THE PHYSICALLY CHALLENGED:
COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES IN ART
AND ARCHAEOLOGY MUSEUM

Manvi Seth

Disability can simply be defined as special need of any sort. Museum is a public service however when defining public, are we really including everyone? If not then is it because Museum lack infrastructure, training, spirit or Museums just don't consider people with special needs to be part of museum target audience. Disabled people are entitled to the same cultural life as the rest of us and their right to it is inalienable. Article 27.1 of the universal declaration of Human Rights, says - everyone has the right freely to enjoy the artistic and cultural life of the community

Communication with Museum visitor

When someone wants to communicate with an audience, he or she has to be aware of the conditions under which the exchange takes place.

According to Laswell (1948) an act of communication is adequately explained if every aspect of the following question is answered:

Who → Says → what?
Feedback .

What Effect? → With → Which Channel?

When applied to a Museum the model run as

Museum gives Social, Cultural, Aesthetics,
Intellectual, Moral and cultural information
(about the collection)

Feedback (Evaluation) Through

Target Audience to Planned and Conceptualised Exhibitions
and Audience associated Information, using objects as the primary Medium of
Communication along with other secondary mediums.
Museums by its very definition are a public service. Communicating about this
collection to the people is the essential purpose of a museum. Visitors should have
best possible access to every kind of information stored, i.e. from simple physical
interaction to meaningful communication to cognitive interpretation. Communication
is truly the aim of the Museum and to become a better communicator it has to be
aware of its partners in the communication process.

People do not stand for a homogenous group. Museum should be
knowledgeable about its audience keeping in mind different group of people need
different benefits. There is nothing like general public but segments such as school
children, adults, housewives, ethnic minority, physically and mentally challenged,
foreign tourists and so on.

Culture has no specific boundaries it caters to, culture is universal and
heterogeneous and People cannot be denied cultural right on any grounds whatsoever
exclusivity, lack of education, physically impairment or racism. Therefore culture,
which is reflected in a museum, should be accessible to all.

COMMUNICATION IN ARTS AND ARCHAEOLOGY MUSEUMS: THE
DISABLED.

What is specifically presented in an Arts and Archacology Museum is
knowledge about one's history, education and aesthetic experience. Accessibility to
art and art appreciation is a basic individual right, and a museum only provides a
forum for people to experience and express this right.
Arts and Archacology Museums display Antiques so the problems in catering to the
physically challenged are security hassles, conservation risk, lack of special disability
oriented training program, ill adapted buildings are lack of resources.

Practical accessibility to museums is not the only problem faced by the museums, the,
attitude of the people is also essential since many able-bodied people are incapable of
interacting with disabled people. There are limits to the ability to adapt facilities 1:Or
everyone. What is to be changed is the attitude of people towards disabled and of I
disabled towards the museum.,

UNDERSTANDING OF THE PROBLEMS FACED BY DISABLED

- Locomotive (movement disability)
- Visually Disabled
- Hearing impaired
- Mentally Challenged

Out of these three come under the category of physical disability.

The goal of this paper is to understand the problems faced by disabled people
in accessibility of a museum and the hurdles able-bodied persons (acc in trying to
understand that. Adaptability is instinctive to man, so why not adapt to include the
disabled people.
In order to comprehend the difficulties faced by the disabled and to incorporate their specific needs following reformations are needed in Museums and Musicology training courses.

- Inclusion of Disability oriented module in the Training Programs—both the taught degree and diploma programs and in-service training courses.
- Regular cooperation among Museums and the Government organisations and NGO’s working formidable;
- Periodical Evaluation of Physical and Information Access —Sensitisation Program for all Museum staff,
- Audit Access by the members of Government disability organizations and NGO’s.

One more. Reformation could be the out reach rammers for those who either because of lack of resources or health problems can coach Museum e.g. Samsung children museum, Korea.

Education and Training of Museum Person

Education of museum personnel is must. Generally able-bodied people more often plan not, ignorant of the needs of Physically Challenged and if these able-bodied happens to be Museum Personnel then they are ignorant of the needs of an important category of their regret Audience they are legally and ethically supposed to serve.

