distance from urban India, DakshinaChitra embodies a modernist logic for representing, assessing and consuming the past. It invites a contemplative, at times, mournful and even ironic, remembrance of the pasts that modernity conceals, whether through occlusion or erasure. DakshinaChitra, aimed avowedly toward ends that are both secularist and historicist, does not invite the participatory, tactile seeing — the exchange of gazes known as *darśan* — that is constitutive of Hindu ritual. It nonetheless invites visitors to contemplate such transactions as signs of an authenticating before and, by overwriting the centre's recombinant rural with personal memories, to endow its sights, sounds and spaces with auratic value.[26]

DakshinaChitra's geography, its design, the labour that sustains it and the goods and services offered on its grounds are means by which local encounters with a world of global consumer

[25] Sumathi Ramaswamy, *Passions of the Tongue*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997; A. Srivathsan, 'Politics of Tamil Monuments: 1968–1975', *South Indian Studies*, 1998, pp. 59–82.

[26] Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', in Hannah Arendt (ed.), *Illuminations*, New York: Schocken, 1985 [1969].

practice are managed. It participates fully in the neoliberal project with its emphasis on service sector industries and in its commitment to deregulation and public–private partnerships in economy and governance. This introduction of heritage into the industrialising hinterland inscribes the rural with signs of modernity and the centre's effect is not unlike that of nearby factories and information technology campuses. Visitors, seduced by neoliberal nostalgia, encounter the nation as handicrafts; workers may encounter it as a space in which modernity and the possibilities of consumer-citizenship are presented. Consumer-citizenship, as a socio-moral discourse and subject-position, is encoded in the 'modernity' that work for the 'company' offers, and in the visitors whom the centre's rural workers encounter. In tandem with the residential and industrial developments of globurbia, whose names and designs are meant to evoke imperial pasts, DakshinaChitra both encapsulates and authenticates the home that India's urban elites and off-shore citizens desire, while ensuring that its authenticity, its pastness, remains legible within global cultures of consumption. It celebrates a past that anticipates, not without hesitation, the ethos of consumer-citizenship even as it laments the loss of the rural life-world.

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9

museu

reincarnations of the museum

the museum in an age of religious revivalism

Saloni Mathur &
Kavita Singh

This chapter explores the unexpected and often surprising role of museums in current identity politics in India. At its fullest, such a project would inevitably cover a vast terrain; of necessity we focus here on only one aspect of this landscape, namely the incursions of the museal mode into the institutions built by a range of religious revival movements that are animating the political and social life of India today.[1] While the sites under examination here may appear to be primarily religious ones, we believe that their use of exhibitory spaces as part of the circuit of pilgrimage and worship indicates broader trends in the changing role of museums and the museal mode across the globe today. Far from being a curious local phenomenon, this blurring of the boundary between museum and shrine is, we believe, emblematic of the shape-shifting of key cultural institutions in response to the needs of the new cultural economy that art history as a discipline must acknowledge and to which it must respond.

The increasing prominence worldwide of politicised religion — in which groups use religion rather than nationality, race or ethnicity to effect a political consolidation — has been one of the characteristic features of the history of the last 20 years or so, and is intimately bound up in the processes of globalisation.[2] Inevitably, as organised religions undergo profound changes, the religious institutions that they build must be designed to perform new tasks; to address unfamiliar audiences as well as to consolidate their existing constituencies; to make new claims and to repeat old messages. This leads to a new kind of religious institution that combines ancient symbols and modern communication technologies. Nowhere is this more clearly visible than in India, home to

[1] This chapter derives from a larger collaborative project that addresses a wide range of museological phenomena in India, most of it — with the exception of the grand, colonial museums — largely unexamined by scholars. With generous support from a Getty Collaborative Grant, we are investigating, for example, the legacies of the princely collections, the emerging forms of a craft-heritage-museum complex, the museum's identities in relation to tourism in the 21st century, and the division of museum collections as a result of the 1947 Partition of the subcontinent, to name only a few lines of inquiry that our project has opened thus far. The authors are grateful for the stimulating discussions and scholarly support offered by the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, where this paper was first presented, and the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florence, which provided a most salubrious environment for its revision.

[2] Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996, and *Fear of Small Numbers: An Essay on the Geography of Anger*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2006.

several religious communities and host to several transnational ones that are increasingly prominent in national and international political life.

We examine in the pages that follow three emergent museum-like institutions — either recently made or still under construction in various parts of India — that have been sponsored by Buddhist, Hindu and Sikh groups and that are fully imbricated in the identity politics of these communities. In each of these cases, the desire for visibility has resulted in the creation of spectacular complexes whose architecture blurs the distinctions between the museum, the theme park, the temple, and the shrine. In these sites, we see the epistemological apparatus of the museum put to new use. Used for 50 years so far by the postcolonial state to put forth a vision of a unified, state-mandated 'national' culture, the museum form is now being used by a range of communities within the nation for their differential claims to politics and citizenship — claims that we loosely identify as 'post-national'.[3] As we will show, the museum is emerging in 21st-century India as one of the key cultural forms through which religious revivalism and cultural nationalism are attempting to consolidate both their statements and their constituencies. And this, in turn, suggests that the opposition between the realm of the sacred and the presumably secular, national space of the museum, a prevailing distinction in art history's understanding of museum formation in Europe, is a conceptual structure that no longer meets the theoretical challenges of museums today.[4]

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The persistent presence of religion in the secular space of the museum was a longstanding problem for British colonial officials when they first introduced museums to India in the early decades of the 19th century. As historians of modern India, such as Tapati Guha-Thakurta and Gyan Prakash, have shown in their different accounts of colonial exhibiting practices, Indian visitors routinely defied the conventional (defined as modern, scientific and rational) scripts for relating to art objects.[5] As they caressed and worshipped objects that were presented by imperial science as 'secular' specimens or archaeological finds, Indian museum-goers were seen by colonial officials as an uneducable or 'uncivilisable' public. The colonial narrative of 'failure' — that is, the failure of the museum in India to replicate the pedagogic outcome of the Victorian institution, or more precisely, the failure of the colonial museum to *become* the British Museum or the Louvre outside of London and Paris — has long haunted the story of the museum in India, and indeed, in many parts of the Third World.

As India gained independence in 1947 from colonial rule, the new nation immediately required two tasks of its museums. One, responding to an intensified need, was to celebrate the Indian past, in order to make a claim about the enduring civilisation of a primordial Indian nation. The other was to turn this past into a heritage that could be shared by the citizenry, comprising many religions, castes and ethnicities. There was thus a continued, and more urgent, need to secularise the sacred objects of past ages in the authoritative space of the museum, but this time the objective was national integration. It is typical of the internationalist and modernist vision of Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of independent India, that he chose Grace Morley to serve as Director of India's new National Museum. Morley, an American, was previously head of the Museums Division at UNESCO and the former

[3] By this term, we are gesturing toward social groups who no longer accept the 'national' as an appropriate frame for their identity-formation. The drive away from national incorporation and toward greater autonomy and visibility can take many shapes — in some cases, resulting in the demand for a separate nation; in others, forging links across national boundaries to make transnational and often virtual communities; in yet others, simply as a relation of opposition to the enframing nation. See Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*.

[4] Carol Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums*, London: Routledge, 1995.

[5] Tapati Guha-Thakurta, *Monuments, Objects, Histories: Institutions of Art in Colonial and Postcolonial India*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2004; Gyan Prakash, *Another Reason: Science and the Imagination of Modern India*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999.

director of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.[6] In her installations for the National Museum as well as other museums in post-Independence India, the desire for secularisation was effected through the use of 'masterpiece' culture in which sculptures were celebrated for their formal qualities and presented in classic white-cube spaces with minimal contextual information. Their religious meanings were allowed to recede in the struggle to create one nation in the face of India's impossible diversity. This was of course essential in a country that had just been riven in two along communal lines, with the great bloodbath that occurred when India and Pakistan were partitioned from each other at the moment of Independence.

Parallel to this 'secularisation' of India's religious art, we see a turn to Buddhism in the national imagery adopted by India on the eve of Independence. The placing of the Buddhist wheel on the national flag and the choice of the Sarnath lion symbol[7] as the new official emblem of the State derived from a desire for a national image dependent not on Hinduism or Islam, which had been in conflict, but on a more neutral layer of culture. Although India was the land of the birth of Buddhism, the religion was all but dead there at the time. Since these ancient Buddhist symbols were seen as belonging to no one specific group, they could thus belong to all. However, just eight years after Independence, the great leader of the 'untouchable' castes and one of the principle architects of the Indian constitution, Dr B. R. Ambedkar, publicly renounced Hinduism and converted to Buddhism — along with some four hundred thousand of his followers. In the decades since, the untouchable castes (who prefer to be called 'Dalit' or 'oppressed') have become an increasingly visible and vocal force in Indian politics; and this group seeks out India's ancient Buddhist past as *their* heritage, something that is frequently expressed in their popular visual culture.[8]

Similarly, in the first of our three case studies, we see a Dalit Buddhist presence intervening and altering the meanings of a site that is being developed by a group other than itself. The 'site' in question is the Maitreya Project, which is engaged in building a giant statue in the shape of Maitreya, the Bodhisattva who is the Buddha-yet-to-come (Plate 9.1). Still in its planning stages, when completed, the 500-foot-tall statue of Maitreya — roughly three times the height of the Statue of Liberty — will be the second-tallest statue in the world[9] and the throne on which the Buddha sits will be a 17-storey building. Within both the throne building and the Buddha's body (accessible through elevators) there will be numerous shrines, meditation rooms, exhibition galleries, and, inevitably, a museum. While construction is yet to begin on this project and there are no details available about the museum's holdings or its narratives, the very desire to incorporate a museum within this Buddha's body seems significant. At the

[6] See http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/oralhistories/transcripts/morley82.htm, accessed on 23 April 2014.

[7] Both the wheel and the four-addorsed-lion emblem are taken from the capital of a pillar erected by the 3rd-century BCE Mauryan monarch Asoka who ruled over most of northern India. Sickened by the destruction his own military campaigns had caused, Asoka famously converted to Buddhism and abjured violence. He proclaimed his vision of a peaceful and just society through edicts carved on massive pillars that were erected at many locations in his territory. In the imagination of nationalist historians, the Asokan pillars became symbols of just rule that combined spiritual and political good. The lions on the pillar are intended not as aggressive animals, but they roar out the message of the Buddha to the four corners of the world. The wheel is the Wheel of Law, or Dharmachakra, in which the Buddha proposes a way of living and acting that frees one from the cycle of action and reaction.

[8] Gary Tartakov, 'Art and Identity: The Rise of a New Buddhist Imagery', *Art Journal*, vol. 49, no. 4, 1990, pp. 409–16.

[9] Shortly after the Maitreya Project was announced, the Chinese government revealed its plans for an approximately 500-foot-high statue of the Bodhisattva at Jiuhua Mountain, one of the major Buddhist shrines in China, which would be 3 metres taller than the Maitreya. A spokesperson from the Maitreya Project stated in response that, '[i]f other people want to make bigger statues, we are delighted. It has never been a race from our side.' They nevertheless continue to use the title 'World's Tallest Statue' in some of their fundraising material. See Luke Harding, 'China Beats India by a Head in Buddha Wars: It was the Biggest Statue in the World until Last Week', *The Guardian*, Sunday, 13 May 2001.

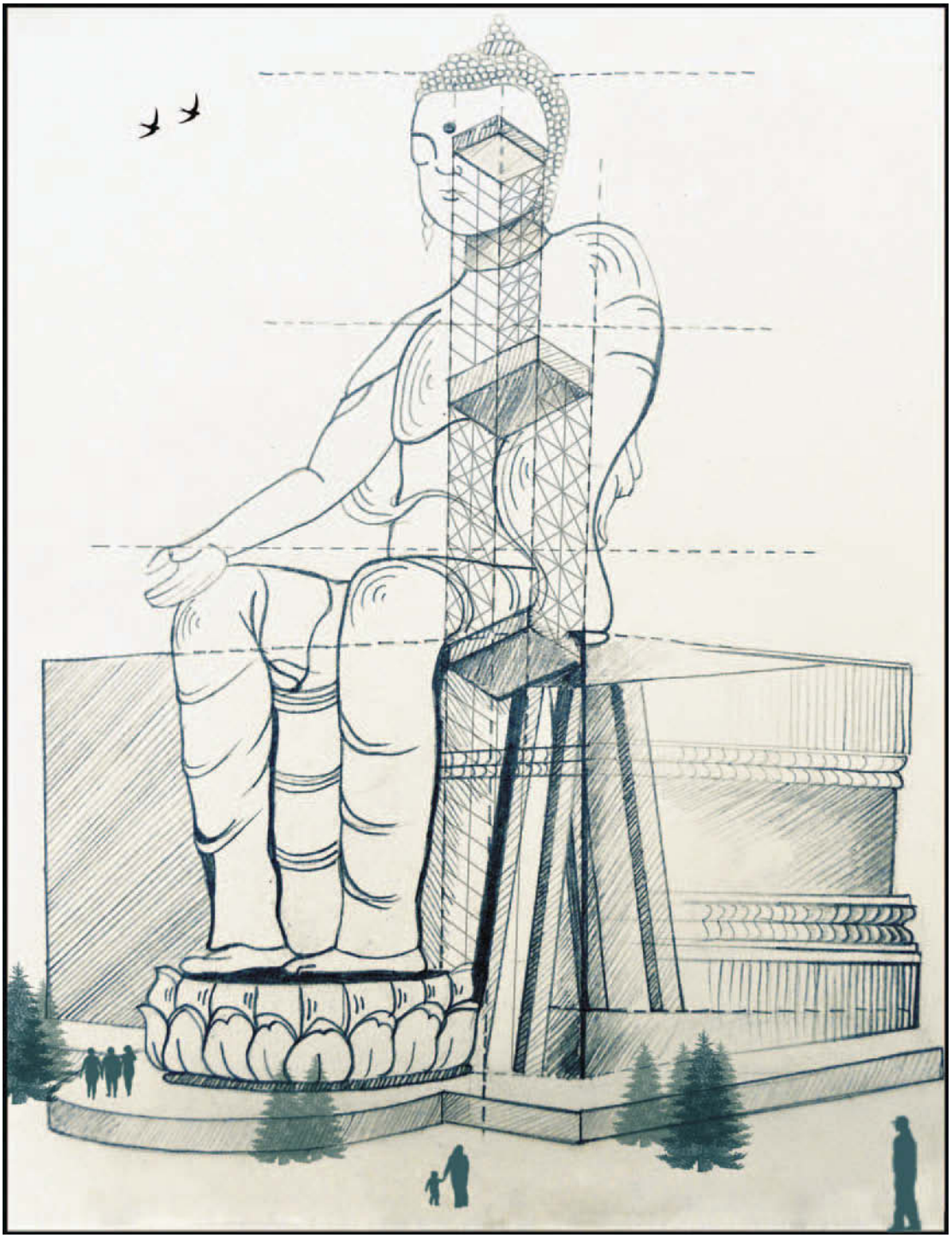


PLATE 9.1 • *Sketch of the Maitreya Project.* *SOURCE*: PREPARED BY SABRINA SRINIVAS.

very least, it reverses the traditional relationship between the Buddha figure and the museum: here it is not the figure of the Buddha that is placed inside the museum, but rather it is the museum that is incorporated, swallowed whole, as it were, into the gigantic body of the Buddha. Second, this 'incorporation' of the museum seems to be making a declaration about the objects that will be placed within the museum: to wit, that the ritual artefacts made for Buddhist practice are no longer available to be desecularised and recontextualised by the superior authority of the museum; instead the 'museum' itself will be *desecularised*, its modes of display and narration becoming pressed into the service of religious messages and sacral experience within this complex.

The shifting relationship between museum and shrine is dramatised by the 'heart shrine', which will be located at the level of the statue's heart and which is intended to house a rare collection of relics of the Buddha, his immediate disciples and other great Buddhist preceptors (Plate 9.2a). These relics, which are currently on a worldwide fundraising tour, have been collected over the course of several years by the project's 'spiritual director' Lama Zopa Rinpoche (Plate 9.2b). Many of the relics intended for this shrine were salvaged from monasteries in Tibet where they had been held for thousands of years before the Communist occupation in 1959. Other relics have been donated by museums, particularly the Meiktila Relic Museum in Myanmar, which gave the most precious blood-relic of the Buddha himself.

This gift of a relic — *from* a museum, *to* a shrine — is a small event within this mega-complex, yet it points to an important and growing trend in the relationship between the secular space of the museum and the sacred space of the shrine. We have been accustomed to think of the shrine as the museum's prehistory; we understand that when an object enters the museum it is lifted out of daily use and ritual, and is given its definitive meaning as 'history', 'heritage', or 'art'.[10] Instances of the reverse flow of objects — out of the museum and into the shrine, in this instance — urge us to rethink this process as a fluid one: instead of being the final repository of things, the museum might turn out to be a 'holding house' that temporarily keeps objects out of circulation until the time is ripe for their return.[11]

The Maitreya Project is being developed by the Foundation for the Preservation of Mahayana Tradition, the organisation that has done the most to popularise Tibetan Buddhist dharma to the West. Founded in 1975 by Lama Thubten Yeshe and now led by Lama Zopa Rinpoche, the foundation has 136 meditation centres in 26 countries across the Americas, Europe, Australia, and Asia, as well as monasteries, publishing houses, schools, hospitals, and hospices; well-funded by donations from followers and revenues from meditation courses, it is the largest body for the preservation and propagation of Tibetan Buddhism in the world. Even with its huge spread and many activities, the Maitreya Project — whose $390 million budget includes plans for a park dotted with ten thousand stupas, schools, a teaching hospital, and eventually, a university — is undoubtedly the most ambitious that the Foundation has undertaken.[12]

Commentators have noted the way 'the Project has relied on an organizational structure derived from modern corporate capitalism', with an international design competition and the hiring of prominent architects, professional managers, engineering firms, and tourism development

[10] See Pomian Krzysztof, 'The Collection: Between the Visible and the Invisible', in Susan Pearce (ed.), *Interpreting Objects and Collections*, London: Routledge, 1994, 160–74.

[11] Indeed, one may think of the 'repatriation' of objects to the North American First Nations groups as another manifestation of the same process. Whether bones and grave goods are returned for reburial, or masks returned for occasional use in dance rituals, there is a post-museum phase in the life of the object, where it returns to a 'more rightful' claimant than the museum. See for instance, Ruth Phillips, 'Disappearing Acts, Traditions of Exposure, Traditions of Enclosure, and Iroquois Masks', in Mark Salber Phillips and Gordon Schochet (eds), *Questions of Tradition*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004, pp. 56–80 — only one essay in a growing body of literature on this phenomenon.

