

INTRODUCTION

To begin with the author of this script seeks to give the meaning of the words museum and architecture and their interrelationship.

The fourth edition of the Oxford Advanced Learner's dictionary gives the meaning of a museum as “ *building* in which objects of artistic, cultural, historical or scientific importance and interest are displayed ” .

Chambers dictionary gives two meanings to *architecture* as-the art of building and the style of building. It could be deduced from the events of ancient human civilisation, that architecture is one among the oldest form of art related to the sheltered existence . It is evident as a ‘highly creative form of art’ through the manifestations in the form of magnificent structures and fascinating edifices that attract, amaze and impress its creator, viewer and user alike.

Several dictionaries must have given different meanings to this term which in essence would be close to the above. But the crux of matter pertinent to present discussion here is the first word in the above meaning of the museum as a BUILDING. So, even to a lay person what occurs or strikes first in his thought about a museum is a physical structure- which contains curiosities; which in Indian context is better termed as “Ajayabghar”. The author once again attempts to emphasize the importance of an edifice that shelters objects meant generally for display. When this is the understanding of a lay person about a museum who may or may not be a visitor in a life-time or a frequent user in exceptional cases; for the expert it would definitely be a matter of serious concern and greater importance.

The definition given by International Council of Museums, world professional body on museum matters states museum as “ a permanent, non-profit making, public institution that collects, preserves, researches, creations of man and nature ”.

Again here the first mention is about the need for existence of a PERMANENT structure, as by now the museum profession knows fully well that a fundamental requirement for the establishment of a museum is a structure to shelter and secure its *raison d etre* - its collection, and to support the activities based on them ; as it is understood that museums are established to last forever.

The foregoing may suffice here in order to initiate a discussion on the importance of a museum building. This should logically lead the topic for further discussion on the details of the building and its salient features. To

dwelling on it it is necessary to know first about the subject, that deals with the art of building known as ARCHITECTURE. Since this investigation strives to encompass the various aspects of museum building in its manifold manifestations, it is titled as MUSEUM ARCHITECTURE

Architecture per se is defined differently by several people who are concerned with it in one way or the other. Generally, this appealed to a client- the user, an architect-the creator, some times even a critic- an observer. Depending upon the intensity of their emotional feelings or creative ability these definitions vary from - 'building beautifully' as quoted by Smita Baxi¹ who is an architect by training and a museum professional with considerable experience in key posts at two leading museums of the country. This one individual who mostly wrote on matters related to architecture and exhibition. She wrote the above as a tag end to one of her articles. Something so simple which appears just as a passing remark could at times may carry a lot of meaning if one reflects on it. Of course, in order to do that one must either have necessary training or an aptitude or an opportunity or an experience on related matters. On one hand it appears as familiar or commonsense matter on the other hand it may serve as a reminder. Every sensible person associated with a building project would invariably attempt to make it beautiful construction only but the ideal objective can always be attained? would it easily transform into the cherished goal? if yes, at what cost? if no, what are the consequences? These are some of the few questions the author seeks to answer, analyse and focus on. Confirming the popular adage 'grass is greener on the other side of the fence' and contrary to the observations and opinions expressed by some Indian delegates and experts who have been abroad on several occasions for various professional participations; examples galore across the globe of failed projects of museum buildings. It is unfortunate that, as a result, we not only had a distorted view of the fact, but also a feeling of guilt as if we only erred in our context, and could not succeed in building suitable abodes. Without stretching this matter further, the author seeks to mention at this juncture, that this work mainly focuses on problems of museum architecture, considering the Indian context as a backdrop. However, no strict geographic boundary is observed when it comes to explaining a point which is universally applicable. The author is aware of the climatic differences across the world and took that aspect into consideration while making suggestions regarding any native problem.

¹ . Smita J. Baxi, Exhibition of Museum Architecture- In India and Abroad, *Museum Architecture*, Museums Association of India, New Delhi, p.83.

Even for that matter, there can't be any uniform climate in a vast territory of a sub-continent like India, as was stated long ago by late Dr. Moti Chandra¹ while expressing his views on this subject, long ago.

It is mentioned by Markus Lupertz² 'Architecture, which is often called itself as mother of all art.' If it is true then architecture even as a form of art has a greater importance. Art can be aesthetic, entertaining or utilitarian. Architecture has greater significance as it comprises of all these functions.

Likewise, authors like Rudyard Kipling wrote in praise of the museum buildings which fascinated their imagination and caught their attention.

So, by all means it is imperative for a museologist dealing with museum architecture to know some basic elements of architecture in order to understand the requirements and possibilities of museum buildings. With this view, the author transcribes Yatin Pandya³ in the following:

Although a form of art, architecture cannot afford the luxury of being esoteric like other forms of art; buildings have to be functional, too. At the same time, being simply functional-machine like-is not enough, buildings should have to be banal. The very challenge of architecture lies in turning necessities into virtues. *Utilitas* (activity), *Firmitas* (firmness) and *Versustas* (beauty) being the dictums of architecture, building should be functional, durable and aesthetically pleasing. Thus, the 'freedom' of art has to unite with the 'discipline' of engineering.

