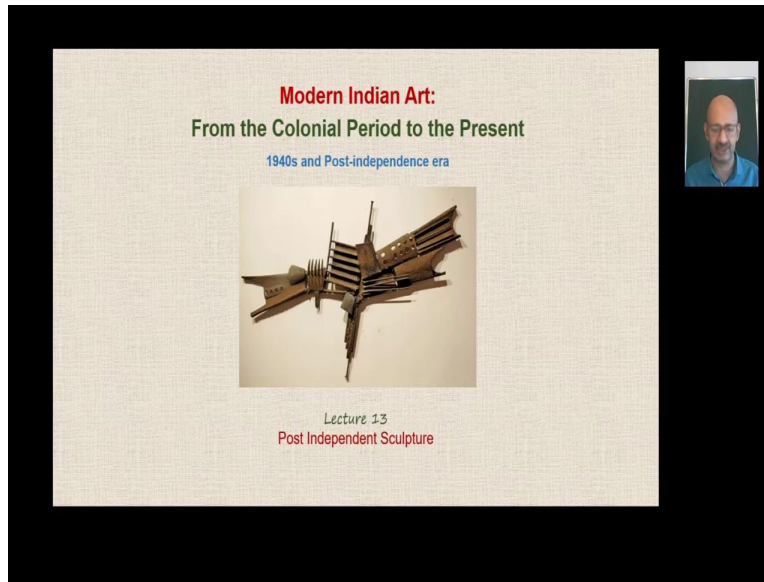


Modern Indian Art from the Colonial Period to the Present
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Lecture-13
Post Independent Sculpture

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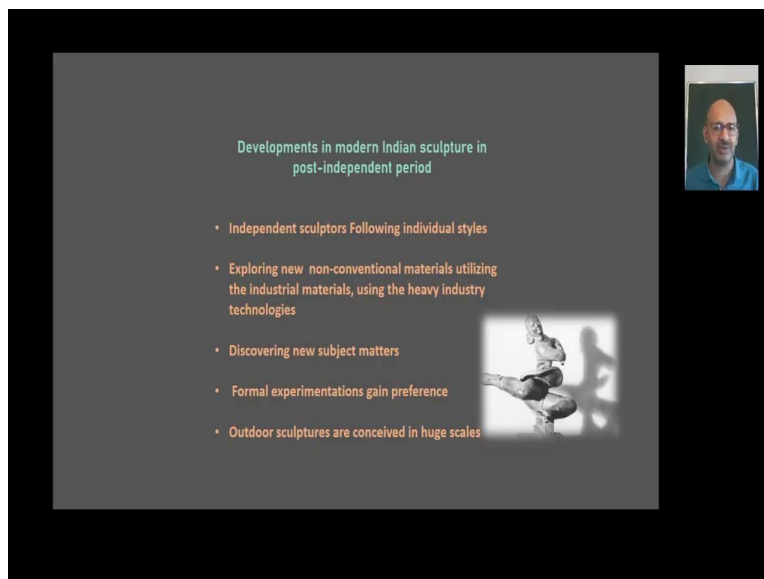
Hello viewers, welcome to MOOCS online course on Modern Indian Art from the Colonial Period to the Present. Today the 13th lecture from this course or the 3rd lecture from the third way is dedicated to the developments of Modern Indian Sculpture in the Post-Independent period. Along with the painters, the sculptors of the new India, sculptors from that very significant transformative phase of 1940's and followed by the decades after the Independence of 1947 gradually, tried to look at the new possibilities of the medium, new possibilities of the form, new possibilities of the content that is the subject matter of the sculptures and very importantly now, the new Indian sculptors or sculptors from the 1940's also began to look at their efforts, began to look at their works, as independently as possible. In other words, when you look at their predecessors, when you look at the history of the early modern Indian sculpture for example, you look at the works of Karmakar, Mhatre and all you see that mostly their works were the results of certain commissions. Therefore, their subject matters, their style of representation, everything was tied up to some extent to that obligation of a commission, of a commercially conceived work of art.

But, now in this what you see among this new generation of sculptors is that- commission or not, they are all making efforts to think independently, to create independently. This independent creativity in the sculptures is shown through various ways as I have already told- their medium, materials, technique of executing sculptures and most importantly the content, the subject matter. Therefore, we begin to see a new history of modern Indian sculpture is emerging from the 1940's and slowly developing into a very powerful movement in the post-independent era.

So, let us look at what exactly is happening, how this story is unfolding itself and who are the main masters behind this particular movement. Though modern Indian sculpture has never been at least in the post-independent phase or in the 40's a consolidated movement, we have seen a couple of sculptors as active members of groups for example, Kamala Dasgupta, Pradosh Dasgupta both these sculptors were active members of Calcutta group formed in 1943.

We have also seen Bakre as again a very important modern sculptor and an active member of the Bombay Progressive group. But, the rest of the sculptors whom we are going to look at today were all independent artists working on the basis of an independent thinking and existence.

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Let us look at some of these points before we begin to look at the works by the individual artists. So, the developments in modern Indian sculpture in post-independent period can be understood through some of these points or markers for example, most of these or let me say all of them, these independent sculptors- they kind of followed individual styles, they were following

individual style instead of following certain preset or pre-conceived norm or style or a particular way of doing things. Therefore, all these sculptors began to explore new non-conventional materials, utilizing the industrial materials, and also utilizing the heavy industry technologies.

Because, we need to also remember that 1940's and particularly after 1947 India, entire Indian was involved in the making of this new nation and a part of this developmental project was of course industries, factories and sculptors took advantage of the situation and tried to explore how they could use the new technologies not only to execute their works of art but, also to create new ideas out of this new technological developments happening all around from 1947. And in the process most of these sculptors also discovered new subject matters.

They also put lot of emphasis on experiments. You must have seen and I am sure you remember that how the previous generation of sculptors who were mostly academically tuned or trained in certain kind of academic realistic representations were not exactly experimenting with forms or styles. They were mostly focused on gaining a certain perfection in the already set norm that is Mhatre or Karmakar people like them, sculptors like them were dedicated to the academic naturalistic style. All they wanted to really achieve was a perfection in that style.

But now, in this new situation we have a number of sculptors coming up from the next generation who were mostly born in say around the first very early decade of 20th century, they all wanted to give up the burden of the pre-existing norms and to look at the formal aspects that is the representational features from an experimental point of view. That is most of these artists, or, let us say all of these artists tried to see or understand representation in sculptural forms not as a photocopy of reality, not as an exact representation or replica of what you see around- be it human figures or anything else. They wanted to experiment with the representations. Therefore, today when you look at their sculptures most of the forms that you get to see even if they are forms of human figures, animal figures, birds or anything else, they do not immediately conform to our observation.

