

Curating a Tribal Museum: A Study of Nehru Centenary Tribal Museum, Hyderabad

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By

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that dissertation entitled “**Curating a Tribal Museum, A Study of Nehru Centenary Tribal Museum, Hyderabad**” submitted by **Fathima Noora** bearing Reg. no. **19SSHL04** in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Master of Philosophy in Sociology is a bonafide work carried out by her under my supervision and guidance.

The dissertation has not been submitted previously in part or in full to this or any other University or Institution for the award of any degree or diploma.

Signature of the Supervisor

Head of the Department

Dean of the School

DECLARATION

I, **Fathima Noora**, hereby declare that this Dissertation entitled, “**Curating a Tribal Museum: A Study of Nehru Centenary Tribal Museum, Hyderabad**”, submitted by me under the guidance and supervision of **Dr. Hoineilhing Sitlhou** is a bonafide research work. I also declare that it has not been submitted previously in part or in full to this University or any other University or Institution for the award of any degree or diploma.

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Chapter- 1

Introduction

Heritage has been variously imagined and practiced in the past. Heritage is mostly recognized as that which is inherited; it is believed to be passed down from the ancestors. Heritage could be an image, object, practice, property or anything that is considered inherited. The study aims to problematize this assumption in two ways: firstly, by reaffirming that heritage is always negotiated and contested by underlining its inescapable political character and highlighting its relevance in the making of the nation-state, and secondly, relating the problem of heritage to the making of ‘tribal’ heritage, and thus, to the articulation of dominance and subordination and the hierarchical ordering of the society.

Heritage, albeit subjective, is foremost, in David Harvey’s vocabulary, a “process” or a “verb” filtered with reference to the present of a society, but intrinsically reflective of its past (Harvey, 2001, p.327). There is no dearth of definitions or theories on heritage and I do not intend to delve into that indefinite realm. However, it is not enough to debate the subjective nucleus of heritage, it is also necessary to take account of how heritage-making plays out in the making of a nation. Heritage sites play an essential role in molding and mirroring a society’s culture, history, and identity. The museum is one such institution through which the heritage-making process can be observed. Like other heritage markers, museums selectively demarcate, acknowledge, and preserve a particular tangible and intangible cultural patrimony as representative of the collective heritage stories. Hence, museums elude the definition of just being a repository of objects for display. They are formulated for a purpose, and the contours of

the purpose have been changing over a period of time depending on their interrelationship with power and authority.

Museum as an institution has originated as part of a search for a European identity during the Renaissance and later, the Enlightenment period. The private collections of aristocrats and royalties that had been previously displayed only to the limited gaze were then made accessible to the public gaze which led to the formation of this modern institution which was conceived as a pedagogic space, a disciplinary institution and an instrument of state governmentality as Bennett puts it. Museums' role extended in the postcolonial period; newly formed nations like India, after surviving numerous economic and political crises, needed to represent themselves as a nation to their diverse peoples and, as a result, the museums became a key site where identity politics and the essentialization of cultures took place. With the eagerness to structure a new nation that caters to its different cultures, it was necessary to bring in the domains of the discriminated. Museums are considered important entry points to bring these neglected voices into the mainstream discourses as they contest and validate histories, cultures and identities. The establishment of tribal museums is one such example.

The adivasi population in India has had a turbulent history and even now has a complex relationship with political power. The nexus between the adivasi communities and their representation in the heritage is problematic even after eight decades of Independence. In the context of this ongoing tribal representation in the Indian heritage market and a boom of proposals for tribal memorials and “Tribal Freedom Fighters’ Museums”, the study critically examines the tribal representations and the heritage-making process. With reference to the tribal museum in the newly formed Telangana State, whose tribal population with thirty-two communities as Scheduled Tribes, constitute 9 percent of the total population in the State

(Census 2011), the study vigilantly traverses through the complexities of marking out a distinct and unique history in order to compute the historical peaceful co-existence of different communities.

Research Question

The study *Curating a Tribal Museum: A study of Nehru Centenary Tribal Museum in Hyderabad* engages with the politics and the practices involved in curating a tribal museum to bring into light the narratives effaced with the exhibits and demonstrates how the construction of the ‘tribal’ category is set in motion through the heritage practices by investigating what aspects of a tribal group are being represented in a tribal museum and how the state deploys these representations.

In the introduction, further, I aim to put forward the guiding research objectives and then discuss the nature of the fieldwork. Before doing so, I shall discuss the key discourses and the shifts involved largely in the area of museology to ground the study in its broader branch of knowledge and offer its wider scope.

Major discussions in literature

With the influence of cultural theory and the ‘critical turn’ during the 1980s in the new humanities, scholarly articles displayed great interest in museums. At different points of time, the existing thoughts were elaborated and also, different lines of thought were developed such as the association of museums with colonialism, their role in knowledge production and the creation of historical canons, their practice of effacing the minorities and promoting certain heritage values and so on, which promulgated a set of views on museum studies. Contrary to the old studies

concerning the contents of the museum, the new museology, inspired mainly by Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu, critically analyzed the institution of the museum. Along with Bourdieu who extensively researched on art museums and argues that art institutions are tools of cultural reproduction (Bourdieu and Darbel, 1991), Foucault's (1986) nascent and fragmented comments on museum space as heterotopias, that are real places, which can be "lived in, visited or, in general, empirically experienced in an obvious fashion", has led to a sea of critical museum studies (Deshpande, 1995, pp. 3220-3221).

The earlier critical works on museums in the 1980s and early 1990s mainly emerged from the Marxian terrain, such as that of Antonio Gramsci and Louis Althusser. Museums were analyzed as an ideological state apparatus that facilitated in maintaining the already existing power interests. Accordingly, museums thus depicted a structured binary power relation through ideology. For instance, Tony Bennett (1988) argues that the museum is the locus of elite interests and therefore are a receptacle that materializes the dominant classes' power by displaying their collections and promoting a general acceptance of their cultural authority. In nineteenth century Britain, Bennett elucidates that museums also became a major vehicle to facilitate the state's new moral and educative role, thus, intending to instruct the public.

Consequently, drawing from the intellectual matrix of Foucauldian thought, a different form of analysis was applied to museums. For example, Bennett (1988, 1995) links Foucault's *disciplinary power* and *governmentality* concepts to the emergence of the public museum in the nineteenth century. He argued that the museum as an institution was also designed as a disciplinary institution to enable citizens to regulate themselves. Similarly, Eilean Hooper-Greenhill (1992) also discusses the concept of "disciplinary museum". Hooper-Greenhill was also interested in tracing the trajectory of the evolution of the institution called museums.

Borrowing from Foucault's three major epistemes, namely- the Renaissance, the classical and the modern- that govern the production of knowledge from *The Order of Things* (1966), Hooper-Greenhill offers a description of the role of museums in the construction of knowledge at specific times. Kevin Hetherington painstakingly categorized the works of Hooper Greenhill and Bennett as influenced from the early (1966) and later (1975) writings of Foucault on the discourse and the disciplinary power respectively following Deluze's reading of Foucault. Hetherington exposed the abandoned middle phase during which Foucault dealt with the archeology (1974) and the character of archives to set out a third model of the museum. Critiquing Hooper Greenhill and Bennett for their over-emphasis on discourse and relations of power respectively, Hetherington argued that museums are "spaces of monadic archive", defined "by an irresolvable tension between establishing the truth in discursive and non-discursive forms" (Hetherington, 2015:37).

A different form of analysis emerged with the rise of nationalism. Benedict Anderson (1983) in his pathbreaking account of the emergence of the modern nation state with the development of an "imagined community", later added three logos namely, the Census, the Map and the Museum to illustrate how the implementation of these colonial logos of control and rule were adopted to shape post-colonial states. In the context of the museums, Anderson states that like "the museumising imagination", museums are "profoundly political" (Anderson, [1983] 1991, p.178) and represents the government's sovereign hold over national history. Therefore, the early critiques largely questioned the museum as an institution and its social function in particular.

However, James Clifford connected Mary Louise Pratt's concept of the *contact zone* (1991) to the museums. Clifford (1997) defined museums as colonial constructs of contact

zones – a place for dialogue where cultures meet/conflict (Boast,2011, pp.57-58). In other words, Clifford argued museums are a matrix for transculturation.

Following Clifford, the contemporary research works on museums departs mainly from the museum nation-state dialogue and the institutional critique of museums, and focuses on the public culture in museums, the display practices, the community engagements and so on. For instance, Andrea Witcomb (2003) rejected the understanding of museums as purely an effect of governmentality and addressed the agency of curators and the community groups represented to claim that, with the new social movements, emerging museums are forced to reassess and recognize the plurality of identities. Another alternative narrative on museums is seen in the work of the renowned cultural anthropologist Sharon Macdonald. Taking up Hermann Lubbe's term musealisation used in 1980 for the dramatic proliferation of museums in Germany and further evoking various musealisation theories (citing Joachim Ritter, and Andreas Huyssen), Macdonald discusses the politics of the exhibits and "the musealisation of everyday life" (Macdonald, 2013, p.137). Macdonald sharply depicts the radical transformation of the nature of an ordinary object after displaying them in the museums. Further, in the light of contemporary Europe's transcultural migrant identities, Macdonald posits the challenges posed to heritage agencies and explicates museums as sites of contested history and cultural meanings rather than a collective national conscience.

Some of the other recent research works engage with question of the role of museums being the new memory cartography (Huyssen, 2003), serving as spaces that categorize cultural and ethnic differences (Loukaitou-Sideris and Gordach, 2004), visitor's reception (Macdonald, 2002) and the space-time conjugation in museums (Macdonald, 2013). In addition, there is

another set of studies focusing on indigenous museums and community-based museums of native people and minorities located in the postcolonial lands (e.g., Karp et al., 1992).

The scholarships that emerged from the Indian lexicon mainly toiled with the association of museums with colonial power and the changing role of the concept of museum. For instance, Tapati Guha-Thakurta (1997, 2004) traced the history of Indian museums and reflects on the failure of museums in India to turn away from the imperial mold to new centers of disciplinary specialization. Kavita Singh (2002) illustrated that the post-colonial India inherited the nationhood model of their former colonizers by recasting museums as national to assert India as a sovereign land. An exploration of Romila Thapar's (2014) and Mahua Chakrabarti's (2016) writings on museums illustrated the changing contours of museums in India since the establishment of the Indian museum in 1814 and discussed the museum's future. Saloni Mathur and Kavita Singh (2015) invigorates the distinctiveness of museums in South Asia and puts forward various themes that reflect culture specific understanding of museum and its contents. There other new studies elucidating the relationship between museums and minority history. For example, Jangkhomang Guite (2011) looks at how state-sponsored public spaces such as museums, memorials, etc. represent the dominant elite past under the notion of a shared past in a multi-cultural and multi-ethnic North-Eastern society and thereby, became battlegrounds of contested memory. In her article published in 2002, Neela Karnik teased out the colonial and post-colonial Indian tendency to displace and "museumize" the tribe. Rose Sebastian (2017) poses tribal museums as minority discourses that can undo the power of nationalist homogenization. However, she argues that the tribal museums are intended to add "richness to the national past by assuming the privileged position of the modern citizen with nation-state as the benefactor" (Sebastian, 2017, p.31). In the same vein, my attempt here shall be to investigate

the sanctity of the tribal museums in the weaving of the post-colonial nation-state and establish how the exhibits intend to create/efface a particular kind of tribal knowledge for the public by becoming the officially recognized imprimatur of the tribal heritage. Although the literature on museums on its relationship to the tribal community is mushrooming, the masked practices involved in curating a tribal museum has often been under-analyzed. Providing an interdisciplinary analysis of the tribal museum and the curating practices associated with it, the study strives to contribute to the existing corpus of knowledge.

Research Objectives

Below are the three objectives of the study, followed by a brief description of how they have been accomplished.

- A. To understand the politics of representation in a tribal museum by analyzing the curatorial practices involved.
- B. To explore the relationship between the exhibits in a tribal museum and the adivasi groups and provide insights into how these exhibits are weaved as a tribal heritage.
- C. To locate the significance of tribal museums in a postcolonial nation-state.

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to investigate the narratives effaced by the tangible exhibits and illustrate the politics of display in the tribal museum. Hence, examining the

significance of representation in defining the ‘tribal’ category and in turn, locating the function of the tribal museum in the post-colonial nation-state.

