

Museological Approach - A Case Study of the Museums in Bikaner, Rajasthan

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Abstract:- Museology, also known in older sources as museography, includes the study of museums, museum curation, art exhibitions and how museums developed into their institutional role in education through political and social forces. Museologists are responsible in organizing the display of artifacts in museums; organize exhibitions by choosing the display items; making purchases of rare and new collections for museum enrichment; identifying, examining, cleaning, preserving, displaying or storing art objects; and conducting educational programs and training courses.

INTRODUCTION

The primary purpose of the museological approach is to support the preservation of cultural heritage and its intangible values. The core areas of focus include the identification of how and from what materials heritage objects were made; how these change and deteriorate over time and in different contexts; and how to optimize conservation treatments, display and storage conditions to reverse or slow down the effects of decay. The conservation and management of heritage can be done in context within places of cultural significance, including both historic and natural environments. Beyond the physical preservation of objects and places, their meaning has to be preserved, and it should bring benefit to people through promoting access to the heritage, so that they are encouraged to care for their heritage today and in the future.

The museological approach can be linked with the 'memorial approach' that acknowledges the importance of 'memory', 'oral transmission' and 'performance' as ways for experiencing and comprehending the past. According to this perspective, the past is not a foreign country, but rather it exists in living people, in their bodies and minds, through memory.

THE APPROACH

The museological approach opens a new perception of objects of heritage, in which there is a wide and deep range of information. There is a phenomenon in communication with museum objects which is similar to that occurring in

communication with nature – the constant discovery of new data. The process of information emission in a dialogue with a heritage object is never complete since the object always contains a new quantity of information to be discovered by new generations and added to the information inherited from the past. This approach is open not only to information, but is also coloured by those levels of emotion that accompany all information – information influences emotional life often. It participates in the formation of aesthetic, ethical, historical and other judgements, which only when it concerns the persons forming those judgements become relevant to the objects themselves.

THE SOURCE, CARRIER AND TRANSMITTER OF INFORMATION

The museum object as well as any object of heritage is an absolute source and an unconventional carrier of information, since the information or data that it carries within itself is an immanent part of its being. The total process of communication between a person and a museum object depends on the ability, knowledge and sensibility of the person to discover and receive a given quantity of information and, when possible, to record that information. The object of heritage reveals its history – it tells about its durability in time and space, and about what happened to it, the people who made it, who used it, who preserved and stored or exhibited it, who used it for its original purpose and for all other secondary purposes.

ROLE OF MUSEUMS IN CONSERVING CULTURAL PROPERTIES

The three main types of museums are: those situated in urban areas, those in the countryside, or those attached to a particular site. The latter are particularly significant in the present day because the public, can visit such sites and gain immensely from the interpretation and the supporting documentation provided by the site museum. The visit thus becomes memorable and particularly relevant because the objects are clearly relate to their historical setting. Eg. Colonial Williamsburg, Virginia.



Figure 1. Colonial Williamsburg, Virginia

The first public museum in modern Europe was a good example of “adaptive use” of a masterpiece of architecture, the Palazzo Nuovo of the Roman Capitol, designed by Michelangelo in 1525. Opened by Pope Clement in 1734 to house his collection of Roman antiquities, it made the Romans aware of the value of their cultural heritage, which had been greatly reduced by the great collectors of the Renaissance.



Figure 2. Palazzo Nuovo

DYNAMIC ROLE OF MUSEUMS

Museums play an integration with the community at many levels by having a dynamic role in education, running seminars, and organizing exhibitions. The museum should be involved in the presentation of cultural property in such a way as to stir the imagination and convey its meaning. However, it is the undisturbed dialogue between the object and the visitor, who may have come thousands of miles, that is the vital function of a museum. The contemporary visitor to a museum may well consider that he has a certain right to see into its inner workings. This can be given expression by allowing a look behind the scenes into some of the conservation studios, laboratories, and technical installations, but must not disturb the work of the conservators. Visitors should at least be separated by a glazed screen. Closed circuit television would also be a useful aid for viewing details

ROLE OF THE CURATOR

Within the museum infrastructure, curators have the general responsibility for the study and preservation of collections, as well as their management, interpretation, display, animation and museum public relations. People usually believe that an object is safe when it is placed in a showcase or in a storage room of a museum. It is not a well known fact that many objects which have survived for several centuries have been severely deteriorated or destroyed within a few years in a museum. A dramatic example was presented by the mummy of the Egyptian pharaoh Ramses II, which was found to be infected by no less than 58 different types of micro-organisms. Distressingly, the infection had been caught from other objects in the museum

