

THE TRIVANDRUM NAPIER MUSEUM AND ZOO

By. K. S.

Among the museums of India, Trivandrum Museum, named after Napier, a former Governor of Madras, is one of the most important. It is over three quarters of a century old and has, throughout these years, provided instruction and amusement to numerous visitors.

IN 1852, when the State was ruled by Bhagyodaya Uthram Thirunal Maharaja, it was proposed to start a museum of objects illustrative of the natural and physical sciences, of the arts and of the products and antiquities of Travancore "as a means of aiding the natives in their efforts to gain a practical knowledge of the arts and sciences of Europe and of preserving the rapidly decaying illustrations of the ancient manners and customs of the country".

Accordingly, a Society was formed, in 1855, with the Maharaja as Patron, Gen. Cullen as President, and Mr. J. A. Brown, Astronomer and Geologist, as Secretary. It was, however, only in 1857 that the museum was thrown open to the public. About 3,000 persons visited it during that year.

The curiosities sent in from time to time by a long succession of enthusiastic members began to accumulate. The accommodation was found insufficient and, in 1873, it was decided that a suitable structure should be erected immediately to house the collections. The new building was designed by Mr. Chisholm, the consulting Architect of Madras Government, and completed in 1880. The collections, which were temporarily removed to the Public Offices, were brought back to the new building, which was named after Napier, the then Governor of Madras.

In 1880, Col. Ketchen was appointed Secretary of the Committee and he was succeeded by the distinguished scholar, Mr. H. S. Fergusson, who took charge in 1890 and devoted himself to his work with remarkable zeal.

Innumerable collections of value and importance were obtained and exhibited in the museum. The classification and arrangement of the exhibits was carried out on the same lines as chalked out by the British Museum. The Committee of Management was soon abolished and Fergusson was appointed Director of the institution.

In 1903, Fergusson retired after a distinguished service. During his connection with the institution he made systematic collections of new species of fauna. In his own words: "We have most of our mammals represented in our museum, a good proportion of birds, all the snakes and nearly all the amphibia. The butterflies are pretty complete, and we have, large collections of the other orders of insects. The collections are progressing. Cases representing ivory carving, brass-work, lace, wood-carving and kuff-gari work, are all complete. The hill-tribes are represented with all their peculiar instruments. A good collection of the musical instruments of the country had been made with some care and trouble.....".

The museum consists of a main hall, joined to two rooms parallel to it by two wings. The distinction and beauty of its blend of indigenous and related architectural features have been carefully preserved. For over half a century, it housed a large collection of specimens of indigenous natural history. But the growth of examples of the plastic arts of South India, particularly of Travancore, necessitated increased floor space. In 1942, the Natural History section was, therefore, removed to a building near the beach, and the entire space available was devoted to the art-crafts of India, with special emphasis on those of Travancore and contiguous areas. The arrangement of the different specimens was a different task, but this was successfully accomplished by Mr. J. H. Cousins, the then Art Advisor to the State Government.

The central hall contains now a selected set of South Indian bronzes so arranged on its commodious floor-space as to allow the aesthetic quality and technical excellence of each figure to be appreciated without confusion with neighbouring figures. The centre-piece is an example of the famous conception of Shiva as Lord of the Cosmic Dance (Nataraja) which dominated the imagination of craftsmen from the 12th to the 15th century. Among the other bronze figures are those of Vishnu, belonging to the 10th



PATHAKAM

Pathakam is an indigenous form of story-telling peculiar to Kerala. Performed usually during the festival season in the temple, *Pathakam* is one of the most popular forms of entertainment. Here are two pictures of a *Pathakam* Performer (popularly called *Pathakam*) depicting two different *rasas*.

(Photos by Sivaram Studio, Tricoandrum).



SHASTHA—Bronze in the Trivandrum Museum

All the Bronze figures exhibited here are admirable, but special attention may be drawn to a local figure, in bronze, remarkably adorned, of a Shastha of the seventeenth century from North Travancore

century, in the posture of blessing man and of Sasta of the 17th century, both from North Travancore.

The Central hall also contains a large number of musical instruments, some of which are of local origin. They illustrate the musical life of Travancore and her people.

The northern corridor contains examples of the arts of stone sculpture, bronze casting, and wood carving. The oldest stone image yet acquired by the museum is that of a Buddha from North Travancore. With the rearrangement of the museum in 1942, the northern wing took shape as a repository of Travancore wood-carving. Most impressive in the collection is the temple car from Padmanabhapuram, which was in use 300 years ago.

In this section, there is also a model of a typical Nayar house, with miniature models representing their domestic and social life.

The southern corridor contains a collection of Nataraja images. There are a number of striking Shiva figures in bronze. A rare piece of mainature craftsmanship is a Brahma, another is a dancing Ganesha. The exhibits of bronze and brass lamps are over a century old.

The museum annexe contains two special groups of art objects. The Java-Bali collection was made by His Highness the Maharaja Sri. Chitra Thirunal during his visit to Java and Bali in 1937. The collection is specially notable for its illustrations of the religion and religious dance of the islands.

A collection of modern folk paintings of Bali the first to be exhibited outside the island are in the Sri Chitralayam. The Roerich room contains superb paintings by the late Nicholas Roerich and his son Svetoslav Roerich.

Museums have always been important adjuncts to the successful prosecution of Botanical and

Zoological studies. In the general layout, in the marvellous beauty of its arrangements as a Botanical garden, in the excellent arrangement of plants on a scientific basis, the Trivandrum garden is a storehouse of information.

The different kinds of animals from an admirable collection for the zoo and provide instruction and amusement to the numerous visitors. For the ornithologist, there is an excellent collection to see and admire: the vulture, kite, owl, night heron, duck, Nicogor pigeons, coel, spotted dove etc.

In his highly interesting book 'India', Pierre Loti praises Trivandrum as having a "zoological garden with parks of gazelles and ponds of crocodiles, as well kept up as those of Europe; one of the few places where it is possible to escape from the stifling shade of the palms and to everlook the distant prospect of forests and jungles. Lawns have been laid out with rows of exotic flowers and other matchless plants".

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