11

'OUR GODS, THEIR MUSEUMS':[1] THE CONTRARY CAREERS OF INDIA'S ART OBJECTS

TAPATI GUHA-THAKURTA

ON INDIA'S 'GODS' AND THE MUSEUMS OF THE WEST

In the beginning of his book *Museum Skepticism*, David Carrier works with the central idea of 'metamorphosis' to show how a physical artefact in a museum acquires the 'envelope' that will make of it a 'work of art', and how art writers and museum curators work closely together in creating 'the envelopes in which art arrives'. Crucial to this process is the distinction that he invokes between 'the work of visual art and a physical object in which it is embodied', to underline the way the two entities remain categorically separate and separable, even as their identities come to be integrally tied to the same material artefact.[2] The case of a sculpted object from India, transplanted from an Indian temple to an American art museum, provides Carrier with one of the most obvious instances of the cultural osmosis of the religious idol into a work of art, whereby the same physical object sheds one 'envelope' and acquires a new one as it moves from an ambience of worship to one of an art display. We are returned here to Benjamin's classic formulations about the replacement of the 'cult value' by a new form of 'exhibition value' in a modern age of replicable and moving images.[3] All along, the assumptions are that the art museum as a modern 'ritual site' for the collection and display of art stands entrenched in a history and a cognitive cultural frame that is quintessentially Western.[4] And that this institutional space of the museum has a profoundly transformative impact on every object, including Indian religious images, that comes into its folds.

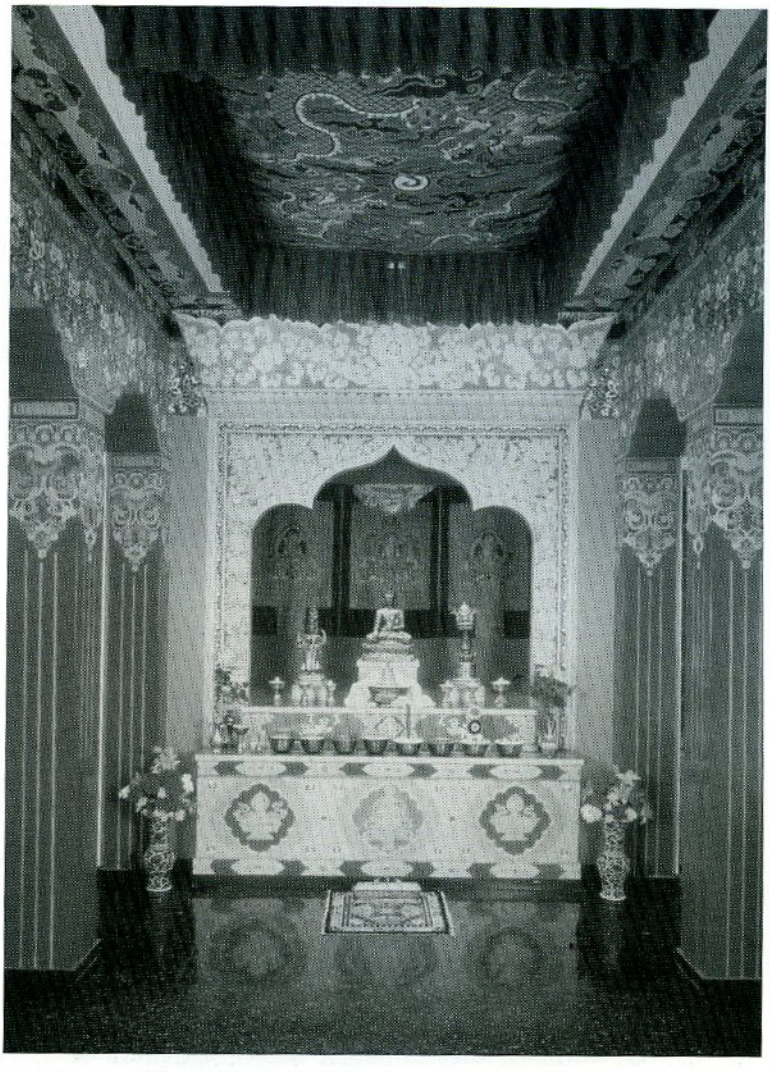
This essay will be complicating some of these assumptions by throwing open the ways in which the Western art museum today functions as a complex site for the production of new orders of 'religious' value around Indian sculpted objects. One of its main points is to foreground the ambivalence and instability of identities – the unresolved tensions between sacred and aesthetic tropes – that surround the contemporary lives of India's art objects, both within and outside the precincts of museums. Over the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, India offers her own internal history of the growth of the institution of the museum, alongside the disciplines of archaeology and art history, and the

11.1 *The Sculpture of India* exhibition at the National Gallery of Art, Washington DC. A giant torso of a Buddha figure (sandstone, third century CE, from the Archaeological Museum, Nagarajunakonda), leading on to a gallery of sculptures from the first to sixth centuries CE. Photo: reproduced with the kind permission of the Gallery Archives, National Gallery of Art, Washington DC.

unfolding of a long tradition of scholarship and connoisseurship around such collected and conserved objects.[5] Yet these historical and artistic consecrations, it will be shown, are neither stable nor sealed, and remain continuously prone to contestations. This essay explores the positioning of sculpture as the reigning Indian art object in American museum spaces, while also tracking some of the clashing custodial claims, especially some of the recent modes of religious re-inscription of these objects, that threaten to dislodge their parallel lives as 'works of art'. Central to the story will be the theme of the travels abroad of Indian sculpture, and the drama of their returns and repatriations.

Let me begin by asking: when, in what ways, and for whom does Indian sculpture present itself as 'gods' in museum spaces? Going by the question that set my title, we could turn to a contemporary group of South Asian viewers who confront Indian religious imagery in American museums and exhibition galleries with a strong sense of unease and indignation. Their disconcert comes from a conviction that the 'true' life of these sculptures (certainly in the past, but even in the present) are as worshipped gods, and that their very place in a museum is an offence to their ritual existence. One could dismiss this point of view as coming out of a cultural illiteracy about the long modern history through which these objects came into the institutional care of museums in India, passing from structures of colonial custodianship to those of national authority. One could even conflate this illiteracy with the 'ignorance' of the masses who still form the bulk of museum visitors in countries like India, who (as we are frequently told) cannot distinguish between 'gods' and 'museum treasures' and remain impervious to the aesthetic and art-historical worth of these sculptures.[6] At the same time, it is also important that we locate this position within the current ambit of immigrant South Asian identity politics in Britain and the USA, particularly within the growing wave of religious and cultural fundamentalism among expatriate Hindu communities that often expresses itself in the desire to reclaim for worship objects that the Western museums have been profiling as 'art'. The pressure of religious reclaim presents itself around specimens of ancient and medieval Indian sculpture usually in the form of a newly configured monolithic 'Hindu' faith, which tends nonchalantly to subsume Buddhist and Jain iconographies within its appropriative folds.[7] These claims can also be seen to surface primarily (and most vociferously) when the avowedly 'sacred' objects move outside the nation space to find a home in Western art museums. To date, there are hardly any instances of objects being reclaimed for worship by religious communities or temple authorities from within museums in India. One could argue, then, that it is in the perceived foreign and desacralized space of Western collections that matters of religious rights over divine statuary become closely entangled with the larger issue of national cultural patrimony over expropriated objects.

Let me now turn to a second closely related development that spins off such demands and anxieties around Indian religious imagery in Western museums. The recent past has witnessed the spurt of a new trend of multicultural museum practices in the West, especially in the United States, where both authorities and viewers are increasingly sensitive to the epistemic violence that non-Western sacred objects have suffered in Western museum spaces by being categorized as 'art', 'craft', or 'folk art'. Having conferred the designation of 'art' on its exhibits, Western museums today are at the centre of reversing this process by trying to



11.2 The new Tibetan Buddhist altar at the Newark Museum, consecrated and inaugurated by the Dalai Lama in September 1990.

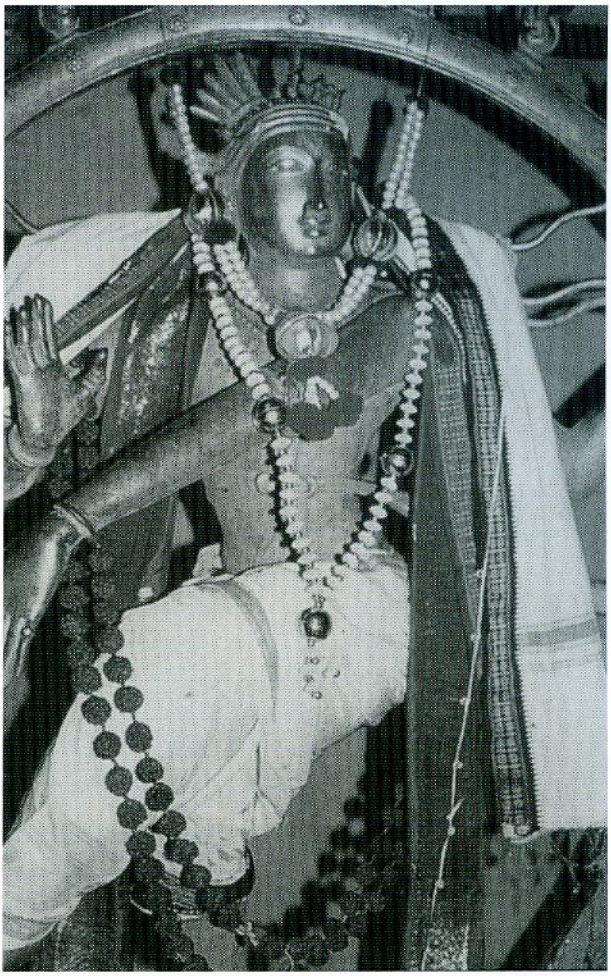
recover the original, authentic and traditional context from which objects came 'before they became art'. There is thus a rising emphasis within current museum practice on the reproduction of tradition, authenticity and ritual symbolisms of non-Western objects within its precincts. In a freshly anthropologizing turn, much of Indian art, like all of African or Oceanic art or Himalayan Buddhist imagery, is being powerfully re-inscribed within museums as religious icons, with elaborate attempts made by curators to recreate around these objects the performative practices of worship of priests and local communities.

