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Importance of Museums in Society: An Analysis

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Abstract

Museum is an institution. A museum tells the story of man throughout the world. It narrates how humanity has survived in its environment over the years. It houses things created by nature and by man. Cultural and heritage tourism is defined as travel directed toward experiencing the arts, heritage and activities that truly represent the stories and people of the past and present. This has taken much attention during the past decade. India, because of its complicated and ancient culture, is rich in tangible and intangible cultural, Heritage. It is a great source of knowledge. It not only gives us knowledge but also makes us familiar with our history, culture, civilization, religion, art, architecture of our country. In the museum, there are many things which are kept for the public. The importance of museums in society has been analyzed in the present research paper.

Keywords: *Cultural, Heritage, Historiography, Historian, Art*

Introduction

Generally speaking, museums reflect people's civilizations, enhance patriotism, and play a vital role in serving culture and heritage .in addition; they monitor and document the history of nations and traditions of peoples through their cultural programs. They also provide an image of the cultural momentum and indicate how far the society is aware of the importance of historical documentation. From this perspective, museum visitors have the opportunity to be acknowledged with the cultures and civilizations of nations through their antiquity collections. Museums are buildings in which we see many things of artistic, cultural, historical, and traditional and objects of scientific interest. It is a great source of knowledge. It not only gives us knowledge but also makes us familiar with our history, culture, civilization, religion, art, architecture of our country. In the museum, there are many things which are kept for the public. Through all these things we can come to know how people of ancient times lived, what they used and what things they made. Therefore, Museums are also called storehouse of history.

A museum (plural museums or, rarely, musea) is an institution that cares for (conserves) a collection of artifacts and other objects of artistic, cultural, historical, or scientific importance. Many public museums make these items available for public viewing through exhibits that may be permanent or temporary.[1] International Council of Museums (ICOM) (2010)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".[2] At this stage, museum has a big

role to play to conserve, research, and exhibit cultural heritage in any country. Heritage and tourism are interconnected and reflect the image of the particular country and its inhabitants**.** Museum is an institution. A museum tells the story of man throughout the world. It narrates how humanity has survived in its environment over the years. It houses things created by nature and by man. In modern society it houses the cultural soul of the nation. The English "museum" comes from the Latin word, and is pluralized as "museums" (or rarely, "musea"). It is originally from the Ancient Greek Μουσεῖον (*Mouseion*), which denotes a place or temple dedicated to the Muses (the patron divinities in Greek mythology of the arts), and hence a building set apart for study and the arts,[3] especially the Musaeum (institute) for philosophy and research at Alexandria by Ptolemy First Soter about 280 BC. The word museum is derived from the Greek word '*Mouseion'* which means the seat of Muses. The name museum indicates a temple of Muses. Greek mythology tells us that Muses were the daughter of Zeus, the Greek Jupiter. They were born in Peira at the foot of Mount Olympus - the mountain of gods. Nine of them were regarded as the divinities who presided over arts and science.

In Europe towards the latter part of 16th century and beginning of 17th century, the collection of amusement led to the actual beginnings of some of the great museums of today. Museum therefore is not a modern innovation. The first museum as already mentioned is accepted to have established in Alexandria in 283 B.C. However, the evidences of a certain kind of museum in Babylon and small private collection of curiosities had been reported to exist earlier than this museum. They were like the collections in our modern museums.

In India many communities live with their cultural knowledge, traditions, and rituals, oral expressions and historical heritage. Museums are gradually recognizing the need to go beyond collection, conservation and education of tangible heritage. Museums need to adopt a new model to engage themselves with communities for a constant process of transformation through the collection of intangible heritage. With the beginning of this new era, museums are working in directions to connect with communities in an effective way but still are lacking the right punch. With the advent of a new world order, i.e., urbanization, traditional knowledge about culture is not being passed on to future generation for many reasons, such as families moving to urban areas for better employment. These community members are far from their roots, traditions and family arts and crafts. And thus newer generations of particular communities are losing their interest in their traditional art, crafts and other cultural skills. Museums can play the role of a mediator or communication bridge to fill the gaps between the generations and to share the community knowledge on a larger platform with different communities and a diverse range of visitors. Indian museums have a wide range of traditional, religious and cultural arts and crafts in their Collections; some of these collections are the living heritage of certain communities. These Communities have used these artifacts in the past to pass on knowledge and skills generation by Generation in families by the elders.

