Creating Public Spaces for Art:
Dr. M S Randhawa’s Seminal Contribution

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Abstract
Museums and galleries play an important role in promotion of art by providing a platform for artists to display their works. They also help in preserving art works of the past and present so that the future generations may reconnect with their past and benefit from the experience. As both museums and galleries bring art to the public, their importance in propagating art becomes immense. Beside museums and art galleries, public display of art works, especially sculptures, is also done in public spaces like gardens, malls and roundabouts. Chandigarh’s first Chief Commissioner, Dr. M S Randhawa, played an important role in erecting museums, art galleries and providing space in gardens for art in Chandigarh and the northern region of India. It was due to his efforts in this regard that today Chandigarh has been able to create a name for itself in the art circle of the country. My aim in writing this paper is to recognise Dr. M S Randhawa’s contribution in promotion of art in the northern region of India by initiating building and creating various museums, galleries and open art spaces. I would also like to focus on the effect these buildings and spaces had on the art of the region, especially on the art and artists of Chandigarh.

1 Introduction
Museums are essential requirements of a modern civilized world. It is here that we come face to face with culture, heritage and the development of humanity over the ages. The recognition of our creative needs sets us apart from animals and to connect with this quality a place is required where informative as well as visual examples of our tradition, science and art can be displayed for all to see. It was in Europe that the concept of museum became popular in the seventeenth century, which latter spread to the rest of the world. Although it was already in practice to collect curios and art works by the ancient Greeks, but the concept of exhibiting art works for the common people to view became popular in the eighteenth century Europe. It became prevalent for the Europeans to collect art works during this period and even some privileged and royal Indians took to this practice. Initially, like in India, even in Europe the viewing of this treasure was limited to the owners and the privileged ones and not to the common man. Setting up of museums changed it all. Displayed art in the museums could be enjoyed by the common people without owning it and burning a hole in their pockets by buying the expensive works. Likewise an art gallery also serves this purpose of bringing art to the public. Both museums and art galleries are buildings (or space) where art works are exhibited. Museums can be either private
or public. However, museums usually have the ownership of the displayed art works in them and galleries, on the other hand, usually display art works which belong to the artist or a third party (an investor or connoisseur of art). This demarcation is fast diminishing as now galleries also have started owning art works and museums sometimes display works hired from other organizations or other museums. Both museums and art galleries help in development and propagating of art and has become a major part of our modern civil society. The need of a place to display art for public viewing was first recognised in the eighteenth century Europe, especially in France. Art exhibitions started mushrooming in the eighteenth century France which soon spread to the rest of the continent. This was an important cultural development which nourished not only the art but artistic sensibilities of the Europeans. The growing presence of the Europeans in the seventeenth and the eighteenth century India and various objects of interest found in the sub-continent compelled them to build museums here as well. With the arrival of the British in the sub-continent of India the museum culture also prevailed on the eastern soil. During the British-Raj many museums were established at prominent cities of our country including Delhi, Madras, Bombay and Lahore. A number of art objects from the local area and around were collected and displayed in these museums. The museum of Lahore had a collection of priceless Gandharan and Indus valley art along with some Pahari miniature paintings. It was the main museum of the north India next to the museum of Delhi. However with the partition of India and Pakistan the collection of Lahore museum was divided into sixty forty ration between the countries. India was given forty percent share which needed to be housed in a museum of Punjab. Chandigarh being the new capital of Punjab was chosen for establishment of the new museum in the early 1960’s. Building of this museum was not a smooth run and it faced many hurdles. Dr. M s Randhawa, the first Chief Commissioner of Chandigarh came to its rescue.

2 Objectives of the Study
I. To recognise Dr. M S Randhawa’s contribution in promotion of art in the northern region of India by initiating building and creating various museums, galleries and open art spaces;
II. To focus on the effect these buildings and spaces had on the art of the region, especially on the art and artists of Chandigarh.
III. To show the importance of Museums and galleries in promotion of art by providing a platform for artists to display their works & help in preserving art works.

