

CHAPTER – VI

Management of Antiquities

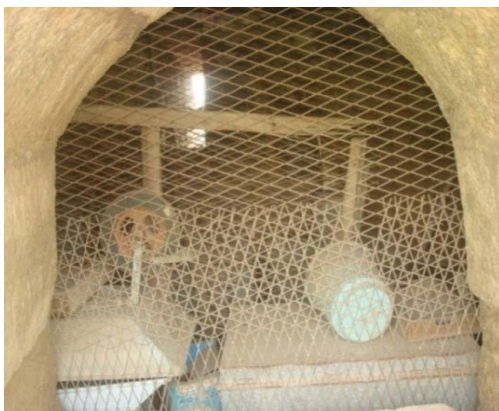
Antiquity includes any coin, sculpture, painting, epigraph or other work of art or craftsmanship; any article, object or thing detached from a building or cave which is of historical interest, or declared by the Central Government to be an antiquity which has been in existence for not less than one hundred years. This also includes any manuscript, record or other document which was of scientific, historical, literary or aesthetic value and which had not less than 75 years of existence⁴⁶.

The ASI is one of the largest repositories of antiquities in India. Besides, antiquities are acquired and maintained by various museums across the country. The ASI is responsible for the management, security and display of antiquities found during excavations. These are often displayed at the Site Museums. The ASI is also responsible for registration of antiquities possessed by private individuals and organisations. This includes efforts for restoration of stolen art objects.

6.1 Inadequacy of Policy and Legislation

6.1.1 Absence of Standards and Policy Guidance

The Ministry did not have a comprehensive policy for the management of antiquities. There were no standards for acquisition, preservation, documentation and custody of objects.



Trunks of Antiquities kept at Ghiyasuddin Tuglaq's Tomb, Delhi



Antiquities kept at Safdarjung Tomb

⁴⁶ Antiquities and Art Treasures (AAT) Act, 1972

There are several international standards available for managing antiquities in a museum issued by International Council of Museums (ICOM) and UNESCO. These standards and guidelines clearly define the methods of running a Museum, application of accession numbers, guidelines for disaster preparedness in museums etc. However, international best practices or standards were not adopted. In the absence of any standards, the decisions taken often lacked objectivity, uniformity and transparency as detailed in the succeeding paragraphs.

AAT Act provided registration of antiquities with individuals and private collections; however, the registration had not been made mandatory. This resulted in incomplete documentation and was also an impediment in retrieving stolen and lost antiquities.

6.1.2 Review of the AAT Act, 1972

We noticed that the ASI and the Ministry were conscious of the need for amendment in the AAT Act, 1972 since 1987. The Ministry started an exercise in 1997 to amend the Act. A draft cabinet note was also approved by the Cabinet in 2003. However, the amendment was still under process at the Ministry. Thus, the limitation of the legislation to curb illegal export and smuggling of art objects persists. The Ministry accorded no priority for this work and no timeframe was fixed for this purpose.

Recommendation 6.1: *The provisions of AAT Act and the International Conventions should be reviewed in order to make the legislation more contemporary and effective and to facilitate restoration of stolen art objects from other countries.*

The Ministry stated (May 2013) that the proposed amendments to the AAT Act, 1972 were under active consideration by the Ministry.

6.2 Acquisition, Registration and Documentation of Antiquities

6.2.1 Acquisition

Acquisition of antiquities is effected by the ASI and other museums through following modes:

- (i) Collection of antiquities during survey, exploration and excavation of architectural sites;
- (ii) Direct purchase;
- (iii) By way of gifts;
- (iv) By way of loan; and
- (v) Compulsory acquisition of antiquities

The ASI acquired antiquities mostly through survey, exploration and archaeological excavations. The ASI established the Central Antiquity Collection (CAC) in 1960 for storing antiquities collected during surveys, explorations and excavations of archeological sites. Presently housed in Purana Qila, Delhi, CAC is a rich repository of explored and excavated pottery and antiquities collected from various parts of the country. We noted that the acquisition, documentation, storage conditions, physical verification and security of antiquities of CAC was grossly inadequate.

The artifacts of CAC were scattered and spread over four different locations. In the absence of appropriate documentation it was not possible to ascertain the location of specific artifacts.

The storage condition of antiquities kept at CAC, Purana Qila and Safdarjung Tomb were found deplorable as depicted in photographs below:



Antiquities at Purana Qila in an improper condition



Antiquities at Safdarjung Tomb in an improper condition

6.2.2 Compulsory Acquisition of Antiquities

The ASI was empowered to compulsorily acquire antiquities but no antiquity had been compulsorily acquired till date. There were also no schemes of incentive for voluntary disclosure of antiquities.

6.2.3 Acquisition of Art Objects by Museums

The Museums acquired art objects mainly by way of purchase and gifts. No benchmarks or standards were followed for acquisition and valuation of artifacts. The Museums had not evolved a consistent policy for the acquisition and valuation of artifacts. As a result, decisions relating to acquisition were often arbitrary. We noticed that the Victoria Memorial Hall (VMH), Salar Jung Museum and National Museum did not purchase any artefact during the period covered under audit.