I have tried to look at museums as a form of text and used tangible things as a reliable source of data collection to narrate the effaced history of the tribes. The approach also gives the perspective of those involved in curating the museum. This method is used to explore the rationale behind the form of exhibits deployed in the tribal museum, beginning from the choice of the design of the museum building, the selection, the classification and the positioning of artefacts to other aesthetic presentations and styles, such as to enclose artefacts in a glass gallery or not, to have a voice over on the information kiosk or not, the presence or absence of a soundscape in the museum etc. In doing so, I try to examine how these selections, classifications, styles and silencing (if any) perceive the larger political and cultural rationalities of the state. In his ethnography of the state, *Blurred Boundaries: The Discourse of Corruption, the Culture of Politics, and the Imagined State*, published in 1995, Akhil Gupta features the state by representing it through the various government agencies and public practices, through which the people constructed the state symbolically. His analysis is based on the “everyday practices of local bureaucracies and the *discursive construction* of the state in public culture” (Gupta, 1995, p.377). Analogously, the study attempts to look at the practices and exhibitionary styles involved in curating a tribal museum largely focusing on how the curator of a tribal museum pronounces a set of selected tangible and intangible assets to conceptualize the tribal domain.

Initially, the research proposal intended to concentrate on all of the four state-owned tribal museums of Telangana- Chenchu Lakshmi Museum, Mannanoor, Komaram Bheem Museum, Jodeghat, Sri Sammakka Saralamma Adivasi Museum, Medaram, and Nehru Centenary Tribal Museum, Hyderabad. Unfortunately, due to the paucity of time and the

restraints imposed by the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic upon the study, the research study focused on an in-depth study of one museum alone- the Nehru Centenary Tribal Museum. Situated in Masab Tank, Hyderabad, the museum was established in 2003 and contains over 400 tribal artifacts. It was chosen as the field site as it is currently the only museum that was revamped after the formation of Telangana state and it is easily accessible to visitors because of its location.

A key component of the fieldwork consisted of observational methods. In addition, the study also looked at the various secondary data, knowing that a close analysis approach might not enable an analysis of the wider contextual change involved in the curatorial practices.

Secondary Data and Archival Analysis

Along with the literature review conducted, archival sources that would assist the study were collected from the library from The Tribal Cultural Research & Training Institute situated adjacent to the NCTM. Basic information about the museum and its development were collected from the old and new pamphlets published between February 2003 to September 2020. Other documents, such as government web pages and reports, newspaper articles, and museum registers were read and translated when necessary in order to build up a picture of the functioning of the museums.

Fieldwork in the museum

The major part of data collection was done by a close observation of the exhibits which included habitat dioramas of tribes and material artifacts, an analysis of the brochures and the descriptions written on the labels and electronic monitors, and archival materials from the library

attached to the museum, trying to explore ways through which tangible objects can be interpreted. To gain a better understanding about the museum's curation approaches, the fieldwork consisted of in-depth conversations, and online-interviews with one of the curators at the NCTM, conducted over a month in two phases- between February 2021 to March 2021 and in August 2021. The conversations were in English. The information was recorded in writing during interviews. Owing to the hesitation of the curator to sit for a formal interview, I found it appropriate not to use a voice recorder. The questions we engaged with largely addressed the major theme of the study i.e., how are tribes being represented in a tribal museum? Some of the questions were; (i) What aspects of the tribes are represented? (ii) Why were they represented through dioramas? (iii) What was the principle used to select the tribes that were represented? (iv) Does the museum collaborate with the community? (v) How did the museum procure the material artifacts? (vi) What are the sources of the descriptions in the labels and electronic monitors? (vii) What is the rationale behind the system of categories created in the museum? and so on.

To ensure a fair and ethical research approach, before the fieldwork was conducted, an introductory letter was given to the curator of the institution, communicating the profile of the researcher, the purpose and needs of the research, to obtain an informed oral consent to proceed. It is also important to mention here that I am acutely aware of my position as a researcher who does not belong to a tribal group nor to the region of Telangana, and therefore, whenever possible, I have tried to incorporate diverse inputs from peers and resource persons who are more familiar with the field.

Overview of Thesis

In this introduction, I have set out the background of the study, research questions and the nature of the research. Further, this section aims to give an overview of the chapters that draw on different scholarly works to offer a broader conceptual framework pertinent to the study.

The second chapter, ‘Placing Tribal museums in the Evolution of Museums in India’, is concerned with the politics of representation and explores the sociopolitical factors underlying the construction of museums in India. In India, the first museum was a colonial employment. There are references to painting galleries called *chitrashalas* providing lessons in art, religion and history and collectors of special artifacts such as the collections of the Mughal princes, Sarfoji in Tanjore, and some small collections made by wealthy merchants in the pre-colonial history which suggest that accumulating and displaying valuable things were part of the Indian tradition (Ambrose and Paine, 1993; Thapar, 2014), but the idea of the museum as an institution quintessential to history and heritage was less familiar to India. As the chapter outlines, it was one of the fruits of the primary mission of the colonial authorities. Their need to establish control over the Indian people paved the way for larger ethnographies of various linguistic, religious and regional groups. It was in these ethnographic details that the Indian society was conceived as an amorphous complex organization. Later, in 1814, the Imperial Museum was established in Calcutta (currently the Indian Museum) by the British Empire to hold a representative Indian collection reflecting the colonial knowledge about India and its past. However, after Independence, the formation of the new *nation-state* was followed by a spate of activities, which were aimed at reinventing a separate identity from the colonial past. To assist the laborious construction of a ‘national consciousness’, the post-colonial Indian state curated museums and heritage sites akin to the tailoring of the national flag during the Indian Independence movement.

The chapter then examines how the museums gained momentum and traces the emergence of tribal museums in the post-colonial arena.

The third chapter ‘Exhibits and Narratives of a Tribal Museum’ analyzes critically the constitution of the Nehru Centenary Tribal Museum in Telangana. It aims to traverse the politics and practices behind the assessment through which select aspects of the tangible and intangible tribal assets become the tribal heritage of a nation. The chapter starts with a description of the field and then provides a close picture of the diverse forms of visual data in the museum underlining the rationale behind the exhibits. Further the chapter weaves the narrative that the museum space evokes with the help of Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of the chronotope.

The fourth chapter ‘Beyond “Primitiveness”: Demystifying the State’s Articulation’ poses to situate the role of the tribal museum as a post-colonial institution and investigates the politics and practices of nation-making. The question the chapter grapples with is: Is the tribal identity created in the colonial period conducive to the creation of a post-colonial heritage? The analysis will address whether the tribal museums cater to the interest of the state or the tribal communities. Drawing from Bourdieu, the study examines the significance of a tribal museum.

The last chapter ‘Conclusion: Towards an Inclusive Tribal Museum’ conducts an arduous task of summarizing the main arguments of the study and re-examines the objectives of the study to make concluding remarks.

Chapter-2

Placing Tribal museums in the Evolution of Museums in India

This chapter discusses the sociopolitical factors underlying the construction of tribal museums. To contextualize their emergence in India, the chapter looks into different historic events to show how the politics, rationality, and uses of certain objects during the colonial and post-colonial arena led to the formation of museums. The focus is on mapping the discourses that shaped the museums of India during the colonial rule and explores the consequences of its adaptation in the nationhood narrative after independence to materialize a ‘nation’ with a national heritage. Beginning with how and why the deployment of museums in colonial India started, the chapter unearths the significance of museums in amplifying a certain Indian-ness through a selected Indian collection carried out by the imperialist. Subsequently, the chapter explores the adoption of national museums and how the tribal museum played a pivotal role in the process of acculturation in independent India.

Colonial rule and the Museums: Collecting, Classifying and Exhibiting

The emergence of institutions dedicated to collections and their display in India traces its lineage to colonialism and anthropology. During the 16th and 17th centuries, even before India officially became a jewel on the British Crown, the Europeans encountered India through travel adventures and their collection of items of preciousity from India, including swords, gems, ornaments, and ivory caskets. By the early 17th century, with the advent of trade relations between India and Great Britain, the consuming classes in Europe came to know and experience India primarily through the textiles and other Indian products imported and sold by the British

East India Company (Cohn, 1996, p.77). In addition, the impact of the advancement of British imperium with the fall of Tipu Sultan and the siege of Seringapatam in 1799 was transmitted tangibly to Londoners by shipping Tipu's looted material legacy from his palace and the circulation of paintings and images inspired by the unfolding of the events in and after the battle. For example, the hand-organ called Tipu's tiger, his helmet, and the tiger's head of gold from his throne, among others were presented to the royal family and exhibited in the museum room on Leadenhall street and the two hundred feet long spectacular semi-circular panorama of the capture of Seringapatam created by the artist Robert Ker Porter was displayed in the Somerset House in London in the 1800s (Breckenridge, 1989, pp.198-199).

Meanwhile, in India, the British imperialists were confronted with the diversity of the Indian subcontinent. To interpret and govern the people, the British administrators instituted the need for Indian history. In their mission to codify India's history, the British obsessively initiated a collection of information from Indic texts, local customs, inscriptions on old buildings and ruins, and family histories and artifacts (Cohn, 1996, pp.77-81). Warren Hastings, the first Governor of Bengal, in trying to facilitate the British to demarcate the Indian geography created a system of rule congruent with indigenous institutions, where the courts would administer the Hindu and Muslim law for Hindus and Muslims respectively which eventually brought about the notion that Indian civilization was founded on particular Sanskrit texts (Cohn, 1987, p. xxii). Henceforth, the company's officials vested several surveys and inquiries into the country's agricultural laws, religion, and artifacts. For example, the contours of Colonel Colin Mackenzie work with his native associates between 1784 and 1821, explored by both Bernard Cohn (1996) and Nicholas Dirks (2001), illustrate Mackenzie's pivotal role in collecting local texts, traditions, and histories (predominantly histories of particularly temples and political families/lineages) in

South India. The officials took initiatives for a systematic collection of painting, art, antiquities, scriptures, and the need for a scholarly organization led to the establishment of various institutions like the College at Fort William founded by Lord Wellesley to accomplish a systematic study of Indian texts and languages (Cohn, 1996, p.38).

Similarly, the Asiatic Society of Bengal was one of the private organizations concerned with the accumulation and dissemination of knowledge about Indian civilization and objects. The impulse to collect natural history and explore the antiquities of India yielded the necessity to house these growing accumulations. As a result, in 1814, with the botanist Nathaniel Wallich as the founding curator, the Asiatic Society established the Indian Museum in Calcutta. The museum predominantly engaged in the development of scholarship related to the natural history of India. The Indian Museum was primarily premised on collections relating to archeology, ethnology, zoology, and geology. For the British, armed with a taxonomic knowledge based on the hierarchy and order of science, India's botanical and zoological varieties became a locus for scientific research. Their interest in India's natural history led to the foundation of similar institutions in other parts of British India specializing in unique Indian natural sciences collections, beginning with the Madras Museum, established in 1851 (Mathur and Singh, 2015, p.50).

This mushrooming of museums in India ran parallel to the flourishing of world fairs and exhibitions. The 1850s was the period of nation-states, "imagined communities" constructed through the rise of "print-capitalism" based on "horizontal comradeship" and citizenship (Anderson, 1983, pp.6-7), imperialist expansion, and capitalist societies. The contours of museums changed in this modern period. Timothy Mitchell (1988) exposes the politics of the exhibition representations in the second half of the 19th century. Mitchell argues that exhibitions

and other spectacles were the means of producing the political certainty of colonial rule “by their technique of rendering imperial truth and cultural difference in ‘objective’ form” (Mitchell, 1989, p.222). Echoing Heidegger’s phrase, he calls these exhibitions occasions for apprehending reality and experiencing the “world-as-exhibition” (Mitchell, 1991, pp.7-13). The first world fair in 1851 held at the Crystal Palace in London, titled “The Great Exhibition of the Industry of All Nations,” had a resplendent display of Indian objects shipped by the British East India company¹. The extravagant Indian Court animated the objects stripped out of contexts, including the vessels, robes, crowns, ivory thrones, textiles, rugs, palanquins and weapons to represent the ‘exotic’ royal insignia (Breckenridge, 1989, p.202-204). The world encountered an India which the colonial rulers fabricated. The Indian Court was structured in contrast to European progressiveness and the modern inventors and their machinery. Consequent to the Crystal Palace Exhibition, another set of objects became the target of collection and tutelage. Objects prior to the industrial design that revived craftsmanship were identified as “decorative arts” or the “art manufactures” of India (Mathur and Singh, 2015, p.50). Henceforth, the craft objects too became counterparts to the natural science specimens and texts acquired in the museums in India, following which, the museums concerned with the storing of Oriental art designs and processes penetrated the School of Arts in the 1860s and 1870s².

