

CHAPTER-I
Modernism and its Multiple Trajectories
in Andhra Pradesh:
The Formation of the Art Schools

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In this chapter I attempt to write the history of modernism at a crucial historical juncture when a region of the state of Andhra Pradesh was carved out of a nation that had recently acquired independence from centuries of British rule, with a concern to bring out its specific modernisms and the experiences therein.

Modernisms in this context relates to the challenges posed to the hegemonic aspects of monolithic category of modernism. So far, the genealogy of modernism in India has been traced with attention devoted to male artists. In the standard historiography of Indian modernism¹ a linear progression has been drawn with the Progressive Artist Group (Bombay) placed at its origin. It is not surprising that metropolitan cities like Bombay and Delhi have been privileged where national institutions of art emerged. The moves towards experimental modernism had been initiated and pursued in regions away from these metropolitan centers that have been largely ignored giving a false impression of absence of art trends and movements in places like Andhra Pradesh, etc. In a sense, by focusing on women artists active in Andhra Pradesh, I will regard them as doubly marginalized on account of their gender and regional location. One of the tendencies has been to write and represent modernism in terms of male artists and their creativity. I would like to enquire into the 'Other' side of it to bring out the spaces of women artists. So as to write about their struggles and the way they shaped and inhabited modernisms in Andhra Pradesh.

The state of Andhra Pradesh was formed in the 50's. Therefore in the first section I trace the history of modernity through the socio-political changes that occurred at this point of time to comprehend modernism(s) and in the second its implication on the field of art is read via the art school of Hyderabad. However, women artists from other regions of Andhra Pradesh during this time were almost on the margins of art institutions. The art

1. See, Geeta Kapur, *When was Modernism: Essays on Contemporary Cultural Practice in India*, Tulika Books, New Delhi 2000 and Nuvelli Tuli, *The Flamed Mosaic: Contemporary Indian Painting*, Heart- Mapping, 1997, for this kind of a pan Indian approach.

schools at Rajahmundry and Machilipatnam and the Women's college at Guntur that flourished from about the second decade of 20th century ceased to exist by late 40's. Since the aesthetic goals of these schools were toward regionalization of nationalist art, women artists associated with these schools, viz. D. Satyavani, B. Krishnamma, Vijaya Lakshmi. P, Shaivalika Kamakshamma, Pushkaramba and others, are also taken up for study in retrospect in the third section.

Formation of Regions /States:

For a proper understanding of regional histories it is necessary to have at hand the general pattern of nationwide developments, as we know that a nation has a strong hold on its regions. However at times historic happenings at certain regions can reshape the façade of a nation. I am referring to the agitation and hunger strike of, a Telugu Gandhian who had participated in the nationalist movement, Potti Sriramulu, from Andhra Pradesh, which made headlines a few years after India won independence i.e., in 1952. Potti Sriramulu pleaded for a separate state of Andhra Pradesh which, coastal Andhra particularly, was still part of Madras Presidency. The need for a separate state was felt long before during the nationalist movement when in 1913 the Andhra group of congress aimed to establish a separate Telugu unit or center of congress². This was articulated in an extract from a local newspaper of 1912 thus:

The Andhras can feel themselves a race with an individuality only when they are separately governed and have common interests. It is units that compose a nation. Unless the parts are efficient the nation cannot be efficient. Hence the national well being of the Indians is also dependent to some extent on the progress of Andhra nation³

Soon after the independence of the nation this regional nationalism grew further to become full-fledged regionalism as expressed in Potti Sriramulu's agitation.

2. Dr. Gopala Menon, An Enquiry on the Socio-Economic Policy of British Rule in Madras Presidency and Its Impact on Freedom Movement in Andhra and Kerala-1905-1942, Centre for Regional Studies, Hyderabad Central University, Hyderabad, 1992.
3. C.SeshagiriRao, Deshabhimani, 26.12.1912.

The then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru feared that this kind of regional patriotism would pose a serious threat to the center's authority.⁴ He, therefore, resisted the demand. Nevertheless, he had to give in to the proposal of re-organizing the regions following the demise of Potti Sriramulu due to the hunger strike. Consequently, in 1953 a radical re-organization of states/ regional borders and formation of new geographical and political territories took place mainly on linguistic lines. The Andhra region, including Rayalseema and coastal districts was separated from Madras Presidency.⁵ In the meanwhile, there were similar sentiments demonstrated in parts of erstwhile princely state of Hyderabad or the Telangana region. The process of localization of history projected itself first through the *Mulki* agitation of 1952, which demanded that the Madrasis leave the positions and go back to their own region.⁶ Later in 1956, by the act of States Re-Organisation Commmission, the erstwhile princely state of Hyderabad was annexed to the separated Andhra region to complete Andhra Pradesh as one among the southern states formed on November the 1st of that year.⁷ Hyderabad became the capital city of Andhra Pradesh.

Socio-Political history:

Hyderabad had a distinct history under the Nizam's rule, for the Nizam did not wish Hyderabad to become part of India. However the adamant Nizam had to surrender Hyderabad when Sardar Vallabh Bhai Patel sent the Indian military in 1948. This event is known as the police action. This also put an end to the oppressive regime of the Razakars.⁸ But, before this could happen there were voices of resistance against the feudal order under the Nizam's government from the people of Telangana.

The Telangana arms struggle (1948-51). Women's struggles within the movement and also the way they shaped it have been written by the efforts of feminist researches.⁹ The work reveals several aspects hitherto unthinkable for women.

4. M.J.Akbar, *India: The Siege Within, Challenges To A Nation's Unity*, Penguin Books, England.

5. Kurnool was the capital of this new region. The first chief minister of this state was T. Prakasham Pantulu

6. G.Ramreddy, B.A.V.Shrama, *Regionalism in India: A Study of Telangana*, NewDelhi,1979.

7. The districts of Andhra Pradesh include Telangana region comprising of Hyderabad, Warangal, Karimnagar,medak, Nizamabad, Khammam, Nalgonda, Adilabad and Mahabubnagar: And srikakulam, Vijayanagaram, Vaishakapatnam, East and west Godavari, Krishna untur,Kurnool, Nellore, Anantapur, Cuddapah, and Chittoor of Andhra region under Madras Presidency.

8. The Razakars literally means volunteers. During the feudal order of Nizam's rule the Majlis-E-Ittehad –E-Muslimeen grew stronger and formed a Para military wing of these volunteers who played havoc on the poor and oppressed peasantry.

9. Lalita.K.Vasantha Kannabiran, Rama Melkote, Uma Maheshwari, Suzie Tharu, Veena Shatrugna, *We Were making History: Life Stories Of Women In the Telangana People's Struggle*, Kali For Women, New Delhi, 1989.

The movement brought forth women's self-consciousness as they discovered their potentialities. This is what Suzie Tharu, K.Lalitha and Vasantha Kannabiran mention in this regard:

Women stood forth facing the enemy- the razakars, the goondas of the landlords and latter the Indian Army. Unraveling a whole hidden strength, taking on any role that the situation called for. They evolved collective forms of resistance, which were 'spontaneous and untaught'¹⁰.

