CHAPTER-2

MUSEUM VISITORS : THE PRIVILEGED AND UNDERPRIVILEGED

The Indian museum movement that pioneered with the establishment of the Indian museum Kolkata has made slow but steady progress after independence. They are now a centre for non-formal education a continuum of learning and above all a heritage space that offers people aesthetic enlightenment through visual experience. ‘Museums for all’ is a phrase that is slowly gaining ground in the present times. Museums for all or social inclusion in the museums whatever might be the term, the common point of reference is the access to one and all i.e. every individual segment of the society must gain access to the museums-its collections, exhibitions, programmes and services for individual and collective benefits.

‘Museums for all’ is therefore an important topic before us as access is considered to be a matter of universal right, no longer a privilege reserved for selective individuals. There are several barriers in the way of universal access such as physical, mental, social as well as economic. Since the scope of this research work is to highlight the underprivileged section of the society so here the discussion pertains to the socio-economic barrier. Illiteracy and poverty act as bane against the museum accessibility. They act as socio-cultural and economic barriers to proper utilization of the museum’s resources. However the museums have great responsibilities as institutions of learning in informal ambience.

In order to proceed further into the topic it is necessary to elaborate on the concept of underprivileged. The Oxford Dictionary, 5th edition 1992 describes the term underprivileged in the following manner, ‘less privileged than others, not enjoying the normal standard of living or rights in a community.’ In other words it implies having less money, education, etc., than the other people in a society or having fewer advantages, privileges, and opportunities than most people. It includes the socially or economically disadvantaged or more commonly the poor. Privilege is based on the possession of or access to a resource - physical, social or psychological. Those who possess the resource obtain a power or advantage from it which expresses as a benefit or privilege to that community. Those who do not possess or
have access to the resource or are unable to utilize it lack the power and the privilege.

Since this research work highlights the socio-economically underprivileged or in other words the BPL category, hence it is required to define and elaborate as to who are the BPL in the Indian context as well as the state of West Bengal. Below Poverty Line is an economic benchmark threshold used by the government of India to indicate economic disadvantage and to identify individuals and households in need of government assistance and aid. It is determined using various parameters which vary from state to state. Criteria are different for rural and urban areas. Income based poverty lines consider the bare minimum income to provide basic food requirements. It does not take into account for other essentials such as healthcare and education. However, it is common knowledge that poverty is intricately related to both health as well as education. On the rural side a “Below the Poverty Line” (BPL) Census has been conducted by the Ministry of Rural Development every five years, beginning in 1992. The criterion for identifying rural poor, however, has varied from Census to Census. With a view to evolving a standard methodology, the Ministry of Rural Development constituted an Expert Group under the Chairmanship of Dr. N.C. Saxena in 2009. The Expert Group recommended an approach based on transparent and objectively verifiable indicators applicable in the rural setting. No corresponding initiative had so far been taken for identifying the urban poor. In the absence of a standard methodology, the states/Union Territories devise their own methodology/criteria to conduct the BPL surveys on the basis of state specific poverty lines for urban areas as defined by the Planning Commission from time to time.

In its Ninth Five Year Plan (1992-2002), Below Poverty Line (BPL) statistics for the rural areas was set at an annual family income less than rupees 20,000, less than two hectares of land and no television or refrigerator. The number of rural families was estimated to be 6, 50,000 (6.5 lakh) during the Ninth Plan. The survey based on this criterion was again carried out in 2002 and the total numbers of 3.87 lakh families were identified. This figure was in force until September 2006.
To estimate the poverty, the first step is to define a poverty line. A poverty line divides the poor from the non-poor. In India, the estimation of poverty is done by the Planning Commission based on the Quinquennial Consumer Expenditure Surveys conducted by the National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO). The national poverty lines are worked out from the national level expenditure distribution obtained from the NSS data on consumer expenditure and the national level poverty ratio. The overall estimate is based on the data available on from NSSO’s all-India sample survey of household consumption expenditure, where poverty is defined with reference to a poverty line which is the level of per capita consumption of expenditure considered minimum necessary for living.

For 1999-2000, the Poverty Line is defined in terms of Monthly per capita income of Rs.327.56 for Rural areas and Rs.454.11 for Urban areas.

