

## **INDIAN MUSEUM, KOLKATA**

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The Indian Museum originated from the Asiatic Society of Bengal which was created by Sir William Jones in 1784. The concept of having a museum arose in 1796 from members of the Asiatic Society as a place where man-made and natural objects collected could be kept, cared for and displayed.

The objective began to look achievable in 1808 when the Society was offered suitable accommodation by the Government of India in the Chowringhee-Park Street area. On February 3, 1814, Nathaniel Wallich, a Danish botanist, who had been captured in the siege of Serampore but later released, wrote to the council of the Asiatic Society for the formation of a museum out of his own collection and that of the Asiatic Society in Calcutta, volunteering his service as a Curator wherein he proposed two sections—an archaeological, ethnological, a technical section and a geological and zoological one. The council readily agreed and the Museum was created, with Wallich named the Honorary Curator and then Superintendent of the Oriental Museum of the Asiatic Society. Wallich also donated a number of botanical specimens to the museum from his personal collection. In 1815, Mr William Lloyd Gibbons, Asst Secretary and Librarian, was appointed Joint Secretary of the Museum.

After the resignation of Wallich, curators were paid salaries by the Asiatic Society ranging from Rs 50 to Rs 200 a month. However, in 1836, when the bankers of the Asiatic Society (Palmer and Company) became insolvent, the Government began to pay the salary of the Curator from its public funds since a large part of the collection was that of the surveyors of Survey of India.

A temporary grant of Rs 200 per month was sanctioned for maintenance of the museum and library, and J. T. Pearson of the Bengal Medical Service was appointed curator, followed shortly by John McClelland and, after the former's resignation, by Edward Blyth. In 1840, the

Government took a keen interest in geology and mineral resources, and this led to an additional grant of Rs 250 per month for the geological section alone. In 1851 when the Geological Survey of India came into being with the advent of Sir Thomas Oldham, a rented building at 1, Hastings Road now K N Roy Road, the present site of the New Secretariat became its office. The geological collection of the Government of India 'Museum of Economic Geology' at the Asiatic Society, were then transferred to this site in 1856. The Asiatic Society geological collection were however held back with the condition that it would be handed over to the GSI once a Museum for all its collection came into being. It was way back in 1837 that Sir James Princeps, then-Secretary of the Asiatic Society, had written to the Government asking for a Museum paid for by the state. A movement for a full-fledged Museum was thereafter keenly pursued over a decade, and later, with Sir Thomas Oldham, then Superintendent of the Geological Survey of India, at the helm, it gained momentum.

The thrust for a full-fledged Museum was held up due to the intervention of the revolt of the sepoys of the East India Company. The matter was pursued again, once things settled down after India came under the Crown. Thereafter the First Indian Museum Act was passed in 1866 and the foundation of the Indian Museum at its present site laid in 1867. In 1875 the present building on Chowringee Road, presently Jawaharlal Nehru Road, designed by W L Granville in consultation with Sir Thomas Holland, on Chowringee was completed. In 1877 after the retirement of Sir Thomas Oldham in 1876 the Geological Survey of India including the Museum of Economic Geology shifted here from its rented accommodation on 1 Hastings Road. This building had been designated as the site for not just the Asiatic Societies, Oriental Museum's collection and the Economic Geology collection of the Geological Survey of India but also to hold the offices of both.

The Asiatic Society however relinquished its rights preferring to maintain its autonomy from the government. The Geological Survey of India is till date headquartered at the buildings of the Indian Museum Complex and holds exclusive rights over the Geological galleries of the Indian Museum.

The building parallel to Sudder Street commenced in 1888 and occupied in 1891. The next building block at right angle to Sudder Street was erected in 1894. Half of this building was consigned to the Geological Survey of India but by 1912 it was wholly transferred to it.

This museum was established in 1814 by the Asiatic society of Bengal. This museum opened for the public since 1878 onwards. This is the ninth oldest museum of the world, oldest museum in India and the second largest museum in India, after the Madras Museum, and has rare collections of antiques, armour and ornaments, fossils, skeletons, mummies and Mughal paintings. It has a rich collection of Indian treasures from prehistoric to recent times. The museum has more than 60 galleries under six main sectors like art, anthropology, archaeology, geology, industry and zoology.

**ANTHROPOLOGY AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SECTION:** The anthropology and archaeology sections are located in the ground floor. The Anthropological section contains a set of Javanese knives and daggers. A large collection of musical instruments, clothes, dioramas, etc of various tribes of India are on display.

In the archaeological section are antiquities right from prehistoric tools to early historical period. They include Harappan antiquities like seals, coin of different period. The Bharut gallery has remains of the stupa, railing, sculptures, yaksha and yakshis collected from the site. The sculptures of Gandhara, Gupta and Medieval period and also those of Khajuruho, Belur, Konarak are also on display. Beside these, sculptures from Java, Burma is also under display.

**ART SECTION:** The art section spread on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> floor. They are divided into textiles, paintings, decorative art objects from china, and Japan, specimens from Burma, Nepal and Tibet, etc. the display include metal images, bidriwares, ornaments, glass wares, pottery, ivory and wooden objects. The painting gallery has almost all the important schools of miniature paintings include Mughal miniatures, Kangra paintings, Pahari miniatures, Mewar, Jaipur, Marwar, Palm leaf miniatures, and Kalighat, pattas from Bengal and a section is devoted for works of famous painters from Bengal like Abindranath, Nandalal, and Gagenendranath, etc. It also has Tibetan thankas.

**TEXTILE GALLERY:** The textile gallery displays Muslin and Jamdani cloth from Dhaka, Persian carpets, Phulkari works, rumal from Chamba, Shawls from Kashmir, Punjab and Rajasthan. Few cotton sarees from Bengal are also shown.

**GEOLOGICAL SECTION:** The extensive geological section consists of four galleries and has over 80,000 specimens have been displayed. They include rocks, minerals, fossils, etc.

**ZOOLOGICAL SECTION:** The zoological section is rich with innumerable specimens of insects, fishes, reptiles, mammals, stuffed birds and skeletons of mammoth.