



Evolution of Museums in Indian Metros

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Museums: An interpretation

During the 9th to 12th centuries of the middle ages of European history, museum stood as the 'House of Relics'. Its main function was the preservation and the saturation of relics of saints who played an important role in the political and cultural life of the day. In other words, the relics of the important saint during the middle ages in Europe were the objects of exceptionally intensive the sacral activity governing the political and cultural life of the people. Hence the relic was the key to understand the surrounding world. The Christian Church which relied on the dogmatic religious ideology used these houses of relics for religious purposes and thereby influenced the masses.

Even in Asia, such early social institutions did exist to keep the collective memory of people alive. In India, a stupa, containing the bodily relics of Buddha, was an embodiment of sacredness and spiritual value. The relics of the Buddha were collected and preserved inside the stupa which gave it the social status and sanctity. A stupa also acted as a treasure house because it treasured the most precious objects viz, relics of the Buddha. It also acted as the Mirror to reflect the moral and social values of the time. A magnificent structure viz., stupa was built suiting to valuable contents. Thus, the stupa like a modern museum collected the valuable items in the form of relics of the Buddha; it conserved these objects and ultimately passed on the message to its devotees who flocked there from far off region and lands. The tradition emanating from these provided social norms to govern the socio religious aspects of the society. Hence a stupa realizing the similar social objectivity was an earlier manifestation contacting back the social reality and providing the traces of theoretical museology in India even as early as in 3rd century BC.

The era of Renaissance, from 14th to 16th century A.D. marked qualitatively a new change in the history of museum movement. Increased interest in social and natural objects, representing scientific knowledge, were of special interest to the neo-rich class of the changing society. The growing demand for curios (Latin 'curiositas' meaning thirst for knowledge) and rarities (Latin 'raritas' viz., rare things) gave rise to big collections of authentic objects. The love for universal collection of art objects and natural curiosities necessitated a new organization. The term 'museum' for a collection was first introduced in the late 15th century. The search for rare cultural and natural objects gained momentum soon after Renaissance. The chambers housing art curiosities and natural objects were new kind of institutionalized museum phenomenon, which

for all its variety was in essence a form of museum. The situation changed in the late 18th century as the classical age crumbled under the pressure of an emerging industrial world which considered a classical antique to be an object as the material source and producer of knowledge. The numerous archaeological discoveries brought out by the archaeologists and historians became irreplaceable testimonials that alone could reveal the secrets of bygone ages.

With regard to the development of Museum Movement in India, there are four major factors which helped the growth of museum and the museum movement in India. Firstly, the British Civil Servants in India, who had seen museum movement in their own country, gave an enthusiastic lead. Secondly a whole-hearted support was given by the local rulers and nobility to foster Indian art and culture. Thirdly the collections of the learned, philanthropic societies were donated to form the nucleus of big museums. Lastly the emergence of Archaeological Survey of India strengthened the movement by opening site museums at a number of excavated sites.

According to the ICOM Statutes, Article 3, Section 1: “A Museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the Service of society and its development, open to the public, Which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and Exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity And its environment for the purposes of education, study And enjoyment” (ICOM Definition of a museum 2007)¹.

Museum are monuments which preserve a country’s past Glory.

Museums are no longer just Ajayabghara - storehouses of Curious housed in old grey buildings. They have the potential to be a living emblem of our rich and varied heritage. Provided we create the right environment for them to Flourish. Museums are institutions which can help people Increase their power of observation in order to look beyond The diversities that characterize all the creations of nature As well as of man and derive knowledge and pleasure from The same.²

The old concept of museums as storehouses of curios and Antiquities has long been abandoned and museums are now Recognized as institutions of considerable importance, Encompassing a wide variety of ideas and information to be Gained in an easily comprehensible manner.³

Categorisation of Museums

There are some important categories of museums like:

- National museums
- State museums
- Archaeological site museums
- Memorial museums
- Specialized museums run by departments of the Central and state governments
- Science museums/centres
- University museums
- Natural science museums
- Museums run by trusts and private bodies

Museums in India

The origin of museums in India goes back to late eighteenth century, although references to chitrashala (picture gallery) can be found in ancient Indian literature (literature of Kalidasa, Ramayana, Mahabharata etc.).

