



GOVERNMENT MUSEUM MADRAS



A view of the Museum Building



GOVERNMENT OF MADRAS

1968

THE MADRAS GOVERNMENT MUSEUM

INTRODUCTION

THE Madras Government Museum is the largest and oldest of the State museums in India. Since the time of its inception in 1851, it had steadily developed and expanded under the able guidance and supervision of a succession of devoted directors. Beginning as a Museum of practical Geology, its scope was soon extended to cover other fields such as Archaeology, Ethnology, Prehistory and Natural History. Its first officer-in-charge was Surgeon Edward Green Balfour who launched an intensive collection campaign in order to build up the collections in the various sections of the Museum.

With the merger of the Pudukkottai State into the Madras State, the Pudukkottai Museum also became administratively annexed to the Madras Government Museum, and this may well prove to be a starting point for the establishment of a network of regional museums all over the State.

In 1951, the Museum celebrated its centenary, having completed hundred years of fruitful service to the public as a pioneer educational institution in the State. The Centenary celebrations were inaugurated by the Prime Minister, Pandit Nehru, on November, 27, 1951. The National Art Gallery was also organized and thrown open to the public on the occasion.

The Madras Museum is a large multi-purpose Museum covering a wide range of subjects and is organized into the following sections: Art, Archaeology, Anthropology, Numismatics, Zoology, Botany and Geology. In addition to these there is a well equipped Chemical Laboratory for the conservation of



Tripurantaka—a Bronze from Tirukkodikkaval,
Thanjavur District

Museum objects. Each of these sections is in charge of a qualified Curator who is a specialist in his own field. These sections contain extensive collections illustrating mostly the past history, culture and natural history of South India. Some of these exhibits are displayed in the public galleries, but a large part of the collections is kept in reserve for study and reference purposes in accordance with modern museum practice.

It may be of interest to make a brief reference here to some of

the most outstanding collections in each of these principal sections of the Museum, and some of the other general features of the activities of this Museum such as research, educational services and recent schemes of expansion.

ARCHAEOLOGY

The Archaeological section of the Museum is the chief centre of attraction particularly to foreign visitors and tourists. It deals with the acquisition, preservation, study and display of sculptures, antiquities and allied objects pertaining to the various periods of South Indian History. The exhibits in this section consist of sculptures in stone and metal, inscriptions on stone and metal, architectural pieces, paintings, wood-carvings, metalware and a few original manuscripts. The most ancient antiquities of the

historical period of South India consist mainly of the Buddhist relics from Andhradesa of which the beautiful Bhattiprolu crystal reliquaries and the inscribed stone caskets which contained them deserve special mention. The Buddhist sculptures from Amaravati which adorn an entire gallery in this Museum constitute by far the most interesting and important record not only of the development of the artistic activities of South India during the five centuries from about 200 B. C. to about 300 A. D. but also about the social life of the people of those times as that period is not attested by any indisputably authentic written records. The galleries devoted to South Indian bronzes constitute another remarkable part of this section. The Museum possesses one of the world's richest collection of bronzes, many of which are superb specimens of South Indian Art. Of these the most notable ones are the series of images depicting the Dance of Siva (Nataraja) and groups consisting of Rama, Lakshmana, Sita and Hanuman. In the whole world this Museum may be said to be the only institution where the widest possible range of icons in bronze from a limited area are available for study under a single roof. The Museum's rich collection of bronzes is now displayed in a spacious three-storeyed building—the Bronze gallery which was newly constructed and thrown open in September, 1963.

