CHAPTER FOUR

THE ACQUISITION OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL OBJECTS, SYSTEM OF REGISTRATION AND DOCUMENTATION IN BANGLADESH MUSEUMS

It has long been recognized that the services that a museum can render to any community may conveniently be grouped as how to collect, preserve and display any object in a museum. The first duty of a museum official is to collect, to indentify, and to preserve for posterity any material that may be useful for scientific or artistic purposes.

Collections in Bangladesh Archaeological Museums are generally acquired through four distinct channels. Firstly, there are purchases; secondly, gifts; thirdly, there is loan material and fourthly the acquisitions are made by the law of the land, like application of treasure trove act. Again acquisition may be done by exploring and excavating sites of archaeological or historical importance.

With regard to purchase it cannot be too strongly emphasized that the utmost discrimination should be exercised in this field, and that no object should be purchased unless it definitely assists in developing the theme of the museum. 1

Gifts are in rather a different category, and they vary from superb collections of objects such as Sir Ratan

Tata and Sir Dorab Tata have given to the Prince of Wales Museum at Bombay, Syed Md. Taifoor, Hakim Habibur Rahman and Nalini Kanta Bhattasali to the Dhaka Museum and the spectacular and purposeful gifts to the American Museum, to the most deplorable number that was ever thrown out of a palace or household.

In the case of loans many Museums are regarded as the repositories of material collected by archaeological services, and here, of course, they are to a great extent a reference library of material. Occasionally collections of great value are loaned to Museums. In such instances the Museum can only exercise a modified form of discrimination. This also applies to loan exhibitions or temporary exhibitions of art, such as the annual art exhibition which is displayed in the Indian Museum at Calcutta and in the National Museum of Dhaka.

ACQUISITION & COLLECTION:

The archaeological and historical records do not provide evidence that the Museum as it is known today

developed in such early times; nor does the word Museum support this, despite its classical origin. Nevertheless, the collection of things that might have religious, magical, economic, aesthetic or historical value, or that simply might be curiosities, was undertaken worldwide by groups as well as by individuals. In the Greek and Roman Empires the votive offerings housed in the temples, sometimes in specially built treasuries, are but one example: they included works of art and natural curiosities, as well as exotic items brought from far-flung parts of the empires, and are normally open to the public.

The veneration of the past and of its personalities in Oriental countries also led to the collection of objects. Paintings and calligraphs graced the imperial palaces of China in the 2nd and 3rd centuries A.D. In the 8th century A.D. at Nara, Japan, was built the temple that houses the Great Buddha, a colossal seated bronze statue. The temple's treasures still can be seen in the repository at Nara. At about the same time Islamic communities were making collections of relics at the tombs of early Muslim martyrs. The idea of waqf, formalized by the Holy Prophet Muhammad (Sm) himself, whereby property was given for the public good and for religious purposes, also resulted in the formation of collections.

In medieval Europe collections were mainly the prerogative of princely houses and the church. Indeed there was often a close link between the two, as in the case of the fine treasures of the emperor Charlemagne, which were divided among a number of religious houses early in the 9th century. Such treasures had an economic importance and were used to finance wars and other state expenses. Other collections took the form of alleged relics of Christendom, in which there was a considerable trade. 4

The influences that led to the European Renaissance were already at work in Italy, and as a result the first great collections began to form. A reawakening of interest in Italy's classical heritage, and the rise of new merchant and banking families at this northern Mediterranean gateway to the continent, produced impressive collections of antiquities, as well as considerable patronage of the arts. Outstanding among the collections was that formed by Cosimo de Medici in Florence in the 15th century.

Royal patronage was crucial to the encouraging of the arts at this time. Rudolf II sponsored astrologers and alchemists as well as artists. Francis I of France invited

4 Ibid., P. 479.
famed French and Italian craftsmen and artists to rebuild and embellish his art gallery, and there he kept his outstanding collection of art. In England, Henry VIII gave his attention to music and thus did not form a collection of significance. He was responsible for the appointment in 1533 of a king's Antiquary, whose task was to list and describe the antiquities of the country.  

The developing interest in human as well as natural history led to the creation of specialized collections by the intelligentsia of the day. Among the specialized historical collections were those of the archaeological collection of the Grimani family of Venice, and the fine collection of illuminated manuscripts made by Sir Robert Cotton in England.