Ancient and medieval Indian literature is full of such terms like 'Alekhyaagriha', 'vithi', and 'Chitrasala' etc. which stand for galleries, housing paintings, sculptures and terra-cotta.

These were however the royal museums where ordinary people had no access. The various Sanskrit plays, like, *Pratima* by Bhasa and *naisadhivacharita* of Sriharsa belonging to 12th century A.D. respectively speak of the permanent and mobile exhibition galleries attached to the royal courts. The audio-visual shows and *pata-chitras* (scroll paintings) were intended basically for public enjoyment and instruction, one of the important functions of the modern museum.

Today, there are over 150 Mesolithic rock art sites have been found in various part of India, especially Bhimbetka,⁴ Madhya Pradesh, which itself presents a long gallery of pictures mainly concerned on animal figurines. The Bharhut rails which is now preserved mainly in the Indian Museum, Kolkata, and which presents an expressive representation of Jataka stories provide evidences of concept of an open air museum in India as early as the second century BC. The Sitabenga and Jogimara caves on Ramgarh hill, in Chhatisgarh can also be consider as picture gallery or a picture museum.⁵

There are also records of royal antiquarians who collected objects of curiosity to embellish their palaces. Feroz Shah Tughlaque (AD 1351-1388) brought two colossal Ashokan pillars from distant places and established them at Delhi, his capital.

The walls of the temples in medieval India narrating various facets of life, society and nature showed that Indians were not only highly skilled in various art forms but also in displaying them.⁶

In 1814, the royal Asiatic Society was able to establish a museum in Calcutta, which is also referred as Imperial museum at Calcutta in colonial accounts, with Dr. Nathaniel Wallich, a Danish botanist, as its first curator. This was the first museum in India⁷ and after that different kind of museums have opened in India.

This article attempts to classify the different categories of museums such as Museum of national importance which is National museum, Delhi and Indian museum, Kolkata and state museum like Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu sangrahalaya (formerly The Prince of wales Museum of Western India), Mumbai that exist in the country.

A. National museum, Delhi

The National Museum, New Delhi, founded after Independence, laid on 12 May 1955, in New Delhi and the first phase was completed by June 1960 is directly under the administrative control of the Ministry of Culture, Government of India, and is wholly financed by the Union Government of India.

The collection

The museum owned around 2, 00,000 samplings of exquisite art, both Indian and foreign. This collection is concerned to our rich and composite cultural heritage that dates back to more than five thousand years.

The vision / motto of National Museum is:

- To collect art objects of Historical, Cultural and Artistic significance for the purpose of display, protection, preservation and interpretation (research).
- To disseminate knowledge about the significance of the objects in respect of history, culture and artistic excellence and achievements.
- To serve as cultural centre for enjoyment and interaction of the people in artistic and cultural activity.
- To serve as epitome of national identity.

