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Paper : **Museology**
Module **Types of Exhibitions**

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INDIAN CULTURE

ज्ञान-विज्ञान विमुक्तये

Pathshala
पाठशाला

MHRD
Govt. of India

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Component-I (B) – Description of module:

Subject Name	Indian Culture
Paper Name	Museology
Module Name/Title	Types of Exhibitions
Module Id	I C / MUS / 14
Pre requisites	Knowledge of Museums, Exhibition, Principles of Exhibition Design
Objectives	To study different types of exhibition according to duration, subjects, target visitors and administration.
Keywords	Permanent exhibition, temporary exhibition, travelling exhibition, mobile exhibition, special exhibition.

E-text (Quadrant-I):

1. Introduction

One of the prime functions of the public museum is to present material culture to be viewed... In the museums, objects, or artefacts are put on display. They are there to be looked at (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000: 14). Susane M Pearce (1992: 139-141) describes the process that transforms 'material' into 'museum collection' based on Saussurian semiotic insights –

... both objects and collections carry a two-fold nature which embraces a continuing real or metonymic relationship to their own time and place and a metaphorical relationship to their original context, which arises from the processes of selection and interpretation with which they have been involved. Material is transformed by the collecting process into a museum collection archive, and clearly it is transformed again as a further stage in the same sequence by the exhibition process.

Conventionally, museums around the world, exhibitions are considered as the primary means by which collections are appreciated and knowledge disseminated. Accordingly, exhibition making focuses the selection of objects, the accuracy of texts, and, to a lesser extent, the design of spaces in an attempt to appeal to relatively knowledgeable audiences. The exhibitions are considered as primary agents of communication by which the visitors are communicated. In recent times, the interactions between exhibitions and their visitors have been emphasized more attentively. Concepts such as audience draw, educational outcomes, and the quality of visitor experiences have joined, and sometimes even overshadowed, objects and texts as critical issues in exhibition planning. Nowadays museums are in the midst of a paradigm shift from an emphasis on objects and subject matter to a focus on audiences. Initially the museum exhibits and exhibitions were primarily meant for elite and educated section of the society. Then there was as a shift to the well-educated middle and upper-middle class audiences and ultimately the more representative

section of the population and the local communities are included. To extend academic credibility museums organize various educational programmes, of which exhibition is the most important one.

2. Exhibition

Verhaar and Meeter (1989: 26) defined Exhibition as,

An exhibition is a means of communication aiming at large groups of the public with the purpose of conveying information, ideas and emotions relating to the material evidence of man and his surroundings with aid of chiefly visual and dimensional methods.

Through the definition the authors tried to describe an exhibition by means of all forms of communication techniques and interpretation of the objects for visitors' understandings. According to Edson and Dean (1994: 149), "It indicates a structured or formalized presentation with specific goals in mind and including the idea of public display. Therefore, exhibitions are planned and structured in their objective as well as the subject matters. Exhibition is an essential component of interpretation which includes pedagogy of the objects. Exhibition is a popular medium of expression, dissemination and interpretation.

2.1. Museum Exhibition vs. Other Exhibitions

All types of exhibitions exhibit objects for display with the help of audio-visual media conveying information in a holistic approach primarily for merchandise. Uniquely museum is not arranging exhibition for commercial purpose as other exhibitions do. The fundamental character of the museum exhibition is educational. Success of exhibitions depends on educative value of museum. Museum disseminates the story to its visitors through exhibition in a form of education and entertainment. It is considered as way of informal learning for its visitors.

The purpose of a museum exhibition is to transform some aspects of the visitor's interests, attitudes or values affectively, due to the visitor's discovery of some level of meaning in the objects on display – a discovery that is stimulated and sustained by the visitor's confidence in the perceived authenticity of that content (Lord, 2001: 12).

As such a museum exhibition can be defined as the systematic arrangement of exhibit in a sequential and meaningful manner with a conscious effort for interpretation.

3. Types of Museum Exhibitions

Exhibitions are of different types. Effective techniques are being introduced to make the exhibitions both interesting and attractive. Different types of exhibition are being arranged time to time to popularize museum. Exhibitions are being made for the purpose of education, enlightenment and enjoyment.

3.1. On the basis of Nature:

Basically museum exhibitions are two types – object oriented and concept oriented:

3.1.1. Object Oriented Exhibition:

Where museums arrange exhibitions based on the objects at their collections. **Thematic exhibitions** are also object-oriented as the theme is selected based on the available objects

from the collection of the museum. Harappan Gallery in the National Museum, Bharhut Gallery in the Indian Museum, Kolkata, are examples of object-oriented exhibitions. Gandhar Gallery in the Indian Museum, Bronze Gallery in the Chennai Government Museum, or the European Painting Gallery in the Salar Jung Museum, Hyderabad, are examples of Thematic exhibitions. For example, an exhibition on a theme 'Elephants in Indian Culture' may be designed with stone sculptures of different ages, paintings, illustrated manuscripts, bronze figurines, ivory objects, folk art items, ritual objects, etc. – all may revolve around the main theme involving the artefacts.

