The Wandering Collection: The India Museum and Dialogues on Empire

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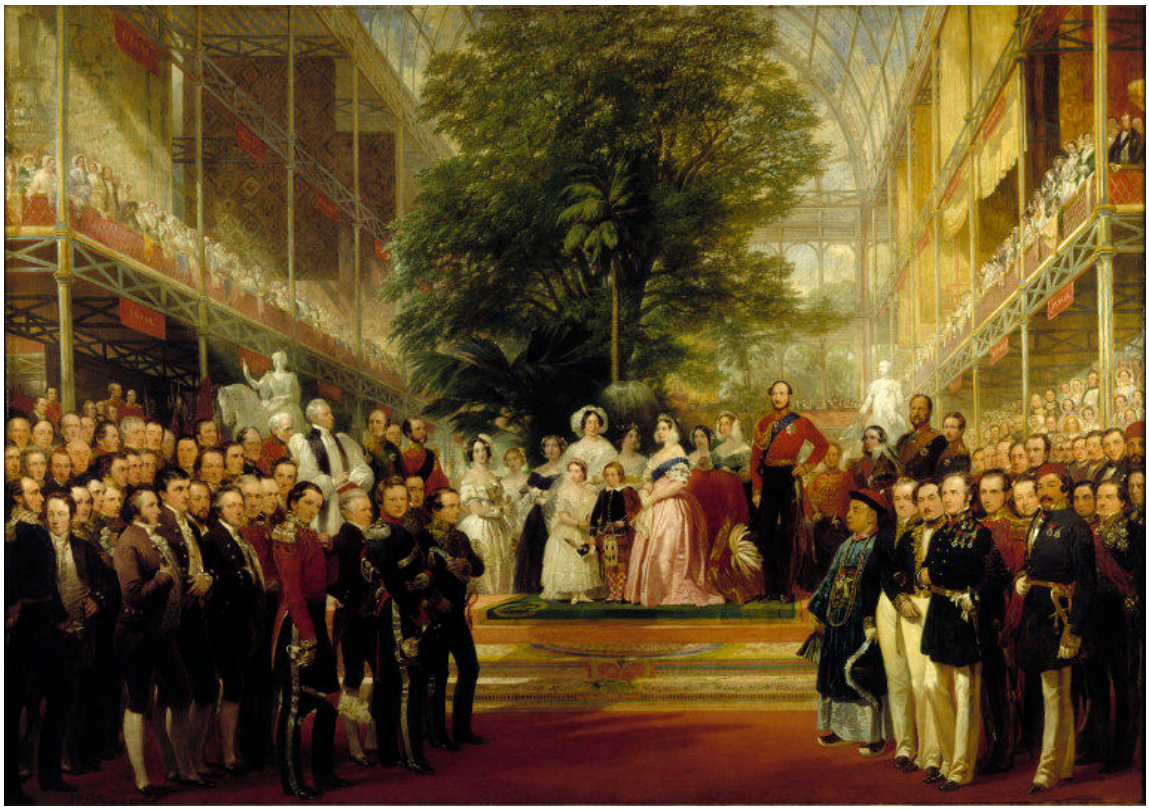
Introduction



"The Opening of the Great Exhibition by Queen Victoria on 1 May 1851" - Henry Courtney Selous[1]

On May 1, 1851, Queen Victoria rode through a crowd of about half a million people in Hyde Park to open the Great Exhibition in the new Crystal Palace. There were a further 30,000 people waiting inside the hall for the Queen's arrival. The Crystal Palace was a sight to behold. Made mostly of metal and glass, it covered 800,000 square feet of exhibition space and sat on a plot of land in South Kensington that was 2,300 feet in length and 500 feet in width. The Great Exhibition featured exhibits from all over the globe and from thousands of different types of industry and art.[2] For the over 100,000 exhibits at the Crystal Palace exhibition, there were

[1] Henry Courtney Selous, "The Opening of the Great Exhibition by Queen Victoria on 1 May 1851," 1851-1852, Oil Painting, 169.5 cm x 241.9 cm, Victoria and Albert Museum.
[2] Trevor May, *Great Exhibitions* (Oxford: Shire Publications, 2010), 9-13.

13,937 exhibitors, over 6,556 of which travelled from overseas. The foreign courts were the most popular with visitors, especially the Indian Court.

"The Indian Court" - Nash[3]

For the two hundred years prior to this exhibition, a significant portion of the trade between Great Britain and India had been based in the import of luxury goods. However, after the exhibition, British manufacturers increasingly viewed India as a supplier of raw materials for British industrial centers. 6,063,986 visitors, a number roughly equal to twenty-five percent of Britain's population at the time, came to the Crystal Palace exhibition.[4] A wide range of people from varying classes, genders, and ethnicities were reintroduced to the idea of empire in India as it existed then, an era in which the idea of empire was expanding. This exhibition reinforced the

[3] Nash, "The Indian Court," 1854, Lithograph, 44.4 cm x 59.8 cm, Victoria and Albert Museum.
[4] Trevor May, *Great Exhibitions,* 21-22.

idea of trade in empire, but in such a way that it also introduced a new conception of empire, one that did not rely so much on economics, but on a comparison of cultures.

Despite this eventual success, initially it took a great deal of time and effort for the exhibition committee to garner public support. Originally, members of the public saw the exhibition as a waste of time and resources. Its location caused concern as well. One of the Great Exhibition's selling points was that it would help to promote industry and trade. Yet, the committee decided that the exhibition should be placed in the middle of West London instead of the historic trading center of London: the East End. Some of the wealthier members of West London were cautious about having trade come so close to their front doors. Some in the East End felt that moving what was to be a great exhibit on trade out of their area was something of a betrayal. Due to these public sentiments, the exhibition committee made a few concessions. For the first couple of days of the exhibition the committee sold tickets at a much higher price than had been originally suggested in order to ensure that the wealthy patrons of the exhibition would have a few days to themselves to explore. Additionally, prices could not be presented beside exhibits within the Crystal Palace, especially in the Indian Court.[5] This ensured that the exhibition resembled a museum more than a market. This became the first in a long line of instances in which Indian artifacts placed in museums were used as a tool of communication.

Prince Albert's positive response to the Great Exhibition of 1851 spawned several new museums in the South Kensington area, including the India Office's India Museum. Scholars for the past century and a half have extensively studied all of these museums. Many of the museums that opened in the wake of this event were museums that revolved around the concept of education as discussed in Bruce Robertson's 2004 article "The South Kensington Museum in Context: An Alternative History." Robertson's article is one of many that focuses on the

[5] May, *Great Exhibitions*, 12-13.

creation of a museum and the roles that the director and staff played in that creation. Like many other historians, Robertson looks at a museum, in this case the South Kensington Museum, without looking at the wider context in which it was founded. Many of these histories do not include empire as a factor in the creation and day-to-day operations of these institutions. Those scholarly explorations which do involve empire such as the Smithsonian's *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display* tend to focus more on post-colonial representations of other cultures, such as the 1986 exhibition of Indian Art at the Grand Palais in Paris.[6] In contrast, this paper examines the cultural dialogues regarding empire that took place between the educated British public and the Government through the collections of the India Museum.[7] By tracing the collections of the India Museum between 1869 and 1883, it is evident that the British Government and the British people used cultural centers such as the former India Museum as a structure through which the perception of empire could be discussed, changed, and molded to fit changing conceptions of British national identity. In many ways, during this period British perception of empire changed from one sustained by trade to one sustained by culture.

By utilizing the internal documents found in museum archives in London, this thesis is able the follow the internal, bureaucratic debates that occurred within this museum and how those debates correlated with larger events. This paper is divided into three chapters. The first chapter examines the trade background and focus of the India Museum as it came under the purview of the India Office, as well as how some in the British public received that background

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[6] For more information about museums in a postcolonial context, see *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, Robert Aldrich's *Vestiges of the Colonial Empire in France: Monuments, Museums, and Colonial Memories*, Dominic Thomas's *Museums in Postcolonial Europe,* Iain Chambers, Alessandra De Angelis, Celeste Ianniciello, and Michaela Quadraro's *The Postcolonial Museum: The Arts of Memory and the Pressures of History,* and John MacKenzie's *Museums and Empire: Natural History, Human Cultures, and Colonial Identities*.

[7] However, I am by no means the first person to ever write about imperial museums within context. For more information about previous texts in this area of study, see Tim Barringer and Tom Flynn's *Colonialism and the Object: Empire, Material Culture, and the Museum*, Sarah Longair and John McAleer's *Curating Empire: Museums and the British Imperial Experience*, and Maya Jasanoff's *Edge of Empire*: *Lives, Culture, and Conquest in the East, 1750-1850.*

and focus. The second chapter explores how changes were made to the India Museum during the mid-1870s in response to public criticisms, including a move from the India Office building to a new home in South Kensington. The final chapter traces the India Museum's collections through their dispersal to the South Kensington Museum and the ways in which that dispersal reflected shifting perceptions of empire from a solely financial institution to one with a variety of functions.