After the great rebellion, to keep India, the British believed that they needed to know it better than they had before. Thus, colonial ethnology unfolded in the terrains that had once been

¹ See Altick, Richard D, *The Shows of London*, Cambridge: The Belknap Press of the Harvard University Press, 1978, for discussion on the Great Exhibition.

² For an insightful illustration of different collections refer Guha- Thakurta, Tapati, ‘The museum in the colony’, in *No touching, No spitting, No Praying*, New Delhi: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2015, pp.45-82

held by colonial history. The Indian “ethnographic state” was led to believe that it could be ruled with the anthropological knowledge (Dirks, 2003, pp.43-44). By the late 19th century, ethnological knowledge became more privileged than any other form of imperial understanding. The information gathering practices initiated by the East India Company officers later became institutionalized in the census, gazetteers and ethnographic surveys (Cohn 1987, p.248). It became increasingly formalized and canonical. For instance, W. W. Hunter produced and supervised a series of gazetteers that sought to systematize official colonial knowledge about India – each manual/gazetteer had an ethnological chapter that included castes, tribes, marriage systems, kinship patterns, etc.

Therefore, in the 19th century, the texts, the art, the craft, the ‘tribe,’ the ‘village community, the ‘family’ and ‘caste’ institutions were conceived to be the very embodiment of an authentic India. The idea of the primacy of the Sanskritic component in Indian civilization then became the determinant of action, policy, and structure, not only for the rulers but also for many of the ruled. What had been fluid, complex, and even unstructured became fixed, objective, and tangible. What had been a dependent variable became an independent variable and the determinant of action. Museums were sites integral for these narratives to emerge. Romila Thapar remarks that the impulse to accumulate collections were created in response to the exigencies of ruling India and as part of British curiosity in the culture; however, the classification of objects in the museums rendered the theories of colonial interpretation and scholarship that later interfaced with colonial policies (Thapar, 2014, p.4).

Moreover, the museums became the prime locus to define Indian civilization. Cohn, in his seminal works on British Colonialism in India, charts the strategic innovations of the artifacts, antiquities, the legal systems, and the land revenue systems of the colonial

administration, elucidating how an official view of caste, a Christian missionary view of Hinduism and an Orientalist view of Indian society as a ‘static, timeless, spaceless’ and internally undifferentiated monolith, were all produced by the complicity of knowledge and power. Similarly, Dirks, through his pioneering writings on tracing the history of the Indian caste system, insists that caste was not only an important emblem of tradition but also a core feature of colonial knowledge, and argues that British colonialism played a very crucial role in the production and identification of ‘Indian tradition’. Hence, the colonial rule premised on the British notions of modernity and progressiveness reduced Indian tradition to a one-dimensional form by apprehending the flora, fauna, ruins, and other paraphernalia in the museums and redefined the rules and orders for India.

The logic that impinged on the museums was the discourse of colonial superiority used to legitimize their rule. The colonial museum reflected such discourses by classifying adjectives like ‘primitive,’ ‘backward,’ ‘uncivilized’ to define the native culture, specifically the tribes. The British needed to create a “commonsense” fostered on European rationality and weave a society that will reason through the colonial line of thought (Kaviraj, 2010, p. 18) and achieve it through the establishment of colonial institutions, which gradually brought an intrinsic change in the structure of ideas. As Dirks (1996) diligently puts it, colonialism sustained and was made possible by not just force and military power but also by the use of “cultural technologies of the rule,” and colonialism itself was a “cultural project of control” (Dirks, 1996, p. ix). Thus, the imposition of museums can be read as an ideological act of the colonizers for fulfilling their objectives and greed.

Museums and the Laborious Construction of Nationhood

Independent India had dual concerns. One was to transform into a modern nation-state from an 'antique' civilization to re-shape its identity, and two, to heal and recover from the aftermath of the political partition of India. Accordingly, India engrossed in the complex task of building a nation which G. Aloysius defines in his book, "Nationalism without a Nation" published in 1997, as "an entity forming part of the compound concept nation-state, or to a linguistic, ethnic community struggling for its own statehood" (Aloysius, 1997, p.10). The journey of instigating the sentiment of a nation had begun before the Independence- for instance, the making of the national flag and national songs in the pre-independence period. It must be noted though that even before the advent of the British empire, Indians were used to establishing symbols expressing a group identity or royal power; Arundhati Viramani (2008) in her book unearthing the history of the Indian national flag, quotes instances from the Mahabharata where a royal *dhvaja* is described as a royal power, the Mughal emperors' flags like *Alam* confirming symbolic attributes of royal insignia, the triangular flag of the Rani of Jhansi and many more to argue that the state symbolism integrated through elements like banners or flags was not a new concept. However, it didn't serve to indicate a solid belonging to the community, and it was more an expression of the monarch or a particular group's power. The nationalist leaders wanted to have a distinct symbol, which led to India's depiction through maps, as 'Bharat Mata' and the revival of national heroes like Bal Gangadhar Tilak's initiative of Shivaji festivals. This mode of stimulating nationalism was short-lived. Then, through the leaders' consensus, emerged the idea of a standard national flag. To adopt a unique symbol for all Indians, the flag was projected as a collective emotion rather than a political abstraction by the nationalist leaders, as mentioned above. Furthermore, to induce a "common bond of Indian-ness" among the people, the national

calendar mentioned that a Flag Day was to be celebrated every month and also to draw the people into the “flag’s orbit” (Viramani, 2008, pp.154, 204). To arouse sentiments of patriotism in the people while hoisting the flag, various vernacular, national songs were sung. Therefore, the flag emerged as an emotional experience linked to individuals before emerging as a national symbol. Along with the flag, songs like *Bande Mataram*, *Jana gana mana*, etc., came into existence (Viramani, 2008).

As Anderson (1991) argued, the newly decolonized states in Asia, Africa, and Latin America adopted the colonial instruments of control and administration. Therefore, soon after Independence, building a national museum as an additional molder of national consciousness became a critical project for the post-colonial Indian state (Singh, 2002, p.176). The Indian art historian Kavita Singh (2002) evaluates the gathering and dissemination of national heritage in the museums as national culture, as a feature distinct to the post-colonial states. Hence, in the decolonization process, museums, which had its colonial roots, were now endowed with the task of re-constituting and re-defining the new nation-state through its contents. The first incarnation of the national museum happened in the Durbar Hall of the Rashtrapati Bhavan as “Masterpieces of Indian Art,” which exhibited the loaned and returned objects that participated in the exhibition in 1947 in London³. In her article on the first Indian National Museum in the national capital, founded just two years after Independence, Singh traverses through the complex terrains of historicizing and museumizing the ‘national’ culture. In doing so, Singh points out that “India’s National Museum is national by default and not design,” the mere fact that it exists and not what it does makes the museum national (Mathur and Singh, 2015, p.130). Singh illustrates that the dual task of the National Museum was to depict an Indian culture and history that demonstrated

³ For discussion on the Rashtrapati Bhavan exhibition, see Guha-Thakurta (1997) and Singh (2002).

India as eternal and eternally significant. To present this narrative, the stone sculptures from the Gupta period that resembled Greek and Roman antiquity were picked to testify for a long-lasting tradition that, in some respects, was similar to the European civilization (Mathur and Singh, 2015, p.109).

The exhibits and the skewed collections from the colonial period and various private collections donated by the Indian elite were subsequently represented in the museum space as a 'national' culture to reinforce the bonds of nationhood. At the same time, the museums stood as the canon of modernity. Thapar (2009) says that much of the studies in the early Indian nationalist historiography was carried out in response to colonial interpretations and failed to have an open approach to India's past; however, in approaching the modern period, they did not demonstrate the same intensity and rigor used in criticizing colonial historiography. Thus, the matrix of modernity in the museum was conceptualized on colonial rationality and progress. However, Kristy Phillips' essay investigating the biography of the National Museum with the appointment of an efficient American curator, Grace McCann Morley by Nehru shortly after Independence in the 1960s, Phillips describes the significance of 'aesthetic experience' and 'attractive decor' under Morley's curatorship to subvert the Victorian model of the museum. The archeological collections from the British empire that were formulated into the nationalism narratives were systematically arranged "towards the inevitable designation of modern 'art,' which only needed the gaze from visitors to begin to build the tastes of a modern citizenry" (Mathur and Singh, 2015, p.138).

The nationalists, in challenging colonial historiography, thus, opted for an alternative narrative that took refuge in India's ancient past and attempted to establish a unitary Indian identity that disregarded the existing diversity (Nair, 2009). Nevertheless, "three decades of

sustained efforts at nation-building in post-independence India have brought into sharp relief the significance of various forms of ethnicity, for its diverse manifestations have befuddled policy-makers and blocked the emergence of a cohesive and viable nation” (Dube, 1977, p.1). Consequent to the Nehruvian mandate ‘Unity in Diversity,’ India’s National Museum had to foreground the plurality of India. In 1961, followed by the government’s impulse to have an inclusive and diverse national museum, a cultural anthropology gallery exhibiting the regional clothing mainly focusing on rural and ‘tribal’ pieces of jewelry, headgears, and footwear found its place in the museum (Mathur and Singh, 2015, p.142). Thereby, India’s dream museum was actualized, a museum representing the new nation-state as a microcosm. The cultural anthropology gallery resembled the ethnological collections of colonial museums. The reciprocity between ethnological collections, colonialism, and the discipline of anthropology that grew in the museums of India, and the vocabulary of ‘tribe’ are much discussed. However, it is briefly echoed here as a background to the further discussions on the tribal museums in India, which intersects with, or is coterminous with, the wider discourse of displaying the ‘other’ and the colonial knowledge.

Andre Beteille (1993) and K.S Singh (1993) speculate that the concept of the tribe did not exist in India before the British. Several scholars like Arjun Appadurai (1988), Virginius Xaxa (1999), and Nicholas Dirks (2001) have argued that the formulation of the term tribe was done for categorization and hierarchization. Xaxa opines that tribe as a ‘social category’ was added in the process of census enumeration used administratively to divide the population into tribal and non-tribal segments. He asserts that the ‘tribe’ is part of the modern consciousness brought into being by colonialism and confirmed by the state after Independence (Xaxa, 2008, p.8). The studies carried out by early anthropologists, sociologists, and the romantics of the tribe have

evaluated tribes and their culture positively as something that could not be lost, and negatively as something that had to be overcome, based on the outlook of the authors towards modernization and the changes that came with it. In his illuminating writings on the Indian state and tribes, Xaxa highlights that the stress in India has been on the juxtaposition of tribes with castes (H.H. Risley, 1915 & D. Mandelbaum, 1970), peasants (Andre Beteille, 1960 and N.K Bose, 1971), or as stratified communities. Xaxa argues that the tribes in India are reviewed “against the endpoint represented by communities that are seen to be part of civilization” (Xaxa, 1999b, p. 1523).

The ‘Museumisation’ of Tribes in the Shifting Mosaics of Indian historiography

From the 19th century onwards, the tribe has served as a symbol of a group of people who descended from a common ancestor, who is animistic and living in redundant or barbarous conditions in the hills or forest parts of the Indian society. A definition of ‘tribe’ first appeared in H.H. Risley’s and E.A. Gait’s *Census of India*, 1901, where a tribe was described as “a collection of families or groups of families bearing a common name and claiming common descent from a mythical ancestor” affiliated to a definite territory but did not have specific professions like a caste (Inden, 1990/2000, p.62). The colonial scholarship further characterized the Indian tribe based on race, nasal expanse, religion, and craniometrical calculations from the Indian castes⁴. These idealizations of the tribes were drawn on evolutionary classification and colonial civilizational dominance. Ajay Skaria (1997) points out that this British anachronism had an essential role in constructing the tribes, a trope that still survives. Skaria remarks that the colonial scholarship entailed that the tribe referred to people outside ‘civilization’ or who have not received ‘civilization,’ the population that was out of step with modernity. Hence, the tribe as a

⁴ For overview of how ‘tribes’ characterization set out refer, Risley (1915), Inden (1990/2000) and Skaria (1997).

culture became an 'object' of study. Their language, culture, religion, artifacts, dress, etc., fell prey to colonial anthropology and the museums to study the Indian civilizations.

