

# GOVERNMENT MUSEUM CHENNAI





# GOVERNMENT MUSEUM CHENNAI

An Introduction

**Published by**

The Principal Commissioner of Museums  
Government Museum  
Egmore, Chennai - 600 008.

**Title** : 1998  
**Published by** : Thiru. S. RANGAMANI, I. A. S.  
Principal Commissioner of Museums  
**Year** : 1998  
**No. of Copies** : 2000  
**Price** : Rs. 5/- (Rupees Five Only)

© Commissioner of Museums, Chennai

First edition:1968

Revised edition : 1982

Revised edition : 1998

Price Rs.

Typeset & Printed by : Rajeswari Graphics Limited  
Phone : 4842843

## **GOVERNMENT MUSEUM, CHENNAI**

---

---

The Government Museum, Chennai is the largest and oldest of the state museums in India. Since the time of its inception in 1851, it had steadily developed and expanded under the able guidance and supervision of a succession of devoted directors. Beginning as a museum of practical Geology, its scope was soon extended to cover other fields such as Archaeology, Anthropology, Art and Natural History. Its first officer-in-charge was Surgeon Edward Green Balfour who launched an intensive collection campaign in order to build up the collections in the various sections of the Museum. Others who followed him carried on his magnificent work further to make this Museum the repository of outstanding objects of art and fine specimens of natural history.

With the merger of the Pudukkottai State into the then Madras State in 1951, the Pudukkottai Museum also became administratively annexed to the Government Museum, Madras. The Salem Museum, established earlier at Salem by a Committee with the Collector of the district as its Chairman, was taken over in 1979 and reorganised as the Government Museum, Salem. In January 1981, the Government Museum, Madurai was opened at Madurai. Within the next few years a network of district museums were opened.

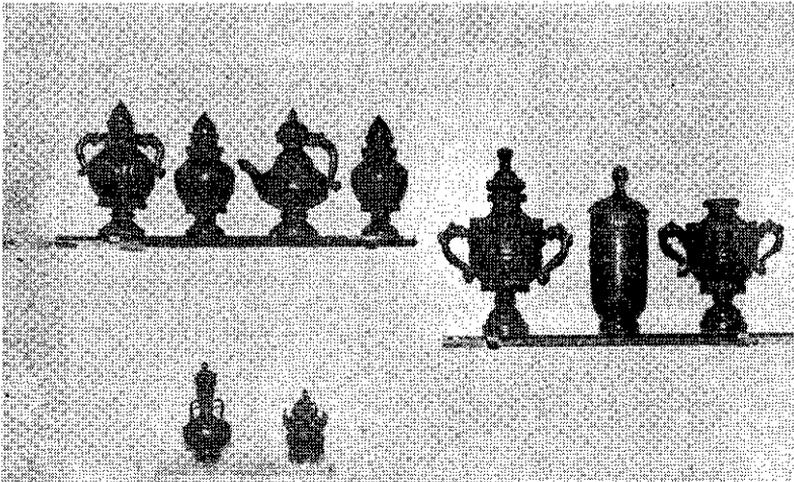
In 1951, the Government Museum, Madras celebrated its centenary, having completed hundred years of fruitful service to the public as a pioneer educational institution in the State. The Centenary celebrations were inaugurated by the then Prime Minister, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, on November 27, 1951. The National Art Gallery was also organised and thrown open to the public on the occasion.

There was a spurt in the reorganisation and development of the Museum in 1963 with generous financial assistance from the Government of Madras resulting in the new Bronze Gallery, a new Natural History wing and an extension of the Chemical Conservation Laboratory. A Gallery of Buddhist Antiquities was opened in 1964 and a Philatelic Gallery was opened in 1966. A Numismatics Gallery was set up in 1976. In 1984 January, contemporary Art Gallery was opened and in 1988, April, the Children's Museum was inaugurated.

The Chennai Museum is a large multi-purpose museum covering a wide range of subjects and is organised into the following sections: Archaeology, Art, Anthropology, Numismatics, Children's, Zoology, Botany and Geology. In addition to these, there is a well-equipped Chemical Laboratory for the conservation of museum objects, an Education Section for carrying out the educational activities and a Design and Display section for organising the display work of the Museum. Each of these sections is in charge of a qualified Curator who is a specialist in his own field. These sections contain extensive collections illustrating mostly the past history, culture and natural history of South India.

