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Indian Museums Review



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INDIAN MUSEUMS REVIEW

1961—64



MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, NEW DELHI

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INTRODUCTION

In the year 1962, I had the privilege of editing the fourth issue of the *Indian Museums Review*, comprising the material received from about sixty-five museums all over India, covering their activities for the years 1959-60 and 1960-61. The present volume is the fifth issue of the *Indian Museums Review*, and I am grateful to the Ministry of Education, Government of India, for having once again given me an opportunity of undertaking this interesting piece of work.

The *Indian Museums Review* is intended to serve as a cross-section of the progress achieved by museum in this country during the immediate past, and to present the lay reader with a broad outline of the major acquisitions, improvements in display and labelling, etc., building extensions, educational activities and publications of all museums in the country in a concise and readable form. But the task of collecting the requisite material for such a comprehensive review and presenting it in a proper shape has been an extremely time-consuming and tedious process in view of the enormous variety in the size, scope, nature of the contents and the aims and objects of the large number of museums in the country. In spite of the fact that a stereotyped questionnaire was sent round to all the museums in order to gather the required particulars for the Review, the answers to the questionnaire have been received in such a bewildering variety of style and form at that they sometimes almost defy any attempts on our part to iron out and streamline them so as to fit them into a more or less standardised pattern. But perhaps this is inevitable, when we are dealing with such a large number of museums of widely varying scope and content, ranging from a small school museum with only "one show-case full of exhibits" to a large multi-purpose museum of the size and extent as the National Museum, New Delhi, or the Indian Museum, Calcutta, containing several large galleries and sections. However, despite the

wide range in their size, scope and contents, the fundamental functions of museums are essentially the same. Whatever may be their size, nature of their collections and purpose for which they have been set up, all museums have certain functions in common; they all have the primary functions of collecting, preserving, interpreting and displaying objects of interest pertaining to diverse fields of knowledge and of utilizing these materials to the best advantage for the advancement of learning and the dissemination of knowledge. In the compilation of the present Review, therefore, it has been our aim to highlight these essential functions of the museums, laying stress, wherever possible on the improvements effected and the progress achieved in the implementation of the various developmental programmes which have been initiated in the past few years among the museums all over India, under the country-wide scheme of Reorganization and Development of Museums sponsored by the Government of India.

It is gratifying to observe that about one hundred and ten museums have submitted their reports covering their activities for the years 1961-62, 1962-63 and 1963-64, for inclusion in the present Review, as against only sixty-five museums which contributed material to the last issue of the *Indian Museums Review*. This fact in itself is highly encouraging and is an unmistakable index to the growing realization of the vital role that museums in this country can play as powerful instruments of popular education. It is also encouraging to note that a greater number of College Museums, Institutional Museums, Departmental Museums attached to Universities and even a few Commercial, Industrial and Technological Museums have sent in reports of their activities for the present issue of the Review. Science museums in this country are as yet few and far between, but the reports now received from one or two museums of this

type are promising and in the context of the present Space Age, it is essential that concentrated efforts should be made to develop these museums and to establish a larger number of such technological museums so that they would adequately reflect the industrial and technological progress made in India and in several other countries as well, at the present day and to help layman as well as the industrialist to keep himself abreast of the latest developments in this fascinating sphere of human knowledge. Museums should point both to the past and to the future, and while the large majority of our museums which are archaeological in their scope help us to understand the glorious traditions of our past history and cultural heritage, it is these few museums of Science, Industry and Technology that can helpfully guide us through the present, and point to us the way into the dangerously uncertain future of mankind.

The period covered by the present Review comprises the greater part of the Third Five-Year Plan period during which the Ministry of Education, Government of India, had allotted fairly substantial grants to most of the State museums in the country for their expansion and development, and it is a matter of great satisfaction to learn from the present reports received from the various museums that many museums had been able to utilise profitably the funds placed at their disposal to the fullest possible advantage. A few State museums have been able to construct considerably large extensions to their existing buildings and open up new galleries while a number of others have made commendable efforts to modernize their galleries and augment their equipment, improving their displays by the installation of completely modernized show-cases with internal fluorescent lighting and pleasing interior colour schemes.

Again, in Natural history museums and in the Natural history galleries of the larger multi-purpose museums of India, it is interesting to observe that modern dioramic and thematic methods of exhibition are beginning to be introduced, at least in the larger museums which

can afford the necessary funds, staff and material for such specialized techniques of presentation. One of the modern trends that is being universally observed today in museums is a change from a case crammed with specimens or the Open storage of the past to one containing a relatively small number of well chosen, properly labelled specimens. Today, Natural history is much more than a mere accumulation of facts. Emphasis has switched on to the interpretation of facts in terms of evolution, ecology, biogeography and all other inter-related fields connected with organisms both living and extinct, and it is therefore high time that our Natural history museums re-orientate themselves to cater to this new need.

It is also heartening to observe that side by side with the improvements effected in the methods of presentation and labelling of exhibits, substantial progress has also been made in the quality and extent of the educational activities in many of the museums, especially the larger ones which have the necessary facilities and equipment for such programmes. There has been a marked increase in the number of special exhibitions, lectures, film shows and demonstrations organized by museums in recent years in this country and this is indeed a refreshingly healthy sign for the future growth of the museums, since its activities such as these that popularise the museum among the masses and help to make the museum a "living institution" and distinguish it from the museum of the past which was literally a dead store-house for an assortment of curios.

Apart from their role as institutions of popular education museums also have to cater to the needs of scholars and research workers, functioning as dynamic centres for basic research. The publications brought out by museums are an index to the quality and vitality of their research activities and every effort should therefore be made by Indian museums to maintain the highest standards in this important sphere of their activity. More popular guide books and catalogues are also needed to

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interpret the vast collections of our museums to the lay public, in addition to the scholarly monographs which cater to the needs of the advanced student and the specialist. From a perusal of the present Review it will be observed that unfortunately many of the museums in the country are not as active as they could be in the output of their research publications, although they may contain a wealth of valuable material, rich both qualitatively and quantitatively which might afford a

fertile field for research and possibly form the basis for the production of several useful monographs. However, Indian museums are now gradually awakening to their new responsibilities in keeping with the changing times, and it is hoped that in the various schemes of developmental activities that might be undertaken by the museums of India during the Fourth Five-Year Plan period, research, publications and educational activities will be accorded a high priority.

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