Another Product of the age was the learned society, many of which were established to promote corporate discussion, experimentation and collecting. Better known societies date from somewhat later years; examples are the Accademic del Cimento in Florence (1657), the Royal Society of London (1660) and the Academic des Sciences in Paris (1666). By the turn of the century organizations covering other subject areas were being established, among them the Society of

5. Ibid., P. 479.
Antiquaries of London (1707); and learned societies were also appearing in provincial towns. This was the beginning of a movement that, through the collections formed and the promotion of their subjects, contributed much to the formation of museums.  

The history of museums and their precursors indicates the influence that the existence of a collection has had on the founding of museums and therefore on the nature of their original holdings. Before the 20th century few museums were established with the goal of making a collection; instead, they were created to receive an existing collection. With the existing collection as its base, the Museum proceeded to collect to fill gaps or to extend its activity into other, usually related, fields. For this reason many museums have heterogeneous collections, at best accumulated under an encyclopaedic philosophy (which has rarely been successful unless major resources were available to achieve it), and at worst continuing a "cabinet of curiosities" (which may amuse and entertain the clientele but have little scientific validity). Often the collections made depended on the expertise or whim of the curator and were sure to change when that curator was succeeded by someone with different interests. This method has produced some outstanding special

6. Ibid., P. 480.
collections, but these have resulted from circumstance rather than long-term planning.  

Explicit collection policies have become more common. Indeed where national codes of practice exist a strong recommendation is normally to be found on the need for a clear statement of collecting activity. This has arisen for a number of reasons. Not only should a public institution's policies be available for scrutiny, but the cost of maintaining collections of ever-increasing size must be justified, a factor highlighted at times of economic pressure. Further, although a museum may have arisen from circumstance, an assessment of its available resources, the clientele it attracts or intends to attract, and the role it can serve in society generally must be matched against its primary resource, its collections.

Every museum is responsible for ensuring the legality of its acquisitions. Many nations have ratified the Unesco convention of 1970 on the illicit import, export, and transfer of ownership of cultural property. Other similar regional legislation also exists. In 1976 the Organization of American States adopted the San Salvador Convention on the protection of the archaeological, historical, and artistic heritage of the American nations, while the council of Europe's 1969

convention on the protection of the archaeological heritage has a similar purpose.®

Indeed, it is unlikely that a museum with clearly stated academic objectives will acquire illicit material. Methods of collection reflect the fact that a museum is concerned not only with collections but also with the information inherent in or associated with them. Where applicable, direct acquisition through field work is much preferred. This involves collecting material through archaeological excavation, ethnological expeditions, or natural science field work, and the collecting either is undertaken by the staff of the museum or is sponsored by it. Indirect acquisition is handled through purchases, gifts, bequests, and loans of objects.

The collecting activities of the industrialized world and those available to the developing nations are markedly different. In some instances the significant cultural property of entire nations has been dispersed to private collections and museums in different parts of the world, leaving the developing museums to rely on casts and replicas to convey the area's cultural achievements.

8. Ibid., P. 488.
The international community has had only limited success in encouraging the return through exchange of loan, of such material to its country of origin.9

The true significance of cultural property, collectively the universal heritage of mankind, places on museums a considerable responsibility. The acceptance of objects or collections into their care implies a permanence not associated with the acceptance of other types of property. Some Museum legislation acknowledges this, declaring such collections inalienable. The disposal of museum collection in part, or in full, therefore normally only occurs in cases where items no longer serve a useful scholarly or interpretative purpose. The case for deaccessioning, as it is known in North America, can only otherwise have any validity where it is done to correct the imbalances of earlier indiscriminate collecting, and in that case the material concerned should first be made available to other suitable Museums before being disposed of.10

DOCUMENTATION:

Documentation is a significant function of any Museum, whether it holds only a few hundred objects or,  

9. Ibid., P. 488.  
10. Ibid., P. 488.
as in the case of the largest institutions, many millions of items. Quite apart from the need for records to maintain adequate control of its collections, a museum's documentation system provides an indispensable record of the information associated with the collections, to facilitate the museum's interpretative and other work.

The form of a museum's documentation system may vary considerably, but to meet these requirements it should provide the fullest possible information about each item and its history. There are no generally accepted classification schemes for museum objects, although certain subjects have developed schemes with numeric or alphanumeric notations to facilitate the ordering and retrieval of information. 11

With the advent of information technology, a number of museums have developed computerized documentation systems, some on-line but others relying on machine-generated indexes, periodically updated. In certain countries the potential offered by computers to exchange data among museums has been exploited.

