CHAPTER - FOUR

DOCUMENTATION

Registration and Cataloguing form one of the fundamental functions of museums. The primary purpose of registration is to provide an immediate, brief and permanent means of identifying each object in the collection. Each and every object as soon as gets into the museum whether to form a permanent or temporary acquisition should be duly registered, otherwise it may get lost in midst of increasing collection. The method and procedure of registration vary from country to country. It has been noticed that even within the same country the procedure may differ from one museum to other due perhaps to the varying sizes of the collections. The main principle and function of registration is to identify the objects and hence the adopted system should be scientific and methodical. It is needless to say that the initial recording should be correct and dependable as these not only facilitate identification but will also be used as a basis for further research and cataloguing. It differs from cataloguing, the function of which is to classify objects methodically and usually with descriptive detail. That the improved and standardized documentation is the prerequisite of a modern museum have been now realized by one and all. Since independence there have been fruitful co-operation among the museum-men of our country for improvement of various technical aspects of museum administration and presentation including documentation. Conferences
have been held and important decision taken for improvement of museum recording procedure.

In many of the bigger museums of the West, there is a registrar who undertakes registration of all objects in the museum. All incoming objects should go through the Registrar's Office. It is generally regarded by all that the movement of all exhibits, whether big or small, should be handled by the registration department for proper and consistent recording. In the site museums of the Archaeological Survey of India, this work is done by the Curator or Assistant Superintendent Archaeologist for Museums himself. He is assisted in his work usually by a clerk.

It is a matter of great satisfaction that cataloguing done in Indian Museums as early as in the thirties of this century was appreciated by Markham and Hargreaves in their survey report of Indian Museums. He writes, "generally speaking, cataloguing in India is now neat and accurate, and the various acquisition books that we have seen reflect credit upon its curators." This is true even now in case of site museums. Lately, the procedure has been made perfect and more accurate, may scientific.

The accession register maintained previously by the Archaeological Survey of India at the Indian Museum, Calcutta, had the following columns:

2. This modern accurate and systematic accession register for the site museums was first implemented by Late Sri R.C. Kar, formerly Superintendent, Museums Branch and Superintendent, Eastern Circle, Archaeological Survey of India.
But at present an uniform accession register is being maintained by all site museums under the Survey's control.

They have the following columns:

1. Date (date of entry)
2. Accession number
3. Source or Field Register number
4. How acquired i.e. Gift (g), Purchase (p), Exchange (e), Loan (l)
5. Description
6. Period
7. Locality
8. Price or Value
9. Location in the Museum
10. Remarks and references.

The columns are so arranged that the record of each accession occupies a single line across the pages. The early records in most of the older museums were kept in ledgers. As the leaves of a bound book cannot be removed, entries must be written
in hand. This is a laborious process involving much time and Secondly, it lacks uniformity, as different people at different
time may have written entries in the book. There is still the
disadvantage in bound accession register which in due course
becomes more and more cumbersome and heavy. Difficulty arises
when additional information is available it cannot be written
in the limited space allotted for each column. When new informa-
tion are available, sometimes corrections are required to be
made as occasion arises. Still it has got few advantages. Curators
or Museum-in-charge can write down every available information
about any object in one place along a single page allotted for an
object. So to the Curator, it is much more handy. The scholars
and research fellows can get information in one place ready-made.
Moreover, in suitably bound register the danger of pages being
lost is minimized. In course of time when it becomes brittle,
fresh register may be used. In the site museums under the Archaeo-
logical Survey of India bound book accession register of uniform
type is still in use.

Few important points may be noted while using bound ledgers.
The leaves must be of pure rag paper and chemically neutral, the
bindings must be solid, and the pagination continuous and inde-
ensible. The objects must be entered legibly, and the ink used
must be such as not to fade away with the passing of time. Once
written it should not be rubbed off or chemically obliterated.
If alterations are need to be made, they can be done in ink of a different color and should be initiated by the Curator. A rough draft of all entries should be made before they are written in the register finally so as to minimize the necessary corrections. Loose-leaf register is also suggested for accessioning objects in many museums of the west. There is an advantage in this. When necessary corrections are required to be done, sheets may be removed and fresh typed one may be supplied. There may be some risk of losing a sheet or replacing it incorrectly, but this does not seem very great if the sheets are numbered and if entries are made by the registrar or the staff member responsible for registration. Cards have further uniformity, space for writing additional information and may be duplicated to form other files.