In 1935, after Verrier Elwin's mention, who worked with the tribes of India, that the nationalist movements neglected the tribes, in the Government of India Act of 1935, the British created separate constituencies for the tribes by designating 'Excluded' and 'Partially Excluded' areas. The main thrust of these policies was to isolate the tribal groups from the mainstream society and demarcate the tribal areas (Guha, 1996, p. 2375). Following the nationalist agenda, post-Independence, the government took a particular interest in the welfare of tribes and their development to integrate them into the mainstream society of the Indian population. Under Nehru, the government's policy towards the tribal communities evolved after considering two divergent approaches- isolation and integration. Verrier Elwin, the isolationist, advocated for the establishment of a sort of 'National Park' in a wild and largely inaccessible part of the country under the direct control of a tribal commissioner. The focus of the approach was the preservation and protection of the tribal culture. Because of its ethnographic romanticization of tribes and culture, this approach has received less attention since Independence. Elwin's isolationism was vehemently criticized, mainly by A. V. Thakkar (1941), Ram Manohar Lohia (1960), and G.S. Ghurye (1944), among others, for confining and isolating tribes in their inaccessible hills and jungles as in the glass cases of a museum for the curiosity of purely academic scholarship (Guha, 1996 pp. 2375- 2379). The alternative to the isolationist approach was assimilation. The proponent of this approach, Indian anthropologist G.S. Ghurye, described tribes as 'backward hindus.' His works "Caste and Race in India" and "The Scheduled Tribes in India," published in the 1940s and 1950s provided the basic epistemological premise of the assimilation approach. He believed that the tribes were part of the Hindu Society and that one must view tribes with

reference to their place near or in the Hindu society instead of outside it. He argued that animism was a common link between Hindus and the tribes (Ghurye, 1959, pp. 7-12).

Nevertheless, Nehru's Panchsheel set out in 1959 for national policy, according to Rudolf C. Heredia (2002), has remained the Magna Carta of tribal development till date. The proposal laid forth the following propositions in line with the larger idea of integration that would contribute to the national identity in a more cohesive manner: (a) "people should be allowed to develop on the lines of their own genius and nothing should be imposed upon them; (b) tribal rights on land and forests should be respected; (c) induction of too many outsiders into tribal areas should be avoided (d) there should be no over administration of tribal areas as far as possible, and (e) the results should not be judged by the amount of money spent but by the quality of the human character that is involved" (Heredia, 2002, p.5174).

Later, the postcolonial Indian state, in the broader and national public interest, recognized the Indian tribal groups as a set of people who had been historically discriminated against. Therefore, in 1960, under the "Scheduled Tribes," the reservation system was undertaken comprising a series of measures, such as reserving seats in the various legislatures, government jobs, and enrollment in higher educational institutions, intending to actualize the promise of equality enshrined in the Indian Constitution (Skaria, 1997 and Xaxa, 2005). In the meantime, to sanctify as a nation-state, Indian nationalists deployed tribal culture in all the significant events since Independence. Neela Karnik (2002) asserts that in mediating the new nation-state, the first measures taken were cultural approach and handicraft patronage. The Khadi and Village Industries Board, the All-India Handicrafts Board, the All India Handloom, the Central Silk Board, and the Choir Board, established in the First Five Year Plan to promote handicrafts and village industries, Karnik describes, functioned as agencies to procure tribal artifacts, which

could quickly be subsumed (Lenz, Lutz, Morokvasic-Muller, Schöning-Kalender, and Schwenken, 2002, p.124). In the 1950s, to develop the cultural anthropology gallery for the National Museum, the Indian government asked the state governments to donate examples of regional clothing. As a result, many objects featuring tribal culture were grouped in different categories based on Morley's interpretive and museological skills that stemmed from the American excitement in the African masks and native arts in the 1940s and 1950s (Mathur and Singh, 2015, p.142). More ethnographic museums started to sprout when the Indian Government founded the Tribal Research Institutes (TRI) with the concern to frame tribal identity.

To conclude, though there are references to painting galleries called *chitrashalas* providing lessons in art, religion and history and collectors of special artifacts such as the collections of the Mughal princes, Sarfoji in Tanjore, and some small collections made by wealthy merchants in the pre-colonial history which suggest that accumulating and displaying valuable things as part of the Indian tradition (Ambrose and Paine, 1993; Thapar, 2014), the museum as an institution was established during the colonial rule. As the chapter outlines, it was one of the fruits of the primary mission of the colonial authorities. However, the history of museums in the colonial and post-colonial India reveals that the museums thrived on a selection process motivated by the unequal distribution of power, initially between the natives and the colonizer, and in independent India, between the dominant Hindu culture and others. Museums, thus, can be read as sites in which the dominant or the empowered group in the society decides the contents.

Upon contextualizing the historical roots of museums in general, and tribal museums in particular in India, the next chapter focuses on an ethnographic museum to further illustrate the exercise of power in the building of a tribal heritage through its adivasi representations.



Figure 1. Entrance to the Nehru Centenary Tribal Museum, Hyderabad.. (Source: Photograph by the researcher).

Chapter 3

Exhibits and Narratives of a Tribal Museum

“The panorama of tribal culture which adds colour to the national heritage is unique in its nature. The social organization, economic activities, political organization and the activities of leisure among these tribal societies scattered in the hills and forests present a whole gamut of human behavior” (Museum Catalog, September 2020).

The notion of tribal museums as ethnographic museums underplays the political interference in these curated spaces and thereby clings to the idea of authenticity and neutrality. However, the tribal museum must be understood as a nucleus of massive political relations and ideological contexts. The recognition of tribal museums as inherently political places helps to examine the institution’s bias in the choices made while selecting the collections, display methods, and exhibitory styles. In this chapter, I discuss the tribal slice of heritage portrayed in the national imagery concerning a state-tribal museum and illustrate how the tribal museum makes visible a selective representation of tribes in the heritage-making process by effacing the other to explore the politics of representation in tribal museums. I attempt this by examining the tangible and intangible displays of the Nehru Centenary Tribal Museum (henceforth NCTM).

To approach a museum as a narrative space, I drew upon Russian scholar Mikhail Bakhtin’s indispensable work on the narrative forms in literary history. I use his concept of the literary chronotope. Bakhtin’s work on narrative forms uses the term chronotope to refer to the “intrinsic connectedness” and the unity of time and space in narrative texts (Bakhtin, 1982, p. 44). James Clifford first brings up the idea of “chronotope” for understanding the practice of

collecting art and culture (Clifford, 1988, p.236-237). The concept of chronotope is essential for the study as a methodological tool for interpreting the various displays in the museum, which looks fragmented and diverse. Bakhtin's term chronotope understood as to how the writers narrate time and space and hence create a ground that facilitates particular subjectivities to emerge, and influenced numerous feminist and postcolonial scholars working on media, performative art, and history to argue that "European historiography – in its chronological and 'sanitizing' way – is but one among many chronotopes competing in today's postcolonial world" (Binter, 2019, p.576). Similarly, borrowing Bakhtin's chronotopic approach, the study explores the politics that shape the curatorial practices in the museum, by analyzing tribal museums as a text, implying that it is a narrative space. Though Bakhtin's analysis is mainly concerned with novels, I apply Bakhtin's chronotope to examine the narratives deployed in a socio-political institution like the tribal museum. The museum, like the literary text, is based on a narrative. Within the museum, the exhibitory display represents a narrative. At the same time, the curatorial strategies and arrangements of the collections make up the narrative structure that fashions tribal identities to the public. The tribal museum fuses time and space to create a trope that enables the formulation of tribal identities. Using the analogy of the text, I attempt to offer a two-fold analysis of the tribal museum in relation to the coordinates of time and space in the museum. Firstly, of the narrative staged in the museum space, through the collections, voice-overs, and textual descriptions, secondly, of the curatorial strategies like the display styles, positioning of the exhibits and negotiations involved in the construction of the tribal identity. I begin with a brief description of the field itself.

An Introduction to the Field

The Nehru Centenary Tribal Museum (NCTM) is named after the first Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru “keeping in view of his rich contribution towards basic policy approach for Tribal Development and universally acclaimed principles commonly known as Nehru’s Panchsheel for Tribal Development”(Museum Catalog, September 2020). The museum is attached to the Department of Tribal Welfare Organization of the Government of Telangana. It is situated in Hyderabad district, opposite the Nehru Park in Masab Tank. It was established in 2003 under the then Government of Andhra Pradesh as the part of the Tribal Welfare Department, Hyderabad. It was inaugurated by the Minister for Tribal Affairs, Jual Oram, on 7 February 2003. After it opened, the museum refurbished its collections in 2020. The provocation for this change came primarily because of the bifurcation of the erstwhile united state of Andhra Pradesh and the formation of the official state of Telangana on 2 June 2014. Following the separation of the state, the curators and other state administrators realized that 70% of the exhibits of NCTM depicted the tribal population which was now part of the state of Andhra Pradesh and, thus, under-represented the tribal population enclosed in the newly formed state borders⁵. Planning for the newly formed state tribal museum began in 2016, as a part of which, the Telangana state notified the Ministry of Tribal Affairs (henceforth MoTA) for funds. Approximately an amount of two crores rupees was sanctioned for the same by the MoTA. The museum today, with the new exhibits, opened to the visitors from 9 August 2020.

However, the gallery showcasing the museum’s transformation suggests that the new display methods did not depart much from the earlier. The museum houses more than 400 artifacts along with twelve habitat dioramas and several photographs adorning the walls. The hut-shaped museum building has earthen red and white motifs painted on the exterior (See

⁵ Refer *Appendix* for demographic profile.

Figure 1), an aesthetic choice reflecting the tribal hallmark that signals visitors that they are entering a tribal land. On the left of the entrance is a small desk labelled “Ticket Counter” (which charges 10 rupees for Indians and 100 rupees for Foreigners). Behind the ticket counter is a granite slab stuck to the museum’s outer wall, which had the name of the museum and the names of the dignitaries who inaugurated the museum in 2003. Opposite the ticket counter stands a bronze bust of Jawaharlal Nehru placed on a concrete pedestal.

Inside, a wooden entry door with carvings depicting a tribal performance opens to the hall. A three-dimensional life-sized diorama of a man on a colorfully decorated bullock cart stands at the center of the hall. To the left of the entrance is a gallery of colorful wide-eyed Naikpod masks. Adjacent to it stands an “Audio-Visual Room” in the corner. This room looks like a movie theatre with recliner chairs and a seating capacity of approximately 80-84 people. The projector showed short documentaries about the tribal culture of Telangana created by the Tribal Cultural Research and Training Institute. Out of the 32 tribal groups in Telangana the museum represents 9 tribal groups beginning with PVTG (Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups)- Kolam, Thoti, Kondareddi, and Chenchu habitat dioramas on the ground floor and the next floor opens to a panchayat setup followed by “Gond Habitat,” “Koya Habitat,” “Medaram Jathara gallery,” “Yerukala Habitat,” “Lambadi Habitat,” “Lambadi Teez festival,” “Andh habitat,” representing tribes from plain areas.

The passage to the right leads to PVTG (Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups) Gallery and the curator’s room (See Figure 2). Under the PVT, Kolam, Thoti, Kondareddi, and Chenchu habitat dioramas are exhibited. The three-dimensional habitat dioramas are presented against elaborate murals depicting environmental details and other landscapes accompanied by lighting effects that set the tone for the galleries. Each diorama had electronic monitors attached to its

sides. The monitors displayed the name of the tribe, location, population, social structure, art and culture, religion, fairs and festivals, language and literacy, and color photographs showcasing their festivals, food, and kinsmen in the backdrop of a female voice over. Once the electronic monitors were switched on, I realized that the museum privileged an audio-visual experience. The halls created a sonic environment other than the usual echoes of the visitors' footsteps, whispers, and giggles. A close listening allowed me to decipher various sounds. I could hear the sounds of nature like flowing rivers, birds chirping and instruments playing. The sonic environment heightened the dioramas and illuminated an unseen relationship between each exhibit and their painted backdrop. For example, the painted forest backdrop and landscape of hills, huts, and flowing river modeled in the "Chenchu Honey Collection" diorama showcasing the extraction of honey by chenchu men (three miniature models of men in a dhoti on top of the hill) along with sounds from the monitor evoked an illusion of the real scene from the Nallamala hills.

