

Relevance of Ethnomuseology for Ethnographical Museums and Tribal Cultural Heritage

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Abstract

Ethnomuseology is an interdisciplinary concept that mainly incorporates the Museum Studies and Ethnography / Anthropology with varieties of ethnic arts / artifacts. Ethnographical Museums all over world are the result of specialized field of Ethnomuseography. Since the initial stage and even till today Socio-Cultural Anthropologists are playing significant role to enrich the field of Ethnomuseography and contributing to the development of ethnographical museums in India and abroad. The present paper discusses about ethnographic museums in relation to tribal heritage of India in the wave of modernization and globalization. Most of the Ethnographic collections or cultural heritages are still prevalent in the form of living traditions. But, many of them are gradually lost or vanishing with time in the changing scenario due to cultural change. It is high time to preserve it by ethnomuseographical means. An attempt has also been made to discuss the ways through which such ethnographic museums are growing in India and abroad. In case of ethnographic museums especially community museums and tribal museums; Action Museology deals with the various aspects of tribal cultural sustainability and act as a key explanation to preserve and propagate the tribal cultural heritage.

Keywords: Ethnomuseology; Ethnicity; Tribe; Ethnographic Museum; Ethnomuseography; Tribal Art Heritage; Cultural Change.

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Introduction

“Ethnomuseology is the field of scholarship concerning culturally appropriate museum curation and conservation of ethnographic materials using methods that reflect social, cultural, spiritual, or religious aspects of objects. An Ethnomuseological approach is more holistic”.¹ Though,

Ethnomuseology is followed in some way or another since ages by every ethnographic museum in India and abroad, the concept of Ethnomuseology is relatively a new discipline in the field of Museology and Ethnography that primarily deals with the culture and cultural traditions of the museum exhibits. It is also known as Anthro-Museology,

an interdisciplinary branch of Anthropology and Museology. It can be said that the Ethnomuseology is an interdisciplinary concept that mainly incorporates the museum studies and ethnography with varieties of ethnic arts/artifacts.

Ethnomuseology is the combination of three words Ethnic, Museum (museal) and Logy. 'Ethnic' represents the group of people, the natives or a community. 'Museo' is a short form of museum or museal and represents museum related activities. The English word 'Logy' is derived from the Greek word 'logia' (and verb 'legein' means to speak) which means science. Collectively, it means museum science and studies related with ethnographic collection. Ethnomuseology is interdisciplinary in nature and borrows its practices from Anthropology particularly Ethnography and Museology.

The meaning and history of "ethnicity" concept and the related "race" term described in the book on 'Ethnicity' by Cornell and Hartmann's Race. The term "ethnicity" is relatively recent.² Before 1970, there was no mention of any anthropological textbooks and literature and they contained no defined terms. Prior to World War II, "tribe" term was used for "pre-modern" "race" or societies regarding modern societies. Because of the close connection between the "race" during Nazi ideology, "race" replaced by "ethnicity" within both the European and Anglo-American traditions.³ The further discussion regarding the ethnicity became complicated by using several related terms to designate identical phenomena, like race, nation, tribe, minority group, indigenous people and so on. Certain scholars used such terms interchangeably, when others treated them to be the unrelated concepts. Now, in India the meaning of the term 'tribe' is not relevantly related to its etymological meaning rather it is more symbolic in nature in designating certain ethnic groups which are also known as 'Adiwasi' or aboriginals or indigenous people.

This exploratory study gives a comprehensive information and view of empirical and methodological collection in its multidisciplinary views by bifurcating the monopoly studying tribal culture in the conventional boundary of disciplinary confinement. This focuses on core historical themes of Archaeology and Anthropology suggesting the grand tribal theories interacting over space and time within the composite framework of grand tribal interaction theories of human civilization. They are bound to maximize the reader interaction, discussion and insight with this cross-disciplinary analytical structure and framework, which are the emerging

perspective shifts and trends in tribal studies. This will ensure multi disciplinary mapping and dimensional growth of tribal culture and knowledge to provide a road-map to understand tribal issues in this prevailing academic study. The traditional, aboriginal or vernacular architecture of different indigenous people of same region various in their lifestyles, family size, social organization, climatic and cultural needs and available resources in every community.⁴ The Indigenous architecture field refers to the architecture study and related practice and by local, Indigenous and surrounding people. It is a study field and practice in the USA, Australia, Sápmi Arctic area, Canada, Aotearoa New Zealand, and several different countries where the local, indigenous and surrounding people have a developed tradition or they aspire translating their cultures transformed in the built situation and environment. Such developments have many times extended to public art, place making landscape architecture, and diverse ways to contribute towards the built environmental designs.

