

The Trend of Archaeological Site Museums in Indian Context

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Archaeological Site Museums are a specialized type of local museums and the aim is to concentrate on the archaeological history of a particular site. Site museums are developed as a result of excavation or scientific clearance to preserve and display excavated materials on the spot. These types of museums are basically a conglomeration of broadly two branches of study, i.e. Archaeology and the site associated with Museology. These museums are entirely based on archaeological materials; retain the archaeological interest that can best be studied in relation and in close proximity to the group, style and architecture of the building or site to which they belong. Thus Archaeological Site Museums act as a device for communicating factual ideas through the exhibition of genuine objects.

Historical Development of Archaeological Site Museums in India

The concept of museums in India may be traced back to the historic times, as references to the *chitrasala* (picture gallery) do occur in the ancient literature. However, in India, the museum movement post-dates similar developments that occurred in Europe. The building of museums at important centres was inspired from the British administration in India, especially when archaeology came to the fore as a result of the formation in 1862 of the Archaeological Survey and the activities of Sir Alexander Cunningham, whose research awakened widespread interest in Indian archaeology. The policy of the Survey to maintain small museums in the vicinity of sites subjected to extensive excavations to enable the serious students and the visitors alike to study the antiquities in their proper context. It not only set up several such museums to be cared for by its own officers, but has also acted on behalf of and helped several States in exploring ancient sites within their territories and building up suitable museums near them in accordance with its own policy. But the most remarkable endeavor during this era was the Government museum at Mathura. It was built around the nucleus of a large collection of Mathura sculptures in 1874, thus, it was the first museum to house archaeological collection derived from a particular site hence called as the forerunner of 'local museums'. The trendsetter was made by a private individual, a British Collector, F.S. Growse. Archaeological Orientation Museum spread all over India after the arrival of Curzon as Viceroy in 1898 and the appointment of John Marshall as the Director General of Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) in 1902. In Archaeological Survey of India also, due to various explorative investigations that were initiated since the time of its first Director General, Sir Alexander Cunningham, vast quantity of antiquarian remains were collected. The growth of museums in India, gained momentum after Sir Alexander Cunningham played a very important role in collection and study of the archaeological material. This was the first time the Government recognized the responsibility in regard to the monuments and remains of the country.

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