The objects after acceptance in the accession register is given the next vacant accession number which is marked on the object. Marking museum object is obviously an important task in all museums for it is by this very number that an accessioned object is easily identified in the records. For convenience of marking, museum objects may be divided into two classes, porous and non-porous. Non-porous (non-absorbent) objects like stone, metal, glass, ceramic and wood may be directly marked with black or white enamel paint. Sometimes, Chinese water proof black ink is also used. This water proof black ink is very suitable for marking painting, manuscript, textiles, costumes, and garments. Durability of the mark is another important factor. At regular
interval, the marking needs to be repainted.

All the objects that come to the museum are not supposed to be given permanent accession number as there may be objects for special exhibition, technical examination, repair, inspection. These objects remain with the museum for a short period. Objects of the later categories should be marked, otherwise these might get lost or mixed up with permanent collection. Secondly, marking should be done in such a way that when occasion arises this can be easily removed. Temporary marks of incoming material may be made on paper sticker, tag or adhesive tape. Adhesive tape should be used with due care, otherwise it may damage the object.

The numbering system is accepted today as appropriate and convenient identification of a museum object. The registration or accession number should be one that can be assigned and attached to an object by the Curator immediately when the object is accepted officially in the museum collection. The system previously followed in the Archaeological Section, Indian Museum, Calcutta, was to have one continuous series of numbers for coins and for other antiquities. The result was that the numbers in each series in a museum section of its size with huge collection becomes too long. The difficulty was sought to be overcome long ago by a separate series of numbers beginning with letter 'MS' and a new series of numbers of other antiquities beginning with letter 'BE'. Moreover,
the uniform system appears to have followed in the numbering of the individual specimens belonging to one lot and received at one time from one source. In many cases, they were given different serial numbers while in few instances, they were given the same number and description only showing the total number of the lot. In the Archaeological Section, Indian Museum, Calcutta, while this was attached to the Archaeological Survey of India, new accession number starts with "A" followed by serial number. In the site museums of the Survey, similar process was followed.

Now in many museums of the West today, every museum specimen regardless of its classification, is given a number which discloses not only the year of its acquisition but also its exact position in the series of the year. This was the method followed in the late Central Asian Antiquity Museum of the Archaeological Survey of India. Thus, for example, a number 52.6 would mean that the object was acquired in 1952 and the serial number of acquisition was 6. The advantage of this compound system is, however, that the accession number may be extended as required by additional decimal points followed by further number of letters. Further, if large collections are received at one time from a single source and if it is not possible to determine immediately the exact number of objects to be accessioned, delay in registration can be avoided by using a number composed of three parts: the year of acquisition, the number assigned within that year to a collection accepted at one time
from a single source viz. excavation, gift, loan, etc, and the serial number of the individual item within that collection. The eleventh entry of 156th accession of 1962 will be numbered as 62-156.11. Sometimes, fourth element or unit is used when the object consists of several component parts. This system of numbering has, however, some disadvantages of a continuous serial number running into several digits. But it has the advantage of disclosing at a glance the relative position of the object in the accession register and the year of its acquisition. This decimal system can be of much advantage to the site museums where the annual entry is not high.

Cataloguing denotes systematic classification of objects methodically and usually with descriptive detail. Catalogue is the second stage of work after registration. The catalogue may be a bound book or a loose-leaf book or a card file. The old method of book catalogue has now been given up. A bound volume, no doubt, keeps records nicely but it renders impossible sometimes for readjustment with more details when available later on. Catalogues, in fact, are veritable boon to research scholars as these supply information of antiquities in museums (especially when they are unable to visit them). Scientifically compiled catalogues of descriptive nature are very essential. A detailed catalogue is preferred for other reasons. A descriptive catalogue will contain detailed information which may not be possible at a later date to obtain from the object, worn out by the ravages of time.
The catalogue of a museum has a number of different functions. From the viewpoints of scholars it would be a compendium of the total available knowledge about each particular object. From the viewpoint of security, it is the document which should provide necessary information if the object is stolen. From the viewpoint of the general public, it is a source of information as to the products of any given period, place or technique.