3.1.2. Concept Oriented Exhibition:

This type of exhibition is mostly done in the science museum, where a natural phenomenon might have to be displayed and objects are not readily available. For example, Gravitation; to make an exhibition to explain the phenomenon, quite understandably, no object can be available. There is no way but to fabricate models or similar exhibits that can suitably demonstrate the 'concept.' Similarly, electricity, magnetism, mathematics, electronics, robotics, earthquake, etc.; all will need fabrication of suitable exhibits to drive through the concepts.

Another very good example of concept-oriented exhibition, where an abstract theory of Cognitive Psychology, as propounded by Jean Piaget, was very successfully made in the 'Children's Gallery' at the Birla Industrial & Technological Museum, Kolkata, during the late 1980s and mid-1990s; here the entire exhibition comprised fabricated exhibits, all participatory or interactive, to suit the psycho-motor development of the children visitors. Unfortunately, the innovative and highly successful exhibition later dismantled to pave way to another gallery, which is definitely not better than the previous one.

There may be '**mixed type**' of exhibitions where concept can be exhibited through both original objects/ specimens and fabricated materials. For example, Ecology – to explain the nuances of the topic and its implications on nature & mankind, preserved plant specimens and stuffed animal species may be used with the fabricated visual atmosphere (diorama) consisting of relief or three-dimensional models. This can be made more attractive by adding different types of animations. 'Motive Power' Gallery in the Birla Industrial & Technological Museum, Kolkata, and the 'Information Revolution' Gallery in the National Science Centre, New Delhi, are ideal examples of such type of mixed exhibitions.

3.1.3. Synthetic Exhibition:

This type of exhibition is presented by the museums to draw the attention of the visitors to an important issue of contemporary interest. Such exhibitions involve several subject fields merging in a single issue/ topic. Say for example, an exhibition on 'Freedom from Hunger' materials must be related to the discovery of agriculture, domestication of plants & animals, types of food-crops, cereals consumed by men, geographical & climatic factors influencing their cultivation, growth of population, natural calamities, societal abilities to provide advanced agricultural techniques & inputs. So, exhibition of such a kind involves subjects like botany, zoology, evolution of human societies, technological development and distribution of food. The transformation of the society from nomadism to agriculture is set around the problem of providing adequate food-stuff for satisfying human needs. To it is then added a show of principal crops and the domesticated animals which directly help in agricultural production. At this stage all the other points are brought in gradual stages, like a group of concentric circles keeping the main theme, the focal point 'Hunger,' at the centre.

Synthetic exhibitions need highly developed skills to demonstrate current, relevant social issues.

3.2. On the basis of Duration:

3.2.1. Permanent Exhibition:

Exhibitions which are supposedly 'permanent' in nature with no immediate plan to renovate in near future; in modern museological practices, no exhibition is intended to last forever; these are regularly changed after a considerable period depending on the need and the availability of resources. Curatorial policy, as stated in the mission statement, of the museum decides the longevity of the exhibition. Permanent exhibitions are held depending on the objects in collection as mostly these are object-based. Permanent exhibitions in a museum draw a certain section of the visitors, who come to the museum physically on specific interest on particular subject. Permanent exhibition reflects the objective of the museum as well. It gives a museum its identity. For example the Harappa Gallery in the National Museum, New Delhi, is the major museum in India, where bulk of the representative artefacts of the Indus Valley Civilization are on display. Selection of the theme as well as objects is the product of the intensive research which includes both professional engagement and visitor survey.

3.2.2. Temporary Exhibition:

As the name suggests, this type of exhibition is organised for a defined time period, after which the exhibition is dismantled to give way for another one. The duration of such exhibitions depends on the importance of the subject or the validity of the occasion. One of the major reasons for organising temporary exhibitions has been complementing the permanent exhibitions with exhibits from the reserve collection to receive more footfalls, to raise curiosity level on the topic that might make the audience to be interested to go through the permanent exhibitions or to make visually available the result of an interdisciplinary study with the collections of different sections of a particular museum. It helps to revisit the permanent exhibition. Usually museums organize temporary exhibitions at special spaces within the museum premises designated for the purpose, often adjacent to the permanent galleries. Temporary exhibitions are also held to celebrate or commemorate special occasions, festivals, etc. The temporary exhibition has remarkable possibilities to educate the visitors. Temporary exhibitions attract both serious and casual visitors. For scholars or researchers, museum should have detailed documentary evidences ready for their inspection. Generally, a special research team develops the concept and planning for a temporary exhibition in a museum considering all relevant and suitable aspects including the availability of the objects. It leads variety to presentation, stimulate public interest and encourage repeat visits. Such exhibitions are mounted on structures that can be easily dismantled; slotted angled steel or aluminium frames, wooden structures, light weight exhibition cases are used. Extruded aluminium structures with various shapes and dimensions are widely used for the frames, on which PVC-coated plywood boards or foam boards (sun boards), etc., are placed as exhibition panels. Such frames can hold the light fixtures (like crow-neck focus lamps) to facilitate lighting the exhibits. Transparent acrylic sheets are used for fabricating show-cases. Printing visuals or texts can easily be done on the PVC boards or foam boards. Acrylic laminate sheets (Decolam sheets) are used for flooring or covering wall spaces. Vinyl flex boards/ sheets are widely used for signs, banners and other supporting materials. Temporary exhibitions have high didactic value. Often than not, temporary exhibitions are extensively supported with technological aids like touch-