ANTHROPOLOGY

The Madras Museum is among the earliest of institutions in India and abroad where Ethnology and prehistoric Archaeology are represented as Museum subjects. The first palaeolith in India from Attirampakkam, Chingleput District, discovered in 1863 by Bruce Foote, and housed in this Museum is one of a large collection of prehistoric antiquities possessed by this Museum. An earlier collection acquired in 1878 from J. W. Breeks from the Nilgiris consists of exotic-looking pottery, beads, ornaments, iron implements and bronze vases. The Museum also possesses large collections of iron age pottery, iron tools, bronze utensils and gold ornaments excavated at Adichanallur in Tirunelveli District and Perumbair in Chingleput District, and the stone age collections made later by Mr. F. P. Manley and others have considerably augmented the Museum's reserves so that the pre-historic antiquities of this

Museum constitute one of the richest collections in the world today. Besides, the Museum possesses a large ethnographic collection representative of the tribal and rural cultures of the people of Southern India. This includes tribal dwellings, utensils, implements used by Tribal folk, their dress, weapons and ornaments. These have been recently augmented by such interesting additions as the Kathakali figures representing the Dance Drama of Kerala, shadow play figures of Malabar and Andhra, models of Lambadi and Gadaba women to illustrate their dress and other objects pertaining to the material culture of these picturesque tribes. These exhibits have now been attractively displayed in modernised, built-in, illuminated cases.

NUMISMATICS

The Madras Museum is noted for its large and unique collection of coins, particularly of South Indian and Mughal coins, but for reasons of security, only plaster cast impressions of some of the more important types of coins have been displayed in the public galleries. The Gupta coins are specially interesting, being mostly of gold and bearing inscriptions in classical Sanskrit which appear for the first time on Indian coinage, A very rare find recently acquired by the Madras Museum was a hoard from Dowlaishwaram, a place near Rajamundry, consisting of 127 gold coins, 49 of which belong to the Eastern Chalukyan ruler, Raja Raja I and the rest to his son, Kulothunga Chola. This section also has a good collection of historical documents, seals and medals.

NATURAL HISTORY

The Natural History collections of the Museum are very extensive and are displayed in its vast Zoological, Botanical and Geological galleries, which extend over several halls.

The Zoological section is one of the largest sections in the Museum, handling the collection, preservation, storage and display of all types of animal forms from the lowly organized one-celled protozoan to the gigantic whale. Although its scope is mainly limited to South Indian fauna a few interesting specimens of

foreign animals and birds, especially a few beautiful birds of remarkably brilliant plumage such as the Mandarin Duck, Macaw Parrot, Tragopan, Monal and the Golden Pheasant, have been added to enrich the collections particularly in recent years. A part of the Bird gallery is now housed in the ground floor of the New Natural History Block to facilitate the modernization of the main Bird Gallery in the old buildings, now in progress.

The Botanical galleries include systematic, ecological and economic sections. In the gallery of economic products, a large number of vegetable raw materials, forest products, timbers, indigenous medicinal herbs and cottage industry products are exhibited. The Economic Products Gallery has been thoroughly modernized during the last two years with the installation of built-in illuminated cases.

The Geological gallery is a veritable treasure house of Indian minerals and has been recently rearranged so as to present the layman with a fairly complete picture of stratigraphy and the range and variety of the mineral wealth of India. Some exhibits which specially attract the attention of visitors in this gallery are the stones, gold ores, building stones, meteorites and a gigantic fossil Ammonite (which is allied to the living Cuttlefish).

Subhadra — Andhra Leather
Shadow-play Figure



CHILDREN'S GALLERY

A newly organized gallery — the Children's gallery — was recently thrown open to the public in the Madras Museum on the mezzanine floor above the Geology gallery and with the construction of the new Natural History Block, the Children's gallery has since been re-arranged and accommodated in the mezzanine floor of this new building leaving the mezzanine floor of the Geology gallery free for the expansion of the latter. The Children's gallery is a particularly attractive-gallery consisting of modern illuminated show-cases containing exhibits of special appeal to children. By suitable arrangements a certain amount of continuity has been achieved in the sequence of exhibits. The exhibits on display begin with an instructive portrayal of the story of the origin of the earth followed by a case illustrating the mineral wealth of India, and a series of dioramas illustrating prehistoric animals in miniature, set against attractive case backgrounds depicting their natural haunts, the story of primitive man and his tools and the variety of animal life on this earth. Models illustrating the various organ systems of man and other animals, the story of human transport, etc., are also graphically exhibited in suitable settings.

