MUSEUM, COLLECTING AND MEMORY: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF GOVERNMENT ART MUSEUM AND PRIVATE ART MUSEUM IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Museums are normally described as not only cultural and heritage institutions but also the institutions of arts. It is the cultural and heritage institutions of a country that have long been associated with the tangible aspects of their collected art works. Over a period of time cultural and heritage institutions have learned to interrelate with communities and societies and now are actively working with both tangible and intangible culture and heritage. At a crucial time of urbanization, communities are losing their intangible cultural heritage very fast. The new generation is losing the connection between their cultural heritage and beliefs which had been followed over a long period by their ancestors. Only through the Museums that relationship can be built as it can preserve our cultural and historical heritage. It can bridge the gap with the communities through cultural interpretation of the artefacts and with the support of the communities. Conservation and documentation of the tangible and intangible culture and heritage need to add to the function of the museums.

Indian museums have a wide range of traditional, religious and cultural art and crafts in their collections; some of these collections are the living heritage of certain communities. These communities have used these artefacts in the past to pass on knowledge and skills generation by generation in families by the elders.

Keywords: Museum Activity; Difference between two Museums; Lacuna of Museum; Positive Action of Museum

INTRODUCTION

Collecting, memory and museum is one of the certain parts of human life in every place, which associates with the glorious past. Within the museum, collecting is a significant part, because with the collecting of antiquity and art-objects functions a museum and builds an idea of museum and this idea basically started in the Western countries. Also in the Western countries collecting is not only the museum objects but also the part of personal objects or objects of our memory. American Scholar, James Clifford (1988) discusses in his essay “On Collecting Art and Culture”, “the idea surrounding the collections of primitive artefacts and whatever the cultural practices, and the appropriation and authenticity of this being displayed within Western museum and institutions.”(Source: Clifford, James “On Collecting Art and Culture,” In The Predicament of Culture, Harvard University Press, pp 220, USA-1988) Clifford primarily talks about collecting the primitive art objects and why these are to be the part primary art objects of the museum in the Western context.

In his essay he mentioned about historical approach to collecting the art objects, focussing on subjective and philosophical process. He made a statement of personal objects of the memory, how an
individual room looks as one’s own museum. For instance, a room is possible to be viewed as a representation of personal identity or collecting of art objects. Because we keep this as memory objects and decorate them to remind us of what we love. (Source: Clifford, James “On Collecting Art and Culture,” In The Predicament of Culture, Harvard University Press, pp 223, USA-1988) And at the same time when someone observers our room, our personal objects, they learn about the whole process of collecting the objects. This is also true for a museum, where certain pieces of artefacts are chosen for display in the museum, because that holds the meaning of a certain history and culture.

Another scholar, Donald Preziosi, discusses about the museum, how in sixteenth and seventeenth century, evolution of museum is not only for the common public but for also the museum professionals. Now, in contemporary scenario the modern and public museums are read as more rationally or systematically ordered forms of collection of the art objects. In his essay, he talks about how the museum is the most brilliant and powerful class of modern narrative sharing with other forms of ideological practices like religion, science, entertainment and the academic discipline and its variety of methods for production of knowledge and its socio-political effects.

Through the essay, he says, museums are commonly created collections of objects and arrangements in institutional space frequently imagined with geographical relationship, chronological situation, evolutionary development of form, theme or technique regarding person or people. In this regard they are understood as the representational artefacts portraying history. The fragmented and abstract state of object or artefacts, their association in museum establish evolutionary direction and weight to each object.

Sometimes the museum object comes to serve as perspective or window on history and the evolution of style and extraordinary diversity of human existence. Museum puts us in the picture by teaching us how to be picture-perfect.

Preziosi mentioned about the museum user, the object material properties, their meanings are simultaneously present and absent. In being induced to calculate, to deal, and think with the truth of a museum object by imaging what might reasonably lie behind it in its historiographic or art-historical reality as specimen the subject is nevertheless equally bound to it, fascinated with it, As somehow containing its own explanation. Formalism (is the study of art by analyzing and comparing form and style) and contextualism (describes a collection of views in philosophy which emphasize the context in which an action, utterance, or expression occurs, and argues that, in some important respect, the action, utterance, or expression can only be understood relative to that context) as may have been clear all along are prefabricated positions in the same ideological system of representation of the socio-political project of modernity.