The stairways to the first floor led to the Panchayat Setup that presented a traditional village council in front of a village background. There were mannequins of both males and females attending a council with the clan head (male) seated under the tree. The passage to the left led to more dioramas displaying - "Gond Habitat," "Koya Habitat," "Medaram Jathara gallery," "Yerukala Habitat," "Lambadi Habitat," "Lambadi Teez festival," "Andh habitat," "Goat pen and Grain gola." The dioramas had a similar frame as the ones on the ground floor, i.e., in each habitat, there are mostly two mannequins, male and female, depicting various scenes like a tribal couple doing household chores or farming together or taking care of one another around their traditional huts that looked very similar to one another in contrast to the visible difference in the types of the hut in PVTG gallery. However, the "Yerukala Habitat" was notably

different. The traditional hut depicted is made of bamboo leaves. These huts did not have mud walls like others.



Figure 2. The PVTG passage in the ground floor of the Nehru Centenary Tribal Museum, Hyderabad. (Source: Photograph by the researcher).

In these passages, on the wall opposite to the dioramas, hang several monotone portrait photographs. There were photographs of the tribesmen in headgears, especially the peacock feather crowns, rituals, festivals, and markets, with captions like “Gussadi dancer”, “Kolam grain pounder (dinki),” “Gond marriage ceremony,” “Gond with musical instrument karnat”, “Gond children play in street”, “Kolam women dancing”, “Gonds taking water from common well,”

“Prof. Haimendorf and Dr. Michael Yorke families with Gonds” etc. These photographs were not dated and did not explicitly mention who captured them. However, amidst the photographs on the ground floor, there is a board larger than the dimension of the photographs displayed dedicated to anthropologist Dr. Michael Yorke, the disciple of renowned Austrian anthropologist Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf. The board had a picture of Dr. Yorke in his sunglasses getting a haircut from an adivasi and a long description about Dr. Yorke’s current designation, his family, his achievements as an anthropologist, photographer, and documentary filmmaker, and his engagement with Raj Gond adivasis under the guidance of Haimendorf during his post-doctoral study.

The second floor holds a display of objects and artifacts (See Figure 3). Most of the exhibits here were in glass cases. They looked old, some rusting, and had signs of wear. At first, the room gave the impression of a well-arranged gallery, but inside the glass cases, the labels were arranged haphazardly, and some did not have any exhibit. For instance, the glass case that said the *Tiger trapping equipment* did not have any presentation. Below is a detailed table on how the objects and artifacts are displayed.

Table 1. Objects and artifacts displayed in the Tribal Artifacts Gallery at NCTM.

What categories are created?	What objects went into each category?	Observable data
Hunting and Fishing	Wild bird, small bird and fish trapping equipment, Hunting bow and arrow, Hunting equipment for small game, Wild boar hunting equipment, Tiger trapping equipment.	The exhibit largely consisted of bow and arrow, weaved baskets and nets of different sizes.
Agriculture	Spears, Axes, Sickles to weed, cut broomstick hay and clear bushes.	Spears and Sickles of various sizes were more in number.
Cattle Rearing Gallery	Cart oil container, Sowing tool, Cattle alarm, Instrument for threshing, Water trough for hen and roosters.	Artifacts had signs of wear.
Household Items	Curry vessels, Fish container, Aluminium container, Plate, Kids plate, Spoons, Winnowing fans, Flour makers, Weighing tool, Measures,	Ordinary household objects were on display.

	Pumpkin, Bottle Gourd, Comb.	
Religious Artifacts	Idols of Bhimayak and a special pot used by Koya's called <i>aderaalu</i> .	
Music	Kaalikom, Dapdi, Dolki, Koya dolu, Gond dolu, Vette, Gond dolki, Sannai, Tuitui, Dappu, Peacock Feather Crown, Headgears, Thootha kommu, Masks.	Most of the musical instruments resembled hand drums of different sizes. Some had animal skin or fur ornamentations.
Play Items	Dolls	A set of miniature dolls were enclosed in the glass case without any descriptions. No attempt was made to acknowledge the artistry behind the artifacts
Crafts	Oja/Dokra metal craft, Metal Bhimayak, Naikpod craft.	Artifacts had gained patina with age and were rusted.



Figure 3. The second floor of the Nehru Centenary Tribal Museum, Hyderabad. (*Source:* Photograph by the researcher).

At the entrance of this hall is a “selfie point” with a frame of a tribal man holding a hand drum (See Figure 4). Turning to the right of the selfie point led to a corner workspace for kids. There were small colorful tables and chairs next to a small stage or an elevated platform.



Figure 4. The *selfie point* on the second floor of Nehru Centenary Tribal Museum, Hyderabad. (Source: Photograph by the researcher).

Making the Exhibits of Tribal Culture

In her writings critically reflecting on the logic of exhibits and exhibitions, the American sociologist Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1998) distinguished the display styles in museums into two types: *in-situ* displays and *in-context* displays, explaining that an *in-situ* installation entails the mimetic reconstruction of the cultures on display like the dioramas, period rooms, etc., whereas *in-context* collections refer to the objects and artifacts exhibited with textual labels and other forms of explanatory descriptions (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998, p.20-21). As mentioned earlier of the museum, the layout shows that the NCTM uses both *in-situ* and *in-context* display styles. In what follows, I try to make a detailed examination of these display styles and the curatorial practices that embody representative and narrative roles to the displays. Here, asking questions about the curatorial intentions and choices behind the exhibition was essential to understand ‘who is narrating? To whom? And for whom?’

Objects and their Crafting in the Museum

An object embraces various definitions with respect to its economic, cultural, and social relationships. This mutability and inherent flexibility of objects concerning their social relationships have been theorized extensively, beginning from Marcel Mauss’s (1966) proposition of the *gift* to Arjun Appadurai’s (1986) approach to objects as having *social lives* to illustrations on how objects are perceived in relation to an individual. Instances of these theories include pediatrician and psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott’s (1984) theory of *transitional objects* that aid in child growth, anthropologist Annette Weiner distinction of objects as “symbolically dense possessions” (Weiner, 1994, p.395), Janet Hoskins (1998) analysis of objects as “surrogate selves” (Hoskins, 1998, p.7), oral historian Aanchal Malhotra’s (2017)

discussion on *material memory* and so on. An exploration of Hoskins' description of *biographical objects* illustrates the potential of objects as "storytelling device(s)" (Hoskins, 1998, p.4). During her fieldwork among the Kodi people of Sumba, in eastern Indonesia, she found that people communicated their life course through objects. Deriving the idea of *biographical objects* from French Sociologist Violette Morin's (1969) work, Hoskins remarks that objects are the binding sites for introversion and a means to preserve the past or the sense of self.

In a sense, the objects in museums are separated from their everyday contexts to come to the museum. Their life did not begin as exhibits. Museum is a venue where these separated objects are catalogued, captioned, sequenced and arranged together against one another into the categories formulated by the museum. With the displacement of an object into the museum, the objects are "sacralised" (Macdonald, 2013, p.148) by disconnecting it from their life cycle. As Kirshenblatt-Gimblett has argued in relation to *in-context* displays, the exhibits are theatrical. The objects and artifacts are detached from their different contexts of origin and juxtaposed against one another as an illustration of a narrative that the museum sets up. In her words, "objects are the actors and knowledge animates them", thereby, more than the eloquence and aesthetics of the artifacts, its ability to explain and demonstrate the museum's narrative gives them the chance to be an exhibit (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998, p. 3). Therefore, in a museum, the object either completely loses its previous attributes or its regular functions are obliterated. In other words, the movement to museums can transform the *social life* of an object. To explore this further, I examine the objects displayed in the NCTM through the categories formulated by the curator to look at the reconstruction of these materials in the museum.

The NCTM has categorized its objects and artifacts under *Tribal Artifact Galleries*. The objects and artifacts displayed in the museum collections include ornaments, musical instruments, textiles, sacred objects, pots, masks, baskets, combs, plates, spoons, pumpkins, bottle gourds, tools and equipment associated with agriculture, cattle rearing, hunting, and fishing such as axe, spear, sickle, arrows, bows, animal traps, etc., animal horns and others. Compared to other artifacts, the exhibit primarily consists of domestic items and weapons, like weaved baskets and vessels of different sizes, spears, bows, and arrows. The objects are arranged in a classificatory scheme, namely *Hunting and Fishing, Agriculture, Cattle Rearing, Household Items, Religious Artifacts, Musical Instruments, and Craft Items*. The table above clearly shows that the arrangement and categorization of objects and artifacts into these galleries were essentially based on their functions. Most of the objects were labeled in English and Telugu, and other information such as their native names were mentioned. In addition, there were short textual descriptions attached, citing the raw materials used to create the artifacts and their utility in various contexts. To take one example from the displays, the *Household Items* gallery had various plates and spoons made of coconut shells, measuring vessels, bottle gourds, and different kinds of large flour makers. The board for the gallery read:

Tribes of Telangana use several artistic household items made of wood, cane, metal, and other media.

Mortar- pestles/ (grinders) are used by the tribes for making flour used for household purposes. Wood and stone are used for making these Rolu- Rokalis.

Dinki is a special flour maker but the flour/oil is used for special religious purposes. Sometimes a girl sits on top of the Dinki and two other women lift it up and drop down to pound grains and oilseeds to make flour and press oil.

“Vissurrayi” is a common flour maker used in tribal households. Women singing while rotating the stone circles is a major epiphany in their culture.

Winnowing fans(chatas) are also made from naturally available strips of bamboo with hand weaved patterns and they are used to separate unwanted stones, dirt, etc. from grains.

Pottery of clay is used in various purposes- religious and as household items. Various grain measurements made of black wood are catch to our eyes⁶ (See Figure 5).

Wooden spoons and combs are also the items wherein their artistic approach can be seen (Museum Label, 11 August 2021).

⁶ Italics emphasis added.



Figure 5. *Pottery of Clay* from the category: *Household Items* in the NCTM. (Source: Photograph by the researcher).

Owing to the intention mentioned here, it is noteworthy that though the artistic nature of these artifacts is the prime focus, it does not address the individual artists behind it nor how these artifacts were produced. They do not even explain how the use of these artifacts has changed over the period. Contrarily, the voices of the objects are used to amplify their relation to the tribes in terms of functionality only, thereby, obscuring other voices to make their relationship to the museum, their classificatory schemes, and grouping audible. Therefore, through their arrangement and presentation in the museum, these objects acquire a new layer of meaning that relegates their previous purposes to the margins.

The most significant act in the curatorial practice is the act of selection. Susan M. Pearce remarks that “it is the act of selection which turns a part of the natural world into an object and a museum piece” (Pearce, 1994, p.10). This selection process is preceded by field expeditions to collect as many objects and artifacts as possible⁷. During my fieldwork, I was told that the collections were procured from the tribes in different ways. While most of the collections were willingly submitted by the tribesmen when asked to, a few were “procured” by paying double the original amount of the artifacts from the tribesmen⁸. The collecting practice was held to obtain the material culture from all around Telangana tribes. The phrases like “catch to our eyes” in the description label mentioned above and the curator’s response “if it’s unique and attractive then we procure it from their homes” indicates that, at times, the aesthetic appeal of the artifacts earned it a position in the museum⁹. The tribal museum’s selection criterion thus had a dual purpose in the field collections and exhibiting these collections. First, the objects should reflect and accentuate the cultural categories the museum has laid out. Second, the objects had to be of visual interest to the museum makers and their audience.

