



## Scarcity of Conventional Sculptural Mediums in North Eastern States: Some Issues and Possibilities

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### Abstract

*India has always a rich sculptural tradition. Artist of all the period are very familiar to handle the conventional sculptural mediums. Indian sculpture got little touch of modernity after coming of British. But it got total freedom only due to the emergence of Ramkinkar Baij in the first part of 20<sup>th</sup> century. He paved the way of experimentation in the field of Indian sculpture. He was the Pathfinder of a new and unexplored horizon through his experiments with form, concept, medium and working process. But mainly scarcity of medium drove Ramkinkar to explore new sculptural mediums. Sometimes scarcity can open up a way of new possibilities. In the field of sculpture North-Eastern states are also in a same situation. Due to poor communication and connectivity North –East is little bit detached from the mainstream art and conventional sculptural mediums like bronze, stone etc are also not available here. But scarcity is the mother of invention. Due to this scarcity of conventional mediums North –Eastern artists have acquired an unparallel skill to handle the mediums like wood, terracotta and some other local materials which are available in naturally resourceful North- East zone. Number of artists are practicing and attaining national –International attention. So, scarcity of conventional sculptural materials can be considered not as an obstacle it has now created some spaces of possibilities for the North- East sculpture.*

**Key Words:** Sculpture, conventional medium, experimentation, scarcity, possibilities.

### Introduction:

Sculpture is a three-dimensional form art and India has always a rich sculptural tradition. It can be traced back from Indus Valley civilization. That time people were very much skilled to handle like bronze, stone, terracotta etc conventional sculptural mediums. *Dancing Girl, Male torso, Priest Head*, various seals are bearing the evidences of their artistic excellence. But till 19<sup>th</sup> century Indian sculpture was purely traditional and conceptual. It got little touch of modernity after the coming of British. At that time there were highly skillful sculptors like Debi Prasad Roychoudhury and his teacher Hiranmay Roy Choudhury, V P Karmarkar, G K Mahtre but their works were highly influenced and dominated by the British Academic Realism. Indian Sculpture got freedom only due to the emergence of Ramkinkar Baij who is considered as the father of modern sculpture of India. Only through the works of Ramkinkar, Indian sculpture got not only the taste of freedom and stepped up to the arena of modernity because he went against all the traditional norms of Indian art and made his personal way of destination.

### Necessity is the mother of invention:

Here one thing needs to mention that scarcity of material ultimately forced Ramkinkar to invent a new medium, apply new technique which was fit for his own expression. At that time no facility and no conventional materials like bronze, stone, fibre glass were available in Shantiniketan to do sculpture. But scarcity of material could not suffocate Ramkinkar's creative zeal. He took stone chips which were available



at Khoai, near Shantiniketan and mixed it with cement and applied directly upon the armature. He made armature also with his own way. Then created *Sujata*, first environmental sculpture of India, elongated in form, seems the sculpture is mixed with Eucalyptus trees. It seems *Sujata* is part and parcel of nature and its rough surface reflecting impressionistic chiaroscuro. In the same process Ramkinkar then made *Santhal Family*, *Mill Call*, *Harvester* etc. Ramkinkar was the first among Indian sculptors to give vent to the idea that sculpture has a deep tie with nature and this relationship can touch an apex. The characteristics that mark the open-air sculpture works of Ramkinkar are their monumentality, their coarse and harsh texture which almost unifies them with the nature outside and their dynamism, vitality and energy. He was the Pathfinder of a new and unexplored horizon through his experiments with form, concept, medium and working process. What he made; it was fundamental and purely his personal.

#### **Opened up New Way of Experimentation:**

Ramkinkar's works paved the new way of experimentation in Indian sculpture. After that Pradosh Dasgupta, Chintamani Kar, Sarbajit Roychoudhury, Samkhya Choudhury, Dhanraj Bhagat, Amarnath Sehgal, Somnath Hore, Raghav Kaneria, Pilo Pochkanwala, Meera Mukharjee, Mrinalini Mukharjee, Mahendra Pandya, Latika Kat so many names came in the front due to their multidimensional experiments in the field of Indian Sculpture either in the form, concept or in medium. Still this trend, this practice is going on with full swing. Everyone is searching for new.

#### **Scarcity of Conventional Sculptural Mediums and some Issues:**

Unfortunately, the scarcity of conventional medium which drove Ramkinkar to invent a new medium that issue is still exists. Although in the present internet era art lovers know that what is going on in the global art scenario but conventional sculptural medium like bronze, fibre glass, stone etc are unavailable in the various frontier state. Specially most of the North Eastern state's young artists are suffering from this issue. Sometimes may be few people somehow manage the material by their own way. Here weak communication is the main cause behind this. Along with this people consciousness is also considered as another reason. So due to some lacking strong bonding between North- Eastern art and main stream art of India is still absent.

