



Sandip Chakraborty and his portrait sculptures

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Abstract

Sandip Chakraborty is one of few consistent contemporary portrait sculptors in West Bengal whose works have been appreciated since his student's days. He has experimented all his life with form, surface, expression of portrait sculptures and built his own style. His proficiency in making naturalistic portraits have got him great renown in India and abroad. In this article, discusses Sandip Chakraborty - his portrait sculpture, his philosophy and mentalities, discussed in depth.

Keywords: Sandip Chakraborty, Portrait sculpture, Indian Modern Sculptor.

The sculptors of the current generation are not that keen on making sculpture-portraits. The reason is primarily that there is a dearth of creative portraits and an abundance of sculptures with merely matching facial features with the subject. A lot of portrait artists, including but not limited to artists from Kumartuli and Krishnanagar whose production fit perfectly with market needs. They are generally made from a mould and multiple casts can be made at a very low price. In contemporary West Bengal, the commissions for public portrait-sculptures reach artists through tenders and contractors and those go the artists with lowest bidding price. Because of this, the importance of serious portrait sculpture practice is diminishing and serious sculptors give preference to non-portrait sculptures, keeping aside portrait-sculptures as mere money-making practice. Also, there's serious limitation with pedagogy of portrait-sculptures in art colleges giving a great emphasis on facial measurements with instruments. This method is good enough only as a preliminary step. The students can't surpass this slavish copying process even after art college and create their originally styled portrait-sculptures.

But despite all these, few sculptors are still pursuing portrait-sculptures seriously – with rigorous experimentation, away from any commercial pressures, inspiring the next generation of sculptors from the art college in new ways. Sandip Chakraborty is one of them, who are consistently pursue and experiment in the portraiture genre.

Sandip Chakraborty trained in Government College of Art & Craft, Calcutta and M S University, Baroda, he is one of the few consistent contemporary portrait sculptors in West Bengal whose works have been appreciated since his student days – notable among those are 'Goutam Das (Buro)'[Plate 2], 'Prabir Das (Ponchu)'[Plate 1], 'Lalada', and 'A Model'. In these works, there is a bold, rough character due to extremely rapid modelling with clay – sometimes with thick piling of clay, sometimes with small roundels of clay sometimes with thin, rapid strokes of tools – the artist has create a dynamic character, especially in 'Prabir Das (Ponchu)' – which is made in cement. In 'Goutam Das (Buro)' with shoulder-length hair, a patch of beard on the chin, long, thin moustache – there is a bohemian characterisation. In 'A Model' has broken cheeks, thin face and sunken eyes symbolise her poverty. From my interview of the sculptor and his former classmates we get to know of his prowess of completing a portrait sculpture in mere 30-40 minutes and the incident of him completing his final examination before time and finishing an exquisite sculpture portrait of

the invigilator in the remaining 5-7 minutes. When he went to MGI, Mauritius to teach for two months, he made several sculpture portraits (Plate 3) of many local faces which appealed to him. He committed their facial features to memory by daily observations and sculpted their faces on his own at one go, on his own. Because of his dislike of sitting models for long while sculpting portraits, his works are devoid of stiffness, lively, and with great fidelity to both the facial features and the inner character. Some of his most notable portraits of personalities are – Maharshi Debendranath Tagore (Plate 4), Rishi Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, Swami Vivekananda (Plate 5), B. D. Sureka, Sumanta Chattopadhyay, and Gouri Shankar Chakraborty (his father). These portraits are not rapid and rough, but the textural finish is more akin to human skin, with great fidelity to the facial features and the inner character of the personalities. They look calmer because of the more finished surfaces compared to his previous portraits. Three later bronze portraits of his - “The Philosopher” (Plate 6), “Paramhansa” (Plate 7) and “Holy Mother” (Plate 8) are of highly contemporary style because of their formal simplicity – devoid of details and full of symbolism. “Paramhansa” has only the slightest detail of the great man's facial features and facial hair with our familiar feature of half-closed eyes and half-open lips. The distinctive patina adds to the visual effect. The portrait sculpture “Holy Mother” is of Ma Sarada which is slightly more detailed, with a calmer countenance and has a suitable patina. Rabindranath Tagore's portrait sculpture titled “The Philosopher” is the most minimalist and symbolic of all – with just the bare outlines of his shapely eyes and high nose, his flowing beard falls like a mountain stream – its effect enhanced by the green patina. This highly original masterpiece portrait of such a familiar subject has been made possible by the sculptor's constant experimentation with sculpting methods, form, surface and medium. This also establishes him as a versatile portrait artist in Bengal's and India's contemporary sculptural history. In 2019 (13-23 August) there was a retrospective show of Sandip Chakraborty's sculptures in Triveni Kala Sangam Art Gallery, New Delhi where “The Great Philosopher” (Plate No : 6) was exhibited. About which in an interview with New Indian Express correspondent Ayesha Singh, the sculptor says - “I am an ardent admirer of the poet, Rabindranath Tagore. This sculpture is my imaginary take on him, his intelligence, his intellect, his magnanimity. I have treated this in a very naturalistic way.”¹

Sculptor Adip Dutta has said about this - “The idea further acquires dimensions with a pronounced sense of ancient history in particular. Reflections of just not the mere form of the Mesopotamia figure of the Noble Man become visible while depicting the portrait of Rabindranath Tagore, but also the spirit gets meticulously simulated. The solemn form in its basics simultaneously indicates the ancient schema and a sensitive rendering. The overlapping of two different times, historical contexts and certainly personalities further mystify the idea of the poet thinker.

