CHAPTER - V

SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY OF MUSEUMS

The enormous collections of the Alexandrian Library and the Museum were utilized by the scholars mainly for acquiring their own knowledge. These were not meant for the common people. After the destruction of the Alexandrian Museum a long period of museological abeyance followed. Renaissance brought massive changes in the museum development. Renaissance is considered to have ended the Middle ages and dawned the Modern age in history. The development of museums shows three stages. The first stage was the ‘store house phase’ for assembling collections for research and publication. The second stage was the ‘services to few’ when collected objects were taken care of, preserved and put on view after systematic grouping. Now the third stage ‘education for all’ is continuing. A museum is now considered as an educational institution for the growth of knowledge.

With Renaissance came changes in thinking from societal to human-centred ideas. The change today is from human-centered to global as expressed by Gary Edson and David Dean(29). Museums are now taking the role to cater knowledge to the common masses in all disciplines aiming to make them a complete human being.

Museum in the modern sense is the ultimate result of the humanism of the Renaissance, enlightenment of the rejuvenated people of the 18th century and the democratic idea of the nineteenth century. People threw off the shackles of superstitious ideas and narrow-mindedness of the past.

---

The idea of social accountability of museums flowered mostly after World War II and the people started emphasizing upon the conception that museum is meant for all.

Museums stimulate visitors with an enduring feeling about the objects they visit in the galleries. Museum visit broadens and enriches visitors' mental power to understand the meaning and intrinsic value of the objects. A personal visit cannot be a substitute for picture postcards and low cost catalogues; but these can provide only detail information, which the visitors can utilize afterwards to be museum-minded. Album of noteworthy pieces of paintings, sculptures, etc., also help the visitors substantially in this respect. Nowadays, all over the world museums are considered as the best vehicle for spreading knowledge through presentation of objects. Museums arrange various programmes to attain this objective which broaden and enrich the visitors' mental horizon and experience and inspire their curiosity to know more and encourage their ardent desire for future visit. The whole nation becomes richer in knowledge and wisdom by these kinds of didactic programmes. Sunday / Saturday classes can be organized for widening knowledge of the community members in different branches of knowledge. Reproductions of masterpieces of sculpture or painting or art books can be borrowed for certain days by the interested persons, which will go a long way to add to their knowledge and to appreciate art objects. It is a fact that objects can communicate far beyond the four walls of a museum.

Museums are being established at various places throughout India. Previously museums were only repositories of objects of the past and acted as the custodians of the national treasures, the latter responsibility being still shouldered by them. Gradually people realized the potentiality of museums as institutions capable of spreading knowledge to one and all. As museums are mostly funded by the governments spending public money, the idea of social accountability of museums gained momentum.
All knowledge cannot be imparted through formal education and here comes museums into picture for informal education by using real objects, whereas formal education teaches some abstract ideas. So, for holistic study museums and formal educational institutions will make it more fruitful if they join together. Sir Asutosh Mukherji had explicitly pointed out in his inaugural address in the centenary celebration of the Indian Museum, Calcutta on 28th November, 1913, when he commented, “the museum may be regarded, first, as an adjunct to the classroom and the lecture room; secondly, as a bureau of information, and, thirdly, as an institution for the culture of the people”. “Again, it is unquestionably our duty to do our best for the culture of the public, through the display of attractive exhibition series, well-planned, complete and accurately labelled and thus to stimulate and broaden the minds of those who are not engaged in scholarly research”. He further mentioned, “A National or Imperial Museum must, consequently, be equipped adequately for the fulfilment of three principal functions, viz., first, for the accumulation and preservation of specimens such as form the material basis of knowledge in the Arts and Sciences, secondly, for the elucidation and investigation of the specimens so collected and for the diffusion of the knowledge acquired thereby; and thirdly, to make suitable arrangements calculated to arouse the interest of the public and to promote their instruction”\(^{30}\).

