

## **Vibrant Collections Within Sleepy Walls of Museums: *A Case Study in Nagaland***

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### **Abstract**

Museum and management of heritage in Nagaland is at a nascent stage even though the concerned department has attended its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Erstwhile the region was regarded as the anthropological museum, because of its rich and diverse cultures, and a place for anthropological research and collections. Various agencies are responsible in playing their own role in conserving the heritage in one way or the other. Among these, Museums plays a vital role in conservation, preservation and represents the collections through various means, further as an institution for promoting and educating the communities. This paper keeping in view of the cultural heritage and museum will analyze the status of museums in Nagaland from different perspectives; functioning, representation, conservation, educational role and promotion of heritage, community/local museums initiatives and sustainable museum for development.

**Keywords:** Nagaland State Museum, museum types, collection, status report.

Six! Six! Three, one...shouts and wishes a common scene in front of a ticket counter at the State Museum, a game called Ludo among the famous ancient board/race games originated from India (Pachisi) and modified, patented in England as Ludo in 1869. Some are lucky enough to earn through time past games, as if all is set well within the complex. Shifting the gear, all nation need institutions to represent and reflect the past, understand the present and as a centre for information, enlightenment and preserve for future. Thus, State Museum Nagaland, evolved from 1960s as an institution, known as the Naga Institute of Culture which came to be known later as Directorate of Art and Culture in 1970.

The initial purpose was to research the Naga life and culture and to bring forth a State Museum and a Research Library.

Unlike on the lines of 18<sup>th</sup> century cabinets of curiosities which museums evolve around, the Nagaland State Museum was established as an annex of the Directorate of Art and Culture to research, represent, and conserve the cultural heritage of the Nagas. The policies and the concept behind the Museum cannot be identical and separated from its parent- Art and Culture Department. Even though not in written form which is very much in need in the present context as a written policy, vision behind the creation of state

museum-the promotion of Naga culture, to preserve identity and culture, to unite the Nagas, to educate the younger generation and scholars. Museum in recent century as an institution is not a mere store for collections and display, without a proper cultural policy and legislation, the above vision cannot run or accomplish resulting commoditized of culture and identity.

*The Naga institute of culture exhibition hall  
(Photo: State Museum Nagaland)*

State Museum Nagaland which is as old as the



parent department, has been in the service of the community, representing the fourteen major tribes and the cultural glimpse of the Nagas as a whole, thus representing the collective identity of the Nagas which indeed consist of umpteen vibrant collections. There are around 7000- 8000 collections in museums of Nagaland where state museum owns around 3000 specimens and some thousands in mainland India. It is estimated more than 50,000 Naga objects are in the possession of 43 public and private museums

in United Kingdom alone<sup>1</sup>. So far no accounts from other Europeans and American nations on the Naga Objects in museums, in reality it is still counting. The history of such huge and extensive collection starts from the 19<sup>th</sup> century -Administrators, Anthropologist, and Missionaries and in recent year's private dealers, traders and the tourist. As far as concerning with research works on Naga collections in museums, it has been explored by various, some of the pioneering and important works- Kanungo (2007, 2014), West (1985, 1992, 2001, 2011), Macfarlane & Turin (2008), Schicklgruber (2008), Ganguli (1984, 1983), Jacobs (1990), Von Stockhausen, Oppitz, Kaiser, Stirn, P. Van Ham (2008)<sup>2</sup>. A new dimension towards study and research of the Naga culture and identity through collections from abroad with appropriate evidences is not a new phenomenon and the producer of such objects are left to consume the interpretations. However, the context at home is still in its nascent stage- the vibrant people, culture, rich biodiversity, does only vividly depicts within the walls. The concept of museum and its practices are not full-fledged and not promising as comparing to that of other counterparts. Keeping in view of the present context, the paper examines and analyzes status of museums in Nagaland from different perspectives- functioning, representation, conservation, educational role and promotion of heritage, community/local museums initiatives and sustainable museum for development.

<sup>1</sup> Kanungo, A.K.2014. Who Owns the Ethno- Cultural Past: Cultural Objects of the Nagas in Far off Museums? In Jamir, T and Hazarika, M (Eds) 2014. *50 Years after Daojali-Hading: Emerging Perspectives in the Archaeology of Northeast India*. Research India Press New Delhi.

<sup>2</sup> See reference

The types of museum in Nagaland are mainly categorize into-

- Government/Public Museums.
- Community/Local Museums.
- Private museums.
- University and College Departmental Collections.

