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**Exhibition Strategy  
for  
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# EXHIBITION STRATEGY FOR CONTEMPORARY MUSEUMS

by

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Museums all over the world are treasure houses. They collect, conserve, document, display and interpret all those significant objects which we treasure as our cultural and natural heritage. Exhibition is one of the main functions of the museum. In museum exhibitions mainly, the public comes face to face with the collections and with their interpretations. In other words, exhibitions bring the museum and its public face to face.

The image of the Museum is projected by what the visitors find in exhibitions. They also project the personality of the museum. Well conceived and tastefully installed exhibitions of many kinds attract visitors and if such exhibitions are periodically changed or if they travel from place to place, the public expectation from the museum grows. A continuous programme of exhibitions reminds the public that the museum is a public service or a civic amenity to be used by anyone who can. A single isolated exhibition even if very good is not enough to build such a steadfast image of the museum as a public service.

Exhibitions serve as a medium for the curators to communicate information, ideas, concepts, hypotheses or theories based on the museum collections. Exhibitions are the language of the museum and like any language it may be evocative as well as informative. We are primarily concerned with the exhibitions which inform or educate. Like any language, the exhibition language has to be learnt. Communication has become a special field of research. The findings are very much relevant to the theory and practice of planning museum exhibitions. Many of the problems of organizing exhibitions are traced to their dual purposes of combining interpretation with recreation because public is basically interested in enjoying museum visits.

It is a supreme test of the curator in creating his exhibitions in such a way that not only they will communicate his ideas but they will not fail in pleasing his visitors. This is easily said than done. In fact, this is one area where what the curator wishes to do and what the visitor has come to museum

may conflict. This is a universal problem in all kinds of museums, all over the world. It can be solved satisfactorily if exhibition is based on a well conceived strategy.

Museum exhibitions were relatively speaking a simple task in the past when museums were looked upon as repositories of rare, valuable or strange objects of arts and history. They often attracted those with idle curiosity. The museums required no special strategies for presentation of their material in the public galleries. Photographs of old exhibitions show how the available spaces were saturated or flooded with things some touching the ceiling, others placed on the floors. There was no focus on any specific masterpieces or any meaningful sequence. Today, contemporary museology stresses the need to evaluate museum exhibitions to find out how many of the predetermined objectives are fulfilled. In the past, such an evaluation as a part of the exhibition work would have shocked the curators. Today, we talk of the matter of curatorial accountability in respect of his duties as custodian of material of great educational potentiality and not to use it as a resource or not to make it accessible is held as professionally unethical. In the past, the curator had no qualms of conscience in not using or under using his educationally potential resources.

How was this transformation possible? The answer lies in the changes in the concepts of the museum and museology. Instead of repository of things, the museum is regarded as an educational institution. The contemporary museum has a special role to play in society as a medium of continuing or life-long education which is visual education and which is interdisciplinary. This is in keeping with the new status of the museum as a commonman's university.

In the light of these changes a museum is valued for the unique experience which a visit may produce. The experience is unique because it is personal, direct, based on objects which are real, original and supported by authenticated scientifically prepared updated documentation. The contemporary museum is experience-maker in the sense in which Alvin Toffler uses the term in his *Future Shock*. The main difference between the museum and other commercial entertainment agencies which are purveyors of vicarious, enjoyable, fantastic experiences is that, in the museum, one can validate and revalidate his experience by referring to the original material and the relevant

documentation.

One reason why museums have to be defined as makers of validatable experience is the great changes in the structure and functions of contemporary museums. In the past, museums were concerned with collections, their storage, study, upkeep, exhibition, interpretation, publication and research. While these are still held as valid museological duties, there is a shift in the emphasis. Contemporary museums are not object-oriented. The question which a curator asks today is not what is to be shown but who will see it? Who will benefit from it? Why to show it? This is not a matter of mere semantics. Here there is an entirely different yardstick for measuring the success or failure of an exhibition.

The field of Educational Technology has seen many innovations, which are applicable to museum exhibitions if they educate. One of the contemporary methods of teaching-learning is known as programmed instructions. The museum is influenced by the tenets of the philosophy behind programmed instruction.

Firstly, the instruction has to be so planned as to succeed in all cases by adapting the method to suit perfectly the capacity and background of the learner. Secondly, the learner is taught a small item after item till he masters each one of them and his continuous success reinforces his will to learn.

Programmed instruction is a method which is suited for self-instruction. A learner can absorb the well structured lessons independently, at his own pace. In museums also, the visitor is a voluntary learner for nonformal education. Therefore, the museum exhibition can be organized on the strategy of programmed learning. All the elaborate steps of pre-testing and post-testing are welcome in such enterprises and during visit to an exhibition, the individual can subject himself to voluntary tests at crucial stages so that he can check his own performance and if necessary to make use of supplementary instructive material for remedial purposes. By that way he has to achieve the educational goals, predetermined by the curator, for his level. These decisions, naturally, are not taken arbitrarily. They are the result of a long cycle of planning, preparation and evaluation of appropriate educational material.

When museum exhibitions are so well planned, their education achievements are not speculative, vague or uncertain. It is possible to verify objectively and repeatedly what will be the educational gains. These innovations in the strategy of contemporary educational exhibitions became a necessity because the rising cost of exhibitions makes it obligatory on the part of a contemporary curator to demonstrate the utility of his presentation before claiming public support or support from the welfare state. In the past, and sometimes in some places even today, the museums show scant concern to what the public may possibly gain out of its visits. They get away from the responsibility by avoiding any predetermined, clearly stated objectives for their exhibitions, so that eventually they need not carry out any meaningful evaluation.