ROLE OF OTHERS

Ideally, the examination of any object should be carried out jointly by the curator and the conservator. The curator must

define the environmental conditions in which the object is to be displayed, as this will also pertain to possible treatments. The conservator may offer alternative proposals, with estimates of cost, for the curator to choose according to the desired targets of durability. The librarian/archivist and the museum curator have similar roles and responsibilities; both must maintain and conserve collections and see that the public derives the most value from the cultural property therein. Both must thus provide for correct control of the internal environment of the building, proper storage facilities, and efficient internal traffic flow in order to reduce the causes of decay. The librarian/archivist often faces a number of special conservation problems. Archival material consists of books and manuscripts, printed or handwritten on paper or animal skin products, as well as their leather, wood, cloth or synthetic bindings. Each of these is highly sensitive to changes in relative humidity and temperature and vulnerable to attacks from insects and micro-organisms, as well as damage from light. They may require special storage facilities

MUSEOLOGICAL APPROACH FOR IMMOVABLE CULTURAL PROPERTIES

Historic sites and all works of architecture are encompassed under immovable property. Besides religious, military, civil and domestic architecture, immovable property includes industrial and agricultural buildings, workshops, factories, farms, barns, mills, and indigenous rural housing, and the fixtures, fittings and furnishings belonging to them, as well as the archaeological deposits associated with their development. All of these sites and materials have acquired a significance with the passing of time

PLANNING OF EXHIBITIONS: CONSERVATION ASPECTS

At the planning stage, the conservator may have useful suggestions to make on the physical and environmental control of the exhibition, the scope of condition reports, and the insertion of technical clauses in loan agreements; and

give advice to the exhibition designer. All too often the conservator is called in after the basic decisions are made, and therefore it is not possible to alter lighting or other physical arrangements which affect the conservation of the exhibition.

PLANNING A MUSEUM OUT OF AN OLD BUILDING
Initial enquiries about planning proposals for the area, which may affect an existing and proposed museum. Site potentiality and the requirements of the museum should be clearly visualized. Professional advice from an architect and also from the chief fire officer, the building engineer and professional safety consultant in the case of using an old building for the museum, cost on water, electricity, tax; cost involved in the maintenance of a planned cycle of repairing and washing of the fabric, replacement of carpets, resurfacing the car parks; unforeseen problems such as damage to the building, addition to the buildings to accommodate the changing needs of the museum should be obtained

STRATEGIES FOR PREVENTIVE CONSERVATION

One must know the history of the building, the materials used, the defects, measures to be taken to safeguard the building or cultural materials. The strategies of preventive conservation are:

1. Know your collection/building
2. Know the enemies of the collection/building
3. Identify the enemies of the collection/building
4. Avoid the enemies of the collection/building
5. Block the enemies of the collection/building
6. Monitor the enemies of the collection/building and act
7. Communicate the problem and find a solution

This is not the work of a conservator or a conservation engineer, but the duty of everybody connected with the building or the collection. Everyone must understand their own role in the conservation. General training in conservation is a must to take up this noble task of preserving our heritage.

