



THE EXPANSION OF GRAFFITI ART ENABLING CULTURAL EMBODIMENT IN INDIA: A STUDY

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Abstract :

As visual art encompasses visuals, art of intricate vision by thorough observations where more importance as well as focus must be placed on vision what can be seen and to understand the visual language that it creates for both way communication. Edward T. Hall's book on- '*The silent language*' which invigorates on- "*Culture is communication and communication cultures. The computer is an extension of certain functions of the brain, the telephone extends the voice, the wheel extends the legs and feet, language extends extend experience in time and space, and writing extends the language. Vision, the last of the senses to evolve, is by far the most complex. Vision is synthesis. It is not passive but active, a transaction between a person and her/his environment. A person learns while he sees and what he learns influences what he sees.*" It suggests what an individual is more important than what he/she thinks or imagine. Execution again reciprocates the visionary perspective of the individual that he/she confronts and transactional experiences, which also comments on the geographical periphery which belongs to that individual. Graffiti art can be seen sustaining relatively more in urban cities and towns hardly could be seen in rural or remote areas, these art form adorns elaborated with bright and vibrant colors, sometimes cool colors, the advent of chiaroscuro publicly on the walls, pillars or mansions, auditoriums incorporating superlative advertising commercials which are not mere designed for colorful compositions but beholds an apparent vision of artistic generosity, self-expression of thoughts, perspectives and the walls and ceilings, acts as a mode of communicative virtue or space which requires a special attention and inclination. This Research paper titled as- '*The Expansion of Graffiti Art as a Representation of Cultural embodiment in India*' has attempted to touch the multi-disciplinary existence of graffiti art in various spheres in creating a bridge between the artists and public, where a vibrant silent language through the illustrations squeezing the flavor of vivid cultures that communicates.

IndexTerms - aesthetics, public space, representations, street art, visual language.

INTRODUCTION

One of the most smeared topic rather repeatedly uttered in public or through individual gossip i.e. the term ‘culture’ a very popular term for debate, critic and analysis and indeed research for theorists, anthropologists and literary critics. According to the dictionary connotation it implies- *‘the arts and other manifestations of human intellectual achievement regarded collectively. The cultivation of bacteria, tissue cells, etc., in an artificial medium containing nutrients. Maintain (tissue cells, bacteria, etc.) in conditions suitable for growth.’*

In 1917, Robert Lowie said that culture doesn’t only means racial and genetics rather he states that, culture is something that evokes out with avowed human activities and ‘culture’ connotes a virtue to inculcate and worth identify some uniqueness of every individual. He further says, this is very evident to focus on what people do or perform rather than what they think. His emphasis clearly indicates his keen inclination towards action, simultaneously he had listed out a few ingredients that coherently mingled with culture are- morality, taste, aesthetical viewpoint, attitude speaks of gender, sex, poverty, family structure, language, art & architecture, custom & religion etc. these are acquired attributes. Lowie says, culture is embodiment of ‘shreds and patches’ (Gull, 2015) this phrase convey that, it holds everything especially when the entire world is becoming interdependently globalized spontaneously in the midst of such environment it is very challenging to establish the cultural diplomacy to vindicate peace, tranquility and stability to the entire globe.

So far as the uniqueness or ability of ‘cultural diplomacy’ is concerned, it has the pedigree to ensure influence to ‘the global public opinion’ where individual ideology are taken into accountability, also the communities and cultures are also entertained. Similar to the other form of art and creative practices includes theatre and music, dance, street art and graffiti became as a sharp equipment for critic, inter-cultural dialogues, fight against injustice, peace, unity and diversity, human rights, global changes, socio-political changes.

Edward T. Hall says- *“Culture is a complex series of interrelated activities, with roots buried in the past, in infra-culture, behavior that preceded culture but later became elaborated by humans into the culture.”*

The capital of India ‘New Delhi’ has been nomenclature as a diplomatic capital of the country because of its past variations in the history of dominations from vivid rulers and kings, Mughals and Europeans, this undoubtedly had resulted acceptance and agglutinating versatile molds of culture within it had adorned her a platform of universal center which is not only a mere commercial avenue of northern India but also a myriad shelter for small scale industries. Delhi is popularly known as ‘Dilvaloki Delhi’ (which means Delhi belongs to the expanded hearts) as because of its unique characteristics of holding the rank of one of the very strong economy in the midst of other capitals of India. Moreover, fashion designing, textile, handloom, Information Technology, electronic industry, trade and commerce, had been their respective conducting impact on the capital city and mass from all corners of the country and overseas, amalgamation of incorporating new ideas, habitats, lifestyles, religious beliefs and faith, custom and traditions, market place and ethnicities shows a charming blend of old and new episodes of Delhi life and its inhabitants. On the other side, superlative malls, elongated flyovers, huge buildings and flats, ancient historical sites and monuments, art-architecture and greenery transmits a chronology of residing together along with various new ideas and obviously cultures of