An important aspect of museum organisation is its documentation procedure. With the passage of time and the progress made by the Museums in different spheres, the documentation methods have undergone considerable changes and have assumed greater importance.

A scientific system of recording has to be formulated to keep track of objects entering a museum, either for collection or for temporary display or for any other reasons. Their movement inside the building and their exit from the premises have also to be properly noted. Moreover, on account of the great value of some of them, both monetarily and often as a national treasure, museum documentation has assumed, of late, considerable importance and has become highly technical. Easy location, identification, facilities for research studies and immediate detection of loss or substitution are the vital functions of museum recording. 12

Scientific documentation is also very important to museum men for intelligent display of exhibits. Effective presentation requires an appropriate knowledge of the

materials, their authentic background; the place from where they came, the dealer from whom they were bought, the exhibitions where they were displayed, the artists or artisans who created them and the catalogues and books where they were reproduced. Such records can only be obtained, quickly and easily, if museum documentation is scientifically organised and properly maintained. Much of the confusion and difficulty experienced generally in locating museum objects can be avoided if scientific recording is introduced in a museum from its very inception.

Due to the variance in the administration and control of museums, and also because of the difference in political ideology which have direct bearing on the type and scope of the recording system, it is not practicable to single out particular forms for adoption. Further, all institution are not of equal importance. The varying importance of museums naturally calls for varying-elaborate or simple- systems of documentation.13

Today, conferences of museum associations for improving the working of museums are almost a regular feature. Recording systems are undergoing constant changes not only

13. Ibid., P. XV.
in the western countries but also in other parts of the world. Whether the documentation standards of the museums of advanced western countries will be suited to India or Bangladesh, under the present conditions, is a matter for consideration. Financial limitation will no doubt be a major factor. Our system should be one that can work economically but without sacrifice of the essential requirements. 14

We have in Bangladesh a number of museums and galleries. Several others are in the process of being organised, but our documentation methods in recording acquisitions are perhaps neither scientific nor uniform. This is also partly true of museums of the advanced countries of the west, thus leaving much scope for improvement in their systems too.

It can be said without fear of contradiction that in the matter of acquisition we may not have all that we want, but whatever we have, must receive adequate attention. As soon as the object has entered the Museum, its custody, and care become a charge on the curator's time and attention. 15 The first step is to guarantee proper entry to the

14. Ibid., P. XVI.
antiquities and objects in the accession registers of the museum. There can be no earthly excuse for delay in this most essential item of museum work. The life history of a specimen in the museum starts from its accession in the museum books. The maintenance of the proper manuscript, registers and catalogues is the curator's own job and if this is not done well, none else can be blamed for it. It would not be difficult to come across cases of lapse in respect of proper registration—cases where antiquities once acquired for the museum have been allowed to remain unentered for years. This should be considered inexcusable. Our first request therefore to all concerned would be; "please be prompt and up-to-date in accessioning your acquisitions. Enter at once in your books whatever you allow to enter the museum."

Museums are responsible for objects entrusted to them whether it is a choice specimen for exhibition or whether it is primarily for study and comparison. "Live" as against 'dead' storage is one of the keys to the well being of a museum. There is little sense in having collections which cannot be used owing to lack of records, or to inability to locate them, or in keeping them under
conditions which lead to their deterioration. All these problems are faced by museums which have an active programme of collecting, research, and education. An efficient programme of conservation and a policy of accessibility to the collections for exhibitions (loan or temporary) and for research, will maintain the interest of the staff in their work and encourage others to make use of the institution.

The illegal acquisition of cultural property from one country by a stronger nation is not a modern phenomenon; it has been going on since the dawn of history. Before the emergence of public museums there were private art collections and treasure chambers of kings and princes. They were the outcome of the spoils of invasion. History is replete with stories of plunder. Another powerful method of acquisition is treasure-hunting. It holds a serious menace to the archaeological sites and monuments. It reached its zenith under imperialism. Cultivated gentlemen from the imperial states indulged in wanton destruction of archaeological sites and historical monuments. Culturally thirsty nations, without any sense of guilt, enriched their public museums by acquiring cultural property from countries under their subjugation in this destructive manner.