But in the contemporary strategy of museum exhibition, right mode of evaluation is an integral part of its planning. This may unduly frighten some museologists who would not like to run the risk of possible failures. To them, it is an unwanted incursion into their personal domain of duty as understood by them. They think that they know what the best way of planning a museum exhibition and in what lies its success. According to them there is no need for any formal assessment of their efforts. In my opinion, this is a case of professional shortsightedness. This is also the result of not knowing what is the essence of contemporary exhibition strategy and how evaluation can be a step to redeem the curator of his honour, responsibility and accountability.

The other forms of evaluation are known as Formative evaluation, Summative evaluation and Naturalistic evaluation. The Formative evaluation is carried out while the exhibition is being developed at certain crucial stages, but the Summative evaluation takes place only when an exhibition is ready and open to public. In formative evaluation, a set of mockups is created which correspond to the proposed units in the exhibition, and individuals, who may represent the target audience are exposed to these mock-ups, by turn, to find out if they can understand what is represented or interpreted. If their responses are not what should be then necessary changes are made in the contents and design of the exhibits and also in the corresponding mock-ups which are again tried out on different persons representing the target audience. These modifications are carried out as often as necessary till the curator is reasonably happy about his plans. The most significant

gains are in the improvement of the clarity of instructional components, comprehensibility of the terms and examples, readability of the texts and such other aspects of communication intended through the proposed exhibition.

The formative evaluation is not a general study about the theme of the exhibition but specific assessment of specific physical and ideational components and their sequences, with a view to confirming their choice or to modifying them till they fulfil their role in the total presentation. There are several practical efficient ways of carrying out formative evaluation with help of willing visitors who are specially brought into the service area where the mock-ups are installed for testing, including these days of the use of tape-recordings and video-taping. The advantage of the formative evaluation is that before the final product is accessible to the public, it is as much perfected as possible.

The summative evaluation is to be carried out when the exhibition is completed in order to assess its success or shortcomings not so much as to make any major changes but principally to gain insights into how visitors tend to respond to the presentation so that the experience of that exhibition would be useful before planning others in future. The summative evaluation takes place in the public galleries.

In the naturalistic evaluation, the responses of individual visitor are elicited not so much as to validate the correctness of his comprehension of information but to assess what were his motivation, his past experience, his views, attitudes and how the specific exhibition is accepted as a part of his experience of reality. As in the psychoanalysis, free flowing associations are encouraged to get deeper into the visitor's psyche. The evaluator cannot be rigid in his interviews but must be a good conversationalist with wide experience and knack of dealing with fellow of all kinds.

Commitment to some kind of evaluation is one of the key factors in the strategy for contemporary museum exhibition because it keeps in front of the curator very clear attainable objectives and the needs, expectations and limitations of the target audiences.

While emphasizing the value of evaluation in the exhibitions strategy we should keep in mind that a museum exhibition is an informal learning environment. Therefore, the exhibition will involve an element of free

choice. A visitor may choose not only what to see but at what level and also from any point of view. Also a visitor normally will not be required to any personal evaluation or competition with any other visitor. He should feel very at ease in his on quest for knowledge or special experience.

A visitor should also not become overconscious that he has to educate himself by responding correctly to the instructive displays. But he should be encouraged to regard the exhibition as a pleasant opportunity to add to his knowledge or to widen his horizon of comprehension. Only then the museum exhibition will help informal education fully voluntary and open-ended. It can be called open-ended when after seeing the exhibition the visitor would appreciate the richness and variety of cultural and natural environment. The crucial test to determine if an exhibition is open-ended is that each individual may give different answers to common questions put to him about what he has seen and understood. No specific stereotype responses to exhibitions are intended. All that is really intended is that visitors should "experience" it by their involvement. They should see it as part of a reality. It is not to be taken as a three-dimensional textbook where ideas are represented by illustrations. In museum exhibition, the original objects or specimens, individually or collectively, should serve as entry-points for the visitor to encounter or come face to face with an aspect of reality, or to know the perspectives on the real-world situation outside the museum.

Museologist call such valuable museum experience as the primary experience. Some galleries gain the status as the "primary experience galleries" because their design is meticulously oriented towards reproducing the life-like context to original objects. A habitat-case, historical reconstructions, walk-in, life-size dioramas, and may audio-visual, multi-media supported exhibitions are expected to reproduce specific environments resembling forests, human settlements, arts and crafts workshops, historical scenes, etc. In them, the original objects, their reproeuctions, life-size models, background paintings or projections of still images or films are integrated with lighting effects, sound and movement. Even smells and tactile elements are introduced to enhance illusion of reality. Such "Primary experience" exhibitions are successful to the extent to which the visitor gets immersed in the situation as if it is real. He gets transported away from his daily life or from the museum gallery into a far-away situation reminiscent of another place, time

or social situation.

Some experts even call such presentation as "*escapist*" in a desirable sense. In such realistic illusionist environments, a visitor forgets his individual, narrow, finite existence in order to widen his horizon, his view, outlook towards man and nature. It may be remembered that all museum exhibitions are not of this kind. These are very expensive to produce in terms of time, money and technical work. They have to be used sparingly. They have to be employed mainly to capture and channelize the imagination of the visitors in desirable directions.

In contrast, most of the museum exhibits can be termed as didactic or teaching exhibits as means of communicating specific information or concepts. The exhibits include original objects or specimens but depend considerably on verbal, visual and graphic aids like photographs, slides, transparencies, sketches, paintings as backgrounds, maps, charts, diagrams, etc. which are symbolic or representational but as abstract substitutes to reality. The real life context is not reproduced as is done in the primary-experience exhibits. The audio-visual aids are to establish relationship among objects or between objects and their contexts which are visitor is expected to visualize himself.

