

## Mumbai Museum

January 27

The monks all rested early and well after yesterday's very engaging urban trek. Shivani came to the hotel suite and offered our meal at 8:30 am. She introduced us to her homemade potato filled paratha (with fresh nutmeg), still warm, accompanied by a couple of her homemade mango chutneys. One sweet and one salty. They were all very delicious. The walk up to the museum really is a five minute walk from where we're staying, and it was a quiet and pleasant walk on this Saturday morning. Things did get more crowded once inside.

What used to be called The Prince of Wales Museum, in Mumbai, had its name changed to 'Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj - Vastu Sangrahalaya'. Chhatrapati Shivaji was evidently a benevolent and much loved King of yore in these parts. But that name is just way too hard to say and too long as well, so let's just call it the Mumbai museum from now on. The Mumbai museum is housed in a lovely, spacious, multi-level Victorian era building, and is surrounded by lovely grounds with mature old trees as well. It is neither too big nor too small, as far as museums go. In terms of an outing, it is a perfect half day out. There is the usual, unusual pricing policy. 150 rupee for Indians, 700 for foreigners. I am glad that it is affordable for many Indians in any event.

Our visit coincided with three interesting exhibitions. A selection of stone statuary from several countries. A collection of poetic songs about Rhadha's love for Krshna, accompanied by paintings. And a series of Ajanta cave paintings that had been done as replicas of some of the originals.

Coming into the building under the central grand dome, the stone and woodwork is lovely, a sense of soft light way above is also very nice. The diversity of statuary was interesting. There was a pharaoh in sandstone from Egypt... a fresco of some war scene from Syria or Iran, men with swords drawn in galloping horses. Some Grecian or Roman man with an impressive six pack, muscles and veins popping everywhere, his lower robe falling, revealing his private bits, (without a fig leaf.) So curious that the private bits were so modest and flacid, while everything else was pumped and pulsating. Probably all for the best. An alabaster ladies robe had also fallen and I could see her bottom from behind! Looking towards our right, I saw a selection of religious statuary, feeling a little dizzy from juxtaposing energies under the dome I dashed towards the temple art.

There was a lovely selection of Hindu, Jain and Buddhist sculpture. Shiva, Vishnu, Ganesha, Parvati, Mahavira, Buddha, Avalokiteshvara among others were all here. It is amazing to see how developed the artisans skills were 900, 1000, 1500 years

ago, working with just a hammer and file and some rubbing stones. It is an honour and a privilege to see these works.

Putting the great Indian religions iconography so close together in a limited space is very generous for the viewer, but on another level it is also a bit dizzying. Both Tahn Joel and Tahn Sampanno commented that they felt a little overwhelmed, and we'd only been there for twenty minutes! Walking into a side room where there were only Buddhist items, it definitely felt more calm in there. There was a stunning bronze Avalokiteshvara from Kashmir from 1200 years ago. And a bronze Maitreya from Bihar from 1000 years ago. They were both of very fine quality and about 50 centimetres tall. It is rare to see good quality larger bronzes from these zones and from that era. Stone is more common. There were also some interesting terra-cotta busts of Buddha from Pakistan, with sweet smiling faces and joyful floral auras.

Walking up the staircase on the left hand side we wandered into the Krishna display. I do like the sweetness of Krishna and Rhada, but when I saw a display of Tibetan Buddhist objects over the other side of level two I was quickly drawn there. Shivani who is a classically trained singer appreciated the Krishna poem section greatly, as all classically trained Indian singers will have sung many songs on this subject matter.

There was a beautiful, large dancing Tara in bronze, and many exquisitely fine detailed smaller gold plated copper statues from Nepal. This was a very pleasant surprise, as these are among my most favourite items of Buddhist art to appreciate. We weren't anticipating so many Buddhist items here, and were all pleased at the discovery. But curiously, we were all feeling a bit overwhelmed after just an hour and a half. I think that yesterday's very big day out had left some lingering low scale trauma. Our leg muscles were still a little swollen and tender, and perhaps our hearts were slightly bruised as well. Even so, the museum was the perfect choice for this day, and being allowed to take pictures was a real treat.

The ancient Indian jewellery display was more interesting to me than I would have expected, because it gave a glimpse into what the stone sculptors had been replicating on their devas and Bodhisattvas. From the Ghandhara to the Phala eras. The thangka painters as well, with the armlets, bracelets, anklets, and three layers of necklaces so often adorning the celestial Bodhisattvas. These Indian jewellery makers really knew how to make jewellery! Visiting the Ajanta revisited display was nice, for just that reason. Quietly revisiting. There was a well produced little video to enjoy as well.

After taking in the museum we were all ready to go home. We were back in the hotel by 3:30 pm. We had a quiet afternoon and evening, and it was just what was needed. Some quiet time to meditate and appreciate what we'd been taking in. I enjoyed looking at the photos from the museum on my phone, and sharing them with appreciative friends. Tomorrow our program is to meet Shivani's husband and extended family, have some Dhamma discussion together, then visit some active ancient Hindu shrines as a part of our cultural immersion studies. It is good to rest a bit first.

Our seaside location is working as a home base. It was a good choice. You feel as though you are a little bit peripheral... on the edge of the thronging megalopolis. There is space to breathe. People come here to relax, go for a walk, watch the sunset, or have a meal. It is probably about as chill chill as Mumbai gets.