Hindi term for Museum is *Ajayabghar* (wonder house) or *Jadughar* (Magic house) and now it is known as *Sangrahalaya*. The modern day Museum concept entered India with the birth of the Asiatic society of Bengal. It was soon turned to the Oriental museum of the Asiatic society in 1814, in fact was the beginning of a significant epoch initiating the socio-cultural and scientific achievements of the country. The princely states, learned and research societies inspired from the earlier European enterprise also joined this movement. Museum movement in India from the mid-nineteenth century until independence in 1947, archaeology in India was strongly tied to British Government Policy. The inception of the Archeological survey of India in 1861 with Alexander Cunningham as its surveyor was a feather in the cap of the Museum movement for Archaeology began receiving attention in museums. The

Movement embarked upon a new phase of development during the time of Lord Curzon who had evinced keen interest in the preservation of the archaeological monuments in the country and had established several museums under the stewardship of Sir John Marshall.

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 Mukheiji 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 labeled and thus to stimulate and broaden the minds of those who are not engaged in scholarly research".

The museum was divided into two sections:

1. Archaeology, Ethnology and Technology

2. Geology and Zoology

Meanwhile, in other parts of India the idea of museum sprang up. In 1819 efforts were made to establish a museum in Madras but it took a longtime to materialize it on a sound basis. A few years later, the pathology Museum of Grand Medical College, Bombay, and the first medical museum in Asia was opened. It was not until 1863 that museums were also established in Lucknow and Nagpur. Afterwards, other museums were born gradually at Bangalore-1965, Faridabad-1867, Raipur-1875, Jaipur-1887, Rajkot-1888, Pune-1890, Baroda-1894, and Trichinopoly-1895. In the 20th century when Lord Curzon was the viceroy, there was an outburst of activity for establishing archaeological museums all over the country. Museums were also established at Baripat-1903, Sarnath-1904, Agra-1906, Jodhpur-1909, New Delhi-1949, and Calcutta Ashutosh Museum 1937. In India, there are about 125 museums at present.

Importance of Museums

The importance of a museum is mainly educational and cultural and not merely housing collections of curious objects just as the old Hindi word "Ajayabghar" might suggest. Thus the importance of a museum is two-fold.

1. A place of work for the scholars
2. A place of instruction for the general public

The museum is a veritable treasure house for everybody who thinks beyond the everyday matters of human life. The expenditure of the world stored up there, no thoughtful person should leave its door without gaining something from a visit.

The museum is a picture book of the history of man and for study it is to enlarge one's comprehension of what man has done and what man can do. The universe of man like the universe of nature extends its boundary daily before our eyes and it is in our museum that the story is displaced for the visitors to come.

During the last century progress has been systematized and museums have acquired a recognized place in the educational life of the civilized people. The services of the museum to the general public are three-fold:

1. It stimulates curiosity, the gratification of which increases knowledge.
2. In some of its department, it exhibits the aesthetic culture. It opens before the visitors the beautiful products of nature and of art. It shows what man has been able to create out of clay, stone or metal or by the use of pigments and so gives he means of training, his taste and developing a cultivated appreciation of the beauties.
3. It provides recreational intellectual and aesthetic enjoyment.

The education survey of a museum is not merely passive but active. It is not enough to build and stalk a museum and to let the public find out its

value for them. Museum provides opportunities for visual instructions which are more impressive and lasting than oral instruction.

India's museums house many of the greatest artistic treasures ever produced in the subcontinent. Some of them are all known; others are favorite hunts of the well-informed; all deserve much greater attention. History of these museums, like that of the museums of other parts of the world, reflects a pattern of changing concerns with the past, the present and the future. In India two sets of attitudes to time confront each other, the one indigenous, the other introduced. India's museums are a microcosm of her rich history and varied traditions. The buildings that house them reflect too, the diversity of her architecture. Archaeological site museums allow the visitor to examine artifacts in relation to the total site.[4]

At its deepest level a museum is a collective memory bank of human achievement through a collection of objects. The museum's function can therefore be seen at its basic level as ensuring the objects that associates with human life. After that follows the activity of presenting the objects to the people so that human consciousness continues to incorporate these achievements in its activities. Museum officials execute innumerable actions to achieve these goals.

Museums have now become people-centric. Thus from the days of Alexandria the role of museums has undergone changes many times up to 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-Musicology 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[5].

