

Chapter VI. Conclusion

To common people, museums are very popular places for enjoying new experiences, and learning about man, his culture and environment. Therefore, millions of people visit museums every year, seeking knowledge, observing their own cultural and natural heritage and others' cultures and ecological environment, and furthermore, enjoying various non-formal educational programmes such as creative workshops, gallery talks, and cultural or technical demonstrations. Through scientific presentation of museum materials and various educational programmes, museums offer rich encounters with reality, with the past, with what exists now and what is possible. They stimulate curiosity, give joyful amusement, increase knowledge and preserve cultural and natural heritage. While visiting, in particular, the ethnographic museums, people have opportunities for confirming their own cultural identity, understanding others' ways of life, and observing different ecological environments, and furthermore, learning various cultural phenomena. Museums offer certainty, in these uncertain times through various museum activities such as collection, documentation of significant material and interpretation of certain aspects of life.

Changing times and changing perception brought out new concepts of museums. In particular, since World War II, the museum world has continually showed signs of change in their role and scope. With the growth of nationalism and the progress of industry, it has been expanding in both scope and size. Many countries have been inspired to explore their own identities through the establishment of museums. Not only well-developed countries but also developing countries started establishing various museums seeking their own identities and showing their own specializations. Hence, all kind of collection-oriented institutions are now perceiving themselves as museums.

Since 1960s, many museums are searching for their own identities as well as new direction of museum organisation and management. After all, from the beginning of 1970s, such effort brought out ecomuseum movement. The new concept of museum movement took place at first from the European countries. Since then, neighbourhood museums of America in 1970s, and community museums of North America in 1980s have been gradually established. Many museums of today directly reflect the interests and efforts of their own communities. The concepts of ethnic and minority museums more or less correspond with community museums.

It is a fact that the ethnic and minority museums are based on philosophy of cultural pluralism. In a democratic society,

either majority or minority should have equal rights. In case of multi-ethnic countries such as China, USA and former USSR, minorities started establishing their own community museums since 1980s, which represent their own ecological environment as well as socio-cultural identities. Through these museums, not only minority but majority also understand how people live in this world and maintain relationships among men or between man and nature. Many minority museums today focus primarily on the relationship between man and ecological environment. They represent their own culture traits vis-a-vis environmental factors. It is believed that many communities in India also shall attempt to establish their own community museums in the near future. These museums can contribute to develop regional industry, to seek their own identities as well as to integrate multi-ethnic groups. For that purpose, 'ethnocentrism' should be avoided in the interpretation of ethnographic materials by anthropologists as well as museum professionals.

Contrary to my initial expectations, museums of ethnography in India are mostly of small sizes. Generally, "small is beautiful" and that's true in the museum community as elsewhere. Most local museums are small sized and they are in a close tie with the community. In case of American and European countries, smaller museums like household museums, historical farms and folk villages make a distinctive contribution to their communities. These smaller museums serve well, for each does something special that no other institutions can. Such museums are often central to community's economic development. In my working experience, smaller museums such as household museums, small farms and folk villages have relatively better capacity to survive against financial difficulty and to boost regional economic development and tourism. In case of maintenance of a smaller museum and management of its human resources, a smaller museum has many advantages. They need less maintenance and less human resources. Practically, a smaller museum can easily change its organisation and policies of its business to expand its domain and/or to survive itself in the museum field.

Ethnographic museums in India have their own character. One finds in them a lot of variations according to relevant area, people, period, materials, medium and in their objectives. India has a vast territory, a large population, a great cultural and natural heritage, various ethnic groups and multi-lingual societies. Therefore, various ethnographic museums must be set up and run by various communities based on autonomous financial support. They should represent socio-educational requirements of Indian society. From a local community to the whole of India, for today and for tomorrow, it requires to search of its identity for not only national unity but also local diversity. However, all of these cannot fall into a set formula. India, as it is, in a sense, is also in the socio-economic situation, the nation

contains simultaneously the past, present and futuristic life styles and artefacts. It is, therefore, hoped that ethnographic museums in India in the 21st century can properly represent both variation and universality of Indian ways of life, in their environmental contexts.

When I was a museum professional in South Korea, I never heard the word "Dangs". Even during my first visit to India to participate in the ICOFOM Meeting & Symposium (1988), I was not aware of the existence of any Dangi culture. It was only after joining the Department of Museology of the M.S. University of Baroda that I knew about the District of Dangs and its ethnic peculiarities as well as cultural significance. From that stage of vague preliminary knowledge, I have moved towards intense interest in the Dangi ways of life and their material culture within three years. It was joyful experience. From the stage some years ago when even the word "Dangs" was not known to the stage when a full doctoral thesis is being completed, there were gradual changes in the understanding of museology with special reference to Dangi heritage. It became clear that neither the Dangi culture nor museology are static. So, even a doctoral thesis has to come to one conclusion that the last word is yet to be written on the subject of the Dangi culture as well as museology in relation to Dangi heritage. This doctoral research is one step towards the goal of recognizing rich and many sided museological possibilities of interpreting the Dangi culture. It is also a recognition of much silent scholarly work done by many ethnographers who cared for the Dangi culture. They have faced great difficulties in exploring Dangi territories in the absence of easy communication, transport arrangement and also comfortable accommodation in the interior areas. Their dedicated efforts have inspired me in following their footsteps as fieldworkers and specialists. But definitely credit can be taken for using the available information for exploring the scope for museological application of latest theories to an ethnographically significant area of Indian heritage.

