

15. Sept. 1996

Letters, articles, viewpoints, reports, information, warnings, advertisements: on conferences, meetings, decisions: past, present and future: potentialities and realities: romantic visions, traumatic experiences (or vice versa) - even gossip can be sent to the editor. Of course I know well that nobody will send me anything. But in case you want to surprise me, the deadline for the next issue is December 1., 1996.

My name and address is: Per B. Rekdal (ICME), Universitetets etnografiske museum
Frederiksgate 2, N-0164 Oslo, NORWAY
Tel. -47-22 85 99 61 or - 64
Fax -47-22 85 99 60
E-mail p.b.rekdal@ima.uio.no

Articles or other long messages are preferably received on e-mail or on diskettes. We can handle both Mac and PC, Windows and MS-DOS. Even so: a nicely written manuscript through fax or the good old mail is warmly welcomed. Language: messages from the the president and the editor will be printed in English and French. All other contributions are printed in the language in which it is received, on condition that it is either English, French or Spanish.

ICME

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Vous pouvez adresser à l'éditeur des lettres, articles, points-de-vue, rapports et mises-en garde, ainsi que des annonces concernant des conférences ou des réunions prochaines ou bien des décisions à prendre ou déjà prises. Faites-nous part de vos rêves en ce qui concerne l'avenir, ainsi que de vos expériences plus ou moins traumatisantes de la réalité, ou bien l'inverse; vous pouvez même nous adresser les commérages! Je sais très bien que personne ne m'enverra quoi que ce soit, mais au cas où vous voulez me surprendre, voici mes coordonnées:

Per B. Rekdal, ICME, Universitetets etnografiske museum
Frederiksgate 2, N-0164 Oslo, NORWAY
Tel: 47 22 85 99 61 ou 64
Fax: 47 22 85 99 60
E-poste: p.b.rekdal@ima.uio.no

*La date limite pour le prochain numéro est le 1er décembre 1996.
Il est préférable d'envoyer les textes longs par courrier électronique ou sur disquettes Mac, PC, en Windows ou MS-DOS. Néanmoins une lettre manuscrite expédiée par fax ou par la poste traditionnelle sera chaleureusement accueillie. En ce qui concerne la langue utilisée: Les messages du président ainsi que l'éditorial seront en anglais et en français. Toutes les autres contributions seront imprimées dans la langue d'origine, à condition que ce soit en anglais, français, ou espagnol.*

15. Sept. 1996

Comments from the editor/secretary

ICME 96

The ICME 96 conference in Bhopal is central also in this issue. In case you are late in making up your mind or - as too often happens - have mislaid the registration form, we print it in this issue. When registering, use fax and mail. The fax is fast but not always easy to read, the mail is very slow, but always readable. The combination of the two guarantees success.

If you live far away from India and feel the price for the airline ticket to New Dehli is high - look again at the prices for staying in India. The combined expences are low indeed. You will also get an opportunity to see India outside the common trails of tourism, an opportunity which may not come again.

Specifically for this conference 150 - 200 indigenous craftsmen: potters, sculptors and painters will come to the National Museum of Man in Bhopal. We will also experience three cultural performances for the three evenings by eminent maestros in classical, vocal and instrumental music and dance drama.

And we will get an opportunity to meet colleagues from the large museum world of the Indian sub-continent - a world you possibly did not know very much about.

The theme of the conference is of actuality to all of us, but maybe from very different angles, depending on the realities of our own country or region.

Language

ICOM has three official languages: English, French and Spanish. Most of the periodicals or newsletters of the international committees are mainly in English, with summaries in French and a few times in Spanish. The vast majority of ICME members prefer to use English or are able to use English. A very large proportion of the ICME members are however from countries having French as its own, or first non-national language. Very, very many does in fact live in France itself.

We have active members from French-speaking Africa and Canada, but the passivity of the large number of ICME members from France is striking. I see two possible reasons for this:

One is based on the fact that most of them work in museums dealing with their own local culture. They may feel that ICME is dominated by Euro-American museums dealing with non-European cultures and museums from outside Europe, and consequently of little relevance to them. This theme was commented upon in ICME News no. 23, and we will surely return to it.

