

Museum Ke Sutradhar

Introduction:

Traditionally, museums have been defined as repositories where objects belonging to our past and our culture are collected, conserved, documented, researched, exhibited and used to impart education. This definition of a museum creates a monologue in the interaction between the museum objects and the visitor. Story telling can be an effective tool to break this monologue and create a dialogue between the objects and the visitor. A museum object displayed without context loses its essence completely and thus its aesthetic value. Story telling can be used to bring the intangible aspects like historical and mythological relevance associated to an object inside the museum. This helps in increasing the essence of the object and built better interactive connection with the visitors. Storytelling also helps in subjective interpretations of an object.

Based on the objects present in the museum's collection, our attempt is to use storytelling as a medium of museum's interaction with the visitor. The objects from the museum which we have selected belong to different time periods, multiple dynasties, different regions, various art schools and the collection itself is composite in nature. They have no visual or historical relation, but the beauty of stories is that, it can weave anything into a smooth narration. We have stitched multiple stories from our mythological past, each of which is related to a particular object from the museum collection. These stories narrate mythological events forming part of our oral as well as literary traditions and are knitted together as they occur on the auspicious day of **Akshay Tritiya** in the Hindu calendar.

Akshay Tritiya

Akshay Tritiya is a holy day for both the Hindus and the Jains. It falls on the third *Tithi* (lunar day) of Bright Half (*Shukla Paksha*) of the Indian month of *Vaishakha*. According to the Hindu calendar, it is considered to be a day free of any evil which is why multiple auspicious events have occurred on this particular day which has catapulted its significance. Our stories focus on the various events which have occurred on the day of Akshay Tritiya.

Annapoorna:

One day, Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati were playing the game of dice. The game became so interesting that they started betting with their personal belongings. Initially, Shiva lost the game and along with it all his belongings. But after persuasions from Vishnu, Shiva played again and won all that he had lost in the previous game.

Shiva's sudden turn of fortunes led to a verbal duel between the couple. Finally, Lord Vishnu intervened and revealed that the dice moved as per His wish and they were under the illusion that they were playing. In the philosophical discussion that followed, Lord Shiva said that possessions are temporary...everything is Maya (illusion)...even the food we eat is Maya.

Goddess Parvati did not agree that food is illusion. She wanted to know how the world would survive without food and disappeared. Her disappearance made earth barren. Soon there was severe drought and shortage of food. Many started perishing due to scarcity of food.

Goddess Parvati could not see her children perishing out hunger and appeared in Kashi (Varanasi) as Annapoorna Devi and started serving food to the needy. Shiva appeared before her and said that food cannot be dismissed as mere illusion as it is required to nourish the body in which resides the Atma.

Since then Goddess Parvati is worshipped as the Goddess of food – Annapoorna Devi. The day which parvati chose to take the form of Annapoorna and save the earth from starvation was Akshay tritiya.

Ganga's descent on earth:

Once upon a time a king named Sagar performed the Ashwamedh sacrifice. Indra out of jealousy stole the sacrificial horse and tied it next to the meditating sage Kapil. The 60000 sons of Sagar who were looking for the horse, believed that the sage had stolen the horse. They hurled insults and disturbed the sage's deep penance. The enraged sage burnt all 60000 sons of Sagar and turned them to ashes.

Anshuman, grandson of Sagar started meditating to please Brahma to bring Ganga to earth so that his ancestors could attain moksha, but he was not successful. Later his son, Asmaanjas continued the prayers but he too failed. Dilip, son of Asmaanjas also made the vain attempt. When Bhagirath, son of Dilip, learnt of this fate, he vowed to bring Ganga down to Earth so that her waters could cleanse the souls of his ancestors and release them to heaven.

Brahma finally agreed and he ordered Ganga to go down to the Earth. Ganga felt that this was insulting as now she had to flow on Earth for the mere mortals. She decided to sweep the whole Earth away as she descended from the heavens. Alarmed, Bhagirath prayed to Shiva to break Ganga's descent save the earth.

In order to quell Ganga's arrogance, Shiva trapped her on his hair and let her out in small streams. The touch of Shiva weathered her arrogance and further sanctified Ganga. As Ganga travelled to the nether-worlds, she created a different stream to remain on Earth to help purify unfortunate souls there. The day on which Bhagirath was able to bring Ganga down to Earth and free the souls of his ancestors was Akshay Tritiya.

Sudama meeting Krishna:

Sudama and Krishna were friends since their gurukul (School) days. Their friendship transcended economic and social differences as Krishna belonged to the royal lineage of Yadavas and Sudama was from a poor family. Over the years they lost contact and while Krishna became a military leader and Dwaraka-dhish, Sudama stayed as a humble and somewhat impoverished brahman.

Once upon a time Sudama was facing dire times, not even having enough money to feed his children, at this point his wife Kalyani reminded him of his friendship with Krishna, and asked him to seek help from Krishna. Initially Sudama was reluctant to seek economic help, but finally he agreed to go. He remembered that Krishna loved *Poha* a lot (beaten rice), therefore he decided to carry this as a gift to the Lord.

Krishna breaks all royal protocol and treats his long lost friend royally and with much love. Overwhelmed by the gesture, Sudama completely forgets to ask for what he had actually come for. But Krishna already knew what his friend needed, and the Lord's consort Rukmini, gifted Sudama with all the riches that he desired for without his awareness. When Sudama finally returns to his home, he finds a palatial mansion instead of the hut he had left. He was completely perplexed until he also found his family dressed in extremely nice

attire and waiting for him. He understands what his friend had done for him. He lives an austere life after that, always thankful to the Lord.