In the course of his tour in Soviet Russia, Rabindranath Tagore was highly impressed by the activities of a number of Russian museums for educating the common masses. On visiting a toy museum for children in Russia, Tagore could realize that a modern museum is not a repository of old relics only, but its duty is to create an atmosphere of mental enjoyment. He even started collecting toys for establishing a toy museum for children at Santiniketan. Tagore could visualize that in a country like India where maximum people were uneducated, museums could play a vital role by bringing in the progressive agricultural methods through

\(^{30}\) An inaugural address delivered by Sir Asutosh Mukherji, Indian Museum, 1913, p. 18.
audio-visual means to the cultivators. He writes, "I have gone to visit an
Agriculture House in Moscow; it is like one of their clubs. Such types of Houses
are scattered throughout all the towns—big or small, and in villages all over Russia.
There is arrangement of giving advice on agriculture, sociology, etc., and in these
Houses education has been arranged for illiterates. In special classes cultivators
are taught about scientific agricultural methods. In every Agriculture House there
is a museum on all the topics worthy of learning in natural and social
matters..."." Thus Tagore has elucidated by citing examples of Soviet Russia
how museums can play a constructive, instructive and progressive role for the
whole Indian community. He has pointed out how museums can develop
themselves as supporting institutions of the whole educational system of a country
and how they can be made an essential part of the social life of a nation. This idea
of the social progress and spread of education through museums was welcomed
later by the people of India. Mudaliar Commission’s report after India achieved
independence in 1947 had proposed for founding one museum in every school. A
Handbook was also published by the Government Museum, Madras for
establishing such kind of school museums.

Both the common people and the elite derive services from museums. The
elite learn the latent capacity of museums and spread that knowledge among the
common masses.

It was after World War II that International Council of Museums (ICOM)
was established in 1947 with a view to creating an atmosphere of co-operation
among the museums of the world. UNESCO formed a Museum Division
immediately after its establishment. A quarterly publication entitled ‘Museum’
was started in 1948 emphasizing on museum techniques. The activities of the
ICOM have been bearing fruits.

---

31 Tagore, Rabindranath, Russian Chithi, Rabindra Rachanabali, Pancham Khanda, Kamini
Emphasis is laid now on public service of museums, which was termed by Tagore as ‘Lok Shiksha’ or education of the people. Museum specimens are not considered now as dead relics of the past, but through audio-visual aids and excellent docent services, they are as if becoming alive to tell their own stories and intrinsic values. Museums are displaying not only the specimens of the past, but also of the present. The whole atmosphere of the galleries turns vivacious as if the past talks with the present and the present with the contemporary world.

The ICOM while defining museum under Article 2, Para I in its 10th General Conference, held in Copenhagen of Denmark in 1974 clearly mentioned museum as ‘a non-profit making permanent institution in the service of the society......and open to the public...’ That was redefined again in 2001.

The ICOM Statutes, as amended by the 20th General Assembly of ICOM, Barcelona, Spain, 6th July, 2001 has defined museum as below:

“A museum is a non-profit making permanent institution in the service of society and its development and open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits, for purposes of study and enjoyment, material evidence of people and their environment”

The mention of “in the service of society and its development” has opened the door of Neo-Museology to step in. At the end of 1950s New Museology was first introduced in the U.S.A. and that concept grew into a movement. Neo-Museology or New Museology includes within its ambit the Eco-Museums, Neighbourhood Museums, Econo-Museums and Community Museums. As per this concept heritage should be preserved and presented in the interest of the community and its development. As the museums belong to the society people are to be given important roles in its administration. The community should be aware of their heritage and identity. Collective memory is

---
Social Accountability of Museums

considered as the potent force and their collective memory is utilized for their development in different fields of work. It not only allows one to follow the way of living, but also helps others greatly to let live. Local culture is kept alive and attempt to study the local crafts of aesthetic value is sincerely continued and if they are threatened by the inroads of globalization, these are revived so that the community is benefitted financially by employing artisans, opening outlets for the artefacts and future generation remains informed about them. Neo-museums collect relics pertaining to local history, folklore, music, religious rites, customs and behaviour pattern etc., of a given community. Neo-Museology was developed as a corollary of Museology and it is hoped that museums following this concept of Neo-Museology will become useful cultural centres and attain great success in their objectives. Museum activities combined with the life of the people make a significant contribution to the dynamism by which the aspirations of the people would be fulfilled. When a museum has exhibited the traditional and modern agricultural equipments side by side, the onlookers get the opportunity of having a glimpse of the traditional and improved varieties of native plough, harrow for breaking clods on ploughed field, leveller, different processes of tilling the soil in different ecological milieu, sowing machines, weeding and harvesting implements, like weeder, sickle, paddy threshing, husking lever, winnowing fan, granary, insecticide, pesticide, foes and friends, like insects, locusts, earthworm, etc., of cultivation. They can select of their own the advantages of the improved methods of cultivation by comparing the merits and demerits of the traditional old processes and the modern developed methods of cultivation and can adopt the best one for their easy sustainable living. The community can adopt the improved agricultural tools and the experience it gathers on using such tools may usher in economic progress of a country\(^{33}\).

