

## Kanyakumari Government Museum – A Study

**C.R. Siva Kala**

Department of History, Holy Cross College (Autonomous), Nagercoil - 629004.

Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli - 627012.

Email: [sivakala@holycrossngl.edu.in](mailto:sivakala@holycrossngl.edu.in).

### ABSTRACT

*The word 'museum' brings up different kinds of thought to different people. For some, it is a storehouse of treasures and curios of the past, while for others it may be a centre of learning that provides knowledge on various cultures or a place where dust covered objects are dumped in endless number of galleries. In India, there is generally a lack of awareness among the public about the concept of museums and what is actually stands for, despite the nearly two – century old museum heritage. The milieu is gradually changing thanks to the initiatives of various individuals and institutions.*

**Keywords:** Museum, Archaeology, Anthropology, Inscriptions, Coins, Geology

### Introduction

The term 'museum' derives from the Greek root *mouseion*, which means the temple of muses - the nine Greek goddesses, who are the daughters of *Zeus* and *Mnemosyne* according to the Greek mythology. These goddesses were revered as deities of various arts and crafts. Gradually, the term began to denote the place where antiquities and objects of arts, crafts and science are exhibited.

The word museum is a Latin word. The word museum first appears in the Oxford Dictionary in 1671. A museum is given many things like academy, library, college common space, academic hall, collection of exhibits. In 1688, The Royal University of London began to call the place where the collections were kept called as museum. Murray in 1904 and Whitlin in 1949 helped to bring the word 'museum' into English. In India, it was initially called Wonder House and Saraswati Salai. It was called by various names like Exhibition Hall, Art Gallery, Showroom, while in Tamil, *Arumborudkkatchi*, *Arungkatsiyagam* and *Arumporul Kappakam*.

### Brief History

The history of museums can be traced back to the Classical period. The 'mouseion' of Alexandria, dating back to third century BC is considered as the earliest museum. Though the Chinese, the Japanese and several other communities did have private collections of objects of cultural and natural heritage in the early periods, the modern public museum is a European brainchild. Thus the history of modern museums does not go beyond the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The Renaissance movement, exchange of goods and idea with the opening up of trade routes, colonization, the growth of the places of worship of different faiths and patronage by the

kingdoms and churches contributed tremendously to the museum movement across the globe. Many museums were thrown open to the public from the 17<sup>th</sup> century onwards, important being the Louver Museum, Paris; the British Museum, London, and the Museum of Metropolitan Art, New York. The collections of these early museums not only upheld the patriotic fervour, but also provided a place of prominence to various objects acquired by the Western countries from their colonies. Several museums were also set up in the colonies in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, e.g. the Indian Museum of Calcutta (1814).

Over the years, the nature of museums has been changing. Earlier there were only archaeological or anthropological museums, but now there are museums for almost each and every subject or category of objects on the earth. Nowadays more private museums are coming up across the world. In the modern museums, education goes hand in hand with entertainment. Keeping this trend in mind, many museums across the world create interactive exhibits, which provide entertainment as well as knowledge about the objects and various subjects.

### **Icom**

The International Council of Museums, known as ICOM, was set up in the year 1946 at Paris, to create awareness among the world population about the need to sustain museums in the community. In the post – Second World war period, the very presence of museums was used as a symbol for a country's heritage and culture.

The ICOM defined Museums as a non-profit making industry in the service of the society. Museum performs various functions, such as collecting objects, documenting the collected objects, educating people about the collected objects and finally preserving them for posterity.

### **Importance of Museum**

- Museums play an important part in heritage management.
- Museums help to promote and boost heritage tourism.
- Museums will emerge as major centres of informal learning, especially in the context of globalization which has been demolishing traditional ways of life and cultural systems across the globe.
- Museums are indispensable institutions for the promotion of cultural and natural integrity.

### **Kanyakumari Government Museum**

The first Indian Museum started in India was at Calcutta in 1814 A.D. Madras Museum was the second museum in India was started in 1851. Types and kinds of Museum are National Museum, Regional Museum, State Museum, District Museum, Archaeology site and

Institutional Museum. One of the earliest salvage site museums is at Nagarjunakonda in Andhra Pradesh.

Kanyakumari, the southernmost landmark of India where the sun rises and sets in the sea and where the three seas meet and merge is the centre chosen for the establishment of the tenth museum under the Directorate of Museums, Tamil Nadu. Kanyakumari District Museum was established on 30<sup>th</sup> January 1991 by Tamil Nadu State Government. Historically, it is rich in Pandyan relics and monuments.

