

## NATIONAL MUSEUM ARCHITECTURE IN INDIA

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### **Abstract**

*The Museums have been the forbearers of the thinking of their respective periods. Etymologically, the term museum is derived from the Greek word museion. This means temple of the muses the goddesses protecting arts and sciences. The museion or musaion which was founded by Ptolemaist I (who died in 283 BC) in Alexandria was a centre for learning and scholarship in the world of ancient Greece and an important establishment of Hellenic civilization, housing rich collection. It was temple of the muses occupying a large building in the royal quarter of the town, functioning as a centre of research and education. Hence the primary purpose of the museum was religions. It was not so much connected with the objects of material culture. The objects of the material culture were not deemed to be connected with memory at that time and hence they were not so much collected.*

**Keywords:** *museion, chithra salas, vishwakarma mandirs, galleries, Kotah stone, exhibits*

In India museums existed from earliest times. Many of the kings were liberal patrons of art and organized chithra salas and vishwakarma mandirs. Which were centres of recreation as well as education and culture with the change in times the museums, however became isolated places for the scholars and served the purpose of adding only to the scholarly studies totally reflected the purpose as centers of education for general public. Today again the trend is changing and more museums are constructing their buildings for imparting education and for providing facilities for the general public. Apart from the historical records of the existence of museums, there is no evidence that the earlier buildings were solely desire to serve the purpose of museums. Mostly places, temples and public buildings were used for housing museums. In India, as well aboard the buildings used as museums had the monumental exteriors and dark, gloomy, palatial and ornamental interiors, which were in themselves symbols of culture rather than the center of culture. These characteristics should definitely be avoided in modern museum buildings. Which should have a friendlier atmosphere and should be inviting visitor to share their hospitality and moreover today buildings should be functional, Most of the times, the museum have to be housed in existing buildings which were not specially designed for the purpose. But for our purpose, let us assume the ideal conditions where we have a choice of site and freedom for planning.

Choice of site needs careful consideration, whenever a site is chosen, first consideration should be of building for present requirements with provisions for future expansions. It should be easily accessible and not to fare from the town centers. A site within a park or a garden may be ideal as it gives a good atmosphere and natural setting but it should not be located in the far interior of such parks or gardens and should be easily

accessible from the main roads. The building should have enough open space around it giving good amount of natural light and ventilation.

The numerous archaeological discoveries brought out by the archaeological and historians became reveal the secrets of by gone ages. The interpretation of classical antique objects had provided fresh values to objects of fine arts, architecture, sculpture and paintings which entered the portals of museum in order to testify not only its historicity and materially but also the spiritual meaning hidden within itself. This is how the collections started to become institutions and the time of neo-classicism, new definition of the concepts of museum developed.

The examples set by the above two societies proved a great incentive and many more museums in different parts of the country opened. The Victoria museum, Karachi museum in South India. The last seventy years have been significant for the growth of museums and the museums profession in India. There are more than four hundred museums in India today. The craft museum, New Delhi, The Health museum Hyderabad, The textile museum - Ahmadabad, The Victorial memorial museum - Calcutta, The Ravindranath Tagore Museum - Santiniketan, The Gandhis Marak Sangrahalaya - New Delhi, The Fort St. George Museum - Madras, The Nehru memorial museum Tinmurti Bhavan in New Delhi, The Birla Industrial and Technological Museum- Calcutta, The museum - Bangalore, The Museums forest College - Dehradun, The Museums - Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh, The Agriculture museum - Coimbatore, The National Museum - New Delhi is an excellent example of its kind although still in formative state. A number of university museums are rum under various departments as teaching centers of different disciplines.

The Museums have thus become a social phenomenon where in the recreational and experiential functions are predominant. There have thus grown several kinds of museums, devoted to every field of knowledge and human experience. The diversified net work of museum, such the museums of archaeology, history, civilization, natural science art architecture, maritime and other scientific disciplines have grown throughout the country.

