

# Dawn of Museum in Gujarat



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## Abstract

Museum activity of Gujarat was not enough in the beginning. It was ongoing planned for the project of the British ruling class. The growth of museums in India was well-known prior to 1890. The Indian Museum at Calcutta was established in 1814, and by 1888 more than twenty museums were existing in different cities of India. He calls museum "institution of higher education" and informs that the idea of museum activities got the impetus in 1887 during the Jubilee of Queen Victoria (Mehta, 1995: 3). In Gujarat, museums, art galleries and cultural institutions vary widely ranging from those collections of regional, national and international importance to those comprising only one or two rooms, small individual exhibitions and so called 'Memorial rooms'.

The history of modern museum movement is merely two hundred years old. The new concept of 'public museum' was evolved by the Western European Society in the middle of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It was done under the strong influence of the Renaissance. It generated an idea of learning by all possible means. Museums were viewed as potent means of visual education. This concept counteracted the traditional concept of museums which brought to us modern form of museums. The concept of museum bore an idea that cultural activities should not be dissociated from other developmental activities. This concept inspired civilized nations to create more and more museums. In India of pre-Independence time modern museums crystallized owing to our contact with the western world. The museum movement in India began to take shape with the establishment of the Asiatic Society in Calcutta under the leadership of Sir William Jones. He founded the society in 1784. In 1814 the first Indian Museum was founded in Calcutta with Dr. Nathaniel Wallich Danish Botanist as its secretary. The first modern Art Gallery was opened in the Asiatic Society in December 1834. In 1865 the valuable collections of the society consisting of finds and specimens of the Archaeological Ethnological Geological and Botanical world were made over to first board of trustees appointed by the Government to the comprehensive Imperial Museum which is now known as the Indian Museum

**Keywords:** Establishments of Museum in Gujarat, Museum movement, Witnessed rise of Museum in Gujarat, Museum as a part of cultural activity,

## Introduction

### Establishments of Museum in Gujarat

The first museum was established in Gujarat in Bhuj as early as 1877 as a part of the school of art by the then ruler of Kuchchh, Maharao Khengarji III. Then after museum movement in Gujarat took a dynamic turn as a result of special interest taken by the ruler of the important Princely states of Saurashtra and Gujarat on the occasion of the celebration of the Jubilee of Queen Victoria in 1887. The celebration of Queen Victoria ushered in a new era of growth and development of several museums not only in Saurashtra and Gujarat but also in other parts of British India.

In Saurashtra the Watson Museum Rajkot was established at that time. This was followed by the museums at Baroda in the old Baroda state, at Junagadh in the old Junagadh state and at Dharampur in the old Dharampur state. The process of setting up museums was in progress in the former princely states of Gujarat. Municipalities, educational institutions and literary institutions of some big cities and towns also made considerable efforts to build museums. The museums at Jamnagar, Prabhas Patan, Ahmedabad came in to existence after 1945. It refers to development of museums in Gujarat in the PostIndependence Period and seems that Gujarat has the largest number of museums as compared to other neighbouring states in north and central India and that "The museum movement of Gujarat received strong impetus after the formation of the Gujarat State in 1960

#### **Aim of the Study**

The basic intention for the museums for eventually served as vital centre of cultural education to general public. Though idea of museums spring from the slavish mentality of local rulers they proved a boon or blessings in disguise to the people of India. It is through them that awakening and revival of interest in our cultural heritage was generated among general people and people became more aware of their cultural heritage and history. Likewise, museums in Gujarat too serve valuable support to educational and research activities in the state.

#### **Importance of Study**

##### **Museum Movement**

In the time subsequent to the British Rule, the museum movement took a different shape. In the Independent India, the influence of princely states became less visible. With it, a new era began in the history of the museum movement in Gujarat. It began with a museum at Himatnagar in the former Idar state in the year 1933. The archaeological movement started in the country at the beginning of the twentieth century. It created a lot of interest and enthusiasm in the minds of people. As a result, many excavations were undertaken. With it, people knew the value of material that was excavated. They felt a need of a suitable building to house those precious materials. Museums, thus, served an immediate solution to the problem of housing the materials. P. A. Inamdar (nd) informs in his report titled, "Some Archaeological Finds in the Idar State" that "Specimen of old time images and sculpture's art are rescued from old ruins and are kept in the museums at Himatnagar". U. P. Shah (nd)

informs in his report, "Sculptures from Shamlaji and Roda" that "Unfortunately, however, this museum had to be closed down for want of funds in the year 1953 and the collections of the Himatnagar Museum were transferred to the custody of the Baroda museums under the orders of the former Bombay Government".