[12] More information can be found on the project's website: http://www.maitreyaproject.org, accessed on 23 April 2014.

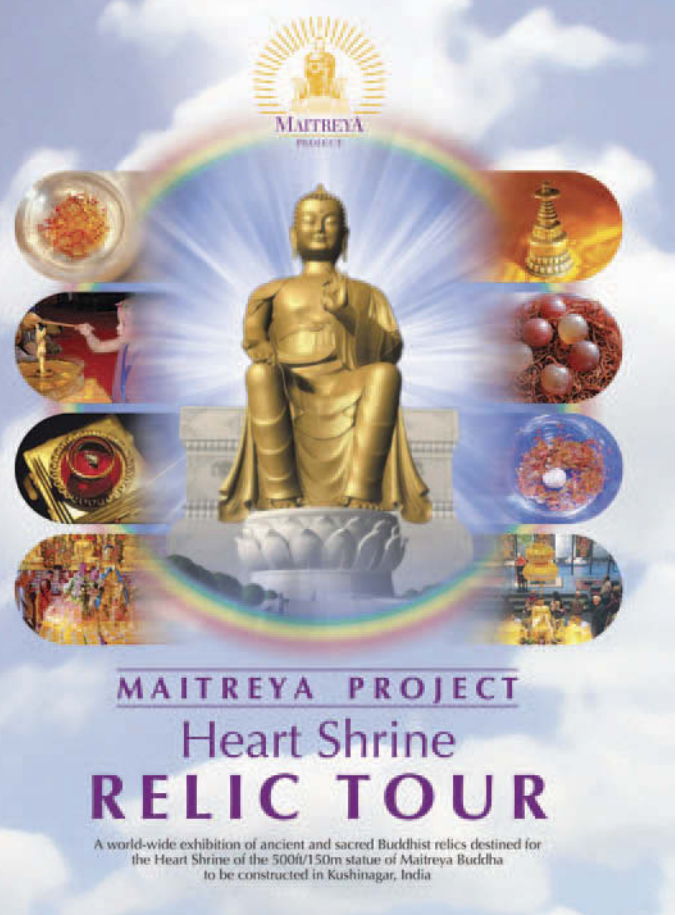


PLATE 9.2A • *An exhibition of ancient and sacred Buddhist relics destined for the Heart Shrine of the Maitreya Buddha.* *SOURCE*: COURTESY OF MAITREYA HEART SHRINE RELIC TOUR, LONDON.

consultants — coincidentally, all British — to shepherd the project.[13] Further, the very body of the Maitreya relies upon state-of-the-art digital imaging and metallurgical technologies in order to translate a small sculptural model into the vast monument that is being designed to last for a thousand years, 'supporting the Project's spiritual and social work for at least a millennium', according to the project's website.[14] The arrival of all this in what one commentator remarked was 'one of the poorest, most technologically challenged parts of the world', only contributes to the 'sense of the project's modern-ness';[15] its belonging fully to the future, not unlike the Bodhisattva Maitreya himself.

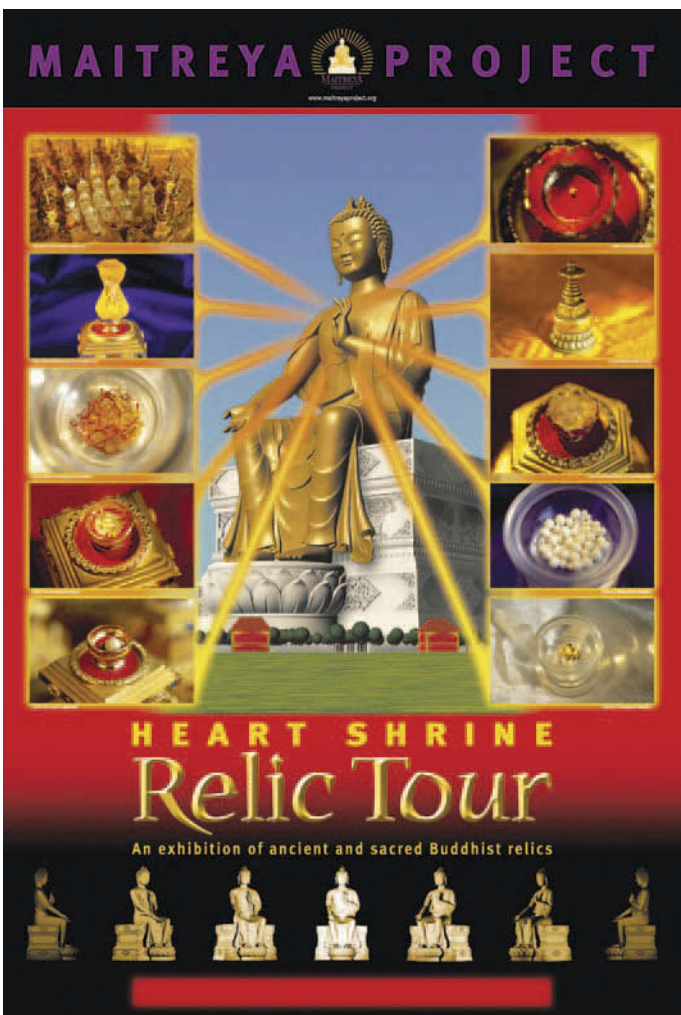
At first glance the Maitreya Project seems to be centred on the currents and crosscurrents of global Buddhism, and more specifically is one of the many instances of the international community supporting the salvage of Tibetan Buddhist culture. However, in this project, global and local interests have come to intersect in unexpected and compelling ways. As the project promoters were trying to purchase 35 acres for the project's site in Bodhgaya, the

[13] Abraham Zablocki, 'The Maitreya Project: A Case Study in Transnational Tibetan Buddhism', paper presented at the American Academy of Religion, Annual Meeting, Cornell University, 2001.

[14] See http://www.maitreyaproject.org, accessed on 23 April 2014.

[15] Zablocki, 'The Maitreya Project'.

PLATE 9.2B • *A poster advertising the Relic Tour.* *SOURCE*: COURTESY OF MAITREYA HEART SHRINE RELIC TOUR, LONDON.



town in the province of Bihar where the Buddha gained enlightenment, they were approached by the government of Uttar Pradesh, the neighbouring province, which offered 750 acres as a *gift* — if the project would shift to Kushinagar, the town where the Buddha had died. No doubt the Uttar Pradesh government was keen to house a project that might become one of the major tourist attractions in North India, but it is significant that the offer was made at the time that Uttar Pradesh's chief minister was a Dalit Buddhist woman; in subsequent years, there has been intense competition among local politicians who would like to take credit for facilitating the project.[16] For them, the critical audience is not the growing international community of the dharma, but the local Dalit Buddhists whose vote is a crucial factor in any election. Thus, on the one hand promoting 'Buddhism' — albeit a multinational, millennial Buddhism of the sort associated with Richard Gere — is presented by Indian politicians as a concession to the interests of the local poor and disadvantaged. On the other hand, Dalit self-assertion, which has been directed toward the creation of greater opportunities and visibility within the Indian state, seems to be finding another register of possibilities through a relationship with a Buddhism of a very different kind.

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The rise of Dalit Buddhism is but one instance of the worldwide trend toward the growth of politicised religion, one that happens to be simultaneously bound up with the politics and sensibilities of caste in India.[17] Our second case study, by contrast, allows us to see some of the effects of the rise of the Hindu right wing in Indian politics in the last two decades.[18] When the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the political party representing the Hindu right, controlled the Government of India from 1996 to 2004, it initiated a number of museum projects that signal some of the ways the museum is envisioned in the consolidation of a new political imaginary.

One such project relates to the most contentious issue in India in recent years. Hindu groups claim that a 16th-century Mughal general built a mosque in Ayodhya over the birthplace of an important Hindu god, Rama; the campaign to 'get back' the land, to raze the mosque, and to build a temple has been violent and inflammatory and is directly or indirectly responsible for all of the communal riots that have claimed thousands of lives in India over the past 20 years. Though the mosque was demolished by a rampaging mob in 1992, the site remains empty pending the Supreme Court's decision on what to do with the land.

Meanwhile, one of the Hindu fundamentalist groups involved in the Ram Mandir campaign was given land in New Delhi by the BJP government to make a museum. Their planned museum will look exactly like the temple that they hope to build in Ayodhya. As they say, the museum will stand *in lieu of the temple*. A news story reporting their intentions presented their argument the following way: 'A Ram *mandir* (temple) may or may not be there so why not Ram museum?'[19] This imagined museum substitutes for the temple, conflating the object with its representation, and exemplifies a process in which politicised religion uses the rhetorical structures of the museum for ideological ends.

The 'Ram Mandir Museum' is still just a proposal, but we see many of these effects already activated in our second case study, which is the Akshardham complex in the heart of New Delhi (Plates 9.3 and 9.4). Part temple, part museum

[16] See R. B. Singh, 'Maya to give UP world's tallest Buddha', *The Indian Express*, 31 July 2002.

[17] Nicholas Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001.

[18] For some relevant discussions see Rajeev Bhargava (ed.), *Secularism and its Critics*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998; Tapati Guha-Thakurta, 'Archaeology and the Monument: On Two Contentious Sites of Faith and History', in *Monuments, Objects, Histories: Institutions of Art in Colonial and Postcolonial India*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2004, pp. 268–304.

[19] 'A Ram *mandir* may or may not be there so why not Ram Museum?', *Express News Service*, New Delhi, 3 January 2002.

PLATE 9.3 • *Visitors milling at Akshardham, New Delhi, and a sunlit view of the elephant plinth prominent at the bottom of the structure.* SOURCE: COURTESY OF BAPS, NEW DELHI & AHMEDABAD.

and part theme park, the Akshardham complex was built in 2005 by a private foundation of the Swaminarayan Hindu sect,[20] with assistance and support from the BJP government. The complex occupies 100 acres of prime land on the banks of Delhi's Yamuna River, land that was not so much granted as *invented* by the BJP government, for they allowed the complex to fill in part of the river's flood plain on which building had previously been forbidden.

The Gujarat-based Swaminarayan sect that built Akshardham is currently the fastest-growing Hindu sect in the world. It has a broad base among Indians in the subcontinent as well as among diasporic Indians living abroad. The sect has built 600 temples, several of which are intended as spectacular statements about the revival and preservation of Indian culture. These temples are built according to norms laid down in ancient Hindu scriptures; the component blocks of stone, carved by traditional craftsmen, have been transported to London, Chicago and Nairobi for erection of enormous temples there. Akshardham in Delhi, which opened in November 2005, is their newest and largest complex.

There is no designated 'museum' within this temple complex, but in a sense we may think of all of Akshardham as a museum. At the heart of the complex is an enormous and elaborately carved stone structure that has been built in strict adherence to the norms of temple architecture (Plate 9.5). However, this structure is called a 'monument', rather than a 'temple'. This term is not used as a kind of self-congratulation but derives from the function of the

[20] The sect has been studied by Raymond Brady Williams in his *An Introduction to Swaminarayan Hinduism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001; of particular interest is his discussion of schisms within the sect and the 'new school' approach of a modernising sub-sect, which spreads its messages through monumental shrine-cum-exhibition complexes such as the Akshardham.

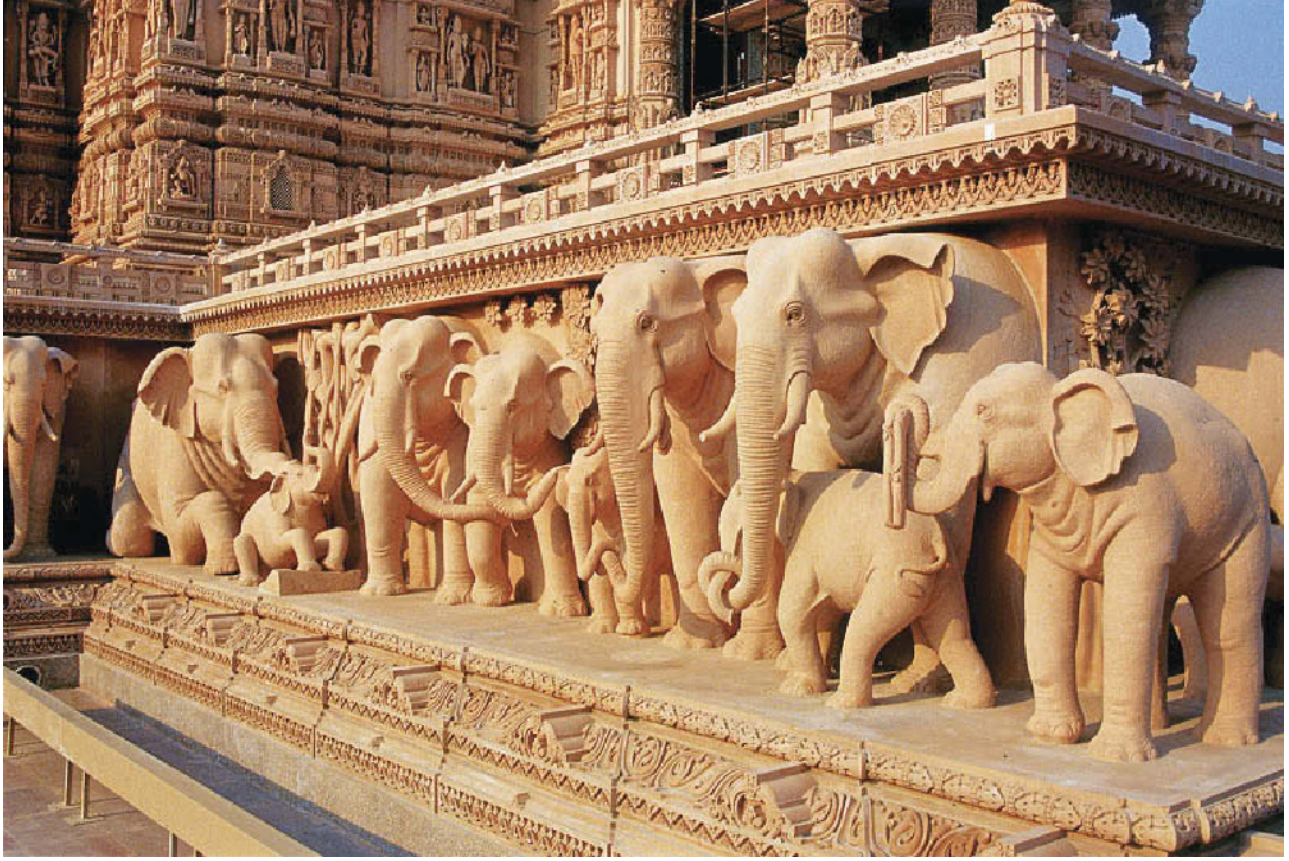

PLATE 9.4 • *Detailed close up of the famed elephant plinth at Akshardham, New Delhi.* *SOURCE*: COURTESY OF BAPS, NEW DELHI & AHMEDABAD.

PLATE 9.5 • *Akshardham lit up at night, with a large-scale statue of Swaminarayan in the main shrine.* *SOURCE*: COURTESY OF BAPS, NEW DELHI & AHMEDABAD.

building. The central structure is built to *look* like an authentic temple, but is not *used* as one; if it had been, the cycle of the deity's resting and awakening would demand that the structure be shut to visitors for much of the day. But Akshardham is intended as a destination for crowds, with tens of thousands of visitors every day and over 150,000 visitors recorded on Sundays. Unlike regular temples, it needs to be open to visitors from nine to five, Tuesday through Sunday; accordingly, worship is conducted in another, smaller shrine within the complex, which follows the ritual norms. As a result, the main shrine is turned into a monument whose main purpose is its visibility — it is intended primarily as something to see.

In this complex, by definition a spectacle, the process of spectatorship is anticipated, guided and articulated throughout, with efficient arrangements for visitor movement and control. One enters the Akshardham complex through an orientation centre that describes the viewing itinerary, assigning the time needed to view the separate parts; for instance, one is told to allot 15 minutes to see the temple plinth carved with elephants. The itinerary is reinforced through the presence of labelling, signage and human attendants, all of which continually direct the viewers' movement while offering texts that extol the greatness of Indian tradition, demonstrate Akshardham's participation in this greatness, and explain the curatorial programme of the complex (we are told, for instance, that the elephant plinth has three sections, depicting elephants in nature, elephants in culture and elephants in legend and myth).

While entry to the central Akshardham monument is free of cost, it is flanked by opportunities to spend. To the left of the monument there is an exhibition complex where entry is ticketed; and to the right are a gift shop and a vast food court. To enter the exhibition complex one must buy a single ticket for all three of its exhibits (again committing visitors to the whole itinerary), namely an IMAX film about the ascetic wanderings of the founder of the sect, an audio-animatronic display that shows him building an institutional structure in his later life, and a Disneyland-style boat ride that takes one past dioramas of the history of Indian science and technology.[21] There is also a musical fountain — another popular and ticketed attraction — in which jets of water play to the sound of Vedic chants.

From its immense scale to its intricate detail, Akshardham is designed to be an impressive visual experience that constantly asks us to note its impressiveness. Attention is frequently drawn to the beauty and intricacy of the carvings, which are presented as the material counterpart to spiritual exaltation; to the labour involved in its creation, which is described as a form of devotion;[22] and to the technology that supports it all as providing a vehicle for eternal truths. There is also much to be said about each part of the exhibition complex, but the dioramas on the boat ride, arranged as the final and culminating exhibit on the itinerary, make particularly interesting assertions about science, modernity and Indian tradition. Ancient Indian scientists and mathematicians are presented as having already known about things that were discovered centuries later by modern Western science; here, mythic references to flying chariots are presented as evidence of aviation technology. Displays like this help to naturalise the affinity, noted by critics such as Partha Chatterjee, that

[21] 'There is no doubt about it — we have taken the concept from Disneyland', stated Jyotindra Dave, the Chief Public Relations Officer for the organisation that built the temple. 'We visited five or six times. As tourists, I mean. And then we went away and worked out how they did everything.' See Jonathan Allen, 'The Disney Touch at a Hindu Temple', *The New York Times*, 8 June 2006.

