

ORIGIN & EVOLUTION OF ORISSA STATE MUSEUM

Dr. C. B. Patel

State Museum, Orissa is an institute of inestimable international efflorescence. Spread on the lap of a medieval fortification near Kalpana square, this premier Cultural and Historical organisation is the epitome of Orissan civilisation through ages.



Its magnificent majestic manifestation is marvellous like that of its humble inception. Being the prolific product of the global trend of museum movement of modern period, it was the brain child of a host of historians and connoisseurs like Sri William Jones, Prof. Ghanashyam Das, N. C. Banerjee, H. K. Mahatab, Kedarnath Mahapatra, N. K. Sahu, K. C. Panigrahi, P. Acharya and B. V. Nath.

In 1932 this organisation originated in the premises of Ravenshaw College, Cuttack. By Government notification, it was renamed State Museum and was shifted to Brahmananda building in old Bhubaneswar in 1945-46. From there, it came to Patel hall in 1950 and then to the building near High School of Unit-I.

In December 27th, 1957 Dr Rajendra Prasad, the first President of India laid the foundation of the present Museum building under the leadership of Dr. H. K. Mahatab. In 1960, the great Institution was finally shifted to the present building. Initially it was part of education department. In 1958 it was handed over to the Cultural Affairs Department.

Under the able stewardship of a host of Historians and galaxy of scholar-Musiologists like B. V. Nath, K. N. Mahapatra, Dr. Arjun Joshi, Dr. H. C. Das, this Museum proliferated at an astonishing tempo with collection galore spread over several galleries like Archaeology, Sculpture, Epigraphy, Numismatic, Palaeography, arms and ammunitions, art and craft and Sanskrit manuscript. It was furnished with a gigantic library to facilitate research. Bustling activities of seminar and symposiums rend the horizon of the holistic museum.

Important publications filled the gaps of Orissan History and Culture. Research activities knew no bound. Scholars from far and wide came and the museum reached its pinnacle of prominence and celebrated its silver jubilee in 1985 with Smt. Indira Gandhi the then Prime Minister of India as the Chief Guest The occasion was marked with a Golden Jubilee publication of Orissa Historical Research Journal and another profound book on "Veer Surendra Sai" the indomitable freedom fighter of India. The Museum has earned its name and fame as a premier international institution of rich collection of various and varied rare antiquities ranging in date from 6th century B.C. to modern period.

Orissa State Museum is situated in a kaleidoscopic environ at the cross point of old temple city and new capital metropolis of Bhubaneswar amidst the ruins of an ancient fortification. The colossal museum building houses as many as 56,000 rare antiquities ranging in date from early time to modern period. The collections spread over ten sections namely -1.Archaeology, 2.Epigraphy, 3.Numismatics, 4.Armoury, 5.Mining & Geology, 6.Natural History, 7.Art & Craft, 8.Contemporary Art, 9.Anthropology and 10.Palmleaf Manuscripts. In addition to this, there is a reserve collection of important antiquities for use of research scholars.

Archaeology Gallery:

The archaeology gallery is famous for rare sculptures of Buddhist, Jaina, Saiva, Vaisnava and Sakta pantheon. The displayed materials present a living panorama of Orissan civilization through ages. The exhibits spread over three spacious hall. The subject matters cover a long time span of 2500 years representing the flourishing plastic, artistic, sculptural and architectural trends and traditions of Orissa, The fragment Asokan pillar, bell capital and lion remind one of the great Asokan art traditions. The Buddha image of Khadipada, Amoghasiddhi of Udayagiri and Lokanath from Bhubaneswar etc. make the onlookers spell-bound. Jaina Tirthankar from Podasingidi and Charampa are few marvellous specimens of Jains art tradition. Saptamatrukas from Dharmasala attract the tourist from far and near for their superb workmanship and philosophical symbolism.



The Dikpal figures from Bhubaneswar are exquisite exhibits in the gallery. Krishna-Visnu of Dharmasala is a unique image symbolising the perfect integration of Krishna cult and Visnu cult in one sculptural panel. The Kaliyadalan scene, Vastraharan scene, shifting of elephants in boats are some of the rare specimens of Orissan artists' workmanship. Infact, archaeology gallery is



the repository of sculptural grandeur of Orissa. Different schools of art works are preserved here in chronological sequence enabling the visitors to peep into the glorious past heritage of Orissa through ages. Tantric image like the emaciated Chamunda figure marked as 'AA' grade antiquity is a rare specimen which attracts greatly the foreign tourists. It has already been selected by Govt. of India for display in foreign countries.

Epigraphy and Numismatics:

The early and medieval history of the State, as else where in India, owes greatly to epigraphs and numismatics. The contribution of ancient Orissa in this context to Indian civilization is remarkable. The Epigraphy gallery has the distinction of possessing original



copper plate grants, stone inscriptions, a good number of plastercast impressions and estampages of the originals. They include the Bhadrakli stone inscription (2nd century AD), the Asanpat stone inscription (6th century AD) inscribed down below an eight armed

Nataraja, the Jayrampur copper plate of Mahasamanta Achyuta, (the earliest grant in the collections) and the copper plate grants of the Sailodbhavas, Bhaumakaras, Bhanjas, Gangas and Gajapatis. These constitute very important source materials for research into the history and culture of the region. The numismatic treasures of the museum consisting of punch-marked coins of the pre-Mauryan and Mauryan age, Kusana and Puri-Kusana coins, Gupta gold coins, Sri Nanda, Kalachuris, Yadava coins Ganga fanams and silver coins of Mughal emperors throws considerable light on the history of the various ruling dynasties. The newly acquired gold coins of Sarabhapuriyas & Somovanshis rulers are some of the significant coin collections of Orissa State Museum.



