

New role of museum in resource management

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Abstract

Nepal is a small Himalayan Kingdom. It is a landlocked country having difficult ragged terrain with barren snow capped mountain ranges and luxuriant undergrowth in the foot hills. A fascinating country with rich culture, diverse ecology and an interesting human geography, more or less underdeveloped, yet a land of proud and courageous people known for their martial traditions.

This country is inhabited by multi-ethnic groups coming from different directions maintaining distinct cultures, but living in harmony for centuries. Various ethnic groups of Nepal have distinct cultures and traditions. However, due to the modernization and contact with other civilizations, there is erosion in the cultural fabric in contemporary times.

In such a critical situation, museums in Nepal have a new role to play, not only in the arena of conservation but also in the revival and regeneration of the dying tradition. Besides, it has a responsibility towards creating awareness among the people by community participation.

There are few museums in Nepal. Most of the museums are of historical and ethnographic importance. In recent time some attempts have been made for the establishment of a Eco-Museum in one of the high altitude areas inhabited by the Buddhist tribes. There is no clear-cut museum policy delineating scope and extent of museum and its role in the community life. There is no systematic organization of the museums representing art and culture at the grass-roots level, regional level or the national level. Except for the National Museum, there is no distinction of the museum as such.

Museums here neither represent a regional entity nor a pan-national identity. Representation of the grass-roots culture has yet to be properly projected. History and archaeology of Nepal is represented by the National Museum or the Place Museum to some extent. Presentation in the museum is very static. Museum communication tools and techniques are almost non-existent. Training of personnel and building infrastructure need augmentation. Marketing strategy has yet to be developed. In a situation like this, the role of the museum as a community center has become harder pressed in recent time.

In this paper, an attempt shall be made to show that the museum resource management through community participation in museums at different levels should be developed. It would be the new role for the museums, which will result in revival and regeneration of the Nepalese dying traditions and creating awareness among the people, and a challenging task for future.

The history and archaeology of Nepal is represented by the National Museum, Nepal, a small country between two big countries of Asia: India and China. Nepal has a long history. This country, rectangular in shape, has India to its south, west and east and the autonomous region of Tibet of China to the north. The northern side of Nepal has peak of above 4000 meters, including the highest peak of the world, Mt. Everest (Sagarmatha). From north to south, it descends gradually and as such is regarded as a paradise for the ecologist specializing in its various branches. Due to the lack of proper scientific exploration and excavation, we are not in a position to say anything definite about the very early history of Nepal and its people. The findings of pre-historic tools both from the Paleolithic and Neolithic ages prove that the people inhabited Nepal from very pre-historic times. The Kathmandu valley, the capital of Nepal, according to mythological records and legends, was once a lake surrounded by hills all around. The concept of archaeology and the museum was introduced at Nepal during the British colony over India; hence it is a new phenomenon. The first modern archaeological finding goes back to 108 years ago at Lumbini where the stone pillar with inscriptions erected by King Ashoka in 300 BC is a remembrance of Lord Buddha. After a long gap, the 1952 archaeological activities were done by joint ventures with Indian, Japanese, Italian and German archaeologist teams. After the establishment of a culture and archaeological department, Mrs. Devala Mitra has done excavation activities since 1965 at Lumbini, the birth place of Lord Buddha. Beside that from Rishoo University, the Japanese archaeologist team with Dr. Nakamura and a research institute named ISMEO, with Italian and German high mountain archaeological teams excavated in different parts of Nepal. Archaeologists discovered the artifacts that are now displayed in the National Museum of Nepal.

The role and main objectives of the National Museum of Nepal is to seriously take care of the collections.

