

Introduction

Traditionally, museums have been defined as repositories where objects belonging to our past and our culture are collected, conserved, documented, researched, exhibited and used to impart education. This definition of a museum creates a monologue in the interaction between the museum objects and the visitor. Story telling can be an effective tool to break this monologue and create a dialogue between the objects and the visitor. A museum object displayed without context loses its essence completely and thus its aesthetic value. Story telling can be used to bring the intangible aspects like historical and mythological relevance associated to an object inside the museum. This helps in increasing the essence of the object and built better interactive connection with the visitors.

Our attempt is to use storytelling as a medium of museum's interaction with the visitor. We have selected eight objects which are woven together by Akshaya Tritiya, a very auspicious day in the Hindu calendar. The objects belong to different time periods, multiple dynasties, different regions, various art schools and the collection itself is composite in nature. They have no visual or historical relation, but the beauty of these stories is that, it can weave anything into a smooth narration.

These stories narrate mythological events, forming part of our oral as well as literary traditions and are knitted together as they occur on the auspicious day of Akshaya Tritiya.

Akshaya Tritiya

Akshaya Tritiya is a holy day for both the Hindus and the Jains. It falls on the third Tithi (lunar day) of Bright Half (Shukla Paksha) of the Indian month of Vaishakha.

According to the Hindu calendar, it is considered to be a day free of any evil which is why multiple auspicious events have occurred on this particular day which has catapulted its significance. The day is considered auspicious for starting new ventures. The legend is that any venture initiated on the auspicious day of Akshaya Tritiya continues to grow and bring prosperity. Our stories focus on the various events which have occurred on the day of Akshaya Tritiya.



Ganga

Once upon a time a king named Sagar performed the Ashwamedh sacrifice. Indra out of jealousy stole the sacrificial horse and tied it next to the meditating sage Kapil. The 60000 sons of Sagar who were looking for the horse, believed that the sage had stolen the horse. They hurled insults and disturbed the sage's deep penance. The enraged sage burnt all 60000 sons of Sagar and turned them to ashes.

After severe penances performed by Bhagirath's ancestors, finally Lord Brahma granted Bhagirath the boon to bring Ganga to the earth for cleansing the soul of his ancestors and release them to heaven.

Brahma's order to Ganga to go down to the Earth was taken as an insult by her, as now she had to flow on Earth for the mere mortals. She decided to sweep the whole Earth away as she descended from the heavens. Alarmed, Bhagirath prayed to Shiva to break Ganga's descent save the earth.

In order to quell Ganga's arrogance, Shiva trapped her on his hair and let her out in small streams. As Ganga travelled to the nether-worlds, she created a different stream to remain on Earth to help purify unfortunate souls there. The day on which Bhagirath was able to bring Ganga down to Earth and free the souls of his ancestors was Akshaya Tritiya.



Annapoorna:

One day, Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati were playing the game of dice. They got so engrossed in the game that a verbal duel broke out between the couple. Lord Vishnu had to intervene to show them that this disagreement between them was an illusion created by him. In the discussions that followed Shiva said that possessions are temporary...everything is Maya (illusion)...even the food we eat is Maya.

Goddess Parvati did not agree that food is an illusion. She wanted to know how the world would survive without food. Her disappearance made earth barren. Soon there was severe drought and shortage of food. Many started perishing due to scarcity of food.

Goddess Parvati could not see her children perishing out hunger and appeared in Kashi (Varanasi) as Annapoorna Devi and started serving food to the needy. Shiva appeared before her and said that food cannot be dismissed as mere illusion as it is required to nourish the body in which resides the Atma. Since then Goddess Parvati is worshipped as the Goddess of food - Annapoorna Devi.

The day on which Parvati chose to take the form of Annapoorna and save the earth from starvation was Akshaya Tritiya.



Kuber

The tale of how Kuber became the "Lord of all riches" is an interesting one. As a reward for his severe penance, Kuber was granted the initial status semi-god by Lord Brahma and was made the king of Lanka, along with which he also got the Pushpak Vimana. Ravana was Kuber's half brother and after acquiring a boon from Brahma, he drove Kuber away from Lanka and seized his Pushpaka Vimana. Kuber fled north to the Himalayas, there he settled on the Mount Gandhamandana, near Mount Kailash and started praying to please Lord Shiva. The Padma Purana says that Kuber prayed to Shiva for many years, and due to his severe austerities Shiva granted him the kingship of Yakshas and the status of custodian, maintainer and the distributor of all wealth on earth to the souls of the universe. Thus he was elevated to the position of god of all wealth on earth.

This boon was bestowed upon Kuber by Lord Shiva on the day of Akshaya Tritiya.



Parashuram

Parashuram is one of the seven Chiranjeevis (immortals) of Hindu mythology and one of the ten avatars (reincarnated forms) of Vishnu. Parashuram's father's name was Jamadagni, who traced his lineage to Lord Brahma and his mother's name was Renuka. Parashuram was their fifth child. Before the birth of Parashuram, Jamadagni and Renuka did tapasya (prayer) for divine providence. With the blessing of Lord Shiva, Vishnu answered their wishes and was born from the womb of Renuka as their fifth and youngest son, and was named as Rambhadra. When Rambhadra grew older, he started worshipping Lord Shiva. Shiva gave Rambhadra his Parashu (axe) as a blessing. Since then, Rambhadra became known as Parashuram, i.e. 'Ram bearing an axe'.