Chapter I

Trade in the Attic: The Museum as a Tool in the Promotion of Trade

On the seventeenth of May 1870, Samuel Robert Graves, the Member of Parliament (MP) for Liverpool, called attention to the role of the Council of State for India. He insisted, "It is desirable that the Council of State for India should embrace among its members persons practically conversant with the trade and commerce of India." He claimed that as the Council currently stood, its members were from too limited a class, none of which had any sort of practical knowledge and experience in commerce. While he believed that the Council addressed trade, he did not feel they had given it the attention it deserved, that it had fallen into the trap of the old adage, "what is everybody's business is nobody's." [8]

This was hardly the first time that a MP had suggested that the India Office could do with reorganization, nor was Graves alone in suggesting that it should have some focus on trade. In 1857, during the writing of the Council's constitution, Benjamin Disraeli, current MP for Buckinghamshire and a future Prime Minister, suggested that within the Council of State for India there should be five members whose job it would be to represent the five centers of industry in Britain. Furthermore, at the same time that Graves made his speech in the House of Commons, Chambers of Commerce up and down the British Isles were calling for a Council that would take into account their worries and avenues of trade. These Chambers wanted to make sure that their trade interests, especially their textile interests, would not be ignored at a national level. The Liverpool Chamber of Commerce, for instance, suggested that "a portion of the

[8] "Resolution", House of Commons, 17 May 1870.

Council should be men who were capable of advising on all matters connected with the industry of the United Kingdom and the Asiatic portion of the Empire."[9]

In his speech to Parliament that day, Graves made a bold statement; he said, "trade was the genius of India."[10] This was a sentiment that the India Museum took upon itself to uphold. This museum, which had long since been labeled as a type of "Trade Museum," came under new management in the aftermath of the 1857 Rebellion when the East India Company (EIC) lost their holdings in India and the British Government took over. In many ways, those in charge of the museum took the words of Parliament to heart and chose to use the collections of the India Museum for this purpose, which meant that speeches such as Graves's defined the museum's function in the early 1870s. After its settlement into the India Office, the collection of the India Museum became a tool through which the British Government could propagate trade between merchants in England and imperial holdings in India. Unfortunately, in the public view, even the support garnered by speeches such as Graves' was not enough to sustain a museum solely focused on trade.

The Function of a "Trade Museum"

What exactly is a trade museum and why would the India Museum be classified as one? In 1869, M. E. Grant Duff, the Undersecretary for India, described the India Museum as being, "not a mere museum of curiosity, nor even primarily a museum intended for the advancement of science, but the reservoir, so to speak, that supplies power to a machinery created for the purpose of developing the resources of India, and promoting trade between the Eastern and Western

[9] "Resolution", House of Commons, 17 May 1870.
[10] "Resolution", House of Commons, 17 May 1870.

empires of Her Majesty, to the great advantage of both."[11] Duff described the museum's primary purpose as promoting trade and Duff was hardly the first ever to consider this to be the museum's primary purpose. The India Museum had a long trade history, one that had long since established it as a "trade museum."

Originally, the EIC owned the museum, and it carried the name "An Oriental Repository." Queen Elizabeth I established the EIC in 1601 as the Governor and Company of Merchants of London Trading into the East Indies.[12] As its original name suggests, the EIC was a company entirely dedicated to trade with the East Indies, and the repository it started was meant to further serve this purpose. As time went on, Company members donated more and more items to the repository and it grew to be a rather sizeable museum. For example, from 1855 to 1857, Captain T Biggs, equipped with a camera provided by the EIC, photographed ancient inscriptions and statues in Western India, a collection which he donated to the EIC, and eventually came under the control of the India Museum. Furthermore, the early development of archaeological studies in India, and therefore the beginnings of the Museum, began with company members who "discovered, explored and recorded many sites and historic buildings."[13] In 1858, when the British Government took control of the imperial holdings in India from the EIC, they also took over care of the museum, which was placed under the control of the India Office and the Secretary of State for India.

Of course, with new management comes new jobs, and the same was true for the India Museum. In 1859, the India Office named John Forbes Watson the Reporter on the Artifacts of India. In his early years in this office, Forbes Watson used his position to further trade with

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[11] Ray Desmond, *The India Museum, 1801-1879* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1982), 94.
[12] "East India Company," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/176643/East-India-Company
[13] Desmond, *The India Museum*, 111.

India, especially now that the EIC had been disbanded. While the India Museum had been a "trade museum" for almost its entire lifespan, Forbes Watson was one of the first to directly describe the India Museum as a "trade museum" and wrote many a publication about how such museums could be used in the further promotion of trade. *The Industrial survey of India, and the measures required to make it results available for the purposes of commerce*, distributed in 1872 described the necessity of having a full understanding of Indian products in Britain. Another writing, titled "On the Extension of Commerce between the United Kingdom and India, and on the Development of the Resources of Both Countries by Means of Trade Museums," more explicitly addressed the question of why such museums were necessary.

In these articles, Forbes Watson emphasized over and over again the importance of trade museums to both Britain and India. Forbes Watson argued that British textile manufacturers, typically located in the North, could use the artwork of India to inspire textiles that they could then sell to India. He pointed specifically to a set of volumes filled with samples of Indian manufactures, which they then gave out to thirteen locations in Britain and seven locations in India, in the hopes that they would start to work together. Furthermore, he specifically mentioned that these volumes as well as the museum itself should be geared towards manufacturers and merchants. Near the end of his article, Forbes Watson asserted: "In short, such museums would, in the first instance, be designed chiefly for the mutual profit of Great Britain and great India, and would tend to tie the two great countries together by the surest and strongest of knots."[14] In 1868, when he presented this paper to the Society of Arts, Forbes Watson considered *trade* "the surest and strongest of knots," a sentiment echoed not only in the

[14] J Forbes Watson, "On the Extension of Commerce between the United Kingdom and India, and on the Development of the Resources of Both Countries by Means of Trade Museums," *Journal of the Society of the Arts* 16, Nov 22, 1867, 229.

statements given by museum staff at the time, but in the way that they approached the museum's set up as it transitioned to a new home in the India Office.

This "trade museum" mentality became about profiting from empire in a mutually beneficial way as well. In a letter to the editor of *Nature* in 1873, Hyde Clarke, a former member of the Anthropological Society of London, wrote:

> There is, it is true, a growing license in this day for representing us as usurpers and oppressors of India, whereas the peace, prosperity, and progress of India have been created by us, and were we to withdraw, would be destroyed by the sanguinary conflicts of the various races of conquered and conquerors constituting the populations. We ought to stand on our right *to share in the prosperity of India* as a prerogative belonging to us.[15]

In the early 1870s, the India Museum represented a tool of trade; trade that was advantageous to both Britain and India. The leaders of the museum projected a mutually beneficial trade relationship by drawing on the multiple articles from the early 1870s that mention the growing interest in "Oriental" products in Britain.[16] As a result of this, British manufacturers needed more information about the sorts of products coming in from India. As one writer at the time phrased it: "The memorialists dwell partly upon the value of the Museum as a means of arousing and fostering public interest in India, but chiefly upon the value of such an institution to manufacturers."[17] Unfortunately, in its current location, the India Museum lacked the space and the drive to be able to dedicate itself fully to this goal.

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[15] Hyde Clarke, "East India Museum," *Nature*, May 1, 1873, 5.
[16] Francis R. Conder, "The New India-Museum," *The Art Journal,* September 1875, 276.
[17] "Political and Social," *The Examiner,* March 20, 1875.

Location, Location, Location

India Office circa 1868. The India Museum could be found in the attic of this building[18]

The location of the India Museum was so deplorable that many did not consider it worth the trip unless going for a very specific reason. 1869 marked a turning point in the history of the India Museum. It was the year in which the India Museum threw off the final shackles of the EIC and moved out of Fife House and into the India Office. Unfortunately, the lack of space at the India Office required that the museum placed into the attic of the India Office along with the India Library, a completely separate institution. This meant that museum visitors had to walk up

[18] "The New Foreign and India Office," The *Illustrated London News*, October 1868.

about 140 steps to "a maze of skylit chambers and passages, which seem to have been originally contrived partly for astronomical observations and partly for the growth of tropical plants."[19] Another observer described the location of the museum thus:

> [The Visitor] will go right up to the top of the principal staircase, and then down the bottom of the long gallery on which it lands, he will there find a number of obscure doors…He will, in fact, open all the doors one after the other, and the right one several times before he ventures in. But if at last, in spite of its seeming to lead to nothing but a lighted lamp against a wall, he should push on, he will, after going up a narrow, twisted, short, stone staircase, find himself at a doorway, on his right, opening into the prolonged attic in which the collections of the India Museum are now being arranged.[20]

This design caused the museum to be scorching hot in the summer and full of dust and soot in the winter from the chimneys that exited through the roof. As a result, the majority of the visitors to the museum at this point in time had to have a reason for visiting the museum, one that was influenced by the artifacts on display.

This odd layout of the museum meant that the India Office had to be selective about what could be displayed. After visiting the new location, a writer from *Oriental* commented:

> There is no catalogue – it would be impossible to use it if there were; -- there is no intelligible arrangement, but organic and inorganic products, machinery and manufactures are mixed up in hopeless confusion….It is practically inaccessible, and hid away out of sight, and when you get to it you find a bonded warehouse and not a Museum in straightforward airy order.[21]

The words "warehouse," "products," and "manufactures" in the description above are particularly telling about the way in which the museum was geared towards trade. For one, even viewers at the time did not see this museum as a "museum," but rather as a "warehouse," a word associated with displaying items for sale. Furthermore, the description explains the artifacts on display as "products" and "manufactures," words more associated with trade than with art or history. The way that museums choose to display exhibitions usually either consciously or

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[19] "Hidden Treasures," *The Times*, 5 May 1874.
[20] "The India Museum," *The Pall Mall Gazette*, April 23, 1869.
[21] *Oriental vol 1,* 1873, 320.

unconsciously reflects the agenda of those in charge of exhibitions. In the case of the India Museum, even the way that the artifacts were chosen was done in a way meant to reflect trade. Forbes Watson removed artifacts from the collection that did not fit this vision including a vast majority of the botanical artifacts.[22]

Even once the museum reopened to the public in April 1870, it saw a few issues. Depending on the time of year, the museum was open for four or five hours on Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Saturdays. The limited hours did not make this museum very popular with the general public, and it took a request from the Working Men's Club and Institute Union before the India Office took notice. This particular request stated that prolonged opening hours would "be of very great service to citizens as a means of industrial instruction."[23] Since the reopening of the museum, the India Office had been receiving complaints about the hours and the inaccessibility of the natural history collection, but it took someone bringing up the industrial connection before anything was done about it. The India Office chose to open the museum for two evenings per week in response to this intervention.