old and new are evenly merged to break the cultural monotony. Especially the greenery in the midst of every historical monument and architectural ambience seems as if erected to welcome every new possibility of being merging up to invoke vastness to keep the ecological balance, equally conglomerated to tempt the tourists from India and overseas.

NEED OF THE STUDY.

Graffiti claims to be introduced first ever art pieces located inside the caves where the pre-historic men used to reside were considered as graffiti. Susan Philips states graffiti as a medium to- “Personalize depersonalized space, construct landscapes of identity, and make public space into private space. The word Graffiti has been used to describe a variety of wall writings including prehistoric cave paintings and a wide variety of political, sexual, humorous, and self-identifying messages that have been scratched, painted and marked on walls throughout history.” Thorough research stressed that, graffiti art had been discovered in the form of carved rocks, painted on huge stones and cave walls of ancient Italy and Egypt. Basically these convey the message of primitive human habitats and themes of food gathering, mutual coordination and friendship as well as love for nature.

Whereas, in contrast the pattern of analysis and discourses of graffiti art seems to be more conscious and purposeful in the context of visual arts and artists of new era emphasizing relatively more on burning issues and agendas of present, not the least past which they considered most emphatic. Factors responsible for its being and becoming and carried forwarded by times which were often overlooked or neglected by people. Darryl McCray or “Cornbread” claimed to be the first individual to envisage graffiti while residing inside prison he used to write his name as ‘cornbread’, and this name continued even after his release from the captivity. This more than a fashion started to pervade throughout the entire New York city (where Demetrius aka TAKI 183) by the virtue of New York Times newspaper flashed this incident resulted every child of the city were tagged to put their ‘signatures’ had given birth to a sub-genre culture of Hip-Hop. And it is a kind of resistance rather than mere performance from the native youth protesting with agony and frustration against the govt. norms especially ‘unemployment’.

The body of graffiti art got its popularity in the early 60s and mid 70s specifically when the artists’ came up with vivid concepts painted almost every public spaces, building walls, subway cars and other vehicles, lampposts, railways were fully decorated and entirely covered with paintings. Even graffiti not restricted only to such arenas but also ensured its subsistence furthermore to- art galleries, movies, commercials or advertisements, videos and multimedia gaming as well. Eventually graffiti recognized as a form of street art which doesn’t possess towards demolishing public property but an approach with aesthetical expression of the artist besides conveying a message. Many big cities around the world witnessed street art like- New York, Berlin, Chicago, Los Angeles, China, Russia, Paris, South Africa, San Francisco and Sao Paulo known for their graffiti street art scenes for conducting a visual language and as a medium for communication.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study concerned about the complexity as well as discursiveness that has been arising from the graffiti art by the artists often comes up with diversities in opinions, which are not available every time in mass media and caused by the various social agendas. What remains as a residue is ‘dissonance’ that implies the persisting inconsistency in the cities, where variances are engrossingly differ from one cities to another in terms of ideas, issues, socio-political & economic conflicts but complimentary to the statement of Edward T. Hall’s book ‘*silent language*’ where he mentioned- ‘*culture is communication and communication cultures.*’ where the sight or vision is a key factor ‘synthesis’ means harmony. A visual language comes out with sense perception the art of seeing and experiencing, materializing the ideas into culture that’s known as visual culture.

It has been examined and authenticated that, alike other creative human beings also have inherent spontaneous tendency to express via different modes of expressions. But in the context of visual art other dimensions like- graffiti art, posters and stencils/stickers basically enumerated on- bus stands, auto-rickshaws, flyovers, shutters, market places are recognized as ‘communicative medium’ where pictures are given equal designation in such a way which would be easily accessible as well as graspable by every common folk. Very interestingly it is understood that, images stay intact for a long duration but words are often forgotten.