While in this movement the women were majorly from lower caste/class and middle class background, women's organizations in A.P provided the necessary platform for women, particularly of upper class/caste & middleclass. Among them were the Andhra Mahila Sabha and the Andhra Maha Sabha established in 1930 and Mahila Navjivan Mandali. The formation of these organizations was aimed at opposing the feudal culture that imposed several restrictions on women's lives. The dominant Muslim rule restricted women from entering into public space by perpetuating the *purdah* system. This system not only curtailed Muslim women behind the curtains but also upper and middleclass Hindu women could not go about with out *purdah*.¹¹ The issues that were addressed by these organizations were, reformist in spirit, such as, education, the abolition of prostitution and *purdah* system, widow remarriage etc. In the year 1936 Telugu speaking people of the Andhra region formed Andhra Mahila Sangham.

When the Telangana women were fighting against their landlords the Andhra Mahila Sangham extended moral and material support to them even as they fought a feudal oppression back home in the Andhra region.

From the late thirties there was a marked increase in the socio-political consciousness among the masses particularly the students and youth.¹² The All Hyderabad Students Union (AHSU) was formed. Around the time when the women at Osmania University had

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid.

to sit behind the veil to attend classes, there were three women in the executive council of AHSU. Urdu was the predominant medium of instruction in educational institutions and an official language at the time. However, an effort at establishing an Anglo- vernacular school was initiated as far back as 1881.¹³ This institution was exclusively for girls. There were schools for different classes of women; for instance, the 'Madrasa A'izza Niswan' was to educate Muslim women of upper class background.¹⁴

Quite parallel to these ventures schools observing stringent *purdah* and addressed to 'sharif' families continued. Around the same time a Anglo-Indian Christian Missionary established a school called Rosary Convent in Hyderabad. English medium schools such as this were scarce. Nevertheless, the educational institutions brought about a transition from private schooling at home for women to collective examination oriented education that reflected their modernity and culture.¹⁵

A cultural revival was possible right from the 20's due to the efforts of organizations like Arya Samaj and Andhra Jana Sangham (later Andhra Maha Sabha). In this regard while the former contributed towards education the latter brought a consciousness among the local Telugu-speaking people by publishing books and newspapers in Telugu¹⁶ While in the Andhra region the claims of the Telugus were recognized by the All India Congress Committee as early as 1917. This was hey day of nationalist movement, which spread to this place via Bengal. Machilipatnam and Rajahmundry were two major centers of activity at the time. Although the ongoing *swadeshi* mottoes were followed¹⁷ the social ferment and the initial outbursts of Andhra were reflected in the arts and culture also. This imparted a regional tinge even to nationalist art.

13. Aghorenath Chattopadhyaya established a Hindu Anglo-Vernacular school for girls, educating 76 girls, both Hindus and Muslims. See Margrit Pernau, *Female Voices: Women Writers in Hyderabad at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century*, *The Annual of Urdu Studies*, P 40

14. Some of these women furthered the cause of education. Exemplary in this regard are the efforts of Nurun'-nisa Begum the eldest daughter of Salar Jung. Her personal involvement, stemming from the education she herself had received from her father, was said to have brought about excellent results. Under her tutoring the daughter of Munir ul Mulk (the later Salar Jung II), Karimu'n-Nisa', not only learned Persian, Urdu and English, but also appeared for the Middle School Examination along with her contemporaries. Ibid pp40

15. Ibid, p.40

16. Newspapers in Telugu, such as, Nilagiri Patrika, Golconda Patrika began to appear during this time.

17. Which were reflected in the hoisting 'Mother India' flag and the raise of local industries like the Rajahmundry Industrial institute with an object to promote local industries and a Swadeshi society. Sustained efforts were made in this regard to revive the weaving units. In 1907 Vadi Budappa and P.Narsimulu Estd. a loom at Rajahmundry.

During the 1930's newspapers played a major role in propagating progressive literature and the ideas of communist party.¹⁸ There were also artists who dedicated to reporting in communist newspapers through illustrations of the peasants in struggle, both in Telangana and else where in India during this time.¹⁹

Women workers of the Telangana movement and the Praja Natya Mandali or People's Theatre disseminated progressive literature in the villages.

This allowed for a wide spread readership for progressive writings in not just Urdu, Telugu and Hindi but also foreign languages particularly, the Russian.²⁰ The Praja Natya Mandali was the wing of IPTA, which was active since 1943 and served as a cultural branch of Indian communist party.

After the fall of the Nizam the Telangana movement was short lived. Further Sardar Vallabh bhai Patel, who was instrumental in merging the princely states into the Indian Union, was a staunch anti-communist. He therefore swore to put an end to the party. Accordingly the government imposed ban on it. In Hyderabad the party fought back the repression and in the early 50's also extended support to the Majlis.²¹ In Hyderabad, the defeat of the Razakars and the Nizam incurred a loss of self-esteem, confidence and the fear of uncertain future in dominant Muslim populations. What followed inevitably was their decline that occurred between 1948 and 1950. However, the Muslims wanted to fight back for their democratic rights and economic security for which they joined the communist party²² in the early 50's. However, Majlis was reinstated in 1957²³ after the formation of Andhra Pradesh.

The Telangana peoples' revolution brought about a change for good in the lives of the peasant population, more importantly it brought qualitative change in the lives of women.

18. Newspapers like *Payam* and *Rayat* propagated ideals of freedom, democracy and secularism. The monthly magazine *Nigar* under the editorship of Niaz Fatehpuri opposed superstition and religious fanaticism and was anti-imperialist in its ideology. Several other progressive journals such as *Jamia*, *Parchum*, *Nayadab* inspired youth all over the country.

19. Artists like Somnath Hore illustrated the Tebhaga Peasant Movement in Bengal and Chittoprasad made illustrations during the Telangana People's Struggle.

20. Opcit no: 9

21. T.V.Satyamurthy, ed. *Region, Religion, Caste, Gender and Culture in Contemporary India*, Vol.3, OUP, New Delhi, 2000

22. Ibid.

23. Ibid.

Propagation of progressive ideas through literature and theatre in the late forties brought a positive transition in Hyderabad and the Andhra region. The social changes, these progressive elements and the revolutionary consciousness make the situation rife for modernism as such.²⁴

The Art scene in Andhra Pradesh during 1950's:

The decade of the 50's was a watershed in terms of women's enrollment into the Central School of Art and Craft, Hyderabad, compared to the number of women students in the 40's.

Freny Behemenshah, Zainab Razvi, Ferozah Santukh, Farrukh Rifaquat, Siddiqua Bilgrami, Fatima Ahmed, Zehra Rehmatulah, Usha Shankar, Urmila Shah, Dasrath Kumari Mathur were among the women who studied between mid 40's through 50's.

Considering the socio-political situations of Hyderabad during this time, we know that although women were educated, their lives were largely spent behind *purdah*. In this respect Hindu and Muslim upper/middle class women were treated alike. In such a situation the presence of so many women in the art school is reason enough to re-contextualize and re-read the difference in the ways that modernism affects male and women artists.

Zainab Razvi and Ferozah Santuk were from middle class Muslim families. Freny Viccaji (Behemenshah) who studied along with them belongs to Parsi minority community. These women studied art during the uncertain and conservative Muslim rule and the oppressive Razakar regime. During this time when stringent restrictions, like the *purdah*, were imposed on upper and middle class Hindu and Muslim women, it is difficult to imagine as to how these women could pursue their interests in fine arts by studying at the art school? Do these women open up spaces of resistance within such a society and also within modernism culling out new modernisms? Or did the women's organizations and the Telangana revolution create a platform for women to emerge as artists as well? The former may be possible due to the latter.