The first categories are run by the State Government - State Museum, World War II Museum and the Heritage complex in Kisama, District Cultural Office cum Museum/ Library and two site museums- Khezakeno and Chungliyimti, both an ancestral Naga sites. The second categories are funded by state government and others – Ministry of Tourism, Art and culture Department but are maintained by local community-Ungma village community Museum under Mokokchung District, Mopongchuket village Community Museum under Mokokchung District, Khonoma community museum, ToupHEMA community museum under Kohima, Shangnyu and Chui village Local Museum in Mon District, likewise the other districts have such local community museums preserving the cultural heritage of their community. The third category of museums, a scant and less initiative is undertaken so far, an excellent example of such private museum is located in Dimapur district- Chumpo Museum, architect in a way of living museum, attached with good collections of library facilities. The last categories are those collections maintained by college and university Department – Geology department museum, even though a compact room, has a good collection displaying the various rocks and mineral of the region and outside, History and Archaeology Department, few collections of artifacts from

departmental excavation which are neatly displayed in a small store, Salesian college Dimapur, Anthropology Department, Kohima Science College collections are doing their own, mainly for class room teachings and references. The collections in general are anthropological, ethnological, various art works of brass and wood, related to Christianity, sculptures, world war II collections, replicas of sculptures and few archaeological artifacts. Except the World War II collections, the displays in museum are dress, ornaments, textiles, weapons arms, wooden art works, musical instruments, ceramics, brass works and in some cases dioramas displaying the cultural life of the different communities.



*State Museum Nagaland*



*World War II Museum*

In recent years, museums has tremendously shifted from repository store of artifacts to wider scopes and challenges as an institution-education, management, audience management, research and publication, facilities, net workings, outreach programs to name a few. Museums have the opportunity to shape identities-through access to objects, information and knowledge visitors can see themselves and their culture reflected in ways that encourage new connections, meaning making and learning. Museums have developed from being repositories of knowledge and wonder, encounter and learning<sup>3</sup>. As a result of its broader outlook museums in modern times develop a systematic institution from conservation and preservation of heritage, functioning and managing, promotion and cooperation across the cultures, visitors' studies, representations and researches and finally the facilities equipped to the needs of the various categories of visitors. To investigate any given research in the field of heritage it is important to note the Status and bring certain recommendations and practicality. In spite of its vibrant collections, availability of rich cultural heritage and in service to community, museums in Nagaland needs attention. A brief status report -

- Poor infrastructure
- No proper written policies
- Inexperience and limited staff

- Poor networking
- Lack of experts
- No proper public amenities
- No facilities for physically challenged and handicapped person
- No proper catalogue, registration and documentation of the collections
- No outreach programmes and exhibition
- Lack of collection Research, publication and proper References
- No guidelines and code of conducts.
- Poor Funding.

Networking in museums are important aspects as it is in entrepreneurs and business, it covers form functioning, social media, technology, link to local, national and globalization, in actual sustainable museum development depends largely on networking. There are 11( eleven) districts and including town and compounds there are 1428 villages (2011).Each districts except the newly born districts, has District Cultural Office(DCO) cum Museum/ library and it is estimated including the District cultural Office cum Museum/ Library there are around 30 (thirty) museums which are functioning and non functioning. The state Museum as the parent has World War II Museum Kisama, the DCO's and two ancestral sites- Khezakeno and Chungliyimti. Who are the care takers for the remaining local/community museums? Indirectly or directly grant in aid are provided

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<sup>3</sup>Bradburne, J. (1998). Dinosaurs and White Elephants: the Science Centre in the 21st Century. *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 17(2), 119-137.

Falk, H. J. and Dierking, D. L. 2000. *Learning from Museums. Visitors Experiences and the Making of Meaning*. Altamira Press: Walnut

Creek. Hooper, Greenhill, E. 2000. *Museums and interpretation of visual Culture*. London. Routledge.

Silverman, L. H. 1995. Visitor meaning-making in museums for a new age. *Curator*( 38)161–170

by the Government for establishment of such museums and are left at the hands of the community or individual. However, even though in its initial stage without proper concept efforts are being put by various organization, communities, private and even the police and military departments , these effort conserve and preserve the identity at its level protecting the local heritage at large. Without proper policies, goals, vision and sustainable development concept, the museums are stagnant and have no progress. Assessment from existing and newly opened

museum theory and practice.

- Whose culture is on display
- Provenance of the object
- The use of vocabulary and the right terms
- Use of appropriate techniques and technologies
- Use of technology in museum with changing needs of time has greatly moved towards a new horizon by educating and safe guarding the heritage both tangible and intangible and creating a meaningful



*Whose culture? No proper labels and discriptions on exhibition (State Museum Nagaland)*

museums of Government/community and organizations shows that there are limited few exhibitions and outreach programmes, the networking within and outside is very poor and negative.

