

## CHAPTER III : MINISTRY OF CULTURE

### Indian Museum, Victoria Memorial Hall and the Asiatic Society

#### 3.1 Preservation and Restoration of Art Objects

*The Indian Museum, Victoria Memorial Hall and The Asiatic Society, Kolkata, are Institutions of National Importance engaged in acquisition, preservation and restoration of art objects of historical importance. Audit appraisal to evaluate the performance of the Institutions in respect of their functions revealed significant shortcomings. None of these institutions had a well-defined set of objectives. Their functions overlapped and there was no synergy among them, leading to inefficient and sub-optimal resource utilization. In the absence of any adopted strategic or perspective plan indicating precise, measurable and achievable targets, their activities often lacked any direction. None of them had ever attempted to evolve or adopt any benchmarks or standards in respect of acquisition, conservation or documentation of the invaluable artefacts possessed by them.*

*The Institutions had never evolved any consistent policy in respect of acquisition of artefacts, whether by way of purchase or gifts or for their valuation, in the absence of which the decisions for acquisition were often arbitrary and lacked rationale. There was no mechanism to assess the genuineness of these artefacts. Shoddy documentation of the acquired artefacts and the inability of the Institutions to modernize their documentation systems with the help of digital technology, coupled with the absence of any physical verification during the last five years make the artefacts vulnerable to loss.*

*Absence of planning was also noticed in the approach towards conservation and restoration of art objects. The Institutions had not created the necessary infrastructure for conservation and training. Further, failure to create appropriate storage facilities for their priceless possessions made the artefacts vulnerable to damage and undetected loss.*

*The security systems of the Institutions presented a poor and alarming picture. Effective manual or electronic surveillance systems were absent. Security guards were deployed without adequate training and experience and artefacts were exposed to very high risk of damage and loss.*

*Such lapses had resulted in the theft of a fifth century Buddha Head from Sarnath from the Museum in December 2004.*

## Highlights

- All the three Institutions were characterised by the absence of planning for the acquisition of artefacts. Funds budgeted for this purpose were left mostly unutilised and the expenditure incurred for the acquisition of art objects reflected ad-hocism. No perspective plan for the acquisition and conservation of artefacts was prepared or adopted.
- Expenditure made on the purchase of artefacts constituted only a fraction of the total capital expenditure of the Institutions during the last five years. There was no policy for the valuation of the purchased and gifted artefacts, neither were there any benchmarks/ standards to ensure that the acquired artefacts conformed to the objectives of the Institutions. There was no methodology to assess the genuineness of the acquired artefacts.
- The Indian Museum did not maintain any Centralised Accession Register for its artefacts. The Museum claimed to possess 1,02,646 art objects, but there were wide discrepancies between the number of objects possessed and accessioned. While most of the objects were not accessioned in the Art and Anthropology sections, in the Archaeology section, the number of objects accessioned was more than the number of objects claimed to be under possession. The Museum never prepared any plan to complete the work of accessioning and to reconcile the discrepancies.
- There was inadequate photo-documentation of art objects by the Indian Museum and Victoria Memorial Hall. More than 90 *per cent* of the 1,02,646 objects possessed by the Indian Museum were yet to be photo-documented and digitised. The Museum did not prepare any plan for accomplishing this task. The Asiatic Society had also failed to achieve the target set by itself for photo-documentation and there were huge shortfalls in the production of microfilm and microfiche by the Society.
- None of the three Institutions conducted any physical verification of the art objects possessed by them during the last five years. Thus the physical existence or condition of the art objects could not be ascertained.
- Expenditure incurred by the Institutions on conservation was inadequate and had little relation to the budget estimates which indicated the absence of any systematic approach for conservation and restoration of artefacts. There was no system in the Institutions to identify the nature of damages to the art objects and to prepare reports indicating priority of their conservation.

- The conservation laboratory of the Museum performed at only 31 *per cent* of its capacity during the last five years. The performance of the Mobile Conservation Laboratory of the Museum was also far below the desired level. The Laboratory was utilised for only 112 days during the last five years.

Despite the acute need for infrastructure for restoration and conservation of manuscripts/paintings/artefacts, the Asiatic Society did not establish such facilities.

The operations and resources of the Institutions were not coordinated and synergised for conserving and restoring the artefacts by utilising existing capabilities developed over the years.

