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## Taking Heritage Digital: Case Studies from NHB's Heritage Institutions

Nalina Gopal  
Curator  
National Heritage Board

### ABOUT THE WEBINAR

Heritage in the context of Singapore's multifaceted community is a complex mixture of tangible and intangible elements of culture, history and collective memory. Is the digital medium a single space that can house the needs for a heritage centre that seeks to adequately represent and preserve the community's heritage? How are we, at the Heritage Institutions, taking heritage digital through tried and tested as well as uncharted avenues? In this webinar, Nalina will share more about the Heritage Institutions' experiences and perspectives.

### ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Nalina is a Curator at the Indian Heritage Centre (IHC). Her work involves developing content for IHC, including collecting and documenting historical accounts, photographs and videos of unique Indian festivities and cultural activities. She has also curated several exhibitions at the IHC, including "Symbols and Scripts: The Language of Craft", and "Chetti Melaka of the Straits – Rediscovering Peranakan Indian Communities".





# *COVID-19 and Curating Heritage for Digital Platforms*

*Experiences at the  
Indian Heritage Centre and  
NHB's Heritage Institutions*



UNTITLED I  
Anchalee Arayapongpanich  
2020

# WE HAVE REOPENED!





# WHO ARE WE



இந்திய  
மரபுடைமை  
நிலையம்



SYSNMH AT  
BALESTIER

MALAY HERITAGE  
CENTRE AT  
KAMPONG GLAM



INDIAN HERITAGE  
CENTRE AT LITTLE  
INDIA

# WHAT WE DO



இந்திய  
மரபுடைமை  
நிலையம்



## VISION

A SUSTAINABLE DESTINATION OF HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE FOR VISITORS AND THE COMMUNITY.

## MISSION

TO DEVELOP SYSNMH, MHC AND IHC INTO LEADING HERITAGE INSTITUTIONS AND FOCAL POINTS FOR THE CHINESE, MALAY AND INDIAN COMMUNITIES;

### STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

- TO ESTABLISH SYSNMH, MHC AND IHC AS LEADING HERITAGE INSTITUTIONS THROUGH MUSEUM EXCELLENCE
- TO CONDUCT RESEARCH TO PROMOTE A DEEPER UNDERSTANDING OF CHINESE, MALAY AND INDIAN HERITAGE AND VALUES
- TO ENSURE THE EFFECTIVE UTILISATION OF RESOURCES TO ACHIEVE HIS' VISION, MISSION AND STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES
- TO CONNECT AND COLLABORATE WITH KEY STAKEHOLDERS TO PROMOTE CHINESE, MALAY AND INDIAN COMMUNITY ROOTEDNESS
- TO ESTABLISH STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS WITH REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL COUNTERPARTS

# CURATING HERITAGE AND COVID-19

- THIS YEAR THE CURATORIAL TEAMS AT NHB's HERITAGE INSTITUTIONS HAVE BEEN ENGAGED IN TRADITIONAL FOCUS AREAS SUCH AS RESEARCH, COLLECTION DEVELOPMENT, AND EXHIBITIONS.
- BUT THIS HAS BEEN COMPLEMENTED BY A HEIGHTENED EMPHASIS ON DIGITALISATION EFFORTS (ENHANCED EFFORTS IN DIGITAL CONTENT CREATION AND ENGAGEMENT) IN VIEW OF COVID-19

# FOCUS AREAS IN 2020

**Acquisitions  
&  
Exhibitions**

**Community  
Engagement**

**Research &  
Publications**

**Build  
Strategic  
Partnerships**

**Digitalisation**



# CURATING HERITAGE AND COVID-19

- THE SITUATION HAS ALSO RESULTED IN SOME SHIFTS, AND PRESENTED US WITH OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES REQUIRING NEW COMPETENCIES FOR A CURATORS