[22] The description of labour as devotion is abundantly evident in the promotional literature of the cult. To wit, 'Akshardham is an architectural marvel of this century. Awe-inspiring auspiciousness and amazing craftsmanship . . . More than 12 million man hours of 900 skilled craftsmen have created this magnificent monument . . . Thousands come daily to discover the inspirations of design and devotion, effort and elegance, care and consciousness, silence and spirituality'. From http://www.akshardham.com/gujarat/attractions/index.htm, accessed on 23 April 2014, the website of the Akshardham complex in Gandhinagar, Gujarat, which was the most architecturally ambitious Akshardham complex until the New Delhi site was completed.

the Hindu right wing has for modern technology, modern markets and the modern political process in general.[23]

If Akshardham appears to be a theme park in the guise of a temple, it is worth noting the sophistication of its elements — the superb sculpture and awe-inspiring architecture, the visually lush IMAX film, the smooth functioning of its complex audio-animatronic show — that elevates it well above the level of kitsch. But all these features — scale, beauty and sophistication — are also frequently verbalised, through signage and audio, in the journey through the complex. Clearly, through complexes such as Delhi's Akshardham, the 19th-century Gujarati-region cult of Swaminarayan is laying claim to pan-Indian significance (including, of course, the Indian diaspora, an important site of the Swaminarayan sect's operation and support), and to primordial roots, deepening and extending its claim over Indic time and space (Plate 9.6). To reach out to an expanding and uninitiated audience, the sect needed a didactic complex; to attract this audience to its message, it needed to deliver a spectacle. For all of this, it has needed to adapt to its own purposes the museum's modes of delivering messages through space, in time, using beauty. Ironically, in mimicking the museal mode, and in the interest of visibility and access, the complex must even de-sacralise the 'temple' that lies at its very heart.

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[23] Partha Chatterjee, 'Secularism and Tolerance', in Rajeev Bhargava (ed.), *Secularism and its Critics*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998, pp. 345–79.

PLATE 9.6 • *Pramukh Swami Maharaj, Head of the BAPS, performing* pujan*, blessing the Akshardham model.* SOURCE: COURTESY OF BAPS, NEW DELHI & AHMEDABAD.

The two cases presented so far — the proposed giant Buddha at Kushinagar and the newly opened Akshardham complex in New Delhi — are both initiatives of private foundations that have been supported by organs of the state; they signal the growing presence of politicised religion of many hues within the cultural field. In the first instance, a government hopes to find favour with a significant minority; in the second instance, a majoritarian government supports institutions whose ideology parallels their own.

Our final case study makes visible another self-consciously spectacular museum expression on the part of a religious community, the Sikhs; in this case, however, the project was initiated and is fully funded by the state. In contrast to the architecture of historical recovery of the previous examples, this museum — the Khalsa Heritage Complex located in Anandpur Sahib, a small city in Punjab and, significantly, a holy site of pilgrimage for the Sikh faith — is characterised by its futurism, its globalist aspirations, and its alignment with the discourses of the international mega-museum. Unlike the other cases studied so far, it retains its identity *as* a museum, hoping to benefit from its proximity to a holy site and yet keep a distance from it.

Like a spaceship dropped into rural Punjab, the Khalsa Heritage Complex holds the promise of what has been called the 'Bilbao effect', the term used as shorthand to describe how the arrival of a spectacular museum can bring economic invigoration, international tourism, prestige, and global visibility to a region.[24] The building's sleek, postmodernist architecture and curved rooftops clad in stainless steel even recall the style of Frank Gehry's Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao (Plate 9.7). Like all new mega-museums, the Khalsa Heritage Complex is many things at once: located on a 100-acre site, it consists of two gigantic complexes connected by an approximately 500-foot ceremonial bridge, a vast water garden of reflecting pools, thousands of square feet of exhibition galleries, a two-level reference library, a 400-seat auditorium for seminars and cultural events, an amphitheatre, a restaurant, a series of arcaded walkways and gardens, and of course, a museum gift shop.

It is worth noting that the author of all this is the 'starchitect' Moshe Safdie, the Israeli-born Canadian who has built 15 mega-museums around the world, including the Skirball Cultural Center in Los Angeles, the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa, the Shenzhen Cultural Center in China, and the Yad Vashem complex in Jerusalem, the preeminent Holocaust memorial museum in Israel. Upon seeing Safdie's contribution to the latter site, a memorial to the 1.5 million children killed during the Holocaust,[25] the then Chief Minister of Punjab stated that he was 'deeply moved'. The response led him to commission Safdie to construct in his home state 'the world's biggest cultural and historical museum dedicated to a community'.[26] Contrary to our spaceship analogy, with its suggestion of an alien imposition, Safdie claims to have gained his inspiration for the project from a range of local influences: the fortress architecture of North India, the physical landscape and hills of Punjab, and the historic Golden Temple in Amritsar, the most significant *gurdwara* or temple for Sikhs. To this we could add the modernist influence of international architects working in the region, namely, the prestigious history of Le Corbusier in Chandigarh, and Louis Kahn in North India and Bangladesh (with whom Safdie apprenticed, significantly). On top of the enormous shafts of each tower of the building, whose cross-sections are alternately cylindrical, square and triangular, Safdie has inverted the traditional domes of Sikh temple architecture to generate huge concave shapes 'like great receptors facing the sky'.[27] Obviously, a key desire of this museum/spiritual space/

[24] Anna Maria Guasch and Joseba Zulaika, *Learning from the Bilbao Guggenheim*, Reno: Center for Basque Studies, 2005.

[25] For an analysis of the Yad Vashem complex, see James Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993.

[26] Anandpur Sahib Foundation, Chandigarh, *Khalsa Heritage Museum: Architecture and Museum Design*, brochure, n.d., p. 2.

[27] Ibid., p. 3.

PLATE 9.7 • *Postmodernist architecture at the Khalsa Heritage Complex, Anandpur Sahib, Punjab. SOURCE*: PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF KAVITA SINGH.

heritage complex is to achieve monumentality, but what exactly is being transmitted in this peculiar convergence of abstraction and embeddedness?

One answer to this question lies in the self-definition of the Khalsa Complex as a so-called 'storytelling museum'. It is, in other words, a 'memory-site', to borrow a term from the Holocaust scholar James Young: it is a museum that participates in the enactment of cultural memory, in part by assigning a monumental form to validate and affirm identity in the present.[28] Although still at the proposal stage, the exhibits planned by the National Institute of Design in Ahmedabad, India's premier design institution, aim to narrate the 'heroic and poignant' story of the Sikhs. Through the use of plasma screens, multilingual audio, surround sound, and special-effects projection, the galleries would take us through the philosophical foundations of the Sikh faith, the historical milieus for the emergence of Sikhism, the people and land of contemporary Punjab, and the lives of Sikhs around the world (Plate 9.8). The historical narrative extends from 15th-century Punjab, when Guru Nanak first founded the faith, to the consolidation and expansion of the Sikh kingdoms in the 18th century, to the ominous backdrop of British presence, leading to the Anglo-Sikh Wars of the 19th century. Inevitably, after highlighting the Sikh role in the struggle for Independence, the galleries lead ultimately to the violence of Partition in 1947, which tore Punjab into two nation-states and continues to haunt the modernity and collective psyche of the region in powerful and inextricable ways. The representation of *this* grim reality — dead bodies littered along the railway tracks,

[28] Young, *The Texture of Memory*, p. 7.

PLATE 9.8 • *An exploration of Sikh history and philosophy through a variety of media: Inside the Khalsa Heritage Complex at Anandpur Sahib, Punjab.* *SOURCE*: PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF DHARMINDER SINGHA.

physical destruction, violence and abduction, and the mass displacement of refugees; a human tragedy of epic proportions — now recalls unmistakably the migration, if in a somewhat mutated form, of the Holocaust paradigm that is also invoked by the symbolism of Safdie's involvement in the project.

The Khalsa Complex is, then, more accurately a 'memory-site in an expanded field', inscribed as much by local or national narratives as it is by what Andreas Huyssen has described as the globalisation of the Holocaust discourse.[29] For Huyssen, the use of the Holocaust as a universal trope for collective historical memory is not only problematic; it is also symptomatic of a new temporal sensibility that turns obsessively to the memory of the past at the same time as it participates in a recurring historical amnesia. Unlike an earlier period of modernity that seemed more oriented toward an image of the future, the relentless culture of musealisation in the present marks a field of memory that is fundamentally altered by the forces of globalisation today. As Huyssen has shown, the Holocaust model

[29] Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003, esp. chapter 6. See also his earlier book, *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia*, London: Routledge, 1995.

has, since the late 1980s, extended far beyond its original reference point to inform expressions of historical trauma in societies as wide-ranging as Argentina, Guatemala, South Korea, South Africa, Rwanda, and Bosnia, among others. How this trope might enhance or hinder the operations of memory around the traumas in Sikh history and Indian Partition is, of course, yet to be seen, or indeed *if* it will be activated at all, given that the exhibits remain at the early stages of reception. For now, it seems important to note nevertheless the unique convergence of social phenomena — global, spiritual, community, history, memory, heritage, and identity — that is imbricated in this unfolding event.

Carol Duncan in her now classic study of 'the art museum as ritual' wrote of the post-Enlightenment separation of the church and state; taking the example of the Louvre, she suggested that the museum is not just a secular, didactic space but is the shrine of a secular religion, the cult of the nation-state.[30] Her great insight, using Victor Turner's anthropological study of ritual, was to show how the museum *works* like a temple; the museum visit is itself a ritual of citizenship, through which the audience is forged into a national community of citizens much as the church visit forged a Christian community of believers. Throughout this chapter, we too have been concerned with the relationships between the religious and the secular, the question of the museum with regards to citizenship, and the possibility of borrowing ideas from anthropology, in the spirit of Duncan's pioneering analyses. However, the operations of history that are now visible to us through the 66 years of India's postcolonial existence throw up phenomena and patterns that reveal the fundamental inadequacy of Duncan's conceptual framework for an understanding of museums on a global scale and within 21st-century conditions of change. Duncan's work may be relevant to the role of museums within the framework of nationalism, but the stability and authority of the nation itself have been increasingly eroded by transnational processes. More and more it seems that the world we inhabit is a post-national one, requiring other models for understanding its operations and alternative vantage points from which to view its effects. We must turn not only to post-Enlightenment Europe, but equally to post-colonial India, to seek out histories, perspectives and cultural modalities that are essential to the workings of the world today.

In India, it would seem that one cannot separate the domain of the secular and the religious in the way that one might in Europe, however tentatively. It is not merely that, for some visitors, museum objects housed in secular museums continue to be worthy of worship. Nor is it only that politicised religion finds the institutional form of the museum attractive — its alternation of resonance and wonder, sensuousness and education — and that politicised religion incorporates its technologies within the temple itself. It is, fundamentally, that the entire epistemological authority established by the museum through its secular avatars, where it declares itself as the teller of truths, is now proving useful for the reconstruction of society along religious lines. This is a set of post-national processes that can, as we have seen, operate at multiple registers simultaneously the interests of the local, the national and the global sometimes merging and sometimes colliding. Indeed, the growing role of religion in politics and the drive toward self-representation by diverse groups evident on a global scale suggest that the developments we have outlined in India may not be examples of backwardness but may provide a glimpse of what the future holds for the museum and its emerging modalities. At the very least, what is required of us is a self-conscious expansion of our conventional field of investigation and its objects of study and a willingness to confront cultural phenomena that might exceed the narrow definition of what constitutes 'art'.

We are seeing a beginning here, not an end: the next chapter of the story has yet to unfold. But this redeployment and appropriation of the museum — art history's key institution — is no doubt of enormous significance for art history in the 21st century. For what we see in the museum's

[30] Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals*.

reincarnation is no less than the dismemberment and reconstitution of art history's own disciplinary knowledge, for the needs, contingencies and difficulties of a future that is rushing to meet the present.

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museum watching

museum watching

an introduction

To historicise and theorise the museum in South Asia is to quickly come up against one aspect of this cultural institution that challenges any singular or all-encompassing account: namely, its status as a *lived* reality, and the diversity of its shape and character at the level of everyday experience. To paraphrase the New Left literary theorist and founder of Cultural Studies in Britain, Raymond Williams, the museum 'is ordinary, in every society and in every mind', and that is where 'we must start'.[1] For Williams, it was actually *culture* that was ordinary, a claim that may seem banal today, but not so when he first made it in England in the late 1950s to radically confront the legacy of an Arnoldian conception of culture as something that meant 'cultivated', and belonged only to the elite. Williams insisted, in other words, on culture as a lived and everyday experience, and rejected what he called 'this extraordinary fussiness' that identifies certain things as culture and then separates them 'as with a park wall, from ordinary people and ordinary work'.[2] Throughout his influential intellectual career, it was this latter realm — that of the ordinary — given shape by specific material realities, that provided the basis for Williams to articulate a shared or common experience across village, region, city, and nation.

The idea that the 'museum is ordinary' is thus an important point of entry into this final section of the volume, which presents a number of positioned snapshots of a broad range of museological sites that exist today in the Indian subcontinent. The authors of these portraits, 13 in all, were graduate student researchers who participated in a multi-year, interdisciplinary collaboration initiated by the editors of this volume. These student researchers conducted fieldwork at some 80 different museums in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, with the goal of building an empirical record of South Asia's museological landscape. Drawing upon a range of interdisciplinary methodologies, such as documentation, archival investigation, interviews, and participant-observation, they sought to build case studies through Geertzian 'thick description', and to make visible the material, social and political contexts of South Asia's museums — some prominent and dynamic, others forgotten and under-visited — through an account of their everyday operations and ordinary existence on the ground. The detailed reports the students generated brought much more than the museum's collections into focus. They also offered dynamic glimpses into the museum's history, architecture, conceptual narratives, urban contexts, visitors and workers, spatial practices, and rituals — the latter, at times, both secular and profane.

What follows are extracts gleaned from these researcher reports. They do not represent a comprehensive or 'objective' record of the facts, but rather situated encounters and informed responses

[1] Raymond Williams, 'Culture is Ordinary', in Ben Highmore (ed.), *The Everyday Life Reader*, London and New York: Routledge, 2002, p. 92.

[2] *Ibid*., p. 94.

by multiple authors in different registers of voice. In these short snippets, the reader will be introduced to a wide range of topics and museological phenomena: from the illustrious status of the Lahore Museum, now at the contested centre of 'official' national heritage in Pakistan; to the humble origins of the Bishnupur Museum, located in a small Bengali town rich with antiquities and archaeological heritage; from the 'Indo-Saracenic' architecture of the Prince of Wales Museum in Mumbai, a symbol of its urban modernity; to the Western-style public toilet of the Stok Palace Museum in Ladakh, the collections of the former royal family located along a Buddhist tourist trail notorious for its lack of such facilities. It is hoped that the spirited novelty of these museological sites, and the pragmatic on-site issues they serve to expose, will present the reader with a small cross-section of the contexts and conditions that are both unique to museums in South Asia, and generalisable to histories, cultures and paradigms beyond.

breaking a coconut in mumbai

on the CSMVS

Tulay Atak

Tulay Atak visited the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalya (CSMVS), one of the main attractions in Mumbai for tourists. She explores the different architectural styles displayed at the museum as well as the image of the museum as a secular institution.

Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalya (CSMVS), formerly known as the Prince of Wales Museum, is one of the main attractions in Mumbai, especially for tourists and out-of-towners. It is situated in the Kala Ghoda district, south of the train station Chhatrapati Shivaji (formerly Victoria) Terminus, and close to the Colaba district at the south end of the peninsula where most tourists stay and spend time. Both these districts are historic parts of the city with buildings dating back to the second half of the 19th century. No wonder tourists — myself included — stay here: these parts of Mumbai have a unified character that resembles the image of an old European city. Istanbul, Paris, Berlin, St Petersburg, Mumbai: there is something common to them all, which is the transformation they went through in the 19th century, a transformation that introduced trains and private enterprise to the city, both of which left their marks in new buildings and urban forms; train stations became gateways, and new building types were invented, which had exits instead of altars to accommodate secular public spaces. This city provided the material for Walter Benjamin's unfinished *Arcades Project* that sought for the material traces of modernity.[1] This is the city that 20th century knew of and tried to do away with, the city that Chandigarh sought to counter with its reticulated superblocks.

The CSMVS (formerly the Prince of Wales Museum) was built to commemorate the arrival of the Prince of Wales to Mumbai, as was the Gateway of India. The foundation stone for the museum was laid in 1905 by the Prince of Wales, and the building was completed in 1914. George Wittet, the architect of the museum, designed and built several institutions and landmarks in Mumbai, such as the Institute of Science, Jehangir Hall and the Gateway of India. The 'Indo-Saracenic style' of the building grew out of the design brief which stated that the museum for Indian exhibits should be Indian in character. Wittet travelled throughout India to discover the styles of architecture that belong to India and designed a building that he considered to be 'Indian in character'.[2] (Plate 10.1.1) Accordingly, each floor of the building refers to a different style of architecture: the ground floor columns are derived from the temple architecture of Rajasthan; the first floor railings were physically transported from the home of an Indian nobleman; the second floor arches as well as the dome covering the central hall refer to Islamic Mughal architecture. Accordingly, the definition of Indo-Saracenic style is a combination of Hindu, Saracenic and Western architectural forms.[3] Throughout the building, there is little sense of transition where different styles meet. Stone temple columns, wooden columns and arches (probably made of brick) are separated by floor slabs; the stacking of floors becomes a stack of different architectures. Columns appear discontinuous, and visually, they no longer play the role of pure structural elements that connect the roof to the ground.

What is continuous instead is space. The building is designed for the flow of constant visitor traffic. Interior and exterior spaces connect to one another as visitors pass through galleries and exhibition spaces.

[1] Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2002.

[2] See the Museum's website: http://www.csmvs.in/about-us/history.html, accessed on 4 May 2014.

[3] *Ibid.*

PLATE 10.1.1 • Exterior façade of the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya, formerly the Prince of Wales museum, built in the Indo-Saracenic style.
SOURCE: PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR.

Almost anywhere in the museum, at a single glance, one can see three different spaces at the same time — a gallery, the hallway, a staircase, or the gardens outside. Rich vistas follow one another when walking through the building. The architectural historian Robin Evans, who considered architecture as the 'format of social life' has written that a major transformation in architecture occurred in the 18th century with the creation of separate rooms that were connected to each other by means of corridors.[4] The introduction of privacy by means of separating spaces would become a consistent element of architecture throughout the 20th century. But here at the CSMVS, in response to the social life of the museum, there is a different architectural format where spaces flow into each other in the way that one sees and moves through them. And each space is different from the other either in its size, light qualities or because of the exhibits inside, which have their own spatial and atmospheric qualities.

