CHAPTER – XI

RAMAKRISHNA MISSION IN THE FIELD OF OTHER TYPES OF EDUCATION

"Knowledge is inherent in man. No knowledge comes from outside; it is all inside." *-Swami Vivekananda*

INTRODUCTION

Much of today's focus on education is on formal resources like schools and classrooms. Informal settings such as museums offer untapped potential for communicating social, cultural and scientific information, correcting misconceptions and improving attitudes and cognitive skills. Learning is voluntary and self-directed in such informal settings. It is driven by curiosity, discovery, free exploration and the sharing of experiences with companions. Learning in museums, in its broadest sense, is a by-product of the free interaction of leisure oriented visitors with exhibitions and their surroundings. (This discussion focuses on adult visitors and family groups, not organized or guided groups such as school groups.)

Progress in recent years has made it possible to design features into public environments that can facilitate the voluntary learning of a variety of cognitive skills such as divergent thinking, critical analysis, better understanding of the past, the complexity of the natural world and critical environment issues. Also, the museum experience can affect personal attitudes such as self-esteem. Experientially rich public environments like museums, zoos, parks, art galleries, science and technology centers, aquariums and even corporate centers offer unique opportunities not only for studying how people learn during leisure time activities but also for offering alternatives to formal educational settings.

Efforts to implement these potentials are not easy. Educational researchers who venture into museums quickly discover that theories grounded in formal education are not very helpful in identifying presentation modes and teaching strategies that stimulate and sustain visitor interest. Sooner or later they place less reliance on educational theory and more on watching what visitors do during visits, how they move through spaces, how much time they spend reading, viewing displays and even which exhibition halls they choose.

Communication in the informal education environment: Visitors often enjoy museum visits, most visibly to observers, in hands-on and interactive exhibitions. Hands-on exhibitions are not necessarily accompanied by educational, cultural or scientific enrichment, although they may be accompanied by having fun. Exit interviews conducted over the years in different types of museums suggest that the public often misses many of the ideas and/or attitudes that were the original intentions of exhibition designers.

Museums generally know how to design the scholarly, aesthetic and physical aspects of exhibition spaces. The motivations, preconceptions, attitudes and learning capabilities of visitors are less understood.

To motivate and communicate in museums, considerable knowledge is necessary about how visitors behave and learn in leisure-oriented settings. It is important to remember that the unguided learning that occurs in museums is a by-product of independent and usually intrinsically rewarding exploratory activities. There are no grades, no top-down control and there is no reason for visitors to pay attention except for its own sake. Usually, exhibition experiences are without benefit of teachers or other knowledgeable persons to interpret what visitors are seeing or doing. This means that visitors may or may not learn that their misconceptions are wrong, that science can be fun while intellectually stimulating, that learning can be exciting, or that things are not always what they seem.

To effectively communicate substantive knowledge or alter attitudes or misconceptions under informal learning conditions is a formidable but not impossible task. Self-directed learning already is part of learning sports, hobbies, music, social skills, attitudes, problem solving and other aspects of lifelong learning. Learning under natural conditions may or may not be as appropriate, useful or efficient as it might be under formal teaching conditions. But people are changed by such natural encounters, sometimes for the better, with most aspects of their daily lives, including museum experiences. Howard Gardner (1983, 1991) and others have argued that natural encounters with the environment form the foundation of later learning and problem solving. The quality of these outcomes varies widely, but in one way or another, the outcomes, good or bad, are shaped by contingencies operating within the environments in which such learning occurs. Gravity shapes what we know about bouncing balls, sensory and physiological structures shape how we see and how well we can jump, and the natural actions/reactions of others teach us how to relate and communicate. In museums, research suggests that contingencies operating in and around exhibitions can affect their potential educational impact as a part of the natural exploration of museum displays.

Making exhibitions work: Exhibitions can work if planners do more than provide logically organized exhibition content. Open, voluntary conditions require modes that deliver content (e.g., interactives, film, objects, words) and the incentives for attending to this content, which are as important as the exhibition content itself. Unfortunately, delivery modes and motivational strategies usually are given little serious attention during exhibition planning.

Directors, curators, and exhibition planning staff also need more direct experience with the general public. The personal involvement which many museum staff have with teaching and education comes through their formal school experience; this offers a poor model for the exploratory, leisure-oriented nature of museums.