### ARCHAEOLOGY

The Archaeological Section of the Museum is noted for its rich collections of South Indian art, which attract scholar and layman by their artistic excellence and variety. The Section deals with the acquisition, preservation, study and display of sculptures, antiqui-



Industrial Art Gallery

ties and allied objects pertaining to the various periods of South Indian history. The exhibits in this section consist of sculptures in stone and metal, inscriptions on stone and metal, architectural

pieces, wood-carvings, metalware and a few original manuscripts. The most ancient antiquities of the historical period of South India consist mainly of Buddhist relics of which the beautiful Bhattiprolu crystal reliquaries and the inscribed stone casket which contained them deserve special mention. The Buddhist sculptures from Amaravati which adorn an entire gallery in this Museum constitute by far the most interesting and important record not only of the development of the artistic activities of South India during the five centuries from about 200 B.C. to about 300 A.D. but also about the social life of the people of those times. The galleries devoted to South Indian bronzes constitute another remarkable part of this section. The Museum possesses one of the world's richest collection of bronzes, many of which are superb specimens of South Indian Art. Of these the most notable ones are the images depicting the Dance of Siva (Nataraja) from Tiruvalangadu and the group consisting of Rama, Lakshmana, Sita and Hanuman from Vadakkuppanaiyur. The Museum's rich collection of bronzes is now displayed in the Bronze Gallery in a spacious three-storeyed building. This was opened in September, 1963.

## ART

The Chennai Museum has a good collection of traditional and modern paintings. The traditional paintings like Tanjore, Rajput, Moghuls, South Indian traditional art, Kangra, Deccani and modern paintings namely Oil, Tempera, Water Colour, Graphics, Acrylic and metal sculptures are in the collections. The Tanjore paintings depicts the figures of Tanjore Maratha King and Queen and puranic scenes from Tamil literature. The Rajput paintings belongs to 16 & 17th century illustrate the love rhythm based on musical notes. The Court scene of Babur, Portraits of Jehangir, Shah Jahan, animals and birds are drawn in the Moghul paintings. The Kangra paintings represents Krishna legends as subjects predominate in this school.

## ANTHROPOLOGY

The Chennai Museum is among the earliest of institutions in India and abroad where Ethnology and Prehistoric Archaeology are represented as museum subjects. The first Palaeolith in India from Attirampakkam, Chengalpattu District discovered in 1863 by Bruce



Kadar Man

Foote, and acquired in 1904 is one of a large collection of prehistoric antiquities possessed by this Museum. An earlier collection acquired in 1878 from J.W. Brecks from the Nilgiris consists of exotic-looking pottery, beads, ornaments, iron implements and bronze vases. The Museum also possesses large collections of Iron Age pottery, iron tools, bronze utensils and gold ornaments excavated at Adichanallur in Tirunelveli District and Perumbair in Chengalpattu District, and the Stone Age collections made later by Mr. F. P. Manley and others have considerably augmented the Museum's reserves so that prehistoric antiquities of this Museum constitute one of the richest collections in the world today. Besides the Museum possesses a large ethnographic collection representative of the tribal and rural cultures of the people of Southern India. This includes tribal dwellings, utensils and implements used

by tribal folk, their dress, weapons and ornaments. These have been augmented by such interesting additions as the Kathakali figures representing the dance drama of Kerala, shadow play figures of Kerala and Andhra, models of Lambadi and Gadaba women to illustrate their dress and other objects pertaining to the material culture of these picturesque tribes. These exhibits have been attractively displayed in modernised, built-in, illuminated cases.

## NUMISMATICS

The Chennai Museum is noted for its large and unique collection of coins, particularly of South Indian and Moghul coins. The Gupta coins are specially interesting, being mostly of gold and bearing inscriptions in classical Sanskrit which appear for the first time on Indian coinage. A very rare find acquired by the Chennai Museum was a hoard from Dowlaishwaram, a place near Rajahmundry, consisting of 127 gold coins, 49 of which belong to the Eastern Chalukyan ruler, Raja Raja I and the rest to his son Kulothunga

Chola. This section has also a good collection of historical documents, seals and medals. A Numismatic Gallery was opened in 1975 in a room on the first floor of the Bronze Gallery. For reasons of security, only metal casts of important coins have been displayed. A few medals, seals and documents are also on show.

This Museum was also the first to organise a Philatelic Gallery, which has a collection of more than 45,000 stamps from all over the world.

## ZOOLOGY

The Zoological Section is one of the largest sections in the Museum, handling the collection, preservation, storage and display of all types of animal forms from the lowly organized one-celled protozoan to the gigantic whale. Although its scope is mainly limited to South Indian fauna a few interesting specimens of foreign animals and birds, especially a few beautiful birds of remarkably brilliant plumage such as the mandarin duck, macaw parrot, tragopan, monal and the golden pheasant have been added to enrich the collections.