The acquisitions made by the Museums during the last five years were as follows:

Table 6.1: Acquisitions during last five years

Museum	Objects acquired	Remarks
National Museum (NM)	Nil	Art Purchase/Acquisition Committee was defunct since 1997
Asiatic Society, Kolkata (ASK)	29	Purchases were made through Art Purchase Committee which was formed every two years
Allahabad Museum (AM)	394	Absence of policy for acquisition
Salar Jung Museum (SJM)	Nil	Museum did not assess the requirement of art objects
Victoria Memorial Hall (VMH)	Nil	Non finalisation of Art Purchase Committee
Indian Museum (IM)	166	No standard system for purchases.

Recommendations 6.2: *The Institutions should evolve a coherent acquisition policy for the acquisition of artifacts.*

The Ministry accepted (May 2013) the audit observation.

6.2.4 Paintings Received from VMH on Loan

Victoria Memorial Hall entered (December 2007) into an agreement with Rabindra Bharti Society (RBS), a registered society in West Bengal, for the acquisition of about 5000 painting.

We noted that out of 5000 paintings the status report of only 878 paintings had been completed till date (November 2012) and no conservation work was taken up so far. As a result, the intended objective of proper conservation of these paintings could not materialise.

6.2.5 Acquisition of Antiquities by Way of Gifts

The Museums accepted gifts and items for safe custody. We noticed that several Museums (namely NM, IM and ASK) did not have any policy for the acceptance or valuation of gifts. Even in the Site Museums there was no clear policy whether Site Museums could acquire antiquities and there was no benchmark for selection of items offered as gifts.

During the period of audit, National Museum, Delhi acquired 906 artifacts as gifts. Some instances of receipt of gifts by the National Museum are detailed below:

- (i) The Indian Museum, Kolkata acquired the 'Kachhoa Sitar', 'tassar saree with maroon border decorated with floral design', and Dorakha red sujni or quilt embroidered with white thread with floral design' as gifts in 2010 and 2011 respectively. However, no records related to their authenticity were produced to us.
- (ii) During scrutiny of records, we found that 10 Site Museums had acquired 7203 artifacts by way of gift/purchase/loan etc. without chemical/scientific verification.

The ASI stated (December 2012) that acquisition/ gifts did not cause any harm/irregularity. Even if the object did not happen to be an antiquity, it helped in site interpretation. It was not clear how such items without establishing that they were antiquities could be collected and displayed.

- (iii) The collections of CAC included 3979 antiquities confiscated and seized by CBI, Custom and Directorate of Revenue Intelligence. No action was taken to return these antiquities to their original places or to place them in appropriate Museums.

Recommendations 6.3: *The Museums should develop a mechanism for safekeeping of gifted artifacts and devise a policy for the acceptance of gifts after establishing their antiquity status and their display at appropriate sites or museums.*

The Ministry accepted (May 2013) the audit observation for compliance.

6.3 Registration of Antiquities

The AAT Act, 1972 provided that the Central Government may, specify those antiquities which should be registered under the Act. As per the extant provisions, registration of the artifacts was not mandatory. The Act further provided that the Central Government may appoint Registering Officers for the purpose of the Act.

As per the National Mission for Monument and Antiquities, the country had approximately 70 lakh antiquities.

There were no targets and no timeframe for completion of this work. There was no monitoring of progress of work by either the ASI or the Ministry. Further, the registration process was not based on scientific testing but relied on the naked eye. Hence, its accuracy could be contested.

Recommendation 6.4: *The Ministry should expedite the work of registering antiquities and devise procedures for ensuring the genuineness of the registered antiquities in a time bound manner. Electronic format may be considered for the purpose.*

The Ministry stated (May 2013) that till date 4.8 lakh antiquities had been registered and no targets and time frame to complete the registration process could be fixed, as every year more objects fall in the category of antiquity. The reply is not acceptable as targets and time frame can be fixed based on the estimation or in absolute numbers of antiquities to be registered every year.

6.4 Evaluation of Acquired Objects

We observed that the IM, NM and ASK did not have a system in place for evaluation of acquired objects to verify the genuineness of the artifacts acquired/possessed by the Museums. We could not therefore derive any assurance on the authenticity of the artifacts in the Museums. Indian Museum acquired a silver coin which after evaluation was found to be a copper coin.



Before treatment (silver)

After treatment (copper)

Best Practice:

Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya (CSMVS) was in receipt of objects/artifacts as gift. The Museum had a process for verifying the genuineness of the objects/ artifacts. The objects were initially examined by a Curator and thereafter placed before exhibit evaluation committee consisting of experts in the field and finally approved by a board of Trustees.

Recommendations 6.5: The Museums should evolve a policy for evaluation of the genuineness of the art objects.

The Ministry accepted (May 2013) the audit observation.

6.5 Inventory and Grading of Art Objects

6.5.1 Accession of Art Objects

All antiquities in Museums should be properly accounted for as soon as received. Each antiquity has a separate unique accession number which also indicates the year of accession. Proper and regular maintenance of the accession register is essential for the safety and security of the Museum objects.

We, however, noted that there was no prescribed procedure in respect of the maintenance of accession registers. As a result, Museums were adopting different methods for accessioning of artifacts as can be seen in the **Annex- 6.1**

6.6 Discrepancies in Number of Antiquities

We observed significant discrepancies in the number of antiquities possessed by the Indian Museum and National Museum, which are detailed below:

Table 6.2 Discrepancies in the number of artifacts in Indian Museum

Artifacts as per Museum's reply	Artifacts as per database of Museum	Artifacts as per accession registers
107308	114271	94462

Table 6.3 Discrepancy in the number of artifacts in National Museum

Information provided in April 1999 to Expert committee	Information provided in September 2003 to Expert Committee	As per physical report of Expert committee in 2004	Information furnished to Audit in July 2011	Information furnished to Audit in September 2012
205375	206121	206713	206212	205981

Similar discrepancy was noticed in the case of Asiatic Society, Kolkata with regard to the gold coins possessed by it.