Finally, even the museum publications emphasized trade and trade alone. In 1886, the India Office published an eighteen-volume text called *Collection of Specimens and Illustrations of the Textile Manufactures of India* and *The Textile Manufactures and the Costumes of the People of India*, both written by Forbes Watson. In 1871, Forbes Watson along with the India Office published *Report on the Cultivation and Preparation of Tobacco in India,* and in 1872, they published *The Industrial Survey of India, and the Measures Required to Make its Results Available for the Purposes of Commerce.* These are just a few of the publications revolving

[22] Desmond, *The India Museum,* 130.
[23] Desmond, *The India Museum,* 131.

around trade that the India Office produced in the 1860s and early 1870s. Even the titles of the publications make it clear what the India Office hoped to accomplish with these texts.

Parliamentary Responses

As the India Museum was owned and operated by the India Office, a governmental office, the museum and its "cost" was brought up in Parliament, though this was not always explicit. The speech by Graves mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, while not directly about the India Museum and what its purpose should be, nonetheless had an effect on the way the museum was run. While the members of the Council of State for India were not responsible for the day-to-day running of the museum, they were in charge of the museum as a whole. Therefore, when members of Parliament decided the agenda and makeup Council of State for India, their decision hugely affected the museum itself.

In the early 1870s, Parliament became divided on the role of Britain in Indian affairs, and therefore the role that the India Museum should play in British-Indian relations. When Grant Duff commented on the India Museum, for example, he made a point to say that the museum had been visited by roughly 50,000 people in the past year and that the primary object of the museum should be "constant communication with manufactures, merchants, and all manner of persons engaged or desiring to be engaged in trade with India." He stated: "I need not say that the more the Museum can be made useful and agreeable to the general public without interfering with its primary object the better shall we be pleased..."[24] By saying this, Grant Duff made it clear that as far as he was concerned the museum would be better suited to remaining a tool of trade. On the other hand, in response to Graves, Charles Eastwick, former member of the EIC and MP for

[24] "Question," House of Commons, June 12 1873.

Penryn and Falmouth, said: "Our Empire in India had been founded by a commercial community, and our interest in that country had been for two centuries purely commercial. But at the end of nearly two centuries there supervened a time when that interest was subordinated to our political necessities."[25] Eastwick believed that the time had come to shift the focus of the India Office away from the singularity of trade. Similarly, William Crawford, Parliamentary Representative for the Durham Miners Association (DMA), believed that finding someone with sufficient trade experience who wanted to work for the Council would be incredibly difficult as anyone that interested in and invested in trade would not be willing to work in the Government. Crawford seemed to be implying that in the public view, trade was no longer in the purview of the British Government, but rather in the hands of private investors. What this would mean for the India Museum is that the museum's operators would have to find a new avenue of interest in order to keep the museum open and relevant.

Read All About It…Or Not

Unlike Parliament, and as a result of the location, arrangements, and limited hours, the general public at this time became skeptical of this museum and its strict focus on trade. Even scholars at the time found the museum to be lacking. The museum's location meant that many of the useful scholarly samples were sealed away in drawers and unable to be studied. In fact, one visitor to the museum remarked: "It has been found on the opening of boxes that some of them have been attacked by moth, and that valuable specimens have been lost."[26] The museum's contents were so little valued that they were never even properly stored. This museum that was

[25] "Resolution", House of Commons, 17 May 1870.
[26] P.L. Sclater, "The India Museum," *Nature,* July 15, 1875.

wasting away at the top of the India Office at the beginning of the 1870s, was one that was known to very few, and important only to those in trade and in Government.

Some argued that the India Museum was a kind of "forgotten museum," that the India Museum's anonymity was a tragedy. *The Athenaeum* described the India Museum, as "a museum which deserves to be better known than is at present its fortune."[27] A different visitor wrote: "The India Museum, where now placed, on the top story of the India Office, has found to be useless for all the purposes for which it was intended. The labor necessary to reach it has been sufficient to deter any but the strongest from making the attempt, and during the summer months…the heat has been found to be insupportable."[28] Another wrote: "The Museum and the Library exist, and we suppose that is nearly all that can be said of them."[29] The writers quoted above realized that the India Museum, whatever purpose it may serve, was useless in its current circumstances.

Even those articles that praised the Museum's focus on trade felt that it was falling short of its potential. In February 1870, *The Pall Mall Gazette* ran an article that focused on the exhibition of Indian fabrics at the India Museum. The writer of this article explicitly stated that this exhibition had the "practical purpose of making our manufacturers acquainted with the kind of stuffs which the native looms produce by hand labour, and which we with steam machinery can produce at half the price."[30] While the review of this exhibition was overall a positive one, the writer criticized the museum's failure to care for its collections and display them appropriately. This writer also called attention to the fact that "not much more than one-third of the whole splendid collection is there; the rest stowed away in boxes prey to damp and moth, and

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[27] "Indian Art," *The Athenaeum*, March 12, 1870.
[28] "The New India Museum and Library," *The Morning Post,* January 14, 1874, 4.
[29] "The India Museum and the Proposed Indian Institute," *The Standard*, March 25, 1875, 6.
[30] "Special Exhibition of Indian Fabrics," *The Pall Mall Gazette*, February 28, 1870.

without much chance of seeing the light for some time…The very display of textile fabrics we have been speaking of is almost hidden in what are little better than garrets."[31] This author approved of the museum's emphasis on trade, but came away unimpressed with the execution. "Indian Art," an article from the March edition of *The Athenaeum*, discussed the same exhibition and came to a similar conclusion, stating "we despair of seeing the splendid and admirably-decorated Indian antiquities and manufactures which are there gathered made popular unless readier means of access are afforded to the treasures themselves."[32] The writer from *The Athenaeum* believed that the museum as it currently stood could not do justice to its collections. The article ended on this note, leaving the reader not with a sense of how astounding this exhibition was, but rather with a sense of disappointment with the Museum as a whole. This meant that even when one read about the India Museum, they were being exposed not to the museum itself, but its failings.

Conclusion

By the early 1870s, the "Trade Museum" could no longer sustain itself as a museum entirely devoted to trade. Between public opinion, governmental involvement, and the writings of India Office officials, a sense of disappointment regarding the India Museum took prevalence. Many, including Forbes Watson, considered the potential of the India Museum to be great, but the small focus, location, and disorganization kept the museum from reaching it. They recognized that if this museum was going to survive and continue to receive funding from the British Government, then some things would have to change. They would have to expand their

[31] "Special Exhibition of Indian Fabrics," *The Pall Mall Gazette*, February 28, 1870.
[32] "Indian Art," *The Athenaeum*, March 12, 1870.

focus and make the museum more accessible to visitors. Furthermore, these officials recognized that if the India Museum was to do the job that it set out to do, much less the job that members of the public now demanded of it, it would have to be moved to a new location, one less addled by lack of space and potentially damaging environmental conditions. In the following chapter, we will see how this sense of disappointment in the state of the museum turned into physical change in the way in which the India Museum was approached.

Chapter II

Education in a New Location: A Response to Public Criticism

> Such an institution would afford not only exhaustive materials for study and research, but would likewise be suitable for reference by the Indian and Colonial authorities, by men of business or of letters, and by officials or emigrants intending to proceed to India or the Colonies. Thus it would be instrumental in furthering actual work or business, whether scientific, political, or commercial.[33]

In his 1874 essay, "On the Measures Required for the Efficient Working of the India Museum and Library," Forbes Watson answered the criticisms that had been thrown at the India Museum in the early 1870s and proposed a new method of presenting the arts and manufactures of India. He acknowledged the "unsatisfactory" conditions under which the India Museum had been operating for the past five years, and that as a result, the collection's value deteriorated. He conceded that the collection had no real value to scholars as it then stood stating that they were "virtually shut out from the only popular source of information on Indian subjects which is accessible in this country."[34]

In order to fix this oversight, Forbes Watson established three principles on which he felt that the India Museum should be based. 1) The India Museum should specialize its contexts, e.g. sort them into various categories. 2) The artifacts should be specialized within each category. 3) Written information should be paired with each artifact. Forbes Watson believed that when combined these three principles would create a museum experience like the one described at the opening of this chapter.

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[33] "A Museum for India and the Colonies," *Nature* (22 June 1876), 173.
[34] John Forbes Watson, "On the Measures Required for the Efficient Working of the India Museum and Library," 1874, in *The Emergence of the Modern Museum: An Anthology of Nineteenth Century Sources*, ed. Jonah Siegel, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008), 320.

Furthermore, Forbes Watson did not just emphasize the new arrangements of the museum, but the benefits of the India Museum as well. Unlike the period described in the previous chapter, Forbes Watson gave four distinct advantages and purposes for the presence of the India Museum. While the commercial benefits were still the item that Forbes Watson mentioned first, he also brought up the museum's political and educational aspects. However, in order for this to occur, Forbes Watson needed a larger location for the museum, one that he eventually found in South Kensington. It was in this western region of London that the India Office responded to the criticisms of the early 1870s by using the collections of the India Museum to promote education both in the museum and in the wider British world. This museum became a tool of discourse through which the British Government and the British public could contemplate empire.