They do not conform at all to the realistic representation. All these sculptures made by this new generation of sculptors are actually partly imagination and partly results of new experiments with ,once again let me repeat technology, technique, material, subject matter and the form itself. The fundamental question was why a sculptural form necessarily has to be a realistic representation or replica of reality, why can not a sculptural form take its own shape even if the shape does not

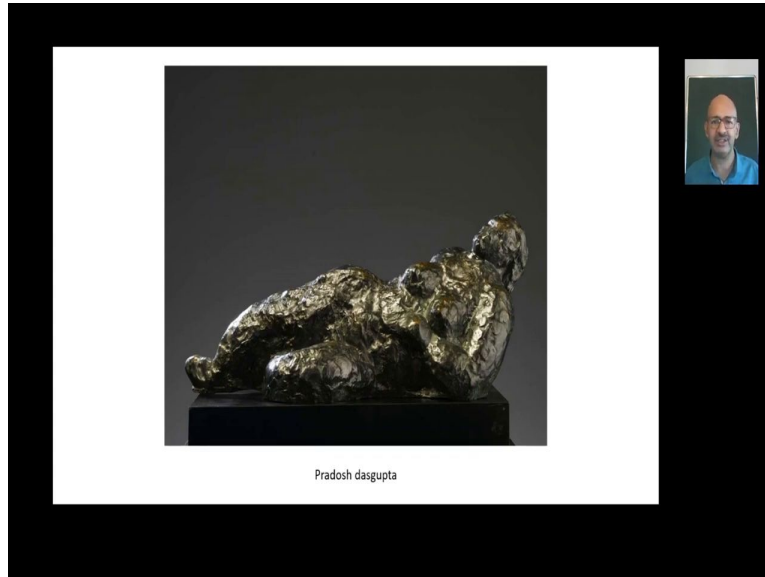
exactly look what it is supposed to mean, no issues. We can always use our imagination and very importantly the new sculptural possibilities to achieve new shapes, new forms, new styles, new appearances of reality.

So, it is not a replica of reality but a new appearance, a new avatar of reality that these artists were trying to achieve and very importantly all of them were focusing on the sculptural possibilities instead of simply surrendering to the norms of realistic representation, what are the new possibilities, how can you think independently, how can you imagine a new form which never existed before.

So, these are the questions, issues and ideas most of the sculptors were encountering. and very important is apart from discovering the new subject matters and going for absolutely mind-boggling formal experiments, we see that during this time, this new generation of sculptors were born in 1920's, 30's or even 40's they are looking at the new possibilities in the outdoor sculpture. Because, new India is also commissioning this fresh generation of sculptors to make huge outdoor sculptures. That was a part of our program, the program of the newly independent Indian development that you have public sculptures, public statues made by the new Indian artists, sculptors.

In order to give shape to the cultural environment of India that is the public environment and instead of again simply going for a very shortcut method of doing something that immediately replicates the reality, these sculptors are making new sculptural statements, they are proposing new sculptural ideas which in a sense was also helping us, the common viewers, the common people to educate ourselves with the new aesthetics.

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Now, we have already seen briefly before the works by this very important artist from 1940's that is Pradosh Dasgupta who right from the beginning started defying the realistic normal representation of human figures and human bodies and he started playing with the shapes of the figures and not only the shapes of the figures as you can see in this particular work he is also experimenting with the textures of the surface of the figures.

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The fact that these figures do not necessarily have to conform to the realistic shape, the idea that sculptural shapes can take its own independent decisions that how it would look like is also coupled with how you treat the surface. Please remember that surface in a sculpture is very

important, a surface can be smooth, a surface can be highly rough, uneven, a surface can be very glittering, a surface can be very subdued, a surface can have different colors, different tones, a surface can have a very strong tactile value that is touch sensation, a surface cannot have, may not have any touch sensation at all.

So, surface- instead of going for an illusionistic realistic depiction now, takes a new imagination. Surface also emerges as a new experimental area where, these sculptors reimagined, they started putting in their own ideas. Once again

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So, it is the surface, it is also the shape, it is also the form, it is also an idea- what exactly you are doing here. Obviously, when you look at this image very very clearly you can see there is a suggestion of figures- not one, probably two figures with the legs. Probably, two figures in a very intimate kind of relationship but, the physicality, the realistic physical situation of the figures of the bodies is not enhanced. What has been given priority over here is the abstract quality of these human figures.

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Now, this is again very interesting that from this time we will get to see that how these sculptors- almost all of them are experimenting with their works in a way that many of their works are slowly reaching an abstraction and here when I use the term abstraction I very very simply mean that in most of their sculptures in spite of the reference to a real subject, real human beings, real life situations- in spite of that as sculptures they do not look so close to the reality but, they gain some very attractive appearances in shapes and forms and this is exactly what as viewers we are supposed to respond to.

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Because, when you look at sculptures like this you can easily make out that the figures are not having very complex subject matters. maybe, the figure of a lying woman but, slightly kind of fragmented into more than one unit and then you look at the shapes of the different parts of the body and soon you realize that what you are looking at is not a real representation of a lying woman but, what you are looking at is how different shapes have been imagined with reference to the idea or image of a lying woman.

So, ultimately in this kind of modern sculptures we are supposed to respond to the shapes, respond to the new kind of units into which a sculpture is broken into. Therefore, right at the outset in these sculptures you see that it is clearly suggested that please do not expect a realistic representation, please enjoy the formal aspects of this sculpture.