Without unnecessarily repeating all the points in the previous chapters, it is possible to present the main conclusions of the research for this thesis as under:
There are very basic changes in Indian museum movement which also reflect changes in museology. The recommendation of the professional Indian bodies as well as the recently published literature are testimonies to these changes. These museum methods are also backed by scientific experiments. The museum's organisational strategies are now more refined. There is also a marked change in the basic philosophy of museums. As a result, the growing emphasis is not on temporary success but on the long-term professional reputation by integrating museum with society. The role of the Indian National Committee of ICOM is very crucial because it has been serving as a bridge between the

integration museum expertise on one hand and the national or even regional agencies, through ICOM members. More and more sophisticated projects are taking place. An important asset of Indian museum community is the critical examination of all new museological friends. No foreign originated idea is passively accepted and imitated. But it is not turned down because of the reason that it originated in literature, project or seminar outside India. Fortunately, Indians are taking leading part in most of the international museums meetings. The present chairman of ICOM is an Indian, therefore, it becomes natural for the profession to welcome new ideas, provided they are examined critically.

Some of these are relevant to the situation in the Dangs. They provide basis for suggesting different museum services. The collection management discussed in this thesis should prove revolutionary in respect of Dangi cultural material. The un-acquired material culture of the Dangs is safer in situ than when collected for museums without pre-planning of their safeguarding and maintenance. It has been emphasized in this thesis that all museum duties and responsibilities are interdependent. Full emphasis is placed on documentation simultaneous with fieldwork and collection. During fieldwork it was found out that Dangi cultural material which is in private and public collections suffers because of the lack of usable data. Even very basic items of information are missing. Such chaotic examples are of little use in telling any worthwhile story of themselves or about the Dangi people.

A fundamental change in museum approach, reflected in this thesis, is also found in Indian museums. In professional practice the emphasis was on the objects. Wherever, however, they were available, such object were looked at as the building-blocks of museum services. This is known as object-oriented museum approach. In the Dangs also isolated objects were given much museum attention. As a result, it is possible to find them in museums but it is not easy to find the "people" of the Dangs represented in all their cultural behaviour or performances. One of the conclusions of this thesis is to re-orient museum responsibilities to the "people" of the Dangs and not "things" of that. There is much debate in museum circles about the status of ethnographical objects in museums of arts, history, archaeology, crafts, etc. Ethnographers feel sorry and cheated when beautiful artefacts are treated like works of fine arts in museums. It is true that by such treatment tribal things become popular. But as in case of the Dangi ethnographic objects like masks, ornaments or icons, there is no justification to emphasize their beauty in isolation from their status in the life of the individual as a member of the Dangi communities. This is so because, as shown in this thesis, the traditions play a supra-individual role in decision-making in the world of the Dangis. There are no

fashions which are acceptable if they come in conflict with social norms. Ethnographical materials of the Dangis should be presented in harmony with the specific life situation in the Dangis. Yet, this does not mean that display should be serious, drab and without exciting colours. Until popular attention is not gained, even very significant cultural material will not be seen carefully. The Dangis love colour and action. Therefore, their material culture can be presented in the true spirit of the Dangi communities.

The concept of "museum object" has also changed in recent times. This thesis has taken into account the broader meaning of the term "museum object" which is often called "museum material". In the past, it was equated with a physical object. It was like a self-contained totality which can exist without reference to anything outside. But the modern concept of a museum object is more complex than the similar object outside museum field. Once in a museum it has a special status. That status makes it unique as basis for research. And also that status relates it to other types of specimens. Moreover that status makes it meaningful in association with other informational aids. Such a status is also a product of design of an exhibition. A similar object without the support of scholarly recognition, designer's attention, curatorial identification and classification will not be able to communicate its richness as a "witness" of life. This new approach to "museum object" offers very different professional perspective which the traditional theory could not provide. For this reason, the modern approach is against fragmentation of cultural heritage in museums. To compensate for the loss of original context from which an ethnographical object is taken away, some strategies are proposed in this thesis. The survey of Indian ethnographical exhibitions made it clear that a visitor cannot understand the value of cultural materials without some introduction. Graphic medium labels alone do not help. Live guidance by educational staff is most welcome but it is unrealistic to expect each individual to get it every time. Mechanical guidance helps interpretation but it can only supplement live guidance and meaningful orientation sections, introductory exhibits and presentations. In the course of discussions, it has been pointed out that proper methodology is the backbone of museography of display work. A developing country has to make the best use of its limited resources. All India Museums Conference on "Museum Infrastructure" organised by Museums Association of India held at Allahabad, 1991 was helpful in visualizing requirements of the ethnographic museums. The professional expertise gained in South Korea in terms of Hi-Technology application to Korean ethnographical presentations cannot be recommended in the context of ethnographic museums in India. The Dangi community museum as recommended in this thesis can rely on simpler, traditional materials and skills to provide the cultural context of Dangi ways of life to museum