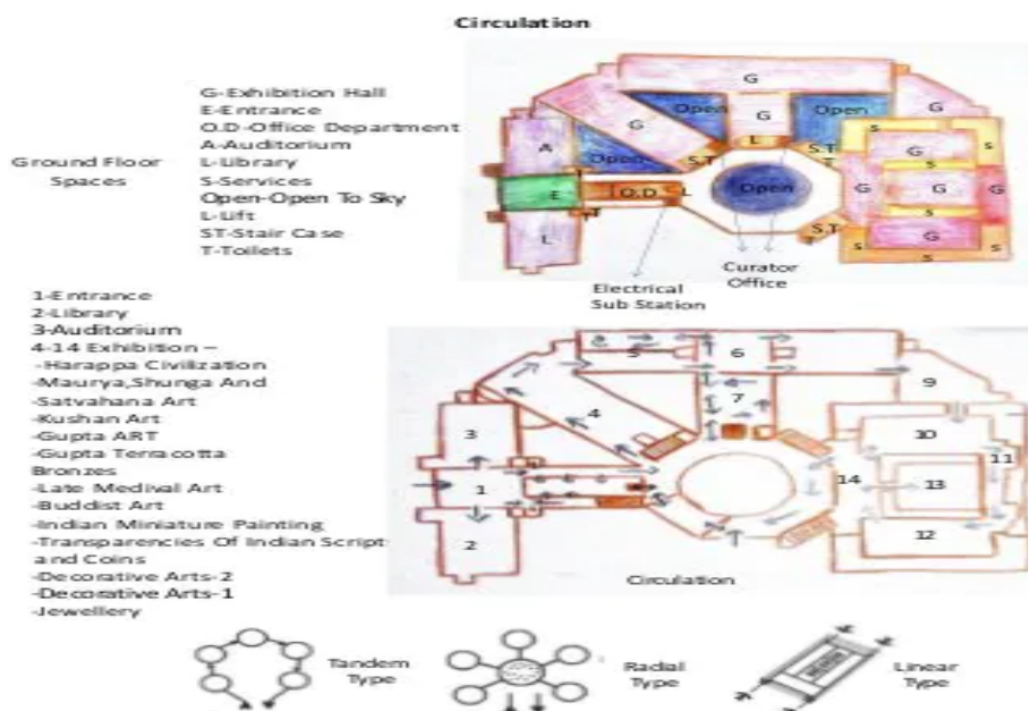
The museum has a rich assemblage of-

- a. Protohistory-artefacts which has been recovered from sites like Harappa, Mohenjo-daro (Pakistan), Jhukar, Jhangar, Amri, Nal, etc.
- b. A collection of sculptures-remarkable pieces of sculpture ranging from the time of Ashoka's reign (third century BC) to the Late Medieval period. Some other splendid work of sculpture such as the standing Buddha, a Bacchanalian scene from Mathura, a viilyadhara couple from Aihole, an inscribed image of yaksh from Pitalkhora, Maharashtra, etc., are also on display here.
- c. Other important collections include terracotra figurines from Harappan sites, figurines from Ahichchhatra, Kausambi, Kondapur, Nalanda, etc., besides textiles and Persian and Arabic manuscripts. Figurines of river goddesses Ganga and yamuna recovered from Ahichchhatra are the largest terracotta sculptures found in India and are the proud possessions of this museum.⁸

The museum has been applauded for its great sequent display of selected art objects in various galleries, screening of educational films related to art and culture, guided tours, gallery talks by experts, special lectures and its training programmes. For the identification of artefacts there is a reference library and also experts are available to provide their advice.

The conservation laboratory of the museum has made its presence felt even outside of India.

The museum has a rich collection of miniature paintings, particularly of the Rajput and Pahari schools. A magnificent collection of central Asian antiquities was also transferred to this museum by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI). Pre Columbian art from Mexico is another excellent collection here and is only one of its kind.⁹



Plan of National Museum, Delhi

B. Indian museum, Kolkata

Established in 1814 in Kolkata by Asiatic Society, it is the oldest museum in the country. It has galleries devoted to art, anthropology, archaeology, and natural sciences. It is housed in a “legacy building”, meaning a colonial structure, in this case a large, white compound of structure, courtyards with open arcades.¹⁰

The museum which was known in the beginning as the "Asiatic Society Museum" subsequently came to be known as the "Imperial Museum" later familiarized as the "Indian Museum". The museum is more familiar by the name Jadughar or Ajabghar among the visitors. The Museum Directorate has three main cultural sections namely, Art, Archaeology, and Anthropology together with eight co-ordinating service units such as Preservation, Publication, Photography, Presentation, Modelling, Education, Library, and Security.