3 Dr. M S Randhawa : A Brief Life Sketch
Born on the 2nd of February in 1909 to Sardar Sahib S. Sher Singh Randhawa and his wife Shrimati Bachint Kaur in Zira, district Ferozepur (Punjab) India, Dr. M S Randhawa was destined to play a major part in establishing not only the Govt. Museum and Art Gallery Chandigarh but various other similar establishments in the region. Dr. Randhawa hailed from a humble and simple family, where his parents stressed on simplicity. He was a bright student and after graduating from his school he joined Khalsa College, Lahore, where he graduated in science. Latter he joined I.C.S and became a civil servant. This might have been the end of the road to new venture for any other man but Dr Randhawa went beyond and embraced the field of art. Being a man of science, his growing interest in arts was taking him to a new direction. Randhawa had varied interest and art was one of the dominant one. His passion towards art drove him to not only to write on art and artist but also work towards welfare and development of art. He wrote several books on art and was part of many art related organizations. He in his capacity of being a civil servant built and helped in establishing various museums and art galleries. He started with following his interest in writing on artists, especially with whom he had come into a close proximity. Eventually he combined this interest with the benefits that
his job as a civil servant gave him and worked towards building of infrastructure to facilitate art in the northern region of the country. Museums and art galleries made it to the top of his list.

4 Establishment Of Public Art Spaces

The Independence of India, in 1947, came at a high cost. The partition of our country fell upon us and Punjab suffered the most in form of loss of thousands of lives, property and most of all, the brotherly bond that the people shared with each other. With this partition of the region, the art objects of Lahore museum were also divided and on temporary bases, these art objects were shifted to Shimla where they were displayed in a church and a building close to it. Latter in 1954 they were shifted to Patiala’s MotiBagh Palace, which was being considered to be turned into a museum. Mr. W.G. Archer was assigned the task to asses it of being worthy. The report given by Archer stated that the palace was unfit to be a museum as it was built for a residential purpose and had many loopholes. This report forced the government to think on the terms of building a new museum in the region and for the purpose, Chandigarh was selected as it was a model city. Mons. Le Corbusier was asked to design the building for an art gallery and museum to house the treasure acquired from the Lahore museum. Although a need was felt for the museum its execution was not a smooth sail as the Indo–China war broke out in 1962 forcing the government to cut out on extra expenses. The museum was seen as one such expense. Dr. M S Randhawa, Chief Commissioner of Chandigarh at the time, who was an effluent art historian, critic, scientist and an able administrator came forward for its rescue. He took the project on a war footing and managed to convince the authorities to go ahead with it. On the 6th of May 1968 Government Museum and Art Gallery Chandigarh was inaugurated. The existing collection of the Museum was enhanced by some added artworks collected by Dr. Randhawa himself. This collection is one of the best in the country and has become one of the main attractions of the museum since. Randhawa, in his speech on the inauguration of the museum had said, “Art collections belong to the whole nation rather than to any group of people or Governments. They are for the enjoyment of the people and provide research material to scholars and cannot be treated as material wealth to be shared and divided.” The statement reflects his selflessness and open heartedness, qualities seen not that frequently in our society. Thanks to him, we have a world-class museum in the ‘City Beautiful’, the building of which in itself is a monument to be admired.

Art, even today is considered an elite activity by many, but Dr. Randhawa understood the necessity of art for the development of society and an individual. He once said, “Art is not a luxury but is as important for the balanced development of human personality as food and drink. In fact it is appreciation of beauty which distinguishes man from the apes and played a vital role in the evolution of man.” It is this belief that drove him to encourage establishment of art galleries and museums in various parts of Punjab. With an aim to make art accessible to the common people as well he was instrument as in the establishment of India’s first History Museum in a place like Ferozeshah in Punjab which was neither the state capital nor was it on the tourist map of India. Although an Anglo-Sikh Wars memorial was to be built here, with Randhawa’s persuasion the plan was changed and a museum was built instead. He further insisted that the museum should have paintings on the historical events and portraits of the prominent personalities of Punjab justifying it by the adage ‘pictures speak a thousand words’. According to him a visual lesson in history exceeds in creating an impression thousand times more than a lesson learned from digging into books. Likewise the museum at Anandpur Sahib too, which was a Punjab Government venture, had Dr. Randhawa’s contribution in its establishment. He was made the Chairman of a State committee for the formulation and implementation of commemorative projects and the Director, Punjab Relations, Punjab was designated as its convener. In this designation Dr. Randhawa was to supervise the project which
included design and planning of the building, which was entrusted in the able hands of S. Surjit Singh (Chief Architect, Union Territory, Chandigarh) and commissioning apt artists for the paintings on the subject which were to be displayed in the museum. The project was started in 1979 and was completed in 1981. The displayed paintings were by artists like Kirpal Singh, Jaswant Singh and Devindar Singh. The artist brought the history alive in their works. Dr. Randhawa not only helped in creating space for art but also employed artists in the project, which encouraged the artists to continue with their artistic creations. On the historical site of the Jallianwala Bagh tragedy, a monument was erected and in 1973, on the suggestion of Dr. Randhawa, it was decided to display paintings related to the scene in a Martyrs Art Gallery which was to be established on the site itself. This was an outcome of the utter confusion that Dr. Randhawa witnessed in the reception room of the corpulent caretaker of the Bagh. Due to this initiation on his part that today visitors to the Bagh get a visual insight into the happenings of the tragedy. Dr. Randhawa’s believe in the impact of visuals in understanding of history can be seen in practice in the ‘Martyrs Art Gallery’ in Amritsar.