objects. For this reason, the role of demonstration especially by the local volunteers is emphasized in this thesis because not only the medium is affordable but it encourages community identification. If there is a network of the Dangi community museums, very good round the-year series of demonstrations can be planned not only of dancing, singing and local crafts but also on learning new skills for using local products for making economic benefits. From my personal encounters with the Dangis, it is possible to conclude that the Dangi community museum may serve the public not only from "9 A.M. to 5 P.M. working hours" like urban museums but also from evening to midnight especially for the people of the Dangis because they usually enjoy resting time in the evening to midnight.

New museum models are required for the Dangi situation is another conclusion of this thesis. Fortunately, many new models are available. But these should not be imitated. A good model should serve as a starting point. Not as an end in itself or destination. The intense museological activities all over the world have provided diversity of experiences which are published in professional literature in sufficient details. Even if the Dangis is less accessible to outsiders, the outside professional expertise should be easily accessible to the organisers of the Dangi museum service. This is possible if those who are interested in "ethno-museology" or "museo-ethnography" join hands. This thesis has many concrete suggestions in the area of co-operative efforts. For example the documentation of Dangi performing arts by enthusiastic groups from Bombay and other places periodically can be used as the basis for reference database because such video and audio recordings can be duplicated or triplicated and shared through a common museum agency. Some museum professionals are against commercial exploitation of tribal cultural activities. Even they do not like commercial reproductions of tribal figures in their beautiful ornaments and colourful dresses on calendars, or of the Warli paintings on the covers of magazines. It is against the modern idea of recognizing pluralistic interests of the public in museum collections. The contemporary public should feel that museum collections are peoples' collections and they should make use of them in an adequate way which will become meaningful to people. This is opposite of the traditional curator-oriented approach in which what the public wants is basically decided by the museum authorities.

The above issue also leads to the matter of granting public access to museum collections and facilities. One conclusion of this thesis is the emphasis on the need to strike a balance between what professionals want and what the public wish to get out the museums. It has been discussed by the progressive museologists that what is called museum public is, in reality, consists of mainly the educated class of society. Their ideas and interests are very often not representative of the other

classes of people like the tribals. During fieldwork over two years, it became very clear that the Dangi communities may not share the views of the elite classes especially in cities about the role of cultural institutions in preserving and using the traditions to strengthen their identities. The commitment to the heritage of the Dangs by the Dangis may not be understood in the same way by outsiders. Hence, any talk of interpretation of the Dangi community or identity museums must lead to effective ways of relating that medium to the Dangi ethos and world view even after noting that it is subject to change.

An elaborate discussion in this thesis is about the need to show everyday life and seasonal life cycle of the Dangs. The idea is to emphasize the rich but simple ways of the communities to live in harmony with nature. Not only other communities can get inspiration from Dangi example but their talent and traditional skills will be appreciated. The open-air components or units like reconstruction of different types of Dangi huts as done in the Saputara Museum can demonstrate such skills in proper settings. Unfortunately, the huts are constructed very near to each other and there is no sufficient space for such demonstrations which can take place near the huts. A lot of Dangi occupational activities take place outside but near their huts like bamboo crafts or Warli paintings. Similarly, many rituals can be re-enacted in the reconstructed Dangi huts specially to give a graphic idea of the processes. It is possible to make use of supplementary aids to interpret such cultural peculiarities in a special orientation section or in introductory area in the middle of open-air exhibitions. Volunteers can also help in such educational work, at predetermined timings. What is concluded is the growing need of representing the Dangi ways of life in all its richness by going beyond "show-case-oriented", or "Gallery-Lecturer-dependent" interpretation. The use of multi-media or devices like those used in the Tribal Research and Training Institute Museum, Pune should prove useful. It has facility to project series of slides on tribal life with synchronized audio commentary. Each tribe in Maharashtra is covered in each series which is projected one after another. In this respect, it is also concluded that in an effort to reflect what to represent of a tribal ways of life, care should be taken to avoid distortions, overemphasis or omissions of the ethnographically most significant aspects. This is necessary because not only material life but also the relevant ways of life of a community should be represented in a museum, it is taken as the scientific reality for future reference. The public will accept them as the most authentic facts and things. Museums themselves also must follow strictly the *Code of Professional Ethics* (ICOM) in museum work. In other words serving the public in educational sense is more important than offering popular or exciting displays for entertainment. Museums should not place the concerned traditional communities under glass as tourists'

attractions. Good museums should make all their audience aware of the social reality. And also, museums must lead the concerned communities to the better life and the better communities.

