

SOCIETY

People's museum...



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In an insightful discussion, Kishwar Desai and Dr. Surajit Sarkar explained what curatorship implies in today's context



Io make museums across the country a destination for art lovers, it is important to focus on storytelling, making them contemporary and inclusive wherein communities, particularly the young, are involved as custodians of our heritage.

This is what curators of multiple museums eloquently emphasised in a panel discussion on “Expanding Vision for Best Practices in Museums” at the National Museum in New Delhi. Chaired by Prof. Amareswar Galla of International Institute of Inclusive Museums, the discussion assumed significance in the light of the fact that a concerted effort is being made by curators and museum experts to see the transition of grand buildings with treasure trove of souvenirs to people’s museum.

Kishwar Desai, whose parents survived horrors of Partition, explained how she set up the Partition Museum in Amritsar literally brick by brick in association with youngsters, who voluntarily chipped in. Desai said: “What we are building is essentially people’s museum which has many voices and connects generations. Instead of one curator we have collective curatives. Story telling in contemporary context is the most important thing you need in museum. What we are saying is how truthful you can be to tell stories of the Partition and how you tell this in today’s contemporary India. A lot of people feel that the museum would have pictures, videos of dead bodies. To dispel this, we focused on lifestyle.”

Desai said: “Without government funding, it was a difficult museum to set up. We got the building but were told that we would have to go out and collect all the money within a specified time frame. It became a personal journey for each of us. We were contacting people, recording histories and simultaneously asking them did they have any objects. Unlike other museums which have structure galleries, the Partition museum makes people get perplexed. Will it show dead bodies in photographs. We dispelled some of these notions.”

Manipur experience

Dr. Surajit Sarkar of Ambedkar University Delhi, explained how he discovered an ancient book in Imphal and put it in sync with present times. “Eight years ago, it rained a lot in Imphal. As people were blocking the rain water the neighbouring parts were getting flooded. One had to create a public platform exchange programme to wriggle out of this. We needed songs that cut across the people and also information about the neighbourhood that strikes people. I came across a 400-year-old handwritten book on how water flows in the Imphal valley. This led to a month long performance series. We videographed the parts mentioned in the book and told women to read out the text. For the locals this was the right platform as they could see images of the past and relate it with voices of the present.”