

## **Government Museum, Chennai - A Historical Study**

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The term “Museum” originally derived from the Greek word meaning the “Sanctuary of the Muses”. The Museum is a building in which objects of historical, scientific, artistic, or cultural interest are stored and exhibited. The main function of a Museum is to collect documents and preserve them in scientific methods. Museums are not only the custodian of information and artifacts but also provide valuable sources for historical research.

Dr. Samuel Johnson (1755) the famous museology’s defines the museum as - "A Repository of learned curiosities". Casper F. Neickel of Hamburg in his *Museuographia* (1727) has defined it as "a chamber of treasures, rarities, objects of nature, art and reason". The declaration made in the Copenhagen 10<sup>th</sup> General Conference of the International Council of Museums is fairly comprehensive. A museum is a non-profit making permanent institution, in the service of Society and its development and open to the public for the purpose of study, education and enjoyment; material evidence of man and his environment". I define a Museum as a Service provider for the spread of Knowledge.

The title of the Research is Government Museum, Chennai - A Historical Study. The Present study assumes importance as it possesses with the rich artifacts holder of south India. Artifacts collected from South India since 1863 have been displayed in about 50 galleries and are arranged according to their nature and content. These artifacts provide rich information on historical, archaeological, geological, botanical, zoological, anthropological aspects besides rich tradition of South India. A scholarly study of these

galleries of Chennai Museum would shed new light on the history and cultural heritage of Tamils.

Museums are the repository and the custodian of large number of specimens, antiquities and other objects related to history, art, religion, culture and science. Each and every object in a museum has its own story that can take us into the glorious flashback and can give us a lesson of history, nature, rich cultural values, scientific and technological achievements of our country etc. In such same way the idea of Indian museums has its own story's.

### **Ancient Period**

The idea of collecting, preserving the objects of beauty and making their use for the recreation and education far masses was very much prevalent in India before 4th century B.C. This tradition of ancient India was continued during the middle ages by the kings and the noble men. With the growth of kingdoms into empires same of the noblest expressions of human imagination and artistry were found on the “*prakaras*” of ancient Hindu temple.

The epics and other Sanskrit literature from 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C speaks of “*Chitrasalas*” and “*Viswakarma Mandirs*” in India, which were centers of recreation as well as education. Some of the references are found in *Uttararamacharitam Pritimanatica, Naishada-charitam, Kudambari and Banabattaetc.,*

The epic “*Vishnu Daramottaram*” which perhaps written in the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C. It is said “permanent and temporary decorations on the floors, walls, the ceiling of private houses, palaces and temples enlightened the minds of general masses. The religious teachers used paintings as the most popular means of communication that could be understood by tile illiterate and the child”. It reveals that huge and valuable collection of objects of beauty and Art grew. During those times, it was not known that they would be valuable treasures of present museums. In spite of all realization, we cannot deny the fact

that most of these objects preserved in treasures are excellent collections of folklore. From this we conclude that the idea of 'museum' like institution was known in India.

### **Pre-Independence Period**

In the modern sense, history and origin of museums in India go back to the end of 18th century i.e., Royal society of Bengal (now Asiatic society of Bengal). At the time of its conception, they had no plan to open any museum, Curators were sent to the society from time to time. It was thought to establish a museum for their reception, preservation and utilization in 1850.

Dr. N. Wallich, a Danish Botanist, donated a part of his own collections in 1814 and also offered his services as an honorary curator, laying the foundation for the present day Indian museum, Calcutta, the first museum in India.

After this, some more museums like Government museum, Madras (1851), Trivendrum Museum (1857), Nagpur and Lucknow museums (1863), Jaipur museum (1876) and Mathura museum (1878) were also set up. However, the museum movement got great impetus in 1887 at the time of the celebrations of Queen Victoria's jubilee throughout the British empire.

Lord Curzon, Viceroy of India (1898-1905) was greatly interested in museums and gave impetus to their development in India. He was followed by Sir John Marshal, the then, Director general of Archaeological survey. From 1902 onwards, there has been a regular sequence in the history of museum's growth in India. Museums in Charuba, Ajmer, Jodhpur, Khajuraho, Gwalior and Bhopal etc., sprang up in the country without any definite plans. Most of these museums were situated in cities and a few were established at the excavated sites.

