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An Overview on the Gujrat Museum: Problems and Development Strategies

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Abstract

Gujrat Museum is a significant cultural institution in Pakistan showcasing the region's rich history and heritage. The main objectives of this study is to explore the problems and prospects of Gujrat Museum highlighting its current challenges and potential opportunities as well as development strategies to ameliorate the plight of this Museum. The study also identifies key problems such as inadequate funding, lack of trained staff and insufficient infrastructure, Rehabilitation of Building, Poor Management, Non-availability of Security Gadgets and Parking Arrangements, Display of Artifacts without information tags, Non availability of Conservation Lab, Canteen/Cafeteria and Library. Despite these challenges, the museum has significant potential for growth, including opportunity for community engagement, digitalization and collaboration with international institutions. This research provides recommendations for improving the museum's operations and enhancing its role in preserving and promoting Gujrat's cultural heritage. This study further aims to create awareness and importance among locals through an in-depth analysis of the Gujrat Museum, its history, problems and solutions. This research also discusses the history and current condition of the Gujrat Museum.

Keywords: Gujrat, History, Museum, Heritage, Problems, Prospects, Development Strategies.



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Introduction

Gujrat is an ancient and historical city, between two rivers, the Chenab and Jhelum. It is bounded on the North-East by Mirpur, on the North-West by the river Jhelum which separates it from Jhelum District, on the East and South-West by the river Chenab, separating it from the district of Gujranwala and Sialkot, and on the West by Mandi Bahauddin. District Gujrat is spread over an area of 3,192 Square Kilometers, including historic villages and towns such as Jalalpur Jattan, Chakdina, Karnana, Kunjah, and Lalamusa. Moreover, Gujrat is a treasure trove of archaeological artifacts. According to Alexander Cunningham, many places in this area were founded by Alexander after his victory over Porus in the battle of Hedsaspes. There are several mounds located in various areas. This city was part of the kingdom of Porus and one of the oldest cities in Pakistan. The Punjab Archaeology Department took a significant step by establishing a museum in Gujrat (Williamson, 2007).

Gujrat in the Mirror of History

Gujrat is the thirteenth largest city in the Pakistani province of Punjab. The earliest historical reference of the Gujrat area includes the invasion of Alexander the Great¹ and the battle fought between King Porus² and Alexander in the early 4th century BCE. This battle was very difficult for Alexander because Alexander and his army had never battled a powerful Indian king before, and it was their first time encountering an elephant on the battlefield (Williamson, 2007).

When Alexander's army crossed the salt range and came near the west bank of Jhelum, he saw Porus's army on the other side of the river. Porus was not ready to surrender so he chose the fight. At the site of Mong, Porus attacked Alexander and after a long fierce battle, Alexander won the fight. After the fight, when Porus was brought before Alexander and asked how he should treat him, Porus replies, "As befits me, like a king". His bravery and courage in defeat impressed Alexander so much that he restored his kingdom and moved towards Multan (O'Brien, 1994). Alexander built a city Nikoea at the present site Mong to show his victory over Porus also mentioned by Cunningham. Pati Kothis on the northern side of the district also considered to be a city built by Alexander (Mehmood et. al, 2016). At that time the southern part of the district was ruled by Raja Bachan Pal, a Suraj Bansi Rajput of whom nothing is known but he is the one who laid the foundation of Gujrat (Cunningham, 1871).

The oldest name of Gujrat was Ude Nagri. Raja Bachan Pal had a fortress in the area which was destroyed by Alexander. The geographical position of Gujrat makes it an important city. In ancient times, kings followed this path to go towards Kashmir. Gujrat was part of several kingdoms that were established there. Gujrat has seen ravages through time. Coins of Parthian ruler Mauses have been found at the present site of Mong (Williamson, 2007).