The largest, most reputed and valuable among the exhibits in the zoological galleries is the gigantic skeleton of the Great Indian Fin Whale (*Balaenoptera indica*) suspended from the centre of the ceiling in the hall of the General Zoology Gallery. The zoological galleries have a good collection of South Indian Mammals, Birds, Reptiles and Fishes. It possesses a good collection of Invertebrates, especially Corals.

In collaboration with the Botany section an annual training course on "Preservation of Biological Specimens" is being conducted every year in the month of June.



'Night Heron'

---

## BOTANY

The Botanical specimens are mainly arranged in two galleries. (i.e. Systematic Botany and Economic Botany) In the Systematic Botany Gallery, the exhibits are arranged in their evolutionary order starting with primitive cryptogams i.e algae and fungi. Families of flowering plants are arranged according to the Bentham and Hooker's system of classification. In the Morphology Section, the models of different types of inflorescence, ovules, pollen grains and embryo sacs are displayed with descriptive labels. Specimens of Angiosperms include preserved herbariums, entire real specimens and photographs.

The chief aim of the Economic Botany Gallery of this Museum is to show the myriad ways in which plants are useful to man. Twenty-seven show cases have been installed depicting Fibres, Cotton, Sugarcane, Paddy, Millets, Pulses, Oils, Spices, Drugs and Narcotics, Dyes and Tans now apart from the four 'Dioramas'. More specimens have been collected and included in the display. The specimens have been arranged according to the uses to which plant material is put. A new theme on "*Plants and Engineering*" has been illustrated in three show cases, apart from Perfumes and Cosmetics. The four dioramas graphically show "Sea Weeds" 'Mushroom', 'Tea' and 'Rubber'. Gums and Resins, Beverages, Toys and miscellaneous (Handicrafts of plant products) show-cases are also on display.

Cut-outs in plywood have been used to frame certain specimens like perfumes and oils. Special lighting effects have been done in the 'Sea Weeds', show case, showing the depths of the sea where these plants are found. The place in the middle of the hall has been utilised for installing four diorama show cases and eight ordinary show-cases built in such a way as to cover the pillars. A skeleton of a sandal wood tree has been placed in the middle and lighted up from below.

## GEOLOGY

The principal geological exhibits are displayed under five major headings viz.,

1. General Geology.
2. Petrology.
3. Mineralogy.

4. Palaeontology &
5. Economic Geology.

The General geological display is mainly composed of line drawings and pictorial exhibits like model of our earth, solar system, rivers, glaciers effects and impacts of volcanoes and earthquakes.

Petrology is one of the important branches of Geology which deals with the study of rocks. Generally a rock is an aggregate of various minerals. The rocks inturn are classified in to three main divisions namely

- a. Igneous rocks
- b. Sedimentary rocks &
- c. Metamorphic rocks.

Mineralogy is the study of minerals. A mineral is usually a natural inorganic substance having a definite chemical composition and characteristic atomic structure. The minerals are indispensable to man. Moreover minerals are the backbone of our modern industries. More than three hundred varieties of minerals and their ores are displayed in the geology gallery.

The team "Palaeontology" is the study of ancient life such as fossils. The fossils are the recognisable remains of animals and plants which lived in the past geological ages and preserved in the rocks of the earth crust by natural process. The various types of fossil exhibits are mainly collected from Ariyalur-a town about 70 kms from Trichy. A giantic ammonite fossil, the huge fossil elephant skull and the rhinoceros fossil attracts the attention of most of the visitors in the geology gallery. The huge fossil wood from Tiruvakkarai is also exhibited in the museum open air garden with fencing.

The economic geology deals with the economic aspects, which is the lore of geology. The economic geology gallery consist principal exhibits of Gold and Silver, various types of ores, Refractories, Micas, Gemstones, Building stones, Coal, Radioactive Minerals, Lignite, Pigments, Abrassives and Ceramics. A special training course on "Importance of Geological Specimens" is being conducted to the college students annually.

## CHILDREN'S MUSEUM

The children's gallery was originally inaugurated in the mezzanine floor of the Geology Gallery and subsequently it was shifted to the mezzanine floor of the Natural History Block where it was functioning for a long time, since 1963.