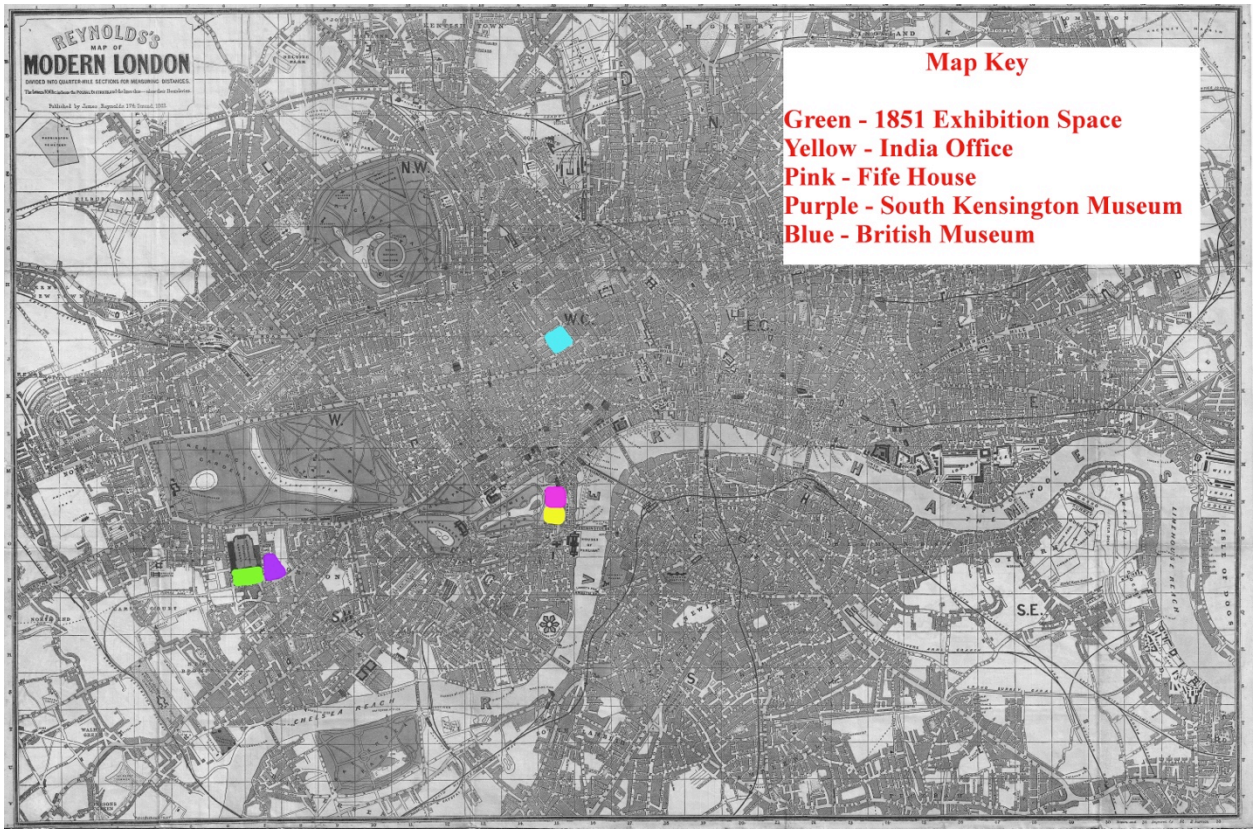
Before delving into the chapter, it is first necessary to define what museum staff at the time meant by the word "education." The curators and operators of the India Museum used "education" to mean two different things. First, education meant education as it is used today, as in, scholars who wanted to learn more about India could utilize the India Museum. While that definition is discussed within this chapter, it is the second definition of education that is infinitely more interesting. Education was also simply an act of looking – not just scholarly learning but an entire culture examining another. Forbes Watson, among others, used this term to denote learning and defining a culture and a history through looking at artifacts. In many ways, what they were alluding to with this was using the collections of the India Museum as a vehicle for the Orientalist gaze.[35]

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section details the move of the museum out of the India Office and into its new abode. The second section examines how

[35] For more information see Edward Said's *Orientalism*.

Forbes Watson influenced the creation of the India Museum in South Kensington by planning "An Imperial Museum for India and the Colonies." The third and final section of this chapter discusses the ways in which the new location and ideas influenced the focus of the museum.

A New Location



Reynolds's 1862 "Map of Modern London" with the various homes of the India Museum collection marked[36]

By the end of 1873, it was obvious to all involved that the attic of the India Office was not a suitable location for the India Museum; the question then became: where should these collections be held. One observer noted: "It is to be hoped, both for commercial and for other

[36] James Reynolds, "*Reynolds's Map of Modern London Divided into Quarter-Mile Sections for Measuring Distances*," Scale not given, (London: James Reynolds, 1862).

reasons, that a Museum will be built in a suitable and accessible location."[37] In January 1874, both *The Graphic* and *The Morning Post* reported that the India Museum would finally have a home of its own. Both of these newspapers stated that this building would be built in a vacant lot across from the India Office.[38] Forbes Watson had been campaigning for a new home for the India Museum since the 1860s, and he, along with the India Office, asked M Digby Wyatt, one of the architects of the Great Exhibition, to prepare a plan for the India Museum on the former site of the Fife House. While Wyatt gave an estimate that the building would cost £61,500, the Finance Committee challenged that estimate and said that the building could not be completed and outfitted for less than £100,000.[39]

These figures proved to be more than Parliament was willing to spend at that time, and thus, the India Museum "temporarily" moved to South Kensington, not a universally loved decision. Before people had generally agreed that the museum was poorly placed inside the India Office and that it needed to be moved into a new building, however, no one thought that the physical location in relation to the rest London needed to be changed. When the India Office announced this decision, one reviewer commented: "South Kensington is virtually a land of exile."[40] Another wrote: "The India Museum has long led a wandering life, but it was never so far west before."[41] Even Forbes Watson saw the move to South Kensington as "disastrous," because it was so far away from central London and Whitehall.[42] Reviewers looked at the location in South Kensington and found it to be lacking, and only consoled themselves by saying

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[37] "Political and Social," *The Examiner,* March 20, 1875.
[38] "The New India Museum and Library, *The Morning Post,* January 14, 1874, 4.
[39] Desmond, *India Museum*, 133.
[40] "The India Museum and the Proposed Indian Institute," *The Standard*, March 25, 1875, 6.
[41] "The India Museum and the Proposed Indian Institute," *The Standard*, March 25, 1875, 6.
[42] Desmond, *India Museum*, 148.

that this was only a temporary move. In three years when the lease was up, the India Museum would surely move back towards Whitehall, a view shared by Forbes Watson.

An Imperial Museum for India and the Colonies

Forbes Watson saw this temporary move as a time in which he could gather support for an Imperial Museum for India and the Colonies, Forbes Watson's ideal *educational* museum: a museum in which every colony had a sub-museum that should foster the interests of the colony it represented. As for the Indian sub-section, Forbes Watson envisioned it as "epitomizing India" using exhibits such as "The country and its resources" and "The people and their moral and material condition." All physical objects would have "object files" to accompany them and the museum would not be limited to people living in London. Forbes Watson planned to use parts of the collection to form a travelling museum, of which trade museums would only be one type. He planned for natural history collections, photographs, and arms to travel around as well. In his plans for this new museum, Forbes Watson began to judge his museum "not merely by the intrinsic value of its collections but also by the amount and quality of the information provided."[43]

Forbes Watson claimed that this new, educational center would not be possible without the Library, the Museum, and the Royal Asiatic Society working together. He believed that the Museum's collections could be augmented by lectures and inquiry by all three departments. These lectures would attract not just sight-seers, but students to the museum as well. In a

[43] John Forbes Watson, *On the establishment in connection with the India Museum and Library of an Indian Institute for lecture, enquiry, and teaching, its influence on the promotion of Oriental studies in England, on the progress of higher education among the natives of India and on the training of candidates for the Civil Service of India* (London: W.H. Allen & Co., 1875), 30.

pamphlet entitled *On the establishment in connection with the India Museum and Library of an Indian Institute for lecture, enquiry, and teaching, its influence on the promotion of Oriental studies in England, on the progress of higher education among the natives of India and on the training of candidates for the Civil Service of India* he described how this ideal museum of his could be used to further the education of several different types of constituents. As the British Government owned the India Museum, and would presumably own the Indian Institute, the museum could offer a wide range of artifacts. The British Government had some amount of control over many aspects of Indian life and therefore had the resources to exhibit these many aspects in a museum setting. It was not held back by the same financial and thematic restraints as some of the other museums of the period, such as the South Kensington Museum or the Botanical Gardens.

By stressing the all-encompassing nature of the India Museum's collections and the many different ways that such a collection could be used, Forbes Watson was able to indicate the many uses of such an institution. He specifically noted, both in the title and within the actual text, the special benefits that this institution would have for future civil servants, the public at large, scholars and Indians themselves. Furthermore, Forbes Watson stated that: "As one of the main functions of this Museum ought to be to develope public interest in India, and to serve as a place for reference on all Indian questions, it is of the highest importance that it should be in a locality accessible to all the classes of people interested in India."[44] Forbes Watson's choice in this article to combine public interest in India with governmental interest in India makes it clear that the way in which people were invited to view empire in this period was still through a British governmental lens.

