CHAPTER-6

MUSEUM PUBLICATION SUITABLE FOR THE REQUIREMENT OF THE UNDER PRIVILEGED VISITORS.

The publications are the mouth piece of the museum. It is through them that the museum speaks about its collections and activities. The museum which does not have any kind of publication will be dumb and not be able to reach out to the visitors who will not be encouraged to visit the museum.

Museum publications are mainly of three types namely administrative, scholarly and popular. They satisfy the visitors of different categories. To popularize the museums or to help serious scholars and historians, these publications play a very significant role. Thus the publications play a dominant role in the museums. The past and present meet in a museum through its collected objects. A glimpse of human civilization can be obtained in it. Inquisitive visitors in a museum are eager to know the nature of the objects and related information about it. Merely, adding labels to the collections do not help. There may be visitors who want to make a detailed study of the objects in historical and sociological perspective before going through the museum.

After the curiosities of the visitors have awakened they may collect necessary publications for further study and return. Good publications which are well illustrated and have the information in a simple manner can help the visitors to see and enjoy the exhibits. They can feel the living presence of the past which is elaborated in these publications.

After finishing their visit it might so happen that visitors may like to have some such publications as mementoes or to give them to their near and dear ones as presentations.

Among the three types of publications namely administrative, scholarly and popular publications, it is the third type of publications that suit the general public. There are many types of popular publications such as the guide book, children’s book, museum news or news letter, folder or leaflets, pictures, poster, take home sheet etc.
These days’ publications also include interactive video-discs, audio tapes and computer software.

Since the target group of this research work comprises of the underprivileged visitors who are at times either unlettered or partially lettered the museums need to give a lot of thought while designing publications for them. There is hardly any doubt that the publications that would suit these people are definitely the popular publications. However not all popular publications are suitable for them.

Before going into the question of the suitability of the publications for the underprivileged visitors one needs to discuss the popular publications of different.

1. Guide book – one of the most popular type of publications in a museum for the common public, a guide book is absolutely necessary for a proper study of a museum. It presents the museum in a proper perspective and supplies information about the nature and importance of the exhibits. Generally it contains the history of the museum in brief, map of the location of the museum, the number of sections with their names, the nearest bus stop, railway station, airport or other means of communication, opening hours, rules and regulations, admission fees and more prominently accounts of various sections and important exhibits in display and in reserve.

Language whatever it may be, international national or regional needs to be lucid and direct. Nature of it is not scholarly. The guide needs to have selective photographs of the objects. Guide books can be divided into broad types:-

1. General
   A. Introduction, pointing to the importance of this particular museum.
   B. Short history of the museum.
   C. Reference to different sections of the museum with plans and layouts contents of a Sectional Guide book.
      A. Brief history of the sections.
      B. Specific information about the selective and representative exhibits in a particular section.
**Children’s Book:** In order to attract children in museums, simple lucid, easy-to-understand books can be prepared. There are generally colourful photographs added.

**Museum News or News Letter:** To supply up-to-date information some museums periodically publish news letters with photographs. It contains information about current and near future programmes of the museum like lectures, seminars, workshops, future programmes with dates and timings, existing and future publications, educational film shows, newly opened galleries, libraries, acquisition of objects and existing and forthcoming exhibitions.

**Folders or Leaflets:** A folder is a single sheet of paper folded and made into a convenient size. The folder may generally consist of three or four folds. It contains in short, necessary information about the museum which is done in a more elaborate form in guide books.

Pictures: Museum pictures may be of the following types –

1. **Enlarged pictures of the exhibits.**
2. **Picture postcards.**
3. **Picture books.**

1. **Enlarged pictures:** Some museums prepare and sell coloured or black and white reproductions of its paintings, sculptures etc. In different sizes.

2. **Picture Postcards** - are usually very common and popular publications of any museum. Visitors like to have these cards for keeping them as a memento and for sending those to interested persons. In it, pictures are printed on one side and on the other half space is allotted for communicative notes and writing address.

3. **Picture books** - These are generally for the children. They consist of a number of pictures of some of the important collections made into a book. The pictures are generally very colourful. Sometimes a small amount of basic information about the pictures is also given.
**Poster** - Exhibition poster contains theme of the exhibition, location, duration, hours of openings, date, time of inauguration, name of the inaugurator, etc. Usually, it is colourfully printed with symbolic and thematic sketches.

**Take-home sheet** - Take-home sheets are available in the gallery in which individual exhibits are illustrated through literatures and photographs. Visitors can take home these sheets. It is not very scholarly in nature, being made to be used by common visitors.

After getting an idea about the different categories of popular publications one may see which ones among them are suitable for the people who are underprivileged.