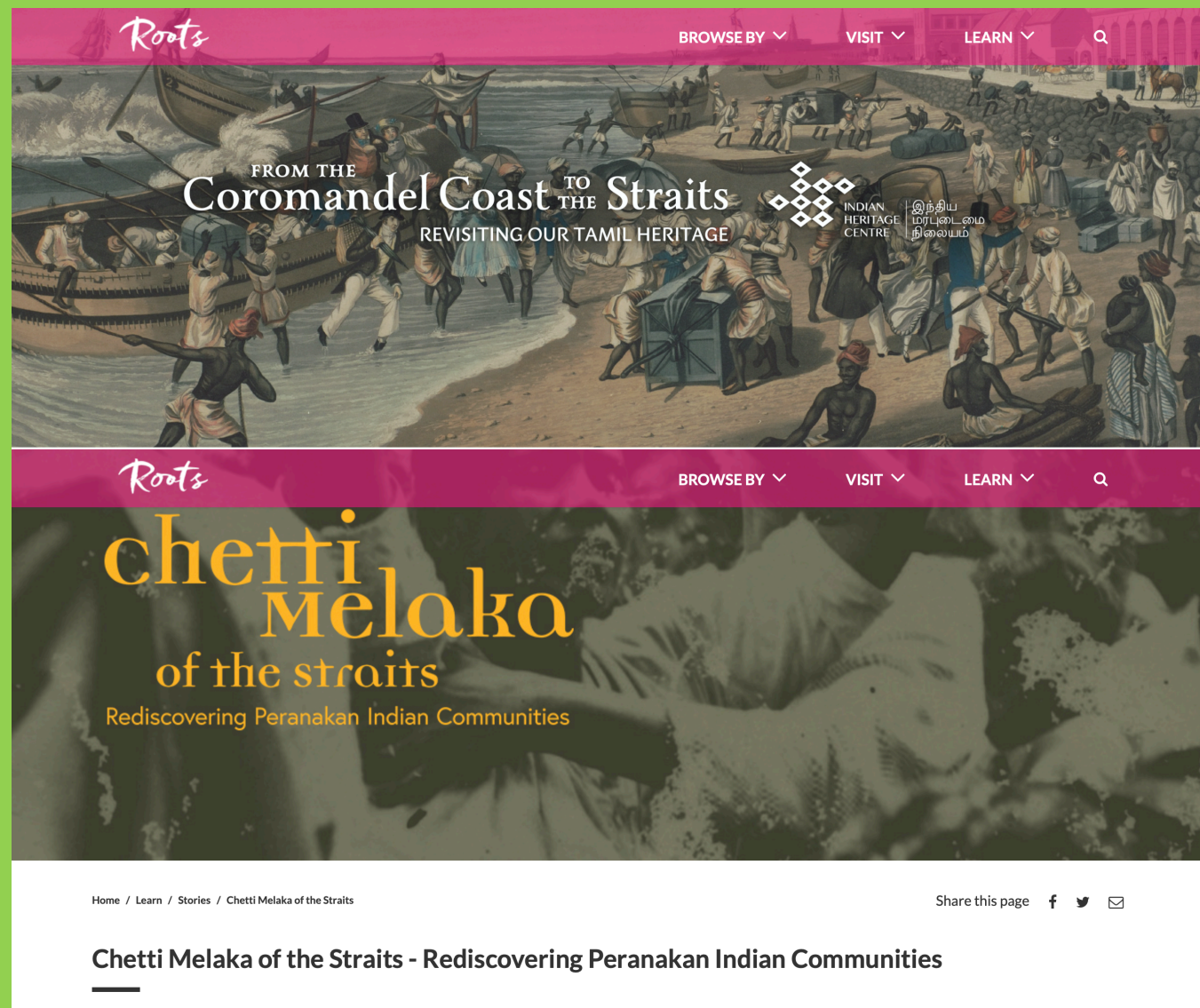


# GOING DIGITAL

- WITH THE MUSEUM LANDSCAPE CHANGING IN THE LAST TWO DECADES, AND INCREASED EMPHASIS ON THE USE OF TECHNOLOGY, THE HI CURATORIAL TEAMS HAVE BEEN DEVELOPING DIGITAL INITIATIVES FOR THEIR RESPECTIVE EXHIBITIONS, WHERE ESSENTIAL.
- DURING THE COVID-19 PERIOD THE HI CURATORIAL TEAMS HAVE INITIATED A RANGE OF DIGITAL EFFORTS
- SOME OF THESE INITIATIVES HAVE BEEN MADE POSSIBLE BECAUSE OF LONG TERM PLANNING AND INVESTMENT IN CURATING CONTENT FOR PHYSICAL AS WELL AS DIGITAL PLATFORMS



# EXHIBITIONS GO ONLINE



- IHC'S CURATORIAL TEAM, IN COLLABORATION WITH SCD, HAS ARCHIVED TWO OF THEIR SPECIAL EXHIBITIONS ON ROOTS.SG
- THESE RESOURCES SERVE AS A USEFUL INFORMATION PORTAL FOR MEMBERS OF THE COMMUNITY, STUDENTS, RESEARCHERS, AND MEDIA.