There are some more contemporary exhibitions strategies which are proved very effective. In the conventional presentations the visitor was allowed to be a passive onlooker. In fact, the usual and notorious signs in galleries warning "not to touch" discourages the visitor to involve himself the exhibited theme. A barrier is created between him and the presentation. The psychological fall out of it is the great difficulty experienced by the viewer to "*Experience*" his involvement in the subject-matter.

The contemporary strategy is to treat every visitor as a potentially active participant. Exhibitions are so designed that visitors can participate and interact. In them the visitor is expected to do something according to his free will as a result of his psychological and physical response to the exhibit. He may touch, he may lift things and inspect, he may use them, he may dismember it and again reassemble. All such manipulations are calculated to increase his awareness and understanding. Simulated games, quizzes and many computer-assisted interactive sections are planned so that the visitor and interactive exhibitions are great fun to individuals, groups and families. They invite repeated visits, encourage thinking, conceptualization,



and development of judgement. They make museums as activity-oriented centres, far different from the dull places which museums were often condemned to be.

Organization and evaluation of conventional of traditional exhibitions is far easier than the evaluation of unconventional exhibitions which are open-ended, or which aim at Primary experiences or which are participatory or interactive. In all of them specification of exact goals becomes the first task. The choice of design is hinged upon the level of specificity to be achieved in the matter of exhibition objectives. In contrast, in the conventional exhibitions, the visitor is more or less a passive observer. How should he respond to the exhibitor is not problematic. He is expected to enter into the exhibition from the preceding area and he is supposed to follow a well laid out path of circulation in such a way that he would not miss any exhibits and he would see them from safe distance and from convenient directions. All the variations in the visitors' actions would be in the duration of halts in front of these exhibits which have aroused his curiosity, attracted his attention and made him linger to drunk in as much of the beauty or appreciate other qualities of the material on show.

Not so simple is the design of exhibition which have more exact objectives. This is so because these objectives are to be translated into behavioural objectives. In simple language, the curator has to visualize various ideal responses of the target audience to the exhibit units which we the exhibition successful. Does he want his visitor to spend sometime in the introductory section? Then to lift a head-phone and listen to some taped commentary? Later, to interact with a gamelike exhibit to know how much he knows about the theme of presentation? The curator may want his visitor to press some buttons to start a multimedia presentation on the subject as a detailed elaboration of some aspects of the story of the exhibition like the functional aspect or historical associations. If the curator is convinced that all visitors ought to witness such a sound and sight presentation, he may arrange areas were intermittantly the groups of visitors may assemble and wait for a few minutes for the purpose. At times, the visitor is required to touch and examine, lift and see what is behind a block of wood as in the Calico Museum of Textiles, Ahmedabad giving details of the accompanying specimen about the technique of manufacture. At some places the visitor is invited to go very close to the material and at other places farther, or around, etc. The

visitor may be asked to feel the texture at some place, dip his hand in some solution at other. He may be asked to open a box or give a push to set a drum or a ball in motion. He may be asked to switch on a gadget, or a projector or enter into an enclosure to witness a spectacle. A large number of actions on the part of the visitor are aimed at inviting him to do something and not pass by a row of showcases passively.

It is not right to say that each unit in the contemporary exhibition has to be interactive. That will be uneconomical and will make the visitor weary of the tricks. What is needed is a strategy to involve him in a self-induced experience. Because of formative evaluation, these behavioural objectives are most likely to be achieved after suitable modifications in the design. During the tests, the behaviour of the representatives of the target audience is observed unobtrusively. The natural reactions are noted, voluntary responses to participatory or interactive units in the exhibitions are maintained. These who are accustomed to see only passive visitors in museum galleries may find it difficult to understand and imagine that a contemporary exhibition can lay so much emphasis on the visitor's behavioural responses to the presentation. For that reason the concept of behavioural objectives should be made very clear. It does not refer to many reflex actions, violent movements, gesticulations or moving here and there which will be so inappropriate in the museum context. Behavioural objectives refer to responses which might be even subtle like comparing two sets of objects or images meticulously by shifting attention from one feature to another or from one feature in one object to its counterpart in another example. Even movement of eyes, head, movement around a specimen, touching a specific part of it to verify a statement in the accompanying text can be an intended behaviour. There are unlimited possibilities in this area of exhibition planning. Suffice it should be here to say that specified behavioural goals differ from unspecified nonbehavioural goals consisting of very vague, indetermination, undetectable effects of exhibits on visitors.

At this stage, it will be worthwhile to take a quick look at the various steps or stages in the exhibition process. First step is the decision about the theme or concept which the Curator or Director has to finalize. Second step is the collection of information including ideas which may need preliminary research if the concept is complex or unfamiliar. Updating of information on the theme is very essential. Third step is the outline which is a summary

of the theme with reference to objectives of the exhibition and its scope, feasibility etc. It is in the fourth step that the Curator has to organize his ideas into a succinct form of storyline. It is a logical sequence of the subtopics supported by a reference to specific original material to be included in the exhibition, to the graphics and other accessories. The fifth step is the production of the exhibition script. The contemporary practice lays much emphasis on this step. It organizes all the constituent parts like references to specific objects, labels, graphics with remarks about the methods of their installation and grouping. When a satisfactory script is finalized a diagrammatic flow chart is prepared in which separate sections have to undertake and when they may begin and end so that production of the exhibition is well organized. A flow chart circulated to all staff members involved in the exhibition work explains the interrelationships among their tasks, encouraging them to be earnest in their contribution to the whole process. The estimated time for each task should be realistic and based on the capacity and convenience of the concerned staff members. A good designer usually prepares preliminary layout floor plans, scale models and detailed working drawings. The last step is the design of the evaluation methodology.