24. Geeta Kapur, *When was Modernism: Essays on Contemporary Cultural Practice in India*, Tulika Books, New Delhi 2000.

In this regard it is worthy to note that, although, the Nizam surrendered Hyderabad to the Indian army in 1948 the situation, particularly for women would not have changed too much for the better. Now Hyderabad was part of Indian Union and under Nehruvian leadership, while the rest of Andhra Pradesh was still subsumed within Madras Presidency. As we know that it was during this period when significant changes occurred in the social and political situations in Hyderabad in the larger context as well as Andhra Pradesh. These women artists were from upper-class background and belonged to both Hindu and Muslim communities. It is important to observe that the percentage of women artists increases after the decline of Muslim orthodoxy brought out via the downfall of the Nizam and the *majlis* by early 50's become confrontationalist as a result of its affiliation with the communist party.²⁵

However the Nizam was still the Rajpramukh of Hyderabad which was under Governor's rule until the formation of the state in 1956. Nevertheless the Telangana people's movement and the various women's organizations, even those comprising middle caste/class women and their activities all had paved way for a consciousness, among women particularly from the educated classes, directly or indirectly. Further, one of the founder members of the women's organization Mahila Navjivan Mandali was Mrs. Gupta, wife of L.N. Gupta who was a founder member of the art school. As we know that most of the ladies of the *nawabi* families were members in this organization, it made it perhaps easier for upper/middle class and upper caste women to be not only aware of the institution but also enable enrollment. The prerequisite of which was basic school education. The selection of students perhaps depended on word of mouth reference.

Women from these families wished to study art for arts sake. Perhaps not consciously thinking of becoming professional let alone earning a living out of art. Yet not only did these women study art but also most were actively practicing during mid 50's through 60's and some of them are still continuing their practice. While modern art history whether regional or national or international has ignored and more often than not successfully erased women's creativity. Here in Andhra Pradesh the operation of sexual difference within art circles becomes evident when male guardians of APLKA published monographs

25. Muslims turned to the Communist Party of India during the 50's for assistance in their struggle for democratic rights and economic security. But the downward slide of the Muslim community continued.

of the 'Great Masters' of Andhra Pradesh.²⁶ In the project of publication of monographs women artists were completely ignored, also when generally studies in modern Andhra Pradesh art marginalize their position.²⁷ However, when historians like Geeta Kapur find modern Indian art as unique as she could trace a woman artist at the head of it. She says "Modern Indian art is distinguished for having a its very inception a brilliant woman artist Amrita Sher-Gill".²⁸ This view in a way reinforces the common notion that there perhaps were no women artists or very few women artists in modernism elsewhere and that Indian art has somehow managed to escape this fate due to the presence of but one exceptional artist. And Geeta Kapur constantly compares Indian women artists with western women artists at the cost of overlooking what was happening at a more local level.

If we turn our attention to the gender politics at a regional level, in the case of the modernism in Andhra Pradesh, we come across a number of women artists. The way these women artists were affected by modernism is different from their male counterparts. Here I attempt to bring out their modernity via the art school and institutions and organizations.

Art School During the 50s:

During the 50's the art school²⁹ (*Illus.001a*) appointed its first woman teacher Freny (Viccaji)Behemenshaw who was one of the first woman student to have studied at the art school (1944-49). Along with her there were other teachers like K.Seshagiri Rao and Syed Bin Mohammed. In the first two years of the 50s, Sukumar Deuskar was the principal³⁰ of this Govt. College of Arts and Crafts. This was founded in 1940 by a leading educationist and the then finance minister Sir Akbar Hydari, along with Salar Jung II, Mehdi Nawaz Jung and L.N.Gupta.³¹

By its very nomenclature, the school shared the division and the interdependence of 'art and craft'. The history of the two terms and their interrelationship was an issue of serious debate

26. 14 monographs were published in the mid 70's and at this time Narrotam Reddy was the president and P.T.Reddy was the secretary along with a team of male members holding various posts.

27. See articles in APLKA catalogues and other books like Sudha Reddy, Art in Andhra, etc.

28. Op cit no: 24

29. Initially it was called as the Central School of Arts and Crafts later it became Government College of Arts and Crafts and by the 70's was taken under JNTU and is now called as College of Fine Arts.

30. He had studied art in Europe, His father Radhakrishna Waman Deuskar was the court painter of the Nizam.

31. The last three were also actively involved in the formation of Hyderabad art society the following year.

during anti-colonial nationalism. As far as craft was concerned, it was extended and elevated to reformulate the status of art. In the years following Independence the scope of art was elaborated to include crafts.³² The regular art courses in the art school at Hyderabad were painting and sculpture while handi-crafts or industry oriented metal engraving, toy making, book binding was a separate wing initially, later by the 1960s it was included in the applied arts and by the 1970s the crafts section ceased to function. Nevertheless, if craft (s) as a category subsumes 'decoration', 'folk' and 'traditional'³³ then these were incorporated into the curriculum by way of certain techniques and styles of traditional Indian art both in painting as well as in sculpture. However, as the curriculum was based on British established art institutions, particularly the J.J. school where the term art was defined according to Neo-classical Victorian norms and was expressed through academic realism. Therefore, the 'art' and 'craft' in the Hyderabad school had greater flexibility because of its affiliation with nationalist discourse which did not separate art and craft as mutually exclusive categories. The disciplines of painting, sculpture and architecture were accorded the status of 'Fine arts' and thereby marginalized 'crafts'. 'Fine arts' in this discourse is a sign of modernity and craft a symbol for tradition.³⁴

The curriculum of the art school throughout 1940s focused on still life, figure drawing and nature studies as this were considered as most important for the artists to be. During the 40s the taste of the local nobility for western academic realism was evident as they commissioned copies of western paintings and their own portraits.³⁵

Yet, in the first decade following Independence the folk traditions were taken up by the cultural front of the communist party, such as, the Indian Peoples' Theatre Association (IPTA)³⁶ and its sister concern in Andhra Pradesh, the Praja Natya Mandali. The adaptation of folk traditions by the artists was aimed at foregrounding an indigenous variety of socialism in that the '...peasant communities become self-complete prototypes for a new and utopian social structure'.³⁷

32. Deepta Achar and Nadeem Omar Tarar, unpublished paper, "Instituting National Self-Identity? Crafting art Education In the National School of Art, Lahore and Faculty of fine Arts, Baroda".