CHEMICAL CONSERVATION

The Museum possesses a well-equipped chemical laboratory which has been recently expanded with financial assistance from the Government of India. This Laboratory deals with the treatment and conservation of valuable antiquities and works of art received by the Museum from time to time by means of modern chemical and electrolytic methods.

RESEARCH AND PUBLICATIONS

Research has always been a dominant feature of the activities of this Museum. The results of the researches carried on in the various sections have been published from time to time, notably in the Bulletins of the Madras Government Museum, which have raised the prestige of the Institution considerably in the eyes of foreign scholars and have brought in several foreign periodicals

by way of exchange. The Museum has to its credit a commendable series of Bulletins both on Natural History and Archaeology. Most of these publications are valuable monographs and serve as standard reference works on the respective subjects, but apart from these scholarly monographs, several popular Guide books and Handbooks have also been brought out recently. The Museum also issues a Half - yearly Newsletter outlining its latest additions and programmes of educational activities.

EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES

Museums which are mere show places are things of the past.

There is now a growing awareness, all over the world, of the vital role that museums can play in the education of the child and the adult, the literate and the illiterate, the able and the handicapped. In keeping with this modern trend, the Madras Museum has expanded its educational activities considerably during recent years. Special exhibitions of important recent acquisitions, special lantern lectures to college students, guide service to the lay visitors, sale of picture postcards, photographs, guide booklets and replicas of coins and bronze icons and loan of original paintings to schools are some of the educational services offered by this Museum. By such means we are attempting to make the Museum more meaningful and enjoyable to the lay public.



The Great Indian Bustard
(*Choriotis nigriceps*)

REORGANIZATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE MUSEUM

In recent years, with the increased tempo of the museum movement in India, vast schemes of modernization and expansion of the Madras Museum were taken up for execution, thanks to the generous financial assistance received from the Government of India during the past four years. Several galleries have been modernized by the installation of upto-date built-in show cases and dioramas with concealed internal fluorescent lighting, and the construction of three major extensions to the Museum buildings was completed, namely, the Bronze gallery, the Natural History wing and an extension to the Chemical Conservation Laboratory. The opening of these new extensions by His Excellency Shri Bishnuram Medhi, Governor of Madras, in September, 1963, is a memorable landmark in the history of this Museum. More recently, a new gallery of Buddhist antiquities and a Philatelic gallery containing a collection of more than 43,000 stamps from all countries of the world were organized and thrown open to the public.

GENERAL INFORMATION ON FACILITIES, Etc.

The Museum and the National Art Gallery are open from 7 a. m. to 5 p. m. on every day of the week except Friday and any other day appointed by authority. Admission to all parts of the Museum and the Art Gallery is free.

Free guide service is available at the entrance to the Museum, the Bronze gallery and the Art Gallery at certain specified hours (10 a. m., 12 noon, 2 p. m., and 4 p. m.) for those who are interested in availing themselves of such facility. Parties of students are specially invited to take advantage of this facility.

Scholars, research workers and parties of visitors are permitted to take photographs and sketches of objects inside the Museum on taking previous permission of the Director of Museums in the prescribed form under certain conditions. The form with the conditions is available at the Museum Office.

The publications, photographs and picture post cards of the Museum are available for sale at the sales counter at the entrance to the Museum.

The Museum is equipped with a microfilming unit and prepares and supplies microfilm copies of manuscripts, documents and publications to scholars, research workers and institutions at rates approved by the Government.

The Museum is also equipped with an auditorium, called the Museum Theatre, with a seating capacity of about 530 persons and a spacious stage suitable for concerts and dramatic performances. The Theatre is primarily intended for educational lectures and for cultural programmes organized under the auspices of the Govt. When not thus required, it may be used for educational purposes, including amateur theatrical performances at rates and on conditions approved by the Government.

The Centenary Exhibition Hall in the Museum is used frequently for temporary exhibitions and lectures and is let out to cultural institutions, art societies, etc., for their meetings, annual functions and for exhibitions on payment of a nominal fee subject to the rules and regulations approved by the Government.

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