Armoury :

The section depicting ancient weapons like swords, shields, battle axes, guns and cannons, marks an important milestone of Orissan Military traditions. The people living in the present exciting century, when the atom has been split and space travel has become a reality, can well admire the armoury



of our 'ancients' which speak of their military strength and prowess. The prize collection of Orissa State Museum is a personal gun of late Madhusudan Dash, one of the makers of modern Orissa. Recently some battle axe specimens & knives have been tested in institute of physics Bhubaneswar in PIXE technique, which has revealed the alloy technique of ancient India for strengthening & sharpening metal weapons.

Mining and Geology:

Orissa's rich mines with their treasures of iron ore, chromite, lime, lead, coal, bauxite, tin and semi precious stones are the envy of outsiders and have made a significant contribution to the development of the State. A variety of stones like sandstone, soapstone, granite, chlorite etc. have been the basic materials for building great temples and monuments. The Mining and Geology gallery, opened with the assistance of the Directorate of Mines, contains samples of minerals and models of mining operations.

Natural History:

This section mainly covers the fauna of the state i.e. birds and mammals. Vertebrate and invertebrate specimens are colourfully displayed in two spacious halls. This attracts



the instant attention of visitors. The dioramas depicting the Royal Bengal Tiger family, the Leopards, variety of Bisons, Nilgais, Black Bucks, Pangolin, a family of mouse deer amidst their natural habitat and birds of different species give a glimpse



of the large variety of animals found in the local environs. The gallery has been recently renovated to attract most tourists & visitors.

Art and Crafts:

Utkal, ancient name of Orissa “means land of Excellence in Art”. The glorious heritage of Orissan art, as embodied in its antiquities, thrives even today among the numerous artisans of the state. The art and crafts gallery is a vast repository of



exquisite pieces shaped with consummate skill at the hands of traditional artisans. Large free standing sculptures, cymbal players and drummers in sandstone in the style of the Sun temple of Konark, lofty Kandarpa Parvati, Chariot of the Love-God, Panchmukhi Siva, the image of Surya, varieties of wood carvings that once adorned royal courts, terra-cotta figures, silver Hawda,



Tamzan and thrones from royal courts, applique and lacquer works of superb quality, Ramalila scenes in Kalamkari, Patta paintings, Giant brass bulls, solid Radha images, tree lamps, Dokra items, traditional, bellmetal utensils and a unique hoard of Buddhist bronzes from Achyutarajpur are but a few samples of the bewildering variety of Orissan handicrafts of exuberant artistic excellence.

Manuscript Gallery :

This section, with a large collection of rare manuscripts including more than 37,000 palmleaf manuscripts, is a unique treasure of the State Museum. These are grouped into 27 subjects which provide source materials to researchers and scholars. These manuscripts are in Oriya, Telugu, Bengali, Persian, Nepalese and Sanskrit. There are writings on bambooleaf, Bhurja bark, Kumbhi bark, and handmade paper. The earliest



manuscripts Abhinava Gita Govinda by Kavichandra Ray Divakar Mishra dedicated in the name of Gajapati Purushottam Deva, Bhakti Bhagavata, Paipallada Samhita, Atharva Veda, Vedartha Prakash Tika on Kanva Samhita, Jnanavali Tantra, Angirasakalapa and Sangita Narayan are some rare acquisitions available in this section. Illustrated palmleaf manuscripts with typical Orissan style paintings, Ganjapas, beautiful calligraphic and medieval miniatures and Gopalila paintings provide an useful record of ancient Orissan painting tradition. Parrot shaped, fish shaped, fan shaped, sword shaped & beaded mala along with ivory manuscripts are some other exquisite collections of the Museum.

Anthropology Gallery :

The four dimensional Anthropology Section of Orissa State Museum is visitors' attraction. The diorama depicting tribal life & culture amidst original environmental milieu & ethos are of special significance. Their musical instruments with real audio presentations are the eye catchers of visitors. The medieval dress & drapery system displayed in the



gallery speaks of the ethnological & folk dress design of the various regions of the state. The tribal hut assemblage presented in a special gallery with every details of an original tribal household is infact a rare exhibit of the Museum. Above all the Pre-historic and Proto-



historic artifacts & echofacts like palaeoliths, neoliths, potteries & plaster casts of Proto-historic rock engravings & Pre-historic rock shelter paintings are some other marvels of the Anthropology Section.

The Patta painting gallery with depiction of Ravananugraha, Tadakabadha and Kaliyadalana scenes etc. are some special presentations. The contemporary



art gallery is adorned with modern paintings & sculptures for appreciation of general visitors and connoisseurs.

The research section with a rich library is facilitating research work in the state. Active research is in progress on the issue of birth place of Lord Buddha. A place named Kapileswar, Bhubaneswar is being identified afresh as the real birth place of Buddha. Several volumes of Orissa Historical Research Journals along with an index volume has already been published containing new research materials Orissa, thus presents a holistic & multipurpose museum of international distinction.

The new collection of Four-headed Manasa figure of South Indian art idiom, six-headed Kartikeya figure of Kalachuri period & a broken temple pillar with erotic and tantric representation of Kosaliyan plastic pattern are some of the exuberant specimens which invite attention of one and all. A visit to Orissa State Museum, Bhubaneswar is intact a memorable event for scholars, general visitors and international tourists.

*Superintendent,
Orissa State Museum,
Bhubaneswar-14.
Ph.: 0674-2431597*