There are a large number of examples that can be cited here. One of the earliest cases is provided by the spectacular recreation of a Tibetan Buddhist altar at the Newark Museum in 1990 for the display of a variety of Tibetan sacred objects (such as *tankha* scrolls and gilded and painted statuary) which the

museum had been acquiring since the early twentieth century (plate 11.2). While the museum had in place an earlier altar, designed as far back as 1935, the crucial point of difference about the new altar was that it was conceived not merely as a display setting but as 'a true religious structure'; that it was built by a Tibetan monk trained at the Rumtek monastery at Sikkim; that it evolved out of the close involvement of the exiled Tibetan community and its religious and scholarly authorities; and that it was consecrated by the Dalai Lama himself.[8] A powerful endorsement of such trends comes from the scholar Ivan Gaskell, who uses this new Tibetan Buddhist altar to illustrate the way that museums can effectively integrate the aesthetic and sacred character of their exhibits and reconstitute living spaces of devotion.[9] Gaskell goes on to cite other more politically contentious renegotiations of the religious identities of museum objects, such as the famous Virgin of Vladimir icon at the State Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow, which became a target for repossession by the Russian Orthodox church in the post-Soviet years, opening up a huge debate as to whether the icon had earlier been royal or ecclesiastical property.[10] In what Gaskell describes as an 'extraordinary solution' to the debate, the icon was relocated in the space of a restored, unused church near the Tretyakov Gallery, where it could be accessed only through a corridor from within the museum during its opening hours and, at other times, from a separate street entrance, and where it stood in its curious double identity as both a state art treasure and a liturgical object.

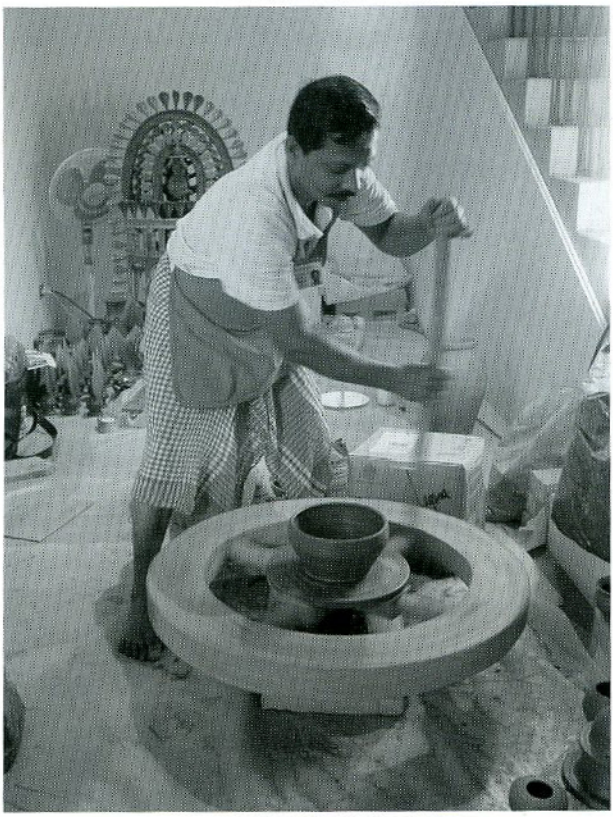
Where Indian sculpture is concerned, a striking instance of such new exhibition practices can be seen in the ritual clothing of Chola bronzes as processional icons and the laying out of the elaborate paraphernalia of worship around them. While the more anthropological tenor of the displays mounted in museums like the Smithsonian Institution in Washington DC allowed for the physical clothing of the bronzes and the staging of *puja* rituals in front of them, a space like the Sackler Gallery in the same museum complex on the Washington Mall saw the option of a different display mode: a display of photographs of the clothed bronze statuary within the temples of Tamil Nadu (plate 11.3) in an exhibition entitled *The Sensuous and the Sacred*, curated in 2002 by Vidya Dehejia. Video footage of the ceremony of their public procession served as a crucial introduction to the 'sacred' world of these images, before attention turned to their different stylistic, sensual and aesthetic qualities, and to the evolution of this sculptural genre across periods and iconographies.[11] These bronzes – largely attributed to the period of Chola dynastic rule in South India (approximately tenth to thirteenth centuries CE), which also marked the construction of some of the most spectacular Shaivite temples in which these bronzes would have been housed – have, for many years now, come to stand as some of the most canonized specimens of Indian sculpture. This innovation in exhibition method, conceived by a premier Indian art historian, tried to integrate the opposing practices of 'art' and 'ethnographic' displays, revealing the alternative ritual lives of these icons without detracting from the supreme artistic value of what was on view.

In recent years, the Durga clay idols of Bengal have presented themselves as another body of choice objects in the showcasing of India's ritual art in Western museums. In a repeating trend, set by the Peabody Essex Museum at Salem in 1995 and followed up in subsequent years by the National Museums of Scotland and Wales, the Honolulu Academy of Arts in Hawaii, the British Museum in



11.3 A clothed Nataraja (*c.* 1010 CE) at the Brihadeshwar temple, Thanjavur, which featured within the photographic installation on worshipped images at *The Sensuous and the Sacred*, Sackler Gallery, Washington DC in 2002.

London and the Museum of New South Wales in Sydney, the Crafts Council of West Bengal has been invited to carry a team of idol-makers, artisans and drummers to stage a month-long project, constructing the Durga images within museum premises. What has been of highest premium in these projects is the performance of all the rituals of the making of the image, from the preparation of the alluvial Ganges clay and the mounting of inner straw and bamboo frames to the crafting of the goddess' clothes, ornaments and decorations and her bringing to life by the final painting of her eyes (plates 11.4 and 11.5). What has been equally imperative for all involved is the adherence to what is projected as the uncorrupted, traditional iconographic form of the goddess and her entourage, with no concessions to the many current artistic innovations that mark the varieties of Durga images in the city of Calcutta. Finally, an integral component of each of these 'Creating a Durga' ventures has been the simulation of select practices of worship and the elaborate consecration of the completed image, which has thereafter been retained as an exhibit in the respective museum.[12] In the recent Durga image-making workshop that was conducted in grand public



11.4 Accessory clay pottery and figures being prepared to accompany the central image of the goddess. *Creating A Durga*, Honolulu Academy of Arts, Hawaii, September 2004. Photo: courtesy Ruby Pal Chowdhury, Crafts Council of West Bengal.

11.5 The idol-maker Nemai Pal (also doubling here as a priest in a ritual outfit), performing the ceremony of painting the eyes of Durga, prior to the clothing and ornamentation of the figures. *Creating A Durga*, Honolulu Academy of Arts, Hawaii, September 2004. Photo: courtesy Ruby Pal Chowdhury, Crafts Council of West Bengal.

11.6 The completed Durga image, height 5.5m, made on site by Nemai Pal in the Great Court of the British Museum, London, September 2006. Photo: courtesy Jayani Bonnerjee.

view at the Great Court of the British Museum, the completed and consecrated image (plate 11.6) was taken in a ceremonial procession from the museum to Camden Town, where it was worshipped by the Bengali community during the five days of the autumnal festival and even accorded its ritual immersion in the Thames. If the clothing of the Chola bronzes presents a vivid case of the ritual re-profiling of objects that have long had an entrenched status as 'works of art', the Durga images offer a counter case of the transient craft object and religious idol being transmuted into museum exhibits for a Western viewership. Between them, they can be seen to represent two opposite ends of the spectrum in the production and valorization of the religiosity of Indian objects in Western museum spaces, with Western museum curators working in close collaboration with their Indian counterparts in foregrounding the primary religious identity of the Indian images that they place on display.

There is a stake here on the 'religious' as the all-important marker of tradition, authenticity and of the 'original' cultural lives of all such expropriated Indian objects. And the implications of such designations, we know, do not remain confined to the world of museums and displays alone but take on a sharper potency within the contemporary, combative identity politics of non-Western cultures in Western countries. As such new display and exhibitions practices have proliferated in the past two decades; they have closely converged with new modes of Orientalism, promulgated not just by Western museums and media but equally by the different cultural agencies of the Indian nation-state. What a smaller body like the Crafts Council of West Bengal has been involved in, with the international presentation of the religious art of Bengal's Durga Puja, has had many powerful precedents in the recent past. The trend had been set in motion by the grand Festivals of India that were held in Europe, Britain and the

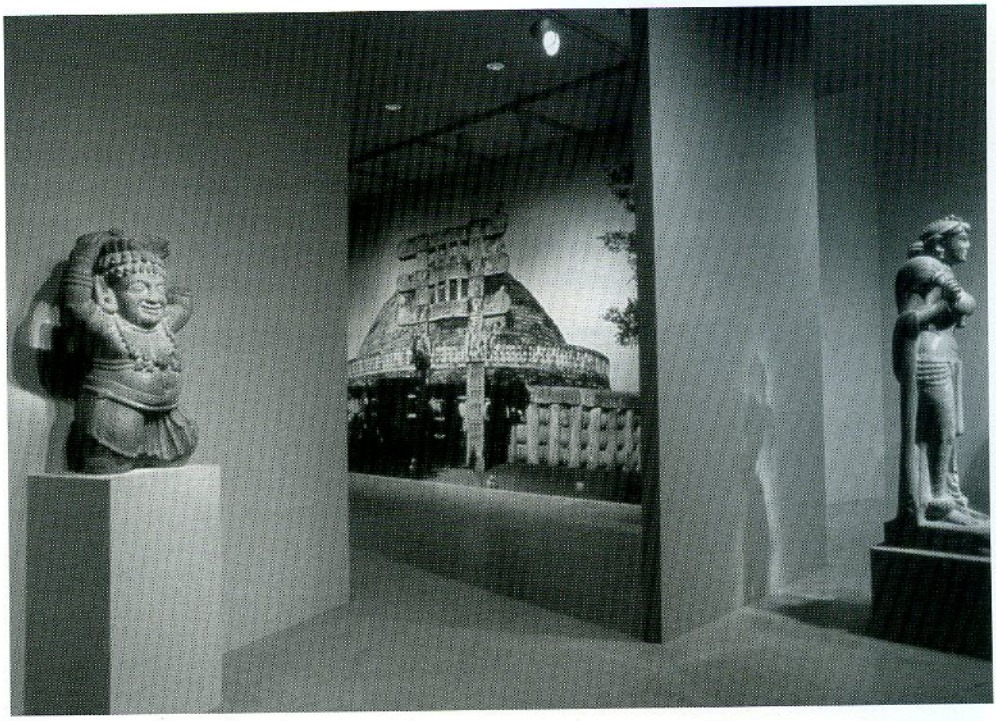
USA in the 1980s, when the Indian government and art specialists worked in tandem with museum and exhibition authorities in the West to reinforce and recycle (as never before) a heightened sense of the cultural 'otherness' of India. While the display of India's visual and performative arts for a Western audience would thrive on a series of cultural essentialisms, the Western media found in these its most ready-to-hand cognitive tropes and multicultural safeguards. The extremes of such a celebration of alterity can be seen in the following review in the *New York Times Magazine* of the most important art exhibition of the Festival of India in the USA: *The Sculpture of India* show, mounted at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC.

