

Handling of

**ETHNOGRAPHIC
MATERIALS**

Editor

Dr. C. MAHESWARAN

Curator

Department of Museums
Government of Tamilnadu.

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GOVERNMENT OF TAMILNADU**

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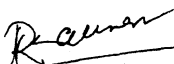
FOREWORD

"Handling of Museum Objects" is the first and foremost basic skill a museologist has to acquire since acquisition upto presenting for public viewing. Packing, transporting, documenting them are the transit stages that need proper handling. Hence, the Anthropology Section of the Government Museum, Chennai has chosen this as the focal theme to conduct a workshop to mark the second phase of Prof. A. Aiyappan's Birth Centenary Celebrations, succeeding the first phase of it on a 'Special Exhibition on Rock Art of India', in collaboration with the National Museum of Mankind, Bhopal.

Topics such as 'Handling of Ethnographic Materials: In Field Exploration', 'Handling of Ethnographic Materials: In Packing & Transporting', 'Handling of Ethnographic Materials: In Designing & Displaying' and 'Handling of Ethnographic Materials: Acquired Through Confiscation' were covered in this "Workshop on Handling of Ethnographic Materials" by eminent Curators of the Government Museum, Chennai. A batch of students drawn from various colleges in and around Chennai were imparted with the skill of handling of ethnographic materials during this Workshop.

Having realized that the importance of the deliberations of the Workshop will help those who want to acquire the skill, they are brought out now in this present form of a booklet.

I hope that this booklet on the focal theme of the aforementioned Workshop will remain as a useful reference work for those who are interested in acquiring the skill of 'Handling of Museum Materials', in general and 'Handling of Ethnographic Materials', in particular.


21/11/2008

(Dr. R. Kannan, Ph.D., I.A.S.)

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HANDLING OF ETHNOGRAPHIC MATERIALS : IN FIELD EXPLORATION

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I. On Defining Ethnographic Materials : -

Materials and or their remains created by mankind so as to fulfil its socio-cultural needs and obligations qualify to be the ethnographic materials¹. The ethnographic materials could be dichotomized into 'artefacts' and 'antiquities'. Any materials created by mankind could be termed as the 'artefacts' while objects created by mankind and over 100 years old could be termed as the 'antiquities'². Hence, all antiquities could be identified as the 'artefacts' but not the vice versa.

II. Classification of Ethnographic Materials : -

Ethnographic materials could be classified in four ways, viz., (i) Based on 'Materials', (ii) Based on 'Chronology' and (iii) Based on 'Ethnic groups' and (iv) Based on "Domains of Usage".

(i) Types of Ethnographic Materials based on 'Materials' :

Ethnographic materials, based on the materials they were made, could be

1. Terracotta,
2. Stone,
3. Wooden,
4. Cane,
5. Bamboo,
6. Gourd,
7. Textile,
8. Leather,
9. Horn,
10. Bone, and
11. Metallic.

(ii) Types of Ethnographic Materials, based on chronology to which they belong to, could be

1. Prehistoric,
2. Protohistoric,
3. Early Historic,
4. Historic, and
5. Contemporary.

Of these, the 'Prehistoric materials' could be further sub-categorized into

- (a) Palaeolithic³,
- (b) Mesolithic, and
- (c) Neolithic.

The 'Protohistoric materials' are also referred to as 'Chalcolithic'. Likewise, the 'Early Historic materials' are identified as 'Megalithic'.

(iii) Types of Ethnographic Materials, based on ethnic groups which utilize them, could be

1. Tribal,
2. Folk, and
3. Urban.

(iv) Types of Ethnographic Materials, based on domains of usage, could be

1. Household artefacts,
2. Hunting implements,
3. Weapons,
4. Agricultural tools,
5. Musical instruments,
6. Ritual objects, and
7. Miscellaneous materials.

III. Mode of Acquisition of Ethnographic Materials : -

Ethnographic materials could be acquired through various modes such as

- (i) Field Exploration,
- (ii) Treasure trove,
- (iii) Confiscation,
- (iv) Gifting,
- (v) Exchange,
- (vi) Purchase, and
- (vii) Salvage.