Exhibition planners must give more attention early in the design process to innocent features of displays such as placement, wording, type size, lighting, etc. These have great influence on whether or not attention is likely to be random and mindless, or active and focused. There are economical ways that enable the early testing and correction of such problems. Methodologies such as formative evaluation provide museum staff with simple, inexpensive procedures to pre-test mockup versions of prospective exhibition components such as text, visuals, placement and interactive formats. (Screven, 1990; Taylor, 1992).

To achieve both visitor attention and communication, exhibitions need goal-directed and discovery activities (e.g., making predictions, completing a task, resolving a question) that reward appropriate attention. The goal is that visitors use exhibition content as the framework for the learning activities. Visitors must operate a dial, compare two events, look for answers to a question, etc. ("What makes the ball come down?" "What is missing in this picture?" "What happens if X is kept constant?") In other words, the positive results from attending and doing sustain this attention. Such natural (intrinsic) rewards can take many forms, but can include such simple things as completion of a task, achieving a prescribed score or performance level, or successfully predicting an event.

Visitors often obtain powerful and intrinsic rewards simply through random and irrelevant interaction with exhibitions. Many museums that employ hands-on gadgets and discovery designs end up encouraging brainless manipulation because of the motivational activities available from simply operating these gadgets. Mindless button pressing, using exhibitions to get attention and sensory stimulation from lights, sounds and companions also are rewarding enough to sustain attention, whether or not appropriate attention is given to exhibition content.

Some suggest that punishing mindless behavior (e.g., exhibition becomes inoperative, hard to read) may be needed. Schools, which face this same problem, often sustain attention by threats of negative consequences if students do not attend (e.g., poor grades). Museums are unique in that visitors are not easily motivated by what may happen if they do not attend! For example, poor lighting, bad placement, too much information, unfamiliar language and poor organization in effect punish viewers by making it difficult to find and use exhibition content. Museum exhibitions must minimize such negative characteristics because most visitors, unlike school students, have the option of ignoring them. In summary, effective educational exhibitions will deliver useful content and be more engaging when focused attention to this content takes place.

While there is still much to learn about how and why people learn in public settings, the following points are proving helpful in producing exhibitions that are more effective educationally. (Bitgood et al, 1990/91; Miles et al, 1988; Screven, 1986, 1990, 1992).

1. The quality of visitor attention varies from passive (casual) to active involvement (visitors compare things, ask questions, look for connections).
2. While some planners often resist text and other interpretive materials as intrusive and aesthetically disruptive, interpretive text/graphics usually are needed to help visitors understand the larger context of exhibition objects. The visual, sensory, emotional, action and social aspects of objects often are more interesting to many visitors than the text (Screven, 1992). This can be

overcome by designing the text so it adds to the rewarding aspects of the sensory, action and social rewards available from the exhibitions. Many visitors will read text that is approachable, suggests things to do, adds to a mystery, leads to the unexpected, enables a prediction and so on.

3. Visitors often must limit the time spent in museums because of fatigue, hunger, parking, appointments, and other practical problems. (The average visiting time is 1-2 hours.) The more time visitors perceive an exhibition or text to require, the less likely they will attend to it without compelling reasons to do so.

4. Almost all interpretive materials require some formative evaluation.

Human learning and motivation, developmental psychology, cognitive science, educational psychology and instructional design have important implications for teaching and motivating museum visitors. However, these techniques have had few real world applications in museums. Misconceptions, pseudo-controversies, contradictory methodologies and over- simplifications of evaluation abound in the museum field. Visitor studies are currently investigating the following questions to increase our understanding of how and why people learn in exhibits.

- Some exhibition formats work better than others (e.g., interactive flip labels, question strategies, game strategies). What specific features of these more effective designs are responsible for their effectiveness? Are some formats better suited for particular educational goals?

- What pro-active exhibit strategies are best suited to change nonproductive visitor attitudes, or correct visitor misconceptions?

- How can the diverse individuals that make up exhibition planning teams work together more effectively?

- Does reading level, knowledge of a topic, misconceptions, learning style, time constraints or other visitor characteristics affect post-visit activities and attention?

- What is the long-term impact of museum visits on schoolwork, life-long learning, vocational choices, environmental attitudes, family activities?

The museum field does have assistance with informal education research. The Visitor Studies Association sponsors an annual meeting which draws museum, zoo and other specialists from around the world. The ILVS Review is a professional journal devoted exclusively to visitor-oriented designs. More and more, museums are realizing that they must pay attention to their visitors and are evaluating the effectiveness of their exhibitions both during and after installation. Such attention to informal education increases the learning potential and the enjoyment of museum visits.