33. Ibid.

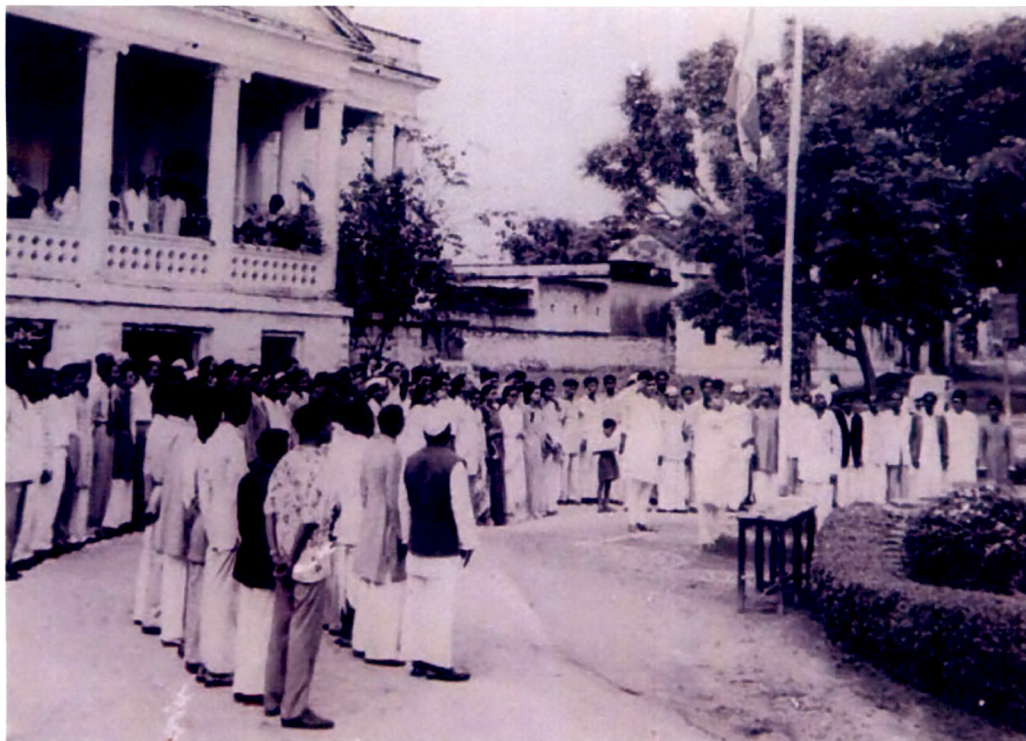
34. Ibid.

35. During this time R.W. Deuakar, a photographer-painter, who came to Hyderabad from Sholapur on the invitation of Raja Dhan Raj Gir, became a favorite painter of the local nobility. Soon afterwards he was employed by Salar Jung III for copying western paintings and to make portraits of the Deccani kings. Qayyum Saheb used to paint backdrops for dramas and occasional portraits and Sardar Nek Singh was well known for portrait painting.

36. Op cit no: 24, p.272.

37. Ibid, p.272

It is in this context that one needs to look at modernisms of Andhra Pradesh. During the early 1950s Freny (Viccaji)Behemenshaw, Rajaiah.K and K.Seshagiri Rao were artists who had in the 1940s worked in the Bengal revivalist Indian and later during the 1950s added traditional folk craft. It was this time that Freny worked in post - Impressionist style particularly of Gauguin via Amrita Sher-Gil. Around the same time artists like Vidya Bhushan, Syed-Bin-Mohammed, Madhusudhan, Sadat Ali Khan, who were among the first batch of students, concentrated on portraiture, landscapes, still life etc., based on academic curriculum. However, in the year 1947 an exhibition of Abdul Rahman Chughtai, who was known for his wash paintings in revivalist idiom, was organized in Hyderabad, he also visited the Government School of Arts and Crafts and demonstrated the wash technique to the students. Among them were Freny, Zainab Razvi, Ferozah Santukh who studied between 1945 and 49. Freny and Zainab worked consistently in this new method till early 50's. A work of Freny of these times is of a *'Madonna and Child'* (Illus.001). In this work the fine lines of her definite drawing and the colour scheme that has been chosen not inadvertently but upon careful study of works on such theme in western art of late Gothic and early Italian Renaissance.



001a - Govt College of Arts and Crafts - Hyderabad - ca1952

As the principal, Sukumar Deuskar (1950-52), and the newly appointed teacher K.Seshagiri Rao, wished to emulate the methods of Santineketan where they had studied. The interest in folk aesthetics that came via Santineketan was in tune with the idea of reformulating art by expanding the craft category. In this regard Freny Behemenshaw and K.Seshagiri Rao practiced and taught wash technique and compositions based on traditional miniature painting schools. Another teacher in painting was Vidya Bhushan.³⁸ Around the late 50s, Jagdish Mittal³⁹ taught art history. He studied fine arts at Santineketan. There were other teachers like Syed-Bin-Mohammed and Masood Ahmed. Students who studied under them included Siddiqua Bilagrami, Fatima Ahmed, Urmila Shaw, Usha Shankar, Dasrath Kumari Mathur and Farukh Rifaquat.



002. Freny Behemenshaw, *Basket Weavers*, 1953,

Vidya Bhushan's work from mid 50s tended towards impressionist and post-impressionist movements of modern western art. A little earlier by about 1953, Freny Behemenshaw's work showed affinity towards Gauguinesque figuration similar to that of Amritha Sher-Gill, for instance, this work called '*Basket Weavers*' (*Illus.002*) represents a woman seated and surrounded by baskets as her child looks on from behind the back. Freny attempts to bring out women's creative labour here. New constructions and the labour involved in the building process was a common theme taken up by artists then, for instance, this work of K. Srinivasulu (*Illus.003*). Freny painted

38. Vidya Bhushan was first appointed in 1952 and re-joined the school in 1955.

39. Jagdish and Kamala Mittal, both studied fine arts at Shantiniketan and first came to Hyderabad to present their wood cuts here in 1951. Later they settled here in 1953.



003-K.Srinivasulu, *Construction*, 1957, approx. 60x90 cm, oil on canvas

a similar theme in an elaborate scroll like work (*Illus.004*). The usage of watercolours for this large scale work had to be done with precision. She said, “ I had to work with rapid speed as against the slow wash technique which I was used to”.⁴⁰ Freny thus moves from a ‘slow’ nationalist wash technique to a ‘fast’ modern technique.

Later, during the late 1960s Freny’s work drew from the folk decorative idiom of Jamini Roy that reached Hyderabad via the Madras school. The adaptation of traditional folk craft was a typical modernist impulse in the post independence phase. Yet, the students had to abide by the academic curriculum. The temptation to adapt the



004. Freny Behemeshah, *Untitled*, ca.1950, 90 x 30cm,watercolour on paper.

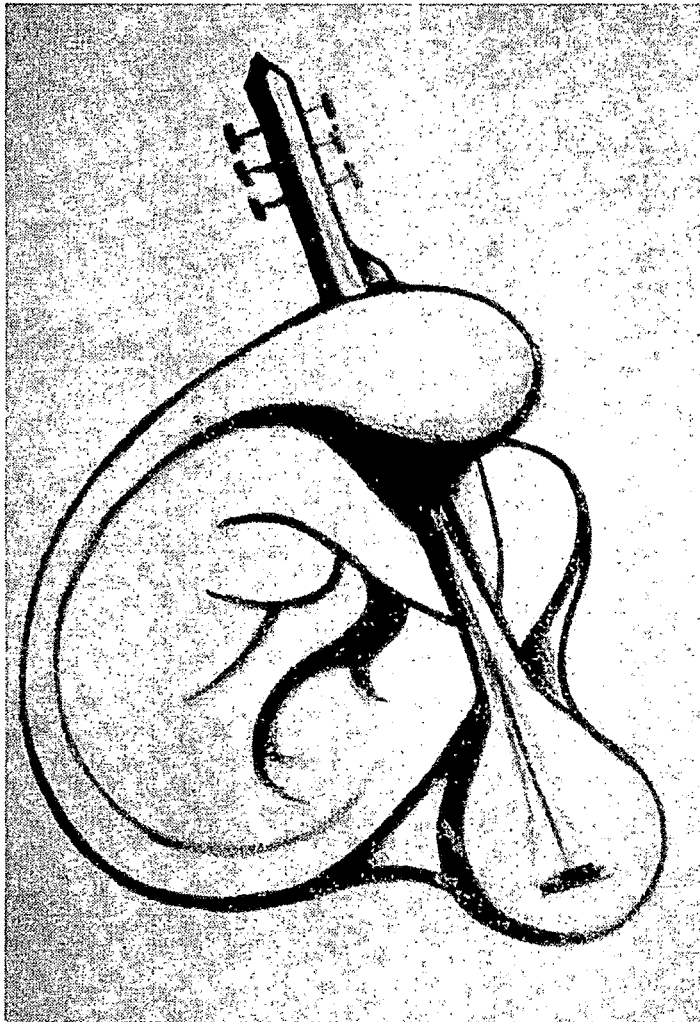
40. As told by Freny Behemeshah to me during discussion



