



New Medias and Pedagogy: Promoting Liberal Arts Education

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ABSTRACT

The paper explores the viability of New Medias, specifically exhibitions as a pedagogical tool in complement to traditional class room and syllabus education. To determine the viability of exhibitions, the authors would construct and curate an exhibition on a subject chosen for its multi-disciplinary nature, and its non-traditional scope. The exhibition would be curated across a variety of institutions of Delhi University, and students would be polled on their interest in exhibitions, the subject, and replicating exhibitions as a learning and teaching tool. The results of the 250 students polled, indicate that students are strongly in favour of exhibitions as a pedagogical tool, and were extremely interested in both the subject, as well as the idea of replicating exhibitions as a learning tool. Our numbers indicate that there is overwhelming support among the student population for exhibitions as a pedagogical tool.

Keywords: College, Education, Exhibition, Medias, Pedagogy, Survey

INTRODUCTION

Delhi University over the past years initiated an inter-disciplinary approach to the teaching and learning process. Within the semester system, we are doing accelerated teaching to cover the course. With this time constraint, the wider social issues and concerns do not get addressed adequately. The paper explores issues of improvements and refinements to the process of teaching and learning outside the classroom, and to showcase the efficacy of the new Medias as pedagogical tools to complement the existing classroom structure, and thus further improve and refine the existing education programme of Delhi University. This paper emerges out of the Innovations Project funded by Delhi University and undertaken by teachers and students of Delhi College of Arts & Commerce titled “ New Medias and Pedagogy; Promoting Liberal Arts Education”. The exhibition was curated at various Delhi University Colleges such as Jesus and Mary College, Atma Ram Sanatan Dharma College(

29 October 2014), Gargi College(13 November 2014), Zakir Hussian College Morning (21 January 2015), Miranda House and Ambedkar University (13 February 2015). The exhibition was also displayed at Antardhwani 2014 and then in 2015.

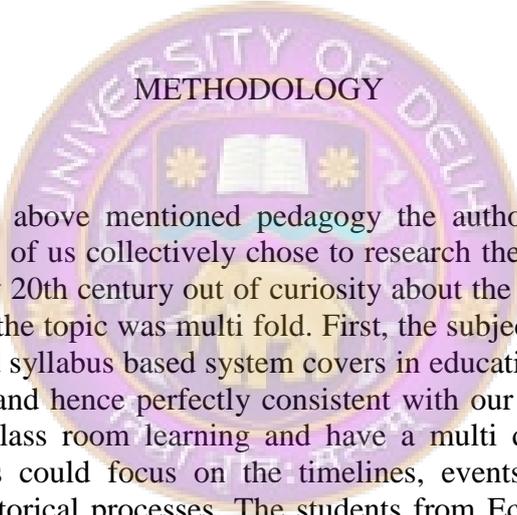
The questions that this paper addresses are the following: Can the undergraduate students across disciplines engage with social, historical, cultural, literary, economical and cultural issues outside their prescribed curricula and create pedagogical tools? What kind of new media can be an enabling tool that an average Delhi University student with limited resources can create? How viable are exhibitions as a tool for education?

The teaching and learning process across Liberal Arts disciplines such as English, Economics and History for instance follow classroom lectures, tutorials, presentations etc. Syllabi and classes have discrete mandates, and thus cannot be expected to cover every topic in detail. In the study of any discipline, many subjects related directly or peripherally to the subject at hand are left unexplored due to the constraints of length, time and examination pressures. Moreover, many subjects outside the mainstream of the syllabus are often only appealing to students predicated on their interest, and are not necessarily crucial to gain an understanding or expertise in the discipline itself. Interest in the subjects however can prove to be a valuable addition to a student's intellectual repository, as one cannot after all have too much knowledge. What gets lost in this classical pedagogical methodology is the possibility of working as a team where both teachers and students can become equal partners in creating pedagogical tool as well as complement each other as knowledge seekers and eschew hierarchies of the teacher and pupil. Exhibitions could complement standard class room education and allow students and teachers to, individually or as a group, explore a variety of topics that the regular curriculum based education would not be able to explore and emerge as alternative companion pedagogical tool. First and foremost, the construction of the exhibition would help the various participants learn about their chosen topic. The freedom of deciding the format and scope of an exhibition means that students are encouraged to study their chosen topic thoroughly, so as to allow them to create an informative and educative final product. The various participants would be required to not just analyse their chosen topic for an exhibition from the purpose of gaining information, but also for the purpose of analysing the viability of various datum gathered, and their ability to incorporate it into a cohesive whole. An exhibition also has the advantage of allowing students to collaborate across a multi-disciplinary spectrum. Students would thus not only have to study their topic from the point of view of their discipline, but would also have to gain a working knowledge of the same topic from the perspectives of other disciplines as well. An exhibition is not just a collection of information. It is about presenting the information in a cohesive and aesthetic whole. This would provide the participants a valuable tool to learn presentation and construction skills, as well as provide an outlet for their more aesthetic tendencies and their artistic expression.