The vibrant central hall functions as a space where one can take a rest from the exhibits in the galleries and simply watch people move in and out of the galleries. It resembles transit spaces such as train stations and shopping malls. People-watching and resting are part of the programme of the building, in the way that it was designed, and in the way that it still functions. There are several lounging spaces throughout the building: in the balcony overlooking the central hall one can see people looking down at the hall; on the seats in the sculpture gallery people sit down to rest and chat; there are also seats located on the peripheral balconies that function as exterior galleries with sculptures overlooking the garden. There is even a 'waiting lounge' on the second floor where the staircase turns into a balcony overlooking the central hall with two benches placed across from each other. One encounters couples and families resting here during their visit to the museum. While waiting is usually considered to be a solitary activity associated with boredom, here it involves conversations and people-watching. The lounging spaces in this museum are seldom boring due to their difference from each other and the variety of spaces that they are connected to (Plate 10.1.2).

Initially, when the museum was founded, the major part of the collection came from the Tata family, the industrialists who have left their stamp on Mumbai with buildings such as the Taj Hotel across from the Gateway of India. The collection consists of sculptures — bronze and stone — manuscripts

[4] Robin Evans, 'Figures, Doors and Passages', in *Translations from Drawing to Building and Other Essays*, London: Architectural Association Publications, 1997, pp. 55–91.

and miniature paintings; decorative arts, which include ivory and jade work; arms and armours; Far Eastern collection which consists of souvenirs like small glass bottles; paintings; and a natural history section that has its own wing at the south end of the building next to the reference library; and a Tibetan collection, which has its own separate gallery on the second floor. In the Tibetan gallery, one finds daily objects, such as musical instruments, along with sculptures and paintings. In a conversation, the museum director confirmed that the Tibetan gallery intends to display the ambiance of Tibetan religious performances. In an all-encompassing display of cultural artefacts, Tibetan culture becomes an 'other' in this gallery.

I had the chance to meet a student who was preparing her thesis project — an urban design proposal for the museum and the area surrounding it. According to her research, only 1 per cent of the visitors of the museum are from Mumbai. The rest are Indian or foreign tourists who are visiting the city. Some come from smaller towns and suburbs; the 'true Bombayite' does not visit the museum, but uses it as a landmark to navigate the city.

Among the interviews I conducted with visitors, one question that I frequently had to respond to was: what is your religion? One of the visitors, who told me that he was Muslim, asked me about Hagia Sophia and its status. He wanted to know whether or not the building was used today as a mosque. I found this question especially intriguing given the ongoing debates in Turkey regarding the status of Hagia Sophia, and its history of programmatic transformation from a Byzantine church to an Ottoman mosque to a modern museum. There has recently been a provocative proposal to transform the building back into a mosque, which has carved deep into the political debates about religion and secularism in Turkey. Hearing this question at another museum made me realise that these two spaces may be closer to each other than their geographical locations dictate. On Mondays,

PLATE 10.1.2 • People resting, in conversation, and watching as others pass by at one of the museum's lounging spots.
SOURCE: PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR.

PLATE 10.1.3 • Fracturing the idea of the Museum; the ritual Monday *pooja* performed for a mid-6th century Shiva sculpture from Parel. *SOURCE:* PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR.

when the museum is closed to the public, a *pooja* (prayer) takes place in front of the mid-6th-century Shiva sculpture from Parel. The previous museum director discovered it at a temple, and it was given to the museum on the condition that it will not be used only for display; its ritual function will be performed as well. On Mondays the staff gathers in front of the sculpture/idol and a coconut is broken and distributed. As the donor's wish is performed, the ritual marks the beginning of the week. When I wanted to take photographs of the ritual, the assistant director was hesitant. He thought that such a photograph, if published might fracture the public image of the museum as a secular institution (Plate 10.1.3).

the bishnupur museum

amateurs and volunteers

Rituparna Basu

Rituparna Basu visited the museums of Bengal and Bangladesh. Here, she reports on the museum in Bishnupur, a town in Bankura district in Bengal that is an archaeologically and culturally rich area. The museum was set up by local amateur scholars who scoured the countryside for antiquities. Basu describes the predicament of a small museum with few resources that must care for a rich collection.

The Bishnupur Museum is located in Bishnupur town, which is itself something of a living museum as it has about 30 terracotta temples dating from the 16th–19th centuries, as well as remnants of royal structures built by the Malla dynasty in the 18th–19th centuries. Bishnupur is known for its archaeological wealth, high quality crafts and textile traditions, as well the Bishnupur gharana of classical music. It is often called the 'cultural hub' of Bengal (Plate 10.2.1). The Museum at Bishnupur, also called the Acharya Jogesh Chandra Purakirti Bhavan, houses a very rich and rare collection of manuscripts, coins, sculptures, folk art, and musical instruments, which reflects the cultural wealth of Bishnupur as a whole.

The Museum was founded in 1951 by local scholars and school teachers who formed the Bishnupur branch of the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad (the Bengali Literary Society). They collected archaeological antiquities from local excavations

PLATE 10.2.1 • Panoramic exterior shot of the Bishnupur museum. *SOURCE:* PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF PAUL ANCHETA.

and scoured nearby villages and towns for important manuscripts. For instance, the museum's manuscripts with their famous painted wooden covers (some of which date back to the 16th century) were collected by Maniklal Singha, a teacher of the Bishnupur High School and by Ramsharan Ghosh, Professor of Bankura Christian College. Satya Kinkar Sahana, a local zamindar, also left his huge collection of books and manuscripts to the museum. The museum is named after Acharya Jogesh Chandra Ray, who donated many antiquities including a stone sculpture of Surya that is one of the prized possessions of the museum. To encourage donations of artefacts, the museum instituted two awards — (*a*) Basanta Ranjan award for manuscripts, named after Basanta Ranjan Mullick, who discovered Chandidas' *Sri Krishna Kirtan* manuscript in a cow-shed in a nearby village, and (*b*) Ganga Gobinda Award, named after the first President of the museum, for the best contribution to sculpture.

In its first year, the museum's collections were housed in the residence of a prominent local family; it was then shifted to two rooms in the hostel of Bishnupur High School where the museum remained for two decades. It was shifted to its present location in the 1970s, where its building was constructed with the funds raised from the government and local clubs, on land donated by Kenaram Bhattacharya in 1954. Scholars, antiquarians and local people, in their urge to preserve the local finds, contributed to the building funds generously. Several art lovers from Calcutta and neighbouring areas, local societies such as the 'Bankura Wholesale Consumers Society' and the Samatata Society of Calcutta have also shown their generosity. Although it originated through the initiative of many individuals, the museum now receives support from the government, and is now the Bankura District Museum under the charge of the Directorate of Archaeology and Museums, Government of West Bengal. It receives government aid and is run by a managing committee that includes members of the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad. At present, however, most of the founder members of the museum have either passed away or become very old, and ardently desire that the museum be completely taken over by the government for safekeeping and proper maintenance of the objects.

The museum's collection continues to grow in present times (Plate 10.2.2). Recently it received a great deal of publicity in the newspapers as it was trying to retrieve an 'Ayudha' image of Jain 'Tirthankara Adinatha' discovered at a local site; this unclaimed object was lying in the local police station

PLATE 10.2.2 • Interior view of the museum at Bishnupur. *SOURCE:* COURTESY OF THE BISHNUPUR ACHARYA JOGESH CHANDRA PURAKRITI BHAWAN.

at the time of my visit. But it is no longer easy to get antiquities from the local villagers who have become aware of their monetary value and often want to sell them rather than give them to the museum — a significant change in attitude from the past.

Even as the museum's collection expands, not everything is put on display. In fact a senior figure associated with the museum observed that in view of the increased smuggling of idols and coins discovered from the villages of West Bengal, as well as the theft of precious objects from many museums, it was better for the museum to maintain a low profile until it was taken over by the government, to ensure the protection of the objects on display. This person said the museum collection had been very strictly guarded by Maniklal Singha, as long as he was alive (d. 1994), and even now, in the absence of adequate security, most of the manuscripts and coins are kept safe under lock and key, away from display.

During the period I spent there, the Bishnupur Museum had a viewership of approximately 20 people per day, though on one particular day it rose to 53 when a team of 35 Santhal (tribal) women came to visit the museum from the neighbouring district of Purulia. Among the visitors were school and college students, people from the nearby villages, as well as from Kolkata, and from other parts of India and abroad. One of the interesting visitors I met was a 25-year-old farmer Debnath Chakraborty, from the nearby Kankila village, who had first heard of the museum from his history teacher at school and has since visited the museum several times. He had recently read in the local newspapers that the museum's famous *Krishna Kirtan* manuscript had been discovered in his village. He had come specifically to see the manuscript and felt proud of it.

a glimpse into the lahore museum

Shaila Bhatti

Shaila Bhatti visited the Lahore Museum, Pakistan, popularly known as the ajaib ghar or wonder house, and studied its unique collection. The museum is a hotspot among the domestic public and Shaila examines the various kinds of visitors coming to visit every day.

The Lahore Museum, located in Punjab Province, is the largest and oldest public museum in Pakistan. Situated on the main thoroughfare of the city, it is distinguished by its redbrick building harkening from the British period (Plate 10.3.1). Dating back to 1856, the Lahore Museum was set up as part of the East India Company's initiative to establish a network of local museums in various districts of India. The original location of the museum was in a 17th-century Mughal building; at that time, known as the Lahore Central Museum, it contained an ad hoc mixture of collections pertaining to archaeology, ethnology, geology, and a large number of general curiosities. Over time, the museum's collections grew and in 1864 colonial administrators shifted it to the vacated Punjab Exhibition building nearby. This offered the museum space to reorganise, expand and with the arrival of John Lockwood Kipling (Rudyard Kipling's father) in 1875, a new direction: Victorian art education and craft reform in colonial India. However, a permanent home for the Lahore Museum was only found in 1893 when the Jubilee Institute was completed, comprising the Mayo School of Art and the Lahore Museum. The current museum still occupies this location,

although now it is a separate entity from the neighbouring art school.

Amongst Lahorites (and in the colonial imagination), the Lahore Museum is popularly referred to as the *ajaib ghar* or wonder house, an image the museum, past and present, distances itself from. Today, the Lahore Museum prefers to project an image of its status as the unofficial national museum of Pakistan, which in relation to tourism perpetuates an aura of national and global cultural importance that entices people to visit, but is equally taken up by other tourist/cultural organisations in a similar vein. For example, the Punjab Tourism Development Corporation or PTDC's leaflets describe the Lahore Museum as the 'largest' in Pakistan displaying key collections such as miniature paintings, rare manuscripts and objects from the Gandhara-period. Likewise, in attempts to develop cultural tourism within Pakistan, UNESCO planned to include the Lahore Museum on its Gandhara Civilization Trail, owing to its vast material archive from this region including the world famous 'Fasting Buddha'. Such credentials highlight the museum's ability to operate within global discourses of cultural heritage and national patrimony through ownership of unique masterpieces or antiquities, while also attracting local and global visitors.

Nationalist discourse in Pakistan is firmly concerned with charting out a history of the nation, and a national identity for its citizens, that is rooted in the advent of Islam in South Asia in the 7th century, later the Mughal Empire, and more specifically the rise of Muslim nationalism during the struggle for Independence from British colonists. The latter occupies the historical period from mid-19th century to 1947, and is foregrounded as the origin for the idea of Pakistan as a separate nation that culminated with the formation of a new nation. Ideologically, this now informs the naturalisation of Pakistani identity that anchors its stability to Islam as the basis for cultural unity, and

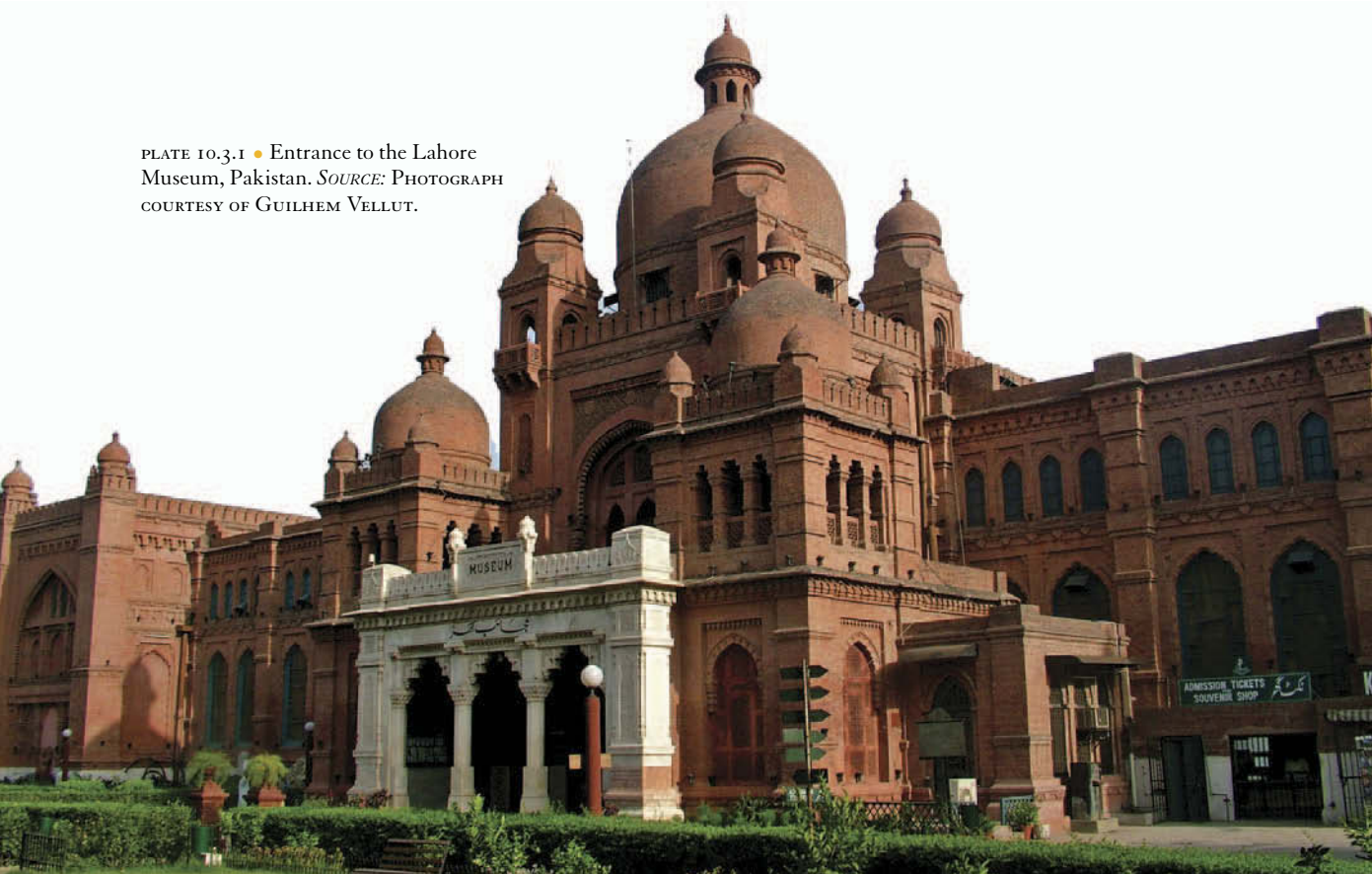

PLATE 10.3.1 • Entrance to the Lahore Museum, Pakistan. *SOURCE:* PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF GUILHEM VELLUT.

the right way of life for all Pakistanis. All political regimes — democratic or not — have utilised this basic ideological stance to create a unifying discourse that emphasises the Muslim struggle for the nation, Islamic culture, and history, which in turn becomes the identity for Pakistan and its citizens. How does the Lahore Museum present visual signs that support this image of a Pakistani society and culture that is also disseminated through school textbooks and media, in order to present a unified Pakistani cultural heritage for visitors?

The most immediate and primary indicators that address these issues are in the names of certain galleries, such as the Independence Movement, Islamic, Manuscript and Calligraphy, Contemporary Crafts of Pakistan, and Pakistani Stamps galleries. All these galleries materially embody the ideologies of nationalist politics — with the Independence Movement Gallery in particular being defined through a pre- and post-Independence chronology.

Over the various decades of politics since Independence, collections have been added or altered to enhance the Lahore Museum's materialisation of this 'imagined community'.[1] The first gallery to be introduced to the museum, following Partition and Independence in 1947, was the Islamic Gallery in 1966–67, representing not religion per se, but the arts and crafts of Muslim society through an emphasis on stylistics and form. It is not clear to what extent this was a 'new' gallery as many of the artefacts put on display were from older collections; so it was more a case of re-organisation of objects in response to an apparent lack — a gallery dealing exclusively with Islamic culture. Another addition came in 1973 with the Independence Movement Gallery on the first floor of the museum, where 2,000-plus images on the gallery walls visually narrate the history of the Pakistan Movement and the All India Muslim League. This highly patriotic gallery about Pakistan's founding fathers acts as an anchor for the other galleries, and helps to reframe the history of art and antiquities as constitutive of

Pakistani patrimony and heritage (Plate 10.3.2). Also in 1973, Pakistan's renowned modern artist, Sadequain, painted a mural on the ceiling of the Miniature Gallery, along with other large-scale calligraphies; it was based on a verse by Allama Iqbal, considered one of the nation's greatest poets. Although painted during an era of populist politics and nationalisation in Pakistan, during Zia-ul-Haq's era (1977–88) these works came to signal the onslaught of Islamisation. However, the puritanical application of Islamic law to society under Zia had a relatively mild impact upon the Lahore Museum, which endured no major re-organisation of its collections, and was essentially left alone during this period. In the 1980s, the museum gained the Manuscripts and Calligraphy Gallery through a subdivision of the Islamic

[1]Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London: Verso, 1991.

PLATE 10.3.2 • Long view of the Freedom Fighters' Gallery at the Lahore Museum. *SOURCE:* PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR.

Collections, and in 1984 a further two galleries were constructed — the Contemporary Crafts of Pakistan and Stamps Gallery; again, neither was hindered by strict ideological constraints, but instead fit into a generic national imagining. Thus, the Lahore Museum, which expanded from an initial seven galleries in 1947 to 18 sections in the late 1990s, remains distinguished as both a national icon and one of the few truly democratic public spaces in Pakistan since its inception as a nation-state.