## **Government Museum, Chennai**

Tamil Nadu is the cradle of civilization of the world. Its rich artistic and cultural heritage has attracted traders and foreign visitors through the ages. Foreign visitors who paid visits in the past like Chinese traveller Huien Sang have written extensively about it. It has many old towns and cities like Chennai, Madurai, Tanjore, Kanchpram, Mamallapuram (Mahabalipuram) etc. Tamil Nadu is known for its culture. And its culture and historical background made it as a bank of historical monumental and remaining. These monuments are placed and preserved through Museums in Tamil Nadu.

The Department of Archaeology and Government of Tamil Nadu has a huge central Government Museum which is The Government Museum, Chennai. With 38 district and site Museums. The Museums are predominantly Archaeology and Art history museums, though they are multi-disciplinary with science sections also. The Government Museum, Madras was established in 1851 at the college of Fort St. George at College Road, Nungambakkam. Then shifted to the present complex at Pantheon Road. The Museum complex consisting of six buildings and galleries covers an area of around 16.25 acres of land. The objects displayed in the museum preserves a variety of artifacts and objects covering diverse fields including Art, Archeology, Bronze, Numismatics, Zoology, Natural history, Sculptures, Palm-leaf manuscripts and Amravati Paintings. It had steadily developed and expanded under the guidance and supervision of successive able directors. Beginning as a Museum of practical Geology, its scope was soon extended to cover other fields such as Archaeology, Ethnology, Pre-history and Natural History.

### **Museum's Origin**

The Madras Literary Society, an auxiliary of the Asiatic Society of London, started their campaign to start a Museum of Economic Geology in Madras. The society based its demand for a public Museum in Madras on the growing economic distress of the Presidency, and need to develop the non-agricultural resources and also to help the people to find new means for the economic improvement. On 28th February 1844, Henry

Chamier, a member of the council recommended Madras Literary Society, to start a Museum for the benefit of the scholars and students and the Court of Directors of the East India Company. The proposal for a Museum in Madras was mooted by the Madras Literary Society in 1846 AD and Sir Henry Pottinger, the then Governor, obtained the sanction of the Court of Directors of the East India Company in London. It was in January, 1851 that the Court of Directors of the East India Company accepted the offer of Surgeon Edward Green Balfour to be the Honorary Officer-in-Charge of the Madras Central Museum in the College of Fort St. George at college road, Nungambakkam. The college had been established in 1821 A.D and made a significant contribution to the development of South Indian Languages. The museum was started in the first floor of the College. The notification in the Fort St. George Gazetteer dated 29th April 1851 A.D contained the first announcement regarding the opening of the Madras Government Museum. It steadily developed and expanded under the guidance and supervision of a succession of superintendents and Directors. As the building was in a dilapidated condition, the museum's superintendent, Balfour advocated to shifting it to another building. In December 1854 A.D, museum was shifted to a building named the pantheon, also known as the Public Rooms or Assembly Rooms, where the elite of the city meet.

### **The Centenary Celebration of the Madras Government Museum**

November 27, 1951, was a red-letter day in the annals of the Madras Government Museum, for it was on this day that the Centenary Celebration of the institution was inaugurated by the Honorable Shri Jawaharlal Nehru, Prime Minister of India. As part of the same function the Prime Minister also inaugurated and dedicated the National Art Gallery, sponsored by the Government of Madras. A special Centenary Exhibition had been arranged to add festive mood to the occasion. For the academic oriented people a Centenary Souvenir had been brought out as to mark the Museum's historic event. The souvenir with pregnant articles and messages of eminent personalities became a feast to people interested in culture and in Madras Museum especially in its growth and development. The Prime Minister, accompanied by his daughter Shrimati Indira Gandhi,

His Excellency the Governor of Madras and Highness the Maharani of Bhavanagar arrived at the Museum Theatre at 3 p.m. and was received by the Honorable Sri K. MadhavaMenon, Minister for Education, Sri K. RamunniMenon, Chief Secretary to Government, and Dr. A. Ayappan, Superintendent, Government Museum. He was conducted to the stage of the Theatre auditorium where the elite of the City and other distinguished visitors among who were the leader and members of the Chinese goodwill Mission, had already assembled. The proceedings commenced with the singing of Vandemataram by the students of the College of Carnatic music. The Governor welcomed the Prime Minister. Speaking about the Madras Museum in general, His Excellency said that it occupied a very important place among the Museums of India and had the distinction of being the first state-owned Museum in India. Its collections of the famous South Indian bronzes and the marble sculptures from the Amaravati Stupa exhibited in the Archaeology Section have been widely admired. The people of Madras had every justification to feel proud of this century old institution.