Mission

The mission of the Victoria Memorial Hall is to function as the premier art gallery, museum, research library on art history and museum studies, and cultural space in the city of Kolkata. In order to pursue this mission, it collects, conserves and disseminates knowledge among the general public about art objects, historical relics, and documents relating mainly to Indian history in the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In addition to the exhibits on permanent display, the Victoria Memorial Hall also organizes regular special exhibitions, lectures, publications, cultural programmes and interactive educational activities-both on-site and in different parts of India and abroad-in its four focal areas of activity, namely, art, culture, heritage and the environment. It promotes research through its research fellowships and library resources, networks extensively with other museums, historical societies and the academia, and seeks to

promote positive social change through its outreach activities with non-museum organizations and community groups. It always strives to be-and is recognized by the wider community-as a museum without walls.

The Architecture

The VMH was envisaged by Lord Curzon, the Viceroy of British India, as a memorial to the deceased Queen Victoria. Hence, according to Curzon this memorial should take form of a great marble hall, which was to be erected on the Calcutta maidan to serve primarily as a monument to the Queen and secondarily as a national gallery and Valhalla of the Indian Empire. The construction of the memorial began in 1910 and What is noteworthy is that even though Curzon had employed British architects (William Emerson and Vincent Esch) to build the memorial, it necessarily reflected not only a classical style (Italian renaissance style) but also a reflection of Curzon's favourite monument the Taj Mahal.

Garden

The Garden of the memorial was exquisitely designed on a total area of 57 acre with the building covering an area of 338 ft by 228 ft. On way to the north gate is a bronze statue of Queen Victoria by Sir George Frampton, R.A. The Queen is seated on her throne, wearing the robes of the Star of India. Approaching the building from the south, visitors pass the King Edward VII memorial arch with a bronze equestrian statue of the King by Sir Bertram Mackennal surmounting it and a marble statue of Lord Curzon by F.W. Pomeroy, R.A.

There are also other statues of various dignitaries like Lord Bentinck, Governor- General of India (1828-1835), Lord Ripon (Governor- General of India from 1880 to 1884; the statue of Sir Rajendranath Mookerjee, the pioneer industrialist of Bengal is on the eastern side.



Display of Baharut gallery

The collection

Its collections depict the cultural history of India from prehistoric to Islamic period. It has six sections comprising thirty five galleries of cultural and scientific artefacts which in alphabetical order- Baharut gallery, bird gallery, botanical gallery, bronze gallery, coin gallery, decorative art, Egypt Gallery, Gandhara gallery, Insect gallery, L. archaeology gallery, mammal gallery and Mask gallery.

The museum also has a special Indian Painting Gallery which provides a chronology of the development of painting in India from the Prehistoric rock paintings to the renaissance period of Indian paintings (early twentieth century) in which the Bengal school played an important role.

It has on display murals, frescoes, illustrated manuscripts, Persian calligraphy, miniature paintings of the Mughal, Rajput, Pahari and Deccan schools and pato-chitra of Bengal etc.¹¹



Ancient Indian Sculpture

C. Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu sangrahalaya, Mumbai

The Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya, formerly known as the Prince of Wales Museum situated in Mumbai, is one of the premier art and history museums in India.

