

The Politics of Modern Monuments and its Rejection of Monumentality.

Olivia Joseph

Post Graduate in English and Comparative Literature
Central University of Kerala, India.

Abstract: Monument reveals the cultural memory of a society. It recollects the spirit of the people in a nation. The multiple meanings derived from the modern monuments determine the rejection of the 'aura' of monumentality of a monument. The modern monuments are determined on the basis of age value, historical value and intentional value where the 'intention' occupies the central position. The term 'monument' does not restrict itself to buildings that commemorate events. It is further extended to the collective memory of people in written or non-verbal forms. According to Lewis Mumford, "If it is a monument it is not modern, and if it is modern, it cannot be a monument". The present-day monuments are based on the historical and aesthetic background of the present time. Therefore, it provides ample opportunities for the reader to derive multiple meaning from the monuments. This paper looks upon the changing dimensions in the modern monuments and the politics intended behind it. The politics of a monument, its power relations and the inherent meanings of violence and non-violence act as a part of the construction of a social and collective memory. The modernity welcomes the monument which refuses the monumentality of that monument but stands as a towering object to promote the politics behind it.

IndexTerms - Monument, Monumentality, Collective memory, and Intentional value.

Monument is a creative structure which commemorates an event or a person. The word "monument" is derived from the Latin word "*moneo*", "*monere*", which means "to remind", "to advise" or "to warn". Monument and monumentality have got multiple dimensions and varied purposes which assume different positions in the course of time. The nineteenth century witnessed two tendencies of the world - Nationalism and Imperialism. The monuments of this century also have two-fold purposes - symbolic and educative. It serves as "mass production of tradition" and was supposed to represent the supremacy of the nation in relation to other world nations. But in the twentieth century, Lewis Mumford in 1938 famously claimed "if it is a monument it is not modern, and if it is modern, it cannot be a monument". The universal value system had changed drastically and dramatically in the twentieth century and the modern monuments' inability to communicate the message is criticized by Mumford.

A monument helps one to visualize the past events and its continuing significance in the changing course of time. Monument is not only the part of a community memory, but also a designed memory where 'memory' is constructed and retained through the monuments. The meaning that the monument radiates is not fixed rather it has a dynamic perspective because it is influenced by the changing perspective of history over time. Thus, it stands as an epitome of 'collective memory.'

In nationalistic sentiments, it becomes an important symbol of national pride and heritage. The monuments help one nation to preserve its culture as the architecture signalize the cultures and practices which stands in the brim of extinction. At times, the egoistic national pride will lead to the glorification of the supremacy of the specific nation-state in an international context. Therein, it leads to a situation of cultural conflict.

By commemorating an event or a person, the monument represents the dominant ideology of the State. There is an inherent element of politics – the monument as a spatial metaphor of acceptance and rejection of the dominant values. 'Aesthetic value' which is dependent on the aesthetic taste of the receptor makes a work of architecture different from the other. But it always has an 'intentional value' which occupies the central position. the BSP leader, and the former woman CM of Uttar Pradesh in India, Mayawati, took initiative in constructing multiple monuments. Through these monuments they tried to provide a space for the Dalit community. One of the criticisms raised by the columnist Amrit Dhilion of The Times of India is that these monuments "... fail to move the spectator because they speak of nothing but their creator's lust for grandeur".

While analyzing the history of monuments, there is significant and rapid changes in the structural patterns in which they are constructed but the politics of it (the conveyance of the dominant ideologies) remained the same. For instance, the authority of Church in the earlier times is replaced by the authority of State in the modern era. The metaphorical pillars and obelisks represent the authority of religion and have a sense of 'divinity' around it. Later these pillars changed to modern architectural forms like, pantheon temples, military cemeteries, monuments and mausoleums of famous persons and events. Yet, the proliferation of power and dominance pertains in both the authoritative ideological apparatuses.

When the monument exhibits the evil deeds of the nation, it contradicts the very notion of the dominant, autocratic policies of the nation. Thus, it becomes an anti or counter monument, thereby subverting or resisting the ruling ideology of the State. By offering a counter statement, this type of monuments traps the cultural memory from the stage of oblivion. An example for this is Micha Ullman's 'Bibliothek monument' in Berlin. His memorial is to the book burning at Berlin's Bebelplatz. It represents the cruelties towards the Jews. The monument do not has an upright structure. They are bookshelves that are placed in the underground and covered with a glass. They bring a feeling or an emotion of guilt and grief. It stands against the politics of nation and the supremacy of nation is reduced to the expression of 'sympathy'. Therefore, the monument stands as an important symbol of resistance.

The Emerich Shaffren's "Dictionary of the Arts," defines "Monument" as:

1. In the wider sense every outstanding or typical work of art, but in the narrower or more correct sense,
2. A monument erected by man to God, a saint or to the memory of important persons or events in history... the erection of a monument in the narrower and in the broader sense demanded an artistic frame of mind which was aware of what was both noble and magnificent. The feelings arising out of these attitudes are described as 'monumental.'

Therefore 'monumentality' is the feeling that arises from a monument. This feeling is absent in the modern monuments because of the interplay of politics. Walter Benjamin, in his seminal essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," (1935) argues that the politicization of art in the modern or mechanical age would liberate a work of art from the clutches of ritualistic or traditional values (aura) attributed to it.

Looking through the traces of (European) history of monuments there are strong affiliations of representations from the classical period. For example- during the time of First World War, one of the most renowned Red Cross propaganda posters titled *The Greatest Mother in the World* created by Alonzo Foringer bears a strong resemblance to *Pieta*, a sculpture by Michelangelo. *Pieta*, has a classical reference to the performance of Virgin Mary who holds the dead Christ in her arms. Thus, all the artistic representation of this classical legend has a deep-rooted theme in the memorization of war. The message of 'sacrifice' from the legend remains the same but is polished in the democratic aspect of memory and nation.

The memorial commemorating, Frederick Douglass was constructed and opened to public in June 2010. He was an African-American abolitionist, orator, writer and statesman. He lived in the nineteenth century when slavery was prevalent and in its peak. The importance of the monument of Douglass in the present era is that he reminds the people of an era of pain and struggle in the fight against slavery. He represents a race and their emancipation. The monument symbolizes two thoughts – firstly, demand for social equality. Secondly, demand for equal rights. It is not only a memory of a past event but it is also a political act that evokes and provokes the historical consciousness and strengthens the future ones to demand for their rights. The real issue comes in this phase as the increasing familiarity with the monument and the ready acceptance of its message will result in the complete reduction of a monument's monumentality.

The monuments which are commissioned for 20 to 30 years are reinstalled in different part of the world as a product of national politics. Even though it commemorates a person or an event which is important in the history of that nation, the real politics comes into play in the form of vote banks and to gain favour from the people. For instance, "a sculpture of Dedan Kimathi, the foremost Mau Mau leader who died in 1956, was commissioned by the Kenyan Government to stand outside the State Law Office in Sheria House...The commissioning of a second statue of Kimathi became possible almost 30 years later; in September 2003 when Kenya's third president, Mwai Kibaki, commissioned a new sculpture of Kimathi. It was installed on Kimathi Street in 2006".

Everything that stands as a representation carries meaning. The inability to communicate the meaning results in the rejection of monumentality. Thus, the monuments have different meanings and there are politics and hidden agendas in erecting these monuments. Promoting the construction of monuments create landmarks for the future generation to go through the old pages of history. But the celebration of commemorating events and persons enable a rethinking of the politics and also the value of age, history and intention in it. Therefore, the monuments should be built in accordance with the monumentality of that work.

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