



Indian Sculpture after Post Independence: A brief Overview

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Abstract:

Indian sculpture has always a rich tradition but it got little touch of modernity when the British came to rule here. But after 1920, Indian sculpture got full freedom after the emergence of Ramakinkar and stepped the arena of modernity. He paved the way of experimentation in medium, concept and style techniques of execution which greatly attracts the future generation sculptors. Raamkinkarbrought a new age in Indian Sculpture and numbers of artists came forward by following his path. But here the study focuses the sculptural development in post- independence period, when 'machines' and 'tool' found a new place in industrial society. Then, artists and sculptors inclined themselves towards application of scientific techniques and industrial mediums. The study concentrates upon the monumental change is visible in Indian sculpture after the 1940's. But multifaceted variety and diversity in the personal thought process of Indian sculptors came to the notice of the critics after the 1960's through the so many young sculptors' master works in newer mediums and newer techniques. The study tried to discuss about the chronological development of that period.

Key Words: Sculpture, Experimentation. Modernism, Indianness, Academic Realism.

Introduction

Indian sculpture has witnessed a developed sculptural tradition since Indus Valley civilization. There may be certain irregularities but it has continued since the very time. But till 19th century, the sculpture practice was purely traditional. Only after the coming of British, Indian sculpture received certain modern outlook. But sculptures at that time were totally influenced by European academic realism. There was skill, dexterity, but no deep relation between common life and the sculptural practice.

After 1920, experiments related to subject and material came to a start. And in this way Indian sculpture got a new direction to continue. New material and technique were given much appreciation. And particularly the contribution made of Ramkinkar leads to the beginning of new era in sculpture. By accumulating the various movement of world art, he gave a new gift to the world of sculpture in India. Form concept, medium and applications let to the opening of unexplained region in art. By remaining independent from the flow of Bengal School, Ramkinkar created, and gave rise to certain thought processes that was very much his own. Holding the very hand of Indian sculptures, he led the way from traditional to modern. Though in spite of the strong academic background and skill of Debi Prasad Roy Choudhury, S. Pansare, V.P. Karmarkar, they could not free themselves from early traditional ideologies, in contrast Ramkinkar broke the very rules and principles of such earlier concepts. Merging, tradition with modernism, he introduced in Indian sculpture, a new language, and originality. With a mind free and undiluted, his philosophy and work led to birth of new generation of sculptures, like Prodosh Das Gupta, Dhanraj Bhagat, Sankho Choudhary, Amarnath Sehgal and Chintamonikar.

Indian Sculpture of Post-Independence:

Indian art world showed no ebb, rather than a new zeal in experimentation, during the post-independent period. The county freed from the British rule was heading towards a new phase of industrialization. India's economy was fast gaining an identity of its own. Its progress was slow, but steady. During those years of progress 'machines' and 'tool' found a new place in industrial society.



Even they were able to exert influence over the growth and development of an individual's character and personality. The same trend went down even to the grass root level. Emotive level, too, had to suffer its impact. The world of Indian art was no exception, artists and sculptors inclined themselves towards application of scientific techniques and industrial mediums. Indian arts became less emotive and more practical. Variety of technique and medium, diversity of skill and applied arts became the main tone of this new era. Over- experimentation brought in newer changes in the field of sculpture.

Sankho Choudhury and Adi Davierwalla were two promising names of this era. They were able to apply new techniques in the sphere of sculpture with their fusion of traditional medium and industrial medium; they could give birth to an abstract sculpture form. Wood, concrete, industrial casting (sand etc) along with direct welding and grinding were their mediums and they left no mediums untried while carrying on experimentation. Their influence inspired a number of young enthusiasts like Mahendra Pandya, Raghav Kaneria, Rajani Kant Panchal, Nagji Patel, Narayan Kulkarni, Ramesh Pateria and others. Sankho Choudhury was characteristically emotional and romantic for which even after over application of industrial mediums in his works, his works show a rare quality of creativity which is both poetic and rhythmic. His direct construction with wooden planks, stone slabs, metal sheets, wax sheets etc gave a new meaning of and dimension to Indian sculpture. The positive and negative space of his architecture reminds us of the formal variety of the cubist sculptor Archipenko. Some unusual poetical and rhythmic pattern and the superb division of line and space, however differentiate him from Archipenko (Ghosh : 1995).

Scientific realism gave rise to a new notion in the world of Indian art. Since then many a sculptor has been trying to update rational or mathematical or scientific harmonies and purely abstract forms. But, today's theoretical footing differs from theirs in that today many sculptors attempt at a fusion of pre-industrial and industrial techniques. Their works exposes emotional, but the expressions are controlled by realistic and national paradigms.

Adi Davierwalla (1922-75) since 1960 tempered his emotional reaction to objects with a logical and scientific attitude. His work is therefore a landmark in the history of Indian sculpture. The experiments with new ideas and media, led his sculpture in a new direction balancing intellectual sensibility and emotional vitality. He explored the intrinsic quality of an object or form for its own beauty and balance than for visual and tactile sensations. His experiments with aluminium, lead, magnet, plastic and glass produced unconventional forms which are visually strange but have a life and beauty of their own (Sheth ; 2006).

