



MUSEUMS FOR DIFFERENTLY ABLE PERSONS

Shreekant S Jadhav

Superintendent of Excavations , Dept. of Archaeology ,
Deccan College , Pune ,INDIA.

Abstract:

People who are differently abled are just like us; they have dreams and hopes and friends. However, out in public these people are often started or whispered about. People who we have talked to, like some of the children at the Blind school, all agree that it is better to talk to them and ask about their condition instead of ignoring them. They are normal people that want to be treated normally. These people are limited in one way, but that means we have to reach out to them and pull them into society rather than isolating them. If we do not reach out to them, then we are limiting them.

The present paper deals with the role of Museums for differently abled persons. These persons should be encouraged and brought to the museums and treat them like the common people. Making these persons more aware of the situations and daily challenges that they face would help to eliminate the silent barrier and allow those who are differently able to be more comfortable.

KEYWORDS:

Museums, Differently abled, Education, Functions, Classification.

I am an differently able child but I do not know how I became a differently able person, it is not my fault, it may be due to environment, accident, disease, hereditary or since birth. So why should be away from the education. But who will give me education?

“A Differently able child”

Now I am only an old store house with statues but I am an educational Institution with multifarious activities. I have many programmes for disabled and abled persons. O welcome you with open heart in my galleries with many educational, scientific, cultural programmes, visuals, games, hobbies, quiz and other activities, so I will give you education.

‘A Museum’

INTRODUCTION-

The word museum derived through Latin from the Greek ‘Mouse ion’ (seat of the muses) was defined by Guillaume Bude in his Lexicon Graeco- latinum (1954) as a place of dedicated to the muses and to the study where one engages oneself in noble disciplines. The notion of the museums spring from the passion for collecting which is deeply rooted in human nature. All civilizations from the most primitive to most advanced, share the desire to accumulate objects that are beautiful, costly, rare or merely curious. Religious communities, rulers set up the first collections open to public or at least for few persons of it. So previously Museum was defined as a store house with curious objects which could be utilized by few people. From the basic satisfaction of the collector’s instinct, one proceeds in time to the making of

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assemblages of objects to suit the need of study. Since society became organized, museums have opened their doors even more widely to those sections of populations that have had access to knowledge through education. More recently with the spread of university education museums have begun to assimilate and make use of techniques of mass communication.

The concept of museum is also present in our ancient Indian literature. In Ramayana we find the word 'Chitrashala' for that hall where lord Rama comes with Sita after marriage. That was the place where fervent statues of Lord Rama's fore fathers were sent and he gave some teaching to Sita there. So we easily say that chitrashala was a type of museum and this concept we can define a Museum that Museums are living dynamic organism with multi functions and not only store house.

In India there are three terms for Museum in different languages-

Ajaibghar- House of curiosity

Sangrahalaya- House of collections

Jadugar- House of magic which hypnotizes a person.

ICOM in 1986 has defined as museum as a non-profit making , permanent institution in the service of society and of it development , and open to the public which acquires , serves , researches , communicates and exhibits for the purposes of study , education and enjoyment.

Conservation institution and exhibition galleries permanently maintained by libraries and archive centres.

Natural, archaeological and ethnographical monuments and sites and historical monuments and sites of museum nature for their acquisition, conservation and communication activities. Institution displaying live specimens such as botanic and zoological gardens, aquaria, vivaria etc

Nature reserves.

Science centres and planetarium.

