
UNIT 20 MUSEUMS AND ANTIQUITIES

Structure

- 20.0 Objectives
- 20.1 Introduction
- 20.2 Museums - A Historical Account
 - 20.2.1 The Western World
 - 20.2.2 India
- 20.3 Phases of Development
- 20.4 Types of Museums
- 20.5 Museums: Roles and Responsibilities
 - 20.5.1 Socio-Cultural
 - 20.5.2 Educational
 - 20.5.3 Entertainment
- 20.6 Museum Organization
- 20.7 How the Museum Objects are Acquired?
- 20.8 Antiquities
- 20.9 Museums and Tourism
- 20.10 Let Us Sum Up
- 20.11 Keywords
- 20.12 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

20.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit you shall be able to know:

- how the museums developed historically,
- the variety of museums and their roles in society,
- the factors determining the acquisition of museum objects; and
- the relationship between museums and tourism.

20.1 INTRODUCTION

Museums today are an important source of tourist attraction. Objects and artefacts revealing the genesis of a country, its cultural expanse, landmarks of its industrial and technological development, etc. are housed in the museums. Now concepts in museology have emphasized the social responsibilities of the museums towards educating and entertaining the public.

All over the world the number of museums as well as the number of the people visiting them have gone up substantially. The attraction of the museums for the public has increased. It is, therefore, necessary for everyone involved in promoting tourism in the country to know about the museums. In TS-2, Unit 8 you were familiarised with the role of a guide in the museum through the case study of Prince of Wales Museum, Bombay. In this Unit we shall tell you about various aspects of a museum and its roles and responsibilities towards the society in general and towards the promotion of tourism in particular.

20.2 MUSEUMS - A HISTORICAL ACCOUNT

Since ancient times museum - like institutions have been part of the social life of humankind. Although the concept of the modern museum as primarily a collection and exhibition centre for antiquities, artefacts and other historical and cultural objects has developed in Europe, institutions with some resemblance to them have been found in India too. In this Section we shall discuss the historical progression of the museums in two parts:

- for the western world mainly taking Europe and United States of America into account; and
- for India.

20.2.1 The Western World

The earliest organized museum was established at Alexandria, Egypt in about 3rd century B.C. by Ptolemy Soter, a ruler of Egypt in the post-Alexander era. But it was more like a university than a collection house for artefacts. It was a state-supported institution and was a place for advanced studies. It was functional for about six centuries when it was destroyed during the civil disturbances.

For a long time after this, no proper museum development took place. In the 14th century, the period immediately preceding the Renaissance in Europe, there was a revival in the interest for museums. In the 15th century, the term 'museum' was used to describe the collections of the Medici family in Florence in Italy at the time of Lorenzo the magnificent. The re-emergence of the museums as institutions of human enlightenment coincided with the vigorous developments in the fields of arts, sciences and humanities.

But even during the Renaissance the museums were not open to the public. Infact, they were more of private collections of artefacts. The first public museum opened in Oxford in 1683 using the collections of Mr. Elias Ashmole. It was followed by the British Museum in 1753. The admission to these museums, however, was limited to only a few individuals everyday. In France also, the Louvre museum allowed limited entry to the people until the French Revolution in 1789 opened it fully for the public. It, therefore, took about two centuries for the private museums to be transformed into public museums in Europe. Moreover, the gradual handing over of the private collections for public use is "generally considered to be a European concept of museum evolution."

In the United States the development of museums is comparatively recent. The museums, threfore, started with the idea of public service and education from the very beginning. Charleston Library Society of Carolina in the U.S.A. was established in 1773. From then on upto the establishment of the National Museum in 1846 "the museum development in the U.S. was a public affair."

20.2.2 India

Various methods were evolved in our country to preserve our heritage. In ancient India there were painting galleries (**chitrashalas**) and art galleries (**chitravithis**). During the medieval period the kings and nobles had their impressive private collections. The beginnings of the first modern museum in India can be traced back to the year 1796. The Asiatic Society of Bengal, established in 1784, decided in that year that several artefacts it had collected over the years should be housed properly in Calcutta. The plan, however, did not succeed and it was only in 1814 that the society could establish a proper museum. It had two divisions - the first dealing with archaeology, ethnology and technology and the second dealing with geology and zoology. By 1857 there were twelve various types of museums in India. But the first important museum was the Indian Museum in Calcutta founded in 1875. By 1936 the number of museums was around one hundred. The most important development was the establishment of the National Museum in Delhi in 1949. By 1995, the number of museums in India had increased to around 360.