The keynote of any system of cataloguing should be simplicity. A too elaborate system may defeat its purpose by perplexing the users. For cataloguing objects, classification raises a number of problems. Medium and function taken together may form a sound basis of classification of objects in a museum of archaeology and art. In the site museums under the Survey, we can broadly classify them into the following groups:

1. Stone Sculpture
2. Metal Image
3. Terracotta figure
4. Pottery and Ceramics
5. Coins and Medals
6. Inscriptions on stone, copper, terracotta, metal plate, palm leaves, etc.
7. Prehistoric artifacts
8. Seals and sealings
9. Gems and intaglios
10. Household objects
11. Beads and ornaments
(12) Paintings and drawings
(13) Textiles and Costumes
(14) Arms and Armour
(15) Minor art objects
(16) Manuscripts and Farmans
(17) Miscellaneous objects

The entire collection of any site museum under the Survey can be easily grouped under any of the above-mentioned category or class. There are two alternatives according to which records giving particulars of objects of one class could be maintained viz. (a) by having separate sectional registers or (b) by making cards for each objects and classifying these cards according to class or may be both. There are both advantages and disadvantages in both the systems. Register for each class of object aims at precision and accuracy which can be hardly achieved in other way. To have separate sectional registers would mean having registers with different columns for each section, since the requirement for entry of objects of each section would be different. Prescription of specific columns would ensure that all peculiarities of a particular object will call for attention. Thus it facilitates scholars and research students by supplying with every minute peculiarity of individual class of objects. On the contrary, there are a few disadvantages in this system. To have separate sectional register means increase in labour and additional cost of printing different types of registers. For small size museums with limited
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class:</th>
<th>Material:</th>
<th>Locality</th>
<th>Reg.No.</th>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Date:</th>
<th>Size:</th>
<th>Gallery:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mode & date of acquisition with ref:

Case No.

Drawer No.

Short description:

D.G.A.87
S.P.(P)Ltd.-MB-56/1-5489-18.5.60-1,25,000

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Fig.8. Index card of all antiquities other than coins in use

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dynasty:</th>
<th>Metal:</th>
<th>Reg.No.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>King:</th>
<th>Weight:</th>
<th>Cabinet No.</th>
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<td></td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date:</th>
<th>Size:</th>
<th>Drawer No.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mode & date of acquisition with ref:

Short description:

D.G.A.86
S.P.(P)Ltd.-MB-56/1-6671-22-6-60-1,25,000

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Fig.9. Index card of coins in use
staff and where objects are not too many, card-index arranged separately is of great advantage. The card used should be preferably of a size in which the necessary particulars can easily be entered. Site museums are using two types of cards (size 6"x4"), one for coins and other for all class of objects other than coins.

The index cards should be kept in cardfile cabinets (preferably made of steel. The Godrej Company made is good and widely used in libraries). The cards should be of thicker quality otherwise with regular use these might become brittle and get spoiled. The cards now used by the Survey are very thin and usually these are written by the Technical Assistant/Curator or Assistant Superintending Archaeologist for Museums. For convenience sake, typed cards may be used as these are good to look at. Any typist under the Curator's direction can easily type it. There is less risk if the cards are perforated, affixed to rods and kept locked. Extra copies should always be available with the Superintendent. The index cards (as shown here) of two categories are surely satisfactory. (Fig. 3 & 9)

But the card meant for coins needs to be studied in detail. It has been noted that there is no provision for attaching photographs both on obverse and reverse. These are very essential for the study of coins. It is better to attach photographs along with the important notes on the front side but not in the reverse side. Bibliographical references may be given on the reverse of the card. Further, if there is any inscription with mint marks, all these can be noted here. The ideal card for coins may include the following points:-
## Obverse

