

2 LOCAL HERITAGE

Why Museum Visits Are Important

- ◆ Museums usually store and exhibit some of the finest creative achievements of human beings that can be shared by everyone.
- ◆ Museums offer direct experiences with original historic objects.
- ◆ Museums contribute to our knowing of who we are.
- ◆ Museums offer an informal environment for self, group, school, class, and family learning, multidisciplinary activities and value education.
- ◆ Interaction with museum collections through a process of exploration and discovery can generate further interest in the subject under study.
- ◆ Museums can foster the creative potential of their visitors.

Why are museums called learning centres?

Educational Goals of a Museum Visit

- ◆ Introduction to the idea of a museum and using the institution as a valuable learning resource
- ◆ Introduction to various art forms
- ◆ Development of observational skills
- ◆ Enhancement of writing and verbal skills
- ◆ Development of powers of deduction and conclusion
- ◆ Museums help to make learning informative, interesting and fun
- ◆ Visits help to create awareness of the need to care for ancient treasures and rare examples of crafts.



ACTIVITY 2.1**MUSEUM VISIT***Class : XI and XII**Time : Homework*

A museum is a place where objects of historic, artistic and scientific value and importance are kept, for purposes of study, preservation and display for the public. Some of the different kinds of museums in India are:

- ◆ National museums
- ◆ State museums
- ◆ Regional museums
- ◆ Art museums
- ◆ Anthropological museums
- ◆ History museums
- ◆ Memorial museums
- ◆ Military museums
- ◆ Museums of science and technology
- ◆ Other specialised museums like rail museums, museums of the defence forces etc.

What is the purpose of a museum?

SUGGESTED ACTIVITY

Make a list of the types of museums in your town/city/locality.

- ◆ List the speciality of the museum
- ◆ Complete the list with the address, timings and routes to each of the museums

Kavad, Gujarat



ACTIVITY 2.2**HISTORY'S MYSTERIES***Class : XI**Time : Museum visit*

An object has no life until you give it meaning. Careful observation of objects in a museum can help to unravel many secrets of the past. Some information on the object may be already given to you in the museum. You may find this information on a label or a text panel near the object. Record this information carefully. Within a gallery choose one object or a set of objects and complete the exercise that follows. The object can be a ceramic pot, painting, piece of jewellery, sculpture, textile etc.

Are there any unusual museums in your locality?

EXERCISE

Record whatever information you can get by looking at and studying the chosen object.

- ◆ What is the object?
- ◆ What is it made of?
- ◆ What skills are involved in making it?
- ◆ Was it made by hand or machine?
- ◆ What tools were used to make it?
- ◆ What clues does it give of the period to which it belongs?
- ◆ What can we understand of the culture and community that produced this object?
- ◆ What features of the object attracted you to choose it for this study?
- ◆ Are similar objects made today?
- ◆ How do they differ from the museum object in design, function and skill/artistry?



*Creations made of waste,
Rock Garden, Chandigarh*

ACTIVITY 2.3**HISTORIC EXAMPLES OF CRAFTS***Class : XI and XII**Time : Museum visit*

What makes an interesting display in a museum?

If you are studying a particular craft in your theory or practical class, see if you can find historic examples of it in the local museum. Write a small essay of 200 words on the museum object. Study the object to understand the skills and techniques used in its manufacture. Do they differ from the skills and techniques used today? Have some of the skills and techniques disappeared?

A variety of museum displays



ACTIVITY 2.4**DIMINISHING HERITAGE***Class : XII**Time : Homework*

Read the two passages given below on the important role of craft in the economic and cultural life of our country. Use it as a spur for organising a class debate or discussion.

...What are all these chandeliers and lamps and European-made chairs and smart clothes and hats and English coats and bonnets and frocks and silver mounted canes and all the luxurious fittings of your houses, but trophies of India's misery, mementoes of India's starvation! Every rupee you have spent on European-made articles is a rupee of which you have robbed your poor brethren, honest handicraftsmen who can now no longer earn a living...

— From a speech by a radical member of the Indian National Congress, 1891

The disappearance of a skill is akin to the loss of a species, the erasing or diminishing of heritage...

Today a clear, precise comprehension of the role of craft in the economic and cultural life of the country is necessary. Do we visualise a scenario where machine-made things will totally replace hand-created artefacts? Can we imagine rural communities using only machine-made synthetic products in their environment, in their homes and on their bodies? ... Do we visualise that in the future crafts with their associated skills will completely disappear from the environment?

This scenario is inevitable unless there is extreme vigilance. With the increasing introduction of a plastic culture into rural markets, with the breakdown of traditional values and with the introduction of consumerism into the rural ethos, the instinctive response to colour and form threatens to disappear. Skills become obsolete.

Already we see that the hand-beaten brass utensils, burnished gold, which made the kitchen of rural India of yesterday a focus of visual delight, have disappeared to become antiques in museums.