Philosopher Hanno Hardt’s opinion on the discourse of ‘television culture’- “*the television culture is replacing words as the important factor in social communication. Shortly, words will be reserved for only bureaucratic transactions through business forms and in books that will only be read by a few individuals. Reading is losing to watching because viewing requires little mental processing.*”

Edward T. Hall’s book entitled as “*The Hidden Dimension*” that- “*Art can be a rich source of data on human perception. The art of a culture reveals a great deal about the perpetual world of that culture. The artist provides the reader, listener or viewer with properly selected cues that are not only congruent with the events depicted but consistent with the unspoken language and culture of the audience.*” Therefore, graffiti art can be said as an art form that transpires the prevailing culture of a particular city, walls plays a significant role with the use of vibrant colored composition, space and composition that invigorates visual communication. Subsequently, graffiti artist exhibits their thought process by persuading certain things for society and space from which the artists belong. The intention behind graffiti art is to substantiating the mass about what is their opinion or influx in reaction to the predominant commemorative issues of the society and politics which people often negates or overlook as if it is not beneficial for them.

During October 2010 construction for Commonwealth Games was targeted as a theme for graffiti art with stickers nomenclature with caption “QUIT CWG” as a resistance proclaiming as- “Corporate Wealth Game.” As per the experience and research is concerned the graffiti artists, writers reveal that, graffiti art influences by commercials that always attracts city life almost every seconds of a day and graffiti executes symbols innate feature in the progress of city culture. The changing cities & towns emerged out with narrow scopes for symbols and making graffiti more relevant and purposeful which has been instigated by corruption, exploitation and perversions. Graffiti reflects the intensity of changing in pace of city and its transitions dictates symbol and icons much more relevant and consequential, and simultaneously it aims on by countering it. Graffiti artists aims in raising the voice through visual representational impact and continues in search of

access to the public spaces beneath the cityscape to keep the norms of democracy intact and understand for public, tourists, mass respectively. In fact, graffiti art always seems to be staying in search of the loopholes and adversities by challenging the domination of social norms, exaggeration in the name of big companies, popular brands, that directly or indirectly, silently or dormant responsible for keeping the democracy debarred resulting inaccessible for the people to understand the importance of public space.

Example- ShahpurJat village and Khirki extension in Delhi (nowdelhi.tv, 2014).

Emergence of Graffiti in Overseas:-

Graffiti claims to be introduced first ever art pieces located inside the caves where the pre-historic men used to reside were considered as graffiti. Susan Philips states graffiti as a medium to- “Personalize depersonalized space, construct landscapes of identity, and make public space into private space. The word Graffiti has been used to describe a variety of wall writings including prehistoric cave paintings and a wide variety of political, sexual, humorous, and self-identifying messages that have been scratched, painted and marked on walls throughout history.” Thorough research stressed that, graffiti art had been discovered in the form of carved rocks, painted on huge stones and cave walls of ancient Italy and Egypt. Basically these convey the message of primitive human habitats and themes of food gathering, mutual coordination and friendship as well as love for nature.

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Introducing Some Graffiti Art Practices in India:-

Graffiti art in other word signifies- a representation s of alarming situations in the form of anti-social practices, objectionable operations or any deformities that had occurred in the past as well as reflection of present situation of global sub-cultures of urban landscape, where the position of cities, life & space, are narrated by the graffiti artists. Graffiti writings has been considered as an attempt of putting resistance to the capitalists and their manifested laws, sanctioned bill boards and commercials and to those norms which dictates how a city should look like.



Graffiti art and its conceptions are still known less as well as lack of consciousness among the people residing in India especially from the rural areas. These visually chaotic alphabets, motifs on walls indicates the situation of economic inequality which has been prevalent in Indian society as compared to the European countries like- Berlin, Barcelona, London, in spite of India's rich cultural heritage. On the other hand, the busy street walls of towns and cities of India holds the promotional advertisements are seen comprised of- medical practitioners, doctors for 'Gupt-Rog' (sexual disease), political campaign or advertising for voter awareness, Polio-vaccine, water wastage, malaria etc. has been very commonly found in Indian towns, cities as well as semi-towns too. The promotional advertisements do not exist only on public or private house walls also perceived on the spaces such as- Railways, fire-brigade, electrical transformers, factories and several unclaimed property and barren land.



