

Importance and Impact of Museum on Society



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Abstract

Museums are symbol of organization representing civilization like other institutions of knowledge and culture. A good museum acts as a dynamic agency in the cultural, educational and revolutionary life of the people. The museum is define by ICOM as a non-profit making, permanent institution, in the service of society and it's development, and opens to the public which acquires, conserves, research, communicates & exhibits, for the purpose of study, education, and enjoyment, material evidence of man and their environment.

Hence museums are very important institution devoted to preservation of cultural material and technological object. It serves vital tools for education, research both formal and non-formal. Museums have much responsibility in this direction which can be vital significances to changing society by serving a platform for interaction between the generations and also by acting as a bridge between past and present. In this way museums are part of the response to the needs of human life. They impost the sense of aesthetic beauty, curiosity and of the chronological development to the society

Keywords: Vision of Museum, Study of Museum, Development of Museology, Impact of Museum on a lay man mind, Museum as magic box, New development of Museum

Introduction

Vision of Museum

"Museum has a unique place to serve as means to impart direct introduction to nature and original articles that serve as documents to culture and civilization", states Sonal Maniar (2000, 6). She further says that museum serves as an educational institution to common people and researchers. It has a base to provide knowledge with the help of collection of natural, cultural or scientific objects. These objects are preserved and exhibited. The people take their advantage by various means. It becomes a site of knowledge for people, as knowledge can be gained from original objects collected in a museum. The genesis of a word 'museum' in Egypt describes it as site of knowledge.

Since the vision of museum attaches importance to acquisition of knowledge with fun and curiosity. It explains with more clarity, ideas and thoughts presented in syllabi at schools and colleges. It imparts direct introduction to them and increases among beholders power of comparison, power of imagination and research capabilities. The power of education that museums possess depends on a collection that it keeps. Hence, the terminology that prevails in India describes it as 'House of Collection'.

Experience at a museum may be related to what Jawaharlal Nehru says about the past in his last letter to Indira: "History is not a magic show, but there is plenty of magic in it for those who have eyes to see it..."

Innumerable pictures from the gallery of history crowd our minds..." (Nehru, 951) Museum brings to us a magic of history and allows us to listen to its melody to make a fascinating experience by evocation of the past through fascinating display of objects.

The Museum evokes the glory of cultural past to a world at large. In this sense, museums can serve as mirrors to reflect our cultural heritage. It is a medium that "connects" generations in the present with a glorious story of the past. It is a window through which one peeps to what good or bad is left behind. This is a view that perhaps occupied the minds of those who founded museums. The history of all countries and communities witness emergence and flourishing of museums. Once a museum exists it serves as witness to the cultural past.

Anthology : The Research

Aim of the Study

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Study of Museum

The study of museums has acquired scopes of academic kind in the recent times and it has come to be known as museology. Its emergence is untraceable. However, two things can be said about it, it is that museums came in to existence before museology and that the emergence of museology was accomplished with the actions related to museums. Development of museums in the modern times, so to say, paved the way to explorations in museology. To make it clear, Sanjay Jain (2001, 96) refers to what Laurence Vail Coleman wrote in 1939:

Development of Museology

The museum's vocational complex is a product of the last 50 to 60 years. Before the 1870s museums were very simply run. Amateurs collected and put their stuff behind the glass of built-in exhibition cabinets. Taxidermy was brought outside, like a haircut. Education work consisted principally of opening door.

Assumptions and perceptions related to museums were further developed and formulated in the twentieth century, says Dr. Sanjay Jain who comments on the research and study conducted on museums in the recent times on national and international levels. He refers to the collaborations set between the museums in India with the museum associations of Britain, America and Germany established respectively in 1886, 1906 and 1917 that led to the establishment of international office of museums in 1926. The chief objective of this office is to create sentiments of cooperation among the museums of the member countries. It led to the publication on the subject of museology and also training programmes for curators, etc. First time in 1958, the UNESCO organized international conference at the Braziln city Rio de Janeiro at which the definition of museology was shaped. The definition goes like this: "Museology is a branch of knowledge concerned with the study of purposes and organization of museums. Museography is the body of techniques related to museology".

In 1972, ICOM defined museology in a detailed manner to include along with purposes and organization of museums also the study of their history and development. It involves classification of museums of different kinds, special methods of research and development, etc. The definition of museology as finalized by the ICOM in 1972 then goes like this:

Museology Is Museum Science

It has to do with the study of the history and background of museums, their role in society, specific

systems for research, relationship with the physical environment, and classification of different kinds of museums. In brief, museology is the branch of knowledge concerned with the study of purposes and organization of museums.