A good plan is aesthetically pleasing but very functional. The needs of security and conservation are given as much importance as the psychological and physical needs of the visitors. The designer has to give particular attention to the use of light, colour, graphics, exhibit, furniture so that visual harmony is achieved in all the elements which make the exhibition-environment. Introduction of traditional means of interpretation like labels or the modern electronic devices need special attention because they are only means and should not compete with original objects or disturb the conceptual relationships among units.

The traditional exhibitions depended on gallery guides to introduce the theme of the exhibition and explain the ideas and importance of objects on show. Still good guides have no substitutes. They can attract visitors' attention, hold it, intrigue and communicate the intended message which is exactly an effective exhibition has to do in that order. But in view of the popularity of museums, and paucity of funds to employ sufficient number of motivated and gifted gallery guides, many museums have to turn to electronic devices to ensure that each visitor will get required interpretive

help evenly. Although, it may sound monotonous and impersonal, electronic gadgets can play their role ceaselessly and at any given level of excellence. The most common electronic devices found in the contemporary exhibitions are hand phone which is like a telephone but in a fixed position. It reproduces a prerecorded message when picked up by an individual visitor. In some sets, there is a choice of languages also. A visitor can listen to it repeatedly if he wants to do so. He can look at things while listening to the recorded commentary so that he knows what to observe carefully and why and in what sequence.

Another system is a tape-deck amplifier set-up which is activated when visitor approaches an exhibit so that recorded message begins on concealed speakers. Human voice can be combined with other meaningful sounds like bird calls.

Radio broadcast loops are very useful in exhibitions of objects like musical instruments. A visitor holding a receiver can pick up a continuous close-circuit broadcast. The Central Electronics and Engineering Research Institute, Pilani has specially manufactured such loops and museums can take advantage of them. The most versatile electronic means for the interpretation is the Cassette tours. A visitor is supplied with a small portable cassette player with earphone for personal listening to the recorded guided tour. It has the advantage of selecting the theme of personal interest. Several cassetted tours are prepared on different galleries or different temporary exhibitions. Some are aimed at specific aspects of the exhibitions for specialists. One can stop the tape if he wants to observe the displayed material in the light of the recorded interpretation.

The video is the latest addition to museum's electronic repertory. Visual imagery is added to sound. Many museums are using this very contemporary medium. Recently, I was in Bangladesh and was happy to find that the video studio in the National Museum in Dhaka was as good as any in the city. The great advantage of such a video studio on the museum premises is that there is no need to take precious and irreplaceable museum objects out of the museum buildings. The experts on the museum staff and those from outside can be associated with the museum based video taping for viewing either in the museums or on the public television service. The National Museum in Dhaka has all the sophisticated facilities to edit the



video tapes. All over India colleges and even schools have started acquiring video systems and therefore the museums can prepare and loan video taped programmes for them based on their on exhibitions as a part of the extension service. Curators to museums of one town can see exhibitions organized in museums at other palces as a part of cassette exchanges. Many museums offer video presentations in the public galleries. The museum visitor can push the specific call number on the keyboard to see one of the series of programmes available to him in the same gallery so that what cannot be included in the articular exhibition or its interpretation can be made available to him. Many of the museums use electronic techniques in their orientation or introductory sections. Usually these are automated systems which combine images with taped commentaries on the sections to follow. The new idea is to have video lounges in the museum where visitors can relax or operate the systems to get information on the exhibited materials or reserve collections. The computer is similarly used in modern museums as agent for interactive exhibits or for data-retrieval. It is treated as an adjunct to museum exhibition. Its capacity to inform on a theme is very vast. The information is supplied at several levels so that both or specialists can be satisfied.

Even with the advent of the sophisticated electronic devices, the use of photographs, transparencies, models, dioramas is not altogether discarded. In fact many contemporary exhibitions make effective use of them by incorporating them at strategic places and in conjunction with electronic systems or as a part of the participatory and interactive displays. These are very useful and time-tested means of achieving the exhibition objectives, particularly the behavioural objectives. We will see in the second lecture how the contemporary museum exhibition strategy is applicable to several kinds of exhibitons.

The hisotry of public exhibitions is very long and interesting. Such exhibitions were both commerical and cultural like the famous world fairs in the capitals of the colonial powers. Choicest material was transported from the colonies and shown in beautifully constructed pavilions for the enjoyment of the citizens of the ruling nations. Very often the focus was on the exotic aspect. Depiction of landscapes, floral and faunal peculiarities were combined with the productions of indigenous arts and crafts of the colonial peoples. These masterpieces were specially shipped to the world

fairs and such other industrial exhibitions. The purpose was to give a sense of pride to the people who colonized and who supported the expanding trades. Incidentally, interest was taken in the exotic aspects of the people who were colonized. An interesting feature was many demonstrations of local handicrafts as a part of such shows. All in all, they were great fun. Many of the transported materials entered into the public and private collections in the European capitals and became part of the early museum collections. The industrial revolution, followed by an intensive search for markets for the mass produced goods increased the value of commercial exhibitions. Competition led to growing investment not only in the techniques of display of the merchandise but also in surveys and research about efficiency of specific museum techniques. The artistic, architectural and engineering talents were attracted to the field of commercial exhibitions. Since many of them were to be open to the public late in the evenings, immense work was done on perfecting illumination techniques and equipments. The profitmaking was a good enough incentive in continuous innovative enterprises which have now grown into a vast industry.

