

## Challenges and Economic hurdles in Digital Age: A Study of Salar Jung Museum, India

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### ABSTRACT:

Digitization of Museums is an ongoing process since the beginning of the 21st century. With growth, expansion and diversification in the sector of information technology digitalization has become a necessity, for even institutions that deal with heritage and culture like museums. Today it has become an all-pervasive phenomenon and adopting digital technology, enables museums to attract visitors far and wide today. As the trend is gathering momentum universally, there are numerous studies and research undertaken, in the areas impacted by this phenomenon, with museums being no exceptions. The challenge and economics of developing, digitizing, and maintaining Indian museums and art galleries thus merits a detailed study. Keeping these challenges in mind, a research study was undertaken to determine the “Challenges and Economic hurdles in Digital Age: A study of Salar Jung Museum, India”. As part of the study, in-depth interviews with the Salarjungs Museum Curator, Librarian, administration department, and social media manager were conducted using a self-administered questionnaire, and data was analysed in a qualitative manner. This study concludes that Salarjungs Museum is challenged by economics of digitization and maintenance. Though, the museum team is taking positive steps towards reaching to the populace across the board by effectively digitalizing the entire museum, the fact remains that for a museum like the Salarjung Museum, digital support is used to only enhance user’s physical experience and this presents its own set of challenges and limitations.

**KEYWORDS:** Museum, History, Economy, Culture, Mass Media, Digital Age, Salar Jung Museum.

### Introduction

As a nation, India has a large geo-political expanse and one of the greatest volume and diversity in heritage in the world. The built-up heritage structures, help one to comprehend, how past cultures and societies have evolved. In doing so, they provide a gateway to future norms and ways of life of emerging cultures. As such their preservation is essential for the continuity of collective human experiences. The present era of the “digital revolution” has had a kind of pervasive and profound influence on today’s world. Not untouched, museums whose objective is to avail to the common man this cultural heritage of humanity and to obtain, research, conserve, communicate and exhibit these treasure troves, find themselves in the throes of this revolution. This pervading and deep influence of the digital world on such cultural heritages has egged museums today to rely on new technology to manage their collections. The collections today are both digital and physical embedded with new-age technology. Here activity related to their physical presence on the site is as crucial as their online

presence. Museums have responded to this need and challenge in myriad ways, a case in point here would be the museum understudy of this paper.

The Telangana state formed in the year 2014, has a history that dates back to the megalithic period. The region was governed by various prominent dynasties from the ancient time that have contributed to its political, administrative and cultural contours/identity. The Asaf Jahi dynasty which reigned from the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, laying the foundation of the erstwhile Hyderabad state till the state's merger with the Indian Union in 1948, contributed to the rich diverse legacy. The museum under study bearing testimony to that. The Salar Jung museum in the state of Telangana was established in the year 1951. The institution defines the cultural landscape/identity of the state. In 1961 the Union Government of India declared the museum as an "institution of national importance". It is the Salar Jung family, that was responsible for the rich/ exhaustive collection of exquisite objects of art, artefacts, figurines, antiques, wares, literature, et all from all over the world that are housed in the museum. The family was one of the most illustrious families, of the Deccan in the 18<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Three generations of the Salarjungs family – Nawab Mir Turab Ali Khan – Salar Jung I, Nawab Mir Laiq Ali Khan- Salar Jung II, and Nawab Mir Yusuf Ali Khan- Salar Jung III, served as prime ministers of the erstwhile state of Hyderabad. Having earned their titles, as astute administrators of the Princely kingdom, the Salar Jung's also left behind a rich legacy as connoisseurs of art, antiques, and rare manuscripts from wide across the world.

When Nawab Mir Yousuf Ali Khan- Salar Jung III decided to relinquish the post of Dewan (PM) in November 1914, he took to augmenting his treasures of art and literature. The more time he devoted to building his collection the news of his passion and interest for collecting art, spread far and across. This brought sellers of wares of all hues and shades from all corners of the world to Dewan Deodi, the ancestral residence of the Salarjungs. Domestic merchandise notwithstanding, he also purchased artefacts from lists and catalogues maintained by reputed antique dealer's world over, procured through agents abroad. Apart from these, he personally bought artefacts during his sojourns overseas to Middle Eastern countries and the Europe. Salarjung III was not only a connoisseur of art but also a man of words and letters. He extended patronage likewise to writers, artists and poet- scholars, thereby encouraging cultural and literary activities. He was even responsible for the publication of many books about his own family members. On his death in March 1949, a peculiar situation arose for the nawabs family. The magnificent collection stood ready to be bequeathed but with a small problem – there was no inheritance put in place. At, this juncture a collaborative effort, by the family members of the late Nawab and the Government of India resulted in the birth of one of India's finest museums – The Salarjung Museum. The museum was initially housed in Dewan Deodi, the ancestral residence of the Salar Jung family. It was, later shifted to its current location in the year 1968, after its administration was handed over to the Government of India. An autonomous board under the Ministry of Culture manages the affairs of the museum and the Governor of Telangana is its chairman.