Of all the above modes of acquisition the field exploration is construed as the better mode as more authenticity and first hand acquaintance are possible through this method than through other modes enlisted above.

IV. Field Exploration - What do we Mean ?

By 'Field Exploration', we mean exploring the field centre(s) and acquiring the materials and or material remains from therein.

Such field exploration is conducted usually in stages as enlisted below :

1. Identification of field centre(s),
2. Visiting the field centre(s) identified,
3. Exploring the surface(s) of the field centre(s) for the materials and or material remains⁴,
4. Unearthing the materials and or material remains from the incrustations,
5. Subjecting the unearthed materials and or materials to requisite conservation treatments,
6. Identifying the explored materials and or material remains,
7. Documenting the identified materials and or material remains, and
8. Packing and transporting the materials and or material remains to the destinations, concerned.

**V. Stages of Handling of Ethnographic Materials :
In Field Exploration : -**

1. Handling during unearthing from earth crust or bed of underwater,
2. Handling during subjecting to preventive conservation or curative conservation⁵,
3. Handling during examining for identification,
4. Handling during visual documenting through photography and or videography, and
5. Handling during packing and transporting the materials and or material remains to destinations, concerned.

VI. Conclusion : -

By 'handling', we mean proper handling and as only proper handling ensures life expectancy a thorough understanding of handling the ethnographic materials is a desideratum in the fields of museography and museology as well. Hence, a museographer and a museologist has to acquire the basic skills in proper handling of ethnographic materials under his or her custody. In otherwords, 'handling' is the basic skills one has to possess as a museographer and or as a museologist to deal with the ethnographic materials under his or her custody.

Foot Notes

- ¹ Contrary to this perspective, there is also another school of thought which conceives the natural objects as an inclusive items within the domain of ethnography. For instance, a plantain leaf which determines the cultural behaviour of an ethnic group as a eating vessel is construed by this school of thought as an ethnographic material (From personal discussion with Dr. M.D. Muthukumaraswamy, Founder - Director, National Folklore Support Centre, Chennai).
- ² Fragile artefacts such as manuscripts are given antique status even after completion of 75 years.
- ³ Palaeolithic materials are further sub-divided into 'Lower Palaeolithic', 'Middle Paleolithic', and 'Upper Paleolithic'.
- ⁴ Hence, such explored materials from the surface of the field exploration are also known popularly as 'Surface Collection'.

- ⁵ Subjecting the materials to conservation treatments is an ongoing procedure. In other words, the materials are subjected to conservation treatments not only during exploration, but in presentation and or in usual storage as well.

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PACKING AND STORAGE OF ETHNOGRAPHIC MATERIALS

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Ethnology is the science of the races of mankind. Ethnography is the scientific description of the races of mankind. The materials used by them are called ethnographic materials. Ritual objects of all kinds, secular objects, tools, machines, equipments, connected with trades, domestic utensils, ornaments and jewellerys, clothes, musical instruments, weapons etc., are some of the types of objects of mankind. Museums normally collect and preserve those objects belonging to the ethnic groups. Metals, especially iron and copper alloys, but also gold, silver, lead and aluminium, glass and stone beads, wood, plant fibres, grass, skin, animal fibres, bone, teeth, clay, ceramics, textiles, feather, latex are some of the types of materials of the ethnographic collections.

Handling of the ethnographic materials in a museum is very important. When we say handling, it is nothing but touching with or taking in hand the object. There should be care in handling each and every one of the objects in a museum. If we want to increase the life of the ethnographic objects, the objects should be properly handled, packed and properly stored.