6.7 Physical Verification of the Artifacts

Periodical Physical verification of artifacts was essential to ensure the existence and also to assess the condition of the antiquities. The status of physical verification of artifacts in various Museums was poor as detailed in **Annex-6.2**.

6.8 Conservation of Antiquities

Preservation and conservation of artifacts was one of the primary objectives of Museums. There were many shortcomings in this activity, as noted from the following cases:

In the **Indian Museum, Kolkata** the Gandhara Stupa had been deteriorating for many years but was noticed by the Archaeology section only in 2008. However, no action was taken to conserve the Stupa. Absence of a policy for conservation and restoration resulted in the deterioration of the artifacts.

A mobile conservation laboratory acquired by the Museum in 1998-99 at a cost of ₹ 7.37 lakh largely remained unutilised.

The **National Museum, Delhi** had a conservation laboratory having qualified chemists. The Museum also conserved the items of several small Museums such as in the Rashtrapati Bhawan and Parliament House. After the setting up of the National Research Laboratory for conservation at Lucknow, the laboratory at the Museum stopped activities of conservation research. We noted that the laboratory was conserving only about 0.25 *per cent* of the total antiquities of the Museum annually. During 2007-12, only 2272 objects out of 2.06 lakh objects were treated and conserved by the laboratory.



Objects from the Aurel Stein collection lying in the conservation lab for the last 45 years

We noted that in the **Asiatic Society, Kolkata** nearly 40 *per cent* of the manuscripts were in poor condition and needed immediate conservation. In most cases, the objects received for conservation were already damaged beyond restoration.

Restoration of oil paintings at Asiatic Society, Kolkata

The Conservation laboratory in Asiatic Society was engaged in the restoration of mainly rare books and manuscripts. The Asiatic Society, Kolkata had 78 oil paintings. In 2005-06 the work of restoration of these paintings was awarded to a NOIDA based agency. The agency which was selected arbitrarily proposed to restore 60 paintings in ten phases (6 in each phase). However, only 26 paintings were restored till June 2012.

At the **Allahabad Museum, Allahabad** conservation work ranging from 1.80 *per cent* to 23.54 *per cent* was undertaken in respect of items received for conservation

At the **Salar Jung Museum, Hyderabad** 136 Indian Modern paintings retained in the store room since September 2008 and were not properly preserved, the dust had accumulated over them exposing them to possible damage.

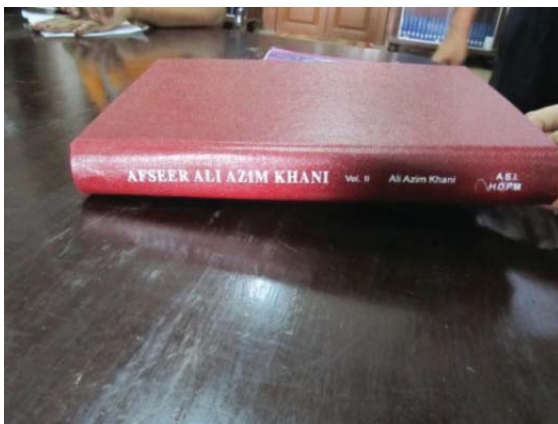
The Museum in its reply stated (August 2012) that the paintings were kept in this condition as the space was insufficient and overcrowding would destabilise the compactors. The fact remains that the paintings required immediate coverage and hanging in convenient compactors to ensure their proper preservation.

Best Practice:

The Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya conducts regular surveys for carrying out conservation work in respect of all the objects in possession of the Museum. These surveys were repeated by rotation. The artifacts were categorised as per their condition and prioritised for treatment. The conservation centre object register chronologically laid out the sequence of receipt and return of objects for treatment.

The **Site Museums** did not have a conservation wing for the restoration and conservation of antiquities. The Museums had not prepared any plan to periodically ascertain the condition of the artifacts kept in the galleries and reserves.

Out of the 179 paintings displayed in the gallery of **Hazarduari Palace Museum (HDPM), Kolkata** Circle, 55 paintings were in a damaged condition. 302 paintings out of 318 kept in reserve were also damaged and 30 paintings needed immediate conservation/restoration. In HDPM out of 77 Arabic manuscripts, 36 were severely damaged and 760 Persian manuscripts were also in poor condition. Binding work done by HDPM on manuscripts had caused further deterioration.



Condition of Manuscripts at Hazarduari Palace Museum

Recommendations 6.6: *The Museums should develop appropriate mechanisms to identify art objects requiring restoration/conservation and draw up a time schedule for their restoration.*

6.9 Research and Development

Research is one of the major functions of the Museums, through which useful information about materials and objects in the Museum collection can be generated for various stake holders.

Best Practices abroad: Victoria and Albert Museum, London

The Museum shares its experience with colleagues around the world and has also benefitted from many collaborations with external institutions. It also provides training and development within conservation and conservation science through internships and work placements. International and National collaboration projects are also undertaken on a regular basis.

