



Dr. Khokon Raut
Assistant Professor
Deptt. of Visual Arts
University of Kalyani
hokonraut@gmail.com

IISRR-IJR ID- 2518(5);

DOI No. 10.5281zenodo.15711904

Conservation Knowledge in Art

Dr. Khokon Raut

Abstract:

Decay is general phenomena, so after completion, any artifacts undergo the process of deterioration automatically brought about by different causes. Artifacts displayed in museums and in private collections are not only good to look at, but makes us proud about our glorious heritage. Hence it is our duty to protect and preserve the works of art, both as a mark of respect for the past and as a responsibility towards our future generation. In the past, awareness for preservation was almost absent but situation is improving at present. To fulfill this obligation of preservation a scientific planned approach is necessary. A thorough knowledge about deterioration of artifacts is required as well as preservation. The deterioration of artifacts depends on the situation and location where the artifacts are kept. An artifact demands a suitable place where the general temperature, humidity and light are balanced. Otherwise, various types of decay will appear in the complicated structure of artifacts. Awareness of heritage as well as conservation knowledge are to be increased for preserving artifacts.

Keywords: Cultural Heritage, Factors of Deterioration, Preventive Measures.

1. Introduction:

Creativity is the source of greatest happiness in human beings. Man creates different types of artifacts to express diverse ideas or thoughts of the artists. Artifacts are thus born, and after a certain period of time it is subjected to inevitable deterioration, internally or externally. Thus, every art object needs major precaution for enhancement of its life span. Here, we can say that an artist is mortal, but the artifacts are not, with proper conservation artifacts' life can be prolonged.

We live in nature. There are different types of elements in nature which affect living being as well as inanimate objects in direct or indirect ways. When we are not able to prevent pollution, we become ill and take medicines to cure it. Whereas inanimate objects are not able to express so their deterioration starts in an invisible way. Thus, the heritage artifacts are deteriorated and we lose them after a time.

The environment of our India is diversified; its effects are reflected in painting. Temperature, Humidity, light and pollution deteriorate paintings from different aspects. Materials and techniques have great role in painting's life. The use of materials in painting is accumulation of organic and inorganic components. Every material has different character and behaviour. The fluctuation of temperature and humidity create various problem in painting. On the other hand, deterioration depends on the quality of materials of paintings. The techniques of painting are also



the great factors of deterioration. The environmental deterioration depends on geographical location of area. Indian diversified environment is different as per every Zone and its effect on painting in several way. The climate of central zone of India is very dry and costal area the humidity is so high in India. The fluctuation of weather deteriorate painting in coastal area more than others area.

2. Review of related Literature:

In conservation and restoration subject, there are different types of books. Besides the accumulation of practical knowledge which is achieved during conservation work. From various articles published in different books and magazines and from my own experience and research I have prepared this research article. Different books on historical aspects of cultural heritage had to be consulted. For the technical aspects, besides my own experience I had to go through books by various authors on the technical and conservation aspects of paintings. What are being discussed now are references by different authors who have contributed to various articles on the subject from their point of view.

3. Conservation:

It is essential to know the definition of conservation. Any direct or indirect actions taken for any objects to enhance life, is called conservation. Conservation has two divisions.

3.1 Preventive Conservation:

All indirect actions aimed at increasing life expectancy of undamaged or damaged cultural property is termed as preventive conservation-like dusting, maintaining light, temperature, humidity etc.

3.2 Curative Conservation:

All forms of direct actions aimed at increasing the life expectancy of undamaged and/or damaged cultural property is termed as curative conservation, e.g. Solvent cleaning, lining etc.

We are unaware but we do practice conservation in our daily life. Different kinds of activities are being done by us daily for maintaining ourselves that can be termed as conservation. For example-

- Brushing teeth in the morning.
- Washing clothes and keeping them properly.
- Daily dusting and cleaning house, furniture etc.
- Arrangement of kitchen and the goods kept there.
- Proper storing of books and clothes in almirah.

