



Role of Indian Museums in Promoting Cultural Heritage of India- A Historical perspective

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Abstract

The objective of education is broadening the mental horizon and developing the power of reasoning of the learner. The main purpose of a museum is imparting education through the objects displaying in the galleries. And in India by which the viewers can be deeply impressed upon India's unity in diversity-an idea, which is too essential for the present day India. This paper aims to explain the different educational activities and steps taken by the Indian Museums on education.

Keywords: Knowledge, Exhibition, Educational Role, Technology, Programme.

1. Introduction

D. P. Ghosh, the founder-curator of the Asutosh Museum of Indian Art, Calcutta University, described that the education should be the main purpose of museums and they can provide in their display of arts and crafts. While passing through the galleries and observing the items displayed, the visitor starts questioning in their mind "Why these objects are here? Who made these objects and why? What are the significance of these objects? etc." It is here that a museum has a spectacular role to play. In a museum the visitor having had the opportunity of eyeing over three dimensional objects gets a chance to apply his option of choice. He can see any of the objects he chooses, deeply apply his mind on the same and becomes intellectually and conceptually involved with the same. Thus museums contribute significantly towards intellectual stimulation and entertainment of the visitor by way of arousing curiosity of the visitor whose instinctive desire to know more about the objects displayed is satisfied and he in this manner develops a steady and true liking for the objects, being aided by guide lecturers, labels and different kinds of modern electronic devices, film shows, light and shade programmes, etc.



2. Outreach programme

In a country like India where a sizeable population is illiterate, a proper idea about a museum having tremendous inherent capacity for catering education to the people cannot be created unless museums themselves take a leading role in this respect. Unlettered people are swayed by many wrong notions and prejudices being the fall out of their having no education. Museums can play a vital role for dissemination of knowledge among these illiterate masses by way of arranging temporary exhibition, travelling exhibition and by providing loan service, etc. These will not only enhance their knowledge but will also infuse a feeling of love for their own country. The Unlettered people of Indian villages, who hardly get an opportunity to view T.V. programmes – either due to want of time or fund or the absence of electricity in the area, would be surprised to see the rich Indian heritage or the scientific development of their own country once they are given an opportunity to see the models of die objects, arts, crafts and etc., through travelling exhibition. The explanations offered by the experienced and knowledgeable guide lecturers in the travelling exhibitions and temporary exhibitions would be of immense value in creating a feeling of oneness among the people of this country, which is inhabited by diverse types of people simultaneously raising their level of knowledge and standard of informal education.

3. Visitors Grouping and Educating

There are different bases for classifying types of museum visitors: Male or female, According to age, literate and illiterate, Physically handicapped and physically sound, mentally retarded and mentally sound, Serious and casual, National and international, Single visitors and group visitors, homogenous and heterogeneous, visitors who cannot come to museum. By grouping their visitors the modern museums follow different ways to educate the different types and group of visitors in all aspects.

4. Mobile exhibition

India is a country where most of the people are living in village areas, but most of the museums are situated in urban areas only. As a natural corollary, the village people get very less opportunity to come over to the urban areas and visit the museums. Thus the underlying idea of outreach programme through museums is to extend the educational activities to the remote rural areas of the country. Although it is thought that the idea of museo-bus(museum-bus) could have its genesis outside India, but the concept was given a real garb perfectly in the Indian soil. In 1965 Birla Industrial and Technological Museum (BITM), Kolkata started the system with the slogan which reads, *“When visitors cannot come to the museum, let museum go to the people.”*