Stainless steel and aluminium have replaced brass and copper in village homes. Clay roof tiles baked in firewood bhattis, placed on projecting roofs – each tile with its uneven tones of terracotta and black, the colours determined by fire and smoke, that unique element of chance germinal to all creation have disappeared...



How long does a plastic pot last?
Do you think it is a good
substitute for a clay or metal pot?



The potter in village societies is no longer engaged in firing roof tiles. Terracotta tiled roofs are being replaced by concrete slabs — a material which increases heat and is oppressive in small homes...

The special beauty of texture, the feel of a reed-woven mat under bare feet; the attention that flows from the weaver's hands and eyes, as he throws the shuttle that results in an uneven weave, regarded as a flaw in a mechanical, materialistic world; yet in the world of creation, the 'flaw' is what gives the cloth uniqueness, for no two hand-woven cloths are identical. The hand of the craftsman is a living hand and the hand-woven cloth worn next to the skin breathes and transmits energy.

– PUPUL JAYKAR, *The Children of Barren Women*



Clay roof-tiles, Madhya Pradesh



DISCUSSION AND ESSAY TOPICS

1. What are the main ideas in these two passages?
2. How do crafts contribute to the economic and cultural life of the country?
3. How has the introduction of plastics and industrialisation caused the breakdown of traditional values?
4. How can traditional craftspersons compete with cheaper, mass-produced factory-made goods?
5. What are the differences between factory-made and hand-made objects according to Pupul Jaykar? Do you agree?
6. What can handicrafts offer that mechanically-produced objects cannot?
7. If factory-made objects guarantee a higher level of standardisation why opt for traditional handicrafts?
8. When the ritual significance of a craft object is lost what happens to the craft? Explain with examples from your home.
9. When images of gods are mass-produced and plastic Ganesh images are made in China, what meaning and significance does it have to the consumer and producer?
10. How does the disappearance of a skill diminish and weaken heritage?

Over the centuries craft traditions have changed: members of crafts community have moved to other regions, changed their profession and craft products have evolved to meet new demands. Read the following extract from a case study and reflect on the various causes of change in the craft sector.

Traditional thatch-roofed house, Assam



Where can craftspeople learn new designs and techniques?

From Chamba to California

“I can be found at the Dogra Bazaar in Chamba. Chamba is a small hill town in Himachal Pradesh — do you know?” asked Hakam Singh. He was sitting in the middle of an impressive display of figurines sculptured in a variety of metal alloys. The place is Surajkund, just outside New Delhi, where the annual crafts mela is held every February.

Hakam Singh is dressed in a black coat, with a green muffler around his neck. He wears a bright Kulu cap on his head and sports a short black beard. He seems quite at home in this metropolis of Delhi. “I come very often to the Crafts Museum in your city,” he says. “My craft has been recognised in this centre. I learn techniques and designs to improve my craft as well as make new contacts.” The new contacts have filled his order book with buyers as far away as California. He has also made friends with the other craftsmen visiting the museum, which in turn has led him to learning other crafts. Designs based on photographs reproduced in books on Indian crafts have inspired him to create new objects in metal. “Once you are a craftsman and have an eye for all things beautiful, then moving from one craft to another is fascinating. Of course it has to be somewhat related to one’s own original art,” says a proud Hakam Singh.

Strangely though, Hakam Singh is a dentist’s technician by training, and has worked with doctors in hospitals. His father was also a ‘dentist’ with the British, and he went to work all the way to Lahore. The father and son team had deviated from the family

Metal sculpture, Bihar



tradition of craftsmanship in gold and silver jewellery. It was while Hakam Singh was working in a hospital that he decided to renew his ‘hobby’ of sculpting in metal. As a young boy he had learnt this craft from a friend’s family. That family is one of the three traditional families left in Chamba who still work in the lost wax and sand casting methods of metal craft using the mediums of brass, gunmetal, and other alloys.

Over the years he has perfected his technique through interaction with other craftsmen and with a much wider exposure than most traditional craftsmen, Hakam Singh has become a master

craftsman today. Hakam Singh believes in sharing his skills. He has joined an association of craftsmen where artisans like himself transfer their craft skills to young teenagers who work as ragpickers, in order to train them for an alternate means of livelihood. Their first project-cum-workshop was held recently in Bhilwara in Rajasthan. The association covers the costs of travel, food and lodging, while the artisans spend a month training street children.

After hearing his fascinating story and just before we left, Hakam Singh adds "...now I'm leaving for California on an invitation from a big American collector. He will provide me with tickets, hospitality and materials and pay me. I will stay with him for three months and make designs that he has chosen for himself in gold, silver and bronze..."

– PRITI JAIN, Exploring Indian Crafts



DISCUSSION AND ESSAY TOPICS

1. What happens to the traditional craftsman when he has to produce objects that have no religious significance for him, and no local market?
2. How will such a person remain connected to his own background? Is there a need for him to remain connected?
3. What craft traditions were once famous in your region and why have they disappeared? What can be done to revive them?

Hand-crafted jewellery in different metals