Later in the year 120 AD Gujrat came under the rule of king of Sialkot commonly known as Salwan or Risalu. Rani Gujran wife of Badr Sena, the son of Raja Risalu rebuilt the city of Ude Nagri and named it Gujjar Nagri. Till now Gujrat is known by the name of Rani Gujran. Gujrat became independent Gurjara kingdom for some time until it was invaded by Sankara Verman ruler of Kashmir between 883-902 AD. He defeated the local ruler Alakhana which may be Ali Khan, who

¹ Alexander the Great (356-323 BCE) was a king of ancient Greek kingdom of Macedonia. He is best known for creating one of the largest empires of the ancient world, stretching from Greece to Egypt and into northwest India.

² Porus (326-321 BCE) was an ancient Indian king whose territory spanned the region between the Jhelum River (Hydaspes) and Chenab River (Acesines).

in local traditions is known as the restorer of Gujrat. After Rani Gujran, Ali Khan restored and rebuilt the city.

Hiuen Tsang³ the Chinese pilgrim also visited this place and mentioned in the book that it was ruled by Kashmiri rulers of Naga or Karkota dynasty. Coins of Kashmiri rulers are also found in the area near the river Jhelum. It became part of the Hindu Shahi dynasty and was later invaded by Mahmud Ghaznavi. During the Delhi Sultanate, not much was added to the area (Elliott, 1901)

The first ever recorded Government in the area was made by Behlol Lodhi in 1453 AD when he formed the Behlolpur district and built a fort. Zaheer-ud-Din Muhammad Babur also visited the fort built by Behlol Lodhi during his campaign towards Sialkot. When Humayun was dethroned by Sher Shah Suri in 1542 AD, he escaped towards Seistan. During his escape, he halted at Kharian where he met a peasant named Gaurah. The peasant tells him about his dream last night which means good news is approaching and Akbar was born at the time. Later, Akbar during his visit to Gujrat met Gaurah and built two wells for people because people were facing problem of water shortage. Akbar reconstructs the Gujrat and baolis along the G.T. Road. Shah Jahan also visited the area nine times during his visit to Kashmir. The most famous Sufi saint Shah Daula became resident of Gujrat during his rule. He built bridges and tanks. Aurangzeb built a mosque, baoli, and serai in Naurangabad only traces were found (Rehman et.al, 1993)

During the Mughal period, Chakla of Gujrat organized into parganah of Gujrat and Herat. It was also known as the parganah of Jats and Gujjars. The parganahs were sub-divided into tapas. This system was used until the death of Aurangzeb in 1707 AD. Gujrat was ravaged and looted by Nadir Shah in 1736 AD and afterward by Mukarrab Khan (Gakhars of Rawalpindi) who ruled over city until 1765 AD (Luard, 2024).

When the forces of Ahmed Shah Durani took over the area, it became the battlefield between the forces of Durani and Mughal. When Durrani forces left the subcontinent, Gujrat came under the rule of the Sikh empire. During Sikh rule, many tanks, baolis, gardens, and baradaris were added in the towns of Kunjah, Gujrat and Qiladar. The gardens had spacious baradaris, elaborate water systems, and plantings of fruit and shady trees. The Sikh army's battle with the Britishers at Chillianwala in the battle of Gujrat end the Sikh rule in Gujrat. The Sikh army was defeated by British soldiers, and they lost territories that they had won and consolidated eighty-five years ago. During the mutiny, the only danger was the 35th Native Infantry but Deputy Commissioner W. R. Elliot and Raja Sultan Khan of Pothi handled everything and crushed the rebellions (Williamson, 2007).