Likewise, another museum came up at Amreli in 1934 as an outcome of the efforts of Prataprai C. Mehta. The Archaeological Department of the Baroda state conducted excavations at Gohilwad Timbo, a site near the town and as a result many interesting antiquities of historical and archaeological importance were unearthed. With these modest collections Prataprai started a modest museum by displaying the collections, and in a small room adjoining the Public Library. The collections included beautiful and well proportionate terracotta, figures of gods, human beings, animals and pottery fragments with decorated designs. Roman type red polished pottery fragments, toys, goldsmith's dice, carved pieces of conch bangles, beads of different shapes, grinding stone of Maurya polish, coins of Kshatrapa and Gupt periods too made the collections. These collections date back from the 1st century to 4th century A. D. The pottery handles speak of the flourishing business relations with the Roman Empire and the grinding stone with Maurya polish dates back from 3rd to 2nd century B. C. This museum that came up basically as a result of archaeological collections does not find a mention in the reports of Markham and Hargreaves for no obvious reasons. One more museum came up at Jamnagar in 1946 with an urge for housing antiquities. Objects of Natural History are recently added to the collection at the museum.

Then, there followed a phase of "Institutional Museums". In 1946, the B. J. Medical College Museum was set up. It marks the beginning of the third phase. The history of the Institutional Museums marks one thing about them that research conducted at such institutions necessitated extensive field work and accumulation of material. It was always essential to find a place to store or house the materials either during the research or on completion of it. Research work carried out constantly swelled up the collections of such material and as ultimate result a museum is set up. As a second side to it, some institutions felt a need to use the original materials for the purpose of classroom teaching and study. Later, students required that material for study outside the classroom. Hence, a need was felt to house this material. While the former

cause was more applicable to archaeology and history museums and other science museums, the latter cause worked mainly behind establishment of medical museums of Pathology, Anatomy, Hygiene, etc. On these considerations, a medical museum was established at the B. J. Medical College, Ahmedabad in the year 1946. The museum is dedicate to the subjects like pathology, anatomy, hygiene, pharmacology and such other subjects that are covered under the syllabus for the studies in medicine.

#### **Witnessed Rise of Museums**

The year 1949 witnessed rise of three museums in Gujarat: the first was the Calico Museums of Textiles at Ahmedabad, the second was the Medical College Museum at Baroda and the third was the Gandhi Smarak Sangrahalay at Sabarmati, Ahmedabad. The Medical College Museum at Baroda was designed on the framework of the B. J. Medial College Museum, Ahmedabad. However, the third museum that is Gandhi Smarak Sangrahalay at Sabaramati was attributed to other kind of reason. It was basically a personality museum built with a motive to establish a memorial at places that were closely associated with the life and works of Mahatma Gandhi. The museum marked an attempt to display how Gandhi lived and worked.

There was another museum set up by the Department of Archaeology of the M. S. University of Baroda at Vadodara in 1950. The department collects various kinds of objects excavated from various archaeological sites in Gujarat. The other two institutional museums of the kind are one at Prabhas Patan and the other was the Maharaja Fatehsingh Museum at Baroda. The first was set up in 1951 basically to house the collections from the site of old Somnath temple which was excavated by A. S. I. to establish the history of the ancient Somnath temple.

In the post-Independence period, several municipalities came forward to initiate and encourage museum activities. The Baroda Municipality was the first to set up a Health Museum at Baroda in 1953. Four years later the Ahmedabad Municipality set up a Cultural Centre in the city in the year 1956. The museum is the only one of the kind. The Cultural Centre at Ahmedabad had different purpose to serve. The instinct with which the Ahmedabad Municipality started the idea of Cultural Centre was, however, quite different. This Culture Centre was to feature an educational museum that would supplement conventional learning with comprehensive visual instruction. The aims of the museum were to make it a social

institution that brings about active participation of the people in a relational exposition of cultural phenomena expressed primarily in visual terms.