In connection with the portrait of Rabindranath Tagore let me further mention here that Sandip Chakraborty's acumen for illusionist realism and training in the line of British academic convention also lead him to execute some portraits, half busts and even full figure of the poet as public commissions. Though he begins from here to look at the image of the iconic figure, finally takes the portrayal to an ethereal state while searching for the ideal form expressing the quintessence of Tagore's presence.”²

Although the sculptor has made many symbolic and simple form-based portraits of Rabindranath Tagore – there is immense variety, signifying his versatility while maintaining facial fidelity. In certain sculptures the eyes are reduced to dots, nose to a prism and the flowing beard to a fountain or stairs, and somewhere the facial hair is rendered with linework.

Recently the artist has made two more commendable portraits of the Kolkata Lalit Kala Akademi employee Paneshwar (Plate 10) - swarthy, highly realistic and with perfect facial similitude and of fellow sculptor Sumitava Pal (Plate 9) – with a thick moustache and a detached gaze, the surface treatment makes it look like real flesh and blood. The sculptor prefers taking facial measurements with his eyes, rather than measuring tools – which reflects in the spontaneous quality of the portraits.



Plate 1: Prabir Das (Study Period)



Plate 2: Goutam Das – Buro, (Study Period)



Plate 3: Faculty of MGI, Mauritius, 2007

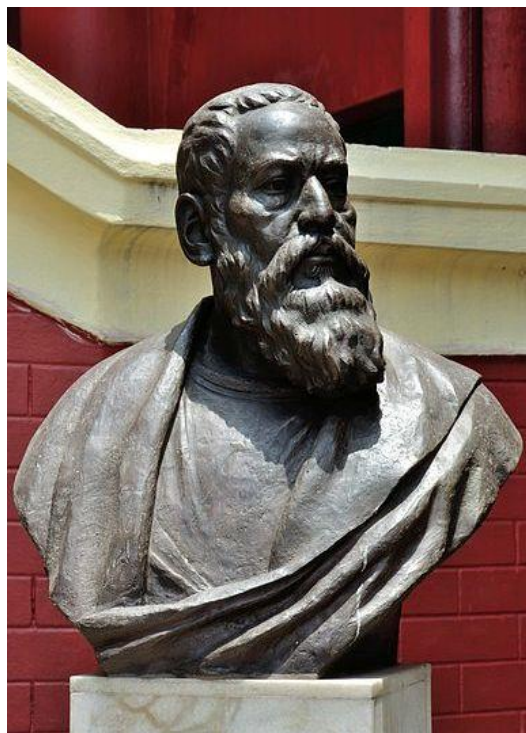


Plate 4: Debendranath Tagore, Bronze,
Jorasanko Thakur Bari, Kolkata



Plate 5: Swami Vivekananda, Bronze



Plate 6: The Philosopher, Bronze, 34x24x25 cm, 2009



Plate 7: Paramahansa, Bronze, 2015



Plate 8: Holy Mother, Bronze, 32x29x27 cm, 2015

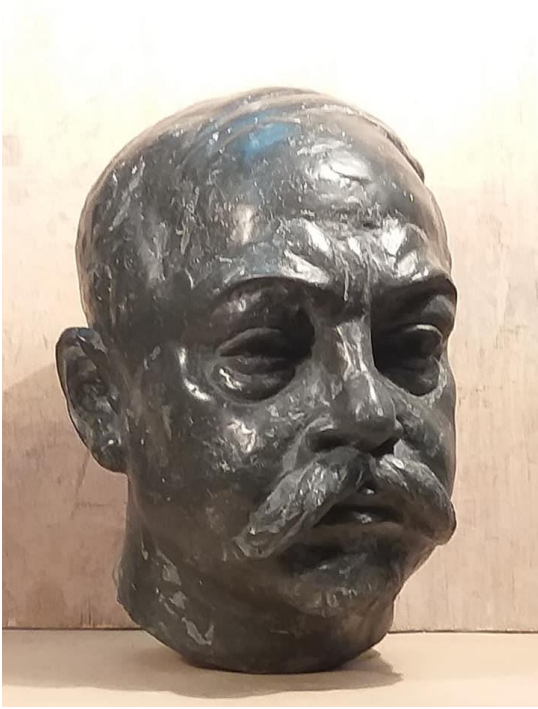


Plate 9: Sumitava Pal,
Epoxy Compound, 2019

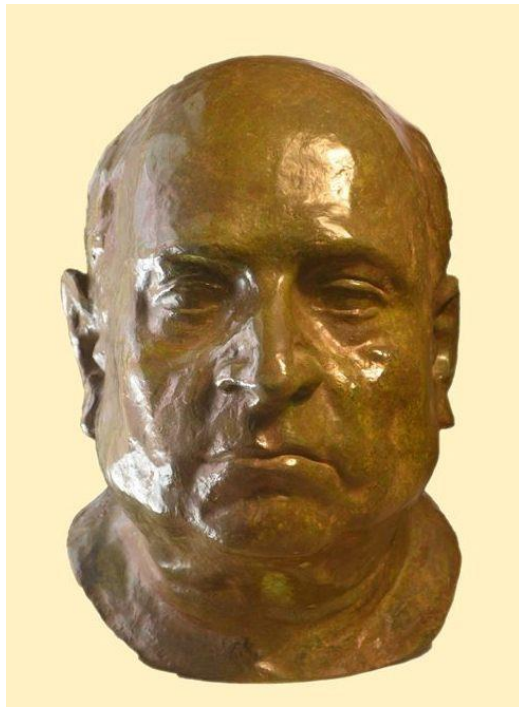


Plate 10: Paneshwar, Bronze, 30x28x20 cm, 2018

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