Care in Handling of Ethnographic Materials

If the ethnographic objects are not handled properly in every aspect, then the objects will be damaged. Climatic variations affect materials of organic nature and paintings. Insects are one of the main enemies of the ethnographic objects. They are wood-borers, white ants, cockroaches, etc. Cockroach is a great destroyer of subtle patinas, paintwork, feather decoration, textiles and desiccated skin like preserved bodies, mummies etc. Rodents cause damage to ethnographic materials. Lizards, geckos damage the materials by their droppings. There are a great number of fungi both wet and dry of the flowering and the

filament type, which cause extensive and fundamental damage to the ethnographic materials. There are many surface moulds, which constantly recur, especially during the wet seasons. These destroy protein elements in patina and will grow well on any film of moisture or finger marks left on metals, and there is even a distinct mould, which constantly recur, especially during the wet seasons. These destroy protein elements in patina and will grow well on any film of moisture or finger marks left on metals, and there is even a distinct mould, which attacks glass. The acids produced by mould metabolism permanently etch the surfaces.

Conservation Measures

Unless one knows the methods of safeguarding the ethnographic objects, the objects will be lost in our hands. Therefore all methods such as mechanical cleaning, chemical cleaning etc., may be effected in order to prolong the life of the materials.

PACKING OF MUSEUM OBJECTS

Packing is putting things into a box, bundle, bag etc., and making the carrying of the materials easily. The primary aim of packing of ethnographic objects are to protect them physically and environmentally at all stages through, to the place of exhibition in relation to the type of transportation. The packing system should not involve complicated procedures in packing or unpacking. The materials of packaging, packing systems and guidelines in packing are essential to take care of the ethnographic objects for posterity.

Packaging Materials

Natural materials such as wood are used in packing to avoid cost as well as environmental changes as wood is buffering the environmental changes. Packing containers are made out of wood, plywood, fibre board, block board, steel etc. Traditionally cushioning materials such as cloth, straw, gunny bags were used. All of them absorb moisture and transfer it to the objects resulting in decay. In recent years, a variety of foamed plastic materials in the form of balls, peanuts, spaghetti, derived from polyethylene foam, polystyrene foam and polyurethane foam are used in surround packing or float packing. Rubber, polythene air bubbles also are used. For wrapping the museum objects acid-free

tissue paper, corrugated cardboard, polyethylene wrapper, polyethylene cellular film air in sealed bubbles, polyethylene cellular film, open cells in film etc., are used. For binding pressure tapes are used.

Packing Systems

Depending upon the type of museum objects (two-dimensional or three-dimensional), condition, size, type of transit, weight, distance, duration etc., the packing system has to be chosen. There are many systems and techniques of packing either expensive or moderate. Depending upon the museum's budget the packing also can be chosen. When the packing is done by contractors the specifications should be given and the whole operation should be supervised by a conservation personnel.

Single Packing

Single packing is very simple and is meant for short distance travel and personalised transport of objects like paintings, prints, drawings, photographs etc., are wrapped with tissue paper or kraft paper, and surrounded with additional soft paper padding materials and kept in a slightly larger container made out of wood, plywood or hard board which is provided with a handle to carry.

Multiple Packing

The packing system in which more similar flat works arranged in layers separated by rigid panels with the free space at the perimeter and edges which are stuffed with cushion shreds is called multiple packing. On the contrary instead of rigid panels interleaving the objects may be replaced by corner pads and the slack face all around are filled with cushioning materials.

Horizontal Tray Packing

Accommodating flat museum objects in individual adjustable tray designed with shock absorbers at the corners which are in turn grooved to the inner walls of the packing case is the horizontal tray system of packing.

Vertical Tray Packing

Panels fixed with flat objects are slid vertically which can slide out and in along the grooves made at two opposite inner walls of the packing cases is vertical tray packing. The vertical panels may have holes or slots for fixing the objects to it.

Track System of Packing

In the place of vertical sliding panels, a system of tracks can be installed inside the packing cases in order to pack the framed works by sliding along the tracks. In this system also we can accommodate framed paintings, works on paper, photographs etc. Proper shock absorbing materials between the tracks and inner walls of the packing case will avoid the transfer of shocks to the packed museum objects.

Horizontal Slide-out Tray Packing

In this type of packing the slide-out panels are like trays to which the objects are attached. The objects should be held by cushioned fixtures having winged nuts.