20.3 PHASES OF DEVELOPMENT

The museums as we know them today emerged during the Renaissance and expanded during the Age of Enlightenment in Europe. Until now we have four phases of museum development.:

- i) Initially they mainly served the function of **storing the objects of artistic and scientific interests**. This was the first phase starting from the 14th century upto around the 17th century.
- ii) The second phase was during the 18th and 19th Centuries when many of the museums were taken over by the state which turned them into public institutions. The effort was to project the glory of newly industrializing nations and expanding imperial powers.
- iii) During its third phase in the 20th century the museum assumed an educational role. Through the selection of objects, their arrangement and exhibitions, the museums

endeavoured to educate the public about their history, culture, scientific and technological traditions, etc.

- iv) Recently, since 1970s with the onset of the phenomenon of mass tourism, the orientation of the museums have changed yet again. They are now "more concerned with entertainment, tourism and income generation". Their educational role has declined somewhat in favour of generating more finances.

The move has increasingly been towards more egalitarianism. The public has become a major factor now and the museums are endeavouring more and more to cater to the public interests.

20.4 TYPES OF MUSEUMS

The International Council of Museums (ICOM) defines the museum as "a non-profit making, permanent institution in the service of society and of its development, and open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits for the purposes of study, education and employment, material evidence of man and his environment."

Apart from the museums the other institutions which conform to this definition are:

- a) Conservation institutes and exhibition galleries permanently maintained by libraries and archive centres.
- b) Natural, archaeological and ethnographical monuments and sites and historical monuments and sites of a museum nature, for the acquisition, conservation and communication activities.
- c) Institutions displaying live specimens such as botanic and zoological gardens, aquaria, vivaria, etc.
- d) Nature reserves.
- e) Science centres and planetariums.

The museums can be categorized as follows on the basis of grants received and the control exercised:

- 1) **Central Government Museum**, such as National Museum, New Delhi.
- 2) **State Museums** such as Orissa State Museum, Bhubaneswar, and Assam State Museum, Guwahati, etc.
- 3) **University, College and School Museums** such as Folklore Museum, University of Mysore, Bharat Kala Bhavan, B.H.U., Varanasi, etc.
- 4) **Private Museums**, such as Maharaja Sawai Madho Singh Museum, Jaipur, Birla Academy of Art, Calcutta etc.

Museums can also be classified based upon the nature of their collection.

1) General Museums

Most of the Museums come under this category. Their collections include articles of various types ranging from ancient to modern times, encompassing sculpture, painting, jewellery, pottery, technological implements etc. They have something or the other for almost everyone. Some important museums of this category are:

National Museum, New Delhi: This museum possesses a very large number of objects which include sculptures of terracotta and bronze as well as potteries and jewellery from the Harappan, Mauryan and Gupta periods; sculptures, manuscripts, paintings from the medieval period,

- a collection of antiquities from Central Asia and the America;
- a large collection of textiles, jewellery and coins from different ages and regions.

- **Prince of Wales Museum, Bombay:** We have given a detailed description of this museum in TS-2, Block-2, Unit- 8. It has sculptures, painting, textiles, a natural history section, etc. from various periods of Indian History.
- **Indian Museum, Calcutta:** Its most notable collections are 2nd century B.C. railings containing Buddhist sculptures from Bharhut in Madhya Pradesh. Apart from these, it has a collection of textiles and sections on minerology, zoology and anthropology.

2) Archaeological Museums

Such museums mostly contain articles discovered from the local excavations. Many of them are **site museums** maintained by the Archaeological Survey of India. Some important museums include Archaeological Museum at Red Fort, Delhi, at Bodh Gaya and Nalanda in Bihar, at Sanchi, Khajuraho and Gwalior in Madhya Pradesh and at Mathura and Sarnath in Uttar Pradesh, etc.

3) Art Museums

These museums mostly possess works of arts which include sculpture, painting etc., the important among them are the Ashutosh Museum of Art (Calcutta) and National Gallery of Modern Art (New Delhi).