From the available studies, it is possible to infer that museums were the beneficiaries of the developments in the field of commercial exhibitions. Yet, it took a long time for the museums to apply the contemporaneous display technology to their own presentation needs. In many institutions, there was a disdain for the commercial ways of showing things unbecoming of the museum material of historical, cultural, artistic and scientific significance. In fact some museum experts avoided the use of the term 'display' because of its commercial associations. They prefer to call their exhibitions as museum presentation. It is true that in many basic ways, the two differ markedly.

Gradually, steadily and almost imperceptibly, the commercial display principles, methods, technology, equipments began influencing those in the museum exhibitions. The most notable areas of such influence are the importance of market research, survey of visitors, particularly their behaviour, pre-exhibition publicity campaigns, comforts of visitors, facilities for amusement, study of visitor fatigue, strategies for attracting attention, holding it for sufficient length of time, appropriate combination of audio-visual aids and original material for conveying the message, study of the possible public resistance of sales of new products out of the familiarity with the currently

used things and processes, need to project the image of reliability and build prestige of the commercial firms, the field of development interests and artificial wants in the visiting public, glamourizing products and their uses to win over the public, etc. etc.

A regular visit to New Delhi's Pragati Maidan where exhibitions of the Trade Authority of India are held round the year will be good way to study the contemporary state of art in the realm of commercial display. A museologist will learn much from such studies if he knows what to adapt and what to avoid. In any case, they will stimulate him to invent more efficient and effective ways. The consideration for cost involved in commercial displays alone should discourage blind imitation. But more valid reasons for avoiding imitation are in the area of conservation, security, role of exhibitions in interpretation, long-term objectives of museums in arousing curiosity and stirring imagination, in a theme, rather than providing ready judgements. While, basically, the commercial displays aim at suspension of critical judgement on the part of the onlooker to make him ready to patronize their products, in museums, which sells nothing, the opposite is intended. Similarly, while the commercial display designer wants to mesmerize through his audio-visual appeal to visitor's senses, the designer of museum exhibitions never wants his visitor to turn off his critical faculties even under aesthetic spell of his creations. In fact, ideally showmanship in the museum should not overstep its limits. Exhibition design is an applied art. Its products in museums should serve as means to more profound aims. They cannot be treated as works of art. autonomous, having their existence as sufficient justification for their creations.

The strategics for designing contemporary museum exhibitions are museological inventions to solve professional problems. The problems are inherent in the contemporary museum situation. The problems are not fictions or mythical. They are real. They arise out of the professional compulsions to serve the population and also out of the growing need to relate the domain of heritage to the contemporary concern for development of community. A profound study of these professional compulsions has led to a worldwide museological movement for new museology or eco-museology. This rejects the conventional ways of museum work including object-oriented exhibitions. New museology is committed to public participation in all seriousness, even to the extent of involving the outsiders in exhibition planning and production.

The new museology wants museums to be eco-museums so that man is presented in the context of environment. The eco-museum is not expected to function in a single building which tends to breed isolation, even indifference, to contemporaneous happenings of great artistic, scientific or sociological significance. The whole territory which the new museum has committed to serve; a village, a town or a countryside, becomes a substitute to museum building. It may have a building or a group of buildings to offer its services but the activities, including exhibitions are not confined to the structures in great contrast to what happens in a conventional museum. Similarly, the eco-museum holds the entire population of the chosen territory as its public. Even migrants or groups of people visiting the area for service, business or excursions are not excluded from the definition of eco-museum's public. The idea is to offer the services not mainly to the representatives of elite, entrenched sections of the community who form the so-called establishment. But whosoever is interested in the history and present day life of the territory is entitled to participate and benefit by using the museum resources. Such eco-museums have three separate panels of representatives of the local self-government authorities, subject specialists and museum experts and lastly the representatives of the public to manage their affairs.

We are here concerned with the influence of the new international professional approach implied in the eco-museum movement on contemporary museum exhibition strategies. Though the early formal manifestations of the eco-museum movement were found only in some museums in France and French Canada, now many countries have come under its spell. The influence has percolated even in many Indian museums almost imperceptibly and without recognizing the main source of inspiration. The trend seems to be irreversible. New museology seems to permeate all the levels of work in museums of all kinds devoted to arts, history and archaeology, anthropology, natural history and sciences, including their exhibitions.

The exhibition strategy for material of Fine Art is an interesting museological development. The arts are valued for their aesthetic qualities. The needs of art exhibitions are supposedly met by tastefully decorated stage led in the museum galleries to present artistic objects. Lights, colour, texture, exhibition stands, screens and other furniture, silk-screened labels, some potted plants are manipulated cleverly by sensitive designers to create a



restful environment within which objects of art are installed in appropriate groups so that internal formal configuration of each of them does not suffer and rather lends to enhancement of the appeal of others. Sufficient space is kept around each to encourage contemplation of its own unique artistic features. The labels for identification don't intrude into sensitive viewers vision to avoid apprehension of any avoidable competition for attention. The furniture and space dividers are designed to lead vision to each object, and to avoid visual confusion if too many are visible at a glance. Galleries are often carpeted from wall to wall to suppress sounds of footsteps so distracting to the earnest lover whose visit to the gallery is comparable to that of a devotee to a shrine for that contemplation of something profound which the physical object triggers off.

