

## S U M M A R Y

### **Title of the topic**

Problems of Museum Architecture

### **Introduction to the topic**

Architecture is known to have originated from the Greek word 'Architecton' meaning carpenter. Though by now the distinction between the above two is too obvious to us ; the English variant not only remained in its distorted, yet evolved form but also acquired an independent and special status as adorable form of art in the domain of civilised human society.

The reasons are not far to seek. Ever since its origin *homo sapiens* sought desperately a sheltered existence in order to protect themselves from the vagaries of nature and attack from wild beasts. Since that time immemorial to the modern day this basic need remained as a must in the daily life of humans. Naturally a lot of thought and action would be accorded to the fulfillment of this need in a satisfactory, comfortable and tasteful manner. Thus evolved this form of study which is combination of both science and art for the practical and emotional requirements it has to cater.

Going by the intensity and imperative of its requirement reasons are not far to seek that architecture today has acquired the status of mother of all forms of art. With this zenithal profile it carries great expectations out of it in all walks of human life. Structural forms are of many varieties based on their purpose and accordingly built to perform a specified function. Their success rate depends upon the efficiency in their planning and construction.

### **Context of the problem and the author's contribution**

The topic of this investigation confines the scope of analysis to the architecture of 'museum' alone. Before the author sets out to get into further details regarding this, it may be admitted at the outset that neither the problem of MUSEUM ARCHITECTURE nor solutions to it are new by any means both domestically and internationally. Yet, I chose to

investigate this quaint and trait topic with a conviction that the problems concerned to this still need to be explored periodically and the pool of existing information about it has to be updated and reviewed in modern context. The author has neither a specialised study or training in this subject nor any practical experience in this area. However, the intention to state this is not at all to be defensive. On the contrary, I welcome a critical scrutiny of this work. Let me admit that I could not include all the aspects of museum architecture as I felt that a few aspects are specific to the needs of individual institution. Regarding certain aspects I do not have anything substantially new or more to contribute to whatever is already stated. Likewise, I did not probe into the aspects which I consider are redundant or alien; and have no or little contemporary or native application. Nevertheless, I took every care to be as comprehensive, relevant and exhaustive as possible. I tried to view this problem in as many angles and perspectives as possible. I attempted to be as eclectic as I could and referred and analysed every major event exclusively held on this topic. The repeated coverage of this topic periodically at museological fora both domestically and internationally, and realisation of building 'shell' as primordial conceivable form of base to provide shelter, protection which facilitates a broad range of corresponding functions relevant to a museum's purpose; and the lack of a substantial recorded evidence or literature on this topic at least in the last two decades were the reasons that prompted and led me to investigate this topic with a view to proposing practicable solutions.

### **History of the problem**

Ever since museums have become public institutions with the purpose of collection, preservation and education of cultural heritage; the need for a suitable edifice to house, store and exhibit its possessions for public delectation and enjoyment has been a matter of serious consideration. Even when museums were in their nascent stage of development as private collections, the various terms used to describe or mention them indicate the significance of the physical structure or shelter not merely as a protective form but a functional entity with a specific purpose. The author seeks to quote Alma Wittlin to give a historic perspective of the problem.

Though the historic account of the earliest use of the term 'museum' dates back to 332 BC the need for alternative terms arose with the change in the nature and character of the prototype and the associated functions. This led to formation of variants with a variety of names such as 'Gallery' 'Pinacotheca', 'Cabinet', 'Chamber', 'Closet', 'Kammer', 'Rarothea',

‘Repository’, ‘Thesaurus’, ‘Penetralia’, ‘Rarotheca’, ‘Cimeliarchium’, etc.

A brief explanation of the above would not only reveal the purpose they used to serve but also of their likely location and form. Museum initially was a place of learning, inspiration and contemplation. As the time passed, it used to denote a place where various specimens of interest and beauty are kept. Thus it dissociated from the existing and previous meaning of the word museum. Apart from that, term Gallery meant ‘a long narrow room, well lit on both sides’. Term Pinacotheca ‘in ancient Greece implied a collection of paintings, or sculpture, or rather the room in which they were they were exhibited’. Cabinet, Chamber and Closet were the names given to rooms of collections by private collectors. Cabinet was often used in English, French and German, Chamber was French where as Kammer was German.

It may be stated that some of these earlier forms are existing even today in their original character; and accordingly have their bearing on contemporary museological principles and practice. Thus taking this historic account into consideration has valid implications on the understanding of this problem leading to finding likely solutions.

