



Growth of Museums in Western Odisha

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Abstract

Museum is the repository of the relics representing history and culture of the nation. It is an institution with permanent exhibition where objects either man made or natural are collected and preserved and it is open to the public for knowledge and entertainment. Museums throw light on the history of man showing how he built up his knowledge, how he developed his family life, his skill in art and crafts, his culture and civilization. It has various duties to perform such as collection, documentation storage, display, security, conservation and dissemination of knowledge. Till the middle of the 20th century, museums in India were used as store houses and a limited number of people such as scholars and intellectuals visited the museum. After independence, the Government of free India has taken initiative to establish a number of museums in different parts of India. There is now atleast one state museum has been founded in each state of India to depict a panorama of the totality of the state cultural heritage.¹ The Odisha State Museum at Bhubaneswar was founded in the year 1932 in order to preserve the cultural heritage of various parts of Odisha. After that, some museums in western Odisha were established for the preservation of the historical antiquities of different places. The western Odisha is proud of possessing a good number of museums like multipurpose museums, specialised museums and university museums.

Key Words – Museums, Western Odisha, History, Culture, Inscriptions, Coins, Sculptures, Palm leaf Manuscripts, Armory objects.

Belkhandi Museum:

The museum movement in western Odisha was started towards the first half of the 20th century when the Belkhandi museum was established in 1946-47 with the archaeological objects excavated from the site. It is situated in Kalahandi district. The excavation was conducted by late K.N. Mohapatra the then archaeologist in the ex-state of

Kalahandi and a notable historian. The museum is located at the confluence of the rivers Tel and Utei. The collection of the museum consists of Saptamatrikas, Manasa, Unameheswara, Hara, Kartikeya, Lakshmi-Narayana, Mahisasuramardini, Nataraj, Avalokiteswar, Parvati etc. After the merger of the state, the museum was brought to the administrative control of the Odisha State Museum.²

Dr. N.K. Sahu Museum, Sambalpur University:

The Dr. N.K. Sahu Museum of the P.G. Department of History, Sambalpur University was established in 1970 when the first session of Odisha History Congress met in Sambalpur being hosted by the P.G. Department of History, Sambalpur University. Since then the museum is developing steadily. Now it has become a repository of a large number of valuable collections in various aspects comprising excavated materials, pre-historic tools, sculptures, inscriptions, coins, palm leaf manuscripts etc. Recently the museum has been named as Dr. N.K. Sahu Museum after the name of its founder Prof. N.K. Sahu the first Professor and Head of the Department of History, Sambalpur University. The museum contains the palaeoliths, microliths and neoliths collected from different sites of western Odisha. The Department has conducted excavations at various sites and the excavated materials have been displayed in the museum.³

The section of sculptures has very important specimens of cult icons. The eight armed dancing Ganesha, the child Ganesha, the twenty armed Durga, Saraswati, Sun god are some of the representative sculptures. The images of twenty armed Mahisamardini Durga are rarely found in India. Further the icon of Saraswati mounted on a centipede is a solitary piece of art in Odisha, a prototype of which has yet to be reported.⁴

The museum has acquired a good number of inscriptions both of stone and metal. The inscriptions belong to Bhanja, Tungas,



Somavamsis, Bhaumakaras, Telguchoda and Chouhan rulers. Those epigraphs have been engraved in Kutila and archaic Oriya scripts and composed in Sanskrit and Vernacular languages. The Ganjam plates of Satrubhanja mentions a date in astronomical details which helped in fixing the Bhauma era. The Somavamsi plates of Devapala also have furnished a date helpful for determining Somavamsi chronology. The recently acquired copper plates belonging to Mahabhavagupta Deva from a place Ruchida in Bargarh district confirms the existence of a king named Mahabhavagupta before Janmejaya. The Sonapur stone inscription of the time of Bhanudeva I records the grant of twelve villages for the Lord Baidyanatha.⁵

The museum has a rich collection of coins which includes coins of ancient, medieval and modern period. Punch-marked coins having oval, rectangular, square and irregular shape of silver and bronze metals belonging to Janapada variety and imperial Maurya category are in possession in the museum. Gold coins of Sarabhapuriya king Prasannamatra, Ganga fanams of Imperial Ganga kings and many other types which are the attraction to the scholars and public.⁶

War weapons used in 19th and 20th century A.D. like bow and arrow, jvelurin, concealed long knife, double edge and semi-arched single edged swords, shield of both offensive and defensive type, guns, stone missiles have been kept in the museum. Important are the swords said to have been used by Veer Surendra Sai and his general Janardan Singh and Hathi Singh. These weapons remind the people of their heroic predecessors who had fought for independence for their motherland.⁷

A large number of art and crafts objects have been procured by the museum from its catchment area. These include the measuring units made of brass and bronze, the silver ornaments of both heavy and light varieties, a good number of puja lamps, wall hanging lamps, lamps of Arati, domestic lamps used at night, utensils and many other things of daily used betel box, coin box, small casket for tobacco powder etc. The section reveals the style of living of the people staying in this area.

The portrait gallery of the museum possesses valuable portraits of illustrious sons of the soil. It comprises the portraits of historians, kings, poets, social workers, philanthropists who had significant contributions to the society and people.