Functions of museum –The different functions of museum which comprises are-

Collection

Documentation

Classification

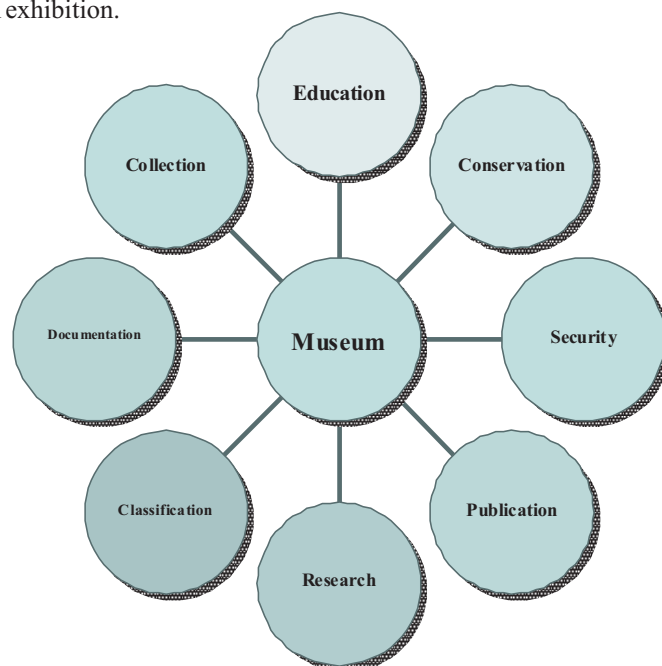
Study of research

Publication of catalogue and guides

Ensuring of security

Conservation of rich heritage of the country in all disciplines of arts and science

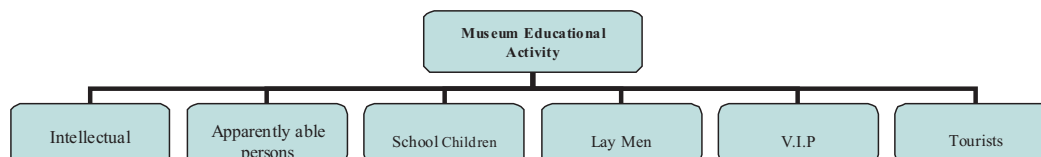
Education through exhibition.



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So the main function of our museums is to educate the public scientifically through exhibits and collections about their national and scientific culture. In our museums a variety of visitors come for knowledge, education and enjoyment. The visitors who get benefits from the museum be classified in six different categories-

VIPs'.
Tourists.
Intellectuals.
Layman.
School children.
And lastly apparently able persons.



In India there are about 900 and odd museums big and small bearing many specialized fields like Art, Archaeology, Transport, Agriculture, Biology, Medicine, Pathology, Botanical, Zoological, Natural History and many more situated in the cities and rural areas. They are serving to VIP's, Tourists, Intellectuals, layman, school children but they have no major programme for differently able persons. The museum authority should bear in mind that if the museum has any duty towards abled, its duty is, nonetheless, equally urgent and important towards the differently able persons who are to live in a limited world suffering from a sense of frustration and guilt.

Differently abled person and its nature- In many languages impairment, handicap, disability, invalidism, defect and other words with similar word overlapping meanings are used interchangeably. So apparently a social phenomenon, representing the social environmental consequences for the individuals stemming from the presence of impairments and disabilities. So we can say that the term differently able means a person unable to ensure by himself or herself, wholly or partly, the necessities of a normal individual and /or serial life as a result of a deficiency, either congenital or not, in his or her physical or mental capabilities.

More than one tenth of the world's population is disabled in some way.

Classification- A person may be differently able in two ways:-

Physically
Mentally

The physically differently abled group has many and varied types of persons. The blind, the deaf, the mute, the crippled, the aged, the epileptic, the paraplegic, the metabolic, the allergic, the cardiac. All these can be classified into oral, optical, auditory and orthopedic disablement. Physical handicap may also be caused by accident in street, factories, mines etc; falling from trees, roof, warfare, friction, trip etc. Blind deaf and dumb, operated out any leg or hand for an accident, orthopedic surgery, paralysis, crippled due to certain polio diseases. Mentally handicap is due to accident or recurrent suffering from diseases and illness shows less development of mentally. Gradually they lose the capacity of logical thinking and comprehension and become slow written child. So sympathetically treatment is the best medicine for them.

Since differently able persons have their own problems, e.g., they are shy in nature and they feel they are neglected by their society, their parents and guardians. As the differently able persons are disabled, they are regarded as social parasites. Human values of the physically deficient's are ignored.