Dr. A. Aiyappan read the messages received from all parts of the world, including those from UNESCO, and the leader of the Chinese Goodwill Mission. Speaking about the National Art Gallery, the Chief Minister said that it was only in its preliminary stage of organization. But added that the Government were determined to develop it, maintaining the highest standard of artistic excellence. Inaugurating the Centenary Celebration and declaring the National Art Gallery open, the Prime Minister expressed his view.

### **The National Art Gallery**

The National Art Gallery of the Madras Government museum is one of the oldest art galleries in India. Constructed with red stones sauced from satyavedu in Andhra Pradesh, built during the celebration of Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee, gallery was built in 1906 in Indo-saraseenic architecture and houses paintings from Tanjvur, Rajasthan, Kangra and Deccan areas, as well as Sandalwood sculptures. The gallery was

remained closed since 2002, as part of the structure suffered damage. In 1945, a departmental committee consisting of officials and non-officials with Mr. C. O. Coorey, I.C.S., Deputy Secretary, Education Department, as the Chairman, was appointed by the Government to surges improvements to the Madras Museum. This committee made the following recommendations with reference to the art sections. "The Committee is of opinion that the time has come for the creation of a picture gallery worthy of the metropolis of the Madras Province, illustrating the various phases of Indian painting, ancient and modern, together with examples of allied schools of Persia, Tibet, China and Japan. The Committee considers that the Victoria Technical Institute Building on the Pantheon Road is eminently suitable for being used as an Art Gallery." No Definite move was made for the creation of an Art Gallery as such, till May 1951, when the Government decided to open an art gallery and proposed to take the Victoria Memorial Hall on lease for locating it. The name "National Art Gallery of Madras" was suggested by His Highness the Maharaja of Bhavanagar, Governor of Madras. The Council of the Victoria Technical Institute, who are the owners of the Victoria Memorial Hall, were cordially co-operative in all our negotiations. The Government appointed a committee consisting of Sri K. M. Unnithan, I.C.S., Secretary to Government in the Education Department, as Chairman, and Dr. James H. Cousins, Sri D. P. Roy Chowdhury and Dr. A. Aiyappan as members to make the preliminary arrangements to open the National Art Gallery. The Museum had already got a collection of about 400 paintings from which 54 were selected by the Committee for the National Art Gallery. A small number of the best bronzes, metal-ware, wood –carvings, ivory and textiles from the Museum and a small series of paintings and textiles from the School of Arts and Crafts were transferred to the National Art Gallery. The Maharaja of Bhavangar, Governor of Madras, issued a personal appeal to private owners of art collections for donations to the National Art Gallery. The response was generally satisfactory but all the articles received could not be exhibited owing the several reasons including the lack of suitable space for display. This work was only a beginning, with the small collections as the nucleus, of the National Art Gallery of Madras. The National Art Gallery was in Indo-Saracenic style, designed by

architect Henry Irwin. The Gallery has been identified as a Heritage site by the CMDA. As of 2002 the gallery has been closed for tourists, due to several building flaws and structural instability, which triggered severe criticism from art critics. However, several proposals for renovation are underway. The gallery contains several Mugul paintings and rare works of Raja Ravi Varma. It also has various Tanjore Paintings. Portraits of various British officers such as Lord Connemara and Lord William Bentinck are also present. The art gallery also included numerous miniature paintings depicting court and battle scenes. In 2013, the gallery was set for a major face lift with Chief Minister Dr. J. Jayalalithaa allocating Rs. 110 Million for repairs and forming an expert committee for its restoration.