In his essay discussed about some museum professionals who claimed museological stagecraft has remained virtually unchanged except in superficial ways since the middle of the nineteenth century. It remains to be seen whether recent interactive media will achieve anything different from what has been done for nearly two centuries. The spectator and object together should be aligned in such a manner that the individual object may be read with minimum of distraction.

In order to looking at museum, nowadays in maximum museums using separated group of people and increasing the number of art-historical cyber preneurs (as to read daily on the museum Internet). This is the essential change in institutional practices: museology and museography. Today, each museum user is provided increasingly more direct access to constructing one’s individual art histories. By accessing the institution and its resources it was an expandable and alterable data source. These new technological syntheses, this collapsing together of museology and art history, parallel the contemporary synthesis of television, telephone, fax and computer into a single apparatus.

**OBJECTIVES**

1. This paper is tried to short out the lacuna of display in both National Museum, New Delhi.
2. This paper is focused on Kiran Nadar Museum of Art has taken initiative for interaction with common people on modern and contemporary art, through various activity within museum itself.

3. This paper discussed on various successful exhibitions by National Museum in different State museum in India.

4. This deals with the collection by Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, how this museum given privileged to only those artists, who are already renowned in India and abroad and this museum has not given any privileged to youth artist in India

**National Museum, New Delhi**

The National Museum is one of the largest government museums in India. It is located on Janpath, south of Rajpath, New Delhi, covering a brilliant collected works of sculptures, costumes, paintings, bronzes and terracotta, which gives a deep understanding into Indian history and Indian ways of life. The Museum Association of India and the Archaeological Survey of India equally situated the National Museum of Delhi. It is the most significant Government Museum across India, which is packed with the various artefacts from different parts of India. Mostly, this Museum deals with the pre-historic art, pre-medieval, medieval, Mughal, pre-modern works of art and modern works of art. However, this museum has never displayed any contemporary art within the museum space, or does not even try to interpret with both modern and contemporary arts. But very soon this museum going to be changing the concepts of what exactly is the whole museum space or how to look at the museum space, which is contemporary art exhibition within the museum space across the world and it is going to be contextualised as a western museum. Indian common people never saw any modern and contemporary art within the National museum. The general public will be changing their prospective to look at artefacts as well as modern and contemporary art.

The section of Indus-Valley gallery displays numerous antiquities discovered from Harappa and Mohenjodaro, like, images, toys made by terracotta and pots, jewellery, seals, bronze and copper techniques and sculptures. The famous sculpture of Dancing Girl has been displayed in the Harappa and Mohenjodaro section. It also has the major and largest collected works of artefacts dating to the Indus Valley Civilization. Since this museum is to be found as significant collections of art objects, it displays objects of the Mughal period such as manuscripts, which exhibit the art of textiles, costumes, paintings and writing. There is also a division, which concentrates on vestiges of the 1857 war (First War of Independence) like maps and arms. Some collection consists of very unusual pottery and coins dating back to the Mauryan period 2nd-3rd century BC, displayed from the Vijayanagar era in south India, wall paintings and miniature, and costumes of a variety of racial group of people.

The museum is having a particular value of visiting its artefacts. The museum has rich artefacts of ancient India and also of central Asia. The museum takes through an interesting journey of what ancient India was all about, pottery, uncommon coins, and several such things including art and architecture, costumes. The most outstanding object here is the poetic bronze gallery has some excellent pieces from the Chola and Pallava phase. There are a number of unusual manuscripts and paintings of miniature, coins, textiles, and objects of tribal art. However, the museum’s on the whole important exhibition space is the one of Central Asian display. The colour painted images of Rajput, Moghul, and Deccan are spectacular. Above and beyond, there are the Git Gobinda, the Mahabharata, the Bhagvat Gita in golden alphabet, Octagonal small Quran, Babarnama in Babar’s calligraphy, Jahangir’s memoir or diary, musical instruments of above 300 types, different tribal dresses enriched the museum.