The British Museum

The Museum carries out conservation research, scientific research over extended periods and in collaboration both with colleagues from other Museum departments and with other institutions. Interdisciplinary study involving the collaborative efforts of curators, conservators and scientists is taken up to take on new challenges and to find solutions.

The Indian Museum, National Museum and Asiatic Society did not undertake any research work. Further, VMH did only conservation research⁴⁷ and did not undertake scientific research.⁴⁸

We observed that the Indian Museum, VMH and Asiatic Society did not have sophisticated instrument and technologies to carry-out research and development for scientific conservation. No training on the current techniques/process in the field of conservation/restoration was imparted in the Museums.

6.10 Digitisation and Documentation of Art Objects**6.10.1 Status of Documentation in the ASI**

In the ASI, there was no documentation of antiquities taken away from the country before 1947 and hence, such antiquities could not be retrieved. Further, we noted several cases of art objects taken out of the country before implementation of the AAT Act, 1972 which could not be retrieved due to the absence of documentation.

⁴⁷ Conservation Research includes the study of the deterioration of artifacts or the materials they are made from.

⁴⁸ Scientific Research focuses on manufacturing technologies and the different types of materials used to make the objects in the collection

Loaned Antiquities of Stein Collection in V&A Museum, UK

The collection of Aurel Stein is perhaps the biggest collection of Central Asian art including Chinese, Tibetan and Tangut manuscripts, paintings, textile fragments, ceramic, Buddhist art objects, Prakrit wooden tablets, thousands of other art objects and documents. Presently this collection was located at the National Museum, New Delhi, Indian Museum, Kolkata and Srinagar Museum in India. A part of this collection consisting of 700 objects was loaned to V&A Museum, UK by the ASI between 1923 and 1933. As per records, these antiquities were still “owned by Archaeological Survey of India” and were on loan. However, we did not find evidence of any efforts by the ASI to retrieve them.

Nazrana Gold Coins

After the merger of Hyderabad State, the Nizam of Hyderabad was allowed to retain some jewellery and such other items for his personal use under an agreement signed between him and the Union of India in 1950. Two giant “Nazrana gold mohur coins” pertaining to the erstwhile Nizam of Hyderabad were illegally taken away by his heir and pledged as security in 1988 with the Indo Suez Bank of Geneva for a loan of USD 60 lakh. These did not figure in the list of items allowed to be retained with the Nizam, nor were they declared by Shri Mukaram Jah on his succession as heir. In the absence of proper documentation on ownership of the coins, the ASI could not get the coins restituted. The coins are presently under the custody of Indo Suez bank Geneva.

The ASI stated (October 2012) that the restitution of the objects which were taken out of the country prior to enforcement of the Act were not within its control. Hence they had to depend on the goodwill of other countries for their restitution.

6.10.2 Lack of Database on Antiquities

The ASI collected and stored antiquities in Sculpture Sheds, Circles, stores, Excavation Branches and 44 Site Museums.

We noticed that as in the case of protected monuments, the ASI was not aware of the total number of antiquities in its possession as no database or inventory of antiquities had been prepared by the ASI. Branch wise lists were also not available with the antiquity Branch at the ASI HQ. In the absence of any centralised information, there was a high risk of loss of antiquities.

The Ministry stated (May 2013) that the centralised data of antiquities would follow only after the completion of digitisation process which is underway.

Recommendation 6.7: *The ASI should develop a centralised and digitised data base of antiquities to document all details of antiquities stored at different locations.*

6.10.3 Status of Documentation in the Museums

We observed poor documentation and digitisation of art objects in the Museums rendering them vulnerable to loss/theft.

We noted that the photography unit of the **National Museum** was to maintain photograph of each art object. However, the Museum had 175409 photographs out of 205981 documented as art objects.

Out of 205981 artifacts, the Museum had digitised only 2769 manuscripts and 2089 (AA category⁴⁹) objects.

The **ASK** had several rare ancient and contemporary manuscripts but out of 50543 manuscripts, only 2467 manuscripts were digitised till March 2012.

6.10.4 Constraints Reported by the Museums in the Process of Digitisation

- The **ASK** stopped the digitisation work of rare books in 2009 stating that the books were damaged in the process of digitisation.
- The **Salar Jung Museum** stated that it was able to digitise only 4.15 *per cent* art objects, 59 *per cent* library books and 5 *per cent* manuscripts till August 2012 due to non-availability of colour scanners.
- The **Indian Museum** did not adopt any policy/procedure for digitisation of art objects. The Museum had no action plan to complete this activity.
- At **VMH** out of 28394 objects, 23415 in-house photo-documentation and digitisation was completed. Electronic database software Virtual Museum Builder JATAN, which was installed to exhibit details of the objects online with photographs, was unable to capture photograph in the database. Till January 2013 entry of 11368 objects had been done without the photographs.

Audit noted that except for Museums at Nalanda (Patna Circle), Bodhgaya (Patna Circle), Lothal (Vadodara Circle), Halebidu (Bengaluru Circle), Hampi (Bengaluru Circle) and Khajuraho (Bhopal Circle) this work was not completed.

In **Fort Museum (Chennai Circle)**, as per the accession register 4111 antiquities were registered; against the 3661 actual available antiquities.

⁴⁹ Rarest of the rare master pieces of artifacts, one of its kind, not fit for transportation owing to fragility etc and digitised on CD format.