Float Packing

The surround packing of three-dimensional objects in a packing case with stuffing materials is called float packing. In this packing heavy objects like bronze sculptures, marble sculptures etc., should be wrapped with tissue paper and then stuffing materials like polyethylene, polyurethane balls etc., are filled in the empty space of the packing case. The packing materials should be clean, dry and free from any deleterious chemicals. The inner wall of the packing case may be lined with polystyrene slabs. It is better to cushion the bottom of the case where bronze is kept with a shock-absorbing layer of 1 cm thick rubber sheet.

Compartment Packing

Compartment packing is similar to the float packing but a number of small objects are packed in different compartments within the same packing case. The case should be sturdy, designed for carrying the weight.

Template Packing

It is packing for complex shaped three dimensional objects by fitting the object in padded form or templates which conform to selected contours of the objects. The objects are wrapped with soft tissue paper and the contact edges of the template with the materials are also provided with soft materials to avoid abrasion and the object is fixed in position. Small sculptures or heavy objects can be packed in a compartmentalised box employing similar template holding devices for each items as required.

Rigid Foam Template Packing

In this type of packing the object is packed within a packing case in a rigid foam plastic like expanded polystyrene, polyurethane or polyethylene, which is trimmed, shaped or scooped out or cut to fit around the contours of the object. In this case also the object is wrapped with tissue paper and polyethylene film.

Double Case Packing

In this packing a packed case is placed inside another case and the interspace between two cases is filled with cushioning materials to avoid shocks and vibrations.

Conservation Measures

1. Air-tight packing cases will avoid change of R.H. and therefore mould growth is avoided.
2. Before packing all the interior wood, filling materials should be fumigated with a fungicide, like thymol.
3. The organic objects and paintings should be treated for the eradication of insects and fungi with suitable insecticides.
4. The packing case should be marked with the directional marks at which it should be positioned.
5. In case of complicated packing system the procedure of unpacking should be instructed in the case.
6. Screw eyes, wires from the frames of the objects should be removed from all two-dimensional objects while packing.

7. Lids of cases should be bolted or screwed down. Nailing should not be allowed.

STORAGE AND CONSERVATION GUIDELINES

There is a natural tendency to relax conservation vigilance when the museum objects are out of sight in storage or in vaults. The basic principle of storage is to keep the objects in a physically secured environment and yet to permit ready access for inspection before their removal to the galleries, storage or other locations.

Storage Devices

There are various storage devices and they are expected to meet the physical and environmental criteria intended for preserving the museum objects against damages.

Stacking

Paintings and flat framed works, prints, photographs etc., may be placed on pads and stacked vertically using cardboard as separators. In group stacking it is necessary to ensure that the pads are skid-proof, that the angle of stacking is average, and that the largest objects are kept first. Three-dimensional objects like sculptures, large objects should be placed on pallets to permit easy handling and lifting.

Shelving

Shelves may be constructed either by wood or preferably by metal free storage of two-dimensional or three-dimensional objects. Vertical slots may be designed for flat items and bays set up for objects. Boxes of different sizes may be made and objects kept wrapped with acid-free tissue paper inside. This method will utilise all the spaces available in the shelves, when there is only a limited space.

Drawers and Cabinets

Drawers are used for flat works of art on paper, card-board and textiles, maps and similar items, and also, when appropriately designed, for small objects. Interleaves of acid-free tissue papers are used. The drawers for coins are with slots in them. Cabinets are also used for two-dimensional and three-dimensional objects.

Sliding Screens

Sliding screens are very common for paintings and flat works and occasionally for decorative art, or arts, which can be suspended by appropriate hooks. Such system is economical of floor space and are efficient for examination and retrieval purposes.

Compaction Devices

Compaction device is fairly recent in the museum world and answers in the requirements for more storage and less space. Compaction equipment is intended for permanent storage primarily. The compaction units are either electrically or manually operated. The manual type of compaction equipment is probably more useful for museum storage, as it is less likely to go wrong. In this type normally textiles are preserved.

Vaults

Vaults and security storage areas are used for extremely valuable objects, e.g. gold and silver coins, precious stones or other treasures like silver, gold and diamond jewelleryes.

