

**ANNA MOLKA AHMED:
A PIONEER SCULPTOR AND EDUCATIONIST IN PAKISTAN**

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ABSTRACT

This research paper is concerned with relationship of history, academics, sculpture, arts and profile of an artist Anna Molka. The research is designed to understand the development of sculpture in Pakistan. The study is based on the contribution of a sculptor and perspective of her works regarding the evolution, learning and appreciation. The aim of research is to trace the ways of seeing, making techniques and affection of the artist with the field of sculpture in Pakistan.

INTRODUCTION

Anna Molka Ahmed (1917-1994) was an educationist, painter, sculptor, teacher and poet. She was born to a Jewish family, her mother was Polish and her father was a Russian, who was living in London, United Kingdom. She received her education in St. Martin school of Arts, London. Being an exceptional student she was awarded a London County Council Senior Art Scholarship to study further at the Royal College of Art, South Kensington in 1939. Anna Molka wedlocked with Shaikh Ahmed in October 1939, after the marriage she converted to Islam. In 1940, she established the Department of Fine Arts at University of Punjab, Lahore. In the year 1951 her marriage was over, she had two daughters and she lived in Pakistan till her death. She was Professor Emeritus of the University of Punjab, Lahore. Anna Molka Ahmad, certainly, a distinguished artist left the art scene but with a long lasting imprints. She died in Lahore in 1994. A large number of students were trained by her, who proved themselves as practicing artists in Pakistan.

SERVICES AND ACHIEVEMENT

As an art educationist, her contribution to developing and promoting the art education in Pakistan has been immense. Among

the various achievements, her most towering venture was establishing the Fine Arts Department in the University of the Punjab in 1940. Initially, Fine Arts as a subject was offered only at an intermediate level but in 1944 it was extended to the undergraduate level as well. The Department of Fine Arts at the University of the Punjab became the only place of higher education in art for women in Pakistan at the time of independence. For instance, after 1947, when she had lost most of her students to the Hindu exodus, she would go door to door in Lahore to encourage and convince parents to send their daughters to the Department of Fine Arts as she may able to save the department from its closure. She correctly felt that this would enable her students to support themselves on one hand and would consolidate art education in the young country on the other. Later, the Fine Arts program developed to a Master's degree in 1955 (Wilcox 2000). A year later, the department offered co-education, which extended its scope further. As a competent teacher, she delivered lectures on the history and techniques of wood and copper engraving, techniques of lithography and sculpture. In addition, she taught Drawing, Painting and Composition, Book Illustration and Advertising Design, Wood engraving and Calligraphy. She remained the head of the department from 1940 in her retirement of 1978. She left many of her students such as Jamila Zaidi, Khalid Iqbal, A.R. Nagori, Aslam Minhas, Collin David, Khalid Mehmood, Shaukat Mehmood, Naseem Qazi, Tasneem Mazhar, Anwar Afzal, Zubeida Javed, Abbasi Abidi, Razzaia Feroz, Zakia Malick and Jalees Nagi developing on her artistic insights. She established the Pakistan Art Council (PAC) in 1948. She started evening classes at the Lahore Arts Council (Alhamra) and later in a village near Lahore. She organized shows at the Arts Council, Lahore and also at the University of the Punjab. Anna Molka was a very vocal, powerful and influential individual. Bibigul (Saffia Farooque), who has been one of her students, writes about her personality that, "On a fair skin, she wore scarlet and had a red flower in her hair; this should have been the years close to the Second World War. Anna Molka was in her early twenties, her temperament intense and fiery; she wanted to paint, had an art department to put together and a life to live. Her passionate nature was easily interpreted as a state of anger, which it never was" (Dawn 2004). Thus she was a woman

of strong nerves and managed to do all this with her strong and uncompromising will.

ART OF SCULPTURE

Although Anna Molka is better known as a painter but she was also a talented sculptor. Her sculptural work was never discussed publicly before Marjorie Hussain wrote a book on her in 2007. Anna Molka's youngest daughter Tahira confirmed that her mother used to make sculptures of her friends and later gifted them as well. Four of her sculptural busts are found on exhibition at the Permanent Art Gallery Collection of the Lahore Art Council at Gaddafi Stadium, Lahore. Although the good part is that they are on public display but they are not in good shape as the paint is chipping off and the dust is destroying them gradually. There is certainly a serious need to preserve them since they are of a distinct value as cultural heritage.