- The security systems in the Indian Museum were inadequate and ineffective which resulted in the theft of a fifth century sculpture. The capital expenditure made for purchase of security equipment was insignificant compared to the revenue expenditure of the Museum. Many priceless sculptures and architectural objects in the Indian Museum had visitors' names etched on their enclosures. The close circuit television system commissioned by the Victoria Memorial in 1990 at a cost of Rs. 14.02 lakh was lying inoperative since November 2002.

Adequate security measures were not adopted by the Asiatic Society, despite recommendations by the Ministry of Home Affairs.

Indian Museum and the Asiatic Society recruited Security Guards without adequate training and experience, in violation of the service rules.

### **Recommendations**

- ❖ The Institutions should evolve a set of globally accepted standards and norms for themselves in conformity with defined objectives.
- ❖ The Institutions should evolve a pricing and valuation policy for the acquisition of artifacts.
- ❖ A system of regular and periodic physical verification of all art objects should be instituted immediately.
- ❖ Art objects requiring restoration/ conservation should be systematically identified and a time schedule for their restoration should be drawn up.
- ❖ The Institutions should identify and develop specialty areas for efficient utilisation of available resources.
- ❖ The Institutions should adopt appropriate security measures to provide protection against theft, damage and losses.

### **3.2 Introduction**

The Indian Museum, Victoria Memorial and The Asiatic Society, Kolkata are Institutions<sup>1</sup> of National Importance under the administrative control of the Ministry of Culture. The Indian Museum was founded in 1814 and is the largest and oldest institution of its kind in India. The Museum has many rare and unique specimens both Indian and trans-Indian, relating to Humanities and Natural Sciences. The administration of the Museum is run in accordance with the Indian Museum Act, 1910 and the Museum rules and bye laws as amended from time to time. The Victoria Memorial was established under the Victoria Memorial Act, 1903. The Memorial has a collection of sketches and drawing, coins and medals, arms and armour, books and manuscripts, etc. that represents and draws our attention visually to the history of pre-camera days. The Asiatic Society was established in January 1784 and registered under the Societies Registration Act of 1860. Subsequently, the Society was declared an Institution of National Importance under the Asiatic Society Act, 1984. The Society possesses a priceless collection of manuscripts, letters, work of arts, coins, etc. and serves readers, researchers and visitors from different parts of India and abroad. Although established at different times, one of the main functions of these Institutions is the preservation and conservation of cultural property, involving acquisition, documentation, conservation and safe custody of the art objects in their possession.

### **3.3 Organisational Set-up**

The administration, direction and management of the affairs of the Indian Museum and Victoria Memorial are entrusted to separate Boards of Trustees. The Governor of West Bengal is the ex-officio Chairman of both the Boards. Other members of the Boards include representatives of the Central and State Governments and eminent personalities in the field of art and culture, judiciary and accounts. The administration, direction and management of the affairs of Asiatic Society are entrusted to the Council comprising of eminent personalities as well as representatives of the Central and State Governments.

### **3.4 Objective and Scope of Review**

The accounts of the **Indian Museum** and **Victoria Memorial** are audited under Section 20 (1) while the accounts of **The Asiatic Society** are audited under Section 19 (2) of the Comptroller and Auditor General's (Duties, Powers and Conditions of Service) Act, 1971.

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<sup>1</sup> The three organisations are hereinafter jointly referred to as "Institutions".

The present system review covering the period from 1999-2000 to 2003-2004 focused on the efficiency and effectiveness of the activities undertaken by the Institutions in the following four functional areas:

- (i) Acquisition of art objects
- (ii) Documentation of art objects
- (iii) Conservation of art objects
- (iv) Safe Custody of art objects

### **3.5 Absence of Standards or Norms followed by the Institutions**

Audit ascertained that none of these three Institutions had evolved any standards or norms pertaining to any of their functional areas nor had they adopted any of the established international standards in respect of these areas. Various international standards exist for acquisition, preservation, documentation and custody of objects possessed by museums and libraries prescribed by various organisations like the International Council of Museums, USA, United Kingdom Institute for Conservation, International Centre for the Study of the Conservation and Preservation of Cultural Property (ICCROM), Museums' Documentation Association, UK, Museums and Galleries Commission, UK, United Kingdom Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works (UKIC), United Kingdom Institute of Conservation, British Standards Institute, UK etc.

In the absence of any standards, the decisions taken by the Institutes in the above four major functional areas of their activities often lacked objectivity, uniformity and transparency, as discussed subsequently.