In April 1988, a new Children's Museum building was inaugurated by the then Governor of Tamil Nadu, His Excellency Dr. P.C. Alexander. In the ground floor of the building costume dolls of different countries of the world and dolls of different states of Tamil Nadu have been exhibited. In addition attractive diorama show cases depicting ancient civilisations of the world are exhibited. In the first floor attractive science exhibits representing all branches of science are exhibited.

## CHEMICAL CONSERVATION AND RESEARCH LABORATORY

Government Museum, Chennai has the richest collection of World famous South Indian Panchaloha images of great value. Most of the bronze icons in the Chennai Museum are treasure-trove finds.



Painting on Canvas  
Before treatment

The bronzes, because of their long burial, became seriously corroded. With the valuable collection, it was felt necessary to treat the bronzes disfigured by corrosive crusts in order to expose the decorative details and to eliminate the bronze disease. The Curator for Chemical Conservation was appointed in 1930 and a laboratory was also established. The Chennai Museum was the first museum which established its own laboratory in 1930s. This laboratory is having the facility to preserve the bronzes by electrolytic reduction from the time of its inception. In the beginning, only bronzes were preserved. Later on coins, weapons etc., were also treated and preserved by this laboratory. In 1934, the bronzes

from Nagapattinam was subjected to x-ray analysis and preserved. In 1935, as per the request from Archaeological Survey of India, this laboratory was engaged in the preservation of wall-paintings and the results were published in reputed journals.

In 1963, the present two-storied new Chemistry block was constructed in order to cope-up with the increased conservation work. It has established its name at the national as well as international level through its contributions to the field. It chemically conserves thousands of antiquities annually. It not only preserves the museum objects at Chennai but also from other museums under the control of the Directorate of Museums.



Painting on Canvas  
after restoration

### CONSERVATION SERVICE :

The laboratory which was preserving only the museum antiquities, from 1996 onwards, has started to extend its conservation service to other organisations and individuals at nominal service charges. At the request of institutions and individuals, their antiquities are examined and suggestions to conserve the objects are extended.

### TRAINING SERVICE :

Since 1976, this laboratory is conducting a refresher course on "Care of Museum Objects" for a month for eight persons who study archaeology, anthropology, history etc., or working in related institutions. This type of training is first of its kind in Asia. A week training in the conservation of temple antiquities is provided to the Executive Officers in the Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Board. Under UGC programme training in archaeology and museology is given. After giving training in conservation college students are utilised to conserve hundreds of museum objects.

---

---

## EDUCATION

**M**useums which are mere show places are things of the past. There is now a growing awareness, all over the world, of the vital role that museums can play in the education of the child and the adult, the literate and the illiterate, the able and the handicapped. In keeping with this modern trend, the Chennai Museum has expanded its educational activities considerably during recent years.

Education Section does the activities like arranging guide service, special guided tours to school children. It arranges film shows, lectures, arrangement for loaning objects, special lectures, special exhibitions, seminars, workshops in collaboration with other organisations or institutions. In addition it sends reports such as monthly, datewise, quarterly, half yearly and yearly reports pertaining to eleven sections of this Museum and also fifteen district museums to the Government etc. Child Art Competition and the exhibition of prize winning entries are conducted yearly.

## DESIGN AND DISPLAY SECTION

**I**n view of the increasing District Museums a Design and Display Section was created in the Chennai Museum in the year 1980. The main function of this section, is the organisation of New District Museums, organising outside Exhibitions, conducting exhibitions in Chennai Museum in collaboration with other sections. Re-organisation of Galleries in Chennai Museum and other District Museums, and renoration of show-cases in the Chennai Museum are also taken up by this section.

## RESEARCH AND PUBLICATIONS

**R**esearch has been a dominant feature of the activities of this Museum. The results of the researches carried out in the various sections have been published from time to time, notably in the Bulletins of the Madras Government Museum, which have raised the prestige of the Museum considerably in the eyes of scholars and have brought in several foreign periodicals by way of exchange. The Museum has to its credit a commendable series of Bulletins both in natural history and humanities. Recent publications in conservations are note worthy. Most of these publications are valuable monographs and serve as standard reference works in the respective