In the 19th century, the British government felt that a large number of lands were not cultivated to full capacity. As a result, the Britishers built canals to make excess river water available for agriculture. The first projects were Rasul Barrage and Lower Jhelum Canal. Canals irrigated a vast area of Gujrat. They founded new towns in the area most famous was Mandi Baha-ud-Din. They built new towns and mandi's and connected them with railways. Public buildings and administrative offices were built there. During the British Raj, many buildings were constructed. They developed and connected the city according to their own will. The whole structure of the district changed. Railway stations were built in different areas for people to transport from one

³ Xuanzang (Hiuen Tsang) 602– 664)) was a 7th Century Chinese Buddhist monk, scholar, traveler, and translator. He is known for the epoch-making contributions to Chinese Buddhism, the travelogue of his journey to India in 629-645 CE, his efforts to bring over 657 Indian texts to China.

place to another. During their rule, local people of the district also made some buildings worth seeing. The 101 years of British rule was of prosperity and peace (Rehman et.al, 1993).

Gujrat Museum

Gujrat Museum is one of the main attractive sites of Gujrat and located near Fawara Chowk, Gujrat city. The building of this Museum is commonly known as Ram Pyari Mahal. This Mahal was later converted into the Gujrat Museum. Rai Bahadur Sundar das Chopra built this architectural wonder in the early 20th century for his second beloved wife Ram Pyari. Rai Bahadur was born in 1880 in Dinga and died at Quetta on 28th October 1921. His death is still a mystery because people believe that he was given poison. He was the main contractor for the supply of goods to the military in the East Persian Cordon and was resided in Quetta from 1914. Britishers were planning to give him the Knight of Garter award and named him Raja. He built many other buildings also. Ram Pyari was born in 1904 and died in 1976. She was the eldest daughter of the Kapur Khatri family. She got married to Rai Bahadur at the age of twelve, Rai Bahadur was thirty or thirty-seven years old at the time of his second marriage. He was already married to Khushal Devi, a Kakar Khatri from Gujrat, and had three children (Mehmood, 2016).

For his beloved wife, Rai Bahadur built Ram Pyari Mahal in 1918. Ram Pyari Mahal was one of the majestic pre-partition buildings. The road passes by the building previously called Ram Pyari Road but is now called Circular Road (*Dawn*, January 17, 2023)

Architectural Features of Gujrat Museum

The building comprises forty rooms and four basement halls. The architecture of the building is a fusion of Indian and Greco-Roman architecture. The façade of the museum shows the influence of Greek architecture. Beautiful pillars of Doric and Corinthian orders can be seen at the entrance of the main hall. At the main entrance, a semi-circular arch is made which adds beauty to the structure of the building (*Dawn*, January 17, 2023).

The pillars of the building are decorated with floral motifs and a priestly figure that looks like an Indian figure. The floor tiles of the building are of Indian style and not in good condition most of them are worn out. The walls of the museum are decorated with tiles of French style and floral motifs made on them (*Dawn*, March 24, 2009).

Director General of the walled city Kamran Lashari visited the place and discussed about the deplorable condition of the building with Deputy Commissioner Gujrat. He met with the Gujrat Deputy Commissioner Safdar Virk and discussed the bad condition of the building. At present, the building of Ram Pyari Mahal has become dilapidated due to heavy rainfall (*Dawn*, November 16, 2023).

Ram Pyari Mahal was part of Explore Gujrat programme started by District administration. The Punjab Archaeology Department said that they want to make a public gallery, an art gallery, and a coffee room as part of Gujrat Museum to make it attractive. The Archaeology Department expended five million rupees on building renovation. The work on the building was started in 2008-2009 and took years to complete (*Dawn*, January 15, 2020).

Ram Pyari Mahal building was in the worst condition because it was used as a hostel for a long time and rainfall deteriorated the building badly. The Gujrat District Government made a decision to convert this building into a museum so the building was handed over to the Punjab Archaeology Department (Rehman, 2022).

The main difficulty was the recruitment of staff after that, in 2016, the work on the building was completed and the Advisor tourism to Chief Minister Chaudhry Asif Mehmood inaugurated the building. Ram Pyari family migrated to India after independence but left beautiful building behind which is an example of Greco-Roman architecture and local architecture (*Dawn*, December 10, 2017).