The second reason may have to do with language. Formerly ICME News was printed in two editions, one English and one French. The arrangement was based on the voluntary and unpaid work of one of the French members of the board and an almost equally monumental effort of the English-writing secretary (or vice versa).

It was impossible to keep it up, and for some time now we have had a purely English-language edition of ICME News. From this issue on we will print all messages from the President and the secretary/editor in both English and French. We do not have the necessary economy to do so also in Spanish. All contributions sent to ICME News will be printed in the language in which they arrive, provided it is in English, French or Spanish. If a message arrives in two or three languages, we print it in two or three languages. An article arriving in one language with a summary in one or both of the two others is extra welcome.

If anybody wants to do an effort in order to change ICME News into a more true two/three-language periodical/-newsletter, please speak up!

The state of Ethnography and Ethnographic Museums in India.

The history of the anthropological collections in the museums of India is intimately connected with colonial administration. Prof. N.C. Chaudhury, an eminent anthropologist who approached the government for establishing a National Museum of Anthropology in India, writes that in the very early year of British rule, the importance of knowing the country, its cultural tradition and its products was realised for better administration of the country. Writing in 1847 on "Indian Museum and Library", Watson observes: "The promotion of the literature, arts and science of India by England had its origin in the acquisition of the province of Bengal. Policy required a knowledge of laws and institutions of the country. Its administration could not be conducted in an efficient manner without geographical knowledge, nor its commerce promoted without a knowledge of its products and their uses. When, under Warren Hastings, the Government of Company's territories assumed a more regular shape, it was found necessary to make use to a great extent of the agencies left by the previous governments, and to assimilate, in some measure, the collection of revenue and the administration of justice to the use and want of the country.

A new epoch in the study of history, archaeology, mythology and the linguistic science began from that date, and since then, the collection, investigation and the description of all Indian antiquities have gone with unflagging zeal, whilst, at the same time, the exploration of the country in the geographical, scientific and commercial sense has more than kept pace with the political establishment of England as a paramount power over the whole of the country.

It is quite probable that even in pre-British days, some of the native rulers made some indiscreet collection of "curios" which has some artistic and rarity value. But the first systematic attempt to preserve them in a public institution was made during the colonial period only for the assistance such an institution might render to the Government in knowing the country and its people.

It was to the credit of Shrl. William Jones, the founder of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, that ethnographical objects could take an important place in the society's acquisitions. The beginning was made by him in 1784. Since then ethnographical objects were continuously collected and added to the collection of the Asiatic Society. But it must be said that the collection policy, if there was any at all, was chiefly guided by the curio value of the object, its rarity and to some extent to throw light on the life and culture of the people. No attempt was made to make the collection representative of Indian life and culture.

The Asiatic Society of Bengal may be said to have given the lead in India in the field of ethnographical collections. After its pioneering efforts, a number of institutions all over India started to build up their own collection of ethnographic exhibits. Mention may be made here of Madras Government Museum (1851), Natural History Museum, Trivendrum (1857), Central Museum, Nagpur (1863), Baroda Museum and Picture Gallery (1894), Lady Wilson Museum, Dharampur (1928). In the post independence period a number of museums with ethnographical collections came into existence, a few of the more important ones being National Museum (1960), Central Museum, Arunachal (1956), Nagaland Museum (1964), Orissa State Museum (1963) and Punjab Government Museum (1959).

After India attained independence, a number of state governments established Tribal Research Centres for undertaking socio-cultural studies among the tribal population of the respective states. All these tribal research institutes have also established museums with collection and display on tribal people of those states in Bhopal, Chhindwara, Ooti, Calicut, Bhubaneswer, Guwahati, Ahmedabad, Calcutta, Pune, Hyderabad, Udalpur, etc.