005-Siddiqua Bilgrami, *Struggle*, 1957, approx. 60x90 cm, oil on canvas.

idiom of Western modern art through the works of their teachers was hard to resist. In this connection Siddiqua, Fatima and Zehra would not follow the rigid curriculum. They soon abandoned the academic realism to include diverse elements from modern western

006-Zehra Rehmatulla, *Solitude and Tears*, watercolor on paper.



isms. Siddiqua's student days works are closer to that of Syed-Bin Mohammed in that they adapt elements variously from realists and post-impressionist artists, Siddiqua in this regard focuses on the working class (*Illus.005*). Zehra's works of this time had affinities to the work of Freny in its linear quality. Thematically the emphasis was on personal emotions that perhaps were autobiographical eg. (*Illus.006*). Other students such as, Urmila Shaw, Usha Shankar and Dasrath Rani experimented with landscapes, still-lives etc., taking cues from post-impressionism.

008. Freny Behemenshah, Nature Study, 1980, 25x30 cm,



Freny Behemenshah, Life Study, 1953, 35x52 cm, drawing.



009. Freny Behemenshah, Landscape, ca.1975, 25x30 cm, pencil drawing.

Pedagogy and Gender power relations at the art school.

Freney Behemenshaw recalls “one had to be an all-rounder in order to teach art. I have taught drawing, composition, portraiture, nature painting and Indian traditional painting”⁴¹ (*Illus.007-9*). Freney had a passion for teaching. She is known for her very calm and quiet attitude. Yet, when the students approached her she channelised their creativity by giving them advise appropriate to their interests and needs. Although, Freney spent a solid thirty seven years of her life serving the purpose of teaching at the institution, she is remembered only by a few ardent students, but, otherwise largely forgotten from the memory of the ‘so called’ historians who have written about art in Andhra Pradesh so far.⁴²

41. Ibid.

42. A.S.Raman, Keshav Mullik, Jagdish Mittal, Sudha Reddy et al.

The saddest part of the story is that she herself does not wish to remember the 'traumatic' years that she spent in the institution. What was the trauma that made her more or less a recluse? Why was she denied of career advancement possibilities?

Some facts come glaring at us if we walk around in her footsteps into the ambience of the institution. She was the only woman teacher in the art school where the faculty was predominantly male. This was the case even until mid 70s.

Among her co-faculty Vidya Bhusan and Syed-Bin-Mohammed were popular with the students. Vidya Bhusan had specialized training in tempera technique, he also taught the same to the students.⁴³

While Syed-Bin-Mohammed emphasized on teaching portraiture as he had special interest in the subject. The former had received national award, he was granted a headship in the department of painting in 1955 and the latter had the credit of being one among the first batch of students in the college and thereby, well known in the local art circles.

Although, Freny was known in the local art scene as she actively participated in the Hyderabad art society exhibitions and other organizations, she did not yearn for popularity. She maintained a very calm and quiet demeanor. This was a result of nurture in upper class Parsi family. Yet, perhaps due to lack of support at home after marriage, she took up the job. However, Freny was well educated and articulate both in verbal and visual languages. She in her righteous manner did have good student following and due to this, perhaps, also aroused male envy and hostility. One of her students recalls, " Right in front of us, they would use abusive language against her" such as *Uttake Phenk denge* (throw you out).⁴⁴

43. Vidya Bhushan went to Belgrade, Yugoslavia where he learnt techniques of murals and egg tempera.

44. One of her students recalls, " Right in front of us, they would use abusive language against her" such as *Uttake Phenk denge* (throw you out). This and many more incidents were narrated by her. This student later became a teacher in the same institution.

Freny's pedagogical efforts at the art school, although, drew many students, were unrecognised. In comparison the value attached to the teachings of Vidya Bhusan, Seshagiri Rao or Khan Bahadur Syed Ahmed in some written accounts is far too much. Freny's role and history as a teacher survives only in oral accounts.⁴⁵ These absences point out at the invisibility of the existing sexual inequalities within the institution as well as in such kind of literature.

Yet, the task of recovering and re-contextualising women's history becomes difficult and at times impossible if the subject does not speak or undergoes repression. In this regard, Freny does not wish to speak about the trauma that she underwent. This chosen and self-conscious silence becomes an 'operation of power' says Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan:

Silence, by the same token that regards speech as the expression of the self, may become a barrier to a knowledge of the self, to its penetration by a perceiver. When this happens, the operation of silence becomes an operation of power rather than powerlessness. It has moved from being an involuntary or enforced ban on speech, to a freely chosen refusal to speak.⁴⁶

Freny's attempt at forging a vow of silence is a process that can be equated to *mouna vritha*,⁴⁷ which served the function of fast, either as an act of self-discipline or as a ritual for spiritual merit.

45. The catalogues of APLKA, Newspaper articles, catalogues, monographs and books.

46. Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan, *Real and Imagined Women: Gender, Culture and Postcolonialism*, Routledge, London and New York, 1993, p 87.

47. Gandhi's periodic vows of silence, or mouna virtha were the same in function as the fast. See, Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan, *Real and Imagined Women: Gender, Culture and Post colonialism*, Routledge, London and New York, 1993, p 87.

Women Artists and their works on the Margins of Art Institutions: The Andhra Region

Although, Freny was part of the art institution, she did her significant work out side of it, on its margins. It was not in the public space of the art institution but her private home, where her creative urge found a potential out let. She drew from spiritual inspiration to depict the medieval woman saint “Mira” in her works. ‘Mira’ was radical in her spirituality (Illus.010). She transgressed the societal taboos in order to attain the ultimate love. Freny,

in her silent battle did not conform to the dominant ideology of the institution and continued her quest in art as a spiritual means to overcome her frustrations with people around her.

Even as Freny represents her spiritual self in this way, the preoccupation with spiritual/material dichotomy was one of the main thrusts of the nationalist ideology when the revivalist art was formulated on these lines.

Freny’s senior contemporaries, D. Satyavani and B.Krishnamma also artists of her age group, P.VijayaLakshmi, from out side Hyderabad who featured during the 1920s, 30s and 40s-50s respectively worked in tune with this *Swadeshi* ideals. D.Satyavani and B.Krishnamma had some opportunity for training that came almost from home and P.VijayaLakshmi did not go to art school even within Andhra region.



010-Freny, *Mira Bhajan*, ca1980, 30x25cms, Color Pencil on paper

Despite the fact that there were two major art centers here in those times. Their art flourished on the borders of these schools. We shall consider the study of situations in which their art flourished and about their art in retrospect.