Some of the most successful activities took place in National Museum that have Chronological exhibitions of selected art objects in different galleries, film-screening of art and culture which are related to education, research and study for the library, different lectures and talks by scholars and identification of art objects up by the Government of India, such as, “Illustrated lecture by Dr Lotika
Varadarajan: Jerusalem, Warsaw, Athens: New Perspectives on Research”, “gallery talk on ‘Textiles of Central Asia’ by Dr. B. K. Sahay (Collection in-charge Central Asian Antiquities)”, “gallery Talk on ‘Care of Museum Objects’ by Shri P.K. Nagta, Chemist” etc.

Some artefacts have been chosen from different museums of India when an exhibition consisting only of Indian Art happened which was fully funded by the Government of India. The museum has collected under its own supervision over 2 lakh beautiful and diverse ranges of art, craft, jewellery, arm weapons etc.

Major collections of the National Museum and Archaeological Survey of India about 3,800 art objects have been displayed in the modernized Harappan Gallery, which includes large number artefacts collected from the sites of Harappan Civilization i.e. toys, jewellery, seals, pottery, terracotta figurines, tablets, weights and measures etc., also the Archaeological Survey of India excavated the artefacts about 1,025 which belongs to the Indian Harappan site. The gallery brings to illumination for the first time 232 unique decorative art objects, which are mentioned from the 18th-20th century. All these functional and decorative objects are made with various materials, like glass, jade, wood, ivory, marble, ceramic and metal. In the gallery, 26 huge sized well-lit glass transparencies are on show displaying the amazing story of the development of different Indian scripts from Brahmi and coins.

The National Museum has a large Reference Library, which is equipped with different variety of books, Periodicals, Journals etc.

For the Indian museums, the Archaeological Survey of India has taken significant role. Half of the museums have displayed the sculpture and artefacts, which are collected through the Archaeological Survey of India. Some of the important sculptures and art objects from different parts of India, discovered by Archaeological Survey of India were donated to not only National Museum but also the other government museum within India. One of the great examples i.e. State Museum of Odisha, in which half of the ancient sculpture and art objects displayed in the museum are collected by ASI.

In National Museum building there has been approximately 800 sculptures displayed on the ground, first and second floor in Archaeology sections. Most of the sculptures are in terracotta, bronze and stone, dating from the 3rd century B.C., through the 19th century A.D. indicating all important regions, era and schools of art. It covers more than 5,000 years of our cultural heritage, has in its ownership more than 2 lakhs objects of fine art, both of Indian and Foreign origin of National Museum. It represents a unity in diversity of various creative traditions and disciplines, a matchless mixed of the past with the present and strong point of view for the upcoming, brings history to life. Apart from the collections of Central Asian Antiquities, Paintings, Jewellery, Arms and Armour, Manuscripts, Archaeology, Pre-historic Archaeology, Decorative Arts etc the Museum has made separate branches of publication of books on art objects and temporary Exhibition.

On the whole museum section, there are some of misinterpretations between actual sculpture and image of the sculpture which easily one can find in all the sections. It is called the great silly mistake. For an example, in the Buddhist Art section, one broken sculpture of Gate (torana) (image-2) from the great Sanchi Stupa and this sculpture displayed on a Pedestal. Image of this sculpture has been displayed in the back side of the original sculpture, which is easily visible to every viewer, how there is difference between the original sculpture and image of the sculpture.

Many Government Museums including National Museum have very limited idea for practices and strategies of displaying in proper way as well as preserving and conserving. Even lot of ancient art objects are getting damaged due to the lack of proper way of preserving and conserving. Text labels and details of art works are not displayed in the proper space, sometimes viewer get confused to know about the art objects. We learn a lot of techniques about art, culture of museum from the western country, but here it is not possible to display the artefacts according to the western system.