screen kiosks, LED panels, digital audio-visual shows with sound system, animations, etc., and ample animations.

3.3. On the basis of Mobility:

3.3.1. Travelling Exhibition:

Sometimes museum decides to send temporary exhibition to different location to increase close interaction with people who are far from the museum. This kind of arrangement is called travelling exhibition. Travelling exhibitions are usually sent to different museums within the country or abroad on a pre-defined agreed schedule between the participating museums/ cultural institutions. It needs detail planning before execution. Many museums have sets of such travelling exhibitions on the topics of the particular specialization of the museum. Packaging is the most important part of sending such exhibitions. Light weight but sturdy materials are used like the temporary exhibition and packed in specially designed boxes with appropriate packaging materials to eliminate chances of damage to the objects/ specimens. As a matter of principle, only duplicate objects or replicas are sent. It is better to avoid rare and fragile objects. Adequate insurance coverage is a pre-requisite for such exhibition.

A team of museum staff generally accompany the exhibition for supervising mounting & dismantling of the exhibition and for guiding the visitor. Often participating museums have mutual agreements for exchange of travelling exhibitions. Such exhibitions may have a single destination or might have several locations of fixed durations over the period that may take several years. There are examples of travelling exhibitions giving rise to a permanent museum, e.g., the Great Exhibition (Crystal Palace Exhibition) 1851 held in the Hyde Park, London, ultimately resulted in setting up the Victoria & Albert Museum, the Science Museum and the Natural History Museum, all at London. Travelling exhibition bring to remote places the possibility of knowledge and enjoyment of the rare collections of arts, sciences and history. It has potentiality to increase interaction among grass root people.

3.3.2. Circulating Exhibition:

Many people refer the travelling exhibition as Circulating Exhibition too. Hardly there is any major difference between a travelling exhibition and a circulating exhibition; except the fact that the latter returns back to the originating museum after travelling through a number of places. Remaining criteria are nevertheless same.

3.3.3. Mobile Exhibition:

During the middle of the nineteenth century, museums in various countries, particularly the UK and USA, started to send set of exhibits to the rural and remote areas loaded on a van or mini-truck. On reaching the spot, the accompanying museum staff used to unload the materials and mount an exhibition there. Later the same was unmounted and returned to the museum. Light, low cost, handy materials used for the purpose. After success in many countries, an experiment started to send semi-assembled exhibitions to the hinterland. In some places such exhibitions were known as **museum on wheels**, especially in the North America. For many years mobile museums served as good communication media for art and science subjects to be carried to the vast people so far remained outside the reach of the museums.

3.3.4. Museobus:

In 1964, under the auspices of UNESCO/ FAO, the Director of the Ontario Science Centre built a 'museobus' based on a tractor with a trolley. It is presented to the public by an itinerary service on a mobile unit run by the museum. It is often known as Museobus. It includes compact unit of display, drivers, mechanics and guides to run the exhibitions successfully. The scope of such exhibition is more specific and is always created within a compact place. The entire responsibility of the exhibition is of the host institution.

Birla Industrial and Technological Museum (BITM) introduced the Mobile Science Exhibition in the form of museobus for the first time in India in 1965. The idea of such programme is to extend the museums' educational activities to the rural areas of the Country. Generally, a set of exhibits is specially prepared for such exhibition. The specially designed bus carries a set of science exhibits, all working, to the remote corners of the country. This has become a role model for many countries of the world. The bus usually contains 24 exhibits housed in sturdy boxes and are placed inside 24 alcoves specially designed on the body of the bus itself, 12 outside and 12 inside. The bus is taken to the targeted areas by a team of four persons – one driver, one technician, and one helper, led by a staff of the education department of the museum. The unit also carries a small film projector, with all its accessories, film rolls, and often a portable generator set. On reaching the desired spot, the exhibition is thrown open to the visitors. The visitors can go into the bus; can see the exhibits inside and outside. The films are shown, generally, in the evening. Sometimes popular talks are also organised. This is a very effective extension programme conducted by the museums.