Students can thus explore a wide variety of such subjects when constructing an exhibition, going down various paths, studying a variety of ideas and opinions, facts and facets, and otherwise explore the subject freely and without the constraints or pressures of a syllabus. Yet the exploration is not wholly unstructured, since at all times, the requirements of the exhibition would keep the search methodical and grounded, and thus make the learning process one which is not overtly chaotic due to lack of structure or direction. It is the opinion of the authors therefore that exhibitions would provide a process of teaching that would not be coercive, would provide a free hand to the student or students to explore their topic, and yet provide the necessary structure to prevent chaos. Moreover, an exhibition would not interfere in a teacher's ability to conduct class, nor would the exhibition interfere with the

syllabus based system. Exhibitions are not considered replacements of the current syllabus based system, but rather as a complement to it. This tool can be a perfect outlet for the artistic, intellectual and academic expressions while at the same time provide a learning experience for members of a class and even beyond, as well as encouraging research at an early level.

Lastly, the value of the exhibition lies in the outreach. The process of curating an exhibition would allow various people who come and see the exhibitions to study and learn about a topic that they have heretofore not explored. Thus for example, if in a class of 30 students, three groups of 10 created exhibitions, the entire process would prove to be a deeply educative experience. Not only would each of the groups learn about their chosen topics while creating the exhibition, the students of the other two groups (as well as students from other classes and even other colleges!) would be presented the exhibition, and thus the students of the class would be able to explore three different topics, and learn about each of them. Thus an exhibition would provide a holistic and wholesome educational experience for all participants involved. Its outreach viability could be gauged by the easy applicability and reproducibility. This learning tool has the potential of easy replication and encouraging group research and archival work.



METHODOLOGY

Choosing A Topic

In order to showcase the above mentioned pedagogy the authors selected a topic as an example to work with. All of us collectively chose to research the 'Courtesan Culture' in the late 19th century and early 20th century out of curiosity about the degradation of the culture. The purpose for choosing the topic was multi fold. First, the subject of courtesan culture was one that no class room and syllabus based system covers in education. It was thus a topic that was off the beaten track, and hence perfectly consistent with our stated aim to study topics that would complement class room learning and have a multi disciplinary approach. For instance, History students could focus on the timelines, events, transformations in the courtesan culture and historical processes. The students from Economics could explore an understanding of the role played by Courtesans in daily socio-economic structures, their importance in the patronage of the arts and the economic impact of various changing norms on Courtesan Culture. Students from English could focus on the literature of the period, as well as an emphasis on analysis of medias from the period, such as a focus on old recordings or the history of playback singing in relation to the culture.

The enormous scope of archival material ranging from British colonial history, Nationalist historiography and its morality, the evolution of modern playback singing as well as the origins of schools of Indian dance forms such as Kathak were interesting entry points for the research topic. For the purposes of research, the team conducted extensive interviews with a variety of subject experts. Ranging from Delhi University college professors, to film makers and even dance experts, the authors sought to obtain the expertise of as many people as possible. Authors attended seminars and lectures, as well as performances and exhibitions on subjects directly or peripherally related to the subject matter, to try and glean as complete an understanding of the subject as possible. It was realized, during the conduction of interviews, that the topic chosen had developed a sense of stigma among the general population. A stigma that negatively affected many people associated with the culture, despite its extreme importance to the culture and history of India. Because of this, it became important for the

authors to develop a sense of discretion while interviewing individuals affiliated with the courtesan group, and provide us with an insight into the more delicate aspects of the research that needed to be conducted.