### **3.6 Art Objects Possessed and Displayed by the Institutions**

The position regarding the total artefacts possessed by these institutions as on 31 March 2004 is depicted in Table 1 below, along with artefacts purchased as well as received by way of gifts from various donors:

**Table 1: Possession and Acquisition of Artefacts by the Institutions**

<b>Name of the Institution</b>	<b>Total No. of Art Objects as on 31-03-2004</b>	<b>Total No. of Artefacts Purchased during 1999-2004</b>	<b>No. of Artefacts Received as Gifts during 1999-2004</b>
Indian Museum	1,02,646	168	173
Victoria Memorial Hall	27,242	319	10
Asiatic Society	59,523	115	1958

Most of the objects possessed by Asiatic Society were received by way of gifts during the last five years. These objects were usually manuscripts of various old works.

### 3.7 Overlapping of Objectives and Functions of the Institutions

All the three Institutions were engaged in preservation of the cultural heritage of the country. However, no functional, geographical or chronological boundaries were delineated for these institutions. As a result, they ended up acquiring & conserving art objects and artefacts of similar kind highlighting the lack of synergy and cohesion in their functioning. For instance, all three Institutions possessed coins and photographs. Further, both the Indian Museum and the Asiatic Society possessed statues.

#### 3.7.1 Recommendations:

- *The Institutions should define their objectives clearly, keeping in mind the strengths and capabilities acquired by each of them over the years and synergise their functions and activities;*
- *The Institutions should evolve a set of globally accepted standards and norms for themselves in conformity with their defined objectives, functional areas and resource positions to bring about uniformity and transparency in their operations.*

### 3.8 Acquisition of Art Objects

#### 3.8.1 Lack of Planning in the Acquisition of Artefacts

**Table 2: Budget Provisions vis-a-vis Expenditure on Acquisition of Artefacts by the Institutions**

*(Rupees in lakh)*

	Indian Museum			Victoria Memorial Hall			Asiatic Society		
	BE	RE	Actual Expenditure	BE	RE	Actual Expenditure	BE	RE	Actual Expenditure
1999-00	25.00	1.00	0.40	NA	NA	0	0.02	0.02	0.15
2000-01	5.00	3.00	0	8.00	0	0	0.02	NA	0.35
2001-02	10.00	5.00	4.30	0	0	0	1.00	1.00	1.90
2002-03	5.00	5.00	0	20.00	35.00	18.70	2.00	5.00	2.47
2003-04	10.00	5.00	11.00	40.00	40.00	37.31	5.00	5.00	2.55
Total	55.00	19.00	15.70	68.00	75.00	56.01	8.04	11.02	7.42
Total Capital Expenditure made during the Period			359.79			293.37			330.65
Percentage of total expenditure on acquisition of artefacts to capital expenditure			4.36			19.09			2.24

The three Institutions acquired art objects mainly by way of purchase and gifts. Purchases of artefacts were made in accordance with the recommendations made by the Art Purchase Committees of the respective organisations from time to time. The budget provisions vis-a-vis expenditure on acquisition of artefacts by the Institutions are shown in table 2 above. As indicated by the table, none of these Institutions followed any consistent policy towards acquisition of artefacts during the last five years. The budgeted funds were mostly unutilised and budget estimates were drastically revised which reflected the absence of any clear direction and plan. Even the revised estimated did not bear relation to the actual expenditure. The expenditure also reflected ad-hocism. For example, **The Indian Museum** could not furnish any reason for excess expenditure during 2003-04 or nil expenditure during 2000-01 and 2002-03. **The Victoria Memorial** stated that during 2002-03 and 2003-04, expenditure was incurred on modernisation of its galleries and no provision was made for acquisition of artefacts during 2000-01 and 2001-02 in the estimates.

It can also be seen from table 2 that the expenditure on purchase of artefacts constituted only a fraction of the total capital expenditure made by these Institutions during the last five years. Hence, in the absence of systematic planning, expenditure on this major function of these Institutions was erratic.

### **3.8.2 Absence of standards and bench marks for Acquisition and Evaluation of Objects**

None of these Institutions established standards or benchmarks for the acquisition and valuation of artefacts as may be seen from the following cases:

In December 2003, the Indian Museum acquired two pieces of African ivory carvings with human figures on two elephant tasks along with one set of chess pieces. The decision to purchase these items was taken by the Purchase Committee in November 2003 based merely on a statement made by the individual seller that these artefacts were collected from African countries by her mother-in-law. The antiquity of the artefacts was not established nor was the claim of the seller of Rs. 10 lakh verified. As against the original price demanded by the seller, the price paid by the Museum was Rs. 5.5 lakh. The basis or the consideration on which the final price was arrived at was not on record. Further, there was no evidence to establish that the artefacts deserved a place among the Museum objects.

