

Public Art in India

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INTRODUCTION:

The terms 'Public Art' are relatively current neologies with the art lexicon, although the practices have always been existent in some form or the other. Now, like in other art practice, recognizing, categorizing and naming the concepts attached to implementations are responsible for identifying the art works as public or site specific. Hypothetically, the term 'Public Art' refers to works of art in any media that has been designed and executed with the specific intention of being sited or represented within the physical public domain, normally exterior space, accessible to all.

The tradition of making sculpture in India was influenced by the British academic realistic style and Technique and these forms was accepted and adopted by the Indian sculptor in the pre and post independent period. Earlier it has been discussed that sculptor Devi Prasad Roy Chowdhury was famous for his academic caliber he got. His education in art in British Academic Style so the academic realistic approach in making statues was initially introduced by British through art school and their creation of British personalities.

Historical Background:

The notion of public sculpture for British was basically to put up certain important personalities like Generals, Lieutenants, and Governors etc. As the head of the 'State' it is a tradition that was continued from the Roman tradition of erecting the statues of high as a part of power and strength, which still noticed in the city side of India. While Kala Bhavana established by Rabindranath Tagore in Santiniketan, in 1922 played a revolutionary role in initiating the modernism in Indian art. The school was independent from the Nationalist Bengal School and Colonial Art Education; the Students and artists were provided full freedom to art practices. Kala Bhavana encouraged liberation of art from the colonialization of art. 1935 Ramkinkar Baij sculpted 'Sujata' in front of Black House in Kala Bhavana. It may be the first sculpture in the pre-independent India, which is not a monument or statue commissioned by any authority. It is an image of a common girl and is site specific and environmental in nature. Santhal Family, Mill Call and Harvester are also environmental sculpture. The Santhal family and the Mill Call both are sculpted addressing the public of the nearby road that goes to the Santhal village.

In contrast to Kala Bhavana the practices of public and in India were mainly based on the National Heroes, Freedom Fighter, Religious Saints and colonial rulers in the name of social reformer.

Some example: Pandit Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar (1899), Roy Krishnadas Pal Bahadur (1894), Vidyasagar was a universal respected person in Bengal for attempt to promote literacy and education in Bengal. He was also a social reformer and his statues were erected in Sanskriti

College and in College square in Calcutta. Krishnadas pal was a renowned journalist, elocutionist and a statesman of the 19th century. This statue stands at the junction of College Street and Mahatma Gandhi road in Calcutta. Another statue that was of Sir Ashutosh Mukhopaddhay (1934), it was done by Debi Prasad Roy. It was erected at the junction of Chowringhee avenue Calcutta.

Periods:

The period of modernization of India is coeval with two hundred years of colonial rule. Thus, the History of British colonialism is a part of the history of Indian modernism, too. The growing forces of modernism were what combated British imperialism in India.

In this period Ramkinkar Baij sculpted Sujata (1935) in front of Kalabhavan it may be one of the first outdoor Sculpture in India.

The Santhal family is very unique Sculpture. It is most successful Sculpture (1938) the Sculpture was made in 1938 when India was still a Colony.

Ramkinkar's 'Yaksha and Yakshi' Sculpture in front of the Reserve Bank of India has been contextualized contradictory social characters through money, community, poverty and showed the opposition of classes.

This period so-called modernization of Indian art brought some new ideas in visual practices such as, national awaking, freedom fighting for motherland and these ideas are delicately imposed by the hegemony of the colonial rulers. The idea of the colonial rulers are mainly occupied the urban space of Indian culture. Primarily in Bombay, Madras, and Calcutta artists are tried to expose their sculptural art in a Victorian domain with high quality of naturalism, which they learned and borrowed from the British made art school. The works of D.P.Roy Chowdhury can be referred in this context.

Some example of D.P.Roy Chowdhury's sculpture:

One of his first multiple-figure reliefs completed in the 1930s was on theme of social justice, the Travancore Temple Early Proclamation, which celebrated the admission of the untouchables into the Hindu caste temples in South India. In Travancore Temple Entry Proclamation, he highlighted the expression of fear and hope in the untouchable, depicting the oppressed as physical faces and hollow bodies, their degradation presented in an expressionist manner. In 'Dignity of Labour', he portrayed the extreme physical effort of trying to loosen a massive, immovable boulder. After independence in 1947, grandiose conception and social commitment were found to be appropriate for memorializing Indies anti-colonial struggle. His interpretations of national allegories-the Martyr's Memorial, Triumph of labour and his over-life-size statues of Gandhi –are a common sight in India a version of the Dignity of Labour stands in front of the international labour organization offices in Geneva. The artist was working on a colossal version of the Martyr's Memorial, which was the largest group composition in the world.