Exhibition As An Enabling Tool For The Average Student

If an exhibition is to become an enabling tool for pedagogy then it need to be a simplistic process and not be prohibitively expensive. In a classroom setup, it is not possible to curate exhibitions like it is possible to do in a museum space. The translation of the archival and research material needs to be presented as visuals. If it has to travel then it also needs to be portable. All of these requirements of this new media can be realised with available material that is cost effective. Cardboard panels, photographs representing the visual documentation on simple A4 sheets, cut and pasted onto the cardboard panels can replace expensive museum like displays. Other material such as models, installations and a bioscope can also be used to enhance the appeal and the scope of an exhibition. In this specific instance a bioscope was similarly constructed such that it could feature panels of A4 sheets, and hence, not prove to be complex or overly expensive and difficult to maintain. It was important to also provide for a basic structure on which to curate the exhibition. Here, the authors had to consider alternatives that most regular students would not face. The exhibition created was designed to be highly portable, so that it could be curated across the various colleges of Delhi University. Thus it became important to order a set of stands and structures on which the exhibition could be mounted. Since the authors were not cognizant of the space requirements of various venues, it was necessary that the stands be modular enough to allow for easy transportation as well as quick setup. Equally important was the ability to spread the exhibition out in a limited area. Thus a simple structure of stands and metal rods, with string were ordered. The panels were mounted on strings, allowing for an exhibition that was both simple and modular enough to allow for a variety of placement and size configurations. In essence it was panels linked across a series of strings attached to poles mounted on plywood stands. For the bioscope roll, coloured print outs of Hindi film movie posters which explored courtesan culture were used. These pictures were then struck together with cello tape. The exhibition itself covered a variety of topics. It contained accounts of individual courtesans, the evolution of the courtesan figure, the changes the culture and art went through, and its modern descendants. The use of a portable speaker on which a Gauhar Jaan recording was played added a sonic dimension to the visuality of the exhibition. It is equally imperative to follow all copyright norms for citation and use for such endeavours. Hence all the visual material for the panels was carefully documented and cited and common property images were sourced. All ethnographic interviews and other sources were part of the panels.

As noted above in the Introduction, at each college where an exhibition was curated, the space allocated was different. It was for this reason that a fixed metal frame had been rejected. Each space had certain restrictions in size or layout. In some venues walls or protrusions, in others indoor spaces, passages, required continuous reconfigurations of display. A limited space would often result in the arrangement of the poles and stands in a circular pattern, rather than a straight axis. At Antardhwani 2015, the paucity of place required a doubling of the panels on the string (see picture 1). In indoor corridors, the exhibition was setup along an axis which allowed for unimpeded access to those passing through, while also allowing optimum viewing (Picture 2 ARSD) .At Gargi College the exhibition was displayed in the Auditorium portico, where it took a semicircular shape

(Picture 3). At Ambedkar University the outdoor place under trees necessitated the use of tree trunks to tie the strings (Picture 4 and 5).



Pictures 1-6 (Clockwise starting left top) Exhibits of the panels at different places

The basic premise of each exhibition was to begin at one end, allow close inspection of the panels, and walk towards the end of the exhibition where the bioscope was placed.

Acceptability Of Exhibitions As Pedagogical Tool

To assess the viability of exhibitions as a teaching tool, a survey questionnaire was circulated at the various venues where the exhibition was displayed. The questionnaire was designed in a manner which would not be intimidating for an undergraduate respondent. It had to be easily comprehensible and indicate whether students were open to the idea of exhibitions as a pedagogical tool. It was necessary to try and understand how difficult they would find replicating the project, what numbers they felt comfortable working in and replicating such work, as well as whether they were willing to accept such a tool as a complement to their work. Thus the survey was designed to assess these parameters. The sample survey questionnaire is attached as Annexure 1.