Museography is the study of techniques related to museology. It covers methods and practices in the operation of museums, in all their various aspects.

Important of Study

Impact of Museum on a lay mans mind

On normal ground, museums are experienced as magic with quality to charm man with its capacity to evoke experience with awe and wonder. For this reason, museums are viewed as effective media. I may cite here one Hollywood film, 'One Night at Museum'. The film shows how a newly appointed security person experiences the museum. During the night duty when he is all alone in the huge building of the museum he feels that objects in the cabinets and windows come alive. He finds that from an old royal painting the general and his soldiers come to life, the general's daughter falls in love with the guard and there is fighting and all hustle-bustle and confusion causing commotion in the mueum. Not only that, even elephants, giraffe, dinosaurs, horses and other animals come alive and run up and down in the building. There is lot of commotion all through the night to cause panic to the guard terribly. In the morning, all things become normal. When he narrates the experience no one believes him and he is about to be fired off. The experience has lot of thrill and wonder. It makes him feel that objects in windows although dead seem to be speaking to him and bring before his eyes new colors and moods of life. Thus, being at museum can become a good audio video experience. Experiencing other dimensions of life is the first objective. It allows a good change to man from his usual life experiences. But this experience may remain stagnant in spirit and impact.

Museum as magic box

On personal level, an idea of museum works as simple and innocent habit or fascination of collecting exquisite objects. On public level, it takes a form of collective fascination about some objects of glory. In this way, museum may be understood as an institutionalized form of fascination for beauty and glory, personal or public. In this respect, museums are established.

Personnelia museums comprise of personal collections of objects that fascinate a person. These objects may be coins, postage stamps, photographs, cards, watches. A child is always fond of collecting several things. Following his entry in this world as such, everything that a child sees or encounters he sees it as new to his sight, knowledge and understanding. Newness of things fascinates him. The fascination goes to such an extent that he feels like collecting things and preserving them fondly as his personal treasure. In course of time, he develops attachment that grows to the extent of possessiveness of treating those things as precious treasure. As the time passes a person's possessiveness grows so strong that a

Anthology : The Research

child would not spare or share his things with anyone. Possessiveness makes him mad sometimes about the things that he collects. Such a collection becomes a personal museum. It signifies fascination. It signifies his personal attachment. It signifies possessiveness. No child is seen to be free from this kind of fascination. It in fact makes a common childhood experience for each person on earth. We may also relate it to psychology of each child. It may, however, go with a child's condition and his personal capacity. In number of cases, a child desires for it but the condition and circumstances would not make it for him a possibility and, as a result, it remains buried in his psyche as desire or fascination unfulfilled. This instinct is seen to be becoming a base for museum. I observe, "At such a stage human instinct of collecting and accumulating objects of curiosity laid foundation of museums and opened a new horizon in the field of human progress".

It is a different matter that the fascination fades slowly and gradually as a child grows up. Then a museum serves him a magic box that unfolds to him childhood memory and he relishes it at times. It may sometime stretch to his ears that faded music of innocence and playfulness that enriched his childhood. In his grown up age when a man is almost out of touch with magic and music his personal museum may connect him back to such beauties of his living. Like looking at a photo album would crowd one's mind with memory of past to evoke to him its glory and melody. It brings to him some relaxation and relief from his day to day botherations, worries and problems. In this sense, personal museum may serve him a kind of resort. Likewise, an album of songs, videos or music, collection of stamps, cards and coins, and the like remain among man's most common fascination. At times, they make news and interesting reports on the television telecasts during regular news bulletins. Further, awards like Limca Book Awards and Guinness Book Awards are granted for such activities respectively at national and international levels for such hobbies. The awards signify that man's hobby to make a museum of objects of curiosity is duly recognized for its exquisiteness. Some persons spend years and good wealth to make a unique museum of his personal collection.

As a child grows up in age he gets in to academics. He joins a school for education and training. In this stage, museum becomes a sort of need to supplement his education. Over and above leaning in classrooms that remains basic to education and training he needs extra exposure to supplement to what his teacher explains to him on subject. It may not be possible for a teacher to show everything inside a classroom. A teacher of history, for instance, refers to number of things like weapons, ornaments, garments, etc. of past kings. But he cannot bring them actually in a classroom and until students do not see them they would not form understanding about them. Because most objects that belong to the past are strange and uncommon to the present day use. Likewise, a teacher of science may describe to students things

like planets, animals, plants and vegetation on earth with all minuteness, but until students would see them as real they would not get an idea. Hence, science museums are set up in the present time in the form of planetarium, botanical gardens, aquariums, etc. They serve the purpose of providing exposure to students in subjects like natural science with an effective display of botany, zoology, geology, astronomy and the like.