## GALLERIES OF THE MUSEUM

### 1. MAIN BUILDING (New Extension Building) GALLERIES

#### Sections

- |                       |   |
|-----------------------|---|
| <b>A. Archaeology</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i) Sculptures</li> <li>ii) Inscriptions</li> <li>iii) Indus Valley Materials<br/>(Anthropology)</li> <li>iv) Memorial Stones and<br/>Hero Stones</li> <li>v) Hindu Sculptures</li> <li>vi) Amaravati Sculptures</li> <li>vii) Jain Sculptures</li> </ul>                       |
| <b>B. Zoology</b>     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i) Integumentary Structure</li> <li>ii) Flight in Animals</li> <li>iii) Foreign Animals</li> <li>iv) Reptile Gallery</li> <li>v) Bird Gallery</li> <li>vi) Mammal Gallery</li> <li>vii) Coral Gallery</li> <li>viii) Invertebrate Gallery</li> <li>ix) Fish Gallery</li> </ul> |
| <b>C. Botany</b>      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i) Systematic Botany</li> <li>ii) Economic Botany</li> </ul>   |
| <b>D. Geology</b>     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i) Rocks, Minerals and<br/>Fossils</li> </ul>  |
| <b>E. Numismatics</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i) Philately</li> </ul>  |

### 2. FRONT BUILDING

#### Sections

- |                        |  |
|------------------------|--|
| <b>A. Anthropology</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i) Arms</li> <li>ii) Pre-History</li> <li>iii) Ethnology</li> </ul> |
|------------------------|--|

- 
- |                                    |      |   |
|------------------------------------|------|---|
|                                    | iv)  | Musical Instruments   |
|                                    | v)   | Folk art  |
| <b>B. Archaeology</b>              | i)   | Industrial Art  |
| <b>3. BRONZE GALLERY</b>           |      |   |
| a) <b>Archaeology</b>              | i)   | Vaishnavite, Saivite,<br>Buddhist and Jain<br>bronzes                                   |
| b) <b>Numismatics</b>              | ii)  | Coins, Medals & Docu-<br>ments  |
| <b>4. CHILDREN'S MUSEUM</b>        | i)   | Dolls Section   |
|                                    | ii)  | Civilization  |
|                                    | iii) | Natural History and<br>Physical Sciences  |
| <b>5. NATIONAL ART GALLERY</b>     |      | Tanjore Paintings and<br>Indian Miniatures,<br>Portraits of erstwhile<br>British Rulers |
| <b>6. CONTEMPORARY ART GALLERY</b> |      | Realistic Paintings and<br>Modern Art   |

### GENERAL INFORMATION

1. Guide Books
2. Bulletins
3. Picture postcards
4. Photographs each 1/2 size Rs.6 full size Rs.10/-
5. Electroplated coins 30 in a box - Rs.400 + tax
6. Fibre glass models Rs.1475
7. Photographing - Rs.20/-  
Videography - Rs.100/-
8. Theatre A/c. - Rs.2500/- per day (accommodates 500 persons)
9. Contemporary Art Gallery Exhibition Hall .. Rs.500/- per day.
10. Centenary Exhibition Hall - Rs.300/- per day
11. Film shooting Rs.5,000 (Allowed only outside the galleries). caution deposit Rs.5,000 (which will be returned later).

Working Hours - 9.30 a.m. to 5.00 p.m.

Holidays: Fridays and National Holidays.

Tickets: Adults Rs.3/- Children Rs.2/-

Concession: Children with requisition from the Headmistress/  
Principals of the schools - Re.1/-

Free guide service: 10.00 a.m. to 12.00 Noon and 2.00 p.m. to  
4.00 p.m.

A network of 15 district museums were set up in Tamilnadu, as a policy of Government to have a Museum in each district as follows:

1. Government Museum, Pudukkottai - 622 002.
2. Government Museum, Salem - 636 001.
3. Government Museum, 9/2, Prominade Road, Contontment, Trichirapalli - 620 001.
4. Government Museum. Gandhi Memorial Museum Complex, Madurai - 625 020.
5. Government Museum, Municipal Office Complex, Erode - 638 001.
6. Government Museum, Lakshmanaswamy Town Hall, Vellore - 632 004.
7. Government Museum, 19, Hospital Road, Cuddalore - 1.
8. Government Museum, Bali Illam, 70, Mysore Salai, Udhagamandalam - 643 043.
9. Government Museum, 1217, Mettupalayam Road, Coimbatore - 641 043.
10. Government Museum, 120A, Ramalinga Vilas, Trivandrum High Road, Palayamkottai, Tirunelveli - 2.
11. Government Museum, Gandhi Road, Krishnagiri - 635 001.
12. Government Museum, near Tourist Office, Gandhi Mandapam Road, Kanyakumari - 629 702.
13. Government Museum, C/o. District Post Office, Sannadhi Veedhi, Adivaaram, Palani - 624 601.
14. Government Museum, Vaara Santhai Salai, Sivaganga.
15. Government Museum, C/o. Collector's Office, Thiruvavarur.