All these activities are included in conservation terms. Directly or indirectly these types of work are executed everywhere. May be unconsciously, but we have an age-old tradition of conservation in both village and urban area. For preventing insects, traditional neem leaves, red chilies are kept in books since long. Camphor is used in clothes in almirah. Smoke of resin is spread in rooms; to prevent insects and germs are conservation.



Image - 1: Neem leaves
(Picture-Author's collection)



Image-2: Chilies
(Picture-Author's collection)

Now it is clear that every person is involved in conservation work in their own place. Every object, like furniture, lights, fans, T.V, computer, paintings etc. needs conservation. Otherwise, all objects will be deteriorated by different factors of deterioration, like, insects, dust and dirt, pollution etc.

Heritage artifacts depict old history, for example artifacts of Indus Valley, Egyptian civilization express the social and cultural life of the period. It is clear how important the heritage artifacts are for the new generation. Today's creative works will be history in the long run. Human life gets treatment for good health. It is obvious that artifacts too demand conservation treatment for prolonged life.

There are many museums in India (Private and Government) for conserving and suitable arrangement for display of these objects and stored objects. Generally, museums have conservation lab and conservators. Besides there are lots of private collections of art work, whose owners need proper conception of conservation.

3.3 Different Kinds of Factors for Deterioration of Artifacts or Objects:

There are different kinds of factors of deterioration of artifacts or objects:

- (1) **Inherent factors:** Poor quality of materials used and implementation of faulty techniques.
- (2) **External Factors:**



- Environmental factors, (light, humidity, moistures, fungus, insects, pollution etc.)
- Mishandling, neglect of objects
- Vandalism etc.

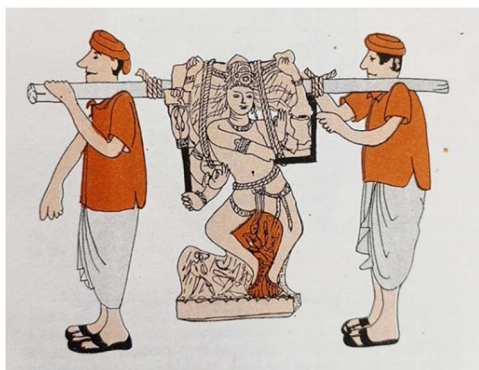


Image-3, Mishandling of art Object

(Image from book- Agarwal, O.P. (1999).
Preservation of Art Object & Library Materials,
India: National Book Trust. Page-88)



Image-4, Unethical Restoration,

Collection: State Archaeology Museums,
Government of West Bengal, Kolkata;
(Image from book- Raut, Dr. Khokon (2023). Early
Bengal Oil paintings. New Delhi: Aayu
Publications. Page-141)

All materials for creating artifacts can be divided in two categories-(i) Organic (ii) Inorganic. Any material derived from living organism forms organic materials. For example-linseed oil, canvas, wood, leather, paper, palm leaves, barks, textiles, bones, ivory and feather etc. Any material derived from earth and mines which are not from life, like soil, iron, gold etc. are called inorganic materials.

These organic and inorganic materials have different behavioral characteristics. They react differently when affected by fluctuation in the atmospheric elements like temperature, humidity, light. For example, organic materials like paper, parchment, wood etc. are all hygroscopic in nature and therefore swell with increase in the humidity of the atmosphere and shrink with its decrease. When these materials are arranged with synthetic materials which are not that responsive to change in humidity then the artifacts will undergo stress and strain which will affect their longevity. So, compatibility and durability of materials and their suitability have to be identified properly and used by the creators. Although artists create with their emotion and passion, they should be aware of the above factors to provide a long life for their creations.

4. Artist should know the materials before using:

Visual arts depict themes in different ways than other languages. It depends on materials (like colour, canvas, paper etc.). In present time, the advanced technology is utilized in modern art and



this language of art expressed in different ways. Artists accumulate different materials and mediums, like light and sound, video, two- and three-dimensional assimilation. In this context an artist should think about compatibility and durability of materials for prolonging the artifacts' life. That is why painters need to survey the market for different materials.