There are nearly 30 universities in India where anthropology is taught as one of the subjects, and the teaching departments of Anthropology in these Universities have small museums with collections from various tribal populations. These museums are used to teach material culture of tribal people as also to provide a glimpse of this for students and scholars about the culture. In the early 70's, the Anthropological Survey of India, a nodal institution working since the last 50 years for conducting research among tribal, rural and urban populations, established a chain of Zonal Anthropological Museums as its headquarters in Calcutta and at Regional Centres in Dehradun, Mysore, Shillong, Port Blair, Nagpur, Jagdalpur, etc. In the late 70's, the Government of India came forward to fulfill the aged old demand of the anthropologists of this country for developing a National Museum of Man in India by establishing a small nuclear set-up in New Delhi. Over the years, this institution has developed as a predominantly open air museum situated on 200 acres of picturesque land in Bhopal. The Government of India established Zonal Cultural Centres in seven cities. Some of these Z.C.C.'s have permanent open air displays of house types of the respective regions. Some personal collections have also grown up into big or small museums of contemporary arts and crafts. They portray the contemporary life style of the people. A museum worth mentioning in this category is Raja Dinkar Kelkar museum, Pune. In the Karnataka State, most

of the universities have institutions for folklore studies, along with folklore museums with collection and display on contemporary patterns of culture of those areas. In all, there are sixty museums in India which are either composite museums with ethnographic collections or pure ethnographic museums.

The current state of Anthropology and Ethnographic Museums is mostly a continuation of the tradition established by the British in the pre-independence era. All the 30 departments of Anthropology in Universities, over 15 tribal research centres and institutions like The Anthropological Survey of India, undertake research and studies in traditional Indian culture, inclusive of tribal culture and have displays on various themes dedicated to tribal and Indian culture. Old museums like the National Museum, Indian Museum, Madras Museum, Prince of Wales Museum, are having specimens of the material culture of the tribal people, collected by colonial administrators, pioneer researchers, ethnographers, etc. This is also the case with other composite museums, but museums like the I.G.R.M.S., Zonal museums of Anthropological Survey of India, Museums of T.R.I., Craft Museum New Delhi, Craft Villages established by Zonal Cultural Centres, some museums of the University Anthropology departments still undertake fieldwork and are enhancing their collection from the entire country, towards salvaging the otherwise fast disappearing material objects of contemporary Indian culture.

The Indira Gandhi Rashtriya Manav Sangrahalaya is an unique institute in trying to work for the documentation and revitalization of life enhancing indigenous knowledge systems in the living museums of the country. It is working towards becoming a museum, working with living communities rather than for the collection of objects alone.

ICME 96: Pre-conference tour October 25 - 26

Museums to be visited in New Delhi

Craft Museum

The Craft Museum houses rich collections from age old traditions. It has an open air exhibition *The rural India Complex* where selected typical house types from different parts of India are on display as actual size exhibits. The craft museum organises demonstrations on Indian craft traditions throughout the year. It's collection and display consists of objects of Archeology, Paintings, Costumes, Ethnography, Anthropology, Crafts, Dolls and Toys, Textiles, Stone and Ivory carvings, Jewellery, Pottery and Terracottas, Basketry, Leather works, etc.

National Museum

National Museum is a treasure house of the National Cultural Property of all the ages. Situated in the heart of the city, housed in a magnificent building built on an appreciative architectural style. This museum is run by the Union Government of India, and has collections of materials related to Pre- and Proto history, Sculpture, Bronzes, Copper plates, Coins, Miniatures, Arms, Precolumbian arts, Anthropology, Central Asian collection including mural paintings, Buddhist Silk paintings and Sculpture, etc. The museum has galleries on Pre-history, Archaeology, Numismatics, Manuscripts, Anthropology, Colombian arts, Pottery and Terracotta, Buddhist art, Indian jewellery, etc.

Indira Gandhi National Centre for Arts

Indira Gandhi National Centre for Arts (I.G.N.C.A.), is an institution which works for documentation, collection, research and popularisation of Indian civilisation and art traditions. *Jan Sampada* is an unit in the I.G.N.C.A. for collection and documentation on folk art. It is also developing a division on pre-historic art named *Adi*. The institution is preparing a large complex over several acres in the heart of New Delhi. It is functioning as an advanced institution for research and documentation on Indian Civilisation and Culture. Currently a special exhibition *Rita-Ritu* is on display.