Manifold manifestations :

Architecture is a visual-spatial manifestation of a philosophy, in different ways: Some sensory, touching the senses; some emotional touching the heart; some metaphorical, that touch the psyche.

This is why each building affects us differently. Architecture that only touches the senses is glamorous. That which touches the heart is significant, but that touches the psyche is immortal timeless. It is the spirit of timelessness which brings buildings alive as true architecture. This feeling can only come about when buildings evoke a sense of belonging whereby allowing people to identify with them.

¹ . Moti Chandra, National Reconstruction and museums, *Journal of Indian Museums*, v.1, 1944, Museums Association of India, New Delhi, p.16.

² . Marcus Lupertz, Art and Architecture, New Museums in the Federal Republic of Germany, Academy editions, London, 1986, p.30.

³ . Yatin Pandya, Unveiling the architects, *Times of India*, 1-7-1991, Ahmedabad

For example, a well-proportioned, meticulously executed wall remains exclusively a three-dimensional object, functioning only as a physical and visual barrier until graffiti appear on it. When this occurs, the wall begins to transform into a “communicator” as it starts expressing more about itself and its user. In the same manner, green paint attaches significance to a wall for a Muslim: It imbibes a sense of belonging. The same wall when oriented toward Mecca, gets further charged with a special meaning. It becomes a place for prayer. A wall in the east with a niche for a lamp does the same for a Hindu. A simple three-dimensional object has become an “event”. Architecture is a catalytical phenomenon which transforms volumes into spaces.

The elements of building, its scale, size, volume, levels of illumination as well as motifs and decoration and the combinations of these, instill in the observer ethos appropriate to the place.

The making of architecture therefore calls for an all round exposure of sensitivity to an in-depth understanding of a wide range of subjects as well as society in which we operate. Training in architecture largely involves acquiring of communication skills; exercises in design and perception; understanding of building as the result of complex systems of interrelated forces; comprehension of construction processes; knowledge of building materials and structural behaviour inquiries into architectural development through history; appreciation of varied forms of art and an exposure to the allied humanities. As such, an enhancement of perceptive, creative and analytical abilities a process of personnel involvement and exploration rather than a mechanical repetition of pre-defined rules.

Architecton-the Greek term for architect, literally means ‘chief carpenter’. Likewise, the Sanskrit equivalent *Sthapati* means ‘master of space’. The traditional training in architecture integrated various aspects of social life in terms of social, religious, cultural, economic and political realities of a time and place. Norms and tools of design were, therefore, in consonance with the societal values commonly shared.

Several styles such as classical, modern, rococo, post-modernism, neo-classicism, deconstructivism, critical regionalism and so on have emerged as a result of different interpretations during different times at different places, the result of forces of climate, technology and society.

Early civilisations perceived man as a unit of the larger system, the universe. This helped to ensure harmony between man and elements of nature.

The ideologies prevalent development of astronomy and astrology were encoded in abstract diagrams (mandalas) which gave instructions for laying out cities, selection of sites, orientation of buildings, proportioning of building elements, or even numbers of doors and windows.

Feng-Shue, meaning wind and water, the ancient art/science of siting building in China did the same. Based on a conception that every part of the earth is a ‘universe miniaturised’, the topography of the site and its physical features (mound, lake etc.) would reveal the good and bad forces of the nature. Further, through mathematical

calculations the geomancer would derive if the site was beneficial or not, as well as suggests the mean of siting of the building in a landscape.

In Europe, the Greeks perceived architecture as an object in the landscape which was then overlaid with rigorous aesthetic parameters generating the classical orders of building elements. These buildings reflected systems of proportioning and visual corrections to minimise distortions due to perspective effect.

Modernism influenced by industrial revolution, extensively used industrially produced components and materials (concrete, glass, steel). Buildings were perceived as an integral system of form, mass, volume, play of light and shade, material and technology and modernism tried to mould these into a standardised formula to evolve an international order based on a universal truth as understood at that time. Inadvertently, it made architecture oblivious to if not divorce from the local expressions and expectations vernacular tradition.

Post modernism, rebelling against the stands called for a resurrection of traditional motifs for arts to be more communicative to the lay observer, not remaining the preserve of the initiated. This movement resulted in buildings with deep assemblage of traditional elements.

Various other schools of thought namely, Critical Regionalism, Neoclassicism etc. also appreciated traditional wisdom but educated their interpretation in newer materials and techniques while retaining the essence of a place.

Concern here, is not to analyse the pros and cons of these theories, ideologies or movements but rather with the phenomenon of changing perception and values of a society in a state of flux. Coping with change in technology, culture and political systems. The role of architect has been of an interpreter, translator or more precisely a facilitator.

For, a given place, climate is largely constant over time. Technology is variant, yet tangible enough to be interpreted as well as understood. The most intangible and mutant factor in culture which remain in a constant state of flux. The number of forces effecting it also increase with increased exposure, communication and growth.