Museums have now become people-centric. Thus from the days of Alexandria the role of museums has undergone changes many times upto the 21st century. Now, it is an educational institute to educate the common masses also for providing education and simultaneously pleasure and mental enjoyment. This New-Museology movement was started due to the failure of the conventional museums to build a bridge between museums and community, which became transparent before the museum activists as a result of socio-economic and political factors after the Second World War period\(^{(34)}\).

Virtual Museum is a recent concept of the present century, which has grown as an effect of the unthinkable progress of information technology. This is not a conventional museum where objects are collected, conserved, preserved, displayed, interpreted and researched upon, but it exists only online. It is an organized collection or storehouse of electronic artefacts and information resources – virtually anything, which can be digitalised. One can see these electronic photographs and information through internet and can have knowledge about the collections of museums all over the world. In this way, the world heritage appears before his eyes and thus virtual museum also renders services to society.

The eco-museum concept goes beyond the traditional museum idea of collecting objects to establish conditions for communities to learn about themselves. Hughes de Varine, a French museologist and a former Director of the ICOM coined the term ‘ecomuseum’ in 1971, but it was Georges Henri Riviere, the pioneer architect of ecomuseums in France who identified distinctly in 1985 its contents and the core functional activities. The prefix ‘eco’ is derived from ‘oikos’ (Gk), a word meaning a house or living place or a habitat. So, the word ‘ecomuseum’ indicates a spatial relation interconnecting biophysical and human

activities, like agriculture, hunting, fishing, festivals, customs, professional crafts, e.g., wood works, basketry, traditional pottery, textiles, folk dolls and toys, hair-do, territory, ecology, soil, temperature, rainfall, flora, fauna, water resources, population of an area, cultural values, tradition, heritage, etc. So, ecomuseum is a mirror in which the local population view their own images, industries and territory. It thus becomes a tool for the economic development of the society from which it springs. 'Knowing the land' is the objective of an ecomuseum, which practically creates a sense of belonging to the place and highlights the wholeness of man encompassing the land and the people. It places man in his natural environment. Ecomuseum acts as a laboratory to conserve, to protect and to study the behavioural pattern of a group of people of a particular geographical area. This ecomuseological approach advocates a democratic functioning to preserve people's own cultural heritage. N. Fuller in 1992 expressed that this type of museums act as a vehicle for community empowerment.

The first ecomuseum in India is the Korlai Community Museum established on 23rd January, 1999 in the Raigarh district of Maharashtra in a small village Korlai on the coast of Arabian sea, south of Revdanda town, about 126 km. south of Mumbai. Korlai village is inhabited by a small community of Indo-Portuguese and the museum was initiated by Shri V. H. Vedekar, an eminent museologist and the then Professor of Museology, Department of M. S. University of Baroda.

Anandaniketan Kirtishala at Bagnan (1961) in Howrah District of West Bengal has made valuable contribution to the development of the rural community of the area. It is situated in a typical Bengal village with natural surroundings. As the museum is situated in a rural area, it has a close relation with the local inhabitants and creates public interest about the museum. The museum organizes programmes mostly on local problems. It tries its utmost to tackle the local
problems, like agriculture, animal husbandry, public health, etc., in its own interest.

The Gandhi Smarak Sangrahalaya, Barrackpore, West Bengal recently organized a travelling exhibition at Guruphadi at Garifa in North 24 Parganas, West Bengal to spread Gandhian thought among the lay public. The museum had undertaken a research oriented programme, called balwadi, a children’s preparatory school for the economically and culturally downtrodden slum dwellers near the museum for cultural change as per Gandhian thought.