The technique of sculpture which is used by Anna Molka is an additive process. The technique develops according to the personality, physical attributes, and preference for heavy texture or smooth surface. The quality of the material used effects and nature of the image to be made and vice versa. The additive process is opposite to that of carving. It is very fortunately that a series of photographs are found in which Anna Molka making a bust of a woman. Anna Molka used clay due to several reasons. Clay in all its forms is the most malleable material. It has no inherent structural quality such as one might experience with wood or stone. It just sits there as a lump; the sculptor must impress his will on it. In this process the application of clay is called modeling. Modeling is a sensual, tactile procedure and by pushing, squeezing, pounding and prodding the clay with hands and fingers, a degree of sensuality will be retained in the work. This is the distinguishing element that makes clay unique in the repertoire of sculpture. The clay is applied over an armature to get the required volume for a head. In her method, clay is added in great handfuls using the power of the whole arm, hands and fist. It is kept wet throughout the making process so that effective gestural marks can be enjoyed and exploited. Although the clay is applied with the hands and details are worked out with the fingers tools were also used in sculpting. These are modeling tools which are available in wide

range of sizes and materials like metal wire tools and wooden tools. However, some wooden tools in particular are found clumsy and a sculptor needs to tailor them according to his individual requirements. The wooden mallets are also used to consolidate the clay. If the striking faces are textured they will impart the surface pattern that will help in comprehension of the form being made by breaking up the light on the surface. As the sculptor approaches the final surface, the sculpture needs more care in the application of clay. One way of doing this is to add the clay in pellets of varying size. These are made with rolling the clay between fingers to the desired size and quality. Such applications are left as a texture or smoothed over to make a tight surface which is visible in all the sculptures of Anna Molka.

There are different methods of mould making; of them Anna Molka used the waste mould method in which only one cast is possible for the mould is destroyed when removed from the cast with a wooden chisel and a mallet. The procedures of the mould making are same but the number of pieces of mould depends on the form of sculpture. The simplest kind of mould is one piece mould which Anna Molka used in making of sculptures. Then there is a two piece mould in which sculpture is divided in two sections; this is applied in all of the sculptural heads and busts made by Anna Molka. In some sculptures more sections have been used. Even the additional armature is also put inside the caste of the sculptures for support. She also applied the separator, the moulds were tied together with a rope, and then the plaster of Paris is poured again in the mould to get the cast. Finally she has painted the sculptures with oil paints with which the original color of plaster of Paris is hiding.

Anna Molka has taught a lot of students who practiced sculpture during their academic training under her. The work of these students is more focused on small size figurative round sculpture, busts and relief work. However, none of these students continued their making of sculpture later on, as apparently there was hardly any future for sculptors in Pakistan.

The Bust of Tahira Ijaz

The figure 1, is the bust of Tahira Ijaz; who is younger daughter of Anna Molka and was favorite to her. She was five

years younger than her other daughter Zarah. She was fifteen years old when Anna Molka made the bust of her. She did Masters in Psychology and was a teacher by profession. It is pertinent to mention that neither of the daughters continued their mother's profession, although Zarah opted to paint as a hobby and still paints today. The referred bust is in possession of the Tahira Ijaz herself.

Mother and Child

This sculpture shown in figure 2 depicts a woman sitting with a baby on the floor, who is so badly starved that his ribs are clearly visible. Even the woman is not in good shape; she seems starved herself and sad because of the poor state of her baby, who is dependent on her. The dates and time of these sculptures are unknown because Anna Molka did not mention them on the sculptures at all, but somewhat sure that these were made in 1960s. In this sculpture she has created the tension through the selection of the subject matter and with the treatment of the material that is clay. The application of clay is in such a way that it has made the surface uneven. Perhaps she tried to show the misery and helplessness of the nation collectively during the partition.

Woman with Peacocks

The above referred sculpture in figure 3 is slightly with different subject matter related to somehow with mythological aspects. In western history, mythological themes were popular with artists since the Renaissance. In the educational system followed in England at that time, the emphasis was on classical learning. So the forms of antiquity were familiar to Anna Molka. *Woman with Peacocks* is also made with plaster of Paris and then painted with color. In her sculptural work, all of them are of the same style only the models are different. Otherwise there was no major change in their execution; technique and material.

CONCLUSION

Anna Molka was a trained artist-academician and she was a great painter but her sculpture work was at par of excellence. She was knowledgeable about the modern role of art as she was the by-product of the West. There is variety in the subject matter of her

paintings like still life, portraits, landscapes, festivals, rituals and migration (from India to Pakistan in 1947) scenes. However, her sculptures seem limited to busts and few based upon the mythological figures. She gradually tried to penetrate her western aesthetics in the people which was quite natural because she was living with it but penetrated them, mostly with indigenized subject matter in her work. She made the busts mostly, which she did for her satisfaction as they were never displayed together in any exhibition. She might have adopted limited subject matter in sculpture because of the social conditions of a new born country in 1947. The conditions and environment was unfavorable for the growth of sculpture. She worked in a country which was established on the name of religion, where there was no need for art at all. On the other hand, the whole nation went through struggle and pain due to unexpected exodus, and was facing the socio-economic pressures. In this situation, she concentrated as an art educationist; when the country's vision for art and aesthetic was completely crumpled. Perhaps, Anna Molka was a great painter, educationist and pioneer sculptor in Pakistan.

Figure-1**Figure-2**

Figure 1: Tahira (daughter of Anna Molka).
Figure 2: Mother & child (life size), Plaster of Paris.
Plaster of Paris

Figure-3



Figure 3: A Woman with Peacocks, Plaster of Paris

Figure-4



Figure 4: Anna Molka Ahmed working at her place with model and bust.

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