Conservation Guidelines

1. Storage areas should be maintained clean and the waste and condemned furniture should not be stacked in the storage.
2. Regular vacuum cleaning should be done to get rid off dust.
3. If open storage is maintained, the objects should be covered by polyethylene sheets or bags.
4. In order to avoid wastage of space in the storage as well as to avoid dust, slotted angle shelves should be arranged with different sized boxes containing objects to fit in the space available.
5. The R.H. and temperature should be maintained at the optimum level and it should be monitored regularly.
6. Light sensitive objects should always be kept closed by screens.
7. When scholars are allowed to study the reserve collector

- pencil only should be allowed for writing. Otherwise there is a likelihood of objects being stained by ink.
8. Biocides should be used regularly to drive off insects and microorganisms. Before the advent of monsoon organic objects should be fumigated with thymol in other to avoid the growth of fungi and fogged with D.D.V.P. to avoid insect attack.
 9. Smoking should never be allowed inside the storage area as it involves fire risk.
 10. Open fire should never be used even in the form of lamps.
 11. When objects are removed from higher shelves ladders should be used with care.
 12. Objects should never be kept near windows.
 13. Proper pallets should be placed under heavy objects in order to facilitate lifting or handling them.
 14. No object should be directly placed on the floor.
 15. Lead coins should not be stored in wooden cabinets, but on plastic trays, as volatile acids emanated from wood affect lead coins.
 16. It is better not to have the conservation laboratory attached to the storage.

Conclusion

In handling of ethnographic objects, handling such as packing, transportation and storage are very important aspects one has to take into account. This paper deals with these aspects in a brief way for making the users to handle the ethnographic objects in the proper way so that the objects collected will be preserved for posterity in a better way. This is every body's responsibility who are connected with the ethnographic collections. Let us preserve our ethnographic collections with commitment and devotion so that they live for ever.

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DISPLAY OF ETHNOGRAPHIC MATERIALS

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The Government Museum, Chennai is in possession of good collection of Ethnographic materials. The second building of the Madras Government Museum which is called as Front building holds the Ethnographic gallery, where a wide variety of objects are on display.

The concept of display have changed from past to present. Previously, the display were *object oriented*, i.e., much importance was given to objects. But the present display concept is *subject oriented*. The interpretation techniques have advanced well, where a number of methods are being adopted for efficient interpretation of objects.

The display of Ethnographic materials may be broadly classified into two types. 1) Open display 2) Display of objects within show cases.

Open display:

Bigger objects in the form of sculptures, bust - figures, etc., are displayed in this method. The objects are not covered by glass-frames or by any other materials. Generally brick structure is used for pedestal making. If the objects are light weight, wooden materials may be used for the preparation of pedestals. Even in brick pedestals the outside of the pedestals are covered with wooden planks or with one side teak plywood, so that after varnishing it gives a very neat look. The pedestals may be distributed uniformly in the exhibition hall or it may be arranged on either side of the hall in a linear order.

Within showcases :

Showcase: Generally small objects and the objects which are rare are displayed within showcases. There is no restriction that the showcases should be of a typical type. It is all with the organizers, imagination. According to this, the showcases will vary in size, shape and in other features. Whatever the type it may be, care should be taken that the

opening and closing of the showcases should be easier and there should be proper facilities given for replacing the bulbs etc. The showcases may be of individual type or else it may be a continuous type wherein the showcases are linked with each other.

Materials used for showcases : Generally the showcases are prepared with the help of wooden materials. The best wood for preparing the showcases is teak wood. The teak wood showcases are long lasting and they are termite proof. The other wood items commonly used are Kongu wood which is cheaper but it is easily attacked by termites. Different types of plywoods are also used for the preparation of showcases and the best may be the water - and termite proof standard plywoods. Generally glasses are used for the preparation of showcases but acrylic sheets can also be used , but the discoloration occurs after a few years and they are prone to scratches also. Modern museums use metals like aluminium for the preparation of showcases. Octanorm showcases are made of aluminium profiles and they are neat looking.

Lighting : The basic aspects of lighting in display is, when a visitor stands in front of a showcase the light coming from the showcase should not hit the visitor's eye directly. It should be placed in a concealed place or should be covered with ground glass or by any other materials, so that direct light hitting the eyes is avoided.