National Museum has taken over good activities in a similar fashion like the private museum of Kiran Nadar Museum of Art. But there is the possibility to do more activities rather than lecture, workshops,
whether they have no interest or lack of ideas to do something. Government of India is providing much fund to the National Museum, where other Government museums are not getting that much of fund. Even then the National Museum is not taking any initiative to do such activities. I would like to say only one of the significant activities which has been taken over by this museum which is the publication of books and catalogues. Few books and catalogues such as Harappan Seals, Sealings and Copper Tablets, Fragrance in Colour, A Guide to the Indian Miniature (English), A Guide to the Indian Miniature (Hindi), Catalogue of the Gupta Gold Coins of the Bayana Hoard in the National Museum, Indian Armours in the National Museum Collection - A catalogue, Kushana Sculptures from Sanghol, Pre-Columbian Gold and Silver Objects in the National Museum, Yogini Cult and Temples - A Tantric Tradition etc. 

National Museum is one of the museums of Government of India where a lot of viewers are coming to the museum to see the art object. Because all the art objects are collected from the different parts of India which has been associated with the common people of specific region whether the art objects are related to mythology or society. For example, the art objects from Harappa and Mahenjodaro are social rather than cultural.

It has multiple histories and position in order to the basic notions of collecting, classifying, and displaying of art object. National Museum always has looked at museum sites, whether of architecture, of exhibitions, of national or cultural narratives, or of political and pedagogical projects for the purpose.

This is only one government museum where education on museum study is imparted in a systematic way. It has been offering various courses for post graduate studies like history of art, conservation and museology. Their emphasis is on improving cultural education; creating better career prospects for students rather than safeguarding our rich cultural heritage.

Display of art object in the national museum is quite poor in comparison with the western museum. This is modern period but still they are following the old traditions and old system to display the art objects. It is possible to make new approaches of display, because Government of India has provided much more fund to the Culture department. Also day by day, the viewers of this museum are increasing who are not only from India but also from abroad. Most of the foreign visitors prefer to travel New Delhi, as it is the Capital of India and second thing is they are getting easy communication from here to other parts of India. Hence, one must keep in mind about foreign tourist while planning for the museum.

National museum in any country always represents the national cultural identity. In this way, it covers up the important art and artefact and highlights the specific aspect of the collection to construct its national identity. In national museum in Delhi, there are so many collections from Indus Valley civilization to pre-independence collection. It is not only representing the culture chronologically but shows how art changes period-wise. Now-a-days, our museums must endorse exhibitions that are up-to-date and stimulating; they need to widen their possibility and not limit themselves exclusively to substances and resources in their assemblies. Museum need be practical in their methodology to the implementation of the ideas.

Museums use their assemblages to endorse the vast collective heritage of the societies that bond the country and its societies. They can conclude their programme and accomplishments settle the numerous welfares in the civilization for the cooperative moral of the nation. In western museums there are plenty of art historical researches and criticisms of whatever they display in the museum space. This kind of approach should be taken by National Museum. Also, day by day a large number of important art objects are missing out of the museum; even then the higher authorities of this museum are not taking any strong measure regarding this. In course of time, the National Museum which always represents the national identity should also address the crisis of the institution and the time.
Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, New Delhi

I might say that Kiran Nadar Museum of Art one the greatest successful private art museums in the capital of India, New Delhi, but still I would say for all the Indians this is the first museum to exist in a Shopping mall. It has something to say with the idea of ‘new museum space’ in Indian context and to create an interest among a new public. It regularly exhibits modern and contemporary art of India and from the subcontinent. The museum space is housed by modern and contemporary art. Every year different kinds of activities related to modern and contemporary art from India and across the global. This type of enthusiasm is hardly found in other private modern and contemporary art museums in India except for Devi Art Foundation in Gurgaon. Even in the Europe there are few private art museums, where museum running through the modern and contemporary art involves different kinds of activities. If we are looking at the government in Europe, there are piles of hundreds of collections from pre-historic to modern art. But in the case of modern and contemporary art, the collection art as well as the activities on modern and contemporary art are always trying to create a dialogue between the collection works of art and activities.