According to National Cultural Fund website (Ministry of Culture, India), "cultural heritage is an expression of the ways of living developed by a community and passed on from generation to generation, including customs, practices, places, objects, artistic expression and values, Cultural heritage is often expressed as either intangible or tangible cultural heritage".⁵ India as a country is rich with natural traditions and its history is spanning above five thousand years. The Indian people belonging to various races, regions, castes, tribes, classes have their personal cultural traditions, which they are known for. In general, the Central India, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh states in particular, where several tribal people have been residing and they are known to be the carriers of tribal cultural heritage and treasury. They have their personal history, traditions and the way of social-cultural life. Many of the cases, somewhat similar, have their mode of language, subsistence, material culture, ornaments, dress, songs, dance and food habit, that vary from one-another. After the British Rule, many scholars from inland and overseas have operated on diverse aspects of their life culture. The major work reflected their rich heritage and tribal culture of central India including Basra, et.al. (2008), Tiwari (2006), Tiwari (1997), Shah (1996), Sharma (1995), Singh (1944), Verma (1990), Mehta (1984), Knight (1983), Thusu (1980), Kaufmann (1961:1-9), Elwin (1943, 1947, 1949, 1955, 1986), Edward (1970), Jay (1970), Fuchs (1968), Fürer-Haimendorf (1948), Griffith (1946), Grigson (1938), Mazumdar (1927), and so on. When their work is compared, they were

done in a specific time and space, indicating quick changes in their modernization and material culture. Sanskritization and Industrialization was the major factor for such changes. In this changing scenario of indigenous cultures, the role of Ethnographic study, Ethnomuseological study and Anthropological or Ethnographic Museums is much significant for cultural preservation, propagation, sustainability and generating harmony.

Tribal Culture in Diversified Indian Tradition

When tribal people contribute 8.6% of the Indian population, they reside in 15% of India's land and geography.⁶ More than 50% Scheduled Tribes are condensed in central parts of India, in the States of Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand and Odisha, mainly synchronized with the mineral and coal belt. It is not surprising that the abundant exploitation of iron-ore, zinc, bauxite, minerals, coal and so on mirrors their pervasive cultural and social exploitation.

The fact is that these tribal people have lived and still living by themselves. They believe that their families, their forests, their animals are valuable and more crucial and that's entirely comprise their everything. They have a history of resisting any kind of interfering with their customary and habitual way of living, and not surprisingly, they have made a colonial administration with a strong and tacit support of zealous preaching for evangelism. Hence, they are naturally very contemptuous and even curious regarding their tribes and tribal affairs.⁴

The majority of the pictures depict their Hindu Gods, some animists, and they believe in natural things, like trees, sky, mountains and understand the value of consciousness and souls, while believing in a supernatural force that stimulates the universe. They further believe that their Gods pervade and inhabit the forest. Therefore, their ancestors worshiped the integral part of their religious convictions. They worship the village deity as a group, when their priest conducts the religious rites. God Idols are of iron, spear shaped, smeared with vermilion powder, kept at Deo-Khulla, a special place, the threshing space of the Gods. They are known as Gond People, known to give human sacrifice as an offering, particularly to the Goddesses Kali.⁷ In the late 19th century, Bara Deo and Danteshwari practice was stopped by the British, however, the animal ritual and sacrifices are preformed in the present days. The unique Nilgiri Mountains are formed in the Eastern and Western Ghat junction, which run southwards to a state converging angle. These mountains were endowed

with valuable thick forests, and they presently transformed into coffee and tea plantations, with rich cultivated fields for tribes like Paniya, Kurumba, Toda, Irula and Kota. Many non-tribal settlements migrated to the Nilgiri plateau and that reduced to a minority group of tribal people.⁸

It is largely understood that Indologists and researchers considered India as an exceptional culture, society, and civilization. Further, it emphasized on the necessity to rely on its specificity. Certain Indian tribal features are very unique. These tribes hold a sex ratio to be 1000 males per 990 females against the overall 940 females to 1000 males national sex ratio.⁶ Moreover, there is an interesting point to note that around 90% tribal people live in rural regions of India and merely 10% live in urban regions. Considering the entire Indian population, 40% Indian population lives in urban regions.⁹

According to 2011 census, 7.85 Lakhs (1.10%) tribal population out of the entire population of 7.41 Crores remained in the Northern region in and around Delhi. The Delhi districts hold the biggest concentration of 15%. Delhi North districts account for 11%; South districts 9% and West-North 7%.⁶ It is important to mention that specific material related to tribal cultures provide by the central Indian tribes are basically the institutional and organizational collection. The ethnographic objects obtained from private and personal collections are rarely accessible from central India. Whatever collections available are dump in the corner or kept away from the public. Certain ethnographic collections from central India are very important from historical point of view in few Museums of Delhi. It was done basically to conserve and collect the traditional ethnic material used by tribal people, which is very different in each tribal group of the specific region. They found it valuable and highly important to preserve. They specified the cultural heritages of vanishing tribals of central India.¹⁰