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dynasty</th>
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<tbody>
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<table>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Size</th>
<th>Drawer No.</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</table>

Mode and date of acquisition with Ref.:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Locality</th>
<th>Photograph</th>
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</table>

Short description:

Inscriptions with mint marks

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Obv.</th>
<th>Rev.</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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## Reverse

References:

1.
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7.
It is a matter of much pride and satisfaction that most of the site museums have a very rich reserve collection. These reserve collections are real boon to the scholars and research students and whenever they approach Technical Assistant/Curator or Assistant Superintending Archaeologist for Museums, they always extend all available facilities. For serving the scholars and interested public better, reserve collection should be so methodically and neatly organized that these could be easily available to them.

A survey of the existing condition of the storage at various site museums reveal the following interesting information. At Fort St. George Museum, Madras, the main storage is located in the ground floor of a building named after Lord Clive. This measures approximately 704 sq.ft. and this is outside the Museum premises. Coins, medals and other valuable antiquities are kept in iron safes at the room of the Deputy Superintending Archaeologist for Museums. The coins are kept in the wooden cabinets in trays similar to the Indian Museum coin room.

The Museum at Hampi was previously housed at the historic "Elephant stable" of the Vijayanagar empire. A portion of the reserve was then kept at a nearby protected monument. The valuable antiquities like gold and cooper coins, palm leaf manuscripts were kept at that time in the iron safe and rarely shown except to the scholars.
on request. The Store-Room was then in a rented house, located at a considerable distance. Gold ornaments including one gold waist chain, two gold rings and others were all deposited with the treasury at Bellary. Since the shiftment of the museum collection to the present new museum building, some changes have taken place. The reserve collection has been kept in a room which is well protected like the other three museum galleries. A new sculpture shed has come up to accommodate the reserve collection.

The Museum at Halebid has been organised in an area of about 60' x 60' sq.ft. in the open air within the compound wall of Hoyasaaleswara temple. The reserve collection is lying in the open field under barbed wire fencing. The plan for the construction of a suitable museum building with adequate storage facilities is under consideration.

The Museum at Goa is a very recent one. As the museum is a new one, the storage facilities are gradually building up. The reserve antiquities are kept in three storage rooms and some of them are also kept in one portion of a big hall where the Museum Office is located at present. The storage area is approximately 1053'x1699' sq.ft. The storage rooms are within the museum building.

At the Tipu Sultan Museum, Srirangapatna, the reserve collection mostly of coins are arranged in wooden coin cabinets. For additional security, the gold objects, though a few in number,
are kept in the local treasury.

The Museum at Sanchi, zonal head-quarter of the Museum Branch, was previously housed in a small building in the hill top. The old museum on the hill top was not suitable for any large scale development. A new building, meant previously for a college was purchased and after necessary additions and alterations, it was converted into a Museum building. Provision has been made for keeping the reserve collection well and easily accessible to the scholars.

At the Khajuraho Museum's reserve collections were kept in three rooms in a building hired for the office use quite away from the museum. Except a few cupboards used for keeping the minor objects, the museum has no storage equipments then. The area of the storage was 656 sq.ft. out of the 19680 sq.ft. museum area. The new museum building has no provision for keeping the storage collection. Suitably we hope in near future enough provision would be made ready.

At the Red Fort Museum, New Delhi, coins are kept in safe reserve, well classified and catalogued at a nearby store room. These are stored in wooden cabinets with trays containing rows of curved cut cups. The Wooden Cabinets with their coins are kept inside burglar proof iron safe. Museum's reserve like textiles, paintings and manuscripts are stored in wooden cupboards. The
storage area is about one-eighth of the floor area of the exhibition. Lack of sufficient space is a hindrance to undertake further development. Very recently, the Branch has undertaken an overall improvement of this museum and has completed it.

The Sarnath Museum, has one large hall and two comparatively smaller rooms behind the Museum building. The area occupied for storage seems to be one-fourth of the floor area of the Museum. Besides these storage facilities, small antiquities are kept in cupboards below the display cases in the exhibition hall. For keeping large sculptures, stair-type pedestals built along the wall have been found effective. For keeping seals, beads, silver and bronze jewelleries, steel cupboards have been used. The reserve collections need to be classified and arranged in modern line and more storage space is needed.