To increase penetration into the remote areas, recently the National Council of Science Museums (NCSM), India, remodelled such buses to be little smaller to accommodate 20 fixed exhibits, in place of earlier 24, so that the bus can negotiate narrow rural roads and more particularly the hilly terrains. Though the science museums and centres under the NCSM are successfully running a fleet of museobuses for the last fifty years, unfortunately the other Indian museums failed miserably to sustain the programme.

3.4. On the basis of Theme/ Subject matter:

According to the subject matter, exhibitions are broadly divided in the following types –

3.4.1. Art Exhibition:

It highlights aesthetically valuable objects belonging to the collection. The most basic point is that here exhibits are regarded from the standpoint of their unique aesthetic quality. The main concern has been to develop the ability to appreciate the art objects.

3.4.2. Folk Art Exhibition:

Folk art & craft exhibitions either the creativity of the artists or the technology of production or the artistic skill of the craftsmen are depicted.

3.4.3. History Exhibition:

The purpose of historical exhibition is to show how all aspects of the human society change, develop and decay with the passage of time. Consequently the display is made in a way so that the viewers get a clear understanding of the element of time as connected with or as represented by the objects collected in the museum.

3.4.4. Archaeology Exhibition:

In archaeological exhibitions, generally the artefacts are arranged chronologically. Association with other related objects are established often by displaying sculptures, tools, coins, etc., of the same era or excavated from the same site, side by side. Types, styles, materials, periods, etc., are also determining categorisation in exhibiting archaeology.

3.4.5. Anthropology Exhibition:

Exhibition on physical (biological) features of primitive man and the racial types follow evolutionary methods; while display of 'ethnography' follows analytical method utilizing material culture in relation to the use in the society.

3.4.6. Zoology Exhibition:

Zoological exhibition previously used to follow taxonomic system of display or according to systematic positions of the specimens. Recently the emphasis has been put on the environmental factors affecting ecology. Previously the preserved specimens of animals used to be displayed passively which later transformed to explaining movements of different body parts stressing on adaptation and evolution.

3.4.7. Botany Exhibition:

Botanical exhibition follows taxonomic arrangement, through herbarium or preserved plant parts. Botany as a subject represented in many ways, like, agricultural products, medicinal use and industrial exploitation. Currently botanical exhibitions are more complex in displaying the man-environment relationship in terms of climate changes, deforestation and depletion of natural wealth.

3.4.8. Geography and Geology Exhibition:

Geology was started exhibiting in economic terms of exploitation of natural wealth like minerals, ores and coal reserves. Later palaeontology made its foray into the domain with the fossil evidences of animals and plants. Thus economic geology and palaeontology are the two main streams of exhibition. Climate, environment, weather along with their changes constitute the subjects of geographical exhibition.

3.4.9. Science & Technology Exhibition:

Being comparatively recent in origin, science museums started with exhibiting the industrial artefacts, like machines, industrial gadgets, etc. With the advent of science centres, basic principles of scientific phenomena started to be shown through working models, participatory/ interactive exhibits and animation. Real objects and models of rail engine, motor car, aeroplane, ship, even space-crafts are shown in the science museums.

3.4.10. Biographical Exhibition:

Life of great men, who influenced the socio-political and economic changes in the society has always been subject of interest for exhibition to disseminate the knowledge among the mass. Thus biographical exhibitions on the personalities from different walks of life portray the important events by reconstructing the situations with the help of the personal belongings they used, archival materials, period settings, dramatization, etc.

Apart from these, museums organize exhibitions on different **contemporary** themes and several other topics.

3.5. On the basis of Status:

According to status, exhibitions may be of following types –

3.5.1. International Exhibition

3.5.2. National Exhibition

3.5.3. Regional Exhibition

3.6. On the basis of Target Audience:

Museums usually create exhibitions keeping in mind its target audience. Exhibitions may be arranged specially for the children, special children, disabled population, senior citizens, etc.

4. Summary:

Exhibition is one of the primary way by which a museum represents itself to its supporting community. It is presented with the goal to perform the organizational mission of interpreting the collections to public view, providing enlightening and educational experiences, and proving the public interest. Exhibition is the vehicle of communication. The exhibition is the only medium through which a museum can communicate and disseminate knowledge both directly and indirectly to the visitors. Besides, all other activities of the museums, it is the commitment of the museums to cater information in a scientific manner to the people irrespective of their social, political, economic, educational, cultural, gender, age and religious background. Though museum is considered as a repository and testimony of our civilization, exhibiting collections is a significant part of the museum activities. Professionals of museums are responsible to interpret the objects for proper understanding of the visitors through the exhibitions.