### **General Planning**

There is nothing an ideal plan for museum building which will serve any type of museum. Every collection will have its own conditions requirements, purpose and problems. So the museum authorities and architect have to work in close cooperation to make to building successful. It is easier to plan for the existing collection, rather than planning for the collection to be made in the future specific requirements of the collection will influence the structure of the building and the form and size of the exhibition rooms and the related services. A gallery planned for exhibiting miniatures, Jewelry or small branches may not be usable for large sculpture and large objects of less meticulous value. Even a picture gallery cannot be designed in such a way as to serve equally well for exhibitions of old paintings and modern ones. Apart from the considerations aspects of a particulars museum at a given site also need consideration. Suppose it is the only public building of the

town it will be a center for all kinds of cultural activities like the artificial performances, lectures, concerts, exhibitions and meetings. Then the museum may get a good financial support and these amenities will have to be provided on a large scale than needed only as accessories for museum activities.

### **Style**

Many people believe that the museum building should be imposing, solemn and monumental. This is achieved normally resorting to the methods of traditional building and adapting archaic styles. This should not be allowed by any contemporary thinker. Old styles were dependent on old methods and materials of construction. Arches and domes were necessary for roofing as reinforced concrete was not available but now the use of these, in the age of modern methods of cantilevering and use of reinforced concrete as well as steel, is ridiculous. The style of the building should be representative of its age and should be at least contemporary, if not ultra modern. The interiors of the exhibition galleries as well as other related rooms should be architecturally pleasing but should not become a centre of attraction and should be subordinated to the purpose in view.

### **Functional Areas**

The area in the museum buildings can be divided into two broad categories.

- Public area
- Service area

Public area will include the galleries and auditorium for meetings, lectures, film shows and library while the service area is needed for offices of administration and technical staff, store rooms, workshops, computer rooms, air conditioning plants and electrical plants as well as preservation laboratory. In addition to these, there must be provision for clock rooms for public and staff separately and water rooms for drinking water which are very essential for India as well as enough corridors and staircases for circulation.

#### **1. Public Area**

If the building site is in a busy locality, it is advisable to set back the entrance considerably from the road by means of trees, flower beds which will separate it from the traffic and it will also allow space for a public care park. If a building is located in a park or garden then it is advisable to have it separately by a compound wall for security but the wall should not form a barrier for viewing the building. The entrance hall should be a large one to admit big crowds and committee rooms, by means of corridors directly without going through the galleries.

### **Auditorium**

Auditorium should be equipped with a projection room, which is necessary for illustrated lectures as well as films. The stage of the auditorium should be suitable for multipurpose activities including occasional cultural performances. It should have an

anteroom attached to it which may be used by the lectures or can be used as a green room for cultural performances. If possible the floor of the auditorium should be on a level and not sloping so that it can be used as a conference hall and can also be used for temporary exhibitions as in the case of the auditorium of the Art gallery which can be considered ideal for a small museum.

### **Library**

Library should have a separate stacking room and a reading area. It should also have a study area set apart from the main reading room. Some of the Libraries have photographic collection as well as prints. The library should have enough natural light particularly for reading and study areas.

### **Enquiry of Sales Counter**

Enquiry office should be located in the entrance hall and should give all the required guidance to public publications of a museum like the guide books, picture post cards, etc. should also be sold at the counter.

### **Stair Cases & Corridors**

These should be wide enough to take a normal crowd, A few labels and notice boards may be displayed in the corridors by these circulation areas should not be crowded with the exhibits or replicas and photographs of the museum objects. The corridors and staircases should be well lighted and should have a pleasant atmosphere. It may be advisable to keep plants in certain corners not obstructing the circulation which can give corridors a pleasant look and can be used as relief areas. The flooring of the corridors should be non-slipper and should absorb noise.

### **Galleries**

The planning of the galleries is mainly dependent on the type of collection and the lighting needed for the same. The size of the rooms and the height of the ceiling will be determined by the nature and the dimensions of the objects. Large wood work like Rathas and huge sculpture need a height of 14 to 20 feet. While the bronzes coins and jewellery displayed in show cases, miniature painting do not need high galleries. Rooms lit by indirect artificial light are more suitable for paintings and textiles rather than sunlit galleries especially in India, where the sun is strong throughout the year. Long and narrow galleries are practicable for these collections while for sculptures tall halls with natural lighting are suitable. Open country arde with natural surroundings are also favoured for sculptures for ethnographic and for museums big halls with high ceiling are needed. As full size dummies are used to display continues is showcases, artificially lighted galleries are more suitable for this type of museum.