This necessities that architects as sensitive individuals and responsible professionals and particular members of the community be well rooted in the society such that they are able to understand the complex realities of figure ground, to interpret rightly the dimensions change and most importantly to evolve developmental norms, appropriate to a given time and place. The emerging architecture will consequently respond to the way life of the people, their needs and aspirations, while the architect is a friend, philosopher and guide.

It is highly creative form of art which according to Klotz¹ 'is basically, always and everyway of space defining in nature'.

¹ . Heinrich Klotz, New Museum Buildings in the Federal Republic of Germany, Academy editions, London, 1986, p.19.

Expressing his views on architecture with reference to *housing*, Gopal Bhargava,¹ observes 'the housing and shelter concept concerns the living accommodation of people. Housing connotes well planned, built-up tenements, with an aesthetic and architectural design. Within the concept of a housing plan, economic affordability, public utility requirements and landscaping assume importance.

Shelter does not mean simply protection from the vagaries of nature but also requires a series of services that are an integral part of the specific location dwelling. It not only requires adequate water supply but also arrangements for the disposal of human waste and refuse that must be taken into consideration in the provision of healthy, environmentally sustainable shelter'. Having said the above about architecture in general, the author proceeds to discuss about 'Museum Architecture'.

¹ . Gopal Bhargava, Housing plan and innovative technologies, *Employment News*, 15-21 August, 1998, p.14.



V. *Charles Towneley, Esq. (with his dog at his feet) and his friends in the Towneley Gallery, Westminster, London.* Painting by J. Zoffany. The room is filled with marbles which the collector bequeathed to the British Museum. Reproduced by permission of Burnley Corporation, and by courtesy of Sir Robert Witt, collection of photographs.

The Galerie du Carrousel in the Louvre, Paris, designed by architects Pei, Macary and Wilmotte. (Courtesy- *Museum International*, v.49, n.4, Unesco)

-A successful example of alteration



The British Museum in its initial accommodation, known as Montague House, London. (courtesy- *Museums, in search of usable future*, The MIT Press)

The Natural History Museum, London. (Courtesy- *Museum International*, v.49, n.4, Unesco)

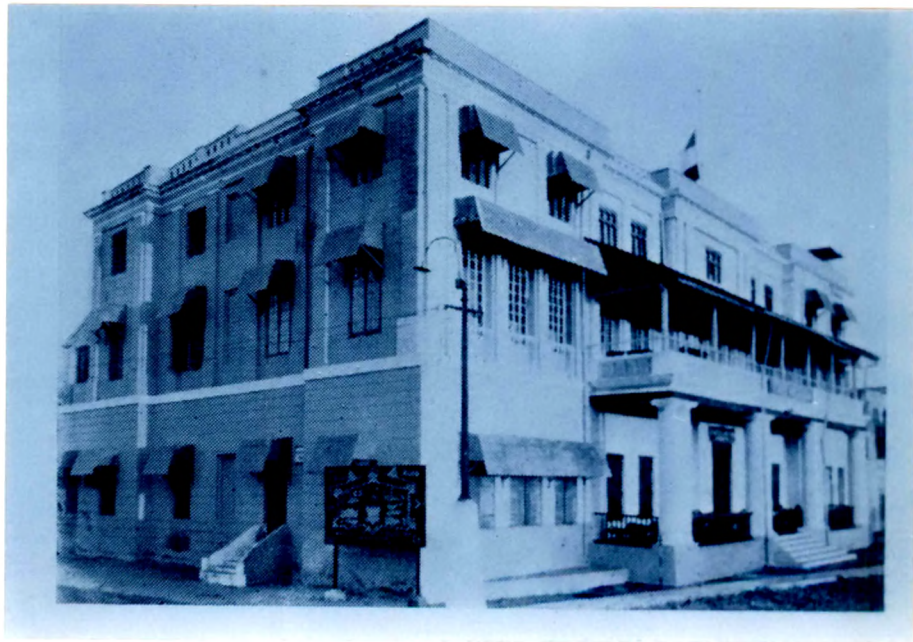


XVIIA. Montague House, the building in which the British Museum was originally housed, seen from Great Russell Street.



The Red Fort, Delhi, built by the Moghul Emperor, Shah Jahan (1639-1648) contains a site museum devoted to the history of the Fort and Moghul period, housed in the Mumtaz Mahal, one of the palaces. (Courtesy- *Museum*, v.XIX, n.4, Unesco)

Fort Museum, Fort St. George, Madras. Large label at angle of building showing plan of Fort St. George. (Courtesy- *Museum*, v.XVIII, n.4, Unesco)



Government Museum, Madras. National Art Gallery opened for the centenary celebrations of the museum in 1951. Early 20th century building for the exhibition of paintings, out-standing bronzes and some examples of decorative arts. (Courtesy- *Museum*, v.XVIII, n.4, Unesco)