MUSEUMS IN BIKANER

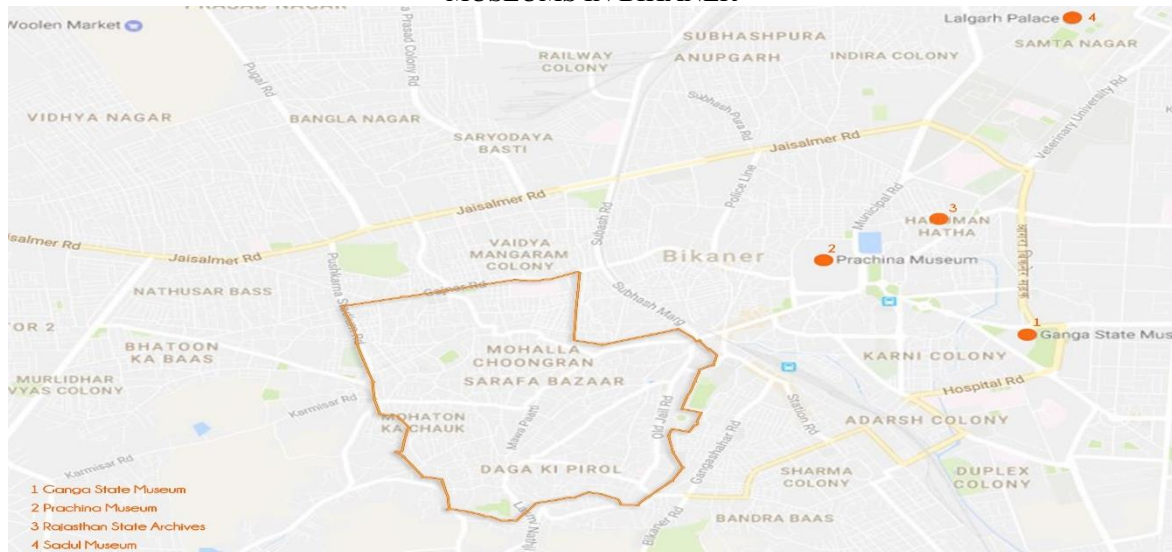


Figure 3. Museums in Bikaner

1. GANGA GOVERNMENT MUSEUM

This museum, established in 1937 on the occasion of the Golden Jubilee Celebrations of the great Maharaja Ganga Singh, was opened to the public by Lord Linlithgow, the then Governor General of India on 5 November, 1937. The museum is resplendent with an array of archaeological

discoveries from prehistoric Harappan and early Gupta period. There are separate sections which put on view paintings, arts and craft, terracotta, pottery, carpets, coins and ancient Rajput weaponry. The collection includes 71 stone sculptures, 10 inscriptions, 192 miniature paintings, 124 terracottas, 27 metallic objects, 574 arms, 22241 coins and 1108 objects of local art, craft and textiles.



Figure 4. Ganga Government Museum



Figure 5. Maharaja Ganga Singh gallery



Figure 6. Local arts and crafts gallery



Figure 7. Textile and carpets gallery

2. PRACHINA MUSEUM

Located in the Junagarh Fort, this museum is dedicated to royal costumes, accessories and textiles. It was established by Siddhi Kumari, daughter of the Late Maharaja Narendra Singhji of Bikaner in 2000. A study of the changing cultural settings can be seen here, in the display of family portraits of the former rulers. The museum attempts to preserve

Bikaner's rich cultural diversity and to showcase monolithic identity of Bikaner. The collection contains a varied display of royal costumes and textiles, family portraits of former rulers and their changing cultural milieus from one generation to the next, their response to Western influences, ritualism, religious accessories, the legacy of their patronage which survives in the contemporary arts and crafts of Bikaner till date, etc.



Figure 8. Ritual crafts



Figure 9. Royal portraits



Figure 10. Period room



Figure 11. Goblets and glasses

3. RAJASTHAN STATE ARCHIVES

Set up in 1955, the museum exhibits its uniqueness in its acquisition, collection, preservation and maintenance of historical records using latest scientific technology. The museum also extends its services to make the record available to research scholars, administrative departments, judiciary and the public as per their requirements. The collection houses very precious administrative records of the

Mughal period like Persian Farmans, Nishans, Manshurs, Akbarat, Vakil Report, Arzdasht, Khatoot and the records created during the administration of the Princely states of Rajasthan such as Bahiat, Pattas, Parwanas, Rukkas, Chithiat, etc. Facilities like microfilming, reference library and research rooms are also available to researchers. An exhibition of the collection of important documents is also set up here especially for tourists.



Figure 12. Records



Figure 13. Team work



Figure 14. Microfilming



4. SADUL MUSEUM

Named after Maharaja Sadul Singhji, the museum is located within the Lalgarh Palace complex. Opened in 1972, this museum covers the entire first floor of the palace and contains well preserved old photographs and trophies. A unique aspect of this museum is that the royal family still lives in a portion of the palace. A part of this palace has

been converted into a heritage hotel. The valuable art and antiques are housed in nearly 20 large rooms. The immensely rich collection also includes former kings' collections of arms, jewelry, clothes and valuable gems, diamonds, as well as British viceroy's paintings and their belongings.