Delhi most famous historical and prestigious city of India anomaly parts of this metropolitan city. Eventually, the concept of 'free art' has also introduced parallel and the university walls, public walls and ambience were metaphysically and lavishly articulated with graffiti art for free. It can also be said that, due to the advent of Hip-Hop culture during 1990s in India approximately had unveiled the gateway for graffiti art. very interestingly, the crowd of city like Delhi has been quite reluctant to analyze the 'street art' as a symbol of perversion, vandalism, any other socio-political agenda or any dismantling urban issues, rather they are keenly interested in 'decorating' and tagging the walls by the graffiti artists and get away with it. The discourse of these letterings, motifs and wordings inquisitively implies Daku's street paste up mocking the Louis Vuitton Logo at the urban village of 'Khirkee Extension'. The most fascinating insight was revealed in order to show the Economic Inequality in Indian society and in reverse 'DAKU' stands as- 'KUDA' in Hindi means garbage/ discarded or rejected amenities. And DAKU means dacoit or bandit in Hindi language.

Indian graffiti artists includes- Yantr, Zine, Zake and in 2012 "Extension Khirkee" project had profusely emulated by Aastha Chauhan, who envisaged for the first time ever a Street Art Festival in Delhi near Khirki village, which is basically operated as non-profit 'Foundation for Indian Contemporary Art' (FICA) specifically designed for graffiti artists to display their creativity and concept to such a global platform to ensure communication and exhibition. Apart from this project there are other platforms such as- Khoj, Hip-Hop dance studio and Tiny Drops. Moreover, Khirki also be considered as a vital platform where the scenario of old and new portrait of India seems to have converged.

Artist Anpu Varkey's Graffiti Art:-



Anpu Varkey's incredible creation of Mahatma Gandhi (156 feet tall mural) has opened another window rather brought a new revolution for Delhi Police headquarters during Gandhi Jayanti, which marked a clear contrast between Indian and western culture. Street art of 2016 Delhi was another milestone laid and ventured by Arjun Bahl, Akshat Nauriyal Giulia Ambrogi, Hanif Kureshi, Thanish Thomas, Pierre Guyot respectively. Delhi along with its adjacent wings Mumbai brought together around 25 plus artists from India and abroad had congregated to create a revolutionary step in the form of- murals, graffiti art, installation and many others. This art Foundation had cleared its principles through this statement- culminating public space for its people, moreover it conferred India's first public art district in Lodhi colony lavishly ornamented with vigorous art activities. Asian paints one of the biggest paint manufacturer of India had conducted free paints for such projects and initiatives. St+Art Delhi had also worked as a unit in govt. project towards 'Swachh Bharat Abhiyan' (St+Art Delhi, 2014: Street Art Festival, week 1, 2014).

Some Remarkable Graffiti Works:-



Mural of a Buddha like face fully covered with a gas mask and sprouting leaves by popular artist Yantr in Khirki village. Seeking oxygen as a contrast to the scarcity of life support and congestion against a huge shopping mall near to the village. Though this marked as a very polluted space near Khirki village, where life with sustainability are under severe threat.



Situated in Lodhi colony Neils Shoe Meulman painted his poem in the form of color and fonts, where he deciphered his writings in the form of a huge mural. After a prolong tenure of approx. 35 years he had decided to amalgamate his poem as well as thought process, influences and loads of experiences which he had gathered over the years executed into painting.



Collaborative works with Central Public Works Dept. and Ministry of Urban Development wall composition by artists- Kafeel and team of sign painters, comprising of clear awareness messages of Swachh Bharat Mission.

Street Art & Role of Social Media:-

Street art in other words known as urban art has been one of the most popular and common to the urban life over the years. The busy streets of big cities in India have witnessed the acceleration of street art, murals, installation art since 40-50 years. Must mention due to the advancement of technology and access to social media like- Facebook, Instagram has been an explicit mode of communication that added a boon to spread like anything in the 21st century for both graffiti art and street art. people started to respond not only to the huge art works but, the existing artists as well as many artists who are lesser known.

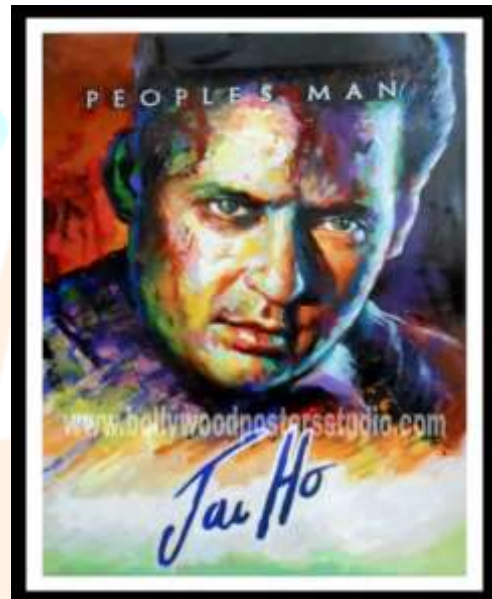


Hanif Kureshi project director of 'St+art' India stated that- *"There were more shares on the Lodhi colony wall art on social media rather than more likes, a way to show pioneer instinct in people to be the first to know about Graffiti or street art. the first tags in India were seen during the 90's but who can give authentication to it... that's why media plays an important role in bringing it to the viewer's because in their life time it's not possible to see the work done by the artists/writers earlier so social media is a huge player in informing the people, this is my thought since there is rise in the use of social media so one can reason the boom of graffiti may be."* (Kureshi, 2016)