1. Conservation
2. Preservation
3. Documentation
4. Exhibition
5. International Exchange Exhibition
6. Dissemination
7. Develop a Research Laboratory
8. The information of visitors have been a high priority
9. Local and international cooperation of the National Museum

The National Museum privileges the research opportunity for scholars both locally and internationally. Handing over Nepal's cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible, through the National Museum for the sake of our national identity is our major responsibilities. The National Museum bears a wide range of collections from the Stone Age to the 19th Century. Stone, terracotta, bronze and wood art, ethnographical objects, weapons, paintings, textile, and paper, make up the major part of the collections.

Having rich collections, we still could not display our heritage; hence our heritage is limited as a visual art store. The National Museum of Nepal has been seriously caring for these culture properties from our ancestors. Due to the influences of modern education, globalization, fast communication, industrialization, urbanization and modernization, the National Museum of Nepal has been playing a vital role to preserve our own cultural heritage. The collection must be further organized according to the appropriate and agreeable standards. The present cooperation of the project with local craftsmen and consultants should be expanded.

In less developed countries it has become a serious problem to preserve cultural properties. The reason for this is basically a lack of awareness towards the value of these

properties. This emanates from lack of education and funding to maintain these properties and due to other basic priorities of the people. The authorities are also helpless to adjust in terms of the budget. So the cultural properties are neglected, stolen or sold at an exorbitant price. In Nepal this is a common feature as in other developing nations. All the cultural properties such as monuments in Nepal have been preserved by three categories of the institutions. They are as follows:

- The Guthi Sansthan (a trust fund)
- Private
- Public

The custodian of all these properties is the Department of Archeology. The properties belonging to other institutions have no budgetary provisions for conservation. We have nine world Heritage sites in Nepal. Even inside the heritage sites there are monuments belonging to the above-mentioned patrons. Most of our cultural properties are religious, either Hindu or Buddhist. Besides these, some are of animistic cults. Without proper documentation and conservation policies these are getting slowly destroyed. The difficulties facing conservation of these properties, in my view as a professional, in Nepal can be classified in the following terms:

1. There are laws made for the conservation, but they are in dire necessity of implementation. The public and the authorities do not follow these laws strictly. Due to the confusing clauses of these laws sometimes dual meanings are interpreted. There is no co-ordination between the different sectors of the authorities like the local administration, police and the department of Archeology. This state of affairs is highly damaging to these cultural sites. In a country like Nepal where political stability is fragile due to the political pressure, lots of modern structures are being built around these properties.

2. Institutionally some of the sites are

highlighted more than necessary like the Temple of holy Pashupatinath which itself is a World Heritage site. The temple has Royal patronage and has lots of trust funds, land endowments and cash turnover. On top of that there is a separate development fund for this site. Even being so well looked after, there has not been a significant change in the area of conservation. This is an example only; there are lots of other sites, which come into this category.

3. The custodian of these cultural properties, the Department of Archeology has not made a proper list of inventories of monuments. There is no record of how many monuments there are in Nepal and their present condition. There is no classification of monuments at international, national and local levels. There is no scientific strategy of the policy. Different agencies are overlapping each other in the area of conservation such as the Department of Archeology, local municipalities, private trust funds and NGOs. This is because of the lack of proper implementation of policies for the preservation and conservation of them. Sometimes this becomes so confusing that the work becomes incomplete.

4. In Nepal, tangible and intangible cultural properties are highly religious and sensitive. To deal with such sensitive issues, we do not have an independent ministry for culture and the problems of other attached departments overshadow the cultural issues, especially conservation. Consequently, the end result is negligence.

5. At the decision making level, the need for experts is urgent. As a rule in Nepal, a junior civil servant due to his seniority in the job gets promoted to a decision making rank without any expert knowledge and specific training of conservation. A separate ministry of culture would have been better for the specific decision in the direction of conservation where the experts' help and advice could be made available, because this

is the heritage of Nepal that is preserved for posterity.