Museology is facing an identity crisis. Museums are also facing identity crisis. In the past, it was a simple matter to define both museology and museums. Recently ICOM has defined them for the benefit of professionals. In this thesis, current definitions of these terms are given. Yet one of the conclusion of this thesis is the observation that socio-cultural changes taking place are influencing the theories of museum work and aims and objectives of museums because they have to respond to the local, regional, national circumstances. Hence, in relation to the Dangi culture and its interpretation also the existing models of museums should not impose rigid limitations. The Dangs is not cut off or isolated from the rest of Gujarat or India as it was in the past when limited transport made it inaccessible. The Dangs is treated on par with other districts for educational investments as well as for developmental schemes. These are creating hunger in the local people for better living standards. So, even if local people want to preserve their traditions, they will also welcome new ways of living. As illustrated in this thesis many unusual things are being introduced in the ceremonies and rituals of the Dangs to replace the old local products. Therefore, we need not import models of museums from outside the Dangs blindly because they are successful in Ahmedabad, Bhopal or Udaipur. One of the conclusion of this thesis is the need to use the Dangi situation as an opportunity to try new ideas in every department of museum work including collection, field work for documentation, diffusion of ideas and creation of exhibits using local material and technology to suit local audiences. In fact, it is believed that museology in India can be richer if experiences and experiments of museum organization in the Dangs are carried out with open mind and determination to integrate museums in the Dangi tribal communities. The thesis is full of suggestions based on a critical analysis of current museology, which are directly applicable to the Dangi situation. If museological workshop are organised in Dangs the regional and national level agencies can examine how a museology theory, as it is, is valid and how far it needs to be changed. There is much talk about the neo-colonial attitude in which the highly industrial sections of society treat the backward regions and tribal areas as if they are colonies for exploitation. Hence, special museological emphasis should be given to bringing previously isolated the Dangs into national mainstream to share equally the progress and development in culture.

Again and again, it is repeatedly emphasized in this thesis that the objects on display when out of the context, lose their cultural significance. Presenting objects as representative of a cultural context is the present challenge before museums dealing with the Dangi culture. Such objects should become

parts in a three-dimensional story about the Dangis and their ways of life. Sufficient discussion is made in this thesis on the dangers of the process of de-contextualization of the Dangi cultural materials out of ignorance and neglect. That is an insult to the Dangis.

A very detailed discussion is included in this thesis on archaeology, history, ecology of the Dangs with a view to place the Dangi culture in proper perspective of time and space. The conclusion reached is that museums cannot deal with the Dangi culture without a comprehensive understanding of the people and without knowing how Dangi communities are different from other ethnic groups of people. Such detailed data will help in organising systematic exhibitions, comparative exhibitions, ecological and other exhibitions on developmental schemes in the Dangs. So there is every hope that museum interpretive projects vis-a-vis the Dangi culture can enrich contemporary museology.

With the advancement of museum studies, many students of various subjects are interested in interdisciplinary research between museology and their own subjects. The present academic result is an example of interdisciplinary research work between museum studies and anthropology. As already discussed the functions and roles of ethnographic museums, the ethnographic museums definitely need ethnographic objects with specialized ethnography, which contains a detailed description, the relevant measurement, illustration and audio-visual data of ethnographic materials. It is certain that ethnographic museums require so-called museo-ethnography which will be very useful for preparation of ethnographic museum work.

From the viewpoint of museology and museography, the present research work contributes to advance methodology and theory of museum studies such as collection policy, documentation methods, and interpretation of ethnographic materials in the museum context as well as in field situation. In the future, Dangi museo-ethnography in my thesis must supplement lacunae such as comprehensive and detailed ethnography of each tribal community of the Dangs. And further, in-depth analysis of museo-ethnography of each tribal community is required in terms of holistic and cultural relativism. In the near future, one may attempt to analyse similarity and difference between a particular tribal community and the same tribal community which is inhabited in either adjoining or remote areas. The Dangi ethnographic museums in the future must represent the unity of the multi-ethnic tribal communities of the Dangs as well as the diversity of each tribal communities of the Dangs. We often hear people in academic field asking: What is the role of an ethnographer if he works in a museum? Also we come across queries: What is the role of a museologist vis-a-vis his ethnographical collections? In my thesis, I have tried to answer these two questions with special reference to the Dangi culture.