When the age of colonial rule came to an end with many nations attaining independence, there began a sophisticated but not less rapacious means of acquiring cultural property from the poorer countries. The richer and mighty nations invade the poorer states with the powerful arsenal of money. Aid giving agencies pour into the underdeveloped countries and while their officials perform their jobs they begin to appreciate antiquities and works of art not for enjoyment in their countries of origin but for acquisition and smuggling them out illegally in utter disregard of the national legislations. With increasing leisure time, growing affluence, easier accessibility, and greater mobility they keep on buying, through agents and dealers, objects from the poorer countries, which these countries require in order to build up and enrich their own museums. Such transactions are totally illegal and lead to a widespread and well-organized international system of theft and smuggling without any interruption. As a result, the poorer countries are victims of illegal digs and thefts from excavations. Their temples and museums temples in particular, are robbed of antiquities. 18

Every museum, large or small, public or private, national or local ought to preserve its collections, and in this task every museum, irrespective of its size, status

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and character, has to share the responsibility equally at least in regard to the primary step in caring for collections. All objects entrusted to museums are treasured, some as unique specimens of human creation, many for their artistic beauty or excellence, some as having great significance from a scientific or cultural standpoint, some for their monetary value, and many as the solid basis for the addition of human knowledge in various fields of study. Nevertheless an object would turn into an useless curio unless all the information concerning it is properly and systematically put on record. Hence the primary step in caring for collections is to record the information relating to every object as completely and accurately as possible in accordance with the established practice of museum documentation.

The museums in Bangladesh have utterly failed to maintain complete and accurate records of their collections. The state of documentation in the museums of Bangladesh is highly unsatisfactory and even dismal. What is highly deplorable is that no museum in Bangladesh has yet embarked upon indexing. Without indexing a museum cannot be expected to serve scholars and researchers.
As early as 1970 Enamul Haque, Director of the Dhaka Museum, disclosed, "During the initial years of Independence, most of the Valuable records of the museum were lost mainly due to inattention and now there are many exhibits whose antecedents can never be established correctly". Enamul Haque further said: "The Dhaka Museum is overwhelmed with its burden of backlog work where the documents are either lost or incomplete for the collections made prior to 1962 and the manyfold increases in collections since 1965."

There are three successive stages of museum documentation: registration, cataloguing and indexing. A museum can claim to have an inventory only when the first two stages are adequately covered. A statement based on physical counting is not an inventory. There is a fundamental difference between a checklist and an inventory. It is necessary to explain the difference. A checklist is only a list of objects for the purpose of scrutiny or verification. It is also of two categories:

20. Ibid., P. 42.
CATEGORY- 1

The checklist which was provided by the Dhaka Museum in Bangladesh Lalit Kala for example, is a checklist falling under category 1. It is a statement of the objects acquired by the Dhaka Museum during 1973-74. The checklist which was provided by the Varendra Research Museum in the Souvenir is also an example of category 1. The checklist gives not a complete list but a statement of the holdings of the Varendra Research Museum from inception in 1910 down to 30th June 1981.

CATEGORY- 2

The Archaeological Site Museum, Mahasthangarh has, for example, a checklist of its holdings under category 2.

Of the two categories, category 2 has got documentary value while category 1 which provides the crudest basis for scrutiny or verification has got no merit other than giving an idea of the nature and extent of collections. We are now illustrating these two categories.


## Category 1

1. Stone sculptures 750
2. Bronzes 35
3. Gold Coins 25
4. Silver Coins 820
5. Copper Coins 140

**Total 17,70**

Thus, we find that category 1 is based upon mere physical counting and as such it falls for short of an inventory.

## Category 2

1. Visnu in Stone 1978.1
2. Gold Coin of Akbar 1978.2
4. Hara-Gauri in bronze 1978.4
5. Illuminated Quran 1978.5

Thus we find that category 2 is a list of objects in the manner in which each object is identified in relation to its accession number.

An inventory based upon registration and cataloguing is a complex process. Then every museum must have an
A checklist of objects under category 1 is meant for publicity, neither for proper scrutiny or verification nor for museum documentation.

In my survey I discovered that quite a good number of museums had neither a checklist nor an inventory. Upon my request some of them prepared checklists of their holdings under category 1. Thus I have come to know the nature and extent of their collections.