The second important point in selecting the light is, what type of materials we display within showcases. If the objects are delicate then soft light like compact fluorescent lamps should be used.

The basic lights which are used for different display purposes are given below, which are also applicable to ethnographic materials:

Fluorescent tubes : Still this is the ideal lighting material for museum showcases. It has the advantage of less heat and more light. The modern compact fluorescent lamps (CFL) comes in a wide variety of wattages and they are widely used in museums. They require minimum space and produces less heat. They give white light.

Halogen bulbs : These are modified versions of incandescent bulbs (tungsten bulbs). They come in compact sizes and they are generally 12 volt 50 watt types. Less and more wattage bulbs are also coming. They give yellow light.

Tracklighting is another type of light system where the tracks can be fixed on ceiling and the bulbs along with holder can be moved from one place to another or it can be focused to any desired place. It is useful for open display exhibits.

Labelling : Whether ethnographic gallery or any other gallery the following six types of labelling is very much essential for proper interpretation of the subject.

1. Gallery caption label
2. Gallery description label
3. Showcase caption label
4. Showcase description label
5. Individual object label
6. Individual description for objects

Materials used for labelling : In spite of modern computer world still hand written labels done by good artists, deserve the credit. The other type of labelling methods are computer printed labels on paper or on vinyl, or screen printing labels.

Display techniques :

1. **Uniform display** : The objects to be displayed on showcases should be distributed uniformly on the display area. Crowding of objects on one side should be avoided.
2. The objects should be placed in the display area in an up and down manner (with relief). Some objects may be placed on the wall surface and some may be placed on relief structures so that we get some depth in display.
3. As far as possible the objects should be supported by supporting materials like photographs, drawings etc.
4. Uniform pattern should be followed for the display of labels within the showcases.
5. For the objects which are displayed on the bottom, pedestals should be used.
6. As mentioned earlier lights should be fixed in concealed places.

7. The background colour given for the showcases should be relevant to the objects. Contrasting colours should be given. The background may be painted with plastic emulsion paint or some other display materials may be used like special display cloth or wall paper.
8. **Dioramas** : These are the showcases where the objects are engulfed by its natural surrounding. Backgrounds are painted as scenery and the ground work is converted into natural surroundings with the help of a modeler. It needs lot of work but the result is welcomabale one by the visitor.
9. Nowadays different types of working models are used which may be of electrical or electronic type. Computer based multimedia programme gives a vide variety of display opportunity where learning can be fun as well as educative.

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HANDLING OF ETHNOGRAPHIC ARTEFACTS ACQUIRED THROUGH CONFISCATION

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I. On Introducing Confiscated Items of Cultural Property

Ethnographic artifacts are required by various modes such as field exploration, gifting, exchange, purchase and confiscation¹.

When artifacts possessing antique value are trafficked, they are confiscated by one of the following appropriate legal authorities: Customs & Central Excise, Archaeological Survey of India, Central Bureau of Criminal Investigating Department (Idol Wing), Judicial Magistrate².

Such confiscated artifacts of antique value may have either archaeological or numismatic or ethnographic significance owing to its nature (an idol or a coin or an ethnographic artefact, as the case may be).

II. Legal Aspects Governing Ethnographic Artefacts Through Confiscation

While dealing with ethnographic materials acquired through confiscation we should bear in mind that an object of cultural heritage could be encapsulated through confiscation only. We have to examine the artefact in the light of i) Is the object so closely connected with our history and national life that its departure would be a misfortune? ii) Is it of outstanding aesthetic importance? iii) Is it of outstanding significance for the study of some particular branch of art, learning or history? These criteria have to be followed unscrupulously to evaluate the object before we come to any conclusion³.

III. A Note on Recently Acquired Confiscated Folk Bronze Artefact

Archaeology Section of the Government Museum, Chennai has acquired recently a folk bronze artefact of ethnographic importance through confiscation⁴.