From Dioramas to Objects: Locating the Meaning

Upon entering the museum, the visitor is first introduced to life-like diorama-type exhibits. The giant life-like mannequins engulfed the passages of the ground floor and first floor. The dioramas were set up off the floor on slightly raised platforms, featuring a hut in the center. They recreated the scenes of tribal life. Surrounding the hut mainly were two life-sized mannequins depicting a male and a female in their traditional costumes. The museum catalog

⁷ Field notes, 5 February 2021.

⁸ Online-Interview with the curator, 19 August 2021.

⁹ Field notes, 10 March 2021.

that gave an orientation to the exhibits made the necessary linkage between the mannequins and the recreated environment. For example, the description for the “Thoti Habitat” read:

***Thoti Habitat** Diorama depicts a couple playing musical instruments called Keekiri in front of their traditional hut in the background (Museum catalogue, September 2020) (See Figure 6).*



Figure 6. *Thoti Habitat* diorama in the Nehru Centenary Tribal Museum, Hyderabad. (Source: Photograph by the researcher).

Similarly, the label for the “Kondareddi Habitat” read:

Diorama depicts a woman making a bamboo craft while her husband is arriving from forests carrying a hunted wild boar. Their typical Kondareddi hut and habitat is in the backdrop (Museum catalog, September 2020).

The diorama stands as fragments of the contexts from where the museum's objects were removed. These dioramas were described in detail during my conversations with the curator. I have included two excerpts from my fieldnotes, which I wrote during the discussion with the museum curator. The museum curator, whose early training was in anthropology and later in museology, has been engaged with NCTM for the last ten years. The museum curator described NCTM's dioramas in the following manner:

The dioramas are 'authentic', the murals on walls showcased exact landscape features of their habitats like the Chenchu diorama showcases the Nallamala hills itself, where they are. And some of the mannequins were replicas of the community members. Tribes modeled to make these. Their accurate facial features are depicted. He further illustrated the authenticity of dioramas mentioning the occupations portrayed in the dioramas. The Kolam tribes are shown weaving bamboo baskets because that's what they do. The word 'kola' refers to bamboo. Likewise, the Kondareddi tribes are hunters and Yerukala women fortune tellers (Field notes from the conversation with the curator, 10 February 2021).

The dioramas were thus intended to feature the living environment of the tribes and their traditional occupation. Drawing from the thoti diorama, one can then decipher the scene of a couple playing musical instruments in front of their grass-thatched hut indicating their service relationship with the Gonds as reciters of Gond kathas during festivals and rituals. It is also

interesting to know how the curator articulates being ‘authentic’ into the narrative structure of the exhibits. The elaborate murals, the facial features of mannequins, and their gestures indicating traditional occupations are how the authenticity of the presentations is translated on the ground and evokes a mimetic representation of the displayed objects’ cultural, social, and physical setting. Through the dioramas and the sonic environment created by the monitors, the object’s realness is crafted or, in Walter Benjamin’s (1968) words, the ‘aura’ of the object enhanced.

However, it should be pointed out that when asked about the reference to costumes worn by the mannequins, the curator said:

The costumes were not necessarily the same costumes worn by the tribes who modeled; he further added that some of these tribes don’t wear clothes, but then “you understand right, we can’t make ugly displays for the people to see. We even had to remove an old depiction of their burial ritual because most of our visitors are school children” (Field notes from the conversation with the curator, 10 February 2021).

Hence, though the dioramas were a means of designing the real setting, it is also a codified fragment of the actual context, which acts as a window that delivers the meaning and location of the objects to the audience. Correspondingly, these two field notes illustrate how the curatorial intentions negotiate the internal content of the tribal museum. The museum staff focused on procuring more appealing and engaging displays that would entice visitors into the museums. Although the male and female mannequins in the dioramas were cast from the tribal community, the dioramas are still designed within the fabric of ‘decency’ to serve the interests of

non-tribal segments of society. The imagined audience and their values are the guiding principles of curatorial practices here.

So how are these carefully selected mundane or ‘attractive’ objects and habitat dioramas representing the tribal culture? Which aspect of tribal culture is being displayed? And what is the narrative composed by the museum through the exhibits? Considering these questions concerning the exhibits and their arrangement, I shall try to locate the narratives put forth in the museum’s matrix.

Following Hannah Thurston’s (2017) methodological approach to punishment museum, I aim to explore the meanings employed to the exhibits within the museum space. In the case of the NCTM, the dioramas, objects and artifacts, photographs, museum catalog, information kiosks, textual labels, spatial arrangements, the audiovisual presentations in the halls, the documentaries played in the audiovisual room, and the use of lighting in the galleries are the representative narrative units that mediate the museum’s narrative. The arrangement of the exhibits - the habitat galleries of particularly vulnerable tribes, the tribes from plain areas, the hunting weapons, the clay pottery, the headgears ornamented with bison horns and peacock feathers, Oja metalwork, etc. displayed was not based on abstract principles. The exhibits and their visual representations were influenced by evolutionary progress, race, and hierarchy. To elucidate my argument, I have added excerpts from my field notes. The first excerpt relates to the diorama exhibitions and the second to the objects in the cabinets which contained the dhokra craft:

The open diorama exhibits lured the visitors. At the site of the dioramas, most became excited. They were carried away by the pleasure of stepping into a different way

of life. The dioramas were immersive. The lighting and the soundscape elevated the experience of the 'other' lifeways. They widened their eyes, giggled, excitedly imitated the mannequins, and shot pictures sitting/ standing in front of the huts (Field note, 3 February 2021).

In contrast, the dhokra crafts in the cabinets were received differently:

Though the other galleries, which included the bows, arrows, animal horns, hand drums, and headgears, which preceded this cabinet, could hold the visitors' gaze, this cabinet was devoid of attention. The visitors just passed by it swiftly, not even glancing back. The artifacts exhibited in this cabinet neither have the air of grandeur and uniqueness that surrounded the musical instruments or the headgears, nor there is a performance of sound and light or a mock diorama to show artistic labor behind it. The artifacts were rusted and attached to a label that says, "....in Telangana the metal crafts are prepared by Oja Gonds for Rajgonds meeting their needs of deities, agriculture and, household utilities. There are about 96 families depending upon the profession in Asifabad and Adilabad Districts....." (Field notes, 3 February 2021).

The museum's portrayal made *dhokra* craft a premodern amateur craft exhibit. Similarly, in relation to the categorization of the tribal artifacts into the galleries: "Hunting and Fishing," "Agriculture," "Cattle Rearing," "Household Items," and "Religious Artifacts," though the textual description alerts to the artisticness of the artifacts as mentioned in the "Household Items" label, these categories acted as metaphors for the rudimentary domestic life of tribals. The diorama's nature of including replicas of the community members indicates the display techniques utilized to feature and stabilize the racial 'others'.

In addition to looking into the meanings constructed through the exhibits in the narrative, it is crucial to understand the museum's construct of time and space. The museum's ground floor has photographs on the walls that captured portraits of men, women and children, adivasi festivals, daily chores, landscapes, etc., from 1976. The narrative the photographs created surrounded around the rawness of adivasi life. On the upper floor, one ends up with artifacts from the past and present period. The displays or its layout does not explicitly speak of these timelines. The past and present are fixed here. The coordinates of time are paused and preserved while the museum actualizes the space. Thus, it is through the space-time conjugation that the museum evokes an ahistorical representation of adivasis. The narrative is manifested in the space and established through the different modes of presentation. And as mentioned earlier, in one way or another, the displays demonstrate the pre-modernness of the adivasis- their costumes, tools, weapons, crafts, sacred objects, or domestic items. The most striking themes of the narrative structure in the museums that can be identified from displays are the adivasis association and proximity to nature. The information kiosks and documentaries did not shy away from explicitly describing particularly vulnerable tribes as 'backward and primitive'. The objects plucked from their ontological corset were kept in glass galleries to speak of the 'primitive' aspects of the adivasi life that contrasted with the imagined audience of the museum. Therefore, the tribal museum acts as a chronotope of colonial subjectivity.

Chapter 4

Beyond “Primitiveness”: Demystifying the State’s Articulation

This chapter aims to call into question the significance of tribal museums. As previously discussed in chapter one, the nationalists’ rationale behind the conception of museums after Independence was to forge and portray a singular identity. The post-Independence museums were trusted with the goal of assembling India as a modern nation with a rich ancient history, contrary to the colonial discourse. However, the investigation of the Nehru Centenary Tribal Museum and its curatorial strategies in the previous section suggests that the tribal museums of India do not fall under this umbrella and are mere chronotopes of colonial subjectivity. The Nehru Centenary Tribal Museum in Hyderabad is another clone of these already existing tribal museums in the country¹⁰. The characterization of the adivasis in NCTM as barbaric hunters, primitive, simple, and illiterate tells that, despite changes in the Indian historiography from the pre-British to post-independence periods, the story of the adivasis as depicted in the museums has not changed. Even though the casting and recasting of the ‘tribe’ through anthropology has taken place with the changing currents of thought, the adivasis are seen to exist in perpetuity as history-less subjects inextricably intertwined with their natural surroundings and domestic objects, regardless of the power shifts. This chapter tries to appraise the role played by the chronotope of colonial legacy, in practice, in reinforcing adivasi stereotypes in a postcolonial state like India. In order to understand this, the first section outlines the characteristics of the postcolonial nation-state, taking Benedict Anderson and Dipankar Gupta as points of entry to

¹⁰ See also V. Sebastian, 2015; Rose Sebastian, 2017; Idesbald Goddeeris, Benjamin Steegen and Arjun Sharma, 2018.

grasp the concept. The chapter then gives a background of the state-society relationship to understand the engagements between the state and the society, regulated by structures of the state like the tribal museum, and attempts to decode why the tribal heritage of the nation is sustained as though it was set in stone.

The Postcolonial Nation-State

Benedict Anderson (1983), in his path-breaking account on the rise of "imagined communities" and the unfolding of the modern nation-state, identifies the material conditions and the historical transformations in the 17th and 18th centuries that led to the conceptualization of the nation as a new form of political community that is imagined as "inherently limited and sovereign", conceived on the basis of "horizontal comradeship" (Anderson, [1991]2006, pp. 6-7). In his analysis of "the last wave" of nationalism after World War II, Anderson examines the emergence of postcolonial nation-states. He asserts that the origin of nationalism in the ex-colonies, mainly in Southeast Asia, has a specter of their colonial legacy and are a result of a fusion of "popular nationalism" and "official nationalism"; in his words, "they took from European linguistic nationalism its ardent populism, and from official nationalism its Russifying policy-orientation" (Anderson, [1991] 2006, p.113). Anderson illustrates his assertion by identifying three colonial means of control, namely, the census, map, and museum, that are appropriated by the postcolonial nation-state in Southeast Asia. Thus, the new nation-states constructed their 'imagined community' following their former colonizers' path and political mindset. The inheritance of these three critical institutions from the colonizers as logos of the postcolonial state, Anderson argues, indicates the continuity between the Empire and the postcolonial state (Anderson, [1991]2006, pp.163-164).

"Nation," "nationhood," and "nationalism" have been further defined and redefined in numerous ideological patterns, from viewing it as a feature manifested against the colonial Empire to a matter of meta-local homogeneous culture to symbolic construction. To understand the nuances of the nation-state, I turn to Dipankar Gupta (2000), who states that imagining the national identity is an ideological process entangled in the notion of culture and space, which is achieved through the deliberate measures of the state. Gupta offers an analytical account of the relationship between nation and state by effectively decoupling the nation-state into two separate entities. For Gupta, 'nation' is a sentiment, and 'state' is the structure around which a nation is built. Nations, Gupta elaborates, are marked by "the popular sacralization of territory" (Gupta, 2000, p. 152). In other words, the nation-state's territory is a sacralized encultured space and membership to this space becomes a strong sentiment. To sustain the euphoria of the nation-state, the state sets structures and policies that forge a collective sentiment towards the nation.