Therefore, for sensitivity towards the disabled people, education of the museum personnel is essential.

In the Musicological training students must be given a better understanding of the needs, learning modes and shared interests of these special visitors. Another phase of training should be to conduct workshops and discussions with handicapped consultants in a give and take session.

Training program on the whole including sensitization, theoretical lectures and interactions with the NGOs and Government organization should be included in the Musicology courses and should also be imparted to In-service Museum personnel of all grades, i.e. from Director General to curator, to technical Assistants, to reception staff to peons, to Museum Education Staff, to security personnel and so on.

Sensitisation Program

This is to be carried out on the three at least of physical disability by undergoing a mock experience of their visit to a museum.

The idea is not to stimulate what it is like to be handicapped but to get a feel of the handicaps a museum faces when it comes to dealing with such
people, and about the kind of services and exhibits which can be made available and ease their discomfort. For this is a small exercise should be conducted.

The whole group can be divided into sub-groups of three or four; each group representing one category of the physically challenged and responding to a questionnaire:

Group A.
Visually impaired

Group B.
Hearing and Speech Impaired

Group C.
Physically impaired, on the wheel chair:
The visit may be followed by discussions on their response to what they perceived the problems that the physically challenged face during a visitor a museum.

Audit Access

The visually impaired read information in brail and participate in educational activities during the exhibition with the students of Museology, National Museum Institute.

Culture gives us passage to better comprehension and widen our vision. Hence, Persons involved in culture profession are expected to be more sensitive towards everyone’s needs.
Somehow there is deflection in reality: Museums portrays the image of a forbidden territory for the visually and hearing impaired and physically disabled. For the people in a wheelchair, there are steps; For the visually impaired, no sign boards exist in Braille and neither is there any orientation system and so on.

The essential factors to be considered for assisting physical disabilities: -The Material facilities -Information
Human Assistance
Information
Human Assistance

The audit should be done by a Government organization or by NGOs working for the disabled to assess all the hurdles restricting overall fruitful experience of the Museum.
The entire audit can cover two broad categories of accessibility:
Audit Access & Indoor Faculties

Views of exhibition for the physically challenged. National Museum Institute, 2002

Maps and Layout Plans
Maps and Layout plans of each gallery should be provided at low height, in big prints and in big prints and in Braille for physically challenged, partially sighted and for visually impaired respectively, so that the visitor gets a better understanding of the space and place around and his location in it.

Standard Text (Notice boards and signs) height for seated people: 1-6 meters from the ground. Ideal levels for counters, information desks and ticket offices: -0.2 to 1.6 meters eight for anything that has to be held: -0.4 to 1.4 meters
Levels and Obstacles

Often in museums the floor is at different levels, for removing the dullness to remove for the sake of aesthetics. However, for the disabled people, this proves to be a barrier, as it complicates accessibility for them. Even screens and partitions used in galleries should be placed in such a way that they do not obstruct movement. Along with stairs there should also be provision for ramps. In case lifts are available for the disabled the height of control buttons of the lift should be: 1.3 meters from the floor.

Floor Textures

Different floor textures not only enhance the look of a gallery but also help the visually impaired in their movement. Floor should be non-slippery. However, different floor coverings might be obstacles or those on wheelchair, which is to be encountered by leaving enough space for the wheelchair in the entire movement space.

Lighting

Dramatic change of lighting should be avoided, as it is disturbing for the people with partial vision. Uniformity in lighting degree in the corridors and strong lighting in the display area is helpful to those with partial vision as they can see the object on display and read the text.

Audit of Galleries and Information & Audit of Exhibitions and Information

Exhibitors consist of two sources of communication primary and secondary fly. Primary Source in an Art and Archaeology Museum is the object on display. Secondary sources or supportive material comprises of Labels, Publications like Brochures, guides and catalogues, Photographs, Maps etc. and they play an important role in imparting education.