Galleries of Gujrat Museum

There are 6 galleries in Gujrat Museum but four galleries are operational out of six. The galleries are the Miscellaneous Gallery, Ethnological Gallery, Pre and Proto Historic Gallery, and Gandhara Gallery (*Dawn*, April 20, 2021).

In galleries of the Gujrat Museum, local products, jewelry and pottery are also displayed. The miscellaneous gallery of the museum shows local musical instruments, guns and pistols used in war, swords, armor, utensils, old Holy Quran, and coins of local rulers found in Gujrat. The ethnological gallery shows local utensils such as trays, glasses, plates, boxes, and local jewelry. The pre and proto-historic gallery shows artifacts of the Indus Valley and Mehargarh such as terracotta pots, male and female human figurines, saddle and pestle, jars, terracotta plates, cakes, balls, animals, whistles, seals, bangles, and goblets. The Gandhara Gallery shows the Gandhara School of art such as Buddha figures in different poses, Boddhisattva, Buddha's head, and artifacts collected from Gujrat District (*Dawn*, April 20, 2021).

Gujrat Museum - Problems and Prospects

The museum is considered a house of knowledge where historical, scientific, educational, and cultural artifacts are displayed. Pakistan is facing problems regarding the conditions of museums. Some museums in Pakistan are not attractive and they are not able to catch world eyesight. Gujrat Museum is one of the best steps taken by the Punjab Archaeology Department. This museum creates awareness among people. Museology is not widespread and well-known in Pakistan but efforts are made to make it famous. Museums are a gateway to understand a country, culture, religion, and aspects of everyday life. Gujrat Museum is facing some challenges and issues which need to be resolved. The Researchers visited the Gujrat Museum and observed the problems as follows:

1. Poor Management

Management in museums plays an important role because without proper management museums cannot become successful. Management is an essential in every part of the museum. Gujrat Museum is facing poor management. There is no proper management for objects and artifacts. Some artifacts are placed too close and some of them are far. Labeling of information tags with the artifacts is great but they fell from their position due to which the objects of the museums are displayed without information tags and the visitors are facing difficulties to know about the etymological and basic information of the objects. Some objects are also not in the right position and can be seen lying on the ground of showcases because of poor management. Such type of poor management is a reason for not attracting the visitors to visit museums.

2. Building Structure

The overall structure of the building is not in a good condition even though the Archaeology department has carried out conservation and preservation of the museum. The condition of the Gujrat Museum building has become deplorable because of rainfall. The ground of Gujrat Museum has sinkages (sump) and no more restoration has been done. The building is deteriorating with the passage of time which needs rehabilitation with immediate effect.

3. Inadequate Funding

Finance is a base of any organization without it no organization can be survived. The major constraints or barrier which the Gujrat Museum is facing is the issue of funding. Due to scarcity of budget, a number of tasks which the Museum intend to execute for smooth functioning, become pending.

4. Community Engagement

There is no community engagement in making this museum successful. There are no seminars, lectures, or workshops to attract the community and visitors. Community engagement plays an important role in making a museum successful but unfortunately, no step has yet been taken for the purpose.

5. Lack of Trained and Skilled Staff

The museum does not possess expert and skilled staff to manage the collections and educate the visitors. Lack of trained professionals has resulted in the inappropriate conservation of collections and undesirable development of museums. There is a need of professional staff in the Gujrat Museum. The staff of the museum is insufficient to meet the requirements due to which the museum is facing great difficulties in connection with handling the museum affairs especially conservation and preservation of artifacts as well as security of the museum etc.

6. Cleanliness

There is a need to make cleanliness arrangements in the museum. The environment of museum must be neat and clean. The museum administration should make necessary arrangements of cleanliness of the objects and especially the galleries should not be neglected otherwise the dust and such negligence would lead to damage the precious and priceless artifacts and objects of the museum. In showcases, paint falls from walls and paint can be seen in the galleries due to which the visitors are not coming in museum.