The huge and diverse collection of the museum is spread across thirty-nine galleries in three buildings viz. the Central Block, the Eastern Block, and the Western Block also known as Mir Laiq Ali Khan Bhavan and Mir Turab Ali Khan Bhavan respectively. There are over forty-eight thousand objects preserved in the museum, that depict the culture of India, the Fareast, Middle east, and Europe of the bygone era. [1]

The collections of the Salar Jung Museum range from 2<sup>nd</sup> century to early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The museum has a collection of over 48,000 Art exhibits, 8,000 Manuscripts and over 65,000 Printed Books that comprise the exhaustive collection. This collection has been categorized into art forms from different regions namely – Indian, Western, Nepalese, Chinese, Middle-Eastern, Persian, and Japanese. These exhibits are spread over 38 galleries. There is also, a special gallery devoted to the founding Salar Jung family, called the "The Founder's Gallery".

Indian art and artefacts collection in the museum includes sculptures made of bronze and stone discovered from the region of South India, miniature paintings belonging to Rajasthan and Mughal School, an ivory collection that includes a set of ivory chairs that belonged to Tipu Sultan of Mysore;

jade, wood carvings, metal-ware, modern paintings, a collection of Bidri ware- believed to be the largest in the world, textiles, arms and armour. In the later years, works of modern Indian artists were also added to the original collection. Carpets from the Persian looms, objects of ceramics, glass, metal ware, furniture, lacquer etc. from Syria, Egypt and important Arabic and Persian manuscripts comprise the Middle Eastern collection and the Far Eastern collection at the Museum, one of the select few museums in India to possess of such an extensive collection has Sino-Japanese art objects, Chinese and Japanese celadon, ivory ware and embroidery pieces, Samurai swords and sheaths, objects of porcelain, paintings, bronze, woodwork, inlay, enamel, lacquer-ware, embroidery to name a few. In the European collection, there are objects from England, Ireland, France, Italy, Austria, etc. The wooden statue of *Mephistopheles and Margaretta*, by unknown artists, 19th century British and French paintings are exhibited along with porcelain objects, glass objects, furniture, and clocks. One of the prized attractions purchased in 1876 by Salar Jung I when he visited Italy, was the 'Veiled Rebecca' by the Italian sculptor *Giovanni Maria Benzoni*. [2]

The museum has a young learner's section which is a great place that provides informal education to the children about the bygone era. As they traverse through the gallery, the children take delight in the objects on display which include – train, toy armies, and similar objects made of metal, jade, porcelain etc. The Salarjung Museum is home to one of finest stocked libraries in the twin cities of Hyderabad and Secunderabad. The museum library has an enviable collection of rare books, manuscripts, publications on subjects ranging from physical sciences to law, literature, history, art, applied sciences to name a few. That the Salarjung family were great patrons of learning and education can be determined from the rare books and illuminated manuscripts which has been made easily accessible to the common public through the library. For history enthusiasts and scholars there are autographed manuscripts of Emperors Akbar, Aurangzeb and sister of Aurangzeb and daughter of Shahjahan Jahanara Begum with their seal and signatures. The museum, thus presents an opportunity to visitors both local and international to know the history, heritage and art of the land and simultaneously gives the chance to view various aspects of the art and heritage of other countries of the world too.

## Review of Literature

Museums in the digital age are throwing numerous challenges at curators, how they tackle them was discussed in a study conducted by **Regine Bonnefoit& Melissa Rerat**, Cambridge scholars in 2017, where they have highlighted the manner in which the challenges of digitalization will be handled by the museums. The authors observe that be it promotion, communication, exhibition, or conservation the use of technology for creative purposes, cultural mediation, etc. has multiple benefits in the current age. In the above context, the writers have also looked into the legal tenability of digitalized content. Similarly [3], **Ross Parry**, in 2009, in his work on 'Museums in a Digital Age' presents a cross-sectional body of digital heritage literature, to show the challenges of computing for different aspects of curatorship and museums. In terms of information, space, access, interpretation, etc [4]. **Susana Smith Bautista** in her work on Museums Place, Community, and Culture illustrates the socio-cultural factors like community, places, etc. that determine a museum's mission and, in that context, why and how technology should be used in museums.[5] **Enrico Bartacchini and Ferdinando Morandoin** analyze how technological innovation is redefining the purpose and mission of museums as stakeholders and distributors of digital images of cultural collections. The authors also identify the important shifting or emerging patterns in models for access and use of digital cultural collections, arising due to changing users' behavior, production structure, and access cost in cyberspace. The study also looks into the areas, such as the role of museums as important providers of authoritative and trusted content, the profitability of digital collections, and the adoption of new methods to evaluate their social impact and public opinion [6]

**AIM:** To find out the challenges and economic hurdles faced by the Salar Jung museum of Telangana in the digital age.

## Objective:

1. To know the economic challenges of the museum upgradation and maintenance.

2. To understand the digitization process of the museum.
3. To identify the usage and impact of social media platforms.
4. To examine the efficacy of the digitization of the museum.