Monastic Education: In the second half of the 20th century, worldwide interest in monastics and monasticism increased dramatically. Mount Athos continued to thrive, not least as a centre of pilgrimage (for men only), after suffering a period of decline earlier in the century. After 1945, monastics introduced numerous innovations to their various traditions. Liturgical reform in the Roman Catholic Church, enacted at the Second Vatican Council (1962–65), was anticipated and advocated by several generations of Benedictines in Europe and the United States (notably at Maredsous, Belg.; Maria Laach, Ger.; and Collegeville, Minn.), who continued their role as liturgical reformers in the years following the council. The Dominican theologians Henri de Lubac and Yves Congar prepared the theology that culminated in the Second Vatican Council. The so-called “Engaged Buddhism” of Thich Nhat Hanh brought Buddhist monastics into political protest, initially in Vietnam and Thailand and later around the world. Many Tibetan Buddhist monastics, forced to flee their homeland after the Chinese occupied it in 1959, settled at Dharmsala in northern India under the leadership of the 14th Dalai Lama; they later founded schools and monasteries in Europe, North America, and Australia. So-called “Western Buddhism” evolved among European, North American, and Australian lay and monastic followers. Their controversial practices adapted Chinese, Japanese, Tibetan, and Southeast Asian monastic traditions to the rhythms of Western secular life. To a large degree, Western Buddhism de-monasticized Asian practice, so that meditation was more commonly conducted on retreat and at home rather than in a monastic community.

A number of 20th-century monastics were recognized and admired worldwide. The American Trappist Thomas Merton furthered intermonastic dialogue and pursued imaginative spiritual quests through dozens of writings; he remains the most widely read of recent Christian monastic authors. Brother Roger Schutz, founder of the Taizé communities, developed a style of Protestant and then ecumenical monasticism that appealed above all to young people and attracted hundreds of thousands of pilgrims to France each year. An English Benedictine, Bede Griffiths, introduced Benedictinism into an Indian ashram and explored transcultural theology in books such as A New Vision of Reality: Western Science, Eastern Mysticism, and Christian Faith (1989). In China the monastic reformer Taixu (T'ai-hsü) reorganized and internationalized the sangha, founding dozens of organizations during a period of more than 30 years. The Thai educator Buddhadasa renewed Thai practice while embodying many aspects of Theravada tradition. In worldwide travels, the 14th Dalai Lama personified the quest for peace, interreligious understanding, and spiritual realization. A winner of the Nobel Prize for Peace (1989), the Dalai Lama is the world's best known monastic.

After 1945 monasticism in India enjoyed a resurgence that took several forms. The models were Christian, particularly Jesuit in the case of neo-Hindu orders such as the eclectic Ramakrishna Mission (founded in the 19th century), which established centres in the United States and Europe as well as in India. A swami—a term that properly means an ordained Hindu monk—presided over each of these centres, often assisted by a younger monk. In theory, the orders trained monks in the sannyasi tradition, but in practice they served European and American laypersons committed in various degrees to the Vedanta theology. In addition to the Ramakrishna Mission, there were some two dozen organizations of this quasi-monastic or semimonastic type. Spreading from India to all parts of the Western world, some of them grew to considerable size and acquired great wealth. Among such groups were the Self-Realization Fellowship, founded by the Swami Yogananda Paramahamsa, and the Hare Krishna movement (officially known as the International Society for Krishna Consciousness), founded by A.C. Bhaktivedanta (also called Swami Prabhupada).

Not surprisingly, intermonastic dialogue was pursued more eagerly by Christians than by Buddhists. The former readily adopted Buddhist meditation as a technique (one that requires no religious conversion), but the latter (notably in Japan) seldom borrowed anything from Christianity. Meanwhile, some Tibetans in the United States interacted with Jewish synagogues in order to learn ways of surviving as a community in diaspora. Bede Griffiths's model of Hindu-Benedictine interaction exerts appeal in India and among New Age questers.

In the 20th century, historians and other scholars also showed unprecedented interest in monasticism. Scholarly understanding of Western Christian monasticism underwent several revolutions starting in the 1960s. Periodicals and monographs abound, as medievalists exploit a wealth of monastic archives. Scholarship on female monastics recovered major figures (e.g., Hildegard of Bingen and Julian of Norwich), redefined gender issues throughout the centuries, and discerned fresh problems of interpretation, not least regarding the symbolism of fasting as a way to imitate the life and suffering of Christ. Studies of the social history of religious orders and individual monasteries placed major and minor figures in context and explored the economic and political factors that shaped monastic life.