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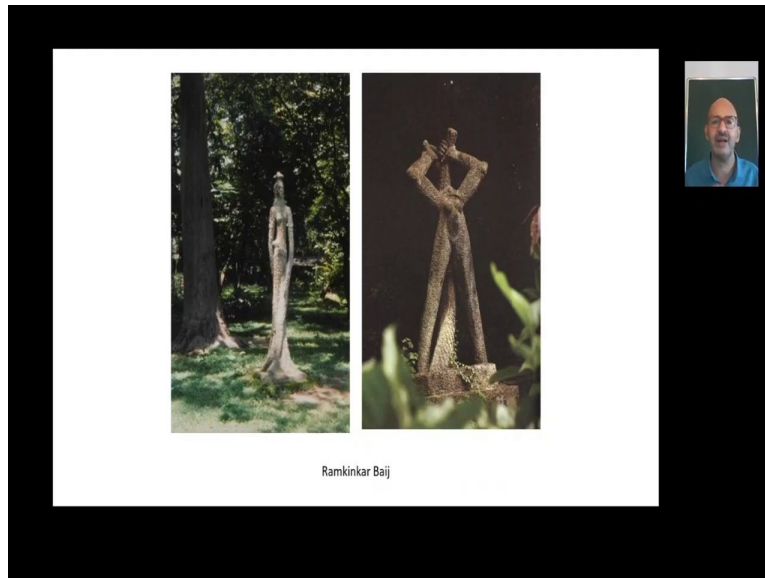
And sometimes along with this formal aspects one can sense something more than that- maybe, an emotional or psychological content. For example, when you look at this portrait by Ramkinkar Baij and this is a portrait of Rabindranath Tagore and very interesting- the portrait of such a famous man whose face is so well known by entire world- a very renowned person, the philosopher, poet ,what not and but, here you go for a style in this particular portrait- a style that defies all and every norm of realistic representation. Unless told we may not even recognize this portrait as the portrait of Rabindranath.

But, that is not the point here, the point is how Ramkinkar is trying to apply a semi-cubist idiom here, a semi-cubist language here on to the face of Rabindranath, onto the portrait of Rabindranath and in the process he is going for a certain fragmentation of different units of the face and portrait and reconfiguring it in a way that here the realistic look and appearance of Tagore is not important. What is important is its sculptural value and more you look at this sculpture more you realize keeping the context in mind that when Ramkinkar Baij was doing this portrait Tagore was already at the late stage of his life where he was suffering from acute pain and trauma due to the situation created by the Second World War. Tagore died in 1941. World War second had already begun and Tagore was deeply pained by that .

Now, probably this fragmentation of different units or different parts of the face and reconfiguring it in a slightly mutilated way could be read- this particular configuration, this

particular distortion could be read as an expression of that pain. So, what I am trying to say here with reference to this sculpture is that often in modern Indian art whether it is sculpture or painting or even printmaking- these distortions, these fragmentations may not be just a result of formal or stylistic experiments often you might feel and see and read an emotional or psychological content into it but that depends from sculpture to sculpture.

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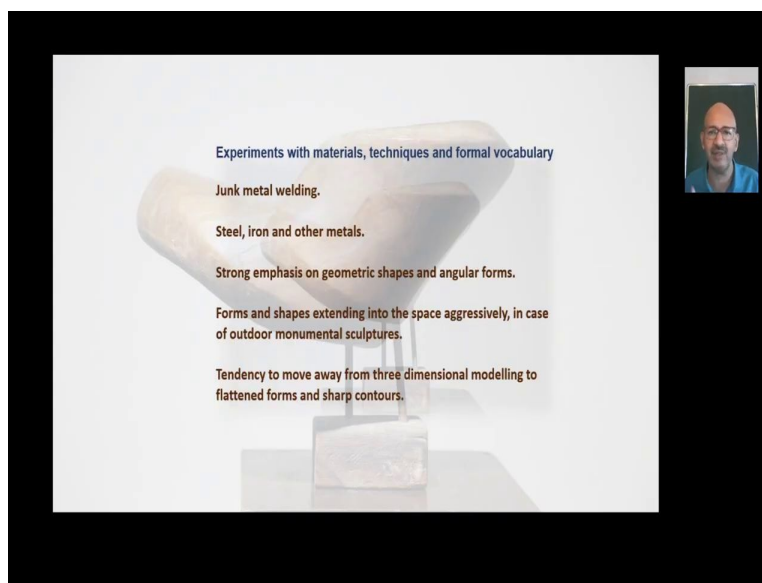
Now, talking about the surface of a sculpture Ramkinkar from the 1930's has already created and established this new surface treatment far far away, removed from the typical realistic sculptures where the surface was expected to have a rather smooth and conformist kind of look and

treatment. But here, the surface whether the figure depicts a long, tall lady or a working man anything, you always see that in case of Ramkinkar the surface does not conform to the real human being or the real figures. It rather responds to the character of the material.

So, most of these sculptors from this period beginning with Ramkinkar Baij followed by Pradosh Dasgupta, Chintamani Kar, Sankho Chowdhury, Dhanraj Bhagat, Adi Davierwala, Amarnath Sehgal, Pilo Pochkhanawala, and others treated surface as not a reflection of the real life but, a reflection of the material in which you are creating the sculpture.

So, giving a certain preference to the material quality, giving a certain preference to the new way of looking at sculpture. Now, let us look at some examples with reference to which we can actually see how these new ideas are being actually executed in the sculptures.

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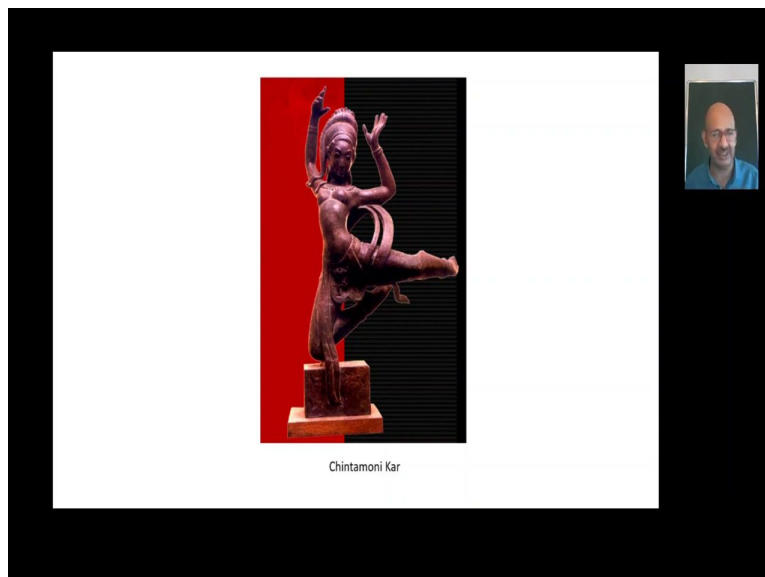
Now, before we go into that since we are talking about the materials and the techniques remember that when these sculptors are experimenting with new materials, techniques and formal vocabulary they are using certain materials which are completely non-conventional. Conventional mediums and materials in sculpture would generally mean that we are talking about bronze, we are talking about plaster, we are talking about stone carving.