The methodology for estimation of poverty followed by the Planning Commission has been based on the recommendations made by experts in the field from time to time. In December, 2005, Planning Commission constituted an Expert Group under the Chairmanship of Prof. Suresh D. Tendulkar to review the methodology for estimation of poverty. The Tendulkar Committee submitted its report in December 2009 and computed poverty lines and poverty ratios for 2004-05. For comparison they also computed poverty lines and poverty ratios for 1993-94 with identical methodology. These were accepted by the Planning Commission.

The next Large Sample Survey of Household Consumer Expenditure was conducted in 2009-10. Following the Tendulkar Committee methodology, Planning Commission made estimates of poverty for 2009-10 which were released through a Press Note on 19thMarch 2012. Since several representations were made suggesting that the Tendulkar Poverty Line was too low, the Planning Commission, in June 2012 constituted an Expert Group under the Chairmanship of Dr. C. Rangarajan to once again review the methodology for the measurement. The poverty lines of West Bengal (according to the Human Development Index of 2011) 27% of the population lives below the poverty line. In comparison to 35.66% in the year 1993-94 the poverty in the state has reduced considerably but there is a long way to go. The poverty in the state is especially concentrated in the rural areas with around 84
% of the absolute poor populations living in the rural area compared to 74% in India as a whole.

However, Poverty is not restricted to rural areas alone. On 3rd February 2009 the Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation, government of India with support from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) launched India’s first of its kind of report on the nature and dynamics of urban poverty in the country at an event in New Delhi titled- ‘India: Urban Poverty report.’ It enumerated that the pace of urbanization in India is set to increase and with it, urban poverty and urban slums, despite 62% of GDP now being generated in towns and cities.

According to this report in 2001 an estimated 23.7% of the urban population was living in slums amidst squalor, crime, diseases and tension. The report has noted however that not all slum dwellers exist below the poverty line. Tendulkar methodology uses implicit prices derived from quantity and value data collected in household consumer expenditure surveys for computing and updating the poverty lines. The Planning Commission has updated the poverty estimates for the year 2011-12 as per the methodology recommended by Tendulkar for 2011-12, for rural areas the national poverty line using the Tendulkar methodology is estimated at Rs. 816 per capita per month and Rs. 1,000 per capita per month in urban areas. Thus, for a family of five in India poverty line in terms of consumption expenditure would amount to about Rs. 4,080 per month in rural. These poverty lines would vary from State to State because of inter-state price differentials.

Illiteracy comes hand in hand with poverty. Education trains the mind to understand the themes, current and cross current of events around us in their proper perspective. Literacy and awareness are interconnected. Despite several of the policies and programmes adopted by the government of India, a large section of population of the population of India is still unlettered even after 68 years of independence.

The 15th official census of India was calculated in the year 2011. In a country like India, literacy is the main foundation for social and economic growth. When the British rule ended in India in the year 1947 literacy rate was just above 12%. Over the years, India has changed socially, economically and globally. After the
2011 census, literacy rate in India was found to be 74.04%. Compared to the adult literacy rate here the youth literacy rate is about 9% higher. Though this seems like a great achievement it is still a matter of concern that many people in India cannot even read and write. He numbers of children who do not get education especially in the rural areas is still high. Though the government has made the law of Right To Education emphasizing free education for all up to 14 years but the problem of illiteracy is still at large.

Now, if we consider female literacy rate in India, then it is lower down than the male literacy rate as many parents do not allow their female child to go to schools. They get married off at a very early age. Though child marriage has been lowered at very low levels yet it still happens. Many families in the rural areas still believe that having a male child is better. The female literacy rate according to literacy statistics are 65.46% whereas the male literacy rate is 80%.

A sizeable section of these women form the potential visitors of the museum. Government programmes and campaigns are being held to bring about awareness about the literacy of females but India has a long way to go with regard to female rights and literacy. The population of India is very high and being the 7th largest country its population is very high only after China. The Number of Schools and educational centres especially in rural area is less. Even today people below the poverty line who are the underprivileged and potent visitors of the museum are largely absent in museums.