

Indian Museums.

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(Central Museum, Nagpur.)

MOST provinces in India have their museums but it is regrettable how very few of these museums have developed a provincial aspect, which should be the foremost thought in their system of development.

Recently there has been a tendency to develop archæology only in these museums to the detriment of other branches and sections. Archæological museums are certainly the easiest to curate whilst biological ones are the most difficult. As archæologists or numismatists are frequently in charge of such institutions, it is natural that natural history and other sections will suffer, although the latter are more popular with the general public.

I visited the Lucknow Museum many years ago and was rather struck by the richness of its natural history collections which only required proper arrangement and labelling to make it into a really good show as many good specimens were already there. Twenty years later, I visited this same museum and found that most, if not all the biological collections had disappeared and had been replaced by other exhibits, among which the only ones of any interest were archæological.

The Lahore Museum is purely an art museum and, although I have not seen it myself, I am told it is badly ventilated and that the natural history section has disappeared long ago; yet the Punjab is extremely rich in animal life peculiar to itself.

I took a peep into the Patna Museum the other day. The building was an imposing structure and I anticipated seeing a horde of Asokan relics, perhaps a whole room devoted to old Pataliputra and Mauryan art, but I was disappointed. A fine figure of a 'chauri' bearer, at the entrance was all I saw and though this was attributed to Asoka's age, the stone showed no signs of age and appeared as if recently carved. The natural history section contained practically nothing of local interest although the province of Bihar is rich in fauna, not to mention the fauna of the Ganges alone. A pair of Pink-headed Ducks were the only decent exhibits; the rest consisted of some local, exotic and domestic birds, mostly badly mounted with illegible or incorrect labels. A good bison head hung on the wall but one of its horns was completely destroyed by dermestid beetles. In this same room were also placed Tibetan head dresses, paints, paintings, sculptures, etc.

The Bombay Museum is perhaps the most up-to-date, particularly in its natural history section, but conditions here are different to what are available in most provincial museums. The natural history section is backed by a society of about 1,000 members interested in natural history,

many of whom help in an honorary capacity and besides, the staff is better paid than in most museums.

One defect I found in most archæological museums is that they do not bring the subject home to the layman, nor are the collections arranged in a way to make the subject interesting and guide books are generally not available.

Nowadays most colleges teach biology but even an elementary display of zoological types are non-existent in most provincial museums. I once met a post-graduate student in zoology, who said his thesis had been on the moths of Lahore, yet this same student when shown a Uranid moth, pronounced it to be a butterfly!!

The complaint in most museums is lack of funds and mismanagement by those at the head through want of proper technical knowledge on the subject of museums. Sometimes a few persons who perhaps are uninterested and have never visited a museum are appointed to select a curator and of course the man with the highest degree amongst the applicants is selected, although he may be quite unsuited for the post. The result is that valuable collections already accumulated are lost or rejected before he gets initiated or learns his work.

Then again a person cannot be an expert in all the branches of a museum and it becomes necessary to have assistants for certain sections; this prevents neglect in sections in which the head of the museum is not much interested. A geologist for instance will hardly take an interest in ethnology or an archæologist in zoology and *vice versa*. It is here that the services, if available, of honorary workers, who are experts and keen on the subject, should be enlisted. Perhaps it would be better policy for one man to curate a certain section in two or more museums.

Another point which needs development in local museums are libraries, laboratories and research collections, which should be available to the public. There might also be an Inspector-General of Museums whose duty it would be to go round giving advice and suggestions.

Visits of the staff to other museums should be encouraged, as it may be useful in suggesting new ideas, and it should be open even to junior members of the staff as well as to directors and curators. Museum publications should be encouraged even if they do not profit the museum.

Lastly the man appointed to a museum should be an enthusiast and keen on his subject, and the keener he is the more the museum will improve unless his energies are damped by those above him or by financial stringency.