4) Crafts Museums

Here we can find the live crafts traditions of India with craftsmen exhibiting their skills as well as selling their products. These museums endeavour to popularize the crafts traditions of india and provide the craftsmen direct access to the consumers. **National Crafts Museum** in Pragati Maidan, New Delhi is the most prominent example.

5) Children's Museum

Objects mainly of children's interests are housed here. **Bal Bhawan** and **International Dolls Museum** are two such museums.

6) Defence Museums

Their collections comprise of the objects relating to national defence. **National Defence Academy Museum, Pune** and **Air Force Museum, Palam, New Delhi** are important examples.

7) Personality based Museums

These contain articles used by or related to some important persons. **Gandhi Memorial Museum** and **Nehru Memorial Museum** in Delhi are two such institutions.

8) Natural History Museums

Flora and fauna of the world, objects showing the major landmarks in the development of the earth and its inhabitants, etc. form parts of their collection. **National Museum of Natural History** in New Delhi is the most important museum of this kind.

9) Science and Technology Museums

For example, **Central Museum, Pilani (Rajasthan)**, **Visvesvaraya Museum, Bangalore** and **Rail Transport Museum, New Delhi**.

10) Specialised Museums

These museums mostly keep specialized collections. **Calico Museum** (having a collection of Indian textiles) and **Utensils Museum** (with a collection of Indian utensils) in Ahmedabad (Gujarat) are two such examples.

20.5 MUSEUMS - ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Museums have many roles to play in modern times. They utilize the national resources and exist for public benefit. Preservation, educating the public and entertainment are some of the functions a museum performs.

20.5.1 Socio-Cultural

Museums are meant to shoulder the cultural responsibilities of a nation. They function as custodians of the natural, cultural, scientific and technological heritage of a people. The material remains of the development of the earth and of human society, the arts and crafts of a country, etc. are housed in the museums. In India, the Archaeological Survey of India and the State Departments of Archaeology have the responsibility for excavation and preservation of historical sites in rural as well as urban areas. The Anthropological Survey of India collects and provides informations about the aboriginal and seni aboriginal people of India thereby contributing to the cultural enrichment of the country.

Museums also testify to the composite cultural ethos of our country. Their collections include artefacts from various periods and regions and make them part of our common cultural heritage. Apart from this museums organize exhibitions on themes of socio-religious significance. For example, the Salar Jung Museum, Hyderabad holds various exhibitions on themes like 'Lord Krishna in Indian Art', 'Christianity and Art' and 'Islamic Contribution of Indian Art'. Such activities make people aware of the cultural heritage of their own country. This also encourages people to visit the museums.

The reason of a museum's existence is the public. They exist for the benefit of the society. They are also the "medium for expression of new - or at least newly discovered - democratic cultural values."

The new museums take upon themselves the responsibilities of democratizing their collection. Their role includes providing the public a wide range of aesthetic, cultural and emotional experiences as well as the knowledge about human past. As the American Association of Museums has formulated:

"The ethical duty of museums is to transfer to our successors, when possible in enhanced form, the material record of human culture and the natural world."

20.5.2 Educational

The museums also play an educative role through the collection, conservation and interpretation of the objects of historical and cultural interests. By exhibiting their collections ranging from mundane to exotic, they attract and entertain people and arouse their curiosity. This stimulates the imagination of the visitors and induces them to ask questions thereby promoting learning. The educational role of the museums are enormous, particularly with regard to the children. The museums are ideal places to impart education to people of all age-groups, interests, capabilities and backgrounds. The museums are often situated in attractive and spacious buildings; the objects are normally arranged systematically and attractively; everyone is free to approach the displayed articles freely and without interference. The visitors gain knowledge about innumerable things about their past. Seeing things in their actual form is much more instructional than reading about them in books. Frank Oppenheimer opines:

"The whole point of education is to transmit culture, and museums can play an increasingly important role in this process. It is a mistake to think that preserving culture is distinct from transmitting it through education."

The ICOM also recognizes the contribution of the museums in educating the public by:

- increasing the awareness of cultural heritage,
- transmitting the essence of the evolving culture to new generations,
- raising the awareness of other cultures.