In the Nalanda Museum, store-rooms are at a distance from the main Museum Building and the exhibition galleries. The storage area is about 131 sq.ft. (nearly one-eighth of the total exhibition area) and contains besides the curatorial stores, other house-keeping stores of the museum. A good number of exhibits are kept in the cabinets at the bottom of table-show cases in the exhibition hall itself, the top of which are used for public display. More precious antiquities are, however, stored in a strong room-cum-gallery within the Museum Building. The coins are kept in a burglar-proof iron safe in the Curator's Room. The storage space is inadequate.
At the Bodhgaya Museum, the store-room for keeping sculptures is within the Museum Building and very near to the galleries of the Museum Hall. The area occupied by the storage room is about one-sixth of the exhibition space. The bronzes and some other minor antiquities are kept in steel cupboards in the Curator's room. For want of sufficient space, storage cannot be properly organised.

The Museum at Konarak, Orissa, is a recent one. Still adequate provision of storage area is needed here also.

The storage collection at the Nagarjunakonda Museum, is absolutely insufficient, consequently half of the gallery is now kept for the reserve collection. The eastern gallery has been partitioned and the sculptures have been kept on the floor. The minor antiquities like coins and objects of similar nature are kept in steel almirahs. Facilities for using the reserve by the scholars and interested visitors would soon be available.

At the Kondapur Museum, there is a storage room, adjoining to the gallery in which three steel almirahs with glass shutters are provided for the storage of valuable reserve. There are five more almirahs for the storage of all other antiquities and the size of the area occupied by store room is 60' x 60' sq.ft.

The Museum at Amaravati has some facilities to keep the reserve. The collection in the reserve consists of crystal caskets, silver and lead coins and some other important objects. In order
to keep the sculptures, a sculpture-shed has been constructed. It is understood that the Superintendent has got more plans for reorganizing the reserve in near future.

The Vaisali Museum, which is still under organization, enough provision for storage has not been made. At Taj Museum, Agra, the office of the museum has started functioning under an Assistant Superintending Archaeologist for Museums. The reserve wing of the museum is in the process of setting up in one of the buildings of the monument complex of the Taj Mahal garden. This museum has at present adequate storage facilities on the first floor of the building while the ground floor is utilized for the purpose of gallery.

The foregoing survey reveals that many of these site museums are being housed in modern building. As a consequence, storage is organized within the available space. Some are in historical buildings and modern museological facilities are lacking. Still, arrangements for storage are quite satisfactory, though lack of sufficient space is always the problem with them. Same is also true in case of rented buildings which have been converted into a museum purpose.

Documentation of the storage object is of primary importance. It should be done in such a way that each individual specimen can be traced out immediately and all pertinent information can be available within a short time. This facilitates investigators and students who come very often to study the reserve. To ensure correct identification of the objects, there should be a general register.
for them having the following columns: (1) Date of entry
(2) Accession number (this needs to be written on the object inconspicuously) (3) Description of the object (4) Period
(5) Locality (6) How acquired, i.e., Gift, purchase, exchange or loan (7) Name of the donor (8) Size and weight (specially necessary in case of coins) (9) Location in the Museum with cabinet and drawer or shelf No. (10) References (11) Remarks (already discussed in detail).

After registration in the general accession register, the objects, if required, should be sent to the Chemical Branch for necessary treatment (Survey has Chemical Branch at Dehra Dun). Thereafter, the objects are made ready for entry in the sectional registers where further detailed information regarding the objects should be recorded. Necessary precaution should be taken to avoid confusion arising between the entries in the general accession register and those in the detailed sectional register.