## GOING DIGITAL



# #museumfromhome THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA



- THE TEAMS HAVE BEEN STEADILY POSTING COMMUNITY STORIES, AS REPRESENTED IN OUR COLLECTIONS AND EXHIBITIONS, AS HUMAN INTEREST POSTS PERFORM WELL.
- WE HAVE ALSO REBRANDED AND REPACKAGED EXISTING CONTENT FOR SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS.

## GOING DIGITAL

# E- CURATOR TOURS & #museumfromhome THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA

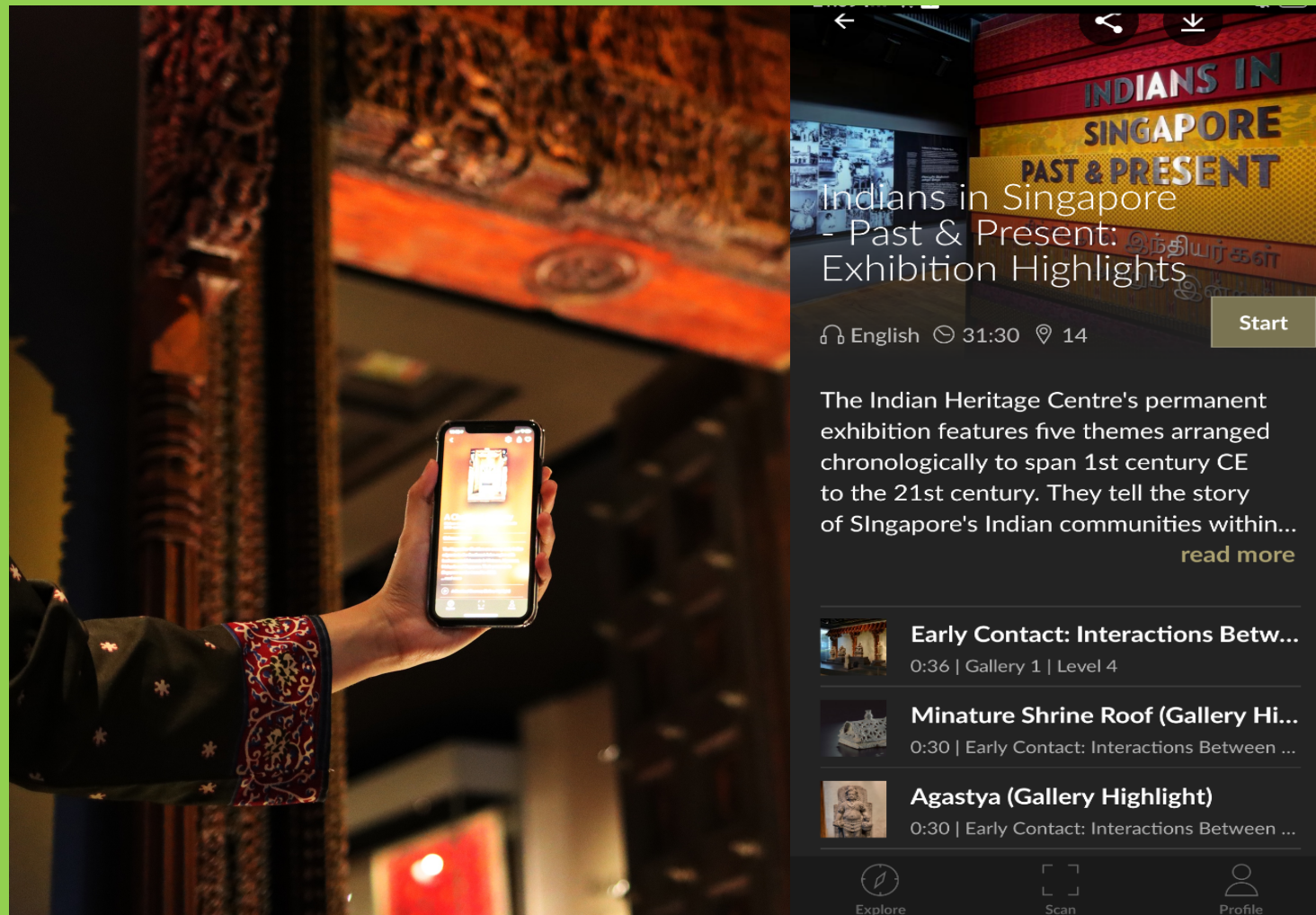


- THE HI CURATORIAL TEAMS HAVE ALSO BEEN PRODUCING CONTENT FOR UNCONVENTIONAL AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT
- E-TOUR ON THE THEME OF HAPPINESS AND SUFFERING AS FEATURED IN OUR RESPECTIVE PERMANENT EXHIBITIONS FOR THE SINGAPORE MANAGEMENT UNIVERSITY (SMU)
- CURATING ARTEFACTS FOR PUBLIC TO DISCOVER AND ENGAGE WITH OUR COLLECTIONS THROUGH THE RECREATE ART CHALLENGE

**GOING DIGITAL**



# #museumfromhome THROUGH AUDIO TOURS



IHC'S CURATORIAL TEAM, HAVE PILOTED AUDIO HIGHLIGHT TOURS OF OUR PERMANENT EXHIBITION (1 FOR ADULTS+1 FOR YOUNG ADULTS) ON THE SMARTIFY PLATFORM

IHC WILL ALSO BE ROLLING OUT MULTI-LANGUAGE TOURS ON SMARTIFY, WITH FUNDING APPROVED BY THE DIGITAL+ WORKING COMM

## GOING DIGITAL



# #museumfromhome THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA



Malay Heritage Centre  
May 1 · 0

In support of the #MuseumFromHome movement, we are getting our staff to share their favourite artefact with you!

