Polarization of Science Through Science Centres: A Case Study of Nehru Science Centre, Mumbai

Description:
Cultivation of science should include knowledge of science as well as capacity to recognize the misuse of science. We live in exciting times, for it is the century of science and technology.

Informal science learning environments (e.g., science museums, zoos and outdoor settings; youth programs; science media) could be utilized to maximize this end. Informal science learning can take place in many environments, e.g., natural history parks, geological sites, zoos, botanical gardens, industry, science museums and nature centres. Informal science learning through field trips will include the following features: Voluntary, Unstructured, Un sequenced, Non assessed, Unevaluated, Open-ended, Learner-led, Learner-centered, Out-of-school context, Non-curriculum-based, Many unintended outcomes, Less directly measurable outcomes, and Social intercourse.

Some of the provisions which are related to the spread of science through science museums and science centres and other informal agencies in the S&T Policy of the Government of India published in 2003 are as follows:

- To ensure that the message of science reaches every citizen of India, man and woman, young and old, so that we advance scientific temper, emerge as a progressive and enlightened society, and make it possible for all our people to participate fully in the development of science and technology and its application for human welfare. Indeed, science and technology will be fully integrated with all spheres of national activity;

- To promote the empowerment of women in all science and technology activities and

Public awareness of Science & Technology constitutes an important part of the latest S&T Policy (2003) of the Government of India.

- There is growing need to enhance public awareness of the importance of science and technology in everyday life, and the directions where science and technology is taking us. Programmes will also be developed to promote learning and dissemination of science through the various national languages, to enable effective science communication at all levels. In general the activities of science museums and science centres have been identified as an area for promoting public awareness of science & technology and the Government of India has given a special thrust in this area.

To achieve the objectives of spread of science among the masses including school children, the role of science museums or centres facilitating interaction with science and technology becomes vital. These museums or centres are characterized as non-formal or informal science education institutions. The Science Centre activities can present the thrill of science to the students starting from the school level and therefore, supplement formal school education by its doing science approach. The policies of the Government of India related to Science & Technology Museums and Centres received a thrust when a Task Force constituted by the Planning Commission of the Government of India recommended fast growth in infrastructure and activities of science museums. Riding on these recommendations, the present infrastructure of about 40 science museums and science centres has been created. The task force saw immense potential of the Science Museums for creation of science awareness and a scientific temper among the people at large and made several recommendations.

The following research questions were formulated in order to carry out the proposed study:

- How did NSC unfold to the present state?
- What is the present organizational structure of NSC?
- What are the key activities carried out by NSC for the masses?
- What are the activities carried out for the school children?
- What is the impact of these activities on the people?

The investigator adopted incidental sampling method for selection of samples for getting holistic information about NSC and information about randomly selected specific galleries so that maximum
variations in the information can be captured.

The investigator planned to carryout a pilot survey of NSC, Mumbai before finalizing tools and collection of data for the present study. The investigator also planned to record preliminary data in the diary by informal observation of its facilities and ongoing programmes. On the basis of preliminary data and study of collected literatures during pilot survey, the investigator planned to identify aspects of NSC to be studied from different sources in order to seek answer to research questions formulated for the study.

Visitors formed the target group of the NSC. They were the most important source of information in order to know the impact of science centre on the spread of science. It was planned to obtain the their responses/opinions by administering questionnaires/opinionnaires. It was decided to administer a questionnaire and an opinionnaire on the sample visitors. The questionnaire was intended to get general information about them, to know their reasons for visiting NSC, to know the kind of facilities and programmes observed by them, to know their liking for facilities and programmes etc. The opinionnaire was intended to get the extent of satisfaction with facilities holistically and overall impact of NSC. It was also planned to administer another four different questionnaires based on four randomly selected galleries to the small visitor samples at the gallery site. The investigator planned to analyze the data inductively.

The general questionnaire was consisted of eleven questions. The another four questionnaires were based on four randomly selected galleries of NSC namely Sound and Hearing Gallery, Light and Sight Gallery, Evolution Gallery and Man and Machine gallery. Each questionnaire was consisted of ten questions.

Two separate structured open ended interviews were constructed, one for the Director of NSC and another for Curators of NSC.

Nothing is specified about the visitors and their timing of visit during the visiting hour of NSC. For administration general questionnaires and opinionnaires 1000 visitors will be selected and for administration of four gallery based questionnaires 100 visitors will be selected at each of the gallery site.

Finally responded general questionnaires from 600 visitors were available for analysis and 70 questionnaires each for Sound & Hearing Gallery, Light & Sight Gallery, and Man & Machine Gallery and 60 questionnaires for Evolution Gallery were available for analysis.

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