The first question “Have you read about or studied the courtesan of India before?” established the student’s familiarity with the subject. The second question “Do you believe after seeing the exhibition, that you have learnt something about courtesan culture?” helped us determine if the student learned anything from the exhibition displayed, and left with a positive

experience. The third question “How interesting and engaging did you find the exhibition today”? indicated student interest in the subject, while the fourth “ Would you be interested in seeing exhibitions on different topics on a regular basis”?, established future interest in the idea of exhibitions. The fifth question “Do you believe that putting on exhibitions might be more academically rewarding than compiling written reports as part of your semester project”? sought to establish the viability of exhibitions as pedagogical tools, especially in comparison to the current system of presenting only written projects. The sixth question “ How difficult do you believe it would be for groups of students to put on an exhibition on a chosen subject in their college for other students and teachers”? established the replicability of the project by students, while the seventh “ What do you think is the number of students required to create and hold an exhibition in college”? gave us an insight into student opinions on group sizes for such projects. Thus, the survey helped us determine the nature of student interest in the idea of exhibitions, as well as their opinion on the applicability and acceptability of exhibitions, and provided us an insight into the viability of exhibitions as a pedagogical tool. Students were polled after they viewed the exhibition of the authors, with a total of around 400 students polled, across the various colleges mentioned in our Introduction. However for purposes of illustration we decided on a sample size of 250 responses which are discussed below.

RESULTS

The results of the survey are given below in the form of Pie Charts, to better help illustrate the outcome of the result analysis.

The first question asked about the awareness of the subject showed that out of 250 respondents, 173 were not aware of the courtesan culture while 77 knew about the subject (Figure 1). This shows that topics not included in syllabi if researched through exhibitions can raise awareness and interest.

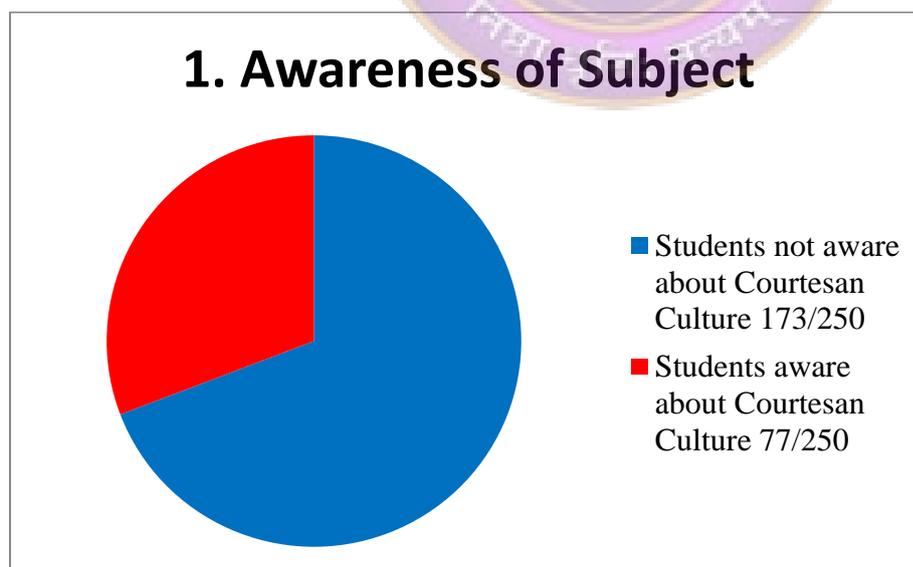


Figure1.

The respondent poll about gaining awareness showed that out of sample size of 250, as many as 238 had learnt something new while only 12 had not learnt anything (Figure 2).

