ABSTRACT

Symbolic and Imagery Representation of Lord Buddha in the Museums of Eastern India: Collection and Communication

Buddhist symbolism appeared from around the 3rd century BC, and started with symbolism. The Buddha was not represented in human form until around the 1st century AD. The beginning of representation of Lord Buddha in anthropomorphic form in India, both indigenous and adapted styles is an interesting study.

The purpose of this research is to review the representation of Lord Buddha in symbolic and imagery forms; and, whether museums can create and maintain an effective communication in educating the public through visual interpretation on the moral principles of Lord Buddha.

The results of the study indicated that art & archaeological museums in Eastern India, which have the exhibits relating to the symbolic and imagery representation of Lord Buddha, try to communicate the inner meaning of the exhibits in their own ways. Large museums use textual as well as verbal modes for communication through labels, audiovisual aids, etc. Moreover, the museums arrange for educational programme to convey the essence of the Buddhism to the people. Another important mode of communication is the published materials available at the relevant museums.

However, study revealed several facts, which hamper the communication. Poor conditions of small museums in rural and suburban areas hinder satisfactory communication. Docent service is not always available in these museums. The objects related to Lord Buddha are displayed unselectively, lacking a thematic method, which induces tiredness in the visitor. Many museums do not provide appropriate labels.
The small museums in rural and suburban areas also undergo financial crunch, problems of maintenance, security measures, efficient workforce, and organization.

Museums are still inaccessible to community though they claim that they are for the people. Even though the collections available in big and small museums are rich and could provide a resource for learning and preservation of the cultural heritage, they fail to do so by not being properly being presented to the visitor.

In this respect, the present research proposes a method for improving this situation as suggested in the last chapter. A museum network 'MuseumAccess' would smooth the progress of communication within-museum and between museums that would benefit the visitor as well as the museums collection database.