

Location :

The Assam State Museum stands on the south bank of the historic Dighali Pukhuri (a tank), flanked on the east by the Rabindra Bhavan and on the west by the District Library. Hard by the south-west of the Museum stands the Bhagawati Prasad Barua Bhawan, the Gauhati branch of the Assam Sahitya Sabha, and the Art Gallery, Govt. of Assam, in front of which is situated the District Congress office. On the east of the Rabindra Bhavan, a cultural institute, at present housing the Department of Cultural Affairs and the Lalit Kala Akademy, stands the Central High School on whose premises valuable archaeological objects were discovered a few years back, as a result of which the site came to be known as the Ambari Archaeological site. Further to the east is the campus of the Assam Textile Institute, where the Cottage Industries Museum and the Government Sales Emporium are situated. On the western bank of the Dighali Pukhuri stands the Handiqui Girls' College and the Nabin Chandra Bordoloi Hall & Library plus the Department of Zoology and Botany of the Cotton College. The Assam State Museum is, thus, situated at a place with academic and cultural atmosphere—a fitting place for the location of a museum.

Communications : facilities for tourist lodge :

There is easy communication to reach the museum. The Railway Station is located hardly a quarter km. south-east of the museum. About half a km. west of the museum is the city office of Air-India. The mini-buses of the Department of the Tourism, Government of Assam, as well as city buses ply along the thoroughfare in front of the museum building. One can thus easily get down just in front of the museum precincts to visit it and thereafter move off to the Assam State Zoo and

Vasistha, a picnic spot of enchanting scenic beauty, where, as the legend goes, the sage Vasistha is said to have had his hermitage. At present, there is a temple built in the days of the Ahom king Rajeswar Singha.

The tourists or the scholars who intend to visit the museum can get their accommodations in the Hotel North-East India, situated just in front of the museum premises, and the Tourist Lodge situated half-way on the way to the Railway Station. The circuit house, situated across the tank, is also not very far from the museum.

Historical back-ground of the museum :

The Assam State Museum was established on 21st April, 1940, by a band of selfless workers of the *Kamarupa Anusandhana Samiti* or the Assam Research Society, Gauhati. It was the only institute at that time that undertook researches in the history and culture of this part of the country, particularly Assam. Founded in 1912, it was the result of tireless endeavours of a number of persons genuinely interested in history and culture. The late Raibahadur Kanak Lal Barua, an important member of the Samiti, was the first editor of the *Journal of the Assam Research Society*, the bulletin of this learned institute, and it was he who evinced keen interest in the establishment of a museum in Gauhati. With this idea in mind, Barua went on collecting materials with full co-operation from other members of the Samiti and ultimately succeeded in translating his dream into reality. He got a museum, of which naturally he became the first president. It was, by then, known as the Assam Provincial Museum. This non-government museum was housed for sometime in the small building of the samiti. Later on, through public contributions, a brick building (the central part of the existing complex) was constructed ; and it was inaugurated by Sir

Robert Neil Reid, the then Governor of Assam. Unfortunately, Barua did not live to see the inaugural ceremony of the building. He was away at Calcutta to attend the Indian History Congress, where he suddenly breathed his last. After his sad demise, the late Dr. S. K. Bhuyan was nominated by the Government to take charge as its president, in which capacity he remained for a short period and was succeeded by the late Raibahadur Kaliram Medhi. It was during his time that the museum was inaugurated by the Governor.

Sri P. D. Choudhury was the first Curator of this museum, who was associated with this institute since its inception. On 1st April, 1953, this institute was taken over by the Government of Assam. In 1947, Sri M. C. Das was appointed Assistant Curator. In 1961, Government established the Department of Archaeology and put it under the charge of the Curator. Subsequently in 1966, the two departments were amalgamated and converted into a composite department, with Sri P. D. Choudhury, the then Curator, as its first Director. After the retirement of Sri P. D. Choudhury, Sri M. C. Das succeeded him.

As said above, the Museum was started with the collections of the *Kamarupa Anusandhan samiti*, which numbered as follows—

Stone images	....	86
Metallic objects	....	30
Wooden images or other objects	....	8
Terraçotta sculptures	....	18
Old earthen pots & potteries	....	46
Textiles of the Ahom period	....	36
Tribal articles	....	19
Coins	....	33
Miscellaneous articles	....	25
<i>Sanchi</i> bark manuscripts	....	256

(For details see *Antiquities of the Kamarupa Anusandhan Samiti*. Gauhati, 1939.)

In addition to these, the *Samiti* donated some foreign coins. Except the manuscripts, all the other articles are now on exhibition in the museum. From the nature of the objects housed in the museum, it appears that it was intended to make it a cultural museum. Later on, the main building was extended and a wing on either side was added. When enough space was thus available, some new sections, such as the children's section, painting section and zoological section, were opened. Thereafter, it was considered appropriate to call it a multi-purpose museum. With the addition of more and more collections, however, the galleries have of late become congested, thereby affecting the mode of display. In recent years, therefore stress has been laid on better display by way of the re-arrangement of the galleries. Even though the existing buildings of the museum has a number of shortcomings and is not fit for a modern museum, all possible attempts have been made to improve upon it by effecting certain alterations on the building structure as well as on the display system. For the time being, the children's section has been kept closed and a reserve collection has been opened. Some not so important objects that cluttered up the galleries have been shifted to the reserve collection and store-rooms. At present the following sections are there in the museum:—

- (a) Epigraphy
- (b) Sculpture (a)
- (c) Miscellaneous
- (d) Geology
- (e) Arts & Crafts
- (f) Gandhi Corner
- (g) Old Costumes
- (h) Musical Instruments
- (i) Literature section
- (j) Painting section
- (k) Sculpture (b) and
- (l) Arms and Accoutrement section.

Four armed image of Surya, it may be mentioned, is extremely rare.

Miscellaneous section :

Moving towards east from this gallery, the visitor then arrives at the Miscellaneous Gallery, which houses an assorted number of objects. Two images of seated Buddha on slabs of basalt stone each bearing beautiful designs of a votive stupa and a votive stupa of sandstone from Bihar, are shown. These may be datable to 8th/9th and 11th centuries A. D. respectively. There is also a good collection of terracotta art works. Except for a few pieces, which were brought over from Paharpur, Bengal, all the rest were locally found. Of these, three plaques are datable to C. 11th century. One shows a scene of dance-teaching where the *guru* or the teacher is depicted as seated, showing some *mudra* with his hands and a girl is shown dancing and a man playing on *Mridanga* or *Pakhowaj* before him. In this gallery some old metallic objects, a few plastercasts of stone tools found elsewhere in India, some pieces of pottery representative of the Painted Grey and Northern Black Polished wares etc., a good number of designed pots found while digging a tank at Gauhati, a few articles from Barpetta Satra, a seat of Vaisnava learning founded by Sri Sankardeva, the great saint of Assam of 16th century A. D., and some pottery pieces and other articles from Harappa and Mahenjodaro are displayed.

Natural History :

Next comes the Natural History section, which normally attracts the school children and people from the countryside. Noted among the exhibits are, a rhinoceros from Assam, a crocodile, a stuffed monkey, a peacock, a python, a duck, a bear and other birds and animals.