2. Awareness Gained

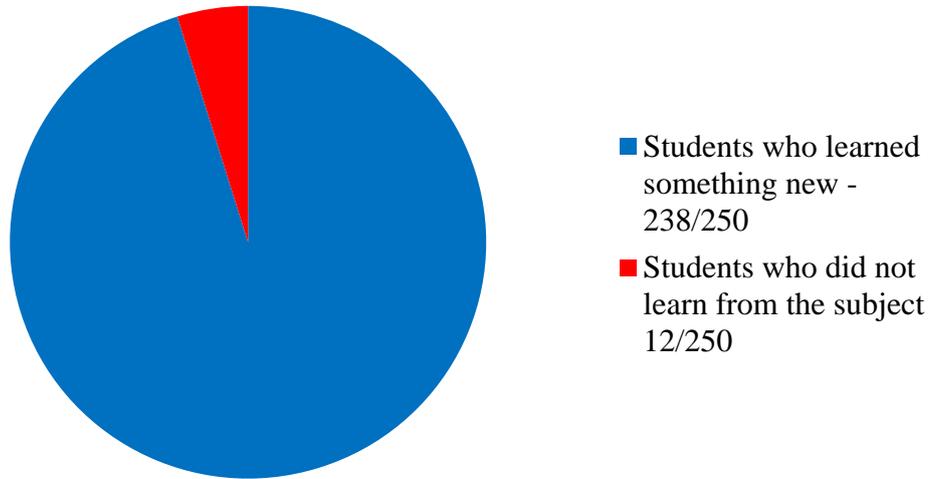


Figure 2.

The third question asking about student interest in Exhibition showed that about half of the respondents found it very interesting or somewhat interesting. Very few were not interested in the exhibition(Figure 3)

3. Student Interest in Exhibition

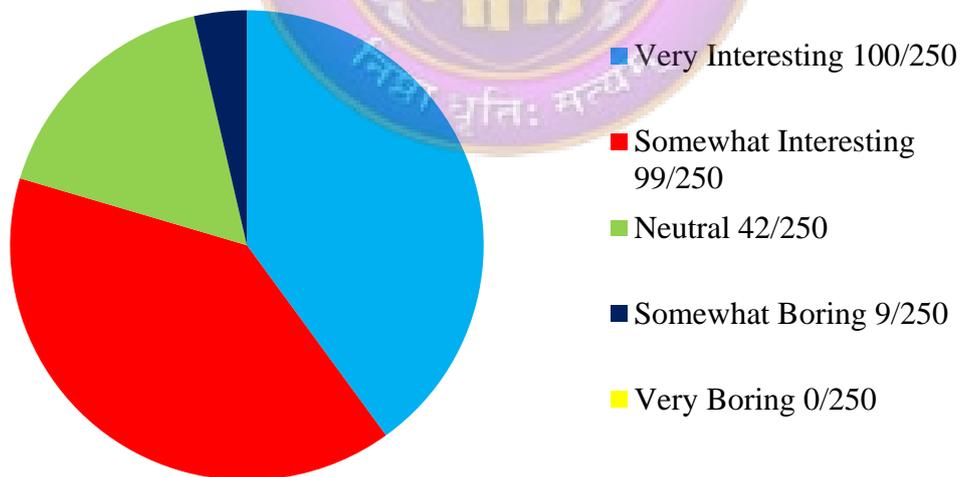


Figure 3.

On being asked about interest in future exhibitions our survey indicated that about half of the respondents were keen on seeing other exhibitions regularly while ten were not interested (See Figure 4).