In another case, a pair of golden bangles highly engraved and decorated with stones was acquired by the Museum in March 2000 at a price of Rs. 20,000 as

against the demanded price of Rs. 40,000. The individual seller only declared that the pair of bangles was inherited by her from her grandmother. The Purchase Committee in its meeting held in March 2000 did not establish the authenticity of the claim, nor was there anything on record to assess the correct value of the objects. Further, the grounds for acquiring these objects in the first instance were not on record.

The institutions did not have any policy for the acceptance of gifts. They did not evolve a valuation policy for the objects received by way of gifts. As such, value of these objects were not reflected in the accounts. The decision to accept gifts also lacked transparency. For example, the accession register of **Indian Museum** showed that it had received 100 Ganesha icons by way of gifts from an individual. However, the Museum could not produce any record to disclose the grounds on which the decision to accept the gifts was taken. The antiquity and historical value of the objects donated were also not evaluated.

The Institutions did not evolve any methodology to assess the genuineness of the artefacts. As such, the manner in which the Museum satisfied itself about the genuineness and authenticity of the art objects acquired by it could not be ascertained in Audit. The Indian Museum stated in its reply that it would evolve an appropriate policy to eliminate the possibility of acquisition of any false objects.

### **3.8.3 Absence of Any Perspective Plan for Acquisition or Conservation of Artefacts**

The Institutes never prepared any perspective plan for acquisition or conservation of artefacts. The **Indian Museum** stated in reply that it would formulate the perspective plan for purchase of antiquities. **Victoria Memorial Hall** stated that the perspective plan was being prepared, but no record was shown to audit in respect of this claim. **The Asiatic Society** had developed Draft of the Vision Report of 2001 of their Planning Board, but the Institute was unable to say whether the Draft Report was finalised and accepted by their Board. In any case, there was no mention of the Institutional objectives or of any perspective plan in this document.



### 3.8.4 Recommendations

- *The Institutions should evolve and adopt a perspective plan for all their activities including for acquisition of art objects;*
- *The Institutions should evolve a pricing policy for the acquisition of artefacts and valuation policy for artefacts ;*
- *The Institutions should evolve a well-documented scientific methodology to ascertain the genuineness of artefacts acquired by them.*

### 3.9 Documentation of Art Objects by the Institutions

#### 3.9.1 Organisation of Activities

The activities of the **Indian Museum** are organised under different sections and units. There are three sections directly controlled by the Museum Directorate, and seven service units, also reporting to the Director. Apart from the above, there are three scientific sections, viz. Geology, Zoology and Economic Botany, controlled respectively by the Geological Survey of India, Zoological Survey of India and Botanical Survey of India. Activities of the **Victoria Memorial Hall** are organised under six units, the activities of the **Asiatic Society** are organised primarily under six sections: Library, Museum and Manuscript, Reprography, Conservation and Publication and Academic.

#### 3.9.2 Accessioning of Art Objects

Proper and regular maintenance of the Accession Registers is essential for the safety and security of the Museum objects as well as for their proper accountal. These registers have columns indicating the year of possession of the object, location, details and all other particulars relating to the object. This process of entering the details of objects in registers is called Accessioning.

Of these three Institutions, the **Indian Museum** did not maintain any Centralised Accession Register with the details and locations of all objects possessed by the Museum. After acquisition, the artefacts were sent to one of its three major sections, viz. Art, Archaeology and Anthropology, depending upon their nature and entries were made in the Accession Registers maintained by the respective sections. Audit noted that entries in the Accession Registers were not complete. Details of age and location of the objects and their conditions were not recorded. There was no running number in the accession

registers allotted to the objects to disclose the total number of objects possessed by the Museum.