5. Indian Museum, Calcutta

Indian Museum, Calcutta’s mobile van (Museum on wheels) was started on May 16, 1987 with the object of carrying the museum to the very door of the villagers in India according to the mass education programme for the rural people. A theme on man devised as “Creation and Nature’s Manifestation” gives a



bird's eye view about the different types of collection the museum has. It may be mentioned that the Indian Museum, Kolkata has a huge collection of exhibits, the museum being the oldest among all the museums of Asia. Twenty dioramas in two tiers of the museo-bus represent some remarkable artistic creations of the ancient Indians along with the exhibits on flora, fauna and fossils, which can be considered as fantastic evidences of nature. The exhibits, which are displayed within the mobile van are either fibre glass fabrication or cast models. The objects exhibited are varied representing the rich cultural heritage of India so that through the limited number of typical and marvellous articles the rural people can have a glimpse of the glorious past, which was the creation of our forefathers. These are : The Great Bath at Mohenjodaro, Kalibangan an ancient Harappan city; Asokan edict of Dhauri of Odisha, representing the famed transformation of the famous emperor from Chandasoka to Dharmasoka; the carved medallions of Bharhut in Madhya Pradesh, the archaeological excavations at Arikamedu in Tamilnadu bringing forth the ancient trade centre, Fatehpur Sikri's central pillar of Diwan-i-Khas, Mughal paintings, various Indian gold coins, Records representing the socio-economic conditions of the relevant periods, a number of scenes representing various stages of Lord Buddha's life, sculpted on stone, presentation of Indian women in Indian art, the Gods and animals in bronze, etc. Besides these, different types of Bengal masks, the wood carvings of the Nagas betraying their simplicity and colourful birds of hills and mountains have found a place in the mobile van. Fossils of flowers, plants, animals and medicinal plants are presented also in the beautiful dioramas. These are enough within the short but reasonably spaced galleries and dioramas to inspire the thought and investigating gaze of the rural as well as urban folks. Some original objects are also exhibited. The aim of the museo-bus service is to present before the viewers a panoramic view of the rich cultural heritage of India spanning over five thousand years of the past bringing to life before the children and adult alike the wonder that was India.

6. Kerala Science and Technological Museum

Kerala Science and Technological Museum, Thruvananthapuram, with a view to spreading knowledge of science and technology among the common masses has opened a Mobile Science Exhibition Unit which has twenty four interactive exhibits. The exhibits have been arranged along with a mini planetarium in the same bus. Advance booking is to be made with the museum authority if any education - minded organization or institution intends to arrange exhibition of this Unit anywhere in Kerala. Thus museum authority has been rendering valuable educational service to the State of Kerala by way of exhibitions, which are open to both educated and uneducated, children and adults of the urban as well as rural areas. By keeping a mini planetarium within the bus the museum authority presents a panoramic view of the development of astronomy through the ages in India from ancient time. Guide lecturer explains the exhibits. The rural people thus get opportunity to introduce themselves to the latest development in science and astronomy and in the youngsters develop the dream of knowing further and becoming scientists of fame in the days to come.



7. The Nehru Science Centre

The Nehru Science Centre, Mumbai also has a mobile exhibition bus, which travels in rural areas only with twenty four exhibits. Their theme is 'Time'. Science demonstration and film shows on the concerned topics are also arranged.

Number of museo-buses are very less in our country. As most of the people of India live in rural areas, where many children do not get opportunities to go to cities or towns, museo-bus renders valuable service to them. As such, if governments make it a point to arrange for more museo-buses throughout India, the village children will be much benefitted. Language of lectures should be very naive and lucid, so that they can easily grasp the same.

A magnificent international travelling exhibition deserves to be mentioned here. This sonorous exhibition entitled 'Rhythms of India : The Art of Nandalal Bose (1882 - 1966)' was organized from February 23 to May 18, 2008 at the Sun Diego Museum of Art through an unprecedented collaboration with the government of India and the National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi. This was the first comprehensive travelling exhibition outside of Asia to survey the expansive repertoire of Nandalal Bose, the father of modern art of India. Rhythms of India features close to 100 of Bose's finest paintings, which are executed in a variety of styles and media. It also reveals how Bose contributed to the success of India's non-violent struggle for independence from colonial rule through his association with Mahatma Gandhi. The exhibition also marks the first time that a survey of Bose's work has been allowed to leave Asia. The works on view reveal the way Acharya Nandalal contributed to the development of a new Indian art form and laid the foundation for modern visual culture in independent India.

