

20st Century's Women Sculptors in Modern India

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Abstract

This research paper is based on the 20st Century women sculptor in modern India. The objective of the research is to document and study the works of women sculptors in early 20th century in India. Understand the underlying structure of Modernism, the idea of modernism as a colonial trope and the counter colonial Interpretation of modernism. Modernism became a contested domain and the Centre of this discourse was woman. Hence there is an attempt to present a genderized art historical intervention which tries to rethink the ideas of art and Aesthetics of this period. There are significant documentations of early 20th cent. Women sculptors but there is an absence of such endeavour in art historical art work. Thus this effort aims to place them not as a tokenist presence but as an Intervention that will bring a rupture in the linear narrative of early twentieth Century art and their interpretations.

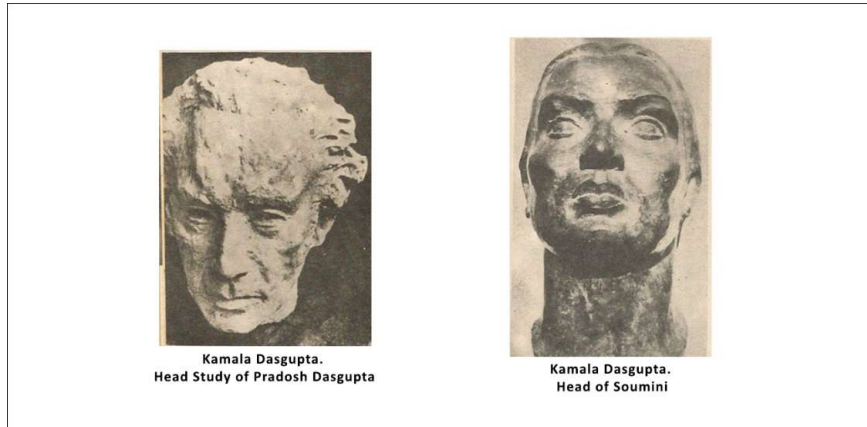
Introduction

Representation of women in modern and modernist Indian sculpture is very limited. Women who came to the field of artistic creativity mostly preferred painting. Sculpture is a laborious art-form that requires physical strength and enough time and money for execution, which is difficult for women artists to cope with mainly due to her familial responsibilities. So before 21st century women artists hesitated to come to creative sculpture. In 21st century girls have, however, coped with the problems and preferred sculpture and installation to express their socio-temporal commitment. In this research paper will not go into the details of their creativity, as many of them are still in the formative stage. Our venture is to highlight the creativity of the women sculptors, who came to the field from 1940-s to 1970-s, who were born between 1920-s and 1950-s. There we will find a few of the great sculptors, who made very important and original contribution in the development modern and modernist Indian sculptures. Gradually we will come to their creative modes.

Woman Sculptor of Modern India

Kamala Dasgupta

Who was the first woman sculptor in modern India? The matter is controversial. But we may consider the name of **Kamala Dasgupta**. She was the wife of the famous sculptor Pradosh Dasgupta. Before marriage her name was T.C. Kamala. Her father Dr. Paduval was a renowned civil surgeon of Kochin state. He could paint also. Kamala came to learn art at Madras Art School under Debiprasad Roychowdhury, who was the principal there. She joined the school in July of 1934 six months after Pradosh Dasgupta. There she was one year junior to Pradosh. Pradosh Dasgupta was born in 1912. So Kamala's year of birth may be taken as 1913, though we are not sure about it. They married in 1940. Kamala was a member of Calcutta Group (1943-1953). But her sculptural creations were limited within portrait sculpture only. Pradosh Dasgupta writes about her in his book: *Smrirkatha Shilpakatha – Calcutta Group* : 'Kamala had shown her skill in portrait sculpture. Her works had been awarded in many all India exhibitions. But it is true that she had worked in a very limited space, as did the famous French sculptor Despiau (1874-1946)'. After this Dasgupta has spoken about the condition of woman sculptor in our country. He writes: 'The number of women sculptor in our country is very minimum. Kamala is the senior most among them. Girls of our country like more to paint. Acquiring skill in sculpture requires much of physical labor, which our girls cannot stand due to two reasons. Firstly, they do not have that much physical strength. Secondly, where is their time? All their times are bound to their household activities. In case of Kamala also I have seen such obstacles.' Here we can present two images of Kamala's head study. One is of Pradosh Dasgupta. Other, the face of a girl named Soumini. These two works prove her skill and sensitivity.