The Lahore Museum is a definite hotspot among domestic public. Visitor logs for the year 2003–04 record that a total of 324,978 people visited the Lahore Museum, of which only 3,126 were foreigners — whose numbers have declined dramatically following 9/11. The local museum public only partially comprises visitors from Lahore itself; they also come from other districts and Provinces: 46 per cent from Lahore, and 53 per cent from places such as Bahawalpur District in Punjab or the Provinces of Sindh or the region of Azad Kashmir. Such visitors appear to consume the museum as part of a 'day out' in the city that frequently includes other tourist/recreational sites; they come in groups that range in size from two to 15, and consist of all ages, with many of the older visitors on a return visit. If the category of the local visitor is, at times, looked upon with condescension and defined as 'uneducated' by museum staff, this image was also contradicted by my own sample of visitor questionnaires and interviews undertaken in 2003: 80 per cent had been to Urdu/English medium schools, 20 per cent were Matriculation passed, 11 per cent High School level, 28 per cent had Bachelors and 11 per cent a Masters; these numbers suggest a lower-middle to middle class constituency for the museum. As one local tourist, Kurat-ul-Nainh, a 17-year-old girl from Naushehra (near Peshawar), said: 'I really like this place. I thought it was only one gallery but there is more and even though I cannot understand how these things were created or how they work, I am amazed by them. I really wanted to visit it.' Another visitor, Tanveer Akhtar, by contrast, expressed a sentiment that suggested a relationship more at odds with one of Pakistan's most iconic institutions: 'I mean, it is our ancestor's and land's heritage and culture and history, but you cannot relate to it personally, it is cultural inheritance but not my identity'.

visitors (and their needs) at the stok palace museum, ladakh

Hope Childers

Hope Childers reported on museums in Lahore, Pakistan, as well as Ladakh, India. This extract pieces together her conversations about sacred objects and basic needs with visitors to the Palace Museum in Stok, Ladakh.

Stok is an agricultural village, with a population of approximately 1,200, located in the district of Ladakh in the Indus Valley. It is the current residence of the former royal family of Ladakh and its palace museum contains the shrines, crown, ceremonial dress, and jewellery of the Ladakhi King. It has two small, well-established hotels, but no shop, thus the handful of tourists who stay in Stok tend to have their own private vehicles and are most likely seeking to avoid the relative bustle and noise of the nearby capital, Leh. Also, the village has electricity for only a few hours in the evenings, usually 7:30–10:00 pm, and often even less. As far as I could tell, only the hotels and the palace have generators to maintain power after the village supply is shut down. As a result, most museum-goers zoom through the village throughout the day in their hired taxis — vans and SUVs — and do not engage with the local population in any way at all.

The palace, located on an outcrop of rock above the village, is only a short walk from where I stayed, but (unavoidably) up a very steep stairway or road (Plate 10.4.1). Just adjacent to the palace is an outstation of the Broadcasting Corporation of India, with a huge transmission tower that dominates most views of the palace. Most visitors arrive at

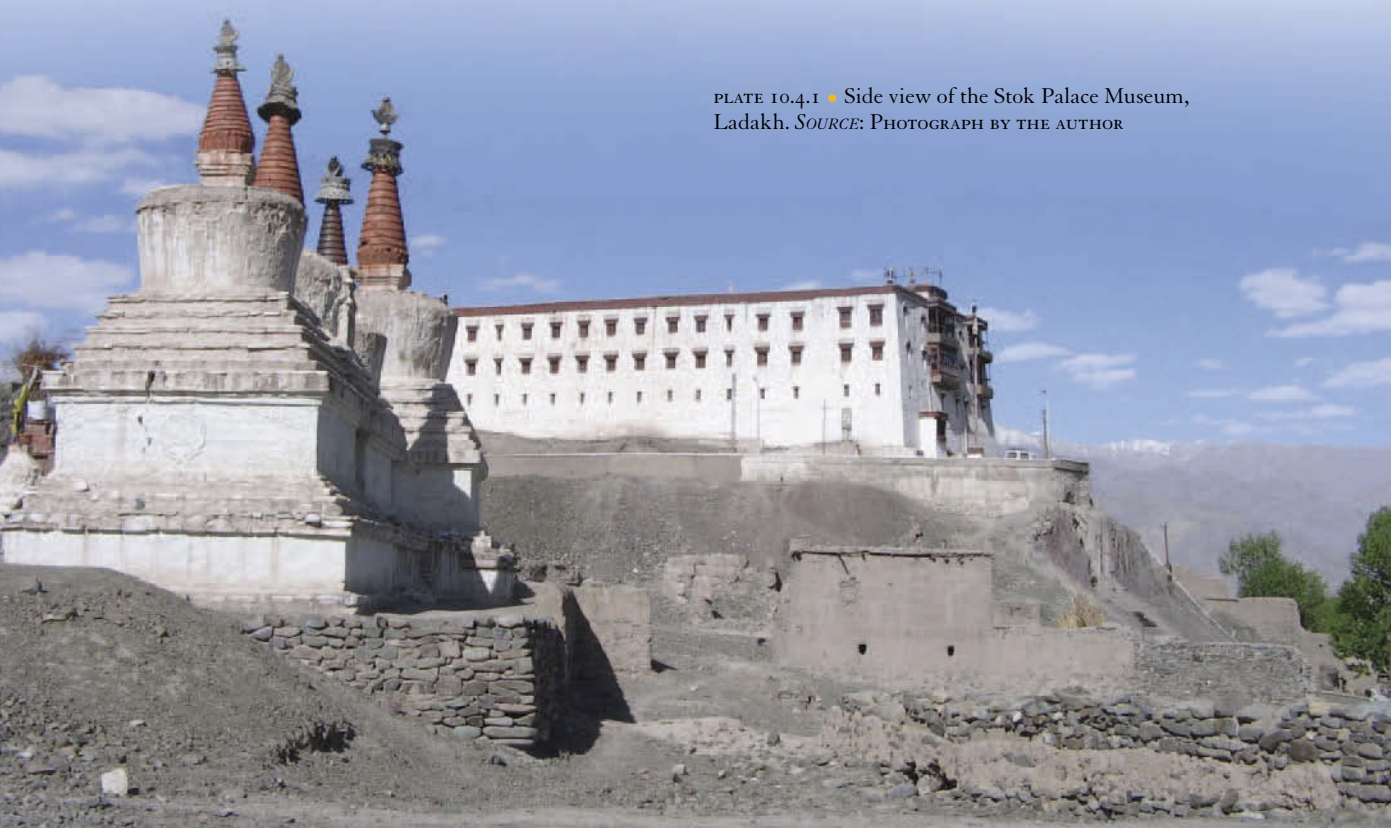

PLATE 10.4.1 • Side view of the Stok Palace Museum, Ladakh. *SOURCE*: PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR

the museum by car, following the winding road up towards the transmission station, where there is a gravel parking lot behind the palace. Then it is a short uphill walk through the gate to the main courtyard at the front of the building, where many guests are startled to be greeted by the 'huge' (but very friendly) shaggy dog that belongs to the prince. This spacious courtyard, with a tall prayer flagpole, is also used as the site for village festivals.

I spoke to numerous groups/individuals at the palace museum, engaging with at least 80 people (Plate 10.4.2). The vast majority of visitors I encountered were middle- and upper-class Indian tourists, mostly Hindus from the Delhi, Punjab, Mumbai, and Hyderabad areas — especially on the weekend. Others came from Assam, Bengaluru and Kolkata. This high number is partly because Indians almost invariably arrived as extended family groups, though there were also several retired senior couples, sometimes accompanied by their adult children. In one case, *three* families from Kolkata had hired a small bus to take a 16-day Himalayan tour together — a total of 17 people! The large proportion of Indians was also probably due, in part, to the timing of my stay in Stok, which was just when semesters/classes were finishing throughout the country, thus enabling families with students to embark on their holidays. In contrast, Europeans and Americans tended to come as individuals, couples or (rarely) as small groups of friends, perhaps 3–4 people — and not during the weekend. Most of them were not students, but working adults. No children under 10 years of age were brought to the museum during my time there and only about three children under 15 or so accompanied their parents. Though while in Leh I met many European 'trekker' tourists, the foreign visitors to the museum were never trekkers — they were what I would call urban tourists. I met only one trekker, who was actually on his way to the Stok glacier nearby. It seems the itinerary routes for the two types of tourists are rather divergent, and adventuring trekkers prefer to go further afield than Stok, which is comfortably close to Leh.

Almost by definition, a collection of Royal Family possessions will be limited in scope — a fact that many visitors understood and expected.

PLATE 10.4.2 • Entrance to the Stok Palace Museum.
SOURCE: PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR.

However, by the time they emerged from the museum, the visitors often expressed a measure of disappointment in what they saw as a lack of connection with the local context. 'What do the royals *do* for the villagers? We don't get that from the objects,' said one mother from Mumbai, visiting with her husband, a civil engineer, and their teenaged daughter. A trio of young German friends expressed a similar view: 'We expected royal stuff, but what about the local people? They are not represented here.' For one visitor, a young man from Bengaluru, the lack of 'a more integrated view of local life' amounted to a minor moral failure: 'The royal family should be more honest about their part — after all, they rule *some*body, right?'

That said, numerous guests found the palace museum to be a refreshing counterpoint to the abundant religious material on view at the

surrounding monasteries. One woman, a graphic designer from the Netherlands, described the Queen's jewellery as 'an important supplement to the austerity of monastic life' (Plate 10.4.3). Also, a significant number of museum-goers enjoyed the objects at face value, commenting on the luxuriousness of the jewellery, the beauty of the young queen in the photographs, the precision of the *thangka* paintings, and the craftsmanship of the silverwork.

PLATE 10.4.3 • View of the private quarters of the royal family at the Stok Palace Museum. *SOURCE*: PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR.

Because one of the four galleries requires visitors to remove their shoes before entering, I solicited for comments about the incorporation of a 'sacred space' within the museum. It took me some time to work out how to pose this question so as to avoid stock answers. The initial response, from both Indian and Western tourists, was one of unquestioning acceptance of the rule — a natural reaction in a culture where shoes are often removed in many contexts: secular, religious, public, domestic. Most simply followed the rules out of cultural habit or respect and thought no more about it.

I then tried to frame the question as a comparison with Western museums and Indian museums. This usually led to a more nuanced discussion about sacredness generally: where does the sacred nature of objects reside? As an inherent feature of the objects themselves, or in the people who view them? This generated greater sensitivity to the larger context of the objects and the manner of their display. A retired Indian Army Officer suggested that Westerners visiting their own museums in Europe and North America 'would benefit from more integrated displays, like those in India'. He felt this would be an important component of the 'educational mandate' of museums.

Interestingly, many Indians claimed that the requirement to remove shoes at this museum had nothing at all to do with putative sacredness of space but was simply a matter of domestic hygiene: 'The King [sic] wants to keep his house clean', declared an IT tech from Delhi. When I pointed out that most of the spaces did not require shoe removal, he suggested that the gallery that *did* demand it is more like a personal space — one that might still be used. To some extent, he has a point: the smallest room in Gallery Three (the *Thangka* Gallery) is arranged as the ruler's personal meditation chamber, complete with devotional offerings to the Buddha and photographs of the Dalai Lama, in the form of burning incense, silver bowls of fresh water, and draped, white silk scarves.

Finally, an amusing — yet no less urgent — problem for many museum visitors was the general lack of public toilets outside of Leh, along the Buddhist tourist trails. Stok Palace has a newly

built, clearly marked, Western-style chemical toilet only a few yards from the main entrance, thus numerous guests would zoom directly there. Unfortunately, the door was often locked, and guests would be frustrated to learn that they would have to troop upstairs, pay the entrance fee, and only *then* gain access to the facility. Such logistics invariably led to animated, extended discussions about toilet situations and habits in India at large. One woman became very angry about the situation and she immediately left the premises with her husband, in search of a toilet. The same occurred with a large Indian family, including a swarm of boisterous teenagers looking for the toilet; they did not bother to wait, and rushed back to their jeep, skipping the museum altogether. While it may seem trivial, the problem of available toilet facilities (or lack thereof) constitutes a continual daily concern for humans generally, and tourists specifically. At the simplest level, the inaccessibility of the toilet occasionally meant lost revenue and one less visitor; but on another level, this event will inform the narrative of that person's museum-going experience — a story they are likely to share with others. This speaks to the gap that remains between public–private, academic–popular and sociological–art historical perceptions of the museum-going experience, in which the viewing of objects is at least obliquely connected to the physical state of the guest. As one visitor put it, 'I cannot look at *anything* until I find a toilet'.

the wonder of the mundane

vechaar utensils museum

Monaz Gandevia

Monaz Gandevia travelled to the museums of Gujarat. Here she reflects on the familiarity and intimacy of museums devoted to everyday objects.

The Vechaar Utensils Museum, which is attached to the popular Vishalla Restaurant in Ahmedabad, was established in 1981 by Surendrabhai C. Patel, a well-known architect and interior designer in Ahmedabad, Gujarat. According to the story narrated in the museum guide, Patel, 'an ambitious young Gujarati' collected utensils and stored them in his house since his youth. It was a hobby that turned into a vast collection. He has some good specimens of small utensils such as jugs and spoons and a great collection of betel-nut crackers. Patel had noticed that many people in India discarded old utensils as scrap, to replace them with new ones during festivals. Almost 30 per cent of the vessels sold off in markets were recycled as scrap-material and could be bought by weight at very reasonable rates. Many of the vessels in the museum are bought from these markets; therefore most of them displayed here are old and used, rather than new and shiny. Later, when he began collaborating with the well-known art historian Jyotindra Jain on the organisation of the museum, Patel travelled across the country to expand the collection by buying old utensils of different forms, uses, types, and materials.

The 'museum-next-to-the-restaurant' has an open front porch, also known as a traditional *aangan*. As soon as the visitor enters the museum, a large, open and beautiful space greets her. A wooden, cushioned settee and a chair are arranged at the entrance, which doubles up as the resting area as well as the reception. There is a marble bust of Patel's mother on the left side of the door, and photographs of celebrities, politicians and sportspersons adorn the right wall. The

architecture is traditional here, in tune with the restaurant. There are mud floors, wooden pillars and sloping roof covered with tiles. The owners claim that this is 'the only museum in the world with mud-architecture'. A pool of water with ducks is a unique sight and a welcome relief in the scorching Ahmedabad summers. On a closer look, one finds a little temple nestled in the middle of the pool. The deity is prayed to twice a day, mornings and evenings, and the *prasad* is distributed to whoever is present at that time in the museum.

The museum has a vast and varied collection (almost 4,000 pieces) of fascinating utensils, which have been used by a range of communities across the country (Plate 10.5.1). Every visitor appears to find something or the other in this collection which s/he can recognise and identify with. All the items on display have been collected by Patel over a period of 30–35 years. There are utensils made of brass, copper, bronze, zinc, iron, and German-silver, collected from all parts of India (Plate 10.5.2).

The best pieces, which have an entire gallery devoted to them, are undoubtedly the amazing and baffling range of betel-nut crackers, numbering some 800. A curiously shaped cutter in brass, big enough to fit in ones hands comfortably, is designed as if it is greeting the viewer with a 'Namaste' (Plate 10.5.3).

PLATE 10.5.1 • A display of brass and bronze icons, ritual vessels and implements used in domestic shrines.
SOURCE: PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR.

PLATE 10.5.2 • A variety of *paan* containers. *SOURCE*: PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR.

PLATE 10.5.3 • A *supari*-cutter in the form of a lady greeting viewers with a 'Namaste'. *SOURCE*: PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR.

Other similarly interesting pieces include the large and uncanny-looking Dowry Boxes from Kutch, a gallery full of jugs and jars, and another one full of just boxes. A large 1,000-year-old pot is said to be the oldest item in the museum. Other 'utensils' which draw exclaims of surprise from visitors include the Turban Boxes from Saurashtra, the Parsi Ses or the prayer tray and the 'antique' baby feeders. Further, there are the South Indian masks, the leaf-shaped trays and 'fancy' spittoons, which are equally fascinating, and are animated by anecdotes. The *Rajputana thali* (a metal platter) with its large grooves, the *Annapurna* cooker, the coffee-filters and the *Ganga-jal kalash*s (pots for sacred water) are all familiar items collected over time in large numbers. The diorama of the Gujarati house in one of the galleries provides further context for the other items on display, such as milkmen's pots, tiny spouted jugs and sets of journey vessels, complete with lids, boxes and bottles. Peculiarly, stirrups are also addressed as 'utensils'.

The guide says that women visitors find certain items such as the *puja* (prayer) vessels, *lota*s (round water pots), cookers, etc., more interesting because of their familiarity with them; and the men find the collection of betel-nut crackers, Cambay locks and turban boxes more fascinating than ordinary things. The sheer variety of the Utensil's Museum is amazing, as is its ability to generate wonder about the most mundane objects of everyday life.

government museum chennai

publics in a public space

Neelima Jeychandran

Neelima Jeychandran studied the museums of Chennai and Mysore. Here, she is taken with the crowds that throng the Madras Museum, Chennai. The Madras Museum was one of the principal museums of colonial India, and has an enormous encyclopaedic collection housed in many buildings set in expansive grounds.

the bronze gallery

At the Government Chennai Museum, most of the foreign-tour groups, usually led by a guide, head straight to the museum's spectacular collection of bronze sculptures. The bronze collections are showcased in a separate building, which has a relatively modern layout with air-conditioning, a temperature-control mechanism, as well as fine glass display cases and lighting features. International tourists particularly appreciate the gallery's displays and narrative texts. In contrast to the foreign visitors, local visitors quickly pace through and spend very little time inside the bronze gallery. When I asked a local visitor for his opinion of the gallery, he made a comment in Tamil — *Ange enna irukku, verum saami silay thaan* (there is nothing out there, but just sculptures of deities) (Plate 10.6.1). As the local visitors are familiar with seeing similar sculptures at homes and in temples, they do not view the sculptures in the galleries as particularly interesting or, for that matter, in any way exceptional. In fact, during my interactions with local visitors I learned that they were more fascinated with the gallery's interior design rather than the exhibits. They would want to discuss how much they appreciated the air-conditioning and lights, and, on most occasions, I had to rephrase my question and emphasise on the word 'sculptures' to get responses about the bronze collections.