Dr Randhawa was not merely an appreciator of arts but contributed to its development and propagation to best of his ability. His foresightedness in this regard had such lasting effect that artists of Punjab and Chandigarh even today are reaping benefits from it. He became the chairman of the Chandigarh Landscape Committee organised in July 1953. In this position he was involved in planting of various trees around the city which adding to its beauty. He did not limit his expedition of beautifying the city to planting of different variety of trees around Chandigarh alone but involved art in it as well. He came up with different ideas in this regard which had presence of art and artists in them. It was his idea on which a monument called ‘Landscape Sculpture—Un-Divided Punjab’ by artist S L Parasher was erected, in 1968 in Leisure Valley Chandigarh to commemorate undivided Punjab (Punjab, Haryana and Kangra). This inspired and paved way for many other artists to display their works in the open. Latter on many other sculptures were added to similar sites. Renowned artists like Shiv Singh, H. S. Kulkarni, Avtarjit Dhanjal and Charanjit Matharu have further contributed in this idea by erecting sculptures in the valley. The famous tourist spot of Chandigarh, the ‘Rock
Garden’ by Nek Chand Saini, would not have existed had Dr. Randhawa not suggested to the Chandigarh Landscape Committee, of which he was the chairman, to accept this unique garden of rocks as part of Landscape scheme of the city. The garden was hidden from the public eye for eleven years but it was disclosed in the early 1970’s.


As this unplanned development was not part and contrary to the otherwise planned scheme of the new city, Nek Chand feared its demolition. He sent an emissary to M S Randhawa who took prompt action and made provision to retain it. Dr. Randhawa was sensitive towards artists and did not delay any action which could help encourage artist. Due to his enthusiastic interest in arts Chandigarh can today boast of a work of art like the ‘Rock Garden’.
Mohinder Singh Randhawa is fondly remembered by the art fraternity in Punjab and Chandigarh as the founder of many art organisations. A lesser known fact is his role in establishing the Lalit Kala Akademi, Chandigarh in 1966.
The Akademi was registered on 22nd December 1966 and Randhawa was appointed the first chairman of the Akademi which had twenty founder members. Today the Akademi is considered to be the best in the country and organises many interactive lectures by top artists of the country which are open to public. This interaction of the public with the top artists of the country has resulted in developing artistic sensibility among the common people. Other institutions like Punjab Arts Council also attribute their existence to M S Randhawa. Punjab Arts Council was established in 1981 and it is an independent cultural body. Although the Punjab Arts Council has a separate entity but it consists of three independent Akademies namely Punjab Sangeet Natak Akademi, Punjab Sahit Akademi and Punjab Lalit Kala Akademi. Dr. Randhawa was the first Chairman and founder of the Council and headed it from the year 1979 to till his death in 1986. It was under his supervision that the present Council building was constructed in the prestigious one acre plot in the Rose Garden. The building, named Punjab Kala Bhawan, consists of an Art Gallery, an Auditorium with seating capacity of 300 chairs and Open Air Theatre and Committee Room. The art gallery of the Punjab Kala Bhawan is given out for rent for various exhibitions. This facility in the city attracts many artists from Chandigarh and around to exhibit there works in the city.
Due to availability of such infrastructure artists get a chance to exhibit their works in public and get encouragement. Thanks to Randhawa’s contributions, Chandigarh has a tradition of regular art exhibitions, art workshops and art camps which are organised by various organizations on these sites.

4 Conclusion

Dr. M S Randhawa has contributed in establishing many museums and art galleries in the region of Punjab. In doing so he facilitated not only the artists but infused an interest in the residents of the region towards viewing and appreciating art. His contribution in promotion of art, especially in establishment of infrastructure for art, in Chandigarh and Punjab is immense. Along with these infrastructures for art Randhawa also provisioned for open spaces in Chandigarh gardens which also served as art spaces for artists. Many sculptures around Chandigarh are installed under this provision.

Dr. Randhawa had a foresight to see the lasting effect of many of his projects in contributing to the growth of art in the region. Artists, even today are benefitting from these art spaces. His selfless dedication towards promotion of the arts has become a landmark and an inspiration for future administrators. His efforts, in this regard, deserve recognition. If one man could make such a difference, imagine how progressive our country will become if all administrators are equally dedicated.

References