No museum in Bangladesh has yet undertaken registration at a high professional level. The various archaeological museums of Bangladesh have not reached even the crude level of registration. Only the National Museum of Bangladesh has adopted a transaction form. However the system of registration in this museum fell short of the high professional level.

On acceptance of a work of art in a museum or gallery, its recording is known as registration. The method of registration, however, varies to an extent from country to country. And even within the same country, the procedure may differ from one museum to another due perhaps to the varying size of the collections. Some may have a large number of magnificent works of art of national importance costing billions while others may collect exhibits of less importance and not many in number.
The former may thus require an elaborate registration procedure, while the less important museums may need only a simple method of registration.23

The main function of registration is to identify objects and hence the adopted system should be scientific and methodical. In many museums and galleries (not only of under-developed, but also of advanced countries) registration is only entering all accessions in a register consecutively with such entries as 'serial number', 'date', 'short description', 'price' and a 'remarks' column. In other museums, however, advanced methods are in the process of being introduced while there are museums whose recording organisations are highly scientific and who are constantly supplementing or altering existing procedures by improved ones. The study of registration methods implies the observations of continued efforts to overcome difficulties in the recording procedures and their subsequent revisions, from time to time.

The main purpose of registration is to identify an object, and therefore the recording should be clear and include some specific information. It is needless to add that the initial recording should be correct and dependable as

these not only will identify an object but will also be used as a basis for further research and cataloguing.

Registration is of prime importance for the safety and easy location of museum objects and therefore its procedures should be methodical, simple and easy to operate. As future cataloguing is based on earlier recording, registration assumes great importance. The basic principles of registration for all museums, big or small, should be the same, though there may be differences in details. Like registration, cataloguing too must be on scientific lines. Cataloguing is the outcome of systematic study of an object from diverse angles. Accurate and methodical recording therefore is of prime importance.

Cataloguing is based upon a master accession sheet, involving, the process of compiling a full methodical description of an accession to a museum collection.

The Department of Archaeology and Museums has inherited the cataloguing system formulated by the Department of

Archaeology of Pakistan. This cataloguing system was first adopted for the National Museum of Pakistan which the Department had established in Karachi in 1950. The master accession sheet which the Department has inherited contains the following columns:

1. Date
2. Accession Number
3. Supplementary Number
4. Source
5. Gift or Purchase or Exchange or Loan
6. Object
7. Locality
8. Price or Value
9. Remarks (if possible with sketch or photograph).

A discerning eye will not fail to notice that the above sheet does not include any column for dimensions though it is a very vital aspect of museum documentation. However, the Department later introduced this column in the accession sheet. It may be observed here that the master accession sheet of the Department is far below the normal standard as it has not been designed to contain all the basic information as will be evident from a comparison with the master accession sheet adopted by the Dhaka Museum.

The Dhaka Museum was the first museum in Bangladesh to introduce a master accession sheet which was printed in 1965 when museology began to have any claim to be a science in this country. It may be mentioned here that in the 1960s museology was at a formative stage even in Britain. As a result, the master accession sheet which the Dhaka Museum introduced then had to be replaced in 1970 to bring it in conformity with the latest development. The one introduced in 1970 remains in vogue in the Bangladesh National Museum. While in 1965 the master accession sheets were loose leaves, those printed in 1970 were bound together into accession registers, each containing 400 master accession sheets.27

The master accession sheet or the Bangladesh National Museum, though elaborate, has not reached the highest international standard. The inventory is said to be miserably incomplete. In 1965 several thousand objects were existing in the Bangladesh National Museum merely on a basis of Physical counting.

On 22nd January 1982 the Dhaka Museum decided to segregate the collections department-wise still not physically but in the process of accessioning. One of the greatest contributions of museology or museum science is the

27. Ibid., P. 401.
accession number which is the key to the object and which should be referred to continuously in all work, e.g., in an identification tag, in a master accession sheet, in a caption, in a conservation report, in an exhibition catalogue, in a seminar paper, in a dissertation, and so on. Hence a museum has no right to complicate it at its own discretion if it really cares for museology and the international practice. The Bangladesh National Museum is indeed retrograding into the past when Nalini Kanta Bhattasali with no knowledge of museology had to give classified accession numbers in order to differentiate objects according to his needs of study and research. But museology has simplified this exercise by evolving a system of indexing and by scientific storage. 28

The master accession sheet adopted by the Chittagong University Museum, the Dinajpur Museum and the Zila Parisad Museum, Bogra falls far short of the normal standard. The Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy has not yet adopted a master accession sheet. The state of documentation in the other museums does not deserve any notice.