### 3.9.3 Irregular Maintenance of Accession Registers

The **Indian Museum** claimed to possess 1,02,646 art objects as on 31 March 2004. However, review of the accession register showed several discrepancies. Detail of the objects possessed by the different sections and as entered in the accession register were provided by the Museum as shown in Table 3:

**Table 3: No. of Objects Accessioned by the Indian Museum**

Name of The Section	No. of Objects Possessed by the Section	No. of Objects Accessioned	% of total Objects Accessioned
Art	14,062	1,634	11.62
Anthropology	9,178	1,427	15.55
Archaeology	79,406	81,491	102.63
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,02,646</b>	<b>84,552</b>	

It can be seen from above that not all the objects possessed by the Museum were accessioned. While in the Art and Anthropology sections, 88.38 *per cent* to 84.45 *per cent* of the objects were not accessioned, in the Archaeology section, the number of objects accessioned was more than the number of objects possessed by the Museum. The Museum attributed the discrepancy in the figures to a large number of transfers of objects between the Museum and the different Surveys, viz, Botanical, Zoological, Geological and Anthropological. No record was, however, maintained of such transfers, in the absence of which the authenticity of the figures or the physical existence of the unaccessioned objects could not be established.

In the absence of accession there was no mechanism to detect theft or loss of any of these unaccessioned objects. Despite the wide discrepancies between the numbers of objects possessed and accessioned, the Museum did not prepare a time-bound plan for completing the work of accessioning and reconciling the discrepancies in respect of the archaeological objects.

**The Asiatic Society** claimed to possess 59,523 art objects as on 31 March 2004, which included 46,994 manuscripts. Out of this, only 28,423 manuscripts (47.74 *per cent* of total objects) were accessioned till November 2004. Though the majority of objects were yet to be accessioned, the Society never prepared any action plan for completing the work.

**The Indian Museum** also received art objects from the Anthropological Survey of India (ASI) and the Asiatic Society during 1966-1967 along with registers indicating details of the objects. These objects were subsequently accessioned by the Museum without verifying or reconciling the same with the registers received from the Anthropological Survey of India (ASI) and the Asiatic Society. As such, the Museum was not in a position to identify theft/loss of artefacts, if any, of the originally received objects from the Society.

### **3.9.4 Inadequate Photo-Documentation of Art Objects**

A Photography Unit was set up in the **Indian Museum** in 1964 for photo documentation of art objects. Apart from other advantages, photo documentation would also establish the existence of the art objects. The Museum did not adopt any policy nor specified any procedure to photograph the art objects and to preserve their negatives. The negative registers where details regarding the photo-documentation work were recorded did not have any entry in respect of Art and Anthropological Sections after October 1983 and May 1986 respectively. It was seen from the registers maintained by the Photography Unit that out of 1,02,646 objects possessed by the Museum, only 8,587 were photo-documented. The remaining 94,059 objects, representing 91.64 *per cent* of the total holdings, were yet to be photo-documented as of March 2004. The Museum did not prepare any plan for accomplishing this task either.

The **Victoria Memorial Hall** in their Annual Action Plan for 2003-04 had set a target for photo documentation of 2000 objects. Of this, only 786 objects were photo-documented during 2003-04. No reason for such huge shortfall was given by the Memorial.

**The Asiatic Society** had established their Reprography Unit in 1964. The unit was further augmented in 1985 with the procurement of modern electronic devices for the purpose of documentation and preservation of old and rare collections. In order to preserve old books and manuscripts, the Unit produced microfilm and microfiche<sup>2</sup> from the old and rare books. The targets and achievements of the unit during 2000-01 to 2003-04 are shown in Table 4:

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<sup>2</sup> Two-dimensional layout of micro images on sheet film.

**Table 4: Performance of Reprography Unit of the Asiatic Society**

Year	Target		Achievement		Percentage of Shortfall	
	Microfilm	Microfiche	Microfilm	Microfiche	Microfilm	Microfiche
2000-01	25000	5000	19000	750	24	85
2001-02	25000	5000	7510	2500	69.96	50
2002-03	10000	10000	9494	226	5.06	97.74
2003-04	8000	12000	9026	Nil	Excess	100
<b>Total</b>	<b>68000</b>	<b>32000</b>	<b>45030</b>	<b>3476</b>	<b>33.78</b>	<b>89.14</b>

It is evident from the above that the Society had failed to achieve its own targets and there was a shortfall of 34 *per cent* and 89 *per cent* in the production of microfilm and microfiche respectively during the period 2000-01 to 2003-04. No reason could be furnished by the Society for such significant shortfall in targets.

