



The history of the origin and the growth of the Indian Museum is one of the remarkable events towards the development of heritage and culture of India. Founded in 1814 at the cradle of the Asiatic Society of Bengal (at the present building of the Asiatic Society, 1 Park Street, Kolkata), Indian Museum is the earliest and the largest multipurpose Museum not only in the Indian subcontinent but also in the Asia-Pacific region of the world.

The movement, which was started in 1814, in fact was the beginning of a significant epoch initiating the socio-cultural and scientific achievements of the country. It is otherwise considered as the beginning of the modernity and the end of mediaeval era.

With the foundation of Indian Museum in 1814, the Museum movement started rolling in India and through the years from then, got a new fillip and great momentum. Since then, it has so magnificently developed and culminated into the fruitful existence of more than 400 museums in the country.

To appreciate the history of the origin and growth of the Indian Museum we are to travel back to the last quarter of the 18th century when Sir William Jones a profound scholar devoted his life to the service of India, founded the Asiatic Society in 1784 in Kolkata.

The role of the Asiatic Society was to form a learning centre for the development of art and culture pertaining to the socio-cultural activities, entertaining people, disseminating

knowledge and preserving the cultural as well as natural heritage of mankind for posterity within the geographical limits of Asia.

Sir William Jones, the founder of the Asiatic Society, however, in his inaugural address did not refer to the foundation of a museum as part of the activities of the society.

In 1796 the members of the Asiatic Society conceived an idea of establishing a Museum at a suitable place for the reception and preservation of the objects whatever it is performed by man or produced by nature.

The idea got shape in the beginning of 1808 when society found itself in a position to occupy its premises erected at the corner of Park Street on a land granted by the Government.

Six years later a definite effort was made to give effect to the intention to establish a museum when, Dr Nathaniel Wallich, a Danish botanist, who had been taken prisoner at the siege of Serampur, Hooghly, but was released by the Government in recognition of his scientific attainments, wrote a letter to the society in which he strongly advocated the formation of a Museum and offered a proposal to the society not only to act as honorary curator of the proposed Museum but also to supply duplicates from his own valuable collections.

The proposal found ready acceptance with the members of the society and it was determined to establish Society Museum at the premises of the Asiatic Society of Bengal.

Thus a museum, under the guidance of Dr Nathaniel Wallich was established on 2 February 1814 at the Asiatic Society. He was appointed as Honorary Curator of the Oriental Museum of the Asiatic Society.

Interesting and curious objects were collected from various parts of the country. A list of gifts consisted of 174 items were donated by 27 European donors in the year 1816. The individual collectors were Col. Stewart, Dr Tytler, General Mackenzie, Mr Bryan Hodgson, Capt. Gillon.

Indian contributors started gifting objects to the Museum. Out of 49 donors of the list six donors were Baboo Ram Comul Sen, Kali Kissen Bahadoor, Moharaja Radhacant Deb, Mathuranath Mullick, Sivachandra Doss, and her Highness Begam Sambroo.

In 1837, James Prinsep, Secretary of the Society wrote to the Government to adopt proposition of the Society for the formation of a National Museum at the cost of the State.

Dr Helfer and other scientific officers decided to found a museum of economic geology in Calcutta; this museum was actually opened in 1840. The museum of economic geology thus constituted continued to occupy the premises of the Society till 1856 when the portion

of the collection owned by the Government of India was removed and housed at no. 1 Hasting Street in connection with the Geological Survey of India.

In 1856, the members of the society decided to submit a memorial to the Government of India for the establishment of an Imperial Museum at Calcutta. Two years later a representation was submitted to the Government of India in which the society pressed for the foundation of an Imperial Museum at Calcutta. The Government of India recognized its duty to establish an Imperial Museum in the Metropolis for the collection and exposition of specimens of natural history, physical, economical and historical, etc.

In 1858, The Geological Museum was amalgamated with that of the Geological Survey of India.

In 1862, the Government of India announced the foundation of a Public Museum at Calcutta which might be taken into consideration with the practical realisation.

Negotiations between the Government of India and the Asiatic Society were protracted till the middle of the year 1865 and it was decided that the Society should make over to the Board of Trustees for the proposed Museum for the zoological, geological, and archaeological collections and in this connection Government of India would provide a suitable accommodation for the Society in the Museum building.

Afterwards it was realized that the building as planned could not possibly find accommodation for the Asiatic Society in addition to the Geological Survey of India and the Natural History Museum, the society also expressed its unwillingness to enter a building where accommodation was insufficient and freedom of action was liable to be cramped.

In 1867 the foundation of the present building of the Indian Museum was thus laid on the finest site of Chowringhee in front of small Cause Court. In 1875, the present Museum building on Chowringhee, designed by W. L. Grandville was completed. From 1814 to 1878 the museum was at the Asiatic Society of Park Street, Kolkata. After the completion of the construction of the new building at Chowringhee Road, the Society Museum was shifted from the Asiatic Society to the present building and it was thrown open to the public with two galleries on 1 April 1878. The Archaeology gallery and bird gallery of the Zoological Section had been declared open to public in the present building.

Though in the beginning Indian Museum was opened with two galleries later on it was transformed into a multipurpose Institution where multi-disciplinary objects have been displayed in its six sections, viz. Art, Archaeology, Anthropology, Zoology, Geology, and Botany.

The museum which was known in the beginning as the "Asiatic Society Museum" subsequently came to be known as the "Imperial Museum" later familiarized as the "Indian

Museum". The museum is more familiar by the name Jadughar or Ajabghar among the visitors.

From the days of the Asiatic Museum, this institution has been rendering its services to the people of India as an epitome of art and culture of India. The role of Indian Museum witnesses the socio-cultural harmony between the Museum and the society.

As a consequence the museum has developed into the largest institution of its kind of the country portraying the legacy and pride of the nation and also being highlighted as one of the pioneering National Institutions in the Constitution of the Republic of India.

The Museum Directorate has three main cultural sections namely, Art, Archaeology, and Anthropology together with eight co-ordinating service units such as Preservation, Publication, Photography, Presentation, Modelling, Education, Library, and Security.

The Museum has its own Medical unit to provide preliminary medical services to all the staffs of the organisation.

The administrative control of the cultural sections, viz. Art, Archaeology, and Anthropology along with the other co-ordinating units/sections rests with the Board of Trustees under the Directorate Office of Indian Museum.