Although contemporary museum exhibition strategy for artistic materials may not underestimate the value of aesthetically pleasing displays, it nonetheless has its own priorities. It is specially necessary to design exhibition of artistic heritage with a view to relating it to the ethos of the population. It is patently absurd to think that artistic creations were either not interrelated to one another in style, technique or contents or to the contemporaneous sociological, political, economic and philosophical world-views.

Another dimension to artistic material is the public interest in the creator. All the lovers of art have some exaggerated curiosity about the persons who fashioned the art objects including in his personal life, views, likes and dislikes, and, naturally, in the specific individual ways in which he works. One of the examples of contemporary museum strategies of artistic exhibition is the remarkable Jacques Lipchitz Exhibition in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York in the summer of 1972. It was an experiment in audio-visual communication sponsored by IBM Corporation. A research project on the famous sculptor Jacques Lipchitz was the source of the special exhibition. The highlight of the exhibition strategy was recording on audio-tape approximately two hundred hours of autobiographical interviews with the sculptor. Subsequently, more than thirty-five hours of colour film was made showing Jacques Lipchitz in conversation and at work. From such extensive tapes and films, a number of statements by the artist on a several topics were selected and those were transferred to video-tape for easy retrieval in one part of the Metropolitan Museum exhibition. A visitor to

the special exhibition was provided with an audience card and he was invited to participate in the exhibition by writing on the reverse of the card a subject on which he would like to hear conversation by Jacques Lipchitz as if it would be a personal encounter. After going through the exhibition of sculptures of Lipchitz, the visitor enters into a small room partitioned off from the main gallery by tinted plexiglass. He then witnesses an extraordinary spectacle. A museum staff member standing at a podium on a stage reads the question aloud and the taped Lipchitz response is immediately seen on the large television screen to the viewers. The trick is the fast work of several smart staff members to match the written questions from the individual visitors with appropriate answer pre-recorded on two, one hour, videotapes operated by two colour television monitors placed on the stage. Although no visitor was deceived by the fact that the artist was not physically present in the gallery, the final effect was more of an actual dialogue because after questions are read aloud, the answers by Lipchitz followed on T.V. Scheme instantaneously.

This is an exciting way of using videotape to relate the artist to his fans or to those of the public who would like to see an artist at work or in conversation on subjects of their own interests. The significance of such a strategy is the involvement of the viewers and impressing on them the importance or liveliness of the creative process. Again many contemporary artists criticize museums for neglecting them personally, even while glorifying their productions in the exhibitions. Such shows is the museum's best answer to the criticism. Of course, ideally, in a small town particularly, the artist himself can be invited to remain personally present during the exhibition of his works and meet the visitors and explain his processes, themes, style and may answer other queries. Visitors would learn much from such encounter, particularly the ideal attitudes towards appreciation.

The metropolitan exhibition on Lipchitz is also important because the museum curator gets an idea about the wide variety of interests in details shown by the visitors and their concepts, pre-determined notions about art. Eventually the museum may find art from such participatory exhibition, the specific areas of art to be documented to serve its audience needs. It is rightly observed that the day of the "gentleman connoisseur" is over. The contemporary art lovers need different service for enjoying art exhibitions more vividly or vicariously.

Metropolitan Museum is a giant in museum population with almost unlimited resources so that an exhibition as sophisticated as that of Jacques Lipchitz is so easy for its designers. We may, therefore, profitably study an example of a contemporary exhibition strategy in a small art museum.

Red River of the North Art Center, in Moorland, Minnesota, U.S.A., is a small art museum, with a handful staff and inadequate budget and practically no permanent collection. It depends on travelling exhibitions coming from outside or on the display of the work of the local artists. Often such travelling exhibitions are cancelled at short notice which is so disappointing to the local population as well as museum staff. The Director usually has a problem to find suitably substitute to the much publicized travelling exhibitions. But necessity is the mother of inventions. I may refer to the actual event in which the lady Director of the center had solved her problem of finding substitute to a cancelled travelling exhibition. She got her inspiration from the writing of John Deey the famous American thinker and writer on art. He has mentioned in his, "Art as Experience" that the artist has his problems. When he thinks as also works, his thoughts are immediately embodied in his project. The artist, according to John Deey is compelled to be an experimenter as he has to express intense individualistic experiences through means of materials with which public is familiar. The lady director felt that there will be wonderful response to an exhibition on the artistic process. She thought that the artist's work is not suitably understood. Particularly his artistic enterprise is thought as isolated from the everyday life of the common man. So she decided to conduct special activities by the local persons so that she may help them learn about the problem-solving nature of artistic activity. The result was a special exhibition created by the participation of the local people to which she gave the title "*Essence = Simulation of the Artistic Process as Problem Solving.*" It served as a substitute to the cancelled travelling exhibition what was her strategy? She approached all 230 members of the center and also to the non-members with a request to work voluntarily on this novel exhibition devoted to exploration of the artistic process. She got 18 persons who agreed to participate. They had a wide range of backgrounds - a construction worker, an executive director of the local musician's union, automobile mechanics, students, architects, football coach, psychiatrist, city councillors and even a university Professor like me. She managed to get raw material by way of donation from the local businessmen. In three days the team of 18

persons constructed her exhibits. A video cameraman documented each stage of the work and the edited tapes were shown regularly to the exhibition audience. The exhibition concentrated on presenting objects of day to day uses but specially changing their usual context. Not only the exhibits were popular but visitors were encouraged to construct their own exhibits as solutions to their own artistic problems. Many of these problems were written boldly on a wall to serve as starting points for personal involvement.