> Indians [we were told] do not view their divinities any more than they view the art in their museums, with the kind of detachment that is regarded as good form in the West ... Indian visitors identify with Indian works with an intensity that is almost unknown in the West. To them, they are not *works of art at all, in our sense*, but *objects of worship* that happen to be in a museum and not in a temple. To see them lay gifts and offerings at the feet of the figure of a dancing Siva is an experience that has nothing to do with 'art-appreciation' or the nice distinctions in artistic quality and form that we in the West like to find between one Crucifixion and another ...[13]

In a sweeping gesture, the very entities of 'art' and 'museum' are rendered as constitutively alien to India, not just to the India of the past but equally to the country of the present. All of Indian sculpture is pushed away from the world of art museums, which it seems so inappropriately to inhabit, and repositioned within an alternative indigenous system of viewing and worship. And the one-and-a half century-old institution of the museum in India, which has always been regarded by both Western and Indian cognoscenti as a travestied form of what it was meant to be, is shown to occupy a nebulous position somewhere between a temple and a viewing gallery.

THE SCULPTURE OF INDIA AT THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART, WASHINGTON

I would like, in this section, to turn away from such a mode of imaging India and her sculptural art to remind ourselves of the long history of art collecting, museum practices and art-historical scholarship in India – and to present, as an exemplary product of this history, the landmark exhibition of the 'masterworks' of Indian sculpture that was placed on view in the National Gallery of Art, Washington DC in May 1985, as the inaugural event of the Festival of India in the USA. Like the prior two festivals held in England and France during 1982–83, the year-long Festival of India in the USA was a characteristically mega-event, jointly sponsored by the specially appointed festival committees of the two governments, generating over a hundred shows and performances, large and small, in museums across different North American cities.[14] The focus of such an event, as was to be expected, was on scale and magnitude, also on a comprehensive coverage of all aspects of Indian art and culture, ranging from the country's ancient to her contemporary arts, featuring the 'classical' and the 'folk', the 'higher arts' of sculpture and painting alongside book illustration, calligraphy, textiles, crafts,



11.7 Entrance gallery of *The Sculpture of India* exhibition at the National Gallery of Art, Washington DC: enlarged photograph of the Sanchi *stupa* and two of the earliest sculptures from the second to first centuries BCE – the 'Dwarf Yaksha' from the Pithalkora caves of Western India on the left and the 'Didarganj Yakshi' from the Patna Museum on the right. Photo: reproduced with the kind permission of the Gallery Archives, National Gallery of Art, Washington DC.

music, dance, photography and film. To use the Festival's own cliché, the idea was to offer the sights, sounds, smells and the very feel of India around a congregation of human and material exhibits. Such a promise was best fulfilled by a parallel exhibition of Indian crafts, craftspeople, folk musicians and performers, called *Aditi: A Celebration of Life*, which was organized by the Smithsonian Institution and spread out on the Washington Mall, in the manner of the many 'folk-life festivals' it hosts.[15] It was in such an exotic Orientalist setting, such a mixed mélange of shows and performances, that the *Sculpture of India* exhibition at the National Gallery of Art assumed its distinctive status, not merely as the inaugural but also as the key aesthetic event of the Festival. The art-historical specificity of genres like Indian sculpture was to be promoted through a few exhibitions such as this, and some even more specialized shows, such as one on Kushana sculptures at the Cleveland Museum and another on terracotta statuary at the Brooklyn Museum.[16]

The exhibition offered a privileged art-historical view of nearly five thousand years of the development of sculpture as the choicest form of traditional Indian art. There were 104 works in stone, terracotta, bronze and ivory, dated from 3,000 BCE to 1,300 CE – with the large majority of these travelling for the first time from museums all over India – laid out on the Upper Level and West Bridge of the East

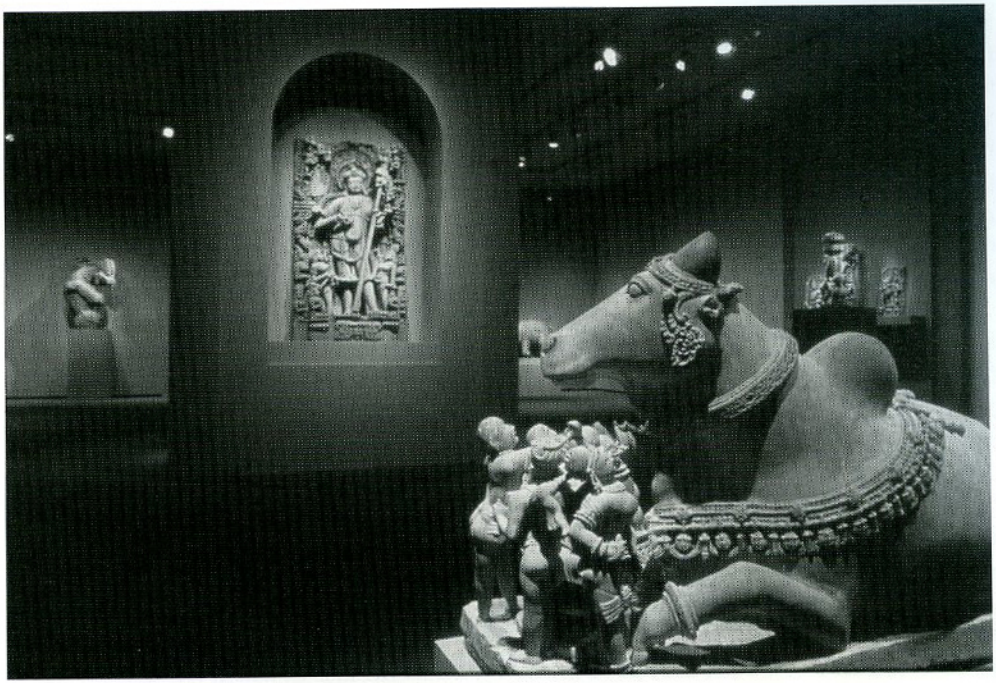
Building, over 10,000 square feet of exhibition space. Ancient stone railings and pillars, animal figures, fertility and guardian deities, mother goddesses and a range of semi-divine beings took their place side by side with the more familiar meditating Buddhas, dancing Natarajas, portly Ganeshas, sensuous Krishnas, Parvatis or Lakshmis. Between them, they took American visitors on a novel tour across the length and breadth of India, into the intricate history of her many religions and iconographies, and the rich traditions of her religious architecture and sculpture (see plates 11.1 and 11.7–11.9). The exhibition bore in every detail the mark of the art-historical expertise of the scholar who had been invited to

11.8 *The Sculpture of India* exhibition at the National Gallery of Art, Washington DC. A gallery with some of the prime specimens of statuary from Mathura and Sarnath of the Kushana and Gupta era (*c.* second to sixth centuries CE), featuring the two 'great ages' of Indian sculpture. Photo: reproduced with the kind permission of the Gallery Archives, National Gallery of Art, Washington DC.

curate the show – Pramod Chandra, then Professor of Indian Art at Harvard University – who, in his training and background in India and later academic career in the USA, stood to best represent both the national and international stature of Indian art.

Much of the prestige of the exhibition had revolved around its select venue, featuring Indian art for the first and only time within the capital's National Gallery. In the strikingly modernist venue of the East Building, designed by I.M. Pei and housing twentieth-century European, British and American art, ancient and medieval Indian sculpture stood out in all its 'otherness', struggling to wrest for itself the same stature of 'art' that seemed to reside so naturally in all the other exhibits in the same precincts. That designation of 'art', the presentation of

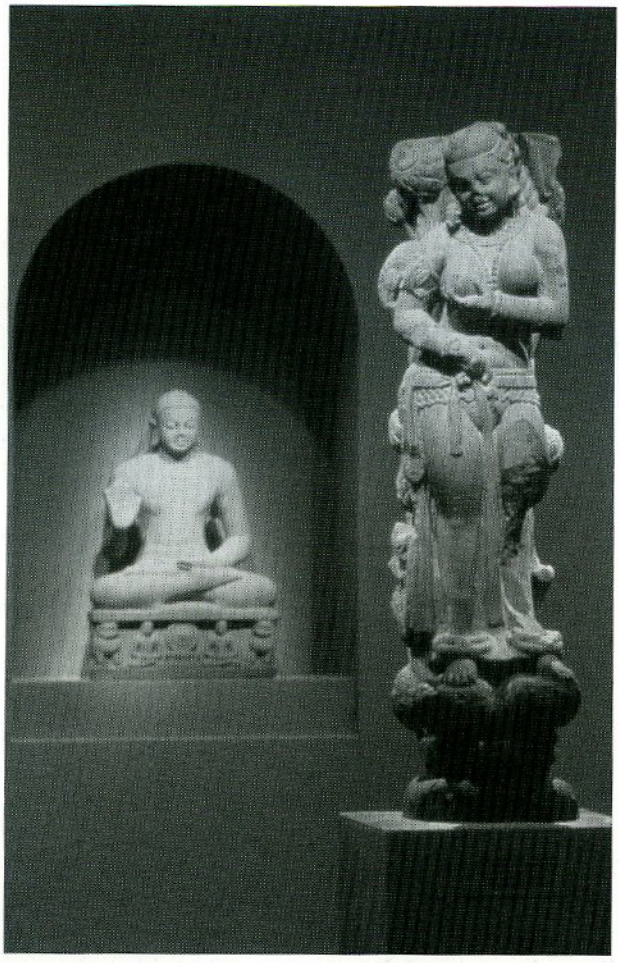
a different, autonomous and far more ancient art tradition than that of the West, was a factor of utmost importance for the curator and the team of design professionals with which he was working. The battle for Indian art, the battle to free it of the calumny of Eurocentric prejudices and wrest for it the status of a 'fine arts' tradition, had long ago been fought and won.[17] If, in such exhibitions, scholars still needed to advertise the 'Indian-ness' of Indian art, they also wished to assert its rightful place within a universal 'family of art'. In choosing to focus on sculpture, Pramod Chandra's main intention had been to pick out a 'master-genre' of Indian art that could rival the traditions of European classical sculpture



11.9 *The Sculpture of India* exhibition at the National Gallery of Art, Washington DC. The early medieval period gallery, featuring in the foreground a South Indian sculpture of a large kneeling Nandi bull (the escort of Shiva), with the recreation of the darkened atmosphere of an idol within a temple sanctum. Photograph reproduced with the kind permission of the Gallery Archives, National Gallery of Art, Washington DC.

and 'convey a sense of the contribution of Indian sculpture to the common artistic heritage of mankind.'[18]

The selection of pieces for the show had been determined both by aesthetic criteria and the desire to offer a proper historical representation of all the main schools and trends of Indian sculpture. The exhibition carried distinct signs of the changing classificatory structures and the expanding object-domain of the evolving discipline of Indian art history. Avoiding religious classifications (like 'Buddhist', 'Hindu' or 'Jain') or dynastic labels (like 'Maurya', 'Sunga', 'Kushana' or 'Gupta'), the exhibition opted for the provenances only of 'time and place',[19] dividing its objects into chronological phases – such as the Proto-historic period



11.10 Photograph of 'Lakshmi showering milk from her breast'. *c.* second century CE *in situ* at *The Sculpture of India*, Washington: National Gallery of Art, Washington DC. Red sandstone, Mathura. The sculpture is set off against an image of a meditating Buddha (red sandstone, Ahichchhatra, second century CE). Photograph reproduced with the kind permission of the Gallery Archives, National Gallery of Art, Washington DC.