"Every time I enter the museum, I'll usually make a quick stop at the gallery where Zubir Said's baby grand piano is on display. The showcase is set up to look like Pak Zubir's home studio on Joo Chiat Road. As I picture him sitting at the piano, I'm always struck by how this highly talented man, overcame so many odds in pursuit of his passion for music and the arts, yet he was so generous with his time and gifts, composing rousing songs to promote love and loyalty to Singapore, and still teaching music to children from



*Fuxin (Renaissance)  
Series General Knowledge  
Textbook (1949)*

Ms Jermaine Chua  
Curator, SYSNMH



Artefact details:  
Hand bag made from parachute  
chords  
Made in Bombay, India, 1940s  
Synthetic fibre, metal, 35 x 34 cm  
Collection of Mrs Salma Moiz

#CultureCarriesOn #IndianHeritage  
#DoseOfCulture #MuseumsAndChill  
#Enjoy\_CityMuseums\_From\_Home  
#OurSGHeritage #GoDigital  
#SocialDistancing #StayHome  
#SGUnited #StayHomeforSG  
#MissOurMuseums  
#museumfromhome #stayhomeforSG  
#pickoftheweek

Like Comment Share  
Liked by nalinjinju and 49 others  
7 DAYS AGO  
Add a comment... Post

One of my favourite artefacts in the museum is this General Knowledge textbook from 1949 that was used to teach about animals and plants in local Chinese... See More

41 2 Shares  
Like Comment Share  
Write a commen...

- THE HI CURATORS HAVE ALSO CURATED AND PARTICIPATED IN A SOCIAL MEDIA SERIES FEATURING STAFF PICKS FROM THEIR RESPECTIVE COLLECTIONS

## GOING DIGITAL

# SHIFTS

- THE CURATOR AS STORYTELLER/ ENTERTAINER NOT JUST SPECIALIST
- THE CURATOR AS KNOWLEDGE BROKER
- CURATING BEYOND THE CONFINES OF THE PHYSICAL MUSEUM, DIGITAL INITIATIVES TO COMPLEMENT THE PHYSICAL
- CURATING FOR NEW AUDIENCES, UNDERSTANDING THE DIGITAL AUDIENCE





## CURATOR AS STORYTELLER

GUIDED TOURS HAVE GONE  
DIGITAL IN THE GALLERIES IN TIME  
FOR OUR REOPENING .