But, here the artists are using junk metal welding which is typically an industrial technique, they are using steel, iron and other materials, they are giving strong emphasis on the geometric shapes and angular forms now, the sense of geometry this idea of geometry overtaking the soft modeling

and modulation of the sculptures also comes from this new industrial developments around and also one inspiration should be credited to the developments happening in modern western sculpture.

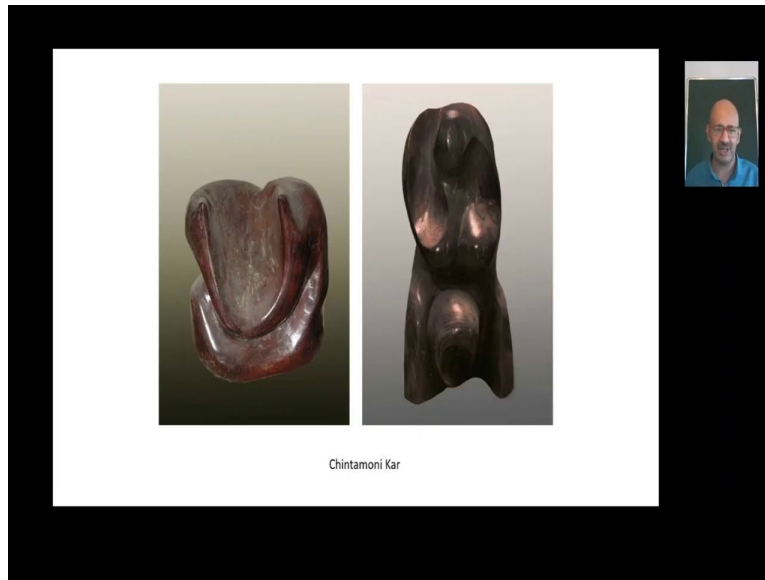
Now, we have forms and shapes extending into the space aggressively in case of outdoor monumental sculptures so, there often we find very strong and sharp and aggressive geometric shapes which do not have anything to do with the real life forms but, they do have a very strong relationship with the geometric shapes therefore, artists are as I have already mentioned are thinking often independently in terms of form that considering form as form which may not have a direct correspondence with the reality. but, will certainly have a very strong relation with the material with the medium and the possibilities of form as form. Therefore, the tendency towards abstraction that often the sculptures of this time may look abstract is not unnatural. Therefore, the tendency to move away from the three-dimensional modeling to flattened forms and shapes and often you find not soft contours but, very very sharp contours slowly become not exactly the norm but, the new idea of this new phase in modern Indian sculpture.

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So, we begin with Chintamani Kar. Now sometimes in some of these works by this new generation of sculptors you do find that they are using some traditional motifs maybe, mythological motifs but, the execution in terms of style, in terms of shape is completely different- nothing to do with traditional sculpture.

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And sometimes the same artist Chintamani Kar comes up with almost abstract sculpture but, the reference to the human shape, the shape of a human body is often retained to some extent. So, there is a certain kind of proportionate division between how much reference you would like to retain in the final sculpture and how much abstraction you would allow the sculpture to take shape. So, often in these sculptures you find a very well thought out, a very well planned, a well-conceived combination between very little minimum realistic references or let us not say realistic let us say real references - references to the real world on the one hand and on the other hand abstraction- giving lot of priority to the possibilities of shapes and sizes and also proportions and geometrical possibilities of shapes and patterns.

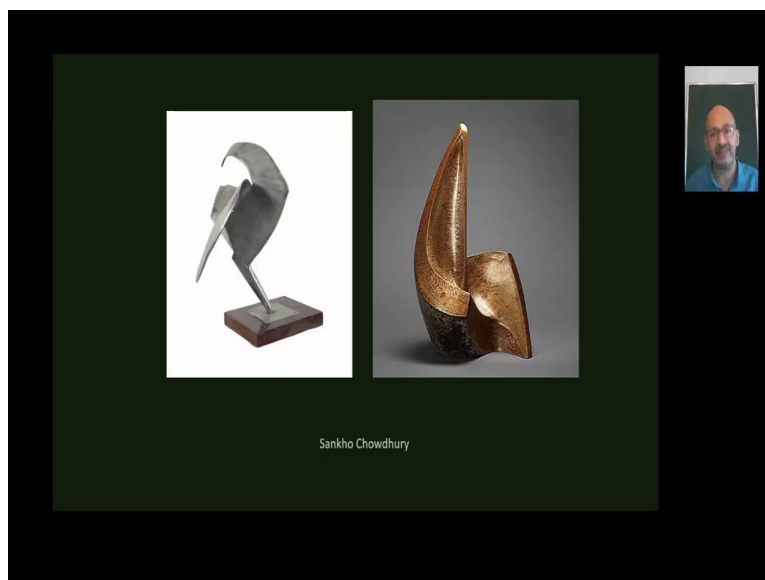
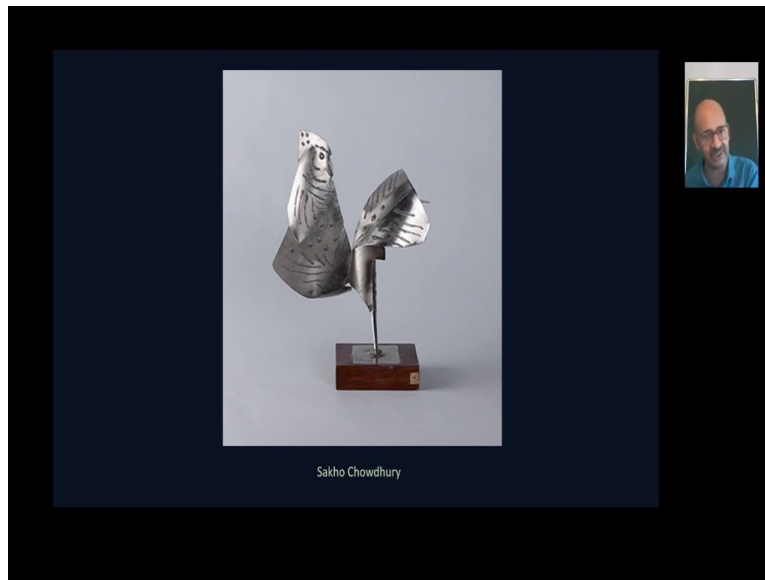
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Once again, by Chintamani Kar- so irrespective of the subject matter- in sculptures like this what we are supposed to enjoy, what we are supposed to look at is the shapes and the patterns of the shape, how the shapes are being constantly explored, reinvented and reimagined.