In our country, many museums, apart from educating the public by displaying their collections and organizing special exhibits, also give practical training courses on the ancient arts and crafts of the country. For example:

- The **Salar Jung Museum** in Hyderabad conducts courses on bronze casting, lapidary work, woodwork, Bidri artwork and tribal embroidery.
- **Archaeology Museum** at Baroda organizes temporary exhibitions whenever a new excavation is done in order to educate the trainee teachers and higher level students.
- **Birla Industrial and Technology Museum, Calcutta** and **Visveshriya Industrial and Technology Museum, Bangalore** conduct short term training courses for school teachers in science and technology and museums.
- In **Bal Bhavan**, New Delhi, children are given instructions in arts, painting and dance.

20.5.3 Entertainment

In the modern period another responsibility of the museums is to entertain public in order to augment the domestic and foreign tourism. The exoticism and the attractive arrangement of museum objects fascinate the visitors and also satisfy their urge for knowing about their past in case of domestic tourists and about host cultures in the case of foreign tourists. Later in this Unit we shall discuss the role of the museums with regard to tourism.

Check Your Progress-1

1) Narrate the phases of museum development in 100 words. ...

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

2) What is the educational role of the museum? Write in 100 words.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

3) What is the different between the archaeological museum and crafts museum ? Write in 100 words.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

20.6 MUSEUM ORGANISATION

At the level of organisation there are three functions in a museum:

- 1) **Administrative** which includes personnel management, financial management, general services, fund-raising and public relations;
- 2) **Curatorial** which involves collection registration, collection care, conservation and research;
- 3) **Operations** involving exhibitions, public education, technical services and security.

The major decision-making staff of the museum consist of the following personnel:

Director: Director is the topmost decision-making person in a museum responsible for policy making, planning, organizing, staffing and coordinating activities.

Curator: Curator is the academic decision maker in a museum. It is primarily on his/her recommendations that the objects are acquired and accessioned. The curator is also responsible for research and publication.

Museum Educator: Museum's educational and training programmes are the responsibilities of the museum educator. These include organization of classes, tours, films, lectures, training programmes etc.

Museum Registrar: The Museum Registrar is responsible for the preparation and maintenance of legal documents, files and forms for acquisition, accession, cataloguing, loans, etc.

Conservator: The conservator's duty is to see that the museum objects are kept in good condition and no damage is done to them.

Exhibit Designer: The exhibit designer plays an important role in designing the exhibitions along the lines suggested by the curator and educational staff.

Collections Manager: Supervision, numbering, cataloguing and storage of the objects in each division are the responsibilities of the collections manager.

20.7 HOW THE MUSEUM OBJECTS ARE ACQUIRED?

The acquisition of the museum articles takes place mainly in five ways:

- 1) **Field Work:** The most important way to acquire the objects is through research and fieldwork. Items gained from excavations, regional and local tours, etc. are gathered to bring them to the museums. These include objects of historical importance both in geographical and cultural terms.
- 2) **Gift or Donations:** The museums also get their collections through gifts or donations from private sources. These objects are works of arts and artefacts of historical and ethnological value. In India many traditional rulers donated their private collections to the museums.
- 3) **Purchase:** Another way of collecting the objects for museums is through purchase. It, however, is subject to the availability of finances. Most of the objects which are worth collecting for the museums command high prices for which the museums have to compete in the open market.
- 4) **Transfer:** Sometimes the museums receive objects through transfer from one museum to another. The criteria for doing so can be various. For example, some of the objects acquired by the British museums from India during the colonial period were returned after independence. Some objects are transferred from State to the National Museums and vice versa depending upon the nature of the objects.

- 5) **Loan:** Museums regularly use this channel to augment their collections. It, however, does not involve the transfer of title and the lender museum gets its objects back after a definite period. It is a two way process and benefits all the museums.