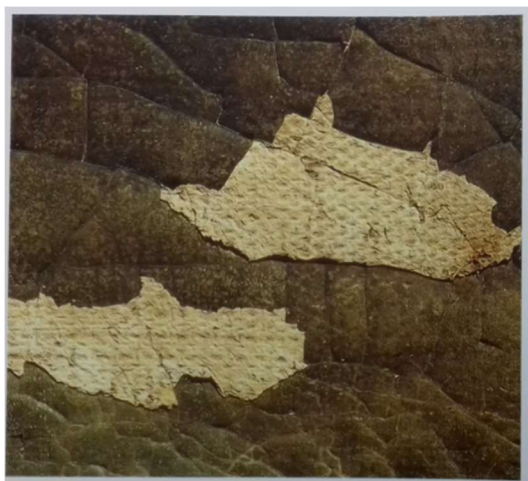


Image-5: Flaking of paint layer

(Image from-Raut,.Khokon .(2010)..Dissertation Paper-Some aspect of preventive conservation of oil painting. Chennai: CCRL, Government Museum, Chennai.Page-30)



Image-6: A leather binding damaged by

insects *(Image from book- Agarwal, O.P. (1999). Preservation of Art Object & Library Materials, India: National Book Trust. Plate-XXVIII)*

Artists should know that the use of cheap materials not only affects the quality of their work but is often not economical; a pure, superior quality colour will go further than a inferior quality one. Materials will make a good painter and that good painter can turn out surprisingly good things under adverse condition. Few eminent artists' works are brilliant, but due to use of poor-quality materials, their works cannot be preserved properly.

In this context, art students and artists should know the paintings anatomy and materials' categorical characteristics, otherwise, the technical fault and lack of materials knowledge will reduce the life expectancy of artifacts. It has already been discussed that the paintings or artifacts' life depend on artist's skill, technical knowledge which are utilized in artifacts. Conservation knowledge should be known to all artists and art lovers.

5. Requirement of Suitable Atmosphere of Artifacts:

- Maintaining the temperature between 20°C to 22°C and relative humidity between 50 to 55% for artifacts. The maximum amount of light permissible for sensitive material like water colour paintings is 50 lux and for oil paintings it can go as high as 150 lux. Damp area should be avoided for all artifacts.



- Storage area should be maintained clean and unusual things should not be stacked in the storage.
- No object should be directly placed on the floor.
- Insecticide should be spread in store area.

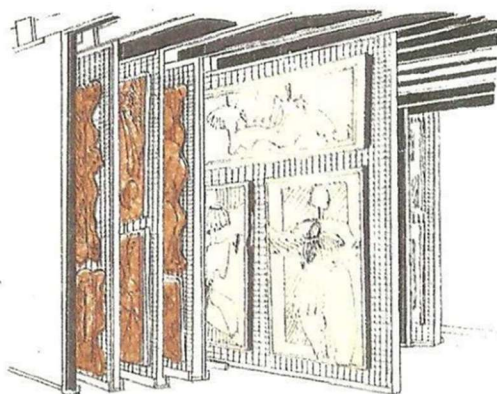


Image-7, Sliding Screen for keeping paintings
(Image from book Agarwal, O.P. (1999). Preservation of Art Object & Library Materials, India: National Book Trust. Page-88)

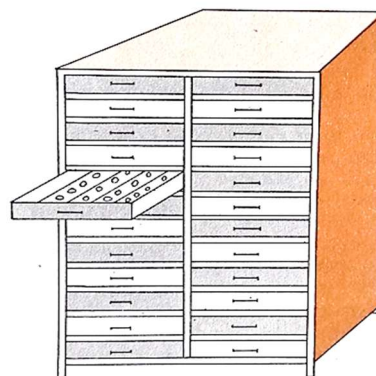


Image-8, A cabinet for storing coins
(Image from book- Agarwal, O.P. (1999). Preservation of Art Object & Library Materials, India: National Book Trust. Page-41)

6. Awareness of conservation:

Art awareness transcends human's mentality to a level which is very healthy for our society. Similarly, awareness of conservation is equally essential for all. Personal collection or public property get proper value if timely restoration is done. For protecting public property, public should take the responsibility to see that such art collection is well maintained.