4. Interest in Future Exhibitions

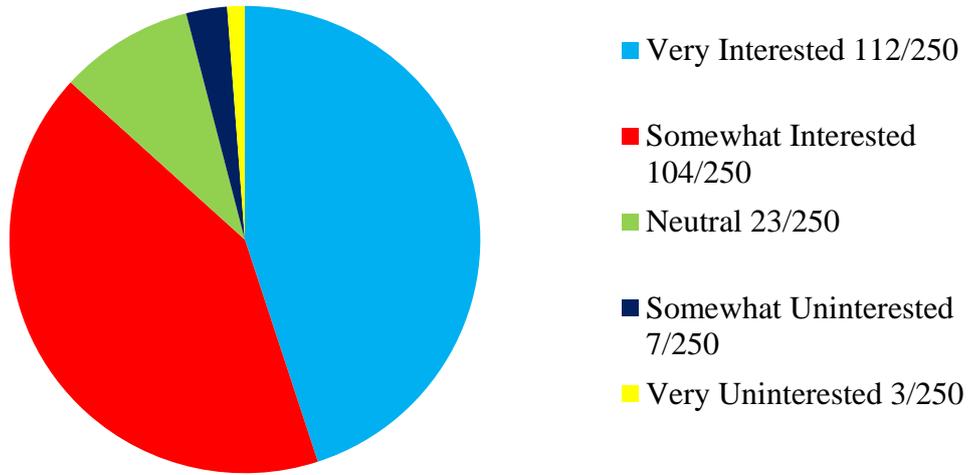


Figure 4

The majority of students were in favour of exhibitions over written reports for their projects (Figure 5).

5. Preference for Exhibitions over Report Writing

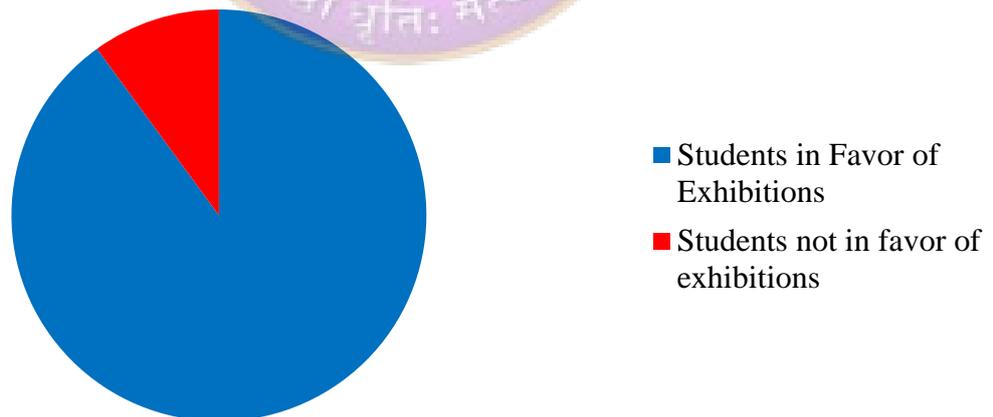


Figure 5

On being asked if the students would be interested in undertaking putting up exhibitions almost half of the respondents gave a positive response (Figure 6).