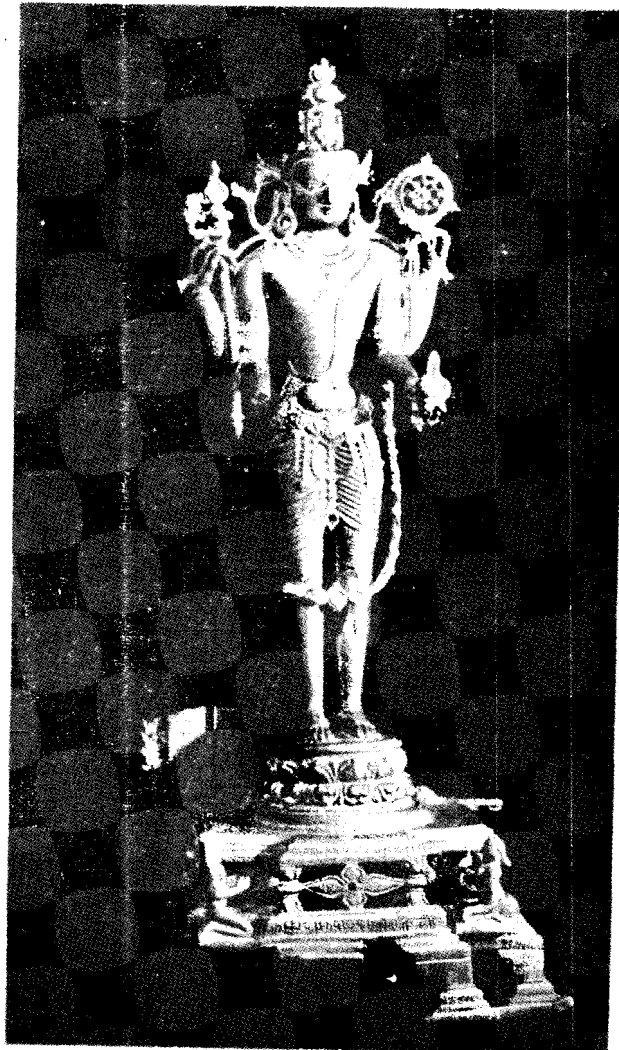
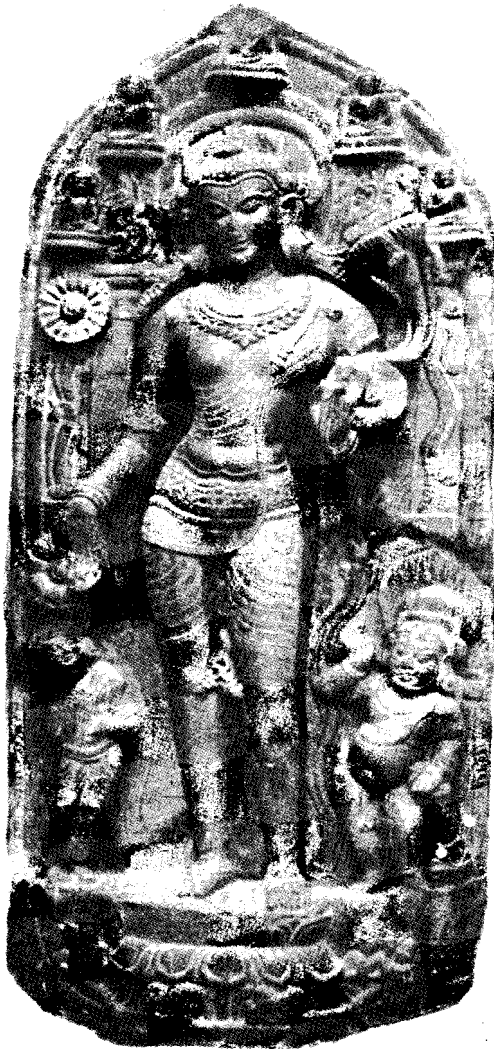
After the acquisition the objects are accessioned on the advice of the curator. While the acquisition is an indiscriminate process, accession is done on the basis of set standards. Accession involves "the transfer of the titles of objects, through defined procedures, to the museums or the registration of objects held-in-trust for governmental agencies." After accessioning, that is, acceptance of ownership and responsibility, the museum is obliged to securely manage the objects.