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Now, Sankho Chowdhury who was trained in Santiniketan and then later moved on to Baroda and also stayed in Delhi and made large number of sculptures- a very very prolific sculptor who also began to use industrial materials, he also began to use shapes despite the reference to some real object- in this case clearly the reference is to a bird could be a hen or a cork.

But, the point here is not how realistic, how close the shapes actually refer to the real bird but, how independently the artist is able to think of a new shape out of a real bird that is what we need to appreciate -this independent thinking and the thinking is not merely thinking- one has to actually execute in various mediums and materials and once you are trying to execute in various

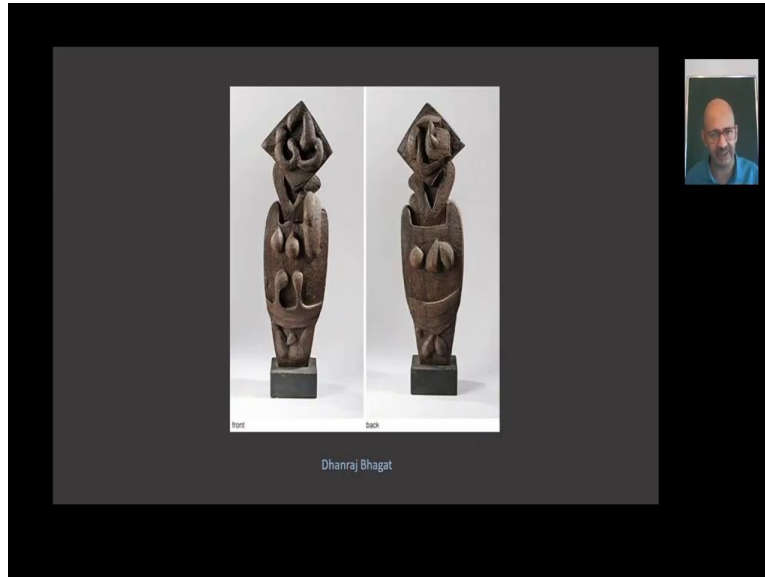
mediums and materials, you also feel a certain kind of interest and obligation to explore the possibilities of that medium also.

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Then similarly, we have another sculptor from this era known as Dhanraj Bhagat who also went on to utilize and explore the new industrial materials like junk metal, junk iron, wrought iron, and often these sculptures are not polished to look very sophisticated or refined they are exactly left at that stage or quality of the materiality. So, materiality and giving a lot of preference to the real look of the raw material you are using slowly becomes the new norm of the new sculptures.

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Now, artists like Dhanraj Bhagat also explored some of the conventional mediums for example, wood carving here but, again using and imagining and thinking of the new possibilities of wood carving giving new shapes not directly referring to the real world or representing the real world- there is a often a kind of shadow of the real world on these sculptures.

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For example, when you look at this one by Dhanraj Bhagat you can see some one, two, three, four, five, figures seated on a shape which also looks like a figure. So, this strange combination is actually the product of not reality but, the product of sculptural imagination, creativity. Now, this is how we should try to look at these sculptures, that is, from the point of view of creativity that they are thinking creativity in terms of an independent process, not always conforming to the reality of life around.

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But, often the reality of the feeling, of how you are experiencing the life around is given a due importance. So, in many works by these sculptors for example this work by Dhanraj Bhagat you get to see a kind of independent thinking leading to which I already mentioned abstraction.

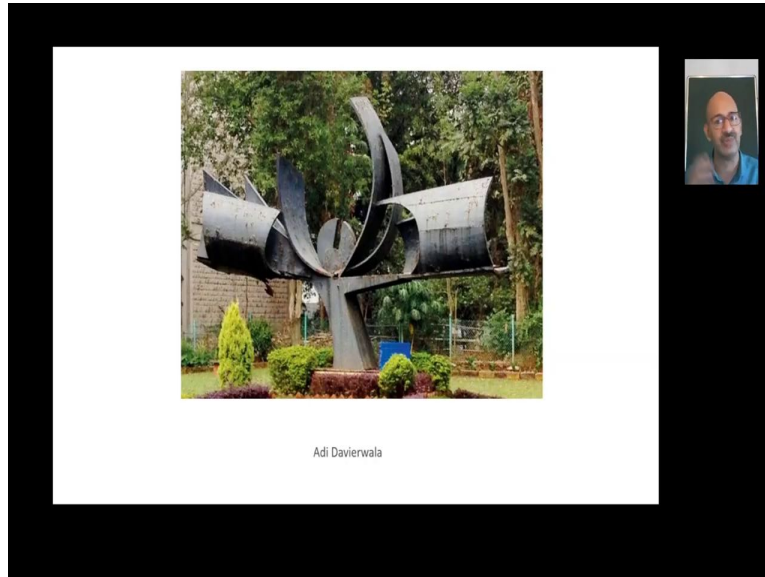
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It is clear that the subject matters here are figures but, it is also clear that at no point Dhanraj Bhagat was trying to achieve a realistic figure, he was rather interested in converting the figures into shapes.

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Next important artist -a sculptor from this phase is Adi Davierwala. Again, he is well known for his most unconventional use of materials, junk metals, raw metals and the way he used them is a very strange imagination of a sculpture where the rawness of the materials, the rawness of the shapes and the forms are kept intact. I mean, there is no tendency anywhere here to transform them into something that is very well known visually. He retains the sculptural form exactly in that raw stage of material as well as the visual form and idea.

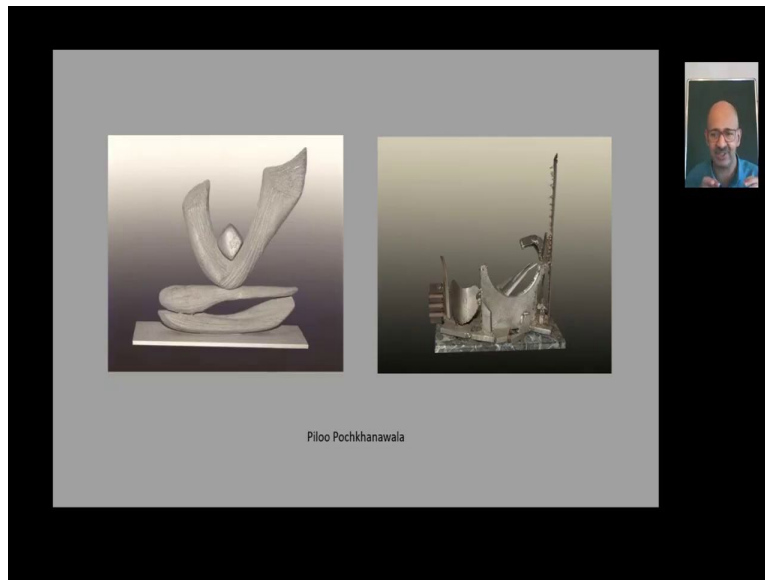
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Similarly, Piloo Pochkhanawala again a very important sculptor from this period always tried to look at the shapes of the sculptures in terms of the material the sculpture is using, the quality of

the material ,the character of the material and the medium become more important than the shape of the sculpture and as you can see here and as you have already seen in the sculptures by the previous sculptors- that often the subject matter is just a pretext, subject matter is not that important- it is just a pretext to create new forms.

