

The INTACH Material Heritage Series

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BIODETERIORATION OF ETHNOLOGICAL OBJECTS



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INTRODUCTION

Museums in India have a vast collection of ethnographical artifacts of different types, particularly with special reference to tribal people (Agrawal, 1980, John, 1973). All types of materials which came into existence in relation to religio-cultural setting of mankind could be included in the ethnographical collections. They can be grouped according to their purpose i.e. costumes, ornaments, basketry, masks, musical instruments, terracotta, folk paintings, brass objects, wood carving, war implements, agricultural appliances of various types, etc.

The ethnographical objects are varied in nature and include all types of materials available in different ecological conditions and used by various communities living in their socio-cultural milieu. These diverse collections could be classified according to the nature and type of material from which an object is made into two categories (Dutta, *et al*, 1983, Dass, 1982) : (i) Organic (ii) Inorganic. The organic objects may be either of (a) animal origin e.g. silk and wool or of (b) vegetative origin e.g. bamboo, bark, cane leaves, fibers, textiles and wood. Inorganic objects include beads, glass, pottery, plaster cast, clay, stone implements, metal and its alloys such as gold, silver, bronze, brass, copper, and bell metal. Agrawal (1980) said that if we study carefully the collection of an ethnographical museum we shall see that there are certain peculiar problems that are involved in the presentation of ethnographical specimen because all objects in ethnographic collections are mostly organic in nature. The inorganic objects are more stable whereas organic objects are extremely unstable and vulnerable to damage due to constant action of various deteriorating agents (Agrawal, 1977).