Sanskrit Parisar

Sanskrit Parisar, a non-government organisation, is a new cultural centre at the outskirts of New Delhi. It has displays on folk arts and crafts and has developed working facilities including studios and accommodation for stay of traditional and creative artists. It has open air structures as typical exhibits and organises programmes and activities of live demonstrations and exhibitions etc. on contemporary Indian culture.

These papers were presented at the ICME proceedings at the general conference of ICOM in Stavanger 1995. Dr. Das has a general aim, though writing with reference to India. Dr. Wolf discusses the changing role of regional museum in India's neighbouring country, Sri Lanka.

Dr. A.K. Das

COMMUNITY RESPONSE TO THE MUSEUM OF FOLK-LIFE IN RURAL AND URBAN SITUATION IN INDIA

When we take total perspective of man in the time and space, the past compliments the present and in turn it permeates into the future. All these facets continues in timeless journey. In the museum parlance, culture has broader connotation covering total perspective of man as the product of environment in a Linear time frame.

Material Culture, which gave the identify to man has become the epitome of the ethnography museum world over (Pearce, S.1989, pp.47). The term "ethnography" literally engulf the scope of the museum devoted to the life-style of the people. In a most appropriate direction, the ethnography museum extends its scope and incorporate folk-life, probably a most suitable substitute for ethnographic museum, draws towards its parameter all sorts of museums such as folk-art museum, rural museum, ethnographic museum, tribal art museum, open-air village museum, craft museum, etc. representing community Life-style in totality.

A museum of folk-life may be urban, rural of 'tribal' - it may be anything concerning way of life of the people having a 'traditional' base. Various activities of man performed at various stages of life from birth to death - ceremonies, rituals, artifacts, oral-literature, performing art, ethno-music, value-system, world-view, language etc. which are an integral part of the community life, forms the realm of the museum both in concrete and abstract terms.

The concrete aspects represent the material culture or the artefacts identified with a community or a region. And in the Language of Pearce - "--- and that artefacts were only meaningful if they were explained from outside because they have nothing of say for themselves; and this in spite of the fact that we know from experience that artefacts can sometimes express our innermost feelings and beliefs". These "innermost feelings and belief" are the abstract aspect of the material culture which are without any dimension. The concrete aspects are easily documented by means of multimedia audio-visual techniques. The abstract aspects etc. yet to be captured in a museum and technology yet to be developed to represent them. (1)

The museum of folk-life require tremendous transformation in so far as the basic concept is concerned in South East Asia. Instead of an object-oriented show-house it should become an institution of introspection of all the life activities of man, both in terms of conceptual and the physical. Over the years the holistic approach to such a museum was a myth and now it has become a reality. This has been experienced in India in recent times. (2)

The new conception of the folk-life museum has gradually broken down the water-tight compartments, when we take into account various input activities such as collection, documentation and dissemination. The area of collection now digests everything from the three dimensional artefacts to the nontangible aspect of culture. In the same way the documentation system is not only confined to the preparation of inventory and catalogue, it has entered the stage of "total documentation". (Furst, 1989, pp.98). A multiprolonged thrust using every available electronic hardware and software in addition to the traditional audio-visual techniques is called for. In the areas of dissemination, in addition to the thematic expositions, multi-media documentation, the use of multiple techniques communication through real life enactment and deliberations, man to man interaction culminating in total participation aimed at a complete understanding at all levels have become inevitable. (3)

Today a folk-life museum stands for both emic and etic approach involvement of the community from within and from without as an insider as well as an outsider. Some one has realistically coined the phrase - "a museum by the people, of the people and for the people", when we take into account the community and the museum. (4)

From the very phrase it is quite apparent that the museum of folk-life involves the members of the community at various stages of the museums input activities from different rungs and social order. It is a peculiar congregation of the rural and urban, tribes and castes, illiterate and elite, professional and the non-professional - a diverse crowd of different background, mental set up, academic level and inhibitions.