Evolution of Street Art in India:-

The art of mural painting in India dated around 1819 back to the 2nd century BCE, which evoked out from the Buddhist cave paintings of Ajanta, which has been an incredible hub for exotic art pieces and artists, especially mural and obviously a center of attraction for tourists, inspiration for budding artists and both sculptors from generations. It is well known that mural paintings and street art have had a greatest impact in towns, semi-towns, and cities due to its exotic virtue of communication expressions with forms, colors and themes aesthetically.

Graffiti art in the form of Film posters, typographic signboards, truck art, rickshaw art, slogans and hand written banners, wall murals,





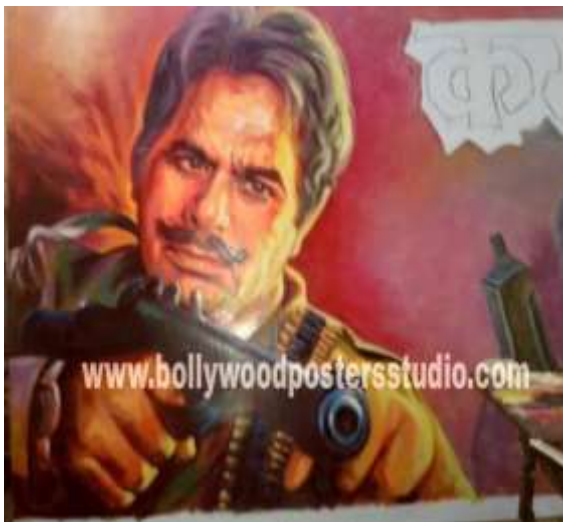


wall paintings etc. are various mediums of graffiti art as a visual language which regularly communicates with the public





Another very interesting instance which made graffiti art and street art more fascinating that, artists were not only skillful and accomplished through their profession but also a role model for society and savior of environment with their wall painting themes that consists of figures, image representations of god and goddesses, political themes by affixing them to the public walls and pavements in order to restrict people spitting or urinating here and there openly.



Apart from graffiti art the artists of northern and central part of India Rangoli has been a very popular and crude mode of street art which incorporates powdered colored illustrations for the street or wall compositions. Rangoli in West Bengal are commonly known as 'Alpona' which incorporates a mixture of rice powder and water to draw various pious motifs and symbols, figures, forms came out of virtuous beliefs basically drawn on the floors, underneath of holy basil plant of almost every village houses, slowly it entered into the cult of urban as well. The eclecticism of the artists irrespective of any caste, creed, gender can take part not necessarily of having any formal training or degree in art, in fact self-taught, amateur artists or lesser known

artists and most striking thing has been every special occasion is adorned with a variation in style and rhythm, motifs stands out with more significant and aesthetical values embedded with a relevance to religious practices and customs.

Must mention the epicenter of Bengal graffiti art had very much fascinated and inspired from the political issues. Moreover, the political party led to rely on caricature art to figure out their speech or thought process. The etchings of Che Guevara, Red Army, the vibrant slogans of Soviet Union in the midst of narrow by-lanes of Kolkata. The acceleration of political graffiti in West Bengal had started during 1960-1990 which created a typical culture where public and the coalition of political parties seems to be aligned at a point.

The reflection of Naxalite party workers assassinated by the police were sketched equally Indira Gandhi was portrayed in devastating (psychedelic) gesture and the composition shows a clear hint of political unrest, unexpected feeling of lamentation as well as agony of public and political parties against the govt.

Artist Mudar Patherya-

a resident of Sarat Chatterjee avenue near Lake avenue Kolkata as well as an artist who took up electrical boxes which have been installed by Calcutta Electric Supply Corporation as canvases in order to paint his thought process in the form of visual communication with the neighbor of the Lake Temple Road equally he made an attempt to sensitize the public about their rich cultural assets, as well as mobilize the crowd to be a part of his composition. Patherya took the responsibility of portraying various Bengali film stalwarts specifically cultural icon on very common spaces, easily accessible for common people by breaking the notions of gallery structure.