### 3.9.5 Digitisation and Computerised Documentation of Art Objects

Digitisation<sup>3</sup> involves acquiring, converting, storing and providing information in a standardised, organised format and availability on demand from a common system accessible to the users of museum objects for various purposes. The objective of digitization is easy retrieval of data and ability to make entries of data into the main database. Computerised documentation in contrast involves storing information about the objects (such as condition of the object, its collection data etc.) in a database in computer, with or without digitisation of the corresponding objects.

The Computer Unit of the **Indian Museum** took up the work of computerised documentation system of artefacts in 1993 and the project of digitization of museum objects subsequently. Audit ascertained that out of a total of 1,02,646 holdings, the unit was able to complete computerised documentation of 86,979 objects and digitization of 4,573 objects as of March 2004. Digitisation work of the remaining 98,073 objects, representing 95.54 *per cent* of the total holdings, was yet to be undertaken as of March, 2004. The Museum, did not prepare any time-bound action plan to complete the work, despite underperformance of the Unit. The Museum assured in September 2004 to prepare a perspective plan to complete the digitization work within a period of five years.

**The Asiatic Society** had a microfilm scanner with a printer costing Rs. 10.05 lakh installed in March 2003. The scanner could be used to scan images from the microfilm/ microfiche. The scanned and digitised images could then be

<sup>3</sup> Digitisation means conversion of analog data to digital formats and preparation of textual and image data of artefacts.

stored in the computer. As the Society did not purchase any computer for this purpose, digitisation of the art objects could not be undertaken as of March 2004, thereby frustrating the very objective behind the purchase of the scanner and the printer. The approach of the Society thus lacked systematic planning and co-ordination.

### **3.9.6 Absence of Physical Verification of Art Objects by the Institutions**

None of the three Institutions conducted any physical verification of the art objects possessed by them during the last five years. As such, the physical existence and condition of the art objects as shown in the records of the Institutions could not be ascertained in audit. This fact was repeatedly mentioned in the Separate Audit Reports issued to the Institutes every year.

### **3.9.7 Recommendations:**

- *The Accession Registers may be maintained centrally and these registers should be regularly updated. A time bound action plan may be immediately drawn up by both the Indian Museum as well as the Asiatic Society for completing the documentation work relating to the accessioning of all art objects possessed by these Institutions at the earliest. Possibility of use of electronic scanning or any suitable technology may be explored to expedite the process.*
- *All discrepancies in accessioning of the art objects should be reconciled by adopting a strict time-bound programme for the same.*
- *Photo-documentation and digitisation work may be completed similarly in a time bound manner and with adequate seriousness.*
- *A system of regular and periodic physical verification of all art objects possessed by the Institutions should be instituted immediately. Proper training may be imparted to the staff designated for this purpose.*

### **3.10 Conservation of Art Objects**

#### **3.10.1 Inadequate Expenditure Towards Conservation**

The following table shows the expenditure incurred by the three Institutions on conservation/ restoration:

**Table 5: Expenditure on Conservation/ Restoration against Budgetary Allocations of the Institutions**

(Rupees in lakh)

Years	Indian Museum			Victoria Memorial Hall			Asiatic Society		
	BE	RE	Actual	BE	RE	Actual	BE	RE	Actual
1999-00	16.00	7.00	3.88	NA	NA	7.00	0.22	0.22	5.49
2000-01	8.00	6.00	10.91	8.00	8.00	7.00	0.09	NA	3.12
2001-02	10.00	7.20	1.34	6.00	6.00	4.00	5.50	4.50	2.55
2002-03	9.00	4.00	3.52	10.00	10.00	7.75	16.00	11.50	7.95
2003-04	6.00	4.00	3.33	10.00	10.00	4.85	12.00	12.50	9.06

There was significant variation between the expenditure incurred by the three Institutions and the estimates, indicating the absence of a systematic approach to the task of conservation/ restoration of historical or art objects.

### **3.10.2 Inadequate Conservation and Restoration Efforts by the Indian Museum**

There was no system in any of the three Institutions to identify the nature of damages to the art objects and to prepare reports indicating priority of their conservation.

#### **The Indian Museum**

There was no system of periodical checking of the stores or galleries by the Conservation Unit for identification of damages, indicating the absence of a systematic approach to the conservation of artefacts. The Art, Archaeology and Anthropological Sections of Indian Museum sent the identified artefacts on their own to the Conservation Unit for conservation purposes. The estimated time required for completion of work was also not recorded and no completion report was ever prepared. In the absence of any priority list indicating the total number of objects requiring conservation/ restoration, it was not possible to determine the extent of conservation work yet to be completed.