There is no sufficient conservation training institute in India except NRLC, Lucknow, Delhi, National Museum and Chennai. But there are many arts Institution in different places in India. Students are getting knowledge of art technique, thoughts, history, but without knowledge of art conservation. So, it is essential that students receive the minimum knowledge of conservation for protecting artifacts. There are different advantages of this.

- This experience helps to protect their own paintings.
- They can give the idea to protect public heritage.
- They can spread the awareness of conservation to public that can be a part of social awareness.

Social awareness is very important, because there are many public heritages in India, like temples mosques etc. Indirectly public damage the heritage, due to lack of conservation knowledge and values of artifacts.



7. Different activities for Awareness:

To arrange seminars and workshops at different places, such as museums, schools, colleges, universities, public institution etc.

- Conservation and art books are kept in every library (School, College, and University).
- Conservation activities are to be displayed at public place or museum.
- Conservation laboratory is very essential in every museum. That should be displayed in front of public by photograph or video media. Public will be interested seeing these activities.

It is seen that we are aware of our health generally. What is the effect of cold and hot weather on a health? Accordingly, we take precaution for that. Similarly, we need to know the deterioration factors of objects or artifacts. If we know the actual reasons, obviously we can take precautions as early as possible.

8. Conservation ethics:

- First of all, patience is very important for conservation.
- Minimum intervention is needed in conservation of artifacts.
- Preventive conservation is more essential than curative conservation.
- Observation and decision making are important before conservation or restoration.
- Conservation is the most important part of maintenance of art work.

9. Conclusion:

Heritage is our cultural legacy. Hence it is our duty to protect and preserve the works of art, both as a mark of respect for the past and as a responsibility towards our future generation. In the past, awareness for preservation was almost absent but situation is improving at present. The deterioration of artifacts depends on the situation and location where the paintings are kept. An art work demands a suitable place where the general temperature, humidity and light are balanced. Otherwise, various types of decay will appear in the complicated structure of different types of paintings. Negligence of paintings is one of the main causes of deterioration. Decay is a continuous process which cannot be stopped but can be reduced by constant effort. Advanced technologies can be of great help for the purpose. But nothing should be used that cannot be maintained easily. So, the emphasis must be on simplicity, reliability and cheapness.

References:

- Agarwal, O.P. (1999). Preservation of Art Object & Library Materials, India: National Book Trust.
- Ghosh, Arun. (1989). Conservation and Restoration of Cultural Heritage. Delhi: Agam Kala Prakashan.



- Gupta, K.K. (1992). Restoration of Oil Paintings. New Delhi: National Museum Institute of History of Art, Conservation and Museum.
- Harinarayana N. Jeyaraj Dr. V. Jeyaraj (1995). Care of Museum Objects. Chennai: Commissioner of Museums, Government Museum.
- Jeyaraj, Dr. V. (2002). Hand book on Conservation in Museum. Chennai: Commissioner of Museums, Government Museum
- Jeyaraj V. Dr. (2005). Museology Heritage Management. Tamil Nadu: Director of Museums, Government Museum.
- Jeyaraj V. Dr. (2003). Conservation of Stone Objects.Chennai:The Commissioner of Museum, Government Museum.
- Mayer, Ralph (1970). The Artists's HAND BOOK of materials and Techniques.3rd Edition, New York: The Viking Press.
- Raut, Dr. Khokon (2023). Early Bengal Oil paintings. New Delhi: Aayu Publications.
- Roy, Smith (2009). The Artist's Hand Book.3rd Edition, London, New York: Dorling Kindersley Limited.