In reply (December 2012), the ASI agreed stating that detailed documentation was lacking for which necessary steps had been taken.

6.11 Stolen and Seized Antiquities

During joint physical inspections, we found that 131 antiquities were stolen from monuments/sites and 37 antiquities from Site Museums from 1981 to 2012. We also found that two Buddha statues and one Garuda statue from Patna Circle were lying with Araria Police Station since 2005. Similarly four antiquities of the Indian War Memorial Museum, Red Fort Delhi were with the Daryaganj Police Station since 1989.

The ASI informed that FIRs had been lodged for all missing antiquities. Immediately after report of theft of an antiquity, look out notices were also issued to all the enforcing agencies, custom exit channels and CBI-Interpol. However, we observed that in similar situations, worldwide, organisations took many more effective steps including checking of catalogues of international auction house, posting news of such theft on websites, posting information about theft in the International Art Loss Registry, sending photographs of stolen objects electronically to dealers and auction houses and intimate scholars in the field.

We found that the ASI had never participated or collected information on Indian antiquities put on sale at well known international auction houses viz. Sotheby's, Christie's, etc. as there was no explicit provision in the AAT Act, 1972 for doing so. We noticed several examples of antiquities of national importance being sold and displayed abroad. (Idol of Saraswati pertaining to King Bhoj is in British Museum, London).

Many countries had started aggressive campaigns to recover their treasures. Italy, Greece, China etc. had made initiatives in this regard. The Ministry did not have strategy for such proactive action.

As part of its responsibilities, the ASI was also a nodal agency to retrieve stolen or illegally exported art objects. From 1976 to 2001, 19 antiquities had been retrieved by the ASI from foreign countries either through legal means, indemnity agreement, voluntary action or through out of case settlement. But after 2001, the ASI had not been able to achieve any success.

Recommendation 6.8: *There is a need for a more concerted approach for retrieval of Indian art objects stolen or illegally exported to other countries. The ASI, as the nodal agency for this purpose needs to be more proactive and vigilant in its efforts and the Ministry needs to develop an aggressive strategy for the same.*

The Ministry stated (May 2013) that whenever any antiquity surfaces abroad ASI makes efforts for its retrieval.

6.11.1 Seized Antiquities and Court Cases

The ASI was empowered to give an opinion as to whether the seized antiquity was authentic. We noted that this function was characterised by delays and inefficiencies.

- i. In June 1994, Dr. VJA Flynn, an Australian citizen, was intercepted by Customs authorities at Delhi with antique coins. Due to inordinate delay in photography by the ASI, even after a lapse of 18 years the case was still sub-judice. The ASI was also facing a defamation suit from Dr. Flynn claiming damages of US \$ 11,00,000. The ASI stated (October 2012) that the delay was “procedural”.
- ii. Delhi Circle of the ASI, made a surprise check (November 2010) of an auction held at ITC Sheraton Hotel, New Delhi and declared four paintings of Raja Ravi Varma, brought for auction, as antiquities. These paintings had been declared as Art Treasure⁵⁰ under the AAT Act, 1972 by a gazette notification in 1979. The matter went to Court through a descendant of Raja Ravi Varma. The Court, sought information on the registration of the paintings, which the ASI failed to provide to the court.

In December 2012, the ASI was yet to decide whether these were original works of Raja Ravi Varma and to declare the Art treasure as an Antiquity.

6.12 Export of Antiquities and their shifting for Exhibitions Abroad

6.12.1 Grant of Non Antiquity Certificate

Every Circle through an Expert Advisory Committee⁵¹ headed by Superintending Archaeologist issued Non Antiquity Certificate (NAC) to objects meant for export. The Appellate Committee headed by the DG ASI decides on applications that disputed the action of the Expert Advisory Committee.

We noted that in the ASI circles, this certificate was given without any fee after mere inspection of the object without stamping to avoid tampering before export. Besides, the ASI did not maintain any centralised information on grant of these certificates.

In the absence of these controls, the entire procedure for the grant of the non-antiquity certificate was completely open to the risk of malpractice.

⁵⁰ An Art Treasure means any human work of art, not being antiquity, declared by Central Government by notification in the official gazette, to be an art treasure for the purpose of the Act having regard to its artistic or aesthetic value, provided no such declaration can be made in respect of any such work or art so long as the author was alive.

⁵¹ With outside experts

In 2003 two art objects were declared as antiquity by the “expert committee”. When challenged in court, the objects were re-examined by another expert committee, which concluded that only one out of two objects was an antiquity. This case highlighted the need for undertaking detailed tests before grant of non antiquity certificates.

6.12.2 Exposition of Buddhist Relics to Bhutan

Without permission from the Ministry of Culture, the ASI issued Temporary Export Permit for exhibition of antiquities abroad. We noticed that in violation of the guidelines the ASI sent three Buddhist relics to Bhutan in 2011.

In their reply the ASI stated (October 2012) that the proposal was not placed before the Inter Ministerial Committee as its meeting was held before receiving the proposal.

6.12.3 Non- signing of Conventions

We found that in 1977, India had ratified the Convention on the means of Prohibiting and Preventing Illicit Export, Import and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property, Paris, 1970. Subsequently, no other multilateral or bilateral instrument had been signed or ratified to facilitate restoration of stolen art objects.

Recommendation 6.9: *The Ministry should frame a comprehensive policy for Management of Antiquities owned by the Organisation.*

The Ministry stated (May 2013) that ASI would work towards achieving comprehensive policy on Antiquities.