The underprivileged category of visitors consist of those people who are generally not very well to do, rather they belong to the lowest strata of the society and placed at the lowest socio-economic level. They are generally infrequent visitors when they visit the museum most of them are clueless about what to expect from the museum. Some are first time visitors who have no idea as to what is a museum. Children are very excited and inquisitive whereas the ladies and sometimes the senior citizens are mostly sky. The ladies generally do not come alone. They come with the family and sometimes a member of such families came to the museum together.

For such visitors if one readily prepares a guide book and gives them they are of no meaning. Further if the guide-book is not free they generally do not show any interest in it. For that matter any publication which has to be bought generally discourages. This is because their economic status prevents them from taking a free hand in spending money. When they come to the museum form the remote areas or even if they stay in the town or city the entry fee of museums however low it might be is a matter of concern for them. This combined with the expense of travelling by bus or train or at times both puts economic pressure. Even if they like the publications it is next to impossible for them to buy the same. Further a number of them might be unlettered or partially literate. Hence going through a guide book to read the information on the collection generally has a repulsive effect. They are attracted by the pictures of the guide books.
So rather then guide books they have to be given either forms of publication which requires hardly any reading. So for them the folders or leaflets are a better option. These are colourful, having more pictures than the guide books and the information that is supplied about the collection is comparatively much less. Furthermost museums generally give the folders free of cost.

Another good option for these people is the pictures of different kinds. Firstly, the enlarged pictures of exhibits are generally colourful and attractive and fascinate the simple folk for whom the biggest appeal lies in seeing a prominent object which if colourful suits them better. However, pictures are generally not free but have to bought for an amount. It might prove to be discouraging for such visitors. However, since the pictures come in all sizes. So in case they want to buy the pictures they can sometimes afford one that is smaller in size and has a low price. Enlarged pictures might be visually appealing to them might not be economically conductive for them.

The picture post cards might be a good option. Picture postcards in museums generally in sets on a particular theme for instance the Indian Raghmala series, the Gandhara sculptures, the Kalighat patas and so on. A single picture post card may cost rupees five and the entire set generally consisting of six cards may cost around rupees twenty five. It might seem to be expensive for the under privileged visitors. However, the picture postcards come in sets. Hence, if a few people contribute the money and buy one set of postcards, then each family can have at least one picture post card.

In case a family group has children who are students in the schools at least of the secondary level then a take-home sheet can be a good option. The take-home sheets are generally free. If the son or daughter takes the sheet then he or she can read it out to the other members of the family. In case some are unlettered or partially lettered they receive the help of the some or daughter of the family. This is has a positive effect on the unlettered or partially lettered people because some of them especially ladies are generally shy to ask questions to the guide lectures can freely ask them to a family member without any shyness whatsoever. These post cards can be kept as a memento.
Posters attract the underprivileged visitors due the fact that they are placed at strategic points on the road, stations or other public places announcing exhibitions or workshops. Though the posters are attractive they can be an option for the people who are literate. This is because the poster has written information about the exhibition or workshop or any other important museum event. However, the information might prove to be a problem for the unlettered visitors. Further if the posters do not have a vernacular version then it would be a problem for some of the literate people too.

Children’s books though attractive can prove to be expensive for the underprivileged visitor.

CDs DVDs are still not so common in the museums in India including those in West Bengal. In the West these are sold in the museum sales counters and people can readily buy them.

There are various factors that have to be kept in mind the museum authorities while preparing the publications. They include the following:-

(a) Finances
(b) Expertise
(c) Time
(d) Market potential
(e) Marketing and distribution system
(f) Existing policy and practice.

(a) **Finances**: Developing a range of in-house publications – at whatever level(s) can be expensive. The bigger museums that are better placed economically placed an think of investing more. However, the museum has to decide whether the necessary investment in the publications is worthwhile in terms of the rate of return through sales on the capital invested. The museum may decide that a subsidy can be justified. It may seek sponsorship or grants to help reduce the unit cost or to keep the retail price at a lower level. Only then can the popular publications be really low priced.
It is however important to:-

(i) Analyze the full costs of publications in advance of commitment.

(ii) Ensure that firm cost quotations for design, typesetting, and printing are obtained from relevant individuals/organizations.

(iii) Consider additional costs of marketing, distribution, discount for bulk sales and storage.

(b) **Expertise**: Writing for publications carries with it substantial responsibility on the part of the author to ensure accuracy. All publications carry with them the need for research. In some cases this may be extremely time consuming and complex, in other cases it is more straightforward. Commitment to publication carries with it commitment to dedicating sufficient time for research. Whatever the publication marketing and selling also requires expertise. It is of no value to the museum to produce large quantities of publication at great expense if they languish in the store because their market has been poorly researched or too few outlets are available for them.