Hence, the Public Sculptures of India was started of the period of colonial domain and characterized by the high influence of Victorian art.

Changing Role of Public Art:

Since 1950s modern artists have been taking art outside the gallery and museum. The term 'public art' evolved in 1960s was exhibiting non-representative, no-utilitarian and primary geometrical readymade objects and spaces. Emphasis was given on the dialogue delivered by industry-made materials and surfaces, minimizing the role of artistic craftsmanship and artist's privacy, ownership and identity as creator. Art became independent of its creator and appeared as real object. The Earth art could be seen as an extension of the minimalism, where minimalism confronted the gallery space, the earth art denied gallery space and beyond the gallery had confronted the land itself. The emphasis shifts here from object to the space. Here the space is the work of art. Earth art is site-specific but not always an art in public sphere or public art. Most of the earth works were done in remote lands away from the land of human civilization. Public was only the audience. The audience had to follow the given conditions to view the work (by helicopter, from a distance) due to their huge unpredictable size, scale and space they covers. These works had a narrative approach that the artists invite the public to see their huge amazing art works done in earth. Here the artist had to negotiate with the Government to do the work.

Now the question come to my mind that is every work of art exhibited outside the gallery and museum a public art? Sculptor Scoot Burton wrote, "*public art has descended form, but must not be confused with large scale outdoor sculpture.*" John Beardsley emphasized an interpretation of public art that addresses societal concerns: "*art in public places must be different from public art.*"

In 1960, in Museum of Modern Art, Jean Tinguely exhibited 'Homage to New York', which was a self-destroying machine sculpture. Since then sculptors were trying to make art that is transitory, temporary, momentary invisible, immaterial or remote sculpture. The public artist too was seeking for alternative language, in this changing nature of art.

In 1986, in Germany, the twelve meter high 'Harburg Monument against Fascism' invited the public to write their name on it. There were inscriptions in German, French, Russian, Hebrew, Arabic, Turkish and English near its base; that reads- "We invite the citizens of Harburg and visitors to the town, to add their names here to ours. In doing so, we commit ourselves to remain vigilant. As more and more names cover this 12 meter tall lead column, it will gradually be lowered into the ground. One day, it will have disappeared completely and the site of the Harburg monument against fascism will be empty. In the end, it is only we ourselves who can rise up against injustice." The public responded to the invitation. Public added their graffiti, names on it and gradually it was lowered down. The more actively and faster, the public participated, the sooner it was losing its height. And one day it completely vanished underground leaving only the memory to the visitors. It was countering the conventional notions of public monument. It was a transitory, performing monument.

Michael North quoted, "Changing the nature of art meant changing the role of the audience as well, questioning the purely contemplative role the observer plays in the conventional setting of the museum and gallery." He added, "As the aesthetic focus shifts from object to the experience it provokes, the relationship of the two goes beyond mere implication: the public becomes the sculpture." Richard Serra quoted, "the viewer becomes the subject."

In 1982 in Documenta 7 in Kassel, Joseph Beuys initiated a project '7000 Okas'. It consisted of seven thousand large basalt stones arranged in a triangular pile pointing to a single oak tree. With exchange of one oak tree for each stone, he let the pile for sell. Individuals and organizations responded to him. The intention was to replant the Kassel. Dramatically the pile disappeared stone by stone and in that places a new pile of oak plants gradually emerging. Here the emphasis shifts to the process through what the activity goes on. The process continued till 1987.

Beuys called his work as, "Social sculpture" or "Social architecture". Because individuals were taking place of each single stone or participating to replace each stone with an oak tree. The position of the public shifts from audience to sculpture or object of art. Beuys here provided a condition through what the process of the work of art will go on. The emphasis was also on functionally of the art project. Here there is no space for the conventional artistic craftsmanship.