(*c.* 3,000–1,500 BCE), the Third Century BCE, the Second through First century BCE, the First through Third century CE, the Fourth through the Sixth Century CE, and the Seventh Century Onwards. Even as 'Indian sculpture' was presented as a national stylistic and conceptual unit, it was shown to feed off a rich diversity of regional idioms, and combinations and contrasts – 'works of grand conception and majestic power' alongside 'those cast in more intimate modes, both lyrical and delicate', 'images of absorbing spirituality' next to those of 'innocent sensuousness' (plate 11.10). The exhibition also made it a point to go beyond the known 'masterpieces' to search out several 'hidden treasures chosen from a vast corpus of works scattered in site museums throughout India'.[20] India's art history became a mirror of both the nation's history and its geography, with the exhibition space encapsulating the actual territorial space of the country it embodied.

In its choices and priorities, the *Sculpture of India* show stands within an ongoing history of the formation of major museum collections and the staging of exhibitions of Indian sculpture in Britain and the USA. Placed within this history, the exhibition offered itself both as a culmination and as a turning point. It brought to a crescendo a longstanding focus on sculpture, in both its earliest and

later medieval genres, as the prime category of India's 'great art' heritage. In keeping with earlier exhibition practices, it also laid a huge premium on the transportation of a large corpus of objects (including some rare and monumental pieces) from their home museums in India, and attached special importance to seeking out little-known items from several small site museums. In both these trends, the Pramod Chandra show at the National Gallery saw itself as following the trail of the pioneering exhibition on the 'master achievements of Indian sculpture' that was held at the Royal Academy of Arts in London during 1947–48, to commemorate the Transfer of Power and the arrival of India's Independence.[21] This show directly presaged the follow-up exhibition in the ceremonial precincts of Government House in New Delhi (soon to be renamed Rashtrapati Bhavan), which in turn led to the formation of the new National Museum of independent India. A key feature of the exhibition in London in 1947 had been the travels abroad, for the first time, of a large number of monumental and smaller pieces representing the finest specimens of Indian sculpture. It is this opportunity to encounter first hand the best of the nation's art that was seen finally to have dispelled the long-standing Western biases and misconceptions on the subject. While such an exhibition was a sign of the full-blown international stature of Indian art in the West, it also advertised the custodial authority and importance of the art establishment in India as the main support system for that stature.[22]

Much the same would be true for the exhibition curated by Pramod Chandra that followed almost four decades later. The strength and novelty of the National Gallery show, as he planned it, would lie in securing the rarest and the finest, and a host of relatively lesser-exposed items of sculpture that he, in his intimate knowledge, knew only to exist in museums and collections in India. From 1947 onwards the 'national' identity of Indian art abroad would be centrally premised on the strength and authority of the nation's own art establishment – on India's extensive network of central, provincial and site museums, without whose cooperation no exhibition of scale and quality could be mounted in foreign museums. Thriving on a canon of reproducible images that circulated in catalogues, folios and postcards, much of the international aura of Indian art objects had also come to rest on the fact that the originals themselves could be made available in different exhibition venues across the world. It is this expectation that would be fulfilled, but also most bitterly contested, in the *Sculpture of India* exhibition of 1985. The event brought to a head a host of incipient tensions between the 'national' and 'international' custodians of Indian art, questioning the very legitimacy of the loan and travel of India's ancient museum resources. This is where the *Sculpture of India* exhibition would mark a sharp break with the past.

BUREAUCRATIC WRANGLINGS AND CLASHING CUSTODIAL CLAIMS

Let me now turn to the politics of the international transportation of Indian art objects, by taking the lid off some of the bureaucratic tussles and hindrances that not only preceded but spilled over into the time and space of the exhibition.[23] It is particularly instructive to look at these tensions in the light of the kinds of possessive national claims and the religious re-christening of Indian sculpture to which I have earlier referred, that can be seen to move between different popular, scholarly and institutional arenas. A series of lead players from different institutions emerges in the unfolding drama – at the National Gallery, the Director,

J. Carter Brown, with Dodge Thompson and Anne Bigley of the Department of Exhibitions; Ted M.G. Tanen of the Indo-US Subcommission on Education and Culture, and Pupul Jayakar of the Festival of India Committee of the Indian government's Ministry of Culture, as the main representatives of the negotiating international bodies of either country; and, most importantly, Laxmi P. Sihare, Director of the National Museum, New Delhi, as the central mediating agent through whom the entire gamut of loans from Indian museums had to be negotiated. It is this last personality, Sihare, who emerges both as hero and villain in the fraught official exchanges of the period. Exercising his prerogative as the head of India's museums establishment, Sihare would repeatedly question the feasibility of loans, even when they had been approved by the smaller home museums, and would offer alternative items as replacements for originally chosen sculptures.[24] In the process, we see Sihare and the National Museum of New Delhi setting themselves up as an active front of resistance against the curatorial authority of Pramod Chandra and against the status of the Festival of India Committee as a promoter of the nation's art treasures. Indian and American media reports from the period sensationalized particularly the differences between Sihare and Pupul Jayakar. A formidable mix of scholarly and bureaucratic authority, Pupul Jayakar's powers over governmental policies and decisions would invite the rancour of many within the national administration, even as her driving initiatives in the international 'hard sell' of Indian art and culture would make her the continuous focus of media and public attention.[25] In the tensions that erupted over loans and damages, what increasingly surfaced were the dichotomous pulls that now set apart the 'national' from the 'international' custodians of Indian art.

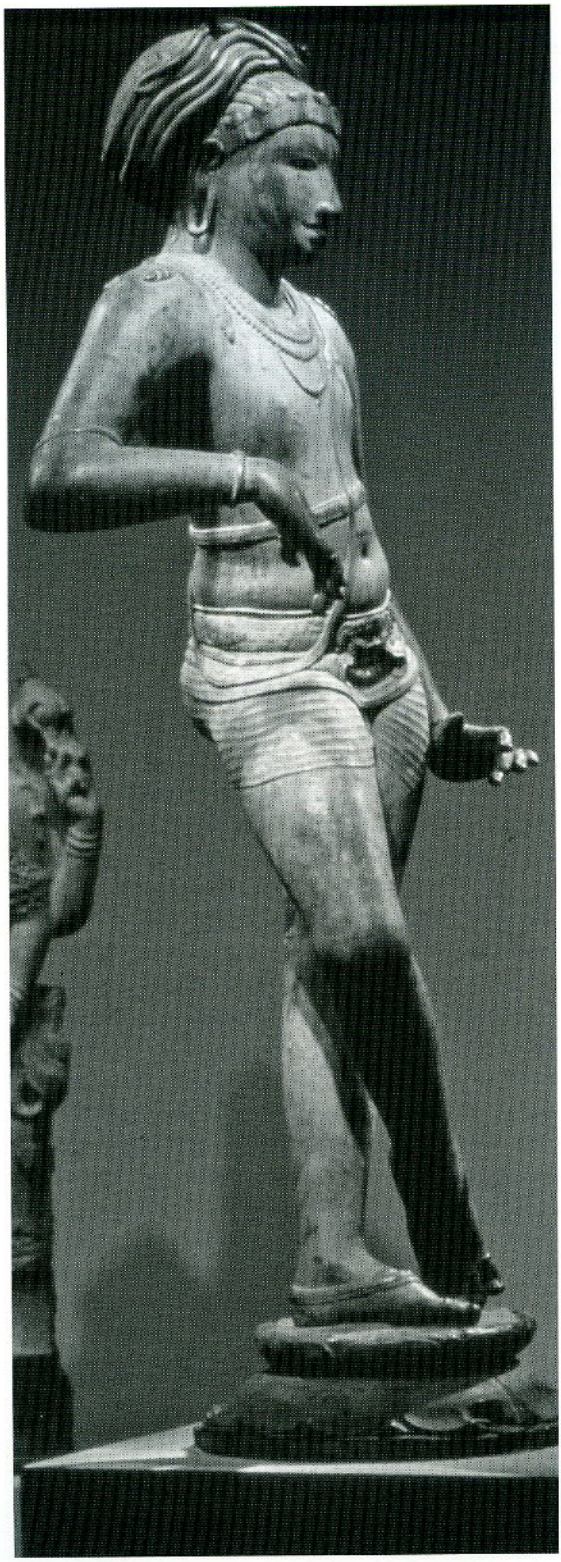
The first of the controversies was triggered off by Pramod Chandra's request for a set of bronze statuary of the Chola period from a series of temples in Tamil Nadu. In the full list of requested 'India loans', these bronzes from the Tamil Nadu temples remained marked as 'pending' well into the advancing time of the exhibition, even as other desired loans, like the Rampurva Bull Capital from the Rashtrapati Bhavan collection, were cancelled.[26] While both Pupul Jayakar and Pramod Chandra readily conceded the risks involved in the travel abroad of this monumental Mauryan sculptural object (housed in the exclusive venue of the Rashtrapati Bhavan), they held firm on to their claims on the temple bronzes. They argued that these were some of the most unusual and lesser-known varieties in this sculptural genre, and that similar temple bronzes (though not these very ones) had travelled for the Festival of India exhibitions in London in 1982. This time, however, months before the exhibition, the propriety of allowing these bronzes to travel for the exhibition was taken up by the Tamil Nadu state legislature and blocked by a writ petition in the Madras High Court, on the grounds that these were 'religious objects housed in temples', and that their travel abroad would 'offend the sentiments of worshippers'.[27]

There is a crucial caveat to be mentioned here. While the art-historical literature on Indian sculpture had constantly upheld its identity as a 'sacred art', notions of the 'sacred', like those of the 'spiritual', had come to serve as a profoundly 'secular' designation, infusing the old religious object with the new ritual status of 'art'. Ever since its inception at the turn of the twentieth century, the field of Indian art history has stood deeply ensconced in these tropes of a

'spiritual' and 'transcendental' aesthetic that was singled out as the unique attribute of Indian art.[28] In the history of the discipline, we are often privy to the way that the continued location of sculpted objects within temple spaces was not a deterrent to their appraisal as 'art' by a new community of scholars and connoisseurs. Where the Chola bronzes are concerned, there is a wonderful irony in the way that one of the first Indian scholars and collectors of the genre, O.C. Gangoly, referred to his encounter with these figures in 'the sculpture galleries' he discovered 'in every corridor of all the important temples in the South'.[29] For the discerning scholar, a temple space could well double up as an art gallery, as it clearly did for Pramod Chandra, as he scoured the temples of Tamil Nadu in search of the finest specimens of these bronzes.