Firstly, the professionals - the anthropologists, ethnographers, museologists, art-historians, etc. are a highly motivated group of specialists and elite of the society. These are core members, and are the creators of the institution. Starting from the preparation of a blue-print for the museum concerning the collection parameter, exhibition themes, architecture and designing the lay-out, conceptualizing the

communication systems, writing catalogue and other informative materials, etc. are domain of these professionals. In spite of their understanding of the community and their need they sometimes emotionally attached to the institution which they create, as a result wrong priorities are pursued. Their academic exercise reflects their career interest and egoism. This attitude on the part of the professionals has resulted, in most cases, arbitrary policies and programmes in the museum's input and output system without linking the requirements of the community at large. As a whole it can be summarized that the response of the professionals is shrouded in a linear approach. (Peter, 1989, pp.74)

Secondly, there are the ethnic groups, whose life-style is enshrined in the museum's continuing programmes and projects. They are the resource people. All the concrete and the abstract materials accumulated by the museum for its functioning comes from the resource people. The involvement of the resource people in the museum activities is unilateral. Generally they are oblivious of the happenings in the museum. They are mostly semi-literate or illiterate masses from rural and tribal areas. A large number of the resource people, in their life time have never seen a metropolis, what to speak of a museum. Museum as an institution of learning is beyond their comprehension. The response of the resource people, therefore, is by proxy.

Finally there comes the users, the visitors who frequent the museum from time to time in some metropolis or town. The users are generally members of the communities from urban and semi-urban areas in most cases. A negligible section of the vast multitude or population living in villages and remote hamlets may also be included who are fortunate to have visited a museum in their life time.

There are three types of users: the casual visitors, induced visitors and the intellectuals. The casual visitors are a mixed lot mostly urban and literate. Their visit is business-like. It is not that they come to learn and understand culture, they come to witness something curious, something amusing. When they go back they retain some impression of the museum in their memory. The induced visitors are mostly students. They are brought to the museum without giving adequate orientation about the culture and its relationship with museum's programme.

The intellectual are the people who utilize a small bit of the museum's entire programme. As they are specialists, such as scholars, media-persons, artists etc., they are duty bound to work on a particular area of the museum dealing with a particular aspect of folk-life. Generally they do show some interest in various other programmes of the museum which are not directly related to their field of study but they are more inclined to their area of work. The users response, as a whole, is specific and limited. (Merriman, 1991, pp.15)

The total response of the community towards the folk-life museum in the present rural and urban situation in South East Asia is barely congenial for a meaningful growth. It is because of the fact that there is no linkage between the creator, resource persons and users. The resource persons, who are the foundation stone of the institution, remain ignorant about their participation. No attempt has so far been made to involve the resource people physically and consciously in the development programmes of the museum as it should have been done. Had there been conscious participation at the level of resource person, it would have been a fantastic experience both for the creator and the user. For the resource people it will be a meaningful contribution and a satisfaction of participation for a common cause.

The professionals generally lack in enthusiasm for evolving an empic approach in moulding the museum's programme. They are indifferent about the role of the resource people at various stages of the museum's development schedule. It is also a fact that the professionals never try to gauge the need at the users level and evaluate the programme of the museum accordingly.

Keeping in view the responsive disparity at the three levels, the very mould of the folk-life museum may be recycled to generate a common response and a total participation of the creator, resource people and the users, on a common platform

The recycling of the programme might be based on a pilot survey of the area where the museum is located, the composition of the population whose interaction is expected to be involved in the museum's programme, the proximity of the resource people to ascertain their conscious participation as well as understanding and assimilation of the professionals with the cultural traits of the resource people. The material, theme, architecture, the mode and technique of presentation must be attuned to the responsive parity of the community as a whole.

Therefore, the folk-life museums to be developed in future, requires a shift from urban areas to the rural areas and developed by the resource people themselves with whatever expertise they possess. The motivation for such a movement should come from the educated village youths and knowledgeable people. And in fact this is happening in India. There are reports about museums developed by tribal people themselves in remote villages.