Further, index cards should be prepared containing the detailed information about the object. At a subsequent stage, several copies of the index-cards may be prepared, their number depending on the classification of heads under which a particular museum specimen may be required for study and research. Index-card may be arranged according to provenance, Material, School or in alphabetical sequence.
For better security, index-cards as well as the general accession register should be kept in safe custody, preferably at the Curator's own room. Accession register should be properly bound. The index-cards may be kept in card file cabinets. The Index-cards should contain a location column where entries regarding the location of the object should be written preferably in pencil. All the store room furniture like racks, shelves, cabinets, boxes should be so marked and labelled that their reference can be immediately found in the index-cards and vice versa. In order to prevent theft and to provide information to police and detective agencies in case of any loss, a full scale plan for the preparation of a variety of index-cards is under consideration. This elaborate plan shall cover antiquities and works of art not only in the museum but those which are attached to the monuments.

For maintenance a well organized store, following points should be considered:

1) There should be at least as much space for curatorial (including storage), administrative and service purpose, as for exhibition.

2) The space allotted should be planned in a way to allow for adding more space without affecting the basic scheme of the museum building, i.e., without disturbing the basic plans of the exhibition area.
3) The storage area should be very near to the curatorial office and at the same time near the galleries where similar objects are displayed. If possible, the storage area should be very near to the place of loading and unloading objects.

4) The floor should be hard-wearing and easy to clean and should be easily washable. It should not absorb dirt or dust and must be damp-proof and shock-resisting. Lastly, it should be non-slippery with adequate drainage facility and sealed roof to prevent any damage or wastage from heavy rain-fall.

5) Necessary equipments like fire extinguishers, sand and water-buckets should be installed near at hand. Guards should be on round-the-clock duty in the area.

Furniture for storage objects are of prime necessity for all museums. Considering the question of finance, following furniture may be suggested for use in site museums.

(a) The heavy sculptures and architectural pieces should be placed on masonry benches or pedestals with sufficient precautionary measures so that moisture do not affect them in any way. The lighter and smaller pieces may be kept inside glazed steel almirahs.

(b) Ivory and wooden objects may be kept in steel cabinets.
(c) Pottery, beads and terracottas may be stored in steel cabinets. Beads should be kept in boxes padded with cotton in the same way as done by jewellers. Small fragile potsherds and terracotta objects should be kept in boxes with similar cotton padding.

(d) Coins and jewelleries should be kept in strong room or in iron safes. The room used for storage of these valuables should be very near to the Curator's room and should be easily accessible. Jewelleries should be mounted in boxes in the same way as is done by the jewellers. The cabinets used for keeping coins in reserve are used in site museums are satisfactory. These are kept in wooden cabinets with a series of wooden trays with cut out grooves for keeping individual coins. Lead and potin coins are kept in steel cabinets as the wooden cabinets are not found safe for them. There are some disadvantages involved in the use of cabinets of the type just mentioned. While the trays are pulled out from the cabinets, coins are likely to be dislodged from the cups. To keep them in proper position, perspex sheet may be kept on it. The other disadvantage of the system is that as only one side of the coin is visible and as a consequence they are to be handled while these are being studied.
(e) Manuscripts should be kept in usual library method in glazed almirahs. At the National Museum, New Delhi, some novel method in storing paintings is in vogue. There each miniature painting on paper is mounted on a folding card-board by means of two or three strips of cellophane tape. The front of the painting is protected by laying a sheet of tissue paper over it, taking care that the glazed side of the paper does not come in contact with the painted surface. They are classified according to school and stored in specially designed boxes of cedar wood or compressed fibre which is open on the top and on one side.

Besides the storage equipments few other necessary things should be always kept ready at hand. These are as follows:

(a) A number of trays of suitable sizes, preferably in wood for carrying smaller specimen's from one place to another.

(b) Wheel trolley of both lighter and heavier capacity for carrying objects from one place to other. It is needless to say that trolley should have ball-bearing and rubber-tyred wheels and cushioned so that they may be moved easily without any noise or scratches on the floor.

(c) Vacuum cleaners should be provided for cleaning reserve rooms periodically.
(d) Small stools and steel folding chairs and tables at the storage room for visiting scholars and students should be provided.

(e) Provision for light and exhaust fan at the storage room should be made. Lighting should neither be strong nor too dim. If there is no provision for electricity, sufficient provision should be made for getting natural light.
NOTES


