Indian Museums in Community Identity and Development: A Critical Study

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Introduction:

Museums are complex institutions of integration of cultures; tangible and intangible traditions exhibit the man and nature relationship and promote education and research activities. And in elaborating manner, the Museums stand for the holistic presentation of various tribal and folk populations in the systematic way of socio-cultural economic and technological aspects. It focuses not just specifically on a particular community, or subject; trend or theme; and tradition or technology, but always presents the unbiased aspects of the past and present of the existed and existing societies. And through its activities, museum plays a vital role in presenting the equality and dignity of all cultures in parallel developmental approach for their preserving the cultural identity. Thus, museums have come up with people's aspirations and inspirations in terms of promoting and safeguarding the various communities on single platform.

Changing Face in Museums:

The museums are not sudden emergent factors, but they took centuries together in its concept and presentations. The people's awareness and interest around the past and present perhaps inspired them to have a personal collection of typical art and artifacts related to various sciences. The amateur scientists in the beginning of the age of enlightenment in Europe by the 16th century had cabinet of curiosities with the scientific and evolutionary collections and during the 17th centuries the collections were systematically studied and categorized. And later in the 18th and 19th century public museums have burgeoned throughout Europe and America the European and influenced the societies of South America, Australia, and India. The people's interest in this time was curious in observing the discovered wonders and the collections and under codification. The field of collections had specialized into different subjects like natural history, geology, archaeology, history and heritage. Later, in the late 20th century, the concept and objective of the museums have been changed into interesting sections after the emergence of specialized museums with different concepts. For example, the specialized museums with the broad concepts like, site museums, science museums, archaeological, geographical botanical, zoological, planetariums, anthropology and natural history and the museums with small concepts like shell museums, doll museums, and community museums, ect are being emerged.

Indian Museums a Brief Note

The concept of museums in India may be traced back to the historic times. The museum movement in India started towards the close of the 18th century. Initially the scholars attached with the learned societies like the Asiatic Society of Bengal, the Madras literary Society, British administrative officials, military personnel, and native rulers. However, in India the museum movement post-dates the similar developments that occurred in Europe. The earliest necessity to house objects of antiquarian remains dates back to late 1796 AD when the Asiatic Society of Bengal felt the need to house the enormous collection of archaeological, ethnological, geological, zoological pursuits. However, the first museum by them was started in 1814. The nucleus of this Asiatic Society Museum later provided to the Indian Museum, Calcutta. In Archaeological Survey of India also, due to the various explorative investigations that was initiated since the times of its first Director General, Alexander Cunningham, vast quantity of antiquarian remains were collected. The creation of site museums had to wait until the arrival of Sir John Marshall, who initiated the founding of the local museums like Sarnath (1904), Agra (1906), Ajmer (1908), Delhi Fort (1909), Bijapur (1912), Nalanda (1917)andSanchi(1919).

The situation has gone radical changes in the post independence era. The museums at national level and state level are established under various disciplines. The

universities, scientific and other research institutions have also come up with their subject related museums. Today, there are more than 500 different kinds of museums in India and all of them have a special charm and a distinctive characteristic of their own. There is, of course, the National Museum in Delhi, whose unique Indus Valley gallery displays many antiquities like terracotta toys, pots, jewelry, bronze and copper implements and sculptures, excavated from the ancient sites of Mohenjodaro and Harappa. Museums located in Mumbai, Chennai, Hyderabad, Bangalore, Bhubaneswar and other parts of the country are famous for their outstanding and rare objects. These are some of the most prestigious institutions of India with their extraordinary objects and artifacts of historical importance and traditional significance. The most prominent change in the concept of museums in India came through thematic presentation in the galleries. The subject matter is based on different themes like fossils of Narmada valley of India et, Indus Valley Civilization, primitive art, tribal art and craft, musical instruments in tribal or folk culture, terracotta and pottery of folk cultures, tribal religion, and traditional knowledge systems ect. For instance, the museums like National Museum of Mankind (Bhopal and Mysore), Salarjung Museum (Hyderabad), Indian Museum (Calcutta) National Museum, (New Delhi), are some of the museums in India at high level whose exhibitions are related to various themes. And the Shankar's International Dolls Museum (New Delhi),State Health museum (Hyderabad), Shell Museum, Wax Museum, Maharaja Palace Museum (Mysore), Technological Museum, Folklore Museum(Bangalore) are some of the other museums which has acquired importance through its display.

