

Museums, Exhibitions, and Collections-Based Research: Curatorial Approaches to Prehistoric and Protohistoric Heritage

Moumita Dhar ¹, Dr Tariq Latif Tamboli ²

1. Independent Curator, Pursuing MA in Anthropology from Indira Gandhi National Open University, India curatormoumita@gmail.com
2. Assistant Professor, AIHC & Archaeology, Punyashlok Ahilyadevi Holkar Solapur University, India

Abstract

Collections-based research relies on the diverse holdings preserved in museums and related institutions, as no single archaeological site can capture the full complexity of human prehistory. These collections—assembled over long periods by museums, universities, and cultural organizations—carry distinct acquisition histories. When examined comparatively, they reveal connections and cultural patterns that isolated excavations cannot provide.

Museums and galleries play a central role in shaping archaeological narratives while serving as custodians of material heritage. They not only preserve and conserve objects for future generations but also act as active gateways that draw public interest into prehistory and protohistory, enabling communities to contribute intangible knowledge that enriches archaeological interpretation. Yet, collection-based research is often underutilized due to dispersed holdings, inconsistent documentation, uncertain provenance, repeated ownership changes, and limited research engagement.

Provenance studies have therefore become indispensable for archaeology, museology, and heritage governance. Recent global investments in digital infrastructures and integrated provenance platforms have improved transparency and accessibility, enabling more responsible stewardship.

Alongside research, physical and digital exhibitions serve as powerful interpretive spaces. Physical galleries enable direct engagement with objects, while digital exhibitions expand accessibility through virtual environments, interactive media, and high-resolution documentation. Museum publications—catalogues, leaflets, guides, and digital booklets—further disseminate archaeological knowledge and mediate between experts and public audiences.

This session will explore the multifaceted contributions of museums, exhibitions, and collections-based approaches to prehistoric and protohistoric studies: including documentation, conservation, provenance research, digital interventions, permanent and temporary exhibitions, virtual galleries, and museum publications that safeguard and reinterpret the deep human past for future generations.

Key words : Museums, Collection, Conservation, Provenance Studies, Exhibitions, Galleries, Documentation, Publication