Yet, in the political climate of Tamil Nadu in the mid-1980s, all such configurations flew in the face of the counter-position of the legislature and the court which contended that the continued worship of objects and their positioning within temples de-legitimized their travel abroad as 'art'. The same genre of bronzes – such as this pair of Shiva as Vrishavavahana and his consort Parvati (plates 11.11a and b) – could more easily qualify for loan when they came from the Thanjavur Art Gallery. The location of some of these sculptures in museum galleries and of others in temples resulted from highly contingent and accidental developments. As these bronzes were being unearthed and disinterred in abandoned or used temple grounds during the twentieth century, it remained up to local villagers and temple authorities to hand these over to district collectors, according to the requirement of the Indian Treasure Trove Act of 1878, and thereafter up to the collector to decide as to whether these objects were to be rebronzed and rehoused in temples or made available for museum collection and display. That this disinterred bronze pair of Shiva and Parvati happened to have been handed over to the collector in 1952 and acquired by him for the newly founded Thanjavur Art Gallery in the district town now became decisive to their prospective career as travelling art objects.[30] The final judgment of the Madras High Court, delivered in May 1985 after the opening of the exhibition, is ridden with a host of paradoxes. It cleared for travel to the exhibition not just the Thanjavur sculptures, but also a selection of the requested temple sculptures, with the statement that these bronzes were *utsavamurtis* (those that were taken out in ritual processions) and therefore 'secondary deities' and 'not the main ones being worshipped'. It was also emphasized that 'every precaution would be taken for 'the safety of them while abroad' and that their loan for the exhibition 'would greatly enhance India's international prestige.'[31]

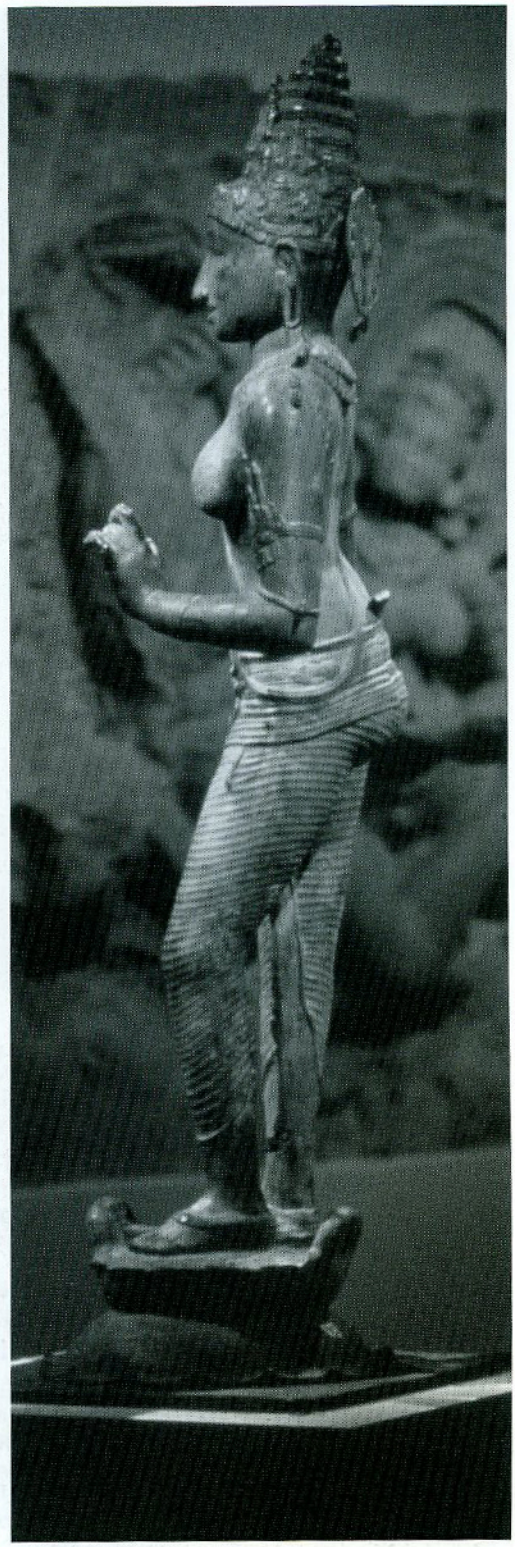
The claims of the 'religious', it seems, were never too far away, lurking around many of these sculpted objects even after they were placed on view in the richly aestheticized ambience of the exhibition. The mode of reference to all these sculptures as 'idols', in both Indian and American journalistic parlance, showed a continuous conflation of their 'sacred' and 'artistic' identities. And this line of divide between sculptures and divinities would be further blurred in the acoustic guided tours and popular hand-outs of the exhibitions, which presented the show as a tableau of the different 'Gods and Goddesses of India', invoking India as 'home to one of the oldest continuous civilizations' whose 'religion expresses the deepest and the most ancient truths of human thought . . .'[32] In pointed contrast to the art-historical provenance on each exhibit provided by the catalogue, the

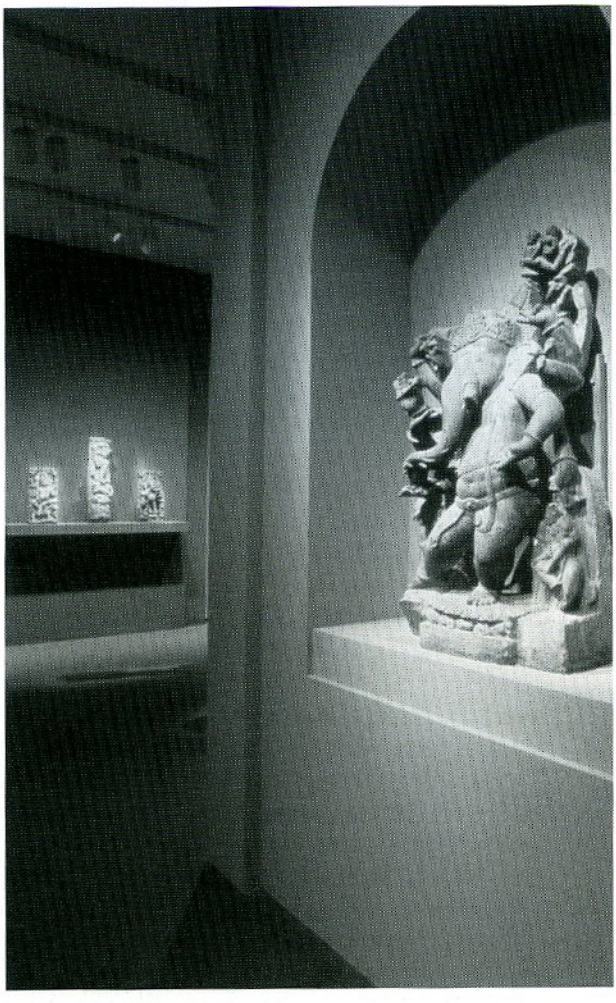


11.11a (left) Shiva as Vrishavavahana (meaning one with a bull as his escort) and 11.11b (facing) Parvati (Shiva's consort). Both bronze, *c.* 1011–1012 CE, Tiruvengadu. On display here at *The Sculpture of India* exhibition. Shiva stands leaning his elbow on a disappeared figure of the bull. Photographs reproduced with the kind permission of the Gallery Archives, National Gallery of Art, Washington DC.

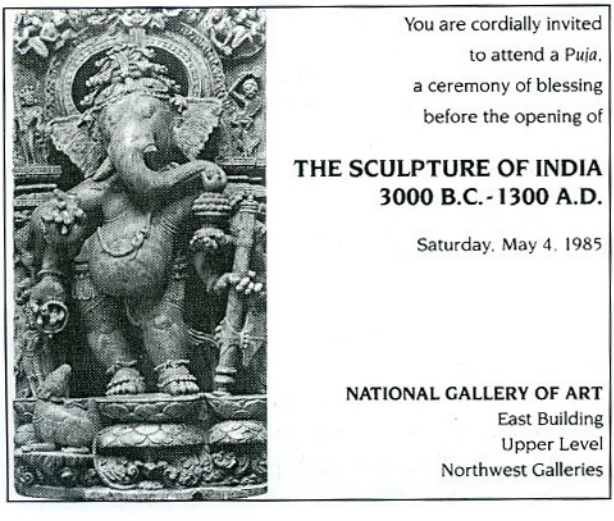
acoustic tours told viewers only about the different attributes and powers of India's innumerable divinities. Often, such conflations between sculptures and gods were deliberately solicited by the Festival of India authorities. An inaugural ceremony of a *puja* was performed in front of an eleventh-century Ganesha image from Bhuvaneswar in the gallery, with offerings made to the 'god who removes all obstacles at the beginnings of a new endeavour', with some traditional dances, devotional songs and story-telling also thrown in (plates 11.12 and 11.13). The event was widely attended, with welcome addresses by the Indian ambassador, Shankar Vajpayi, Pupul Jayakar and Carter Brown. Pramod Chandra conspicuously stayed away.

The curator, it appears, had other continuing battles to fight. Cleared by the court, the loan of the promised bronzes from the Tamil Nadu temples and the Thanjavur Gallery would continue to be blocked by Sihare, this time on grounds of their 'uniqueness and rarity', with the offer of substitute specimens of the same genre of bronzes from the National Museum's reserve stock. 'Religious' objections gave way to equally urgent 'aesthetic' reservations: the National Gallery of Art's design personnel refused to accept Sihare's substitute offers on the grounds that they were inferior in artistic quality to the ones that had been selected by Pramod Chandra.[33] This caused the unprecedented embarrassment of featuring in the catalogue nine Chola bronzes which failed to arrive in time for the show, including the splendid Shiva–Parvati pair (plates 11.11a and b) that had its pride of place on the catalogue cover. The climax of this drama came with the final arrival of these two much-





11.12 The sculpture of Ganesha, *c.* eleventh century CE, Bhuvaneshwar. Black schist. The inaugural ceremony of the *puja* was performed at *The Sculpture of India* exhibition in front of this sculpture. Photograph reproduced with the kind permission of the Gallery Archives, National Gallery of Art, Washington DC.