Cultural Pluralism and Community Development in Museums:

It was the British who were primarily responsible for initiating the process of museumization of communities in India by introducing community habitats. Community representation in the museums is symbolizes like variety of fishes placed in the aquarium. Such a way when we visit the museum, the presence of various communities makes us delight with colorful and vibrant appearance through their display of exhibitions and cultural demonstrations. The presence of various cultures gives an account that they are capable to accumulate in the selected society with the presence of inside and outside factors. Since the Community has the tendency of changing its nature due to several factors like biological, social, economical and ecological, the museums will defend in preserving them through its activities. And it is true that a community which deserves to die finds a niche in a museum.

The representation of the various communities through their ethnographic objects, indigenous structures, indigenous knowledge systems, and activities connected to the community groups will make a sense that; the museum is in community based approach. Such museums are endeavor to preserve the cultural heritage along with the environments in which such objects were used, and this enables community members to function as the primary keepers of a community's history and collective memory. This memory, the sum total of individual members of the community's ideas and feelings towards the past and the present, is perpetually validated as part of a process of on-going exchange among community members. Through its activities the representation of a community with the historical and cultural identity along with the other communities will promote the self respect and dignity towards each other.

The community role in preserving their respected cultural heritage has got massive support globally in the last two decades in various museums and their involvement not just limited to simply preserving them through participate directly and indirectly but they are extended to be part and active in explore and expose their cultural heritage through sustainable development by connecting to museum based programmes. A further feature common to most community-based museums and cultural institutions is the importance they attach to transmitting and perpetuating living cultural traditions. For this reason, such institutions have to maintain living cultural traditions and to help tackle economic and social conditions.

Museum Curator and Communities:

The museum curator is a chief architect in designing the community involvement in the museum activities. He is the one who concerns

of museum with all the aspects of the study, research, preservation, interpretation and museum's collection. Whether the museums are approaching the communities or the communities are approaching the museums is depends on the vision and approach of the museum curator. He plays a prominent role in the flourishing of the museum activities connected to the various community groups' involvement and their development.

In India the museum curator's role and responsibilities are not just bound to exploring the archaeological sites or identifying the typical cultures, collecting the fossils or ethnographic objects; preparing the exhibitions or documentation of the various communities and so. But museum curators are tend to identify the various goals for the community development of socio-cultural and environment based. The curator has to promote the goals which hasten positive changes in the society and to ensure that continuity of social institutions and customs for better race and inter ethnic group relations. India is the country where we come across number of cultures based on culture, religion, race, and language. In this conditions the museums in India are to be careful in presenting them without unbiased towards any community. The curator's approach towards the community development requires being unbiased, presenting them in equal manner is very much required. As the communities are migrating to other places in search of their livelihood especially from hilly areas to plain areas a proper museum research has to be done through museums. And the museum curator through the museum activities has to look into progress of the local community groups by organizing various outreach activities with community groups and community museums and non museum organizations. For instance, the museums like, National Museum of Man Kind popularly known as Indira Gandhi Rashtriya Manav Sangrahalaya (Bhopal and Mysore) and Craft Museum (New Delhi), Indian Museum (Culcutta) and other tribal and folklore museums at state level are designing their activities and instructing their museum curators and supporting staff to organize community based programmes like workshops, training programmes, cultural performances, popular lectures, symposiums on tribal, folk and traditions to help them in their livelihood and development of the community groups as well.

And other hand the museum curatorial staff in India is found with some limitations in their duties. The decision making is the key factor in studying and developing the important identified communities. As the decision making power lie down with the hands of superior officers or administrators who are non curatorial in nature with little or less aware of museum and research activities, the subordinate curatorial staff are getting difficulty in implementing the tasks which they have selected. Due to these circumstances, sometimes the working attitude comes down as they are unable in getting expected moral support. And strangely due to infrastructure and budget problems, some of the museums in India where the curatorial staff is not even provided with the personal computers to carry out their professional works. And there are some museums without proper library facilities too. When the museums are not equipped with the proper library facilities and personnel computers for museum education and research purpose we cannot imagine the development of communities through museums in India. In this regard the museum curators need to be supported with the required things. And other most important factor is the museums departments in India are not recruiting the adequate number of candidates for the curatorial posts. Due to this factor the existing curators are unable to complete the community development related tasks.