FOOT NOTES

1. In the IGNCA, New Delhi, two galleries called 'Adi Drsyā' (primal sight) and 'Adi Sarvya' (primal sight) have been conceptualized in the format of the multi-media presentation. Since the very conception primal sight and sound is unlike any other theme-oriented or object-oriented presentation noticed in museum, it was felt necessary to look for brand new techniques. At present materials are being assembled in a global context, keeping in view the multi-media approach already formulated for the purpose. International seminars and workshops are being held to mobilize conceptual resources in a global frame-work. For these two galleries a multi-pronged action plan has been initiated for the last several years. Field work, survey and documentation, exploration and trial excavation, video-filming, replication etc. continued with the help of Indian and foreign experts. When completed it is hoped that it would generate a new experience in the field of museum.

2. The IGNCA, New Delhi had mounted an exhibition entitled Kal' (Time). Here designers have created a multi-media presentation combining the conceptual part with the visual input in such a way that it recreated a journey and experience in time. Another experiment was done in recent time in an exhibition called - "Prakriti". Here man's eternal relation with five elements of nature have been conceptualized and concretised by amalgamating classical textual ideas and folk-beliefs and practices in a natural situation. This exhibition was an experience of harmony and conflict between man and nature.

3. In the IGNCA, New Delhi an unique programme called "Geet Govinda" has been initiated with the help of computer experts and scholars to design a multi-media documentation incorporating both the abstract and the concrete aspect of the "art-form". "Geet Govinda" is not only a text but a multiple expression-a multi-media art form in itself. This is being captured in a multi-media computer programme.

4. Based on the paper Eco-Museum presented by V.H. Bedakar in a seminar organised by the Museum of Man in Bhopal.

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Dr. Wolfgang Mey

Beyond the Bone-House. The Changing Role of Regional Museums in Sri Lanka

The National Museum in Sri Lanka was founded to demonstrate the superiority of the colonial power over the conquered population.

Regional museums in Sri Lanka, generally recent achievements, follow in a bizarre way the same historical pattern. They were meant to document the superiority of the modern metropolis over the "regions". The metropolis, this is Colombo, the commercial capital with its closed society of civil servants, development specialists and businessmen and it is the Up-Country, that is mainly populated by high caste wet-rice farmers, in pre-British times ruled by a nobility under a King. They held out against the British until 1815.

The regions, these are parts of the country that are populated mainly by lower caste people. The Low-Country, e.g. the west and south west coastal areas came under Portuguese colonial rule already in 1505 and it was there that the transformation of traditional structures started earliest and there capitalism gained strength first. At the same time almost all revolts against colonial rule and the modern state were initiated there. The "region", these are, in a wider sense, today all the areas that differ at varying degrees from the Up-Country-design of National Culture.

While the cultural policy of the metropolis still considers the regional museums as repositories of inferior types of culture, a general political and cultural development in the country has changed them into repositories of logic and dignity. And it is only through this overarching development that the unnoticed change of the role of regional museums can be perceived.

There is no word for "museum" in Sinhala. A term meaning "bone house" or "house, where to keep very old things" is used to designate such alien institution. The preservation of cultural objects was neither done in the perspective of preserving them for the generations to come, nor for the sake of history of culture. They were handed down in the family, finally substituted and eventually discarded. Buddhist notions of the non-permanency of existence supported such notions. A museum that intends to preserve things for the future does not have really a place in the realm of non-permanency.

So, the foundation of the National Museum in Sri Lanka was an entirely British move. Along with the Custom House it was designed by the then Government architect in 1870 when plantation economy and exports from the island boomed. It contains natural and cultural history collections of the island's history and past present. Objects on display were re-contextualised as trophies. It was certainly not designed to preserve material objects of the various cultures of the island for generations to come or to support ethnic identities, it rather served the imperial interests of the colonial power ruling the island.

Visitors to this museum, however, interpret these institutions in a different manner. The throne of the last King of the country for instance is regarded still today with great respect and awe rather than as a museum object. Statues of the Buddha are still perceived as objects of veneration rather than museum objects.

While the National Museum was part of the colonial era, a number of regional museums were founded in Sri Lanka after independence. They concentrate on archeology, on colonial history, on local history and on "manners and customs". They were meant to substantiate the culturally leading role of the metropolis and its English speaking elites. The objects these museums keep document the cultures of regions, of farmers and fishers, of the potters and drummers, of those people who had no access to the High Culture. These regional cultures were and are at the same time considered backward and governed by superstitious ideas and notions.

