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105 antiquities smuggled out of India are back home from US, 16 more on the way

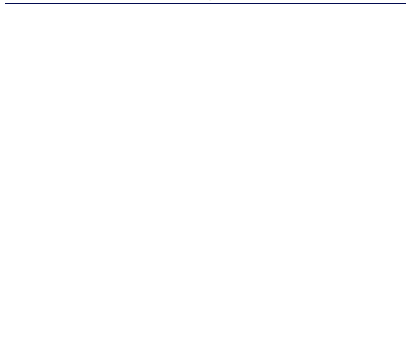
Besides the 105, over 250 “non-antiquities” smuggled out of India are expected to arrive soon from the United States.

Written by [Shyamal Yadav](#) [Follow](#)

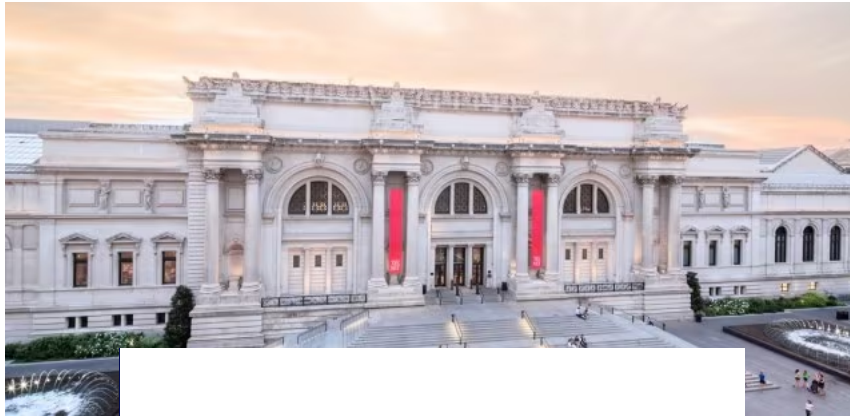
New Delhi | Updated: September 12, 2023 13:26 IST



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LIVE BLOG



New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art (Met) is returning a series of antiquities to India following an investigation published by The Indian Express in March. (Facebook/Met)

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From a terracotta plaque depicting a standing figure with two attendants to a bronze sculpture depicting Lord Krishna in the famous Kalinganarthana posture, from a sandstone image of Vishnu and Lakshmi riding the Garuda to a terracotta vase from Eastern India — these are among 105 antiquities smuggled to the United States from India that arrived in the country nearly two weeks ago.

In its RTI response to *The Indian Express*, the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) confirmed on Monday that “one hundred and five antique art objects have been repatriated in the month of August 2023 from USA. Cases of repatriation of antiquities with other countries are in progress”. Sources said the process is on to bring back 16 more antiquities, which were returned by New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art (Met) following an investigation published by *The Indian Express* in March. Besides the 105 antiquities, over 250 artefacts, categorised as “non-antiquities”, are expected to arrive on Indian shores soon.

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with Garuda

Vishnu & Lakshmi ride over Garuda. Vishnu holds a shankh & a chakra. Lakshmi sits on his left thigh.

Material: Sandstone

Provenance: Central India (12th-13th century CE)



Kubera

A seated Kubera holds a bowl in one hand and a noose in the other. A female figure stands besides Kubera.

Material: Sandstone

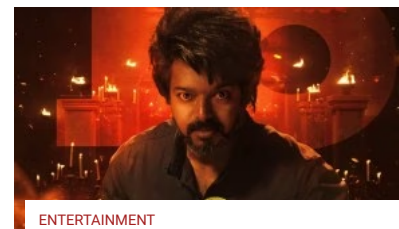
Provenance: Central India (8th-9th century CE)

Some among the antiquities and 'non-antiquities' were **smuggled out of India by Subhash Kapoor**, who is serving a 10-year term in a Tamil Nadu jail since November for the illegal export of artefacts.