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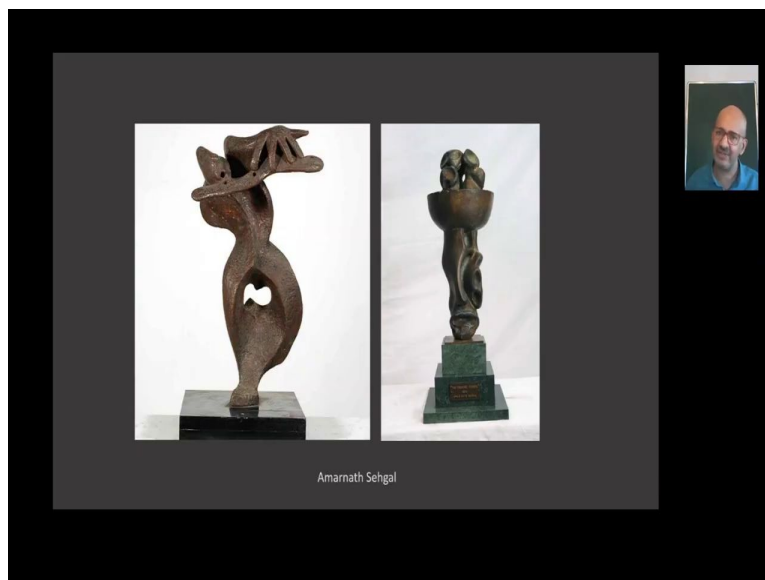
Now, Piloo Pochkhanawala also was very much interested in the industrial materials and the shapes and the forms. Sometimes, they all go to the extent that the real references are lost completely and what you look at is actually an abstract arrangement of shapes, forms, different units of the sculpture and also the materiality of the medium that you are using- these are the things that we need to appreciate and understand when we look at.

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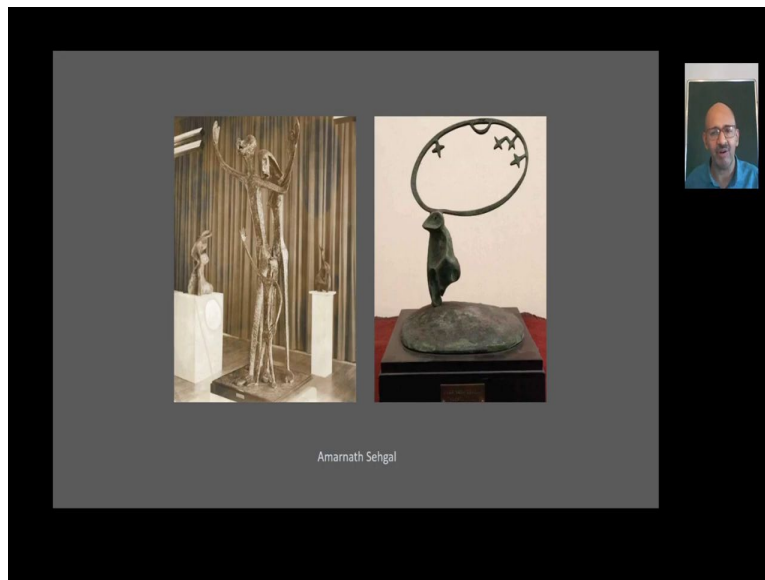
And therefore, when a sculptor like this from this era like Piloo Pochkhanawala creates drawings, all these drawings similarly, gain an abstraction. Not a realistic drawing and this kind of drawings actually help the artists to develop their ideas in an abstract logic rather than a realistic logic.

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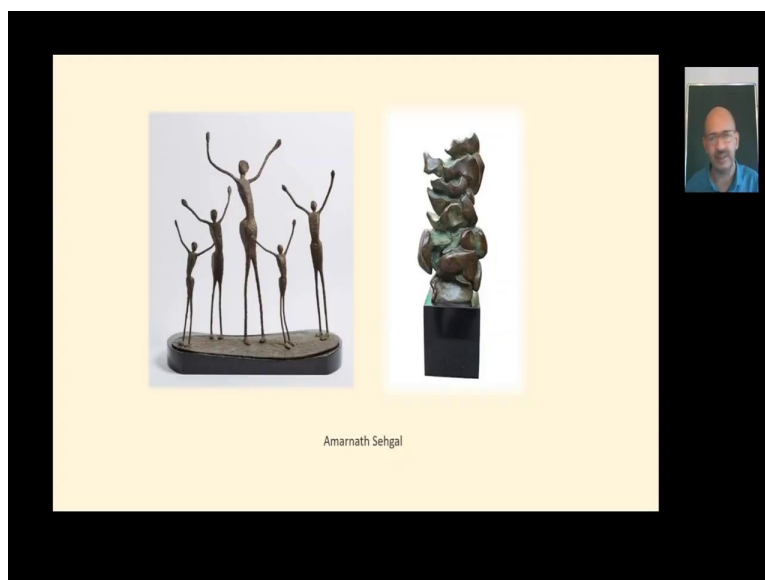
And another important sculptor from this period Amarnath Sehgal also created very interesting shapes in his sculptures, shapes having a slight reference to some real object but, ultimately moving towards a different idea, new idea of shapes or a conglomeration of shapes or combination of different shapes.