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."[6] Museums reflects the heritage, cultural and social environment and can have a useful role in the formation of national consciousness for unity. Importance of Museums in history is as follows-

1. Preservation of history: The main role of museums today is the preservation of history. Museums store artifacts that have significant cultural, religious, scientific and historical value; objects that denote significant turning point in the history of main kind. They provide tangible proof of history and help us identify us in context. Museums help in preserving the cultural remnants and provide proof of man's survival through the ages. It is through museums that we can get a solid evidence backed glimpse in to our past.

2. Crucial to education: The museum holds a place of prime importance in the field of education. A museum holds the cultural history of a nation and its many inhabitants, along with the history of other cultures as well. The only other mode of imparting cultural history to a nation would be through verbal dissertations and that is not as effective as museums since it lack the element of being able to interact and physically see and touch the artifacts being presented.

3. Window to history: It is impossible to mankind to progress if we are not aware of our past and museums provide the only window to our history. The artifacts stored and displayed in museums help us to understand where we came from, and thus determine where we are going. For instance, the Holocaust museums in different parts of the world help us know about the immensely mindless atrocities that humans once committed against fellow humans, and that makes it possible for us to know why such atrocities should never be committed again. Similarly, the relics of a country's great past in its museums invoke the spirit of nationality and propel the nation to stand up and be great again.

4. Invokes unity: Unity is necessary in order to ensure that people live in happiness and prosperity. Museums use their resources and ensure appreciation and solidarity among the various social and cultural groups that exists within a community, and thus promote unity in a society. This brings about greater understanding about the other cultures, thus paving the way for further appreciation and communal harmony. Today, communal and religious problems are driving the world apart, and museums, with their horde of cultural and religious artifacts, have the ability to promote understanding and appreciation of different cultures, encouraging people to embrace diversity and be peaceful in acceptance of difference.

5. Sources of knowledge: Museums are a great source of knowledge. There is something in every museum that will attract the interest of someone. They truly cater to every taste. If you are interested in scientific achievements, there are museums dedicated to such advancements made by mankind, staring from the invention of the ballpoint pen to the airplane. If you are interested in knowing the different cultures of the world, there are museums that house artifacts related to the smallest of details about the many different past and present cultures of the world. In fact, even the quirkiest of interests are catered to by museums, such as the famous Sulabh International Museum of Toilets in Delhi, India. There are museums dedicated to fashion, food, aviation, space, and what not; you name the subject, and you will find something in a museum related to it.[7]

Types of Museums

Museums can be divided into following categories:

- **Fine arts:** They contain all types of paintings, drawings, sculpture, architecture etc.
- **Historical Museums:** These museums illustrate historical events or period, personalities etc. They have weapons, statues, artifacts made of stones and other material.
- **Science and Technology:** It contains all the things which are representative of the evolution of history, science, and technology such as fossils of dinosaurs.
- **Museum-house:** It is located in the birthplace of a famous person such as Sabarmati ashram, Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar's home, Tipu Sultan palace etc.
- **Archaeological Museum:** It contains all the objects related to history.
- **General Museum:** They contain more than one subject and therefore these museums are called multidisciplinary museums.

History Writing and Museums

'A people without the knowledge of their past history, origin and culture is like a tree without roots.'
—Marcus Gravey

What is a museum? It is defined as 'a building or institution that cares for and displays a collection of artifacts and other objects of artistic, cultural, historical or scientific importance.' The definition itself presents a wide scope of credit that museums must be given for preserving history. And Indian history undoubtedly, is one of the richest and varied histories of the world. But history comes in different forms. It could be through art, culture, science or natural objects. History can be understood through esteemed facets, such as paintings, carvings, documents, and weaponry. At the same time it can also be seen through the prism of daily objects, such as clothing, pots and pans, toys, cutlery and more. Either way history or heritage is preserved through tangible articles and it is a museum that houses these.[8]

The main function of museums has traditionally revolved collecting, preserving, researching and displaying object. In the last fifty years, a greater emphasis has been placed on exhibitions, interpretation, learning and audiences. Furthermore; the number of museums has grown dramatically in this period, with an incredible range of themes and subjects covered. Displays are still constructed essentially around objects, thus making material culture a key constituent of most museum interpretation narratives. History consumed in

museums is closer to what might be termed 'public history' than the history that circulates within the academy. Despite the rapid expansion of museum collections throughout the last century historians have preferred to research in the familiar comfort of the archive and the library rather than in the museum object store. Recently, historians have become more engaged by objects as new technology has resulted in digitized collections being made available through the internet. They have also become more involved in the development of new museum galleries and temporary exhibitions. The history of museums and of collecting has become a specialist field all of its own.