The artist designed one of the Electrical box covered in maroon color and one pair of opera spectacles in white shade captioned by him as- *“Satyajit Ray lived at 3, Lake Temple Road when he made this film.”* This very popular image had been portrayed by the artist captioned in Bengali as- ‘Charulata’ of Rabindranath Tagore’s novel which decentralized the essence from the life of a married woman residing alone. The next glimpse upholds by commemorating the portrait of Debaki Bose who was a remarkable playback singer in Indian cinema, also resided in S.N. Roy Road Calcutta. Patherya noticed from his periphery that, someone had exploited the electrical box as a ‘cartoon graffiti’ he says- *“While it was an improvement from the usual barrage of half torn and fraying posters, it was still a very childish visual, I thought, let’s take the idea to another level and bring in the aspect of neighbourhood pride in this. If everybody started talking about their neighbourhoods and its heritage, Kolkata would be so much better for it.”* Apart from these he painted more than eleven (11) Bengali icons from film and music like- Mahanayak Uttam Kumar, Soumitra Chatterjee,

eminent vocal singer, producer and music director Hemanta Mukherjee. Even renowned photographers, artists, bloggers as well as spectators celebrates Kolkata Street Art Festival of every year attracts a huge numbers of viewers to see such a festival of art and artistic mastery in the form of sophisticated crafts, paintings and prolific imaginations. Apart from Kolkata graffiti practices in Delhi, Mumbai invigorated the street art trend as well as the artists like- Yantra 2006, Zine in 2007 and Daku in 2008 had carved their niche in explorations of Indian graffiti art.

Organizations like- Delhi street art, St+art India Foundation along with it other various govt. accredited projects and bodies like- NDMC, DMRC, Swachh Bharat, Ministry of urban development and CPWD clasping hands together have extended support, congregated whenever against any crisis or casualties have had aroused, cooperated for the providential elevation and popularity of such creative undertakings and it is apparently declared that the consequences out of these art works, devoid of any massacre or ill effect to the society.

Graffiti art practice traditionally from India transformed itself into various segments undoubtedly are in search of something never done before and unique with a multifaceted approach in magnifying socio-political debates for e.g. Daku's expedition in open city space by highlighting "Mat do" connoting whether 'to vote' or 'don't vote' for the upcoming elections of 2014 has been a very new concept of visualizing the discourse behind this two words 'Mat do'. Simultaneously in 2016 Daku created another piece of art for St+art India's Lodhi Art District- 'Time Changes Everything' into which a summit of graffiti artists engaged themselves into street art gradually turned out to be like a very common platform to perform easily, and to raise the interest level of the viewers in upgradation of street art/graffiti art, and many graffiti artists have responded to the situational demand that's why graffiti artists started to move out from the unlicensed graffiti practice towards sanctioned space for street art or commissioned by the govt. organization or various other patrons.

St+Art at Lodhi Art District St+art, New Delhi eminent graffiti artist Akshat Nauriyal states that the novelty of rich and elite class relishes or can access the gallery space regularly but for common mass it happens almost occasionally. In fact, it seems that spectators feel like suffocated and the structure of gallery seems to be a constraint for them even tedious to breathe. The discourse of St+art India banner Nauriyal says- through the street art on people walls seems to be knocking by making them understand the elaborate pictorial narratives evoked out from the creative minds of the artists.





[From the extreme left images of second line (from left to right)- Akshat Nauriyal, content director Giulia Ambrogi, Festival curator, Thanish Thomas, project director and Arjun Bahl- Festival Director. Photography by- Naman Saraiya.]

Conclusion:-

Eventually, in 2016, an artist from Bangalore named as Shilo Shiv Suleman got entwined with a govt. foundation known as- '*Sewing New Futures*' organization that fights for those women who were thrashed into sex-racket in Najafgarh area, this organization along with the women who were the victims and volunteers had painted the walls in the Lodhi art District to pass a ray of hope for their new future and sustainability apart from their previous indefinite miseries. And the mural invigorates itself tells a story by an aged woman to a younger lady that life has got wings which will be getting much better in the coming time so, it's better to be optimistic.



St+ Art stepped out along with ARAVANI ART PROJECT of Bangalore incorporates Transgender people to magnify their latent potential in the midst of public spaces to provide ample opportunity to them to decorate

the wall with their creativities and let the rest of the world realize and acknowledge is must needed for them to show their skills to yield a vital social message.

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