EDUCATIONAL PROBLEM FOR DIFFERENTLY ABLE PERSONS

The education for the differently abled person is of great problem and also very important. Although we have few schools for deaf and dumb, blind person but they are mostly situated in the big cities so the main bulk residing in villages remains uncared for. For imparting knowledge about things around the world museums can share the responsibility of disseminating education through the utilization of their audiovisual means. The means that may bring home to the differently able persons the great treasures found

into museums and for doing that, museums need some special arrangement, amenities and facilities for them.

Museum education for Orthopedically differently abled Children

The orthopedically apparently able children are the best visitors among the disabled who can witness the museum in a full-fledged way. The problem faced by them is crippledness. As the majority of the museums are housed in old historical or palace building or in few cases buildings specially designed for museum purposes, it is but natural that they might not have taken into consideration of the physically differently able people. However, provision can be made to accommodate this category to visit this museum without much difficulty. In order to make their visit more useful the museum should provide ramps and lifts. The display of the exhibits should be in such a way as to provide more space to take a wheel chair, sedan chair and the doorways should be easily negotiable. The floor should not be slippery. The ground floor of the museum is to be selected for arrangement of objects with a view to avoid unnecessary strain to climb upstairs. During their visit if they are given a proper guided tour of the museum galleries they can get the maximum benefit because visual knowledge is more informative than stereo type of knowledge.

Adequate transport facilities should be provided to them so that they can visit the museums and learn more by their visits.

MUSEUM EDUCATION FOR DEAF AND DUMB

Deaf may be divided into two main groups-

- 1) Those who are born or have become deaf at such an early age that speech has not developed naturally.
- 2) Those who have become deaf in later years after acquiring speech and language in normal manner and those with partial impairment of hearing capacity.

The deaf and dumb person usually express mainly through gesture and lip movement. This faculty should be used largely by museum personal. For these visitors the services of a specially trained instructor in the language of sign and symbol is a must. One trained person can be opted for the institution when such category of visitors visit the museum. The museums are advised to chalk out their programmes and announce a specific day so that they can engage the services of the trained person to meet the demands of the deaf and dumb. The hobby centre and creative centre of museums can help the deaf to make things in clay modeling, carpentry, dolls and toys, embroidery, painting, tailoring etc.

Museum education for the blind

The problems of the blind visitors are perhaps most evident. Basically museum displays are designed by sighted people for the sighted visitors. So, much care should be taken while dealing with the blind visitors. But for the blind the use of hearing and touch are very important and particular the use of touch will go a long way in understanding things. Hence a gallery of touch if introduced at a central place in a museum will be of utmost use for blind visitors. An organized guided tour will also be of some use. While making a gallery of touch, care should be taken in selecting the objectives. The best course will be to have replicas of the object made of selected themes and to allow the blind visitors to handle them. This will give them not only satisfaction but also provide them an opportunity to understand and differentiate form and shape. The Braille labels if provided will enable the blind visitors to identify the objects.

Museum education for mentally retarded persons

For the mentally retarded persons it would be very difficult because they have less intelligence than average persons. The child has to undergo a long period of training and the same should be practically oriented, based on simplified techniques, so that he could learn some of the skills which the normal child learns by imitation. The physical development of a mentally retarded child is much faster than his essential development and hence his essential development and hence the child needs some supervision and support at the advanced age also.

Moreover, mentally retarded children or adults are less conscious and imitative and have a short span of attention. Hence, while selecting the exhibits the museum personal should be very careful. These objects and topics selected for discussion should relate closely to them to arouse and stimulate their interest. For such people the museum should organize a series of visits which will give them more opportunity to

adjust.

In order to make their visit more useful, it was suggested that the museums should have a special room where they can show a limited number of objects which will enable the mentally retarded visitors to have a close understanding of the visits.

Further museums can take replicas and enlarged photographs to the Institutions where these mentally retarded receive training and allow handling the items. This will not only give them encouragement but also make them familiar with the objects. This will no doubt help them in forging a link with the museum, the museum should use effectively the audiovisual media probably in local languages. This will have a greater impact and lasting value as it combines the two sensory impressions. This will be of utmost use for all the differently abled, excluding the blind and to a certain extent deaf.

