



Exhibition 'Return of the Three Stone Sculptures from Australia to India' begins in National Museum

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An exhibition "Return of the Three Stone Sculptures from Australia to India" has begun in National Museum, Janpath, New Delhi. It has been organised to mark the safe return of three stone sculptures (Seated Buddha; Worshippers of Buddha; & Goddess Pratyangira) from Australia to India. These sculptures were purchased by National Gallery of Australia from the Nancy Wiener, New York in 2007 and Art of the Past, New York, 2005.

Minister of State (I/C) for Culture and Tourism Dr. Mahesh Sharma inaugurated the exhibition yesterday. He attended a special event at National Gallery of Australia (NGA) in Canberra, Australia in which Senator Mitch Fifield formally handed over three ancient artefacts stolen and smuggled out of India and inadvertently acquired by National Gallery of Australia.

Earlier, during the visit of Australian Prime Minister to India in September, 2014, the Australian government had also returned sculpture of 'Dancing Shiva'.

This exhibition is important as it celebrates the return of rare heritage sculptures that were stolen from the country.

I. **The statue of Worshippers of the Buddha** : (Satavahana, 1st Century BCE to 2nd Century CE, Andhra Pradesh, South India, Lime Stone, size: 96.5x106.7x12.7cm). This architecture piece adorning a stupa (possibly drum slab) is made of limestone. The panel depicts the worship of some of the Buddhist symbol (possibly *chakrastambha* or *Bodhi tree* but it is not visible as the piece is damaged at the top) kept on a throne, below which the Buddha-pada are visible. The central objects are flanked by worshipper couples on either sides in standing posture. On both the sides, male worshippers are represented first followed by the female worshippers. The most probable offering objects held in their hands are vases with flower or garlands. This sculpture was unearthed in 1970s during the excavation of a Buddhist stupa at Chandavaram (District, Prakasham) in Andhra Pradesh.



II. **Seated Buddha with large halo** : (Kushan, 2nd century CE, Maholi, Mathura, Uttar Pradesh Spotted Red sand stone, size: 129.5x101.5x30.5cm). This image represents the Buddha seated cross legged (*Padmasana*) wearing *ekansika sanghati* (drapery covering one shoulder and arrayed with additional pleats). The transparent effect of the cloth is apparent through the conspicuous marking of the navel. The image indicates that the right hand was raised in the *abhaya mudra* (protection pose) and the left rests on the thigh. The large halo with a scalped border (*hasti nakha*) emerges just above the waist. He is shown with an *urna*, *pralamba karna* (elongated ear-lobes), *ushnisha* and with a filing contemplation on his face.



III. **Standing Pratyangira** : (Chola, 13th Century CE, Tamil Nadu, South India Grey coloured granite stone, size: 125.1x55.9x30.5cm). In order to carry out his supreme task of preservation, Lord Vishnu took incarnation in the form of Narasimha in which he is represented by a human body and a lion's head, who destroyed the demon kind Hiranyakashipu, the personification of evil. The deity represented here is a tantric deity who is the female aspect of God Narasimha also known as Narasimhi. She is invoked in the *Sadhanamala* also. She is standing in *pralambapadita* pose, the face of a roaring and furious lion while the body is of a female. Flames are coming out of her head. However, the attributes tridents (*trisula*) and drum (*damaru*) in her right hands suggest her to be *Pratyangira*, a form of *Bhairavi* as per Saivite cult. The image was under worship in Vriddhachalam temple near Chennai before its theft.

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