Modern art in Hyderabad began to flourish due to the art school and Hyderabad art society from 1940 onwards. While, in the rest of Andhra region, which was under Madras Presidency, a need for a local art school was felt much earlier as aspiring artists had to look towards Bombay or Madras or Shantineketan for art education. As a result, a three member non – artist team⁴⁸ took the initiative to lay foundation to Andhra Jateeya Kalasala or “Andhra National College” in Machilipatnam around the 1st quarter of 20th century. To impart art training some of the senior most artists of Bengal school were called upon. In the formative years, Abanindranath .T and N.Bose taught art at the Andhra Jateeya Kalashala. Later, their students Pramod Kumar Chatterjee and Raveendranath Chakravarthy were appointed to teach art there.⁴⁹ Through this direct training from prominent artists, Bengal School aesthetics proliferated in Andhra region.

The curriculum laid emphasis on studying from traditional Indian art sources such as the miniatures and murals. Further, the Japanese prints and Chinese painting were also included, thereby, emulating the Bengal revivalist ethos to mark the beginning of modern art in Andhra region. However, by the mid 30’s artists of this college went to different art colleges out side the state such as Shantineketan, Madras school etc.,

This region gets the credit for introducing the first women’s college of Andhra region .In connection with the modernist reformist ideology of early 20th century educational institutions aiming at women’s development were established. Sharada Niketan of Guntur was founded in 1922 by the reformist couple Unnava Lakshmi Baiamma and her husband Unnava Lakshmi Narayana. Drawing, painting and sculpture were also part of the curriculum.⁵⁰ Many women took up training in these arts because of this institution.

Fine arts, particularly, painting and sculpture was taught by young artists who got through from Andhra Jateeya Kalasala .The flow of aesthetic temperment from Jateeya Kalasala to Sarada Niketan then becomes evident. Women who studied were Pushkaramba, Saraswati, Shaivalika Kamakshamma. But, the institution was not exclusively for women, as it also enrolled men also.

48. K.Hanumanth Rao, a noted educationist, Muturi Krishna Rao, editor of popular magazine “Krishna Patrika” and Dr. Patabhi Seetaramaiah, an educationist and a political activist who served the INC).

49. Sudha Reddy, “*Art in Andhra – A Historical Perspective – 1900-90*”, Hyderabad, 1999.

50. The institution focused on cultural re-generation. In this regard liberal arts, performing arts and fine arts were taught.



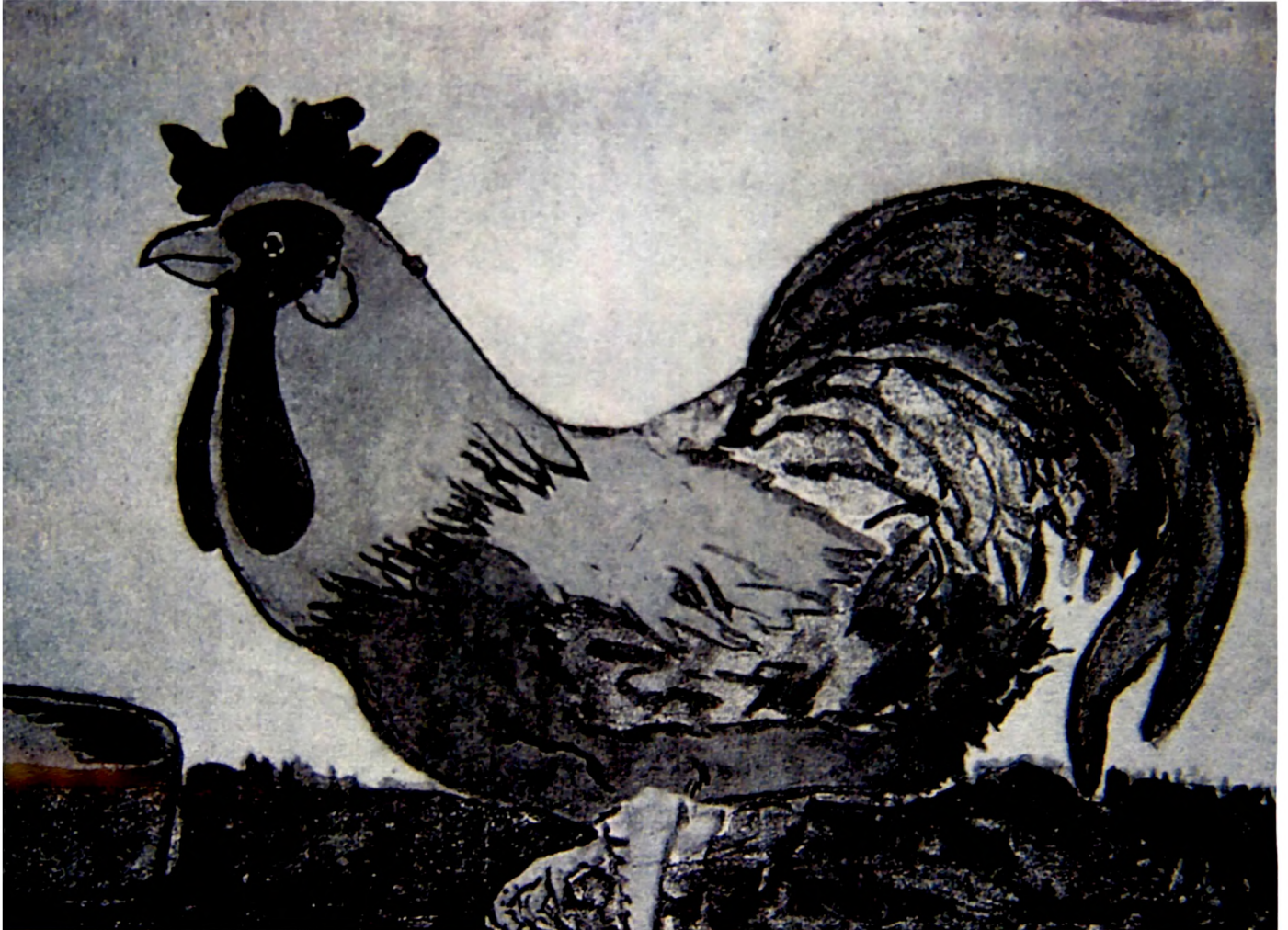
011a-Pushkaramba, *Nataraju*, ca.1925, approx 25x30 cm, watercolor on paper.

Pushkaramba and Kamakshamma were well known in the region in their times. This work of Pushkaramba portrays a dancing *Shiva* (*Illus.011a*), which resonates the stylistics of the Bengal revivalists, however, her fellow artist Kamakshamma's work, '*Kodipunju*' (*Illus.011b*) displays a certain amount of realistic tendency.

Even if one wanted to know more about these artists, there is not much one can dig out of the debris of time that has collapsed. Moreover, the institution Sarada Niketan began to wane in the early 1950s following the death of Mrs.Unnava. Sometime after the death of Mr.Unnava in late 1950s Sarada Niketan was taken over by the endowments department. But, there no more was any art institute in it.⁵¹ The vast gap in time and no proper written account of the achievements of these women artists has made their histories difficult to re-record.

Andhra Jateeya Kalasala was followed by another in the neighboring district called the Andhra society of Indian arts at Rajahmundry in 1922 by Damerla Rama Rao and his brother Venkat Rao who had studied at the J.J.School of Arts Bombay.