### Methodology

To achieve the set objectives **qualitative methodology** is adopted for this study. **In-depth interviews** with **Salarjungs Museum** Curator, Librarian, administration department, and social media manager were conducted. Based on A self-administered questionnaire with some on-the-spot questions asked was used to collect the data. The collected data was presented and analysed in a qualitative manner.

### Data Presentation and Analysis

To meet the set objectives of the study, an in-depth interview with Ms. D. Ramani Kumari, (PR & Curator) and a few more staff from Salarjungs museum, Hyderabad, were taken with a self-administrated questionnaire. This paper discusses the latest advancements in the growth of digital museums and ascertains significant challenges and aspects that affect its successful implementation.

### Maintenance of Museum: Income and Expenditure

Salarjung museum is a designate national museum, that comes directly under the administrative control of Ministry of culture, Government of India and hence receives an annual grant of Rs. 20 crores from the Union govt of India, under museums grant scheme. Furthermore, the Ministry of Culture has many schemes, and programs that support funding, infrastructure and support to heritage institutions. This above-mentioned amount is released on an installment basis and the museum management utilizes this for the maintenance needs of the same. However, the expenditure incurred varies from one financial year to the other, as it involves continuous work of maintenance, restoration and upgradation of not only the heritage collections housed but also the infrastructure. There are also limited avenues of self-revenue generation for the museum which primarily consists of ticket collections, amounting to an approximate figure of Rs. 3 crores annually. Data analysis of self-administered questionnaire revealed the challenges of financial management of the museum. These include – untimely staggered release of the grant amount, prioritizing recurring expenditure, cost cutting on human resources, limited self-revenue generation.

### Interaction and Education

To create an environment of knowledge-based interaction for children the museum organizes summer camps for the students below age group of 18years. According to the Museum management, this venture of theirs always secures good responses from the student community. A newspaper advertisement is given in prior, as to the date and schedule of these camps and a fixed number of students intake is intimated as part of it. Besides this, the museum arranges guest lectures/workshop's/seminars for the benefit of the students who take part in summer camps. Special Outreach programs are arranged for underprivileged children to educate them on history, culture and heritage through museums. The museum also reaches out to the digital community by using social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, this initiative was started in 2019.

### Digital Curation

National level designate Salarjung Museum from Hyderabad stands at the forefront in adopting digital technology to create a virtual environment for its visitors by keeping the digital information on web pages or pre-recorded tour guides in an app through portable devices. In this regard the Ministry of culture, through its museum upgradation scheme, provides assistance for modernizing and strengthening the museum infrastructure. From digitizing art objects to capacity building of museum professionals the scheme provides financial assistance to all category national level museums. This digital technology is fast becoming the best source for spreading information among people in a quick and easy way without significant time lapse. Although the digitalization of the museums seems to benefit in all possible ways there are some disadvantages too. As digital museums cannot replace traditional museums, conversely, the digital information should complement the physical museum. In the in-depth interviews, it was expressed by the museum management team that on regular weekdays around 1500 to 2000 people physically visit the museum whereas there will be heavy



footfall on weekends and on holidays the number goes around 5000. The museum gets around 10k everyday virtual visitors who browse the museum website, app, Facebook page, Instagram, and Twitter. The maintenance responsibility of the website and app is given to the third party with some amount, visitors can access the museum app on the days they visit the museum which is accessible only in the museum during the visiting hours. whereas social media is maintained by dedicated employee who posts minimum 2 posts per day with a picture of an exhibit with a descriptive note to create awareness and receive feedback on social media platforms. The purpose of this being, to attract the digital community to the physical museum.

### Digital Challenges of Museum:

The greatest challenge Salarjung Museum authorities face, despite successful digitization is the ability to garner the attention of visitors on digital platforms. The museums visitor profile ranges from tourists, to history enthusiast, research scholars, children from the ages 10-14 years, and the like. Most visitors' focus on museum exhibits, tends to comprise of viewing the object tagged with a brief description on the side panels, the text of which is formulated by either curators or art reviewers, on most occasions. Then there are pre-recorded hand-held audio devices which the visitor can use to get the experience of a guided tour.