For the historian, the museum represents both a resource and a place where his work may be presented. As a visitor, the historian is also an expert of the institution's performance, capable of judging it in relation to his own field of knowledge, related to the nature of the collections and the museo graphical project that guides their display. The museum can also be a place that inspires, reactivates, or even induces historical work; suggesting new topics or points of view. The writings of historians bear witness to the stimulating effect of the museum. The visit to the museum is an essential experience in the birth and development of historical imagination. The historian may be a specialist of all or part of a museum's collection, whether on display or stored in its reserves. He establishes a direct relationship with the objects, contributing to their understanding. In this case, the historian is part of the museum's team, and must adapt his work to the needs of its management, in particular in terms of communication and public policy, whilst adhering and imposing the ethical standards of his own profession, its erudite specificity and methods of scientific interpretation. The historian becomes part of the sphere of "public history" and dedicates a more or less important part of his activity to guaranteeing a balance in the mediation of his research for the interests of scholarly communication with the development of civic values and the public success of the establishment that he works for or with. However, in relation to the museum the historian more often than not plays the part of the independent scholar who, if needs be, may express his opinion of the institution in critical terms, appreciating and questioning the interpretations that nourish the exhibitions that it dedicates to events, personalities, objects, sometimes dealing with memorial, political, cultural or social issues. In this case, the historian sees the museum as he might see any other media, such as cinema, television productions, historical novels, school manuals, etc., that popularize what he considers to be his field of expertise. Lastly for the historian of historiography or memory studies, the museum has itself become an object of inquiry as it provides particular insight into the constitution of collective memory, the state of historical knowledge in the past, providing a more or less clear panorama of the practices and issues at stake in the way the past was used to serve the present at different points in the museum's history.

The diversity of relationships that exist between the historian and the museum needs to be considered in the context of the different kinds of historical genres and the variety of specialized domains that they engender. An historian of art or more generally of forms and objects, which may see him as a veritable archaeologist of more or less banal things, relating to past societies, will most likely find himself entering into direct contact with some form of museum collection. On the other hand, the historian of economy or politics, international relations or doctrines, may feel very detached from the accumulation of old manufactured products or the relics of great men that more classical museums might dedicate to such themes. It is clear that historical interpreters do have knowledge and experience of museum-going. Through stories of their own museum-going experiences, historical interpreters demonstrate the ways in which they use the museum or gallery as a resource when personally engaged in self-directed learning.[9]

The relationships between narrations and museums are conditioned, on the one hand, by the modalities that organize the writing of history

and forge the didactic ideal of its diffusion, and on the other, by the logics inherent to writing about collections, including different rhetoric's of enumeration and listing, and the sense of vertigo that goes with them, as described by Umberto Eco.

Conclusion

Museums are sources of unparalleled knowledge. There is a great impact in viewing apart of history with your own eyes, right in front of you, and the experience can evoke a number of emotions. Being exposed to museums at a young age instills in children a wide range of feelings, from curiosity to nationalism. They are national treasures and should be preserved with utmost care, instead of the negligence many of them face in certain regions. Museums play a crucial role in preserving local culture. With careful documentation and artifact preservation, a culture can be recorded and remembered regardless of its future. It can also be shared and understood by those from different cultural backgrounds.

Museums are buildings in which we see many things of artistic, cultural, historical, and traditional and objects of scientific interest. It is a great source of knowledge. It not only gives us knowledge but also makes us familiar with our history, culture, civilization, religion, art, architecture of our country. In the museum, there are many things which are kept for the public. Through all these things we can come to know how people of ancient times lived, what they used and what things they made. Therefore, Museums are also called storehouse of history.

Museums are institutions which can help people increase their power of observation in order to look beyond the diversities that characterize all the creations of nature as well as of man and derive knowledge and pleasure from the same. It supports people as an informal education center for disseminating knowledge on art, history, science and technology through the material and non material evidences. So, it is another important function of a museum to develop itself in such a way that it can serve society through knowledge dissemination. The museum as an institution tells the story of man the world over and how humanity has survived in its environment over the years. It houses things created by nature and by man and in our modern society it houses the cultural soul of the nation.

Museums which disseminate information through visual and oral means can be turned into very useful instruments for elevating awareness among the masses of the significance of all matter of existence. The role of museums should not be confined to mere collection, Preservation and display of the exhibits; they should be developed into living organs of society, providing participation and leadership in solving problems that confront the nation. If we achieve this goal, the people will also find real interest in the affairs of museums and they will emerge as real instruments in the service of the society.

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