A monumental change is visible in Indian sculpture after the 1940's. But multifaceted variety and diversity in the personal thought process of Indian sculptors came to the notice of the critics after the 1960's. After the 1960's, the young sculptors exposed a trend to master newer mediums and newer techniques. Either in form, concept or in style, they showed an eagerness to embrace the new. Some, however, remained loyal to the canons laid down by Ramkinkar or Dhanraj Bhagat or Sankho Choudhury while others chose to create new forms and completely different images. They were emotive as well as entertaining. And rational realism, too, found its reflection in their works. Experience and sensitivity blended together, made their works a new heritage in the world of Indian Sculpture. Sculptors other than them were experimentalists and some were merely perfectionists. The former did experiments creating newer forms, ideas, pushing and producing the directions evolved along the way. Some sculptors of the latter category chose the perfectionists way of work and tried to achieve the essential of the totality or that of particular aspect.

Raghav Kaneria, a Baroda-based sculptor and an experimentalist of the early 1960s, emerged as a perfectionist in the 1970s. He achieved the finest form and image in a stylized direction using the findings of his experiments with industrial junks and industrial techniques. Though playful and



emotional in the beginning, he gradually rationalized, and achieved the finest form and expression. But in the 1980s Kaneria again emerged as experimentalist making images with earthen pots. His new attempt replaces his industrial junk and technique of the earlier works and the image developed from this experiment is inspired from ritual units or deities of village culture. Raghav Kaneria changed in the early 1960s from modelling and casting to assemblage and construction in industrial scrap. He worked using direct process like carving joining etc. and breaking up surfaces by chiselling, nailing and drilling. The results were vigorous and had a primitive scent of industrial culture.

Another important experimentalist PillooPochkhanawalla (1923) who concentrated in the middle of the 1970s on the conceptual representation of the rock-scape on sea beaches. By extensive use of the working process of industrial casting PillooPochkhanawalla shows a new direction in the field of sculpture. PillooPochkhanawalla's early sculptures revealed both her Indian heritage and the impression that Henry Moore's organically shaped reclining figures had made on her. Soon, the 'holes' in the works began to enlarge and the works became increasingly abstract. She began to use wax and plaster to achieve the swirling movements and gestures of abstract expressionist sculpture. Which during the 70's and 80's same abstract spontaneity was reflected in the works of David Smith Like many others of the period. She began incorporating junk and scrap material into her works of the later period, when exploration of space and texture became her overriding concern. She has worked with several media including welded steel, copper, ceramic, wood, lead, cement and marble chips, but aluminium alloy, especially cast aluminium remained her favorite.

She is perhaps the first person in India to represent rock-scape of sea beach, the age long subject of painting, in the medium of sculpture. The form and concept have evolved out of the welded sculptures in industrial steel scrap, which are with natural forms of stone. The constructed, assembled masses vibrate in natural space, and evoke the feeling of natural environment. She mixes different compositions of metal to bring colour to her sculpture. This colour is a natural outgrowth of her working process than a superficial imposition. She believes strongly that every step of the working process is an integral part of the whole concept and its realization (Vasudev :1980).

Another artist Mahendra Pandya who widely experimented with sculptural media that included new industrial mediums such as fiberglass, though he preferred marble and wood. This curiosity about the material and its possibilities intruded into his teaching as well. He exposed the fine grain of the marble and wood through his carving. Since sand stone has no such grain, he used textural surfaces ranging from the rough to the smooth to create a subtle interplay of Chiaroscuro. The works of the late 50s show a reliance on heavy solid masses.

He handled portraits in the manner of Rodin with impressionistic smudges and pinches of soft clay. His wood carvings of the early period show chisel marks roughly following the directions of the wood grain. He also did some assemblages in wood, mounting organic shapes with pegs in a strongly vertical or horizontal configuration. The angularity of planes distorts the mass of the figures; carved forms of animals, birds busts and heads of men, women and children are organized in a constructed frame that suggest a gate, door, window, lobby or balcony to represent the background of middle-class society of modern culture. (Sheth : 2006). But social upheavals and turmoil's along with social events was not a new subject for the contemporary sculptures. Already the pathfinder of modern sculpture Ramkinkar Baij, Dhanraj Bhagat, Amarnath Sehgal and Pradosh Das Gupta have lifted up social nuances in their art-work. The Indian poverty was considered a popular theme among the academic painters and sculptors. The bulk of their work was illustrative and somewhat romantic, but artists of the later period reflect this social variety through symbolism and /or critical analysis. The works of Meera Mukherjee, Somnath Hore and K. G. Subramanyan have followed a similar track. But their technical attainments have exposed new vistas of Indian sculpture.