Into this cluster of ideas Joel Migdal in his *State in Society*, published in 2001, laid down two elements of the state- image and practice. The state's image posits two sorts of boundaries- territorial boundaries which differentiate the spaces of control for each state, and social boundaries which distinguish the state from other non-state entities such as private institutions. Thus, to quote Migdal, "the image of the state induces people to perceive its agencies as generically integrated and acting in conjunction with one another" (Migdal, 2004, p.17). Another aspect of the state he dwells on is practices, which serve to reinforce and validate the image of the state, for instance, ceremonies such as a coronation. He asserts a new definition of the state in terms of domination and change, by identifying and analyzing patterns of domination. Migdal refers to Talcott Parsons' social-systems theory that subsumed both state and society, where various parts of the social systems are bound together by an overarching and unified set of

values. Hence, the society as a social system maintains stability through a patterned normative order, thus, resulting in the need for the existence of a state. Therefore, there is no such visualized picture of the state. The existence of the state primarily relies on its relation to the society. Another interesting question arising here is the understanding of the society as a subject of the state, i.e., the state is seen as initiating reforms and restructuring the society through its legal and legislative control. However, the relationship between the state and the society isn't always reciprocal; differences in the interests of the state and society are often witnessed in our day-to-day lives. By forging an image of the state as an entity with territorial and social boundaries, Migdal depicted the state as elevated and separated.

I shall now try to read Migdal's description of the state and society in parallel to the Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's analysis of state to understand the permeability between the two spheres, namely the state and society. The state expresses itself as legitimate through institutional discourses, and Bourdieu says that these discourses fulfill three functions:

“.. as Aaron Cicourel has shown.....firstly, it performs a diagnostic, that is, an act of cognition which enforces recognition and which, quite often, tends to affirm what a person or a thing is and what it is universally, for every possible person, and thus objectively.....In the second place, the administrative discourse, via directives, orders, prescriptions, etc., says what people have to do, given what they are. Thirdly, it says what people really have done, as in authorized accounts such as police reports. In each case, it imposes a point of view, that of the institution, especially via questionnaires, official forms, etc. This point of view is set up as a legitimate point of view, that is, as a point of view which everyone has to recognize at least within the limits of a given society. The representative of the state is the repository of common

sense: official nominations and school certificates tend to have a universal value on all markets.” (Bourdieu, 1990, p.136).

Bourdieu views the state with its legitimate authority as an organizational structure that exerts a "permanent action of formation of durable dispositions", through its institutions (Lardinois and Thapan, 2006, p.79). It is through its institutions that the state accomplishes its functions, that is, regulating and delegating social identity by acts of selection and nomination. Simultaneously, it contributes to the production and reproduction of the social order by constructing a perception of the social reality. In sum, the state is a complex organization that dominates through 'legitimate' means. The existence of the state in the 21st century is centered on key concepts like development, welfare, citizenship, etc. Max Weber puts forward 'modernity' as one of the primary ideas which the modern nation-state brought along with its establishment and functioning. Here, the state is conceptualized as an agent of modernity, development, and change, thereby projecting the state as above the society. Migdal asserts that the interaction of the state and society is an integral component for transformation and change. He illustrates that the use of nationalism can bring about a divide between the state and society. The state then becomes an embodiment of the nation, and nationalist myths bind individuals to one another and to the nation-state. In short, through its various symbols and institutions, the state reinvents society (Migdal, 2004, pp. 258, 262).

Tribal Museum, State and Symbolic Power

The discussion above attests that there are fields where the state and society come together and mediate to maintain and regulate nationalist sentiment. As Gupta highlights, for the nation-state to survive and sustain itself, it has to not only mobilize a collective sentiment of a

supra-local identity but work out ways to actualize the same by enabling everyone to have a membership (Gupta, 2000, p.112). This is where the tribal museums become crucial. The task of mobilizing the collective sentiment and maintaining the fraternity falls heavily on the shoulders of the tribal museums. However, the tribal museums' task is not to make all citizens equal but to provide membership to the nation-state's 'sacralized territory' (as Gupta puts it). The tribal museum, as an institution of state, first validates the contents exhibited and then creates a synergy between the state, the contents in the museum, and the tribal culture, thereby enunciating a tribal identity. Through the tribal museum, the state provides the adivasis a form of membership in a territorial identity that Gupta emphasizes as crucial to maintaining the nation-state's fraternity.

My fieldwork at NCTM reveals that the contents at display are not neutral. As the normative exhibits classify the tribal culture and technology by demonstrating their houses, tools, domestic vessels, ornaments, and art that covertly embody the taste and preference of the state. For instance, in the last chapter, I discussed the choice of the exhibits and museum labels that pronounced the idea of having a display that catered to exaggerating the voyeurism of the audience's gaze. Further, the images of the state are forged in the museum through curatorial expertise. The documentaries in the audio-visual room gave a detailed declaration of the number of funds granted to each adivasi festival by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs and the government of Telangana State more than any description about the festivals. Similarly, the information kiosks flesh out the importance and the role of the modern state in the lives of the adivasis who are 'backward' and with no understanding of the value of their art and craft. To quote one example, "there are about 30 master craftsmen among the total number of families. The Oja Gonds prepare the products and sell them in the local weekly markets. In 1981, the Jangubai Tribal Brass

Handicrafts Industrial Societies Ltd. was established with 60 members. In 2016, the Girijan Hastakala Jai Seva Society was established in Keslaguda with 26 members. The TRIFED and TS Handicrafts Corporation take their products and sell them through their souvenir shops” (Fieldnotes, Oja/Dhokra Metal craft, 11 August 2021). Here, the state, in Bourdieu’s words, is a “central bank of symbolic credit” (Wacquant, 1998, p.xvii), whose legitimate authority can assign and exert identities, which are then regulated and sustained by institutions. The tribal museum, thus, is a pivotal entity of the state that constructs the state itself. The displays insemminate the hierarchical vision of the state. It heightens the imperfect social order in the society by representing the adivasis as subjects without history and relegating them to a fixed position of primitiveness.

The importance of tribal museums lies in their capability to form a narrative of the state. The efficiency of the adivasi exhibits is anchored in the notions of a pre-modern civilization to advocate the proposition of a social evolution that culminates into the modernity of the state. In other words, tribal museums are avenues that mark out the distinction of adivasis through the selective display of objects and texts that are primarily curated on the modernity narrative of the state and the dominant social groups in the society. Through the selective and strategic curation of inequality in the tribal museum, the state standardizes a distinctive ahistorical and apolitical adivasi identity that appears natural. It could be argued then that the tribal museum is a site of the state’s symbolic power, which inscribes different positions of power by reproducing the societal power relations¹¹. According to Bourdieu, “symbolic power is a power of consecration or revelation”; it is that “performative power” which contributes to revealing the social divisions

¹¹ I am indebted to Shafeef Ahmed as this thought developed during a fruitful engagement with his unpublished thesis titled, “School Textbooks in India”.

that are implicit by naming and designating groups in an instituted form to maneuver the objective structures of the society (Bourdieu, 1989, p.3). In a sense, this ability to visibilize something which is the result of human invention as inevitable, and impose it through “the naturalization of the practices and cognitive schemes that make it possible for such messages to resonate with their intended audiences” is called symbolic power (Loveman, 2005, pp. 1655-56).

Symbolic Violence: The obscured nature of the tribal museum

For Bourdieu, symbolic power is a legitimate form of power that derives its legitimate authority from other forms of power such as economic, social, and cultural capital. The tacit acknowledgment of authority as legitimate is a defining condition of symbolic power. However, symbolic power, which is exercised if ‘recognized’ as legitimate, is a ‘misrecognized’ invisible power, that is, it is capable of mobilizing its effects without any apparent physical force or “is wielded precisely inasmuch as one does not perceive it as such” (Bourdieu, 1991, p.170; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p.168). This process of imposition of the relations of domination and subordination through symbolic power structures accessible to the dominant group is what Bourdieu calls symbolic violence. In other words, symbolic violence fundamentally impairs the thought and perception of the dominated social agents, and thereby, the dominated then takes the social order and their position to be ‘right’. The domination is socially ‘recognized’, but the exercise of domination is ‘misrecognized’.

An exploration of the concept of ‘symbolic violence’ illustrates that Bourdieu had initially defined symbolic violence in the specific sphere of education as the exertion of power that manages to impose meanings “as legitimate by concealing the power relations which are the basis of its force” (Dubin, 1987, p.133). Now, if we apply the concept in the context of tribal

museums, the state uses its legitimate authority and the power it confers against an agent who holds less, here the adivasis, by covert curatorial strategies that tend to refine the elevated position of the state and re-establish the social order in the society and thereby exercise symbolic violence against the adivasis. Contrary to the supposed intent of tribal heritage preservation through these exhibits, there is an implicit violence exercised through the same. I intend to substantiate my argument by focusing on a few exhibits from the NCTM.

One of the most prominent narratives the displays embody is that of ‘primitiveness’ and ‘exoticism’, in addition to the other themes that we have seen in the previous chapter. To demonstrate the act of symbolic violence by the state, in the table below, I list out a representative sample of the exhibited objects into the different narrative themes presented in the NCTM.

Table 2. A representative sample of the exhibited objects arranged as different narrative themes presented in the NCTM.

Narrative themes represented	Objects	Museum's description
Primitive/ premodern life style and art	Spears, Sickles, Axes	Agriculture Tools
	Baskets, Aluminum containers, Kids Plates, Wooden spoons and combs	<i>Tribes of Telangana use household items which are made from an artistic approach used for their day to day life...Wooden spoons and wooden combs is where their artistic approach to household items can be seen.</i>
	Cart oil container, sowing tool, cattle alarm, water trough	Cattle Rearing
Exotic and Barbaric in	Items in Hunting and Fishing	

nature	Nooses Gallery Antelope Horn and Bison Horns Using dioramas as display method is in itself exoticising	<i>Tribals of Telangana like any other tribals are adept in seasonal hunting, fishing and gathering to supplement their food resources in non-seasonal times...They have a special practise of skilfully luring tigers to hunt deers for them and later frighten the tiger to get the deer hunt for its meat.</i> The Gussadi Dance diorama carried the description: ...<i>The Gussadi Dance form presents a dreadful scene to the beholders. They jump hither and thither and utter war cries with vehement</i>
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		<i>motion and frenzied laughter</i> <i>they frighten the boys and</i> <i>come up on the spectators.</i> <i>They also touch the waists of</i> <i>the spectators with Rokal</i> <i>(stick) to tickle them...</i>
Dancing and singing entertainers	Musical Instruments	<i>Almost all tribals- men and</i> <i>women and children are</i> <i>adept in dancing while men</i> <i>use to beat drums.</i>

A critical analysis of the above table reveals that the material expressions of the adivasi way of life were symbolically transformed into curating stereotypes such as primitive, pre-civilized, dancing, and singing folks. The museum's exclusion of a gallery of adivasi art and recreating domestic utility and play items as artistic showcase adivasi arts and crafts as redundant and backward. Similarly, the adivasi nature and characteristics were embodied in their weapons, musical instruments, and dance forms. Each exhibit was driven by assumptions of inferiority in the culture of the adivasis, and the exhibits curated adivasi identity in stereotyped ways. The common occurrence of these adivasi images often led to the question: can these tangible things be a source of information about the neglected tribal history? This curiosity propelled the study

to divorce the exhibited objects from the museum setting and look at the aspects of the exhibited objects that were being obscured or neglected. By focusing on the context from which the objects emanated, I attempted to connect the objects and the histories they may be a part of to understand the adivasi image that the museum effaced, if any. To do so, based on the fieldwork notes and the availability of the literature, I scrutinize three exhibits- the Padigiddaraju Flag: the Koya flag from the *Medaram Jathara Gallery*, the Lambadi Dapdi/ Dappu: a musical instrument from the *Musical Instruments Gallery*, and the Oja/ Dokra metal craft as examples from the NCTM.

The first object that captured my attention was the *Padigiddaraju Flag* standing at one end of the Medaram Jathara Gallery (See Figure 7). The diorama depicted the “traditional deities of Sammakka and Saralamma at Medaram with the jathara depicted in the background” (Museum catalogue, September 2020), along with the large triangular pictorial scroll at one corner and a model of a male devotee making a jaggery offering at the other end. The gallery came to life when the electronic monitors were switched on. It displayed previous videos of the jathara and described the Medaram Jathara as the largest tribal religious congregation in Asia, which is held every two years at Medaram, in Mulugu district in Telangana. It also mentioned the funds that the Telangana State released for the same. The gallery did not describe the flag itself other than a label that said *Padigiddaraju Flag*. The flag is a pictorial representation of the origins of the Koya lineage, which is very much part of the unique painted narrative scroll tradition of Telangana art. The Koyas inherited pictorial scrolls from their ancestors. The *Padigiddaraju* scroll is a lineage narration of the chieftain Padigiddaraju who waged a war against the Kakatiya dynasty ruler for unjustly imposing taxes on the community and how his wife Sammakka and daughter Saralamma challenged the king Prataparudra on the battlefield¹².