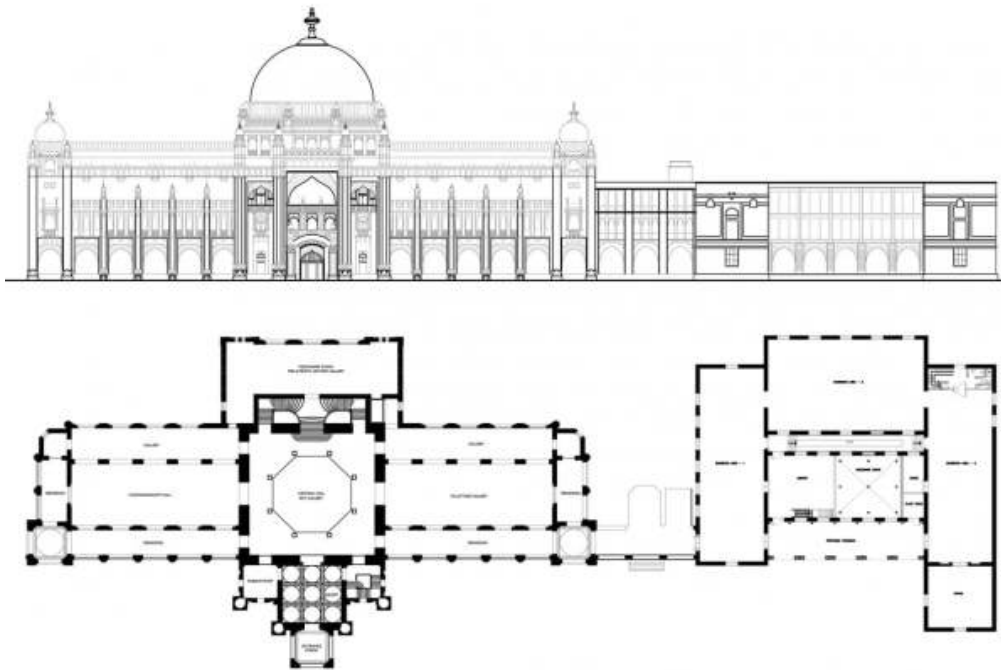
The foundation stone of this museum was laid by the Prince of Wales (later King George V) on the 11th of November, 1905. The construction of the building was completed in 1914 but the museum was opened to public on the 10th of January, 1922. The architect of the building was George Wittet who was well known for the Indo-Saracenic architecture.¹²

The museum is inspired or influenced by different architectural style such as Indian, Islamic (especially the onion shaped dome)¹³ and western.

Planning of Building

The plan of the Museum is simple, with a central hall from which the staircase leads to the two upper floors with galleries branching out on the right and left. An extension on the right-hand side of the main building (as you stand facing its front entrance) houses the natural history section. The second floor houses the Indian miniature-painting gallery, the pride of the museum, and next to it are the galleries of decorative art and, to the left of the central well of the staircase, the gallery of Tibetan and Nepali art.

Above, on the second floor are the European painting, armoury and textile galleries.



Ground Plan of the museum. Picture Courtesy: Google

The galleries

The Prince of Wales museum has more than twenty galleries. Some of them are:

- Sculpture gallery
- Pre and Proto History gallery-situated in mezzanine floor.
- Natural History section- situated in basement.
- Indian Miniature Paintings gallery-situated on first floor.
- Krishna gallery
- Himalayan Art gallery-situated on first floor
- Indian Decorative Art gallery
- House of Laxmi- Coin gallery
- Chinese and Japanese Art Gallery
- Karl and Meherbai Khandalavala gallery- situated at ground floor
- Sir Ratan Tata and Sir Dorab Tata gallery of European paintings- situated at ground floor
- Arms and Armour gallery- situated at second floor.

- Jahangir's Nicholson gallery
- Premchand Roychand gallery
- Key gallery
- European decorative art gallery
- Textile gallery

References

The International Council of Museums (ICOM) was established in 1946. Today, it has over 37,000 members, including experts from 141 countries and territories.

Museums in India: a review by S.S Biswas, page no. 396, ancient India, bulletin of the archaeological survey of India, 2011, New Delhi.

Ibid, 369.

There are 642 rock shelters here and animals dominate The scenes at Bhimbetka. Near about 29 species of animals Are depicted.

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A fusion of Indian and Islamic (Sarsenic) architecture and in later period it was named Indo-Islamic architecture by Percy Brown.

Inspired by Gol Gumbaj of Bijapur.