7. Non-availability of the Conservation Lab

The conservation lab is the backbone of a museum where the necessary repair, maintenance, preservation, conservation, and consolidation of museum artifacts are carried out. There is no conservation lab in the Gujrat Museum which is not good for museum artifacts. Without conservation, the artifacts soon began to deteriorate and also give shabby look. If there is no conservation lab then the restoration, preservation, conservation, consolidation, and maintenance would not be carried out. The visitors will not attract towards the museum, if artifacts are displaying in deteriorating condition and also have a shabby look. Artifact's life expectancy will decrease if conservation does not carry out from time to time. Due to the lack of conservation of museum artifacts will lose their existence and importance and there would not be any revenue generation.

8. Poor Artifact and Gallery Management

The management of gallery artifacts is one of the significant tasks at the museum. The management of artifacts is not up to the mark at Gujrat Museum. Some artifacts are placed too close and some are at a distance. The light is so high that it can be difficult for a person to watch and such type of light sources are also dangerous for the artifacts. Some labels/name tags fall due to improper care and vigilance. There is no proper cleanliness, repair, maintenance, conservation and preservation of museum artifacts at Gujrat Museum due to which the artifacts are giving shabby look. In view of this condition, the visitors are not attracting towards the museum.

9. Non-availability of Library

There is no library in the museum due to which those researchers and scholars who are doing research on Museum/heritage or intend to carry out research on Museum and heritage are facing great inconvenience, to study and learn more about the museum and its artifacts. Gujrat Museum needs such things to raise awareness about museology.

10. Non-availability of Canteen/Cafeteria

There should be a cafeteria in the museum to provide refreshment to the visitors. There is one cafeteria in Gujrat Museum but it is not operational. Sometimes tourists, visitors and especially most of the researchers and scholars who are working on museum or intend to carry out research work on museum, spent enormous time in museum in connection with their research work or collection of material related to their topics, so they need a place where they can eat something or get refreshment, therefore, the closed cafeteria at Gujrat museum must be operational to facilitate the visitors.

11. Non-availability of Security Gadgets

The existing security system of museum is not up to the entire satisfaction. The museum collects and stores antique and precious artifacts which are priceless, therefore, security of the Gujrat Museum must be ameliorated by adopting latest tools and techniques and also to avoid any untoward incident in the museum. Visitor safety is one of the biggest problems which can only be solved by improving security arrangements. Gujrat Museum has only one security guard and there is no security guard inside to monitor the museum activities. Security cameras, metal detectors, and monitoring room don't exist in the museum. Lack of such things can cause problems such as vandalism. There are no fire extinguishers. In order to improve the security arrangements of the Gujrat museum, more security staff be hired and the security staff be provided the latest security equipments i.e. weapons, walk through gate, fire extinguishers and alarms etc. CCTV cameras be installed at prominent places and a monitoring room may also be established to monitor the museum activities through these cameras.

12. Fireplace (Hearth)

Gujrat Museum is a historical place built during the British Raj and it shows the fusion of colonial and local architecture. In Gujrat, it is known as Ram Pyari Mahal. There are fireplaces in the building which gives an odd feeling. The presence of fireplaces in the gallery is giving scruffy look which need to be removed immediately to make it eye catching because the people love to visit those museums which are looking so good and possesses repletion of attraction in building.

13. Ticket Room

There is no ticket room in Gujrat Museum. There should be a ticket room in Gujrat Museum. There is only one desk and chair outside the museum and is utilizing as Ticket collecting place, that is not giving cogent impression.

Development Strategies/Suggestions

Every museum faces various challenges which can be resolved by taking necessary measures. Here are some suggestions/recommendations to ameliorate the plight of Gujrat Museum: -

1. The government should allocate some funds to the Gujrat Museum so that the museum can manage short falls according to its requirements.