17

THESE STAY RELEVANT EVEN  
AFTER WE RESUME PHYSICAL  
TOURS AS IT IS A GREAT WAY TO  
ARCHIVE CURATORIAL INSIGHTS  
INTO THE MAKING OF AN  
EXHIBITION



# OPPORTUNITIES

## REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL

- EXPAND REACH TO REGIONAL AND GLOBAL AUDIENCES BY OFFERING EXHIBITIONS IN OTHER LANGUAGES
- MORE COLLABORATIONS WITH OVERSEAS PARTNERS, WITHOUT COMPLICATED LOGISTICS/EXPENSIVE BUDGETS
- COLLABORATE WITH INTERNATIONAL EXPERTS AND SPECIALISTS TO RESEARCH OUR COLLECTIONS

## LOCAL

- GIVE EQUAL REPRESENTATION TO LESSER KNOWN COMMUNITIES AND CREATIVES
- SHOWCASE INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE IN DIGITAL EXHIBITIONS
- ENGAGE THE PUBLIC IN UNDERSTANDING OUR COLLECTION AND ITS RELEVANCE TO SINGAPORE
- OPPORTUNITY TO INSPIRE INNOVATION, COLLABORATION AND INTERPRETATION USING THE COLLECTION
- OVERCOMING THE LIMITATION OF SMALL EXHIBITION GALLERIES

# IS THIS THE DEATH OF INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATIONS?

The 1918 Spanish flu was the most severe pandemic in recent history until COVID-19.

Singapore was not spared in 1918 either, and the trading hub was affected by 2 waves.

Yet but a few months later this extant fragment of the Singapore Stone was transferred from India to the Raffles Museum in Singapore.

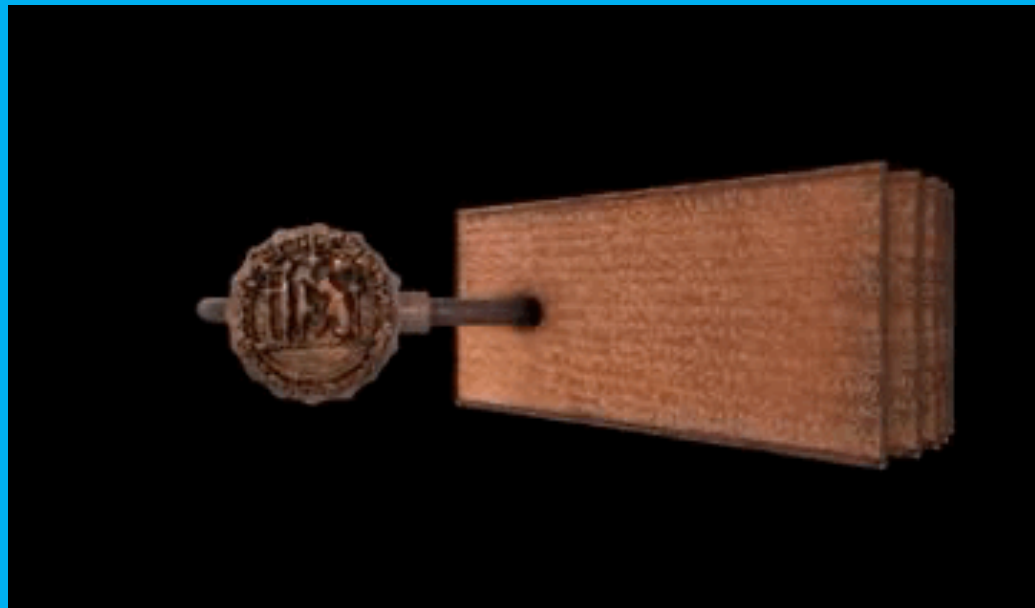
Let's not write ourselves off just yet!