6.13 Site Museums of the ASI

According to the International Council of Museums, a Museum is a non-profit making permanent institution in the service of society and of its development, open to the public, which acquired, conserved, researched, communicated and exhibited, for purposes of study, education and enjoyment, the tangible and intangible evidence of people and their environment.

The Sarnath Museum, established in 1904, was the first museum in India.

In Site Museums archeological/historical material specific to the region were displayed in close proximity to the site. These were mostly located inside monument or adjacent to the excavated sites while other Museums were separate entities.

As on March 2012, the ASI had 44 Site Museums. We found following deficiencies in the establishment, maintenance and development of the Site Museums.

6.13.1 Criteria for Establishing Site Museums

The Site Museums were managed by a Director (Museum) at DG ASI. We noted that the re-organisation of Site Museums had been made five times; in 1960, 1977, 1998, 2010, 2012 for achieving growth and development. The ASI Site Museums were set up as per approval of the competent authority through inspection by an Archaeological Officer (ASA or above). No other guideline was available. Accepting the factual position, the Ministry stated that the ASI would need to frame a perspective plan and policy in regard to the functioning and establishment of its Site Museums over the next few years.

Recommendation 6.10: *The ASI needs to develop detailed guidelines for the functioning and establishment of site museums.*

6.13.2 Opening New Site Museum

- i. No new Site Museum had been opened after 2006, and there was no action plan /target for opening new Site Museums. Shortage of funds and human resource (December 2012) was attributed for not opening new Site Museums. Archaeological Museum, Dholavira, Gujarat was the last Site Museum opened in 2006 after a Parliamentary assurance. However, excavated antiquities had not been handed over to this Museum so far (December 2012) defeating the very purpose of establishing the Museum. The ASI stated (December 2012) that report writing on Dholavira excavation was in progress and the selected antiquities could be shifted to the Museum only after completion of the report. However, no time frame was indicated in the reply.
- ii. The Sub Committee of the Central Advisory Board of Archaeology (CABA) for Antiquities and Museums recommended for opening of Site Museum in places having valuable collection of archaeological material like Patan (Gujarat), Deoghar (MP), Banawali (Haryana) Rakhigarhi (Haryana) Chandraketugarh (West Bengal). However, no progress was reported till December 2012.
- iii. Proposals for opening Site Museum at Piprawaha (UP) and Shivpuri (MP) were under process since 2009 but the Site Museums had not yet been opened. The ASI stated (December 2012) that the State Governments had constructed the buildings in low lying water stagnated area and this was a major hindrance to shift the valuable antiquities in the buildings. The matter had been taken up with the State Governments for remedial action.

- iv. Lalitgiri, Odisha was the only site in Odisha in which the Buddhist relics were found in a fourfold casket, in the excavations conducted from 1985 to 1992. The ASI had proposed to set up a Site Museum at Lalitgiri to house the Buddhist relics in 2007. However, the Site Museum was yet (December 2012) to come up and the building plan was still under finalisation .
- v. The Speaker, Assam Legislative Assembly during his visit to the site of Masonry Remains on the Bamuni Hills in 1998 suggested setting up a Site Museum in an unfinished building close to the site. We noticed that ₹ 33.11 lakh were paid towards the cost of the acquisition of the land and building during February 2001 to 2003 and further ₹ 29.13 lakh was incurred for the development of the building during 2007-08 to 2011-12. However, the Site Museum had not yet been established.
- vi. In July 2000, it was decided to establish a Site Museum at Fatehpur Sikri. The Site Museum had not been opened (December 2012) despite incurring an expenditure of ₹ 63.24 lakh.
- vii. In Lucknow Circle, a large room was constructed in 2002-03 for ₹ 4.91 lakh for locating a Site Museum but it was not established till date (November 2012).

6.13.3 Failure to Convert Sculpture Sheds as Site Museums

The Site Museums are purposely created, to place antiquities in juxtaposition to the excavated site so as to retain the archeological context.

In 2009, the Sub Committee of the Central Advisory Board of Archeology, recommended to convert more than 35 sculpture sheds⁵² and 38 other sites with valuable antiquities in Site Museums. We could not find any progress in this regard.

During site visits, we also noticed cases of under-utilisation of Sculpture Sheds as antiquities were not stored in them thus defeating the very purpose of construction of Sculpture Sheds. We found that antiquities were scattered at Site/Circles/Sculpture Sheds and the ASI had failed to develop site museums as detailed below:

i) In the Kolkata Circle, a Sculpture Shed was constructed at Rabdentse Site in Sikkim in the year 2003-04 with a view to display the objects found at the Rabdentse Site. The Circle also incurred an expenditure of ₹ 8.31 lakh in 2009-10 for strengthening and enlarging the display area of the Sculpture Shed. However, during site visits, we

⁵² Sculpture Shed is a place where the archeological remains belonging to the site and the adjoining area are kept in safe custody, under a shed

noticed that 12 glass boxes fixed to the wall in the Sculpture Shed were empty and only 69 sculptures and 48 other items were displayed in the shed without any accession number. Some antiquities found in Rabdentse Site were kept in plastic bag inside the office of the ASI, Sikkim Sub Circle, Geyzing without accessioning.