The Satras (Vaishnava sect monasteries) of 16th century A.D. are found in Majuli island. The satras of Majuli island of the Brahmaputra river as mentioned above, are situated in the district of Jorhat in the upper Brahmaputra valley in Assam and were established by Sankaradeva, Madhavadeva and Damodaradeva. The exact number of such satras in Assam is difficult to ascertain. S. N. Sarma lists 380 satras at different places of Assam, while Ramcharan Thakuriya believes the number is about 650 and all are regarded as heritage sites. The bhaktas (devotees) of the satras collect objects mainly from their sisyas’ (disciples) houses and preserve the age-old satriya culture and tradition of Assam. These institutions are the repertories of traditional objects collected from the Mising, Deura and Sonwal Kachari tribes, the kumar (potter) and Sudra kalitas, the traditional craftsmen of terracotta. The objects include Khol (drum), ghanta (bell), tal (cymbal), thogi (platter for keeping the Bhagavata), sarai/sara (platter), boha (wooden cup), bieani (hand fan), kath (mat), mukhas (masks), puppets, pith works, typical dhoit, gam khau (bangle of women), satra’s architectural parts, like toran griha (entrance gateway) namghar, (prayer hall), manikutus (pillars), woodcarving images, Garuda, gate keeper Hanuman, jaya – vijaya, dolls and toys and other religious articles.

In ancient and medieval India temples and shrines served the purpose of educating the people, although these cannot be ascribed with all the features of modern museums. Mention may be made of chitrashalas as found in the Ramayana and in the classical writings of Kalidasa, Vyasa, Bhavabhuti, etc. “Hall of Paintings” has found mention in Vinayakapitaka, a literary work of the 4th century B.C. Mention may be made of the ancient Hindu temples e.g., Jagannath temple at Puri, Sun temple of Konark, Lingaraja temple at Bhuvaneswar (all in Odisha), Somnath temple at Patan in Gujarat, Kailasanatha temple at Ellora in Maharashtra, Kandariya – Mahadeo temple in Madhya Pradesh, Badami temples of Chalukya style, Venkateswar temple at Tirupati in Andhra Pradesh, Meenakshi temple at Madurai, Siva temple at Rameswaram, Brihadiswar temple at Tanjore with lofty sikhara (tower), crowned by a massive dome and covered from the base to the top with sculptures and decorative mouldings, Hoyasala temple at Helebid in Mysore having exquisitely carved elephants, tigers, horsemen and celestial beasts and birds and scrolls. Stupas with life stories of Buddha at Bharhut in Central India, Sanchi at Bhopal, Amaravati in Andhra Pradesh and Sarnath in Uttar Pradesh, paintings of Ajanta and Ellora, carving in Dilwara Jaina temple, Rajasthan, rock-cut rathas at Mahabalipuram in Tamilnadu, rock-cut cave temples at Udaigiri and Khandagiri in Odisha are considered as open – air museums to cater knowledge to the masses about the epic stories though they have not all the characteristics of modern museums. These earlier temples and monasteries offer scope for seeing and touching and thus these are most effective to cater education to the viewers giving a deeper truth about the objects. But nowadays usually museums do not allow visitors to touch the objects for saving them from damage. The monastery of Nalanda, turned into a famous university of the ancient world, taught arts, science, medicine, Vedas, Hindu scriptures, philosophy, grammar, logic, etc. A mammoth collection of painted manuscripts of the University was allowed to be seen by the pilgrim visitors. The Ramnagar Fort at Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh belonging to Raja Chet Singh has a Saraswati Bhavan for housing many illustrated manuscripts including a Panchnana, signed
by Goswami Tulsidas. In this connection mention may be made of Jaina Bhandar at Kota in Rajasthan. These temples and monasteries were hubs of learning possessing thousands of illustrated manuscripts. The pilgrims could have glanced at the panels of sculptures and paintings, which decorated the pillars and walls of the temple. Thus they could come to know much about the social life, mythological stories, art and literature, etc. Their intellectual faculty was stimulated. Visit of paintings on the walls about religious anecdotes, varieties of items like jewelleries, arms, musical instruments, palanquins, chariots, manuscripts, sculptures, etc., preserved in the temples gave them an opportunity of enjoying intellectual pleasure, which is also an objective of a modern museum. These temples and monasteries still act as community centres where people gather spontaneously to take part and thus a bond of unity is forged in their social life. These are undoubtedly seats of learning dispensing their social accountability like that of modern museums.