Mentally differently able visitors should go in museum in small groups to the galleries and allow them to see and touch objects at their will. Mention may be made of the 'Please touch' exhibition for them. The ears of children so accustomed to hearing 'Please do not touch' when they go to the museums, the words 'Please touch' have a magic sound. To make museums services more effective among the differently able persons 'Let me see it'. "Look at this' or 'Please touch' are important items to arouse an interest among the differently persons to use museum materials. Display of exhibits should be made in such a way that they can enjoy by handling or touching at least some of them. Quiz boxes with questions and answers are ideal for them to play and learn. Museum games are held for making the differently able persons better acquainted to objects displayed in the museums. It is a play way method of learning and is an effective way or aid to education. Museum games sharpen the participant's power of observation, successful and articulate expressions about the objective world.

For all kinds of differently abled visitors museums may provide low stools or mats or squats and inexpensive specimens should be given to them which will be passed around for view, handle and feel. While passing the objects from hand to hand, their component parts will be named by the guide lecturers and will be brought into comparison with the experience of the visitors and answer the questions arise during discussion. Here children are free to handle and examine objects in a very homely and cordial manner. The guide lecturers should try to stimulate an active interest in the mind of the differently able persons.

The National Museum of Natural history, New Delhi organizes touch and feel and learn programme for the blind. Though this programme is sporadic and serves a section of the differently able society yet this is a pioneer attempt in India. A move to tackle this problem from a single centre will be proved futile if not others join considering the problems magnitude. It is evident that the museum in India was not given due weight age to this neglected side. Teaching of the differently able persons attains a high degree of excellence if it is object oriented or activity oriented and wheel of learning of them will march rapidly too. Local arts, crafts, history and science should be given priority which will help them to recognize and to interpret their own environmental situations. Museums are presenters of a group of objects in an orderly manner and these are more suitable tools for the teaching and recreation of physically and mentally differently persons.

As the differently able persons are special type of visitors so the gallery arrangements for them will also save some special features than the ordinary visitors of the museums. It must be kept in the mind of the museum personal, the space or gallery allotted for them should be such that once the differently able person enter the museum they must feel secure. It is necessary that the differently able visitors must be protected from the curious onlookers which make this unfortunate group more preserved. For the crippled, special arrangement should be made so that their wheel chair and sedan chair could be propelled or carried directly for museum entrance to the special area without any hindrance. The floor should not be highly polished. It is always better to use floorings of unpolished texture, so that the differently able visitors can move about securely.

Museum games and hobbies

The opportunity to keep differently abled persons occupied in the recreational activities are most essential for their physical, mental and moral growth and development. A few games are described below which can be easily introduced by the museum educators for both normal and differently abled person.

Games bases on comparison- In these type young participants are supplied with different related exhibits. They are asked to note down the similarities and dissimilarities among exhibits, e.g., a large number of stuffed birds of different size are given and ask them to sort out of the birds on external morphology.

2. Games based on part whole relationship- Young participants may be supplied with small wooden

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blocks to construct a particular scene displayed in the museum dioramas. Similarly an outline drawing of typical habitat of an animal or bird or particular type of plant is given to young participants. They are asked to fill the different colours on the drawing sheets. They may also draw the bird or plant at one corner of drawing sheet.

3. Games based on questions- In this game question sheets provided with or without sketches of exhibits are supplied to visitors and they are asked them to go round the galleries and fill in the answers.

4. Games with clay and sand- The differently able children are supplied with clay and sand and children make lots of things out of these materials which they have known or learnt. It provides the children opportunity to make models and to create many objects. At present plastic or rubber clay is available in the market. This type of clay helps to keep the area clean during the time of play.

5. Games with models and mock up- The first hand experience of a thing is the most valuable way to educate differently able children. But it is not always possible to experience the things which are far off.. Moreover, a real thing may be too complex, too big, or too small for the actual study. In such cases models are useful aid. It is more interesting and much instructive to use a model than the picture chart or the graph of the same. Models can be used to teach almost all the subjects and can be used successfully in case of visually differently able children.