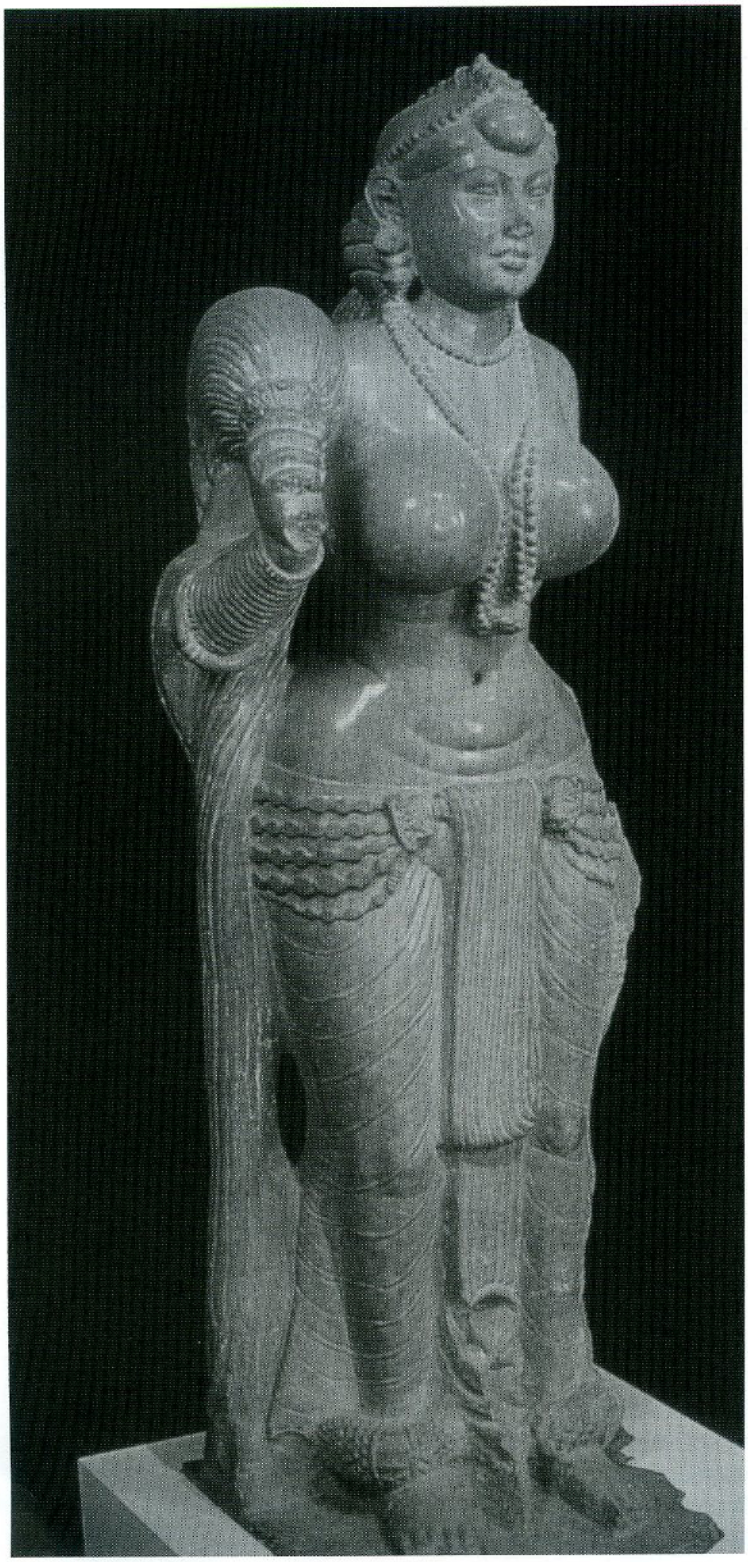


11.13 The invitation card for the *puja* to inaugurate *The Sculpture of India* exhibition on 4 May 1985, featuring the image of Ganesha. Photo: reproduced with the kind permission of the Gallery Archives, National Gallery of Art, Washington DC.

11.14 The late arrivals, the Shiva–Parvati pair from the Thanjavur Art Gallery, finally installed in the last gallery of *The Sculpture of India* exhibition, alongside other medieval temple sculptures in stone and bronze. Photo: reproduced with the kind permission of the Gallery Archives, National Gallery of Art, Washington DC.

coveted pieces, and their installation within the medieval sculpture gallery, more than a month after the opening of the show (plate 11.14). It was a diplomatic victory sealed through frantic negotiations on the eve of Prime Minster Rajiv Gandhi's visit to Washington and his scheduled tour of the exhibition. Similar considerations of antiquity and rarity also rendered uncertain, until a very late stage, the arrival of fragments of a newly excavated stone railing of the first century CE from the Kushana-period site of Sanghol in Punjab, with the pending status of the loan disallowing its inclusion in the exhibition catalogue.[34] The final arrival of these bronzes from the Thanjavur Gallery and of the Sanghol railing-pillar sculptures, along with India's Prime Minister, marked the highpoint of the *Sculpture of India* exhibition.

But the troubles were far from over. Another set of acrimonious disputes would erupt in the subsequent months over the alleged damage of some of the exhibition objects in the course of their travel abroad. At the centre of these allegations was the most ancient sculpted figure that travelled for the show, the 'Didarganj Yakshi' of the Mauryan period (plate 11.15). The Yakshi, as I have demonstrated elsewhere, had a long history of travels, relocations and artistic consecrations.[35] Unearthed on the banks of the Ganges in the outskirts of Patna in 1917, the statue had become an object of local worship before it was quickly wrested by archaeological authorities and placed in the newly established Patna



11.15 The 'Didarganj Yakshi'. Polished sandstone, *c.* third century BCE, from Didarganj near Patna, loaned from the Patna Museum to *The Sculpture of India* exhibition. Photo: reproduced with the permission of the American Institute of Indian Studies, New Delhi.

Museum. D.B. Spooner, Superintendent of the Eastern Circle of the Archaeological Survey of India, indicated how it was easy to convince the villagers that this woman with a fly whisk was 'clearly no member of the Hindu pantheon, nor entitled to worship of any kind by any community'.[36] Years later, Pramod Chandra, with his expertise on ancient sculptural iconography, established these fly whisks as common iconographic attributes of ancient tutelary guardian deities called Yakshas and Yakshis, noting with caustic relief that this thankfully remained unknown to the 'donors of Didarganj'. Wrested from popular devotion and disinvested of all sacred connotations, the Yakshi in the museum would thereafter be steadily reborn as the nation's most antique 'work of art', and 'as one of the earliest visual statements of the Indian ideal of feminine beauty'.[37] Over time, the sculpture moved from its first home in the Patna Museum to the exhibition at London's Royal Academy in 1947, from where it came to the Rashtrapati Bhavan show that opened in the new Indian capital of New Delhi in the winter of 1948. There it remained through the period of the setting up of the National Museum until it was reclaimed by the Patna Museum, from where again it was loaned in the 1980s for the Festival of India exhibitions in the UK, France and the USA.

At the end of the *Sculpture of India* exhibition, the Yakshi returned to India, allegedly with a fresh pockmark-sized chip on her left cheek, leading to a huge outcry in the Indian media about the ethics of the international travel of such rare art treasures. Archaeological and museum authorities in India listed no less than twenty-seven rare items that bore greater or lesser marks of wear and tear.[38] The Indian press made a great sensation about such 'damaging displays' and their 'damage of diplomacy'.[39] In official circles, much of this consternation would be expressed in the language of compensation and control. The most controversial of these battles for financial compensation surrounded the rarest of these objects, the 'Didarganj Yakshi' (plate 11.15), insured for 250 million rupees, of which the state government of Bihar demanded 62.5 million as compensation. The Festival of India projects had been propelled primarily by the demands of international capital. In the marketing of India as an exotic cultural entity, their main purpose had been to familiarize her for political and business relations, and to introduce her as a viable location for investment.[40] It was in keeping with the times and its demands that art objects came now to configure largely as items of economic value. With her historical and aesthetic significance established beyond debate, the preciousness of the Yakshi was now given its clear financial tag. Its status as a national 'art treasure' demanded that the sculpture be made scarce and inaccessible, available for viewing only in its original, national location.

Opinions remained divided over the extent of the damages sustained by these objects and their implications. Confronted by the hue and cry in the Indian media, the National Gallery in Washington hastened to absolve itself of the charges of mishandling, furnishing detailed condition reports on each of the objects in question on their arrival and departure from its premises, to prove that whatever damage had occurred had taken place, not during their time at the exhibition, but in the course of their unpacking and reinstallation at the National Museum in Delhi.[41] In India too, some felt that the issue was being blown out of proportion, while others emphasized that even a small rupture caused an

immense weakening of an ancient physical artefact. For most, what was centrally at stake was the loss of control of the national government over its museum resources. The chip on the Yakshi's cheek became the mark of a huge dent in national pride, outweighing all the other historical marks (such as the broken nose or the missing arm) of her physical mutilation. This damage was made the occasion by Indian art specialists and government officials for insisting that such rare and monumental artefacts could not stand the strain of foreign travel, and should never again leave India. The Festival organizers argued that everything they had done was for 'the greater glory of Indian art'. This glory, it was counter asserted, was best preserved in the sanctified territory of the country of origin.[42]

ON SMUGGLED ART TREASURES AND REPATRIATED IDOLS

I would like to present this story of damages, outrages and refused loans as part of a larger narrative of recovery and reclamation that takes us back deep into India's colonial pasts, into the background of archaeological and art-historical practices, through which figures like the Yakshi or the bronze pair of Shiva and Parvati were culled from other locations and uses, often from years of oblivion and disuse, and made available as 'art treasures'. I would also like to position these cases within a more recent politics of belonging that imbricates the newly nationalist and post-colonial histories of these objects. The Festival of India controversy rekindled, in a new context, many of the questions that have always beleaguered the subject of Indian art. There was, for instance, the central clash between contending claimants over the possession, protection and care of objects. The old colonial emphasis on the *in situ* preservation on India's antiquities was refurbished in the new language of possessiveness of India's state and national museums. At the same time, the old accusations of 'native' neglect and destruction of the country's antiquities also returns in the new debate around the apportioning of blame for the damage. The allegation (of course, hotly contested) that the National Museum of New Delhi was guilty of a lack of adequate care in the packaging and unpacking of objects once more posits the post-colonial Indian site as improperly equipped for the care of her art heritage.