2. There should be some professional people in museums to make the right decisions and management should be done by professionals.
3. The Archaeology Department of Govt. of Punjab should make necessary arrangements to carry out restoration in the Gujrat Museum to add beauty to the museum structure. The building structure should be monitored by museum staff from time to time in order to ensure its safety.
4. There should be one cafeteria full of necessary things needed by visitors. Also, there should be seating arrangements for visitors to relax themselves.
5. There should be one library in the museum where anyone can go to learn more about the museum artifacts, culture, and religion.
6. There should be one ticketing office.
7. Cleanliness of the museum and showcases must be carried out on daily basis.
8. Community engagement is needed for smooth operational of the Gujrat Museum. Therefore, lectures, seminars, workshops and public talks be arranged in this museum to engage people towards Gujrat Museum.
9. Digitalization of Gujrat Museum should be carried out because that is the best way to attract people towards museum.
10. One conservation lab is necessary to ensure the safety of artifacts. If artifacts need some preservation and conservation work, then there should be one conservation lab equipped with necessary instruments. All the conservation work should be done by professionals.
11. Proper gallery management and artifacts management be carried out; it will attract the visitors towards museum. The International Council of Museum (ICOM) rules and regulations should be implemented in true letter and spirit.
12. Trained security staff should be hired to ensure the safety of museum artifacts and visitors.
13. Monitoring room, CCTV cameras, fire extinguishers, and metal detectors should be available in the building to ensure safety of museum artifacts. CCTV cameras be installed at prominent places of the museum and a monitoring room should also be constructed to monitor the museum activities through CCTV Cameras.
14. The restoration work should be carried out immediately on the deteriorating area.
15. The administration of Gujrat Museum should make some plans regarding conservation and also to generate funds.
16. Extra structures of the building that look bad such as fireplace should be removed to make the structure beautiful.
17. The labeling/name tags of museum artifacts must be checked by a professional and labeling should be done in digital form.
18. The museum lighting should be adjusted to reflect the museum standard otherwise people with weak eyesight will have trouble to watch artifacts.
19. The museum building should be expanded to make it beautiful.
20. The administration should make special arrangements to overcome the issues/challenges.

Conclusion

Gujrat is not a newly settled land its history goes back to the time of Alexander the Great and the earliest king of this land known as King Porus who fought with Alexander. People of different traditions, religions, and cultures have lived here for centuries. The establishment of the Gujrat Museum is one of the great steps to preserve the history and culture of Gujrat. Pakistan is facing many challenges in the field of museology but now there are many museums open to the public. During this research, it has been observed that the Punjab Archaeology Department is not actively promoting the Gujrat Museum on digital platforms. It was also noted that conservation and preservation efforts at the museum are inadequate. The management appears to be ineffective, with minimal efforts to improve the galleries. The architecture of the museum does not align with its purpose, and poor administration further limits its popularity. Additionally, regular cleanliness and maintenance are not being carried out properly.

The artifacts from Gujrat are displayed in only one exhibit or showcase. Gujrat remained under Hindu rulers for a long time and there are no artifacts to show the Gujrat Hindu culture, therefore, there should be one gallery representing the Hindu culture of Gujrat. Gujrat is famous for pottery making and the pottery of Gujrat is considered the best in Pakistan, therefore, there should be one gallery that should have Gujrat pottery. There should be one gallery to give tribute to martyrs because district Gujrat, known as the "Land of Martyrs," and home to three Nishan-e-Haider recipients (Major Aziz Bhatti, Major Muhammad Akram, and Major Shabbir Sharif) and 70 police martyrs, symbolizing its deep legacy of sacrifice and valor.

The administration of Gujrat Museum should organize lectures and seminars to emphasize the importance of cultural heritage, educating visitors and the community about its value in preserving history, traditions and identity. Moreover, the administration of Gujrat Museum should also collaborate with academic institutions to provide research opportunities and internships, fostering academic engagement and allowing students to gain practical experience in museum studies and heritage preservation. Overall, museum collections are significant and it needs to put more efforts for ameliorating the plight of the museum and its artifacts.

Conflict of Interest

The authors showed no conflict of interest.

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