Figure 15. Sadul museum



Figure 16. Portraits



Figure 17. Royal clothes



Figure 18. Clothing of Maharaja Ganga Singh



Figure 19. Communication with the British

PALACES ADAPTIVELY REUSED AS HERITAGE HOTELS

Bikaner is extensively rich with palaces adaptively reused as heritage hotels. The most significant among them include the following:

a. *BHANWAR NIWAS*

This monument is a living testimony to the splendid architecture of Bikaner, and also a proof of the

workmanship of the artisans of Bikaner. The palace, which belongs to the Rampuria family, was completed in 1927, and is one of the most stunning havelis of Bikaner. The décor reflects the feel and elegance of the 1920s, which has now been clubbed with contemporary comforts. It has now been converted into a heritage hotel, exhibiting a perfect blend of Indian and European style.



Figure 20. Bhanwar Niwas courtyard

b. *LAXMI NIWAS PALACE*

Commissioned by His Highness Sir Ganga Singh Ji in 1904, the impetus behind the palace was two-fold: to provide employment to the townspeople and to create a stately residence worthy of the royal house of Bikaner. The various

friezes on the palace's walls, with the geometrically perfect symmetry of its outlay, the ornate filigree work, latticed screens, etc. may all be attributed to the artistic vision and personality of His Highness. This structure too has been turned now into a heritage hotel.



Figure 21. Laxmi Niwas Palace

c. *BHAIRON NIWAS*

Bhairon Singh Ji's residence, near the Junagarh Fort, was built in 1872 and is named after both Bhairon Singh Ji and the god Bhairon Ji himself, whose temple on the site predates the haveli. Its presence was considered very

auspicious and was thought of as a good omen for the inhabitants there. Today Bhairon Singh Ji's ancestors still live in the haveli and have converted it into a heritage. All the rooms and grounds are decorated with period furniture, from the family's personal collection.



Figure 22. Bhairon Niwas

CONCLUSION

Other suggestions to carry out museological approach studies in Bikaner include:

a. THE HISTORICAL BAGICHIS

Their importance need to be understood by the local people also so that they themselves would take care of

these. They should understand that they are able to sustain in a desert climate like Bikaner. They can improve the micro climate of the region. Some of them be converted into nurseries, public parks or even well maintained private gardens.



Figure 23. Bagichis

b. PIAO

A historical drinking water supply system, not in use now. However it is essential that this should be restored and used

again for the same purpose. Inevitably this should be given the importance of a museum object and restored.



Figure 24. Piao

c. *NEW CIRCULAR MARKET*

Established in commemoration of Ganga Singh's golden jubilee, the structure is a hybrid of British and local Bikaner

architecture. It is highly essential that the structure should be revitalized and its lost glory be brought back.



Figure 25 New Circular Market

d. *INTANGIBLE HERITAGE*

The various art forms of Bikaner like Usta art which are almost dying now need to be revived. Similarly exhibitions

and workshops may be carried out to make people aware of their importance once again. These can improve the livelihood of the people practicing these skills. These skills need to be passed on to the future generations also.

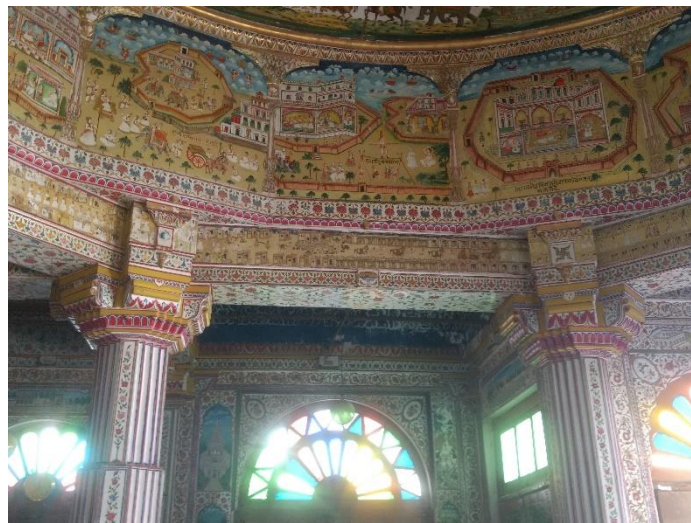


Figure 26 Usta art in Bhandasar Temple

e. *THE ENTIRE WALLED CITY*

The entire walled city of Bikaner can be viewed as an object which needs to be conserved. Each element needs to be studied and analyzed; the entire city needs to be studied as a whole also. This includes the fort walls (including the 5 gates and the 8 *badis*), their surroundings and everything that comes inside the wall.

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