6. Replicability of Exhibitions

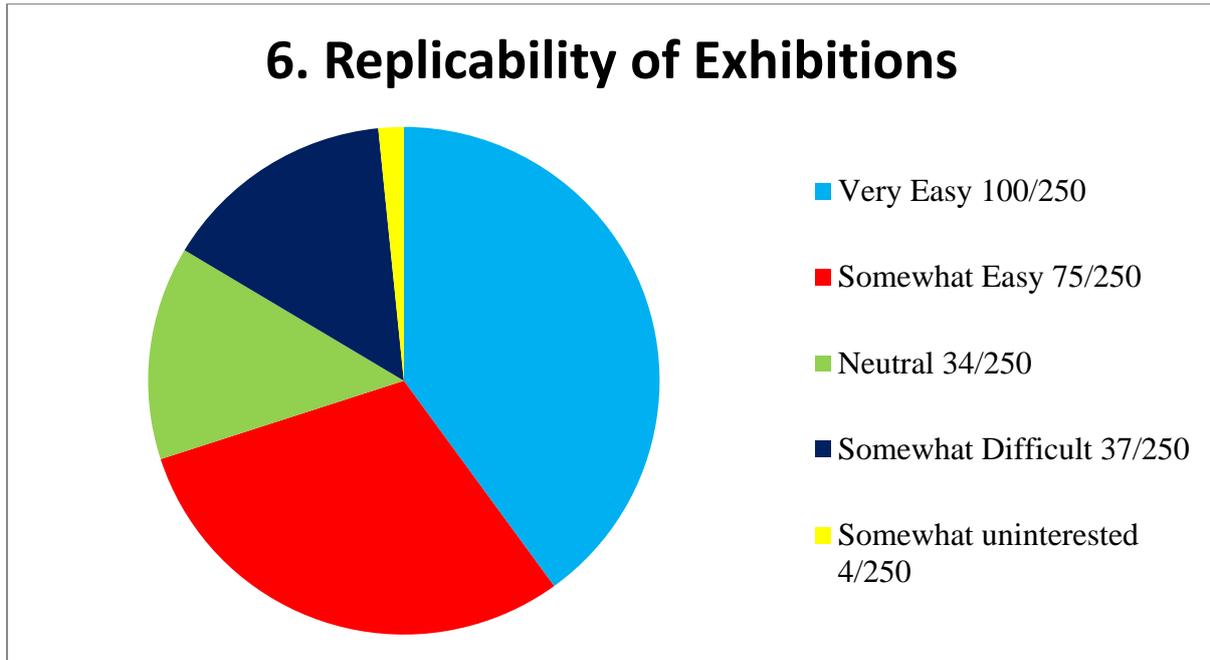


Figure 6.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As the data shown above establishes, the vast majority of students polled were in favour of exhibitions. The above data allows us to see that exhibitions are certainly effective as a pedagogical tool. Over 95% of the students polled felt that they had learned something from the exhibition. As the data also shows, over 80% of the students polled are in favour of more exhibitions, while over 70% are in favour of replicating exhibitions as a pedagogical tool. 90% of the students polled also noted that exhibitions would be preferable to the current system of submitting written project reports, as a form of learning. Data from the polling suggested that the optimum group for creating and curating an exhibition, was approximately between 10-25 students, although many students did feel that smaller groups creating an exhibition would also be viable.

It is thus the recommendation of the authors, that exhibitions be examined as an alternative to the current forms of concurrent pedagogical tools such as written projects. The authors believe that exhibitions would prove to be a successful complement to class room education, and would help broaden the horizon of students, as well as providing a more holistic and universal education experience for all the parties involved. As such, the authors are also of the belief that exhibitions would help not only as an educative tool for the students involved in the projects itself, but also far beyond the confines of the class or even the institution. Exhibitions can be used by colleges to help spread awareness about subjects beyond the classroom they are produced in and can be evolved as collaborations between colleges and institutions. As such, the works of students could help teach individuals far outside the base targeted by the current methods such as written projects. Colleges could curate exhibitions at Departmental and Institutional cultural fests. Exhibitions could be ported to various locations, and thus help spread awareness and education on the subject of the exhibition among people outside the college, such as students at other colleges or at public locations. The authors thus hope that institutional authorities would consider exploring the usage of exhibitions as a

teaching tool on a more intensive basis, and consider the implementation of exhibitions among the current undergraduate education systems prevalent in India.

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Annexure 1

Survey Questionnaire circulated among teachers/ Students at various sites:

DCAC

203

Innovation Scheme Survey

1. Have you read about or studied the Courtesans of India before?
 - Yes
 - No
2. Do you believe, after seeing the exhibition, that you have learned something about Courtesan Culture?
 - Yes
 - No
3. How interesting and engaging did you find the exhibition today?
 - 5 – Very Interesting
 - 4 – Somewhat Interesting
 - 3 – Neutral
 - 2 – Somewhat Boring
 - 1 – Very Boring
4. Would you be interested in seeing exhibitions on different topics on a regular basis?
 - 5 – Very Interested
 - 4 – Somewhat Interested
 - 3 – Neutral
 - 2 – Somewhat Uninterested
 - 1 – Not at all Interested
5. Do you believe that putting on exhibitions might be more academically rewarding than compiling written reports as part of your semester project?
 - Yes
 - No
6. How difficult do you believe it would be for groups of students to put on an exhibition on a chosen subject in their college for other students and teachers?
 - 5 – Very Easy
 - 4 – Somewhat Easy
 - 3 – Neutral
 - 2 – Somewhat Difficult
 - 1 – Very Difficult
7. What do you think is the number of students required to create and hold an exhibition in college

Personal Details

Course –

Year –

College –

Please Note: We are **not** going to share your information with third parties. Since we are not asking for private details, please don't fill up the survey multiple times