The bronze under study is an exquisitely fabricated item of tribal (folk) bronze locally known as 'Dokra work' (popularly referred to as a "jungle piece"). This depicts a team of boat's men oaring a country float boat in circular form. The centre of it is shown with a circular basket with three fish freshly caught. Interestingly, concentric rings (3 in numbers) are shown on three corners of the float boat, to localize the energy centres, an aspect of tantricism. Accordingly, the basket in the centre with fish is to be conceived as the symbol of fertility - another aspect of tantricism-once again to localize the energy centres, being positioned in the centre. The arrays of concentric rings on the rim of the float boat reiterate the element of tantricism- of localizing the energy centres throughout the artefact. The outer of the float boat depicts scenes of daily life such as fishing with fishhook, elephant. The anthropomorphic forms are shown with triangularly shaped body, dating back to antiquarian period. The depiction of elephant and other anthropomorphic forms in the style of prehistoric rock art once again confirm its antiquarian nature. The float boat is shown with striations to give a realistic look that it has been fabricated in pandanus leaves⁵.

This artefact though looks rustic is definitely a work of antiquity, with the depictions on the lines of prehistoric characteristics. The stylistic content of the antiquity confirms beyond doubt that it is an artwork of Madhya Pradesh.

IV. Case History of the Confiscated Folk Bronze Under Study

All the works of Art of bygone ages have to be registered under this Act. If by chance we come to know that the antiquity in question had not been registered then under the provisions of this Act Sec. 19 empowers the Central Government to compulsorily acquire the said antiquities and art treasures. And further to determine whether the artefact is an antique or not is vested with the Director General of Archaeological Survey of India and his decision shall be final as per the Sec.25 of this Act. Recently being a member of this committee this author while examining the antiquities had come across a folk bronze which at first look seems to be a folk object, but after careful study came to a conclusion that it is an object of tantricism. It was actually confiscated by CB (CID), Idol Wing branch of Police on arresting a

suspect at Mount Road, two years back came to the Chennai Museum to know whether this was an antique or not. After a close look at the artefact it was determined to book a case against the suspect under this act.

V. Conclusion

The motifs of the aforesaid folk bronze artefact such as 'stick like anthropomorphic forms with triangular body' 'zoomorphic form akin to prehistoric rock art depictions'⁶ reaffirm the antique value of the ethnographic material under safe custody.⁹

Further, this ethnographic artefact under study bears elements of tantricism such as 'concentric rings' (throughout the outer rim of the circular float boat and on three corners of the interior of the boat), signifying energy centres and 'shoal of freshly caught fish (within a centrally placed basket), conveying one of the '*pancha makaras*'⁷.

And hence, we could surmise that it is only judicious that the trafficking of this particular cultural property is curbed, by enforcing the legal barriers through confiscation.

Foot Notes

¹"The modes of acquisition should go hand in hand with a befitting policy of acquisition", advocates Museology.

² Of all these legal authorities, the Archaeological Survey of India excels others as the appellate authority and all other authorities act only as per the suggestions of this appellate authority. However, in majority of the cases of confiscation, the CB (CID) (Idol Wing) is observed to have initiated the momentum of the requisite legal battle.

³ Until the confiscation is justified and final orders are passed in favour of such confiscation, the confiscated object, i.e., the 'property' in the parlance of the CB (CID) (Idol Wing) is advised to be kept in safe custody of the Museum.

⁴ Interestingly enough, the folk bronze artefact of ethnographic significance under study was confiscated by the CB (CID) (Idol Wing) of the Chennai Circle, despite the stiff resistance of the party and handed it over to the Archaeology Section of the Government Museum, Chennai.

⁵ The exponents of the Rock Art Studies conceive anthropomorphic forms with triangular body and stick-like depictions to be relatively primitive in style and chronology.

⁶ The elephant motif depicted over this folk bronze artefact resembles those prehistoric rock art depictions of Madhya Pradesh, especially at Bhimbetka.

⁷ The 'Pancha Makaras' that are dealt within tantricism are i) *Matsya* (Fish), ii) *Madhu* (liquor), iii) *Mamsa* (meat), iv) *Madhu* (Woman) and v) *Maithuna* (copulation).

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