Leela Mukherjee

Wife of celebrated painter of Shantiniketan Binodbehari Mukherjee (1904-1980) practiced sculpture. She was trained in Kala Bhavan, Shantiniketan under Nandalal Basu from 1942 to 48. When her husband Binodbehari moved to Kathmandu in 1949, Leela went with him and learnt the art of wood and stone carving under his friend, the eminent Nepali artisan Kulasundar Shilakarmi She made one man show in Delhi 1957, 58, 70 and 77, at Calcutta 1958, Bombay 1976. She was art teacher in Welham Preparatory School at Dehradun for 23 years. As a sculptor she was also not much remembered in public memory. We may see one a few of her sculptures.



Leela Mukherjee. Wood



Leela Mukherjee. Wood



Leela Mukherjee. Wood

Reba Hore

Another important woman artist of 1940-s was Reba Hore (1926-2009). She was mainly a painter and worked in a very personal expressionist style with a social commitment.

She occasionally did sculpture in terracotta also out of pleasure. The subject of her sculptures was mainly human faces primitivist in expression with a rough and rugged texture. Out of this darkened expression the artist used to bring out an enlightened vision. Among the other women sculptors of forties there were Usha Rani (1923) of Jaipur, Savi Prakash (1924) of Delhi, Aruna Vinayak Purohit (1926) of Mumbai and Sudha Arora (1926) of Lucknow / De¹¹:



Reba Hore. Terracotta



Reba Hore. Terracotta



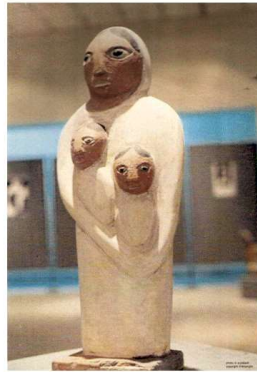
Reba Hore. Terracotta

Navera Ahmed

Among the sculptors of 1960-s we like to mention the name of Navera Ahmed (1930-2015), though after independence she did not belong to India. She is the first and celebrated woman sculptor of Bangladesh. She was born in Calcutta in 1930. His father Said Ahmed was in Calcutta in connection with his service. Navera's school education started here. She passed Matriculation from Loreto School. After independence her father was transferred to Coomilla of Bangladesh. Her college education was in Coomilla and Chattagram. In 1950 she went to London. Her education in sculpture was in London, Italy and Paris. From 1956 to 1961 she was in her country, then East Pakistan. In 1961 she went again to Europe and remained there for the rest of her life. The sculptural works that she did during her stay at home and the works of rest of her life show how Navera assimilated her indigenous popular forms with Western modernist expressions. We mention her as an important woman sculptor of this subcontinent. Let us see some of her sculptures.



Navera Ahmed. Paribar



Navera Ahmed. Maa o Shishu



Navera Ahmed. Exciting Angel.
Cement. 1960

Uma Siddhanta

She a very important woman sculptor of 1960's from Kolkata. She was admitted to the sculpture department of Government College of Arts, Calcutta in 1951 and got Pradosh Dasgupta as her teacher. There was a very good relation between the teacher and his students of sculpture in Govt Art College even after he departed from the college till the end of the life of Dasgupta. Some of the sculptures of Uma Siddhanta of 1950's showed some influence of her teacher. She came to her original form from after 1960. She worked in various styles and expressions, primitivist, expressionist and classisistic. In the core of her expressions always there is rebellious social criticism. Let us see some of her sculptures. She has experimented with various forms, both Western and indigenous. She tried with paintings also. Her water colors on bettle-nut burk are very innovative experimentation. Example of one such painting is presented here.

Conclusion

This research attempts to bring in the discourse of gender through documentation of women sculptors of early 20th century India, the aim being not writing them back to the canons of art history but to bring in the understanding of the construal of women in the art practices ,it is not to essentialize and neither to erase the existence of women in art practices but to understand the spaces in-between and re-interpret the art historiography of the 'Swadeshi Art movement 'with the aspiration to contribute to the feminist art historical interventions in Indian art.

Reference

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