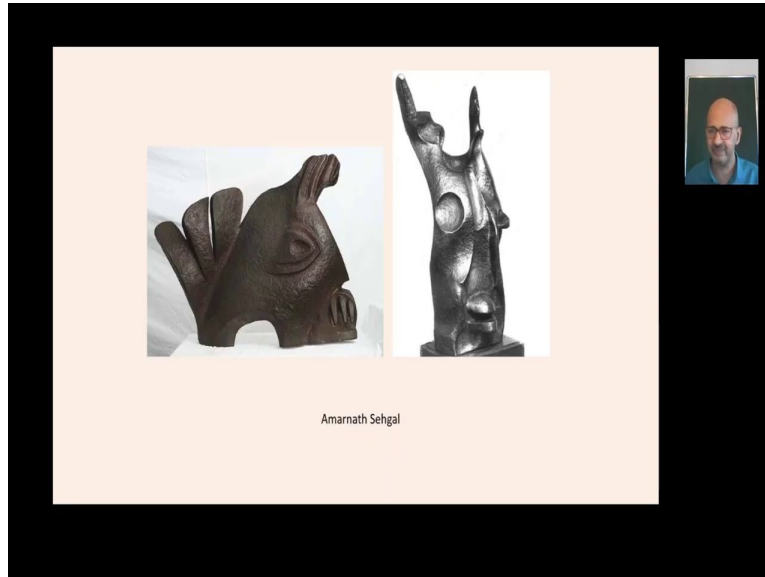
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Therefore, in their sculptures you find, sometimes you do find reference to a real figure. But, more than the figure you begin to appreciate the shape, the elongation, the style of the figures, also the color of the sculptures, the surface and the texture that is a tactile quality.

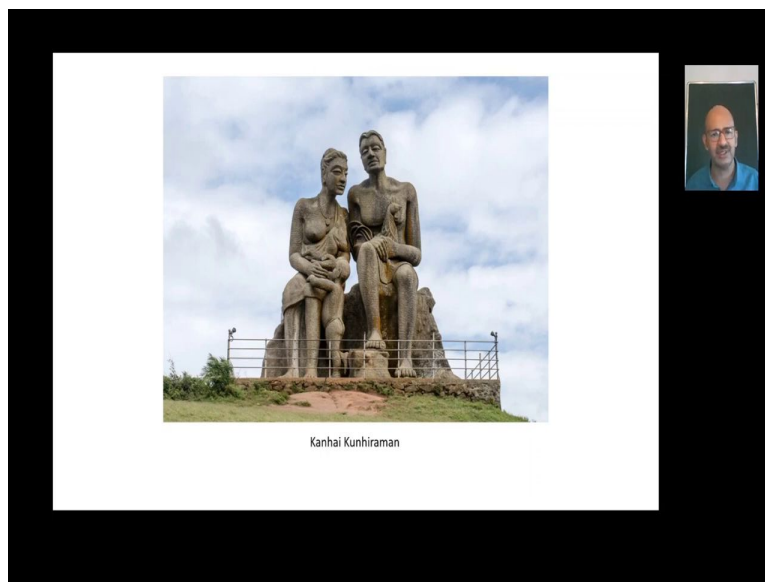
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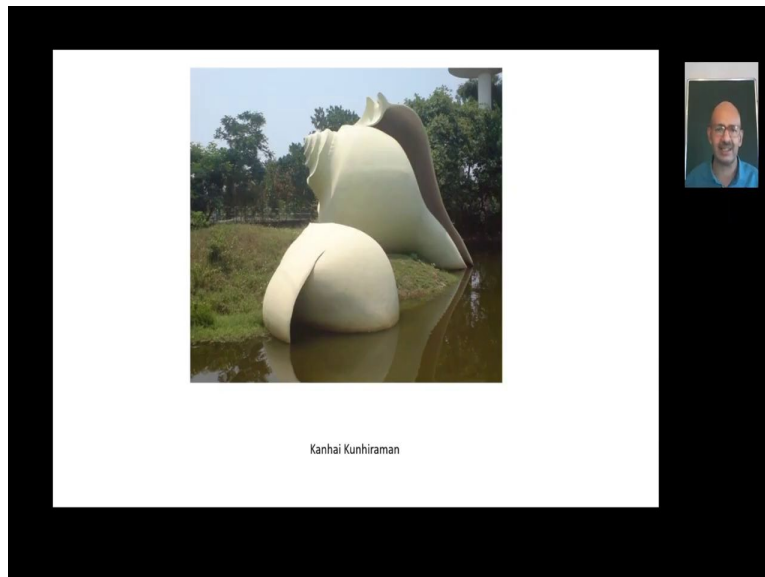
Now, at this point I do want to remind you of something that I just mentioned a few minutes back that all these cultural developments were possible at least partly due to the developments taking place in modern western sculpture. If you look at the sculptures made by the modern western sculptors for example, the British sculptor Henry Moore or the famous sculptor from a slightly later period Giacometti or Brancusi you would see that their sculptures must have influenced some of these new Indian sculptures at least given the impetus and the encouragement to think independently.

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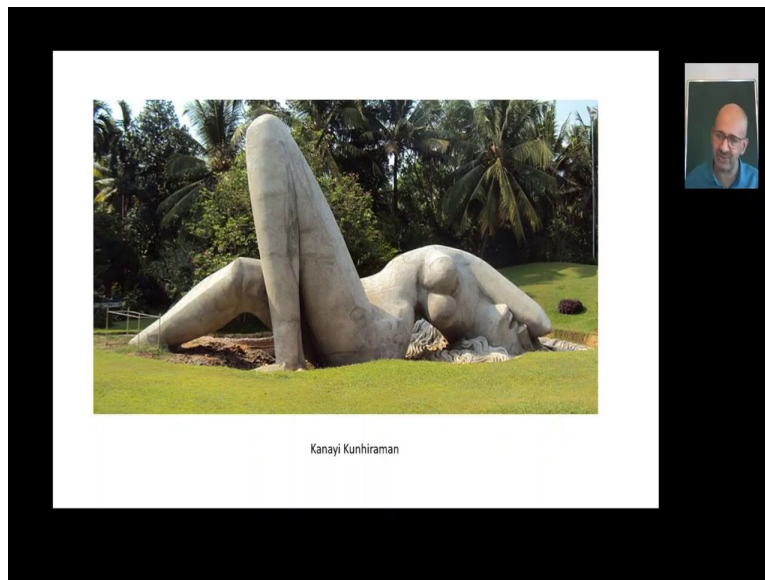
So, similarly after Amarnath Sehgal we have P V Janakiraman. In fact very interesting sculptural developments were taking place during 1940's and later in the Southern part of our country- from Tamilnadu mainly you will see a lot of very very interesting sculptors coming up. You can see the works by P V Janakiraman. You can see the works of the famous sculptor- famous also because he made some stupendous and colossal huge scale sculptures in the public space- his name is Kanhai Kunhiraman. look at his sculptures- so big, so huge, so skilled he was achieving skill. Maybe, his sculptures do not look real.