This development took place in a historical milieu of the development of what is called "National Culture". In fact, the implementation of this concept turned out to be a very explosive way of dividing the country into a "high", e.g. a national and "low", e.g. regional cultures.

In terms of hierarchy and purity the Up-Country nursed the reputation of representing The Traditional Culture, Pure Buddhism and the Correct Way of Life. In this perspective the Low Country with its long and chequered colonial history its unstable and continuously changing economy and culture, its mixture of religions, and of a "corrupt" Buddhism represented what has been called a degenerated way of life.

When State-and Nation-Building was adopted as national ideology after independence, the concepts of the Up-Country elites served as a model of how THE CULTURE of independent Sri Lanka should look like. The concept of National Culture (if it can really be called a concept) reflected, however, only the political and cultural notions of the urban, upper-class and Up-Country elites, e.g. pure Buddhism, hierarchy, caste differentiation and the domination over the means of production and distribution. These elites consider themselves as guardians of the pure old order while almost all rebellions against British forces in the last century, all riots, revolts and upheavals started in the Low Country and sometimes even spread from there to other parts of the country. This gives the Low Country an image of a particularly unruly province, ready to violence and revolt.

The implementation of what is called National Culture has been part of political and cultural measures of all parties that were in power. Increasingly the ideology of National Culture was used to support maintenance of power and certainly all legal and sometimes even more illegal means were employed to this end. It was in this historical milieu that a number of regional museums were founded.

They emphasised the division of the island into two sections: the political and cultural division into The Centre and the regions. This went along with the implementation of a particular kind of development of the country. Most of the development resources were and are channelled into the Up Country while the Low Country and other parts of the island were economically, politically and culturally neglected, at times even underdeveloped.

These regional museums did not emphasise experiences of hundreds of years of Sinhalese and Tamils peacefully sharing the resources of the country, they were not meant to support the contributions Tamil culture had made to the island's history. Instead they focussed on the glorious Sinhalese past, and the Sinhalese people were depicted as the brave sons of the soil whose culture has been threatened over a thousand years by brutal, destructive and treacherous Tamil invaders from India.

Sculptures of Sinhalese heroes were for instance erected in Kataragama, a shrine which attracts hundreds of thousands of pilgrims each year. The achievements of Duttugemunu were particularly emphasised. Duttugemunu was a Sinhalese prince who had fought the Tamil King Elara in Anuradhapura in the 2nd century B.C. Elara's 40 years of rule was reportedly wise and just, and even Sinhalese people claim these 40 years to have been the Golden Age in Lanka. Elara was killed by the prince, the power of the Tamils was broken and the island was again under Sinhalese rule. Elara was then duly cremated and, as the chronicle reports, the ashes were buried in a dagoba which was given the name of "Elara Sohona", the "Cemetery of Elara". Now, few years ago human ashes were

found in this dagoba. As any discussion of the beneficial role of this Tamil King had to be prevented an anonymous committee of experts decreed that the ashes were of the Sinhalese King Duttugemunu. This being not enough, a governmental order was issued that the search for the clothes of Kuveni would be started. Kuveni, if she was ever more than a mythical person was an indigenous woman of Lanka and the consort of Vijaya, the "Victorious" Indian prince who had conquered the island and established the rule of the Lion Sons, the Sinhalese people in the 5th century B.C.

Dagobas and statues of the Buddha were erected all over the country in the late 1980s and early 90s, and the famous and most important shrine of God Kataragama and its area was streamlined into a national mould; drawings and photos of presidents in the company of Gods smiled from archways, blessing constantly and mercilessly pilgrims and devotees.

Culture was taken hostage by the then ruling political party and its torchbearers.

In this context, regional museums never played a substantive role in the definition of changing identities of cultural regions.

Though they were used or rather misused, they were, at the same time, put into an awkward position: Regional museums were founded a) to please the public, b) to recruit voters for the ruling party and its local representatives and c) to guard objects of the regional, traditional cultures.