CASE STUDIES

Table-27 (Institutions catering Other Types of Education under Ramakrishna Mission)

Types of Institution	**Institutions of Ramakrishna Mission in the field (State wise)**	**Case Study done on**
Monastic Education (Probationers' Training Centre /Seminary)	West Bengal: Probationers' Training Centre (Seminary) at Ramakrishna Math, Belur Math	Probationers' Training Centre (Seminary) at Ramakrishna Math, Belur Math

Library, Exhibition, Museum and Art Galleries	All the 132 centres of Ramakrishna Mission in India (Library) & Andhra Pradesh: Hyderabad Arunachal Pradesh: Narottam Nagar Delhi: New Delhi Gujarat: Limbdi, Porbandar, Rajkot and Vadodara Jharkhand: Deoghar Meghalaya: Cherrapunjee Tamil Nadu: Chennai Math (Vivekanandar Illam) West Bengal: Belur Math (Headquarters and Saradapitha), Institute of Culture, Narelndrapur, Swamiji’s Ancestral House	Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Kolkata
Religious and Spiritual Guidance and Counselling	All the 132 centres of Ramakrishna Mission in India	

Probationers’ Training Centre: All the Probationers of the Ramakrishna Order have to stay for two years at the Training Centre before they are given Brahmacharya Ordination. It is a three-storied building where the novices and Acharyas (teachers) stay. In this institution regular classes are conducted for the novices on basic Hindu scriptures, lives and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi, Swami Vivekananda and other incarnations and prophets, Indian philosophy, Western philosophy, Comparative Religion, etc. The novices are also given training in music, Vedic chanting, performing Puja, keeping accounts, gardening, etc.

Library, Exhibition, Museum and Art Galleries: Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda were both connoisseurs of the arts. From his earliest childhood, Sri Ramakrishna observed his father make beautiful garlands for the family deity, Raghuvir. He gradually developed a taste for painting and also learnt clay molding of images of gods and goddesses from the potters. At a later date he restored the broken leg of the idol of Lord Krishna in such an ingenious way that it still stands to this day (after a lapse of 150 years!) in the Vishnu Temple, also known as the Radha Kanta Temple, in the Dakshineswar Temple complex. The sketches and drawings he has left behind portray the firm and clear hand of an accomplished artist.

Swami Vivekananda was also extremely sensitive to all that was positive and manly in fine art. During the course of his wanderings in India he visited innumerable historic places and observed first-hand the works of the great artists, architects, and sculptors of the past. While travelling in America, Europe and England, he visited art museums and galleries and engaged with famous artists of the time. Swamiji's enduring contribution to art is his conceptual design of Sri Ramakrishna's Temple at Belur Math. Even as he could not see it completed in his lifetime, the temple built on his guidelines is an architectural masterpiece combining pristine Eastern and Western traditions.

The emblem of the Ramakrishna Order designed by Swamiji is also an unique and unparalleled work of art created in an exalted mood of spiritual inspiration. It is a profound symbol of harmony and synthesis leading to life's fulfilment. This is indeed what he wanted every man and woman to be, to realize, either in the East or in the West. The meaning behind this emblem, in the language of Vivekananda himself is as follows: "The wavy waters in the picture are symbolic of Karma, the lotus of Bhakti, and the rising-sun of Jnana. The encircling serpent is indicative of Yoga and awakened Kundalini Shakti, while the swan in the picture stands for Paramatman. Therefore, the ideal of the picture is that by the union of Karma, Jnana, Bhakti and Yoga, the vision of the Paramatman is obtained."

In the very premises of the Belur Math there is a National Level Museum. In this Museum articles and artifacts closely associated with Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother, Swami Vivekananda and other direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna have been exhibited.

Religious and Spiritual Guidance and Counselling: Both the Math and the Mission centres lay emphasis on the dissemination of the spiritual and cultural ideals of India. Through various types of activities, they try to give a practical shape to the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, especially that all religions are true. The centres establish real points of contact among people of different faiths through a large number of libraries, lectures, seminars, symposiums, youth camps, Balak Sanghas, regular classes, public celebrations, occasional exhibitions, screening films on religious and cultural values, etc.

Besides, many of the mission's centres serve rural folks by spreading spiritual and cultural ideas among them through mobile units like 'Jnana Vahini', 'Viveka Vahini', etc. Educative and religious film shows, lectures, exhibitions, guided meditation, personality development classes, book-sales, etc were organized in the interior parts of the country. Many centres such as Belagavi, Chennai Math, Hyderabad, Kadapa, Mysuru, Rajkot, Ranchi (Morabadi), Vijayawada, etc have started institutions like 'VIVEC' (Vivekananda Institute of Value Education and Culture) to impart values education to people in general. During the year 2015-16, 3,46,922 people participated in various programmes conducted by 2743 Cultural Units of the Math and Mission such as Balak Sanghas, Youth Sanghas, Jnana Vahini, Viveka Murasu, VIDYA (Vivekananda's Inspiration for Development of Youth Auakening), Institute of Human Excellence, etc.