But, due to the lack of connoisseur of modern and contemporary art, very limited viewers visit to the private art museums. Mostly, the visitors are fine arts students, artists, few public from the shopping mall, those who are having twice in a week visit to the shopping mall. Secondly, this contemporary art museum has not done much-needed publicity for the common public in the city or other parts of the country. But during the time of any public event or any kind of public talk, there is some crowd inside the museum. Because the museum itself such space, which is really very different from the other part of the same building or shopping mall. For an example, when we are visiting the art works of Amrita Shergil, during the visiting, we are remembering on the past or how she depictions the reality of that time. Also in the same case we will find in the work of Ram Kinkar Baj, Chitta Prasad, how they depicted and represented a period or a situation of society.

Talks and symposiums are organizing in this museum space a number of times in a year. Through these talks and symposiums, different kinds of issues related to contemporary art practice in India and globe are discussed. For example, in 11th August 2012, one talk series was organised inside the museum space on “Making Art, Art Making: Process, Polemic, Patronage”, which is basically the panel discussion inviting seven artists from the exhibition to talk about their artistic practices with respect to ‘doubt’ as a conceptual structure, different determinants in their method, various models and roles that artists engage in the social area. The dialogue tried to deal with the larger landscape of forms and ‘publicness’ of museum space in relation to the losing sociality of the space of artists studio. It reflected through various kinds of contexts and provocations for production of art that map the momentum of current artistic engagements: workshops, commissions, residencies, performance, artists as mediators and curators, and the less important initiatives that working almost as interlocutors to the lack of big institutional spaces in the country.

Nadar started collecting art in the late 1980s, with her first major acquisitions consisting of two interesting works by M.F. Husain and another by Manjit Bawa, which she had commissioned. In 2010 they had an exhibition which served the purpose of offering a peek into the extensive private collection of Kiran Nadar. Over the years, she collected art with a voracious enthusiasm and has been a keen buyer at auctions.

Education and Workshop is the important part of the events of the Kiran Nadar Museum of Art among others. The Art Week included four workshops that provided children with a fun learning environment where they learned to use material in different ways and present their ideas into their art pieces. There have been workshops with the idea Art as Transformation, Art as Narration, Art as Collaboration, Art as Exploration etc. All these workshops are conducted through various schools in New Delhi and NCR, in different time. Through this workshop school children are getting knowledge and different way of looking at art as well as they are creating some new ideas.
School and College students are learning the basic unit of the grass root level of Art Education, where Kiran Nadar Museum of Art facilitate through the special inputs and informal learning, enjoyment and aesthetic appreciation of the Arts to the children in formative years. Using playful techniques, KNMA intends to familiarize children with the visual history of modern India. Schools need to improve the quality of their curriculum for a holistic education through art and culture inputs. KNMA intends to fulfill that role. Along with the art workshop, performance art is also taken over at KNMA inside the museum space. They are trying to create the museum space not only the space of art object but also the space of performance. For an example, performance artist Inder Salim conducted a workshop, where the whole idea is “the process of the workshop allowed artist/college students to improvise and inhabit the space in their own ways. Small yet vital changes occurred in the museum space in real time during the process of this workshop. Performances by the participants were unpredictable, often expressing rebellious acts and sudden disruptions to the museum-structure itself. All these acts can be read like a conquering of the space, producing moments of reflection, rupture and reckoning.”

__Kiran Nadar Museum of Art

Sometimes the museum organizes special events for the public like short film, art film and documentary film. Through the art and documentary films, KNAM tries to show the work and life of modern and contemporary artist across global. But, the government museums are not interested in this kind of event or even not take interest in organizing in any place. The reason may be the lack of fund or lack of idea. In the case of private museums, whatever they want to do, they have the freedom to do as they are the deciding authorities of their course of action rather than external agencies regulate it.