EXTANT FRAGMENT OF THE  
SINGAPORE STONE, COLLECTION  
OF NATIONAL MUSEUM OF  
SINGAPORE



# CAN WE STILL COLLABORATE? YES!



3D HOLOGRAPHIC SHOWCASES FEATURING ARTEFACTS  
FROM THE LEIDEN UNIVERSITY LIBRARY AND MISSING  
PARTS OF THE SINGAPORE STONE RECREATED FOR FROM  
THE COROMANDEL COAST TO THE STRAITS – REVISITING  
OUR TAMIL HERITAGE



# CHALLENGES

## CURATING EXHIBITIONS

- REINVENTION OF THE CURATOR WHO TRADITIONALLY WAS SEEN AS AN ACADEMIC IN AN IVORY TOWER TO NOW A MULTI-SKILLED, MULTI-TASKER WHOSE ROLE IS BOTH SPECIALIST AND GENERALIST
- THE FUNDAMENTAL SHIFT IN CREATING EXHIBITION EXPERIENCES, MOVING FROM HANDS-ON TO HANDS-OFF EXPERIENCES
- PREPARING FOR EXHIBITIONS WITH RESTRICTED ACCESS TO COLLECTIONS
- COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN THE ABSENCE OF FACE TO FACE CONTACT



# CHALLENGES

## CURATING FOR DIGITAL PLATFORMS

- WRITING FOR DIGITAL Vs GALLERIES
- RESTRICTED RIGHTS FOR ONLINE DISPLAY OF COLLECTIONS
- DILIGENT FACTCHECKING OF ALL DIGITAL CAMPAIGNS USING COLLECTION
- LACK OF DIGITAL DATABASE FEATURING NON-NATIONAL COLLECTION RESOURCES

## KEEPING OUR COMMUNITIES ENGAGED

- STAYING CONNECTED WITH OUR DONORS, DOCENTS, AND AUDIENCES

# TRADITIONAL COMPETENCIES

**RESEARCH &  
WRITING**

**EXHIBITION  
PLANNING AND  
COLLECTION  
DEVELOPMENT**

**DOMAIN  
KNOWLEDGE**

**MULTI-  
LANGUAGE  
FLUENCY**

**NETWORKING  
&  
STAKE  
HOLDER  
MANAGEMENT**

**FUND RAISING**

**NEGOTIATION  
SKILLS FOR  
LOANS AND  
DONATIONS**

**KNOWLEDGE  
OF ART  
MARKET**

# COMPETENCIES REQUIRED DUE TO SHIFTS

- KNOWING THE AUDIENCE
- USING DIGITAL PLATFORMS FOR STRUCTURING, PUBLISHING AND MEASURING DIGITAL CONTENT
- USING TECHNOLOGY EFFECTIVELY
- DATA ANALYSIS
- WRITING FOR DIGITAL PLATFORMS
- FUTURE PROOFING MUSEUMS AND THE CONTENT WE PRODUCE
- CO-CREATE AND ARCHIVE EXHIBITION TOURS ON DIGITAL PLATFORMS
- DIGITAL STORYTELLING
- PUBLIC SPEAKING
- HELMING PUBLIC DISCOURSE/ENGAGEMENT
- MEDIA ENGAGEMENT
- EXHIBITION PLANNING & PROJECT MANAGEMENT

# COMMUNITY DURING COVID-19

- DOCUMENTING COMMUNITY COVID-19 INITIATIVES WITH THE COMMUNITY.
- DOCUMENTING COLLABORATIVE GLOBAL DIASPORA COVID-19 EFFORTS






# SOME TIPS

- CURATE CONTENT SUCH THAT IT IS SUITABLE FOR BOTH PHYSICAL AND DIGITAL PLATFORMS. GOING DIGITAL INVOLVES LONG TERM PLANNING AND INVESTING TIME IN ORGANISING OUR CONTENT AND RESEARCH

- Arikamedu
- Kedah
- The Singapore Connection
- Odyssey of Tamils
- PART 2: TAMILS IN 19TH CENTURY SINGAPORE
- Merchants
- Scribes, Poets and Publishers
- Bankers and Patrons
- A Fleet of Carriages
- From Vaddukoddai to Singapore
- From Mannargudi to Singapore
- They came from Jaffna
- Tamil Women
- Duality and Diversity
- Journey Across the Seas
- Portraiture
- Revisiting the Past

## PART 1 TAMILS IN PRE-MODERN SOUTHEAST ASIA

### Ancient Connections



Sureshkumar Muthukumar

Maritime links between South India and Southeast Asia date back to the late prehistoric period. During this period, Tamils acted as intermediaries in a trade network comprising the Roman Empire and the Mediterranean in the west to the other side of the Bay of Bengal. By the early centuries of the Common Era, pre-modern Tamil diasporas comprising seafarers and traders travelling to ports in Southeast Asian polities, had become common.

