



## Bengaluru: A City of Museums

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### Abstract:

*Bangalore, widely recognized as the Silicon Valley of India and a hub of high-tech industries, is also a city with a deep commitment to preserving both tangible and intangible heritage. Known for its balance between modernization and cultural preservation, the city houses numerous historic landmarks, memorials, and gardens. Bangalore is home to some of India's oldest museums, with the first, established in 1865 during the colonial era, laying the foundation for a thriving museum culture. Over time, the city has expanded its repertoire, offering a diverse range of museums focused on science, technology, defense, and folk history. Museums play a vital role in public education, serving as repositories of knowledge and cultural scholarship. They provide learning opportunities for people from all walks of life, enriching their understanding of history, art, and science. This study explores how Bangalore's museums contribute to education and cultural preservation.*

**Keywords:** Bangalore, museums, heritage, education, cultural preservation.

### Introduction

The term "museum" originates from the Greek word "museon," meaning "the seat of the muses," which historically served as venues for spiritual discussions and intellectual debates. Over time, these spaces evolved into repositories for collections of significant historical, cultural, and artistic artifacts. Evidence of early museums dates back to Alexandria, where a museum was established around 283 B.C., containing materials collected

during the conquests of Alexander the Great, marking it as one of the earliest known museums in the world. From the 9th to the 12th century, museums functioned as "Houses of Relics," displaying the remains of saints who played pivotal roles in political and cultural life. These relics were venerated, and their preservation became integral to the socio-political landscape. In India, stupas housing the relics of Buddha served

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a similar function, representing sacredness, moral values, and social order. These stupas symbolized both spiritual significance and the community's dedication to preserving cultural heritage. (Subodha, K. M. et.al, 2007).

The modern definition of museums has evolved considerably. According to the 5th UNESCO Regional Seminar, a museum is an institution that serves as a cultural center within a community, functioning through its exhibits, research projects, and educational programs. It plays an essential role in preserving the history and identity of a community while promoting universal human values. In addition to preserving artifacts, museums also aim to educate, integrate, and inspire the public through artistic, educational, and recreational activities. (Bhatnagar, 1999)

The International Council of Museums (ICOM) defines a museum as a non-profit, permanent institution dedicated to serving society by conserving, researching, communicating, and exhibiting artifacts for study, education, and enjoyment. In 1962, ICOM further emphasized the importance of museums in society, highlighting their role in research, conservation, education, and their relationship with the physical and cultural environment. Museums, therefore, play a critical role in preserving the material evidence of human history and development, shaping both individual and collective understanding of the past (Banerjee, 1990)

### **Museums in Bengaluru**

Bengaluru, widely recognized as the Silicon Valley of India, is not just a hub of technology and innovation but also a city steeped in history and culture. This balance between modernization and heritage is reflected in its numerous museums, which showcase everything from ancient artifacts to cutting-edge science. The museums in Bengaluru cater to a wide range of interests, including history, art, folklore, defense, and science, offering residents and visitors alike an opportunity to explore and engage with the city's diverse cultural fabric.

### **Museum Culture in Bengaluru**

The museum culture in Bengaluru began in 1865 during the British colonial era, when Edward Balfour, a British officer, established the second-oldest museum in South India. Balfour recognized Bengaluru as an ideal location to showcase the regional history of the Mysore State, and the museum initially housed collections from British officials. The museum remains one of the oldest institutions in India exclusively devoted to archaeology, numismatics, cultural history, and ethnology.

Today, this museum is also home to the Venkatappa Art Gallery, which hosts regular exhibitions of photography, sculptures, and paintings. The building itself, a testament to colonial architecture, stands as a heritage monument, symbolizing the rich history and evolution of museum culture in Bengaluru. Its

legacy extends beyond its collections, as it played a pivotal role in shaping the city's cultural identity during a time of significant political change.

### **Karnataka Chitrakala Parishath**

Among the key art institutions in Bengaluru is the Karnataka Chitrakala Parishath, which houses both an art gallery and a museum. This cultural institution is home to the Kejriwal Museum, named after H.H. Kejriwal, an art connoisseur who donated much of the collection. The museum is renowned for its modern art, featuring paintings, sculptures made from bronze, fiberglass, and ceramic, and large collections that span generations of artistic talent.

This museum offers an incredible showcase of Mysore paintings, a traditional form of art native to the region, which continues to draw art lovers from across the world. Mysore paintings are known for their intricate detail and use of natural dyes, reflecting centuries-old techniques passed down through generations. The Karnataka Chitrakala Parishath is also home to unique artifacts such as puppets from the Channapatna region and artworks by famous Russian artist Nicholas Roerich, adding an international dimension to its collection.

### **Memorial Museums**

Bengaluru also hosts a variety of memorial museums that commemorate influential figures and moments in Indian history. One such museum is Gandhi Bhavan, also known as Karnataka Gandhi

Smaraka Nidhi. Dedicated entirely to Mahatma Gandhi, the museum houses an extensive collection of photographs, letters, and personal items that chronicle Gandhi's life, from his youth to his leadership during India's freedom struggle. Notable artifacts include Gandhi's wooden shoes and water bowls, which provide visitors with a personal connection to the figure who shaped India's modern history.

The museum also serves as a center for seminars and conferences on Gandhian philosophy, ensuring that the values of non-violence, truth, and self-reliance continue to resonate with future generations. Through its educational activities and exhibitions, Gandhi Bhavan offers both a tribute to the past and a guide for the future, ensuring Gandhi's legacy is preserved.