The general cultural process in Sri Lanka has, since about a century, tried to do away with regional and "popular" traditions. This process was part and parcel of an overarching re-definition of the island's most important ideology, e.g. Buddhism. With the advent of members of the Theosophical Society of the United States the transformation of Theravada Buddhism to what has been called "Protestant Buddhism" started. In traditional Theravada Buddhism Gods and demons and supernatural beings of all sorts were accepted and given their due respect. Monotheistic Christianity denounced the polytheistic pantheon of Theravada Buddhism as a system of superstition that by its very nature could not cope and compete with Christian religion and philosophy. The theosophical "reform" led to a purge of traditional Theravada Buddhism. Gods and demons and all other mythical beings were duly excommunicated and instead of a de-mythologisation of myth, mythical contents and contexts were suppressed and reduced to "customs" and "superstition". Almost automatically regional cultures that for a number of reasons do not share the ruling Up-Country ideology, e.g. that of a caste-oriented authoritarian market economy backed by a politically dependent class of "reformed" Buddhist priests were identified with backwardness and historical obsolescence.

This process is gaining momentum. Western notions gain increasingly importance in designing everyday life of upper and middle classes. They trickle down as visions of "how a decent life should be" to the less privileged and poorer segments of the population. Life becomes more dependent on uncontrollable forces external to man's actions. Today the future is governed more by connections to important or otherwise powerful people like MPs or influential party members than by one's own striving, education and social setting. Where external forces so obviously gain the upper hand, other external forces like Gods and demons have correspondingly to be called upon to regulate the uncertainties of life.

During the last years Buddhism lost increasingly importance and legitimation, Buddhist priests are widely considered corrupt. Many of them earn a living by selling amulets and casting of horoscopes. All sorts of cults keep on booming. What Sai Baba, a self styled saint much in fashion now, did and what not is the talk of the town, and those who cannot afford to visit this man in India flock to local shrines. Possession, demonic diseases and interventions increase, Gods and demons gain an hitherto unknown importance. In the language of Buddhism, superstitious beliefs and practices are increasing rapidly. In this context regional museums are gaining a completely new function and perspective: they emphasise the normalcy and logic of the particular and local, of the syncretistic, "little" traditions as opposed to overarching trends reaching out from the cities. The urban influences have so far brought only problems to the regions and have never provided strategies to solve such problems. This fact accounts for much of the loss of credibility of modernisation in the countryside. As modernisation did not provide problem solving strategies for the problems it brought to a large number of people, villagers increasingly turn to traditional or what they consider traditional problem solving strategies.

In this context regional museums are acquiring a new task. They guard the objects of the past that is in many cases still the present. Instead of being bone-houses stuffed with objects of superstition and backwardness they are becoming repositories of identity. They are becoming important centres of a revindication of the past through which and only through which the present can be understood and the future shaped.

David Boston

Computerized access to anthropological Periodicals

Besides major libraries and universities around the world, a significant number of ICME institutional members now take the Anthropological Index to Current Periodicals, an essential tool for researchers in all areas of Anthropology and Archaeology, published by the Royal Anthropological Institute (R.A.I.) in London. The Index lists the titles of articles and the names of authors in over 750 periodicals taken by the British Museum's Department of Ethnography (Museum of Mankind), many donated by the R.A.I.

In view of the response from existing subscribers, it is now intended to launch a CD-ROM version of the Index to provide electronic access to all the quarterly issues printed between 1985 and 1993. This will be a networkable multi-platform CD. The data, planned to be updated on a regular basis, will be fully searchable on multiple fields and the results of searches can be printed in a variety of formats or saved to disc.

Projected costs have been scaled down to very competitive prices:

£ 100 a single user - for use strictly on one computer and not via network.

£ 250 a single user with access permitted over a local area network. Arrangements can also be made for simultaneous user licenses.

Existing subscribers will be sent full particulars but anyone else interested in receiving further information about the CD-ROM can write to the Honorary Librarian of the Royal Anthropological Institute, David Boston, at the following address:

Quebec House (National Trust)
Quebec Square
Westerham
Kent
TN 16 1 TD
England

Details on subscription arrangements will then be sent. It may be possible to send a loan copy of the CD-ROM if sufficient copies can be produced on a sale or return basis.