The Review Committee set up in December 1992 by the Board of Trustees of the Indian Museum mentioned in its report that the conservation laboratory of the Museum was in a position to treat and conserve about 1000 antiquities per year. However, the Museum could treat only 1,547 objects in five years which represented 30.94 *per cent* of the capacity. No reason for such underperformance was furnished to audit.

**Table 6: Conservation Work Undertaken by Indian Museum**

Year	Preventive Conservation	Curative Conservation	Total Conservation work done
1999-00	144	16	160
2000-01	264	6	270
2001-02	127	77	204
2002-03	230	26	256
2003-04	560	97	657
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,325</b>	<b>222</b>	<b>1,547</b>

With a view to rendering assistance to small Museums for conservation of the artefacts and to conduct workshops for the purpose, the Indian Museum in 1998-99 acquired a mobile conservation laboratory at a cost of Rs. 7.37 lakh having instruments and chemicals required for restoration. The activities of the mobile laboratory during 1999-2004 are as shown in table 7:

**Table 7: Underperformance of Mobile Laboratory**

Year	No. of Museums Attended	No. of days	No. of artefacts treated
1999-00	13	53	239
2000-01	8	28	438
2001-02	2	6	11
2002-03	2	8	155
2003-04	3	17	126
<b>Total</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>112</b>	<b>969</b>

The laboratory could attend to only 28 museums within the state of West Bengal using a total of only 112 days during the last five years. Reasons for such low performance of the mobile laboratory over the years were not furnished to Audit. The Museum, however, stated in September 2004 that adequate steps would be taken for optimum utilisation of the laboratory.

#### **The Asiatic Society**

In 1986, the Asiatic Society had a collection of 75 oil paintings. As the condition of most of the paintings was unsatisfactory, in January 1986, the Society sent nine paintings for restoration to the National Museum, New Delhi, which returned the paintings in January 1990 after restoration.

The Society, however, was of the opinion that the paintings were not properly restored.

In March 1991 the Society entrusted the work of restoring these nine painting and five additional paintings to a private restorer, who restored only three paintings till December 2000, when the Society terminated his contract on the grounds of unsatisfactory performance. The restorer, however, alleged in October 2000 that the Society had provided him with the necessary infrastructure and chemicals only after a lapse of seven years, resulting in the delay. In reply to Audit, the Society conceded that there were space and other infrastructural constraints. The fact, however, remains that restoration of most of the paintings could not be completed even within a span of over 18 years.

The Society informed Audit that it had sought Rs. 5 lakh from the Ministry of Tourism and Culture in July 2002 for the purpose of restoration work to be undertaken within the Society premises by engaging National Research Laboratory for Conservation, Lucknow, as advised by the then Minister of Tourism and Culture, but could not undertake any further restoration since the money was not received from the Ministry.

### **3.10.3 Absence of Synergy in Conservation Efforts of the Institutions**

As mentioned already, in para 3.10.2 the Indian Museum has a Conservation Unit but its services were never availed of by the other two Institutions. The three Institutions did not synergise their operations and resources for the purposes of conservation and restoration of their objects. The strength areas of each of these Institutions in terms of their restoration and conservation capability should be identified and synergised.

### **3.10.4 Absence of a System of Training Staff Members in Conservation Techniques**

Audit ascertained that none of the three Institutions had any programme and earmarked budget for training of their staff, in the absence of which the Institutions had to depend on the limited private expertise available in conservation/ restoration of art objects within the country. In the absence of any effort towards in-house capacity building in these areas, the conservation efforts of the Institutions suffered.



### 3.10.5 Recommendations

- *The Institutions should introduce regular training of staff members in techniques of conservation/ restoration of art objects through earmarked training budget. Possibilities of involving the expert bodies, universities and institutions in training efforts may be explored.*
- *Appropriate mechanisms should be instituted by all the three Institutions to identify art objects requiring restoration/ conservation and a time schedule drawn up for their restoration.*
- *Infrastructure for restoration and conservation work should be created in the Institutions. For this purpose, the Institutions should synergise their resources and capabilities and each one should identify their speciality area and develop on these areas for better and efficient utilisation of resources.*

### 3.11 Safe Custody of Art Objects

#### 3.11.1 Inadequacy of Security Systems

The Review Committee set up in December 1992 by the **Indian Museum** (as already referred to in para 3.10.2) recommended, *inter alia*, the installation of smoke detector and fire alarm system. The Indian Museum, however, did not install the equipment till November 2004. Further, the capital expenditure made for purchase of security equipment was insignificant compared to the revenue expenditure on security of the Museum as seen from Table 8:

**Table 8: Capital Expenditure on Security made by Indian Museum**

(Rupees in lakh)

Year	Capital Expenditure (A)	Revenue (B)	A as percentage of B
1999-00	14.95 <sup>4</sup>	25.78	58.00
2000-01	6.95	122.25	5.69
2001-02	2.78	37.49	7.41
2002-03	0	60.43	0
2003-04	Not Verifiable	46.46	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>24.68</b>	<b>231.98</b>	<b>10.63</b>

Through a process of direct observation, Audit also noticed several security lapses in the galleries open to public. The general public could approach the several priceless objects. Audit noticed several inscriptions and scribbles

<sup>4</sup> Due to installation of Closed Circuit Television System.

made by the visitors on the enclosures where architectural pieces were kept, some just below the pedestals of the statues.

In December, 2004, the statue 'Buddha Head' (Sarnath) of 5<sup>th</sup> century AD was reported missing from the Museum. The area where the theft occurred was not covered by close circuit television system. The Museum confirmed the theft. It also stated on 30 December 2004 that the value of the antiquity had not been assessed. In the absence of assessment, the loss could not be quantified.

With a view to strengthening the security arrangement of the galleries, in May 1990, the **Victoria Memorial** commissioned a close circuit television system costing Rs. 14.02 lakh. However, the system was lying inoperative since November 2002 as it was unserviceable and outdated.

The Chief Security Officer, Ministry of Home Affairs, conducted a survey of the security management of **The Asiatic Society** during September-October 1993 and submitted a report in October 1993. The report, *inter alia*, contained the following recommendations:

1. Increase in the number of cameras for close circuit TV.
2. Introduction of visitor's pass system.
3. Modification and renovation work at main gate.
4. Installation of walkie-talkie radio transmission system.

Audit ascertained that the Society did not take any action to implement any of these measures till November 2004.

### **3.11.2 Recruitment of Security Guards without Adequate Training and Experience**

The service rules for employees of the Indian Museum provided that only Class VIII passed ex-servicemen with at least 10 years of regular service were eligible for direct recruitment as security guards. It was observed that of the 52 security guards appointed between November 1984 and April 2003, as many as 30 were not ex-servicemen. None of them had ever been trained in security aspects by the Museum, thereby seriously jeopardising and compromising the security interests of the Museum.

The Society's service rule for employees effective from December 1998 also provided that only Class VIII passed Ex-Servicemen with certificate and proficiency in use of fire fighting equipment were eligible for direct

recruitment as security guards. It was observed that of the 32 Security Guards who were not ex-servicemen and were appointed prior to 1998, only six Security Guards had been imparted training in fire fighting. The remaining 26 Security Guards did not have any training in fire fighting. This compromised the security of the Society's objects.

### **3.11.3 Improper Storage of Artefacts by Indian Museum and Victoria Memorial**

Proper storage facilities with effective air-conditioning and adequate air-circulation are essential in order to avoid deterioration of artefacts. Audit ascertained that the store room of the Indian Museum and Victoria Memorial Hall were neither air-conditioned nor had adequate air circulation facilities. The store room of Victoria Memorial Hall also had poor lighting and were damp due to the continuous seepage of water. Improper preservation of art objects would inevitably lead to their deterioration. The Memorial stated that the building and the roof were in dilapidated conditions due to non-repair of the monument for decades. As a result the stores were not in ideal conditions. The stores of Asiatic Society were, however, in relatively good condition.

### **3.11.4 Recommendations**

- *The Institutions, especially Indian Museum and Victoria Memorial Hall, should urgently formulate a time bound action plan for comprehensive improvement in the storage conditions of the art objects possessed by them by recurring or re-appropriating existing funds.*
- *Appropriate security mechanisms should be put in place to protect the priceless objects possessed by these Institutions against theft or damage or defacement.*
- *The closed circuit television system installed in the Victoria Memorial Hall should immediately be made operational for ensuring proper surveillance of the art objects.*
- *The Asiatic Society should take appropriate and immediate measures to ensure safe custody of the invaluable art objects and manuscripts in its possession.*
- *Proper and adequate training arrangements for security guards recruited by the Indian Museum and Asiatic Society should be instituted.*

The matter was referred to the Ministry December 2004; its reply was awaited as of January 2005.