20.8 ANTIQUITIES

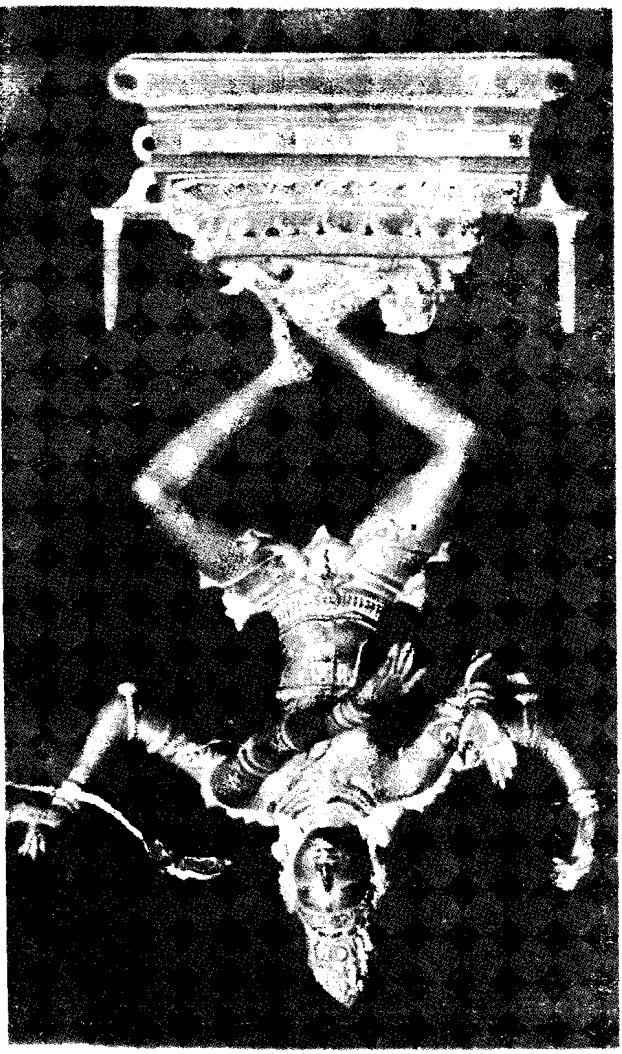
The museums collect, preserve and display the antiquities found at various archaeological sites as well as recovered from other sources. The antiquities of India are covered under Antiquities and Art Treasures Act, 1972. The following items come under the category of antiquities and art treasures:

- a) Sculpture
- b) Painting
- c) Other works of art and craftsmanship illustrative of science, art, crafts and religion and of historical interest.

But these items should be at least one hundred years old in order to become antiquities.



National Museum, New Delhi: A) Stone sculpture with flying gandharvas from Alhola and B) Bronze Nataraja from Tiruvarangulam