When documentation is basic to museum work, no museum can afford to neglect it any more. The primary

records and the master accession sheets together constitute the inventory of a museum. Every accession register as well as each master accession sheet therein must be duly authenticated by the Chief Executive officer or any other officer duly authorized by the former. The entries in each master accession sheet must be endorsed by an officer other than the one who has made entries therein. Unless an accession register as well as each master accession sheet therein is authenticated, it carries no official status. To prevent forgery every museum must lay down the procedures of documentation and must determine in clear terms how and by whom an accession register and each master accession sheet therein shall be authenticated and how and by whom the entries in each master accession sheet shall be endorsed. In a large museum each department should have its own accession registers, and the accession registers should be in duplicate. One set should be retained by the curatorial department concerned for normal work, and the other set should be held centrally and should remain locked as a measure of security against damage, loss, theft or forgery.

Indexing is of two kinds: one maintained by the registrar's office and the other by the curatorial department concerned. This indexing is a step taken prior to cataloguing.
and designed to meet a different set of requirements. The latter is the recording of the full details under different cards to suit the needs of scholars and researchers. Under this system indexing should be in accordance with a scheme of classification in which the various specimens have to be differentiated by object, material, provenance, historical period or date, school, artist, media, habitat, human group, purpose, use and so on. The information to be provided will depend upon the nature and characteristics of each object. At least the principal museums should embark upon indexing of both types as early as possible.

Catalogue raisonne is a Catalogue containing detailed descriptions and assessments of the objects covered in it. It is, therefore, a scholarly undertaking. Characterized by scholarly length and depth. According to Kenneth Hudson an accepted English equivalent for this rather snobbish and off-putting term is badly needed. He suggests that full catalogue or catalogue in depth might meet the situation. We prefer catalogue in depth. Nalinikanta Bhattasali's Iconography of Buddhist and Brahmanical Sculptures in the Dhaka

Museum is an example of a catalogue in depth. Not many of them are not scholarly in contents though well illustrated and even lavishly printed. Hence exhibition catalogues should form a class by themselves, and those which have attained a desired level of scholarship and depth may be treated as catalogues in depth. 32

Museum objects should flow in and out through the office of the Registrar with records of accountability handled by this office. Unfortunately this tradition—a vital requirement in modern museum administration has not developed in Bangladesh as yet. There should be a registrar in each museum, and the strength of his office should be according to the needs of each museum. Registrarial activities are to receive special attention from the Board of Trustees of each museum and be highlighted in the Annual Report of each major museum. 33

In the developed countries, particularly in the United states of America, the office of the Registrar remains very busy. From any Annual Report of the Smithsonian Institution it is evident that the office of the Registrar handles several million pieces of mail and thousands of

accession memoranda. For the year ended in 30 June 1973 the Shipping section of the office of the Registrar had processed over 2100 shipments totalling more than 40,000 pieces. The Smithsonian Institution gives us so much importance to registrarial activities that it has undertaken a microfilm project for the photographing of the original accession records.

In Bangladesh the museums, particularly those supported by the Government, are expanding. In the future more and more museum objects will flow in and out on loan for study by professionals and for exhibit purposes stimulated by television programmes, school projects, mobile exhibitions, exhibitions abroad and so on. It is highly irregular to receive and send out museum objects without records of accountability on a professional system. In the past many objects from a principal museum, for example, went out for television programmes without such records of accountability. The major museums should immediately develop a tradition of registrarial activities on professional lines to cope with the future needs.  

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Thus the collections of objects in any archaeological museum of Bangladesh are the essential part of a museum. They are administered in accordance with special rules: (a) bearing on various operations; (b) varying according to the type and level of the museum and the country concerned. These collections are constituted by what is called, in the broad sense of the term, acquisitions. Secondly a museum's acquisitions can be effected (a) subject to payment, i.e. made under a contract of sale or exchange with any person or a corporate body entitled to possess and dispose of his or its property, (b) free of charge, i.e. as a result of acts of generosity; direct immediate gifts from persons or corporate bodies; bequests from persons; deferred gifts or bequests from persons who reserve the right of enjoyment for themselves or their beneficiaries during a stated period, usually the lifetime of the person in question. 35

Thirdly in the proper discharge of his administrative functions, a museum curator, however competent, should not himself actually decide on an acquisition. His role is to select objects whose authenticity and inherent value seem to him such as to make them useful additions to the collections under his scientific control, i.e., objects covered by the museum's programme.