(c) **Time**: A lot of time must be given to the planning of the publications. All the factors such as research, selection of topic, liaising with designers, type-setters and printers require considerable time on the part of the museum. It therefore follows that in determining a publication strategy for the museum, the scheduling of publications (as well as their costs) needs careful consideration.

(d) **Market potential**: The value of the publications is related to their markets. The museum’s publication policy needs to service as much of the market possible. It is important to investigate the marketability of different types of publication by comparing what other museum shops produce and sell and their prices.
(e) **Marketing and distribution systems**: The development of a publication programme for the museum needs to take into consideration the marketing and distribution systems needed for publications. It is not right for the museums to automatically assume that every visitor is a potential buyer of the publications. In case the visitors are the ones belonging to lowest economic strata of the society then the chance of buying is virtually minimum or nil. Further there is plenty of competition and the success of the museum’s publications will depend on good publicity and promotion within and outside the museum.

(f) **Existing policy and practice** – Publications need to reflect the purpose and objectives of the museum. They should conform with museum policy and seek to provide information relating to the museum’s collections. Museum managers should be careful to ensure that time is not spent by the staff on the production of publications which have limited or marginal relevance to the mission of the museum.

Thus, both the standpoint of the museums as well as the visitors have been discussed. Museums need to come forward to bridge the gap between the collection and the visitors. The museums like BITM give most of the publications to the visitors. However, all museums cannot afford to do so because they are not all run directly by the Government.

However, it is to be remembered that the visitors are the life blood of the museums. The collections are mute and of use unless interpreted to the visitors. The museums exist for its visitors. So if they are unable to buy even the low priced publications owing to economic constraint then effort must be made to provide at least some kind of popular publication which can be distributed free of cost. Such publications need to contain the broad outline of the collections. The language should be very lucid as too tough language might repel the visitor for the fear of intellectual exercise.
It is to be remembered that the duty of all museums is basically to reach out to the visitors through their collections. Publications prove to be one of the most important means of bridging the gaps between the collection and the visitors. It needs to be ensured on the part of the museum that the publications speak for themselves and do not require any interpretation as such on the part of the guide lecturers. However, whenever such a need arises the guide lecturers should never hesitate to help. This is especially true for the visitors who are unlettered and infrequent. The museum shop must be strategically located preferably at the entrance where everybody can see it. However, in case the unlettered visitors are disoriented and don’t know about the existence of the publications they must be gently and politely guided towards the sales counter. Another way of giving the publications is by distributing some of them that are free of cost right at the ticket counter or the reception desk when the visitor enters the museum. BITM distributes publications to the visitors at the reception desk.

It needs to be remembered that the simple rural folk who are underprivileged do not have the capability or desire to understand complicated words or display. They are guided by visual stimulation. So the effort must be made to make the publications appealing to them.

The publications need to be bright in colour. It is seen that if the objects are in red, yellow, orange or green colours they tend to attract the attention of more people. So the publications too must try to incorporate at least one of the primary colours.

The content too must appeal to the laymen. For instance children are enthralled by pictures of animals or transports such as cars or airplanes. In case the collection of the museum has such objects they may be presented attractively to the children by means of folders or picture and if none is possible by a leaflet.

In case of Natural History Museums animals as well as different varieties of flowers may also be presented by means of photographs.

Objects of folk art also attract people especially the rural ones since they are closer to their hearts. Bright coloured objects featured on folders or leaflets would lead to the visitors showing interest in visiting the gallery containing the exhibit.
In case of health museums the folder can give small amount of information on the spread of diseases and the vectors causing them. It may also contain the methods of prevention.

The language of the publications needs to be paid attention to. It is to be remembered that the people who come form the rural areas are not always conversant in English. Most of them do not know any other language other than their mother tongue. So if possible bilingual publications or a set of separate publication in the local vernacular will prove to be useful.

All said and done the publication programmes of every museum is different depending on its collection, the people who visit it and the availability of funds at the disposal of the museum. Bigger museums who have adequate funds at their disposal can have various types of publication and can afford to experiment with them on the other hand the smaller museums in the rural or suburban areas do not have so many funds. At times publications are totally absent in such museum.

However, total absence of any kind of museums is not advocated. This is because being the mouthpiece of the museum the publications also act as a sort of agent of publicity. Total absence of publication will lead to failure on the part of the museum to reach out to the community at large. This means that the chief function of the museum will not be taking place. The museum therefore will fail in its chief commitment.