Let's take another example of Siah Armajani's project 'Sacco and Vanzetti Reading Room #2' in 1987/88. He created a reading room by installing benches within the sculptural space. He wrote, "My intention is to build open, available, useful, common, public gathering places. Gathering places which are neighborly. They are no conceived in terms of wood or steel but in terms of their nature as places at hand ready to be used." Here he wanted to build a functional public gathering space where the experience for the space became the aesthetic of the art. The participated public became sculpture not the objects installed. The work tried to enclose a community within the space provided by the artist.

Since 1970s, new alternative approaches to public art were initiated by public agencies and institutions in United States and Europe. A new kind of public art founded – one that directly engages people of different communities who do not belong to the art and artist community, with the sociopolitical issues related to these people. The public art adopted some new alternative approaches initiation art projects in public interest and art projects in public domain. These new alternative approaches were: Artist working with nonartists; issue oriented community art projects; using the commercial spaces; using the medial etc.

These projects were sponsored and funded by programs like CETA Artist project (Comprehensive Employment and Training Act); organizations like FCA (Foundation for the Community of Artists), CCF (Cultural Council Foundation) and issue oriented group like the Art Workers Coalition. These public art projects are issue based, contextual and art in public domain. They are performative, activity based, process based and transitory. Most of the time this alternative public art practices in public domain has a conceptual existence rather than the material existence. These art activities exist in the photographic and video documentations which are granted as bi-products of the activities. Art in public domain is directly dealing with the real space Public art also adopted Medias like radio, TV, Internet in its alternative approaches to the public space.

In 1932, Bertolt Brecht wrote, "radio would be the most magnificent system of communication in public life." In 1977 the Australian sound artist Bill Fontana, called for all the radio listeners of Australia to record the sounds of their everyday life and environment and to transmit them live by telephone to the radio station. Fontana mixed these collected sounds recorded by the public and played in radio. It was a collective and collaborative process of art what was functioned through the participation of public. Here public becomes the work of art. Since 1986, some groups were seeking for alternatives to public art. Such as Minus Delta t, Van Gogh TV,

PONTON, Fernseh-und Radiosender. These groups have been experimenting with multi-media communication systems to intervene the public space by applying some conditions for interaction. Internet provided a virtual public space. This is a space which belongs to the public domain. Using this domain, art and artist are interacting with the public. Artists have been creating sites as work of art. This artist virtual but accessible to interact. Knowingly or unknowingly, the public participates in this virtual space of art.

One of the popular public commission in India is as: kerala-born Subramayan perhaps the best-known products of Santiniketan, he become a brilliant theoretician, essayist and craftsman. One of his numerous public commissions, and most remarkable is the monumental terracotta mural (1962-1963) for a theatre in Lucknow named after Tagore. A mammoth undertaking, it involved 13000 individual pieces of fired clay which were assembled into nine-feet (2.7 meter) high and eighty-one-feet (24.7 meter) long spectacle on an exterior wall.

Another project was 'Renewed Intensity' it was organised by Lalit Kala Akademi Regional centre, Bhubaneswar. It is public and a site specific art project by ten young artists was held between 20th and 27th january 2010. The project was supported by Sanskriti Gallery, Lalit Kala Akademi Regional centre, Bhubaneswar and the Foundation for Indian Contemporary Art (FICA) New Delhi. 'Renewed Intensity' was speculative in approach towards the changing time, culture, urban attitude and their intermingling within the urbanized space.

The seven day long schedule included the workshop public interaction, slide presentation by participating artists and the preview.

The project 'Renewed Intensity' held in a place like Bhubaneswar.

The project aimed at exploring the possibilities of varied aesthetic influences and expressions based on interactions, performances and installation that can potentially shape a new language. These artistic bactions made during the workshop were attempt to understand mutual equations between nature, culture, city, politics, existences, effacements, fictional text, real facts and vital inner life.

In India also some residencies and artist initiatives are khoj public. Art Ecology and other community based project; Jaaga's graffiti project in many parts of Bangalore and 'Urban Avant Grade'

In recent time (Bruhat Bangalore Mahanagar Palika) took upon the task of painting a large part of Bangalore's public. two years ago a cement conglomerate based in Hyderabad came forward to sponsor sculptures in six traffic junctions and BBMP sportingly accepted the offer and in early 2012 the sculpture were unveiled with much hoople. In British Cantonment areas towards the railway station, in between a matrix of traffic signals a number of cement animals are installed. Another work are a abstract geometrical structure near Chalukya Circle, four horse it is made in cement at Race Course Circle. Another vibrant work at Mekhri Circle, a cement tree circled by a human chain of life size cement children.