8. Indian Railways

Indian Railways have developed a novel idea of travelling exhibitions organized in trains. The train is called Sanskriti Express, which was flagged off by the Railway Minister from Bolpur Railway Station, Birbhum in West Bengal, on 9th May, 2010. This Sanskriti Express, a five coach Exhibition Train, fully air - conditioned, was scheduled to travel throughout India for a period of one year to showcase Rabindranath Tagore's versatile genius to the people exhibiting the life and diverse creations of him. This exhibition train performing 'Sanskriti Yatra' had been introduced by the Indian Railways through Eastern Railway from Howrah railway station to pay homage of the whole nation on the occasion of Tagore's 150th Birth Anniversary. Apart from bringing to the eyes of the people the works and life of Tagore throughout the length and breadth of the country, this travelling exhibition proved to be a marvel of exhibitory for developing a spirit of oneness making a great stride forward towards national integration specially at a time when divisive forces are spreading their tentacles from different directions. No entry fee was charged to visit this exhibition and the Sanskriti Yatra Train covered many places of the country and lakhs of visitors - adult and children alike, had visited the exhibition braving



even torrential rain. On the occasion of the exhibition cultural programmes were organized, in which hundreds of people attended with rapt attention. For example, on 19 July, 2010 cultural function was organized by Eastern Railway at the Community Hall at Bandel in West Bengal by the Divisional Cultural Association, Howrah of Eastern Railway at 5 p.m. on the occasion of the exhibition at Bandel station on that day. Tremendous publicity was given by the railway authorities about the programmes to become successful. Programmes in connection with Sanskriti Yatra were being published in all the major leading newspapers of the country.

9. Commonwealth Express

Another remarkable exhibition in train had been introduced by the Indian Railways through South Eastern Railway which is again a novel idea mooted by the Railways. This train had been named 'Commonwealth Express' which was an Exhibition Train combining the ideas of sports and information technology. Highlights of the Commonwealth Express had been described in advertisement in newspapers by South Eastern Railway as a window to one of the most spectacular sporting events of 2010. It deserves mention that this exhibition train had been set on motion on the occasion of the Commonwealth Games organized in New Delhi.

The exhibition in train started at Kharagpur railway station on 27th July 2010 and this was open to the public on 27th and 28th July from 10 a. m. to 5 p.m., entry being free as in the case of Sanskriti Express. The highlights of the Commonwealth Express are as below :Five exclusive coaches had been devoted to Delhi – 2010 Commonwealth Games' theme; Highlighting India's sports icons and their achievements in the world of sports; Role of Indian Railways in nurturing and promoting sporting talent; Six other coaches had been devoted showcasing the capacity, capability and work done in the country in the area of information and communication technology.

Commonwealth Express was a tribute of the Indian Railways to men and women, past and present, with exceptional talent in the sporting field. This novel idea of travelling exhibition in trains on a particular theme is serving the fundamental duties of a museum of expanding the visitor base, promotion of critical thinking, providing a fillip to the open-mindedness, creating sensitivity of intrinsic value of the objects and reaching out to the crores of Indians, who belong to diverse interest groups thus involving the whole Indian community together reinforcing a sense of oneness in a country inhabited by various groups of people in different areas of the country-from Kashmir to Kanya Kumari and from Gujarat to Mizoram dovetailing the whole nation into a homogenous whole through these programmes preserving our cultural heritage. The message of the great feats of our past and present sportsmen would be passed on to our next generations, at the same time generating a genuine feeling for community participation. These travelling exhibitions, having the character of museums, are no doubt promoting the cause of education and national integration.



10. Education through public programmes

Educational activities in museums nowadays are not confined within their four walls, but also outside the premises of museums. Apart from different kinds of programmes organized within the museum periphery, activities for dissemination of education among the public are also carried out sometimes for target groups.