This example clearly shows that strategy of involving museum audience in a contemporary artistic exhibition. The strategy is to make public think about art not as an abstraction or finished product but as a culmination of a live experience. An imaginative curator can introduce many if not most of the basic concepts of arts to his public by devising suitable exhibition strategies. Here, one should recall, the relevance of visualizing the behavioural objectives as a part of an exhibition design.

Another example of a successful contemporary exhibition strategy was found in the Craft Museum, New Delhi. The theme of the exhibition was pottery and terracotta and its lucid title was "*Form and Many Forms of Mother Clay.*" It was designed to focus the attention on the age-old relationship of man with clay that led to creation of many useful forms. The potter was compared to Vishvakarma, the divine creator and his versatility was demonstrated by an array of examples from all parts of India which included painted pots of Kutch, tribal grain storages, horses and elephants from Madhya Pradesh, Gorakhpur horses, Molela plaques, embellished relief work on walls, huge horses and Aiyandar deities of Tamil Nadu. The outstanding feature of the exhibition was the stages in the processes of clay work which were represented by a sequence of samples of incomplete work. Many of the clay objects were given correct context. As the craftsmen were specially invited to give demonstrations as a part of that exhibition recreation of characteristic environment was very authentic. For example, votive offerings were placed in groups under tree-sanctuaries, forms of deities along with associated ritual objects were shown in reconstructed folk shrines. Kitchenware and other household objects were installed in a simulated situation. Not only visitors could watch the potter's wheel in use but many stages of firing of terracotta could be seen in different stages. The



exhibition presented many historical material to show the antiquity of the craft. But it also touched the contemporary socio-cultural situation of the potters from all parts of the country, the great diversity in their creations, and what changes are taking place in their design and techniques.

The installation of the objects of clay including series showing stages in preparation and also their uses and contexts, appeared very informal. Urban associations were avoided. Things were shown on different levels. Colour scheme, particularly of the backgrounds and lighting were evocative and textures were used imaginatively. The excellent, thoughtful displays become very effective because of the live demonstrations nearby. The exhibition was a good example of how contemporary techniques can be applied to a traditional art. It was almost what an eco-museum is expected to do but with a difference that the public who visited it was from New Delhi.

I am tempted here to refer to the exhibition approach found in the Gold Museum in Ballarat, Australia. It can serve as an example of new museology. Ballarat Gold Museum is situated at Sovereign Hill Goldmining Township. At the site, one can see the various huts and shacks in which early explorers lived. The open-air displays tell us their struggle and hard life. In the stream, we see groups of visitors, particularly families, using traditional equipments for panning gold particles out of clay in the streams. Thereafter, one enters into the interior of the Hill and walks through a tunnel leading to several simulated exhibits. Life-size dummies with characteristic costumes and complete with equipments are seen in dim lights. By following this path one gets very vivid idea of the development or rather progress in the technology of gold mining. The samples of machinery used in the successive periods for processing gold-rich ore is seen in working condition. The various indoor exhibits in the Gold Museum complement what the visitor has seen outside. They deal with geology of gold, miniature models of equipments used in various stages of mining, coins of gold, grading of gold. What is remarkable is the section explaining the modern uses of gold in industry, medicine, dentistry, defence. For example, a gold-plated submarine cable repeater is on show. There is a fascinating audio-visual unit showing the use of gold in space exploration. It is interesting to see how much of the gold produced today is used in industry because of the special physical properties. The display shows how gold is used in electronics and circuitry. Use is made by the visitors of several

handphones to commentary.

The actual original golden objects and samples of gold as found in nature are fascinating enough. But what can be called as strategic coup d'etat is the section dramatizing the early gold rush. As one enters into this section, gradually one becomes aware of the sounds filling the air. They appear to be coming from different directions and in a confused way. The sounds represent the voices of the gold-seekers. They come from the overhead audio-visual unit. Eighteen slide projectors are used to throw images while a ten-minute long commentary narrates the story of gold hunt and prospecting. The story starts with the glory of gold and its spell on man throughout history. It gives a history of the world's most famous as well as notorious goldrushes particularly in the 19th century and early twentieth century. Many of the voices simulate the narrations by the persons who reached Ballarat and they tell their excitements or sufferings. These utterings are based on the letters written to their friends and relatives from Australia. The exhibition exemplifies how design strategy of a memorable and interpretive exhibition is more than slick furniture and evocative lighting. The strategy takes into consideration the behavioural objectives of visitors, responses and participation as found in the gold panning by family groups at Ballart Gold Museum.

Yet one more example of contemporary museum exhibition strategy is the exhibition called "*Teeth*" in the Children's Museum of Boston. In my opinion, it can be seen as a landmark in museology. Though ostensibly, the exhibition was on teeth, it was in reality and experiment in development of a validated exhibition. The exhibition used skulls, models, photographs and a variety of tooth specimens to show how teeth differ in shape and in function. In the process of planning, children were involved in writing the script for the exhibition. At every stage from the decision about the topic, the exhibition connected staff was guided by the manner in which children interacted with the materials, concepts and activities planned for them. Possible sequences in the exhibits and potential material were first tried informally with individual children or with small groups of them so that ideas and questions from children would indicate their interests, their boredom and possible misunderstandings. Modified versions were then tried on other children. Slowly out of these feedbacks a satisfactory exhibition script evolved. A record was kept of various approaches.