¹² From conversation with the curator on 10 February 2021

The scroll indicates that the Koyas were a ruling tribe and an evolved civilization. The deities Sammakka and Saralamma, the 13th-century legends in Telangana, establish their glorious past as warriors and rulers (Vimala. K and Kranti. C, 2018, p.53). The narratives on the scroll depict how the Koya adivasis resisted the monarch state of the Kakatiya dynasty. It also commemorates the warrior image as a crucial part of the Koya ancestry and identity. However, the museum is dismissive of this history “because of the space constraints,” as the curator puts it, and thereby essentializes the role of the state in the depiction, providing a platform for the jathara to accurately highlight the crores of rupees that the government spent for it.



Figure 7. The *Padigiddaraju Flag*: the Koya flag from the *Medaram Jathara Gallery* in NCTM. (Source: Photograph by the researcher).

The second object I explored is the Dappu; this percussion instrument is a flat-faced drum that is believed to be the oldest among the regional musical instruments (See Figure 8). It has a round framework made out of tamarind or neem tree wood. The frame on the one side is tightly covered by the processed skin of cattle or goats and then tuned with a stroke of fire. It is slung across the shoulder and beaten with two lightweight sticks in rhythm. Dappu is also a traditional art form of Telangana, which became the central figure in building caste-based mass movements as the Madiga Dandora Movement started in 1990 and other political protests in Telangana (Venkateshwarlu, 2011, p.530). It must be admitted that the adivasi musical instruments are not reflections of their pre-modernness nor intended for their leisure. The making of musical instruments out of dead animal skin is also an expression of their social world and their resistance against the existing social hierarchy in society. In “Mula Dhawani”, the authors document the tribal and folk instrument stating that “Indian music usually implies either classical Hindustani or Carnatic styles” and therefore deliberately ignore the musical instruments and art of adivasis (Thirumal Rao and Manoja, 2019, p.v). In the museum, the curatorial strategies clearly silence the story of the makers of the instrument by curating a pathological allegiance of the same to the dominant culture.



Figure 8. The *Lambadi Dapdi* from the *Musical Instruments Gallery* in NCTM. (Source: Photograph by the researcher).

Similarly, the Oja/Dokra metal craft represents metallurgical art, mainly brassware products, created by the ‘lost wax technique’ process. The gallery description reads:

“Dokra metal handicrafts made by tribals are well known in the Central Indian states of Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, and Telangana. In Telangana, the metal crafts are prepared by Oja Gonds for Rajgonds meeting their needs of deities, agriculture, and household utilities. There are 96 families depending upon the profession in Asifabad and Adilabad districts.....” (Museum Label, Oja/ Dokra metal craft, 11 August 2021).

The Dhokra craft is notable for its durability and shapeliness (See Figure 9). In the article, *Dhokra: A Traditional Craft of Rural India*, the authors trace the origin of the same to the Bronze age and establish how the craft has been practiced and evolved in India for centuries since the Harappan civilization (Sinha, Chakraborty and Sinha, 2015, p.31). As noted in the previous chapter, this gallery with worn-out exhibits and no visual flamboyance downplays the uniqueness and evolution of the craft. This paralysis of the historical richness of the objects in the museum invites us to understand that essentializing certain aspects of tribal culture is imperative to bring out the image of the state.



Figure 9. The Oja/ Dokra metal craft in the NCTM. (Source: Photograph by the researcher).

The three objects I have looked into challenge the characteristics of the adivasis pertinent in the museum narrative. When looked at from a broader historical and cultural perspective, these objects contradict the museum's narrative that shows adivasis as static, “vulnerable,” and

“primitive”. I now return to the argument I began with and safely conclude from the above analysis that the curatorial strategies and the tribal museums themselves are representative of the symbolic power of the state by which the state exercises a gentle and disguised form of domination and exploitation of the adivasis. Through curatorial strategies, the state can set up and perpetuate the durable relations of domination under the rubric of tribal heritage preservation. In sum, expanding upon the first chapter, it could be argued that the initial proposition to have tribal museums was with the intention of cultural inclusiveness and to re-center the adivasis from the peripheries to the mainstream. While tribal museums seem to be a project of heritage preservation and cultural inclusiveness, we have seen that much of the display within the NCTM embody the attitudes and preferences of the state that largely caters to the dominant social groups in the society. A tribal museum is a key tool of the post-colonial nation-state to craft itself as a modern state and an important site to sustain the hierarchical social order in the society by demarcating and distinguishing identities.

Chapter 5

Conclusion: Towards an Inclusive Tribal Museum

This research study attempted to understand the curatorial practices and strategies involved in the making and unmaking of national heritage. At its inception, the study adopted the position that heritage is constantly negotiated and contested by underlining its inescapable political character. To take account of how heritage-making plays on the ground, the study confined to one heritage institution: museums. It was against this background that the three research objectives were proposed to tackle the central question: what aspects of adivasi lives are being represented in a state-tribal museum, and analyze how the curatorial practices of the museum construct an image of the adivasi in its displays that can be read along with the national heritage of the Indian nation-state.

The study's first objective was to understand the politics of representation in the tribal museum by analyzing the curatorial practices. The objective was met through the two core chapters of the dissertation. Tracing the history of museums in India from the colonial to the postcolonial period, the first chapter outlined the socio-political factors that contributed to the making of Indian tribal museums. In the beginning, the chapter explores how the objects encountered by the British officials through their trade, explorations, and conquest of the subcontinent paved the way to an enormous collection practice. The collections from India were exhibited in the fairs in the West to represent the colonial Empire, announcing a European hegemony. However, when the collections swelled, India got its first museum in Calcutta which led to ordering and explaining the objects in a way to understand the colonial subjects. The

colonial museums were repositories of colonial knowledge about India, and its contents represented the colonized, colonial rule, and Western civilization. Subsequently, the museum and its relationship with anthropology brought the ‘tribes’ into the museum space. Their tools, clothing, and artifacts became the primary text to study them.

Later, the chapter traces the fate of museums in the postcolonial period, how independent India, sanctified as a modern nation-state, adopted the museums to curate a national heritage which subtly privileged identity politics in the broader and national public interest, leading to the birth of Tribal Museums. The chapter invoked scholarly works from various disciplines to provide a historical context for the rationale behind the choice of different collections that earned a place in colonial museums, hijacking the notion of ‘museumizing’ as apolitical, and highlighting its relevance in casting India as a nation-state.

Reaffirming the strategic-political nature of museum institutions in India, the dissertation moves forward to examine the curatorial practices behind the establishment of a tribal museum in the heart of Telangana, the new Indian state, in the next chapter. Using a field study based on observations, in-depth conversations, and online-interviews with the curators at NCTM, and by approaching the museum as a narrative space, the second core chapter engages with the politics and the practices involved in curating a tribal museum to bring into light the narratives which are effaced with the exhibits. The contents, namely the displays and messages on the labels of the Nehru Centenary Tribal Museum, were interrogated to understand how the exhibits were composed, what the objects say about the adivasi group it represented and the museum’s creators. These questions were pertinent to gain a deeper understanding of the curatorial practices involved here and to fulfill the proposed second objective, which was to explore the relationship between the exhibits in the tribal museums and the adivasi groups and provide

insights into how these exhibits are weaved as tribal heritage. To do so, the study looked at various forms of visual data within the museum to detail the processes involved in selecting and creating the displays to arranging them in a museum space, and argues that ethnographic museums are not naive spaces with static exhibits. The chosen objects from the ethnographic fields undergo modifications, first, with respect to the classificatory schemes developed by the curator and then, composing meanings that may or may not be attached to the object in its earlier social context. Borrowing from Bakhtin's chronotopic approach, the study explores the narratives deployed by the tangible and intangible things at the NCTM. I attempted to offer a two-fold spatio-temporal analysis of the tribal museum to show how the NCTM fuses time and space to create a trope that enables the formulation of adivasis as unchanged and ahistorical identities.

The field study made it clear that the contents in the tribal museum have had a state of permanence since the colonial times. This led me to my third objective, which was premised on understanding the function and significance of tribal museums in the postcolonial nation-state. The third core chapter attempted to analyze why, despite the changes in the Indian historiography from pre-British to post-independence periods, the adivasis were being represented in perpetuity. The central question that guided the chapter was, are the museum spaces an extension of the representers rather than the represented: to whom does the museum really belong? In order to answer this question, it was pertinent to look at the characteristics of the postcolonial Indian nation-state. Taking museums as the lens to reveal the characteristics of the postcolonial state and its interaction with the adivasi groups in the nation-making process, the study draws from a Bourdieusan perspective to argue that tribal museums represent the 'symbolic power' of the state and that they are a means of executing symbolic violence in the

name of heritage. The arguments of this chapter are substantiated with examples from the NCTM demonstrating how the tribal representation makes visible a selective representation of adivasi groups in the making of nationhood by effacing other narratives and how the museum becomes a means of exerting symbolic violence through the displays within its space.

In sum, the dissertation attempts to problematize the cultural inclusiveness of the tribal museums' project in the broader context of national heritage preservation. The study relates the issue of national heritage in the making of 'tribal' heritage to the articulations of dominance, subordination and the hierarchical ordering of the society. The study goes beyond the conception of museums as political spaces and explores precisely how curatorial strategies are set in motion from the selection, classification, transformation, and construction of adivasi representations in museums, silencing the meanings that the objects emulate for the source community. The study also looks at the broad rubric of the state by underling the characteristics of tribal museums using Bourdieu's analysis of state's role in universalizing and codifying. It argues that the tribal museums in India are sites of symbolic power of the state which legitimize the modernity narrative of the state by producing a lasting curated knowledge about the adivasis and camouflaging the unequal power structure of the society.

Rethinking the Future of Tribal Museums and New Avenues of Research

Throughout this endeavor, the study has tried to problematize the meaning of the tribal museums as a cultural center for the nation. It is thus essential to reconsider the assumption that the culture of the adivasis was accepted, and now, it was the political, economic, and regional inclusion of adivasis that has to be attained. Today, when the Tribal Affairs Ministry is gearing up to install permanent museums to commemorate the "Tribal Freedom Fighters," it is crucial to

look at the existing tribal museums in the country and ask how these museums are representing the adivasis. Why do they exist when the museums do not have a viable engagement with the source community and if its displays cannot retain the whole story of the source community? At this juncture, it is essential to rethink how a museum can be intended for the source community, but at the same time, created by and for the larger nation. The study has made a minor attempt to show how the museum creators could use the existing displays to be more inclusive and construct the tribal museums as a space for critical dialogue by acknowledging the past and present of the adivasis through the exhibits. Addressing the conflicted relationship of the state with the adivasis and the struggle that the adivasis have undergone in making the 'nation-state', anchoring the exhibits in these struggles would be a good start to understand how the construction of the Indian nation began.

However, the recommendation comes with a caveat: this study has only focused on the display methods within the NCTM. It has not accounted for how the intended audiences or the visitors perceive these exhibits, as this study was undertaken when the country was in the second lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It would be interesting to see how a research study might unfold by incorporating the visitors' point of view by looking at how the visitors or the represented adivasis themselves perceive the exhibits in a tribal museum and engage with the displays. The study's methodological insights were more of an exercise in testing and reading the museum spaces in conjugation with their time and space, which was only partly accomplished due to my inability to include the views of the museum visitors. Yet, despite these limitations, this study is significant in that it explores the academic debates on adivasi issues in the space of heritage complexes like museums, also alerting the hesitation in the discipline to include museums as sites of sociological research.

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Appendix

Demographic Profile of Tribes in Telangana

- There are 32 Scheduled Tribes in Telangana (A.P. Reorganization Act, 2014).
- The Tribal population accounts for 9% of the total population in the State.
- Integrated Tribal Development Agency (ITDA) districts- 52.96 % of the total ST population in the State
- Remaining- 47.04 % inhabit the plain areas

(Source: Telangana Tribal Welfare Department Annual Report 2018-19)



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