[44] Forbes Watson, *On the Establishment,* 7.

Members of the public responded enthusiastically to the idea of this museum. In 1876, *Nature* claimed:

> Students of natural science would find a properly arranged collection of our colonial productions of great use, especially if combined with proper library, and no better method could be devised of educating the general public generally as to the extent, importance, physical condition, and natural products of 'Greater Britain.'[45]

The author of this article found the idea of the Imperial Museum to one of most important, as *Nature* had been criticizing the lack of scholarly sources within the India Museum for years. Additionally, in 1876 and 1877, the India Office received some fifty missives supporting this plan from town councils, chambers of commerce, and organizations such as the East India Association and the National Indian Association, from places as distant from each other as Edinburgh and Hastings. Those involved obviously planned this event as each of these petitions ended with the same sentence:

> Your Memorialists therefore pray that Her Majesty's Government will take the earliest opportunity of providing, as the share of England in the undertaking, the funds required for the purchase from the Crown of the Site on the Victoria Embankment for the purposes of the proposed India Museum and granting such other assistance towards is establishment and maintenance as may seem to be necessary.[46]

This meant that there was an organized effort throughout Great Britain for a new museum, one that should be financially supported by the British Government. Many urged the Government to bring this new museum under consideration and to leave the discussion of the cost for a later date. By sending these letters directly to the India Office the writers asserted their belief that this museum, and by extension the empire, was solely a matter of state. They could have written letters to the editor and made them available for public consumption, but instead they implored the governmental power to help make their dream a reality. This association between the new museum and Her Majesty's Government and its empire was solidified when the Prince of Wales

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[45] "A Museum for India and the Colonies," *Nature*, 22 June 1876, 173.
[46] Desmond, *India Museum,* 151.

visited the new space in South Kensington, remarking: "What we must have now is a great imperial museum of the industries of all India and the Colonies."[47] Despite all of these glowing recommendations, when Parliament discussed the Imperial Museum in 1877, the questions posed were to the Chancellor of the Exchequer and were about the financial feasibility of such an operation.[48] As a result, this scheme, though "favourably received by the public,"[49] would never come to pass, and the India Museum was left to its South Kensington fate.[50] This sweeping aside of public sentiment would have long reaching effects on the India Museum, including, but not limited to, a new focus for the existing museum.

[47] Desmond, *India Museum*, 151.
[48] "Question," House of Commons, 26 July 1877.
[49] "An Imperial Museum for India and the Colonies," *The British Architect and Northern Engineer,* June 16, 1876.
[50] "The Indian Museum, South Kensington – Question," House of Commons, 18 March 1875.

A New Focus: Education?

The India Museum – May 1879[51]

Just because the Imperial Museum did not come to fruition, did not mean that Forbes Watson, alongside the India Office did not put some of his theories into practice. After the public response to the idea of the Imperial Museum, Forbes Watson and his coworkers had no other choice. An educational focus became a way for Forbes Watson to implement new ideas in an old system. This so-called "symbol of our Indian empire" was now available to a much larger

[51] "The India Museum," *The London Journal*, May 31, 1879, 341.

public and it was no longer geared simply towards the merchant class.[52] Every white male, no matter the class, could now claim ownership of the empire through the Government and the India Museum became a physical representation of that ownership. As one reviewer wrote: "It is not so much to a single class that [the India Museum] offers the materials for instruction, as to all."[53] While another stated: "The Exhibition is one that cannot fail to prove attractive to many classes of visitors."[54]

Furthermore, Forbes Watson put into place in the India Museum many of the educational practices theorized for the Imperial Museum. The Upper and Lower Galleries of its new home were specialized according to the type of artifact and there were more types of artifacts on display than ever before. It included "many different phases of India life – princely, commercial, agricultural, religious, domestic, personal." Forbes Watson presented arms, musical instruments, garments, vegetables, seeds, fibers, drinking-vessels, hand mills, pans, chisels, looms, drawings, photographs, and figurines.[55] Many of these items had no trade purpose, but they did show a little about what life in India was like. In arranging the museum this way, Forbes Watson hoped that "the museum groups will be found to be those most suitable for showing, by mere inspection of actual specimens, the leading features of the country and the characteristics of its people."[56] In essence, the India Museum had created a cultural trophy room. Forbes Watson followed his own advice and expanded the items on display in order to attract a larger crowd.

Additionally, as the new location in South Kensington already had a reputation for being a center of education, the India Museum officials found it easy to fall in this pattern. On the advice of Prince Albert, the Royal Commission for the Exhibition of 1851 had purchased land in

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[52] "The India Museum," *Pall Mall Gazette,* April 15, 1875.
[53] Conder, "The New India-Museum," 276.
[54] Conder, "The New India-Museum," 276.
[55] Conder, "The New India-Museum," 276
[56] Forbes Watson, *On the Establishment*, 28.

South Kensington with the proceeds from that exhibition. On this land they established several educational institutions per Prince Albert's suggestions. These included the exhibition halls for the International Exhibition of 1862, the South Kensington Museum, the Royal College of Art, the Royal Albert Hall, the Natural History Museum, and the Royal School of Needlework. In and amongst these buildings Prince Albert "envisioned a metropolis of learning, organized around the production of useful knowledge and benefiting the entire nation."[57] It was in this environment of education and learning that, in 1874, the India Museum found its new home in the exhibition halls of 1862, and in an 1875 article from *The Morning Post*, the author called upon this history of education to speculate that it was most likely that The India Museum would find its permanent home in South Kensington.[58]

While Forbes Watson attributed the rise of oriental studies in Britain to the India Museum, it is clear that these institutions were affecting one another. Forbes Watson's participation in the International Congress of Orientalists had an effect on the way that he approached his concept of the Imperial Museum. Furthermore, a good number of the items in the India Museum were on loan from organizations such as the Royal Asiatic Society and the East India Association. The men in these organizations held conferences and meetings in which they discussed how Britain and India should interact with each other and how their cultures should be defined.

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[57] Bruce Robertson, "The South Kensington Museum in Context: An Alternative History," *Museum and Society* 2.1 (March 2004), 1-2.
[58] "The India Museum," *The Morning Post*, April 3, 1875, 2.

Conclusion

> The relationships of England to India are so varied and affect so many different interests that the establishment of an institute for the advancement of India, and for the dissemination of that knowledge in England, would satisfy a public want, and would tend greatly to the advantage of both countries.[59]

This 1874 description of the purpose of the India Museum, originating in the mind of Forbes Watson, showcased the way in which the India Museum was used as a tool of communication regarding empire between the British Government and the British people. The mid-1870s visceral reaction to the criticisms the India Museum had received in the years prior showed that the Government knew that public opinion of empire and imperial holdings would now have to be taken into account. The India office moved the location and changed the focus of the India Museum: it became more about education than about trade in these years.

Unfortunately for Forbes Watson, despite all of the success that the India Museum had once it moved to South Kensington, members of the public still considered it to be far from perfect. As one reviewer put it: "It is not even now what it ought to be, and what it might be if the preserving efforts of a few gentlemen who have laboured in its formation had met with the encouragement it was but reasonable to assume it would have received…But it is the best India Museum we have ever had."[60] And in opening up the museum to a wider public, the museum opened itself up to a newer criticism, one that did not rely so much on a lack of organization in the museum, but rather upon who it was that was doing the organizing. In the next chapter, we will see how the public's response to the India Museum in the late 1870s led to the Government slowly being taken out of the India Museum, until it became a "museum of the people."

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[59] "The International Congress of Orientalists," *The Morning Post,* September 21, 1874, 2.
[60] "The India Museum," *Daily News,* May 26, 1875.

Chapter III

Identity in South Kensington: From an Expression of Government to an Expression of Culture

When word broke that the Secretary of State for India had decided to dissolve the India Museum, the issue became a national concern. On July 17, 1879, the House of Commons discussed the India Museum. The M.P. for Gloucester asked if portions of the collection would be offered to provincial museums; the M.P. for Cheshire asked that a new museum be built in London to house the artifacts; and the M.P. for Liverpool suggested turning the collection into a travelling exhibition. This debate continued in the House of Commons for several weeks and every M.P. seemed to have a different idea about what should be done.[61] None of them seemed to know exactly how to approach this physical representation the governmental power in empire once the Government was no longer the main owner.

Around the same time this debate was occurring in Parliament, the India Office called a meeting to discuss the future of the India Museum. Those in attendance included E. A. Bond, principal librarian of the British Museum, Dr. A. Gunther, keeper of the department of zoology at the British Museum, A. W. Franks, keeper of British and medieval antiquities and ethnology at the British Museum, and two assistant directors of the South Kensington Museum: R. A. Thompson and Major Festing.[62] These men as well as representatives from the India Office and the Board of Works spent several days over the course of July discussing how the India Museum should be broken up and who should be the recipient of the museum's treasures.

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[61] Desmond, *The India Museum*, 170-73.
[62] Desmond, *The India Museum,* 170.

While the Secretary of State for India originally wanted to keep the entire collection together, the committee deemed this idea infeasible as they found the collection too varied to fit any one museum's purpose. When the India Museum had been a governmental holding, it could represent everything that the Government could have control over, but once the museum was taken away from Government hands, a little more thought had to be put into how to arrange the collection. The committee quickly decided that the botanical specimens should be sent to the Royal Botanical Gardens and the natural history artifacts should go to the new Natural History Museum, which had broken away from the British Museum several years earlier.[63] The real question was what was to be done with the rest of the collection. The committee found it difficult to decide between "the old" national holder of imperial artifacts, The British Museum, or "the new" South Kensington Museum, set up to present imperial artifacts to the general public for all to enjoy. In the end, the South Kensington Museum received the majority of the collection. The South Kensington Museum's acquisition of the India collection reflected a shift in the perception of empire from an institution of Government to an institution of culture through which some of the British public began to define themselves.