### **Landmarks after the Centenary**

During 1951 A.D, the Chennai Museum celebrated its Centenary in a fitting manner, with a series of activities such as “Special Exhibitions” and “Release of a Centenary Souvenir”. It was Centenary Celebration attended and inaugurated by our first Indian Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. The history up to 1951 A.D has been documented in the Centenary souvenir. Since 1951 A.D, the following important events have taken place:

In 1956, the 2500th Birth Anniversary of the Buddha was celebrated with a special exhibition. Dr. Rajendra Prasad, the first President of India was the Chief Guest. Sri C. Subramanian, the then Finance and Education Minister and the then Governor of Madras State, Sri SriPrakasa participated. A Souvenir was published. The Children’s section of this Museum was reorganized into a separate Children’s Museum and inaugurated in 1988.

A Special Exhibition on the focal theme “South Indian Bronzes” was organized on 14th April, 1994. The Honorable Chief Minister, Dr. J. Jayalalithaa inaugurated the exhibition and released a “Special postal Cancellation Cover of the National Art Gallery”. The systematic publication of the Journal to fill up the void caused by the

cessation of publication of the Museum Administration Reports since 1978 AD, was started in 1999 AD. There was revival of the Popular lecture Series in 1999 AD with eminent scholars from India and abroad delivering the lecture. These were first delivered in 1873 AD.

Outreach activities like restoration of portraits for the Madras Medical College of the Surgeons-General of yester Years and similar restoration of portraits of the erstwhile Principals of the Madras Christian College, nine training workshops for the citizens of Tamilnadu in traditional paintings of various parts of India like Madhubanietc, participation in exhibitions like the Platinum Jubilee Celebrations of Loyola College, Chennai are some that readily spring to the mind. A fillip was given to new publications and reprinting of old publications which had gone out of print from 1999 AD onwards. Private sponsorship by a famous company that used to transport Britishers from the early 19th Century AD onwards of the title “Jain Images in the Government Museum, Chennai” published in 2001 A.D, brought this museum in line with the national policy and current international practice of attractingsponsorships to make museum self-sustaining. This had been followed up by a bulletin of the Museum cataloguing all the Jain images in the district museums of the Department of Museums and the Site Museums of the Department of Archaeology. The quality of photography and printing have been made world class by going in for Desk Top methods in an hours. The Web Site lists all our publications form the 19<sup>th</sup>Century AD onwards.

### **Celebrations to mark the completion of 151 years of the Government Museum, Chennai.**

On 19-6-2003 at 10 A. M., the President of India, His Excellency, Dr. A.P. J. Abdul Kalam was the Chief Guest for the celebrations to mark the completion of 151 years and also The Governor of Tamilnadu, His Excellency, Thiru p. S. RamamohanRao, the Honorable Chief Minister of Tamilnadu, Selvi Dr. J. Jayalalithaa and the Honorable Minister of Education, Thiru S. Semmalaiparticipated, made the function more special

with their presents. Along with the function many new galleries were opened to make the museum more wider based on its strength they are, Rock Art and Cave Art Gallery, Reorganization of the Bronze Gallery, Numismatic Gallery and Painting Gallery.

### **Challenges in running an old museum**

An old museum poses its own challenges. Some of the displays are a century old. They were the best technology at the time of installation. This was because of the close ties between this museum and the museums in England. This historical link was because the personnel were English. This link is growing weak as Indians have fully taken over. This has to be strengthened with more visits to England and other developed countries by the museum personnel here.

The great institution has its periods of waxing and waning, which also resembles in the History of the great Government Museum, Chennai, and this museum is no exceptional. We should credit all those who have made this journey possible. It is sure that this museum will reinvent itself as technology, Socio-economic and cultural conditions change every few years and continue to serve the people of Chennai, Tamilnadu, India and the world. There is a long journey ahead. As the lines of the poet Robert Frost

“The woods are lovely, dark and deep, but I have miles to go before I sleep”.

### **Aim of Study**

The Present Government Museum Chennai was first called as the Madras Government Museum. The Government Museum Chennai building is one that gives us a sense of wonder and makes us want to know more about the people and culture. It has architectural, aesthetic, historic, documentary, archaeological, economic, social, political, spiritual and symbolic value; but the first impact is always emotional for it is a symbol of our cultural heritage. Since it has survived the hazards of 167 years of usefulness, it has good claim to be called as an historic building. The study of this historic building reveals

the unknown history of the museum as well as its surrounding. A detailed knowledge of the historical background of this region is a desideratum.