There are also museums to store personal belongings of a person of repute and to exhibit to public in general. The purpose of such museums is to inspire people in to higher living and thinking through a story displayed through the objects that a great person used during his life. In this category the objects on display include personal belongings, letters, statues, photographs etc. The Mahatma Gandhi Museum at Porbandar, Kirti Mandir, Porbandar; the Nehru Museum, Allahabad; Anand Bhawan, Allahabad, the Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel National Museum at Bardoli etc. are set up to commemorate a person's glory and thoughts. Such museums have a specific purpose to provide exposure to students to supplement their studies. They are known as personalia museums.

New Development of Museum

Recently a new concept of museums has emerged in the west. For instance, the Madam Tusad Wax Museum is set up at London. It displays wax statues of eminent celebrities in the world. The idea of this kind of museum is to treat these personalities and the glamour world as cultural ambassadors of their country to the world at large. They become places of attractions for tourists across the world and thus viewed as helping tourism industry.

With a view to impart better exposure and understanding of related subjects, educational visits are organized by schools. Students are taken to museums from time to time so that students' live touch with museums can be maintained. When we refer to museums, they need not only be those set up in buildings. There are museums in the open too like botanical gardens, medicinal gardens, zoos, aquariums, etc. They are carefully maintained. They allow good exposure through a close contact and observation of plants, animals and fish in large variety and invaried shapes and colours. A museum that is set up in a building is artificial, while natural museums are basically nature's creation with little modifications to suit the purpose. Both kinds of museums fascinate students equally during their studies. Nigam (1985) observes,

"Well exhibited galleries of museums are more informative than any textbook. Museums provide with effortless education as well as entertainment to its visitors. The bookish knowledge is much more theoretical and incomplete. It has to be supplemented by seeing, feeling and realizing real objects which the book is written upon. Museum objects, by virtue of their three-dimensional effect, are more appealing to the human mind. Thus, the museum education is learning by seeing. 'Looking and Learn' a slogan introduced to the museum world during Second International Campaign of

Anthology : The Research

Museums organized by ICOM in 1967-68, represents the very spirit of museum- education. Museums therefore must bear in educational policies, that it is the object, which is all important in dealing with their educational activities. Museums provide with effortless education as well as entertainment to its visitors."

Mehta (1995, 2) states that for the activity of bringing the experience and ideas in conformity, the essential conditions are field work, laboratories and museums in the present day world. He, thus, puts museums in the category of co-educative activities that are intended to arrange for adequate exposure to students involved in studies. He very specifically says, "The general idea of the function of the Museum is that of education". Stating the relationship of museums and education he says, "With the spread of primary education and the extension of secondary, collegiate, scientific and technical education, district museums are a desideratum and form the complement to these factors of a complete and progressive educational system". Sir Sayajirao Gaekwad of Vadodara too expressed right back in 1906-07 concern over an idea of developing taste of fine arts. Further in this line M. H. Spielmann comments on the ideal, "The illuminating idea that the collection should have for its prime purpose the educative motive for setting before students and lovers of arts in Baroda...It must renew from within..."

In grown up age when man plunges in all kinds of worldly responsibilities, liabilities and difficulties that close him so tightly that he is distracted from his childhood fascination. He no longer feels the newness about the world and nature. He pays little attention to museums. His interest and enthusiasm in museums get dried up gradually. He may develop psychology that spending on museums would be foolish and senseless. But this kind of feeling or attitude would lead him to undermine the value of museums. Museums serve as potent sources to tap variety of source material that has potency to influence.

Conclusion

My research also proposes to focus on this aspect of study and spell out the ways in which museums can be approached correctly and in true spirit. It hopes to open new avenues to allow further study and research to unfold a few more possibilities in the light of dynamism of museums. In this paper it is tried to introduce the subject of research and the museums in general.

We should focus on the meaning of the word 'museum' and its evolution from personal activity as hobby to a level of institution that claims value. In this light, I shall present a historical review of how museums evolved with the history. It will review the situation in the present that marks a shift in politics from autocratic kingship to a democratic form of political community that emerged in almost every state over the world. With it, a drastic change has occurred in people's thinking and attitude about museums.

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