6. Cultural properties of Nepal are deteriorating physically, biologically and chemically. These are the main areas that a conservation body should be aware of. Murals, terracotta and wooden structures and other monuments exposed to light, heat, and moisture are getting damaged everyday. Pollution by traffic and industries and other chemical agents due to overcrowding of the surrounding areas are harming them. Compact guidelines should be prepared by the decision-making body after carefully identifying the problems.

7. The difficulty with the UNESCO fund is that it provides experts only and funds from other agencies. Nepali experts are not employed as bound by the rules. Consequently, 70% or more of the funding goes to the allowance, salary and other incidental cost of the experts. In most cases there is no training for foreign specialists by Nepalese experts. This process becomes costlier and takes longer as the foreign specialists are mostly salary based.

8. Wood from indigenous trees known as Chilaune, Chap and Blue Pine are sacred and are used only on the top of the structure of temples. On the other hand, timber is a lowly wood used in doors and plinths. In conservation done by foreign experts this fact is either completely ignored or they have no knowledge of it. This process completely wipes out the religious and cultural value of the monuments. For the difficulties of conservation no nation in the world can find enough funds to deal with this problem. In this situation a classification of the monuments in view of its architectural value, basis of style and historical importance becomes necessary. Optimum utilization of limited funds with competent staff, efficient supervision and the research is really a challenge for us. There is a huge need of the conservation consciousness on the part of

the public too. Occasional interaction with international experts on conservation is necessary to know the latest techniques. The type of training ICCROM is planning to organize in November will be an eye-opener for me. The government is formulating a National Cultural Policy and with my training I can be of help in advising as an expert for conservation of our cultural properties.

Problems identification in Nepalese museums

- The collections of the objects are not up to the standard of a national museum.
- The buildings and the surroundings are badly kept. They need a face-lift.
- The presence of the museum looks ritualistic.
- The staffs are not attentive as they are government officials not trained specially for museum duties.
- It is a pity that the museum is not included in the tourist itinerary.
- The displays are uninteresting and never changed from its inception.
- The condition of the garden is deplorable.
- The guards from the Royal Nepalese Army are imposing and that feels threatening to visitors.
- The public relation is poor.
- The museum should have the maximum of public participation as they are developed in the concept of democracy.
- Basically the whole area looks like a house in which its members had a fight and deserted leaving the premises in the hands of caretakers.
- The love and the care for the place are reflected by the well-kept gardens, attentive and obliging staff and the lively atmosphere, but all these are missing in the museum. An office of the HMG has a five-star appearance such as the Tourism Board and not the National Museum.
- Curio shops have better collections in Katmandu than the museum. If I were a visitor I would avoid this museum.

- There is no museum marketing as museums must be advertised and marketed.
 - There has not been virtually any purchase by the National Museum of Nepal. As general ethics, the National Museum of Nepal must acquire valuable objects from time to time with the help of its patrons. No valuable paintings are to be found in the museum. Kathmandu had many paintings of European artists and other artifacts, which could have been acquired by the museum after the fall of the Rana Dynastic rule. The collection looks as if they were given in alms, which did not have any utility for the donors. This is because the National Museum is not established according to the museum principles and ethics.
 - The canteen of the National Museum of Nepal is like a horse stable that is outside the gate of the museum. It should be immediately removed. It makes the entrance look like an alley. The canteen for museum visitors is considered necessary. Trivial as it might seem provision of a good cheap eating-place inside is a great facility. These places also serve as meeting places for groups of artists and scholars, which is not yet thought and considered by the museum authority till now.
 - A good library forms a necessary adjunct to any educational and research organization. Libraries abroad are well organized and well documented. Attempts are made to collect materials from all over the world and more important to classify the documents and catalogue them properly. Several libraries publish regularly bibliographical reference of the subject in other countries. For instance, they publish regularly the bibliography on anthropology, history of art, museology etc.
 - There is not a single piece of importance that people would like to see repeatedly in the National Museum of Nepal. There is no jewelry section and no manuscript section.
 - The statues that are kept in the museum are of little value without proper catalogues and information. Such statues are scattered all over the nooks and corners of Katmandu. Strategy for income resources
 - There are no laboratory facilities for the preservation and conservation for the cultural properties. The Central Chemical Laboratory provides the chemical conservation facilities for the museum, but due to the absence of the museum knowledge, professionalism and the ethics, their work further deteriorates the collection. This is highly unfortunate for the museum. The strategies for betterment at Nepalese museums are as follows:
 - Admission fees
 - Endowments
 - Loans
 - Donations
 - Museum shops
 - Restaurant
 - Catalogues and publications
 - Special Exhibitions inside and outside the country
 - Festivals
 - Museum membership
 - Museum clubs like 'Friends of the museum'
 - Gift items like T-shirts, jewelry like pendants, rings and other souvenirs.
- There are other service-oriented activities that can be performed for the income of the museum like training programs such as training in iconography, color and glues, training for the museum guides etc. In order to publicize each object and impart education to the members of its community, an art museum should also conduct periodical training courses on art and crafts. Dates and subjects to be taught during such courses may be given wide publicity, well in advance, so that people interested in joining these courses may join at their convenience. Beside the press publicity, leaflets and circulars may be sent to educational