Before entering the museum and exhibition space, there is a huge tree made out of stainless steel utensils to welcome every single viewer. The entire museum is spread in an area of 18,000 sq feet and has separate chambers for different set of art pieces and sometimes the exhibition space gets changed due to the display of new art works instead of old art works or exhibition space. It is India’s first humanitarian, non-profit modern and contemporary art museum and it houses artworks created by some of the renowned and famous names in Indian art. The modern and contemporary art collections include works from Indian and sub-continental artists such as Rashid Rana, Subodh Gupta, Anish Kapoor, S.H.Raza, Ganesh Pyne, Bhupen Khakhar, Shahzia Sikander and among others.

“As the director and curator of Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, my role is to envision Kiran Nadar Museum of Art as a land mark on the cultural landscape of National Capital Region with its iconic building and give direction to the museums mission to be a ‘people-centred’ and ‘action oriented place’. In the coming years, Kiran Nadar Museum of Art will be focused on growing the collection and designing programs to regularize foot falls while cultivating a museum-going culture in India”.

__Roobina Karode

Simultaneously lot of questions arise when we talk on the subject of private museum. Because, private museum, which is a modern and contemporary art museum, deals with various contexts of art in different perspectives. This is the only one private art museum in India, where a lot of activities take place in order to promote in all the discourse of contemporary art in India. Yet, this museum only prefers and privileges only those artists who are already established. Now-a-days, a large number of young contemporary artists comes from the small cities, but due to the lack of proper platform, they are not getting prominence. In the small cities no body is familiar with the contemporary art. Here is the question if no one is going to consider the young artists coming from small town/cities, then how can they prove their talent in front of the urban cities or in larger public space?

There might be a reason behind the private art museum’s preference of only the established work of the artists. First thing they are always market oriented rather than looking at aesthetic value of art. They should give primacy to the aesthetic value of art work. Due to the market value, a large number
of artists are disappearing and this is also a bad impact on the art field as well as for a country, where contemporary art is changing regularly day to day.

There is such a huge gap for the common people to participate in Kiran Nadar Museum of Art. Because common people are not much familiar with the contemporary art. In Indian culture common people are always associated with the folk art and traditional art. The culture of contemporary art did not spread to every place in India. Also there is a reason why Indian people are familiar with the traditional art and folk art, because this art is easily available and accessible. However, the contemporary art is not easily accessible to the larger public due to the regulation of market. Through the regular publication of art magazine, monograph, art activities in newspaper common people will have a new attention for contemporary art. The private art museum also needs to focus on tribal art, folk art and traditional art not in traditional context but in a contemporary context. This might also create a space for the general public to participate in the space of contemporary art activities.

**Image 1.** Buddhist Community praying in front of Buddhist temple in the Buddhist section, National Museum, New Delhi

**Image 2.** One Broken part of the Gate (torana) of Sanchi Stup, Sanchi and image of the Gate

**CONCLUSION**

Considering the collecting, memory and museum, the functions of museum are very different in Indian context as those from the western context. The interpretation of the western scholars is quite different from the experience in Indian museum. They mention about history, subject, system of culture, and
stage-craft for the museum. The ways of looking at art object or artefacts is different in west as compared to India. Considering the lack of systematic knowledge and awareness about the museum objects among the general public, all the objects and artefacts in India are usually interpreted and associated with personal meaning.

In a third world country like India, people are not much familiar about private modern and contemporary art museum. Considering the kind of socio-economic and political system and other such problems, it is a challenge to innovate a new structure. In the private, modern and contemporary art museum, there are very specific collections, limited exhibition and wide range of activities. Also due to lack of connoisseurship, there are very limited viewers. The activities are something very new to the general public. They always try to bring the new context of art works for their museum space. Sometimes the private art museum appears like a craft showroom, for example, the new commodities take the place of the old commodities after few months, but there are still some commodities which are on permanent display.

There are stark differences between the government and the private museums. In the government museums like National museum, almost all the art objects always exist in the museum space and displayed for public reception. But in the Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, there are some art works which are always displayed and some art works exist in the collection. There is lot of problem with the proper display of art objects as well as maintenance of the museum space. Activities in the government museums are wide ranging but there is no new context unlike the private museum. In the government museum viewership is much more than private museum, because the art objects in the museums are common and to some extent part of their everyday life and culture, which they associate with mythological, ritual or sociological perspectives.

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