Some of the objects historically or aesthetically important may be placed at low height, for wheelchair persons to view and replicas of the same may be provided to the visually impaired for them to handle. In case it is possible then some objects sat from conservation point of view could be allowed for touching and feeling. Sense of touch is important, but security and conservation factors have to be kept in mind. The supportive material used should be easily accessible to the visitor and should impart the correct information. Accessibility to the museum publication should be made in Braille and through audiocassettes for the visually impaired. The rightful placing and right kind of font size of the label is extremely important. Braille labels should also be provided along with some kind of audio system. A guide should be there for both orientation and interpretation that described or exhibit to the visually impaired or hearing impaired. For the physically imita, the guide should refer many low height objects so that they can see the exhibits or displays.
Audit Access of National Museum for the Physically Challenged-a case study

Access Audit held in the National Museum on 17th September, 02

For the physically disabled person the main problem lies in reaching the Museum, its facilities and exhibition areas and has the movement inside.

Under the project 'Museum Accessibility and Disabled' (MAD), air project done in 2002 in the National Museum Institute, National Museum, New Delhi, Audit Access or the National Museum for the Physically Disabled was done by the President of Spastic Society of Northern India, Major General Ian Cardoons. Before this several pre-audit sessions were held in which discussions with several NGOs namely, Blind Association of India, Delhi Association of Deaf and Dumb, YMCA, Federation of Handicap Welfare took place. Later, a report was made on the Access Audit.

Following are the suggestions and the arrangements needed in the Museum:

Entrance

At the gate there should be guiding blocks for visually impaired, indicating the way to the museum entrance.

- Mats at the entrance should be embedded in the ground and not project out.
- Here should be a ramp on the main entrance with side railings.
- The width of the ramp should be according to the CPWD norms. There should be a proper signage and a guide map at the reception hall.
- A separate security checkpoint should be there for the disabled.

Parking Space

- Special parking space for disabled people. It should be according to the CPWD norms.
- Parking space should be marked.
- The guard should be aware of the special parking facility for the disabled and he should be able to guide them to the parking area. There should be a drop-off facility for the disabled. The parking area should be next to the ramp.

Reception

- There should be provision for additional level of the ticket counter, which should be slightly reduced for the convenience of the wheelchair users.
- The floor should be non-slippery; (In fact till 1999 the Museum was floored with red sandstone which was both aesthetically pleasing and user friendly).
• There should be audio-visual devices and digital running information.
• A few seats in the galleries and in the lobby should be non-cushion and fixed for the comfort of the disabled visitors.
• There should be a provision for few more wheelchairs.
• A guide map at the reception should indicate and orient the visitors about the number of floors, galleries and type of galleries.
• The sculpture, which obstructs the direct view of the reception counter, should be removed.

Auditorium

• The floor-mat should be embedded in the ground.
• Its and the last row should have space for wheelchairs. There should be hand railings on both sides.
• A small ramp on one side should be constructed to reach the stage.
• The seat numbers should be embossed on the seats so that the visually impaired can identify his seat number.

Toilets

• Special toilets should to be created.
• There should be vertical and horizontal hand grab bars on the three sides.
• The doors of the toilets should be wide enough to enable a cay's way to the wheelchairs.
• Hand washbasin should be placed near the toilet.

General

• There should be signage indicating all other public service area.
• Audio-visual techniques should be adopted. The height of the digital kiosk should be little lower so that the disabled person can use it. The introductory text in the gallery could be at a slightly low height or the text in bigger font size for a seated person to read.
• A few seats in the cafeteria should be reserved for the distantly. The average height of the seats should be 20 cms.

Exhibition Planning for the visually and Hearing Disabled

Phases – A tactile exhibition at student's gallery - a case study

The definition of a visually disabled friendly Museum or gallery rests on whether or not there is tactile experience of any sort.

• How can, touching of antiques is allowed?

• Use of copies or plaster casts is the answer. Limited handling of category of original objects may also be allowed ill some cases.
• In spite of so much the oriental research about the ways of providing special visitors with special facilities very little has been done practically to make Aths
and Archaeology truly accessible to all especially in India.