### **Rationale of the study**

According to the understanding of the author two basic traits of the subject Museology especially in Indian context are, first it is alien and second it is vaguely understood by a majority. Museology being a highly interdisciplinary subject the need to understand the basic principles of different subjects which has a bearing on the museum activity and functions need not be specially emphasised. Within the two hundred years old long history of museum development in this country the special attention paid to this important topic are scanty and sporadic. In addition to the occasional reference found in the museum literature and reports such as Markham and Hargreave’s, during pre-independence epoch; the only worthwhile discussion with a special focus exclusively on this topic was held at Mysore way back in 1971 by Museums Association of India and in recent past in New Delhi in 1993 by the Indo-US Sub-commission. A monogram was published on the proceedings of the former and a few papers were presented at the latter event by a few leading museologists. Considering the multifarious significance of this subject the museum buildings require a substantial understanding and thorough scrutiny at periodic intervals. The fact that this topic is a matter of serious concern, is

evident from the debates and discussions that were organised at professional fora and gatherings all over the world from a very long time in the past of the museum field.

### **Need of the study**

Unlike many other aspects concerned to organization of a museum, the probability of failure (whether major or minor) in achieving a desired result; is greater with regard to a museum building for the diversity and complexity of objectives it has to fulfil. Therefore, a proper understanding of the scope and need of a structure is an imperative in order to build a well designed and successful museum building on the part of the all the people associated with a building project of a museum. From the preliminary studies carried out on this topic it is inferred that this subject is understood and developed basically out of experience and experimentation than out of any systematic study in advance. The reasons and compulsions for such approach are however not far to seek. During the formative stages museums of a newly liberated nation eager to catch up with the rest of the world progress took place spontaneously and in a spur based on impulse and intuition rather than a rational and scientific study of the method. That phase of urgency was over and now there is a need to understand things in their proper perspective in order to ensure complete success in the future projects of the same or similar nature.

### **Importance of the study**

This investigation has the twin objective of expanding and upgrading the existing pool of knowledge on this topic. It seeks to review, analyse and compile all the reported and published literature of this topic by different agencies in this country so far. The author of this script made every possible effort to find out and incorporate all major events and activities that were held until now on this theme. But for some scattered information spread across different places, confined to a handful of museum leaders and available at a select few institutions; there is vacuum of information regarding this topic in general. This investigation attempts to fill this existing lacunae in the available literature and focus attention on a few neglected aspects.

### **Methodology followed**

The approach to the problem was made by undertaking the following pattern. It began with literature survey in order to acquire basic and

elementary idea regarding the nature and intensity of problem and its various dimensions. It also facilitated to learn more about the problems faced by museums in the past and the attempts made by them to overcome those hurdles. This included study of available literature at majority of the prominent places known for their active museological interests and participation. The nature of literature encompassed books, reviews, articles, reports, journals, notes, minutes, recommendations, suggestions and opinions, proceedings etc.

In addition to this, extensive field work was carried out across the country with a view to studying the situation *in situ* and have a first-hand account of the problem. Needless to elaborate this procedure has no alternative or substitute and has its special advantages in the assessment of a situation.

Further, questionnaires were prepared and sent to a selected set of leading museums known for their museological standing in one aspect or the other; in order to understand their perspective and view point regarding this topic which helped to compare and contrast the findings of the author and draw meaningful conclusions about certain aspects.

Above all, several discussions held with many museum leaders and various professionals on various occasions while undertaking this work, immensely aided the author in indicating a direction or hinting a probable solutions to a problem; and enriched the statements noted in this text with their rich and variegated opinions and experience.

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## **Presentation**

The entire work is summed up in to two units.

The first unit consists of five chapters viz. Architecture, Museum Architecture, External Architecture, Internal Architecture, Construction and Allied Matters.

The second unit consists of two sub-units comprising of - important suggestions and recommendations made during professional events on this subject; and the opinions expressed by senior museum professionals which are elicited in the form of answers to questions framed in a questionnaire by the author on this subject; which were furnished in the form of appendices.

These two units together propose to give a comprehensive coverage about the various aspects of museum architecture.

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Any beautiful structural construction is a form of art. The Lotus Temple of the Bahai sect at New Delhi is an example of this point.

Opera House, Sydney

(Courtesy- *The Times of India*, Bennette and Coleman)