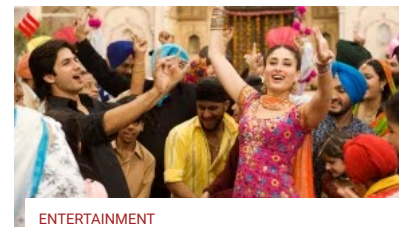
Antiquities from Met set to return as US hands over 1,414 objects

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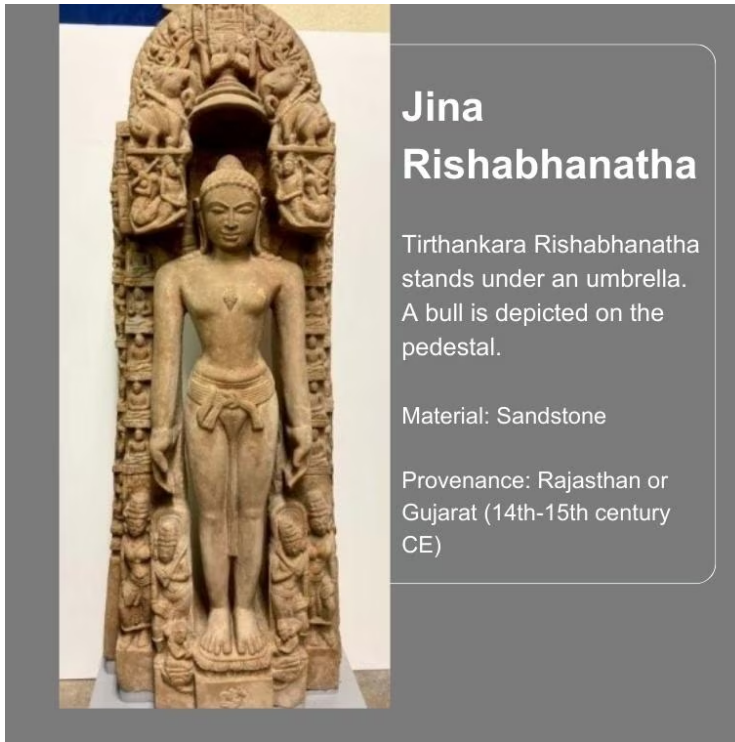
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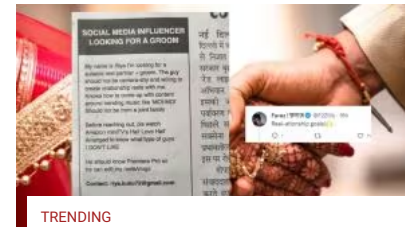
Sources in the Ministry of Culture and Ministry of External Affairs told *The Indian Express* that **35 of the 105 antiquities are from Chandraketugarh, an archeological site about 35 km north-east of Kolkata, and nearly 2,000 years old. Terracotta** antiquities from this site have been smuggled out for decades, they added.

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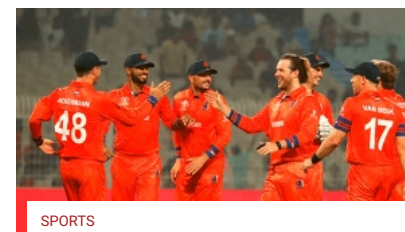
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Standing Parsvanatha

Tirthankara Parsvanatha stands under a canopy of hooded snakes. A snake is depicted on the pedestal.

Material: Basalt

Provenance: South India (12th-13th century CE)

Standing Surya

Standing on a lotus pedestal, Surya is flanked by Usa, Pratusha, Dandi and Pingal. His seven-horse chariot is drawn by Aruna.

Material: Information unavailable

Provenance: Central India (11th-12th century CE)



A review of the list of 105 antiquities — which belong to different periods and mostly over 1,000 years old — by *The Indian Express* revealed eastern India as the provenance or source of 46 artefacts, south India of 29 and central India of 17. Among others, the provenance of three antiquities was listed as “central or eastern India”; two each as Uttar Pradesh and “Rajasthan or Gujarat”; and one each as



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The 105 antiquities were handed over to the Indian Consulate in New York on July 17. During his state visit to the US, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had said on June 24, "I am happy that the American government has decided to return more than 100 antiquities that were stolen from us."

Sambandar

Gyana Sambandar is in a dancing posture on a lotus pedestal.

Material: Bronze

Provenance: South India (14th-15th century CE)

Chandraketugarh vase

The terracotta vase is decorated with floral and human motifs.

Material: Terracotta


Provenance: Eastern India (6th-7th century CE)

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confiscated antiquities at Delhi's Old Fort or returned to the states from where they were smuggled.

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Different materials, ages

Most antiquities depict gods and goddesses such as Shiva, Lakshmi, Ganesh, Vishnu, Surya, Kubera and Krishna, besides two Tirthankars. The treasure trove also includes a "crypt" of a male's gravestone carved in marble, and a steel dagger and sheath. The "crypt" has an Arabic/Persian inscription from Western India from 18th-19th century CE, while the dagger and sheath is from north India from 18th century CE.

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Venkateswaran

Lord Krishna dances on the hood of a snake while holding its tail.