institutions to attract and invite people to join these courses, on the other hand persons well noted for their knowledge about different types of art-objects may be invited to teach and demonstrate the techniques of producing various types of art objects, their utility and scope etc. Such courses must be planned well in advance and copies of programmes should be distributed among candidates mentioning the date, time and venues of the lectures and the practical demonstration.

The traditional derivatives of the colors are vegetable and minerals. Glues were made of plant and animals that are replaced these days by the chemical colors and glues. The museum can train and preserve the age-old tradition of producing colors and glues. The Tribhuvan University has a museology course without proper museum professionals. This course can be taught at the museum with live examples of icons, documents and artifacts. One of the traditional industries of Nepal was papermaking. The museum can train people about this trade and preserve it. Replicas of the icons can be produced from polyester resin and fiberglass easy for transportation, instead of plaster of Paris. That can be sold at the museum shops. The museum can give dealership to people for its productions. The big business houses should be included for endowments and grants. The main object is to create public awareness and preserve cultural heritage. This way, the museum automatically makes a place in the heart and minds of the people. By founding of clubs, the museum can relate to the local festivals like Indra Jatra, Gai Jatra and other regional festivals. It can preserve traditional industries by promoting them, in order to develop and grow museum patronage when is most essential whether public or private.

There should be an auditorium hall for its own use and for rentals. Taxidermy should be done in the museum with proper experts. Training the guides for the handicapped and the blind visitors are essential. There should

be a good restaurant offering Nepali food. Individuals are richer by European standards but public properties are the poorest. This is the symptom of underdevelopment. The sum total is heartbreaking for any individual with nationalistic pride.

A modern public museum is supposed to cultivate very cordial relations with the members of its community for fundraising. But a museum must reserve the right to restrict entry into the club only to those interested, as well as suitable persons as it may sometimes lead to very odd and bitter experiences. Local artists, designers, craftsmen, students, scholars and other persons interested in the museum activities may find a place in the museum club. A museum club can play a dominant role in creating artists, as well as cultural atmosphere in a particular locality.

The artist and designer may be allowed to copy ancient designs from the object, which may be given wide publicity and fundraising.

Big and influential firms may be interested in borrowing the beauty patterns and designed for their commercial purposes. It will bring a good amount of funds to the museum.

Besides lecture on topics relating to are design and traditional dance music by eminent scholars and cultural professionals, films and documentaries on the manufacturing techniques of various types of art objects, may also be shown to the public in order to enliven their interest.

Temporary exhibitions and mobile exhibition should take place, as it is neither possible nor advisable to exhibit the collection that the National Museum of Nepal possesses. The museum, therefore, change exhibits from time to time in their gallery and also hold temporary exhibitions for a limited period to show their stored material. Temporary exhibitions also contribute to enhance the popularities of the museum. Visitors get a change and make more frequent visits to the museum.