PLATE 10.6.1 • One of the famed Chola bronzes on display at the Bronze Gallery. *SOURCE*: PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF SHILPA VIJAYAKRISHNAN.

the museum and its visitors

To study how different visitors interacted within the museum space, and with the objects displayed, I observed several Indian families as they navigated through the museum. A recurrent pattern, I noticed, was that after visiting the galleries, most of the families went to the Children's Museum and enjoyed the outdoor Science Park with swings that are meant to demonstrate principles of physics. This park seemed to function as a popular playground for children. Also, the majority of the families that I observed never ventured to the last gallery (i.e.), the Contemporary Art Gallery, which is adjacent to the Children's Museum. When asked about their interest in the Contemporary Art Gallery's modern and abstract collections, the local visitors often told me that the gallery just had some 'drawings'. Reflecting on the spaces and objects that captured the attention of local museum visitors, it seems that most domestic

PLATE 10.6.2 • Riding a heavily ornamented bull: Photo shoot at the Madras Museum. *SOURCE:* PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR.

visitors preferred spending more time in galleries where they could touch and feel objects. Although they were occasionally restricted from doing so, most of the visitors could not restrain their tactile urge and would touch the objects; especially the stone sculptures, which they leaned in to feel while the guards were preoccupied. I saw some parents perching their children on top of the stone sculptures and stone pillars for a photo opportunity (Plate 10.6.2). A few enthusiastic parents who were finding ways to engage their children would often encourage them to touch the object as a means to know them. On one occasion, I noticed this female visitor quizzing her child on all of the animals displayed in the Zoology Gallery. And, every time the child failed to recognise a particular animal, the woman wondered aloud what he was being taught at school. Later on, when I had the chance to speak with her, the woman informed me that she had brought her children to the museum so that they could have a better understanding of what they had learned in school.

Most of the local male visitors with whom I interacted had visited the museum at least three times and usually at three distinct points in their lives: once as a young male during what they called their bachelor days, the second time after their marriage and later with their children. Several of the men were frequent visitors to the museum grounds (although they did not enter the galleries) and they recounted how they had had 'a good time' inside the museum premises while they were in college. Although most of the male visitors with whom I talked vividly recollected the external space of the museum, they were unable to recall any details of the gallery or the display.

celebrating Kaanum Pongal

In Tamil Nadu, the harvest festival of *Pongal* is an occasion for great celebration. The festival spans four days and each day is devoted to a different festivity. The first day is the *Bhogi* festival, when old things are discarded and burned to signify renewal. The second day is *Thai Pongal*, when the harvesting of the new rice crop is celebrated. The third day is *Maatu Pongal*, an occasion for which the cattle are bathed and decorated. The last day is *Kaanum Pongal*, which is the festival of seeing (the word *ḳaanum* itself means 'seeing' in Tamil). On this day people in rural areas usually visit temples, while in cities like Chennai, people head to scenic places such as the Marina Beach, amusement parks, the zoo and, recently, the shopping malls. I was amazed at the number of people who came to the museum on the day of *Kaanum Pongal*. On this day, the entire museum had a festive aura with people dressed in their best clothes. Women wore silk saris with flowers in their hair and men wore crisp white *dhoti*s or pants. Most of the families brought big bags with containers of food and water, and straw mats to spread out for a picnic lunch (Plate 10.6.3). The visitors carried these bags into the galleries and most would place them in a corner of the gallery while they saw the exhibits.

The majority of visitors that I encountered in the museum on the day of *Kaanum Pongal* hailed from the working class. Although they were dressed in fine clothes, some of the visitors were barefooted, which was indicative of their modest means. Several of the men and women with whom I spoke were daily-wage labourers, vegetable vendors, plumbers, masons, auto-rickshaw drivers, or porters. Some of the auto-rickshaw drivers had brought their whole family in their own autos. They preferred to visit the museum on *Kaanum Pongal* because it was cheaper

PLATE 10.6.3 • Picnic-ing on museum grounds; relaxing outside the lunch hall at the Madras Museum.
SOURCE: PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR.

than going to an amusement park or the movies. Moreover, the museum never got as crowded as the beach or the zoo and hence it provided a more comfortable atmosphere. There were also several young couples with infants; when I asked them why they chose the museum, they said it was a safer place, patrolled by guards, with less hustle and bustle and the space to move around with a baby. Furthermore, these visitors also said they were happy to see things in the museum that they had never seen before.

At the ticket counter, I noticed that adults from poorer families purchased the two-rupee tickets that allowed them to enter the museum grounds, but not the galleries. Some families purchased entry tickets to the galleries only for their children, as these were cheaper than the adult tickets. The children entered the museum so that they could play in the Science Park while the parents watched them from across the fence.

While discussing *Kaanum Pongal* with the museum guards, some of the senior guards told me that during past celebrations, large crowds thronged the museum and there were years when they had to place temporary barricades to regulate the crowd. According to these senior guards, the museum was a favourite public spot for members of the *Nadar* community and several families would gather at the museum grounds during *Kaanum Pongal*. They would sing and perform the *kummi* dance (a local folk-dance form) inside the museum grounds and they also used this occasion to fix marriage alliances. For the *Nadar*s, the museum grounds served as a public space where they could meet other members of their community and socialise without spending much money. I was told that in recent years visitation from this community had declined, and that they no longer used the museum complex for any rituals. The guards believed that the crowds have diminished due to the increase in the entrance fee (from ₹2 to 15) and also because of modifications made to the museum premises. Earlier there was a vast expanse of green area where people could rest under the shade of the trees, but now there is a manicured garden in which people are not allowed to enter. They also attributed the decline of visitors to the increase in theme parks and shopping complexes with multiple movie theatres.

maharaja sawai man singh II museum or 'city palace museum', jaipur

Brinda Kumar

Brinda Kumar studied the museums in Punjab and Rajasthan. The excerpt below describes the City Palace Museum in Jaipur, which occupies much of the residence of the erstwhile royal family of Jaipur. This is a site popular with tourists and central to the circuit of Maharaja tourism in the area.

The City Palace Museum (Plate 10.7.1) is situated in the heart of the old city of Jaipur, which according to the traditional plan of the city was the rightful location for the palace of the sovereign. One structure in the City Palace complex — the Chandra Mahal — is still the living quarters of the present Maharaja of Jaipur, but many other buildings in the complex have been converted to make this museum. Housed in several historical buildings, some dating back to the 18th century, the City Palace Museum has been referred to in every guidebook as one of the highlights of a visit to Jaipur. The museum represents the past grandeur of the royal family. It thus fits neatly into the prevailing emphasis in the tourist industry that markets Rajasthan as a royal destination.

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The 'official' history of the museum dates to 1959 when the late former ruler of Jaipur, Sawai Man Singh II, opened his private home to the public as the Maharaja of Jaipur Museum. His successor, Maharaja Sawai Bhawani Singh, enlarged the

PLATE 10.7.1 • Exterior façade of the City Palace Museum, Jaipur. *SOURCE*: PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR.

museum and also renamed it the Maharaja Sawai Man Singh II Museum in 1970. 'Unofficial' histories of the founding of the museum contain oblique references and allusions to the tension between the Jaipur ruling family and Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India. Some of these tensions arose when Nehru was endeavouring to form a national art collection for the newly established National Museum; he had hoped, when Jaipur merged with the Union of India, that the royal family would donate their collections to the nation. Instead, the Jaipur family formed a public trust in 1959 and declared the opening of their own museum, so that the royal collections could remain in Jaipur.

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There are five major architectural features in this complex where visitors tend to linger — the façade of the Mubarak Mahal, which houses the textile gallery; the Rajendra Pol — a marble gateway with heavy brass doors, flanked by marble elephants; the Pritam Niwas Chowk — called the 'Four Seasons' courtyard with peacock doorways; and the Sarvatobhadra, an open pavilion modelled on the Mughal Diwan-e-Aam that houses the largest silver urns in the world (Plate 10.7.2). These locations are particularly popular with tourists who pose for photographs in front of the structures; they often call upon the museum attendants, men who are attired in navy blue *achkan*s (knee-length coats) and red turbans, so that they can be photographed with a 'real Rajasthani Rajput'. One of these attendants is a dwarf, and in a manner that is reminiscent of sideshows he has become one of the most popular 'attractions' that tourists like to

PLATE 10.7.2 • Tourists posing with 'real Rajput' turbaned attendants at the 'Sarvatobhadra' pavilion, with the largest silver urns in the world featuring in the background. *SOURCE*: PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR.

be photographed with. Visitors who hesitate to call him are encouraged to do so by the local guides; the attendants receive ₹10 or 20 as a tip to pose for these photographs.

Inside the museum's galleries, visitors see a tiny fraction of the museum's approximately 11,000 miniature paintings from Mughal, Rajput and Deccan schools, fabled collections of textiles from various parts of India, valuable Persian and Mughal carpets, sophisticated and often elaborately decorated weapons, palanquins and buggies, and other miscellaneous objects from the royal collection. There is a Textile Gallery, where the display ranges from didactic explanations of different Rajasthani textile techniques to historic costumes worn by specific rulers on important occasions, such as a particular king's polo outfit, or a royal wedding dress. The former Durbar Hall houses the Art Gallery, where many paintings from Jaipur's important collections are on view, although in recent years they share space with thrones and chairs arranged as though for an assembly of noblemen. Decorated with chandeliers, carpets and gilt furniture, it is an opulent room. Finally, there is the 'Silehkhana' or Arms Gallery with an enormous number of weapons on display, some of which are very finely made. If the Arms Gallery was not enough to remind us of the famed Rajput valour, the passage leading to the Silehkhana is decorated with large-scale paintings of war. It is interesting to note that on one wall there are depictions of mythological wars between gods and demons, whereas on the opposite wall are illustrations of 'real' battles, such as the war with the Marathas, and also the Jaipur strongholds of Amber and Jaigarh.

Unsurprisingly, the narrative created by these galleries is a male-dominated one. Female presence is palpable by default in the textile gallery where a dioramic reconstruction of an unnamed queen and her ladies celebrating Teej (a festival to ensure conjugal bliss) serves more as a pretext for the display of the sumptuous (although now dusty) costumes and ends up being the only trace of women's activity or role in this world. Indeed, in stark contrast, not a single female name or identifiable figure is to be found in the displays that describe this ostensibly 'Rajput' world. Anonymous females float through Ram Singh II's harem frames or as 'consorts' in miniature paintings. Elsewhere the female presence is marked by a covered palanquin, or rather incongruously in the form of a Maharani's writing desk, which is placed next to a model horse in the Arms Gallery. The only other place in the museum complex where one senses a female presence is in the 'Durga Diya Enterprises' that runs the Palace Café (Plate 10.7.3). This venture, one learns, was initiated by the current Princess Diya Kumari and her husband.

PLATE 10.7.3 • Tourists relaxing at the Palace café, while 'folk performers' take a break of their own on the side. *SOURCE*: PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR.

In addition to these galleries, there is the 'Friends of the Museum' or the 'Maharaja Sawai Bhawani Singh Gallery', which is a hall where 'award-winning' artists and craftsmen demonstrate their skills and, more importantly, sell their work (Plate 10.7.4). The overarching narrative created by the galleries of the City Palace is of the importance of royal patronage for the sustenance of cultural heritage and the continuation of tradition.

However, today this identity of the palace museum tends to be undermined rather than sustained by the world outside the palace. Not

PLATE 10.7.4 • A craftsman demonstrates his skills, displaying the tools of his trade to visitors at the City. *SOURCE*: PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR.

only has the prestige of the Maharaja been much eroded by quarrels and fissures within the Royal family itself, but it has also been reduced by the tourism industry, which has produced a packaged, caricaturised and fantastical vision of royalty for its clients. There are also demographic changes in Jaipur, whose population now includes many migrants; many of these new locals see the royal family as vestiges of an obsolete past. Most tourists to the museum are not local, while for many resident visitors, the invocation of 'our Maharaja' and the tales of royal benevolence are largely lost.

the salar jung museum in hyderabad

a question of location

Ramesh Kumar

Ramesh Kumar travelled to the museums of Andhra and Madhya Pradesh. In this brief extract, he discusses the many ways in which the Salar Jung museum is 'owned' and 'disowned' by the residents of Hyderabad.

The Salar Jung Museum is probably the most visited museum in India and is seen as one of the most important public places in the city of Hyderabad. Receiving nearly one million visitors annually, the museum is a mandatory stop in any tourist itinerary for the city, along with the historic Charminar and Golconda Fort, the Birla Mandir,

NTR Gardens, Lumbini Park, Necklace Road, and the Hussain Sagar Lake. The museum appears secondary only to the Charminar in its ability to both mark and define the city of Hyderabad and act as its important emblem.

Salar Jung is often promoted in tourist literature as the biggest one-man collection of arts and antiques in the world housing 43,000 art objects from across the globe (Plate 10.8.1). Emphasis is laid on the museum being the extraordinary private collection of Mir Yusuf Ali Khan (Salar Jung III), who is described as a great connoisseur of art and Prime Minister to the Nizams of Hyderabad. Its wide-ranging collection is divided into sections, such as Indian Art, European Art, Far Eastern Art, and Children's Section. Special mention is made in most tourist literature of the museum library and its collection of over 50,000 rare books.

The museum's importance in the social fabric of the city of Hyderabad may be understood at two levels. On a primary level, the museum enjoys the status of being an 'Ajaib Ghar' or a house of curios,

PLATE 10.8.2 • The 'Veiled Rebecca' — one of the three most popular objects at the Museum. *SOURCE*: PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR.
PLATE 10.8.3 • The famed double-statue of 'Mephistopheles and Margarita'. *SOURCE*: PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR. COURTESY OF SALAR JUNG MUSEUM, HYDERABAD.

PLATE 10.8.1 • Posing with a recent edition of *The Hindu*: Display of the Painted Wooden Figures in the French African Room at the Salar Jung Museum, Hyderabad. *SOURCE*: PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR. COURTESY OF SALAR JUNG MUSEUM, HYDERABAD.

for the residents of Hyderabad as well as the tourists visiting the city. The local population of Hyderabad enthusiastically participates in the creation of such an identity for the museum when they show their friends and relatives around. A major portion of the daily visitors are from outside Hyderabad, and the museum is presented to them as a storehouse of interesting objects like arms and armory, textiles, ivory, jewellery, statues, toys, silverware and china ware. The 'Veiled Rebecca' (Plate 10.8.2), the double-statue of 'Mephistopheles and Margarita' (Plate 10.8.3) and a Musical Clock are regarded, both by the residents of the city as well as outstation visitors, as the three most fascinating objects in the museum. The museum collection is thus primarily viewed as an odd assortment of interesting things that are worth a quick look.

On a secondary level, the museum is seen by many as a repository of Hyderabad's culture. This may appear ironic because the museum collection is global rather than local (Plate 10.8.4). It holds

PLATE 10.8.4 • A shot of one side of the European Sculpture Gallery. *SOURCE*: PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR. COURTESY OF SALAR JUNG MUSEUM, HYDERABAD.

many European and Chinoiserie, but very few pieces directly pertinent to the culture of the Hyderabad state. Many people in the city also tend to confuse the Salar Jungs with the Nizams of Hyderabad. They understand both families as belonging to the royalty, thereby being the last custodians of the now lost 'Hyderabadi' culture. The luxurious life of royalty, as demonstrated through the objects on display, is admired and celebrated by many Hyderabadi citizens as the city's prized possession that enables them to stake a claim to a glorious past. As such, the museum collection is seen by many as not a private one of a passionate art collector and his ancestors but rather the showcasing of a history they can be proud of. A number of local residents regard the museum as a storehouse of *Hyderabadi bade logon ki purani cheezein* (old objects belonging to important people of Hyderabad), which illustrates their heritage and allows them a glimpse into the past of the city of Hyderabad (and the rich tastes of its 'cultured' people). This may be seen as being in sync with the larger identity of museums as 'sites of history'. A number of tourists also come to the museum with similar expectations.

But the museum also exists at the intersection of complex religious, cultural and linguistic tensions, as I witnessed through my interactions with various people across the city. The Muslim community is a religious minority in the city, and is largely seen as restricted to the old parts of Hyderabad, described as the 'Charminar area'. Their field of operation is usually limited within a radius of four to five kilometres from Charminar; an area often referred to as *turakawalla jaaga* (literally the Turkish or the Muslim Area) by most Hindu (Telugu) residents of the city. The entire area is looked down upon by a majority of the Telugu–Hindu population. The Salar Jung, which is located in this area, is therefore perceived as being situated in the dirty and congested zone of the 'other' and the 'Hyderabadi' heritage that is represented through the museum is seen as the heritage of the 'other'. The museum thus becomes the site of an internal conflict that most Telugu residents of Hyderabad find difficult to resolve. On the one hand, the beauty and variety of the objects that the museum houses along with the opulent lifestyle of Salar Jungs is a source of pride for Hyderabad and for their own selves. But the museum's identity as a popular tourist spot is also marked by a level of discomfort because it is seen as representing and belonging to Muslims. For many Telugu families of Andhra Pradesh in general, and Hyderabad in particular, the use of monuments such as the Charminar and the Salar Jung Museum as emblems of the city appears to be in conflict with their desire for an *Andhra Desam* and *Telugu Desam* (Andhra Nation-State and Telugu Nation-State). Thus, while the museum's identity as an 'Ajaib Ghar' is wholeheartedly promoted by the Telugu-speaking people, they usually maintain silence over its historical and cultural significance.

For the Muslim residents of the city, especially the ones living in the Charminar area (but not limited to them), the heritage value of the museum gains prominence over its status as merely a house of curios. The awareness and enthusiasm of the Muslim population of the city regarding the museum appeared to be much more than that

of their Hindu counterparts. As I stayed in the Charminar area and interacted with a number of Muslim residents, they referred to the museum as *hamara museum* ('our museum'), and talked about it as being directly related to their own selves. They were more knowledgeable about the history of the collection and most were aware that it belonged to the Salar Jungs who worked for the Nizams. They were also aware that the museum housed a great collection of religious and other Islamic texts.

However, for most tourists visiting the museum (both from the State of Andhra Pradesh as well as from outside), such tensions get masked under the excitement of travelling to a new place and the curiosity of seeing interesting objects. The museum's promotional material also seems to project it as a multicultural collection, while maintaining a relative silence about its specific importance in the history of Hyderabad and its residents. The museum's own narrative thus may also contribute towards diffusing these conflicting meanings surrounding the connotations generated by the museum.

a site museum without a site

the bodh gaya archaeological museum

Sraman Mukherjee

Sraman Mukherjee travelled to museums in Odisha, Bihar, Jharkand, and Bangladesh, and examined the relations between sites, histories and propaganda. Here he visits the site museum managed by the Archaeological Survey of India in Bodh Gaya, the site of the Buddha's enlightenment. Now a World Heritage Site, it is a centre for transnational Buddhism, and here the Archaeological Survey's usual secularising control recedes in the face of strong religious beliefs.

The Archaeological Survey of India or ASI's site museum at Bodh Gaya is unlike its other site museums. It stands out not only for the way in which sacred and secular spaces overlap within the intended secular pedagogic museum space, but also for the very different regime of archaeological control that exists in Bodh Gaya when compared to the other archaeological sites of India. In most other archaeological sites that have ASI site museums, the ASI exercises absolute control over both the protected sites and the site museums.