Fourthly much of the information entered in the registers or on the inventory cards is taken from written documents - correspondence, invoices, bills and other private or official documents which are proof of acquisition in the possession of the directorate or its Registration Department. These documents must be so field as to facilitate their consultation for administrative or research purposes.  

Then whatever system is adopted for the Archaeological Museums of Bangladesh:

1. The responsibility for keeping inventory entries and keeping records of locations up to date would fall to the curator, the registration department or, within the limits of their competence, the specialized departments, depending on the organization of the museum.

2. A useful practice is to replace any object that is removed from its usual position by what librarians call a dummy, i.e., a card giving the number and a very brief description of the object, and the date and purpose of the removal; this is also a gesture of courtesy towards the public if the object removed is an exhibit.

3. It is also useful to have a system of topographical symbols to indicate the premises and parts of premises in which the objects have a regular location—i.e., in the present case, to the exhibition rooms.

Thus we can note the nature of progress in the primary functions of museum collection and documentation in the archaeological museums of Bangladesh. The gradual expansion and multiplicity of the archaeological museums in Bangladesh, have risen to problems which can be properly met only by the adoption of the latest documentation techniques. All kinds of museum collections and their documentation require a rigid adherence to a definite code of rules, keeping in mind the nature and quality of objects kept by the respective museums. The documentation of the archaeological museum specimens was previously considered in Bangladesh to be a simple job devoid of any need for a careful study and handling. But now due to the prolongation of the life of an object which is indeed a basic museum criterion, is a difficult problem to deal with in the damp climate of Bangladesh.

Museum objects have to be maintained and their movements watched. With increase in their numbers by additional acquisitions, their identification and location become correspondingly difficult and hence the necessity for scientific
recording arises. Besides, documentation or recording is the essential pre-requisite for preservation of museum objects. Therefore, its procedures are to be carefully formulated. Acquisition, alienation, movement of exhibits in and outside the premises, packing, unpacking and repacking, registration and cataloguing in the archaeological museums of Bangladesh are the diverse activities systematised through recording. Documentation is truly the nerve centre of museum activities.

To control the movement of objects charts, forms and cards are used. They help to make the documentation system methodical and easy to operate. The procedures of scientific documentation are simple, mechanical and their application is obligatory. It is wrong to think that systematic recording is difficult and requires the services of only highly technical personnel. It may be convenient, but not essential, to have trained staff in the archaeological museums of Bangladesh for the purpose. The procedures themselves compel strict observance of the museum's approved methods as a matter of routine.

The acquisitions in an archaeological museum of Bangladesh is effected by the following six modes:

(1) Direct purchases
(ii) Field-work purchases
(iii) Direct gifts or bequests
(iv) Permanent loans
(v) Field collections
(vi) Excavations.

Only the Department of Archaeology and Museums is authorized to carry out excavations, and as such the archaeological museums under it build up their collections chiefly from excavations. Of course, during the British period both the Varendra Research Museum and the Dhaka Museum carried out excavations and thereby acquired many antiquities.

Acquisitions need to be made under an acquisition policy. No museum in Bangladesh is known to have adopted in writing an acquisition policy consistent with its aims and objectives. Acquisitions are, therefore, made at the discretion of the Chief Executive of the concerned museum.

The acquisition policy of each public museum, irrespective of its status, is to be determined at the national
level in order to ensure the harmonious and planned development of the public museums throughout the country. The acquisition policy on being drawn up at the national level, it is felt, to be published and reviewed at least once every five years.

The acquisition policy in the museums of Bangladesh is to be followed by rules of procedure for acquisition of museum objects to be administered by an Acquisition committee. Only the Bangladesh National Museum (inherited from the Dhaka Museum) and the Chittagong University Museum have got the rules of procedure of acquisition of museum objects. It is felt that all other museums in Bangladesh immediately report rules of procedure for acquisition of museum objects, a vital requirement in accordance with the code of practice in museum administration.