Exchange of the museum objects for fundraising

Museum exchange should be encouraged not only between museums inside Nepal but also between the museums from other countries. This is the only legitimate way of building world art collections in Nepalese Museums; at least the museum of national importance should have some collections from other countries also. For instance, the art from India, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan and Pakistan are closely related to the art of Nepal. It is not only pertinent but essential to understand these art forms to fully grasp the spirit of Nepalese Art and vice versa. Similarly, the art of the West should also be brought through exchange to our museum to make them comprehensive so that the Nepalese citizens are able to appreciate them.

The Indian community has taken a lead in establishing a museum from society, the only society of its kind in India. Such 'friends of the museum' are a common factor in every US city. It gives the community a chance to share the burden of museum activities as private support to benefit the museum. Women are always in the forefront in such organizations.

With the increasing facilities of gas and electricity, the Indian housewife now has ample time at her disposal, which could easily be utilized for such volunteer work in such organizations. The office bearers of such societies have the satisfaction of being a part of the museum and sense of responsibility develop in them. Such organizations can certainly play a major role bringing public donations to the museum and can help creating a "museum mindedness."

Active public support is badly needed at least from the rich industrialists, who can very well afford the opening and the running of museums. In India, big tycoons like the Birlas have already opened a few museums in the country. It is a well-known fact that almost all

the super rich have made collections of the art objects after the Gold Control Act in India. They found objects as the safest investment, to mention a few of these, like the Kanorias, the Goenakas, the Rams, the Singhaniyas, Tatas and Birlas have rich collections of art objects. They should be persuaded to put these objects in the museums. Art after all, is a common heritage of a nation and not an exclusive right of the selected few. It is a matter of great disgrace that a museum of national stature has no valuable collection at all; whereas a big collection is in the hands of private individuals. It is high time that this cultural collection should be shared with the public.

Museum as a source of national integration and secularism

Scholars from the West have always labeled Nepalese art as solely religious in its spirit. However, it is not the whole truth. Although religion has been the prime-motivating factor of Nepalese art, other factors have also contributed to its growth. There are a number of pieces, which are secular in nature. Not only that, art history shows how tolerant our rules have been in the past.

Curio shops are another feature seen at Japanese Museums. These attract all types of visiting tourists. The sale of local arts and crafts at these stalls is an intelligent way of fundraising and propagation of cultural heritage of a particular country. No campuses other than museums are an ideal venue for this.

Booklets and leaflets should contain detailed information on their educational services, vocational activities, loan service, courses and their times, etc. A brochure should tell the intense interest that the museum has towards education for children and visitors. A letter brought out by the educational wing of the museum should be sent periodically to schools about its

activities. It should contain the gallery collection, forthcoming exhibitions, details of exhibitions, calendar, notes on items from the services, catalogues and gallery bulletins.

About the author

Mr. Bharat Raj Rawat served Tribhuvan University in the history department in the post of Lecturer. He is also a Ph. D. Candidate of Tribhuvan University (Kathmandu, Nepal) in Museology and got his M. A. of History there and received another M. A. in Museology from the National Museum Institute (New Delhi). Beside that, he obtained another degree in Education (B. Ed.) from T.U.

Mr. Rawat has much work experience about museology from various museums in Kathmandu, Nepal and has led some heritage renovation projects of world and national levels as a project chief. He has served as the curator at the National Art Gallery, Bhaktapur (1988-1990), and the National Museum of Nepal (1990-1998). He was the director of the Museum Kapilwastu Museum from 1990 to 1995 the Secretary General ICOM National Committee of Nepal till now. He was selected as an UNV volunteer as a heritage expert. He has worked as a museum expert in Eco-museum Jomsom Mustang under the Scheme of King Mahendra Trust, 2006.