In Bodh Gaya, however, the regime of archaeological control is very different. The main temple of Bodh Gaya has been a scene of archaeological restorations for more than a century (Plate 10.9.1). In most cases the restoration has been directly conducted by the ASI. However, the ASI never had and still does not have any custodian rights over the Mahabodhi Mahavihara, the great temple that marks the spot where the Buddha gained enlightenment. The complex 19th-century history of this site — claimed by a transnational Buddhist community but occupied since the 16th century by Shaivite monks who had legal title to it — has been discussed by Tapati Guha-Thakurta in her book.[1] In a 20th-century compromise, courts ordered that the temple would be governed by a Bodhgaya Temple Management Committee (BTMC) with equal numbers of Hindu and Buddhist members.

Today, the sole proprietary right over the temple lies with the BTMC. The ASI thus has no control

[1] Tapati Guha-Thakurta, *Monuments, Objects, Histories: Institutions of Art in Colonial and Postcolonial India*, Columbia University Press, 2004, chapter 9.

PLATE 10.9.1 • Frontal shot of the temple, Bodh Gaya.
SOURCE: PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR.

PLATE 10.9.2 • Entrance to the unimpressive brick building that houses the Archeological Museum, the Archeological Survey of India's site museum at Bodh Gaya.
SOURCE: PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR.

over the main site of Bodh Gaya, the Mahabodhi Mahavihara. The site museum, however, is under the control of the ASI. The Archaeological Museum of Bodh Gaya is a site museum without a site (Plate 10.9.2). The museum is housed inside a small single-storeyed building, painted yellow and brick-red, and is not very impressive. The collection mainly consists of objects of archaeological interest from Bodh Gaya and its environs — carved sandstone and granite railings and pillars from the Sunga, Gupta and Pala period, stone sculptures and metal images of Buddhist and Brahminical pantheon, pieces of pottery and terracotta figurines, many of which were found during excavations at the Mahabodhi Temple Complex. The sandstone and granite railings, as a board announces, are the most treasured exhibits of the museum. These railings once surrounded the main temple and the Vajrasana throne and the Bodhi tree, and represent two distinct phases of building activities at Bodh Gaya — the sandstone railings representing the rich tradition of Sunga art (2nd–1st centuries BCE) and the granite railings representing the art of the Gupta period (4th–5th centuries CE) (Plate 10.9.3).

The museum is not a popular destination for the foreign pilgrims and tourists who throng the Mahabodhi Temple site during the peak tourist season. During my four-day field work at the museum the only foreign tourists I encountered there was a small group of Japanese tourists. The three women in this group interacted in broken English and did not look very excited about the

PLATE 10.9.3 • The treasures of the Archeological site museum at Bodhgaya: sandstone and granite railings from the Sunga and Gupta periods respectively. *SOURCE*: PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR.

display. One of them said that compared to the main temple, the museum looked very dull, uninteresting and lifeless. The museum guards, the ASI officials and even the curator of the museum admitted that the main centre of attraction in Bodh Gaya is the Mahabodhi Mahavihara and the museum occupies a much lower position on the general tourist itinerary. The man at the book shop of the BTMC inside the Mahabodhi Temple also told me, *museum mein kya rakha hai. Unha to sab tuta phuta patthar aur khandahar hai. Yeh mandir hi asli dekhne ka chiz hai* ('there is nothing to see inside the museum except for old broken pieces of stones. The temple is the main attraction of Bodh Gaya').

The main visitors to the Bodh Gaya Archaeological Museum that I saw were people from the neighbouring towns and villages of Bodh Gaya and Gaya who had come on a day's excursion, usually on weekends. These visitors who come down with family and friends are mostly Hindus from the not-so-well-to-do sections of the society. Their tour itinerary includes the temple, the various monasteries and the museum. For these people, the Jadughar image of the museum still reigns strong. Groups of villagers led by elderly men come to the museum to touch the feet of Hindu and Buddhist sculptures. For them these sculptures were not lifeless works of art but living images of gods. Besides, there was a group of three little monks from the local Burmese monastery who seemed to enjoy their day's outing to the museum.

However, every year during Buddha Jayanti (the annual birth anniversary celebrations of Lord Buddha which usually falls in the month of May), a historical casket containing the bodily relics of the Buddha travels from the strong room of the Patna Museum to be housed inside the ASI Museum of Bodh Gaya. During the Buddha Jayanti celebrations, when there are not many usual Indian or foreign tourists around in the heat of May, the Dalit Buddhists from Nagpur travel to Bodh Gaya in huge numbers. The museum then becomes one of the most popular destinations of Bodh Gaya and the relic casket of Buddha the prime exhibit.

PLATE 10.9.4 • Curiosity and Ritual: Visitors at the mostly unfrequented ASI site museum walking in a file, Bodh Gaya. *SOURCE*: PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR.

The guards admitted that during Buddha Jayanti the Nagpurwalas perform religious rituals in the museum and the authorities, despite the violation of the ASI rules, have to permit the practise of rituals inside the Museum in face of popular demands.

The Bodh Gaya Archaeological Museum thus exists for the general visitors as a place for popular entertainment and ritual practice, challenging the secular pedagogic curatorial intentions of the ASI authorities (Plate 10.9.4).

collapsing public and private, display and worship

the hanuman sangrahalaya in lucknow

Suryanandini Narain

Suryanandini Narain studied the museums of Uttar Pradesh. She was dismayed by the many shabby and unwelcoming public museums she studied, when she stumbled upon a private museum dedicated to the god, Hanuman, by one of his devotees.

Sunil Gomber never intended to create a museum. As a devotee of the God Hanuman, he had begun to collect paintings, posters and calendar images of this deity, when a reporter for the Hindi daily *Hindustan* wrote about his collection, calling it a '*sangraha*' ('collection') and

concluded by appreciating Gomber's '*sangrahalaya*' (literally, 'collection-house', the common Hindi word for 'museum'). Gomber recalls being besieged with phone calls all weekend as *bhakt*s (devotees) enquired whether they could visit this unique museum. Embarrassed by their attention and expectations, he had a 'conversation' with his Lord who guided him to start a museum-like space beginning with one room in his own house at 14/1192 Indira Nagar (Plate 10.10.1).

Over the past 12 years Gomber has collected Hanuman images in the form of reproductions of artefacts. He has not attempted to acquire the originals. In his perspective, reproduced images of ancient sculptures and paintings of Hanuman from the National Museum, New Delhi, are as good as the originals. Among other things, his collection comprises seven albums full of scanned images of the God in sculptures, paintings and prints including calendars, posters, post cards, wedding cards, and newspaper and advertisement images. Fibreglass replicas of Hanuman figures and Hanuman heads from temples all over the country stand neatly labelled on glass shelves, and Gomber's favourite is an image of Hanuman playing the *veena* (a musical instrument) that he saw on the web and got a fibreglass specialist to create in 3-D. There are also files and CDs of all the websites related to Hanuman and newspaper articles (such as 'Why Michael Jackson likes the Monkey God') crowded on a notice board on one wall. This one-room museum has 250 publications, provides access to 137 websites, an illuminated scroller with 1,000 names of the Lord, and more than 700 photographs of Hanuman artefacts. Owning a publishing house as his business has apparently made it easy for Gomber to bring out five of his own books on the Lord, although the details of designing and four-colour printing, Sanskrit translations and research have taken several years of work (Plate 10.10.2).

The museum is open to the public from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Sundays, though Gomber also offers to open it after 8.30 p.m. on weekdays, by prior appointment. These timings ensure that he is at hand to guide visitors through his collection. The visitors are usually given a cup of tea in the drawing

PLATE 10.10.1 • Entrance to the Hanuman Museum.
SOURCE: PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR.

room before they are taken to the museum. While drinking tea, they are expected to narrate their purpose of visit, how they came to know of the museum, as well as provide information about their identity, occupation and religious inclinations.

Gomber then takes the visitor up a stairway whose walls are hung with images of Hanuman. Upstairs, he unlocks a door that has 'Hanuman Sangrahalaya' written above it. The museum room is small, about 10 sq. ms. It is centrally lit by a large chandelier and is bathed in yellow light. Gomber

PLATE 10.10.2 • Hanuman-related publications at the Museum. *SOURCE*: PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR.

goes from one exhibit to the next explaining each one to the visitor, and answering any questions. In the centre of the room are a table and a few low stools for visitors to sit on while they leaf through the albums and books. There is also a visitors' book, some plastic-laminated newspaper clippings held down under a Hanuman head acting as a paperweight and the latest copy of the quarterly magazine on Hanuman that Gomber publishes. The cabinets on the right and the left of the central one hold books, and on either side of these are long glass shelves with fibreglass replicas of Hanuman heads and figures. These are labelled with care, giving the date, provenance, collection, and sometimes an explanation of the deity's posture.

One could come away asking whether the name 'museum' is appropriate for a display that has to be accessed through the drawing room of its owner, and that has 'replicas' rather than artefacts. With what purpose did Gomber make this museum? And what comes across to the visitor as its purpose? Personal as the collection may seem, compared to Gomber's puja room which is not lit up, labelled or organised like the museum, a distinction can be discerned between the place of worship and the place of display. While the museum contains the 'unusual' images of Hanuman — playing the veena or the *manjeera* (cymbals), eating *laddoo*s (sweets), or images from *khandit* (broken) temples — the puja room has the more conventional images of Hanuman flying to Lanka, Hanuman at the feet of Rama and so on. The museum's intention seems to lie somewhere between a *bhakti* (devotion)-like zeal to personalise one's god, to learn more about the deity than a conventional temple would reveal,

and also to satisfy an irresistible urge to 'collect' of the kind described by Jean Baudrillard (Gomber also has the impulse to 'complete' his collection).[1] The Gomber family intends to see this museum grow, enshrining within it their personal aesthetic, concrete faith, charitable works, and the hope of accumulating religious merit.

Following are some extracts from an interview with Sunil Gomber

SURYANANDINI (S): Mr Gomber, how did your museum begin?

GOMBER (G): I never really intended to make a Hanuman museum. I have been a devotee of Hanuman since I was a child, and as an extension of my faith, I started collecting images of Him. So I had some calendar images, reproductions of some other rare illustrations like paintings and sculptures of Hanuman. Our family started celebrating Hanuman Jayanti (the day of Hanuman's nativity) in Balram Garden several years back. In a press conference that followed the event, a reporter came up to me enquiring whether I possessed anything else related to the deity. So I called him home and showed him my small collection of images. The next day he had taken out a whole story on my collection and my engagements with Hanuman in the newspaper *Hindustan*. But by default he had used the word 'sangraha' for my collection, and 'sangrahalaya' for its location. I immediately started getting phone calls enquiring about this unusual museum and if people could visit it.

S: Then what did you do?

G: I felt a sense of embarrassment at not actually having any Sangrahalaya and so I had a dialogue with Hanuman (I have a direct line with him, I talk to him often) asking him what I should do. He guided me and said just start with one small room in your house on the first floor. So that is how the museum saw the light of day … today I have a collection of 250 books in various languages collected and displayed here, a directory of 137 websites related to Hanuman, files of interesting newspaper and web-based articles on Him, a scroller with the 1,000 names of Hanuman, and these fibreglass installations such as a tableau that depicts Hanuman's family. I have about 5,000 calendar images of Hanuman, I have also brought out my own calendars.

S: How do you select the things to be kept in the museum?

G: I want to exhibit the unusual in the museum. Like my favourite piece which is also the central piece of the museum is a fibreglass image of Hanuman playing the veena — such an uncommon image! I saw it on the internet and got it made by the finest craftsman. I evaluated the work of several craftsmen before selecting this artist. The image has a metal look but is actually of fibre glass.

S: How do you wish to expand this museum? What future do you see for it?

G: I started the museum with one room. Now as the collection is growing, I wish to see it extend to the whole first floor, and then the whole house including the ground floor. We will have limited living area, but we want the whole house to be devoted to the display of Hanuman images. I even plan to redo the driveway, so that one knows from the gate itself that there is a Hanuman museum inside.

S: What does this museum mean to you — personally and with relation to the public?

G: This museum was a product of my divine engagement with Hanuman. It was in consultation with Him that I made it, only He will advise me on its expansion. Whatever I have in life is thanks to Him; my sons are doing well because of His blessings. With regard to the public, our magazine is in wide circulation, and I am currently compiling a list of the names and contact addresses of all the Hanuman bhakts in the country. I have always received good feedback and great appreciation for the museum, and prayers for its expansion.

[1] Jean Baudrillard, 'The System of Collecting', in John Elsner and Roger Cardinal (eds), *The Cultures of Collecting*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994, pp. 7–24.

padmanabhapuram palace museum, trivandrum, kerala

Ameet Parameswaran

Ameet Parameswaran surveyed the museums of Kerala and South Karnataka. The excerpt given here describes the Padmanabhapuram Palace; this was the palace of the erstwhile rulers of Travancore (southern Kerala) but the palace now falls within Tamil Nadu. Ameet's report discusses the ironies created by the redrawing of provincial boundaries, and includes an interview with an outspoken museum official.

Out of the seven museums run by the Archaeological Survey of India for the State of Kerala, four are housed in old palaces rather than in modern buildings designed to be museums. The Padmanabhapuram Palace Museum at Padmanabhapuram, the Koyikkal Palace Museum at Nedumangad, the Krishnapuram Palace Museum at Alappuzha, and the Hill Palace Museum at Tripunithura are all palaces converted into museums. The curators of all these museums complain that their buildings frame the exhibits too powerfully and control the production of meanings. The curators are unable to highlight objects for the attentive viewing that would make them appear as 'art'. Although these four palace buildings are widely dispersed across Kerala, they are similar in a fundamental sense: they are all *tharawad*s (ancestral homes) built in the *nalukettu* (courtyard house) style. Stretching from present-day Tamil Nadu to Thrissur in Kerala, these *nalukettu*s provide a uniform structural backdrop for the archaeological exhibits. Despite the complaints of the curators, however, I feel that the strong forms of the buildings produce an identity for the otherwise heterogeneous society and history of Kerala.

The most celebrated palace–museum of Kerala is, ironically, not in Kerala. The Padmanabhapuram Palace was the official residence of the Maharajas of the erstwhile State of Travancore. The Palace was founded around 1601 CE by Ravipillai Ravivarma Kulasekhara Perumal, who ruled Travancore between 1592 and 1609 CE. Subsequent rulers added structures during their own reigns, making the Palace a complex of buildings that reflect different periods and styles. After the Indian states were reorganised in 1956 and Kerala was carved out of the former Madras State, the Palace and its premises fell within the boundary of Tamil Nadu. In recognition of its connection to Kerala's history, the Government of Kerala was given the administrative control of the complex. The income from and expenditure on Padmanabhapuram Palace are shared equally by the governments of Kerala and Tamil Nadu. The Palace is located on the road that connects Thiruvananthapuram with Kanyakumari. As Kanyakumari is a popular tourist destination, this museum gets a high number of visitors — 3,000 to 4,000 per day.

Even though Padmanabhapuram Palace is located in the State of Tamil Nadu, it is perceived as a cultural icon of Kerala; in a certain sense, it can be seen as a Kerala cultural island inside Tamil Nadu (Plate 10.11.1). The Palace is thus one of the few existing physical remnants of 'undivided' Kerala that once stretched from Kasargode (in Karnataka today) to Kanyakumari (in Tamil Nadu) at the southern tip of the Indian peninsula.

Spread over an area of 6.5 acres, the Palace complex has 12 buildings. Though there are some objects inside these palaces — a few pieces of furniture, brass lamps, mirrors, as well as murals and oil paintings — the buildings themselves are the main exhibits. Extensively built of wood, with terracotta-tile roofs, these buildings are known for their wood carving, seen in pillars, ceilings and windows.

The archaeological museum is housed in a new building at the site of the former stables. It

has an extensive collection of stone and wooden sculptures from the region, and coins, inscriptions and reproductions of murals from the palaces.

The third museum, the heritage museum, contains an assortment of objects of daily use, mainly vessels and utensils from the kitchens. There is an interesting story connected with its building, which is reputedly the oldest one in the complex. According to one of the guides, this building was made as a temple, and its entrance was kept very low so that all visitors would have to bend as they entered, thus bowing to the god. A later ruler of Travancore became annoyed at having to bend and had the entire building dismantled and transferred to a marginal position in the complex.

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Today, the former royal palace is open to the public. What do the current-day custodians of the palace have to say about the role of the palace as a museum? To find out, I interviewed C. V. Sreekumaran, Research Officer, Padmanabhapuram Palace Museum.

AMEET (A): Sir, I am here in relation to a project on the study of museums.
SREEKUMARAN (S): Yes, I was expecting you. Have you seen the whole complex? There are three separate museums here — the palace museum, the archaeological museum and the heritage museum. The building as you see on the right [the archaeological museum] was constructed in 1996. Before the building was constructed, the exhibits were placed in the Palace itself. Now all of these have been transferred to the new building.

The problem that the Palace Museum puts before us is immense. It is a protected monument and is in itself an object of display … But because we cannot make changes to the buildings, we cannot use scientific methods of exhibiting objects. We cannot use museological techniques or provide proper lights and neutral backgrounds so as to highlight the individual objects of significance.

A: So the new museum building addresses these needs …

PLATE 10.11.1 • Visitors resting in the sheltered shade of a tree outside the museum entrance. *SOURCE*: PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR.

S: Hah! That is a different story. We made proposals for a new building to house the exhibits. But the construction was given to the PWD and architectural wing. And they did the work without taking our opinion or interacting with us. The structure in itself is beautiful. It is made in the same style as the Padmanabhapuram palace and it does not stand out as an eyesore in the complex. Yet the basic purpose of the building was to house the numerous exhibits … that is still a problem for us.

A: The museum I can see draws in a huge audience …
S: Yes, we get 3,000 to 4,000 visitors daily. But it is not good for the monument. So many people swarming in such an old palace is not a good thing.

A: I never thought I would hear the management of a museum complaining that their audience is too large … in other places they want to find ways to attract visitors.
S: The point is that of this great number of visitors coming in daily, less than 20 per cent is a genuine audience. The rest have no understanding of the place nor have any interest in understanding it. Once I was on my rounds and when I reached the *oottupura* (dining hall), I saw four children who were about to start a race, while their teacher had a

whistle in his mouth, ready to give them the signal to go. I immediately caught hold of them and the teacher started arguing with me. He said he was just making the children run in the long corridor —what was the problem with that? I ask you, is that the way to behave in an 18th-century structure? But what can you expect, when this teacher who was accompanying the students was the physical education trainer. Most of the teachers who bring the students are themselves insensitive and illiterate in regard to history and art.