The first section of this chapter considers the negotiations that surrounded the failed attempt of the British Museum to acquire the collection, the South Kensington Museum's successful attempt at achieving the same goal, and explains why these outcomes occurred. The second section of this chapter examines the media coverage of the event. The third section of the chapter contemplates the response of the South Kensington Museum to the collection, focusing on the inventory of the collection itself as well as how this inventory was used to define an

[63] "At a Special Meeting of the Standing Committee," 26 August1879, Minutes Vol. XXXVIII, British Museum Archives, London, England.

"Other." The final section of the chapter focuses on one last expansion of the collection and how this expansion presented a certain view of empire.

India Museum Negotiations – An Empire of Government or An Empire of Culture?

Sir Hans Sloane, a physician and naturalist collected over 71,000 objects in his lifetime. Upon his death, Sloane left those objects to King George II. The British Government accepted this bequest which led to the establishment of the British Museum in 1753. Sloane's collection consisted primarily of books, manuscripts, and antiquities. However, at the start of the nineteenth century, the museum grew and acquired increasing numbers of antiquities, such as the Rosetta Stone and the Parthenon sculptures. In the nineteenth century, the museum also expanded into the lecture sphere and published guidebooks to the collections.[64] The British Museum was the world's first national museum, and this representation of national power remained its priority.

This idea of empire as an institution of governmental power was one that was being wrestled with at a higher level as well. In 1851, William Greg, an industrialist and writer, wrote an article titled, "Shall We Retain our Colonies?" in which he described the role of empire in international politics. He wrote: "For by overawing foreign nations and impressing mankind with a prestige of our might, it enables us to keep the peace of the world which we have no interest in disturbing, as it would enable us to disturb the world if we pleased."[65] The empire he described was not one of superior culture, but one of Government, of national security. This

[64] Trustees of the British Museum, "History of the British Museum," *The British Museum*, n.d. www.britishmuseum.org/about_us/the_museums_story/general_history.aspx.
[65] William Greg, "Shall We Retain our Colonies?," 1851, *Politics and Empire in Victorian Britain, A Reader,* ed. Antoinette Burton (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 81.

article described empire as a method for the Government to keep the peace, as a way for the British to exert their power on a global scale. While this emphasis on power was still the case in the 1870s, the question of what exactly empire meant to the British people was often expressed differently. In a speech made in 1872, for example, Benjamin Disraeli, a leader of the Tory party, attributed the greatness of the empire to the ancient governmental institutions of the land.[66] In contrast to Greg's 1851 article, however, Disraeli never said that it was a function of Government alone. In fact, towards the end of the speech, Disraeli takes this one step: "Why, the people of England would be greater idiots that the Jacobinical leaders of London even suppose, if, with their experience and acuteness, they should not long have seen that the time had arrived when social, and not political improvement is the object which they ought to pursue."[67]

It was in this conceptual framework of empire that the Duke of Somerset authorized a special meeting of the standing committee of the British Museum to discuss the offer made by the India Office regarding the India Museum on the 26th of August 1879. The Secretary of State for India offered the British Museum the complete natural history collection, but any duplicates would be given to museums in India or other museums in Britain devoted especially to the exhibition of Indian artifacts. As the Secretary of State for India continued to believe that the collection should not be broken up, he imposed a few conditions, the most important being that the collection be displayed together in full and that no expense fall on the India Office for the care of the collection.[68] As part of the conditions for the transfer of the collection, the British

[66] Benjamin Disralei, "Conservative and Liberal Principles," 1872, *Politics and Empire in Victorian Britain, A Reader,* ed. Antoinette Burton (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 132.
[67] Benjamin Disralei, "Conservative and Liberal Principles," 134.
[68] "At a Special Meeting of the Standing Committee," British Museum Archives.

Museum would be required to attach two members of the Council for India as trustees of the museum.[69]

The British Museum's main considerations regarding the offer were the artifacts included in the collection, expected maintenance costs, and the lack of storage and display space for the collection. Some of these considerations were easier to come to terms with than others. Artifacts such as the Amravati Sculptures, Roman Pavements, and a mummy, particularly interested the British Museum, as they were antiquities, some of the only antiquities in the India Museum collection. The rest of the artifacts, for example more modern works, hardly interested the British Museum. As they were not as interested in parts of the collections, the Trustees decided that if necessary there would be room to store some artifacts in the basement of the new Natural History Museum.

The expected maintenance costs particularly worried the Trustees. While the Royal Commission for the Exhibition of 1851 offered the use of the eastern exhibition galleries to house the collection at a reduced cost to the British Museum, the Trustees were not sure that this would be enough. They hoped the costs would be around £3,500 per annum. They knew, however, that the India Office spent £9,439.16.2 in the past year on the museum. The Trustees eventually decided that the cost would be worth the acquisition of the key antiquities and therefore agreed to accept the offer, but only with the approval and promise of help from the Treasury and some backing from the India Office.[70] What all of this means is that the British Museum would be willing to take on the collections of the India Museum, so long as there was Government funding.

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[69] Desmond, *The India Museum,* 193.
[70] "At a Special Meeting of the Standing Committee," British Museum Archives.

In contrast, the South Kensington Museum had a long history of building explicitly upon the education and culture of empire. It opened in 1852 as a result of the positive public response to the Great Exhibition of 1851. The museum's organizers, including Henry Cole and Richard Redgrave, made the museum's emphasis on education clear. They followed in the footsteps and plans of Prince Albert by declaring a need for an educational institution.[71] The museum, originally situated at Marlborough House, held two libraries, one specifically meant for members of the public, and five study rooms for scholars. As a result, in the early years of the museum, the artifact collection was quite small. Some of the profits from the Exhibition of 1851 went towards purchasing land for a larger museum in a section of South Kensington. The doors to this larger museum opened on 22 June 1857. The South Kensington Museum originally consisted of a north and south court, but as the museum's collections rapidly expanded additions were built on to house the new items.[72]

Thus the South Kensington Museum, a museum born out of the appreciation and pride in empire, already had a history of rapid expansion by the time it was asked to send representatives to the committee meeting regarding the India Museum. As far as the employees of the South Kensington Museum were concerned, the British Museum's acceptance of the items came from a sense of duty rather than an actual desire for the artifacts. Upon receiving knowledge of this offer, a member of the Science and Art Department at the South Kensington Museum wrote a letter to the Treasury stating: "With regard to the offer of the residue of the India Museum although [the British Museum trustees] are sensible of the difficulties which are raised by the condition insisted on they consider that on public grounds they ought not to refuse its

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[71] Robertson, "The South Kensington Museum," 1-2.
[72] Richard Dunn and Anthony Burton, "The Victoria and Albert Museum: An Illustrated Chronology," *A Grand Design: A History of the Victoria and Albert Museum*, n.d. http://www.vam.ac.uk/vastatic/microsites/1159_grand_design/essay_vanda_new.html

acceptance."[73] The South Kensington Museum, however, wanted the artifacts for the "artifacts' sake." They, therefore, went over the heads of the India Office to the Treasury and proposed a deal that would allow the South Kensington Museum to acquire the collection at a much lower cost than the proposed budget of the British Museum. They appealed to the Trustees, stating:

> My Lords would further desire to point out the responsibility which would be incurred by the arrangement proposed by the Trustees of the British Museum which would entail an application to Parliament for an annual sum of £3,330 for the yearly maintenance of objects which are for the most part essentially of industrial and economic value! and would in that case remain for the exclusive use of the metropolis.[74]

The British Museum's plan would cost the national Government 3300 pounds per annum whereas the South Kensington Museum's plan would cost the Government 2000 pounds per annum, economically a fairly hard argument to ignore.[75] Additionally, it showed a true interest on the part of the South Kensington Museum as they were more willing to pay for the collection themselves.

Furthermore, the South Kensington Museum already held an Indian Collection. As such, the South Kensington Museum was "prepared to aid her Majesty's Government in centralizing the collections which already exist, by adding to the India Museum the objects of Art Industry which for the use of the country generally have been purchased with Imperial funds and exhibited in the SKM."[76] In other words, if they acquired the collection, they would not only display it but would expand it, and while they would depend on the Government for help, the Government would not be solely responsible for financing the collection. This reflects a shift away from the Government as the sole proprietor of empire.

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[73] "E.A. Bond to Treasury," 2 September 1879, Doc. 4901, Folder 170 Part II, Victoria and Albert Museum Archives, London, England.
[74] "George Hamilton to the Treasury," 14 October 1879, Doc. 4995, Folder 170 Part II, Victoria and Albert Museum Archives, London, England.
[75] "George Hamilton to the Treasury," Victoria and Albert Museum Archives.
[76] "George Hamilton to the Treasury," Victoria and Albert Museum Archives.