## **Research Objective**

In this research work we wanted to establish the strength of Chennai museum and to inform its activities, to provide information about its objects to interested people and to attract people towards museums an 'Information Service' which is urgently necessary today. There are many drawbacks in today's museums, which are all together alarming museums a threatening of extinction. No single attempt is sufficient for proper survival of today's Indian museums. A Museum Service can serve as one of the lifesaving drugs for the survival of museums in India today. But implementation of the service is not enough to fulfill its mission, it should be well managed and highly marketed in society so that it can inform every citizen about it and make museum most useful, entertaining, and informative centre for the use and access for every category of people.

## **Review of literature**

**Fundamentals of Museology(1966)** by M. L. Nigam, gives in definitions of museum. This book explains the basic fundamentals for museology and it traces the origin of museum from the past.

**Museum, Museology and New Museology(1999)**by AnupamaBhatnagar and Rangarajan. This book is a First ever sincere attempt to place and analyse all divergent Researches, views and opinions published through the International Journals, Reports and Proceedings of Conferences, Workshops and seminars for the benefit of young museum personnel, Researchers and Students of Museology.

**Modern Museum (1973)** by Smita J. Baxi and Vinod P. Dwivedi. This book aims to project the museum as a dynamic institution actively involved in modern function. It has been planned as a guide to the students of museology, the beginners in the profession

and to the curators of the smaller museums, who have to carry out the task all alone without any guidance and expertise.

**Southern India its History, People, Commerce, and Industrial Resources (2004)** by Arnold wright. The Book deals about the Early history of the Southern India analysing the Native Races and more in detail.

**Heritage of Harmony (2002)** by Ajeet Jawed. The book interprets the patrimony of the Indian country and makes us to know in detail about the legacy.

**The Hand Book of British Architectural Styles (1992)** by N. David Durant. This book analyses the Architectural styles of the British which have been implemented in British ruled countries and gives an elaborate knowledge of their engineering.

**The Story of Madras (1921)** by M. A. Glyn Barlow. The history of the city Madras is vital while studying the history of Madras museum. The Story of Madras book gives as a clean sketch of the madras and its structure during the British India.

## **Period of Study**

The period of study commences with origin of the Chennai Government Museum from 1851 to the changes and developments that took place up to the present day. It is only from the Government orders during British India, Government orders from India after independence, Museum Journals, Administrative reports and Periodical evidences, enable the scholar to understand the historical significance of the Government Museum Chennai.

## **Hypothesis**

By making Educational communities and society to understand about Museum, by explaining the origin of Museums, its development and history, it may be possible to broaden and update the perspectives about Museum, making the contents more accessible to a range of visitors and providing more opportunities for learning and engagement. The

personal and creative way that people relate the Museum material will be the contribution of the museum to the valuable community. Interaction of the visitors with the museum and its contents will have the possibility to plan from the beginning the way that the museum community could create content.

## **Methodology**

To accomplish the set objectives, the proposed study employs historical, descriptive and analytical methods. The primary data includes Government orders from both the British India and the Indian Government after freedom and also the PWD reports. The Secondary sources also consists of information's books, magazines, articles, journals, etc. Internet sources also have also been used for this study. The present work is constructed by using the primary and secondary sources alike.

## **Chapterisation**

The present study "Government Museum, Chennai - A Historical Study" unfolds various aspects which are highlighted in four chapters with an appropriate Introduction, Review of literature, methodology, results and conclusion.

The first Chapter Origin and Growth of Museums in India, trashes the early evidences of the Museum in India. The ways it have developed and evolved through the ages. Analyzing from the ancient period to the medieval and modern developments.

The Second Chapter analysis the Genesis and Development of Chennai Government Museum. In this chapter analyzing the primary and secondary sources available from 1850, we came to know exactly about the origin of the Chennai museum and following this many sources like annual report, News Letter, journals and etc., have been analysed to explain the growth and development of the museum in the following years.

The Third Chapter, The History of Galleries in the Museum, explains in detail about the galleries of the Chennai Museum. It individually tells about each and every galleries and section of the museum and explains the exhibits with high impact.

The Fourth Chapter, Publications of the Museum. Form the origin of the Museum many publications have been made and this chapter deals with all the published books, Journals, Newsletters etc., and critically examines the contents of the publications and its impact.