- In the 11th General Conference of ICOM in 1977 it was resolved that museum should talk, active steps to ensure maximum accessibility, should take initiatives in favour of the disabled and to expand adequately adapted programmers.

In year 1988 the 'foundations' de France' a non profit making foundation in year 1969 to help individuals, associations and companies to carry out charitable, cultural Scientific projects of general interests, provided (1 platform for people with a wide variety of background to discuss the issue of 'Museum and the Disabled. Many European Museums of Arts since then have taken initiative to put up Tactile Exhibitions in their Museums along with providing other basic facilities and thus making their museums inclusive of all would not exclusive to a selected majority, but so no such effort has been made in India.

In order to explore the potential of Art and Archaeology Museums in terms of providing an overview of Indian Art to the visually and Hearing impaired a small exhibition, Senses and Images was organized in tile student's gallery of the National 'Museum Institute. It was inaugurated on 24th November 02 by Professor Amarendra Galla, Chairperson Asia Pacific, Executive Board & Cross Cultural Task Fore, ICOM (and Technical Adviser on Culture and Heritage to UNESCO.

It gave an overview of 'Indian Sculptural Art through Ages' kaleidoscopic in its rich variety of form and colours by the display of replicas of explicit masterpieces. Since National Museum's modeling department make excellent replicas it was possible to 2 obtain the representation all the important periods of Indian art.

The aim was to acquaint the visually and hearing disabled was partially sighted with basics of Indian art. The medium chosen was Sculpture due to twofold reason- one since - the ancient times Sculpture has always been the most popular medium of expression, used most widely and hence captures the essence of the Indian art, and secondly for a first effort it was least complicated to perceive. The title of this exhibition elucidated its significance-the experience of sensing and feeling the images.

The logo of the exhibition signified - hands for sign language for the speech was Hearing-impaired, the ear barrier for the Hearing-impaired, and the eye barrier for the visually impaired. The Chakra, or wheel stands for continuity.

The layout of the gallery followed a chronological order.

The possibility of executing the concept in an Exhibition form was explored thoroughly with the blind and deaf NGOs, Museum professional knows the potentiality was weaknesses of its collections and resources. Disability organizations are aware of the strength and weaknesses of the audience they specializes in. During the formative stages of the exhibition self-evaluation and audit by disability NGOs
was done time and again. Following practical issues could be solved because of this-

- The pedestal sizes are short enough to accommodate the tactile needs of children.
- Physical orientation of the visitors has been done through a two and a half feet wide rug running the length of entire exhibition area.
- The wall colour is in bright orange which has proved useful for the partially sighted to orient themselves.
- Instead of focused lighting for the objects there is ample lighting to help the partially sighted.
- The information provided in the gallery went through several edits so that entire could be presented in a layman's language and was just right in size.
- There was also a provision of an activity room for the purpose or active participation and self-expression on part of visitors. Clay modelling and painting could be enjoyed in this room under the guidance of a professional modular.

Initially for communication and interpretation it was thought best to give labels in Braille, the Blind Association of India provided the figures of literacy among blind, which is 10 to 12% and among them also only 50% can read Braille. It helped to try for a second option as "Yell- the audio guide, inaugurated on 3rd December 02, the world disability day. The Brochure for the gallery both in Hindi and English was done in Braille. To ensure personalized communication with the visitors, there was facility for the guided. Tours of the gallery by student volunteers who read out the text, and also of a guide with sign language. The evaluation of the gallery was done in the form of regular visitor book and the response was overwhelming, especially of the senior grade students who so the bid been only reading the description of Ancient Indian Art but could not perceive the same. In their Braille written comments they had expressed that this exhibition provided them 110% only a better understanding of Indian Art but 3.1so of the cultural functions of the Museum.

Bibliography

Hein, G.E. (1998); "Learning in the 1vfuseum"; Rutledge, UK.
Hooper-Greenhill, E. (ed.) (1999); "The Education Role of the Museum"; Routledge, UK.
Wheatcroft, Andrew (ed.) (1991); "Museum without Barriers: A new Deal for disabled people";
Routledge, UK.