Material: Bronze

Provenance: South India (17th-18th century)



Sadashiva

A four-headed Shiva holds a kamandala and a lotus stalk in his hands. The fourth face is depicted on the backside of the sculpture.

Material: Schist

Provenance: Uttarakhand and Himachal (15th-16th century CE)

Sources said most of the returned antiquities (27 of 105) are estimated to be from 2nd-3rd century CE, 16 from 6th-7th century CE, 13 from 12th-13th century CE, and 15 from 15th-17th century CE. Four of the “youngest” antiquities from this lot are from 18th-19th century CE.

Sources said the antiquities are made of different materials — 46 of terracotta; 27 of bronze; 11 of sandstone; three each of wood and marble; two each of black stone, granite and silver; and one each of brass, chlorite schist, schist, slate stone, spotted sandstone and steel.

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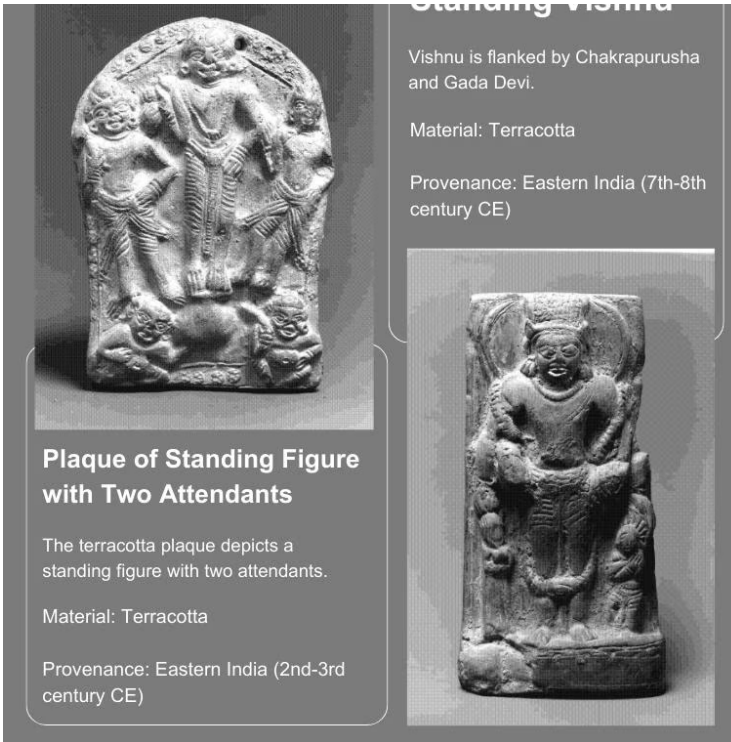
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Over the last few years, several antiquities have been retrieved from different countries including the US, Australia and Germany, among others. The move to bring back the antiquities picked pace after the arrest of one of the most notorious idol smugglers, Kapoor. He was arrested in Germany on October 30, 2011, and extradited to India in July 2012. On November 1, 2022, he was charged by a Kumbakonam court for burglary and illegal export of idols belonging to Kanchipuram's Varadharaja Perumal temple. He is currently serving his sentence at Trichy Central Jail.




He also faces various charges in the US, including theft and smuggling of artefacts. According to a complaint filed in July 2019 in a New York court by the Homeland Security Investigation (HSI), the principal investigative arm of the US Department of Homeland Security, the “total value of stolen antiquities known to have been trafficked by Kapoor exceeds \$145.71 million”.

According to HSI’s complaint, 2,622 antiquities valued at over \$143 million (nearly Rs 1,165 crore) with links to Kapoor have been seized. His modus operandi, the HSI stated, was to first select the antiquities, illegally export them to the US or the UK, get them restored and “laundered” using “false and forged” papers, and then use his art gallery in New York to sell them to “dealers, collectors and museums around the world”.

Also read | Govt welcomes Met offer to return antiques, works on next steps

Express had published a long list of Indian antiquities linked to Kapoor that were placed at the Met.



Head of Shiva

The terracotta head of lord Siva with the third eye on the forehead.

Material: Terracotta


Provenance: Central India (8th–9th century CE)

Cenotaph Lid

The crypt of a male's gravestone. It has Arabic/Persian inscriptions and is decorated in floral and geometrical motifs.

Material: Marble

Provenance: Western India (18th–19th century CE)



After the publication of the series, on March 22, the Supreme Court of the State of New York issued a search warrant against the Met, with Justice Felicia A Mennin giving 10 days to the New York Police Department or any agent of the Department of Homeland Security to seize the antiquities and bring them “before the court without unnecessary delay.”

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