Another important memorial museum is the Kempe Gowda Museum, which opened to the public in 2011. Located in the heart of the city, the museum honors Kempe Gowda, the Yelahanka chieftain and founder of Bengaluru. The museum is dedicated to preserving the city's medieval history and features photographs, posters, and exhibits that showcase the city's historical landmarks, including forts, temples, and inscriptions. Through this museum, visitors can explore the architectural and cultural development of Bengaluru, gaining insight into the city's origins and the significant role Kempe Gowda played in shaping it.

### **The Folk Museum**

In the outskirts of Bengaluru lies one of the most unique museums in the city, the Folk Museum. Established by the Karnataka Janapada Parishath, this museum is located near Channapatna, a town known for its traditional wooden toys. Spanning 15 acres of open land in Doddamannugudde, the museum showcases an extensive collection of rural artifacts, ranging from puppets and dolls to agricultural tools, reflecting the daily lives of Karnataka's rural communities.

The museum's displays focus on traditional crafts, farming practices, and cattle rearing, offering visitors an intimate look into village life. Additionally, miniature statues depict various folk performances such as Dollu Kunita, Yakshagana, and Veeragase, highlighting Karnataka's vibrant cultural heritage. The Folk Museum not only preserves the state's rural traditions but also educates visitors on the importance of folk art in shaping local identity.

The museum also honors its founder, H.C. Nagegowda, through a memorial hall that showcases photographs and documents chronicling the collection and preservation of these rural artifacts. His dedication to preserving folk culture remains a driving force behind the museum's ongoing mission to protect and promote Karnataka's intangible cultural heritage.

### **Modern Art and Photography - MAP**

Bengaluru is also home to cutting-edge institutions like the Museum of Art and

Photography (MAP), which opened to the public in 2023. A private museum founded by art collector Abishek Poddar, MAP is located on Kasturba Road, also known as Museum Road. It houses collections that span textiles, photography, craft, and contemporary art, reflecting Bengaluru's modern identity as a dynamic and creative city.

MAP's mission is to make art accessible and engaging for everyone, sparking creativity through its exhibitions and programs. The museum not only showcases art but also serves as a platform for dialogue and exploration of the role of art in contemporary society. As one of the most modern museums in the city, MAP represents Bengaluru's evolving cultural landscape and its dedication to fostering artistic innovation.

### **Philately Museum**

For those interested in communication and history, Bengaluru offers the Philately Museum, located in the General Post Office (GPO). This museum, which features over 5,000 stamps, is dedicated to the art of stamp collecting and the history of postal communication in India. The exhibits trace the development of communication methods before the introduction of the pager and telephone, offering a glimpse into how the postal system connected people across vast distances.

The Philately Museum showcases commemorative stamps and postal cards dedicated to freedom fighters, politicians,

sports personalities, and UNESCO World Heritage sites. Visitors can also explore thematic collections of stamps featuring animals, forests, forts, and other significant symbols of Indian history. This museum is a treasure trove for philatelists and anyone interested in the journey of communication.

### **Defence Museums**

Given its strategic importance, Bengaluru is also home to military museums that preserve India's defence history. One of the most notable is the HAL Aerospace Museum, established in 2001, which is India's first aerospace museum. Located on the HAL campus, this museum exhibits a wide range of aircraft models, helicopters, and engine prototypes, showcasing the evolution of India's aviation industry.

The museum also features interactive displays and video demonstrations that explain the workings of fighter jets, bombers, and target systems. The Hall of Fame section guides visitors through India's aviation journey, providing detailed insights into the technological advancements and milestones achieved by the Indian Air Force. This museum is a must-visit for aviation enthusiasts and history buffs alike.

Another notable military museum is the Madras Sappers Museum, established in 1979. This museum showcases various military artefacts, including weapons and equipment used by soldiers over the years. Additionally, the museum displays

portraits of generals and military officials, offering a glimpse into the leadership behind India's military prowess. Although the museum is not generally open to the public, special permission can be obtained to visit and explore its unique collections.

### **Science Museums**

Bengaluru is also renowned for its science museums, which are particularly popular among the city's younger generation. The Visvesvaraya Industrial and Technological Museum, named after Sir M. Visvesvaraya, one of India's most distinguished engineers, is a prominent institution dedicated to science and technology. Opened in 1962, the museum features a variety of exhibits, including engines, mechanical devices, and interactive displays that teach visitors about engineering and technology. The museum's child-friendly exhibits and demonstrations make it an exciting and educational experience for families.

Another fascinating science museum is the NIMHANS Brain Museum, located at the Neurobiology Research Centre of NIMHANS. This unique museum offers visitors the chance to explore real human brains, collected over the past 35 years for medical research. Guided tours educate visitors on brain function, diseases, injuries, and tumors, providing a one-of-a-kind educational experience. The museum's main goal is to increase public understanding of brain health and neuroscience, offering an interactive and

informative journey into the workings of the human brain.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, it is fair to say that Bengaluru can rightly be called the "City of Museums." From having one of the oldest museums in the country, Bengaluru has expanded its cultural landscape to include around 16 museums and multiple art galleries, each offering something unique. The city's museums encompass a wide variety of themes, including archaeology, photography, art, science, defence, folk culture, and even college and university museums. These institutions play a crucial role in society by not only preserving history but also educating the public. Museums act as both cultural tourist attractions and community centres that provide valuable insights into our rich heritage, traditions, and the artistic craftsmanship of our ancestors. Through their collections and exhibits, Bengaluru's museums help foster a deeper understanding and appreciation of our past while engaging future generations.

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