The day in which Sudama was able to meet his lord and also his friend, Krishna was the auspicious day of Akshay Tiritiya.

Kuber getting his wealth:

The tale of how Kuber became the “Lord of all riches” is an interesting one. As a reward for his severe penance, Kuber was granted the initial status semi-god by Lord Brahma and was made the king of Lanka, along with which he also got the Pushpak Viman. Ravan was Kuber’s half brother and after acquiring a boon from Brahma, he drove Kuber away from Lanka and seized his Pushpaka Viman. Kuber fled north to the Himalayas, there he settled on the Mount Gandhamandana, near Mount Kailash and started praying to please Lord Shiva. The *Padma Purana* says that Kuber prayed to Shiva for many years, and due to his severe austerities Shiva granted him the kingship of Yakshas and the status of custodian, maintainer and the distributor of all wealth on earth to the souls of the universe. Thus he was elevated to the position of god of all wealth on earth. This boon was bestowed upon Kuber by Lord Shiva on the day of Akshay Tiritiya.

Birth of Lord Parashuram:

Parashuram is one of the seven Chiranjeevis (immortals) of Hindu mythology and one of the ten avatars (reincarnated forms) of Vishnu. Parashuram's father’s name was Jamadagni, who traced his lineage to Lord Brahma and his mother’s name was Renuka. Parashuram was their fifth child. Before the birth of Parashuram, Jamadagni and Renuka did tapasya (prayer) for divine providence. With the blessing of Lord Shiva, Vishnu answered their wishes and was born from the womb of Renuka as their fifth and youngest son, and was named as Rambhadra. When Rambhadra grew older, he started worshipping Lord Shiva. Shiva gave Rambhadra his Parashu (axe) as a blessing. Since then, Rambhadra became known as Parashuram, i.e. ‘Ram bearing an axe’. It is believed that Parashuram, one of the most revered of the ten avatars of Vishnu, was born on the day of Akshaya Tiritiya and hence, the day is considered sacred by the Hindus.

Draupadi Vastraharan:

Once upon a time, Duryodhan had invited the Pandavas for a game of dice to Hastinapur. Shakuni, Duryodhan's maternal uncle had a pair of dice that would never disobey his will. As a result, Yudhishtir lost everything one-by-one, his property, kingdom, wealth, brothers and ultimately himself. Yudhishtir to the horror of everybody even puts Draupadi up as a bet for the next round and ends up losing her as well. Draupadi was horrified after hearing that she was staked in the game. She questions Yudhishtir's right on her as he had lost himself first and she was still the queen. Angry with Draupadi's behaviour, Duryodhan commands his younger brother Dushasan to bring her into the court forcefully. Dushasan brings her into the court, dragging her by the hair.

Duryodhan orders Dushasan to disrobe Draupadi as she was like a whore as she had five husbands. Seeing her husbands' passivity, Draupadi prays to Krishna to protect her. Dushasan unwraps layers and layers of her sari but due to Krishna's magical intervention her sari keeps getting extended and keeps piling on the courts floor. Everyone looks upon in awe, and Dushasan is forced to stop due to exhaustion.

The events that took shape in the court of Hastinapur after the game of dice was horrific, but things could have been even worse. Draupadi could have been completely disrobed without Krishna's intervention and had it not been the day of Akshay Tritiya.

Gift of Akshay Patra:

When Pandavas marched towards the forest to serve the next thirteen years in exile, a lot of Brahmanas followed them. Yudhishtir pleaded the brahmanas to return, citing the dangers and difficulties involved with forest lifestyle. The brahmanas refused to return and told Yudhishtir that they would not be a burden for the Pandavas. They added that they would source food on their own. Hearing this, Yudhishtir fell into despair as now he couldn't provide food to the Brahmanas who were following him out of love. Yudhishtir's priest named Dhaumya advised him to pray to Surya dev and also taught him the hymns to please Surya dev. Subsequently Yudhishtir started meditating and sang hymns praising Surya. Gladdened by his act, Surya appeared before Yudhishtir and gave him a vessel. The vessel could provide inexhaustible supply of food each day and could feed numerable people, until Draupadi partakes her portion of the food. Yudhishtira received the gift of Akshaya patra from Surya dev, which he used to serve food for all the needy on the auspicious day of Akshay Tritiya.

Ved Vyas reciting the Mahabharat to Ganesh

On Lord Brahma's recommendation, Rishi Ved Vyas requests Lord Ganesh to write the first copy of the Mahabharat at his dictation. Ganesh accepts the proposal on the condition that his pen should not stop even for a moment during the writing process. To ensure time for thinking, Ved Vyas accepts Ganesh's condition on his counter-condition that Ganesh must understand the verse before he transcribes it. Lord Ganesh agrees. Ved Vyas spoke out the shlokas fast and after every 10-15 shlokas used a very difficult one. In the time that Ganesh took to understand the difficult ones, Ved Vyas would make more new shlokas.

It is believed that Ved Vyas along with Ganesh started compiling the great epic of Mahabharat on the day of Akshay Tritiya.

Conclusion:

The passivity of the museum objects is a barrier in creating an interactive space with the visitors in a museum. The essence of an object would not reach out to a visitor until and unless the museum creates a dialogue which breaks this passivity. Storytelling is an effective tool to bring the objects to life.

In our pursuit to make the objects speak for themselves we have compiled stories of events that occurred on the day of Akshay Tritiya. These stories have spoken volumes about the objects and their association with our tangible and intangible heritage. The common binding factor amongst them is the auspicious day of Akshay Tritiya.