It is believed that Parashuram, one of the most revered of the ten avatars of Vishnu, was born on the day of Akshaya Tritiya and hence, the day is considered sacred by the Hindus.

Museum ke Sutradhar akshaya tritiya

Krishna and Sudama

Sudama and Krishna were childhood friends. Their friendship transcended social differences. Over the years they lost contact and while Krishna became a military leader and Dwaraka-dhish, Sudama stayed as a humble and somewhat impoverished Brahman. One day Kalyani, Sudama's wife coaxed him to seek Krishna's help. After initial hesitation Sudama finally agreed to seek financial help from Krishna. As a gift he carried Poha which had been Krishna's favourite food when they were children.

Krishna breaks all royal protocol and treats his long lost friend royally and with much love. Overwhelmed by the gesture, Sudama completely forgets to ask for what he had actually come for. But Krishna already knew what his friend needed, and the Lord's consort Rukmini, gifted Sudama with all the riches that he desired for without his awareness.

When Sudama finally returns home, to his astonishment he finds a palatial mansion instead of his hut. The family he had left dressed in rags were waiting for him dressed in riches. The family and Sudama spend the rest of their life being grateful to Lord Krishna.

Akshaya Tritiya is the day when Sudama met Lord Krishna.



Draupadi Vastraharan

Once upon a time, Duryodhan had invited the Pandavas for a game of dice to Hastinapur. Shakuni, Duryodhan's maternal uncle had a pair of dice that would never disobey his will. As a result, Yudhishtir lost everything one-by-one, his property, kingdom, wealth, brothers and ultimately himself. Yudhishtir to the horror of everybody even puts Draupadi up as a bet for the next round and ends up losing her as well. Duryodhan commands his younger brother Dushasan to bring Draupadi forcefully to the court. Dushasan drags her to the court by her hair.

On Duryodhan's command Dushasan begins to disrobe Draupadi. Seeing her husband's passivity, Draupadi prays to Lord Krishna to protect her. Dushasan unveils layers and layers of her sari but due to Krishna's magical intervention her sari keeps getting extended and keeps piling on the courts floor. Everyone looks upon in awe, and Dushasan is forced to stop due to exhaustion.

The events that took shape in the court of Hastinapur after the game of dice were horrific. Things could have been even worse for Draupadi had this not been the day of Akshaya Tritiya.



Akshaya Patra

When Pandavas marched towards the forest to serve the next thirteen years in exile, a lot of Brahmins followed them. Yudhishtir pleaded with the Brahmins to return, but in vain. The brahmins refused to return and told Yudhishtir that they would not be a burden for the Pandavas. They added that they would source food on their own.

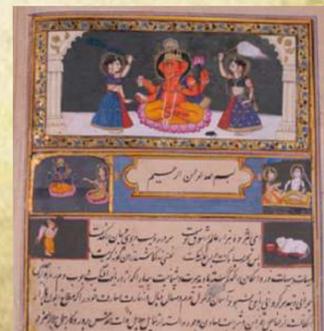
Hearing this, Yudhishtir fell into despair as now he couldn't provide food to the Brahmins who were following him out of love. Yudhishtir's priest named Dhaumya advised him to pray to Surya. Subsequently Yudhishtir started his meditation. Gladdened by his act, Surya appeared before Yudhishtir and gave him a vessel, Akshaya Patra. The vessel could provide inexhaustible supply of food each day and could feed numerable people, until Draupadi partakes her portion of the food. Yudhishtira received the gift of Akshaya Patra from Surya on the auspicious day of Akshaya Tritiya.



Ved Vyas and Mahabharat

On Lord Brahma's recommendation, Rishi Ved Vyas requests Lord Ganesh to write the first copy of the Mahabharat at his dictation. Ganesh accepts the proposal on the condition that his pen should not stop even for a moment during the writing process. To ensure time for thinking, Ved Vyas accepts Ganesh's condition on his counter-condition that Ganesh must understand the verse before he transcribes it. Lord Ganesh agrees. Ved Vyas spoke out the shlokas fast and after every 10-15 shlokas used a very difficult one. In the time that Ganesh took to understand the difficult ones, Ved Vyas would make more new shlokas.

It is believed that Ved Vyas along with Ganesh started compiling the great epic of Mahabharat on the day of Akshaya Tritiya.



Conclusion

The passivity of the museum objects is a barrier in creating an interactive space with the visitors in a museum. The essence of an object would not reach out to a visitor until and unless the museum creates a dialogue which breaks this passivity. Storytelling is an effective tool to bring the objects to life.

In our pursuit to make the objects speak for themselves we have compiled stories of events that occurred on the day of Akshaya Tritiya. These stories have spoken volumes about the objects and their association with our tangible and intangible heritage. The common binding factor amongst them is the auspicious day of Akshaya Tritiya.

Reference

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Sutradhar: Narrator akshaya tritiya



Akshaya Tritiya