Apart from this, 234 libraries were run by ther Math & Mission centres; most of these libraries had attached reading rooms also.

Centres of the Math and Mission published several books and 22 journals in different languages. The Math centres at Mayavati, Baghbazar (Kolkata), Chennai, Hyderabad, Nagpur, Mysuru, Rajkot, Thrissur and Bhubaneswar, in particular, have to their credit a considerable number of publications. A sum of Rs. 25.32 crore was spent on publication work during the year. Some of our centres in other countries are also publishing valuable books.

The Math and the Mission centres maintained temples and prayer halls, and organized lectures, retreats and devotees' meets. Thousands of people were inspired to accept higher values of life by coming into contact with the different centres.

It is noteworthy that the member Ashramas of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Bhav Prachar Parishads in different parts of the country also, under the guidance of Ramakrishna Math, spread moral values and culture.

Most of the Math and Mission centres celebrated the birthdays of great saints and prophets, popular Hindu festivals and Christmas Eve. The general features of the celebrations of the birthdays of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda were: special worship, homa, chanting from scriptural texts, bhajan and sankirtan, distribution of prasad to devotees, feeding of the poor in large numbers, and lectures by the sannyasins of the Order and other eminent speakers. Through all these activities the message of Sri Ramakrishna and his direct associates was spread steadily. Many ardent souls came in close touch with the ideals of the Math and Mission.

FINDINGS

Monastic Education (Probationers' Training Centre/ Seminary):

1. It is an obvious customary for all the probationers, left hearth and home in the name of the God, of the Ramakrishna Order to stay for two years at the Training Centre before they are Ordained into sacred Brahmacharya -Vows.
2. This training centre is meant to train up the monastic members of the Mission who are supposed to lead the various educational activities of the organization in multifarious capacities for the rest of their lives.
3. The whole programme is conducted through residential mode where the novices get the opportunities to live with the Guru and under the direct instructions of the Acharyas.
4. The daily routine is comprised of Meditation, classes, practice of translating theoretical knowledge into practical working field.
5. It is a platform where from all over the world whosoever have joined the Order in the same year i.e. March to February stay together and grows spiritually, intellectually and physically.
6. The course curriculum taught in the institution shows liberal blending of Oriental and Occidental Philosophy, Comparative Religion, World History, Psychology etc.
7. The whole scheme is a venture for capacity building to be fully identified with the Ramakrishna Sangha casting aside their pre-monastic socio-economic-cultural identities.

Library, Exhibition, Museum and Art Galleries:

1. The Mission has a threefold aim in this field:

    (a) Proper interpretation and appraisal of Indian culture,

    (b) Promotion of mutual knowledge and understanding between India and other countries

    (c) Promotion of the study of the cultural heritage of India and of humankind as a whole.

2. The Mission's libraries generally have three wings – (i) General Library, (ii) Children's Library and (iii) Junior Library. The library also oversees the responsibilities of other departmental libraries. Professionally managed, the library ranks foremost among public libraries in India.

4. The libraries has a collection of rare books and Online access is provided to Open Library of free e-books. Access is provided upon request, to digitized versions rare books. The libraries subscribe to altogether approximately 600 national and international print journals and Online access is provided to various international e-journals consortia.

6. Often the libraries oversee the workings of the Vivekananda Study Circle (Junior) for children up to the age of 15 years who are at the same time active members of the Libraries also.

7. The Museums allow students from the various universities to prepare dissertations based on their exhibits and in this way, act as parallel academic institutions.

8. The Museums often offers a highly-valued certificate courses on Art Education and prepare modules on the following topics:

    a. Story of Art and Aesthetics

    b. Development of Mural and Miniature Painting in India

    c. Sculpture and Architecture in India: Early, Medieval, and Modern

    d. Development of Art in India – 19th and 20th centuries; and

    e. Minor and Folk Art of India.

9. Often Art schools are attached to the Museums offering Long term and Short Term Courses on various art disciplines.

10. The Mission has wings of permanent display of artifacts, organizes annual exhibition and periodic displays based on thematic or taxonometric (period, size, composition, and utility) considerations. It offers services with guides providing detailed information on exhibits to visitors.