Sculpture Shed at Rabdentse Site, Kolkata Circle with empty glass boxes and antiquities kept below

Empty Sculpture Shed at Bangarh, West Bengal

A sculpture shed was constructed at Bangarh Site in 2009-10 at a cost of ₹ 5.71 lakh . However, this was lying unused, as only one stone sculpture found from a nearby village, two wooden pieces and some terracotta tiles found from Bangarh excavation were kept in the sculpture shed, without accessioning⁵³ . The remaining items, out of total 1246 antiquities found from Bangarh excavation, were kept in Circle Office, Kolkata.

Recommendation 6.11: *The ASI should take early action to utilise the above Sculpture Sheds and develop Museums at Sites.*

6.13.4 Status of Antiquities

The ASI was required to preserve, protect and disseminate all forms of art, culture and objects of historical importance for identification of a particular culture, socio economic history. However, we found that the antiquities were kept in Circle Offices, Excavation Branches, Monuments/Sites as below. These antiquities were not displayed properly:

⁵³ Documentation of antiquities in the prescribed format

Table 6.4 Status of the Antiquities

Sl. No.	Place where kept	Number of antiquities
1.	Chennai Circle Office	395 antiquities recovered from the excavation conducted in Adhichanallur, Siruthavur and Malaiyadipatti.
2.	Store Room of Bhopal Circle	3486 sculptures of 6 sub circles of Bhopal Circle (Burhanpur, Jabalpur, Raisen, Rewa, Sagar and Sanchi) were lying in store.
3.	Store Room of Jaipur Circle and Monument Sites	10265 antiquities of monument site and 2881 antiquities of excavated sites were dumped in store rooms.
4.	Excavation Branch, Nagpur	2949 antiquities from excavations done during 2007-09 to 2011-12 were stored.
5.	Vadodara Circle	Over 2000 uninventoried antiquities were dumped in four cupboards. 228 iron cannon balls had been dumped in the store of Diu Fort, Diu. 2160 cannon balls(left by Portuguese while leaving the Fort) were lying scattered in the compound/garden area, these were not inventoried even Over 100 sculptures were kept in a store room in Sub Circle Office(Patan) of Vadodara Circle 300 sculptures were kept in a shed near sub circle, Patan
6.	Bhubaneswar Circle	5915 antiquities had been stored in the store room by Excavation Branch
7.	Srinagar Circle	2724 artifacts were dumped in the office premises for last one to 42 years. There was no Site Museum in the Circle. An unearthed sculpture belonging to the ancient temple, Fatehgarh was stored in a private rented room.
8.	Chandigarh Circle	1028 antiquities and 70 silver coins were dumped in the office premises
9.	Patna Circle	973 antiquities found from excavation of 1978 and 1989 were dumped in Patna Circle Office
10.	Jaipur Circle	In 16 monuments, (Details in Annex 6.3) antiquities like old carving stones, pillars, statues, sculptures were lying scattered
11.	Hyderabad Circle	Undocumented loose sculptures were found lying in the monuments
12.	Bengaluru Circle	Excavated sculptures and antiquities were found scattered in the excavated site opposite the Hoysaleswara temple, Halebedu, and also in the Hoysaleswara temple compound. These were not inventoried.

The ASI thus failed to develop Sculpture sheds and Site Museums in several cases. This was fraught with the risk of loss/deterioration of the priceless antiquities.

Recommendation 6.12: *The ASI needs to carry out physical verification of antiquities lying at different sites/stores/circles/sub circles to ensure that each one of them is properly documented, numbered, and recorded. They need to be placed in sculpture sheds, site museum or may other suitable location.*

The Ministry stated (May 2013) that physical verification was being done based on existing accession register.

6.13.5 Fourteen Points Reform and Upgradation of Site Museums

The Ministry of Culture issued 14 points museum reforms/guidelines in October 2009 for Upgradation of security, public awareness, visitor facility and modernisation of all the Site Museums. However, these had not been fully implemented in all the 44 Site Museums.

The Ministry stated (May 2013) that the Ministry was monitoring the implementation of these reforms and had issued instructions to all officers in charge of various Museums to implement the museum reforms in their true letter and spirit. The fact remains that the work has not been completed till now.

6.14 Display and Maintenance of Art Objects

6.14.1 Rotation Policy

Art objects displayed in the Museum depict rich and diverse heritage of our nation. Given the space constraints, all Museums in the world devise policy for periodic rotation of display items. We noted that the Museums selected for audit did not evolve a rotation policy for displaying artifacts. The display details of the Museums are given below.

Table 6.5 Details of the display and reserve of artifacts

Name of the section	No. of objects possessed till date	No. of objects displayed	No of objects in reserve	Percentage of the total objects in reserve
National Museum	205981	7333	198252	96.24
Indian Museum	107308	1862	105446	98.26
Victoria Memorial Hall	33493	1625	31768	95.13
ASK	54655	79	54576	99.85

It would be evident that more than 95 per cent of objects were lying in reserve in the above Museums. This resulted in the non- display of large number of art objects and the museums were not able to showcase their valuable antiquities.

6.14.2 Site Museums

We noticed that none of the Site Museums had any rotation policy for displaying the objects to facilitate the public viewing of reserve antiquities. In 11 Site Museums⁵⁴, more than 90 per cent of the antiquities were kept in reserve. The ASI stated (December 2012) that there was no unified policy document in Site Museums.