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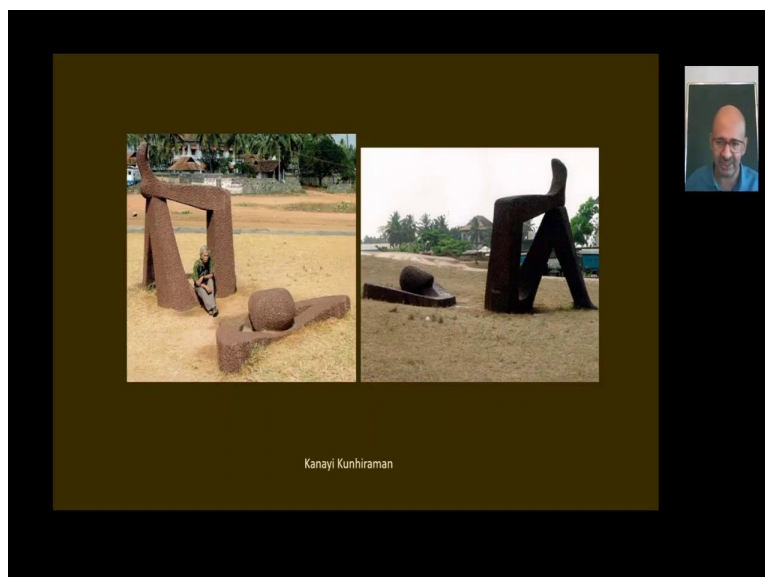
But, it does not matter. References to reality is very obvious but, what is more important is the size of his sculptures and the scale and size certainly put a lot of impact, it really impresses the environment and therefore, Kanhai KunhIRaman's sculptures often give an impression that his sculptures are so big, so huge, so impressive that they become a permanent part of the natural surrounding- it is not just the little show piece in environment. It becomes as permanent as the mountain behind, as permanent as huge trees, as the earth etcetera.

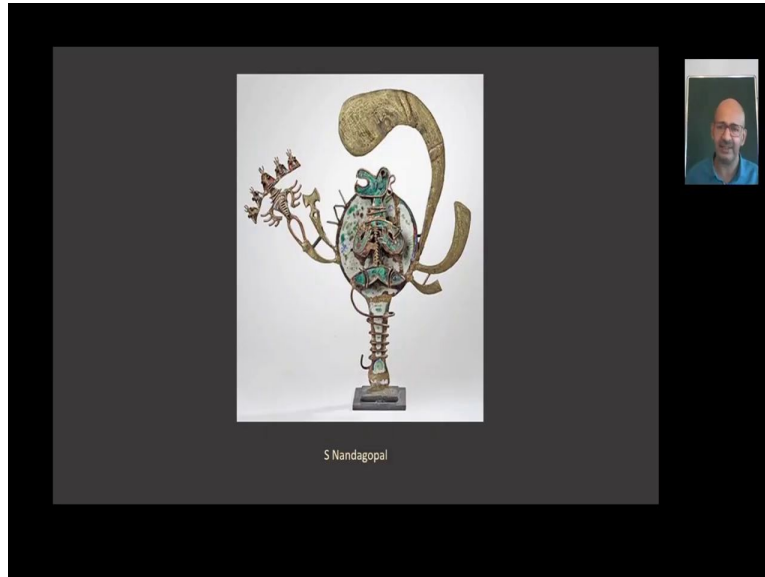
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So, this sense of scale on the one hand creates a new experience of looking at sculpture- that you cannot look at the whole sculpture at one go you have to actually go around the sculpture, come close, move away from the sculpture so, it is a new way of looking at sculpture that these sculptors are actually expecting on part of the viewers.

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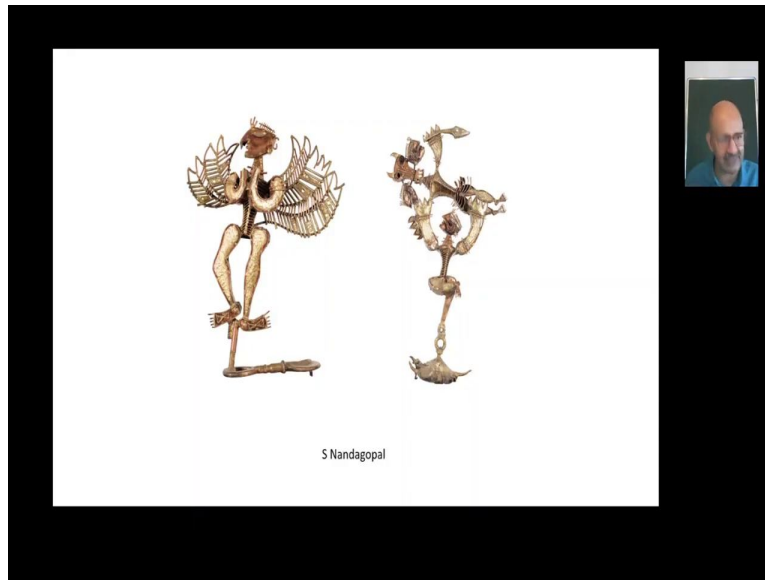




So, new sculptures are definitely encouraging us to develop new ways of looking at sculptures. So, when you look at a sculpture like this which is clearly not exactly a representation but a form that relates to a man on the ground with a very relaxed mood and how do you know that he is in a relaxed mood it is only when you look at the position of his legs and also the arms- folded just behind his head but, interestingly the entire body is divided into just two parts and the middle portion which we call torso is completely removed and we do not have any problem.

So, we have already learned to accept these forms. When you look at a sculpture like this you never question where has the torso gone, where is the middle part of the body gone- you do not ask that you are completely okay with this new idea of a sculpture- you are also completely okay with the new scale and size of these sculptures which demands that you go around and look at the sculptures from all angles and finally, the last sculptor in today's lecture is S Nandagopal- another very interesting sculptor who dealt with the detailed possibilities of decorative apparitions and small little detailing on the sculpture using metal as a very fluid possibility metal as not like the way people use the junk material as a solid shape.

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But, as a fluid material with which by casting- going through a process of very very meticulous casting process S Nandagopal could actually achieve details, decorative details and details of textures, lines in his sculptures and most of his sculptures are based on certain mythological figures or often new mythological figures but, what is important here is how he transforms the idea into new metallic appearances, new metallic forms.

So, this is what we see so far- as far as the new developments of modern Indian sculpture is concerned in the post-independent period we shall see more such developments taking place in the later decades that is 1950's, 60's and 70's in our subsequent lectures. Thank you.