ART+PUBLIC interrogating everyday at Guwahati was an experiment set within the public space in Guwahati a week-long public art workshop held between 24th -30th march 2010 jointly initiative by Lalit Kala Akademi Delhi and Periferry Guwahati.

This workshop was one such attempt to bring together the local artist and (who seem to be making an effort to engage with the concept of ‘global’ in art) with artists outside the region (who too are addressing the concept of ‘global’ in art), all of whom are making an effort to engage with the concept of ‘global’ in art.

It was a huge barge floating on the river Brahmaputra, an immense potentiality for public intervention and participation, where along with the artist, tourist, labourers, boatmen and fishermen too become a part of their project and event.

More recent time in Guwahati February, 2012 initiative by Kankhowa and Black Rice named as “Regional Art, Performance, and Events (RAPE), 2012”, which comprised of public art, installation and performance. These events explored several public and private places across the city. These were the multiple discipliners’ event of visual art and performance art platform.

CONCLUSION:

As early as the pre-historic times, sculpture started playing an important role in magico-religious practice. The psychological need for a sculpture in the religious practices has permeated down the present days explaining the statues of deities of different religious being part of their worship. Different civilization used Sculpture for different purposes. Egyptian adopted sculpture, as part of funerary beliefs. Example of stiff sculpture of Menaure and his wife, Queen Khamernerneby II, from Giza 2515 BCE, is part of funerary representation. Over a period of time sculpture has been used as part of city-scape. It was no more restricted to the realms of aristocracy but become a part of public domain. The sculptures also carry the symbolic meaning one of the example are: Auguste Rodin (1840-1917) brought a major event of english siege of calais, 1347, into the public space. In India, sculpture has play important role, as a example the stambha outside the Temple have been having, on its top, the sculpture of a deity, for and beyond. Sculptural architecture has played an important role in India, such as: Jantar Manta, New Delhi, built in 1724.

While speaking of these public sculptures we often speak in terms of its artistic identity i.e. we always look at it and recognize merely as a piece of art only. We find to undermine its importance in our day to day social, cultural and political life. The presence of these pieces of art in any society holds a cultural recognition of that particular society. These are like the index or contents of a book that are sufficient enough to explain the entire subject matter. These public sculptures have become a part and partial of our day to day life. This not only gives an artistic identity to the society but also provides a platform for cultural, moral, ethical and spiritual values. The establishment of these public sculptures itself is like giving a recognition to the society’s morals values, codes and ethics in conformity to those which are considered as universally accepted as true and correct. These public sculptures also provide a religious identity of the society and thus explain the religious characteristic of a society.

Basically while installing any public sculpture, the place plays a very significant role in its utility. Specially open space like market, three way road, four way road, official buildings, sports ground, parks etc. are used for the purpose of installing these public sculpture. It is done so because these spaces capture the attention of the viewer at a large scale. Also while entering into

any community or town the presence of such public sculpture provides a cultural identity to the particular community or town.

Another importance behind the establishment of such public sculpture of the national icons provides a platform for the moral and cultural development and value addition to the children and especially to the youth, because the children lack the interest of reading or studying about these great persons. But these public sculptures ignite and arise in them the interest to know and learn about those persons and their contribution to the society.

These public sculptures also acts as a strong binding force to the society. The statues of the national heroes and that of the social thinkers always portrays to the society about their sacrifice and contribution to the society and thus, this acts as a source of inspiration to the society to become united and act collectively for the promotion of healthy and peaceful existence.

In the modern times, sculptor Ramkinkar Baij brought the condition of Santhal tribe to the public eye with his sculpture "Santhal Family", 1938. It depicts a group migrating from its roots in search of work. The condition of migrant labour is very sensitively portrayed by Ramkinkar. Famous Dandi March by Mahatma Gandhi in 1931, against the British rule for imposing salt tax, is rendered with great understanding by Debi Prasad Roy Choudhary. The sculpture is located outside the President house on the T-junction of road that comes from S.P.Marg in Delhi.

In recent time, Anish Kapoor (b-1954), an Indian born British artist, has built a public sculpture of "Cloud Gate" that is erected in 2004-2006, the sculpture is made of stainless steel. And is a great public attraction of Millenium Park, Chicago, Illinois, United States.

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