There are also some Visitors come with a purpose to do research on archeological objects. Most foreign visitors come during the winter season than in other seasons as they cannot adjust to this weather during summer and rainy. During days of heavy footfall, special arrangements are made for crowd management by opening additional entrances in the building. East and West wing gates are opened to allow the crowd inside and let go outside. The entire museum is digitalized. All 48,000 objects available in the museum are digitalized. Already 39 galleries are existing and have plans to increase them in the future further. Yes, adequate training will be provided to all the staff of all duties to effectively deliver their duties to suit the job needs. Almost 9000 manuscripts of Persian, Arabic, and Urdu languages have been digitalized for the benefit of research scholars. The museum also has a library with a children's section and a section for research scholars. With 8000 manuscripts and 60,000 books (in various languages and subjects) in its repository, it was made open to the public in 1961. The library is one of the only two places in the world where a miniature copy (2.4 cms) of the Holy Quran exists (the other place being Iran). Apart from preserving rare texts in its library, the Salar Jung Museum has a system of in-house publishing too. It has previously published about nineteen descriptive catalogs for specific use by research scholars along with leaflets and postcards for souvenir collectors. They have catalogs of Persian, Arabic, and Urdu manuscripts and a journal called the 'SJM Bi-Annual Research Journal' to aid researchers. Koha App to maintain the digital library. Research scholars who visit the library psychically will be allowed to access this. Some personal books of Salar Jang-I along with the rest of the collections are also available in the library.

### Limitations/Suggestions

An attempt was made through this study to know what challenges the Museum faces economically, digitally, and societally to maintain itself in this digital era, and how it is constantly re assessing itself to meet the needs of the present generation. Financially aided by the central government, the museum undergoes renovation every year. Recent upgrades are mostly targeted toward digitization. A national museum that is popular in Telangana, the museum attracts very good number of local and foreign visitors, from around the globe keeping it busy and lively. No doubt, it is a little challenging for the staff of the museum on overcrowded days, but high-security measures are taken to monitor each and every individual who visits the museum, and special arrangements are made for their entry and exist on these days. Expenditure of the museum exceeds its income. Though it is a National Museum, funded by the central government, local management tries its best to self-generate a certain amount of revenue with the aid of entry ticket collections. But the amount collected is a far cry from the estimate expected. Then, the museum authorities take some initiatives like summer camps, and outreach programmes to draw in young visitors from schools and colleges. But those initiatives are not sufficient and attractive enough to bring in more revenue or visitors. Only two social media posts are made available daily on official pages to engage digital audiences, but they are not attractive enough in getting responses or interaction from audiences. Although great efforts have been taken by the

team to improve the museum digitally, a lot more to be done. For example, virtual interactions without paying the way to physical visits, spreading more awareness about the museum objects and their unique collections are some suggestions forwarded to the museum management.

## Conclusion

In the days to come a wide variety of drivers and trends will shape the character and function of museums. Newer technologies like extended/computer minded reality will change how we view and experience our museums. It can also redefine the very place that can give us a museum-like experiences in the future. Similarly, Socio- cultural paradigm change will influence what type of experience people will avail. Restricted financial aid will continue to hamper effective functioning of museums and apply pressure on the efforts to making such institutions both profitable and more inclusive at the same time.

Questions also arise as to whether, the presence of virtual guided reality tours, videos and photographs of museum collections worldwide on the web make physical museums themselves obsolete or do these digital resources increase the efficacy of physical museums. If the digitalization of museums is not taken up at the earnest these questions may remain unanswered forever, because as matters stand complete digitalization of museums does not necessarily mean visitors stop visiting museums physically and view it from their androids. So, this current study concludes that, Salar Jung museum is constantly challenged with regards to financial resource management, in the face of constant upgradation, restoration, maintenance and digitization despite receiving financial aid from Central government. Despite the crunch, the museum team is taking positive steps by effectively digitalizing the entire museum. This act of the management rests on the firm belief that the physical experience of visiting the museum will be enhanced by an interactive and captivating atmosphere. As the last word is still out on the efficacy of digitization, in terms of expanding footprint digital or otherwise of heritage structures, the work in the near future will remain focused on enhancing the user experience in a museum as is seen with the Salarjung Museum.

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## Declaration Of Interest Statement

Today, digitization has become an all-pervasive phenomenon and adopting digital technology, enables museums to attract visitors far and wide today. As the trend is gathering momentum universally, there are numerous studies and research undertaken, in the areas impacted by this phenomenon, with museums being no exceptions. The challenge and economics of developing, digitizing, and maintaining Indian museums and art galleries thus merits a detailed study. Keeping these challenges in mind, a research study was undertaken to determine the *“Challenges and Economic hurdles in Digital Age: A study of Salar Jung Museum, India”*.

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