The mock up has been recently introduced in the museum as a play way method for teaching within a short period. By making and playing with mock ups the children can learn many things about the objects like clock, trains, airplanes, ships, bridges. Birla Institute of Technology Museum (BITM), Calcutta has prepared a mock up of coal mine for the science students.

6. Games based on sound- By this, visually differently able child can easily recognize the sounds of various animals, inanimate, and abstract things around them. This game can be organized within the museum campus or outside the museum with the help of a tape recorder.

7. Therapeutic games- For physically differently able people, museums can organize this game. The children can learn more about their personal hygiene and sanitation through participating this game.

HOBBIES

Some of the hobbies can easily be developed among the differently able children. The children have the urge to collect many odd bits. If properly guided these can be developed into fruitful collections giving a deep insight and in depth knowledge in a particular branch.

The collections of rocks, minerals, leaves, fruits, seeds, insects, molluscs, shell etc. can be good hobbies that can be sponsored by the museums on natural history. Museums on science and technology can encourage the creative faculty among the children by sponsoring constructions of models, replicas, mock ups, moulds etc. A craft museum can encourage preparation of baskets, puppets, toys, greeting cards etc.

CONCLUSION WITH SUGGESTIONS

Since museums are now not only store houses but museums are more educational institutional. So their duty is to educate differently abled children and I can also suggest that museum in collaboration with service institutions can organize few programmes which will be of great significance for disable and these are following:-

1. A movement should be started all over the India with slogan "Museum in the Service of Apparently abled persons."
2. The museum authority of particular children's museum in India should sit together to chalk out planned programmes and start project of education for differently able person.
3. Information bank regarding the various needs of differently able persons are to be established at different regions all over India. Easy availability of such information's is to be ensured to those individuals and organizations servicing for the interest of differently abled persons.
4. Museology and museography as the subject should be introduced in the curriculum of teachers training for the differently abled persons.

a) As the disabled do have talents, the museums should organize competitions in drawings, painting, clay

molding etc. This will give a great boost in unearthing talent among them.

- b) The differently abled persons are denied the chance to meet normal children. Opportunities should be provided for disabled to mix with others. Museum can organize during summers or weekend classes in drawings, painting, modeling where in the students should be drawn from the disabled and able.
- c) Museums can plan trip to other museums in the state to stimulate interest and expand their knowledge.
- d) Museums can conduct demonstration classes by employing skilled craftsmen especially for the adult disabled as they have enough spare time.
- e) Museums can send models and photos on loans to the Institutions dealing with the disabled to provide them opportunity to touch and learn.
- f) Museums can organize special educational programmes consultations with service Institutions.
- i) A short term training course in art and its appreciation can be organized by the museum for the teachers working in the Institutions connected to disabled.

ii) A specific day can be set apart by the museums especially for the disabled.

Although a very few museums in the country like Salar Jung Museum, Hyderabad, National Museum, New Delhi have few programmes for differently able persons but other should also do.

The role of any museum will be incomplete if it does not think of the differently able persons.. The already existing educational activities of the museum can be adopted to suit the needs of these persons. If the museum staff shows a little more patience, sets aside some extra time and original thinking to cope up with the needs of these visitors, the reward that they will get is the satisfaction and the enjoyment of the community which have been hitherto neglected for no fault on their part.

A museum is essentially a centre of education and its collection is teaching tools for the fulfillment of educational programme. The collections of the museum may well be held as a shrine where the cultural activities of men, scientific developments, arts, archaeology, biology etc are mirrored in a great measure. Thus museums which grew up as abodes of objects of diverse categories are obviously capable of stimulating a spirit of enquiry and interpretation among the people. These can make a path smooth for propagating knowledge. Infact the repertories of objects in a museum whether they are being highlighted in a pan aroma of display or they are relegated to the obscurity of the reserve collection add a great value as useful tools to the aid of education of the normal as well as differently abled persons.

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