The museum has also a palm leaf manuscript library as an independent wing. More than 1500 manuscripts are there in this library. It contains manuscripts on Sruti and Smriti Epics, and

Puranas, Kavyas and Alankaras, Ayurveda and Tantra, Grammar and Lexicon, the Astronomy and Astrology. Most important among these is an illustrated palm leaf of Bhagavata Vols VII and IX collected from a village Bhilingi in Ganjam district. Besides, the museum has acquired some plaster cast and fibre cast of representative sculptures of India and plaster fibre cast of coins of famous royal dynasty as visual aids of the curricular academic programme of the Department of History.⁸

Thus the museum preserves the life and culture of Odisha particularly of western Odisha. It is a prized possession of the Department of History as well as of the Sambalpur History.

Khariar Museum:

The Khariar Museum was organised in 1976 in a private building of the Raja Saheb of Khariar. Subsequently it was shifted to a rented house in the heart of the town. Most of the objects were donated by Jitamitra Singh Deo, the Yuvaraj Saheb of Khariar who was an enthusiast in archaeological and historical research and survey. The articles include sculptures, epigraphs coins of the Sarabhapuriyas and Panduvamsi dynasty, palm leaf manuscripts, armoury objects and art and craft specimens. Some of the excavated finds from Nehena are also to be seen in the collection which was brought out by Jitamitra Singh Deo. Some archaeological objects of Marguda Valley have also been displayed in the museum.⁹

Nuapada Museum:

The District Museum Nuapada was founded in 1976 in order to preserve the precious antiquities of the rural area. Presently the museum is functioning in the District Library Building. This museum is the storehouse of antiquities ranging from pre-historic period to the modern era. It is a great centre of tourist attraction due to its rich cultural heritage in and around it. Everyday thousands of tourist are coming from the neighbouring Chhatisgarh to Pathora Dam and Nuapada.¹⁰

The museum preserves stone and terracotta sculptures, stone tools, arms, palm leaf manuscripts, tribal ornaments etc. The collections are displayed in two galleries.

Nuapada and its adjoining area especially Raj Khariar is famous for Shakti cult. Yogini culture also started from this area. There are large number of fragmentary sculptures related to Shakti worship are found in almost all over the district. Before the construction of the Ranipur Jhariar and Hirapur Jhariar temple the Shakti worship was



prevalent in this area. Therefore a large number of female deities have been excavated and display in the museum.

Bolangir Museum:

The District Museum Bolangir was founded in 1995 with the antiquities collected from the local area. The Kalamandal, Bolangir a leading cultural institution which is looking after the socio-cultural activities of the district played a significant role in the formation of the museum. Now the District Museum Bolangir has been the repository of the various objects ranging from pre-historic period to the present century. Many seminars, meetings had been organised throughout the district for the development of the museum. Lot of response had been marked and people started to donate museum specimens. These specimens were collected and arranged in a Hall and in the year 1996 and independent museum building was constructed in which at present the museum specimens are being displayed.¹¹

The museum comprises the collections of stone sculptures, metal images, metal objects, jewellery, terracotta, pottery, glass objects, wooden objects, textiles, manuscripts, ivory, miniature painting, oil paintings, anthropological objects and others. The archaeological collections of the museum though very few in number but culturally it is very important. The collections include sitting bull, old bricks, human figurine etc. The palm leaf manuscripts collection are more attracting than any other object of the museum for the research scholars. The bamboo made manuscript container are also preserved in the museum. But the important collections of the museum are the tribal artefacts and ornaments of the local tribes. The wooden object like Gajabidala is the most attracting one for its minute workmanship. The traditional art objects of the local area are attracting not only the local visitors but also to the research scholars.¹²

Bargarh Museum:

The District Museum Bargarh was established in 1997 with the initiative of Anu Garg, the then Collector of Bargarh district. At first, the museum started functioning in a rented house near Kali Mandir Chowk adjunct to the Panchayat College Road. Subsequently the museum has been shifted to Gandhi Bhawan and at present it is functioning in the District Library Building.

The District Museum Bargarh is the store house of antiquities ranging from early medieval period to the modern era.

It is a great centre of tourist attraction due to its rich cultural heritage in and around it. The famous Nrusimhanath temple is situated 120 km from Bargarh. These areas once upon a time famous for its Buddhist culture which has been referred by the famous Chinese traveller Hiuen-Tsang.

The museum preserves stone, terracotta sculptures arms, masks, tribal ornaments, modern and old coins, tribal artefacts etc. The collections are displayed in three galleries namely Archaeology, Armoury and Traditional art.

The earliest collection of District Museum Bargarh is the image of Uma-Maheswara, decorated sitting bull, Nayika etc. The museum preserves traditional weaving instruments for which Bargarh is famous. These instruments are though presently used by the weaving community but the collections are belonged to late medieval period. The instruments include wheels, traditional wooden weaving materials and other allied objects. These objects are showing the great traditional culture of weaving clothes in this areas.¹³

The tribal ornaments and artefacts are the priceless collections of the museum. Tribal ornaments of the museum are bangles, necklace, ear stud, pendant etc. The tribal artefacts like bow and arrow, swords and other objects are preserved in the museum. The wooden cycle of the museum is one of the important collection which attracts tourists and visitors.¹⁴

All the museums which are discussed above serve the purpose of creating consciousness, and understanding of the heritage in western Odisha. These museums help to reconstruct the history and culture of Odisha particularly of western Odisha. Therefore the museums of Western Odisha need proper preservation which will definitely be helpful for study and research for the students, scholars and teachers.

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