Communities to Museums

Community participation in the museums is an important feature which ultimately makes any museum lively and zesty through its exhibitions. And in fact the community presence in a museum is an essential component and continues to contribute to development of indigenous life. The presence of various community persons as visitor, demonstrator or museum staff, it enhances the museum activities and contributes for the museum development. Promotion of the public visits is another aspect of the community development in museums. In this aspect the museum in India have to began to change in approach of exhibition policy and instead of organizing small and popular shows along with the collected ethnographic objects, the museums has to focus on bringing out popular exhibitions around the topics of general interest such as tribal women workshops, primitive tribal groups life styles, tribal and folk medicine,

contemporary folk arts, health and environment, etc. For instance the British museum recently in August 2012 prepared an exhibition on Shakespeare works to attract a particular set of community and the Regional Museum of natural History (Mysore) also organized a community based exhibition in November 2012 based on ecology of Mysore region. Yet, organizing the educational training programmes, workshops, and inviting the community groups to perform their traditional recreational activities like games and sports, and cultural performances, ethnic food festivals ect will also encourage the community groups to enhance their tradition among them.

Besides, if the museums are aiming for the direct involvement of the community groups in the museums, the best possible approach is allow them to work as an employees in museums as curators or supporting staff. If they are not found technically sound enough to perform their duties, provide all the support which they have required to become emancipate and capable. If the particular community person or persons are employed in looking after the exhibitions, it is good to museum as well as for the visitors for the better understanding. For example the National museum of Australia has appointed Australian Aboriginals as staff in their museum that idea had helped in running aboriginal related exhibitions with the great success.

The publicity department has much role to do bringing the communities to museums. Using the electronic media like showing the clippings in Television, Movie Theatres, and internet will definitely a best idea to bring the public into the museums. And preparation of the scholarly catalogue on the selected exhibitions will be a successful attempt to attract the particular communities. And more ever the interview telecasts by the museologists or anthropologists on various popular exhibitions in print and electronic media will serve better in bringing the communities to the museums. The scholarly catalogue plays a silent role in bringing various communities to museum. The preparation of the catalogue needs to be more educative with number of colorful photographs rather than more running text.

And the language selection is also an important factor in preparation of the catalogues. For example, the national museums and other state museums in India usually prepares the catalogues in English, Hindi and other local languages based on the factors that common language (English), national language (Hindi), and local language (state language) for various exhibitions. But it is suggested that, there is a room for implementing new technique in attracting other language communities who frequently visit the museums since they have accessibility. For example, if the museums are located in the national capital New Delhi or any state capital like Bangalore (Karnataka), we come across more number of other state or ethnic communities like Punjabi, Haryani, and Gadwali and so in New Delhi, and in similar way, Andhraites, Tamilians, Malayalis, and Rajastanis in Bangalore respectively. For these speakers Hindi or English catalogues are may not be helpful and not enough in understanding the running exhibitions. To make understand them well in better and comfortable way is, the catalogues are need to be printed in their respective languages, so that it not only make a way understanding the museum exhibitions but it also help in more number of particular community visits.

Still, adding the museum shop is a key factor for attracting the visitors to the museum. After seeing all the galleries, most of the visitors attracts to particular ethnographic object or whatever displayed in the exhibition and intend to buy if they are available in the museum shop either in the form of replicas or photographs. And where ever possible a special discount can be made to the visitors to buy so that, which helps in satisfying the visiting community and the artisan community who prepare the artifacts in terms of their lively hood. Of course, the museums also will generate marginal income. Unfortunately except few museums at national level, remaining museums in India are without museum shops. Hence, the museums need to be very cautious to make arrangements for the shop to accelerate the various communities to the museum.

Museums to Communities

Museums are still perceived to be ‘elitist’ not in the sense that they are closed doors to the certain socio-economic groups. It is an exclusive body to serve the various community groups of the society through

education and entertainment. But the billion dolor question is that whether the museums are open to all sections or are their activities reaching all the community groups? But, unfortunately most of the museums are in India unable to reach the some sections of the community groups due to the following reasons like typecast planning, lack of infrastructure and problems in identifying the core community groups.