The Ethnographic Museums in India

Today, the museums present the anthropological and ethnographical picture of the culture of a nation and they are known to be the best media. Whereas, the anthropological and ethnographical museum's role in India is to present the unity in diversity of our Indian culture and that is very significant. The ethnographic museum's importance in India has improved to a large extent after Indian independence. Both state and Central Governments have supported the museum development in India.¹¹

A separate Anthropological Section was established in 1945 with ethnographic collection in

Indian Museum (first museum of India started established in 1866). After this various museums with ethnographic collections were initiated in different parts of India in pre-independence period by various literary societies, royal families and local administration, etc. A small museum of ethnographic collection was established by Sarat Chandra Roy in his home at Ranchi in 1918.

After independence many museums started in India having ethnographical collections, such as, Anthropological Section (1948) at Junagadh Museum, National Museum (1949 in Rashtrapati Bhavan and 1960 in present building at Janpath) at New Delhi, Salarjung Museum (1951) at Hyderabad, Tribal Research Institute Museum (1953) at Bhubneswar (Odissa), Museum of Tribal Research Institute at Ranchi (1954), Shri Badal Bhoi Museum of Tribal Research and Training Institute at Chhindwara (1954), Museum of Central Research Institute (1955) at Kolkata, NEFA central museum (1956) in Shilling, Patna Museum (Patna, Bihar), Kohima Museum (1964), Manipur State Museum (1969), Sardar Vallabh Bhai Patel Memorial Museum (Ahmedabad), Girdhari Lal Children's Museum (Amreli, Gujarat), Shri Pratap Sinha Museum (Srinagar), Government Museum (Patiala), Government Museum and Art Gallery (Chandigarh), National Handicrafts and Handlooms Museum (New Delhi), Parliament Museum (New Delhi), Sanskriti Kendra Museum (Delhi), Chitra Museum (Benaulim, Goa), Big Foot Museum (Goa), Goa State Museum (Panaji, Goa), Pondicherry Museum, Sikh Ajaibghar (Balongi, Punjab), Namgyal Institute of Tibetology Museum (Gangtok), Jawaharlal Nehru Museum (Itanagar), Dogra Art Museum (Jammu), Dharohar (Kurukshetra University, Haryana), D.N. Majumdar Museum (1977) at Lucknow, Don Bosco Museum (Shilong), Tribal Museum of Bhartiya Adim Jati Sevak Sangh (New Delhi), Museum of Tribal Research Institute in Bhopal, MGM Museum (Raipur), etc.¹²

The biggest Indian ethnographic Museum of Mankind progressing in the Indira Gandhi Rashtriya Manav Sangrahalaya (1977) in Bhopal, Dakshin Chitra Museum (1996) at Muttukadu (near Chennai (Tamilnadu) and Purkhouti Muktangan (Raipur) are eco-museums with open air display. Vaacha-the Bhasha Museum (Tejgadh, Gujarat) of tribal languages and dialects, Shankardev Kalakshetra (Guwahati, Assam), Shilp Gram (Udaipur, Rajasthan) and Tribal Museum (Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh) are example of new type of ethnographic museum movement in India.¹²

Apart from these museums there are government

state and district museums in various states of India managed by the state governments. Each one of these museum represent their cultural heritage and communities. Tribal Research Institutes, in every Indian state having tribal population, have their own museums. Zonal Cultural Centers have good collection of ethnographic material, musical instruments, masks, dress, etc. Anthropological Survey of India has very huge collection in its museums. It has Central Museum at Kolkata and Zonal Anthropological Museums at its regional centers at Shilong, Dehradun, Udaipur, Nagpur, Jagdalpur, Mysore and Port Blair. Apart from this, Museums of Department of Anthropology at various universities of India, come under the category of university museums, have their own collection of ethnographic artifacts. For example, in 1920, Anthropology Museum, formed in the University of Calcutta; in 1947, Anthropology Museum in Delhi University was formed; in 1956, Anthropology Museum at the Gauhati University was initiated; in 1950, Anthropology Museum in the Lucknow University was formed; in 1960, Anthropology Museum in the Panjab University was developed; in 1958, Anthropology Museum in the Utkal University was created.