The early presence of Tamils in Southeast Asia is supported by epigraphic and archaeological finds that include medieval Tamil inscriptions, coins, pottery, ceramics, beads and bronze artefacts. The oldest inscription in the Tamil language dates to the 2nd or 3rd century CE on a potsherd found at Phu Khao Thong in south Thailand bearing the word *turavon*, meaning "ascetic".

A 3rd century CE touchstone inscription of a *perumpattan* (Tamil goldsmith) from Khuan Luk Pat in Krabi Province points to the presence of pre-modern professional diasporas. The Takua Pa inscription indicates that a *manigramattar* (Tamil mercantile guild) operated in Thailand in the 8th-9th centuries CE. The Lobu Tua inscription also mentions the Ayyavole trade guild who established a permanent outpost on the west coast of Sumatra.

In addition, the Sangam anthologies contain the earliest literary references to Tamil contact with Southeast Asia. The



# chetti Melaka of the straits

Rediscovering Peranakan Indian Communities

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## Chetti Melaka of the Straits - Rediscovering Peranakan Indian Communities

Situated at the crossroads of the Indian Ocean region and the Far East, the Malay Archipelago has always been a region of cultural confluence and diversity. The region experienced an influx of

Museum

[Indian Heritage Centre](#)

### Nyonya Needlework

Created with gold threads, silk floss, and tiny beads, nyonya needlework is typically associated with Peranakan Chinese women. It is one of the distinctive features of Peranakan Chinese culture. This exhibition explores the richness and diversity of this Peranakan Chinese art. Intricate details and immaculate workmanship are hallmarks of nyonya needlework. Designs, methods, and embroidery styles show how embroiderers worked within traditions while embracing the transformations inspired by contact across cultures. Visitors are invited to enjoy the microscopic details of these objects to discover the innovative spirit, craftsmanship, and stories embedded in this rich Peranakan Chinese art.



Mirror cover (detail)  
National Heritage Board, Singapore

TAP INTO EXISTING  
PLATFORMS. SAVE  
YOUR FINANCIAL  
RESOURCES TO  
PRODUCE CONTENT,  
IF YOU ARE AN  
INSTITUTION WITH  
LIMITED  
RESOURCES!

ROOTS.SG AND  
GOOGLE ART &  
CULTURE

# ADDITIONAL READING

- **CURATORIAL DREAMING IN THE AGE OF COVID-19**  
<https://www.aam-us.org/2020/05/04/curatorial-dreaming-in-the-age-of-covid-19/>
- **CHANGING ROLE OF THE CURATOR**  
<https://www.estate-living.co.za/news/behind-canvas-changing-role-curator/>
- **THE FUTURE FOR CURATORS**  
[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/272714156\\_The\\_Future\\_for\\_Curators/fulltext/55f7580b08aeba1d9ef7b103/The-Future-for-Curators.pdf](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/272714156_The_Future_for_Curators/fulltext/55f7580b08aeba1d9ef7b103/The-Future-for-Curators.pdf)
- **CURATING IN THE DIGITAL AGE**  
[https://academia.edu/39224398/Curating\\_in\\_the\\_Digital\\_Age](https://academia.edu/39224398/Curating_in_the_Digital_Age)
- **ART OF STORYTELLING WITH CONTENT CURATION**  
<http://www.nancypekala.com/modern-day-show-and-tell-the-art-of-storytelling-with-content-curation/>
- **MUSEUMS AND BIG DATA**  
<https://www.museumnext.com/article/big-data-and-museums/>
- **FUTURE PROOFING MUSEUMS**  
<https://icom.museum/en/news/icomkyoto2019-curating-sustainable-futures>
- **CURATING IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY**  
<https://www.artfund.org/assets/supporting-museums/curators/art-fund-21st-century-curator.pdf>  
<https://www.artsfwd.org/changing-curators/>
- **IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THE SOUTHEAST ASIAN ART MARKET**  
<https://www.artandmarket.net/analysis/covid-19-impact-on-southeast-asian-art>

**THANK YOU**