Even more vital became the issue of reasserting the religious identities and ritual values of what could also qualify as the nation's 'art treasures'. One could argue here that objects like the 'Didarganj Yakshi' would never again be available for any other ritual practices other than those of 'art'. This unavailability had as much to do with the figure's iconographic complexity (its clear lack of fit with the standard pantheon of Hindu goddesses) as with the long, resonant history of its aesthetic and sexual canonization (as the most antique and exceptional specimen of stone sculpture and an emblem of the erotic feminine form in Indian art). As the controversy brewed around its damage, the sculpture remained once again in the National Museum in New Delhi, with the Patna Museum refusing to take her back without 'proper compensation'. The Yakshi eventually returned to Patna in 1989, to this place of her first museum location, now marked out as foremost among a special category of objects that should never travel again. Rendered into the most fetishized of art objects, this fetish is now left with a new curse of indifference and oblivion in the provincial confines of the Patna Museum. The most recognizable of the region's sculptures, copies and replicas of the Yakshi greet us everywhere around Patna: from roadside souvenir stalls and emporium

windows to the special commemorative gateways erected with Japanese funds at the refurbished Buddhist sites of Bodh Gaya and Nalanda. Alone and forgotten in the museum, the fossilized museum treasure seems to have lived out its life, leaving image and copy to proliferate freely.[43]

By contrast, the Chola bronzes have come to be inscribed with new kinds of sacral values, even as they have become some of the most widely circulating objects in the Western art market, especially in the illegal antiquities trade. In the process, they have also become the prime targets, both of religious and ritual reclamation by aggrieved temple authorities from whose custody they are purportedly stolen, and of national repatriation by state governments which have powerfully pushed the case for the return home of these 'gods'. The dispute over the loan of these bronze sculptures to the *Sculpture of India* exhibition takes on a new angle when seen in the context of the cases of the repatriation of two Nataraja sculptures from Western collectors to the government and temples of Tamil Nadu, in the years immediately before and afterwards. In the last section of the chapter, let me briefly touch on this theme of the new controversial lives of such Chola-period Natarajas as 'smuggled' art treasures and repatriated temple icons.

In the one case, there was the Shivapuram Nataraja (plate 11.16), considered by connoisseurs to be among the finest pieces of tenth-century Chola bronzes, which changed hands between several dealers and collectors in India and the USA, before it was acquired in 1973 by the Norton Simon Museum at Pasadena.[44] A mounting allegation by Indian authorities about the 'stolen' status of the Nataraja fire-balled soon after its acquisition by Norton Simon, bringing on law suits by the Indian government both against the Norton Simon Foundation and the New York art dealer Ben Heller, who had first purchased the statue when it came out of India and had sold it to Norton Simon. Both suits were suspended in 1976, when the Norton Simon Musuem agreed, in an out-of-court settlement, to transfer the 'title' of the Nataraja to the 'nation of India', on the condition that this 'masterpiece' could remain on display in his museum for another ten years before its return to India, and that the Indian government would not pursue its claims on any other allegedly 'smuggled' art objects owned by the foundation.[45] The Western museum, one could argue, made optimum capital out of this controversy. It took on a new righteous role as saviour of India's 'stolen gods'/'art treasures', and the main facilitator of their return to their country of origin, while also inoculating the rest of the Indian sculptures in its holding against all such anticipated future claims. The year (1985) that saw the huge tussle over the loan of Chola bronzes from Tamil Nadu's museums and temples for Pramod Chandra's exhibition coincided, then, with the time when the Shivapuram Nataraja was on the final months of its American odyssey and was being prepared for its triumphant return home.

What becomes pertinent in this story is the new category of the 'stolen' or 'smuggled' art treasure and the many histories that unfold around it. It confronts us with the fine line of distinctions that is drawn by the Indian government and by art dealers between the status of 'stolen' and 'smuggled' objects and the different legal and ethical connotations that redound on their reclaim.[46] It exposes the full complicity of different bodies of Indians – from bronze restorers and dealers to the museum and customs agents – in the sale and export of these objects. Most important of all, it throws open a fresh line of divide between 'national' and

11.16 The Shivapuram Nataraja. Bronze, *c.* tenth century, Tamil Nadu. The sculpture was repatriated from the Norton Simon Museum, Pasadena to the state government of Tamil Nadu. Photo: reproduced with the permission of the French Institute, Pondicherry.

'international' custodial claims over these items circulating in the art market. Thus we see how a prior history of the possession of this 'stolen' Nataraja in the home of a Bombay art collector in the 1960s could be implicitly condoned by authorities in India; and how it was the surfacing of this object in the American collecting circuit which orchestrated national outrage and official concerns about the return to India of this illegally appropriated 'national art treasure'.

Deeply embedded in such stories are also several new twists that come to coil around the reclaimed ritual identities of such peripatetic objects. As shown by Richard Davis in his studies of the multi-faceted careers of Indian monuments and images, the case of the Shivapuram Nataraja was one of several such examples of ceremonially buried temple icons in southern India, which were later accidentally discovered by locals in the vicinities of used and defunct temples. At times, such finds were duly reported and handed over to the temple or district authorities, in keeping with the Indian Treasure Trove Act of 1878.[47] However, all too often, as knowledge grew about the ready demand for these images, these bronzes swiftly passed from the local villagers and bronze craftsmen (who were entrusted with the work of their restoration and reconsecration) into the illegal national and international art market. Such was the fate of the Nataraja unearthed in the 1950s from the temple grounds at Shivapuram: where the original piece went on its travels as a desacralized and highly coveted art commodity, while, ironically, for decades, a fake copy installed in the temple served quite effectively its functions as a reconsecrated devotional icon.[48] Such was also the story of another stolen and returned Nataraja sculpture from another temple site of Pathur in Tamil Nadu, one that Richard Davis unravels like a detective thriller in his book *Lives of Indian Images*.[49] In the same years (1975–76) that the law suit for the return of the Shivapuram Nataraja was framed by the Indian government, the Pathur Nataraja surreptitiously moved from its underground life as a buried temple icon into the international art market, passing from Bombay to London art dealers on to Robert Borden, an officer of the Bumper Development Corporation of Canada, and a major purchaser of Asian art for several Canadian museums. And it was from the Bumper Corporation that this Nataraja was eventually wrested in 1991, following a long legal battle by the Tamil Nadu government, the state archaeological department and the Pathur Temple Trust.

With both the Shivapuram and Pathur Natarajas, the main plaintiff in the court cases was neither the Indian government nor the particular temple trusts, but the divine personage of Lord Shiva, with the god himself taking on a modern juridical personality to repossess the physical object in which his divine presence is manifest. What must be emphasized here is the way the Indian government participated actively in this extraordinary mix of religious and legalistic discourses, where the concerns for the recovery of the nation's art treasures tantalizingly blurred and blended with the intricacies of theological arguments about the nature of divine embodiment in such sculpted imagery, and where the artistic identities of these figures rested side by side with the principle, 'once a religious object, always a religious object.' An image that 'certainly attained greater celebrity as a litigated commodity than it ever possessed as a consecrated temple image' returned to the state but not to its sacred home in Pathur.[50] It required the renovation of the disused temple to house the reinstalled icon. Pending that, it was deposited in a separate, specially constructed icon vault at Tiruvarur that the Tamil Nadu government had conceived of in the 1980s to

prevent a rash of thefts of idols from small temples.[51] Ironically, the Shivapuram Nataraja, returned by the Norton Simon Museum in a landmark case of repatriation, found its way into the oblivion of the same icon vault, with the village temple in Shivapuram considered too unsafe for this highly coveted sculpture. Secure in their new custody, these 'gods' have remained 'jailed' ever since in a place which is neither temple nor museum and fails to fulfil the purpose of either. The bronzes in the vault are available neither for worship nor for art-historical study, nor are they given the climate-controlled protection needed to resist metal fatigue.

Is there any easy return, then, from being an art object into a renewed life as a devotional icon? Ivan Gaskell answers in the affirmative, as he presents new instances of the reconstitution of the sacred object within the museum, and shows how certain objects may be invested by cultures and communities with an 'inalienable sacred status' while others may be more amenable to slipping in and out of that status.[52] The Chola bronzes can be seen as wonderful examples of that second category of objects which seem to be able to move strategically in and out of different concurrent identities, negotiating the demands of both their artistic and religious reinscriptions in the present. The point at issue is to think of the 'religious' and the 'artistic' less as fixed and stable values, and more as a shifting, transmuting ground for the positioning of these sculpted icons. Taking the case of the disputes that wracked the *Sculpture of India* exhibition, or the legal battles that led to the repatriation of the Chola bronzes, this essay highlights the constant blurring of boundaries between the 'secular' and 'sacred' denominations of such ancient objects, and the impossibility of keeping safely apart the seemingly polarized worlds of 'art' and 'religion'. All such travelling objects today have to negotiate the multiple demands of art, authenticity and popular devotion, as they stand to embody both international goodwill and a contentious religious and cultural politics of nationhood. The tide, it is said, clearly turned with the Festival of India exhibition of 1985, as it also did with the return of the Shivapuram and Pathur Natarajas. The scope for procuring sculpture from India would henceforth be severely constrained by the zealousness of the Indian museum bureaucracy and by the new politics of repatriation. In a paradoxical twist, in the subsequent American exhibition and collecting circuit, the increasing visibility and aesthetic stature of Indian art objects would go hand in hand with the stigmatization of India itself as an intractable problem entity.

Notes

This essay has grown out of a project I undertook to chart a select history of collecting and exhibiting of Indian sculpture in American museums during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, during a Visiting Fellowship at the Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts (CASVA) at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, in the summers of 2003 and 2004. I am particularly grateful to the staff of the Gallery Archives at the National Gallery of Art for allowing me access to the institution's repository of official papers on the *Sculpture of India* exhibition. Earlier versions of this essay have been presented at seminars at Kala Bhavan, Santiniketan in February 2005, at the Departments of Art History of the University of California

Berkeley, and of the University of Minnesota in October 2005, and most recently, at the 'Display and Spectacle' conference at the Department of Art History of the University of Nottingham in January 2007. The final version has drawn on the many comments and suggestions that came out of these presentations.

1 My title is drawn from a question that was posed to me at a public conference organized around an exhibition of colonial Indian photographs on Indian architecture at a museum in Los Angeles in 2004: I was asked by an immigrant Indian couple of the area whether it did not upset me to see so many of 'our gods' in the museums of the West.

2 David Carrier, *Museum Skepticism: A History of the Display of Art in Public Galleries*, Durham and London, 2006, 4–6.

3 See Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, London, 1973.

4 Carol Duncan, in *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums*, London and New York, 1995, offers the best formulation for thinking about the Western art museum as 'ritual structures', which help to produce, preserve and present 'art' as one of the most powerful secular-ritual objects of the modern world.