This Government Museum of Kanyakumari is a multi-type object exhibits museum which contains many exhibit showcases on various fields like Archaeology, Anthropology, History, Numismatics, Zoology, Geology, Botany, Children Section and local history, etc.,. Some important collections from Archaeology, Anthropology and History, Numismatics, Geology, Zoology and Botany, local history are Palaeolithic, Microlithic and Neolithic stone tools, terracotta images, original wooden temple car of Swamithoppu temple and wood carvings, Kani tribes and their objects, Travancore kings and family photos and paintings, Iron – cannon and cannon balls, British coins, Travancore Kingdom coins, Indian coins released after 1947, Rock and minerals, rare earth's sands, stuffed birds and animals, wet preserved-marine species, whale-bones, sample wooden pieces, Household objects of Nanjil Nadu, photos of Kanyakumari district, historical and tourist places, beaches and religious centres, etc, were exhibited.

The idols of Thirumangai Alwar, Manikkavasagar, Rama, Natarasar, Devi, Balakrishnan, Sivagnathan are on display in this museum belong to the 15<sup>th</sup> century A.D. The wood carvings extracted from a temple car of Ramanathapuram are exhibited. Eighteen feet wooden temple car of Swamithoppu Ayya Vaikundaswamy temple, received as a gift and exhibited in the special exhibition hall has exquisite wood carvings of saints, dancers, musician, nomadic girl, etc. The things of betel box, incense burner, hanging lamps, pavai lamp, *gendi* made of brass used by the people of Karaikudi in their day to day life were exhibited in the metal ware showcase.

Musical instruments such as urumi, tamuku, nadaswaram, panchagi and swaragut which are showcased in a display resemble the various type of musical tradition practised by the people in ancient times. Coins are the primary sources to know the history of a Country. With the help of coins, people get to know the chronology of the kings, the economic condition of the country and about the development of arts. A set of model metal-cast coins from 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C. right down through the age of Kushans, Guptas, Chalukyas, Mughals, Cholas, Pandyas, Vijayanagar and the East India Company adorn the numismatics showcase.

Things like flint and stone, bamboo container for collecting honey, Kokkarai a musical instrument, betel-nut box, Bamboo fire making casket of the Kani tribes, a indigenous tribes community of Kanyakumari district are displayed in Diorama showcase. The ancient war weapons like sword of Kattabomman's period, Iron-cannon and cannon balls collected from Udayagiri fort at Kalkulam taluk in Kanyakumari district are being displayed depicting the type of warfare of the ancient Tamils. A few oil paintings of western style and Indian themes are on display in the paintings gallery. The copies of paintings of famous artist, Raja Ravi Varma's work, some important copy of paintings are titled such as Incontemplation, Mohini Rugmangada, Papa, a milkmaid, Sakuntala, lady with swarbat are adorned the painting gallery. Travancore gallery was inaugurated by Sri Uthiradam Thirunal Marthanda Varma on September 17<sup>th</sup> 2004, was set up to showcase the period of Kanyakumari district under the Travancore rulers before 1956. It displays the photos of the Travancore kings who ruled Kanyakumari highlighting their achievements. Travancore coins, Chakra stamps, first day covers, documents, Travancore emblem, palm-leaf manuscripts, some interesting wooden objects and few photos of the Diwan Sir C.P.Ramaswamy Iyer's achievements in Travancore kingdom and Gandhiji's travel to Tamil Nadu and costume dolls of the people.

### **Conclusion**

Kanyakumari Government Museum has come to join the ranks of the distinguished and proud of Kanyakumari district. Archaeology and Anthropology artefacts reflects the Palaeolithic, Microlithic and Neolithic age, Kani tribal people life style material evidences are exhibited in the museum Exhibits of wood carvings, temple car of Ayya Vaikundaswamy at Swamithoppu, paintings of Raja Ravi Varma, incidents of Dr. Ramaswamy Iyer, Gandhiji's travel to Tamil Nadu and costume dolls of the people, exhibits of palm-leaf manuscripts, coins and sculptures of gods, goddesses, saints and animals, geological exhibits of rocks, minerals and sands which are acquired from earth, exhibits of marine species and physical form of humn being and other living organisms, posters and pictures of historical places, religious centres, occupations, life style of Kanyakumari district people. People knew from the wooden sculptures that Tamils are good at making not only stone and metal but also wooden sculptures. There are also specimens of coins issued from the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC to the Kushana, Gupta, Chalukya, Islamic, Chola, Pandya, Vijayanagara and East India Company. Musical instruments, war tools, etc., which illustrate the ancient Tamil Living culture, and the setting in the lush rubber plantation and bush forest environment have been designated this museum. Paintings in oil colours combine Indians in western style with principles. This unique museum

is a treasure house displaying the rare and interesting objects of times of yore, giving a rare opportunity for the onlooker to enrich the store of knowledge.

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