Meera Mukherjee works in the indigenous method of bronze casting; the process incorporates modelling, stringing and rolling of wax on an image core, which is followed by covering it by a clay mould, baking and pouring of molten metal. The technique is based on her study of the process involved in the traditional Dhokra and other indigenous castings. Her works represent the moods of men and women in contemporary society in their various social and economic environments, often narrative style, but as a kind of folk and tribal art. These demonstrate a creative freedom of the sculptor that she abounds in. Her *Ashoka* (1972), standing about 11feet high in bronze is a symbolic representation of the violent energy of youth at the crossroads. It is an imaginary statue of king Ashoka in his mental dilemma after the Kalinga war, with avowed reference to the choices left to the youth during the time of the popular unrest of 1970's in Bengal. She has distorted the figure expressionistically to show the passage from violent to the peaceful, from the grotesque to the sublime (Ghosh : 1995).

Somnath Hore, already a well-known graphic artist of the country had been working since the early 1970's in the medium of sculpture in both relief and round, cast in paper pulp or in bronze. Somnath arrived at these bronze cast objects in the round in the process of his search for giving to simple physical wound a larger symbolic role and endowing the image of physical wound with a tactile quality which would make it more real than an image. The wounds in the sculptures unlike that in the pulp-prints, have no separate identity, other than those to be perceived in the images of the wounded. In the image of human beings, asses, goats etc. they are identifiable only as lonely and hapless victims of wounds, cruelly inflicted on them causing to them agonizing physical suffering.

Somnath, does not have to resort to familiar anthropomorphic devices to make the sufferings of the animals touch human heart, since the intensity of physical pain suffered by a wounded lowly animal and the god's dearest being are roughly of the same order and in this respect to him, their places are interchangeable. The metal sculptures of Somnath are examples per excellence of perfect interpenetration of techniques of making and the language of expression; of idiom of expression and the conceptual content. The images indeed represent a convergence of the structural elements of metal sculpture making, of the human and animal figures and of the concept. The armatures, air vents and the escape pipes of the molten metal are arranged in such a manner as they form the skeletal structures of the figures with bones, veins and all that. The sheets of the thin metal over the torso and the head of a figure are, at the same time, like a skin covering the bones with no flesh intervening and a bandage covering the wounds. The ends of the metal sheets join in such a manner as it suggests a slashed open skin or skins with marks of surgical operation or skins showing bones. Covering actual human suffering and human conflicts, Somnath's metal sculpture gave a new dimension to the modern Indian sculpture.

Another important sculptor of modern Indian sculpture is Janakiram. A student of D. P. Roy Choudhury has developed an individual style in working with metal sheet, synthesizing repose and welding techniques. His style and working process has influences many young sculptors in the South, especially his students. Though Dhanraj Bhagat, had worked with metal sheet and used the repose technique in his late phase of work, his methods were more traditional and orthodox. Whereas Bhagat's sculptures dealt with mystical concepts, Janakiram's sculptures are bold apparition of anthropomorphic figuration that achieves the character of icons. Their presentation bears the look of deities or incarnations with their details and signification. Through their elaborately crafted frontality, Janakiram lends apparent indigenous character to his sculptures. However, these details are not primary to the essential grasp of volume, and thus, to the intrinsic law of sculpture. His technical handling of the material and details, nevertheless reveal his meticulous craftsmanship. Janakiram's sculptures although possessing a strong indigenous flavour, tend to be rather ornate in form than clarifying their identity in a contemporary sense (Mago :2001)



Today Indian sculpture has got an identity as modern. Moreover, many other sculptors have contributed a lot to the vast arena of Indian sculpture. Ved Nayar, Sarbari Roy Choudhury, Mrinalini Mukherjee, Ratnabali Kant, Kanai Kunhiraman are just a few names among a host of innumerable sculptors who have been trying to give Indian sculpture a new identity in the international world of art through their ingenuity and innovativeness. Indian sculpture has till then found no space to pause for a while in this whirlpool of creativity. The success of Ramkinkar and Dhanraj Bhagat are keen on experimentation researches on form space and medium are continually going on. These are giving a real boost to the schools of sculpture. Indian sculpture world is now really enriched. Perhaps future years will pave wider roads for its popularity and success.

Conclusion:

A rich tradition of Indian sculpture can be seen from the period of the Indus Civilization. But great Ramkinkar showed the way of freedom of sculpture from tradition. He created the first environmental sculptures in the country, created abstract sculptures, and opened up new avenues of experimentation. In a word Ramkinkar's contribution to Indian sculpture is beyond comparison. But following his path Indian sculpture got a new momentum in the period of post-Independence.

After independence, the issue of industrialization becomes a pressing subject matter. And naturally, industrial tools, instruments, machinery and scientific applications become the urgent need of life and society; this also influenced the art world. The artist also began to get interested to the use of scientific methods and industrial tools. After 1940, there were certain changes in Indian sculpture. New path, new medium, were given much stress for new innovation and creativity by the Indian sculptors. After 1960, multiple aspects of content, material and medium could be seen in the art scenario. Many young sculptors came in the forefront with renewed skill and talent. They succeeded in presenting to the world of Indian Art, new contemporary works. As an experimentalist PillooPoonchkanwala, Mahendra Pandya, SomenathHore, P. V. Janakiram, Meera Mukherjee through their, experiment, research, and exploration led Indian sculpture, to a new direction and pace, and the flavor of Indianness was experienced.

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