6.14.3 Status of Galleries of Various Museums

We noted that all the galleries were not open for public due to some reason or the other like refurbishment of gallery, seepage etc. The galleries closed for public were as follows:

Table 6.6 Status of closed galleries

Name of Museum	Total number of galleries	Number of galleries closed	Remarks
National Museum, Delhi	26	7	Period ranging from one to nine years
Indian Museum, Kolkata	29	8	Out of the 21 open galleries, rotation was not done during the period ranging 2 to 23 years in eight galleries
Victoria Memorial Hall, Kolkata	12	2	In seven galleries, artifacts were not changed since inception.

⁵⁴ Kondapur and Nagarjunakonda, (Hyderabad Circle), Nalanda and Sarnath (Patna Circle), Red Fort (Delhi Circle), Sheikh Chilli's Tomb (Chandigarh Circle), Tipu Sultan Museum (Bengaluru Circle), Khajuraho and Sanchi (Bhopal Circle), Ratnagiri (Bhubaneswar Circle) and Kalibangan (Jaipur Circle)

6.14.4 Status of Storage of Art Objects in Different Museums is shown in the following Photographs:



Objects lying in the basement of the National Museum along with other items



Dust gathering over priceless statues in the basement of National Museum



Store Rooms of Victoria Memorial Hall

At Benisagar site, Ranchi we found that antiquities were kept in the staff quarters.



Antiquities found in staff quarters at Benisagar

6.14.5 Storage of Antiquities/conditions of Reserve Items in Site Museums, CAC and Data Bank of the ASI

Proper storage facilities with effective air conditioning and adequate air circulation are essential in order to avoid deterioration of artifacts. We noticed that the reserve collection of Ropar Museum (Punjab Circle) and Fort Museum (Chennai Circle) was not stored in proper condition. Sculptures were lying on the backyard of Aihole Museum (Dharwad Circle) Chanderi Museum (Bhopal Circle), Sarnath (Patna Circle) and Nalanda Museum (Patna Circle).

In the Central Antiquity Collection (CAC), there was no facility of maintaining air conditioned environment for the antiquities. We noticed problems of peeling plasters, dampness and seepage aggravating the deterioration of artifacts stored in various cells of Purana Qila, Delhi.

During physical inspection of the Data Bank by audit in June 2012, we noticed that while shifting from Purana Qila to Red Fort, 60 cabinets out of 120, containing valuable records (original registration certificates) of the Data Bank were severely damaged. In the absence of proper space, another 66 cabinets were kept open in the gallery, exposed to heat, air and dust which deteriorated the records beyond recovery. The data bank was estimated to have 4.5 lakh records but during the digitisation work of the National Mission and Monument Authority, only 3.5 lakh records were produced as the rest were damaged by rodents.

6.15 Exhibitions and Insurance Claims

One of the most important functions of a museum was to exhibit its collection. 'Show less but show well' was an accepted slogan by most of the Museums so that the best pieces were exhibited.

Indian Museum organised Coins' exhibition in December 2009 in which 101 coins having historical value were displayed in the exhibition. We noted that these included two coins having pictures of Emperor Akbar which were declared as fake by the physical verification committee (February 2009). The action of the Indian Museum to display these fake coins was, therefore, inappropriate.



Pictures of Fake Coins

6.15.1 Exhibitions Organised Abroad

The Ministry decided to organise exhibitions in China and Korea during 2011 which were subsequently cancelled due to some reason or the other. The Ministry had not entered into any agreement with the respective governments.

For the exhibitions held abroad, the National Museum appointed a 'Fine Art Handling Agent' (FAHA) to handle the transportation, packing, handling, and fabrication of boxes etc. The objects sent abroad were covered by insurance. The following artifacts were found damaged/lost during the exhibitions held abroad:

- Loss of semi precious stone from the hands of Buddha in the Tierra sent to Korea (Buddhist Art Exhibition) in 2006 (insurance value of ₹ 50 lakhs),
- Abrasion on the right fingers and loss of nail tip of stone Sculpture,
- Huntress (insurance value of ₹ 12 crore) in the exhibition to Brussels (Passage to India) in 2010

We noted that the Museum failed to take adequate steps to recover compensation from FAHA in the light of agreement. We also noted that the same agency was being awarded the contract of future exhibition indicating undue favour to the firm. The National Museum stated (September 2012) that due care would be taken in all future exhibitions.

Recommendation 6.13: *The Museums should adopt a rotation policy for the display of artifacts. It should devise mechanism for proper and attractive display methods to attract visitors.*

Recommendation 6.14: *The reserve collection should also be properly maintained and preserved in suitable storing condition.*

The Ministry accepted (May 2013) the recommendation.

6.16 Modernisation of Metro Museums

In 2004-05, the Ministry started a scheme for modernisation of metro museums in four metro cities. The scheme also covered National Museum, Indian Museum and CSMVS. An outlay of ₹ 100.00 crore was earmarked for National Museum and Indian Museum for the 11th Five Year Plan. The museums were required to submit detailed project report with the help of well reputed consultants. However even after a lapse of more than eight years, National Museum and Indian Museum failed to submit the same.

The Ministry released ₹ 15.43 crore to CSMVS, Mumbai between September 2008 to January 2013. However, it was noticed that the Ministry did not properly monitor the works carried out by the CSMVS. Irregularities like delay in completion of the project, multiple revisions in the estimates, absence of information in respect of the actual expenditure incurred on the project etc. were noticed.