51. Discussion with one of the alumni of the institute who is a resident of Guntur



011b. Shivalika Kamakshamma, *Kodipunju*, ca.1925, approx 25x30 cm, watercolour on paper.

The aim of this organization was also to forge an artistic style in conjunction with the nationalist ideology as emulated by Bengal revivalist idiom of art, Rajahmundry was a political active center during the Swadeshi period.⁵² The art society was actively supported by Damerla's family members (i.e) wife D.S.Vani , sister Krishnamma and other artist friends like Varada Venkat Ratnam etc.,⁵³

52. Sudha Reddy, *Art in Andhra*, Hyderabad, 1999

53. Ibid.



011. Damerla Rama Rao, *Bharathi*, ca.1920, approx. 35x48 cm, watercolor on paper.

It was through this institution that the women of Damerla family found a way to channelize their creative urges. Damerla Satyavani, wife of Damerla Rama Rao and B. Krishnamma sister of Damerla Rama Rao could study art under the guidance of Damerla Rama Rao at Andhra Society of Indian art.

Damerla Rama Rao and most other artists of the society like V.V.Bhaghirati Rajaji , Varda Venkat Ratnam,D.S.Vani and B.Krishnamma took up themes that were most sought after during the revivalist phase. These included historical, mythological and day-to-day lifestyle like native rituals etc., apart from these some of Damerla Rama Rao's works also participated in the then political atmosphere. For instance, his work '*Bharati*' (*Illus.011*) written in Telugu meaning mother India is almost similar to a poster designed for such a campaign. To the nationalist spirit of Andhra art this work is equal in effect to 'Banga Matha' of Abanindranath Tagore. Even as the work of Damerla Rama Rao's '*Bharati*' expresses a concern for the national through the region, works like 'Andhra Kanya' by D.Satyavani show more and more distinct and direct regional flavour. D.Satyavani infact represented the girl in the way that she herself



012. B-Krishnamma, *Noolu Teeyuta*, ca.1932, approx. 25x30 cm, watercolour wash on paper. From Gruhalakshmi.

used to be. Therefore, the regionalism in her work is largely due to her own sense of being and the experience of an environment that immediately surrounds her.

Works that are more appropriate to the nationalist cause like '*Call for the Swadeshi*' by Satya Vani and '*Noolu Teyuta*' (Illus.012) or extracting yarn by B.Krishnamma. During this time, sustained efforts were made for the revival of weaving industries in Rajahmundry.⁵⁴ The representation of a woman at the Charka subverts the image of Gandhi or other male leaders doing the activity.

54. Op cit no 1



013-D.Satyavani, *Birth of Bharatha*, ca.1925, approx. 48x35cm, watercolor on paper.

Satyavani as well as Krishnamma were proficient in the wash technique. They took up historical, mythological themes in addition to themes like day-to-day activities in the revivalist style. Here are some instances of their works based on mythological theme are “*Birth of Bharata*, (Illus.013) (Satyavani) and “*Tatakamu*”(Illus.014) (Krishnamma).

It is relevant to note here that historical and mythological themes were considered a male prerogative and were thought to be best handled by men. And critics who are obsessed to find only female figures portrayed by women artists find subjects like “Women sitting on bed” “Waiting at the door” etc., suitable to be published in a women’s magazine, *Gruhalakshmi*.



014. B-Krishnamma, *Tatakamu*, ca.1930, approx. 31x44 cm, watercolour on paper. From *Gruhalakshmi*.

This magazine was addressed to the women who usually remained at home, particularly the 'housewife'. Why did the male guardians of artistic conventions feel it necessary to send back the works of these women artists from the public sphere, into which they were trying to make an entry, to the private domain of a home through this magazine? Did the art world fear the matter of fact representation taken up by them? Or was it the effect of the combined forces of patriarchy and nationalist fervour of this time? But, what was the space assigned to the women with relation to nationalism?

Women and their Relationship to Nationalism:

The discourse of nationalism shows that the material/spiritual dichotomy was a powerful one that co-related with the outer and the inner domains, that is, this distinction when applied to day to day living separates the social space into *ghar and bahir*, or the home and the world.⁵⁵ The world is where activities pertaining to material interests are carried out; this is where the colonisers challenged the nationalists with their superior material culture. This was the territory that belonged to the male members who were prone to Western influences while, the home was a space that retained the spiritual essence. This is where women were meant to be, because, it was necessary to maintain the sacred inner spirituality and protect it from getting contaminated by the influence of the outer world. Therefore, as Partha Chatterjee explains "The home in its essence must remain unaffected by the profane activities of the material world- and woman is its representation. And so one gets an identification of social roles by gender to correspond with the separation of world space into *ghar and bahir*".⁵⁶

But the kind of isolation and insulation from the influence and changes from the outside world was not possible because the family as a unit was entangled in wider social relations. Then there ought "to be a difference in the degree of Westernisation of women as distinct from men".⁵⁷

55. Chatterjee Partha, *Nation And Its fragments: Colonial And Post- Colonial Histories*, Princeton University Press, 1993.

56. Ibid, pp120

57. Ibid

This is how a new patriarchy in the nationalist phase defined a “new woman”. This “new woman” was not a common woman, who was coarse in manners, loud and vulgar. And who due to this had to face male oppression. On the other hand the “new woman” was educated, perhaps even in English and yet was also unlike the Westernised women who were (projected as) degenerate. The “new woman” was someone who would attain success by her own efforts of a “superior national culture” that marked her newly acquired “freedom”. This was the crux of the ideological strength of the Nationalist resolution of the women’s question.

Despite the new “freedom” and newly assigned status of womanhood, it seems from the evidence in the form of autobiographies, family histories, songs and paintings etc., that the home was the principal site of womens’ lives and struggle. Here is where one can find their real histories. It is in this light and context that we shall read the lives and works of Satyavani and Krisnamma whose works reflect the nationalist idiom. Rajahmundry, the place in Andhra Pradesh, which featured fore most in the Swadeshi movement, is the place from where the two artists hailed. Both of them painted subjects appropriate to the nationalist fervour. For instance, ‘*Noolu Teeyuta*’ or extracting yarn out of ‘*Charka*’ or spinning wheel, ‘*Birth of Bharata*’ etc. But what was appreciated about the work was the genre that reflected various domestic activities. The male critics labelled this as “feminine” style. For, they believe that, to create such work it was not necessary to have the imaginative power or flair, as one needs when representing historical or mythological themes, which they thought the women “lacked”.⁵⁸ Or perhaps they wanted the women to paint only domestic life due to the fear that they would loose their own position in the field of art. However, even as the women painted scenes form the household chores they said about their real life situations and of the women of those times in general. Although these works may not bring out entirely the individual subjectivities of these artists, histories of their lives are inscribed in the broad narrative of their position within nationalism

58. Partha Chatterjee writes “what made the narrative history of domestic life particularly suitable as a “feminine” literary genre was the belief, inculcated, need less to say, by the male guardians of literary conventions, that this required little more than the retelling from memory of impressions left by direct personal experience. One did not have to have the imaginative power or stylistic flair of the poet or the novelist in order to tell one’s *smrutikatha*: anyone could do it. He immediacy, directness, and indeed the very artlessness of the form was seen to make it appropriate for an authentic “feminine” literary voice. When charulatha, the heroine of Rabindranath tagore’s story “The Broken nest”(made into a film by Satyajit Ray) first tried her hand at writing and wrote an essay called “The August clouds” it seemed very much like that of her brother –in- law’s writing. Rabindra Nath writes that “ Although in the early part her writing was cluttered by excessively ornamental style of Amal, it soon acquired a simplicity and charm of its own, filled as it now was with the richness of a rural idiom.”