Baroda Museum, Baroda: A) Ekamukha Siva-linga, b) Head of Surya and C) Vishnu





A

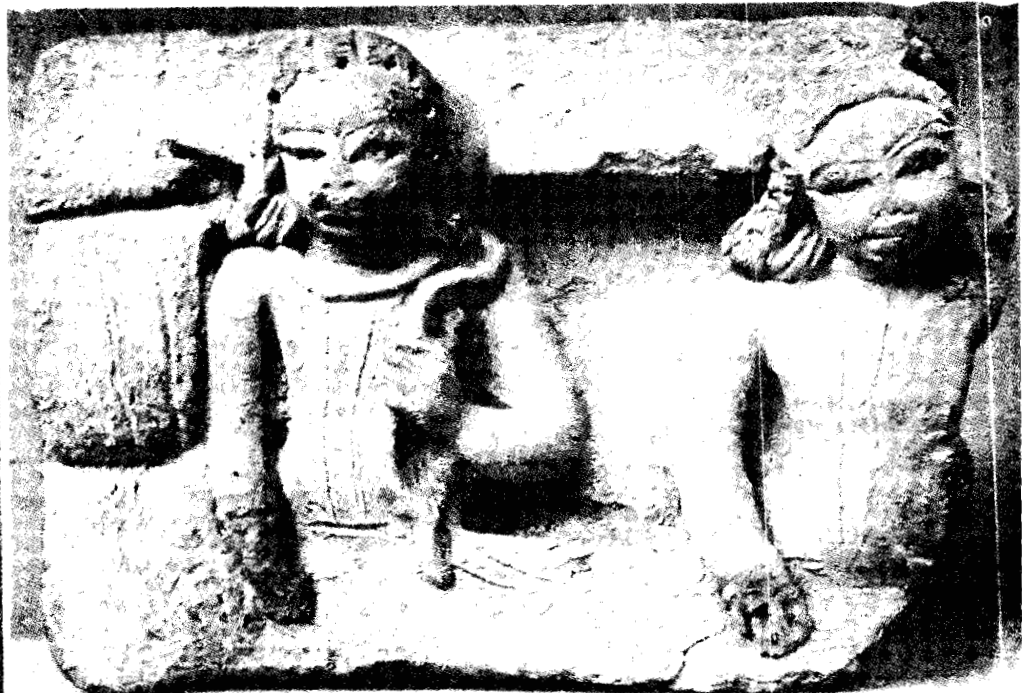


B

Mathura Museum, Mathura: A) Sandstone image of Surya and B) Dasavatara panel



A



B

Prince of Wales Museum, Bombay: A) Terracotta mother-goddess and B) Moulded Brick

20.9 MUSEUMS AND TOURISM

Museums have the potential to play an important role in tourism sector. The touring children can perhaps be the largest clientele group because the museums offer both education and entertainment. Even for the adults they are a great source of information about the history, culture and tradition of a locality or country. People can discover their past through the museums. To the foreign visitors the museums offer detailed informations about their destination country. They can be supportive to the service sectors as the people visiting the museums use conveyances and visit the restaurants and shops nearby.

The promotion of tourism through museums, however, has to be a concerted effort. The museum management should bring out brochures and handbooks listing their collections and giving some information about them. In addition, photographs of the objects should be sold to the visiting tourists so as to leave them with a memory of the visit. The tourist agencies should give the museums a proper and prominent place in their itineraries for the tourists emphasizing the educational and entertainment roles of the museums. The tourist guides should be knowledgeable about the museum collections. They should also possess some information about the history and organization of the museums themselves.

It is only through the joint efforts of all concerned that a meaningful and frequent interaction can develop between the tourists and museums.

Check Your Progress-2

- 1) What are the main ways in which the museum articles are acquired ? Give your answer in 100 words.

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

- 2) Write in 100 words about the role which the museums can play in the development of tourism.

.....
.....
.....
.....

20.10 LET US SUM UP

The modern museum is a product of the European Renaissance, although institutions resembling it have existed since a long time before that. It evolved through various phases and in contemporary period it is conceived as an institution for education and entertainment. Acquisition, conservation and exhibition of its collections are its main functions. By proper management and display of its collection, the museum endeavours to attract more and more visitors and play an important role in the growth of tourism. However, concerted efforts are required on the part of all those wanting to promote tourism to make the museum an important element on the tourist map.

20.11 KEYWORDS

Aquisition		The act of gaining physical possession of an object for the museum.
Accession	:	The process of transferring title or ownership from the providing source (fieldwork, purchase, gift, etc.) to the museum.
Artefact	:	An object that has been selected, altered, used or made by human effort.
Age of Enlightenment	:	The period during the 18th century in Europe, particularly France when some thinkers and writers believed that reason and science, not religion, would advance human progress.
Cataloguing	:	Assigning an object to an established classification system and initiating a record of the nomenclature, provenance, number and location of that object in the collection storage area.
Renaissance	:	The period of the revival of art and literature based on classical forms in the 15th and 16th centuries in Europe, particularly in Italy.

For the meanings of some of the keywords and all the quotations in the text, we acknowledge our debt to Gary Edson and David Dean, *The Handbook for Museums*, Routledge, 1994.

20.12 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress-1

- 1) See Sec.20.3.
- 2) See Sub-sec. 20.5.2.
- 3) See Sec.20.4.

Check Your Progress-2

- 1) See Sec. 20.7.
- 2) See Sec. 20.9.

SOME USEFUL BOOKS FOR THIS BLOCK

Dilip K Chakrabarty	:	The Archaeology of Ancient Indian Cities , OUP. 1995.
Bridget and Raymond Allchin	:	The Rise of Civilization in India and Pakistan , Select Book Service Syndicate, 1983.
Gary Edson and Davin Dean	:	The Handbook for Museums , Routledge, 1994.
Gaynor Kavanagh (ed.)	:	The Museums Profession , Leicester University Press, 1991
Shobita Punja	:	Museums of India , Guidebook Co. Ltd., 1990.