**Walls**

The treatment of the walls makes a lot of difference to a gallery. An uncluttered wall space is the most usable space in a gallery. If the windows are above 8 feet height from the floor level, the wall space below is free for exhibition purpose no electrical fittings should be located in the walls. Walls also act as backgrounds for free standing exhibits walls should be painted with plastic emulsion or equivalent paints which are easily washable and can be kept clean. When the walls are to be used for nailing or fixing the exhibits cement plastered walls are not of much use. It is much better to line them up with wood paneling painted with the wall color. It is then easier to change the exhibits without spoiling the walls. Color of the wall should be lighter than the floor, so that it can reflect light.

**Floors**

The choice of the flooring for the galleries and corridors and halls of museums is a matter of importance floor should be easy to keep clean and should be easily washable. The flooring should not absorb any dirt or dust. It should be non slippery. The color of the floor should be darker than the walls so that it may not reflect light on the exhibits lined along the walls and showcases for this reason, white marble should never be used on the floor as it would reflect light on walls. Kotah stone flooring or marble terrazzo flooring are the most practical floorings for Indian conditions. These do not absorb dirt are hard wearing and easy to keep clean.

**Ceilings**

These should not be ornamental or cluttered with electrical fixtures. Lighting fixtures may be hung from the ceiling but the wiring should be in hidden conduits inside the ceiling so that it is not visible. Ceilings should be in hidden conduits inside the ceiling so that it is not visible. Ceilings should be white or of light color to reflect as much light as possible.

**Ventilation**

It is advisable to have natural ventilation for galleries, libraries and other areas also. The normal method of achieving this is through the windows. High windows on one side and doors or lower windows on the other give good cross ventilation if it suits the layout. For the purpose of preservation of art objects like paintings and manuscripts, it is advisable to have twenty four hours air conditioning which can maintain a desired temperature and humidity throughout the year.

**Relief Areas**

While planning a series of galleries it must be remembered that it is not possible for visitors to keep up their interest, however attractive the galleries are if they have to walk

through a number of galleries, all the while their attention focused on exhibits. If the color schemes and the mode of presentation vary from one gallery to another, it may give some relief but it is essential to plan a relief area after two or three galleries, where the visitor's eye may rest with the natural surrounding and get relief after continually looking at same exhibits. A few seats though not too comfortable, provided in these areas will relax the visitors and they can continue the round with more enthusiasm. These areas could be lobbies overlooking a little garden or a lily pool or balconies overlooking the landscape.

## **2. Service Area**

Now for the service area, which is behind the scene of a museum but is equally important as the museum galleries area at least 40 percent of the total area should be provided. The preservation laboratories offices for administration and technical staff of different departments and workshops need office space, stores for reserve collections and other materials as well as working space. Workshops and laboratories need power connections, gas and water connections for using the equipment. All these areas should be well planned well lighted and ventilated and linked up with one another and should be clean and usable having pleasant atmosphere for efficient work.

Computer installation is a must in the information era. A separate room with all infrastructural facilities such as air conditioning, UPS, Latest Pentium computers, Internet/cyber platform, Telex and fax machines, advanced printers, scanners and other graphic devices must be provided to have willed wide contact with other museums and contras of information.

The should not be too many entrances and exists for a museum building as these complicate the security measures but it is advisable to have a separate entry for serving the offices and service areas. Electrical and air conditioning plants should be accessible from it as well as it should be connected with the store rooms so that goods and art objects can be directly taken to the stores without interfering with the galleries and the circulation of visitors. These areas which form the important aspects of modern museum complex may vary from institution.

## **Conclusion**

Architecture means building beautifully. A building when it is functional and planned for convenience. Beauty and utility go hand in hand. Planning should be suited to the purpose the building is to serve and convenient to use. Exteriors should be pleasant to look at, interiors suitable for museum installations and to work in and both should be able to build an atmosphere which will give recreation to the visitors, will refresh their minds and will inspire them in their creative activities.

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