The Maharaja Fatehsingh Museum at Vadodara was perhaps the last museum with a royal patronage and to house material exclusively from the royal collections. It was with unparalleled dedicated efforts put in by the royal Gaekwads. In setting up this museum the Gaekwad sought counseling from foreign specialists and accumulated precious collection from various foreign origins such as European paintings, European, Greco-Roman and modern Indian sculptures, pieces of Chinese and Japanese art and modern Indian paintings.

One more museum that needs a mention is the B. J. Research Institute's Museum at Ahmedabad about which very little information is available.

In addition to the museums mentioned above, there are several departmental museums that too find no specific mention. These are predominantly the museums set up by the various departments of the universities for the purpose of education and research. At the University of Baroda, for instance, the departments like the Botany, Zoology, Geology, museology, Geography etc. work consciously at developing museums to suit their purposes. They turn out to be inevitable sections in the departments.

#### **Museums as a part of Cultural Activity**

Such remained a part of cultural activities during all times since the ancient period. The seeds of art and culture that were laid down at that time were nurtured by kings and princes who lived then after. Thus, it took a shape of personal collection of art pieces and precious and exquisite objects of curiosity. But it chiefly remained activity under the royal patronage and a common man was not allowed a glimpse of it. This collection being precious and exquisite was put under strong guards and safety to save it from pilferage. Thus, museum activities remained in those times a part of royal hobby. Majority museums we find today are the ones that come down to us mostly from royal collection and they serve as valuable heritage and documents to project and explain the history of the respective time.

The Kachchh museum, Bhuj was a first museum of significance in Gujarat It marked the beginning of almost all the others museums founded at later dates, including:

1. Barton Museum, Bhavnagar. 1882
2. Watson Museum, Rajkot. 1888

3. Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel Museum, Surat. 1891 (Formerly known as Winchester museum)
4. Vadodara Museum and Picture Gallery, Vadodara.1894
5. Junagadh Museum, Junagadh (Sakkarbaug). 1901
6. Lady Wilson Museum, Dharampur.1928
7. Archaeological Museum, Jamnagar. 1946
8. Darbar Hall Museum, Junagadh. 1947
9. Calico Museum of Textile, Ahmedabad. 1949
10. University Museum of the Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel University, Vallabh-Vidhyanagar.1949
11. Museum of Archaeology and Ancient History, M. S. University, Vadodara.1950
12. Prabhas Patan Museum, Prabhas Patan. 1951
13. Gandhi Smarak Sangrahalaya, Ahmedabad. 1951
14. Shri Girdharbhai Children Museum, Amreli. 1955
15. L. D. Museum, Navarangpura, Ahmedabad). 1957
16. The Gujarat Museum Society, 1961 L. D. Institute, Ahmedabad.
17. Maharaja Fatehsinh Museum, Laxmi Vilas Palace Compound, Vadodara. 1961
18. Museum of Tribal Research Institute, Gujarat Vidyapith, Ahmedabad. 1962
19. Saputara Museum, Saputara.1970
20. Shreyas Folk Museum, Ambavadi, Ahmedabad.1977
21. Sardar Vallabhbhaai Patel National Museum, Bardoli. 1979

### Conclusions

The development of museums in Gujarat was undoubtedly a part of this Indian movement of museums. But, museums were set up in Gujarat basically as a part of the British influence. Like other famous museums in the country, museums in Gujarat were established by kings of the princely states in Gujarat under the British patronage. The chief among these princely states were Rajkot, Bhavnagar, Kachcha, Jamnagar, and many small or big states in the region of Kathiawad and Gujarat. The princes and kings took museums as gift from the British masters. Their basic intention was to please the British masters by setting up a museum in their states. Although these museums were initially a kind of a king's personal collection they eventually served as vital centres of cultural education to general public. Though idea of museums sprang from the slavish mentality of local rulers they proved a boon or blessings in disguise to the people of

India. It is through them that awakening and revival of interest in our cultural heritage was generated among general people and people became more aware of their cultural heritage and history. Likewise, museums in Gujarat too serve valuable support to educational and research activities in the state.

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3. *Darbar Hall Museum, Junagadh*
4. *Barton Sangrahalaya, Bhavnagar*
5. *Lakhota Museum, Jamnagar*
6. *Prabhas Patan Museum, Prabhas Patan*
7. *Chhota Udepur Sangrahalaya*
8. *Archaeological Museum, Jamnagar*
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