Discussion

"Museum is a service sector institution which preserves the past and present knowledge, both tangible and intangible, through research, acquiring collection and related information, documentation, conservation and it disseminates knowledge, generates awareness and provides informal education with amusement by means of exhibitions and activities for grater social benefit to the posterity."¹³

Museology is the combination of two words 'Museo', which is a short form of museum or museal and 'Logy' means science. Combinedly, it means museum science and museum studies. Interdisciplinary research and practices are promoted in the field of Museology, such as, Ethnomuseology.¹² "The New Museology (la nouvelle muséologie in French, where the concept originated) widely influenced Museology in the 1980s, first gathering some French theoreticians and then spreading internationally from 1984. Referring to a few pioneers who had published innovative texts since 1970, this current of thought emphasised the social role of museums and its interdisciplinary character, along with its new styles of expression and communication. New museology was particularly interested in new types of museums, conceived in

contrast to the classical model in which collections are the centre of interest. These new museums are ecomuseums, social museums, scientific and cultural centres, and generally speaking, most of the new proposals aimed at using the local heritage to promote local development".¹⁴

"Various ways or modes of social communication, such as, educational and cultural activities, social awareness programs, museum outreach programs, eco-tourism and eco-museum related activities, etc. are utilized by various museums in India for generating awareness and dissemination of knowledge for greater social benefit. Big ethnographic museums like IGRMS (Bhopal), Dakshin Chitra (near Chennai, Tamilnadu) and museums with big ethnographic collections, community museums and museums like Shankardev Kalakshetra (Guwahati, Assam) and Shilp Gram (Udaipur, Rajasthan), etc. employ these Action Museological approach in bigger or smaller form".¹² In case of ethnographic museums especially community museums and tribal museums; Action Museology deals with the various aspects of tribal cultural sustainability and act as a key explanation to preserve and propagate the tribal cultural heritage.

The issue of the prospect of Ethnographic museum has been discussed in several forums. In 2013 at Pitt Rivers museum of Kemple college (under University of Oxford), an International seminar was held in which Kavita Singh of Jawaharlal Nehru University discussed the several aspects about the future prospects of the Ethnographic Museum, Ethno-Museological Study of Tribal Art, Representation and the ethnic culture in Museums.⁷ Several distinguished Anthropologists had constantly contributed to this self-reflective Anthropological term and Anthropological Museums and that reflected on the likely future of the Ethnographic Museum.⁸ Kavita Singh also emphasized that 'The Future of all the Museums is going to be Ethnographic'. Many other participants also expressed their view on relation of Anthropology and Museums.

They strongly advocated that there is a bright future of Ethnographic Museums. Considering the impending death of the ethnographic museums, rather than observing ethnographic museum as an entity of the past ethnic culture, we intent to argue that museums are going to be the ethnographic future, which means to say, to a lesser or a greater degree, it is going to take the ethnographic drive soon to underlie all major exhibitory and museal forms, describing the specific ethnic human cultures, applying methods with interviews and close

observations.¹⁵ Drawing the instances from the Gulf states, South East Asia, South Asia and China, this paper explores and discusses the manners in which, the museums are now growing around the world and responding to the push and pull of a global cultural circulation through the global cultural economy through procedures of inscription and description.

At one level, as an ever-growing range of objects disseminate in more venues, whereby, all the future museums requires to provide higher degrees of contextual mode along with the object descriptions they exhibit. These objects are basically embedded in an invisible diorama, thereby they are spot lit by isolating in modernist sequences, while audio guides and podcasts provide a few aural interpretation layers. At a different level, the global stretch of museums, presently inscribes the museum, cultural form upon a new Indian landscape, commencing a chain of meaningful themes deriving from the radical otherness of museums; it's not interested form, in the place where they find themselves. When we try to convert an old museum into a new form and location, we learn to savor all the contents of the museum, along with the entire museum itself as a Work of art and an Artifact. Through such manoeuvre, eventually, the Enlightenment of an ethnic particular culture in Delhi appears to be imminent.⁸ In this regards, the native tribe's condition was scrutinized in its administrative, political, ethnographic, economic, material and their religious aspects.⁹

Conclusion

"Ethnographical Museums all over world are the result of specialized field of Ethnomuseography. Since the initial stage and even till today Socio-Cultural Anthropologists are playing significant role to enrich the field of Ethnomuseography and contributing to the development of ethnographical museums in India and abroad. Addition of Museographical techniques and practices with Ethnographical practices made this specialized field of Ethnographical Museums complete by appropriately fulfilling the needs of these museums to achieve the greater goal of preservation and propagation of cultural heritage."¹²

The museum is considered as an Institution to perform several functions like art collection, its proper preservation by exhibiting them and providing the natural interpretation of its cultural objects. It acts like custodian of Indian ethnic heritage, which is under constant threats due to urbanization, natural hazards, and artificial ways of industrialization, western culture interference and

so on. The ethnographic museums owe the prime responsibility to protect the cultural heritage by various means. It remains a challenging task to study the past and prevailing culture and society of India and the enormous cultural values it carries given the entire diversity of paradigms and perspectives. Ethnomuseological studies are gradually developing and with multidisciplinary approach can show a path for better understanding, interpretation of culture and propagation of sustainable culture and harmony.

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