Well, we know that during Gandhi's nationalism women's militancy was censored.⁵⁹ It strictly struck to patriarchal ideals of family and society.

Women's participation as followers or leaders in the movement from 1920s onwards was seen as an extension of their homely selves.⁶⁰ But, as Ania Loomba states that "Nevertheless, because these women were politically active, worked and lived outside of purely domestic spaces, sometimes in positions of leadership, they opened up new conceptual spaces for women".⁶¹

Butchi Krishnamma sets an example to show this kind of space not only in the context of the political movement but also through her art in the cultural field. Krishnamma remained a Gandhian throughout. She along with her husband started a social welfare centre or an *ashram* for destitute women. The *ashram* took up the task of a primary health care centre. With her creative output in terms of drawing and painting and her social service, Krishnamma, was surely a multi-faceted personality. However, in her work '*Noolu Teeyuta*' (*illus.012, pg 53*), by portraying the woman actively involved in extracting yarn in a domestic space along with a child, Krishnamma foregrounds an interface, a overlapping between the political/public and the private sphere of home and child care. Both Satyavani and Krishnamma had painted hundreds of works out of which only a few, that are "preserved" in very bad shape, can be seen at the Damerla Memorial Museum in Rajahmundry.

Yet, due to the vagaries of art historical writings and reportage their personalities have been suppressed by the "artist-genius" position given to Damerla Rama Rao. For instance, a news paper account of Satyavani's ill health and eventual death highlighted these points⁶²...

(i) Satyavani was wife of great artist Damerla Rama Rao. (ii) She is seen as a model in some of his works. (iii) She also painted. Satyavani, the artist, and her works are all rendered insignificant while her representation in the works of her husband becomes a laurel. In this way she loses her right as a producer of art and remains as a sign of his creativity.

Another artist who could never go to an art school, despite a strong leaning toward painting since childhood, is Vijayalakshmi. Her husband and brother were also artists.

59. Ania Loomba, *Colonialism and Post-Colonialism*, Routledge, London, 2000.

60. Ibid.

61. Ibid.

62. *Andhra Jyothi*, Hyderabad, 24-7-1992

Due to her undeterred aspiration, she would always keep herself informed about the developments in the field of art through them.

For Vijayalakshmi art is worship, which she practices almost every day. She has also won awards. However she has had her share of discrimination, based on gender, in the art



015. Vijaya Lakshmi, *Krishna*, ca.1960, watercolour on

field. There have been many instances when she wished to exhibit along with her husband, which she could not because her works were rejected. Why? Did the art community think that her works were qualitatively inferior to those of her husband's? No, infact they thought that she could not paint at all and that her husband painted even on her behalf.⁶³

It is true that there were stylistic affinities to her husband's work, a tendency that one develops while working in close quarters to someone else. For, she and her husband had worked together on some projects, such as the murals at Simhachalam.⁶⁴ In order to establish her independent identity, Vijayalakshmi changed her style of painting. The style of Lakshminarasimhamurthy's works was a combination of South Indian mural traditions, particularly Lepakshi and the Bengal revivalist aesthetic via Madras

school. Vijayalakshmi's transformed style reflected her interests in Lepakshi murals, which she had observed and applied in her mural projects and her study of the Rajasthani miniatures (*Illus.015-16*). Apart from these her works are also inspired by Telugu folk traditions, such as, *Veedhi Bhagavatam* etc. This change was the outcome of an intense personal struggle to restore her self-esteem as an artist and to establish her own identity

63. The then governor of Madras, C.Rajagopala Chari, questioned her ability to paint. Then her husband defended her by proposing to allow her to demonstrate painting and feel satisfied.

64. Simhachalam is a temple near Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh.

different from her husband. Vijayalakshmi was ambitious and competent. She has won several awards.⁶⁵ Later her work was also recognised and received patronage.⁶⁶ Despite all this she is known less in art circles than her husband or her brother, why? Is it because she did not have any formal training in art? While we look into this aspect with relation to another artist, Kamala Mittal, we shall return back to Hyderabad.

Kamala, studied in an art school and like Vijayalakshmi, also married an artist. Kamala was born in Muzzafar Nagar, Uttar Pradesh. She settled down in Andhra Pradesh since 1953. She completed the fine arts diploma course from *Kalabhavana Shantiniketan* in 1950. In 1951 she and her husband, Jagdish Mittal, had their first joint exhibition of woodcuts in Hyderabad (Deccan). Jagdish Mittal's works received all the applaud due to them but, Kamala Mittal's works were described thus:

Though not intellectual and competent in expression as her husband and some what less experienced in the technique of the craft, Kamala is, nevertheless, an artist with a sensitive awareness for the wood cut.⁶⁷



016. Vijaya Lakshmi, *Kaliya Mardanam*, ca.1960, approx. 35x56 cm, watercolour on paper.

The writing in itself is contradictory in that how can a person, inexperienced in a practical discipline such as a woodcut, have a sensitive awareness of the same? For, her awareness and experience came from the training at Shantiniketan from where she had a through grounding in painting and graphic techniques.

65. She won the AIFACS award and Sinior Fellowship along with her husband.

66. Many private and public sector undertakings have procured her paintings and sculptures.

67. Badri Narayan, *The Wood cuts of the Jagdish and Kamala Mittal*, Hyderabad 1951.



017. Kamala Mittal, *Quilt Makers*, ca.1951, approx. 35x48 cm, watercolour on paper.

Kamala in her paintings and prints chooses themes that portray women in various active roles, through their domestic labour, creative pursuits etc., in works like the “two sisters”, “mat weavers & quilt makers” (Illus 017a-17), “music party” etc.,

017a. Kamala Mittal- *Mat weavers*, ca.1951, approx. 35x48 cm, watercolour on paper.





018. Kamala Mittal, *Chand Bibi Fighting Against Mughal Emperor*, ca.1960, 60x30 cm, Gouche on Paper. Collection: Jagdish and Kamala Mittal Museum of Indian Art, Hyderabad.

in addition to landscapes and historical themes such as *ChandBibi fighting against the Mughal army (Illus.018)*, while Jagdish Mittal concentrated more on the out door scenes. In the writing mentioned above the author wishes to highlight the qualities that (he feels) she “lacks” and which her husband possesses namely “intellect”, “competence” and “expression”. All of these are traditionally assigned by conventional art historians to describe male creativity. Creativity itself was thought to be a male prerogative. For instance, in the 1940’s and 50’s such writers not only in India but also in Europe and America held this view. For according to Havelock Ellis, who followed Holmann who in turn was Freud’s disciple, “only men have the wings for art”.⁶⁸ These views get currency due to the operation of sexual difference within artistic practice thus undermining women’s creativity.

Kamala has not only explored her creative potential in paintings and graphics but has been interested in Indian embroidery traditions. She has co-authored a book on this subject along with her husband.⁶⁹

Kamala continued to paint till the mid 60s, when many more women artists entered the field.

68. Whitney Chadwick, *Women, Art and Society*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1996 pp302

69. Jagdish Mittal & Kamala Mittal, *Bharatiya Kasida*, Hyderabad , 1951.