By the late 1870s, the country as a whole was now certain of its moral and racial superiority, but not necessarily sure what role the Government should plat in this institution. "The 'mutiny' [in 1857] offered the British a cleansing sense of heroism and self-assertion, a confirmation of moral superiority and the right to rule," but it would be the British approach to India in the twenty to thirty years after that which would give the British their imperial identity.[77] As a result of all of this, by the late 1870s, the British were not only sure of their right to rule, but they "were, for the most part, convinced of an essential difference between British and Indian that justified indefinite control of political power by a 'superior race.'"[78] This, of course, shows that the Government still had a role to play in empire, just as it still had a role to play within the India Museum. What had changed was the justification for this governmental interference and influence. Furthermore, in 1878, W.E. Gladstone spoke in Parliament:

> The sentiment of empire may be called innate in every Briton….It is part of our patrimony: born with our birth, dying only with our death; incorporating itself in the first elements of our knowledge, and interwoven with all our habits of mental action upon public affairs.[79]

This statement also reflects the shift that was occurring in the perception of empire. Gladstone made a point of stating that every Briton had a stake in Empire, but he said so in governmental building, where only a limited number of people would have been able to hear him. The question of whether it would be an empire of duty or an empire of culture had not yet completely been answered. Gladstone, for instance, seemed to favor both.

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[77] Barbara D. Metcalf and Thomas R. Metcalf, *A Concise History of India* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002), 106.
[78] Metcalf and Metcalf, *A Concise History,* 93.
[79] William Gladstone, "England's Mission," 1878, *Politics and Empire in Victorian Britain, A Reader,* ed. Antoinette Burton (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 135.

By the end of December 1879, the India Office transferred the collection to the South Kensington Museum, who then dispersed the appropriate items to their new homes.[80] All records show that this was an amicable process among the various parties involved, but that, even at this late stage, there was some confusion about which museums should receive certain artifacts. In fact, it would take until the 1930s for all of the artifacts from the India Museum's collection to find a new home. Thus, the treatment of the collection by the British Museum and the South Kensington Museum showcased the beginnings of a shift in perception of empire from one simply bound by duty to one also sustained by culture.

Media Attention

In 1879, when the Secretary of State for India made the final decision to transfer the collections the journalistic establishment took hold of the story and showed its approval. Some of the first mentions of this occurrence in British newspapers came through reports on the debates in the House of Commons. These reports discussed the amount of money the Government would save by breaking up the museum as well as the ways in which the collections would be better suited to different arenas.[81] This does not mean, however, that everyone in the Commons was equally supportive of the dissolution of the museum. Grant Duff, the Undersecretary for the Colonies, believed that a collection that was built up at such a great cost to the East India Company and then the British Government should stay in Government hands.[82]

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[80] "Proof of Inventory," 30 December 1879, Doc. 6319, Folder 170, Part II, Victoria and Albert Museum Archives, London, England.
[81] "House of Commons – The East India Museum," *The Standard,* July 15, 1879, 2.
[82] "Imperial Parliament," *Reynold's Newspaper,* August 3, 1879.

The coverage of the debate was not restricted to the House of Commons either. The dissolution of the India Museum gathered steam in the House of Lords as well. The Earl of Carnarvon actually directly asked the Secretary of State for India why the museum was being dispersed. Furthermore, *The Standard* cites protests against this move in large cities as well as by various Chambers of Commerce as to why the Earl became involved in this issue.[83] Unfortunately, due to the nature of these reports and the way that they only expressed what the elites were saying in Parliament, not much can be gleaned about what the general public thinks.

Starting in 1880, reports and reviews regarding the South Kensington Museum's takeover of the India Museum's collections began to be published. One thing that was particularly interesting was the way that members of the public seemed not to regard the collection as having been "broken up." *The Art Journal* wrote: "We rejoice that the proposal to break up the India Museum and distribute its contents has not been carried out. As it is, the provincial museums will be greater gainers by the future administration by the South Kensington Museum authorities, as the loan principle will be also applied to their new acquisitions."[84] In other words, the writer of this article believed that the collection would be better served by staying at the South Kensington Museum. This writer, however, like many others, made no comment about the fact that entire collection did not stay at the South Kensington Museum. Once the museum reopened, it was heralded as "an assemblage of beautiful and interesting specimens of Indian art which, though incomplete, is no unworthy nucleus of such a great national illustration of our greatest 'possession abroad' as we ought to have."[85] This is perhaps the most positive review that the collection had received up to that point and it was simply one of many that came out in May and June of 1880 that extoled the virtues of the new setup and its accessibility for to the public.

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[83] "Imperial Parliament – House of Lords," *The Standard*, August 9, 1879, 2.
[84] "The London India Museum," *The Art Journal,* 1880, 74.
[85] "Notes on Art and Archaeology," *The Academy,* May 22, 1880, 392.

The South Kensington Museum – An Emerging Identity

On the 15 of May 1880, Queen Victoria arrived at the South Kensington Museum around 10 o'clock.[86] She, along with H.R.H. Princess Beatrice, spent the next two hours being shown around the museum by John Spencer, the fifth Earl Spencer and former Viceroy of Ireland, and Dr. Birdwood, an employee of the India Office, before they opened the renamed India Section, now including the collections of the India Museum, to the public. The Prince and Princess of Wales arrived to hear about the new museum and see its contents, including the loans they had made, now displayed for the first time.[87] The Queen's opening of the museum to the public reflects the shift that was occurring in a different way than what has been discussed thus far. In many ways, British society was shaped by the actions of the monarchy for centuries. For instance, in around 1900, one observer remarked: "An aristocracy of lordly and chivalrous heroes is bound in time to create a great democracy but the reflection of their character in the mass, and the idea of the divine right of kings is succeeded by the idea of the divine right of the people."[88] Here, the Queen's opening of the India Section, besides just being a ceremonial job, reflected the importance of empire at all levels of society. She did not just tour the collection, she opened it, to anyone who wished to view it.

This re-opening at the South Kensington Museum took several months due to the curators rearranging the artifacts in order to invite in a larger public than ever before; they wanted it to be a collection for everyone. Furthermore, the collection received by the South Kensington

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[86] *Twenty-Eighth Report of the Science and Art Department of the Committee of Council on Education, with Appendices* (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1881), xviii.
[87] "Indian Section, South Kensington Museum," *The Times*, May 15, 1880, 12.
[88] A.E. "Nationality and Imperialism," ca. 1900, *Politics and Empire in Victorian Britain, A Reader,* ed. Antoinette Burton (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 201.

Museum in 1879 was comprised of more than 20,000 items.[89] Because the sheer volume of items received as well as the number of Indian artifacts already held by the South Kensington Museum that had to be incorporated into the new collection, the museum decided to defer the opening of the collection until May 1880.[90] The collection was further

> enriched by loans of many beautiful objects from her Majesty the Queen and H.R.H. the Duke of Edinburgh, also by Lord Lytton and other gentlemen, and further by a large and interesting series of watercolor drawings made in India by Mr. William Carpenter, and lent for exhibition by that gentleman.[91]

Realizing that this task might be too big for the museum to handle alone, the Lord President of the Science and Art Department agreed that in order "to enable the Indian collections to be properly described, and in order that a knowledge of the country be at the disposal of the Museum it becomes essential that a special Referee for India should be added."[92] Not only did the Council believe that they needed help, but that this help had to come from someone who knew the complicated history of the collection itself. The Council eventually decided to offer the post of "Professional Referee" of the India collection to Dr. Birdwood.[93]

Now under the command of the South Kensington Museum, a larger section of the public was able to view the collections than ever before. The museum was open to the public for free three days a week and open for a small fee on Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays, the so-called "Student Days."[94] Even on the "Student Days," however, India Office employees could gain admittance to the museum for free; they just had to give their names to the guards at the

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[89] *Twenty-Eighth Report,* 492.
[90] *Twenty-Seventh Report of the Science and Art Department of the Committee of Council on Education, with Appendices* (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1880), 527.
[91] *Twenty-Eighth Report,* 493.
[92] "Minute Paper," 8 January 1880, Doc. 255, Folder 170, Part III, Victoria and Albert Museum Archives, London, England.
[93] "Minute Paper," Victoria and Albert Museum Archives.
[94] "Notices sent to Newspapers," 28 May 1880, Doc. 2609, Folder 170, Part III, Victoria and Albert Museum Archives, London, England.

entrance.[95] The reopening of this museum also caused a jump in museum attendance. In 1879, the South Kensington Museum had 879,395 visitors; in 1880, the museum had 981,963.[96] This increased visitation, especially compared to the visitation in the last year of the India Museum, showcases how the collection became more popular with the general public.

Expansion of the Collection

Despite the apparent success of the collection, the South Kensington Museum found it to be lacking. Under the East India Company and then the India Office, the India Museum had not been a systematic collection as it was "to a great extent brought together by chance."[97] Many of its best artifacts were "a mere haphazard accumulation of military spoils, spasmodic purchases, bequests from old Indian officers, and unsaleable Indian contributions to the different International Exhibitions which have been held since 1851."[98] As a result of this arbitrary past, there were gaps in the artifacts that needed to be filled, especially in regards to pottery and carpets. Furthermore, the artifacts they had received had either doubtful or unknown provenance.[99] The South Kensington Museum voiced this issue before Parliament and received a £2000 parliamentary grant for the expansion of the collection in addition to a donation from the Secretary of State for India.[100] The Secretary of State for India made this decision as a result of the South Kensington Museum pleading that this was necessary in order to give people a "true"

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[95] "Free Admission," 20 May 1880, Doc. 2491, Folder 170, Part III, Victoria and Albert Museum Archives, London, England.
[96] *Twenty-Eighth Report,* xxvi.
[97] "Minute: Extension of the India Section of the South Kensington Museum," 14 April 1880, Doc. 1857, MA/2/I1/1, Victoria and Albert Museum Archives, London, England.
[98] "Indian Section, South Kensington Museum," *The Times*, May 15, 1880, 12.
[99] Desmond, *The India Museum,* 192.
[100] "Minute: Extension of the India Section," Victoria and Albert Museum Archives, London, England.

vision of India, a vision they could be proud of.[101] Once again, the Government played a role in the India Museum, but this time it was not to promote their own power, but rather to promote an overall sense of British superiority.