Whose culture and what does it mean? Question generally asked on collection and display are- whose culture, whose property or who we are links cultural identity to claims of cultural property especially in the contest over representation and ownership in current museum debates<sup>4</sup>. Recent time's culture and representation has become the core contest in

space for engaging audience. Representing a culture in the same conventional techniques comparing with the application of newer techniques can give a better understanding of the cultures on display, as the situating context demands. The need for explanations on certain cultures with use of latest technology gives better interaction between the object and the viewers. There are of course good number of well illustrated dioramas representing the communities in the state museum, the

<sup>4</sup> Clifford, J & George, E.M (Eds) 1986. *Writing cultures: the poetics and politics of ethnography*. Berkeley University of California Press.

Kisama heritage village, the Chumpo museum a living museums can have a better understanding as the setting itself interacts with the viewers. Museum as an institution at this juncture should address and represent the socio-cultural identities to deepen the true aspects making it visible to the visitors who are in the process of search of identity of self and others.

Coming to the question of who is responsible?

responsible attitudes and awareness on the importance of museum from both staff and visitors needs attentions. Misuse of funds is a common scene, for instance there are some local/community museums which don't even look like a museum or store a single collection, and building a museum needs a proper organize design from architecture, sanitary, accessibility - but here the local contractors take major initiatives under



*Mimi village community museum*



*Tribal Museum Longsa village*



*World WarII Museum*



*State Museum Nagaland*

In spite of unique heritage resources providing outstanding opportunities the role of museum in Nagaland in collecting, preserving and educating is a challenging issue, as an overall considering the museums both public and private museums –

political power without consulting experts, it is rather development oriented keeping away the true essence of museum in broader aspects. Considering the staff and experts living aside the small museums, the State Museum has limited staffs and experts and

lack of awareness both among the general masses and the concerned on the importance and the role of museums.

Sustainability is the dynamic process of museums, based on the recognition and preservation of tangible and intangible heritage with the museums responding to the needs of the community. To be sustainable, museums, through their mission, must be an active and attractive part of the community by adding value to the heritage and social memory ICOM (2011). The mere preservation and conservation of heritage objects is no longer a strong enough argument for the allocation of public subsidies to museums. In recent years there has been a diversion towards the views of museums<sup>5</sup> traditional which is associated with the collection, display, and preservation, focusing on heritage having little on consumer oriented. On the other hand, new views without discarding the traditional are adding more activities attracting more consumers thus justifying what museum is and benefits on the other hand. Considering Nagaland, the strength with its diverse heritage and opportunities sustainable development is yet noticeable. For instance, the revenues from the state run museums leaving aside the accounts of local community museums, except from entry tickets and photography shows no improvements- Museum entrance ticket and photography= Rs 175000 (2013-2014 March), Museum entrance ticket and photography= Rs 166565 (2014-2015 March). To be sustainable, museums in Nagaland should have the four pillars of

museum sustainability-Museum and community (social), Museum and moveable cultural heritage (cultural), Museum and Revenue (economic), Museum and planet earth (environmental). Even though with its strength and opportunities museums in this region are small and almost unknown with scant financial and human resources. Consequently these attract little investment resulting in vicious circle that needs a systematic solution by completely reforming their management principle applied in the past.

#### **Recommendations and Practicalities**

- Inclusion of neighboring cultures
- Inclusion of minority communities
- Intercultural Museum Program
- Systematic networking's
- Review & Separate policy for Museum
- Outreach program
- Organize seminars, exhibition, workshops, lectures etc...
- Introduction of museum on wheels
- Research on collections
- Public Amenities
- Proper toilets
- Cafeteria
- Museum shop
- Proper parking
- Facilities for Disable Physically challenge categories of visitors
- Reference Library for collection attached to museums

#### **Addition of New Galleries**

- Archeological gallery
- Historical gallery

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<sup>5</sup> Clifford, J & George, E.M (Eds) 1986. *Writing cultures: the poetics and politics of ethnography*. Berkeley University of California Press.

- Indigenous games and Music gallery
- Display of ancestral and other important sites through replicas
- Gallery for western anthropologist and writers on Nagas
- To set a special committee of independent experts to survey and study the collections abroad and work possible ways for the return of the objects
- To see which benefits museums in Nagaland have not yet explored.

According to ICOM definition of Museum- Museum is a non-profit making, permanent institution in the service of the society and of its development, open to public which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and

intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purpose of education, study and enjoyment (ICOM 2013). As have mentioned before, even though museums in Nagaland is in its initial stage, do we have the aspects of what definition states, which focus on both traditional and modern views of museum-with its immense scope and opportunity if we are at the traditional, it has to completely reform the management principles. Further, recently there has been voices on the issues of returning collection from abroad, but question is are we ready to accommodate those long preserve collections from outside- if Museum is the future of the past, then where are we now.

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