5 For an extended study, see Tapati Guha-Thakurta, *Monuments, Objects, Histories: Institutions of Art in Colonial and Postcolonial India*, New York, 2004.

6 The absence of an informed and initiated public has long been the bane of museum authorities in India, from the colonial period into the present, to a point whereby this problem of an 'inappropriate public' became symptomatic of the failed pedagogic project and the 'backwardness' of the transplanted institution of the museum in the colony. See Guha-Thakurta, 'The Museum in the Colony', in *Monuments, Objects, Histories*, 79–82.

7 This is an important theme outside the scope of this chapter. Just as India remains a multi-religious nation (with Muslims and Christians forming the largest of the non-Hindu religious 'minorities'), the figures that came to form the canon of ancient and medieval Indian sculpture came out of a medley of religious sectarian practices of the past, featuring a diverse range of Buddhist, Jain, Shaivite and Vaishnavite iconographies, whose styles, forms and motifs have featured as the main subject of Indian art-historical scholarship. But the currently configured ideology of Hindu nationalism often posits a conflated category of 'Hindu gods and goddesses' to refer to this entire body of sculpture.

8 Valerie Reynolds, *Tibetan Buddhist Altar*, Newark, 1991; and *From the Sacred Realm: Treasures of Tibetan Art from the Newark Museum*, exhib. cat., Newark Museum, 1999–2000 Munich, London and New York, 1999. Plate 11.1 is reproduced from the latter.

9 Ivan Gaskell, 'Sacred to Profane and Back Again', in Andrew McClellan, ed., *Art and its Publics: Museum Studies at the Millennium*, Oxford, 2003, 151–4.

10 Gaskell, 'Sacred to Profane and Back Again', 154–7.

11 Vidya Dehejia, *The Sensuous and the Sacred: Chola Bronzes from South India*, exhib. cat., travelling exhibition that opened at the Sackler Gallery, Washington DC, 2002. Plate 11.2 is reproduced from this source.

12 My observations here are based primarily on the case of the *Creating a Durga* exhibition held at the Honolulu Academy of Arts, Hawaii, during September–October 2004. I am grateful to Mrs Ruby Pal Choudhury of the Crafts of West Bengal for giving me access to the files and photographs on the project.

13 *New York Times Magazine*, 2 June 1985.

14 *Festival of India in the United States*, New York, 1985.

15 Held from 4 June to 28 July 1985 at the Smithsonian Institution on the Washington Mall, this exhibition featured 40 traditional performers and artisans and over 1,500 artefacts, many of which were created on site.

16 *Kushana Sculpture: Images from Early India*, Cleveland Museum of Art, Ohio, 13 November 1985–6 January 1986. *From Indian Earth: 4000 Years of Terracotta Art*, mid-January–end March 1986, New York: Brooklyn Museum.

17 This is now a widely discussed theme in the historiography of Indian art, first set out in Partha Mitter, *Much Maligned Monsters: History of European Reactions to Indian Art*, Clarendon, 1977, 252–86, and Pramod Chandra, *On the Study of Indian Art*, Cambridge, MA, 1983, 2–3.

18 Pramod Chandra, *The Sculpture of India, 3000 BC–1300 AD*, National Gallery of Art, Washington DC, 1985, 18.

19 The exhibition should be placed side by side with Pramod Chandra's historiographical survey of the field of Indian art history of the same years and his refining of its classificatory units; see especially the chapter on 'Sculpture' in *On the Study of Indian Art*, 43–79.

20 Chandra, *The Sculpture of India*, 19–20.

21 Chandra, *The Sculpture of India*, 18.

22 Discussed at length in my essay, 'The Demands of Independence: From a National Exhibition to a National Museum', in *Monuments, Objects, Histories*, 175–9.

23 *Records of the Departments of Exhibitions and Loans, Sculpture of India, May–September 1985*, Gallery Archives, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, (subsequently RG).

24 RG 22, Box 108, Folder 13, contains extensive, heated correspondence between L.P. Sihare, J. Carter Brown, Anne Bigley, Pupul Jayakar and the Indian Ambassador in USA, Shankar Vajpayi,

on the subject of refused loans and substitute offers from the National Museum, New Delhi.

25 See, for instance, the reports, 'The Splendours of India: Pupul Jayakar – Celebrating her Nation's Treasures with a Festival', *Washington Post*, 12 March 1985; 'Conflict surrounds the Festival of India', *Inquirer*, Philadelphia, 14 June 1985; 'Personal Antics on Show: What Pupul Jayakar wants, Pupul Jayakar gets', *Week*, New Delhi, 19–25 May 1985 (RG 14, vol. 1.).

26 Full list of 'India Loans'; list of objects expected to arrive after the initial shipment from India, 19 March 1985; list of still-pending loans of objects from Indian museums, 5 June 1985 (RG 22, Box 110, Folder 26).

27 Among the vast body of media reports, fax and telex correspondence on this subject in the National Gallery Archives, the problem is best summed up in a despatch from the US embassy in New Delhi to the National Gallery of Art, 20 April 1985, with an annex on 'Lok Sabha Questions to Minister of Culture, K.P.Singh Deo on the question of sending Tamil Nadu temple bronzes to the Festival of India Exhibition in USA', RG 22, Box 110, Folder 24.

28 For a condensed discussion of this theme, see Guha-Thakurta, *Monuments, Objects, Histories*, 184–8.

29 O.C. Gangoly, *South Indian Bronzes: A Historical Survey of South Indian Sculpture with Iconographical Notes based on original sources*, Calcutta, 1915, preface, i.

30 As described by Richard Davis (*Lives of Indian Images*, Princeton, 1997, 15–16), many of these temple bronzes had come to be ritually buried, in order to be protected from marauders and looters once the temples fell into disuse, and were unearthed by local villagers much later in the twentieth century. A first set of bronzes discovered at the same temple site in 1925 was returned to the Swetaranyeshwara temple, where they are still in worship. This Shiva–Parvati pair, found by a farmer in 1952 and handed over to the District Collector, however, came to be obtained for the Thanjavur Art Gallery which had just then been set up in the district headquarters.

31 Copy of the judgement notice by Judge S. Natarajan of the Madras High Court, enclosed in the correspondence between J. Carter Brown and Indian government officials, 25 May 1985, RG 22, Box 109, Folder 13.

32 'Gods and Goddesses of India, A Children's Guide to *The Sculpture of India 3000 BC–1300 AD*', an illustrated guide and work-out sheet; Acoustic-guide script on *The Sculpture of India* show, Narrator, Lyn Farmer, Production # 1038, May 1985, Gallery Archives, National Gallery of Art, Washington.

33 Memorandum on the negotiations with Pramod Chandra, Pupul Jayakar and Indian government officials on whether the National Gallery of Art should accept the nine substitute bronzes being offered by Sihare or whether it should press ahead with the 'original nine' chosen by Pramod Chandra, 16 May 1985, RG 22, Box 108, Folder 13.

34 Reports on the 'epoch-making' archaeological finds from Sanghol in *Sunday Observer*, New Delhi, 26 May 1985, RG 22, Box 108, Folder 13. The site of Sanghol in the Ludhiana district of Punjab had then been recently excavated and had yielded a rare crop of sculptural fragments that would have been part of a Buddhist *stupa* and railing complex at the site. The sculptures were ascribed by experts as belonging to the 'Mathura school of art that flourished under the patronage of the Kushana emperors during the first to second centuries CE'.

35 Guha-Thakurta, '"For the Greater Glory of Indian Art": Travels and Travails of a Yakshi', in *Monuments, Objects, Histories*, 205–233.

36 D.B. Spooner, 'The Didarganj Image now in the Patna Museum', *Journal of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society*, 5:1, 1919, 108.

37 Chandra, *The Sculpture of India*, 49.

38 Among other allegedly damaged objects were the Chalukyan 'Flying Gandharvas' of the sixth century CE which had a deep gash below the left leg of the female figure; the fifth century Mankuwar Buddha, which had scratches on the lobes of its right year; or a sixteenth-century painting of the *Devi Mahatmya* series, which had a hole burnt through it.

39 Raj Chengappa, 'Damaging Display', *India Today*, New Delhi, 30 November 1986, 148–50; N.K. Singh, 'Damage of Diplomacy', *India Today*, New Delhi, 31 March 1989, 192–4.

40 On this theme, see Brian Wallis, 'Selling Nations: International Exhibitions and Cultural Diplomacy', in Daniel Sherman and Irit Rogoff, eds, *Museum Culture: Histories, Discourses, Spectacles*, London, 1994.

41 Full 'Condition Reports' on the objects sent from India for the *Sculpture of India* show, recorded on their arrival and departure from the National Gallery of Art, Washington, 2 December 1986, RG 22, Folder, titled 'Alleged Damage to Sculptures'.

42 Chengappa, 'Damaging Display', 150.

43 Guha-Thakurta, '"For the Greater Glory of Indian Art"', 232–3.

44 The modern life and travels of this sculpture has been recounted by Richard Davis in his paper, 'The Dancing Shiva of Shivapuram: Cult and Exhibition in the Life of an Indian Icon' – lecture delivered at the Five Faiths Colloquium in the USA in August 2003.

45 My main source on his case have been the following media reports: Saryu Doshi, 'Robbing our Temples and Museums', *Illustrated Weekly of India*, Bombay, 10 October, 1971; Pratapaditya Pal, 'The Strange Journey of the Sivapuram Nataraja', *Los Angeles Times*, 22 August 1976; Paul Kunkel, 'The Case of the Dancing Idol', *Los Angeles Magazine*, May 1985, 192–5, 293; Geraldine Normane, 'Why Grave-robbing is no longer ethically acceptable', *Independent*, London, 17 June, 1986. My thanks to the staff of the archives of the Norton Simon Museum in Pasadena, California, for allowing me to consult these reports and other records in their holding.

46 It appears that in official parlance the term 'stolen' refers to the illicit removal and sale of an object from the temple or museum premises where it was housed, while the term 'smuggled' is used to indicate the illegal export of an object out of India, in violation of the Indian Treasure Trove Act of 1878 and Indian Antiquities Acts of 1971.

47 Davis, *Lives of Indian Images*, 15–16.

48 Such bronze icons, especially when they have been lying in disuse over long periods of time, are routinely rebronzed and reconsecrated to enhance their devotional value for worshippers. So, while the value of the untampered original is of supreme importance in the art world, the copy or remake has its legitimate place within a temple.

49 Davis, *Lives of Indian Images*, 222–59.

50 Davis, *Lives of Indian Images*, 252, 256.

51 Davis, *Lives of Indian Images*, 248–59.

52 Gaskell, 'Sacred to Profane and Back Again', 150–1.