Religious discourses, recitations from the Ramayana and the Mahabharata epics, musical dance, drama, etc., are visual features of the temple shrines. They are accumulating and preserving treasures, antique objects and early cultural properties for self-glorification. These are meant for education and entertainment not only for the inquisitive persons, but also epitomising the history and culture.

All types of museums have the intention of serving the people. Indian museums play a great role in dispensing the objective of social accountability, especially in the domain of education and creating consciousness among the people for preserving the cultural heritage. They become vibrant organs for solving the problems of the society.

Museums act as mirror to reflect the social and cultural life of the people. The benefits of using Ayurvedic medicines, methods of drug preparation, diagnosis, symptoms, cause of diseases, etc., may be given publicity through the
museum programmes. Ayurvedic medicines are age-old traditional knowledge of the villagers. In the post-independence period museums take interest in this matter. The science and technology museums through their museo-bus programmes have done a lot to create a kind of science temper among the village people through various programmes, even on traditional knowledge.

Indian economy is mainly agrarian. Indian cultivators still follow the old methods of tilling the soil. In this activity they are far behind than the advanced countries and lagging behind in advanced technology. As a result, production of food grains is low. Museums can play a useful role in this matter by way of arranging frequent exhibitions on agriculture displaying the details of scientific equipments on agriculture and birds which are inimical and friendly to crops. Harmful and useful pests and insects to cultivation should be shown through charts, drawings, diagrams, sketches, cartographs, photographs and models. These visual aids attract attention of the visitors. The proverb 'seeing is believing' is true especially in the case of the unlettered, unsophisticated and uncomprehending rural folks. While presenting the programmes museum men should use simple language and local idioms understandable to the villagers. Museum laboratory can analyse the soil and water and suggest their suitability for cultivation of particular type of crops. Discussion may be arranged about the quality of the soil and the crops, which are grown in those soils. Food processing in the traditional methods following hygienic ways may be shown to the villagers. Effect of drinking dirty water of ponds, living in unhygienic and uncleaned clothing, effects of drinking adulterated milk, etc., should be highlighted to the village masses to make them aware of the adverse effects of these factors. Use of lacto-meter for ascertaining purity of milk and the fact of smoking causing cancer are to be shown. Simultaneously, good effects of better housing and sanitation principles should be properly explained to them for good health through museum programmes. It is a fact that ordinary people often suffer for their ignorance. Illiterate village masses can be inspired to follow these well-being programmes rendered by museums for
the benefit of their society. Pollution of atmosphere is caused by indiscriminate felling of trees, soil erosion starts due to deforestation, plantation conserves the soil etc., can be highlighted through museum exhibitions. Another problem, nowadays, is the circulation of counterfeit coins. Science museums can teach the people how fake notes are identified. Illicit trafficking of elephant tusks, tiger skins and endangered birds and animals may be highlighted through museum programmes. Indiscriminate killing of these animals disturbs the ecological balance in the biosphere. Global warming is another factor on which focus of the people is to be drawn.

Museums can take the assistance of radio, television, and print media to carry out their social responsibility. In case of poisonous snake-bite, death is inevitable unless treated timely and properly. The villagers go to ojha (witch doctor) for treatment. Follow of occultism many a time results in worse consequences. So, to avoid this, patient needs to be removed immediately to hospital for modern allopathic treatment by way of administering anti-venom injection. Special drive may be launched against dowry system, which has become a social malady in Indian society taking away the lives of hundreds of innocent women by way of brutal murders, usually by their husbands and kinsmen and sometimes suicides by the woman themselves as a result of inhuman torture on them. Other social problems, like caste hatred, honour – killing, ethnic conflicts and overall development of the people may get an added value in the sphere of responsibility of museums to the society. Damaging effect of heat, light, pollutants and micro-organisms are the most devastating factors to heritage materials which are to be shown through exhibitions along with their remedial measures.

