

EXPLORATION OF PORTUGUESE-BENGAL CULTURAL HERITAGE THROUGH MUSEOLOGICAL STUDIES

Dr. Dhriti Ray

Assistant Professor

Department of Museology,

University of Calcutta

draychaki@yahoo.com

drmusl@caluniv.ac.in

(91)9830249182

Abstract

The Portuguese came to Bengal in the early 16th century for trading. Between 1575 and 1600, they established many colonies on the banks of river Ganga, like Chinsura, Hooghly (Porto Pequeno), Satagaon, Gopalpur and Bandel, covering the eastern part of India. During their stay, Portuguese built many churches, schools and charitable institutions. Churches of Augustinians and Jesuits became popular tourist destinations until today. Although by the 18th century, the Portuguese presence had almost disappeared from Bengal with the emergence of British imperialism, the 500 years old (approx.) Portuguese culture is still living in modern Bengal, in the form of tangible and intangible heritage.

Traces of the Portuguese impact could be seen in Bengali language, literature, folk-tales, folksongs, cuisines, agriculture, religion, cinema and trade. Some of these are included in the academic curriculum of history at school, college and university levels. In this context, research has been undertaken in the past and is still ongoing in several universities. However, heritage studies under a museological point of view have not yet been initiated at the university level. Though Goa, Panaji, Calicut, Chennai and Nagapattanam were the Portuguese centers for long periods and research has been conducted there along with the establishment of some museums,

Bengal is yet to explore similar possibilities. There is a large collection of contemporary paintings, artifacts and archival documents in museums, churches, archives, the Asiatic Society and the National Library (Kolkata, West Bengal), but no exclusive gallery has yet been designed for the Portuguese. But such objects and documents are required to explore, interpret and unfold many episodes of Portuguese history and heritage in Bengal. Apart from the sources scattered around Bengal, there are many other sources of cultural importance in the museums, archives and libraries of Portugal, which could unveil many chapters of contemporary Bengali society, art and technology, such as the weaving of Muslins (a worldwide known fine cotton fabric) among many other.

Museology is an integrated subject at the Post Graduate level in the University of Calcutta, dealing with museum administration, collection, exhibition, management, education and conservation of art, history, culture and science, as well as of intangible heritage. But it is also possible to undertake research programs in integrated disciplines at the PhD level. Likewise, internships at the Post Graduate level would allow students to work in museums abroad. The Department of Museology of the University of Calcutta has enough potential to establish a 'Centre for Portuguese Studies' in collaboration with similar departments in Portugal. Through this Centre, several activities could be undertaken:

- Offer certificate for small orientation programs and summer courses on Indo-Portuguese relations and heritage issues;
- Research documentation about Portuguese objects in museums of West Bengal and/or about objects from Bengal in Portuguese museums;
- Management of databases on documented objects and publications for online use;
- Undertake short-term/long-term projects on different issues of the Portuguese heritage in West Bengal;
- Develop brochures, monographs, catalogues, books, and special issues of the Departmental Journal on local Portuguese heritage;
- Foster faculty, students and visitors exchange programs in order to explore cross-cultural heritage and exchange knowledge that may bring people together;
- Undertake a language study program for both Portuguese and Bengali;
- Curate exhibitions in collaboration with local museums and museums in Portugal;

- Arrange orientation programs on the Portuguese influence in Bengal through workshops, symposium or seminars;
- Explore the possibility of fellowship programs for PhDs and other research work.

The faculty of the Department of Museology of the University of Calcutta has the expertise to undertake this initiative. Detail planning will be shared in the presentation of this paper, as we firmly believe this is possible through collaborative approaches, careful planning and joint work at every stage.