

Conservation Approaches of the Barrackpore Gandhi Memorial Museum

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Introduction:

The Gandhi Memorial Museum, Barrackpore came up in 1961. The objectives of this museum are to collect, preserve and display materials connected with the memory of the Mahatma, disseminate his life, thoughts, activities and programmes for the public.

Collections of Gandhi Memorial Museum:

1. **Photographs** related to Gandhiji's activities and Indian Freedom movement.
2. **Articles** used by Gandhiji
3. **Historical Documents**, like, letters written by him, specimens of his original Bengali handwriting, some original glass negatives.
4. **Hand-spun threads** by many National Leaders including Gandhiji and Kasturba.
5. **Oil & Water Colour Paintings**
6. **Voice records** of Gandhiji, Tagore, Netaji and Pandit Nehru, and a collection of Swadeshi songs and Music.

Conservation Approaches:

- Documentation
- Evaluation to identify deficiencies.
- Establishing a preventive conservation programme.
- Assessing the condition and preservation needs of the housing of the museum objects.
- Conservation survey of the museum collection by the professionals.
- Identifying emergency threats to the museum collection for incorporating appropriate emergency planning.

Present Condition of some of the Museum Objects:

I. Original Objects:

- **Wooden Desk (Plate 1)**, used by Gandhiji for taking meal at Sodepur Khadi Pratisthan in 1946. Condition: Good.

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- **Wooden Spoon (Plate 2)**, used by Gandhiji at Noakhali (Bangladesh) during 1946-47. Condition: Good.
- **Palm Leaf Bolpur Topi (Plate 3)**: A hat made up of palm leaf, used by Gandhiji. Cane strips, jute and rope are used as binding materials. Palm leaves are loose in position in several places and cane strips are broken in few places.



Plate 1

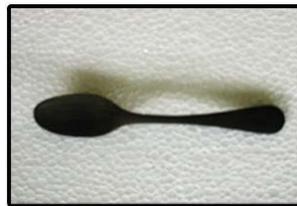


Plate 2



Plate 3

- **Bed Cover (Plate 4)**: Gandhiji used it at Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das' residence in 1925; made up of hand spun cotton; tagged on a white khadi cover by stitching with khadi cotton threads. The original khadi cloth is torn at several places and degraded.

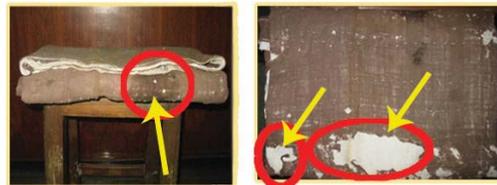


Plate 4



Plate 5

- **Lantern (Plate 5)**: ditz Lantern, made in New York, USA; used by Gandhiji in Noakhali in 1946-47. Presently in good working condition. Some marks are prominent on the glass portion. Discoloration has occurred due to metallic corrosion.

II. Hand-spun threads (Plate 6):

A very rare and interesting collection of this museum is the hand-spun threads, spun by many of our National Leaders. Each thread is covered by a paper in which the name of the particular Leader, written in ink for identification. Due to the deterioration of the covering papers and accumulation of dust and dirt on the threads these specimens are gradually deteriorating.



By Gandhiji



By Kasturba Gandhi



By Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru



By Dr. Rajendra Prasad

Plate 6

III. Original Bengali hand writing of Gandhiji (Plate 7):

This was written during his stay at Noakhali. It is kept in the Reserve collection with proper recording. It is laminated and in good condition.

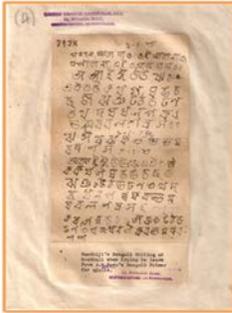


Plate 7



Plate 8



Plate 9

IV. Paintings:

- **Life-size Portrait of the Mahatma:** restored by INTACH in 2006.
- **Mural Painting (Plate 8):** on the life, work and philosophy of the Mahatma. A big spot has been identified on a panel, may be due to moisture accumulation or biodeterioration. The old wall of the building is not properly damp proofed.
- **Portraits of 36 National Leaders (Plate 9):** Almost all are in good condition, but the supporting background of some are damaged affecting paint layers.
- **Water-colour paintings (Plates 10a & 10b)** by Durgesh Chandra Das, painted in the 1920s. The paintings were restored by INTACH in 2008. Now in good condition.



Plate 10a: Before Treatment



Plate 10b: After Treatment

V. Original Letters (Plates 11a & 11b):

There are 11 original letters of Mahatma Gandhi's in his own hand writing. These are strengthened by Hand Lamination.



Plate 11a

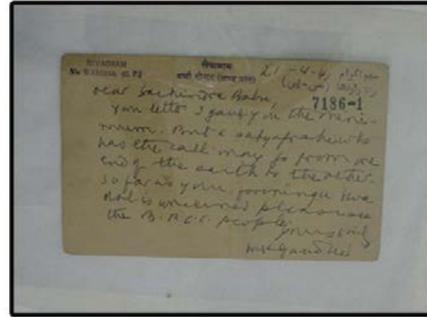


Plate 11b

VI. Photographs (Plates 12a & 12b):

This museum has a huge collection of photographs on Gandhiji's life, activities and the Freedom Movement. Photographs displayed in the gallery are damaged due to acidification and iron pins and screws. Now digital prints are gradually replacing the old ones.



Plate 12a: Previous Condition



Plate 12b: Present Condition



VII. Glass Negatives (Plate 13):

Some very rare and original glass negatives are stored in the Reserve, covered by envelop containing necessary information. Recently some spots are noticed on few negatives. Some of them are broken during collection and are joined through cello-tape.



Plate 13

VIII. Disc Records:

Disc-records containing voices of Gandhiji, Rabindranath, Netaji and Pandit Nehru and also Swadeshi songs and music. The audio quality of some of these voice-records is not clear. By using of some audio-editing software, efforts are being made to clear the sounds to maintain the original quality as much as possible.

Conclusion:

This Biographical museum depicting Mahatmaji's life and philosophy in totality is perhaps most organized in this part of the country and has been in limelight since long time. Due to its importance to the present society all the collections need to be maintained with proper care and responsibility. Efforts are being made to identify the damages and factors for deterioration on various objects of the Museum. Contacts have been made with some professional conservators for treatment of the original and rare collections; and to protect the already treated objects from further damage. Digital documentation of all the acquired objects is under progress. The authorities of Gandhi Memorial Museum are determined to maintain the objects in a professional manner.

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