Dissemination of knowledge among the villagers about these problems is the need of the day. Different educational institutions get valuable ideas from museum sources and hence, museums play a vital role in serving the society.
Museums help in growing tourism and the foreigners generally express their keen desire to see museum objects. Museum and tourism are interlinked in spreading education to the visiting masses.

Unless the museum exhibits are conserved properly, they will be destroyed before long. Accountability is the result of responsibility. Every museum has its visitors and every museum has a message of its own. The Rabindra Bharati Museum shows Bengal renaissance galaxies by objects of the Tagore family and inspires youths while the Gandhi Memorial Museums put emphasis on social developments.

Museums attract visitors and arouse their curiosity, which leads to questioning and thus promotes learning. Through outreach programmes museums convey knowledge to the visitors. “Museums are made for people – people are not made for museums. The responsibility for service lies with the museum. Museum professionals have no greater responsibility than to generate the ethical and moral climate necessary to strengthen the foundations of the society in which we live”(37). Museums reflect the heritage, cultural and social environment and can have a useful role in the formation of national consciousness for unity.

Museums have not yet realized fully their potentialities of education. Their importance as an effective educational organization is rapidly growing. The museums collect antiquities and preserve the cultural heritages for the posterities. In pursuance of such activities museums can best be utilized in serving the community by way of arranging meaningful programmes in both urban and rural areas. As has been opined, “the museum should take every opportunity to develop its role as an educational resource used by all sections of the population or specialised groups that the museum is intended to serve. Where appropriate in

relation to the museum's programme and responsibilities, specialist staff with training and skills in museum education are likely to be required for this purpose. The museum has an important duty to attract new and wider audiences within all levels of the community, locality or group that the museum aims to serve and should offer both the general community and specific individuals and groups within it opportunities to become actively involved in the museum and to support its aims and policies\(^{(38)}\). No doubt, the heterogeneous composition of Indian people has many demands and needs. No single museum can meet all the demands of these diverse types of people of the community. So, the particular needs of the people of the area where the museums are situated should be looked into by museum personnel by marshalling facts and offering interpretations consistently with the requirements at the right time in a right way. Museums' direct and potential capacity to lead a country towards the path of development is now well–established.

Industrial and technological museums maintain galleries on science topics, natural history museums display biological specimens and art and archaeological museums display art and archaeological relics. These are shown to the people attaching labels with them. Language of the labels should be very simple, so that this is understandable to all. Then the visitors will grasp the impact of the artefacts and the natural phenomenon.

Industrial and technological museums are developing in India, e.g., the Lord Reay Maharashtra Industrial Museum (present name – Mahatma Phule Vastu Sangrahalaya) (1875) is the first science and technology museum in India at Pune. Later followed the Birla Industrial and Technological Museum (1959), Kolkata, Visvesvaraya Industrial and Technological Museum (1965), Bangalore, Nehru Science Centre (1977), Mumbai, Srikrishna Science Centre (1978), Patna,

National Science Centre (1992), New Delhi, and Regional Science Centres at Purulia (1982), Bhubaneswar (1989), Bardhaman (1994), Guwahati (1994), Digha (1997) and others. There are 41 “science” centre including science museum in India. ‘Science and Technology for all’ is the guiding principle for science and technology museums in India to popularize scientific knowledge among the people in general and students in particular.

Modern Hi-tech Museums deserve special mention for providing educational, social and cultural profiles of the country.

In a nutshell, every collection of all types of museums has the following pedagogic value from the viewpoint of the services rendered by them to the society:

1. Engage the public in cultural activities and people are made conscious about the educative value of the objects collected.
2. Hands-on exhibits, particularly in science and technological museums provide an adequate opportunity to learn the know-how about them;
3. Information is elucidated and translated to the visiting people;
4. Youngsters are encouraged to take science as their career;
5. Develop the power of mental faculty and prowess;
6. Increase social awareness;
7. Solution of community problems by scientific methods;
8. Development of awareness about health hazards;
9. Use of latest implements paves the way for more production;
10. These Museums become the centres of academic discussions and enjoyment.