At first the typecast planning of the museums need to be eloquent in implementation of the programmes. The repetition of the programmes and poor vision will not attract the public as longer, instead of that the museums need to look after and identify the vanishing cultures of traditional, folk and tribe and try to preserve and promote them through outreach and salvage activities. The vanishing tangible and intangible cultures of the communities are required to ascertain through holistic field work and try to put emphasis to protect their cultures for the future generations. The planning of some adequate progrmmes on traditional knowledge systems, traditional medicinal practices, art and craft etc of the tribal or folk communities may be possible and advisable in their own geographical locations and that facilitates community development. In the era of globalization, unfortunately and unknowingly many tribal and folk communities in India are vanishing in terms of their traditional knowledge systems slowly to survive in dominant competitive world factors. For example the bamboo basketry *meda* community in Karnataka and other regions of India are losing their traditional art and craft due to non usage of bamboo basketry products and other ecological factors like non availability of the bamboos. The present generation of the community is reluctant to be in their traditional craft due to no guarantee of their livelihood. Surprisingly most of them are not learn the process of knitting the basketry technique. To revive their cultural legacy the community museums in India need to be focused on these respective groups to promote them by providing a platform to be in their cultural tradition and supporting them to use the advance technology in their traditional art and craft to meet the public interest.

Secondly, the local participation in the museum activities by community groups will boost their psychological strength and stimulate them to penetrate further towards their cultural aspects. And if these communities are having any local organized bodies or running a community based museums within the community which may be encouraged by supporting with proper guidelines, providing technical and non technical assistance like training on certain aspects. And based on their cultural importance of their art and craft they may be encouraged to introduce new techniques and tools for promotion of their art and craft. The community based museums incorporate aspects of the conventional museums but many omit or include activities or methods as pertinent to local agendas. For instance, couple of years ago the community museum in Minicoy Island of Lakshadweep is set up by the local tribal organization with the intention of preserving the socio-cultural and economic ethnographic objects of indigenous tribal groups is established. The museum collection is so rich in cultural point of view, but the organizing set up of the museum and conservation of the collected objects is in very bad shape and the collected cultural objects were put adjacent to each other without any space and proper labeling. Their intentions of having the community museum are the means of preserving and transmit the knowledge and they believe that the objects reflect the cultural and spiritual values of the community. Hence, such community museums are organizing by the local communities without proper guidelines need to be supported and assisted by the main stream developed museums and if required along with the other research institutions by providing technical guidance and training.

And the one of the most important factors is that the travelling exhibitions which are enormously popular in museum field where the museums try to reach the targeted community groups with selected thematic exhibitions. The common targeted groups are ethnic populations, minorities, tribal and folk populations, youth, women, physically challenged and etc. These exhibitions are not only planned in aiming the preservation and protection of the cultural identities, and also alerting various community groups on cautioning on some tricky problems. Some exhibitions are specified by communicating the great cultural history and some by highlighting the present social and ecological causes. The symbolic presentation is important to communicate through artifacts, replicas and photographic panels will create awareness and throw positive signals on

respective cultures and also among the other community groups. At present only few Indian museums are organizing successfully the travelling exhibitions in collaboration with the other institutions like education centers, research centers, government and local bodies. The reason may be due to lack of infrastructure and financial difficulties in implementation. These problems need to be sorted out soon to be active in the community developmental programmes. The government is required to arrange the sufficient infrastructure and funding to promote the programmes. Furthermore the other important thing is how far they (travelling exhibitions) are reaching the respected communities need to be reviewed. Whether the communities are able to see them or not? To sort out the issue the museums should plan the travelling exhibitions in a proper manner so that they will reach to the respected targeted communities. The museums should not be sluggish in expenditure and arranging such exhibitions at remote places even. Let them be a women folk, children, youth, or ethnic group and make sure that the travelling exhibitions have come across these exhibitions, later in result there will be a definitely a development factors to revive, upgrade or develop their culture. Since, the travelling exhibitions have tendency of influencing the various community groups by creating awareness, it is possible to bring back their cultural renaissance and community development through. But the selection of the travelling exhibitions keen to be designed by the Indian community museums in view of the present circumstances where they are very much required, so that the expectations of community development may be the feasible factor.

Conclusion:

The cultural and spiritual values of the community must shape in the museum if it is to survive and provide a significant role in future cultural preservation practices. The process of globalization will definitely affect the communities which badly require the precious support by the museums and it's curators to be in their original state. The indigenization of the museum offer communities new models of preserving, presenting and transmitting culture. The activities of community based cultural institutions and the gradual infusion of community groups as staff into the museum profession is beginning to change the museum practice in India where it well works to better show of the indigenous concepts and cultural heritage. The concept of dealing the selected community groups through various exhibitions based on culture, ecology and races will not only help in understanding them but also stands in respecting each other community where India houses innumerable number of community groups. The development of various community groups, local institutions, and local museums by the main stream museums will be a key factor in achieving the community holistic development. Hence, we may conclude that, we cannot imagine cultural museums without community participation and any communities without museum interruption in countries like India.

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