#### **Scarcity Paves New Possibilities:**

But there are some positive aspects also. Scarcity is the mother of invention. North East is a place which can be considered as an anthropological garden. The residents of the zone are the Bengali, the Dimasas, the Nagas, the Hmars, the Manipuris, the kukis, the Assamese, the Riang, the Karvis, the Nepalis and the tea garden labourers and various other tribes. In the area of art, all different ethnic and linguistic groups are engaged to develop their indigenous art forms in their own traditional ways. It is necessary to mention that North East is very popular for its very rich bio-diversity. Various kinds of high-quality wood are found in this region. Wood is very popular permanent sculptural medium for the whole art world. But wood is very easily affordable in this region. There are number of good wood carver also found in the entire north east. One person named Lanu Pongen, from Kohima, Nagaland, who can make a 6-7 ft sculpture within 4-5 hours with full details. He acquired this skill traditionally and most of his works exports in various foreign countries. His works got huge appreciation from the main streams art critics and art lovers of India and abroad. He is crossing just 43 but within this age apart from huge stone and wooden three-dimensional sculptures he has made more than 500-600 huge wooden relief which is beyond imagination



for an artist in his whole life. Assam and Tripura, the two states are very famous for wood carving practices. There are numbers of sculptors from both the states got national and international recognition for their carving and creativity. Ratul Gogoi and Shiva Prasad Marar, both the artists have very good hand in wood carving and got national award from Assam. Dr Swapan Paul, a renowned sculptor from Silchar who is always in discussion for his wood carving skill. So there may be a great scope for the wood carving practice to create a new zone with own local identity. Bamboo is another medium of art in North-East which abounds in natural resources. This zone is very popular for bamboo craft work. It can be turned as a good sculptural medium. Now some young talents are experimenting with this material to express their creative emotions. In future there may be a possibility to see a silver line through their experimentation. Terracotta is another important sculptural medium for the North-Eastern Artists. Number of clay variety is available in North-East. Their qualities are also very good. More over North-Eastern people are very familiar with terracotta work because it is linked with their tradition. Maybe it cannot be compared with the rich terracotta tradition of Bankura and Bishnupur, West Bengal but thousands of people of North-East are engaged with pottery and terracotta work. More than 75 family of Panibhora Village of Cachar, Assam, are getting lively hood by doing pottery works. Another important terracotta village is Asharikandi. This village is in Debitola development block in Dhubri district of Assam. The village is famous for its traditional crafts, Terracotta and Pottery. It is one of the largest clusters of Terracotta and Pottery in India. Tripura and Manipur have also their unique terracotta and pottery tradition. So obviously numbers of sculptors from this North-East zone choose terracotta as medium for their creative expression. Banamali Sharma, a sculptor from Manipur established him as specialist person for terracotta sculpture. He is equally skilled for wood carving also. Debabrata Das and Shyama Prasad Bhattacharjee are the two sculptors from Tripura who are very famous for their terracotta works and wood carving. As a part of natural resourceful North-East numbers of other mediums are there which can be explored as sculptural medium. Dr Ganesh Nandi, researcher of the paper is also engaged to explore new sculptural mediums which are available in this zone. Presently he is using betel nut bark, cotton, cloth and bamboo to do sculptural works. These mediums are very easily affordable here and they have uniqueness also. Binoy Paul, another important sculptor of Barak Valley who is searching continuously unconventional material for his works and he got national recognition already. So, scarcity of conventional sculptural medium could not stop the creative journey of North-Eastern sculptors but paved a new way to proceed. Although it cannot be considered as it is enough. Moreover, there are cane mat making tradition and North-East is famous for its unique textile works. All the tribe has rich weaving tradition. Their unique design, motif can be used in the other form of arts also. Even their dance form, unique musical instruments can create a new way of contemplation for art intellectuals.

### **Conclusion**

Even though all the possibilities she has but North-East is still unexplored as expectation. Although sculptural works are going on its own way but no Ramkinkar has emerged with that creative tenacity to create something new for art world, which can be considered as milestone for the discussion. Communication and art consciousness are two big issues. Main stream art world, government art organizations should also look back towards the frontier states art practices and have to take initiatives to promote the possibilities. If this can be done and a good connectivity can be created between traditional art



practices of North East with modern art practices of the rest of India surely Indian art as a whole will be benefitted.

### References

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### Photos



LanuPongen, wood, 7.5x2 ft, cambridge anthropological museum



Ratul Chandra Gogoi, The Nature-II, Wood and Bronze, 20”x18”x8”



Titled: Untitled  
Medium: Wood  
Size: 95X76X60 cms  
Sculptor: Siva Prasad Marar

Siva Prasad Marar, Wood, 37”x30”x24”



Debabrata Das, Lady with Bird, Terracotta, 15”x12”x15”



Shyama Prasad Bhattacharjee, Terracotta, 20”x15”x12”



Dr Ganesh Nandi, Power Centre, Mixed Media, (Betel nut stem, cotton and cloth),24”x24”x12 “