Mockups were prepared in one part of the museum to make formative evaluation of the proposed exhibition on teeth for the target audience of children. An important feature of the strategy was the decision about the behaviour objectives. What the successful exhibition on teeth was expected to do for the children was specified in terms of their activities which served as demonstrations by the children of their comprehension of communicated messages. Systematic pre-test and post-tests were carried out on children to measure the actual learning by the children in their visit to exhibition on teeth. In the formative evaluation it was found that children will not read labels so audio-equipment was installed to guide the children to the material, their relationships and to tell them how to handle the devices. By watching, touching, manipulating, discriminating of different teeth for different functions, by linking their names with their shapes, by identifying specific teeth out of associated specimens by comparing the actions of using teeth in animals with his own actions, and similar behaviour the success of the exhibition was objectively proved. That, in my opinion, demonstrated the triumph of strategy for contemporary museum exhibitions. Such examples can be multiplied because they are now found everywhere. They are the curatorial answers to the public demands on contemporary museums to prove how they function as "*experience makers*". They also distinguish museum exhibitions from other kinds of presentations in the matter of possible validation of the worth of the experiences as contributing to the life-long or continuing education based on appreciation of original examples of our heritage.

Any description of the exhibition strategy for contemporary museums will be incomplete without a reference to the American Museum of Natural History's Centennial Exhibition: "*Can man Survive*". It is a classic example of outstanding success when the message, the media and the audience are considered together. It is basically a multi-media presentation using films, slides, sound, printed labels, graphics and objects. The subject is the threat facing mankind through the destruction of our environment.

The design of that exhibition and its use of audio-visual techniques create an atmosphere of movement and urgency about the environmental problems. It takes about twenty minutes for the visitor to completely see the exhibition. The essence of strategy is seen in the effect on the visitor as he first enters into a cool spacious environment. Pleasing films depict interdependence between animals and their natural surroundings. From

this section, the visitor moves into the area which shows human progress in technology and consequent control as well as interference of the natural environment. Now the sound effects become louder and louder. The space for visitor's movement gets smaller. Gradually, tension rises in the exhibition atmosphere as the visitor proceeds into sections showing horrors of overpopulated world and the man-made wastes spoiling the environment. Progressively the visitor is subjected to increasing shouts, cries, slogans, flashing lights, loud discordant music and similar unpleasant noises. The space is narrower here which gives a feeling of stuffiness. Visitors cannot walk without bumping into one another. Junk is shown piling in the path of the visitors. So is garbage. At the end of the tunnel the visitor is told that the solution to the kinds of problem he was experiencing depends on himself.

The exhibition is mainly in the pathway like a tunnel which was physically suspended in the American Museum of Natural History. Six films, 800 slides, with sound tapes are used. The strategy of the exhibition is that it does not explain any single individual object but with the condition, or situation. Its success is due to overall effects of the devices on the visitors, changing their attitudes towards the external world and making them aware of the problems which man faces or likely to face. It dramatically communicates the curator's message, not in words, but in terms of direct experience. Many contemporary museums have to organize exhibitions in which it is secondary to identify objects on display as such, but very vital to appreciate the contribution which the objects make to the message. Such strategy is helpful in exhibitions which are not object-oriented but which are loaded with exhibits leading to specific experiences.

The Sonargaon Museum of Folk Arts near Dhaka, Bangladesh, offers one more instance of an usual strategy for a successful exhibition. It has created several simple life-size dioramas with inexpensive clay figures of rural folk and artisans engaged in their day to day life and festivals. The artistic objects of folk arts are seen in characteristic uses in the dioramas. Palenquins, earthen jars, decoration of boat ends, figural decoration on rice pounding wooden devices, and many such objects become meaningful without referring to labels or printed guides.

The complementary part of the indoor exhibition is the outdoor demonstrations of famous crafts of Bangladesh like weaving of Jamdani, jute objects, clay



toys, basketry. A visitor can see their continuous demonstrations as in the village complex in New Delhi's National Crafts Museum. Only difference is that several apprentices undergo their training in the traditional crafts to ensure their continuity. Many techniques and equipments for fishing can be seen in the open-air portion of the Sonargaon Museum because of artificial canals. Different kinds of indigenous wooden bridges and samples of countrycrafts are seen over the artificial canals. The memorable feature of the Sonargaon Museum was the conservation of many old deserted buildings belong to the golden period when it was the capital of the region. Attempts are made to preserve them and rehabilitate them. The inhabitants had left at the time of partition of India. It will be a triumph of exhibition strategy when the structures are brought to life by placing in them things used by the original occupants who practised different professions. Life-size dummies will enliven the structures or on some days museum staff may move about in the contemporaneous dresses. Here one is reminded of the great reconstruction of Colonial Williamsburg in U.S.A.

Many more examples can be cited in favour of the central theme of these lectures namely there is need to devise new strategy for the contemporary exhibition in museums because of the change in the concept of museums, the change in the visitor's expectations, and the function of museums as makers of such experiences in which continuing education is combined with recreation and the experiences can be validated by reference to museum resources. Also the modern exhibitions attempt holistic approach to interpretation of a given theme. Taken to its logical limit, such a holistic strategy must relate heritage with the contemporary needs of development of the population. These are the benefits of the latest changes in the concept of museums and museology. By understanding their implications particularly by focusing on behavioural objectives, it should be possible to plan pragmatic strategy for every exhibition in the contemporary museums. Only then can we call the museums contemporary if their attitude and strategies, are adapted to contemporary human needs. Being contemporary, in this sense, is not a chronological characteristic. It refers to the modern attitudes, updating of techniques and selection of a strategy based on today's understanding of the new public, their present day obsessions, problems, interests, adventures, quests and innovations. From the discussion we had so far it should be apparent that museum work is extremely challenging and if undertaken