On our own part, we are also not doing much for our audience. It is after great effort that we were able to bring a catalogue introducing the Palace. We have told the authorities so many times that we should have an audio-visual presentation at the start of the visit that will narrate the history and the significance and beauty of the Palace. But this has not been done.

A: Isn't understanding and experiencing the *nalukettu* architecture a difficult thing in itself? Unlike say the palaces of Jaipur, these are not at all imposing. Sometimes for tourists these may look more like a big house than a palace …
S: Yes, the architecture of this Palace like many of Kerala's buildings is very difficult to understand in passing. It needs some effort. It is because of the difference in aesthetics. It is not outwardly magnificent. To develop sensitivity towards this architecture, you need to have a different way of seeing (Plate 10.11.2). How do you show the visitors the nuances of carving, or the play of light, in a *nalukettu*?

We don't understand the significance of our own heritage. Do you realise that around 390 palaces of Kerala have been transplanted; these have been taken out of the State — some have even been sold abroad? One palace was taken down, transferred and converted to a hotel in Italy. Real heritage conservation would be to prevent this from happening.

A: A question on the guides working here, are they specially trained?
S: We do not have enough staff here. Many people who are employed in different categories have to work as guides. They memorise things and repeat them to the visitors. But they also develop their own tales. How many times can you stop them? We try sometimes, but it is of no great use. For example, there is a special tale popular with the guides about a granite stone. Did you hear it?

A: No. I think I missed out on some stories because I was not part of a big group. I think they tell many more things when there are more people.
S: Well, the story they tell is that this big stone that is in the Palace was used by the rulers to select soldiers for the army. Only those who could lift the stone a 100 times would be selected …Well, do you think the story is true? And tell me the reason why? (Plate 10.11.3)

A: No. It would be very difficult to get such strong soldiers …
S: No, the question one should ask is, would the people applying to be soldiers in the army be allowed to enter the palace? No, they would never come right into the palace. We have a big problem of history writing. What we need is a social history of the Palace.
A: What is the response of the government to the needs of the museum? Has there been a change in policies with the changing governments?
S: I would say some things openly. I don't mind, for I am retiring in three months. There has been immense work in terms of conservation and declaring many new monuments as protected ones. But what are these? All of these are Christian monuments. Regardless of which political party is in power, there are people here who want to prove that Kerala has a history only after the arrival of Christianity. These efforts have to be fought. And we cannot provide the true history. There are objects of prehistoric age in our collection here.

A: I did not see them …
S: That is because they are not exhibited. I have been saying they should be put on show for a long time, but now who is interested? They are piled up in the store.

PLATE 10.11.2 • Poomukham at the Padmanabhapuram Palace; intricately carved wooden roof above the entrance and railings on the balcony above. *SOURCE*: PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR.

PLATE 10.11.3 • Stone block at the Padmanabhapuram Palace, falsely mythologised as a legendary weight used to appraise the strength of candidates during army recruitment by the king. *SOURCE*: PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR.

religion, technology and the temple-cum-museum

Siddarth Puri

Siddharth Puri visited a number of sites that fuse the temple with the museum in north and south India. In this extract, he describes a street in the pilgrimage town of Haridwar that is lined with fantastic buildings that represent Hindu mythology through plaster and fiberglass sculptures and mechanised dioramas.

The site of Haridwar sits about 200 kms northeast of the Indian capital New Delhi. Thousands of pilgrims and tourists journey to Haridwar annually to receive blessings and ritually cleanse themselves by bathing in the Ganges River, participating in temple rituals and visiting ashrams. Haridwar is also important because it marks the entry of the Ganges into the plains from the mountains, and is believed to be one of the four places where, according to Indian mythology, the sacred nectar was churned from the ocean. Its importance as a pilgrimage site has now been blurred with its status as a tourist destination. I was interested in the way technology and religion have coalesced onto the temple-cum-museum institutions constructed in Haridwar. These temple/museums are spaces of hybrid modernism that function as entertainment areas and embody the idea of the spectacle.

Walking down Sapt Sarovar, a small street on the banks of the Ganges where these temple/museum structures have sprung up since the early 1990s, visitors are greeted by ostentatious, colourful and frightening experiences of mythology and architecture (Plate 10.12.1). The buildings are constructed in the image of mountains and caves, with external façades made up of fibreglass and ceramic jagged-edged stones and painted rocks. Folded into these rocks are oversized faces of demons that strike fear into entering visitors; these are juxtaposed with images of Gods that placate the visitors and underscore the sanctity of the space. These architectural choices and figures function on two different levels to attract visitors:

by highlighting and confirming their religiosity, while simultaneously indicating their identity as spaces for entertainment. Yet with the increasing number of temple/museums on Sapt Sarovar, a subtle competition emerges between these sites. The newer structures are more lavish, technologically savvy and aesthetically pleasing compared to the older buildings whose colours are fading and whose technology is quickly becoming outdated.

The façades, however, are not the most astonishing parts of these Disneyland-like creations. What is most striking about these spaces is their use of technology in retelling Hindu mythology. The interiors of the structures continue the cave-and-mountain motif and house moving dioramas of deities placed in protected cases inside the rock-walls. These spaces employ electronic figures in the dioramas to recount the tales of valour, piety and benevolence of Lord Rama and Lord Krishna.

The craze for these temple/museum structures in this area of Haridwar began after Hinduism saw a popular rise in mainstream Indian media. The 1986 hit television serial 'Ramayan', which retold the life of Lord Rama, ushered in a new way to use media and technology to promote an understanding of Hinduism and Hindus (Plate 10.12.2). The first of what I call the 'electric mandirs' was established in Haridwar in 1992, which interestingly coincides with the right-wing Hindu party, the Bhartiya Janata Party's (BJP's) aggressive 1992 campaign that used video, radio and media campaigns to 'regain the lost Hinduism of India' by promoting a Hindu nationalist ideology. Though the BJP does not have obvious links to the ashrams and temple/museums in Haridwar, they share at least one common mission statement: to increase an understanding of Hinduism through visual and entertainment avenues. While this is by no means an attempt to parallel the ideology and missions of these two groups, it does speak to the increased use of technology to propagate an understanding of Hinduism (Plate 10.12.3). The temple/museums, however, attempt to remain staunchly apolitical with their goals deeply grounded in religious

PLATE 10.12.1 • An oversized demon face protrudes out of the rocky façade, flanking one side of the entrance to the 'India Temple' at Haridwar, Uttarakhand (left).
A range of gods and mythological figures from Rama, Sita, Lakshman and Hanuman to the Surya Deva or the Sun God in his chariot drawn by seven white horses grace the exterior of this temple though the sign board proclaims it to be a temple of the Goddess in Haridwar, Uttarakhand (above). *Source*: Photograph by the author.

education. Crucial to note, however, is the fact that overseas devotees and non-resident Indians fund these temple/museums and they oftentimes encourage ashrams to display Hindu mythology in these entertainment structures.

In the case of Haridwar, the combination of religious education and fervour mixed with technology has created a by-product of kitsch modernism and spaces reminiscent of amusement parks. The temple/museum spaces are coveted, not for religious purposes, but for the consumption of entertainment, leisure and tourism. In this way, religion is commodified and made into a spectacle in these spaces. The ashrams spectacularise religion with entertainment in the form of large, interactive toys and scenery. The electrically animated figure of Lord Rama with his consort Sita sitting while Laxman is cutting off the nose of a demon fails to convey the ideas of dharma and righteousness that the episode was supposed to illustrate, but is deployed as an entertaining act. Likewise, the image of Lord Krishna and his lover Radha seated on a revolving throne does not attract visitors because of its display of divine love, but because it is entertainment: a spinning shiny, silver and glass-covered throne with devotees draped in multi-coloured saris, surrounded by mosaic glass pillars.

In these simulacra of sacred pilgrimages and spaces, the sanctity of the journey is replaced with hushed giggles of children crawling through ceramic passageways. While it makes it easier for the religious experience of the cave-temple to become more accessible to a wider range of populations, it is important to note that visitors mainly consist of middle class or upper-middle class families who come to Haridwar to spend time in ashrams, or tourists looking for a leisurely outlet for entertainment. It is in this way that these temple/museum creations primarily cater to the upper classes (and castes) of India, non-resident Indians and tourists.

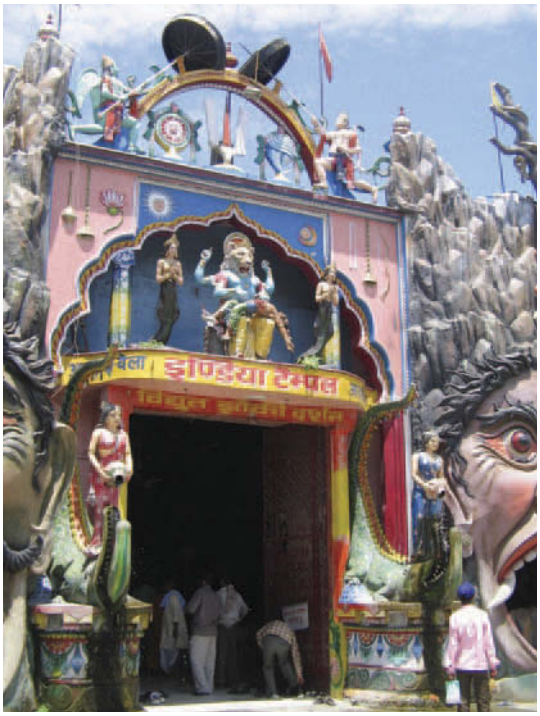

PLATE 10.12.2 • Visitors at the entrance to the 'India Temple' that declares 'Vidyuth Jhanki Darshan' or 'Electrical Tableau' darshan, in Haridwar.
SOURCE: PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR.

PLATE 10.12.3 • A display prominently showcases the three central gods of the Hindu pantheon, Vishnu, Brahma and Shiva, explicating two origin myths — one of the universe with the birth of Brahma from Vishnu's navel, and the other of the descent of Ganga mediated by Shiva's locks.
SOURCE: PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR.

two museums in guwahati

Akshaya Tankha

Akshaya Tankha travelled across north-east India, visiting museums in Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Nagaland, and Arunachal Pradesh. In the extract that follows, he muses on two very different museums in Guwahati, the Assam State Museum, and the Srimanta Shankar Mahadeva Kalakshetra, and the ways in which they are marked by the troubled history of the north-east.

The origin of the Assam State Museum can be traced back to the Kamarupa Anusandhana Samiti (the Assam Research Society), a volunteer organisation established in 1912 under colonial rule with an interest in the history of Assam and north-east India. The Samiti gradually amassed a collection of books, manuscripts and artefacts that included copper plates, carved stones, coins, archaeological finds, and anthropological articles, which collectively constituted the museum's core collection and library when it was formally set up with the support of the colonial government of Bengal. State support also ensured that the museum was enrolled with the Museum Association, London, in 1916 (Plate 10.13.1). A large building to house the growing collection was constructed in the 1930s but the museum remained an independently-run organisation till 1953 when it was formally taken

PLATE 10.13.1 • Exterior façade of the Assam State Museum, Guwahati. *SOURCE*: PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR.

over by the state government, which also effected a change in its title from the 'Assam Provincial Museum' to the 'Assam State Museum'.

Today, along with sculpture galleries the museum houses a Freedom Fighter Gallery, a Painting Gallery (a dimly-lit gallery showing artists' impressions of Assam and its landscape), a Village Life of Assam Gallery (with artefacts and dioramas) and an Ethnographic Gallery (with dioramas of Assam's tribal groups.) Textual supports inside the Ethnographic Gallery along with the arrangement of objects and labels appear to reinforce a desire for racial and ethnographic fixity associated with the erstwhile colonial state. Dioramic displays of the tribes of Assam carry brief notes on the community's 'racial type', whether they belong to the 'Mongoloid group', for instance, their linguistic group, whether they follow a patrilineal or a matrilineal system, whether they practise monogamy or not, what their primary occupation is as well as their dominant religious beliefs. The introductory signboard declares that the intention behind dioramas and photographs of cultural objects associated with tribes is to show a 'homogeneity in the cultural pattern' of the tribes and how the 'works of art represent the entire lifestyle of the people'.

Interestingly, the Ethnography Gallery has been rechristened the Ambedkar Gallery, visible as a label below the main title that greets visitors at the entrance to the exhibits in the room. According to the exhibition officer, while the issue of Dalits is not really prevalent in Assam, the title is nonetheless symbolic of the politics of inequality faced by tribal populations in Assam, in a manner akin to the experience of Dalits across the country.

Through this project, I have become extremely conscious about not letting my reading of museums sound like a narrative of failure. But the sense of failure is not easy to shake off either. It seems as though it has seeped into the most intimate confines of the museum, becoming a recurring and sometimes nagging feature of it. This time it manifested itself in the officials working in the Assam State Museum, as my interviews with the director, exhibition officer and even with an ex-director, revealed. There can always be a number of reasons for an individual to differ with a certain policy, but it seems as though the issue at hand has gone beyond a few people getting disgruntled over something. Here, there is a disillusionment that is an integral feature of the museum's discourse about itself.

'Assam State Museum — Assessment and Recommendation', a document written by Samiran Baruah, the Guide Lecturer-cum-Exhibition Officer who works in this museum, exemplifies this disillusionment perfectly. It documents the inefficiency at work in the institution. Detailing the ills that plague the museum in an extremely forthright manner, Baruah carefully lists the problems pertaining to the display of objects, the conservation work still required, the unprofessional work being carried out in the name of documentation, as well as in other aspects like manpower, the photography department and the library facilities. There are detailed accounts of the failings and shortcomings of the museum staff, its management, the investment of finances, and the lack of proper infrastructure. Baruah also sheds light on how the galleries function at present, appealing for better and properly researched displays of objects as opposed to simply displaying older forms of representation in better-looking, slicker galleries,

as is currently the case. This document was given to the state government in 2001 as a request for the better upkeep of museums, but until 2006 Baruah was still waiting for a response.

The main issue in the galleries is that contextualisation is far from adequate. While the museum holds rich collections representative of various historical themes, a persistent absence of thematised literature to guide the visitor makes the museum experience less than satisfactory. Museums are often criticised for being restrictive and claustrophobic spaces, crowded with pedagogical devices and cues to control visitors' movements and their interpretation of objects. The Assam State Museum, on the other hand, appears extremely claustrophobic due to an absence of precisely these or any other devices. There is no interest, it seems, in accommodating the exhibited objects in a narrative that would explain them within a context of production, consumption, skill/artistry, or a similar framework. When I brought up the issue of making the museum interesting for the viewer, the common response I received was that the museum was a place for education and not interest. But in the absence of such cues, the museum fails to even educate its audience (Plate 10.13.2).

PLATE 10.13.2 • The museum as an educational experience: An informative label denoting a set of sculptures at the Museum. *Source*: Photograph by the author.

The Ethnography Gallery is a prime example of this problem. It lists the tribes of Assam in very superficial terms that include their supposed racial group, language group and occupation without any accounts of/by particular subjects that could challenge and/or complicate the image of tribal identity gleaned through such a simply enumerated account. Moreover, the museum lists their practices as hunting and weaving without giving any further information about the nature of the local economy, markets, patterns of consumption, or other details that could flesh out the role of such practices. The dioramas and accompanying notes reflects a postcolonial continuation of a colonial practice, of surveying subjects in fixed and static terms. This problem demands a significant revision in the nature of the information offered in the museum and a reframing of the terms in which tribal, or any form of identity, is discussed in the museum's exhibition spaces. However, that is unlikely to happen any time soon since the staff appeared to be convinced that the museum had changed greatly from the time it was controlled by the British. The absence of any engagement with shifts in debates around the issue of tribes and tribal identity in India, or even with the history of identity-politics that has affected Assam in the postcolonial period, reflects poorly on the relationship between tribal subjects and the Indian State. Moreover, it is a stark realisation of what the state offers to the museum visitor by way of a picture of its subject populations.

Across town, at the other end of Guwahati, is the Srimanta Sankaradeva Kalakshetra. Inaugurated by President K. R. Narayanan on 9 November 1998, the Kalakshetra owes its formation to the landmark 'Assam Accord' signed in 1985 under the Rajiv Gandhi-led Congress government, which is believed to have brought the widespread social unrest of the early 1980s to an end. Clause VI of the Accord states that 'Constitutional, legislative and administrative safeguards, as may be appropriate, shall be provided to protect, preserve and promote the cultural, social, linguistic identity and heritage of the Assamese people'. The result on the ground is the sprawling Kalakshetra, which sits across 10.28 hectares of land, built with funds released by the Ministry of

Human Resource Development of the Government of India. The Kalakshetra includes centres for the literary, performing and visual arts, a cultural museum, a heritage park, an open-air theatre, an artists' village as well as a sound and light show and 'dancing fountains' that perform daily. Other features yet to be built include a children's park, a solar energy park, three 'academic institutions' and a craft market. The complex bustles with activity. Everyone seems to be rushing off to the next attraction in the itinerary before they miss the next show — the sound and light show, the water-works display, the puppet show, the folk dance show in the lawns, the play in the open-air theatre, the presentation ceremony inside the convention centre, the art competition, the museum, etc.

In this complex, the museum is just one amongst a host of other sites to visit. The four galleries it has are relatively bare compared to other museums on this scale. However the museum has interesting points of departure from the State Museum. First, it appears to show folk and tribal crafts as 'art objects', isolated in display cases rather than located as ethnographic objects within dioramas. Second, the displays are at pains to emphasise Assamese Vaishnava culture as a dominant characteristic feature of the objects on display, stressing its high-culture Brahmanical continuities and connections with the Indian 'mainland', rather than focusing on tribal groups as 'specimens' entirely contained in their own world.

While the institution appears to be very active, what is bewildering is the way in which the State Museum seems to have been abandoned by the government in favour of something that evidently draws greater crowds. That the State Museum was fading into irrelevance was articulated by one of the Kalakshetra officials I interviewed. When I asked him to compare the Kalakshetra with the State Museum, he said: 'We differ a lot from the State Museum. The State Museum has a lot of artefacts but it reflects our historical culture. We, on the other hand, promote and exhibit the contemporary culture of this region' (Plate 10.13.3).

PLATE 10.13.3 • Exhibiting Culture: Murals and relief work on the walls lining the entrance path to the heritage park, Kalakshetra. *SOURCE*: PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR.

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series

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contri

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