11. Slide show

Slide shows on a small scale are organized by museums relying on their collections either inside a hall or outside in a field, where people will gather to witness the programmes. These slide shows should be accompanied by lectures on different themes like protection of eco-system, studies on heritage, bad effects of deforestation, the pre-historic paintings, etc., which are competent to leave a deep imprint on the mind of the visitors. The projectors will give very clear images if aided by digital devices. Films being a powerful media are noteworthy for their effectiveness, which may be organized in both urban and rural educational institutions and clubs. Museums may have their own projector. Films may be borrowed from like organization or from the Directorate of Field Publicity, Government of India, the latter having hundreds of educational films in their stock. Topics may be the life of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose, India - sixty six years of freedom, the heritage of India - a bird's-eye view, the evolution of human civilization, etc., which will make the visitors contemplate deeply casting a spectacular influence on their pattern of life and thinking. Now, at a time when moral degradation is spreading its ominous shadow on our society, more films on the lives of the great men of our country should be included within the film show programmes.

12. Quiz programme

Quiz is a competition in which competitors have to answer questions. These programmes are organized generally for young visitors with a view to making the visitors inquisitive about the concerned topics. Museum staff naturally have to carry with them the models of typical exhibits for displaying before the visitors for educating them.

13. Sit and draw programme

These are organized for young visitors on special occasions to rouse their interest on different topics to give them an idea about time-bound programmes and to know how to draw paintings and sketches, etc.

14. Science demonstration

These programmes of science museums help die rural schools mainly where laboratory facilities are not adequately available. These may cover different themes connected with collections of the museum. A group of knowledgeable staff dealing with educational matters of the museum forms a team, which selects some topics



for the target visitors and deliver lectures, which are accompanied by demonstration of scientific experiments made by the museum people. For example, die Nehru Science Centre, Mumbai arranges demonstration lectures on the topics, like matter at low temperature, sound, air, chemistry, science versus miracles, etc.

15. Seminar, conference and workshop

Museums arrange seminars, conferences and workshops outside their premises on various topics on various occasions. For this, there should be regular communications with schools and other educational institutions and normally programmes should be organized when climate is favourable. Annual seminars are organized by the National Council of Science Museums on all India basis every year on particular themes at different places of the country. Some of the themes on which seminars were organized are: Space and Mankind (1982), Communication Today and Tomorrow (1983), Environment & Human Survival (1985), We and the Ocean (1985), Pollute and Perish : Conserve and Flourish (1987), Origin of Life (1991), Are We Alone in the Universe? (1993), Health for All : Vision and Reality (2000), Powered Flight : A Century of Innovation & the Future of Aviation (2003), Science Awareness :Needs & Prospects (2004), Conservation of Biodiversity : Prospects &Concerns (2006), Global Climate Change and Its Impact (2007), etc.

Students get a chance to present their views before the audience. Competitors are selected on Block, District and State levels. Scholarships and prizes are offered to the successful participants.

In conferences knowledgeable persons of the subject from die area are called. They may be professors of colleges, teachers of schools, local entrepreneurs, who have established rural museums in the area and social workers interested in cultural conservation of the area and spreading idea of national integration and scientific development of the country. Conferences are organized on a particular topic on special occasions like Diwali, Durgapuja, Birthday of Mahatma Gandhi, etc.

Workshops for the students are held in schools for students on both science and art objects. Practical training and experiments, which are not taken within the school curriculum are also included for the students themselves to carry out. Courses on different topics of science and arts are conducted. These types of seminars, conferences and workshops instill a feeling of national integration in the mind of the students.

Thus Indian museums have significant effect on preserving the values of the past which the society has. It was proved that the museums education contributes to the training of the people to become conscious of the environment as a treasure inherited by our ancestors and to be passed onto the future generations. Although it is accepted that the cultural elements formed with the accumulation of hundreds of years cannot be changed overnight, it was proved that museum education activities could be very effective in the development of environmental consciousness and in the formation of nature culture.



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