Whether or not the museum ever gave the British people a "true" vision of India is debatable. Like many museum exhibitions, both then and now, it was a completely constructed façade, and one that was entirely put together by men living in London. The India Section and the choice to expand it did say something about the state of empire at that point in time. The collection did not represent the "India" that the department wanted to portray, so they changed the collection. It did not portray India as a well-functioning imperial holding of the British. As Krishan Kumar stated in his article "Empire and English Nationalism": "Nineteenth century imperialism can then appear as an extension, perhaps a hypertrophy, of nationalism; by the same token the nation can come to conceive itself in the image of empire, the supreme expression of power status."[102] In this manner, the curators and directors at the South Kensington Museum used the India Museum to promote an idea of empire that place Britain, and not the empire itself, at the forefront. The expansion, despite what was portrayed by the curators, was never about portraying India; it was about portraying the British empire and the power it held.

In justifying their decision to expand the collection, the South Kensington Museum made is evident that this expansion was being done, not just for the museum, but for the British public as well. The South Kensington Museum quickly selected C. Purdon Clarke, who had already been working as an advisor to the Indian section, as their representative to be sent to India for the

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[101] "Draft of Letter to the Undersecretary of State for India," 14 April 1880, Doc. 1859, MA/2/I1/1, Victoria and Albert Museum Archives, London, England.
[102] Krishan Kumar, "Empire and English Nationalism," *Nations and Nationalism* 12.1 (2006), 3.

collection of artifacts.[103] Purdon Clarke left in early October, returned in late April, and visited many different sections of the Indian subcontinent in the course of his journey. In each region of the subcontinent that he visited, Purdon Clarke was given a list by the museum of types of artifacts to look for and bring back with him at the end of his journey.[104] At the end of his trip, Purdon Clarke bought almost 3,400 items for the Indian Section, some of which are to this day among the treasures of the Victoria and Albert Museum.[105] Furthermore, the South Kensington Museum required Purdon Clarke to write monthly reports in which he included illustrations of the artifacts he had procured. Additionally, they decided that these reports would sometimes be published in order to keep members of the public in the loop about how the expansion efforts were going.[106] The museum did not commission Purdon Clarke solely to expand the collection, but to make it evident in his monthly reports that this expansion was for the benefit of the British public as well. It was for the British public and their empire that he went to India to acquire more artifacts.

Dr. Birdwood's decline of the South Kensington Museum's offer to accompany Purdon Clarke on this venture became the first of many steps taken by both Birdwood, and by extension the India Office, and the South Kensington Museum to distance themselves from each other.[107] Birdwood and the Science and Art Department had very different approaches as to how the collection should be treated. To begin with, Birdwood had only been chosen on the condition that he would not interfere in any way with the affairs of the South Kensington Museum. As far as Birdwood was concerned, this was an impossible task. How could he help create the India

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[103] "Mr. Purdon-Clarke's Indian Exhibition," 8 July 1880, Doc. 3371, MA/2/I1/1, Victoria and Albert Museum Archives, London, England.
[104] "Mr. Purdon-Clarke's Indian Exhibition," Victoria and Albert Museum Archives.
[105] Desmond, *The India Museum,* 192.
[106] "Mr. Purdon-Clarke's Indian Exhibition," Victoria and Albert Museum Archives.
[107] "India Office to Department of Arts and Science," 24 June 1880, Doc. 3125, MA/2/I1/1, Victoria and Albert Museum Archives, London, England.

Section, if he was not allowed to interfere? Furthermore, in his first annual report, not only did Birdwood publically critique the museum's priorities, but he also dismissed the museums in South Kensington as "a national disgrace."[108] The South Kensington Museum saw this as an unnecessary interference with their affairs as well as a report that would damage business. To cause further dismay, this report came from an employee. The eventual result of this was that both Birdwood and the SKM started pushing for an advisory board for the section, though for completely opposite reasons.[109] This pull away from the Birdwood, and therefore the India Office, reflects the shift that the country was taking away from the idea of empire as a solely governmental institution. They did not get rid off Birdwood completely, nor did they ever cut off relations with the India Office, but they did offer up an alternative, a new way of doing things.

Conclusion

> To abandon these great hopes – to cast out our colonial empire to the winds… – is a line of policy which, we sincerely think, is worthy only of a narrow and niggard school; which will be counseled only by men who are merchants rather than statesmen, and whose mercantile wisdom is confined, short-sighted, and unenlightened; one, which, we feel assured, can never be adopted by England till the national spirit which has made her what she is, shall have begun to wane and fade away.[110]

By the 1880s, the perception of British empire was shifting. Empire was no longer meant only for the elite; it was stretching and becoming more accessible to the everyday subject. It was something they were invested in, for a variety of reasons, perhaps because "it was from the empire that they got their sense of themselves, their identity."[111] However, this shift was not

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[108] Desmond, *The India Museum,* 194-5.
[109] Desmond, *The India Museum, 1801-1879,* 196.
[110] Greg, "Shall We Retain our Colonies?," 85.
[111] Kumar, "Empire and English Nationalism," 4.

complete. While Britons may have begun to define themselves in terms of their imperial holdings, there were still those who believed that empire was an issue for "statesmen" alone. But even those men brought the idea of something like "national spirit" into play.

This shift in the idea of empire was not simply at the governmental level either. It was reflected in the actions taken by those in all sectors of public life, including museums. The events surrounding the dissolution of the India Museum and its re-opening in the South Kensington Museum, reflect the complicated issues surrounding some of the new ideas of empire in the late Victorian era. Empire, by this point, had become a method of identity creation, and this idea and its repercussions would continue to play out over the next one hundred years.

Conclusion

Map of level 1 of the Victoria and Albert Museum. The Nehru Gallery is located in the orange section where the red circle is placed.[112]

A little over one hundred years after Queen Victoria opened the India Section at the South Kensington Museum, Margaret Thatcher opened the Nehru Exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum. Thatcher began her remarks that afternoon by thanking the members of Museum's Committee of Honour for the Nehru Gallery and Victoria and Albert Museum Director Elizabeth Esteve-Coll before moving on to describing the exhibition that she was opening. Thatcher called it "very exciting," "beautifully designed," and "a worthy memorial to a most remarkable man, one of the true giants of the modern world—and someone who himself

[112] "Print Map Spring/Summer 2015," *Victoria and Albert Museum*, 2015. http://www.vam.ac.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0005/253175/V-and-A-map-Spring-Summer-20151.pdf

symbolised the historic meeting and mixing of the cultures of India and Britain."[113] She claimed that the exhibition "shows us both India's pre-independence history and India as it is now, so that one can measure the tremendous progress made, so much of it derived from Nehru's bold vision of India's future."[114] Thatcher emphasized the size of the India collection, calling attention to the fact that the Victoria and Albert Museum held the largest collection of Indian artifacts outside of India. However, not once in her entire speech did Thatcher state where the artifacts came from or how they came to be in the Victoria and Albert Museum's possession, and not once did she mention the word "empire."

Thatcher alluded to the long history between Britain and India, but she never fully explored it. For instance, Thatcher referenced Tipu's Tiger saying: "It will remind us also of everything that Britain and India have been and still are to each other—of a relationship thankfully now rather happier than that symbolized by the Museum's most famous mechanical toy—'Tipu's Tiger'—which represents a ferocious Indian tiger eating a recumbent Englishman."[115] Since the early nineteenth century, Tipu's Tiger had been a part of the India Museum collection. In her opening of the Nehru Gallery, Thatcher failed to mention the long history of the collection, from its start in the East India Company to any of its many transitions over the following century. "Empire" and all of its consequences seem almost banned or perhaps conveniently forgotten in this speech.

When Thatcher framed her speech this way, she followed in a long line of using museum collections in order to further one's own ideals. This particular collection had been used at its inception at the East India Company as a way to promote imperial trade. In 1857, the India Office continued in this vein when they took control of the museum. By the mid-1870s,

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[113] Margaret Thatcher, "Speech opening Nehru Gallery at V and A," June 7, 1989.
[114] Thatcher, "Speech opening," June 7, 1989.
[115] Thatcher, "Speech opening," June 7, 1989.

however, the focus had changed. Instead of focusing purely on trade, directors chose to focus the museum on education. The bureaucratic debates surrounding this decision reflected larger debates, larger shifts that were occurring within British society. British perceptions of empire were shifting. It was no longer an empire of finance alone, but one sustained by Government and culture as well.

By the time Thatcher made her speech, the British empire had risen to its greatest height and subsequently collapsed. Empire, for many, was part of the past and they envisioned that no longer had an effect on society, which might explain Thatcher's lack of mention of the word in her speech. What Thatcher did was invite industry magnates to the event. In her own way, Thatcher brought the collection back to its roots, and made that opening about the promotion of trade.

This speech took place in June 1989, over 100 years after the India Museum's collections were absorbed by the South Kensington Museum, now called the Victoria and Albert Museum, and the collection was still being used as a tool through which people could discuss what role empire plays in society. When Margaret Thatcher presented this new gallery as an exhibition for the future, she erased hundreds of years of history, and in so doing, pushed the India Museum back into obscurity, back into being the "forgotten museum."[116]

[116] Thank you to Professor Susan Pennybacker for alerting me to Thatcher's opening of the Nehru Gallery.

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